BLUE BOOK

Magazine of Adventure for MEN, by MEN ★ JULY ★ 25c

30¢ IN CANADA

The Go-Devil
A Complete Novel
by H. VERNOR DIXON

The Final Hoard
A Novelette of Quest, Inc.
by GORDON KEYNE

Hawaii Pearls
by WILLIAM BRANDON

The Mission Called X
by BERT SIMS

The Trumpet of Tradition
by EUSTACE COCKRELL

AND MANY OTHERS

Who's Who *in this* Issue

The Cockrells

FRANCIS and Eustace Cockrell are, as it happens, brothers, sons of Judge Ewing Cockrell of Missouri. Both are well-known writers who have frequently contributed to our pages—once back in 1932 in collaboration, but usually since that time working separately. This month they both appear—Frank with a moving fact story of his experiences as a combat photographer with the Marines on Iwo Jima; and Eustace with an equally memorable contribution of a different sort, "The Trumpet of Tradition."

Henry Alonzo Myers

DR. MYERS is at present associate professor of English at Cornell University, but he is a PHD. in philosophy; and he therefore combines a philosophical training with an understanding of literature.

"As a student of philosophy," he writes, "I have found that I could not accept the view that the ideas in the Declaration of Independence, although altogether admirable as sentiments, were intellectually indefensible." His answer to those who feel that they are indefensible is brilliantly presented in "Are Men Equal?"—the first chapter of which we reprint beginning page 25. We plan to reprint additional chapters of this timely and significant discussion in succeeding issues.

Burton R. Sims

BURT SIMS, twenty-five, former Los Angeles *Examiner* picture editor and sports columnist, has been on special duty with the Eighth Air Force after serving as a combat Intelligence officer with a high-scoring Mustang fighter squadron in England. His story "The Mission Called X" begins on page 97.

He became *Examiner* picture editor at twenty-one, after working on the copy desk, and entered the Army as a private in May, 1942. Assigned to Army Air Base at Muroc, Sims advanced to Staff Sergeant in five months, was appointed to Officer Candidate School, graduated near the top 150 in a class of nearly 3,000.

Captain Sims was graduated from George Washington High School, Los Angeles, and studied at South Georgia State College.

At one time he conducted a radio program: "Man Bites Dog."

Sergeant Francis Cockrell

Captain Sims stands at General Doolittle's left

Lieutenant Harold Coffin

Charles W. Furlong

COLONEL FURLONG has had several careers and done a vast number of interesting things: his record in the first print of "Who's Who" fills nearly a column. He studied art in Paris and later was instructor and then head of the art department at Cornell. As an explorer he made a remarkable journey through Patagonia for *Harper's Magazine;* and earlier was the first American to explore Tripoli. (It was in the course of this expedition that he located the wreck of the American frigate *Philadelphia,* sunk in our war with the Barbary pirates.) In World War I he wrote tactical field handbooks for the use of our forces, was a special military aide to President Wilson and a delegate to the Peace conference. . . . Another facet of his character showed in 1914 when he won the world's bull-riding championship at Pendleton, Oregon. It was out of his experiences on the range in Montana and Oregon that he gleaned the material for "Feed 'Em Buckskin!" (our Twice-Told Tale, on page 42).

Harold Coffin

LIEUT. COFFIN was born in Reno, Nevada. He worked as a newspaper man and publicist in Hawaii from 1927 until 1938, and has also done free-lance writing for a number of national magazines. He returned to the mainland in 1938, and at the outbreak of the war was advertising manager for the Columbia Steel Company. His wife is a poet, and they have a son, thirteen years old. Lieut.

Coffin is now convalescing from a leg injury received on the U.S.S. *Bismarck Sea,* the baby flat-top sunk off Iwo Jima in February. His story, "Grandma Splices the Main Brace," begins on page 102.

Fred Painton

FRED PAINTON, who contributed two novels and about a dozen Secret Service short stories to Blue Book in the years between 1936 and 1942, when he went overseas as correspondent for the *Reader's Digest,* died on Guam early this spring. He knew a lot about war, for he served overseas in the first World War; and in the course of his job as correspondent, had a ship torpedoed out from under him, and saw a man killed beside him in a plane by antiaircraft fire.

Ernie Pyle, in what was to be the last of his own columns, said of him (Scripps-Howard Newspapers; United Features Syndicate):

"Fred Painton was one of the modest people; I mean real down-deep modest. He had no side whatever, no axe to grind, no coy ambition. . . . .

"I have no idea how Fred Painton would have liked to die. But somehow I'm glad he didn't have to go through the unnatural terror of dying on the battlefield. For he was one of my dear friends, and I know that he, like myself, had come to feel that terror."

Achmed Abdullah

ACHMED ABDULLAH died in New York in May—as it happened, on his sixty-fourth birthday. Our readers will recall many of the colorful stories he has contributed to Blue Book in the last ten years, as well as books like "The Swinging Caravan," "The Mating of the Blades," and "Night Drums." He always wrote and lived under his pen name; but according to his newspaper obituaries, he was a son of the late Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia and of the Princess Nourmahal Durani of Afghanistan. In a letter telling of his last hours, Mrs. Abdullah writes:

"I was thinking this morning that the very last thing Achmed read on this earth was the letter of Paul Eldridge, which you printed in BLUE BOOK. A friend had enclosed the clipping with her birthday card, and it pleased him so much. He was too ill all day to look at the papers, but when I brought out the cards, and found the clipping, he just pounced upon it, and read it himself, although I had had to read the cards to him. He has felt so useless in this war, and it pleased him to know for sure that he was bringing a little fun and glamour into the drab lives of the boys in the service."

BLUE BOOK

July, 1945 **MAGAZINE** Vol. 81, No. 3

One Complete Book-Length Novel

One Novelette

Nine Short Stories

Special Features

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

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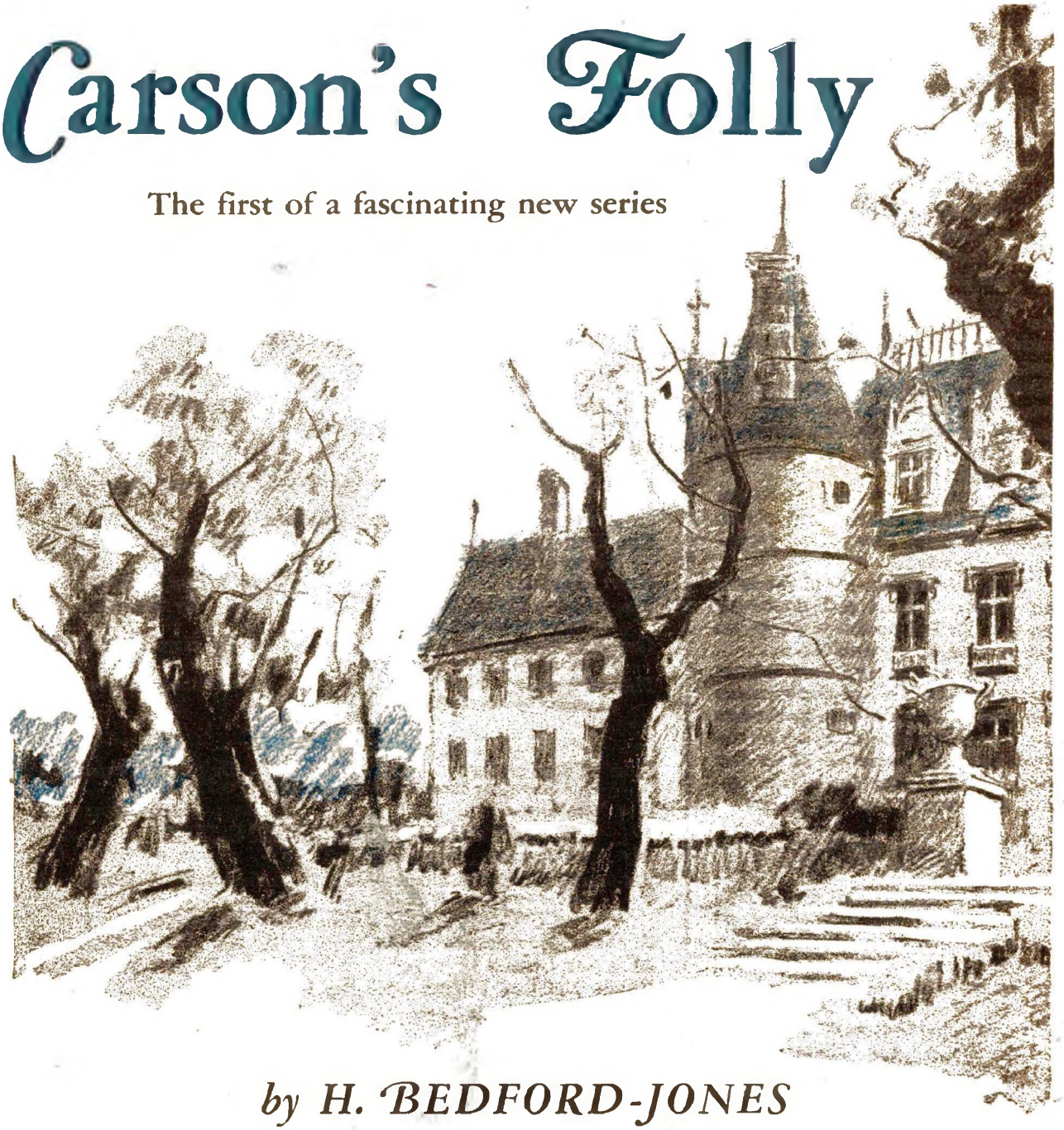
Carson's Folly

The first of a fascinating new series



by H. BEDFORD-JONES

WHEN the European war went to pieces under us, Murchison and I were billeted at Lord Iverleigh's huge arms works in Kent—a factory, we would have called it, back home. We had been through Boston Tech together and in the Army together, and were out on loan to the British together.

Murch was a great guy.

"Now we never *will* see Europe, big boy," he said sadly, when we got the news of the twilight of the Hitlerian gods. "We've lent our blooming Allies a lot of good Yankee ingenuity; we've worked out detectors for every damned kind of land-mine the Krauts could think up—and the war's over! We get shipped home, now, and that's all."

"Not for me," I told him. "I've been promising Bill Carson a tour of Europe, and I mean to have it—with or without Frank Murchison. Give me a chance to think."

"That'll be a new experience for you," he retorted. "But go ahead. Count me in."

"Not in the thinking, son. You're merely the executive arm; Bill Carson is the brains. Remember the Frenchman that Headquarters sent to us last week, with the samples of those new Teller and personnel mines?"

"Sure. Some kind of nobleman, but an officer of the Maquis and a go-getter. I liked him," Murchison recalled.

"Hello!" exclaimed Murchison. "Find something?"

"Well, you go up to London in the morning and find him. Get him here. Then see your brass-hat, red-tab friends—you know a lot of them—and have them pull wires to get us discharged."

He whistled softly. "So? It'll take a bit of time."

"Mr. Carson's thinking will, too," I told him. "Go on, now; no questions. Either you trust me or you don't. I think we've really struck oil, Murch, if my notion works out; but it's so big that I'm afraid to talk about it yet."

He nodded. "As usual, Mr. Carson, I'll take a chance on you."

Sure enough, when I woke up in the morning he was gone. I went to

the lab and got to work, but not on Government jobs. We were all through with the war now.

Our work had dealt with mines—or more properly, with mine-detectors of the newest forms, which we had helped perfect. The *Herrenvolk*, with its usual evil genius, developed the most infernal types of personnel mines ever known, and the counter-efforts had to keep pace. Plastic containers, for example, made a brand-new type of detector necessary.

In countering this diabolism, we had evolved mine-detectors which went after the thing contained, rather than the container. This effected, we were playing around with some of our own private notions—when the war collapsed and we sat twiddling our thumbs.

Chief among these notions was a gadget which Murchison had dignified with the name of Carson's Folly, although it was our joint product. It was a very neat little portable detector of radionic type, and by shifting about various kinds of tubes in it, different results could be obtained. We thought at first that we had a world-beater here, but changed our minds, for it would not work at any depth less than three feet. Consequently, about the only thing Carson's Folly would *not* detect, was land-mines.

In the course of our experiments, however, we had chanced upon some very singular results. These had given me an idea which I'd mulled over frequently. Another reason our gadget was unsatisfactory was that its waves would not bounce back from a small object like a mine; instead, they slipped around and were lost. The object had to be fairly large. We were not interested in detecting millstones, however.

SO, while Murchison was whanging around London and parts adjacent, I devised new variant tubes for Carson's Folly, and put in fifteen hours a day doing it. The results were in some ways good, in others bad: At less than a three-foot depth it was useless, and the tubes of my invention had an annoying way of blowing out. On the other hand, the recordings on the gauges, which served much as does a radar screen, were highly exact. And what was far more to the point, I found that the wave kick-back varied according to the density of different metals and that this variation also extended to other objects.

This was a discovery of absorbing interest, and I labored on it day and night until I had worked out a chart showing the wave reactions from different substances and according to the nature of the tubes employed. I was getting this chart accurately checked when I had a wire from Murchison that he would be with me on the morrow and was bringing the Vicomte de Gondy as desired. Murchison had been gone nearly a week.

I was all ready for them when they arrived early next afternoon; in fact, I had had a trench four feet deep dug outside the lab.

Murchison and I had both taken a liking to Gondy. He was lean, dark, vivacious, bubbling over with enthusiasm, and yet he conveyed an air of dependability. He was in his late twenties and had lost his wife during the war. He had traveled all over Europe and Africa, and had an amazing knowledge of people and places. The war had ruined him; on his previous visit he had told us why.

The three of us got together in the lab, and we were an odd lot, certainly: Gondy, full of life and pep. Me, Bill Carson, built big and heavy and with a cautious slant. Murchison, gray-haired at thirty, a skinny broomstick of a guy. When Murchison laughed he showed all his teeth, and the sparkle in his gray eyes won your heart. He was not your typical scientist, because, like Gondy, he bubbled; he would believe anything plausible, and could spring upon a shocked world some of the darnedest ideas ever heard. Neither he nor I were married, thank heaven.

"Gondy," I began, "when you were here before, you told us about losing all your family wealth during the war. Would you mind going over the story and letting me check it?"

He was puzzled as to why he had been asked here, of course. Now he laughed and relaxed.

"Certainly, if you desire! My father was curator of the Musée des Orfevriers in Paris—the Goldsmiths' Museum, in English. It had examples of fine ancient goldwork from all over the world, you comprehend. He saved the most precious objects of this collection when the Germans came to Paris, taking them to our family home, the Chateau de Gondy, near Orléans. Also, he had there the family wealth. But the Germans were advancing fast, it was impossible to get away, and he barely had time to hide the whole thing, before the flood caught up with him.

"I told you, I think, that he disappeared during the military occupation: whether he's alive or dead, we don't know. The treasure was never found, for the two men who helped him hide it were killed during the fighting. He was responsible for that collection, and the Museum came hard on the family, when France was liberated. We had to settle up for the intrinsic value of the gold. What would you? Some Frenchmen are like that."

He gesticulated, grimaced, smiled.

"We had to sell everything except the chateau and some of the ground, to make good. Naturally, we exhausted every effort to find the hoard. We knew, in a general way, that it was buried in the garden between the house and the river. We've turned over a good deal of that ground, but the search is hopeless."

"Thank you," I said. "Now, Murch, I wish you'd take the car and run up to the Hall. You remember that whopping big gold salver that Lord Iverleigh had given him by Queen Victoria or the Czar or somebody—the present Lord's grandfather? Well, borrow it off the butler and fetch it back here, like a good chap."

"Say, what the devil are you driving at, anyhow?" demanded Murchison. "And you haven't so much as asked what luck I had getting the discharges."

"All right, consider it asked. What luck?"

"It's going through next week, that's what!" He grinned and sauntered out.

IT was only a couple of miles to the Hall, where Iverleigh resided in state. While Murchison was gone, I entertained Gondy with some of our gadgets, trying not to be too joyful. Discharged! Free! It was almost too good to be true.

Murchison came back at last, bringing the big salver in a felt cover. I pointed out the ditch, to him and Gondy, and the two workmen waiting, with spades in their hands.

"Now, boys, this is a demonstration," I said. "I'll stay here out of sight. You take that salver out and bury it somewhere in the ditch. Take out this box of books and bury it. Take out that carton of aluminum parts and bury it. Have the top smoothed over. When you've finished, come back—and don't tell me where any of the stuff has been put."

They were both considerably puzzled, and Murchison said it was a hell of a way to treat Iverleigh's precious gold salver,—which the butler fairly worshiped,—but out they went with the stuff. It took the two workmen all of half an hour to get the boxes buried and everything jake. Then Murchison and Gondy said they were ready.

I got out Carson's Folly. This consisted of a big knapsack holding the batteries and so forth, connected with the finder—a light, curved-handle affair, half the size of a vacuum cleaner, and mounted on wheels. It was made of magnesium alloy, and was very light. When he saw it, Murchison guessed what I was up to, and groaned, but I only laughed at him.

"Now, boys, I'll proceed to demonstrate the all-seeing eye of Carson's Folly," I said, "after which we'll talk

Lucien appeared, then Félice. The suspense hit us hard.

A voice from outside came to me. I looked out. Below the window stood the girl Olympe.

business. No tricks. Nothing up my sleeve. The eye is quicker than the hand, so watch carefully! As I know where the trench is, of course, there's no question of hunting around, but the demonstration should be no less impressive."

It was, too; here was where the value of my chart came in. I trundled the detector down the line of the trench. It buzzed. I looked at the gauges, then at the chart.

"At this spot," I said, "is buried the box of books. . . . Next!"

Next the gold salver showed up, and the chart left no doubt of it; after that, I located the carton of aluminum parts. Gondy's eyes were bugging out when we returned to the lab, and Murchison regarded me with something close to respect—which tickled me.

"Carson, you win," he said. "You hit things on the nail! Eh, Gondy?"

"*Dieu de Dieu*, yes!" bubbled the Frenchman. "It is marvelous! It is like a mine-detector, only a thousand times more wonderful!"

"You're right, it is," I said modestly. "And now we talk business. Vicomte, you're in with us on a three-way split. This machine is not crown property; it belongs to us. With it, we go to your chateau and prove up on our abilities by locating your family hoard of treasure. Half goes to Carson's Folly—which means to us—in a three-way split, the other half to your family or to you. Those are the terms."

We settled down and stayed settled until mess-time, after returning the gold salver to the Hall. I had never realized what our troops in France had to contend with, until I heard Gondy talk. He simply erupted words with every breath. Not that he objected to the deal; quite the contrary, he was all for it.

But he thought up a dozen ways in which Carson's Folly could make our fortunes, and whenever he bogged down, Murchison picked up the ball and thought up a new one. I just sat and pulled at my pipe and shook my head at everything, until Murch lost his temper and demanded why in God's name I would not listen to reason.

"Because I'm the brains of this outfit, Murch," I told him. "Now look. You fellows are just shooting at the moon. For all you know, I pulled a slick trick on you. This gadget of ours needs to be proven; it must be demonstrated fair and square. Once it proves up—then what? We haven't finished. We haven't even begun! Then I'll show you where Gondy comes in on the deal, and where we go from there. I have things mapped out in my own mind, but I need to play safe. I need to prove this thing to myself in a practical way, and Gondy's treasure-trove will do it. We may strike all kinds of trouble. The thing won't work on anything buried at less than three feet, for instance; there may be other kinks."

GONDY stood up, put his arm about my shoulders, and hugged me.

"You're right, Bill," he said. "But how can I be of help to you in future?"

"I'll explain when the time comes," said I. "How about you, Murch?"

He put out his hand. "You win, big boy, as usual. Where are the plans for this vacuum cleaner of yours?"

"In my head," I told him. "And I made the tubes myself and no one else knows what's in 'em."

"Then all's safe," he rejoined with a nod. "Now let's go eat, and get a bottle of champagne from the mess steward, and talk about getting out of uniform."

We celebrated, right enough. Gondy was cutting circles in the moon and could not be drawn down to earth, but Murchison and I talked common sense. Before the evening was over we had considered all our plans, which depended on our discharges coming through. Gondy answered for getting Carson's Folly past the whiskered *douaniers* at the French customs, and everything looked rosy.

We might have known there would be a catch in it somewhere, and there was, but it was slow to develop, and impossible to foresee.

During the next fortnight everything went swimmingly. The British high command, where Murchison had a pull, arranged the details of our discharges and we were mustered out with never a hitch. The gasoline restrictions being lifted, we picked up an old Army car and ferried from Southampton to Havre. Due to breakdowns, it was a two-day trip to Orléans, and that evening, while we stopped in a village inn, Gondy gave us a closer look at his home situation. He was slightly worried about it.

"The chateau was rather knocked about during the occupation," he said, "but a few rooms are habitable and there'll be no difficulty about putting us all up. The uncertainty lies with my brother. He is an older brother, you see."

"Didn't know you had one," I said. "You never mentioned him."

Gondy looked somewhat unhappy. "He is what we call *difficile, très difficile*, my friends—a man of strong passions and convictions; he was a colonel in the Army and a prisoner in Germany for a couple of years. He married a woman who is most remarkable, but not precisely an angel of light. I am glad that she turned me down for him, this Félice!"

"Nice name," commented Murchison. "I used to know a girl named Felicity who sang in the choir, and every time the preacher prayed that we would attain everlasting joy and felicity, we all looked at her and sighed. It brightened the devotional hour wonderfully."

Gondy, who was usually quick on the trigger, speaking English perfectly, missed the joke. He sighed, and looked down at his hands.

"You see, my brother Lucien is older than I, and therefore head of the house in our father's absence," he said. "I have written them, of course, that we are coming, and why, and I do not look for any trouble, but one never knows. That woman—well, I am afraid of her, my friends."

Murchison winked at me. "Leave her to Carson," he said. "That guy came from Kilkenny by way of South Boston, and anything that wears skirts just eats out of his hand when he turns on the charm. You should have seen him wangle anything we wanted out of Lord Iverleigh's daughter—"

"You're a liar!" I said. "She was a lady. All of forty and most correct."

"The more spinsterish they are, the harder they fall," said Murch. "Well, never mind, Gondy. We like you in spite of your folks, and all we're interested in is turning up the treasure, so forget it."

A knock at the door broke up our conference. The visitor was an old comrade of Gondy's in the Maquis forces, and the rest of the evening was devoted to a celebration in which half the village joined. It was not notable for sobriety.

WE went on next morning, and early in the afternoon reached the Chateau de Gondy, which stood off by itself in what had once been a magnificent park, with a river at the back. At least, it was what was called a river, in these parts, but it was about the size of a backwoods creek at home, and any agile jeep could have jumped it. My notions of French grandeur shrank considerably at sight of the place. The buildings were mostly ruins, many of the big trees had been cut down raggedly, and in general the chateau looked as though it had been abandoned to the rats many years ago.

With two scowling servants, Lucien and his wife came out to meet us, and it was a cordial greeting they gave us. Lucien was a big bluff hearty man with an air of harsh and indomitable command; he was dark, had a purplish scar across his left cheek, and his eyes were greedy, but he was making a successful effort to be pleasant. He shook hands with a firm grip and invited us inside for wine and refreshments; though regretting that Murchison and I must double up in one room, he said we would find it comfortable.

As for Félice—wow! Gondy, I thought, must have gone stark mad. She was a knockout in any language, cool and trim and beautiful as a dream of spring. To be specific, she was tall and svelte, high-bosomed, exquisitely gowned, with dazzling cornrassel hair and deep blue eyes so alive that they fairly sparkled. Except for a too-small mouth, her features were lovely. She had charm, she radiated magnetism; when she wrapped herself around Murchison, so to speak, he fell for her like a busted tank.

But that mouth!

She and Murch strolled into the building; the two brothers followed; the two sour-faced men took our bags and Carson's Folly, and I just tagged along, thinking. It has been my experience to encounter one or two small female mouths, and invariably to my sorrow. I thought better of Gondy's judgment now. Beautiful as it was, that small, tight mouth was an ill omen. . . .

Inside, the chateau was crumbling, furnished in gimcrack French style with a lot of near-gilt furniture and imitation silk rugs, all unattractive. We were taken to two small bedrooms and left to wash up. Murchison glanced at the stone walls, the little window with a bar across it, the two cots and the commode where I was pouring water, and grunted.

"Magnificent, Bill! And athletic, I'll bet."

"Looks more like jail quarters to me," I said, splashing my face.

"I'm talking about her, you burp! Did you notice her walk? And her eyes? And that deep smooth voice like a dove's note?"

"And her mouth, like a steel trap," I added. "Yeah, I did."

"You have no eye for beauty. I could fall for that gal! I think she likes me—"

"You'd better have an eye for husbands," I warned him. "You are an impractical inventor, with your head in the clouds. There's Gondy, so shut up."

Gondy knocked and entered. He was happy as a lark, and had forgotten all his evil prognostications. Lucien and Félice knew why we had come, they were most pleased, and we would have a look at the possible burial-place of the treasure after the collation. Eager speech poured out of him, like steam from a singing kettle.

We went along to the drawing-room and enjoyed wine and cakes and sandwiches as we talked. Lucien expressed himself as delighted that we had come to restore the family fortunes, but asked no questions about how we meant to do it. He had some silver cups in a case, won for riding and boxing. I was no great rider, but I still held an amateur heavyweight title, and he and I discussed topics of mutual interest while Félice chattered with Gondy and Murchison.

No sign, Lucien said, had turned up of the father; they did not have the ghost of an idea what had become of him. As for the treasure, that was equally ghostly. That it had been buried out behind the house was mere supposition. I gathered from Lucien that he had not got on very well with the old man, or Félice had not, though he did not say this openly.

When I suggested that we go look over the ground, everyone assented and we were led through a side door which, like the little window in our bedroom, overlooked the gradual descent to the river a hundred yards away. This was a bleak patch of ground that had once been a garden. Now it showed ample evidence of

digging, but nothing else; there were no trees until the river was reached; there a large beech and numerous willows lined the river-banks.

We discussed the treasure. Its value, Lucien said vaguely, ran into millions —meaning francs, of course. I walked along the building with Gondy, leaving the other three chatting, and we tried in vain to pitch upon some likely spot for the hiding-place. There was none. While we talked, a door at the back of the chateau was flung open and out shot a young woman, who came running up to Gondy with a glad cry of recognition.

"*Tiens!* Olympe!" he exclaimed, and shook hands with her, evincing the greatest joy. He introduced me. She was named Olympe Briançon, and was a ruddy-checked, bright-eyed young woman—a cook's assistant, her mother being the cook and wife to one of the sourpuss servants: he was her second husband.

What was more important, Olympe had served in the Maquis during the occupation and Gondy, one of its officers, knew her well. After a few moments she left us, and we turned back toward the others.

"To think of finding her here, an assistant cook!" said Gondy, and laughed. "You should have seen her marching with us, rifle on arm and grenades slung around her waist like turnips! She could use them, too—she fought well. A girl of spirit, and she hated the Boches who had murdered her brother. . . . Well, well—what about the search program?"

The others asked the same thing. The two servants would dig, if we needed them; but to cover this expanse of ground, a good three acres, was going to take time. Carson's Folly was no racehorse. It was finally arranged that Gondy and Murchison and I would have an early breakfast and get started on the job.

THE brothers and I took a long walk over the estate, leaving Murchison and Félice to sit at home and play with the radio. We came back in time for tea, after which, before the cocktail hour and dinner, Murchison and I had a word in private.

"I don't know whether to start on the search," I said. "We'll just have to take turns running the gadget along the ground."

"I've a better notion," he said. "I tried to figure out where I'd hide the gold on a dark night and make sure of finding it again. You know, this is not the first time the Gondy family has been hit by similar bad luck. Gondy says stuff was buried when the Prussians occupied Paris in 1871,—they were all around here,—and farther back, during the Revolution, stuff was hidden and lost."

"Never mind that," I said. "What did you figure out?"

"That the door we used was about in a line with the big beech on the river-bank. A cord run from the tree to the door would make a marker at night; follow it for ten paces, say, and the spot could always be found again."

"Grand! At last you give an indication of brains, Mr. Murchison!" I said. "That really is swell. We'll tackle it, anyhow—following such a line by eye. . . . Did you have a nice chat while we were so thoughtfully away?"

"Sure. We found mutual friends in London."

"All right. Maybe she has an object. But let me tell you one thing," I said: "When you see a mouth like that, it is never careless, it is never sensual, and you'd damned well better watch your checkbook. Don't think for a minute that you, as a man, are anything except a blind tool in the hands of a designing female—when she's that type—because you're not."

This really got under his skin—so much so that I was sure Félice had made some sort of play for him. This was so far out of character for her that I became suspicious. Murch and I maintained somewhat strained relations for the remainder of the evening.

The dinner was simple but good, the wine was practically divine—Vouvray '29, I remember—and between radio and piano and conversation, we passed a pleasant evening. Murchison had unbent considerably by the time we retired, and all promised well. I was now even more certain that Félice was going far out of her way to get my partner all bemused, and it puzzled me. A woman of that type does nothing without an object; and while her object is usually matrimony, it is rarely infidelity. . . .

Breakfast is never much of anything in French homes, so our breakfast next morning were better passed over in silence. The three of us agreed to take working turns of an hour each. Gondy carried out Carson's Folly. Murchison helped me adjust the knapsack. I took the detector in hand and started at the house door, while with sticks they scratched an irregular line along the dirt toward the beech tree below.

Murchison was indulging in one of his pipe-dreams. What we should really do, he said, was to equip a dozen men with a dozen of these gadgets and then turn them loose to cover all the ground possible. He expatiated on this and Gondy caught the infection and began to elaborate on the idea, until both of them got so interested that they did not hear the buzzer sound.

I kicked over a stone to mark the spot, glanced at the gauges, pushed on till all was normal, and then consulted the chart. According to this, we had struck gold, sure enough; but it was barely thirty feet from the house door, and to me this did not look very logical. The others noticed my halt.

"Hello!" exclaimed Murchison. "Find something?"

AS he spoke, the buzzer sounded again and the gauge-needles flickered. The men came close, and I showed them the chart figures.

"Either a big rock or a log," I said with truth. "I haven't worked out the differentials, but take your choice. Something solid, anyhow, and not metallic."

About twenty feet farther, well away from the house, we made another strike, and Murchison, who was by this time acquainted with the chart, let out a whoop.

"Got it!" he cried. "Get your picks and shovels, Gondy!"

Gondy went off at a run, but I began to work the detector back and forth. The result puzzled me, because the gauges fluctuated.

"Watch it, Murch," I said. "Here, by the chart, we have either gold or silver—the differential there is very delicate. But here, only a foot farther, it changes perceptibly: the waves still kick back but less strongly—indicating books or paper, according to my figures."

"We'll soon see," Murchison said. "You noticed all the digging that's been going on around here. Not very deep: it's a job to put down a three-foot hole! I'll bet they just scratched the ground, while old Gondy, on the other hand, was driven by the fear of Nazis when he put the stuff away, and he probably went deep with it."

This was logical. While we were discussing it, back came Gondy and the two men at a run, carrying picks and spades. I indicated where to dig.

"I'd say there was a metallic box of some sort about four feet long and three wide down here," I told them. "Part of it is packed with gold or silver, the other part with books or papers. The depth, I think, is around ten feet."

The two men began to sweat, and muttered something about magicians, but Gondy set them to digging. He and Murchison were fascinated by the problem of how closely Carson's Folly would come to the truth: if my conclusions were correct, we really had something in the gadget, and not just a lucky fluke.

While the digging was in progress, Lucien appeared, then Félice. They joined us, nervous and excited; indeed, the suspense hit us all hard. The diggers went down five feet, six

feet, and had struck nothing. They were out of sight at the bottom of their pit when one let out a yell. We crowded around, staring down, and watched them clear a bulky object fully nine feet down. Gondy tore off, full tilt, to get ropes.

Half an hour later we were examining a flat metal trunk which we had hauled up. My predictions as to size were confirmed: it was hung with huge padlocks, all badly rusted. It was obviously very old and as obviously was not the hidden hoard of gold. Lucien had it carried into the house and placed in the drawing-room. Leaving the two men to fill in the pit, we gathered around our prize, and Lucien attacked it with hammer and chisel.

Carson's Folly proved absolutely correct. More than half the old trunk contained family plate of heavy silver; the remainder was family papers —old vellum deeds and so forth. Among the plate were numerous *rouleaux* of gold coin. It was the treasure that had been hidden from the Prussians in 1871!

There was wild jubilation. Gondy embraced everyone, we all shook hands, and amid the general excitement I mentioned the prior discovery. Now that I could trust the detector fully, I blurted out about the gold strike closer to the doorway. Gondy rushed out to set the men at it. I went along and indicated the exact spot for them; leaving him in charge, I returned to the others, who were examining the massive pieces of silver plate.

"Well," I said cheerfully, "we're not interested in family relics, so we'll settle for half the gold and leave you the rest. Eh, Murch?"

"Oh, sure!" he assented. Félice spoke under her breath to Lucien and left the room, with her gliding step.

Lucien turned and looked at us.

"Messieurs! Did you say *half* the gold?"

"Yes, we wouldn't want the other stuff," I replied easily. "There's no doubt whatever that they're now digging up the gold your father hid. Half of that, and half of these gold-pieces, will more than reward us."

HE stiffened, seeming to freeze all over as he looked at us.

"I think," he said slowly, "there must be some error. True, you have recovered lost property: we are grateful beyond words. But French law is explicit. The finder is entitled to ten per cent."

Murchison caught his breath. I stared at Lucien: he was a changed man, hostile and indomitable, a massive figure of stony resolve.

"You forget," I said, "that we have an agreement with your brother. Half of the find belongs to us."

Lucien waved this away with a lordly gesture.

"My brother is not the head of the family. I am. He has no power to make such an unfair agreement. As to the museum gold, that of course belongs to the Republic, and you can claim none of it. If I decide to reward you with ten per cent of the family property, it will be most equitable."

I was thunderstruck. This was incredible! Murchison burst forth in angry expostulation, and Lucien waved him aside, saying correctly that we had no written agreement. At this, I lost my temper and gave him a piece of my mind. He turned ugly.

"Like all Americans, you are scoundrels and thieves," he broke out in fury. This topped it off, and I went for him. I regret to say that he knocked me flat. As I came to my feet, a cool amused voice broke in:

"What, messieurs! A squabble over filthy gold? For shame! Lucien, apologize to the gentleman, quickly! I demand it!"

There in the doorway stood Félice, radiant and flaming as a flower. We all gaped at her; she dominated everyone by the force of her personality and beauty. Lucien stammered out something, then tendered me a grudging apology. He seemed afraid of her.

"Let us have no more of this nonsense," said Félice, smiling. "Later, we can discuss the problem amicably. This is not the time."

"That's right." Murchison turned to me. We were both smudged with dirt and grime. "Come on, Carson, let's get cleaned up."

"But the gold—"

"Damn the gold! I want to talk with you about this. Come on."

We went off to our own room, and Félice sent a smile after us. I did not like the smile—it was too triumphant, too damned smug—but her intervention had assuredly checked an ugly scene.

In our own room, I poured water into the bowl and mopped my face, and Murchison followed suit. Messing with that trunk had spoiled our morning beauty.

"This is a hell of a note!" I said. "We're in the soup. I forgot that a Frenchman reveres one thing above all else in the world—gold. And a Frenchwoman is more so—"

"Easy, now," said Murch. "Lucien's a bad actor, yes, but I'll warrant Gondy is all right."

"Of course. But Lucien has us by the short hair."

"Our own fault," said Murchison. "He'll bilk us out of all he can, naturally. Do you realize that the plate and other stuff in that trunk is enormously valuable? Ten per cent of that alone will be a huge sum. Suppose the hidden gold is turned up—"

"And he wants to give us ten per cent of the family money alone!"

"By French law, he's right. Even that much will put us on Easy Street."

"Be damned if I'll let anyone bilk me of what's my just due!" I stormed. "Let alone a sore jaw! I can knock hell out of that guy, and all I want is the chance."

Murchison grinned and pulled a chair over to the one little window. He tried to look out on the digging, but the spot was impossible to see.

WE talked things over, gradually calming down to acceptance of the inevitable. After all, half of the whole treasure would amount to a tremendous sum; Lucien might well fight for it. We could afford to take our ten per cent and be about our business.

"I had a great scheme in mind," I said bitterly, "for the three of us to exploit Carson's Folly. The contacts could be made by Gondy, who knows everyone and has been all over. He could arrange all the setups of buried and lost treasure; we step in with the detector and do the locating. People aren't going around hollering that they have a buried pot of gold in the back yard, you know. That's where a contact-man is needed."

"Bill! It's a grand idea!" exclaimed Murchison, taking fire instantly. "Why, right now there's buried treasure everywhere in Europe and Africa and Asia—loot of all kinds, too! It's wonderful! We can even make Government contracts—"

He was off on one of his wild dreams, staking out claims in the moon as he often did. "Estates and empires of the moon!" Cyrano de Bergerac's old phrase was certainly true where Frank Murchison was concerned.

A gentle scratch-scratch came at the door. He went to it, stood whispering for a moment, then closed it and came to me excitedly.

"Hey! Madame is here—Félice, you know. She wants me to run along with her and find Gondy. Says she thinks this whole thing can be straightened out amicably. Suit you?"

"Go along and be damned," I said sulkily. "I want no truck with her. She's a bad egg and I distrust her."

"You're nuts," he rejoined. "All right. See you later."

He departed.

I sat where I was, with my pipe for company. I was extremely out of sorts. That crack Lucien had given me had loosened two teeth, and when anything goes haywire with my teeth, I worry. Also, I had a natural desire to give that brute the trimming he

deserved. And bitterly did I regret having blurted out about the gold discovery; if I had held my tongue, we could have controlled the situation.

It must have been close to noon when a tap sounded at the door. It proved to be Gondy. He came in and dropped into a chair disconsolately; he was the picture of misery on a monument and I told him so. He spread his hands helplessly.

"I warned you about Lucien. What can I do? Technically, his position is correct. I am powerless. You must think me a cheat, a dishonorable person, a rascal—"

I reassured him as to this, but his remorse and anxiety could not be assuaged. Money meant little to him; I verily believe he thought far less about the lost gold than he did of his tarnished honor. Lucien's argument that the museum gold belonged to the Government was, he said, all bosh—the family had already made good its loss.

"What is more," he said, as we discussed the whole thing, "my brother is a scoundrel but Félice is far worse. I should know; I was once in love with her, and no one is so clear-sighted as a disillusioned lover, my friend."

"I've no illusions where she is concerned," I told him. "But she'll back up Lucien, and that's all the harm she can do."

He gave me a startled look. "Yes? Do you know that she has been playing with that machine of yours? She had Murchison show her just how it works. She has brains."

"What of it?"

"My friend, you are in a den of thieves, and it is all my fault," he said earnestly. "You, Murchison, myself—she would get rid of us all if she could, to get that machine. She realizes the possibilities in it. The gold already secured—"

"Oh! Did it turn up?" I asked. He nodded, but showed no elation.

"Two boxes. The same ones my father buried, as the marks show."

"Did you and Murch and Félice come to any agreement?" I asked. I was astonished when he gave me a blank look.

"Agreement? About what?"

"She came here and got Murch, a couple of hours ago. He said they were going to find you and straighten out the thing amicably."

He shook his head. "That's the first I've heard of it. You must be mistaken."

I was not mistaken, but I said no more. I found the whole situation so devious as to be puzzling. Félice

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

The look on Lucien's face was all I needed. Before he could set down his glass, I was out of my chair and at him.

might have been flirting with Murchison in order to get an explanation of our detector and its workings; but why get him away from me on a lying pretext? It was all rather odd, and I did not like it by half.

Gondy and I talked over the ten per cent arrangement, and agreed that the best plan was to accept it, get our share, and skip out. He was delighted on learning of my scheme to put him to work as contact-man and to go on a serious hunt for lost treasures; the fact that we liked and trusted him, in spite of what had happened, brought tears to his eyes.

Realizing abruptly that it was well past noon, I suggested getting something to eat, and we went as far as the door—but no farther, for the excellent reason that a bolt had been shot on the outside. We were prisoners, in a true prison cell!

THOSE next hours were hours of savage fury and fruitless effort. Gondy wore his fists into bloody pulp attacking the door and walls and window-bars; both of us settled down, at last, into angry bitterness, as the afternoon passed.

Later, I recollected a highly tempered screwdriver, a favorite tool, which was in my grip. I got it out, and standing on a chair attacked the cross-bar of the window with it. As I worked away, a low voice from outside came to me.

"*Psst!* M. le Vicomte!"

Putting my face against the bar, I looked out. Below the window stood the kitchen-girl, Olympe Briançon, whom I had met the previous afternoon. She was staring up, her features set in desperate anxiety.

"Hello!" I said.

"Is he there?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"Then tell him—be careful, careful!" As she spoke, she slid from the bosom of her dress a long Luger pistol. "They are going to kill you! Give him this—"

An angry voice barked: with a groan, she vanished from my narrow field of vision. A furious outburst sounded, then died away. I jumped down from the chair and told Gondy about it.

He cursed softly.

"She is a true one, that girl of the Maquis! So they intend to kill us, eh? My friend, I warned you; I felt the danger. And to think I got you into this frightful peril! It is terrible."

"It's more terrible that she didn't slip us the Luger," I said. "We've no arms in our bags. We're helpless. This tool won't even loosen the cement around that bar. But—kill us? That's rather absurd, Gondy! It just isn't done, you know."

"You talk like an Englishman," he said gloomily. "Who in all Europe wouldn't wring your neck or put a bullet in you for gold—for the means of obtaining more gold? That machine of yours, and its possibilities, have hypnotized Félice. Doubtless Murchison already is dead. We shall be sent after him. Who will know? They can destroy us, bury us! Lucien will stop at no crime, under her influence. Today gold is the most powerful thing in Europe—"

He rambled on, completely victimized by his fixed idea. I tried to show him how absurd it was; the words of that ignorant kitchen-girl, instead of confirming my suspicions of Félice, had dissipated them—at least, so far as murder was concerned.

Gondy refused to accept my arguments; he was sunk in a despairing self-hypnosis from which I could not budge him an iota. The notion of bad luck and an evil destiny had depressed his usual gay nature to the depths. While we still argued, there came a rapping at the door.

"Come in," I called. "You can open it; we can't."

The door opened to admit Félice, smiling brightly at us.

Gondy leaped to his feet, transfixed by the sight of her. I put down my pipe and rose. She looked at us, met our eyes, and uttered a light, musical little laugh.

"My poor guests! So someone had shot the bolt—a mistake, of course. That stupid *bonne a tout faire,* Marie, must have done it. Well! We were all too excited—we forgot about luncheon! I have come to invite you to join us in a celebration. What the English call high tea, is it not?"

Gondy blinked. "Where—where is Murchison?"

"Your charming friend?" Félice waved her handkerchief. "Oh, he has gone to Orléans in your car, to get a goldsmith to weigh the gold and appraise it! Everything has been settled amicably; you must hear and approve the arrangement, my friends. Come! Lucien awaits us. Poor men, you must be starved!"

It was perfectly done—so perfectly, that I knew it to be false. She went on to deplore the tragic mistake which had locked us in, and that was well done, too. I almost believed her. Far easier to credit her than the poor kitchen-wench with her melodramatic warning that we were to be killed. The truth, I thought, lay somewhere between. Félice had some game in mind. She even made Gondy feel silly about his notions, and when she laughed and took his arm, we trailed along to the dining-room where we had supped the previous evening.

This was a rather large room, hung with family portraits and furnished in magnificently carved black oak. The shades had been drawn; light from silver candelabra glimmered on the massive plate we had unearthed, with which the table was now set. Lucien stood at the head of the table, and had donned his most pleasant manner.

"Ah, Monsieur Carson, you must forgive my regrettable scene of the morning!" he said to me. "I was beside myself. Now all has been arranged, subject to your consent—and yours, my brother," he said to Gondy. "When your friend returns with a goldsmith and a notary, the papers will be drawn up. Now sit down, sit down! Here are sandwiches and cakes, and the finest wine in the cellar. We shall celebrate our good fortune!"

Gondy threw off his gloom and went to the other extreme, with a torrent of eager French. Félice took the table's foot; Gondy sat beside me, leaving a place opposite for Murchison. It was very odd, I thought, that Murch had taken the car and gone to Orléans without a word to me—especially since the only keys to the car at this moment reposed in my pocket! This yarn, at least, was a lie.

Being, naturally, quite famished, I reached hastily at the sandwiches before me, taking three and passing them on. Félice handed me another plate of them.

"The finest Strasbourg *foie gras,*" she chirped. "A prewar delicacy we've not seen for years—I was saving one tin for some great occasion, and this is it! I made these myself, monsieur. Do not be sparing, I beg of you."

I TOOK a couple, being engaged meantime with those of chicken, and Gondy helped himself. Lucien, patting the wine bucket beside him, beamed at us.

"And the wine—my specialty, messieurs!" he said. "Brother, you remember that excellent Banyuls our father laid in before the war?"

"With the most poignant affection," said Gondy, laughing. "Of proper vintage, that is the rarest and best wine of France!"

"This is it, the last of it," said Lucien, filling beautiful Venetian glasses with the deep ruby wine and passing them. I noted his actions almost subconsciously as I sipped the wine. It was heavy and rich—something like the finest port, only more so.

"You do not like my sandwiches, monsieur?" Félice purred at me. I laughed and bit into one. Gondy, eating ravenously, asserted they were delicious. Then Lucien stood up and lifted his glass.

"A toast to the friendly end of all discord, and good fortune!" said he, then waited, his eye on me. "You are drinking with us, monsieur?"

It had just struck me as a bit singular that no servants were on hand, that we were waiting on ourselves.

"I'd like to ask one question," I said.

Lucien inclined his head.

"Yes? At your service."

"Why," I demanded, "did you fill our glasses and yours from two different bottles?"

A flash leaped across his face—a flash of such utter malignity and virulence that it appalled me.

But, before he could reply, Gondy rose, gripping the table-edge, his face as white as death itself. He wavered on his feet, lost balance, then regained it.

"Poison, *mon ami!*" he gasped. "Poison—"

He lost balance again and fell sideways, so that he came down across the lap of Félice; but I saw his arms go around her and his hands grip her, as they fell to the floor together.

POISON! Then poor Murch was done for. And we—

The look on Lucien's face was all I needed—that, and the sudden queer feeling inside me, though I had not drunk much of the wine. Before he could set down his glass, I was out of my chair and at him.

There was no monkey-work this time; I was prepared for his tigerish delivery and blocked it. For half a minute or more we let go with all we had, and while naturally he marked me up a bit, I gave him a real working-over, and had a lot of satisfaction doing it. I kept at him as I started, hard and fast, and was going ahead to make a thorough job of it, when the dizziness hit me. I could blame the small amount of wine I had drunk for that.

He was groggy on his feet, but clever and desperate. In the instant that I wavered, he reached out, scooped up a wine-bottle and lammed me over the head with it. I staggered back, got my hands on a plate, and skimmed it at him. It took him across his scarred cheek and knocked him flat. But, with a growl and a yell, the two sourpuss servants came bursting into the doorway behind him and lunged at me.

Luckily, the wine-bucket stood almost beside me. I caught up a bottle and went at them—breaking it over one head, stabbing with the broken glass at the other—and they broke and ran for it. But that finished me. I was seeing double, a frightful nausea came over me, and I only stayed on my feet by clinging to the table.

I saw Lucien come to his feet, unsteadily, wipe the blood from his face, and fumble a pistol out of his pocket. But I could not move.

"But no! Stop! Stop!"

The voice, thin but clear, came from the other end of the table, by the kitchen doorway. Someone stood there—I could not see who it was, for now everything was blurry. I cursed Lucien, heard him snarl, saw him fling up the pistol at me, with murder in his scarred visage.

The shot exploded; but he was unsteady, and the bullet shrieked past my ear. An oath escaped him. He aimed again—and another shot re-echoed in the room. But it was not his shot. He caught at the air, dropped his gun, and pitched out of my sight. Then I saw who the other person was—the kitchen-girl Olympe of the Maquis, holding her long Luger. Behind her others were flooding in—strangers, men with arms. They were lifting Gondy.

I could barely stand, and slowly, carefully, I let myself down into a chair. The men were crowding about Gondy, the clatter of their tongues filled the room. I looked for Félice, but she had vanished, leaving only some shreds of her gown in Gondy's hands. He had opened his eyes now and was looking around, vaguely.

"A close call, monsieur!" Olympe stood beside me. "Our friends of the Maquis were a trifle slow in arriving; luckily you ate little of the poisoned *foie gras*. The wine was poisoned, also, or perhaps drugged; I am not sure which—"

I did not hear the rest of it—I was horribly sick, and glad of it; the word "poison" scared me.

Some time must have passed; when I woke up, Gondy and another man were laughing and pulling me up, shoving me into a chair. Gondy embraced me wildly.

"Murchison! He is all right!" he cried delightedly. "They drugged him, locked him in my room—he is asleep, but safe! Do you understand? These are my comrades of the Maquis—it was Olympe who got them here! Oh, holy name of a name of a name!"

He straightened up, his eyes distended, pallor in his face. I looked around to follow his gaze. A sudden silence had fallen. Into the room, up past the table, was walking an old, old man with lined features and white hair and ragged garments. His eyes were vacant, bleared, almost blank, but they dwelt upon Gondy with glad recognition, and the scrawny old arms lifted.

Gondy, bursting into tears, embraced his father wildly, and voices buzzed all around: "M. le Comte has come home again! We found him in the hills—"

That is all I remember, because the ghastly faintness got me again and I keeled over in a dead faint. . . .

Look now to the sunlight of another day, with Frank Murchison sitting beside me in the warm sunlight outside the chateau. I was still a bit shaky, for those sandwiches had been poisoned; the kitchen cat had fed on them and died. Still, I could enjoy my pipe, which was a good sign. Murchison, who had merely been drugged, was quite himself now.

We were alone. Gondy had departed, with his father, to the funeral of Lucien.

"Just think, if the old man had been brought home a day earlier," said Murchison soberly, "we'd have avoided all that mess! He has approved our agreement with Gondy, and we've won a good fat stake. The future looks bright for Carson's Folly, eh?"

I nodded. The old man had not taken Lucien's death very hard.

"No word of Félice?" I asked.

Murch shook his head. It was a sore subject.

"None. She got away with some of the gold coin, and skipped. Gondy says to watch out for her, that she'll be our mortal enemy from now on. I rather believe him."

"Cheer up. Our paths won't cross hers again," I told him.

"I'm not so sure," he said, frowning. "Gondy is really alarmed. He says she had a pistol under her dress—that was why he fell on her and grabbed her. He got it away, but could not hang on to her. He thinks that with our gold-finding machine, as he calls it, in her mind, she'll never let up, and will murder us all if she gets the chance."

"That's bosh!" I said, and talked him out of his bad mood.

WHILE I was at this, a car arrived and Gondy joined us; he had left his father to go on to the cemetery without him. He had a drink with us and launched into one of his gay day-dreams.

"My friends! I've just remembered something marvelous! You know, when the American Army landed in North Africa, I was in Algiers. I came back here later and got into the Maquis. Well, there in Africa I learned about a lost treasure—oh, it is a truly superb chance for us! If it would please you to hear about it—"

He turned eager eyes on us. Murchison gave me a glance.

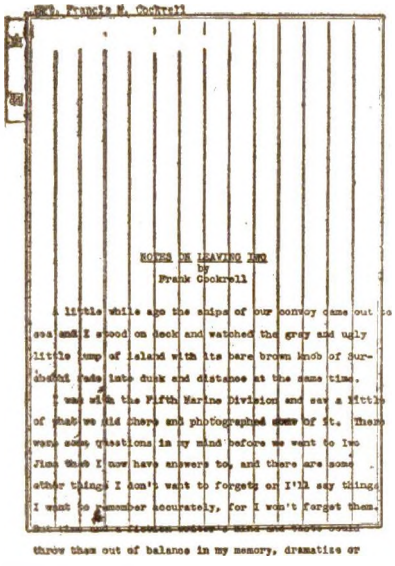
"What say, Carson?"

"Barkis is willing," I replied. "Carson's Folly will work as well in Africa as here. Go on, Gondy, tell us about it!"

He leaned forward and began to bubble happily about the Nazi secret agent and the one-legged dancing-girl—and I knew we were Africa-bound!

NEXT MONTH: "The One-Legged Dancing Girl."

How It Was *on* Iwo


WT3. Francis H. Cockrell

NOTES ON LEAVING IWO
by
Frank Cockrell

A little while ago the ships of our convoy came out to sea and I stood on deck and watched the gray and ugly little lump of island with its bare brown knob of Surabachi fade into dusk and distance at the same time.

I was with the Fifth Marine Division and saw a little of what we did there and photographed some of it. There were some questions in my mind before we went to Iwo Jima which I now have answers to, and there are some other things I don't want to forget or I'll say things I want to remember accurately, for I won't forget them.

throw them out of balance in my memory, dramatize or

A strange-looking manuscript—typed on captured Jap stationery ruled for their vertical writing! But when we saw it was from an Old Guard writer of ours we were still more interested—and think you will be, too.

by FRANK COCKRELL

But time and a fiction-writer's mind and taste could throw them off balance in my memory. So I'm putting them here now before that can happen, as exactly as I can find the words to do it. They make no form or pattern; they come to no conclusion. But they are things I know.

I wondered what it would be like the night before and D-day morning, on the ship; and it was like any night before a practice landing. I watched the others sweating through evening chow, and checking their gear and packs and weapons in the narrow aisles between the five-high tiers of bunks. They looked the same and acted the same; their laughter was no different or less frequent at the dire predictions as to what parts of whose anatomy would be shot off, than it had ever been. There was no tenseness, no edge apparent in anyone. I found that in order to note my own reactions I had to stop and do it consciously; I didn't have any.

The main difference D-day morning was that breakfast was at three-thirty A.M., and we had steak, which made us feel the Government was being pretty big about the thing.

Light had come and was growing as we moved out onto deck and to our debarkation-nets. There was only a little swell then, and it was easy getting down into the boat. I was in an LCM with about thirty other Marines and a half-ton truck.

We moved away from the ship and circled with the boats which formed our wave. We were several miles from shore, but we could see the island clearly, and the battleships and cruisers lying close in, shelling it at point-blank range. The first waves, in the amtracks, were already going in. A guy sitting ahead of me, on the truck, was reading a sheet of funnies from some Sunday supplement. One next to me hauled forth a sheet of Jap words and phrases.

"I guess I better catch up on my Japanese," he said. "*Ko-san-seh-yo*,"* he said. "How's that, Eddie?" Eddie grinned and said it smelled. I looked at the man on my other side, and we shrugged. Whatever we had expected, it wasn't this. It was a letdown, somehow. Not a disappointment, but I had expected something, and there wasn't anything.

Now our boats formed their line and moved to the control boat, two thousand yards offshore. The sun was behind us, the light perfect for photography; I was shooting movies in color. We got our signal and started in.

We would land on the beach nearest Suribachi. Its brown cone jutted into a clear blue sky, and from the low point at its base the island rose gently to the north, gray and bare and uninhabited-looking. The battleships and cruisers still lay between us and the shore, dark and smoky-looking in the shining greenish-blue water. LSTs, lying close also, sent rockets hissing in, and planes dived and strafed and loosed more rockets. Amtracks from the first waves were coming back, and their drivers waved, and their tracks churned up pale green foam.

Each of our boats broke out its flag. Against that background, standing out in the wind with their colors bright and brave, those were a pretty sight.

Very shortly we were close in, the battleships and LSTs behind us, and the first effects of enemy fire we had seen beside us: amtracks which had not come back, lying lifeless in the gentle swell near the beach, bobbing aimlessly, untenanted. Then we were down in the boat, bracing ourselves.

We hit, and the ramp came down, and without getting our feet wet we were on the beach. The truck-driver gave her the gun, and the truck rolled out, and three feet up the beach bogged in the coarse black bottomless sand. He hopped out and was gone.

The beach was fairly level for about twenty yards, then rose steeply for twenty more, and I moved across to this bank. My assignment was to cover medical activities, the treatment and evacuation of casualties; there were three lying here, and so I kneeled and made some shots as a corpsman worked on them; they were clean leg and arm wounds.

THE beach was covered with Marines; shore party men digging in, and others moving across the beach, swarming up that bank. There was a steady succession of expanding whines from machine-gun and rifle bullets passing over, varied now and then with a *spat!* as one hit the sand near by. Down the beach a little, mortar shells were landing from time to time, but none had come too close to where I was. I started up the bank.

By the time I had made the twenty yards to its top, I was exhausted. Not tired; just utterly limp and useless. It was that sand, as loose as sugar. Loaded, as all were, your feet sank into it halfway to your knees at every step. Running was almost impossible, but when you were up, you had to run. I lay there five minutes before I had energy to run another twenty yards and hit the stuff again. One thing, if you reached no hole by the time you'd run as far as your strength and judgment said to run, you could do pretty well just by lying there and wriggling. Presently only your pack would be above the level of the sand; though this was a smallish comfort with Suribachi just to your left, from which they could shoot down at you. And did.

This was little more than an hour after the first wave had hit the beach, and more than fifteen hundred Marines were on that three-hundred-yard wide strip of sandy hill by then. And it was a hill, not a slope. But you saw only a few at a time, in near-by holes, or when they were up and moving. A little above me to the right,

*"*Surrender!*"

however, one was sitting on a sort of hummock, inspecting Suribachi with the reflective look of a gentleman farmer wondering whether he would have this field planted to corn or spring wheat next year. That was Colonel Harry Liversedge, commanding officer of the 28th Marines.

I made my way on up the hill and across it a hundred yards, and came upon some casualties. I made some shots as the corpsmen bandaged them and carried them on litters back down the hill to the beach. Mortar shells sprinkled the hillside from time to time. Always the whine of small-arms fire followed you.

I spent the afternoon on the beach, as casualties were brought down and put into small boats for evacuation to the hospital ships. It was worse on the beach that afternoon.

Vehicles had begun trying to land more frequently by then, and those seemed to be what the Japs were waiting for. ("Japes," on Iwo, usually; sometimes, in the 28th Marines, they were "characters.") The wheeled vehicles couldn't move at all in the sand; tracked vehicles were mortar targets. They were hit and knocked out and set afire. But men on the "cats" kept some of them going, grading the sand, laying metal mats for the wheeled stuff to use. Presently the ducks, carrying artillery, began to come in and climb up the mats. They caught hits too, were knocked out and burned. The Japs didn't have to fool around getting the range on a vehicle; they had the whole beach (hell, the whole island!) pinpointed. Numerous small boats had been hit by then, too, as they landed men and supplies, and with the vehicles were piling up a clutter of wreckage that was clogging the beach. But men kept coming in, and they kept the stuff coming.

I saw no Japs that day. But you could tell they were around.

That was D-day, for me. It didn't seem so bad. There were a few bad moments on the beach that afternoon, but on the whole the thing I minded most was that exhausting sand. It certainly wasn't what I had expected, you can bet.

As far as the risk of being hit was concerned, I had no worse day than this. As far as being afraid goes, I had short moments that were worse than the entire day. Which brings me to that which I had wondered most of all about, along with a lot of others, I suppose: Fear. What fear in combat would be like? How bad? When, and what effect it would have on you with respect to your work? There was no reticence about fear on Iwo. It was a familiar, almost a friendly topic; it was the stuff guys bragged about to each other how full of it they were, this time or that.

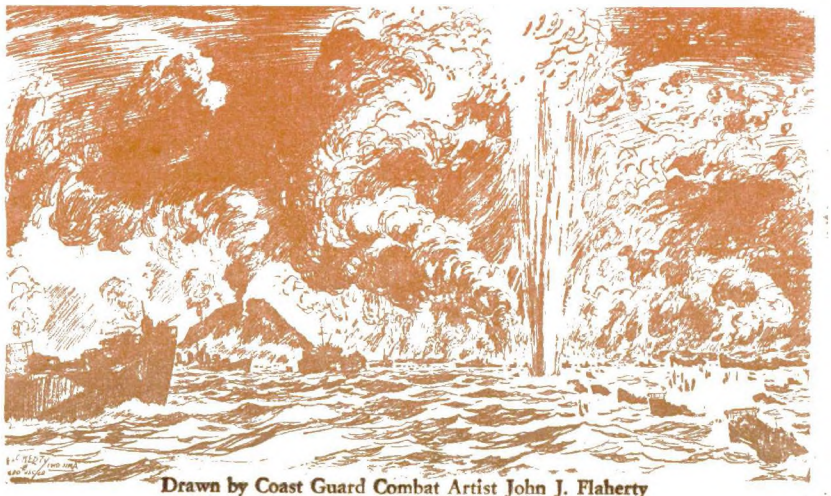
I think several factors contributed to my not having a bad D-day: One was that I did not know, at the time I saw him sitting there so unconcerned, and thought, as a result, that things couldn't be so very bad, that Colonel Liversedge is justly noted for being about as unconcerned a man under fire as one is apt to find. I guess the sight of him has helped a lot of other guys, as it did me. Another was ignorance. For instance, up on the hill that morning I heard a rapid little popping that sounded like a child's toy machine-gun, or like small firecrackers going off. It sounded quite close—thirty or forty yards away. A sergeant-major in the hole with me said it was a Jap light machine-gun. That seemed interesting, for obviously it couldn't be so close; I couldn't see it anywhere. Some odd trick of acoustics, I thought briefly, due to the nearness of Suribachi, or the wind. (I neglected to note the wind was blowing the other way.) Later I saw the emplacement, when that area had been secured. It was about thirty or forty yards away. There were numerous others near. It would have made a difference, all right, to have known that on D-day. Also no shells (my particular fear) landed closer than say fifty yards from me that day, which was simply due to the fact that I was careful to be very lucky.

By far the most important factor, though, the fundamental one, is that I was very busy most of the time. Because fear, for me certainly, and for all other men I've talked to, feeds and grows wholly upon imagination. The few bad moments I had that day were only when I had to lie still for a time, and shells were landing off not very far. I had time to think then. "Maybe the next one will come here. Maybe I'd better move. Maybe if I do, I'll get there just in time to meet one." (This condition is the finest encouragement to keeping busy that I have found.)

For if you're trying to shoot pictures, checking your focus and exposure and camera angles and direction, you haven't time for thoughts like those. If a man is working on a pillbox, if his mind is occupied fully with how to take it, he hasn't time to think about what might happen to him—except with his mind, as part of his problem; he can't dwell on it with his imagination. You judge. You don't take stupid risks. When known risk is involved, you balance it against the worth of the pictures you may get, or the importance of the pillbox, say; but you don't paw it around with your emotions. That's when you're involved in an action, when you're busy. When I wasn't busy I could sit down any time at all, and think a little bit, and work up a nasty sinking emptiness.

Up on the first airfield, when it was well behind our lines, after we had repaired it and were using it, I was sitting in a hole with some pilots when the Japs sent about a dozen large shells over. They were pretty close, and one was close enough to throw a load of dirt in on us; the closest one ever came to me. I knew as well as if I could see my face, from the way my skin felt, when that was over, that beneath the dust and beard, around my eyes where it showed, my skin was a pale, damp green. I asked one of the pilots, and he said it was. He was grinning. It hadn't bothered him much. Those were the worst moments I spent on Iwo.

As I say, it's just how your imagination works; guys have different specials in the line of fear, and mine is shells. When I thought of bullets, I thought of them as being unlikely to hit me in the first place, and of it going through, chances were, a leg or arm, or my shoulder, if one did catch me. A clean hole. Even a chest wound usually isn't too bad if you get prompt attention. But a shell; I thought of a shell hitting or landing near, and I was thinking of no more



Drawn by Coast Guard Combat Artist John J. Flaherty

me, of blankness, of that's all. Shell-fire I didn't like.

One of my friends, a movie photographer, had an unusual fear: everybody has something that bothers him, but Lou's was rather uncommon. It was the fear of being wounded and lying on the battlefield unable to move, and being run over by a tank or amtrack. He thought about it all the way to Iwo. D-day, shell-fire, nothing else worried him; just the idea of being run over.

On the morning of D plus one he *was* run over by an amtrack. He was asleep in his foxhole when he was awakened by the amtrack bearing down on him, only a few feet away. To make it as terrible as possible, he knew instantly and certainly what it was, had time to think, "My God, it's happening!" but not time to get out of the way. Its tracks ran out over the hole and onto him, onto his head and upper body, driving him down into the sand. And stopped.

They dug under the amtrack in the loose sand and pulled him out. He had been sleeping in his helmet, and it is of a singular shape now, quite flat on one side. When he puts it on, there is just barely leeway to do so. The pressure on his chest and shoulders, which would have killed him if the amtrack had gone a few more inches, made it impossible for him to sleep except sitting up for the next week, but after that he was entirely okay, and he went on shooting film all the time, quite unconcerned in some rather concerning spots he chose to work. Maybe he figured it had had a go at him and missed, so there was nothing further to worry about.

ANOTHER guy I knew had his worst time when he knew he had to go up to examine some caves the next morning which he had found were booby-trapped. He had all night to think about it. But some men seemed to have no imagination, at least no fear, in connection with battle. They were a marvelous sight to behold in action. Maybe they are afraid of driving fast in a car. Or women. Or snakes or mice. I'm not trying to be funny.

There are always incidents which have no bearing on the outcome of a battle, but which are fraught with interest for the individuals concerned.

A surprising number of little dogs hit the beach at Iwo. They were good for morale; all members of an outfit which included one were as fond and proud of him as his legal, or at least titular master. So each pooch was a little blessing, in himself, though one of them, a fox-terrier, loosely speaking, was a mixed one at one time.

On D plus one, without noticing very closely, the fellows digging in around him were aware that he was frisking about a good bit, playing with something. When they did notice closely, they found this to be a hand grenade. He was tossing it into the air, letting it fall, pouncing on it, rolling it about. He brought it over to the edge of a foxhole and wagged his tail and danced about with it. They poured out of the foxhole and ran like hell. He frolicked after them. They tried to get him to put it down. He wouldn't. He ran away with a "Chase me!" air. The pin was in, but at any time his teeth, in tossing it, might pull the pin out.

They tried to get him, now, to hold it, and stay away; so he trotted up to the foxhole again and put it down. But he watched it, hawklike, and when a hand reached toward it, he would pounce and pick it up again and canter about the hole. Roguish, full of fun. They tried to lure him with chow. He wasn't hungry. They tried throwing sticks for him to chase. He wanted to play, but only with that grenade. When finally they had got him to put it down by a pretense of not noticing him for a period (no paltry histrionic achievement) and had the grenade safely in their own hands, it is perhaps needless to add that thenceforth their area was as free of loose grenades as any area anywhere ever was. . . .

One friend of mine told me of his life, and those of most of his platoon, being saved by their platoon sergeant. He could see land mines. He told Dick to stand still once, that he was in the middle of a field of them. Dick looked down and could see nothing but innocent-looking sand. The sergeant said to walk straight toward him four steps, sidestep two steps, then come on out straight. Dick made it out all right. He said he never could see them, nor could the others, but when the spots pointed to were carefully explored, always mines would be uncovered.

In addition to those of the Marine Corps, there were Negro troops of the Army attached to us for this operation, crews of DUKWs, those large-wheeled and propellered amphibious vehicles known as "ducks." Some of them did wonderful jobs. One had two ducks shot out from under him D-day, and kept going back for another, finding one abandoned in the ocean, and starting in again, until on his third try, he got one ashore, which he drove from then on through the operation. He said those Japs had made him mad.

And nothing affected their uncomplex approach to things, their fundamental sense of the ludicrous in the dramatic, or their pungent expression of it. One duck was hit about noon, D-day, only some fifty yards or so off shore, knocking out its motor, and its crew went over the side, into the water. There were mortar shells landing around in the water and on the beach, and rifle and machine-gun fire as a sort of added attraction. The duck lay lifeless in the surf, bobbing to the swell exactly like some huge and clumsy surfboard, or so it must have struck the driver. He was piling out too, the last one, standing up to dive, his hands clasped above his head. But before he made the final leap, he called to the others: "I aint no Royal Hawaiian!"

I WONDERED what effect seeing men hit, men dying and men dead would have on me. It's no good. But it's impersonal. You see with the eyes only, realize with the mind only; your emotions turn off. That's for the many, the men you did not know. You can't feel fully for all those hundreds you may see and the thousands you know exist; no human mental, nervous and emotional structure could stand the impact of such feelings, I suppose, and so some automatic safety switch turns them off. It's bad, and you realize it, but you can go on with your work.

But for the few, for men you have known well, for close friends, then it's different. Then is when you're knocked all to hell inside, all dead and empty and mixed up.

Some men spoke emphatically on the way over of how happy they would be not to go in D-day, or at all, and dwelt on the depth and size of the foxholes they would straightway dig and move into when they landed, if they did go in. I wondered what they'd really do.

I saw them D-day carrying casualties on litters down that hill to the beach, through small-arms fire coming from both sides, through the bursts of mortar shells. You can't run very fast carrying a litter; you have to be upright; you have to stop for rest, in that sand; and when you do, there is rarely handy a hole to fit four men and a litter. So you make a dandy target all the time. I heard others who did not come in D-day pleading to go in D plus one; heard them later volunteering to go up to the front as replacements. It was about what I had expected of them, the phonies. They weren't exceptional.

I had wondered what it would be like on the front, of course. It's hard to explain, I'm afraid, for it's difficult to imagine battle without thinking of heroics and dramatics, of dashing figures and climactic spectacle. It is even difficult for me to do so now, when I have seen that it's not like that at all.

It's like work. It is work. There are periods of urgency, certainly, de-

manding the right decision, made instantly, and split-second timing and desperate effort; and there are intervals when the tension is not at peak, of course; but these are merely parts of a whole, and the whole is no more nor less than dangerous drudgery: mean, exhausting work at which men get shot and blown apart.

And so men fighting are like men working, the difference between this and another job being merely that it is both the most hazardous and cruelly wearying possible. It begins when they hit the beach, and it lasts until they have finished it, or it has finished them—nights, Sundays and holidays. And the only feelings evident are those of tiredness and anger and, when a mission has been handled with a minimum of loss, grim satisfaction. Oh, there's drama, but it doesn't seem such then; and there's heroism, and it doesn't either. There's so much of it, for one thing, among Marines, and it's made of such unglamorous stuff: just dirt and intelligence and scrambling and wrath and sweat, and a willingness to be killed while trying to do a job. So at the time it just seems like good work.

That's what the fighting I saw on Iwo Jima was like; there was a lot I didn't see; and of course lots more other places.

ONE other thing I was curious about. A statement came out of the war earlier that there are no atheists in foxholes. I am not atheistic, nor quite agnostic. I believe the teachings of Christ with regard to relationships between men are fine; also those of Gautama Buddha and Confucius. But I have no conception of a deity or any all-knowing, all-powerful force regulating this life or another. I would like to, but I simply happen to be one of the people who find no more foundation for belief than for denial, and cannot believe simply in order to fill the disturbing nothingness of not knowing. Iwo Jima had no effect upon these feelings; in fact, most of the time I was too busy even to think about it one way or the other. I have talked to other men whose feelings were roughly similar to mine; they also remained unchanged. At the same time I have found men whose faith was strengthened, and in all probability there are those who found faith. And this I learned: many who did have a sincere faith found it a tangible support and comfort.

And I'll not forget the chaplains and the work they did. I'll not forget Father Paul Bradley of the 28th Marines, a brisk, rather cocky young man who moved about that beach on D-day, and on the hillside, as calmly as he might make his way through traffic in his native Brooklyn. There were many men pinned down on the beach; but "pinned down" is a term of varying degree. You are pinned down if you think your chance of getting hit is too high to risk getting up. He was never pinned down. He wore no helmet. He said the fellows had got used to seeing him back at camp in his cap, with its turned-up hill and its little gold cross thereon, so he thought it might be easier for them to recognize him if he wore it on the operation. Perhaps he was terrified all the time; I don't know. Certainly if he was, no one else could tell it. The men who were hit and called for him, and found him promptly at their sides, will not forget him: those casualties he found himself will not forget him. He was one chaplain. There were many.

I shall remember the casualties, at the aid stations, on the hospital ships and in the field hospitals—their calm acceptance of their fate and recognition of their chances, if these were slim. They didn't talk much. When they did, it was always of what they had been doing, of what their outfit was. "We were giving 'em hell!" Their eyes were brighter then. No depression, no gloom; not one I saw expected or wanted sympathy. Always: "Lots of guys got it worse" —however bad it was with him! I don't suppose they could all have been like that; I'm just talking about the ones I saw.

I won't forget the caves on this island many layers deep, and their stink and the incredible heat in some of them, which made it hard to believe humans or animals could have lived there. But they did, and fought there, and died eventually. Or the way your foxhole trembled at night as if in a modest earthquake when artillery fired or shells landed near by, or even when a tank or amtrack passed.

Our medical corpsmen are Navy, and there is a rivalry between sailors and Marines. Frequently their mutual disparaging is good-natured, of course; sometimes it's sincere. But all I ever heard from either on Iwo was fervent, unstinting and largely unprintable (which is to say sincere) praise of the others. A corpsman told me one afternoon in a battalion aid station: "I've heard a lot of guys run down Marines and say they're glory-hounds and all like that, and I've done it myself. But I mean nobody better ever do it when I'm around again. They deserve the glory: they're the bravest guys I ever saw, that ever were, and if anybody asks me what I did in this war, I'll tell 'em I served with the Fifth Marine Division, and I'm proud of it. They better not say anything; I'll shove their teeth right down their throat."

He weighed, at a guess, ninety-eight pounds with his pockets full of plasma bottles. It developed, as he gave instances to prove how brave Marines were, that he had been up at the front the night before, evacuating casualties, carrying one end of a stretcher by himself, which is a tough job even for a big man. I'll not forget that little guy.

I landed with the 28th Marines and had good friends among them. Theirs had been the task of taking Suribachi at the first, the key to the operation, and they took it. Then, with a few days' rest, they were on the front lines almost steadily until the very end, and it fell to their lot to hit that deep gorge with its hive of caves which the Japs chose for their final stand. And chose well.

I WAS on the beach when the 28th came down to reembark. They had finished the gorge only the day before. They were cheerful, for they were getting off the island now, but they were quiet men. They would smile instead of laugh. You couldn't distinguish officers from men: all dusty, all weary, nearly all heavily bearded.

A battalion sergeant-major stopped to pass a word with a sergeant I was talking to. The sergeant said he was looking forward to getting back in a camp and coming over to the battalion's sergeants' mess for a good meal once again. A battalion's normal complement of sergeants is sixty-nine.

The sergeant-major was silent for a moment. "Well, I got six now," he said.

From sixty-nine.

I shall not forget our cemetery, with its rows of white crosses and its white picket fence the Seabees made from artillery ammunition cases: with a battery of big 155's firing over it intermittently; with Suribachi rising close behind it, from whose sides many of its tenants were routed here.

Or the men walking through it, along between the rows of crosses, their eyes turned down, reading the names, looking for their buddies. (Is "buddy" a corny word? It had seemed so to me, but it never will again. It's the term they use.)

Casualties from the hospital, limping, with bandages on their heads, with their arms in slings. Men just down from the front, with maybe but an hour to spend before they go back up again. With their weapons, wearing helmets. With the dust of Iwo Jima caked on their faces until you cannot say whether one's skin is fair or dark, the dust of Iwo Jima matted in their weeks-old beards.

I won't forget their dirty, ragged dungarees, or their backs, or the way they walked. I won't forget their faces.

Sam Receives

Called by whatever name, Sam's hunches usually had a solid basis—as witness this remarkable story.

"SAM!"

"Yep?"

Ma Conover slid Sam's boots across the floor, straightened the turned-in corner of the rug with her toe, brushed the yellow cat Trophy off her blue sofa-cushion, then paused to jab a hairpin into place in the silvered coil of hair that seemed to be slipping its coils.

"Tarnation, Sam, there's work to be done!" she said. "Get them boots on. I'm heatin' water to scald a pig."

"So?"

"An' the calves are bellerin'," Ma said. "An' you aint toted no water to the chickens yet. It's high noon."

Sam dropped his broad feet to the floor from their perch on the clothes-rack.

His wife knew nothing about the sudden change in him, the excitement tingling all over.

"Let it all go hoot," he said. "I got business with the Sheriff, over at Speed Gulch. It came like a flash while I was prunin' my toes: Who the feller was that shot Joe Newman, the cattle-buyer, an' where he hid that money."

Ma Conover flicked her apron toward the screen door to shoo off the flies. She walked out on the back stoop warily, gave a sudden forward lurch, and came up with a mess of flying feathers and ungodly squawks. With an expert twist of her right arm, she wrung the rooster's neck, and held it over a railing to bleed.

Reëntering the kitchen, she called through the doorway into the front room:

"Sam, you get a move on. You aint goin' to Speed Gulch."

"I suttinly am," Sam said, appearing in the doorway. "The hog-butcherin' can wait. There's a law o' justice 'round here that can't be impeded by ever'-day work. Poor ol' Newman molderin' in his grave, the victim of foul murder; I got the key to it—an' you're askin' me to stay home!"

"I aint askin' you," Ma said, slipping the rooster into a dishpan and reaching for the scalding kettle. "I'm *tellin'* you."

"Now see here, Ma!" Sam protested. "I got such a lumination all to once, it scraggled me by the back hair. Just in a flash I see the face o' the killer all screwed up as he crawled through skitter-brush an' weeds to the side o' the road. I see his totin'-gun flame. I see Newman fall. Then I see the man take the money, tuck it in his pants an' run. Pretty quick he up-straddles a hoss an' rides off round-about to Speed Gulch. Just outside o' town, he picks up somebody's cast-off boot, sticks in the foldin'-money an' buries the boot. I can lead you right there!"

"Come winter when the work's all done," Ma said, "I don't mind follerin' you. But it's fall now, and we got a passel o' work." She sniffed. "You with the cricks in your bones, an' me none too limber."

"But the law o' justice around here can't—" Sam began again.

The stench of feathers and the puff of steam from the dishpan halted him.

"If we find that money, I'm fixin' to keep it all," Ma said. "Newman aint got no heirs. The county's rich an' the killer aint deservin' of havin' any of it."

Sam balked. "There's some things," he declared stoutly, "I wouldn't be party to! How you goin' to bring Lew Bunty to justice if—"

"Lew Bunty!" Ma screeched. "Why, he's the undertaker, you dang' fool! Nobody in Speed Gulch is more fine, respected or genteel. Mr. Bunty don't kill folks—he buries 'em, polite."

a Lumination

by MICHAEL OBLINGER

"He shot Newman," Sam declared doggedly.

Ma Conover's nimble fingers poised over the pan. "Are you sure it was him? You don't always luminate clear, Sam."

Sam's ears turned pink. "This was a extra powerful lumination," he said. "Never nothin' ever struck me so hard. It was like jiggered streaks o' lightning."

Ma's hands were full of wet feathers. The round exposed breast of the rooster stood up like smooth, piled sand.

"Did you count the money?" Ma inquired unexpectedly.

"No."

"I need a new sittin'-chair in the parlor," Ma said dreamily, "an' white curtains an' such. Pink roses would look nice for the flounces. Also I got my heart set on one o' them crankin' wringers."

An expression of craftiness slid into the corners of Sam's pale, streaked eyes. Nary a woman he couldn't handle if he went about it right. Ma was difficult sometimes and as stubborn as stump roots in a spring grubbin'. But she had a kind of one-mindedness, that could be turned back on itself like meandering creek water.

He said, "I saw a sittin'-chair at Fulsom's, all spangled up in red plush. The springs was so soft you was squattin' on air. I thought we could drop in there, next basket o' eggs we took to town."

"The basket's full now," Ma said.

"But we got to slaughter that hog," Sam reminded her. "Course tomorrow's another day. On the other hand, Fulsom's was full o' folks all askin' the price o' that chair."

"Didn't they have no other like it?"

Sam sighed. "You would think," he said critically, "that ten years' business experience would learn a man like Fulsom you got to have at least two of ever'thing people want."

Ma lifted the rooster from the pan, then ran an experienced hand over its dripping wings. "No pinfeathers," she said. "Are you certain sure, Sam, the money's still hid in the boot?"

"It was there when I had the lumination."

Ma Conover grabbed the butcher-knife. "Go out an' harness the nags," she said, "while I scoot this bird onto the stove. It's tender an' will fry quick. The 'taters are steamin' already."

Sam didn't dare smile until he was out on the back stoop. Then he grinned. Then he stopped grinning, as a democrat wheeled up the driveway from the road, drawn by a pair of gray geldings with clipped tails.

HE recognized the team instantly, also the driver. But he wasn't sure about the man sitting on the left-hand side of the spring seat. He turned and called to Ma, "Here's the Sheriff from Speed Gulch, an'—"

Sam swallowed the rest of the sentence, and stole another look. He stood twisting his fingers, gawking.

When Ma appeared on the opposite side of the screen door, he gulped:

"—an' Lew Bunty, the undertaker!"

Sheriff Joe Rucker tied his team to a wagon in the yard and he and Lew Bunty turned to meet Sam, plodding toward them. Haunted by his recent lumination, Sam's attention centered on the black-garbed and intensely solemn figure of the Speed Gulch undertaker. Bunty walked erect, slow-paced, his shirt-front starched so stiff that it creaked. A heavy chin rested on the cutting edges of a linen collar. The stern mouth turned down so far

"You don't always luminate clear, Sam," Ma Conover said.

at the corners that the lips were stretched thin. Then Sam—without counting the cost, brave to the point of recklessness—uptilted his gaze and looked straight into Bunty's eyes. In that instant two black jets of fire burned into Sam's skull.

He blinked and lowered his head. After that experience, it was pleasant to hear Joe Rucker's big gruff friendly voice:

"Howdy, Sam."

"Howdy, Sheriff."

JOE RUCKER was as big as his voice—filled out and roomy. The same liberal-handedness that filled his enormous boots had squared his wide shoulders, molded his neck and put that huge rugged old head on him.

"I'd like to talk to you, Sam," the Sheriff said. "Where can we sit?"

He looked at the wagon-tongue, but it seemed frail. Near by was an overturned hen-coop with chicken-droppings clinging to it, and he shook his head.

Sam said, "Why can't we go up to the house, Sheriff? There's only my ol' woman there."

"Mind if Mr. Bunty sits in?"

"No, suttinly."

He did, though. How was he going to tell the Sheriff about Bunty and that lumination—with the murderer in the same room? He was afraid of Bunty. Bunty might be, and probably was, the most genteel and polite-mannered undertaker in the world. It was his job. But one couldn't have eyes as sinister as threatening death, without something inside to make them like that!

Sam suggested, "It's around time for lunch. You two gentlemen et?"

"We'll eat in town," Bunty said.

Sam coughed and led the way to the door. Ma opened the screen, ready with her apron to shoo the flies following them. It was a new, clean apron. She'd fixed her hair, changed her dress, rubbed some tallow on her shoes to make them look brighter. She had the table spread with a cloth and it was set for four, Sam noticed.

"Come right in an' take the load off'n your feet," she cried hospitably. "Sheriff Rucker, my sakes—an' you, Mr. Bunty! Now don't mind if you track. It's only the dust. Sam an' me was just hopin' somebody would come and share our fried chicken, wasn't we, Sam?"

"Yep."

"Thank you—thank you!" exclaimed Mr. Bunty.

Sheriff Rucker drew in the aroma from the stove until it filled his powerful lungs; then he said: "Don't mind if we do! How about it, Bunty?"

"Well, of course, it's very kind of you, Mrs. Conover."

Sam said, "Now take off your hats, folks. An' be right to home."

Bunty and Rucker already had their hats off, he noticed. He removed his own, a gray felt with a soiled brim, and dropped it over the upright post of a kitchen chair. Ma picked it up and returned it to him. Absent-mindedly Sam whirled it in his fingers, then placed it carefully on the edge of the table. Ma snatched it off, frowning, and shoved it at Sam's chest.

"Ever'body set right down," she urged. "I got to apologize there aint more kinds to eat, but we'll make out somehow."

The table was loaded, and Sheriff Rucker ate natural and free, all he wanted. But Bunty beat him to the white meat and choice bits of chicken, polite but quick. Bunty used his knife only for cutting, but he worked fast with his fork.

Sam finished off the neck between his fingers. After pie and another cup of coffee, the Sheriff excused himself and got up.

"Now can we talk?" he suggested to Sam.

Rucker walked into the front room, followed by Bunty. Sam was on his way there too when Ma hooked him by one suspender.

"Don't you say nothin' 'bout that buried boot," she whispered.

"Course not."

"What does the Sheriff want?"

"I don't know."

Sam joined Rucker and Bunty. The Sheriff filled his pipe; the undertaker lighted a cigar. Sam sat down and tore off a chaw of tobacco.

"Old Tuck Rogers, your next-door neighbor down the road, was murdered last night," the Sheriff said unexpectedly. "It happened about eight o'clock. Tuck kept his money hid in the house. I found a tin can on the floor, near the body. There was some silver left in it that the murderer must have overlooked."

Sam stiffened in his chair. "I'll be damn-dinged! Tuck! I'll be throwed by a knock-kneed hoss! Ma! Ma!" He turned his head, shouting, "Ol' man Rogers has been kilt."

MA CONOVER appeared suddenly, her hands foamy with dishwater.

"I heard what was said. My sakes, Sheriff, Tuck Rogers was here only yesterday mornin'! He come for some eggs, pullet eggs—they're cheaper. Poor Tuck was a great one to pinch his pennies, but I never thought—"

What Ma thought was lost in the Sheriff's big rumbling voice: "Did either of you see anybody on the road 'twixt seven and eight o'clock last night?"

"Nary a soul," Ma said.

Sam shook his head. "I can't be certain."

Lew Bunty rolled the cigar in his thin lips, removed it and said in the professional tone he used at funerals: "It is very sad. An honest, upright man. This community is going to miss him a great deal."

"I'm having Mr. Bunty look after the body," the Sheriff boomed. "Doctor Wilmot, the coroner, was there. It is a clear case of murder and robbery."

"Who do you think done it?" Sam asked, looking at Bunty.

BUNTY'S eyes met Sam's like two flamethrowers spraying Nazis. Sam dropped his eyelids.

"Wish I could tell you," the Sheriff said. "The same man what killed Newman likely killed Tuck. That's all I know."

Sheriff Rucker stood up. He was scowling. He looked fierce and determined as he nodded to Bunty.

"Come on, let's go. I'll find that double-digged assassin if I got to shake ever' bush in Speed Gulch County! Sooner or later, he'll leave a trail."

Ma pressed close to Sam. "If there's any way we can help you, Sheriff, you jus' call on us. Sam luminates, you know."

Sheriff Rucker turned, hand on the door. "Luminates!" he asked, puzzled. "What's that?"

"He gets visions, like," Ma explained. "Forewarnings an' such. They aint always clear, but he luminates."

"Yes," acknowledged Sam, blushing to his ears. "It's a kind of gift, like readin' a man's mind."

"Can you read mine now?" Rucker asked.

"No."

"Mr. Bunty's?"

Sam hesitated. "I—I think I could read Mr. Bunty's," he admitted.

Lew Bunty laughed. "You might be surprised what you found there," he said pointedly. "It might astonish you."

Sam nodded. "Yes, it might."

Sheriff Rucker and the undertaker went out on the stoop. A few moments later, Sam heard the democrat creak and rattle along the driveway to the road. Ma was back in the kitchen, washing dishes like mad.

"Now's the time to go an' dig up that boot, Sam," she called to him. "You get them nags ready. Soon as they're hitched, I'll come out with the egg-basket. We got to hurry, Sam!"

Sam put on his hat. He was thinking of Lew Bunty. Bunty had also murdered and robbed Tuck Rogers, it looked like. Bunty had eyes that could burn and scorch like fire. He was afraid of Bunty.

"It was *him* that read *my* mind," he muttered. "And not me his'n. In town, I'm goin' to buy double bolts for all the doors!"

A mile from Speed Gulch, Sam Conover stopped his team, handed the reins to Ma and said in a low, choked voice: "It's right here he dug in that boot. The lumination showed it plain." He pointed. "See that place in the bank where the clay is rutted with rain? You see it, Ma?"

"My glasses is thick with road dust," Ma said sharply. "Don't explain nothin'. Just fetch me the boot."

Sam stepped down, furtively reached in the wagon-box for his shovel, then paused to listen. All he could hear was Ma fidgeting in the seat. He crossed the road ahead of the team, feeling hot and shaky. His face dripped sweat. Holding on to brush with one hand, he lowered himself into the ditch, clambered up on the opposite side and approached the high bank. Now his heart was thumping hard with heavy, uneven strokes. Then it almost stood still.

There was a team coming!

"Hurry, Sam! Hurry!" Ma yelled from the road.

THE place was marked with a stone. Sam rolled it aside, struck in his shovel. Then he was down on his hands and knees, digging like a gopher. He could feel something. A bit more scratching, and he saw the crackled surface of old leather. He clawed like a cat. Loose clay sprinkled his knees and peppered his face. In agony he turned his head toward the road. His eyes jumped. The mixed sounds of rattling harness, hoofbeats, and democrat wheels, followed by a despairing wail from Ma, were suddenly blasted by a big voice:

After pie and another cup of coffee, the Sheriff suggested to Sam: "Now can we talk?"

"Tarnation, Sam! What the blue blazes— I say, what in the name of the good Gawd're you doin'?"

Looking toward the bank, Sam bowed his head while the world rocked and tilted. The flesh on his back crept upward on caterpillars' feet. Air clogged his throat.

He tried to say something.

Sheriff Rucker roared, "Sam, what you got there? A snake?"

SAM dropped back in the ditch with his shovel; suddenly, furiously, he whacked on soft ground, ran a few steps and whacked some more. He pursued a phantom up the side of the ditch, through tall grass and into a brushpile. There he lost it. Shovel upraised, he circled the brushpile warily.

"A rattler!" he said to Sheriff Rucker, who was approaching with drawn gun. "It's in there. The durn' thing was coiled up in the road when I come along. It dang' near bit my nigh hoss."

Sheriff Rucker nodded appreciatively. "Big un?"

Sam's fingers circled his wrists. "It was that thick!"

The Sheriff pulled up some dry grass and fired the brushpile. "I got Tuck's corpse in the democrat," he said. "Else I'd stay with you an' watch that rattler come out."

Sam pursued a phantom into a brushpile. "A rattler!" he said to Sheriff Rucker.

The voice of Lew Bunty sounded behind them. Sam jumped.

Bunty said, "You don't need to hurry, Sheriff."

The Sheriff mopped his face. "It's hot," he said. He looked back at the blanket-wrapped object in the box of the democrat and sniffed. "No, we'd better take him right to your undertaking parlor, Mr. Bunty."

Sam's knees were weak. In crossing the ditch, he stumbled, and Bunty caught his hand. Suddenly, Sam's fingers were in a steel trap.

"Careful!" the undertaker muttered. "Something might happen to you."

He smiled politely and withdrew his hand. Sam's knees knocked all the way to the wagon. With wonderful forethought, Ma had driven the nags ahead, pulling up at one side of the road. That left room for Rucker's grays and buggy behind her to pass. Sweating, Sam took all the time he could in putting the shovel in the wagon, climbing to the spring seat and taking the reins.

With a wave of his hand, Sheriff Rucker went clipping up the road. A cloud of dust rolled after him.

Illustrated by Lyle Justis

Bunty's eyes met Sam's like two flamethrowers spraying Nazis.

MA placed a moist palm on Sam's quaking knee. "That was a close call, Sam."

"It aint nothin' compared to what's comin' next," Sam wheezed. "Bunty's goin' to kill us. He'll be waitin' in Speed Gulch."

"Nonsense," Ma said.

"I tell you that murderin' rat is desperate—crazy! If you could feel the way he squeezed my hand in the ditch an' heard what he said, you wouldn't make such light o' it."

"I aint afeared of nobody," Ma said. "If he comes at me, I'll kick his shins. Now, Sam, you pull yourself together an' fetch me that boot."

"To hell with the boot!"

"Sam!"

"We aint got no right to that money," Sam protested. "It don't belong to us, it belongs to the county. I don't care if Newman aint got no heirs."

From the tail of one eye, Sam saw Ma sitting straight and stubborn. Then all at once she quivered, and something sparkled on Sam's wrist.

"I—I allers wanted a sittin'-chair that wasn't nailed to with boards," she wailed. "An' a crankin' wringer an'—an' a new tub. An'—an' curtains that aint rags. Sam, you aint a woman, so—so you don't realize how danged hard it is to fix up a home with just eggs!"

"All right, Nettie," Sam said in a smothered voice. "Stop your hellerin'. But all I got to say is, I hope we live long enough to buy them things from the store."

Ma looked at Sam as if he was a stranger—and blew her nose. Once more Sam got down, crossed the ditch and scooped away at the hole. Presently he tugged at the boot's leather top. It loosened. He brought it, squirming and kicking like a live thing, to Ma, then clambered to the wagon seat.

"Look inside it," he said.

Ma thrust an arm in and brought out a paper-wrapped package. She tore off the covering.

"Sake o' Solomon!" she gasped, her mouth wide open. "Is this here real money?"

Sam's prejudiced eyes gave the stack of bills a perfunctory nip.

"Sure," he answered. "Blood-money. Poor Newman got kilt over that. Why don't you count it?"

He waited patiently. "Over five thousand dollars," Ma said in such a low voice that Sam had to strain his ears.

"Giddup!"

The wagon rolled down the road. Wheels hit chug-holes. Dust smoked around the wagon, gray and thick. Sam was sure he'd never have occasion to travel that road, or any other road, again. He'd stay in Speed Gulch where the cemetery was thick with old fools like him, who'd had more courage than caution. Maybe, too, some of them had wives like Nettie, good wives, but doting on pink flowered curtains and such.

Sam slapped the reins on old Barney's hump.

"Gol-ding you, ol' runaway, I won't need to stir you up much longer."

THE wagon rattled into the main street, past frame buildings, trimly white, past paimless shacks, past the imposing brick front of the bank. Just a few blocks farther was Lew Bunty's Funeral Parlor. They had to pass it to get to Fulsom's store and the sittin'-chair of red plush.

Suddenly Ma's hand slipped into Sam's.

"You was right," she said. "It's blood-money. I wouldn't want no home fixed up ever so fine ill'n we have to pay for it that way."

Sam swung around in the seat. "You mean that, Nettie? That the way you really feel? Sure?"

Her eyes were misty.

"Sam," she said, "if them danged hens only keep layin', some day mebbe—"

She couldn't finish; she didn't need to. She put the money back in the boot.

"You can get off an' trade your eggs at Martin's grocery," Sam said. "Whoa!"

He waited for her to get down. Then, remembering how he used to help her, he got down himself and reached for her hand.

Ma smiled. "That's nice of you, Sam. The money's there—you take it right to the Sheriff at the courthouse."

Sam got the egg-basket and gave it to her. He took a long, searching last look at her face.

"You won't be long?" Ma said.

Sam turned and got up, chipper-like, to the seat. "Course I won't," he answered. "You stop frettin', Ma. I know what I'm at."

He drove past Lew Bunty's, turned the corner and whipped up his team. The shovel jumped out. The boot slid under the seat. Box boards creaked. Snorting, old Barney came to life, took the bit in his teeth and bolted. Sam stood up, yanking on the reins. The spring seat bounced high, landing skewgee over a wheel.

With one hand, Sam rescued it. The courthouse was close. People turned on the sidewalk to yell:

"Runaway! Runaway!"

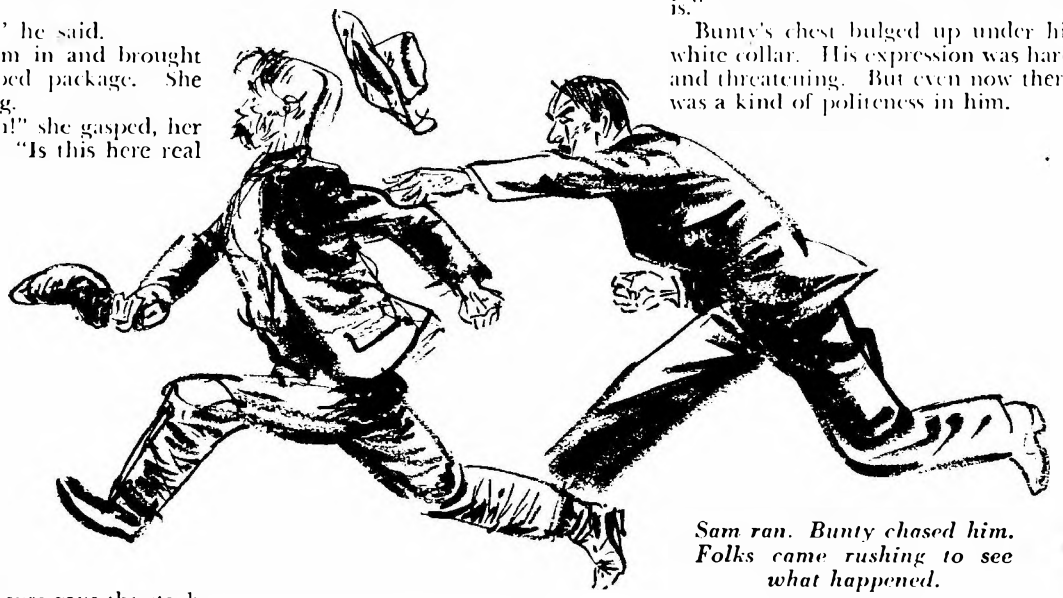
One rein snapped just as Sam passed the courthouse. He grabbed the boot and jumped. Hitting the sidewalk, he whirled and fell.

When he sat up, Lew Bunty stood over him.

"I've been waiting here," he said. "Thought you'd be along soon, Mr. Conover."

Sam rose, holding the boot. "They's a crowd comin'," he choked. "If you shoot, they'll see you an' know who it is."

Bunty's chest bulged up under his white collar. His expression was hard and threatening. But even now there was a kind of politeness in him.



Sam ran. Bunty chased him. Folks came rushing to see what happened.

"You will walk back into the alley, Mr. Conover," he said. "Don't run. Go slow." He showed Sam a knife. "It's sharp. I'll hold it up my sleeve like this, so you won't be embarrassed."

Sam hesitated.

The knife dropped back into Bunty's hand.

"Step along, Mr. Conover."

In the alley the undertaker would stick him with that knife. Quiet place—only garbage-cans and flies, litter and wastepaper and dirt. Woodsheds crowded each other and some had tumbled down. Speed Gulch wasn't none too particular about what folks

couldn't see; it had a clean front but a dirty rear.

"Damn you," Bunty said. "Now move faster!"

He'd forgotten to be polite. Sam struggled ahead. They reached the alley.

"Turn to the right," Bunty snapped. "Walk into the first empty woodshed. Then stop."

"I can give you the boot right here," Sam offered feverishly. "It would save time."

"Jump!" The knife pricked Sam in the back. Pain touched off the rage in him like a match. He whirled, swinging the boot down hard on the undertaker's head. He tried to kick Bunty in the groin. He slammed a fist into a soft belly.

Then he ran. Bunty chased him. Sam fell over the hedge on the courthouse lawn. Folks came rushing from the sidewalk to see what had happened. Over him, Sam saw an upraised hand flashing steel. He heard a big gruff voice; then Bunty was wriggling, biting, scratching like an old tomcat. Sheriff Rucker got a firmer grip on the undertaker's wrist, and the man squealed in agony.

A few minutes later, Sam sat in the Sheriff's office, holding the boot in his lap.

"Must be the heat," Rucker pondered, "to make a feller go all to pieces like that. Bunty was violent, stark mad when I locked him in the cell—raving!"

"You'd rave, too," Sam said, "if you knowed you was to be hanged."

"In this country," the Sheriff said, "you only hang a man for stealin' cattle an' sometimes for murder."

Sam rose and set the boot on the Sheriff's desk. "There's the evidence," he said. "Back in the alley, I hit Bunty with five thousand dollars. It's all in that there boot. Bunty buried the boot back where you thought I was after that snake. That money belonged to Bill Newman, the cattle-buyer, I figger."

"Holy jiggers!" the Sheriff exclaimed. "If that's Newman's money, I can prove it by the numbers on the bills—the bank kept a record of 'em when they cashed Newman's check. I got them numbers right here."

SAM waited while Rucker counted the money and put down the numbers. Next, the Sheriff consulted a paper on his desk.

"I'll be damn-dinged! You're right. It's Newman's, sure as hell." Rucker stroked his chin. "Now look here, Sam, how'd you know it was Bunty buried this boot?"

"Lumination," Sam said, flushing.

The Sheriff scowled. "In the business of enforcin' the law, we don't put much stock in luminations. How do I know, Sam, that you didn't bury this boot?"

The flush spread all over Sam. It covered him like a red blaze. There were burnings even up in his hair.

"You won't never mention it again if I tell you suthin'?"

"No, certainly not."

"For forty years," Sam confessed, "I been havin' luminations just to impress Ma. It makes her kind of proud of me—havin' a curious gift like that."

"Yes, yes—go on, Sam."

"Well, I allers made it a point never to have no lumination until I find out suthin' nobody else knows. One day, 'bout a week ago, two steers busted the fence, an' wandered off toward Speed Gulch. It was late 'fore I ketched up to 'em. I was walkin' along above the high bank, that place where I said I seen the rattler, when Bunty canters up on a bay hoss, gets down and looks 'round, furtive-like. He was holdin' this boot. I watched him bury it an' then I snuck away."

"He didn't see you?"

"No."

"Then what did you do?"

"All week long," Sam continued, "Bunty buryin' the boot give me suthin' to think about. But not till this mornin' did I get things worked out to the place where I could have a lumination."

The Sheriff laughed. "It's going to be a big help to me," he said. "Bunty probably murdered old Tuck Rogers, too."

Suddenly the door crashed open. It was Ma—hot, flushed, but triumphant. "Sam!" she shouted. "Thank God, you're all right! I want you to come down to Fulsom's, quick."

"Fulsom's!" Sam gasped.

"Don't you hear me?" The cherries on Ma's black bonnet bobbed and clicked. "They still got that red plush sittin'-chair, an' some white curtains with pink roses, an' a crankin' wringer with screws on top to regulate it."

"Well?" Sam said.

"Fulsom promised to set 'em aside for me till we get that money, Sam."

"Money!"

Ma pointed wildly past the Sheriff to a place on the wall ornamented with printed sheets.

"Ain't you seen none o' them posters, Sam?" Ma demanded. "They're stuck up all over town! Two thousand dollars offered for information leadin' to the arrest and conviction of the murderer o' Joe Newman. Can't you read?"

At that precise moment, Sam couldn't read anything. He could barely see. He had just enough breath left to ask Rucker:

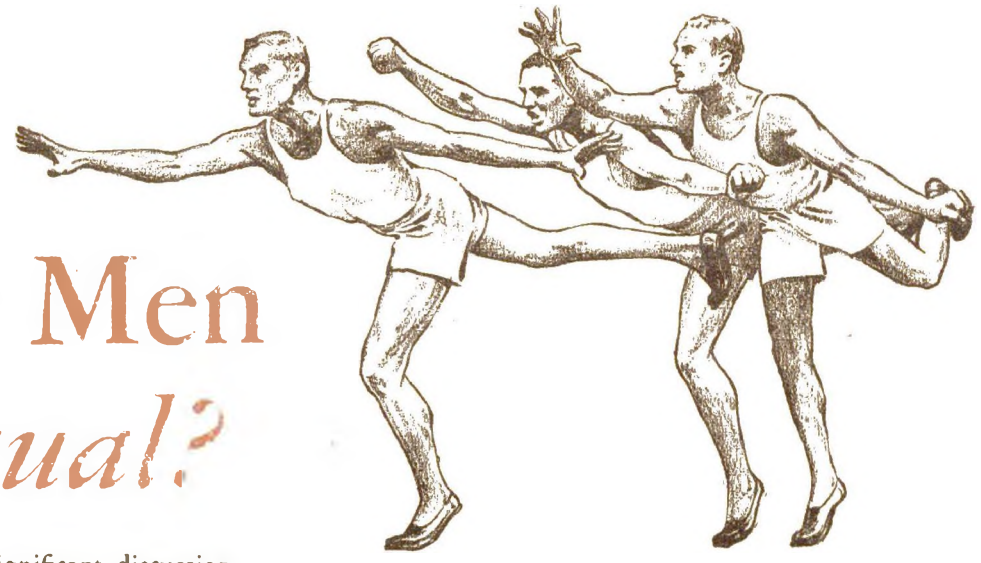
"Is that true, Sheriff?"

"You bet it is!" Rucker boomed. "That reward is yours. Or it will be, mighty quick."

Sam put his hand in Ma's and they moved trancelike toward the door. Outside, in the corridor, Ma gave Sam a kiss.

"It sure pays to luminate!" she said.

Sam moved trancelike to the door. "It sure pays to luminate!" Ma said.



Are Men *Equal?*

A timely and significant discussion

by HENRY ALONZO MYERS

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN EQUALITY is raised by the general agreement of men that in a just society the standing of every member is determined by his true worth.

As political thinkers, even Thomas Jefferson and Adolf Hitler agree that social justice depends upon the correct appraisal of men. But here their agreement ends. In planning a new world order the author of the Declaration of Independence chose the equality of men, the author of *Mein Kampf* their supposed natural inequality, as the fundamental political axiom. Their choice of opposed axioms was fateful; developing on one side into American democracy and on the other into the Nazi will to rule the world, inevitably it brought the United States and Germany into uncompromising conflict.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler models his dream of a new social order on the inequality which he insists is the obvious order of nature. Nature is an aristocracy, he tells us, everywhere exhibiting the grades of good, better, and best, and of bad, worse, and worst. One nation is better than another, and the best qualities are found in races of "common blood," in whose separate and distinct existence he really believes. One such race, by the order of nature, must stand at the top of the aristocracy of peoples. This is the master race. As for the relation of the members of the master race to each other, he seems to argue that the German people, who are the master race, are on a plane of equality with each other, enjoying at the same time superiority over all other peoples. If this is his point, it explains the two powerful appeals to the German people implied in the title of the National Socialist movement. As a national movement, stressing their rightful place at the top of all nations and races, it satisfied fully their cravings for superiority, which had little to feed upon after 1918; as a socialist movement, promising in a variety of ways to set right the grievances of underprivileged Germans against their own "blood-brothers," it satisfied their deep desire, common to all men, for a society of equals.

Once we understand Hitler's view of the inequality of men, nations, and races and his belief, free from any shadow of doubt, in a German race of blood-brothers chosen by nature to rule inferior peoples, we find a perverse consistency in all his words and deeds. He is consistent in *Mein Kampf,* for example, though hopelessly inaccurate, when he insists that the doctrine of equality is a lie invented by the Jews, who use it to mask their own drive to power. If we look into his accusations against the Jews far enough to penetrate beyond the abusive language, we discover his three consistent reasons—just reasons in his view—for persecuting them. First, the German Jews, since they can never be blood-brothers to the true Germans, cannot be expected to deny human equality in order to support the dogma of German superiority. Secondly, the Jews have dared to live among Germans without keeping in their ordained place as an inferior people—in Hitler's view a crime against the Germans and against nature. Thirdly, the Jews have preached pacifism as a trick to keep the true German people in bondage and to prevent them from using their natural strength to establish their superiority over other peoples.

The author of *Mein Kampf* sincerely believes in justice. But there are two views of justice, and what seems just to men who believe in the right of the strong to rule seems unjust to men who believe in equality.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler denounces democratic justice as the cause of confusion, anarchy, and chaos. He longs to restore order by making "true" justice prevail. And like Mussolini, who in *Fascism* rejects "the absurd conventional lie of political equalitarianism" in order to assert the "fertile and beneficent inequality of men," he will never admit that justice prevails until the highest and lowest are in their proper places.

This is precisely the kind of justice which Hitler describes in *Mein Kampf.* When he demands justice for the German people, he does not mean that justice would be satisfied by their sharing equally with other peoples. He means that they are entitled to *more,* to the lion's share, in accordance with their natural superiority. Likewise, when he promises justice to other peoples, he does not mean that each shall have an

independent and equal station in the family of nations; he means that each must accept the fate ordained by nature for those who are inferior to the master race.

Hitler's dream of a world in which a "highest race, as the master nation, based upon the means and the possibilities of an entire globe, will be called upon" to maintain justice was hailed by his followers as the New Order. In fact it is the oldest order in the world, the old, old order in which the strong assert their right to keep the weak in subjection by an appeal to the natural inequality of men. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler frankly admits that this appeal must always be implemented by force. In principle his view "sees in the State only a means to an end, and as its end it considers the preservation of the racial existence of men. Thus it by no means believes in an equality of the races, but with their differences it also recognizes their superior and inferior values, and by this recognition it feels the obligation in accordance with the Eternal Will that dominates this universe to promote the victory of the better and stronger, and to demand the submission of the worse and the weaker."

In his assertion that might and right are the same we discover the logical conclusion of Hitler's defense of a justice based upon inequality. Since he identifies better and worse with strength and weakness, he urges the master race to prove by armed might that it belongs at the top of the natural order. Who can doubt that the heart of the complex phenomenon of Hitlerism is the belief that the inequality of men is the true order of nature?

II

LIKE *Mein Kampf*, the Declaration of Independence is a statement of grievances and a demand for justice, ending in a declaration of war. But Jefferson, as spokesman for the new nation, asks for democratic justice. He makes his view of justice immediately clear by announcing the intention of the American people to win an "equal station" among the powers of the earth. Expressing neither scorn nor enmity for other peoples, he speaks instead of a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind" as the motive of the Congress in making a formal declaration. With a genius for placing first things first, he next sets forth the self-evident truths which are the basis for determining social and political justice among men and nations. The first of these is "that all men are created equal."

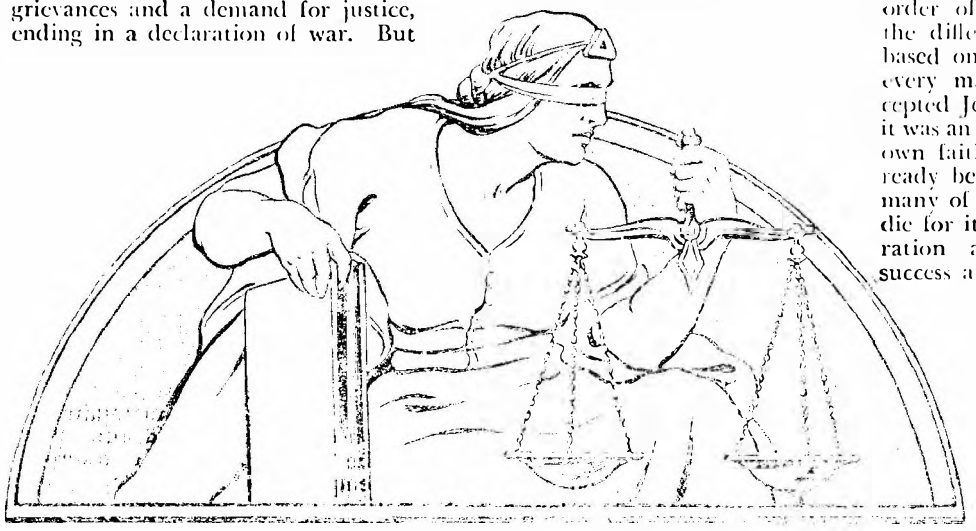
Here lies the bedrock of Jefferson's political thought. Problems of justice between men are to be settled by reference to the self-evident truth of human equality. Here we find the cause of conflict between an America true to the Jeffersonian tradition and a Germany ruled by the principles of Hitlerian politics.

Jefferson made no effort to prove his proposition that all men are created equal beyond appealing to the universal assent of mankind. His interest and compelling motive in stating the proposition were practical, not theoretical. As a problem in practical statesmanship, what mattered most was that Jefferson's key idea should recommend itself first to the interests of Congress and the American people and later to the interests of mankind.

It was immediately accepted at home. For more than ten years the American people had been carrying on a quarrel with the British government, couched in terms still puzzling to the historian. An indication of rapidly growing discontent with government from afar and with the growth of social inequality in the colonies, it came to a head in matters which, as commonly happens in quarrels, did not fully reveal its nature. In the beginning the colonists argued against distinctions between British subjects at home and abroad and in favor of a subtle distinction between internal and external taxation. The deeper cause of trouble was that the final defeat of the French in Canada, whom the colonists had long feared, had removed for the time being the single great advantage of colonial dependence upon Great Britain, leaving the colonists free to become increasingly aware of many disadvantages. Chief among these to a multitude of ordinary Americans was the way in which the mother country fortified the social prestige of the wealthy and powerful, threatening to establish in the new world the fixed and unalterable hierarchies which had driven many of the colonists out of the old.

MANY Americans, who longed for an even more firmly established order of inequality, were, of course, strongly opposed to independence, ascribing the turmoil to demagogues, who they feared would lead the rabble into anarchy. Fortunately not all of the powerful were of this opinion. Men like Jefferson, Franklin, and Washington were in revolt, but clearly these leaders were men of great personal force and ability, who had earned distinction in their communities without the aid of favors from abroad. A swarm of privileged but ordinary men —dull, conservative, and important in position rather than in person—the kind of men who annually renewed their faith in themselves by attending the royal governor's assembly—remained true to the king and were ultimately driven from the country. Long before leaving, however, they had unwittingly performed a service by preparing the majority of the American people to welcome Jefferson's idea.

This majority, whether or not they had any means of proving to themselves or to others that equality is the order of nature, clearly understood the difference between social justice based on equality and the theory of every man in his place. They accepted Jefferson's proposition because it was an admirable expression of their own faith; before reading it they already believed in it so strongly that many of them were even prepared to die for it. For this reason the Declaration achieved complete political success at home.



Justice, universally agreed upon, can unite men in a social force mightier than guns.

On the whole it was successful abroad. If to conservatives it seemed to be only an outburst of political demagoguery, it aroused interest and sympathy wherever it reached the ears of either the disinterested or the dispossessed, and its freshness and force commanded some respect from all who relied more on their own strength than on their position. Nowhere did it make enemies of those who might otherwise have remained friendly or neutral. All in all, its reception was in striking conrast with that given abroad to Hitler's blueprint for the New Order. At first his plan was received in the outside world with amazement and ridicule by those who did not grasp its powerful appeal to both the love of superiority and the need for fellowship of the German people. As Hitler rose to power, ridicule gave way to alarm, but still only a few could believe that the German people would long take his plan seriously. As his ideas were translated into actions, however, and as internal persecution was followed by outward aggression, alarm turned into fear, and fear into resentment, desperation, and finally determination.

Although there were in every country, when Hitler came to power, some who stood to profit by his kind of justice, since they belonged to races destined to be masters; and although there were everywhere some who could better their fortunes by becoming leaders in nations doomed to dependence upon Germany; and although these men weakened opposition to him either by appeasement or by treachery, a few leaders from the first and in time vast numbers were ready to fight to the end against the threat of a social order based on inequality and established and maintained by force.

In the supreme moment of danger the enemy is the criminal, not the crime: in the fog of war we more readily come to grips with a person than with an idea. But since ideas outlive men, and since justice and truth are more than sounds to be mouthed by both parties to a savage struggle, we cannot boast of the overthrow of tyrants until we have answered the doctrine of tyranny. For unless we prove to the satisfaction of all that true justice is based on the equality of men, Hitlerism will rule the world in spite of Hitler's downfall.

III

THE two chief patterns for a world-wide society are the old imperial dream, revived by Fascism and National Socialism, of stability founded on the firm rule of a superior people, and the equalitarian dream of a world community of peoples, organized on

"All men are created equal." Here lies the bedrock of Jefferson's thought.

the principle of equal rights and duties. On a global scale each is without historical precedent, and for a good reason: the difficulties in the way of realizing either pattern are almost insuperable. No one people has ever succeeded in dominating all others; and equalitarians have thus far been unable to muster either enough armed might or that greatest conceivable force in politics, the universal consent of mankind, in support of their dream.

Between these two patterns lie the familiar compromises of history. As in the past, when the great powers are brought into equilibrium, the world may find the kind of peace which is only the troubled sleep of war. If it finds nothing better, the future will be like the past: peace among men will depend upon a temporary balance of armed forces, and war will be the certain consequence of forces out of balance.

The Axis plan for victory was a compromise of power politics on the part of three nations with similar hopes for the justice of racial superiority. The tripartite pact, signed by Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo, recognized a division of the globe into spheres of influence as at least a temporary expedient. Each sphere was to have been a little world dominated by one of the partners.

Each partner dreamed, of course, of a better world to come, of one world in which it alone should be master. By sharing this dream for a time the partners tacitly admitted that equality is the only alternative to mastery. With complete cynicism they violated their doctrine of superiority by agreeing to a division of the globe and by pretending that a justice of equality among three master nations could cure the world's ills. Each knew that equality among the partners could be no more than a precarious balance of forces, maintained only so long as each was too busy in its own sphere to attack the others. First three would divide the spoils; later two might share the booty; finally through superiority one would institute the first true world empire.

The Axis plan has failed. What will take its place? Judging by the past, we cannot expect in the near future either the triumph of a single master nation or the founding of a world-wide community of equals. And yet—with the rapid shrinking of distances and the acceleration of human affairs through mechanization—one is a greater danger and the other a more reasonable hope than ever before. In our time, we may be sure, the pattern for a future world society—equality or inequality—will be chosen, and the compromises leading toward its realization brought into being.

As always, force will determine the choice. In human affairs force can give way only to force. But human affairs are affected by powerful forces not described in a treatise on armaments. The cry of the seemingly helpless infant—the human race will testify—rivals the explosions of torpedoes and blockbusters. And the forces which determine war and peace have their beginnings in the cradle, in human nature. In war armed force spearheads the clash between the opposed wills of men; in conquest it imposes the will of the victors upon the vanquished. So long as men lack a united will, armed force, representing the prevailing will of the strongest, must rule; it can know no master save the force of human unity.

That they despair of ever gaining universal assent and good will the would-be masters of men confess by their blunt praise of war as the highest form of human activity. In this they are consistent. In an order based on inequality strife must be the only cement of society, and strife is justice; that is, it establishes the rightful claims of the strong to rule.

Their opponent, if he is a realist, cannot foresee any time when arms may be safely left to the exclusive use of the enemies of democratic justice. If he has learned anything from the past, he now knows that the United Nations, after victory, face a difficult and complex problem. To remain forever free, they must make certain that force remains in their hands and not in those of their enemies. To remain just to victors and vanquished alike, they must perfect the mechanics of a new world society, drawing ideas from the pooled experience of the American people in maintaining a union of separate and distinct states, of the British people in transforming an empire into a commonwealth of nations, and of the Russian people in

developing a union of socialist republics. And most important, if they hope to free humanity at last from the tyranny of armed force, they must from the beginning face the gravest of all questions: which basic pattern for a world society, equality or inequality, will more readily secure the united will of mankind?

IV

In the familiar terms of power politics—*equilibrium* and *balance* of power—we find the same concept of equality which is central in the consideration of justice and the determination of human worth. This is not pointless coincidence. The complex social and political history of men—a series of adjustments of force to the prevailing views of justice and of human worth, and vice versa—returns in every episode to the problem of equality.

We know from history that every society has been established by armed force in the name of justice. And although men may disagree about the social usefulness of war, no one questions justice. No one maintains that injustice should be the principle governing human affairs. It is certain, therefore, that if the future peace is maintained by armed force, the strong who establish and defend the new order will do so in the name of justice. It is even more certain, if that be possible, that only justice, universally agreed upon, can unite men in a social force mightier than guns. . . .

How can men agree about the need for justice and yet disagree about its nature? In some respects the idea of justice is one of the simplest of the great abstractions. Justice, all agree, is the honored name for a suitable relation between what a man gives and what he receives. Divine or natural justice, for example, implies that each man should receive satisfactions from life in proportion to his efforts and sacrifices. Political justice implies a balanced exchange of duties and privileges between the citizen and the state. Social justice implies that every man should have a position in society in accordance with his true worth. Economic justice implies that goods and services should balance payments received. If one man receives more satisfaction from life at less cost than another, we either question the justice of life, or we believe that in a life hereafter the books will be justly balanced. If one citizen enjoys greater privileges and performs fewer duties than others, or if the social position of the individual is determined without regard to his true worth, we indict society in the name of justice.

The idea of justice has inspired a familiar symbol, the blindfold goddess with her scales. Its central meaning seems clear enough. In exchanges there must be a balance: what is given must equal what is received. So simple an idea seems hardly open to challenge. And indeed disagreement about justice turns on the blindfold rather than on the scales. Why is Justice blindfolded? The traditional answer is that she is thus prevented from making distinctions between persons so that all who appear before her will do so as equals. She is without prejudice, without partiality, without an order of values preferring one man to another. Her concern is not with men, who are to her all alike, but with the relative values of things exchanged.

Here we find the effect of the great issue on the idea of justice: some think that the blindfold helps the goddess maintain justice by enabling her to treat all as equals; others think that it blinds her to the real superiority of some claimants. Until the issue is decided no one can be satisfied with a blindfold goddess. Advocates of the justice of inequality will always agree with Hitler that Justice must remove the bandage from her eyes and favor the strong at the expense of the weak. And friends of democratic justice can hardly appeal to intelligent men to support their cause if they admit that only a blindfold goddess can believe in human equality.

V

If Hitler had been the only advocate of a justice determined by the natural inequality of men, we might be satisfied to find in his downfall a conclusive answer to his doctrine. Unfortunately, the doctrine of inequality is one of the oldest in the history of thought. . . .

For Americans the choice between Hitler and Jefferson, as political architects, is too easy; consequently we are likely to assume that with the end of Hitler's dream the great issue has been forever decided in Jefferson's favor. But we must remember that Jefferson's is the new, startling, and even heretical proposition, and that Hitler's is only a variant, unacceptable to non-Germans, of what many have long believed to be the politically significant fact about men.

Hitler's appeal to war as the test of greatness was not debatable; it had to be answered on the field of battle. But the doctrine of inequality which he used to justify his appeal has special snares for those who cherish reason and virtue. To understand the great issue clearly one must see that, although faith in equality is necessary in a society designed for all men, the doctrine of superiority serves the purposes of a state designed to resist the outside world. For this reason, before politics became global in scope, philosophers defended inequality, although they tried to moderate it by making virtue and wisdom, and not brute strength, the chief tests of fitness to rule. . . .

The most persuasive statement of the case for political justice based on inequality is to be found in Plato's *Republic*. Plato assumes that nature and human nature are parallel, and that since reason rules the universe, it should also rule the individual and determine his position in society. That men are unequal he takes for granted. The ideal state is one, therefore, that follows the true order of inequality. It will be a society of classes. At the top will be those, long trained in philosophy, who are fitted by the superiority of their minds to rule. Their judgments will be enforced, at home and abroad, by a warrior class, who represent the human will. The material needs of society will be met by a third class, composed of workers, farmers, and merchants, whose activities are all on the level of the human appetites. Such a society would maintain the order which should prevail in the individual. As the individual's appetites and will should be under the control of his reason, so in society those who represent the lower faculties should be under the benevolent rule of philosophers.

However authoritarian and undemocratic Plato's doctrine may be, it is a rebuke to most of the orders of privilege that have disfigured history. Membership in his classes is not fixed for all time; one cannot inherit position as a philosopher or a warrior. On the contrary, the social order is to be established through an elaborate system of education in which each is given opportunity to show his aptitude for rising from level to level. Although he places a higher value on fighting than on working by equating one with the will and the other with the lower appetites, he subordinates both to intelligence and gives no comfort to those who find in the will to win the highest expression of the human spirit. The power of wealth to determine social position he would remove by bold experiments in common property. Skill in acquiring wealth, however valuable and necessary it may be to the state, is still on the lowest level of human effort and should bring its possessor no more than the rights and duties of the lowest class. Like many earnest reformers since his time, and anticipating many little sects and cults that have flourished from time to time in America, Plato sought to bring the sexual relations of men and women and the relations of parents and children into greater harmony with his political ideals. Mating and breeding should not be left

to chance or to individual desire; they are a primary concern of the ideal state, which should regulate them in accordance with the master plan of classes. In the ideal society, therefore, no man could attain position by birth, wealth, or marriage, and no man could force his way to the top by brute strength.

The Republic opens with the question: what is justice? At the end Plato points to his ideal state and says that here it prevails. Detailed example is better than definition, but if we must have definition, it is now easy to see that justice prevails when every man has found the place designed for him by nature and there in contentment goes about his business.

If inequality should determine the nature of justice, then surely this is the doctrine in its most admirable form—at least to intelligent people. In the end, however, Plato is left in the same position as the advocates of birth, wealth, or force; he cannot prove to all that a social order of workers, fighters, and thinkers is a natural order of superiority. The kind of people who read *The Republic* are those most likely to agree with him, for they regard themselves as the philosophers who ought to be kings. The impossibility is to prove to the multitude that skill in reasoning, which they do not have, is more valuable than their own skills, especially in determining the all-important question of the relation of man to man.

History demonstrates this impossibility. Only bookish men know Plato's plan, because nothing in it secures the united will necessary to overcome armed force. In actuality history reveals nothing closer to it than the grotesque parodies in which a ministry of propaganda takes the place of Plato's philosophers, serving rather than guiding the armed forces, who truly rule. Such parodies have led some to dismiss Plato as a reactionary who sought by dialectic to fasten upon mankind a pattern of injustice which would forever fortify the claims of Fascism, imperialism, and inequality. This is far from the truth. Although Plato assigns to reason a much higher place in human affairs than it really enjoys, and although he is mistaken in thinking that the will to win is superior to the will to do, he is completely sincere and forthright. He has no hidden ax to grind.

His first mistake is personal. He assumes that his own estimates of human abilities, since they are shared by the men he most respects and likes, are the proper estimates for mankind. He is in love with reason; therefore reason is the true test of superiority, and the most reasonable should rule. He naively assumes that even the unreasonable will agree and no longer press other claims to superiority.

His second mistake seems an unavoidable result of his position in history. In politics Plato lacks a world view; his ideal state is the city-state familiar to him at home and through his slight acquaintance with the rest of the world. In a world of struggling neighbors, in which few could know what lay beyond the lands of the nearest enemy, Plato regarded the survival of the Greeks as itself proof of their superiority. To his credit he ascribed this superiority to reason, just as he ascribed the inferiority of the northern barbarians to will and that of the Phoenician traders to the lower appetites. His ideal state is for Greeks, or for a neighboring people similar to them. Lacking a world view, he neither thirsts for global supremacy nor dreams of uniting mankind. In a world in which war has always been king, and in which no one has thought of mankind as one society, the doctrine of superiority is a faith to which every little tribe or locality must cling as an indispensable weapon in the struggle for existence. *The Republic* has passages on the advantages of a have-not people in warfare that rival some of Hitler's, but it is impossible to believe that a Plato in the twentieth century would have written them.

The major difference between *The Republic* and *Mein Kampf* is that in his order of values Hitler places at the top the will and brute strength, turning Plato's reason into a subservient cunning which accepts the interest of its master as the only test of truth. The major likeness between the two plans is that each defends an order of superiority. But no one should charge Plato with being a reactionary, or with knowingly opposing a human unity for which men had not yet learned to hope. It is *Mein Kampf* which sets the world back beyond Plato and into darkness.

Like Plato, Aristotle finds the idea of justice dependent upon the problem of equality. In both the *Politics* and the *Nichomachean Ethics* he follows the common view of men that the just is the equal, a view long before exemplified in the Homeric picture of Zeus holding the scales as he determines the fates of Hector and Achilles, and in the primitive notion of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Aristotle's fondness for the mean between extremes makes him regard the equality of just acts as an intermediate between too little and too much. But justice, he believes, is too complex to rest on simple arithmetical equality. Justice is a proportion. First, it is a mean of equality in exchanges between extremes of injustice. Secondly, it is a proportion involving four members—two things and two persons. He anticipates Nietzsche's point that justice is equality for equals and inequality for unequals; indeed, he finds here the origin of complaints and quarrels—"when either equals have and are awarded unequal shares, or unequals equal shares." And by insisting that justice is a proportion, with members whose values are in every instance to be determined, he develops a flexible notion which permits treating some men as equals, others as unequals.

He needs his solution because, for reasons much like Plato's, he accepts the idea of inequality, which in the *Politics* finds its sharpest expression in his famous defense of slavery, so often quoted in America before the Civil War. Finding everywhere in nature some fit to rule and others fit only to be ruled—men, and women, human beings and animals, souls and bodies—he asserts that the relation between true masters and true slaves is in accord with nature. Of course, not all bondsmen are natural slaves, and not all slave holders are natural masters. The Greeks, he notes, are fond of saying that Greeks are unfit for slavery, although other peoples are. He amends this, stating that everywhere are to be found some fit for slavery, others for mastery.

In a world which accepts slavery and political isolationism as inevitable, men must defend the doctrine of superiority. Plato and Aristotle presented the doctrine in its best possible forms. Both challenged old pretensions to superiority. Plato sought sweeping changes by making reason the test of social position in place of birth, wealth, marriage, or brute strength; and Aristotle sought to temper these ancient advantages by making virtue the true and only aim of the state. But since they lacked the vision of human unity, they failed to recognize the proposition of equality as the only possible formula for a world-wide free society.

We live in another world. In our world a tradition based on a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind" has come into uncompromising conflict with a doctrine of superiority aimed at world conquest. In our world all men have been asked to choose between the justice of equality and the justice of inequality.

The lessons of history are clear enough. The doctrine of superiority has always been, even in its noblest forms, a means of dividing men, of setting one class or one people over others and against others. The proposition of equality, on the other hand, by its very nature implies the unity of men. Already a giant force in world politics, it will in time prevail over armed force—if men believe it to be true.

Low Water

A Wilderness Drama

by Quintan Wood

THE sun's rays, touching the tips of the tallest cypress, filtered down pale trunks to light the dim aisles beneath, as Lutra the otter brought her two pups to their overland journey's end at Boneyard Bayou. Here she hesitated, seeing the big whitetail buck, another morning wanderer, ankle-deep in the wine-brown waters of the Boneyard. To the old otter, the buck's presence, at this late spring season, spelled danger. Deer, deserting the Flatwoods and the drying marsh to the west for the more vulnerable green hammock country, drew their enemy, the Florida panther. And the panther was the only land creature that Lutra feared.

For several seconds the buck and the otters eyed each other suspiciously. At last, dismissing the aquatic animals as harmless, the deer dropped his antlered head, still in the velvet, to the shallows.

From her vantage point near a rush bank, the mother otter poised undecided. Instinct still counseled caution. And so, when the buck's dripping muzzle rose quickly a minute later, she was alert. His short tail flirted and his ears came up sharply. Suddenly his head screwed about.

Lutra was screened from the east by tall rushes, but interpreting the buck's warning, she flattened instinctively. A moment later, as her young scuttled to safety deep in the rush-patch, she reared her thick brown length, mouth wide, hissing angrily.

A great horned owl, questing home beneath the arching cypress canopy, checked its downward sweep. Now it rose and hovered, beak snapping disappointment. A two-months-old otter pup would have been a welcome addition to its larder; but no meat was worth contest with so formidable a guardian as the mother. So, after a minute of circling, the hunter passed on upon soundless wings.

The otter pups remained hidden for some time after the feathered killer's departure. But Lutra, long accustomed to brushes with danger, lifted her little flat head on its slim neck, and beady black eyes resumed their exploration of the bayou.

At this point the Boneyard's winding channel penetrated the high, fertile land of the hammock; and raccoon, opossum, weasel and wildcat signs dotted the mud banks. Colonies of great birds nested in its trees. Over the water bright-colored butterflies danced. Myriad winged insects skated upon the surface, and above them dragonflies pursued their prey. In the depths bream, bass and catfish sought the silvery marsh minnows. Long-nosed gar patrolled the shallows, and in murky indentations and offshoots, mudfish, with teeth like miniature shark, lay in wait for the weak and crippled. . . . Now and then a bear, deserting the glades, came here to hunt.

Water, necessary to life, drew and served both as a protector and as an enemy covert. And over all, the clamorous cries of birds mingled with the nightly overtone of millions of frogs, a basic food of the bayous.

Here and there Lutra sighted a turtle's head, like a dead snag, projecting from the bayou. She marked these, and the rise, at frequent intervals, of bass looping in silvery spray to fall back with a captured aerial traveler. Longest of all she studied the water lilies blooming on the dark bosom and lending to the area a deceptive air of peace and security.

Each visible sign, each sound and every odor must be deciphered. Marks on the bayou banks indicated that the waterway was shrinking. That disturbed her. However, fed by the creek, the broad channel still showed a gratifying depth in comparison to the shrinking lake from which she had been forced to migrate. Until the rains set in, this spot must serve as a refuge for her family.

As the sun started to climb, cloud mountains marched up the western horizon. Through the tree-tops they piled in great white masses. And with the morning's advance, life in the vaulted upper air stirred.

Strange sounds filtered down from the green-flecked roof. Pale shapes moved. A colony of wood ibis, nesting among the cypress, began to clack their long beaks and extend and contract their slender necks as if indulging in morning setting-up exercises.

Presently, starting the aerial activity, a black-robed water turkey planed from a high platform of sticks. Wheeling, as the otter family watched, it darted down. One moment it was a moving dark shape. Then, phantom-like, it disappeared beneath the bayou's surface in pursuit of its morning meal. Its plunge left scarce a ripple.

The buck, his thirst slaked, splashed shoreward. He crossed the shallows to a projecting neck, bounded over low hummocks and vanished up a high ridge. A minute later a great blue heron launched, flapping, from its perch in a live oak. Passing down the aisle of pale trunks that flanked the bayou like great gray bones, the heron's flight rocked Spanish moss pennants that hung from the limbs as if they were banners moving in a breeze.

At sight of the heron, far larger than the great horned owl, the young otters shrank close to their mother; but Lutra merely stretched her supple neck, lifted her sleek brown body until its pale under coat showed above short legs, and sniffed. Whiskered muzzle upthrust, she studied the heron. Experience had taught her that its presence was insurance against surprise approaches.

This great wading bird, one of the most shy and crafty of all winged hammock-dwellers, was intent on its morning fishing. But it also would serve her as an alert sentry. Heron choose their fishing spots with an eye to strategy as well as utility. And so, when the big bird landed a short distance to the west, her anxiety eased.

Moving at the hopping gait of her short bench-legged breed, Lutra led her pups along the bayou bank. Here a raft of lavender-flowered water hyacinths, their shiny green leaves forming a solid-appearing surface, hugged the shore. The channel deepened and windened. Small fish circled the floating hyacinth roots. And a young leopard frog, disturbed by the otter's approach, scrambled over the green bank and struck the water with a plop.

The frog's spotted body, reddish brown under water, was visible as it sculled along. Then a shadow, like a blunted arrow, emerged from beneath the hyacinths. Surface water swirled. A big bass gulped the frog.

Illustrated by
John E. Costigan, N. A.

At sight of the bass, Lutra plunged through the hyacinths. She was hungry, and fish were her staple diet. Now she dived and planed along under the surface. Forelegs tucked against her breast, webbed hindfeet driving, her long wedge-shaped tail acted as a perfect rudder. She appeared from above more like a seal now than a member of the fierce weasel family to which she belonged.

The pups, at their mother's departure, retreated to the sheltering rushes. Meanwhile the otter worked the hyacinth-bank methodically. From time to time her head and shoulders broke the surface. Under water her eyes scanned each deep hole and shadowy overhang for the telltale fanning of fish-tail or fin. "Green trout," the big-mouthed black bass of the bayous, were wont to lie here in ambush. Frogs, snakes, minnows, unwary insects and the small water fowl that the Boneyard supported, all were on their diet list.

Presently, near a clump of bulrushes ten feet from shore, two shadowy forms detached themselves and moved at right angles to the otter's course. As she drew closer, they separated in darting flight.

One of Lutra's webbed forefeet drove down in a braking turn. Her spread hind feet thrust back. A long line of bubbles followed as she surged after the larger shape.

The fleeing fish first tried speed. Then it resorted to dodging tactics. Finally, terrified by inexorable pursuit, it rocketed upward, seeking escape in the tremendous air leaps for which its kind are famous.

Three times in this manner the fish eluded Lutra. The fourth leap was its last. Just below the surface the otter closed with it. Her long jaws snapped. When she broke water, a two-pound bass slapped in her grip. A minute later short forelegs heaved her body ashore at the starting point. Her oily fur was scarce damp from the immersion.

At once the graceful water nymph was transformed into a waddling land animal. Her young looped forward at the hopping run of their kind. They seized the fish and began to bite and tear at its crisp flesh.

LUTRA watched a moment. Then she plunged back into the bayou. When again she came ashore, she clutched a fat bream. For some time she fished, taking a bite or two from each catch, and leaving the rest for her offspring.

However, the harsh glare of midday was approaching. The family had fed. Security, since her pups still were inexpert in the water, now became paramount. It was incumbent to locate temporary shelters as well as a den safe from the inroads of other swamp dwellers; for until her offspring had perfected their latent swimming talent and hunting lore they would depend upon her.

Driving the pups from the fish carcasses, Lutra now coaxed them into the water and struck out eastward.

Coots, at their morning feeding, paddled their black-feathered bodies from the otters' path. Bobbing their white-splashed heads, their yellow beaks swung right and left as they gave the swimmers a wide berth. Cranes, herons and egrets paid little attention as they probed the shallows and indentations. Curlews and the little Florida gallinules, pattering over the hyacinth rafts and winging above the stands of pepper grass, went about their business unnoticing.

From time to time Lutra stopped to examine temporary shelters beneath the overhang of some bank. A few were acceptable. Others were fresh-hollowed. From these a strong, musky odor emanated, and she passed them by hastily.

At the end of an hour the old otter had located half a dozen likely hide-outs along a two-mile stretch of bayou. But at last, deep within the hammock, she came to a locality that suited her. Here the waterway widened. Cypress trees fringed it in great numbers. Their upthrust knees furnished perches for many feathered fishermen. A current circled gently, and islands of snake-grass dotted the south shore vying with bulrushes and the tall sawgrass of the glades in affording cover.

A great live oak, long since uprooted, extended from the north

shore into deep water. Time had hollowed its trunk. The tree drew the old otter. Diving, she reached its submerged end. Here she found a hollow entrance, and a dark underwater tunnel led upward. She followed this, her long whiskers warning her of obstructions. Presently she came out above water-level deep within the old tree's heart.

The landward end of the oak was sealed by a great pile of debris. Light filtered in through a knothole. The thick shell was undamaged. So, after ousting a couple of startled water snakes, she made a thorough examination of the tree's possibilities. Finally, satisfied of its invulnerability, she emerged, and after much coaxing and nipping, led her young to their new home. Here the brood curled up to sleep off the effects of their long overland migration.

TOWARD sundown Mark Wilson, fishing the Snake from an old boat-landing six miles to the north, swung out of the current and let the boat, containing his twelve-year-old son as passenger, drift into the depths of the Boneyard. It was his duty as guardian of wildlife in this area to patrol the waterways and to report on the living conditions of the inhabitants. The spring drouth had caused much disruption over the State, and it was for purpose of survey that he had begun this fishing expedition.

Where the bayou widened and the trees thinned overhead, he shut off his motor and steered the boat shoreward. Floating beneath a screen of moss-hung limbs, he dropped anchor, broke out his fishing gear, and signaled young Mark to silence.

Presently a plane passed high overhead. The drum of its motor permeated the wild spot. Its passage went unnoticed by the hammock-dwellers, who were attuned to such man-made interruptions. Ten minutes later Mark inclined his head and let his fishline drift.

"Look!" he whispered. "There's a family of otters crossing above. First I've seen in this hammock in four years."

Near the north bank of the bayou a broad V trail was visible. Two smaller ones flanked it. A bass broke water, and the center V ended as Lutra dived. She emerged empty-jawed and blew noisily. A curlew took off from a cypress knee and flapped lazily across the open. High against the afternoon sky, two turkey buzzards soared on motionless wings. Their microscopic eyes followed the otter trail. Where otters fed, there would be remnants for a later feast.

On the south shore, near a screen of sawgrass, a long-legged raccoon squatted upon a drowned log. From

time to time it probed, with handlike forepaws, in the mud. Scooping crawfish from the oozy bottom, it shelled them daintly. Washing each catch with a backward and forward motion of a forepaw, it ate, wrinkling its black nose comically.

Through the screen of moss, the man and boy could detect the raccoon's sharp ears flattening or pointing inquiringly. Meanwhile its bright eyes roved up, down and around in ceaseless scrutiny. From time to time it tested the air. Once it rose and peered toward the hammock's interior, tail waving.

As the otter family reached midstream, three coots took off noisily near the south shore. Spattering over the water, feet working and short wings beating vigorously, they headed into the light breeze. Their flight shattered the stillness of the Boneyard.

The raccoon sat erect, forepaws dangling. Lutra sighted it, and changed her course. Now the black-masked arboreal dweller eyed her approach apprehensively. It humped its back and bared its sharp teeth in a soundless snarl. Finally it reared, whipped about and, ringed tail undulating, scurried shoreward. Leaping from the log, it loped up the incline. Twenty feet from the water's edge, it scrambled up the trunk of a live oak. It mounted a high limb and peered down nervously.

Lutra gave the raccoon but short attention. She smelled where it had fed. Then, with upraised head, she studied the tree's occupant. Satisfied, she began an industrious search for the crawfish that had drawn the raccoon.

The otter family's crossing had been noticed by more than the Wilsons, the coots and the dispossessed raccoon. Fish radiated wildly. Otters are deadly and voracious feeders, and even when not hungry often kill and leave their victims with only a bite or two missing. However, the flight of the coots, which had been sculling about the shadows, had attracted another newcomer to this area.

Where a sprinkling of water lilies spread between the bulrush patches, what might have been a log rolled slightly and sank. Only twin dark knobs, like knots, projected above water. These swung slowly. Gently, almost imperceptibly, they began to drift through the lilies. So leisurely did the alligator advance, that it seemed as if the sluggish backwater of the bayou impelled it.

Mark Wilson, scanning the surface and familiar with its signs, interpreted the action. He apprised his son of the situation. The absence of turtles, in a spot where turtle-heads usually were visible in all directions, indicated that some bayou inhabitants already had suffered from the alligator's advent. Low water, which had driven the otters and deer from the lake and marsh country to the west, had drawn the reptile from the mouth of the Snake.

By the time Lutra and her pups had crossed to the south shore, their stalker was free of clinging roots. As they reached the deserted log, it drifted slowly into a patch of peppergrass less than thirty yards distant.

The young otters gave scant heed to possible enemy approach in their search for crawfish. Lutra, after a few minutes of feeding interspersed with watchful alertness, also began to relax. Ten feet east of the drowned log, a sod hummock at the bank's edge thrust above water. This caught her eye, and toward it she made her way.

A huge cottonmouth moccasin, curled atop the high point, raised its head. Its blunt nose pointed toward her. Then its mouth gaped, white-lined against the gray of open lips. The snake's threat sufficed. Half in and half out of the water, Lutra halted, turning her head from side to side, just out of range of its strike. She desired the snake's location, but she wished to avoid a contest for it.

The moccasin, its bite poisonous, was not by nature belligerent except when hungry or attacked. For a moment it threatened, refusing to

give way. Finally, seizing an opportunity as Lutra drew back, it started a slow withdrawal. At last it dropped from the hummock, slipped over hawserlike palmetto roots and vanished into the sawgrass.

Lutra seemed satisfied at having won possession so easily. Now she set about splashing water on the hummock. Then, climbing to the top she folded her forelegs, shoved with her hind feet and slid off of the rise. A dozen trips converted the lip of the raised point into a slippery descent. And now her young joined her in using the slide.

Presently a white-plumed egret, lifting from its fishing, flapped homeward. Another, carrying a luckless gray mottled frog in its beak, followed. The sun was dropping. Cranes that had been passing up and down the waterway, heads twisting right and left on their slender necks as they patrolled, departed. A great blue heron rose with a long watersnake curving and writhing, gripped in its spearlike beak. The wading birds, signaling the approach of night, would either return to their nests or seek the safer reaches of a marsh. Some passed very close to the otters. Others went directly to concealed nests. The frog chorus, which had been subdued, mounted toward a crescendo. And against the cloud-flecked sky, four wood ibis circled, their black-tipped wings sweeping them in graceful spirals above the trees.

Coots, to the east, gabbled in harsh tones. They headed toward the reed beds. Moving in convoys, they split off into pairs as they worked their way into marshy offshoots. Darkness would find them deep in the rushes, where they might evade the night forays of the great horned owl while yet secure against stealthy underwater attack of turtles, big bass and other underwater enemies.

"Let's go, Dad!" young Mark whispered as the shadows lengthened. "All the birds are leaving."

His father reached for the anchor-rope. Suddenly the harsh cry of a bittern sounded. Mark hesitated, bent forward, and after a moment, pointed through the moss screen.

"Wait!"

The old otter's head was up, nose twitching. Out from a screening shore covert a spike buck stepped. The big whitetail of the morning followed. For a brief moment the two deer, gray against the green of a bamboo clump, paused, ears working. The spike buck saw the otters and froze. Its companion, after a glance, moved forward. Stepping into the shallows, he dropped his head and drank.

The projecting eye and nostril knobs of the alligator, which had floated unmoving while the otters played near shore, commenced a slow swing. Now they drifted eastward parallel to the shore. Scarce a score of yards separated them from the deer, and a tiny wave had begun to build up when the spike buck blew sharply. Tail erect, white flag showing, its companion wheeled and bounded up the bank. A moment later both deer were in full flight.

Lutra and her pups crouched immobile. A gray squirrel chattered among the oaks. The mother otter eyed the alligator and waited. The raccoon climbed higher. A water turkey took off from a cypress knee and flapped swiftly away, just skimming the surface. Unseen by Lutra, a long, tawny shape halted by a clump of palmettos up the ridge. Now, head low and body sagging, it glided toward the water.

The afternoon breeze was dropping. It blew mosquitoes away from the boat's occupants. It also carried the otter's scent eastward. The panther, slipping through the undergrowth, searching the deer trail, suddenly halted. The hot scent of otter brought its head about. Then, tail-tip jerking, it swung and began a slow stalk.

A water snake, startled as bark loosened by the climbing raccoon fell, slithered into the water. Its leisurely crossing of the bayou was upset when spray spurted behind it. Instantly the snake's slim body seemed electrified in frantic, wriggling flight. Again the water spurted. A big bass' tail flipped up, and the snake disappeared.

Two gray mottled frogs hopped from concealment. One flicked a fly from a palmetto root with its tongue. The larger otter pup leaped through the shallows and caught the frog. The other seized one leg, and they tugged each other about. Lutra's eyes followed them and came back to the alligator. Then instinct, scent or some slight sound must have warned her. Rearing, she whipped about. In that instant a great tawny shape crashed through the reeds. As her pups flung themselves into deep water, Lutra made her leap.

PAIN pierced the old otter's loins, checking her in mid-air. A terrifying snarl erupted. Then the cat and the otter rolled into the shallows.

Looping back with the desperate ferocity of the weasel, Lutra drove her fangs deep into the panther's cheek. For a brief moment her counter-attack won her respite. The panther, half blinded by spray, confused by attack when it had expected only flight, jerked back. Then it struck out savagely. Twice it knocked its victim spinning. Then it was on her, seeking to pin her to the muddy bottom.

With a wrench of her slippery body that left a bloody furrow down her wedge-shaped tail, the otter tore free. Dodging a killing stroke that scored her ribs, she thrust toward deep water in a bid for freedom. One moment the shallows were in a turmoil.

Then Lutra was gone, and her attacker stood alone, belly deep in the water.

The panther scanned the blood-dyed vicinity, lips curling. Then, after a questioning sniff or two, it turned and waded shoreward. Stopping in the shallows, it shook vigorously. At that instant a miniature tidal wave engulfed it. A guttering roar sounded. Musky odor filled the air, and sharp teeth backed by powerful jaws, closed on the cat's left hind leg.

Squalling with pain, the panther rocketed upward in a frightened leap. Half out of the water, it jerked back, held by the unrelenting grip. The saurian, attracted by the fight in the shallows, had cruised close unnoticed. Urged by the scent of blood, it had driven blindly to attack.

Instantly the bayou resounded with the cat's startled squall. As the big reptile strove to cripple and drag down the panther, the great cat tore at its armored hide, striving to win shoreward. Once it fastened its claws in a palmetto root and drew both contestants into shallow water. Lashing its powerful tail, the alligator whirled over and over; it broke the hold and doused the cat under.

Now the bayou king, gripping mercilessly, took advantage of its great weight and began to back slowly toward the channel center. As water deepened, the panther whipped about in desperation to rake its enemy's scaly armor. A curved claw pierced one bulging eye-socket. For a fraction of a second the saurian's grip lessened. Then its twelve-foot bulk arched in a mighty heave. Cat and alligator slid from the mudbank into deep water.

The panther's forelegs beat the surface for a moment. Its head strained upward. Then it sank in a swirl of foam. A long, serrated tail lashed up. A tawny back showed. Then the underwater agitation slowed. Ripples, running out from the spot, widened and spent themselves in the reeds. Bubbles, rising to the surface, lessened.

Near the north shore Lutra's head appeared once. When she rose again, it was in the submerged log tunnel. At its end she found her shivering pups. Her wounds, although painful, would not incapacitate her, and after dressing them, she set about comforting her young.

"BOY! What a battle!" young Mark exploded, now that the need for silence had passed. I sure hope those otters keep clear of that 'gator."

"They will," his father assured him. "They've learned their lesson. Generally they are too fast for any alligator. The cat went out of its element to do some killing. The result is that over a hundred deer, that go each year to feed the panther, will live to increase. But deer and even the otters don't dare get careless."

He lifted the anchor inboard. A flip of the starting cord, and the boat's motor roared. Spinning the craft about, it headed toward the Snake.

"Keep a sharp lookout for mud flats," he called. "Low water brings trouble to all who visit the Boneyard."

My Most Amusing Experience

(Conditions governing contributions to the department are the same as for the "What Do You Think?" section. See page 69)

Did I Sleep With a Skunk?

DURING my life I have had many low-down tricks played on me, but it was unbelievable to think that two of the best pals I ever had, my dog and cat, would stoop so low as to do what they did.

I am a mountain ranger living in a small shack in the Sierra Mountains, and it is my job to watch for mountain fires that often break out during the hot, dry summer weather, and report them as quickly as possible.

The dog is a magnificent police dog four years old, but the cat's ancestry is somewhat questionable; for it was found when a small kitten in a cave in the side of a mountain, and is possibly a cross between a bobcat and a domestic. These two animals are inseparable, and my constant companions. They start out every morning, together, and do not return until evening, and very often bring home rabbits, a fox or anything they can carry. Once the cat dragged home a rattlesnake they had killed.

One evening last summer I returned to my shack after a hard day's work, and was eating my dinner when the dog and cat came home. Of all the animals and things that roam the mountains, these two had to pull one of the dirtiest, low-down tricks on me, by bringing home a live skunk. They marched in through their private entrance, giving me a nonchalant look, as the dog wagged his tail in greeting. Of course there was no physical danger, if you know what I mean; but a menace was present that could wreck one's social life for a long, long time.

Many times I have come face to face with cougars, bobcats, rattlesnakes, and every other kind of animal that prowls the mountains; but here was a situation presenting real danger.

The beast made himself right at home, even nudging the dog and cat away from their evening meal. Of course I hesitated to use force in getting rid of the critter. From a safe distance I made remarks about his ancestry, bawled him out about his B.O., and assumed an unhospitable attitude, but he never paid the least attention.

Finally I gave up hope of getting rid of the beast and went to bed. The cat usually sleeps on top of the covers of the bed. After the lights were out, there was a thump on the bed. I knew it was the cat curling up for its night's sleep. A short time later there was another thump. Was it the dog or—something else?

I spent the rest of the night stretched out rigid in bed, not wishing to do anything disturbing for fear of havoc which might follow.

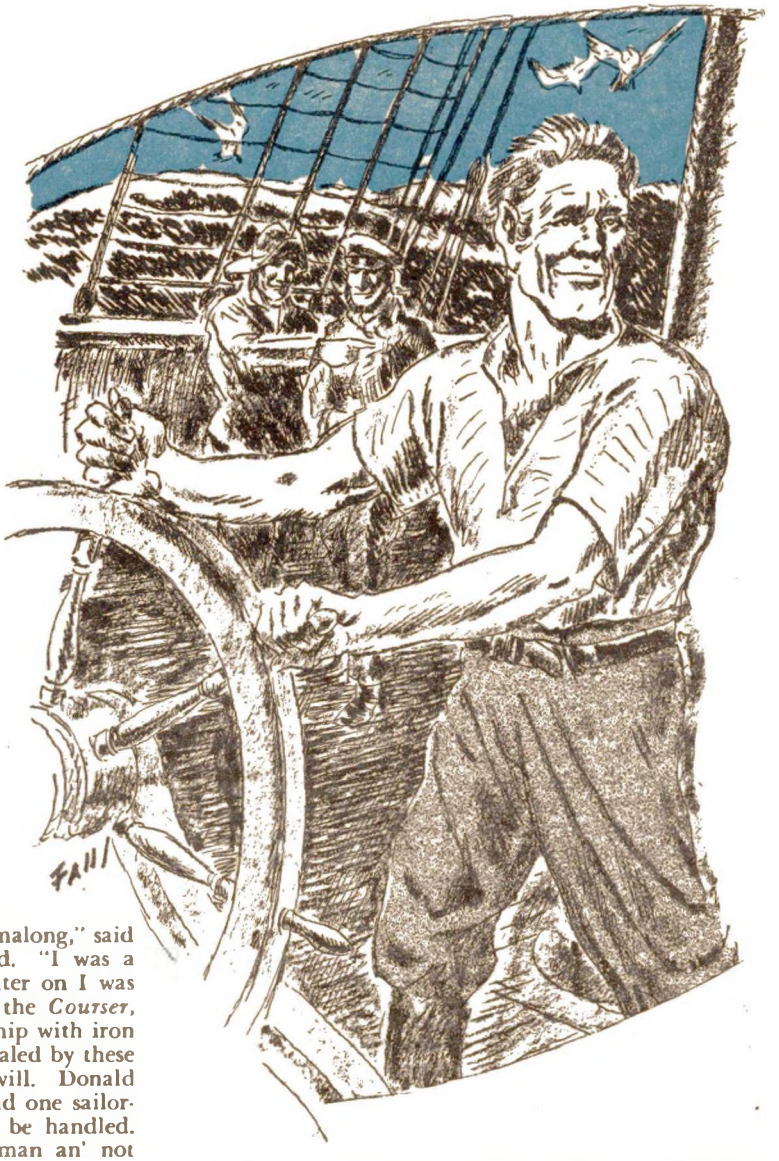
I relaxed my vigilance only when the cat or dog—or the skunk—leaped back to the floor just before daylight. To this day, I do not know what the second bedfellow was.

The skunk displayed indifference the next day when invited to leave the shack. I waited around for some time before it became tired of playing with the dog and cat. Finally the visitor went outside for a breath of air or something, and I immediately slammed the door and closed the entrance used by my pets. Since that time the cat has been forced to climb a ladder and enter the shack by way of an unused chimney.

Skunks can't climb ladders.

Claude V. Fassett

America's Heirloom Stories*



Old Stormalong

by FRANK SHAY

"CERTAINLY, I 'member Old Stormalong," said the oldest skipper on Cape Cod. "I was a 'prentice fust on his ship and later on I was Second when he was bosun on the *Courser*, out o' Boston. *That* was a ship, a wooden ship with iron men on her decks, a ship that aint been eekaled by these hoity-toity steamboats. No, sir, an' never will. Donald McKay built that ship just because he found one sailorman who could handle her as she should be handled. But, you're aimin' to hear about a sailorman an' not about ships.

"Only t'other day a young whippersnapper was a-telling me about Stormie sayin' as how he was fourteen fathoms tall. I've heared other tales about his height. I know! He was jes' four fathoms from the deck to the bridge of his nose.

"He was the first sailorman to have the letters 'A. B.' after his name. Those were jes' his 'nitials, put after his name on the ship's log just the same as always. Alfred Bulltop Stormalong was the name he gave his first skipper. The old man looked him over and says:

"'A. B. S. Able-Bodied Sailor. By your size and strength they should measure the talents of all other seamen.'

"It makes me pretee mad when I see some of the horn-swogglers of today with these letters after their names. They are only feeble imitators o' the greatest o' all deep-water sailormen.

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"You landsmen know very little about real sailormen, that is, blue-water sailors. This chap Stormalong was not only a sailorman for all waters, he was a whaler too.

I mind the time that we was anchored in the middle of the North 'Lantic, finishin' off a right whale. The lookout sights a school off to the east'art and Stormie, the bosun, gives the order to h'ist the mudhook. All hands for'ard but not a h'ist. The hook 'ud give a bit and then it 'ud sink right back into the mud. Seemed to be hands clutchin' it and draggin' it out o' our hands. Once we got it clear o' the bottom and almost shipped it when we seed what was wrong. Nothin' short of an octopus was wropped all 'round that mudhook. He was holdin' the anchor with half of his tenacles and with the other half hangin' on to the seaweed on the bottom.

"The mate yelled 'vast heavin'' and went back to tell the skipper. When the old man came for'ard to see for himself he was just in time to see Stormie go overboard with his sheath knife in his teeth. He went below the su'face and there began a terrific struggle. The water was churned and splashed about so that old hooker jes' rolled about like she was beam to the wind. All of us was sure our bosun had been tore 'part by the octopus. The struggle went on for about a quarter of an hour when Stormie's head came to the su'face. Some one called out to throw him a line but before one could be brought he had grabbed the anchor chain and came hand over hand to the deck. The strugglin' in the water kept on for a while but moved away from the ship.

"'All right,' yelled Stormie, 'all hands lean on it and bring it home.'

"After the anchor was shipped I asked him what he had done to the octopus.

"'Jes' tied his arms in knots. Double Carrick bends. It'll take him a month o' Sundays to untie them.'

"There was one peculiar thing about Stormalong that was due to his size. He was as loyal to his ship as any sailorman until he saw a bigger one. Then he'd get peevish an' sullen until he had signed aboard the bigger ship. His biggest complaint was that ships weren't built big enough for a full sized man.

"Well, the ship we were on at that time was *Lady of the Sea*, finest and fastest of the tea packets. Even that didn't satisfy him. He wanted a bigger ship or he'd go farmin'. Once he said to us as we sat 'round the forebitt:

"'When this hooker gets to port I'm goin' to put an oar over my shoulder and I'm goin' to start walkin' 'way from salt water. I'm goin' to keep right on walkin' until some hairlegger says to me, "What's that funny stick you have on your shoulder, matey?" an' right there I'm goin' to settle down and dig potaters.'

"'Yes,' said the Third-in-Command, skeptically, 'what potaters are you goin' to dig?'

"'Regular and proper spuds, fresh ones, not like the dead potaters you get on this hooker,' said the Sailor Who Was Tired of the Sea.

"'Got to plant them first,' said the Third. 'Then you got to hoe them, pick the bugs off'n them, spray them, hoe them some more. You got to irrigate them, too. Best irrigator for potatoes is the sweat off'n your brow. Just dig so hard and fast that the sweat rolls down along your nose and drops on the plant. Much harder'n holystoning the deck which, by the way, you'll begin on jus' as soon as you turn to in the mornin':'

"'Nothin' can be as hard as holystoning a deck,' observed Stormie.

"'Compared with sailoring,' I cuts in, 'farmin' comes under the headin' of hard labor. The best part o' farmin', I'll admit, is that all the hard work comes in fine weather while with sailorin' it's jes' t'other way 'bout.'

"For the rest of that trip Stormalong was moody and preoccupied. He had been on the ship for over a year, a very long time for him, without seeing a bigger ship. When the ship hit Boston Stormie signed off. He came on deck with his duffel bag over his shoulder.

"'Where you goin'?' I asks him.

"'Farmin',' says he.

"Then he heaves the bag over the rail and follows it to the wharf. The crew of the *Lady of the Sea* just stood along the rail and gaped.

2

"Several years later when we were again lined against the wharf at Boston a big, tall man was seen coming down the wharf.

"'Stormie, or I'm a fool,' says I to myself.

"The big man came over the side and sure enough it was Alfred Bulltop Stormalong. There was a change immediately apparent. He was taller than ever but the flesh hung in dewlaps all over him and his eyes showed the marks of great suffering. Too, he looked hungrily at the sea. He breathed deep breaths of the salt air and in a few minutes seemed to regain some of his old spirit.

"'Stormie, where 'a' you been?' I asks him.

"'Farmin',' says he.

"'How'd you like it?' I goes on.

"'Terrible,' says he. 'Nothin' but green grass an' trees an' hills an' hot work. Nary a breeze or the smell o' the sea. Never a storm to make a man pull out all the best that's in him. Nothin' but zephyrs an' a hot sun an' pushin' on a plow. All my muscles were made for pullin' an' on a farm there's nothin' to do but push. Sailorin's the best job after all.'

"He signed on for his old job of boatswain and after taking on water we got under way. We cruised about the Caribbean Sea taking on and discharging shipments for over six months. Then we made for Boston Harbor.

"Stormie was a loyal sailor until he saw a bigger ship and the *Lady of the Sea* was the biggest ship sailing the Atlantic. At least we thought she was but just before we got to Barnegat we came across what first appeared to be a mirage. She was just the biggest ship ever built and I heard the skipper say to the mate that she was Donald McKay's dream come to life. Her lines were perfect, her cloth pure white and hung on silver masts. She rolled lazily on a sea that made us bump about like a cork. I saw Stormie at the rail gazing in goggle-eyed admiration.

"'Must take a million ordinary sailors to man her,' he gasped. 'Yes, sir! One million at the least. Well, I guess I'll be leavin' this packet.'

"The next mornin' we were without a bosun. The best explanation we could give was that during the night he had gone over the side and swum to the big ship. For a second time Stormalong had gone out of my life.

"After the *Lady of the Sea* discharged her cargo in Boston we got word that they were signing on a crew for a new ship, the *Courser*. I applied for a place as second mate and was signed on. We were told to report to a ship at the end of the wharf that was acting as a tender for the *Courser* which was too big to enter Boston Harbor.

"The next morning we boarded the tender and were taken out to the *Courser*. She was none other than the big ship we had seen from the *Lady of the Sea*, the ship that Stormie had gone over the side for. She looked like a ship that might have been built for a race of men of Stormalong's stature. The first thing that caught my eye as my feet hit the deck was a stableful of horses.

"'Horse boat, huh!' I said.

"'Horse boat nothin',' said the man in charge of the tender. 'Those horses are for the men on watch.'

"Believe it or not. That ship was so big that all officers and men on watch were mounted on horses. Manalive, her rigging was so immense that no living man could take her in at a single glance. Her masts penetrated the clouds

and the top sections were on hinges so they could be bent over to let the sun and moon pass. Her sails were so big that the builders had to take all the able-bodied sailmakers out in the Sahara Desert to find room to sew them. Young men who were sent aloft usually came down as gray-beards. The skipper had to order all hands aloft six days before a storm. Every yard and every block and tackle had bunkhouses and cooks' galleys built into them to accommodate the men who worked aloft. She carried over six hundred men and some of the sailormen never saw all their shipmates. Once the Old Man, who gave his orders through a megaphone, ordered all hands forward. It took the after crew a week to get there and then over thirty were killed in the crush. Some of the men got lost because they had not taken the precaution to bring their compasses with them.

"The *Courser* was so big that she had to keep to the oceans, there was no harbor big enough for her to turn about in. Her wheel was so big it took thirty-two men working in unison to turn her and early in the cruise it was found that Stormalong was the only man aboard who could make her answer the wheel promptly. When we had to take on or discharge a cargo a whole fleet of ordinary ships used to come out and we would transship our load.

"But she was a great ship. There never was a storm great enough to cause her any real discomfort.

"THERE WAS ONE THAT CAUSED us a bit of worry. One of those September gales that chivvy us in the North Atlantic. She was so big that the Skipper just let her ride out any storm, knowing that no matter how big a blow it was the *Courser* could weather it. Well, this was some storm, and we bobbed about like a regular sized vessel all over that ocean. Worst of it was that the clouds and fog made it so dark we couldn't make where we were at. This went on for over a fortnight when we awoke to see the sun bright and shining. The bosun put his mouth to his megaphone and shouted:

"Rise and shine
For the Black Ball Line!"

and all hands turned to. There was Stormalong at the wheel holding her true to what he thought was her course. After the Captain and all the mates had 'taken the sun' and figured it out on paper they told us we were somewhere in the North Sea and headed south. That meant trouble. The *Courser* could never get through the English Channel and it meant that we'd pile up against the cliffs of Dover or on the French coast. You see, the North Sea wasn't big enough for us to turn around in. The skipper and the mates had a consultation and decided as they could not turn around to take a chance of easing through the Channel. The officers rode across the poop of that ship on their horses, yelling orders and squinting their eyes along the ship's sides. Stormie was at the wheel and the only man who could see everything at once. Just as they got to the point between Calais and the cliffs of Dover all sails were reefed and the skipper was ready to order the men to take to the boats. He looked back at Stormie and saw that the man at the wheel was calm and steady.

"'Will she make it?' yelled the skipper through his megaphone.

"'I think so!' answered the man at the wheel. 'May scrape a bit o' paint off'n our sides but she'll go through.'

"Then, squinting first along the port side an' then the starboard, he called to the man on the poop deck:

"'Better send all hands over and soap the sides, put an extra heavy coat on the starboard.'

"The skipper got the whole crew plastering the sides with the best soap he had and the big ship eased through just as sweet as honey. But it's all due to the soap that we did get through. It was such a tight fit that the cliffs at Dover scraped every bit of soap off the starboard side. Ever since then the cliffs at that point have been pure white. That was from the *Courser's* soap and the action of the waves. Sometime when you are in the channel take a look at the waves. They are still a bit foamy from the soap.

"When the Old Man saw we had gotten through he called all hands forward to splice the main brace, which meant in nautical terms, to come and have a drink of grog.

"The *Courser* kept right on going but after a few hours we got into shallow water and we had to jettison all of our ballast. We threw so much overboard that you can still see the piles of dirt. The English call them the Channel Islands.

"IN ALL THE TIME I KNEW her the *Courser* had but one other storm that troubled her. Strange to relate but it was another September gale, one of those lads that generally does so much damage around Florida. The *Courser* was down among the Caribees and the storm whipped her about pretty badly. The skipper wasn't as much afraid of losing his ship as he was of hitting one of the islands and knocking it and the inhabitants into kingdom come. The ship just missed Haiti and headed west by south like a broncho with the bit in his teeth. Right down the Gulf she went, until she came to Darien and without asking anybody's permission went right through the Isthmus. The *Courser* found herself out in the Pacific Ocean. The only eye-witnesses of the destruction outside of the crew were a couple of army officers who had been sent down by the United States to make surveys for a canal. And right in front of their eyes a ship comes along and digs it for them. Naturally they took all the credit but the truth of it is Old Stormalong and the *Courser* dug that ditch."

The Oldest Skipper on Cape Cod paused in his narrative to yawn and give his cronies a chance.

"All I ever knowed about him," said another, "was that he took his whale soup in a Cape Cod dory, that his fav'rite meat was shark. He liked ostrich eggs for breakfast and then he would lie back on the deck and pick his teeth with an eighteen foot oar."

"Skippers came and skippers went," said the Oldest Skipper on Cape Cod, "but Stormie stuck to the *Courser* to the end. He died while we were discharging a cargo from the middle of the Gulf of Mexico."

"I heard how he was buried," said the Sailor Who Had Swallowed the Anchor. "They took him ashore and buried him right near the water so he could always have the salt spray over him."

Then he burst into song:

Stormie's gone, that good old man,

And all the rest joined in the chorus line:

To my way hay, storm along, John.
Stormie's gone, that good old man,
To my aye, aye, aye, Mister Stormalong!

They dug his grave with a silver spade,
To my way hay, storm along, John!
His shroud of finest silk was made,
To my aye, aye, aye, Mister Stormalong!

They lowered him with a silver chain,
To my way hay, storm along, John!
Their eyes all dim with more than rain,
To my aye, aye, aye, Mister Stormalong!

He's moored at last, and furled his sail,
To my way hay, storm along, John!
No danger now from wreck or gale,
To my aye, aye, aye, Mister Stormalong!

Stackalee

by Onah L. Spencer

He Was Born with a Veil over His Face

Gypsy told Stack's mother,
Told her like a friend,
Your double-jinted baby
Won't come to no good end.

And the gypsy woman shore said a hatful, cause it all come out that very way. And how comes Stackalee' mother to call in the fawchin teller was cause he come kickin into this wide world double-jinted, and with a full set of teeth. But what scared her most was he had a veil over his face, and everybody knows that babies born with veils on their faces kin see ghosts and raise 41 kinds of hell.

Sold His Soul to the Devil

And so when Stackalee growed up he got to be an awful rascal and rounder wit lots of triflin women and he staid drunk all the time. One dark night as he came staggerin down the road the devil popped up real sudden, like a grinnin jumpin jack. He carried Stackalee into the grave yahd and bought his soul. And that's how come Stack could go round doin things no other livin man could do, such as:

Makin himself so little he could git into a bottle on a shelf and you could look at him settin there—yes suh! And fillin a small bottle full of water and settin it in a big glass jar where it would sink to the bottom till he began to talk to it and make it rare up and drap back just howsoever he wanted it to. And by walkin barefoot on hot slag out of a pig iron furnace and never gittin burned and eatin all the hot fire you could hand him without burning his stummick and changin hisself into a mountain or varmint. Some old timers lowed they knowed him personal and that his favorite night time shape was a prowlin wolf. That's how it come they used to sing that old song about him:

Stackalee didn't wear no shoe;
Couldn't tell his track from horse or mule.

The Magic Hat

You see, it happened like this: Stack was crazy about Stetson hats; specially them great big five gallon hats with dimples in the crown. And he had a whole row of em hangin on pegs and you could look at em along the wall of his rickety shanty on Market Street in St. Louis, where he lived with his woman, Stack o' Dollars, that I'm goin to tell you about later.

He had a dimpled and lemon colored yaller hat, and a black Sunday one with two white eyes to wear to funerals with his new brogans, and lots of other ones, all kinds and colors.

But his favorite was an oxblood magic hat that folks claim he made from the raw hide of a man-eatin panther that the devil had skinned alive. And like I told you, how come Stack to have it was because he had sold his soul to old Scratch. You see, Satan heard about Stack's weakness, so he met him that dark night and took him into the grave yahd where he coaxed him into tradin his soul, promisin him he could do all kinds of magic and devilish things long as he wore that oxblood Stetson and didn't let it get away from him. And that's the way the devil fixed it so when Stack did lose it he would lose his head, and kill a good citizen, and run right smack into his doom.

His Girl Friend

Now Stackalee had a girl friend and her name was Stack o' Dollars. She blew into St. Louis off Cincinnati's old Bucktown on the Levee where she used to run gamblin games at a saloon there called the Silver Moon, long, long ago; and she always bet her whole stack of silver dollars.

She walked into the Silver Moon
Stacked her dollars, mountain high;
Says they call me Stack o' Dollars
Cause my limit is the sky.

She had two diamond teeth with gold fillin and when she opened her mouth with a sunburst smile, didn't they glitter! Proud of them sparklers, too, cause they shined like flashlights. Wouldn't pawn em, even to get old Stackalee out on bond. And since they was fastened to her haid they was safe cause she was a fat mama with the meat shakin on her bones and she didn't need no man for a bouncer. She feared nothin and nobody. Her motto was: "Come clean, or come dirty and get cleaned." She could put a knot on a bully's haid so big that he wouldn't know whether the knot was on him or he was on the knot.

She had a full bosom, wore an eight-gallon Stetson, smoked cheroots, and was tougher than Big Mag of Chicago's old Cheyenne District. She ruled the levees with her big fist, and even old double-jinted Stackalee, big enough to go bear huntin with a willow switch, had to light out when they had them Saturday night fist fights, cause she would roll up her sleeves and begin smackin him around till their shanty shook like when Joshua fit the battle of Jericho and the walls come tumblin down. But she was good-hearted, though, when she was sober; and old long tall Stack who was a gambler with plenty of good-lookin browns claimed he like her cause she whupped him so good.

Stackalee Goes West

Now like I told you, Stack was popular with the women folks cause he could whup the blues on a guitar, and beat out boogie woogie music piano bass and the like of that, but what they liked about him most was he was so stout he could squeeze the breath out of em almost. And his favorite one was a voodoo queen down in New Orleans French market.

Any way, the women got to braggin on him bein so stout that they reckoned he could even give old Jesse James a good tussle. So Stack, with his gun handle filled with notches, knowed there was a reward out for him for men he had washed away. He lowed he was lucky 'count of his magic Stetson to keep in hidin, but he figgered he had better light out while the goin was good. So he thought he would just look up old Jesse James and give him a trial.

Stackalee went out West,
Met Jesse James, and did his best.

Yes, sir, that fool even got mixed up with Jesse James. But Jesse was too much for him—turned old Stack every way but *loose*. And Lord knows what might not have happened to Stack if the devil hadn't come down the road in a cloud of dust that got in Jesse's eyes. Leastwise, it might have saved the city of San Francisco and it might have kept old Stack from gettin into all them other amazin things I'm goin to tell you about later. And leastwise the devil wouldn't have changed hisself to look like Billy Lyons and get poor innercent Billy killed.

Stackalee Lays San Francisco Low

Anyway, after the devil had saved him from Jesse James, Stack, knowin the law was hot after him, lit out again, headin west.

Now here comes the most amazin part of the story. Stack had been in Frisco about a month, gettin leapin drunk, and just about runnin hisself crazy. So one morning in April, 1906, after he had had a rocky night and had a headache built for a hippopotamus he was out lookin for a sudden jerk and an eye opener to cool the burnin thirst in his throat. Into the first barroom he staggered. He didn't

have one penny on him but he had a fist full of tricks and his magic oxblood Stetson and he was sure he could pull off some kind of conjuration to get his morning's juice.

But the bartender told him: "Listen here, cullud man! I aint wettin' even the bottom of a glass with gin till you shows me the color of your money."

Stack got all big at the nose and woofed: "All right, boss, you either fixes me up with that gin, or I pulls down this bar!"

The bartender he just stood there grinnin' and lookin' sassy. So Stack he laid a-holt of the bar with both hands and sweat as big as marbles rolled down his face while he hufled and pulled and blew.

Stack knowed that he didn't know his own strength, so when he give one last powerful jerk and down come the ceiling and whole building he said: "Mah goodness, I sure didn't aim to get *so* rough! Damned if I aint gone and made a mess for sure!"

It happened so fast it almost skeered Stack hisself.

It Was the Watah Pipes

Outside was more wrecks than you could shake a stick at; buildings tumblin' down all over town.

"Lordy! Sure didn't know mah own strength!" Stack said to a crowd of people in the street. They tried to tell him about an earthquake, but Stack didn't pay them no mind.

"It was the watah pipes," he said. "They was all fastened together all over town. When I give that last powerful jerk, I must have pulled out a faucet in the saloon and snatched down the whole town."

Then he lit out of there for St. Louis, where he run right smack into his doom.

How Old Scratch Tricked Stackalee

You see, Stack was gettin' into so much devilment that he even worried the devil, and old Satan was gettin' tired waitin' for Stack's soul, so he figgered out a way to trick him.

Old Scratch knowed that if Stack was killed fightin' another bad man like Jesse James maybe God wouldn't let his soul go to hell. So this is the way the devil fixed it. He schemed it out to make hisself look like Billy Lyons, an innercent family man. So when Stack killed an honest family man, the Lord would be mad at him and let Satan have him.

One cold, frosty Friday night when Stack was havin' one of his lucky streaks in a big coon can game down at Jack o' Diamond's place in St. Louis, he was so busy pickin' up his money that he hung his oxblood Stetson on the back of his cheer. That's when Old Scratch, keepin' his eye peeled, changed hisself to look like Billy Lyons. Then he snatched the magic hat and tore out toward the White Elephant Barrel House where he knowed Billy was. When the devil got to the door he disappeared. Stack came runnin' up and seen Billy standin' by the door, lookin' as innercent as you please, smokin', and watchin' the can can dancers.

And there is where Stack shot him through and through. Billy pleaded for his life, on account of his wife and babies. But Stack, mad as blue blazes because he had lost the magic hat that kept the law from ketchin' him, blazed away and blasted poor Billy down.

So the wagon come loaded with pistols and a big gatlin gun and hauled Stack off to jail. But the police didn't kill him like the devil, setting outside the window in the shape of a black cat, hoped they would.

Instead, they slapped Stack into jail where the judge sent him to Jefferson Pen for seventy-five years. He's already served thirty-four of 'em and got forty-one more to serve there yet. The devil is waitin' for him to die so he can snatch his soul just like the song tells you.

A War-Correspondent Quiz

by Nat W. McKelvey

FROM the days of Richard Harding Davis, who reported more wars than anyone (the Greco-Turkish, Spanish-American, South African, Russo-Japanese and the U.S.-Mexico trouble of 1914) a great tradition for war coverage has developed.

Floyd Gibbons, whose facile tongue could unleash three thousand words in twelve minutes, came along during World War I to perpetuate and improve on the standards and methods established by Davis. Today, in the greatest conflict in history, dozens of agile, skilled and daring young men—and some women—are following the Davis-Gibbons footsteps to bring you an up-to-the-second report from battle-zones. By their exploits, you should know them.

For each correct identification, score ten. If you make 100, you are practically an ace news-hawk yourself and should be overseas doing your stint—maybe. From 80 to 90 is very good. From 50 to 70 is average. Below 50—war stuff is not for you.

(1) Frederick Faust was killed on the Italian front in 1944. During his life, he wrote short stories and novels under 19 pen-names. "The Luck of the Spindrift" was written under his most famous *nom de plume*. Which was it?

(a) Hal Boyle (b) Reynolds Packard (c) Max Brand

(2) As a member of the AP, he won a Pulitzer prize for his coverage of the British Mediterranean fleet. Captured at Tobruk, he demanded to see Hitler.

(a) William Shirer (b) Larry Allen (c) C. Yates McDaniel

(3) This six-foot, two-hundred-pounder wrote that best-seller "The Curtain Rises."

(a) Pierre Van Paassen (b) Emil Ludwig (c) Quentin Reynolds

(4) He wrote "D-Day," and covered action in North Africa and Sicily. He is known for three other books of "inside" information.

(a) Phil Ault (b) John Gunther (c) Darrel Berrigan

(5) He wrote "They Shall Not Sleep." He is said to have covered more of the war in Burma, India, China and Russia than any other reporter.

(a) Leland Stowe (b) Bill Boni (c) Barney Darnton

(6) Nicknamed "Beaver," this Chicago *Tribune* reporter is noted for jumping into battle with the paratroops.

(a) Jack Johnson (b) William L. Worden (c) Jack Thompson

(7) She is the reporter-wife of a former United Press chief of the Rome bureau. They are now working from Rome.

(a) Eleanor Packard (b) Carolyn Wells (c) Sigrid Schultz

(8) He is a distinguished political writer and correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

(a) Jack Alexander (b) Demaree Bess (c) Paul Gallico

(9) Reporting for the New York *Times*, he won a 1943 Pulitzer prize for his description of conditions on the war fronts of the Southwest Pacific.

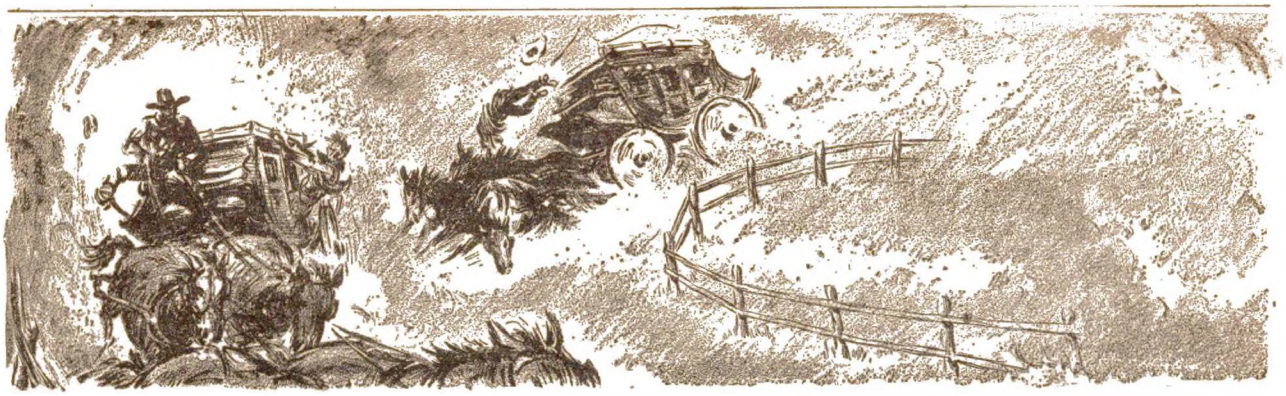
(a) Clinton B. Conger (b) Frank Tremaine (c) Hanson W. Baldwin

(10) Reporting for the Columbia Broadcasting System, he hit the beaches of Normandy on D-Day (June, 1944) with the first wave of troops.

(a) Larry Stuntz (b) Vern Haugland (c) Larry LeSueur

Answers

1. (a); 2. (b); 3. (c); 4. (b);
5. (a); 6. (c); 7. (a); 8. (b);
9. (c); 10. (c).



Feed 'Em Buckskin!

Our Twice-Told Tale (from the April, 1924, issue)

by CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG

"CAN you come now, Bill, before this deer meat toughens up?" Sally Joyce shaded her eyes and scanned the near-by corrals of the Bar Z Ranch, where her husband was watering the stock.

William Joyce was a slight man of average height. His broad-brimmed sombrero shadowed a time-furrowed face, strong in character, with deep-set, kindly eyes; a white beard and mustache covered a square but not heavy jaw, and a mouth whose firmness lent a charm to his quiet smile.

"Jest a minute, Ma, till I put up these bars."

The lower ridge of the Blue Mountains in eastern Oregon was painting its wash of violet across the golden green of Camas Prairie; in saffron the lowering sun brushed a glow of gold over the Joyce homestead, corrals and outbuildings, and over the pine tops which rimmed this level upland valley, and sent shadows lengthening down the softly undulating slope. Two of these shadows were cast by little headstones in a square of green between the house and some neighboring pines, toward which the woman's gaze was instinctively directed.

A tenderness seemed to emerge from the keen gray eyes, and soften the sharp-cut angles, which time and hard experience had character-chiseled in the face of this pioneer woman. Then a hand, joint-distorted and calloused, was pressed lightly on her shoulder.

"Here's the mail, Ma."

Both of the Joyces had crossed the plains, and through the round openings at the end of the ox-drawn prairie schooner had seen the East diminish and the West grow big. William Joyce hailed from Maine. As a mere lad he had trekked out to California over the Santa Fe Trail in the late Fifties, scorching his way through rock, sand, cactus, mesquite and chaparral.

He had ridden the range, mined and traded; but being uncommonly handy with horses, he had eventually settled down to staging. Wherever Wells-Fargo or other big stage-operating outfits had need for an exceptionally able and trusty driver over dangerous roads, it was Bill Joyce whom they sought. He had driven in five different States, winding up in Oregon and "nesting" there.

Sally had come out some ten years later, from Virginia, over the old Emigrant Trail. They left her mother along it—it was that fatal cholera year. Her father settled in Oregon. . . .

"Look a-here, Ma!" Old Bill Joyce glanced inquiringly across the table. "Here's a letter from Dave Holt and his folks. He says they're all setting pretty, and wants us to come down to Pendleton for the Round-up this fall. We'd meet up with a lot of the old-timers we used to know. There'd be—"

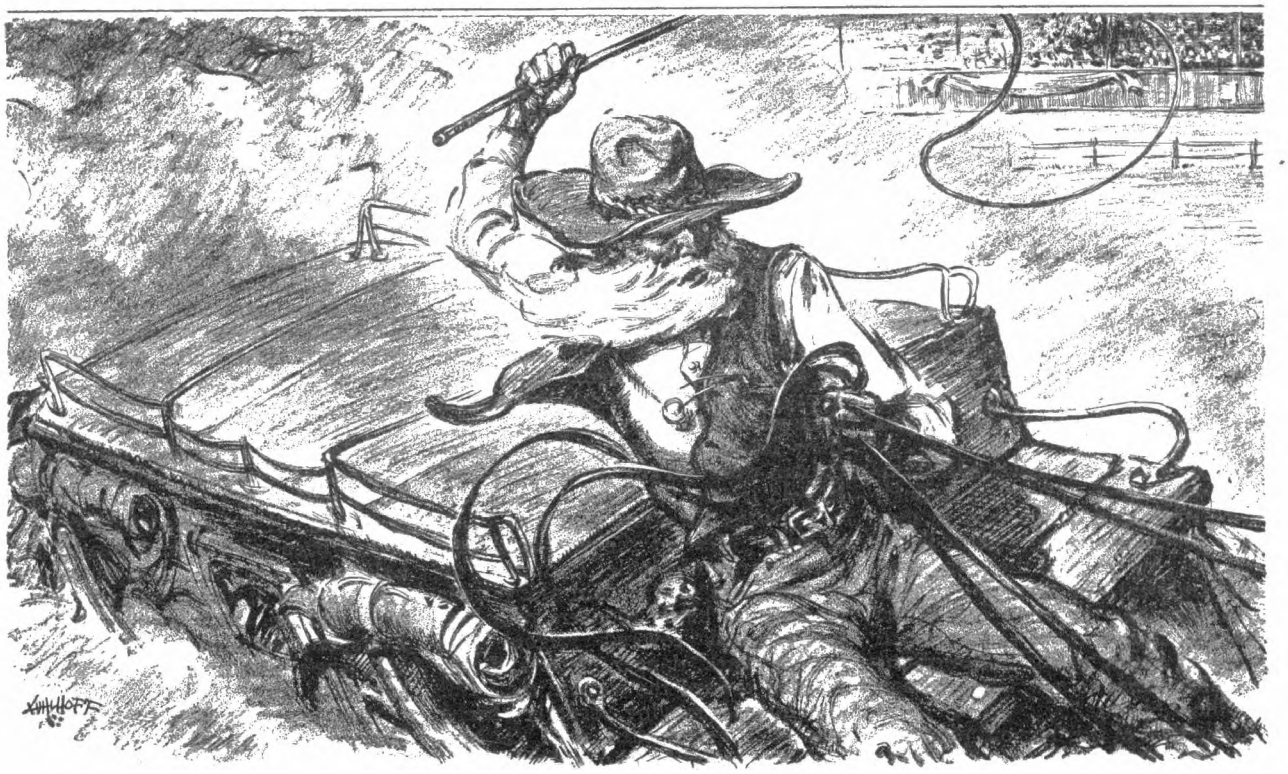
"Why, William Joyce, with the interest on this ranch due that ornery Joe Skinner in November! With half the stock froze last winter, and a wheat-fire this summer, the Bar Z is as good as gone. It warn't no fault of yours, Will, and I could stand moving off the homestead; but"—she half turned in the direction of the little square of grass—"I just can't stand leaving the children over there."

"Well, I guess you're right, Ma."

During the dish-washing neither spoke; only the click of china broke the silence. Through the haze of his old sweet-briar, Joyce saw in the wiry, yet delicately proportioned figure of the little old woman beside him, a gray-eyed girl in poke bonnet and gay tarlatan dress, who, with a frank and merry smile, had climbed into the dicky seat behind him one autumn morning fifty years ago, when he drove out of Boise for the long and dangerous run across the Snake River to Walla Walla.

SALLY JOYCE manipulated the dishes automatically, while her thoughts traveled back by the milestones of the years. She paused, her hand resting gently on a little plate of running blue, a solitary piece of her mother's china, saved by a neighbor when they crossed the plains.

She visioned her journey back to Idaho to visit, and the return with the precious gift. . . . She again climbed aboard the old Concord coach, driven by a spare, clear-eyed youth, to whom she had paid scant attention until they reached the dangerous region of the Snake, where the alert driver observed his horses' actions and other signs of the trail—which meant Indians.



She again heard his curt order to clamber over beside him and crouch down. Again there was the sudden onrush of the yelling savages; the long race for life, in the open, through the cañon of Dead Man's Gulch and along the lower foothills, to the fort, where the heroic young driver collapsed from loss of blood and the dangerous wound from one of the three arrows he carried in as souvenirs. Then there was the delay in her journey, to nurse him through. . . . .

Instead of laying down the plate of running blue to drain, she turned and handed it directly to her husband, hesitating to release her grasp, as her eyes met his. Pipe and plate were set aside; and in the old man's arms she sensed an often felt but rarely expressed tenderness—likewise a sinewy strength which healthy life in the open had preserved.

"Come in, Tom!" ejaculated Joyce in reply to a lively "Hello!" and rap on the door. A tall youth of some twenty-two years strode in with the free and graceful naturalness of the man of the range.

"Hope you liked the deer meat?"

"You betcha; it was sure fine. We've got a quarter still hangin'."

"Look at this!" The young man's eyes gleamed with enthusiasm as he unrolled a long, striking poster of "The Round-up," announcing the great annual frontier cowboy carnival held in Pendleton, in which the rangemen compete for world's championships in the sports of the range.

"A batch of these have just come in to the postmaster down to Ukiah, to hand around. My old man's going to put up a couple in his harness shop, and I figured as how you and the Missus might like one.

"Look a-here!" He traced his finger down the list of events. "See, they've got all the cowpony races. I'm goin' to try the ropin' and the bulldoggin' too, but it's this here buckin' contest that interests me."

HE retraced his finger halfway up the poster. "Here y'are! This'll int'rest you! They're goin' to race the old stagecoaches again, three of 'em this year, all at once on that quarter-mile track. That's crowdin' 'em, I say, but they've got a big cash prize, five hundred bucks for the outfit totalin' the best runnin' for the three days of the show. They say that Rompus fellow, Red Rompus from Prineville way, is goin' to handle one set of lines.

"I knew this would perk you up. You haven't been for three years. Say, my folks thought you and the Missus might like to drive down with them. The hands and me, we're ridin' in."

"Thanks to your folks," responded Joyce. "We'd like to go, but you-all know how we're fixed about this ranch. It looks as though we'll have to sell it or git run out." Old Joyce paused reflectively. "Anyway, I've only one hand—he's a 'wobbly' and aint much account, and I can't spare a day. Besides, mebbe we aint got many days on the Bar Z, anyhow."

"Look a-here. You and the Missus have been as good as our own folks to us fellers round here. We'll stand by you on the work. What do you say?"

"What do you say, Sal?"

"Well, I reckon if Jinks White's going, and Mary too, Tom had better tell 'em we'll like as not go along."

Just before the Joyces went to bed that night, old Bill took from a corner closet a narrow, five-foot leather case. He unbuckled the top and carefully drew forth three beautifully made coach-whips, relics of his calling.

"Remember my team of six bays, Sally, how well matched they were on color and size, and disposition too? Remember how you could hardly tell one from another when I turned 'em out in the corral to roll? How they could throw the dirt!"

"Yes, that was the team that saved us through the Gulch."

"Every one of these sticks is straight as an arrow, Sally." He sighted affectionately down his favorite whip of beautiful quartered hickory. He had put in half a winter, off and on, dressing it with a drawing-knife, polishing and curing it, and braiding and beeswaxing the buckskin lash; it was the winter of the big snow. The lash tapered perfectly from sixteen strands to four, and was finished with a braided silk cracker. The ferrules were not of silver, as on his other whips, but of silk, which he had knotted in a showy whipstitch.

The three whipsticks were polished as slick as glass; he had kept them well

oiled, so they were not brashy, but as pliable as when last used, ten years before.

"Guess I'll take the whips along, Sally, ter show Dave and the boys."

A MONTH later, in the tang of mid-September, sunup found the Whites and Joyces well on their fifty-mile drive to Pendleton. There were many long steep grades, and out of compliment to the old stage-driver, the lines were handed over to Joyce. Tom and a half-dozen cowboys rode beside and ahead, with a soft thud of hoofs, a faint jingle of spurs, and an easy creak of leather—graceful outriders, these stalwart young knights of the range.

The hamlet of Albee was still slumbering when the outfit jogged through its one street at a steady trot; as they passed Bingham Springs, sunrise flooded its first rays through the pines, over the abandoned old stage-station and log cabins along the south fork of the Umatilla. Noon found them camped for lunch, handy to the hollowed-out log which serves as a watering-trough at Willow Springs.

In the lives of the four old pioneers, this spot commemorated a red-letter day in Oregon history, red dyed in blood. Here, during the Bannock War, both Joyce and White, with the rest of the retreating, thirsting ranchers and cowboys from the Camas Prairie and John Day regions, had made a stand in their running battle with the Indian hordes in the Willow Springs fight. A bit farther down, on the Yellow Jacket Trail, the detachment of soldiers under Major Nelson Miles had reinforced them.

So, by the old watering trough, over the cheery roadside fire, two men who had helped cement the Northwest into our national body politic, reminisced, contrasting the events of the then and the now.

The country over which they drove during the afternoon was dry, and some of the grain still lay in the sheaf. Miles upon miles of golden-yellow stubble-fields undulated away in the distance; willows and cottonwoods stenciled green along the watercourses, and clustered about an occasional ranchhouse or nester's cabin, and a few scattered herds of livestock grazed here and there.

A sudden turn, and far away below them the cultivated lands of the Umatilla Valley spread out like a vast color-carpet of Nature. Into it she had woven the yellow, pink, brown and old-rose rectangles of stubble-fields and summer fallow, alternated it with the emerald and distant turquoise of verdant fields of spring sowing, and dark-accented it with rich maroons and distant purples of the near summer plowing. Through its center she had stitched the rambling silver thread of the Umatilla River.

About sundown they drove along the well-paved little main street of Pendleton, just as its cluster lights vied with twilight. A suppressed exuberance and expectancy emanated from the quiet stir of the attractive town. Bunting, streamers and flags bulged and flapped gracefully in the soft lift of air which drew up the river valley. The morrow was the first of the three days of the great carnival, and the town had already quadrupled her normal population of seventy-five hundred. Everybody kept open house, and even turned their woodsheds into bunkhouses, and their lawns into camp sites. Many citizens wore red silk badges inscribed in gold letters: *"Ask me, I live here."*

Thus the little city took care of its visitors. Most of the vanguard had come in comfortable Pullmans, on smooth lines of steel laid along trails where once hardy pioneers with bull-lock-spanned covered wagons had pushed back danger, fate and the frontier toward the western sea. But the quietly moving, orderly throng was well besprinkled with cowboys and even cowgirls, who had ridden in, also bucks, squaws and papooses from the near-by reservation.

The Joyces were dropped at the Holt home, at the end of a shady little side-street. They were greeted warmly; and after the happy group had eaten heartily of the savory muck-a-muck, Dave Holt and Bill Joyce got dressed to take a look around town.

Bill liked to be well dressed, and in common with all old stage-drivers, had a predilection for a good suit of gray. Dave wore black; the trousers of each were tucked into high boots, well polished clear to the tops; white silk kerchiefs softened about their necks; and that pride of the old-time stager—the sombrero of silver beaver—jauntily crowned each white head.

They soon found their way to the crowded lobby of the Pendleton Hotel, just opposite the site of the old Villard House, formerly the stage-station. They rubbed elbows with bankers and cowboys, business men and ranchers, preachers and Indians, doctors and ranch-hands, judges and sheepherders. Most of these were strangers; yet needless to say, the stage-drivers met up with many old acquaintances.

"Well, blast me eyes, if there aint Bill Joyce! You old rock-scorpion, you! Where'd you come from?"

"Tex Robles, I'll be dinged! You old horned toad! We aint met up since that greaser affair on the old Gila Trail."

The two old-timers continued to exchange news and reminiscences, quite oblivious of the keen interest displayed by two well-groomed spectators. They were obviously Easterners, for on the head of each perched that inartistic abomination, the derby.

"Oh, 'scuse me!" Tex turned. "Mr. Wall, shake hands with an old side-pardner of mine, Bill Joyce—'Scorpion Bill,' we used to call him 'cause he was so handy with his whip. He'd crack a scorpion with the silk any time, when he was just drivin' along ord'nary like. And Bill, this is another friend of mine, Mr. Banks. They come from that little town on the Hudson where everybody lives in caves and cañons like the Hopi Injuns—only they don't git half so much air.

"But these two aint as big dudes as they look. I first toted 'em in their prospectin' down in Colorado some years back. We met up ag'in last year, and I'll eat forked lightnin' if I hadn't been a-sittin' and a-eatin' and a-sleepin' on top of a lake of oil, and didn't know it till these two tenderfoots told me. Now we've formed the Everspout Petroleum Company, and Bill, she's sure spoutin' pretty, and I'm ridin' slick.

"Say, boys," he said, turning to the Easterners, "tomorrow mornin' I'll take you round to see Bill and show you some of his whips he's packed down."

It was late when the party broke up. Here and there a small group hung outside the closed doors of a saloon as the two old cronies meandered home. Only an occasional song, a "whoopee," a fusillade of shots, or a wild shout "Let 'er buck!" broke the night's stillness; the big little city slept on into the great tomorrow. . . .

The following day found the Joyces a part of the mass of humanity which, like a gigantic herd on the drive, streamed through the gates of the great arena and went milling to its seats. At one o'clock, to the crack of the pistol, the great show began.

FOR two days the vast audience breathed thoughts and exclamations with common accord, through one event after another; but it was the stagecoach races that tensed every fiber in old Bill's body, more squarely set his jaw, and caused a steely glint to creep into his kindly blue eyes—not a factor of which escaped the sidelong glances of his wife, who, understandingly, edged closer to her husband.

Each coach carried, besides the driver, a lasher and two or three extra hands, to act either as stock-tenders in hitching and in case of accident, but more particularly to serve as ballast at the turns, to keep the coach from capsizing. To counterbalance its terrific momentum, they swung daringly from seat, coach-top or tailboard, to the side of the coach toward the inner curve of the track. Here they threw

their weight as tar out as they could, adhering as tenaciously as barnacles on a ship's hull in a gale. Then, on the straightaways, with keen judgment, they edged back to their places so as not to pull the lumbering vehicle on top of them.

Red Rompus had won the first day, and might have won the second, had not a forefoot of his off-wheel horse got hung up in the tug of the off-leader. He knew a Western horse could run nearly as well on three legs as on four, and so he just whipped him up a little faster to make up the loss of the fourth leg; and after driving an entire lap, running his off-wheeler on three legs, he pulled in a close third—everyone figuring that but for the accident he'd have won again.

But the winner this second day was "Scaly" Fish, from Horse Heaven Country, across the Columbia. A quartet of poorly matched bays, pulling the most ramshackle of the three coaches and driven by a breed, each day pulled in a close second. This gave the Rompus and the Fish teams a first and a third place each, and the breed's bays two second places. But there was still one more day to run.

The yells and exclamations of the crowd showed the Rompus outfit the hands-down favorite, and that of Scaly Fish second; one spectator remarked that the breed's team warn't no use, noway, and only slowed down the whole race. This caused a look of quiet contempt to flit across old Bill's face, and he remarked quietly to Sally: "Them bays is the best outfit on the track, only they aint hitched right, and they aint druv right."

A few minutes after the great finale of the afternoon, the wild-horse race, found old Dave and Bill about the corrals and barns, looking over the stock. At the lower end of the grove of cottonwoods, beneath which nestled the picturesque tepees of the Indian village, they stopped for a drink at the small pump from which squaws were drawing water.

"Hey, old-timer! We're fixing up some bets on the stagecoaches. You can help us settle this argument as to which is the outrunnines' bunch of cayuses of the two best outfits. I'm backin' Red Rompus here, but this hand is puttin' up on Scaly."

The speaker was a tall, heavy-set rancher from Prineville way, and stood beside the breed's unhitched coach. He was the center of an interested group composed of cowboys, ranchers, a couple of Round-up committeemen and a few interested strangers, among whom were Joe Skinner, Tex Robles and his two friends.

"Well," drawled old Bill as he perched a foot on the hub of the hind wheel of the old stage and rested a hand, almost affectionately, on the well-worn tire, "seein' you asked me, I figure that if I was a-drivin', I'd rather to be on the box of this here coach, behind the bays, because—" A roar of laughter cut short his words, and ended by a derisive guffaw from Rompus himself, who swaggered up to the old man.

"So you're a-figurin' that that breed's outfit is better'n Scaly's, and better'n mine! That is," he said with a vindictive leer, "provided *you* was a-handlin' the lines. Strange, aint it," he queried, glancing around, "how these old has-beens are always a-hintin' what *they* used to do! They know they're safe, and we can't call their bluff. You and your breed outfit! Are you tryin' to tell us an Injun's as good as a white man?"

Red Rompus shifted his quid, spat insultingly, and scoffingly wiped his hand across his mouth. The crowd, which had enlarged, was now on tiptoe. Old Bill had not moved a muscle, nor for an instant winced in his straight look toward Rompus; but the onlookers observed that the kindly blue eyes had turned a peculiar blue—the gleaming, neutral blue of steel.

"We don't talk that way up in our neck of the woods," he observed calmly, "and they didn't use to down Prineville way when I druv there—leastways not to a *friend;* and them that warn't—well, 'twas surprisin' how soon they discovered they didn't like the climate, if their disease didn't git 'em before they left."

THEN something welled up in him, an almost forgotten something, the man-desire to buck the game. He knew that Tom White was one of the best "liners" in Umatilla County. Though he had never run a race, Tom had been under his tutelage up back-country, driving six-horse stock at that; so why not under his coaching in the race? If Tom won, and he backed him, with odds favoring, at least the interest on the Bar Z could be paid, and Sally needn't move away from the children this year. All this passed through his mind like a flash in the pan.

"Listen to me, Red Rompus." Bill eyed his adversary. "I aint sayin' but what you've got a good team. I aint sayin' but what they're druv well—for this newfangled, dude track-drivin'; and I aint a-hintin' nothin', neither, about them bays. I'm expressin' an opinion, and to express it so's you and Joe Skinner there can do a bit of figurin' yerselves, if the breed will turn this here outfit over,"—and he brought his hand down forcibly on the wheel,—"from now on till the end of the show, to young Tom White, here, I'll wager what's left of the Bar Z above the mortgage, against yer two wheelers. What do you say?"

This sudden assertion of the old, take-a-chance, gambling spirit of the pioneer won the plaudits of the majority of the crowd, who looked toward Rompus.

"Well, you see, boys, it's just as I was a-tellin' you about these old-liners, and their drivin'. They're good in picturin' how to handle the reins, but when you get 'em corralled and rounded right up, why, they just hand the line right over, polite-like, to some young feller, and want the odds on a pair of the best wheelers in the country."

"Gentlemen, I submit Mr. Rompus' contention is perfectly sound—sound and logical." The interpolator was none other than the rich "Judge" Joe Skinner, a tall, cadaverous, lynx-eyed individual in a faded black frock coat, and soft black hat. His shoulders were slightly stooped, which thrust into prominence a long, pointed nose.

"I think," he went on, "we have heard enough of what Bill Joyce purposes: but the real disputation is not now a question of the fastest team—which Mr. Rompus has already proved is his—but has resolved itself fundamentally into a contentious controversy as to whether the old-fashioned drivers and their methods are comparable to the young men of today and their up-to-date style of driving. Now that bets are on, any of us, I'm sure, would be willing to put up any amount and give odds on any old-liner's driving. But I submit to you, gentlemen, that as we can't go back ten or twenty years, and there is no old stage-driver who is able to drive today and prove it, why, it can't be proved."

"Well, Mr. Moderator, I don't know yer name, or what you calls yourself; but seeing as how you've taken charge of this town meetin', I'd like to do a little of this here *submittin'* myself." It was Tex Robles who spoke. "I submit that you're a late-comer to these parts and aint tolerably well acquainted with our ways. I submit that when this Mr. Rompus was only grass-high, Bill Joyce had forgotten more about stage-drivin' than Rompus ever knew."

"You're darned tootin'," acquiesced a squint-eyed bystander whose hatbrim had been eaten into by wood rats.

"And again I submit," Tex went on, spitting thoughtfully, "that while we can't go back ten or twenty years, as this moderatin' feller submits, I'm opinin' there's an old stage-hand who, in Tex Robles' opinion, is qualified to take the lines of this here coach, and prove up on 'em, even if he is a whiskery old-timer like myself, and that's Bill Joyce thar.

"Now, I and my two side-pardners from the East, here, my associates in

the Everspout Petroleum Company, are willing to stake old Bill ag'in' the field, on yer own terms of two to one, unless yer a-gyppin' me; and I lastly submit, to this here Round-up committeeman as stake-holder, this bit of paper, good for five thousand gold bucks, on the Everspout Petroleum Company—that is, provided old Bill's willin' to drive the coach on his own terms, and the breed's willin' to have him. What do you say, you Prineville outfit?"

This defiant challenge was so unexpected, so incredible, that for a moment even that hard-boiled crowd, any one of whom would bet a nickel against a tidal wave, were impressed into absolute silence. Then a roar of approval signified that, regardless of the absurdity of the bet, Skinner and Red Rompus must see it through; and so sure a thing was it in their own minds that they considered the money as good as theirs.

"Your bet's taken, Mr. Everspout, or whatever you calls *yourself*—taken and doubled if you say so." And Skinner drew forth his pen and a long black book. Using the tailboard of the coach as a desk, he proceeded to write out a check for twenty thousand dollars; and as the crowd drew in closer, Tex, tearing up his first check, promptly followed suit with another one for ten thousand. "Now, as long as I'm investin' in your company,"—and Skinner waved the drying paper grandiloquently back and forth,—"I submit that our checks be cashed in legal tender uptown at once, and turned over to this committeeman."

"Done, providin' the others interested are willin'!" Tex then looked toward the breed. "I'll stack you fifty dollars on the rent of your outfit." The breed nodded assent. "And you, Bill, old pard, the odds of ten thousand dollars are yours, besides Rompus' wheelers and the Round-up prize cash if you'll drive. Hey?"

Bill seemed to be looking beyond his old pal. Somewhere between his eyes and the sky, he saw figures floating—five thousand dollars. Often he had seen them there; they usually were at first, the same size as those written on the mortgage loan he had signed for Skinner; then they would swell and swell, until they filled his whole sky. Now they were shrinking to the paper size. Above them, Bill saw other figures—ten thousand five hundred; and below was the subtracted balance—five thousand five hundred—enough to pay off both principal and interest—and a pair of fine wheelers thrown in! Bill's vision was brief—so was his calculation.

"All right, I'll take the box, even if I am a stove-up old-timer; but on one condition—that the bay outfit is mine to do what I like with, and go whar I please with, from the time I take the lines in my hands till I drive out of that thar arena tomorrow after the race."

Wild yells and "whoopees" from the now big crowd evinced a spontaneous tribute to old Bill's gameness, despite secret misgivings as to his ability.

"You-all'll have time to do some more applaudin'—after the race," Rompus snarled, and paused, expectorating. "It is my opinion that old Joyce has gone plumb *cultus*. Why, how can he drive? Look at his hands! They're cramped up like a couple of bunches of no-use haywire."

"Yes, my hands *are* cramped, cramped in the lines," retorted Joyce, holding out his hands, distorted from too long driving in wet and storm, "but some of you birds have got to cramp yours into this same position afore you kin talk that way."

Then he turned to young Tom White. "Tom, I want you to help me. Pick a couple of old hands from Ukiah way as stock-tenders and to balance the coach; and while we're hitchin' up, you jest run up town in that scrub-tailed flivver thar, and ask Sally for my best whip. And Tom,"—old Bill's eyes twinkled,—"explain to her as how Joe Skinner's plannin' to invest in Tex Robles' company!"

"WELL, boys, bring out yer bays!" The bays were led out; and as they were being hitched, old Bill walked about the animals, patted them, got acquainted a bit, and talked confidentially with the breed, asking him the horses' names.

"The wheelers, I call him Buck and he Dude. The leaders, here, he Mike and he Mandy. I no know much about this Mike cayuse—he new horse. All same, I wish you skookum luck."

Tom shortly returned with the stage-whip. Bill took his seat and gathered up his lines, which fell naturally into place. The onlookers noted that the old man's hands were indeed cramped, but cramped the right away.

"Who you goin' to take on fer a lasher?" a voice asked.

"Well, I've always done my own lashin'—guess I always will, what lashin' I have to do. Let's go!"

Bill gathered in his wheel- and lead-lines, with all the nonchalance of the veteran. He knew there was only one way to hold lines and whip—and that had been figured out by the best of them in the early days.

The nigh reins he ran between the two lower fingers of his left hand, then over his thumb; his off reins followed between the two lower and the two upper fingers of his right hand, but not over the thumb. In both cases, the wheelers' lines were below, and the leaders' on top, while the drop ends fell for about four feet of length into the front boot.

This gave him not only plenty of line to let slip or take up slack, but the arrangement of the hold of the reins allowed him to bunch them all quickly in his left hand when he reached for his whip with his right, which he did at once. Then he reclaimed the off reins with his right hand, in which he now lightly and easily held also his whipstick. Not only old Bill's technique, but his whole set and demeanor had already had its effect on some of the skeptics in the crowd.

"Steady!" There was that peculiar resonant quality of intonation of the understanding driver as Bill gave a slight movement to the reins. His helpers stepped away from the heads of the restless leaders, and swung on the coach, while the horses, Mike excepted, lay fairly well into the collar; the crowd parted and the old stage rattled over the dirt mixed with river stones, under the cottonwoods, through the Indian village, out of the gate of the Round-up grounds, and disappeared. The crowd dispersed, and the news of the wager spread through the little city like a prairie fire.

For two miles beyond the city old Bill spoke no word except to the horses, which he observed closely, and frequently called by name, to accustom them to his voice. Nothing escaped his eye, as he noted the individual faults and characteristics of each animal.

Suddenly his "Whoa!" brought them to a stop at a turnout in the road. Here he shifted the nigh leader, Mike, back into Dude's place, putting that off-wheeler in Mandy's place, while he shoved Mandy over into Mike's: this now made Mandy and Dude leaders, with Buck and Mike wheelers. He then removed all the check reins, and lowered the wheelers' neck-yokes, which had been strapped too high, and instead of pulling directly on the stagecoach, had been pulling down on top of the wheelers' necks. This, as old Bill had noticed in the race, caused the animals to flinch, so that their energy, instead of going into running and speed, went into flinching back against the pull of the leaders.

Then he did something only an old-time stage-driver would do: he crossed the leaders' inside tugs, and hitched each over to the end of the lead-bar of the other to hold the leaders together better; then he hitched each inside tug one hole shorter than the outside ones, to prevent their getting caught fast on the double bar, or entangling a horse. The value of these changes was remarkable, and

was at once evidenced in the evenness of pull of all the bays, who were now also better matched as to color.

It was worth while to ride beside old Bill on the box, and watch him "gentle" or "break in" his team, as the case might be. After the manner of the old stager, he gathered in the lash of his whip about one foot from the end, leaving a good-sized belly; and when he whipped, his stroke was decisive. He never whipped over a horse's head, as this would make him fear for his eyes; then too, it would get the whole team all "nettled up," and throw them out of gait. He went for their legs, where horses are always sensitive about being struck.

A SWING off the main road made it clear the driver was headed for "Wild" Pat Brady's. By this time the team had picked up remarkably, except Mike, who, although doing better, was for some reason still very nervous.

During the next few miles old Bill put his quartet through all the paces —walks, stops, slow and fast trots; but not until he got to a straight piece of road on the last eighth of a mile did he let them out on a lope and then not so the wheelers overreached. The quartet ran in beautiful unison, and only with difficulty, amidst blinding whoofs of dust, did he manage to pull up at Pat's—in front of the whole family, and assembled hands, who had watched them coming for a mile down the road.

"By the holy saints and creepin' Jehoshaphat! Ye ould divil—and what's ahfter ye? Is it a new airplane stagecoach line the Governmint's ahfter institutin' with yerself as Stagemaster Gineral, and Mrs. Brady's as yer central shtop?" was Pat's greeting.

Old Bill explained, and told him he wanted to put up at the ranch while he broke in his outfit.

"Holy shmokes! What'll ye be doin' next? Shure, and it isn't at Pat Brady's me ould friend'll have to be ahfter askin' a welcome!"

All hands put in a busy evening. There wasn't a thing which old Bill omitted which would improve his outfit, even to winding buckskin on his whip-handle, to make the grip easier for his cramped fingers. Of first importance were the horses, which were turned out into the corral to roll and cool off, before watering and feeding. Then they were led into the barn, and while munching a good feed of oats, were given a thorough currying, and their manes and tails brushed out.

They were bedded down with a double amount of straw, while old Bill, to the surprise of some of the hard-boiled, bronco-busting ranchhands, went from one horse to another, talking to them, stroking them, and feeding them lumps of Mrs. Brady's sugar. It was evident that two of the animals were not stall-broken, and evident also that for some reason known only to the horses themselves, only old Bill could enter their stalls without risk of being crowded, kicked or bitten.

Meanwhile the ranch blacksmith shop was alive with hammer and clang; the shoes of the wheelers were recalked, and an ill-fitting shoe or two remedied. An additional ten-inch length was temporarily added to the pole, giving the leaders good clearing space from the wheelers, for they had occasionally overreached on the leaders, making the whole team nervous.

Long before arriving at the Bradys', Bill had decided that the trouble with Mike was due mainly to ill-fitting and chafing harness. So, shortly after the team was bedded down, Bill turned to his host.

"Pat, I want to borrow that genuine Concord mountin' of mine I sold you two summers back."

A beautiful harness was brought out, of the best leather.

"You don't see much harness like this nowadays." And old Bill affectionately stroked with the palm of his hand the tug he was cleaning.

Finally, Bill put a chain from the lead-bars back to the front axle of the stagecoach, thus letting each pair work independently. The old coach itself came in for a tightening and bracing up; axles and wheels were thoroughly cleaned and greased. . . .

Morning broke fresh and clear. Meadow larks sang on fence-posts, and a covey of China pheasants scurried to cover in the violent dew-tinted bunchgrass, as old Bill walked over to the barn to give his horses another good feed of oats. The hands soon turned out of the bunkhouse, and after coffee the day's work began.

By the time the bays had received a second thorough currying down and brushing, their coats shone, showing in brilliant high-lights the reflected rays of the morning sun. As they were led out, harnessed with the new Concord mounting, Bill scrutinized and adjusted the outfit of each horse with the utmost care, tightening up here and letting out there, but taking particular pains with Mike. All this was only in keeping with the technique of Bill's calling, for an old driver was more careful about the fit of his horses' harness than he was about the fit of his own clothes.

Before he took the box, he walked up to his leaders and put a jump-strap between them, from the hames, so that if one horse stumbled, the other would help save him from falling. For over an hour Bill put his team through its paces. The continued improvement was remarkable; after another slight adjustment or two of the harness, Mike's restlessness had entirely disappeared, and the whole tone of the team was better.

Once he let them out on the straightaway, but this time on the full run, only twice cracking his whip, and then without touching a horse—but even this made it hard work and a bit of a strain on his arms to bring them down, although he had thrown on the brake.

During the cool of the early forenoon the horses were again turned loose in the corral to relax and roll. At noon, after a very light feed of oats, and a final grooming, the Joyce outfit were going easily on the way to Pendleton.

It was pretty to see how steady his team was on the bits, how evident it was that every horse knew by just the feel of his mouth, the gait Bill was asking him to take. The horses now synchronized so well in their gait, that it was no longer necessary for Bill's eyes to be on them, but like a veteran stager, he watched the road ahead.

The sides of the mammoth bowl of the Round-up arena were a mosaic of humanity which sat tense on the edge of the opening hour. To the minute, the great drama of the West began; from grandstand, bleacher and the open gap on the backstretch, filled with the mounted cowboy and Indian contingent, the immense throng looked out on the swing and swirl of movement.

They had seen the greatest rough-riders and ropers of the globe vie in the roping, racing, relays and steer-bulldogging; and now the judges had called the stagecoach race, and the timers were ready. A murmur of expectancy swept through the crowd, for the wager had become the talk of the town.

THE Rompus and Fish outfits were already on the track; the timer impatiently paced to and fro in front of the grandstand, waiting for Joyce, who had not appeared; the murmurings changed to expressions of impatience. "Where is he?" "Has he lost his guts?" "Has he welched on his bet?" "Who'd have thought an old-timer would drop out like this?"

Then a voice rang out, deep, resonant, clear: "Open that gate!"

The Indians and cowboys crowding in fell back; the gate was flung wide; in swung four clean-cut steeds at a fast trot. Thus, with a rattle of wheels and clanking of chains, the old stagedriver appeared, with silver locks beneath his sombrero wafting in the soft chinook, as he maneuvered for position. Tom and two other husky cowboys perched on tailboard and coach-top to serve as living ballast. Every one observed how alert, even

agile, old Bill's lean body appeared, how he held his lines by feel, as though he could tell them in the dark, how everything was under his notice, and that his horses were pulling evenly, and working well together. A tremendous yell literally filled the immense crater of the arena.

"Hold 'em down," commanded the judges to the three drivers.

"Whoa, Dude! Steady, Mandy!" old Bill cautioned the leaders.

"Hold them cayuses down!" a judge yelled at Bill. "Hold 'em down, I tell you!"

"Wait for the gun with them outlaws of yourn, Rompus!"

Bang! They're off! Rompus has the pole, the coveted, inside position; old Bill is next, and Fish on the outside, a bit slow on the get-away. No one of the drivers seems more alive than old Bill. It is apparent he had made good use of his absence; for from the very crack of the starter's gun, every one of his horses lay well into the collar.

Bill doesn't lose a moment in swinging his outfit toward Rompus, forcing him to give ground and hug the low fence on the inside of the track to avoid a collision. He now holds back a little until the first turn is reached, veering slightly toward the outer side of the track, while Tom keeps an eye on Scaly Fish, now a couple of horse lengths behind their coach.

The terrific pace that Rompus set forces him, as he rounds the turn, to swing in a wide arc toward the outer side of the track, to avoid slowing down or upsetting his coach. Bill, cutting in, adroitly swerves his outfit to the inside position and holds it stubbornly. By the time they have rounded the turn and started down the backstretch, Bill's bay leaders are running neck and neck with Rompus' white ones. Rompus' lasher viciously applies the buckskin to his team, but the old man's whip still lies in its socket.

Both drivers knew the strategic importance of gaining or maintaining the inside position on the backstretch, down which the two old caravels of the plains swept, lurching and rolling like galleons in a gale, amidst great whoofs of dust and a thundering roar from the spectators.

A LOOK of surprise crossed Rompus' face; no one realized more than he did that he was up against an adversary not only heady, skillful and tenacious, but tough as a boiled owl —a man to be reckoned with. He shot a look of hate at Bill's beautifully running bays, and muttered to his lasher.

Crack went his whip: The silk coiled with a hot, stinging blow, and flayed a round piece of hide clean from the neck of Bill's off-wheeler, which nearly sprang out of its harness, and shied against the coach pole. "Steady, Mike! Steady, hoss, I say! S-t-e-a-d-y! Down, Mandy, down!" old Bill snapped, in that unmistakable, masterful tone which horses understand.

"Hold up your wheelers, Bill. They'll lose their feet!"

Seasoned driver though he was, old Bill plainly was worried. For a second the running rhythm of his four all but broke, and was saved only by his masterly handling. The keen eyes of every cowboy and Indian in the mounted contingent had seen what happened, as they watched from their horses in the gap along that backstretch. The judges had seen it too, but many in the grandstand wondered what caused the stream of blood and the red, raw hole in the neck of the bay off-wheeler.

Old Bill wasn't born yesterday, and he held himself, as well as his horses; but slight as was this note in the movement of his team, it was enough to give Rompus the advantage he sought, for even his wheelers were now gaining on the bay leaders—but under the lash.

"Better save your silk, Red," came from a cowboy.

The old man, still having the advantage of the inside, with an eye to the coming turn, again tried to force his adversary to give ground; but the younger man, still urging his flying steeds with the whip, held them to it for a few psychological seconds, and then, at the turn, to the surprise of some, and the chagrin of many, he crowded ahead of the old-timer into the coveted inside position.

"Feed 'em buckskin, Bill! Use your whip!" yipped from the mounted contingent.

"Stay with 'em, Red! You've got him!" bellowed the bleachers.

Bill was forced to gather in his leaders a bit as both coaches swung round the turn. The younger man held the advantage now, by his whole team's length. As they approached the straightaway, Bill veered again to the outside, emitted a sharp "Hootch-'Ja!" and slightly gave on the lines. His team jumped ahead. Grudgingly the younger man, with horses smarting under the whip as at breakneck speed they dashed by the grandstand, relinquished half his lead, amidst the roar of the spectators.

"Stay with 'em to the turn, and the race is yours, Rompus," yelled some of the crowd.

"Let 'em out a notch, old-timer! Feed 'em dynamite!" whooped others.

"He's good as lost," shrilled Skinner, who in the midst of the din stood teetering on his chair. "The money's ours! Rompus wins!" he sneered exultingly to the Everspout outfit in their box below. "We knew old Joyce couldn't make it. I sub—"

A matted grass cushion which Tex had rented, struck him full in the mouth. With a gurgle and a crash, Skinner disappeared from view.

Almost simultaneously there was a dull, ominous, scraping sound, and every eye turned from the leading coaches toward the curve they had just rounded, the most dangerous of all, the one before the homestretch. It was a sight never to be forgotten by those who saw it; the antiquated brake of Fish's coach had jammed, and the terrific momentum and swing had caused the entire body of the coach, hind wheels and all, to be thrown vertically in the air. Like a moving water-tower it traveled with a peculiar, shuddering sound. *Crash!* It careened to its side, and though buried from sight in a dust-storm all its own, its course could be traced by the crackling, splintering noise.

It righted itself as unexpectedly as it had capsized, and the outfit full-tilted by the grandstand, leaving some bruised and scattered cowboys picking themselves up out of its wake. Mounted herders raced alongside, "took up" the runaways and led them quickly off the track.

OLD Bill meanwhile held his team to the pace. As they reached the lower turn, he ran neck and neck with his antagonist. Roar upon roar from the vast throng followed the onrushing coaches; but to Bill the noise was like the rushing moan of the chinook when it sweeps by high overhead. Then out of it all, strange, yet not so strange, he heard, like a far-away call, the silver shrill of a woman's voice: "I know you'll do it, Bill. I *know* you'll do it." Those in Tex Robles' box knew that it came from a little old woman in poke bonnet and tarlatan dress.

Rompus held tenaciously to the inside; in fact, because of Bill's position, he was forced to, with no chance to swing out.

"Hold 'er down, boys," old Bill cautions his hands; they know he means to speed up on the turn and go round on two wheels, if necessary. Their keenest judgment and daring must be used to throw every ounce of their weight as far out as possible, to counterbalance the terrific momentum and keep their old ship of the plains from capsizing. Bill also threw his weight to the left, and suddenly leaned forward.

"Dude! Mandy!" he shouted to his leaders. "Buck! Mike!" he snapped at the wheelers. Simultaneously his two pairs threw themselves hard into the collar, with an action like clockwork—around the turn, but on the outside.

The inside driver was overswinging his team, running them off their feet. He turned his leaders too suddenly; the wheelers lurched wildly, almost upsetting the coach. This was the moment the old man had been waiting for. "Hold 'er down hard!" he commanded. The boys strained every muscle, and Tom hung far out by his hands. The strain on every bolt and trace was terrific and the coach quivered like a living thing.

Would she hold? Was she going over? Never did a driver figure the relations of momentum to gravity to a closer nicety; and he achieved something never seen before on that track—held an outside coach even with an inside rival around the entire curve, without overturning his coach or losing an inch. Only the backstretch, the upper turn, and half the length of the straightaway lay between them and the finish.

Bill knows the outfit holding the inside at the next turn is a foregone winner. Rompus knows it too, and he flays his team to their utmost. The old man shifts his off reins into his left hand for a second, and for the first time reaches for his whip.

"Let's go!" he yells to his team, with a crack of his ten-foot lash, heard above the din.

"On, Dude! Mandy, on! Lift your feet, Buck! Up, Mike, you devil!" And he follows each call with a crack like a pistol-shot, but never touches a horse. Along the backstretch the old man's team, which he has saved, begin to extend themselves.

"Give 'em the silk!" roars the grandstand.

"That's feedin' 'em buckskin!" yell the bleachers.

"Watch 'em throw the dirt! Muckahy rainbow!" whoop the mounted cowboys and Indians.

The Roman Colosseum never pulsated more responsively to the thrill and movements of its chariots than that arena hidden among the golden hills of Oregon vibrated to the epic of a bygone day. But there was one looker-on—the same little old pioneer woman in poke bonnet and tarlatan dress, to whom it meant more than a magnificent, hazardous, thrilling, spectacle, who looked out toward the man on the leading coach through a mist of years.

SHE saw the beardless, clear-eyed young stage-driver who'd ordered her to crouch down, on that ride from Boise; things seemed to spin about her; the shouts and yells merged with hordes of racing Indians, reins, three arrows—always three—the cracks of the whip, all mixed up, somehow, with a little plate of running blue. . . .

Bill's idea of a fool was a man who made the same mistake twice. That was why he watched the other outfit like a lynx, out of the corner of his "nigh" eye; that was why he saw his enemy's lasher gather in his buckskin, reach over behind Rompus and swing back his lash, this time with his eye on Buck.

"Look out, Bill!" warned Tom, who had seen it too.

Then something happened! The lasher dropped his whip with a screech of pain. Another spot, about the size of that on Mike's neck, flowed red; but this spot was on the lasher's wrist. Scorpion Bill had not lost his cunning with the silk.

Foot by foot, yard by yard, the bays forged ahead, a horse's length, a team's length, until the middle of the coach was opposite Rompus' leaders, at the upper turn.

And now Bill Joyce performed an astonishing piece of horsemanship: swinging his team smartly to the center of the track, judging every inch, he threw his coach directly in the path of the other, forcing him to slow down to avoid a collision, or crash into the fence.

"Lay into yer collars, you wheelers! Stretch them tugs, you leaders! Git thar!" Four times his whip cut the air with a whir, with a sting raised the fur on the legs of each horse in succession, and terminated with a final, resounding crack. With a wild old-time Indian yell that made the blood chill in many of the spectators, the old man rounded the turn, seemingly on two wheels.

"Watch him skin 'em! Whoopee! Wow! Wow! Wow!"

He sheered onto the straightaway in a hurricane of dust. The bays, even in their mad onrush, synchronized in beautiful movement, gleaming in the shine of the sweat of victory.

A tremendous, deafening roar, vibrating in a whirlwind of excitement, swept again and again around the gigantic, living oval of humanity, as though to shake the structure of the vast bowl from its foundations. The vortex of this whirlwind of sound was the slight figure of the old stage-driver, riding on the apex of this fast-moving trail of dust. Below him he sensed a fiery, undulating, living mass of horseflesh, moving like one body in a single, pulsating rhythm of red.

Somewhere back at the turn the chinook had claimed his sombrero, leaving his white hair blowing in the wind. As he passed, those nearest him noted a new vigor in his sinewy figure, and in his eyes the fighting fire of youth, a strange, steely gleam.

"Feed 'em dynamite! Give 'em hell!" yelled Tex Robles as the old pioneer raced by. But Scorpion Bill was as oblivious to his old pard's shout as he was to the rest of the human ferment about him. The long, dark cavern of the grandstand was to him the high, frowning walls of Dead Man's Gulch; the massed ranks of spectators in the bleachers, tier on tier, were cliffs of the foothills, ribbed with rimrock; the medley of shouts were but yells of savages, trying to stop the mad flight of the stage; and the little voice he had sensed in passing was that of a gray-eyed girl crouching by his side on the driver's seat.

With a veritable volley of cracks from his whip, down the homestretch he sped, past the pole—victor against time and youth.

"Stagecoach race won by William E. Joyce of Sweet Water Creek," megaphones the announcer. "Time one minute, twelve seconds, breaking the best previous record by two seconds." And—the crowd goes wild in an outburst of pent-up energy, which does not subside for a full two minutes.

THE bays' coach, after passing the pole, made another complete circuit of the track. At first the onlookers thought they were out of control. Old Bill knew differently; then all knew, when, deftly reining them in with a staccato "whoa!" he brought them to a restless stop, close in front of the last section of the grandstand. Big Tex Robles lifted up the little figure of the old pioneer woman, leaned over the track fence, and deposited her in the powerful arms of Tom White, who promptly placed her on the old stage beside her husband.

Again the plaudits broke out and swept around in the great oval, as though caught by the swift wind of a human passion. Old Bill swung out of the arena—from a single race in which he had driven into fame and fortune.

They passed from sight behind the bleachers; the shouting died away. Old Bill was driving with one hand now, the other arm around Sally. She nestled closer down beside him. The little poke bonnet fell back as she looked up into his face with a radiant smile.

"I knew you'd do it, Bill!" she said. "I *knew* you'd do it!"

"Pardner!" he whispered. As he bent to kiss her, he felt in her tenacious hold the same trust he had first sensed when they raced through Dead Man's Gulch.

With one stroke of luck, one final crack of the whip, the old stage-driver had epitomized the work of a lifetime, and had proved that the skill and character of the old pioneer which made for the winning of the West is a match for the best among the younger generation.

"How'd yer do it, Bill?" called out an old hand.

"Wall, I just kinder got in his way, like," was the laconic answer.

The Trumpet of Tradition

The story of a gallant day aboard a stricken ship.

by EUSTACE COCKRELL

THE Skipper thought, with a little corner of his mind, of the rain glistening on high-topped yellow cabs of a long, long time ago when he was coming out of a theater, elbowing his way up Forty-fourth Street toward Broadway—he didn't know why that thought flitted through his mind, because actually his mind was spinning tightly on a problem of longitudinal stability. What stores could be moved forward in what time? What forward compartments could be flooded—and to what avail? For the *Elkton*, his ship, lay inert, rent port and starboard, settling by the stern. But he thought about those cabs a tiny second, because a sound came harsh and sweet—a suggestion of a sound, from he knew not where.

"What is your opinion?" the Skipper asked across his shoulder to the Navigator.

"Were you whistlin' 'Bye, Bye, Blackbird?'" the Navigator asked, half to himself; then louder, in what he hoped was a more official tone and in keeping with the situation, he added: "We're still losing freeboard aft, Captain." He wondered if the phrase was right, because he had to translate it from *"I think she's sinkin' hind end first."* You didn't inherit the tradition and patois of the sea, teaching astronomy in a co-ed university near Omaha.

"No," the Skipper said, "but I thought I heard it too. I saw that show," he added irrelevantly.

It had been, for Al Tebbins, like once at a college prom when the gymnasium had caught on fire, only more so. . . . Then they'd decided to abandon ship, and he had, of course, gone for his horn, on the leg that didn't work so well; and going there he had fainted. Then once more conscious, he had continued, got the horn, and started back and run into the Bos'n.

The task force had moved, inexorably, over the dark horizon to its high destiny, but the Skipper had asked permission to try to save the *Elkton* with a volunteer skeleton crew.

Al Tebbins didn't know this, but he knew the Bos'n. He'd heeded the Bos'n's harshly worded request and crept into a room. He was lonesome and afraid, and his leg hurt him. He stood there clutching the case under his arm like a baby. It had been a long time since the *Elkton* had been hit and left to sink.

Al Tebbins wanted to cry. And wanting to cry, he took his horn out of its case and put it to his lips and cried into it, converting his grief and bewilderment to high sweet sounds that emerged from the polished bell.

It sounded pretty good above and below the other important sounds, the sounds of a ship sinking, of various others more capable moving stores and ammunition from here to there. He really didn't know much what had happened, but he wanted to play. In moments of stress he thought in music; and it hurt him across the bridge of his nose if he couldn't play. No reaching, nothing fancy; like Bix . . . but Bix is dead these lot of years—hello, Bix. Al Tebbins closed his eyes and started on the chorus of "Bye, Bye, Blackbird."

The First Lieutenant batted his eyes only twice, because he was a brave young man and he didn't want to forget it; but he'd had a girl in high school who knew all the words to "Bye, Bye, Blackbird," and something made him think of her. He smiled, a little self-consciously, down the years, thinking of that young man who had known that girl who had known the words to all the songs. And as he came off the ladder onto the bridge, he was still smiling.

The Captain looked at him, and he answered the question the Captain didn't ask.

"I don't think so," he said; "the men are beat, and we got a lot of stores to

move before we can even start shoring up the bulkheads."

"I don't suppose it would do any good to remind them of the consequences of—"

"No sir," the First Lieutenant said, interrupting. What the hell did he think he'd told 'em? About the three bears?

Al Tebbins had heard the Bos'n say distinctly and with emphasis to get the hell out of the way. Well, he wasn't in anybody's way here, and his lip was pretty soft, but it wasn't so bad; he was feeling better—he'd had a phrase in there.

He leaned against a wall—or bulkhead or whatever in hell it was they called it—and started experimenting with "Sweet Sue."

After all, the "Bye, Bye, Blackbird" was a touch morbid.

HE felt it in his heart and in his lips and in his hands; and it didn't go through his brain; it just came out in the horn, and that's the way it was. Very solid. No flourishes. Just very solid.

And over the ship it came forth from the speakers:

"Sweet Sue, just you."

Otto Kyanchi, Seaman 2nd, who knew more about the rules of One O' Cat, Flatbush version, than he did about powder-cases, handed the one he had in his hand to Lonnie Rice next in line to him in slight acceleration, and said *"just you-u-u-u-u—"*

Lonnie got rid of it. He gave it to the guy on his right, and then he had another one in his hand, but it had got there a little quicker, and he had got rid of it a little quicker; and some guy some place, maybe in the back of his mind, some little man with a hammer, like on mornings with a hangover, said on a horn *"knows the one I love. . . ."*

"Oh, no," Lonnie said aloud, "he don't want the destroyers to take us all off; he wants us to wind up bein' post-humorous heroes for savin' this scow. We're all by ourself now; and come daylight, we're strictly in the sittin'-duck department."

"Whyn't you blame it on the Japs?" Otto Kyanchi said. And the powder-cases were flowing through his hands now, and over the red lights cut in brighter stripes by white beams of hand-held battle lanterns, there was a sound of voices, and they held a hint of hope; and away somewhere a horn whined *"knows the reason why—"* "The Skipper aint been kickin' holes in us, an' besides you volunteered to stay. We all did."

"Tote dat load, lift dat bale, git a little drunk an' you'll land in jail—"

"Don't let me down yet," Al Tebbins said. "I'll blow one for you good."

Al Tebbins let his right leg go away from under him and sank down to the somewhat listing floor—not floor: deck. To hell with it! It was still a floor to him, and he had seemed to lose something with the "Sweet Sue"—trying too hard—trying. Well, "Old Man River" was easy—tonguing those top ones in "Sweet Sue" with no lip—an, to hell with it! *"He just keeps rolling—"*

The Skipper said aloud: "Somebody is playing a cornet over the loudspeaker system." He announced it as if it were a discovery, as if what he had heard hadn't been heard by every man on the ship. As if by special dispensation he was able to hear what was coming over the loud-speaker system and nobody else could.

"Yes sir," the Navigator said. "But it's a trumpet."

"It's music," the Skipper said.

"Jerome Kern did the tunes," the Navigator said.

"He did *not*," the Skipper said. "*I'm* talking about 'Blackbird.'"

"He's not playing that now—"

The First Lieutenant's face appeared, followed by the rest of the First Lieutenant.

"We have a very decent chance, sir; we are gaining on the water." . . . .

Al Tebbins didn't feel so good; he felt all right, but kind of zoopless, like. Not anywhere specially, but his leg hurt, but not so much; and here he was sitting down on the floor, and he really hadn't meant to be sitting on the floor. It was warm and damp; but according to the ads, that's the way the South Pacific was. He thought like—he thought— He put his horn to his mouth and looked up at the gyro repeater—the Bos'n had told him what it was, but it didn't look like a compass to him, more like an electric clock. . . . *"Stay at home, play at home, eight o'clock sleepy-time gal."* When it's coming good, when it's coming solid, it's all right: a little weak, but that thing there looks like a speaker, and this looks like the kind of joint ought to be frothing with gold braid. But what did the Bos'n say? "Get out o' the way!" He said that.

Secondary control station. Maybe they shot away all the secondary controls; maybe they shot away everything coming in like that from all sides masthead high. *"Just a Japanese sandman turning night into day—"* And come day—here he'll be again but no Sandman. Well, it's a good tune, just bad lyrics. But he wasn't doing the lyrics. He was sitting in a pool of blood, just like a stiff in a mystery story, but different when it was your own blood, tourniquet. . . . Hip. Put the damn' horn down, down. Tighten it up. Very much up. Twist it quite tight, and she don't bleed so good no more. She don't bleed no more at all. It's either out o' blood, or it's a wonderful tourniquet. The floor's a little leveler—the decks more even keeler . . . . there—that should be nautical enough. . . .

The Bos'n said: "The music's stopped." The First Lieutenant said: "Get it started again."

"What music?" the Bos'n asked.

"How do I know what music? It was playin' and then it stopped, and the working parties almost stopped with it—and we got to get those stores moved and bulkheads shored and get out of here."

"What music?" the Bos'n asked again.

"The music that was playin' on the speakers."

"Where did it come from?" the Bos'n asked. "I can't start it if I don't know where it was coming from, sir."

"We got to move that stuff out o' there, and we got to have music for those men to work to, and we had it—"

The Skipper said from behind the First Lieutenant's back: "What happened to the music?"

"What music, sir?"

"The music coming over the loudspeaker—a cornet-player."

"Oh."

"It died out on 'Japanese Sandman,'" the Navigator said, moving up beside the Skipper.

"Tomorrow morning—this morning," the Skipper said grimly, "we die out on—"

"I left Tebbins in secondary control, sir," the Bos'n said, remembering. "He's a musician. He got left by mistake, I guess."

Al Tebbins leaned against the bulkhead, moving his head with some difficulty into a more comfortable position, squirmed weakly once and began taking off his lifejacket. He got the jacket off, got it under him. It

was softer than the deck, and soaked up that warm sea-water. Somebody kicked him, and he came awake noticing that it didn't hurt. It jarred him to be kicked on that leg, but it didn't hurt, though it waked him up.

He watched the Bos'n, strangely outlined in pinkish haze, monkey with a couple of buttons. "Get up," the Bos'n said. "You're on the air."

Al Tebbins looked at him with interest. "Air?" he said.

"Play, blow, bleat on that thing," the Bos'n said.

Al formed the words with care, with distinctness. "At a time like now," he said, "he wants serenades! I hurt my leg," he added.

What the Bos'n said about the leg Al didn't hear; it was jumbled and low with great passion, but everybody left upon the *Elkton* heard it, and the line of men that moved the stuff from stern to bow to get at the bulkheads that had to be shored, grinned, but it slowed their too-slow progress.

"Play," the Bos'n said again, distinctly.

Al liked the Navy for an instant, the long instant that it took him to make reply: "There's the horn," he said. "Play it yourself."

The Bos'n wasn't there. The red haze was there that had framed the Bos'n, but the Bos'n wasn't there. He was gone, went: the secondary control room was full of no Bos'n. Al Tebbins reached for his horn and blew an asterisk to that last satisfying sentence: *"I'll be glad when you're dead, you rascal, you."* He moved the jacket under him, and let the horn fall from his hand and dozed.

"NO music?" the First Lieutenant said to the Bos'n.

"No sir."

"I heard your tactful approach," the First Lieutenant said. "It was broadcast."

"I asked him to play."

"Carry on," the First Lieutenant said. "I'll talk to him."

The First Lieutenant didn't kick him; he shook him by the shoulder, and that hurt worse, and it waked Al Tebbins quickly, though it was like he didn't get awake completely. "You could do us all a service," the First Lieutenant said. "Perhaps you don't realize our position. We've stayed on to save the ship—the wounded and most of the crew have been taken off. We're here to save the ship, and your playing is a help—we're moving stores so we can—"

Al Tebbins heard him quite distinctly, though a little far away. "It's —she's sinking?" he asked.

"Yes."

Al Tebbins picked up his horn and pushed back against the bulkhead so he'd have something solider than his own yielding diaphragm to play against, and blew softly, with aching solemnity, the first phrase of "Taps."

"No!" the First Lieutenant said, jamming down a button. "Not that."

Al Tebbins put down his horn. "You prefer a hymn?" he asked.

The First Lieutenant said tactfully: "It's a matter of tempo—something you'd dance fast, if you were playing to— I mean something fast."

Al Tebbins didn't hear him. He picked up his horn and wiped it with care upon his sleeve; inside, the bell was dark—an errant line of red creeping from beneath the kapok jacket into the horn. He rubbed it out upon his sleeve so that the bell shone again. "I hurt my leg—" he said aloud. . . .

The Skipper said: "No music?"

"I asked him, sir," the First Lieutenant said. "He started to play 'Taps.' "

"Hi, chum," Al Tebbins said, looking up at two figures gently framed in pink. "I hurt my leg."

"Do you know a two-step?" the Skipper asked, then added, "—Chum."

Al Tebbins recognized the Skipper; he recognized the tarnished braid; he recognized the voice; and because it was a friendly voice, he tried briefly to explain. "I played," Al said, "but I haven't— It's like this, chum. I can't push against—my lip is bad—" He stopped. "Are you," he asked slowly, smiling a little, "a gate, sir?"

"They call me, on this ship and in this costume, Skipper," the Captain said. "But frankly, I'm a gate." And the Skipper leaned down and eased Al Tebbins' arm around his neck and helped him stand. The First Lieutenant handed him his horn, and Al Tebbins bit his lip and forgot about his leg, put the horn to his mouth and blew into "The Caissons Go Rolling Along."

Al nodded toward the Admiral's sleeve. "Bigger and better stripes," he said.

The Skipper tightened his grip under Al Tebbins' arm.

He blew, Al Tebbins blew, from "The Stars and Stripes Forever" to "Minnie the Moocher" and back again, and something made the deck a little straighter, and sometimes the din of efforts some place aft grew loud and almost drowned the whine of Al Tebbins' horn, and he leaned heavier on the Skipper, and creased a little more that lip that was not hard enough and blew a little louder.

Sometime, he didn't know quite when it was, something happened to the *Elkton*. It was rather vague—a throbbing, a sense of movement, propelled movement, and she was alive again, a ship again, and not an inert floating thing without character or reason.

The Skipper slipped. The Skipper almost fell, and he looked down and saw the blood for the first time, because he'd slipped with this new movement, this new motion, this thing that made the *Elkton* into a ship once more. And he nodded to the First Lieutenant and said from the corner of his mouth: "Doctor."

Al Tebbins heard him—across the sounds, the new sounds of a ship in motion, he heard what the Skipper said—and wondered if he were sick. Aloud he said, "Don't let me down yet," Al Tebbins said. "I'll blow one for you good." And he leaned back and closed his eyes, and he didn't think of the Army-Navy game but what the Navy really was, because he was for an instant a part of it, and he went confidently for "Anchors Aweigh." Not trying, not reaching, but like John Paul Jones and Farragut and Dewey and all the Naval gates would play if they could only play.

It made the Skipper blink his eyes. The *Elkton* got under way.

The Admiral strolled down Fifty-second Street, liking it because they had laid it on the United States and the sounds that came from the various spots he passed were all right, too, because soon he'd be to the Avenue and to the East Side and his apartment which would be quieter. But then a sound came to him, and he stopped and walked in through a door. He walked over to a table and sat down, and watched the man up on the bandstand with the golden horn.

With a wave of his hand the young man hushed the raucous musical associates behind him and leaning slightly, closed his eyes and played his golden horn.

The Admiral beckoned to a waiter and said. "Tell the cornet-player to drop by at his convenience."

The waiter grinned and said he would, and waited for a tip. The Admiral motioned him away.

Al Tebbins finished, finally, and the waiter said something to him above the sound of clapping, and he looked over at the Admiral with no sign of recognition, but stepped down from the stand and limped over to the table.

"How's your leg?" the Admiral asked.

Al recognized him then, and grinned. "They'll never replace the horse," he said, "but you can wear a shoe over 'em." And he pulled his pants up a shade to show the artificial leg.

"It's of no importance," the Admiral said, "now. But you may have played the *Elkton* under way. She was in bad shape, and we had the casualties off and nothing but a skeleton crew and repair parties left aboard, and the other ships of our group were making an important rendezvous."

"Why the hell," Al Tebbins asked, "wasn't I included among the intelligentsia—I mean the casualties that left the ship?"

"Nobody seems to know," the Admiral said. "You started playing 'Bye, Bye, Blackbird' over the speaker from the secondary control, and then you stopped and the repair parties stopped too, though they almost had, anyway, and we all went down and talked to you, and I held you up, finally, and we played all manner of things, and they got the ammunition and stores moved forward, which raised the stern. Then we shored the bulkheads and we got her under way. . . . It was different later, the Nips weren't so forward."

"They flew me out and sawed off my leg the next day."

"The war was risky in '42," said the Admiral.

"Yeah," Al said. He smiled, nodded toward the Admiral's sleeve. "Bigger and better stripes."

"Ships were scarcer then," the Admiral said.

Al Tebbins stood up. "Got to go to work," he said. "Any requests?"

The Admiral rose with him, and something about the way he got up made Al Tebbins ask quickly, "Which one?"

"Same as yours," the Admiral said. "But below the knee."

"Never mind how," Al Tebbins said. "Not a homemade tourniquet. Probably a fourteen-inch shell. Or maybe a shark gnawed it off."

"More or less," the Admiral said.

Al Tebbins walked back up to the bandstand and picked up his horn. If he told him at all how he felt, he'd tell him with the horn. He smiled a little shyly down across the floor at the middle-aged man in all the braid sitting there, and started playing "Anchors Aweigh." The piano picked it up softly, and the joint grew quiet, except for the horn.

Man into Legend

A Quiz about Names

by JACK LUZZATTO

THERE is no better guarantee of immortality for a man's name than to have it identified with some common or useful object, so that name and object come to mean one. Thus an Edison lamp, Morse code or the King James version of the Bible. And on the ridiculous side, you can do a Steve Brodie or commit a Spoonerism. Steve, of course, blithely bounded outward into the thin air surrounding the Brooklyn Bridge, and survived. The Rev. Spooner used to mix up his words in a way that still haunts radio announcers. As, "many theople pink so," or "many thinkle peep so," etc. One announcer even gave out with Hoobert Heever in that gentleman's presence.

This little quiz covers ten cases of men's names that have been immortalized by association with an object. If you can get eight of these ten, you are not only fairly well-read, but in full possession of your memory.

1. This man's name identifies a one-man shoulder rifle used by the FBI, the Army and gangsters, when they can get it. It is a deadly, rapid-fire repeater; and it is outlawed for private ownership. Name: .....

2. In the great days of the "sea of grass," when a stray calf wandered the range unbranded, he was any man's meat, and poison too, if a gunfight ensued over ownership. Stray calves are more uncommon these meatless days, but the dogie who is homeless and motherless bears the name bestowed on him in old Texas. It is the name of an old-time rancher whose estate was so vast that it is said he never bothered to brand his calves; and the stray dogie is therefore still called: .....

3. When a cargo ship is riding light, it displays a clearly painted line running horizontally along the hull and somewhat above the water. This is the load-line. Once cargo is all stowed and battened down, the ship must not be so heavily laden that this load-line becomes submerged. The load-line is the warning note telling that the ship is loaded fully and any more will be dangerous. In the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, a British politician and reformer denounced all overburdened ships as "coffinships." He campaigned endlessly in the face of bitter owner-opposition to make vessels safe by virtue of a law-enforced load-line. This man at last won his fight, and to this day the load-line is also called the .....

4. In this instance, the man's name will be given you, since it is his occupation that identifies the object. Artificial flies are varied and beautiful, tempting not only the wily trout, but also the Izaak Walton and armchair fishermen who like to bask in sporting beauty. One fly is most renowned, and honors Tom Bosworth, fisherman, whose vocation was driving English royalty in proper style. He held the reins for George IV, William IV and Queen Victoria. His trout-fly has white wings, a peacock-herl body (*herl* is a barb of a feather), a brown hackle and gold tag (*tag* is a bit of tinsel on end of the fly). Both fly and occupation of Bosworth are called: .....

5. One of the most familiar of military dress appurtenances is an article originally designed as a sword-belt. A British officer, born and serving in India late in the Nineteenth Century, invented this belt. He died in 1901 but not before achieving both generalship and knighthood. The belt is known to all and sundry as the .....

6. This Union general scarcely needed the additional fame accruing to him because of a saddle. Nevertheless, the fame is his, for he recommended a new type of saddle to the United States Army and it was adopted. It was not as low as an English saddle nor as high as a Western or Mexican saddle. The pommel and cantle were moderately high, in an effort to combine the safety of the high saddle and ease of the low. It was originated during the Civil War, and even to this day, this type of saddle is called: .....

7. Why Americans call this particular yacht rig what they do is difficult to find out, but I will venture my guess in the answer section of this quiz. A familiar and beautiful sight in all our coastal waters is the lovely tall, slim triangle of snowy white sail that characterizes the Bermuda or Bermudian rig. The sail is run up a metal track fastened to the mast, the sail being equipped with many metal attachments that fit the track from peak to foot. Thus it goes up rapidly and efficiently if well-fitted. The sail is very tall, and is triangular, since there is no gaff. The absence of gaff makes for easier handling, since a gaff may lean differently into the wind from the way a boom may point, creating inequalities in the ballooning of the sail. The boom, for the foot of the sail, is very short, lending the magnificent loveliness of effect. Such a rig calls for absolutely dependable stays and masterly sailing. For some reason it is called the .....

8. This nightmarish fellow sounds fictitious, but he was most horribly real to Seventeenth Century Englishmen. His name is now synonymous with that of a public hangman or executioner, since all his successors in office automatically were endowed with the bad odor of his family name. He executed William, Lord Russell and the Duke of Monmouth among others. He was notoriously cruel, and was born to the trade. If a victim's nervous tremors chanced to mar the efficiency of his work, he would complain bitterly about the injustice of this, the thoughtlessness of the condemned in sabotaging his performance and reputation. He was called: .....

9. Less horrible and almost comic, but base enough is this character of ill-repute: Created early in the Nineteenth Century in a play of the same name by John Poole, this fellow now stands for any busybody whose irksome nosiness sets your nerves on edge. "One of those idle, meddlesome fellows, who, having no employment of their own, are perpetually interfering in other people's affairs." This hero and title of a long-gone comedy is a byword today: .....

10. Probably most famous of all oglers is this insignificant tailor, whose immortality is as assured as it is unsavory. Everyone knows of Lady Godiva, but not enough know the whole story. Her cruel husband, Lord of Coventry, consented to relax the bitter tax situation when his lady appealed to him. But sardonically, he demanded a sign of her sincerity. A ride on horseback, stark naked, through Coventry. The great lady did so on condition that all must remain indoors and no peeking. All Coventry most gallantly complied, and Lady Godiva almost got away unscathed by ogling eyes. But the tailor was caught looking. Justice was both poetic and swift, the punishment neatly fitting the crime. The tailor was stricken blind. From then to now and forever after, such a character is known as: .....

(Answers on page 71)

Three Fighting Flights

HOMEWARD *from* TRUK

by Morris Markey

A 7th AAF Base—Marshall Islands

YOU talked to nine of them. (The tenth was dead.) You got half sentences, and then swift bursts of talk, and then answers to carefully worded questions. And slowly the tale of those five impossible hours came alive, so that you saw and understood what had happened there over the endless Pacific seas:

The Liberator did not have a very memorable name. They had decided to call her the *A-vailable*. She was one plane in two squadrons of the 7th Army Air Force which set out for a bombing mission over Truk that hot morning. Halfway between midnight and dawn she passed safely over the reef which protects Truk lagoon and headed for her assigned target. Then suddenly a bank of Japanese searchlights picked her out.

The pilot was Lieutenant Woodrow Watrous, of Detroit. He dived and twisted to escape the glare, and he did escape it, but the maneuver took the plane off her course, out of formation, and away from the target. The bombardier, Lieutenant Robert Irizarry, of New York City, chose another target, and pulled his bomb levers at ten thousand feet.

Lieut. Watrous banked the plane to the left, picked up his return course, and had just leveled off when the searchlights caught him again—so many that their beams could not be counted. All hands stood ready to receive antiaircraft fire. But none came, for a reason. A Jap fighter plane had climbed to attack, and the men manning the searchlights saw him, and waited for him to get to work.

The right waist gunner saw him first. He was Sergeant Jack Young, of Johnston City, Tenn. And he called over the interphone: "I can't get him. He's out of position for me."

The tail gunner was Sergeant Arthur Christopherson, of Flint, Mich. He tried to swing his guns around, but the Jap was in too close for him to shoot. He called over the interphone to the top turret gunner, Sergeant Paul Ragusa, of New York City: "Open on him, Paul. I can't get the bastard in my sights."

Neither could Ragusa. And the ball turret gunner, Sergeant Phillip Wagner, of Mineola, N. Y., was equally helpless. He might have brought his guns to bear on the enemy, only one hundred fifty feet away. But the dodging and diving had fogged his windows, and he could not even see through them. The nose gunner was Sergeant William Terwilliger, of Elmira, N. Y., and he was hopelessly out of position.

The Jap took his time. Then he opened up his guns.

Six guns. A three-second burst from all of them at once. And calamity.

Lieut. Watrous was hit in the right eye, and his left eye was blinded, but he was not killed.

"I reached for the throttles automatically," he says. "My hand couldn't get to them, because Helms' body was lying over them. I knew he was dead. He was the best friend I ever had in the world."

That was the co-pilot, Lieutenant Austin Helms, of Charlotte, N. C.

"I couldn't see anything at all," Watrous says. "I just tried to keep her level."

Now the Jap fighter slid around back of the Liberator's tail. He was getting off quick bursts at about fifteen-second intervals. But he was moving so that our gunners could get him in their sights for split-seconds at a time. The desperate scene was still lit by the glare of the searchlights, ten thousand feet below. Christopherson got off a few rounds. Ragusa pressed his triggers for an instant.

The enemy slipped around to the left side of the Liberator. He was still less than one hundred fifty feet away. He went into a steep bank, as if to charge in, climbing, and rake the Liberator with everything he had. That brought him under the guns of the left waist gunner and engineer, Sergeant William Shelton of Stanley, N. C. Shelton's hand closed over his triggers, and stayed there. His burst lasted at least fifteen seconds. (And I suggest that you glance at your watch to see how long fifteen seconds can be.) As the enemy fighter was in a bank, the fifty-caliber bullets hit him from the top of his plane, just at the junction of the wings and fuselage.

The Jap gave up his plan, and fell away, leveling off again. This brought him under the guns of Ragusa, in the top turret. Ragusa let go two bursts. There was a flash inside the Jap's cockpit. In a moment it broke into a glow. The fighter wavered, and turned away; it broke into flames, and plunged down toward the sea. The Liberator passed out of the range of the searchlights, and into utter darkness.

The fight was over. It had lasted something less than three minutes.

The navigator of the plane was Lieutenant Alex Peck, of Milton, Vt. He asked questions over the interphone, and found that the whole system was out of commission. So he made his way to the flight deck, and used his pocket flashlight to look over things there. What he saw made him signal Ragusa to come at once from the top turret.

Here was the situation:

Watrous could not see. Helms' body lay across the forward control elements. The automatic pilot—that device which might guide the plane for a long while on a fixed course—would not work. There was a large hole in the side of the plane. The throttles of the four big engines were stuck wide open, and could not be eased off to save engines or gasoline. The plane was five hours away from home base. All instruments on the panel were shot away except the altimeter and the compass.

Peck and Ragusa lifted the body of Helms out of the seat and placed it on the flight deck behind Watrous. Then Ragusa checked on the rest of the crew, saw that there were no serious wounds among them, and transmitted Peck's orders for every man to remain at his position.

BY this time, of course, the plane was separated from the other elements of the two bombing squadrons. And its own position in the limitless expanse of sky and ocean was not certain. Peck, the navigator, had to find out where he was.

"I looked out the waist window," he says, "to pick up a star or two and get a fix on the position. There weren't any stars. We had moved into an overcast. I **didn't** have any idea at all where we were heading for.

over the Pacific

"I kept on looking into the darkness, and all of a sudden there was a break in the clouds. I saw two stars. From their bearing to each other I knew they were primary navigation stars. I got my fix, and knew where I was. And then the overcast wiped the stars out again. I laid a course, figuring on drift, that would bring us out at the home base."

Then Peck slumped unconscious to the deck. He had not known until that moment that he was severely wounded by shell fragments in the leg. Nobody else had noticed it in the darkness. Wagner and Terwilliger worked over him with the first-aid kits, and stopped the bleeding, and got him conscious again. They propped him up as comfortably as they could, and handed over to Ragusa the course which Peck had written out.

For certain interminable hours, now, Ragusa and Shelton took turns sitting in the co-pilot's seat and reading the instruments to Watrous—the only two instruments left, compass and altimeter.

"We're losing altitude, Lieutenant," they would say. "Pick her up a little higher."

"Bear a little to the left, Lieutenant. The drift is easing us over to starboard."

Watrous, who could not see the instrument-board, began to recover a little vision in his left eye. The horizon became a trifle more than a blank to him. His distant vision became a little stronger, though his near vision never did.

The four engines were still wide open—full throttle—drinking up the gas and beating themselves to pieces.

It was about this time that Ragusa discovered the bomb. Long ago, in another world, when Irizarry pulled his levers to loose the bomb load over Truk, this one five-hundred-pound bomb had stuck in the racks. Now it was hanging by its tail, and swaying with the roll and lurch of the plane. Ragusa went and got Young. The hydraulic system for opening the bomb-bay doors was shot out. So they opened the doors by the hand crank, and tried to dislodge the bomb. They wanted it to fall through, and into the sea. They dislodged it, but it did not fall through. It hung by an unbreakable shred, banging its sides against the metal.

The two sergeants crawled out on the bomb-bay catwalk, and lay flat with their heads almost touching each other, and dragged the bomb back into the plane. They got it back on a rack where it could do no harm, and cranked the bomb-bay doors shut again.

Shelton was still reading the two dials for Watrous. The plane was still roaring full speed along the course the unconscious Peck had laid—or what all hands hoped might be that course.

THE strain of all-out running began to tell on the engines. The plane began to lose altitude. At five o'clock dawn came up, one of those extravagantly colored, fabulous dawns of the Pacific, and Watrous decided that he couldn't carry on any longer. No land was in sight. The plane had no radio. But Watrous was through, licked, struggling with the controls and unable to see. He decided to ditch the plane—lay her down on the water and get out the life rafts.

Shelton talked him out of that idea, for a most particular reason. Watrous was the only man aboard who could not swim, and he was badly wounded, and in the crash landing, the haste of floating rafts, the plane might very well sink before Watrous could be saved. So Shelton said, "Let's keep on going a while, Lieutenant. Maybe we'll get in to base, even. Anyhow, nowhere else we came down could be any worse than this!" He called the compass and altimeter readings, and said, "Listen, Lieutenant. We're doing all right. I know you're in a hell of a fix, but you're flying this baby, and that's more than any of the rest of us can do. What I say is, keep her flying as long as she'll fly. How's about it?"

Watrous said, "Okay, Shelton. Carry on."

"Altitude 9640. Course 88.3. Bear a little to the right, Lieutenant."

"I'm bearing right until you tell me to stop. Tell me to stop when it reads 89."

"Okay, Lieutenant. . . . We're coming on now. . . . Ten seconds more. . . . Eighty-nine!"

"Okay, Shelton. How's the altitude?"

"9600 even."

"Okay."

That went on for nearly four hours.

At a quarter of nine, Watrous told Shelton and Ragusa to order all hands who could move, to the flight deck. When all save Peck were there, he yelled above the roar of the engines: "At nine o'clock I'm going to ditch her."

Shelton passed the word.

Watrous yelled: "Every man in position to abandon ship at nine o'clock."

Ragusa says, "That was orders, and we had to go and leave him. Going away and leaving him alone was the hardest job I ever did."

Shelton says, "The boys had fixed up Lieutenant Peck so we could get him clear in the water all right, and he could swim. Watrous couldn't swim. And his best friend was lying there dead behind him all that time. We knew he was calling it all off as far as he was concerned, trying to keep us alive."

The time crept up to eight-fifty-seven.

Somebody yelled. Then they all yelled! Because they saw the white breakers marking the reef of an atoll—the home atoll—and the long landing-strip empty in the morning sun.

Lieut. Irizarry went up into the co-pilot's seat beside Watrous.

"I think you can put her in on the strip," he said.

"I can't see anything close. Only things far off."

"I'll call it for you."

"Okay."

"Bank her around now to the left, and hold her there until I give you a yell. Can you see anything?"

"I can see the strip down there. I'm banking."

"Level off!"

"How's that?"

Irizarry said: "Like a piece of string. Hold her. Can you see anything?"

"I'm going to bring her in on that strip."

"Okay, I'll shut up."

Six sergeants and two lieutenants got out of the plane, and together they helped another Lieutenant named Watrous out of the plane. And Watrous stood by while the rest lifted the body of Helms out of the plane. They took Watrous and Peck off to the doctors. The others stood still while jeeps towed the *A-vailable* off to a revetment.

Nobody said anything much. This had been Number Four or Number Five in the series of *A-vailables* flown by this team. She had got through twelve missions. This had been her thirteenth. She would not fly again.

Terwilliger said, "She's done her job all right, that old girl. Yes sir. She's done her job."

Above Rabaul

The true story of a crowded hour of action in the air war.

by T/Sgt HAL GOODWIN

Marine Corps Combat Correspondent

SILENCE lay tense along the carrier flight-deck, broken only by the soft chugging of the waiting tow-jeeps and the sound of the circling aircraft. Crew members thronging the catwalks, watching from behind gun turrets or from the safety of the bridge, froze into immobility. Plane-handlers in brown dungarees, corpsmen in white, red-crossed helmets, fire-fighters in bulky asbestos suits, all crouched, ready for action.

Around the turn and into the landing groove came a lone Avenger torpedo bomber. Watchers could see the gaping holes in wings and fuselage, the ragged edges where great chunks of the control surfaces were shot away. Only one wheel was down, the other locked in retracted position; the flaps needed to slow the big plane were fully closed. And—though this couldn't be seen—one aileron was hopelessly jammed.

The landing-signal officer's paddles swept across in the "cut" signal. The Avenger dropped to the rolling deck, hit on that single wheel—and scores of men released pent-up breaths as the hook caught, the wing slowly drooped and the torpedo bomber slid to a stop.

Instantly the plane was surrounded, and as helping hands tore back the hatches, two men got out, unaided, one from the pilot's seat, the other from the tunnel gun position. Both were white with strain, and so blood-spattered as to be almost unrecognizable. Two men got out. But four had been in the plane.

THE Avenger and its two Hellcat escorts circled high above Rabaul, ignored for the moment by enemy fighters who were making things hot for the other carrier planes below. Air Group skipper Commander Howard Caldwell was staying up high for the present to see how his boys were doing, and to give Photographer's Mate (first class) Paul Barnett plenty of chance for some good pictures. The thirty-year-old photographer was taking shots of the havoc below as fast as he could work the shutter.

Responsibility lay heavy on the shoulders of the Navy men. Miles to the south, Marines were slugging through the Jap lines on Bougainville, oblivious to the danger in Rabaul Harbor, danger in the form of a Jap cruiser task force.

The Dauntlesses had already gone into their dives, screaming down on the ships in the harbor, their rear men shooting off enemy planes that managed somehow to get through the tight screen of Hellcat fighters. Many of the Avengers had gone down too, streaking across the water through a cross-fire of antiaircraft to drop their fish. A few hundred yards away were the remaining Avengers, peeling off.

As the last of the group dropped away toward the harbor, the Zeros came in, concentrating on the lone torpedo plane and its escort. The Japs like easy pickings, and this looked like a set-up. Odds were three to one.

Commander Caldwell put his plane into a dive, with the intention of joining up with the reforming group, but the intention was never carried out. The three planes pulled out of the dive at little better than a thousand feet, fighting. The two escorting Hellcats took on as many Zekes as they could, but there were plenty left over for the bigger plane. They hit from all directions at once.

The pilot swung the bomber in frantic evasive tactics, watching for a chance to use his forward guns. In the exposed seat behind him, Paul Barnett snapped his camera shutter unperturbedly, still taking pictures.

Ken Bratton, the Oxford, Mississippi, turret gunner, was having a busy time lining up his sights on one attacker after the other, the whine of his turret gears augmenting the sounds of the racing engine and the machine-guns.

Below, at the tunnel gun, Chief Aviation Radioman Bob Morey moved from side to side, trying to bring his gun to bear on the slim shapes that kept flashing by. Now and then, as he followed an enemy fighter across his field of vision, his eyes swept over a small color photo of Grace, Mrs. Morey. Grace was safe at home in Los Angeles; yet, in some unfathomable way, she was also here.

From overhead came the deep chatter of Ken Bratton's big fifty, a long, sustained burst. Then a triumphant yell: "I got one!"

Directly behind the Avenger, a Zeke was falling, out of control. Morey caught a glimpse of it as it hit the water astern; then he was too busy to watch any longer.

There was a long nightmare of sleek shapes driving in endlessly, breaking away with a last defiant burst, then circling for a new attack. The air was heavy with the stench of burned powder and overheated metal. Now and then came dull crunches as slugs tore through the taut skin of the plane.

A splinter bit into Morey's forearm. He looked at it curiously, thinking in a detached way, "Why, you're wounded!" He rubbed at the bleeding spot and the splinter came out. Morey went back to the vital business of keeping the Avenger's tail clean.

Ken Bratton was swinging the turret confidently, keeping the fifty-caliber muzzle pointing at the most dangerous of the enemy fighters. Pretty soon he would have to call down to Morey for more ammunition.

Then, without warning, the turret stopped swinging, and with an ominous rumble, the whine of gears ceased.

Bratton glanced up as a Zeke drove in, guns flaming. A jagged star blossomed on the bullet-proof windshield. In the same instant, pain ground through his knee and hip. He gasped: "I'm hit!"

Morey glanced up into the turret in time to see Bratton's face writhe with pain, but he couldn't leave his gun to help out, because more fighters were making their runs. One Jap, evidently noticing that the turret wasn't following him, came in with deliberate care and raked the Avenger fore and aft. Slugs whined through the thin metal skin or rang from the armor plate. Morey heard one smash into the radio behind him and tried to call the pilot. The interphone was dead.

Out behind were more fighters, lining up to come in by turns. The Hellcats were battling heavy odds. The Chief Radioman said a brief prayer: *"Please, God, help us to get out of here!"*

Up in the turret, Ken Bratton was still fighting. The turret was out, his fifty-caliber gun was useless. But the Mississippi boy wasn't taking the beating lying down. As Morey looked up to see how he was doing, Bratton took out his .45 automatic, and started taking futile potshots at the enemy.

UP forward, Commander Caldwell was having troubles of his own. He had flown a zigzag course, following a generally southward trend through any cloud cover that offered, hoping to lose the Zeros. Instead, he had lost one of his own fighters. He pulled up abeam of the remaining Hellcat so that the two planes could give each other mutual protection.

Nor was the loss of the fighter the only bad news. The left aileron was jammed, making it hard work to turn, and so much of the control surfaces were gone that the big plane was handling sloppily.

Commander Caldwell looked out at the remaining Hellcat. It was one of the fighters from the escort carrier. He didn't know the pilot, but his respect was growing by the minute. The flyer was plenty hot, and he had more than his share of guts. No one would have blamed him for leaving and saving his own skin long ago, but such a thought had evidently never occurred to him.

The pilot's attention was brought roughly back to his own plane. Cold air was blowing from behind, through holes left aft by enemy slugs, and the air was bringing with it a fine red mist, a thin spray of blood that was coating the windshield and making his goggles useless.

Morey turned for another look at Bratton. The turret gunner's arm was hanging limp, the pistol dangling from his fingers. He motioned weakly that he couldn't fire it any more. From the bottom of the turret came a film of red wetness that smeared the armorplate.

Morey started back to his gun, then turned again as a thought registered. Paul Barnett wasn't taking pictures. The Texas photographer was slumped over in his seat, and there was a dreadful finality about his position.

BUT there wasn't time for an examination, not right then. He had to check on his supply of ammunition.

It was then, over Rabaul with a sky full of enemy fighters, that a hunch paid off. Just before take-off, Morey had looked at his allotted rounds dubiously. There might be plenty of trouble; he might need more. He hailed Ordnanceman Dick Emory of Oakland, California: "Get me three more belts, will you, Dick?"

Emory made it with the belts just as the plane taxied to take-off position.

Now, Morey spliced in extra rounds, working fast because a Zeke was making a run from astern.

Commander Caldwell spotted the Jap. It was high, too high for the tunnel gun to reach—and the turret was out. He shoved the nose of the Avenger down.

Morey was firing futilely under the enemy fighter, trying to scare him off with tracer. The Jap wouldn't scare. He knew the tunnel gun wouldn't reach him. He sent his rounds into the Avenger. The tunnel gunner felt something grate into his knee.

And in that second the plane nosed down.

The fighter was squarely in the sight. Morey depressed the trigger, saw his tracer bite into the Jap's engine, saw the engine explode, saw the wings rock as the Zeke fell off into a final spin.

But there were plenty of enemy fighters left.

Commander Caldwell watched one make a run on his remaining Hellcat, pouring burst after burst into the big fighter. The pilot must have been in trouble, because he took no evasive action. The Commander tried to turn in, to take the Zeke off the Hellcat's tail, but the Avenger responded sluggishly. The aileron was jammed.

The Hellcat staggered and rocked under the heavy fire from the Zero, taking all the enemy plane had to give. Finally the Jap broke away, his ammunition exhausted.

Two more Japs were making runs on the Avenger astern. Morey threw tracer at them and saw them break away. He spliced the last of his ammunition into the belt.

Commander Caldwell scanned the sky. One left, high above his tail, out of range. He kept an eye on it, feeling exhaustion creep through him. And then the last of the enemy fighters made a long, slow turn, as though undecided, and broke off. The fight was over.

Twenty-five minutes had passed since the first planes jumped them—twenty-five minutes of shuttling around the harbor, taking it from the Zekes every step of the way. He checked the ship. The hydraulics were shot out. That meant no flaps. The left aileron was locked fast, fortunately in stream position. The rear control surfaces were just a memory. The radio had been long silent. Only the engine, coddled into perfect shape by plane captain Harold Salter, was running perfectly.

And how about the crew? He had heard nothing from any of them for many minutes—and there was the ominous fact of the blood-soaked windshield and the useless goggles. He had no way of knowing if any of them were still alive.

The two carrier planes left Rabaul behind them, flying side by side.

As the last fighter vanished, Morey got busy. He ignored his own wounds, in neck, shoulder, knee and arm, until the others had been cared for. Bratton couldn't get out of the turret because of his shattered knee. Morey handed him bandages and morphine, then crawled forward to Barnett. The boy from Corpus Christi was slumped in his seat, blood staining his head and jacket.

Morey ripped his sleeve away and injected a syrette of morphine. It left a hard lump under the skin. The tunnel gunner swallowed hard, and let the remnants of the torn sleeve drop. Presently he crawled back to the aft compartment.

Bratton handed down a note. It would have been impossible to talk over the engine noise.

"My knee is hit, also hip. You okay? Commander okay? Barnett?"

The Chief Radioman pointed forward to where Barnett rested, his camera still clutched in his hands. He made a gesture the turret gunner recognized, the hand held stiff and drawn across the throat. Bratton gulped.

Morey scribbled a note to Commander Caldwell, debating whether to tell him of Barnett's death. He decided on a half truth: *"Bratton and Barnett out of commission. You okay?"*

He took it forward, across the body of the photographer.

Commander Caldwell didn't try to answer. He reached behind him and took Morey's hand in his warm grip and squeezed it tight. It told the Chief better than any words what the skipper had been thinking.

Aft again, Morey lit cigarettes for himself and Bratton. There was another exchange of notes.

"We'll be okay now."

"Yes. For a while I didn't think we would come back."

Morey nodded. He looked around him: daylight showed through countless holes, lighting up Grace's picture. He said softly: "Thank you, God."

And then they were over the carrier, getting a wave-off on the first approach.

COMMANDER CALDWELL'S lights showed only one wheel down. Signals from the ship confirmed it. The plane was in bad shape for a tricky carrier landing, but dunking was out of the question with wounded aboard. He started in.

The Avenger came into the slot, well to port, out of the turbulent air behind the big smokestack. The landing-signal officer's paddles flashed and Commander Caldwell cut the gun and let the big plane sell out. The hook caught; the wing went down; the Avenger stopped with scarcely a jar.

Howard Caldwell's cool judgment and perfect coördination, gained during his Annapolis football years, had helped him in to one of the most amazing landings in carrier history. With only one wheel, elevator surfaces nearly shot away, no flaps at all and one aileron fully jammed, he had brought the Navy's biggest carrier plane in on a pitching flight-deck—and he hadn't even jolted his crew!

This was the aftermath:

Ken Bratton went home to the States for hospitalization.

A few days later Commander Caldwell and Chief Morey took off for another strike on Rabaul.

Paul Barnett was buried at sea. The pictures he had given his life to take were complete and clear—and the last one in the camera told of the last thing Paul had seen: the perfect silhouette of a Zero, driving in for the attack.

Clayton's Bluff

The true story of an amazing wartime adventure in the Pacific.

by CAPTAIN ELLIOTT ARNOLD

THE Ormoc Bay show was over and there were a lot of Nip ships that would never reach destination. It was short and very sweet. In less than seven minutes just a little before noon on November 10, 1944, thirty B-25s from the Fifth Air Force had sunk three destroyers, a destroyer escort and six transports—had seen them explode and go down in Ormoc Bay.

Three other transports and another destroyer were badly damaged, but the flyers couldn't hang around to see what happened to them. The planes had had rough going. They had run into thick antiaircraft, murderous cross-fire, heavier than many of them had ever seen before; and now that the job was finished, they had to get out of there.

Seven of our B-25s were shot down before the morning was out, but many of the crews were rescued. Eight other planes were damaged. Fifteen planes lost or damaged out of thirty was a heavy price—but the victory was as heavy, because the ships had been on their way to reinforce the Jap garrisons trying to fight off defeat on Leyte. And besides, we never minded losing planes as long as we could save the men who went down in them.

The flying men knew they had done a good job, and now they were going home. Some of them were having a hard go. There was P-47 escort that day, and the fighter planes buzzed around the twin-engined strafer-bombers which were crippled, and protected them.

The B-25 piloted by Major Edward R. McLean, a blond, wavy-haired Texan, was in trouble. McLean tried to keep it going, but after a while he saw he could never make it home. He crash-landed in the water, and the plane broke open in the middle.

The six men in the crew crawled out safely. They freed their life-raft. It took them half an hour to inflate it. Then they climbed aboard and started to paddle. It was late in the afternoon of the tenth.

They paddled for a little while, orienting themselves, and then they saw two native canoes coming toward them. Two natives sat upright and stiff in each canoe. The airmen were not sure where they were. They had two revolvers among the six of them. The other guns had been lost in the crash. The two guns were brought out, and the men waited.

"The two canoes pulled up," McLean said. "The natives seemed pretty excited. One of them spoke a kind of English. When we told him we were Americans, he translated for the other men, and then they all started to jabber. They were crazy excited. The first Joe told us he hadn't seen Americans for many years, and he kept grinning at us. It sounded like a Chamber of Commerce speech back home.

"He told us there were no Japs on his island, and he asked us to come with him. We decided they were all right, so we said okay. They tied our life-raft to their canoes and hauled us to the island. Whatever doubts we may have had about the honesty of these birds passed away when we saw the shore.

"There must have been about five hundred people there—old men and young men and women and small children. The guy who had done the talking to us in the canoe shouted something to them, and then they all started to cheer. The little kids ran out into the water and began to pull in the raft by hand.

"Our tail-gunner was hurt from the crash, sort of bruised on the chest, and some of the men came out into the water and carried him out of the boat. I never saw anybody handle anyone as carefully as they handled him.

"They brought us to the house of the chief official in the village. They gave us first aid, and then they took all our clothes to be washed and fixed up. We weren't in the place half an hour when they came in with big plates filled with fried chicken and eggs and potatoes. I never saw such a feast. They were all singing and laughing, and some of them were crying, they were so glad to see us. Finally came the pay-off. Someone produced a half-pound tin of coffee and some sugar. We found out they had been hoarding that coffee for more than three years, and they brought it out for us."

The Americans were given native clothing—of a sort—while their own clothing was being cleaned. They sat in the house, stuffed with food and good feeling, and then the villagers began to troop through the house to observe them.

"It was as if we were exhibits in a museum or something," McLean said. "We were sitting there covered with some kind of grass, and one by one all the people stepped in and looked at us. Sometimes they just looked with a serious expression on their faces, without saying anything. Some of the girls giggled and ran out. The little kids came up and touched us as though they were unable to believe we were real."

The natives themselves, he said, wore rags, but everything they had on was immaculate. They were clean and proud. A few hours after the airmen arrived, a native Catholic priest arrived and held a mass in gratitude for their deliverance.

The flyers had a good night's sleep in the official's house, and when they awoke the next morning they found another platter of fried chicken and eggs waiting for them. They began to wonder what was the use of ever returning home.

After breakfast the native who had greeted them in the boat, and who now accounted himself a close friend, visited them; and after a long talk he agreed to take one of the flyers in a native canoe to the nearest outpost of white men to call for help. McLean went with him, and the two of them started off at nine o'clock on the morning of the eleventh.

The rest of the men stayed in the official's home and rested. They were treated for their bruises, and native musicians came to sing for them. It was a pleasant and relaxing day, and they continued to eat well, and the natives provided some local brew made from coconuts that was very inspiring to drink.

The idyl ended that night. Just before nine o'clock a man rushed in, greatly excited. He said that great numbers of Japs were arriving in small boats and some were already clambering on shore.

NOW the villagers took command with efficiency. They had had dealings with Nips before. They whisked the Americans into the hills. The bruised tail-gunner was carried by two natives in an improvised stretcher. All the flyers were brought to a large cave. Following them were the women and children and old men from the village, bringing along whatever livestock—chickens and pigs—could be carried. The men remained behind to treat with the Japs.

Everyone remained awake that night in the cave on the hill. All was silent below. Then the next morning a native came up from the village. He reported on what was going on below. The Nips, he said,

were sailors, survivors from a shipping strike that sank several of their vessels. There were about two hundred of them. Apart from a few small weapons and knives, they were not armed. They were commanded by three officers. To keep them quiet, the natives had promised to round up enough canoes to get them back to their own bases.

The Americans questioned the courier closely. Were the Nips belligerent? No, they were frightened and disorganized. Not heavily armed? No, just about forty or fifty of their toy pistols and light rifles. Really scared, hey? Very frightened.

THE flyers began to cook up a scheme. It was a beautiful scheme. It was something, perhaps, that only a handful of crazy American flying men might dream up. There were five of them and one was badly injured, and they had only two revolvers, while below them were two hundred Japs, but they planned a beautiful bluff and they were going to try it.

What these American kids suggested was just this: One of them, carrying one revolver, would walk down, arrogant and confident, alone, and tell the Nips there was a large American force in the hills and order them to surrender. Nothing more nor less.

The natives were aghast. It didn't seem even remotely possible. But they admitted there was no telling what violence the Nips might do before they left.

Now the scheme was right up the alley of Lieutenant Maurice W. Clayton, co-pilot of the B-25. Clayton is a burly, stocky, black-haired Westerner, from Idaho. He comes from the country of high bluffing, and he has the hawk face and a pair of piercing black eyes made to order for the job. Behind him in spirit stood hundreds of other Westerners, who had sat impassive-faced behind, say, a pair of jacks, out-bluffing someone else with two pair, or three of a kind.

So Clayton volunteered for the job. He stated that an American, particularly an American from the West, was worth just about two hundred Nips, so the odds were about even. He took the .45. He saw to it that it was in working order. He buckled it on. He took in a hitch of his belt. And then, swaggering, he marched into the village filled with two hundred Japanese sailors.

He strode into the clearing. He demanded in a loud voice to see the commanding officer. He spat. He stood with his legs spread apart and his hands on his hips and he whistled softly.

Three officers walked up to him. Two of them could speak no English. But the third was a graduate from Harvard University, and he spoke English in a pure Back Bay accent.

"I've been sent down by an American garrison," Clayton said evenly. "We are heavily armed and number several hundred men. I've been sent down to order you to surrender to me."

The boy from Harvard translated, and the Nip boss looked puzzled.

"Every one of your men is to be tied up by natives," Clayton continued calmly, as though there was no question at all about the surrender. He looked at the largest building in the village, a place surrounded by a wooden stockade. "Tell your men to get inside that building and let the natives bind them."

The Jap translated again. The three Nips spoke rapidly to each other. They looked at Clayton, who smiled pleasantly. Clayton said later it was a very quiet and a very long moment that followed. Then the Jap commander barked something, and the sailors started to file into the house.

Clayton figured the pot was his. He thought he was going to rake in the chips. But suddenly something went wrong. The Nip commandant called his bluff. He barked another order, and at the same time made a lunge for Clayton's gun. Clayton struggled with him and the gun went off. The three Jap officers turned and ran toward the shore where a few canoes were beached.

At the same time the sailors started to run out of the building again. Clayton ran to the entrance and began to fire at them. They turned and ran inside again. Then they started to pour out of the back exit of the building. Clayton ran around to that exit and fired another shot.

The sailors pushed in again. Now they were pushing in from front and back, milling hysterically inside. Suddenly the fragile wooden walls of the building toppled down, and the sailors began to run from the stockade in all directions.

"That ended that," Clayton said morosely.

The villagers now fled into the hills again. A hand grasped Clayton. He turned. It was one of the young native girls. She smiled at him and tugged at his wrist, and motioned for him to follow. She led him into the jungle and back up the hill to the cave. The rest of the village rapidly collected there.

From the hills they could watch the beaches. The sailors were now packing the shore. They fought with each other for possession of the canoes. They packed themselves in the little boats and began to paddle rapidly out into the water. They took everything that could float.

But their troubles had just started.

For at that moment four P-38s and a Catalina flying boat appeared overhead. In the flying boat was McLean with help for the men. The P-38s buzzed the village to notify the flyers in the cave to get ready, and then the Cat landed gracefully in the water and began to taxi toward shore.

The Cat was about one hundred yards from shore when several natives, who had rushed down to the shore and who had uncovered a hidden rigger the Nips overlooked, paddled out to meet it. They pulled up alongside the Cat and waved their hands in greeting. Then they started to point out to sea. The airmen in the Cat followed their gestures and saw the sailboats and canoes filled with Nips, the Nips paddling madly to get away. The airmen nodded. They turned the Cat around. The natives climbed onto the pontoons; then the big plane taxied out toward the frantic Japs.

WHEN the Japs saw the plane coming toward them, they began to fire at it. Others jumped from their canoes. Two of them overturned.

They were ordered to surrender. Instead, those still in the boats opened fire again on the Cat. So the Cat came along and methodically began to strafe the canoes and sailboats. The Cat stopped, and the crew climbed on the wings: and there on the water began one of the strangest battles of all time—a crossfire between several boatloads of Jap sailors and a half dozen Americans on the wings of a flying boat.

Then, with desperate courage, the Nips closed in on the Cat and tried for a hand-to-hand attack. They clambered onto the pontoons, knives in their teeth, pistols in their hands, and attempted to destroy the Catalina and kill the men aboard.

The flyers spread across the wings and fought them off. The natives assisted them, bashing in the Nip skulls with heavy clubs. The Jap sailors clustered over the airplane like flies, until finally they quit and fled. The survivors struggled back into their canoes and broke away in all directions.

The Cat turned around and headed for shore again. By now the five men from the B-25 crew were waiting for them there. They climbed aboard. The villagers lined up and waved them good-by. Several of the villagers had been wounded in the water fight, but they pointed to their wounds proudly, and laughed and danced.

"They seemed to love being wounded in a fight with Nips," McLean said.

Then the Cat moved out and took off. The pilot dipped its wings once over the village, and the people waved their arms, and then the Cat brought the men safely back to their base.

The Last Straw

A rebellious young man goes forth in the North Woods to seek his fortune—and comes home with another girl.

by THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

ELDON SPEARS came home at nine o'clock and found his Aunt Matty, who kept house for him, still in the kitchen, knitting and dropping stitches and spelling out the jokes in her favorite book—Dr. Trueman's Rural Almanac—over the top of her spectacles, by the light of a newfangled kerosene lamp.

"Land sakes! You back already—an' it jist now struck nine!" exclaimed Aunt Matty.

"I'm back," admitted Eldon.

"Wasn't Annabelly to home?"

"Sure she was to home."

"Well, I never! What was the trouble this time?"

"Never mind what it was, it was the last straw." And without another word, Eldon went up the back stairs like a yoke of oxen.

"That makes jist about a stack of last straws," Aunt Matty cackled. "The sooner they break his back like they did that camel's, in the Good Book, the sooner he'll ca'm down and maybe look 'round for somebody who don't think she's Cleopatry or the Queen of Sheby," she thought.

She cackled again and returned to her knitting-needles and her joke-book. . . .

When Aunt Matty entered the kitchen next morning, the stove was cold; she was still eying it with indignant surprise when Billy Small came in from outside.

"Where's Eldon?" she asked.

"Nowheres, as far as I can see," answered Billy. "He aint milked nor he aint fed the horses nor the horned critters. Nor he aint in bed, for I looked. I wouldn' wonder but he's up an' lit out."

"Don't talk like a fool, Billy! What d'ye mean, 'up an' lit out'?"

"Run away, that's what I mean. He shut Rover into the woodshed so's he wouldn't foller. An' that aint all: Two paddles is gone—his two favorite paddles. They aint there."

"They aint where?"

"In the shed where we always puts 'em."

"He could've put them somewheres else for a change."

"Not him! Not Eldon Spears! Once he does anything twice the same way, he never does it different. But the paddles aint the hull of it. No sir-ee! The canoe's went too."

Aunt Matty gasped and sat down hard on the handiest chair. She was dumfounded.

"An' that aint all," continued Billy, with a bit of a swagger, for it was not often that he flabbergasted Miss Matty Spears. "Not by a jugful, it aint! Here's a letter he pinned to the pantry door."

Aunt Matty bounced up like a rubber ball, snatched the missive from him, and gave it all her attention; this is what she read:

Deer Aunt Matty:

That was the last straw last night and I am off lock stock and barrell as the saying is—to the States or may be to follow the Sea. I have had my fill of wimmin meaning nothing personal Aunt Matty but you can guess who I mean. You never know what is cumming next, with sum. Hell I am all for a quiet orderly life. But you will be allright. Keep on Billy Small for he is better than nobuddy. Half the place and stock is yours allreddy and now I hearwith and hearby make you a free gift of my half of everything deer Aunt Matty like this was my Last Will and Testament. Please take good care of Rover and if Anybuddy asks you where I am you say Ive went to Sea for Rest and Piece and not cumming back.

Yours truely Eldon Spears.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Aunt Matty, with relish; and she started right in to spell it out all over again, finding it even funnier than the jokes in Dr. Trueman's Rural Almanac.

"Crack went the camel's back that time for sure!" she cackled. "And for keeps, let us hope—and if he comes mooching home for another straw before next Sunday, I'll be real disappointed," she added. . . .

When Eldon Spears came to the head of Gunflint Rapids, he was too sore and mad at Annabelle Tracy to take the trouble of putting ashore and carrying around. That last straw was still galling him something fierce.

So he headed right into the suck and pitch and slosh of braided black and green and white waters; even so, he might have escaped the penalty of his rashness if he had hit the channel, such as it was. But he didn't. . . .

There was a man named Salter, waiting for Eldon at the black pool at the tail of Gunflint; but the poor young man didn't know anything about that and would not have known Salter even if he had been conscious of what was going on, for the fellow who appeared to be so interested in

him was a total stranger. Anyhow, this Salter fished Eldon out of the pool with a pike-pole, fished up his wallet and gold watch almost quicker than human eye could perceive, and was about to return Eldon to the eddying black water, when violently deterred by a young woman. He hopped backward on one foot, cursing in pain, for he had received a chop across the shin of the other leg with the edge of a hardwood paddle.

"You murdering fool!" cried the wielder of the paddle.

SHE stooped, looked closely into Eldon's unconscious face; brushed light fingers over his lips and eyelids. Then she ran an inquiring, anxious hand over and under his head, but found nothing worse than a moderate bump and a slight scalp wound.

"He's alive," she said.

"And what of it?" retorted Salter. "Who cares if he's dead or alive, ye wildcat! Hell, ye might've busted my laig!"

She ignored that; turning Eldon onto his face, she straddled him and lifted him by the middle.

"Lend a hand," she said.

Cursing in protest, Salter lent a hand; and between them they rolled quarts of water out of the limp young man. Then the young woman knelt and raised Eldon's head and shoulders and supported them with her left arm. His wet unconscious head rested in the hollow of her left shoulder.

"Gimme the bottle," she said.

Ben Salter handed her a bottle, cursing anew. She drew the cork with her teeth and poured some of the rum between Eldon's lips. Most of it spilled over his cheeks and chin, but enough went down his throat to jolt him. His head jerked and he gasped for breath.

"Just one more sip now, for your own good," said the young woman in a coaxing voice.

He obeyed without question or protest or so much as the lift of an eyelid. His trusting docility melted the young woman still further, and she began to weep softly.

Salter took the bottle from her unresisting hand and recorked and repocketed it.

"What the hell?" he demanded, in tones of angry disgust. "Lay him flat now an' git a move on. We got no more time to waste on half-drowneded strangers."

The young woman looked up at him, with tears still flooding her eyes and gleaming on her cheeks. He was about to turn away, but something which he glimpsed behind her tears checked him and caused him to stare with increased disapproval. Stooping, Salter took hold of her right shoulder with a hard and heavy hand.

"What now? What's yer game? We're in a hurry! Or maybe it slipped yer mind? Cut out the monkeyshines; we got a date up the Malaquak with Ambrose. Or maybe ye've forgot all about Ambrose?"

"I remember him," she said quietly. "Ambrose and yerself and the peddler. But it don't concern me. *I* don't have to run from the Sheriff! I never murdered nor even robbed. The worst can be said against me is 't I'm your daughter."

She continued to look like a person utterly broken in spirit; and the man fell into error—in his anxiety to be gone and on his way up the Malaquak to a safe hide-out, he permitted himself the stupidity of slapping Brigid Salter on the mouth. He saw his mistake before he became aware of her reaction to the blow; and in the same flash he saw, like a colored picture, the girl who had been Brigid's mother—Mary Daly, who had married him when he was an honest young woodsman on the sou'-west Miramichi and cock-of-the-river. The murk of tragic and disastrous years rolled aside and he saw that picture as bright as paint. God! And this was what he had come to! Remorse and self-disgust shook Ben Salter; but they dulled and passed with the dimming and passing of the picture, leaving only fear in his degraded soul. Now he was afraid even of this daughter of his whom he had struck, afraid to look at her. He stared past her with stupid, frightened eyes.

"Ye're my father, or I'd kill you for that," she told him.

She stood now, with her right hand in the front of her woodsman's shirt.

"And if I hadn't promised my mother on her deathbed—and a grand bed that was, with the snow driftin' in on it!—I'd leave you to go to the hangman an' hell yer own way."

"I didn't figger to hit ye, Brigey," he muttered. "But we got to git goin'. We aint safe on the main river. We got to git into the Malaquak an' up to the place Ambrose told us about, where he's got a camp an' stores."

"All right, you help carry this fellow," she said. "Lift his shoulders an' I'll take him by the knees."

"Carry *him?*" he cried amazedly.

"Yes. . . . Lift him by the shoulders."

"What for?"

"To lug him to the canoe. We're takin' him with us—along with the watch an' wallet you picked off him."

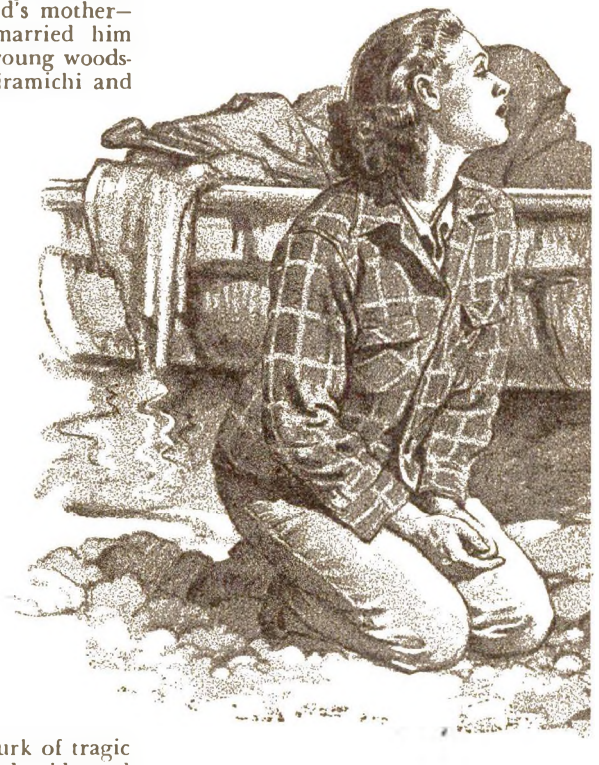
"Ye're crazy!"

"All right, get along by yerself. I'm stopping right here. He'll tell me where he lives when he comes to his senses—and if the Sheriff comes along, I got nothin' to fear. But give me his watch an' wallet, first."

He stared at her bleakly.

"My God! It would be hangin' me with yer own hands—yer own father!"

His glance wavered and fell before her level gaze. He cursed, stooped, and slid his hands under Eldon Spears.



The young woman looked up with tears flooding her eyes. "Ye're my father, or I'd kill you for that," she said.

BEN SALTER and his daughter were from up in the Miramichi country, which is extensive, thickly wooded, laced with streams and sparsely populated. They had parted from Ambrose Foy on the headwaters of one of those innumerable waterways, for bad and sufficient reasons and in desperate

haste, after agreeing to a rendezvous on the Malaquak stream of the St. John watershed. The portage over the height-of-land, in a region of swamps and blowdowns, had taken them nine days; and the descent to the St. John River, by way of nameless ponds and trickles of peaty water and meandering lost brooks, had taken them longer. Musket Creek had brought them to the big river at last; there they had made camp for a night and from there Salter had glimpsed the swamping of Eldon Spears' canoe in Gunflight Rapids. Salter knew, by Foy's directions, that the Malaquak entered the big river a few miles farther downstream.

THEY made those few miles in silence. Salter, sitting in the stern and trying to look casual and local, just in case of observation, did what paddling was required and kept the canoe close in to the northern bank. His daughter sat facing him, with Eldon's head on her knees. Eldon lay on his back, with a gray blanket spread over him and drawn up to his chin.

"Reckon this is it," said Salter as they rounded a little bluff into the mouth of the Malaquak and headed up that small and obscure river.

He shifted his position, got his knees under him and put his back into the stroke. But that was not enough, for this was strong water. He exchanged the paddle for a long slim pole of spruce. He stood to the pole, with his feet apart and his knees slightly bent. He kept in shallow water close inshore, where the drag of the current was lighter than in midstream.

Now and then the iron collar on the tip of the pole clinked on rock or pebble; and for quite a while that and the soft rustling of the current and the rattle of a kingfisher were the only noticeable sounds. Then Salter spoke again.

"He aint dead, is he?"

"He opened his eyes twice," said Brigid.

"The more fool him!" exclaimed her father. "An' the more fool you! What's got into ye? Why couldn't ye

leave him be? What d'ye want with a half-dead farmer? And he'd better be all dead—before Ambrose Foy sees him."

She sneered.

"He aims to marry ye!" said Salter.

"That weasel!" she sneered. "That murdering coward!"

SUDDENLY Eldon Spears sat up, looking at Salter. He gripped a gunwale of the canoe with each hand. Brigid, behind him, gasped and was silent. Salter, facing him, squatted and all but capsized the canoe. Eldon stared at Salter. He twisted his neck and stared at the girl. He turned back to the man.

"I was in the rapids," he said. "Gunflint. Where am I now?"

Salter glanced this way and that, and ran his tongue between his lips a few times, as if he were looking and feeling for safe words.

"Did I upset?" asked Eldon.

"Aye—and I fished ye out," said Salter.

"Much obliged," remarked Eldon. "Thank ye kindly."

He smiled wanly; then his gaze dimmed and his broad shoulders sagged a little.

"Thank ye kindly," he repeated.

He flopped back as suddenly as he had sat up, and again his head rested on the girl's knees and his eyes were closed. Brigid gazed down at him tenderly. Her right hand moved over his face as lightly as a blowing leaf. Salter, cursing under his breath, stood up again and straightened the swinging canoe on her course.

They went upstream steadily and in silence for the next hour; though they passed farmsteads on both shores they saw no humans and were barked at by only a few dogs. They had to put ashore and carry around a little jam of deadwood and slash and a few old logs. When the girl straightened Eldon to a sitting position and tried to lift him out of the canoe, the young man opened his eyes and smiled at her, then glanced around inquiringly, heaved to his feet and stepped out on the little gravel-bar. He made a few wavering staggers around in his own tracks. The girl jumped to him and steadied him with both hands. He regarded her earnestly, with clear dark eyes; her gray eyes returned the scrutiny.

"I got spilled," he said. "I recall it now."

She nodded.

"You're a stranger to me," he added.

"That's right."

"Cut the cackle!" snapped Salter, as he stopped and laid hold of the canoe by the middle bar, ready to shoulder it for the carry around the little jam. Eldon pressed a hand to his head, still looking at the girl, and smiled at her.

"I don't get this," he said to her confidentially. "Reckon I bumped my head. I was goin' somewheres. . . . But let it pass. I must've been in a hurry—but never mind that. One place is as good as another to me. Who's yer friend?"

"He's my father," she said.

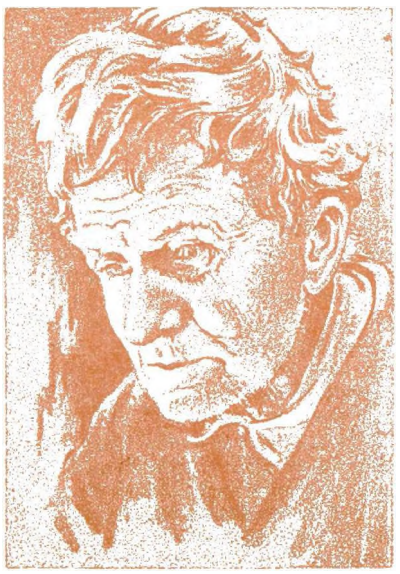
He stepped unsteadily away from her and turned to the man. Salter, still stooped to the empty canoe, was looking back and up at him with narrowed eyes.

"Even if ye did fish me out of the pool, like—and even if I don't know where I am an' feel kind of tuckered out—I'm through with bein' shushed up an' shoved around; an' you lay off me, feller, or I'll sure lay ye off," Eldon said, slowly and surely.

Ben Salter straightened up and turned in one swift, smooth movement—but before he could strike, his daughter stood between them, facing him with glowing eyes and her right hand in the front of her shirt. The three of them stood as still as if they held their breaths, for what seemed a long minute to Brigid. Then Salter turned and stooped to the canoe again and heaved it to his shoulders.

It was rugged country and tough going above the jam. The September rains had raised the Malaquak well above its midsummer dribble, but a flood was needed to make that rocky and devious track fit for the passage of even a bark canoe. The Salters and Eldon Spears had to carry again, and get out and wade and drag three times, between the first obstacle and the midday halt. They were clear of the settlement now, with nothing but woods and swamps and occasional stumpy clearings strewn with slash to the right and the left.

Eldon walked and waded when he had to; though he stepped a mite



wide at times and pressed a hand to his head every now and then, he neither protested nor complained. He looked at the girl frequently and smiled whenever his glance met hers. She smiled back at him, but with an air of doubt and abstraction. Neither spoke.

At noon, Salter made a small and all but smokeless fire of bone-dry cedar, and Brigid boiled water for tea and fried salt pork. There was no conversation during the meal and Eldon alone appeared to enjoy it. The young man wolfed his share of the fat pork and hard bread, and drank three mugs of tea. Then he sighed contentedly and fished a wooden pipe and a cake of tobacco from a sodden pocket. But the tobacco was swollen to twice its right size and was waterlogged to its very core. Salter took it from his hand and replaced it with a dry cake and an open jackknife, without a word. Eldon thanked him warmly and had his pipe filled and lighted within the half-minute.

WHILE breaking camp a few minutes later, Salter whispered contemptuous words in his daughter's ear.

"What the hell d'ye want of that poor fool? Ye'd better left him where he was—or even in the pool. Ambrose'll do for him!"

She turned her face away without answering.

More of the afternoon was spent out of the canoe than in it, what with carrying and dragging. They quit before sundown; Salter went upstream a ways, with his ax, after a dead cedar for fuel.

"I'd take ye to be dumb, if I hadn't heared ye speak," said Eldon to the girl.

She regarded him kindly, but with a slight frown.

"What have I got to talk about?" she asked.

"About me, for one thing: Why'd ye fetch me away from Gunflint pool, and what d'ye figger to do with me?"

"I made him do it. He didn't want to."

"But why? What more d'ye want besides my watch an' wallet?"

"D'ye think I took that junk?"

"No. No, I don't. Honest Injun, I don't! But—why'd ye fetch me along?"

"Ye'd've maybe died right there."

"But why would you care if I was dead or alive?"

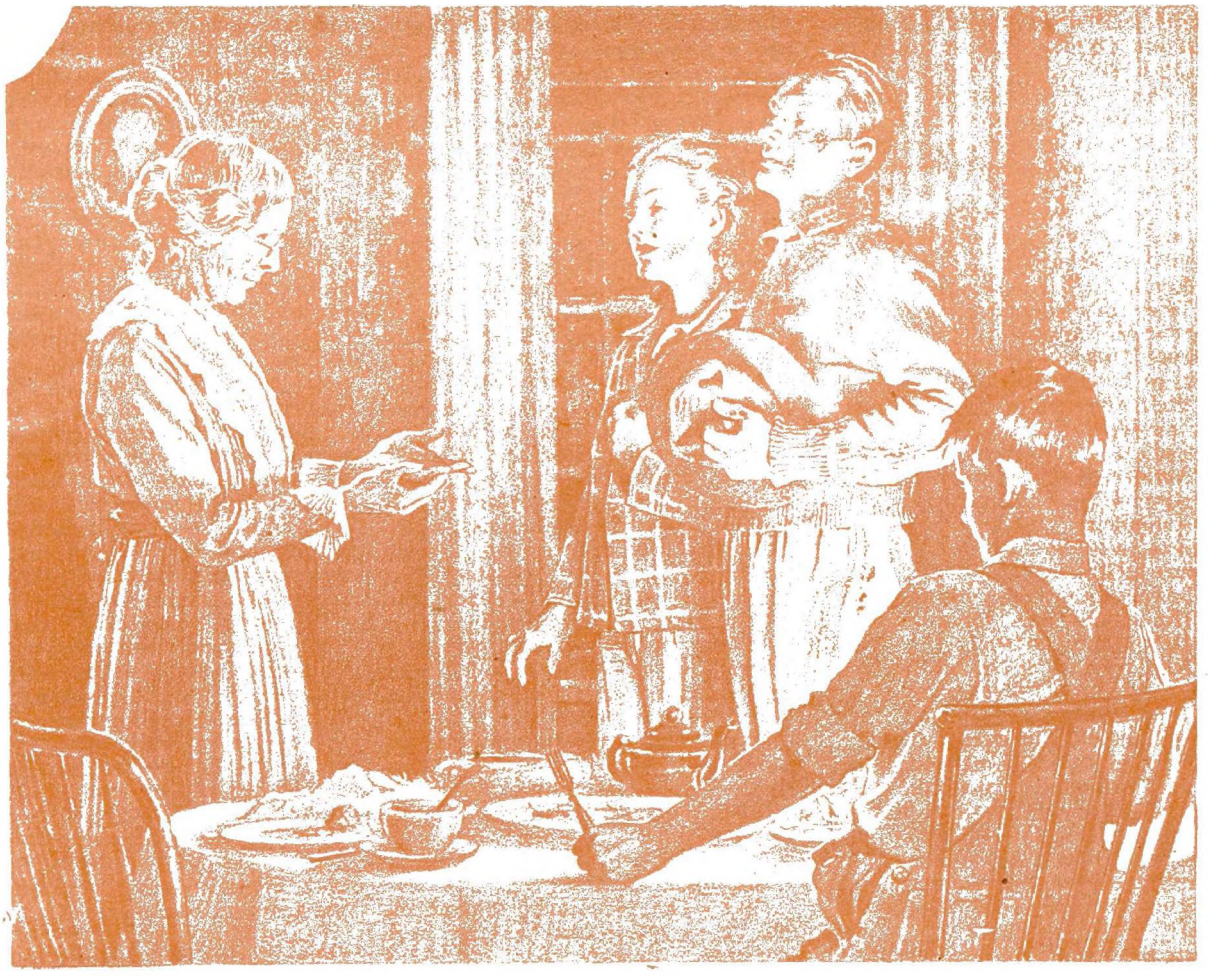
She averted her face and did not answer.

"Yer old man don't want me around, that's sure. He'd jist as lief kill me as not."

Still with averted face, she whispered, "I won't let him harm you."

"Why not?"

She neither looked at him nor spoke. He stooped closer to her and whispered lower:



"How'd a numskull like him get hold of the likes of you?" asked Aunt Matty.

"An' who's this here Ambrose? What's he to you?"

She turned her face to him, with a startled look.

"I heard ye back at the pool," he explained.

Salter reappeared at that moment, with an armful of dry cedar, and nothing more was said.

Supper was like dinner, and it, too, was eaten in silence. The air was chilly after the sun was down. Eldon's clothes had dried on him by that time, but he could have done with more fire, and said so. But Salter said not. Eldon did not argue the point. Brigid fetched him two blankets from the dunnage-bag. They had plenty of blankets. Salter gave Eldon another fill of tobacco, and the two men sat side by side without a word, smoking and gazing at the red embers of the fire until the rosy glow was filmed over by gray ash. The girl sat on the other side of the expiring fire, with never a word out of her. Eldon rolled himself in his blankets.

It was an hour or more before he slept, for he was not only uncomfortable but he felt a strange and pleasurable excitement. He drifted off at last, but not for long. He dreamed that he was at home and in bed; that somebody was trying to wake him up, and that he woke up and found Aunt Matty whispering something to him which he could not hear; he tried so hard to hear that he wakened himself.

A HAND was on his lips. His nerves jumped, but he kept his muscles still, for his mind, quicker than lightning, told him that it was a small hand. It was a hard hand, but it did not press heavily. And there was a breath of whispering in his right ear:

"Wake up, but don't move. Wake up, but don't stir. Wake up, but don't make a sound. When you wake up, move yer lips against my hand."

Then he moved his lips against the palm of her hand. The whispering at his ear was resumed:

"Now's yer time to beat it. He's sound asleep—sound for him, anyhow. And I got yer watch an' wallet back for you. Now's yer chance."

After a moment's reflection, he shook his head.

"Now's yer chance," she repeated. The thread of whisper sharpened.

"Beat it! Now's yer chance."

He put up his hand, removed the hand from his mouth and turned his face toward the whispering lips.

"I'm stoppin'," he whispered.

Her lips were close to his. He felt her breath on his face. But she was silent.

"I'm stoppin'," he repeated. "Ye fetched me along, and I'm stoppin'."

"Too late!" she breathed.

He extended an inquiring hand, but she was not there. He sat up and strained his ears and eyes. He heard faint sounds which might have been the scurrying of wood-mice. Then he heard a scratch as of wood on stone, and saw the slow flare of a match. The small flame was raised by a large hand until it illuminated the face of Ben Salter.

"Can't ye sleep?" asked Salter.

Eldon shivered with excitement. Never before in all his twenty-six years had he felt so much excitement

—certainly not of this pleasurable quality. Of course he had been excited when he had run his canoe into the head of Gunflint Rapids, but that had been the excitement of sheer, cussed, blind anger and disgust. There had been nothing enjoyable in it.

"Who wants to know?" he asked, in an amused voice.

"It was me asked ye," replied Salter dryly. "I suspicioned maybe ye figgered on leavin' us."

"And what if I do?"

"Ye've come this far, so now ye got to come all the way, I guess."

"Sure I'll come all the way! Who's goin' to hinder me?"

"Well, since ye ask, if there's ever any hinderin' to be done,—and there sure will be,—Ambrose Foy will do it."

"Ambrose Foy? Who might he be?"

"Never mind who he *might* be. He's my son-in-law. Well, he'd ought to be, anyhow, and he's swore by the Almighty he'll marry the girl."

"So ye got more than one daughter."

"No, only the one. Only Brigid."

"He's nothin' to her."

"He's everything to her but married to her—and I'll see to that."

"Ye're a liar!"

Salter laughed at that.

"I got nothin' ag'in' ye, young man," he said. "I saved ye from the tail of them rapids and I'd as lief as not save ye from Ambrose Foy. But can I trust ye? If I could trust ye to keep yer mouth shut about ever seein' me or my daughter, I'd leave ye go an' good riddance. Swear ye'll not tell a word about me, nor name this stream, no matter who asks ye, and ye're free to go home. What about it?"

"I'm stopping," replied Eldon stubbornly. "You can't shove me around, nor yer daughter can't—not so's to get rid of me, anyhow—nor Ambrose Foy can't. I'm stayin' right with ye, for as long as I've a mind to. My gold watch and the money in my wallet will cover my board, I reckon."

Salter cursed bitterly.

"Ye can have the dollars—*and* the watch! Only get the hell home an' keep yer mouth shut!" he cried.

"Keep what ye stole off me," said Eldon. "I don't care about that. But I still think ye're a liar—and I'm stoppin'."

"So be it! But don't blame me for whatever happens when we meet Ambrose Foy," sneered Salter, and he lay down again.

ELDON lay down again too; but he could not sleep. His heart and brain raced and battled, in alternating trust and doubt and hope and despair. Hours passed; when he felt something still close beside him, he closed his eyes and pretended sleep. Slow minutes passed before he felt a light, inquiring touch of fingers on his eyelids. He did not move. More slow minutes passed; the touch on his closed eyes was withdrawn and a caress even lighter and as smooth as a moth's wing brushed his lips. He knew that this was not of fingers, but of lips, and his pulses leaped, but he maintained his immobility by an effort of will which twanged his nerves. He forced this torture of restraint even upon his lips. . . . The devastating caress returned and paused a moment, fluttered and returned again and settled as lightly as dew and as warm as blood. . . . He became conscious of tears on his face—tears that were not of his own weeping. His restraint broke then and he clasped her head between his hands and pressed his lips hard on her trembling mouth. He kissed her wet eyes. She clung to him, returning his kisses warmly and wildly for five minutes, or a hundred heartbeats, or a lifetime or an age. He did not know how long it was—but when she tried to get away, he held her tight.

"Go, now," she whispered.

"With you—I'll go with you—anywhere," he whispered back. "Home with you, Brigey—anywhere—but nowhere without ye."

"No. Leave me go—leave me be! I can't go with you. I—I promised my mother—to look after him. You heard what he said, anyhow—about Ambrose—about Ambrose and me."

"But it's a lie! Aint it a lie?"

She made no answer.

"It's a lie. He wanted to scare me off. He's a liar—but he can't scare me now. Nobody can. It's a lie! Aint it a lie?"

She was still and silent in his arms, on his breast, with her tear-wet face against his. She stirred again. She moved her head in negation against his, slowly and unmistakably. His arms loosened their hold slowly and fell apart like dead things; then she was gone.

Eldon Spears rolled over and got his hands and knees under him, and then his feet, and heaved himself upright like an old man. The blankets fell about his feet and he kicked them clear, stumbling blindly. He headed downstream, on rock, in mud and sand, now splashing in shallow water. He made no effort for silence. He didn't so much as think of caution. He did not think of anything. For twenty minutes or more he simply did not think. After stumbling into a deep pool and clawing out of it, his mind cleared a little. It began to function, dully and painfully.

"Only this morning. That aint so long. Twelve hours and maybe three more—or maybe four more. Who cares? What's she to me? She's a stranger to me. 'Tain't in reason."

He went plunging and snubbing on his way. His feet hurt, for he had not taken the time to pull on his cowhide boots. He limped and went slower and did a bit of cussing, but he kept on going for all of an hour. Then an extraordinarily painful stub of a toe brought him to his knees. He crawled around in the dark, found a flat rock, sat down on it and nursed his right foot in both hands. Now his mind worked more clearly.

"I don't believe it. But why would she go on like that if it wasn't true? Still, why would she go on like that—crying and all—if it *was* true? But even if it was true—is true—she sure likes me. She wouldn't carry on that-a-way if she didn't like me. She aint his girl, she's my girl, even if she *was* his girl— Hell! That was before I ever seen her—and she'll never be ag'in, by God, if I have to kill him!"

He started limping back upstream, but had not gone twenty yards before he was stopped by Brigid herself. She dropped something heavy on the rocks and grabbed him by his shirt front.

"I fetched your boots," she cried. "Oh, your poor feet! And now I'll tell you it's a lie. I was afraid for yer life, and so I shook my head. Ambrose Foy never laid a finger on me!"

"I'm headin' back for ye anyhow, lie or no lie!" he cried; then he clasped her to his breast.

AUNT MATTY and Billy Small were at supper in the big old kitchen when Eldon came limping home with one arm around Brigid Salter.

"Land sakes alive, who ye got there, Eldon Spears, an' where ye been?" cried Aunt Matty, bouncing up.

"Never mind all that, Aunt Matty," said Eldon. "She's Brigey, and she's my girl, an' we're all tuckered out an' we're hungry."

Aunt Matty stepped closer to the stranger and gazed searchingly over the tops of her spectacles.

"How'd a numskull like him ever chance to get hold of the likes of you, my pretty?" she asked.

Then Brigid tottered to the support of Aunt Matty's flat breast and wept down Aunt Matty's thin neck; the older woman's thin arms embraced her convulsively and held her tight.

"Cripes!" exclaimed young Billy Small; he jerked his gaze away from the ravishing stranger and looked at his employer with unqualified admiration, for the first time.

"Where'd ye find her?" he whispered.

Eldon slumped onto a chair at the table and reached for the teapot before he answered:

"Never ye mind where I found her! She's the only one there was. There aint any more. There was only the one, of her and I got her—and I'd bust a canoe in old Gunflint every mornin' of my life for her, if I had to!"

What Do *You* Think?

A Readers' Forum

Why *Not* Talk About It?

LOOK, America—this is advice from GI Joes the world over: We're heading home before too long. We've been away for a long time—longer than you'll ever know until you go through the same experiences. But we haven't been so far away so long as it seems; we haven't been away at all—spiritually. Though actually we were crowded behind trees or in foxholes in Sicily, Tarawa, France or Guam, our hearts were still walking side-by-side with *you* up Main Street, U.S.A.!

When we do come home, we do expect a welcome such as we've never had before! We're sure you will understand our actions—we expect a welcome home as the same kids who marched away so long ago. We are *not* changed men. We require no "coddling," no "special handling." Hellzbells! We're men—not infants!

We fear the reception we will receive when we walk down the gangplank onto U.S.A. sod! We certainly have no desire to undergo the patronizing, kid-glove treatment so many of our buddies have encountered on their return! Maybe some of the returnees have been strangely neurotic—but not all of them need to be pampered like insane two-year-olds.

Practically every magazine we pick up has some tripe in it telling the folks at home just how to treat a returning soldier, how to act in his presence, and how to avoid discussing the war before him. "Mustn't talk about the war—mustn't bring up topics about Germany or Japan." Such "advice" has reached the eyes and ears of practically every person in America.

How can anyone except an idiot expect a soldier to forget the thrills and adventure, the loneliness, the pain, the horrors, and—yes, the fun that has totally absorbed two or three of the best years of a fellow's life? That's all we'll be able to think or talk about for quite a while after our return. Why not talk about it? There's so much that's left unsaid by letters and newspapers that would be nice to tell or to hear. It's stupid to try to avoid it!

In our daily letters to the folks we love, we tried to tell what we could about the war, but censorship forbade so much that was so interesting to us. Naturally, none of us cares to be prodded into talking about combat experiences unless he happens to be in the mood for it. Some of us might never want to discuss it. But ninety per cent of us are eager to talk about it. What else is there to talk about—the war is the most important, the most exciting, the most interesting thing in our lives!

It's all wrong, this setting up of rules telling folks how to handle men back from the war. You can't do it! Each man is a separate individual—a lone personality unlike any of his comrades! What would be good for one would be agony for another! There's been far too much junk written by would-be psychiatrists telling wives, parents and sweethearts to make allowances for this stranger who is returning to their door, and for his strange habits. Some of this advice is wise and well-reasoned, but most of it is outlandishly silly. Make allowances? Yes—everyone is going to make allowances for everyone else. The people on the home front have undoubtedly changed as much as GI Joe in the past three or four years.

Civilian life will, at first, be a novelty. As soon as the "new" wears off, it'll seem pretty dull to any veteran. Even so, there's no recipe for dealing with that. We'll have to face this boredom and take the consequences. No one will help matters by handling us as psychoneurotic cases. If we were able to adjust ourselves to the sudden hell of war, we'll certainly be able to readjust back to the simple common ways of civilian life! True, the rigid training and the strict discipline have matured us, but to look upon any one of us as a "problem child" is to underestimate American manhood!

Many GIs are hoping to return to a world that still maintains its perspective of life. Welcome us home as normally as you would a visiting aunt or uncle. Help us in our discussion of this life we lead. Heartfelt respect and genuine affection will do more to heal wounded spirits than all the printed efforts in the world.

Pvt. Howard Lasseter
In the Marianas

BLUE BOOK is glad to receive letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or—a letter recounting the funniest thing that ever happened to you, for publication in our "My Most Amusing Experience" department.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. The author's full name and address must accompany the letters; but, if he prefers, initials only may be used for publication. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do *You* Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

For Their Country and the World

I AM one of many hundred sailors who are patients out here in St. Albans Hospital on Long Island. There are also a lot of Marines in the many wards who keep the pretty nurses busy, and a good many of these boys have seen action against the Japs out in the Pacific. Day after day some of these men just lie in their bunks waiting for battle wounds to heal, or to be cured of malaria or some other disease. You can't help wondering what they are thinking about as they lie there minute after minute, hour after hour, until finally the time runs into months. Believe me, they have a lot of nerve, and they prove that whenever they talk about places like Tarawa or Peleilu, or the Coral Seas battle or the Battle of Midway.

The war is just about over for a lot of these men. Whenever a news commentator on the radio tells of victories on our many battlefronts, these fellows think of the good, strong, and clean me of the U.S.A. who made these victories possible, but who will never come back. They think of the men who made the sacrifice of dying for their country that others might live.

In one sense they not only died for their country but for the whole world, because that's what this war is all about. These boys want a world of peace and security, and not just peace for our country alone. They died with the hope that every mother's son all over the world would be a wonderful guy to know. Let's all work and pray that with God's help we will be able to make this possible, because these boys all fought for love of the U.S.A. and the world of peace to follow.

Louis R. Petersen, U. S. Navy

Our Battle in Korea

A seldom recalled episode that is significant today.

by HARRY VAN DEMARK

MOST people know little of the peninsula between the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan. Our children, however, and modern students of geography, know of it as Chosen. Japan gave it that name—its original ancient name—when it took over the land in 1910, deposing the emperor and relieving him of all political power, much after the pattern used later in converting Manchuria into Manchukuo.

Years before Japan emerged from its own civil war with an ambition for Western greatness and a place among world powers, in the days when the Far East looked upon all Western peoples as barbarians of the outer darkness, Korea suddenly went mad.

Old King Ch'ul-jong died, and the Dowager Queen Cho, snatching the royal seals from the folds of the widowed queen's dress, where they were hidden, proclaimed herself regent, with her fanatical grandson Myung-bok as king.

Back in 1831, Pope Gregory XVI had made Korea a bishopric, and several missionaries had gone there to teach Christianity under the leadership of a Frenchman, Bishop Brugière. Christianity spread quickly; and the government, looking on all Western ideas as devised by the devil, started savage persecutions, not only of white men, but of their own converted countrymen. Three Frenchmen were beheaded by order of the king.

Immediately on learning of the tragedy, France made representations to the Korean court, demanding apologies and indemnities. Dire punishment would be visited upon the Koreans if these were refused.

Then the revolution of 1848 threw France in an uproar and the Korean episode was forgotten in the excitement at home. Even the letter of the Korean king, pleading that he had never heard of France, did not know that his victims were Frenchmen—and that they had incited rebellion anyway—was lost in the rush of frenzied events.

So Korea sank back into its walled exclusiveness and considered itself impregnable, as no punishment had been forthcoming.

Thirteen years later the royal court of Korea at Seoul was electrified by the news that Peking had fallen to the combined assaults of French and English troops. Fearing an attack, the Koreans hid their wealth, fortified their borders and assembled all the arms that could be found.

But gradually the excitement subsided. Apparently the "barbarians" had no immediate designs on Korea.

It was at this juncture that the old king, Ch'ul-jong, died.

Under the incoming reign a new sect called the Tong-hak arose, backed by the old dowager, Christian-hating Cho. Under the influence of this powerful group King Myung-bok issued a proclamation ordering the death by decapitation of all Christians, particularly foreigners.

Caught in the net of this madness, four French missionary priests—Bretenières, Beaulieu, Dorie and Bishop Berneux—bowed under the swinging sword of the Korean executioner. Their blood wrote strange history on the sacred soil of ancient, exclusive Korea.

Four days later two more priests—Petitnocolas and Pourthie—met the same fate. Before Pourthie died, he saw destroyed a work on which he had spent ten laborious years—a Latin-Chinese-Korean dictionary.

Three other priests were seized and dragged to the block in the bloody orgy of the Tong-hak. But before they were killed, one of their number, Father Huin, dispatched a letter to China. Through almost incredible peril and hardship, this letter was taken by a priest named Ridel to the Celestial Kingdom, and there delivered into the hands of French Admiral Roze, who was at Tientsin with his fleet of war vessels.

Informed of the terrible deaths of his fellow-countrymen, Admiral Roze set out on a punitive expedition; and this, indirectly, was the means of involving the United States with Korea.

The French fleet soon cast anchor off the important Korean port of Kang-wha. The Admiral found the upper part of the channel blocked by sunken junks, with the Koreans gathered in a well-fortified monastery high on the bank.

The French Admiral made the serious mistake of underestimating both the strength and fighting power of the Korean army. His attitude toward these "heathens" was one of "contempt," according to a chronicler of the period.

The Admiral landed a party of 160 men to assault the height on which the monastery stood. To reach their objective, they had to cross a deep, muddy ravine.

Gallantly the Gauls scrambled up the steep slope. The Koreans held their fire until the sailors were within a short range, then poured in a withering fire that wiped out half the force.

The Admiral had no means of knowing that the Korean General Yang Honsu had gathered behind those ancient walls five thousand men, most of them fierce tiger-hunters from the mountains—men whose ancestors had driven back a Chinese army of three hundred thousand men and slaughtered all but seven hundred of them.

These tiger-hunters were trackers and woodsmen from their early youth, untiring and absolutely fearless, as a man must be who will face a tiger with a matchlock smooth-bore gun, carrying fifty yards more or less accurately, and loaded with three rough iron pellets but little larger than buckshot.

The Frenchmen retreated with their dead and wounded, and would have been killed to the last man had not a reinforcing party come to their aid when they reached the bottom of the hill.

Reëmbarking his men, many of whom would never fight again, Admiral Roze with his fleet of the Second Empire sailed away. It was the only thing to do when confronted with such overwhelming odds.

But the effect of his withdrawal on the Koreans was both dangerous and far-reaching.

Facing them, the Koreans knew, had been the powerful "barbarians" who had humbled and broken the power of China—some of the very soldiers who had subdued Peking and captured the summer palace of the King of Heaven from the frenzied warriors of Cathay. And they, the invincible Koreans, brave hunters of the tiger, had made that enemy turn tail and flee, carrying their dead.

The Koreans were not only "cocky:" they considered themselves unconquerable. So the bloodthirsty persecutions under the Tong-haks continued with more terrible vigor than before. Neither age, sex nor position were considered in the massacre that followed, one of the most horrible in world history.

More than twenty thousand men, women and children were cut down by the vicious swords of the Tong-haks. Hundreds of others fled in hysterical terror to the mountains, where they starved and froze in appalling misery.

In the meantime an American sailing vessel, the *General Sherman*, had entered the mouth of the Korean river Ta-dong. She had come to trade, but her offers were disdained, and she was sharply told to go away and not come back again. Ignoring this warning from the Korean court, the commander of the *General Sherman* pushed up the river until his ship had reached a point opposite the city of P'yung-yang.

The tide was abnormally high at the time, and when it receded, the *General Sherman* was left partly heeled over in the mud with no chance of escape.

Korea, at this time, had a treaty with the United States regarding the care of shipwrecked sailors. By the terms of this treaty the Koreans agreed to transport such men to China; and many times Korea had done so with the utmost courtesy.

But the Koreans refused to classify the men of the *General Sherman* as shipwrecked sailors. They had been warned away, yet had pushed farther up the river. Therefore their purpose must be sinister. The Americans insisted that they meant no harm. But the Koreans attacked. The Americans kept them off until they set the ship ablaze with fire-rafts.

Many of the American sailors who leaped off of the burning vessel were drowned. Those who reached the shore were hacked to pieces by the frenzied townsmen, standing on the bank with their wicked curved swords.

Not a man of the *General Sherman's* crew survived that brief and bitter battle; and to this day the anchor-chains of the *General Sherman* form part of the city gates at P'yung-yang, a trophy of victory.

Admiral Richard Rodgers with the American Asiatic squadron, was immediately dispatched to Korea to investigate the killing of the American seamen, to conclude a new treaty on shipwrecks and to open trade relations if he could.

From China the Koreans had learned of the American expedition, and they placed General O-Yo-jun with three thousand men at the Kang-wha fort, ready to greet the new contingent of "barbarians."

When the United States warships *Monocacy* and *Palos* steamed up the channel, the ancient guns of the fort boomed a loud warning welcome. The gunboats returned the fire, then returned to the fleet anchorage to report to the Admiral.

Admiral Rodgers, who had recognized from the start the hopelessness of a peaceful settlement, demanded an apology, but only contemptuous silence came from the proud court at Seoul. So under cover of the ships' guns an American force of 105 marines, followed by 575 sailors and several pieces of artillery, were loaded into boats and rowed toward the steep shore under the fortified walls of the monastery of Kang-wha.

The men landed under fire in thick mud, into which they sank to their thighs. Emerging from this, they charged up the hill under the hot fire of the screaming Orientals, whose aim, however, was not as deadly as when the French sailors had come their way.

With better arms and less hot-headed command, the Koreans could have raised havoc with a force totaling only one-sixth their number. But the marines and sailors reached their objective with very few casualties. The fight developed into a hand-to-hand contest, with savage bayonet work on the part of the Americans playing an important rôle in the outcome.

At the beginning of the fight Lieutenant Hugh McKee was mortally wounded and fell at the side of W. S. Schley (later famous as Admiral Winfield Scott Schley). They were on the parapet of the fort at the time. In falling, McKee almost knocked Schley down, but in the excitement and din of battle Schley did not realize that McKee had been hit, thought he had merely stumbled.

A few moments later Schley saw McKee lying on his back inside the citadel, with two screaming Koreans standing over him, about to plunge their long steel-tipped lances into his body. Schley rushed at the Orientals. One of them quickly turned his lance to meet the onslaught of his new enemy. The lance went through Schley's coat-sleeve, pinning it to his coat.

Grasping the haft with his left hand, and in this way holding the Korean at bay, Schley shot him down with his pistol. The other Korean fled without sticking his boar-spear into the helpless and dying McKee.

By now all of the American assaulting troops were within the citadel, and those Koreans who had not died at their posts had fled toward the city below. Many jumped over the cliffs onto yawning rocks. Others rushed down into the area that was being constantly swept by artillery fire.

The situation was soon "well in hand." Three Americans had been killed, and about 275 Koreans. The great discrepancy in casualties was due, first to the aggressiveness of the Americans; and second, to the old-fashioned arms of the Koreans and the paucity of ammunition.

To complete their victory, the punitive force of marines and sailors from the American Asiatic fleet spent the next day in spiking the guns and destroying arms left behind by the Koreans. Four hundred and eighty-one of the Korean Army's outmoded cannon were made useless except for park ornaments. The Americans carried fifty flags back to their ships as trophies of victory.

Thus the massacre of the unfortunate crew of the *General Sherman* was avenged, and the Koreans' belief that tiger-hunters were better fighters than trained soldiers and sailors of the Western world was rudely shattered.

Shortly after this a fantastic event occurred which opened the way for Korea to be conquered and eventually annexed, not by the "barbarian" fighting men who had defeated her crack warriors, but by the subtlety of an Oriental neighbor, then rapidly becoming "Westernized."

The regent Min Ch'g-gu finally had to give up the throne to the young king. Immediately the queen's brother, Min Saung-ho, became the most powerful man in the court. But a strong reactionary party wanted to keep the regent and his Christian-baiting in power. All sorts of unbelievable plots were used to bring this about.

Min Saung-ho, for instance, received a richly-carved chest one day with instructions to open it only in the presence of his mother and son. This he did, and as he lifted the lid, a terrific explosion blasted the three of them to death and set fire to the palace.

Eventually one group made the mistake of attacking the Japanese legation. Through a strange tangle of intrigue, finance and fighting, this finally led to Korea's loss of sovereignty, and her inclusion as Chosen in the Japanese Empire.

MAN INTO LEGEND

Answers to quiz on page 55.

1. Tommy-gun, or Thompson submachinegun.
2. Maverick, after Samuel A. Maverick of Texas.
3. Plimsoll mark or line, after Samuel Plimsoll. (Belatedly, the U.S. law called for a load-line in 1930.)
4. Royal coachman.
5. Sam Browne belt.
6. McClellan saddle.
7. Marconi rig. My guess: Mast is so tall that the cross-pieces bracing it with the wire stays may suggest a radio antenna. If anybody knows the true reason, let's hear about it!
8. Jack Ketch, christened John.
9. Paul Pry.
10. Peeping Tom.

The Case of the Final

Hoard

A huge treasure hidden by the Nazis to finance another war gives Quest, Inc., its most important and exciting task.

by Gordon Keyne

IT has often been asked how Quest, Incorporated, so quickly became influential and famous, in those troubled days at the close of the war in Europe and after.

The world, you will remember, was then in frightful turmoil; peace had brought its problems no less than war. Quest, Incorporated, was instituted to search for persons missing in those vast migrations of slave-labor, of racial persecutions, of mass killings mounting into the millions.

Steve Luring, president of the organization, was just out of the Army; he had been a Fortress pilot, was unmarried, and really started Quest on a shoestring, gathering a few of his Army friends as operatives. It was Luring himself, however, who really put Quest on its feet with the case of the "Three Zeros"—a case so big, so stained with blood and horror, so fateful historically, that it had to be kept secret. . . .

After Berlin was taken and prostrate Germany occupied, a visitor sat in Luring's office—a General close to the head of Army Intelligence, and a man who had known Steve Luring well in France and beyond.

"Steve, I have something for you," said the General, eying Luring's rather hard features with approval.

"That's fine," said Luring. "We need business."

"Every Intelligence service in the world is working on this thing," the

General told him. "I have a tip and am working on it. I'll pass the tip to you—I believe in your abilities, Steve. We can use all the help we can get, for the common good."

"Business comes first," said Luring warily.

The General grinned.

"Sure, but you're a gambler. This is the biggest gamble ever was, Steve. The Nazis are crushed, yes; but extermination was impossible. For a long time they were planning on the Third World War—planning a gigantic underground existence. They were smashed before these plans could be completed. They were hunted down and scattered, but many of them got away. Some of their big shots have never been found."

"Quite a few, I hear, used plastic surgery to change their appearance and their identity," said Luring. "There have been rumors that the gang is not so scattered as was first thought, and that they still aim at a revival."

"Such a revival is a threat to the whole world," said the General gravely. "Some of those rats did escape, Steve; and they do plan a comeback. Their careful planning, their devilish ingenuity and infernal crafty schemes, depend ultimately on just one thing: finances. They cached money, stocks, loot, all over the world, and much of that has been located and recovered. Some has not."

Luring could almost guess what was coming now.

"You don't want me in G-2, do you?" he snapped.

"I do not," replied the General. "We'll give you any assistance possible, but I want you to be entirely on your own. The Nazis have their own organization, which has fought us and the British and the French for years. I don't say we have traitors in our ranks, but certainly we have leaks. I think only an outside man can take the jackpot in this game."

"Okay, I'm it," said Luring.

THE General nodded.

"Fine! We know certain things, Steve. Over a goodish period of time, the Nazis have been making preparations, and their financial preparations have been made on a gigantic scale. Not gold, nor securities, nor industries; but jewels, gems of all kinds, in most incredible quantities. They looted the Jews of Europe before killing them. They looted every subject—and allied—nation. Some of the bigshots looted for themselves on the side; but individuals, firms, museums, all were looted of jewels for the cause of the third war—a financial backlog that could be easily and universally negotiated by chosen agents was desired. With the funds thus available, all their devilish plans could be carried out."

"You mean such a fund was actually established?"

"Yes. So much, no more, we know. A treasure beyond imagination; a treasure so vast as to be worth billions. Where? Hidden in some spot known only to the ringleaders, of course. In gold, such a treasure would be bulky. In jewels, some tens of thousands of them, perhaps, easily disposable—hidden perhaps in more than one spot; divided, against risks. We do not know. Of course, jewel-markets can be watched, but any watch can be evaded."

"You spoke of a clue." Luring's hard, dark eyes were glittering. "Eh?"

"No; a tip," corrected the other, with a regretful shake of the head. "Among the prisoners we took at the Rhine crossings was a colonel, an important man, a high S.S. leader. He died the other day from pneumonia, in one of our western prison-camps. In delirium he muttered certain puzzling phrases. Here's a translation."

The General handed a card to Luring, who scanned it and looked up.

"Aren't you kidding yourself?"

"Perhaps. Will you take over the job? I can offer you only expenses for three months—plus a million-dollar fee, if you succeed. Otherwise, only expenses for that period."

Luring smiled. "You said I was a gambler. I'd like a look at the country our Armies fought over and that I bombed the hell out of, yes. It's a deal, General. You get me a passport and transportation by air."

"To where?"

Luring tapped the card. "Didn't this give your people any idea?"

"Hell, no! You mean you found something—"

"Check it; I'm not telling you a competitor all I know—just yet!" Luring chuckled at the amazed face of his visitor. "You've missed a bet; I've found it. May mean nothing. So get me transportation to—say, The Hague, for a starter. And tell me what has been so far unearthed: you Intelligence people must be working on some sort of theory."

"On any and all sorts—French, British, our own—and none of them worth a tinker's dam," said the other half-angrily. "We've got nowhere. This is something only a few Nazi leaders would know. We've consulted gem experts. Pearls are fragile; other gems are not. Even in tens of thousands, they might be concealed in a steamer-trunk. Perhaps in Germany or Austria, perhaps not. Perhaps in a bank vault, perhaps in a railroad station checkroom. You can see the hopeless possibilities."

"Quest, Incorporated, doesn't acknowledge any such paradox as hopeless possibilities, my dear General," said Luring. "If it did, we'd go out of business. With a million dollars' capital, I can make this company into a world-wide business! I'll be ready to leave in three days. How many people know that I'm in the game?"

"Two. You and I. You're a private citizen, not a Government operative."

"That's the best news I've had yet. Thanks. Get your million ready, General."

"One minute, Luring: There can be no kickback! This Nazi colonel is supposed to have escaped. His death hasn't been announced to anyone; a bit irregular, but pardonable, under the circumstances."

AFTER the visitor departed, Luring picked up the phone and summoned Dick Jacobs, a pilot of his old bomber command and a friend of long standing, now an operative for Quest.

Jacobs shortly appeared; he was darkly saturnine, hollow-cheeked; he never wasted words.

"As I recall," said Luring, "your people were Dutch and you still sling the lingo very handily, Dick. . . . Amsterdam Dutch, Rotterdam Dutch, Potsdam Dutch or the other damn' Dutch?"

"Leyden," came the laconic reply.

Luring nodded.

"Good. Do you recall, some place in Holland, a town named the Duke's Forest?"

"No."

"Neither do I. But I've studied those damned briefing-charts too much to be mistaken. The name sticks in memory, Dick. It's connected with Holland. That's a translation, of course. What would it be in French? Bois—"

The eyes of Jacobs flew wide. "Oh! Bois-le-Duc! But 'forest' is not a correct translation. Bois-le-Duc is the French name of ''S Hertogenbosch,' or ''S Bosch,' meaning the Duke's Park or Wood—"

"Blessings on you, barefoot boy!" exclaimed Luring in delight. "Some guy translated this from the German and made it 'forest.' No wonder the clue escaped everybody! Maybe it was deliberate and meant to escape 'em at that! Bois-le-Duc, of course."

"Population thirty thousand. Capital of North Brabant," said Jacobs.

"Thank you. Get yourself across the Atlantic and go to The Hague."

"Now?"

"Tomorrow or next day. I'll follow. Get us hotel rooms somewhere; leave a note for me at the airport with the address. Now, attention: Get all the dope possible on Bois-le-Duc and particularly on seals. There's some connection and we must have it."

"So you expected me," she said in English. Luring gestured to his sketch and the three circles.

"Trained seals?" queried Jacobs. "Or wild ones?"

"Search me. You find out."

"Encyclopædia Britannica," suggested Jacobs.

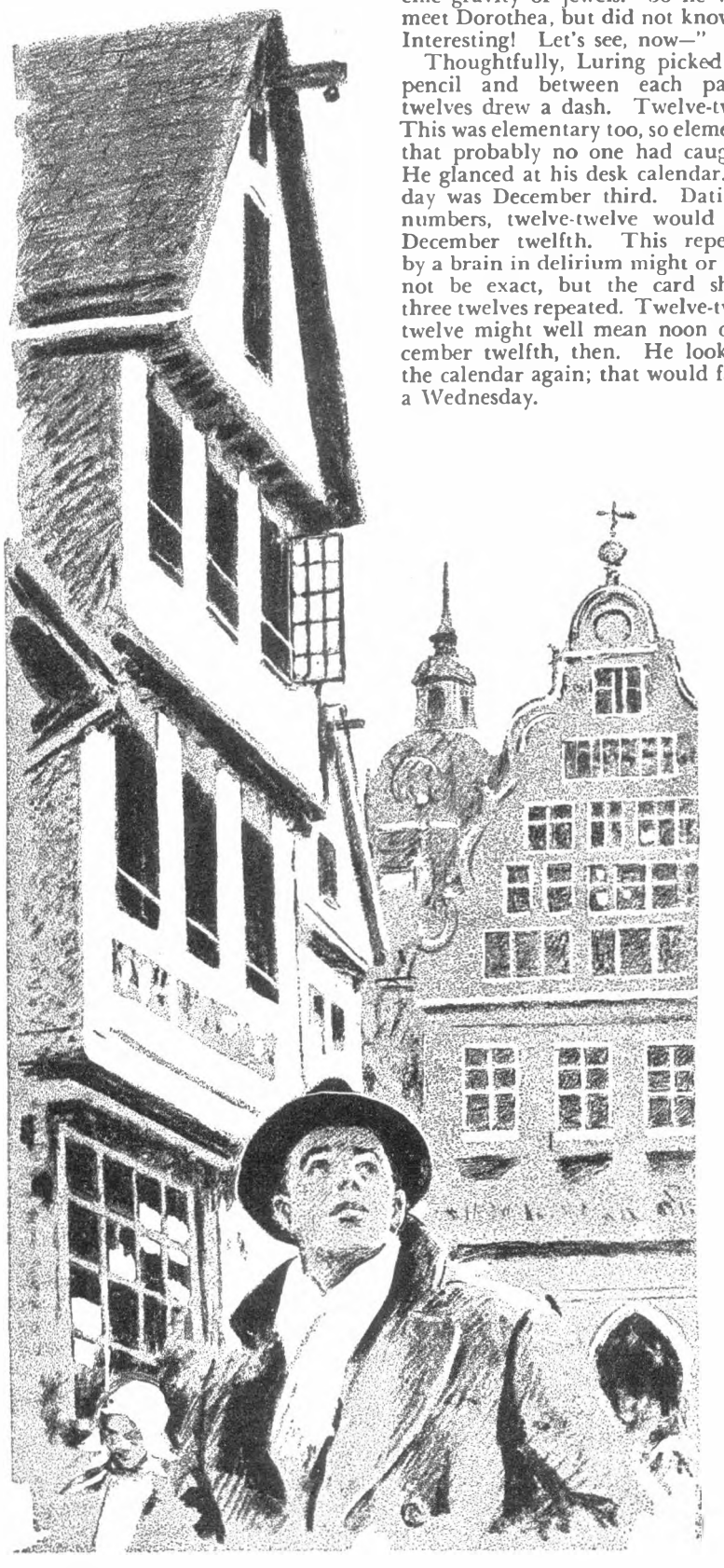
"Nope. It's Dutch information I want, not British. Get going."

Jacobs shrugged and departed. Steve Luring lighted a cigar, cocked his feet on the desk, and proceeded to study the card on which were typed, in English, the mutterings of the delirious Nazi colonel. These made no apparent sense. They had been uttered at odd moments and were here grouped:

They depend on me, they depend on me. . . . It is now impossible. . . . The Duke's Forest, twelve twelve twelve twelve. . . . I cannot do it, I am a prisoner. . . . Dorothea at Seal 1213, yes, twelve twelve twelve. Zero, zero, zero, that is the hope of all, the third zero. . . . *Ach*, Dorothea! I have come for it, I have come from so far! Who are you, Dorothea? The Duke's Forest, yes; I am the one you are to meet, the third zero! I say seven carats and a fraction! You cannot deceive me. I am a better jeweler than you, swine! I know my business; it is a shade over seven carats. You should never use Sonstad's solution, for it poisons the skin. Use methylene iodide, which is better. . . . I am so ill! I cannot be there . . . twelve twelve twelve, yes, I understand perfectly, my Fuehrer. I am faithful; you may depend on me. At Seal 1213, yes. . . . The unknown Dorothea. . . . *Ach, Gott!* These American swine hold me so far away. . . . It is impossible.

There the mutterings ended.

"Zero, zero, zero!" murmured Luring. "The third zero! It means something. And he repeats the word twelve; it is never alone. H'm! It's elementary deduction that he was an expert in precious stones. Sonstad's



He must warn Dorothea at the earliest possible moment.

solution is used to determine the specific gravity of jewels. So he was to meet Dorothea, but did not know her? Interesting! Let's see, now—"

Thoughtfully, Luring picked up a pencil and between each pair of twelves drew a dash. Twelve-twelve! This was elementary too, so elementary that probably no one had caught it. He glanced at his desk calendar. Today was December third. Dating by numbers, twelve-twelve would mean December twelfth. This repetition by a brain in delirium might or might not be exact, but the card showed three twelves repeated. Twelve-twelve-twelve might well mean noon of December twelfth, then. He looked at the calendar again; that would fall on a Wednesday.

Wednesday, December 12th, at noon —to meet with someone named Dorothea at Seal 1213, in Bois-le-Duc. This meant something but revealed nothing; Luring, however, was now convinced that he had hit upon one meaning of the mutterings. Seal 1213 might even be a street.

"It's attractive guesswork, but no more than that." He pocketed the card and resumed his cigar. "I'd say that we have found a clue—to what? Well, to Dorothea anyhow. Zero, zero, zero, that is the hope of all! Queer words, those. What's the third zero? No cipher expert could make anything of this mess, because it's not a code, just something that certain people understand, and most don't—and I don't! Well, if I can meet up with Dorothea a week from Wednesday, I'll be good. Wait and see, gal."

He tucked the problem away in his mind and began to prepare against his coming trip, which would leave Quest, Incorporated, momentarily without a guiding mind.

At this time, practically at the war's end, Quest did not have the remarkable world-wide organization that has grown up in the past few years. The system of world-communication as we know it today in the air age, was in its infancy. While overnight flights to Europe had become commonplace during the war, civilian travel was still so hedged by priorities that it was most uncertain, although western Europe had long since found peace.

LURING, however, received his passage direct to Croydon, thence by connecting plane to The Hague, where he landed late in the morning of the seventh, having luckily encountered no winter gales to delay him. The day was crisp, cold, bracing, and he was in high spirits as he found a note from Jacobs awaiting him. It merely said to come to the Hotel Bellevue near the park, so he took a taxi thither.

The city had not suffered greatly from Nazi occupation, and except in the faces of the populace, the Dutch had long ago wiped out all vestiges of war. American tourists were lacking, but Luring found plenty of English and Russians and Swedes in evidence. A brisk air of business pervaded the city. The Dutch were reconstructing not only their homeland but their colonial empire, and were going about it with a will.

When Luring walked into the room, Jacobs rose from a clutter of books, clippings and guide-booklets.

"Sorry I didn't know when to meet you, Steve," he said. "I only reached here last night. All the dope in the world on 'S Hertogenbosch, or Bois-le-Duc."

"Let it wait. I'll unpack and shave, and after a good lunch we can buckle

down to business. Thank heaven the Dutch like to eat!"

Half an hour later they sat at a table in one corner of the dining-room. Here, for the first time, Luring acquainted Dick Jacobs with the object of their journey and gave him the card to read.

"I called you in," he concluded, "because I'll need help. Also, I don't know Dutch, and you do. See what you make of the ravings on that card; then we'll destroy it."

THIS was done when they were back in the room. Jacobs had a shrewd head but could make nothing of the transcription of the mutterings; he nodded solemnly when Luring explained his theories.

"Sounds fairly probable," he granted. "And you're going to meet the fair Dorothea, eh?"

"Maybe. Have you tied up the mysterious 'Seal 1213' with the town?"

"Not a chance. I've been through everything on the subject. No trained or wild or housebroke or juggling seals. No seals at all."

"Couldn't it be a street address?"

"No. I thought of that myself. Tourist literature on this town is rare."

"Read aloud everything you've got on the place. I'll listen."

Jacobs grimaced, and began to read everything he had collected on Bois-le-Duc, while Luring paid attention. A droning hour passed; then Luring suddenly sat up.

"Hey, wait! You're skipping."

"Sure. Just the contents of a museum or two—"

"Read everything! Even the ads!"

Jacobs began to obey, then stopped. "Luring, darned if you don't win! Here, read this for yourself—and I've skipped it half a dozen times! Here's the sentence." He handed over a tourist guidebook, and Luring glanced at the paragraph indicated.

It read:

"*The Gemeentelyk Museum, in the upper floor of the Raadhuis, contains old plans of the town, the silver seals of the chief magistrates from 1213 to 1795—*"

"Holy smoke! We've got it!" broke out Luring. "What's a Raadhuis, anyhow?"

"Oh, a municipal building, sort of."

"Okay." Luring rose. "Let's circulate, find us a drink, and inquire about trains. I'm gambling that our Nazi colonel had orders to meet this Dorothea in front of that seal of 1213, at noon on the twelfth—five days from now. And since we're getting into the Nazi spy stuff, when we reach Bois-le-Duc we'd better separate. No telling what may happen."

"If anything," Jacobs added skeptically.

Luring was more than delighted by his own guesswork, but he did not dignify this by name of sagacity. It was all a long chance, a gamble. He might be far wrong.

The trains of Holland, thanks to war destruction, flooded polders and blown-up dikes, were shabby ghosts of the past. Next day Luring and Jacobs went chugging slowly but surely through blasted Rotterdam, whose war-wounds were still sadly evident, and ancient Dort, then eastward to Bois-le-Duc—or 'S Hertogenbosch—at which place they alighted and separated. The Hague hotel had already obtained accommodations for them by wire.

Jacobs went to the Lion d'Or, and Luring, who had already decided on his course, to the small but new Hotel des Anglais. He had some talent for drawing, and here he represented himself as an English artist spending a few days on vacation. He learned there were many tourists here, and artists were a drug on the market, since the town possessed one of the finest cathedrals in Holland.

On Monday he betook himself to the Raadhuis, mounted to the museum on the upper floor, and spent some time looking over the cases of musty relics, particularly the unattractive old seals of the magistrates. He found that the museum closed each day promptly at noon. He spent the afternoon buying what he needed to support his rôle, and in watching the gay marketplace, where the stalls had awnings even in winter.

Tuesday morning saw him back at the little upstairs museum. Here he readily arranged to install his portable easel for the purpose of sketching the view from a certain window—close to the case of silver seals. He got his sketch started, and at noon perforce quit work. It was too cursed cold for such business, as a matter of fact, and he thanked the gods that he was not an artist in reality. There had been almost no visitors at all.

Wednesday dawned clear and cold. Fortified by a flask of schnapps in his pocket, Luring went to work about eleven. He was anxious and intent. Under the circumstances there could be no possibility of error if anyone did show up here; but as the time passed he began to lose hope. Either his conjectures were right, or he must begin all over again at loose ends—either this obscure place had long ago been appointed as a future rendezvous for Nazi agents, or it had not. Dorothea was of course a woman's name. She might come, she might be dead—anything was possible. . . .

Eleven-thirty came and passed; the room remained empty. Luring worked away competently at his sketch. Bells and carillons, omnipresent in Holland, announced noon with strident clangor; not a soul had appeared. Luring's tension relaxed. Failure, then! Well—

His heart leaped. Here appeared the old caretaker, volubly protesting—probably that the place was due to close—to a woman beside him. She was intent on the showcases. She was slender, neatly but shabbily attired; a veil fell over her features. Her woolen suit showed at the lapel a pin bearing the Swiss cross. She was Swiss, then?

Luring's arm went out. On the blank space below his sketch, he swiftly drew three circles, one inside another. Why thus, he could not tell; it was pure impulse to make them concentric. The young woman halted beside him; his easel stood in the way. He caught a breath of fragrance and turned, with a smile.

"Ah, perfume! This place needs it. 'Perfume Dorothea', if I'm not mistaken."

She pushed up her veil and looked at him; they stood face to face, the caretaker still spitting out guttural Dutch. She was blue-eyed, unsmiling, with high cheekbones and curving, unplucked eyebrows. Her lips were half parted as though in slightly shocked surprise at his audacity. Luring himself was definitely astonished by her expression; it was of delicate, ethereal loveliness and gentle sweetness. Positively an angel!

"SO you expected me," she said in English. He gestured to his sketch and the three circles. A faint smile touched her face—faint, enigmatic, shadowy. "I see: zero, zero, zero! Yes. But your name?"

"That lies outside my orders," he replied. "I am Steve Luring, an Englishman, an artist."

"Oh, I thought your clothes were American," she said. This evidence of nonangelic shrewdness brought him abruptly to his senses. "Very well. Meet me in half an hour at the Maison Verte café. The place is closing; we must get out. *Entendu?*"

"Understood," he repeated, and managed a short, Prussianlike bow from the hips.

She dropped her veil and left the place, to the vast relief of the old caretaker. Luring folded up his easel and abandoned it, in some confusion.

It was impossible: this slip of a girl could not be one of that infernal Nazi crew! Why, she was goodness and light personified! Ordinarily, Steve Luring was tough-minded, even cynical, but he had seen plenty of Nazis. He knew the look of those adamantine faces, those eyes that lacked a soul, and he could cope with such fanatics. But this girl assuredly had not been raised in the bestial Nazi

school, giving he y to any who asked, knowing n rals, no ideals, no higher thing than Party service.

"She's not that type, unless I'm badly fooled," he told himself. "She may be some hostage earning freedom, or some go-between—but no. All this affair must have been arranged long ago, far in advance. They'd play safe. Dammit, it's got me guessing—or at least *she* has!"

Before leaving the museum he used the telephone to call Jacobs, who was awaiting the call at his hostelry.

"Hello, Dick! Everything okay," he said jubilantly. "I'm meeting a dame at the Maison Verte café, wherever that is. You'd better pick her up there and tail her, or us."

Chapter Two

INQUIRING his way, Luring found that the appointed rendezvous was the café of a very antiquated little hotel, blue with tobacco smoke, comfortably filled with warmth-seeking Hollanders, and clacking with tongues. He secured a table at one side, and five minutes later she joined him. Her greeting was smiling, intimate; they might have been old friends.

Food and wine was ordered. It came and they attacked it, chatting of current events. Luring left the first move to her, watching her very closely. She was not, he decided exactly fragile. She ate heartily. She had a superb figure. Now and again he caught an odd light in her blue eyes that disquieted him, like the chill glint of sun on ice, yet she was low-voiced and charming in every way.

She refused coffee. He ordered another bottle of wine, and they sat sipping it.

"Do you know," she asked quietly, "that a very sharp watch is being kept for any large market-offering of jewels?"

"That was to be expected," he replied. He knew he was on the scent at last.

"Then how do you expect to handle the matter?"

Luring thought fast. He was supposed to be a gem expert, of course.

"I've made arrangements; trust me for that. I'll operate in Geneva and Paris myself, and certain Americans will contact me. The offerings will attract no attention. Much depends upon the source of supply. Not here?"

"No. Walcheren. We must leave—" Without change of expression, she broke off, then continued softly: "Careful! We're being watched. The man alone, behind you."

Luring's thoughts flew to Jacobs, of whom he had seen nothing, but he made no attempt to turn and look. Instead, he deliberately switched chairs and took the one at Dorothea's right, thus getting a view of the person she had mentioned. A breath of relief escaped him; the man was not Jacobs but a stranger—a man of about forty with mustache and clipped beard.

"A Russian," murmured the girl. "Since the war they've all taken to growing hair on their faces, trying not to look Russian. This is bad—very bad!"

To Luring's surprise, she was alive with apprehension. Her fingers played nervously with her wine-glass, her blue eyes were uneasy, pallor had stolen into her cheeks.

"Then you know him?"

"I've seen him frequently, yes," she said. "You see, I have been here a month and more; I occupy an apartment that we have used for a long time. He is in the same building. Evidently the place is suspected. Now you too will be under suspicion. It is too bad; I'll be punished."

"Don't be absurd," said Luring.

She turned wide eyes upon him.

"But you are the one person who, above all, must not be suspected! It does not matter if they know me. We have bungled; all because that cursed museum closed at noon!" Her breath was coming rapidly, color lifted again in her face, and her eyes glittered. "You, more than any of us, must remain free and at work! Those are the imperative orders. Now I'll have to act, and act quickly, changing all plans. That man has seen you meet me. He must be silenced at once, before he can report about you! The third circle, Steve, the zero that holds hope and destiny, the zero of tomorrow—don't you see? All is at stake now! Tell me, quickly, where you're stopping."

Luring gave his hotel and room number. To his surprise, she rose.

"I'll phone you there at five this afternoon," she said, and departed abruptly.

The bearded man called his waiter and also departed. Luring sank back into his chair, alert for Dick Jacobs, but of him he saw nothing whatever. "Dammit!" he said, then lit a cigar and shifted his thoughts to Dorothea.

Indeed a lovely creature; not so innocent, perhaps, as he had fancied at first glimpse, but magnetic and alive with personal charm. Well, he had made contact, by gad! He had achieved what no one else even imagined possible. The Nazi hoard was hidden somewhere near Walcheren, the coastal island that had seen such terrific fighting when Antwerp had been retaken. She would lead him to it or put him in touch with it; this was obviously her business here. She did not suspect him—in fact, she was highly concerned about his safety—though she would probably want some further proof of his status before going much farther. . . .

"Luring, I think, is the name—formerly of the joint bomber command. How are you, old chap?"

Startled, Luring glanced up, then rose with a quick glad exclamation and gripped hands with Randolph Cecil. In those final days of the war, Cecil had been liaison officer with the Britain-based squadron. He was himself a flyer and the scion of a great English family.

"To think of seeing you here, of all places!" Luring exclaimed. "Sit down—have a snifter. How's everything?"

Cecil eased into a chair. Thin-nostriled, handsome, with a heavy-lidded gaze, he regarded Luring with an odd intentness.

"No drink, thanks. Can't stop a moment, but had to give you a view-halloo!" he said.

"You're out of the service, of course?"

"Out of one service, and popped into another for my sins." Cecil paused for a slow instant. "Y'know, Luring, this meeting isn't exactly coincidence. Sorry I can't be frank about it. I'd go a long way to fight square with you."

"Oh!" said Luring, his brows lifting. "All right; no questions. Glad to meet up with you under any circumstances, old man."

"Same here—with reservations. . . . Stunning creature you had with you. Where'd you pick her up?"

"On the fringes of paradise," replied Luring, smiling.

CECIL shook his head.

"Not hardly, my son. Dangerous angel, that: most dangerous angel in Europe, by gad! Jolly good thing she put off. You leave her alone! Mind my saying so?"

"Not a bit: I believe in free speech, and appreciate the warning." Luring was suddenly on his guard. "I'm here on a holiday; not likely to meet her again. Why she skipped out so hurriedly, I don't know."

"Know where her diggings are?"

"No, I don't." Luring said honestly. "Do you?"

Cecil eyed him sharply. "Eh? Perhaps. She'll not be on the loose for long, I can tell you. I see you get the idea; a friendly warning to sheer off."

"Never fear; I don't want my holiday spoiled."

"Right." The Englishman rose and put out a hand. "Happy landings and all that. Glad I could prompt you a bit."

"Thanks again. I'm at the Hotel des Anglais, in case you feel like dropping around for a chin."

"Yes, I know." With a nod, Cecil stalked away. Luring called his waiter, paid his bill and departed without

haste, stifling his inner excitement with hot curses.

Secret service or something of that sort, and not coincidence, eh? Perhaps Cecil was keeping an eye on Dorothea. Perhaps there had been a leak in Washington. But why had Dick Jacobs failed him?

SO Dorothea was known to English agents. Most dangerous woman in Europe? That was all bosh. "She'll not be on the loose for long"—then Cecil or his crowd must be on the point of pinching her! Confound it, that must be stopped somehow. At this juncture, of all times, Dorothea must be left free and unhindered!

"If they grabbed her now it'd be a calamity for me," Luring reflected, as he strode through the narrow, crooked streets. He cursed Jacobs anew for not showing up. "She lives somewhere here, in a place used by Nazi agents: she might well have been afraid of that! The Russian had his eye on her; so have others, no doubt. By gad, she must be high in Nazi circles, certainly! And I can't reach her, can't warn her in order to assure my own schemes of success. Five o'clock may be too late. . . . Dammit, I'd like to break Dick's neck!"

In extremely bad humor, he regained his hotel and went to his room. He had not been there ten minutes when a visitor was announced. Dick Jacobs walked in, his face aglow.

"What cheer, Steve?"

"None, damn you! Why didn't you show up to tail that girl?"

"Eh?" Jacobs gave him an astonished look. "I did."

"Not! I was watching for you."

"Oh, I've read detective books! Would I crab the game by sticking around in plain sight? Not me! So I nearly froze, waiting across the street—"

Luring caught his arm. "For the love of Mike! Did you follow her?"

"Sure. A beehive joint in the Nieuestraat, a toy-market, and adjoining that is her joint."

"In the Nieuestraat? What number?"

"Wake up; you're in Holland, not Brooklyn. Well, it's a creaky old house with faded red and blue front doors. The *beneden* is hers, and that's the left-hand door. It even has her name on a card: the Widow Ruysdael, seamstress—"

"Wait, wait! What in hell is a *beneden?*"

Grinning, Jacobs explained the Dutch house system. Of the two front doors, one led to the *boven*, or upper house, the pleasant and light upper floors; the other led to the *beneden*, the rather dismal and cheaper and smaller ground floor. Comprehending at last, Luring flung his arms

"How did you find this place?" she broke out in German.

around the lanky Jacobs and hugged him.

"Hey! Have you gone Hollywood?" protested the startled Jacobs. "Don't kiss me!"

"I might at that. No time to explain now." Luring scooped up overcoat and hat. "What's the house number?"

"I tell you again, this aint Brooklyn! It's next to the toy-market in the Nieuestraat. You better lay off. Another guy's ahead of you; he came home with her. Picked her up somewhere—a guy with a beard."

"The hell with him! I'm off. You sit tight here—wait for word from me."

He was gone, slamming the door after him. Russian or no Russian, he had to reach Dorothea: his excitement and hurry had died down into quiet resolution. She had skipped out to keep him from being noted down as her companion and possible accomplice. But she knew nothing about Cecil. English, and no doubt Dutch, agents were extremely anxious to get hold of her. . . .

Bois-le-Duc had no taxicabs, but canals in plenty. As he strode along, asking directions at shops with "English Spoken" signs, Luring's mind remained busy with the situation. If he hoped to accomplish his own mission, he must warn Dorothea at the earliest possible moment, not for her sake but for his own.

Even were Cecil right, even were she dynamite, he must still warn her. This, more than all else, would serve to establish him as the Nazi he was supposed to be. She had the secret that half the world was so desperately seeking—and he had it almost in sight!

"Let the Russians or the British or the Siamese get her, for all I care—after she has spilled the beans to me!" thought Luring. "And until then she's a damned pretty girl, the most charming girl alive, and hanged if I'll forget it! Virtue may be its own reward, but not for Steve Luring, by gad!"

He located the toy-market and went on to the adjacent house with the faded red and blue street doors. He went to the left-hand one. Yes, there was the card of the *Widow Ruysdael, Seamstress.* He seized the knocker and pounded lustily. After a moment, a slit in the door opened; he heard a gasp. The latch clicked. He shoved the door open, stepped inside, and shut it again.

She stood there staring at him—a shawl about her shoulders, hair tumbled, and under the shawl nothing much but a pink slip.

"How did you find this place?" she broke out in German.

"Hush!" Mindful of his rôle, Luring reproved her in English. "I congratulate you on the costume; it's charming, and so are you."

Confusion seized her. "Oh, I forgot! Well, no matter. The dress had to be washed. But why this visit? How did you find me?"

LURING was looking past her into a dark living-room. He saw a man's hat and gloves on the table.

"I must see you at once, privately," he said in a low voice.

"Very well. What is it?"

"I said privately."

She laughed lightly. "My friend, we're alone. You may speak freely."

"I'm not a fool," he snapped in German, but under his breath. "I risked much to come here, to warn you. A man does not leave hat and gloves when he departs!"

"Oh!" She glanced over her shoulder, then shrugged. "Very well. I risked much to save you, also! Go in, if you must. I still say that we are alone. You'll see why I had to wash my dress, imbecile!"

He passed her, stepped into the room beyond, and came to a quick, dead halt.

A man sat on a divan that stood against one wall, his head fallen back; he was the bearded Russian of the café. That lolling head, those outflung, still hands, shocked Luring with the truth, even before he was aware of the crimson tide welling from the knife-wound in the breast, spreading down across knees and couch and carpet. On the divan were strewn objects and money, evidently from the dead man's rifled pockets.

Dorothea stood watching him. In the revealing pink slip, her high-breasted, slender shape stood clear. Her poised, alert silence, her limpid eyes, her features of serene purity, were startling. She wore a baffling expression; it was almost a smile, the smile of La Joconde. Luring turned to her and met that searching, enigmatic look with incredulity.

"He's dead! But how—you could not—"

"Nonsense. You have imagination; use it," she said tartly. "He is silenced; that's what matters. How did you find me? I didn't tell you."

"The British Intelligence Service did."

With an effort, Luring wrenched himself into his rôle, forcing himself to disregard the situation, her striking beauty, the implications of the bloody dress that was being cleansed. It took real effort. She held him spellbound. The commanding appeal of sex that emanated from her like an actual force, drew at him; but he resisted.

"You forget that I'm English, well known, securely established," he went on. "Some time after we separated, I met a British agent whom I know. He spoke of you. You're to be arrested immediately. I had to risk all and come, to warn you."

THE blue eyes widened slightly. She reached out, caught his hand, and pressed it quickly, warmth flooding into her face.

"Good comrade!" she said softly in German. "And now—what?"

"Stick to English. You know your way around here; I don't. Take command."

She looked thoughtfully at the dead man; her face showed no repugnance, no horror, no emotion. She nodded slowly.

"Very well. It can be done. There's a westbound train at three-thirty, for Middleburg. We'll get in at midnight, and tomorrow go on. You really would go with me?"

"I must. Orders. And then—" Luring put out his arm and drew her against him, looking into her eyes. "Yes, why not? You're lovely."

"What, you too?" She yielded to him; yet her silvery trill of laughter, expressing surprise and almost contempt, was chilling. "Listen, comrade. I must have a few minutes. You go to the station. Get a first-class ticket; there'll be a first-class coach, but no one else will use it. There's not an instant to waste, either. I'll meet you in the coach."

She pressed against him, lifted her face, and kissed him; like the laugh, her kiss was a chilly, get-rid-of-him caress. Luring nodded, turned, went toward the entrance.

"Right. I'll not even pack my bag. I can phone the hotel to send it—where?"

"The hostel at Domburg," she said promptly. "It's open, even in winter."

Luring opened the door. "See you at three-thirty, then!"

"I hope not," she said, laughing, and the words left him mystified.

He hastened away, fiercely exultant now. With some difficulty, he found an English-speaking shop which directed him both to the station and to a telephone. He phoned his room at the Hotel des Anglais and Jacobs responded.

"Action, Dick! There's been one casualty already and may be more—get it! I'm leaving by a three-thirty train, westbound. You pay for my room, take my bag, and bring it to the hostel at Domburg. Where's that place?"

"Never heard of it, Steve."

"Near Walcheren on the coast, probably. Well, that's all."

"Wait! A Captain Fleuri called, a few minutes ago—Frenchman, he sounded like. Said he'd call back later."

"The hell with him, whoever he is," said Luring. "Follow along tomorrow. No rush. So long."

He struck out for the station; it was quite a walk.

Thought of Dorothea was like a stab. Angelic? Hell! He could well imagine how that Russian had been lured into an embrace of death. Cecil's warning had certainly been well justified! But the thing that made Luring catch his breath was what he had learned.

Domburg! There lay the solution of the riddle, the clue for which half the world was so vainly searching—and he had uncovered it in half a day! He had done well to warn and rescue Dorothea, for she was taking him to the treasure itself. He was the person designated to turn the hoard into cash, obviously. And that slim angel-child, to save him from suspicion, had knifed the Moscow agent like so much cheese.

"Precious darling!" Luring reflected. "I'm supposed to have been an S.S. colonel myself, which is some pumpkins in the organization. She must rank high in the gang! I still can't get over her Mona Lisa smile, with that murdered gent sitting a few feet away. And how I fell for her looks at first! She's a Nazi angel and no mistake. Fine judge of gals, I am!"

As Dorothea had predicted, there were no minutes to waste. The Dutch trains might be a horrible mess of war-worn equipment, but they were running on time at least. Luring got his first-class ticket to Middleburg, found the gates open and the train in, learned the train carried a wagon-restaurant, and hopped aboard. There was one distinctly frowsy first-class coach with not a single frugal Dutch soul in it. He settled down in a compartment.

NO sign of her. He was getting worried when, just as the first guard's whistle sounded, a woman appeared, pausing in the compartment entrance.

"Do you mind if I sit here?" came her quavering voice, in French.

"Yes," he blurted. "No, of course not. Plenty of room." But to himself, he cursed.

She was a trim old gray lady, stooping, walking with a stick, a fur coat flung over her arm. Gray hat, gray hair in neat curls about her temples, a spectacled, deeply lined face of age, and tight-fitting gray wool dress, flat at bust and hips. She entered, put coat and bag on the seat, struck Luring with her stick.

"Wake up, imbecile!" she said—and he understood.

"Good Lord!" he breathed, and laughed to himself.

She sat demurely in a corner, a veil over her lined features. The shrill whistles of the guards resounded, the feeble "toot-toot" of the engine replied, and the stuffy little train of war wreckage began to move. Then suddenly she spoke.

"Watch the corridor! Pull the blinds if anyone comes through. I can't stand it any longer!"

Luring went to the door, not comprehending, but kept an eye on the empty passage and stood ready to pull the blinds if anyone appeared. Then he gasped. Moving rapidly, deftly, she slid off the tight woolen blouse and stripped to the waist. Wide bandages enfolded her breasts, holding them compressed and flat; she loosened the bandage, sighed in relief, and replaced her garments as swiftly as she had doffed them. No one had appeared outside.

"I got them too tight," she commented, in her natural voice. "All well so far. If they were watching the house, they didn't follow me."

"That makeup of yours is magnificent!" said Luring.

"With the veil, it will pass. Tomorrow, I can once more be myself. But we must keep apart. Try the Abbey Tavern at Middleburg. Tomorrow we can get a car and drive to Domburg. The steam tram no longer exists, of course."

"Is Domburg a town?"

"A Roman city sunk under the sea."

She said no more but relaxed. A guard came through, punched their first-class tickets, was very respectful to the old lady, and went his way, promising to reserve places in the wagon-restaurant. After a long while, Luring spoke.

"Our Party chiefs are wonderful men, men of genius, but even they must have been hard put to it, to utilize a Roman city sunk under the ocean! It suggests strange secret things, submarines at work in the dark hours, the kisses of mermaids, the altars of ancient gods!"

Her eyes glinted from behind her veil.

"So you know!" she murmured.

Luring smiled, repressing his sharp wonder.

"Is that so extraordinary?"

"I thought only three living persons knew the secret."

He wondered what the devil he had said to suggest that he knew it. After a moment she sighed.

"Well, marvels never cease! I am glad, after all, that you know. It relieves me of responsibility. Perhaps we had better separate now. I'll take another compartment." She rose and extended her hand. "Good-by for the present. You'll reach Domburg safely. Shall we say, at five tomorrow afternoon?"

"As you like." Luring rose and shook hands gravely. "Where?"

"At the broken column from the temple of the goddess Nehalennia, of course." Her voice expressed surprise at his question.

"What, you too?" Dorothea yielded to him; yet her kiss was a chilly, get-rid-of-him caress.

Chapter Three

LURING saw no more of her. He supped in the restaurant-car; the train swung down to Rossendaal and headed westward through the darkness to Middleburg. He dozed comfortably during the long evening's run, and at Middleburg he found the Abbey Tavern and secured a room.

He lay awake for a long time, vainly grappling with the problem. "The broken column from the temple of the goddess Nehalennia"—it sounded like gibberish; he had never heard of any such goddess. A Roman city under the sea— Bosh! Perhaps he had solved the great problem, but it made no sense to him. The reiterant chimes of St. Nicolas Abbey sent him at last to slumber. Of Dorothea, he had seen nothing further.

Zero, zero, zero! What did those words mean? He woke, thinking of this, in the morning. After breakfast he made inquiries. Domburg? But certainly—a little watering-place on the west coast, ten miles away. It had been wiped out during the savage fighting when the Nazis held the Walcheren islands, so desperately trying to keep the Allies from using Antwerp. He could find out all about it at the Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen—the Zeeland Scientific Institute. The museum had been mauled and looted by the Nazis, but the curator was there.

Luring made his way thither. Walcheren, of course! A bitter name following D-Day, when the Nazis fought savagely and long for every inch of ground along the sand-dunes. The curator at the Institute informed him lengthily, in fluent English, about Domburg.

"It is the name given to a Roman city, now under the sea. The modern village, destroyed in the war, is struggling back to life. At this season—*brr!* It will be freezing there. Of the Roman city are many relics, and from the graves: The altar of the temple (Domburg means the City of the Temple, you know) and other things."

"What temple?" queried Luring.

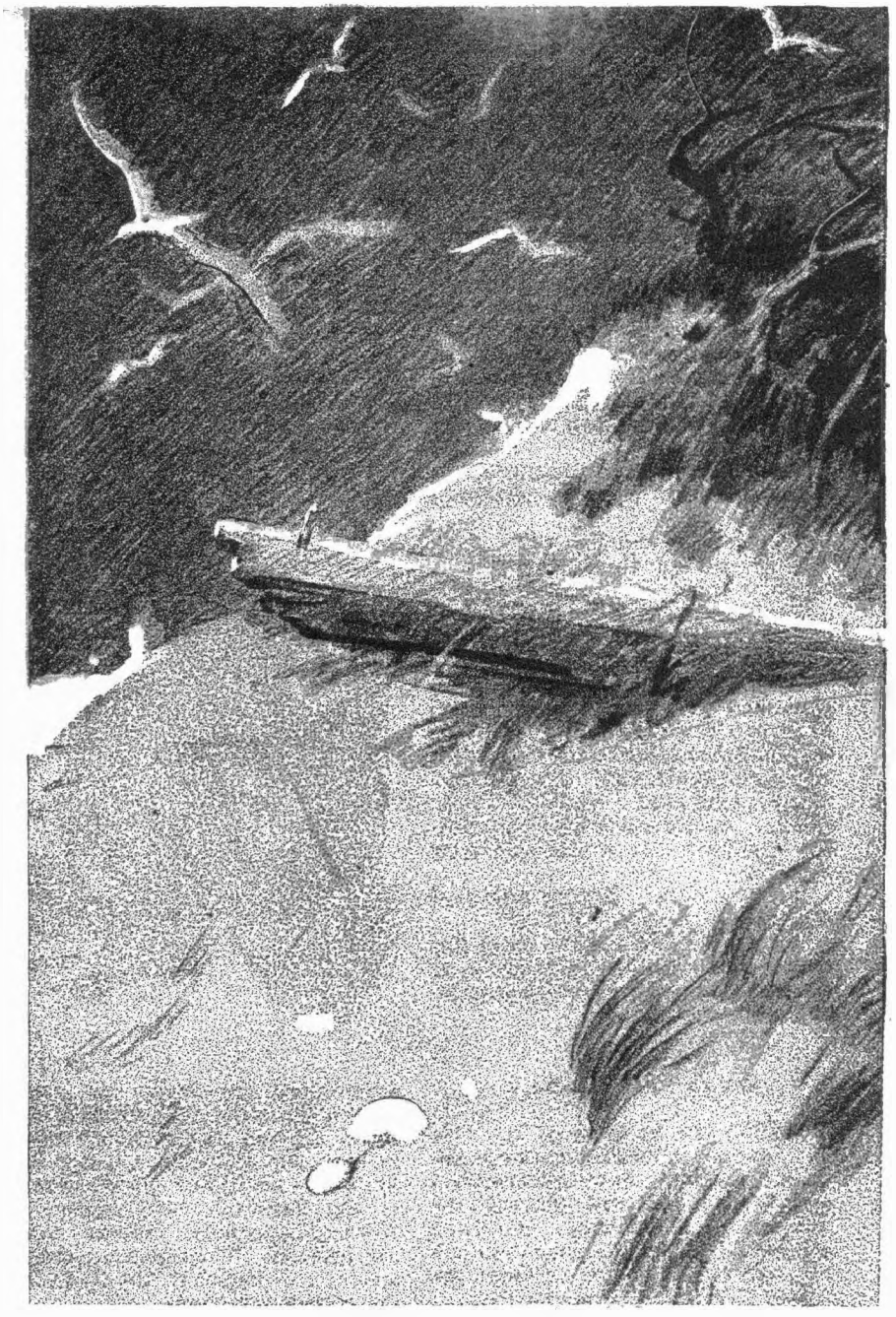
"Of the goddess Nehalennia; the site has been located under the sea. What the name means, I cannot say. But I can give you a map of Domburg which the Institute has published; it shows the locality before the war. Now the farmhouses are burned, the people are scattered. A hostel exists there, however—I think you can find accommodations even in winter."

A broken column from the temple? The curator shrugged; he knew nothing of it. Luring took the sketch-map given him, and went his way.

Evidently Domburg, in December, was neither populated nor pleasant. How to get there was a problem. The tram-lines had been ripped to bits in the fighting. Busses and autos had vanished, as they had everywhere. The hostel provided a man with an ancient, war-weary jeep—not the "beep" of the armed forces, but the true and larger jeep.

He was, he said, already engaged for an afternoon trip to Domburg: would Luring join the party? It comprised a young woman seeking the grave of her husband, killed near there

The sand beneath their feet shuddered to the Atlantic surges on the beach. The evening promised compensations.



in the fighting; a French newspaperman who was writing a war history for his Government; another Englishman, a milord who had fought all over Walcheren with the commandos and was now revisiting the scene.

"Certainly," replied Luring. "You'll pick me up? . . . . Two o'clock. Very well."

It was odd, he reflected over his lunch. The young woman might be Dorothea; neither of the others answered to the description of Jacobs—and visitors to Domburg at this wintry season were assuredly rare.

PROMPTLY at two, the jeep pounded up, and Luring got aboard. There were no introductions. Dorothea was much herself again—fur coat, somber black, heavy black widow's veil. She sat with the driver; the three men sat in the rear seat. Luring eyed his two companions. The Frenchman, a man of forty, was handsome, vivacious, with waxed mustache and a scarred cheek. The other Englishman, cloaked to the eyes in overcoat and muffler, freed his face to light a cigarette; Luring found himself looking at Cecil—who returned his astonished look with a blank stare and silently proffered a cigarette.

"Thanks," said Luring. "It's a bit chilly, what?"

"May warm up a trifle," Cecil retorted significantly; then he spoke in French to the journalist, who chattered along freely, as the jeep got off. The driver struck into the conversation. The roads were abominable; the Nazis had blown up the dikes and half the great island was still under water; there might be snow in a day or two. The coast towns had suffered heavily in the fighting; West Kapelle and Domburg and most of the farms had been burned or shelled to bits. However, the hostel at Domburg could take them all in.

Dorothea said nothing. Cecil sat in dour British dignity. The Frenchman transferred his interest to Luring, who did not rebuff his pleasant, half-expressed curiosity.

"No time for tourists, is it?" Luring responded, chuckling. He was quite aware that the others would be drinking in everything said; it intrigued him wickedly. "No, indeed. Since the war, I've taken up sketching, and I'm doing some illustrations for a book on the campaign here. In its winter guise, the country will look desolate and Godforsaken—that's what is wanted."

"Truly, an idea!" exclaimed the journalist; they were speaking in French, of course. "A book? Why, that is *my* purpose in coming here—you comprehend, I write. I desire to soak myself in the dreary aspect of this dreary coast. The war saw some terrible things happen here, eh?"

"Yes," said Luring. "I knew a man who was in this show. Cecil, his name was. A fine fellow at times, but damned obstinate. Always interfered with others. He was wounded, and interfered with the rescue-party—made no end of trouble. What you call a *mauvais sujet.*"

"All nations have their misfortunes," said the politic Frenchman. "Those English and Canadians who fought here—ah, they were superb! Your friend, was he killed?"

"Unfortunately not," said Luring.

Cecil stared imperturbably at the countryside. . . .

Not a pleasant countryside, for it was largely under water—sea-water, that had killed all the trees and hedges. The seaside villages were scarred by shot and shell or were blackened ruins. The inhabitants had been evacuated, and gigantic pumps were at work; the breached dikes had been patched up, and in another year or two the country would

be clear. Smoke, however, rose here and there in the wintry air to indicate where stubborn Zeelanders had filtered back to their ruined homes.

Domburg appeared ahead—a long, low island of dunes and hedges and trees which the road skirted precariously. Some of the flimsy villas and resort hotels had been burned to the ground; others, like the high water-tower, were ruined by shellfire. A few scattered inhabitants had returned. The hostel, a flimsy new structure, stood on the blackened ruins of an earlier and larger building. Dogs prowled like wolves.

Plenty of reconstruction had gone on here during the summer, said the driver; there would be more next summer. Already there was only a foot or so of water over some of the nearer farms. The hostel people kept the place open because they lived there; most of the inhabitants had not been allowed to return, because German mines were still everywhere. . . .

The hostel people—a man, his wife and two sisters—greeted the arrivals with astonishment and laughter. To think of tourists at this season! Rooms? Plenty of them. Not heated, naturally, but the kitchen and dining-room and parlor had stoves, and wood was plentiful. No one else was here; certainly not Dick Jacobs. But Cecil had two bags, and one of them Luring recognized as his own. . . .

Luring stood in the room assigned him while the women made up the bed and put it to rights. They departed. A moment later came a knock at the door, and Cecil entered.

"Yours, I think," he said, putting down Luring's bag.

"Thanks very much," said Luring. "Sorry I've no small change for a tip."

Cecil closed the door and dropped into a chair, rubbing his hands briskly.

"There it is," she said. "The third zero—the hope of our race!"

"Your pal Jacobs isn't coming," he observed. "He talked—a little."

"So I perceive," said Luring amiably. "It was nice of you to take his place."

"See here, dammit, I warned you!" Cecil eyed him frostily. "Washington has no business sticking its nose into European affairs."

"I've nothing to do with Washington, 'pon my word. Allow me—"

He handed Cecil one of his business cards.

"Quest, Incorporated!" murmured the Englishman. "H'm! Sorry—I happen to know you're here on behalf of Washington. It won't do."

"Thank you, my Lord," said Luring. "Kind of you to permit me to live."

Cecil flushed slightly. "Dammit, we were friends; I liked you. I warned you. Now your pal Jacobs is in jail. I told him I was coming here to meet you—just a stab in the dark. We know there's some mystery or secret about Domburg. He asked me to fetch your bag."

"Again, thanks." Luring smiled. "You wouldn't, of course, have the faintest idea as to the nature of the mystery?"

Cecil eyed him, got out a cigarette, and lit it.

"Y'know, Luring, the Teutonic mind follows old trails, just as the roads of Europe follow the Roman roads. Take this Wagnerian stuff-and-nonsense—*Siegfried,* Rhine maidens, the Nibelungen hoard and so forth. If there was a mythical hoard of the Nibelungs in olden times, it might be repeated. What?"

"Guarded by the three zeros instead of Rhine maidens?" ventured Luring.

Cecil caught his breath.

"God! Then you do know!"

"More than you." Luring's eye was frosty now—very frosty. "You're damned high and mighty; you'd better climb down fast. We're working for a common good. Why not pool what we know and work together? I'm willing. No sense in fighting each other."

"It isn't done offhand, old chap. Sorry. I'll have to get orders."

"I don't. Nor do I take your orders, my boy," said Luring. "That's flat."

Cecil sighed. "A pity! We're not alone, y'know; I'm practically certain this fellow Fleuri is a Belgian or French agent—they've got wind of the thing, too."

The name caught at Luring—the man who, Jacobs had said, had phoned him at the Hotel des Anglais!

"Who's Fleuri?" he inquired carelessly.

"Our French journalist friend."

Luring smothered his astonishment. "All the more reason we should work together, Cecil. When you jailed Jacobs, you declared war. I warn you; this is your last chance, and I hold all the cards. They're at your service. Combine with me, and we split the jackpot."

"Dammit, man, I'd have to get orders to that effect!"

"Then get 'em. Go back to Middleburg, phone or cable London, and return tomorrow."

Cecil shook his head. "You'd like to have me out of the way, eh? Not much. See here, give me just two days—"

"Not two hours. Not two minutes. Yes or no, here and now."

"Sorry. No can do." Cecil rose. "Go on, play with your little widow, and take the consequences! She's put her foot in it by coming here. . . . See you later. They're giving us tea at five o'clock—decent of them."

With a nod, he went to the door and departed.

LURING, still in his overcoat for warmth, dropped into a chair. Confound this mess! So this Fleuri was a French or Belgian agent—and Fleuri had previously tried to contact him! He was probably unaware of Luring's identity, no names having been exchanged in the jeep.

"There was a leak in Washington, sure enough," Luring reflected, uneasily. "And I've a date with Dorothea at four—it's three now. Is she going to take me to the jewel-hoard, with a French and a British agent at our elbows? Not likely. . . . Confound Cecil!"

He drew out the sketch-map of Domburg given him at the Institute, and studied it. No indication here of any broken column from the temple of

Nehalennia—Dorothea had taken for granted that he knew where or what it was. Since this sketch had been made, long before the war, everything had changed.

Farmhouses and village had become blackened ruins. The long Atlantic rollers had probably eaten away some of the dunes and shore. The long hedges planted along the dunes had become trees; Luring remembered the naked wintry branches of the wood they had driven past. And yet, from this dreary winter scene, gray smoke of fires had ascended; people did exist somewhere among these ruins. . . . Oddly, his brain lingered on that wood-smoke, he did not know why.

WHAT a strange and ominous situation, here in this flimsy hostelry! Dorothea, whom he and Cecil knew to be one of the inner council of Nazi arch-devils, one of those few supremely clever, cruel, inhuman black seraphim not yet blasted out of the world; Cecil himself, a British agent; the Frenchman or Belgian, Fleuri, probably a secret agent also. And he, Steve Luring, standing for Quest, Incorporated! Why had Fleuri tried to contact him? That was very strange.

And somewhere hereabouts, in this little bit of blasted, sunken, wintry coastal Zeeland, the great hoard of jewels stolen from half Europe—that second Nibelungen Hoard, so securely hidden away that only three persons knew the secret, that vast hoard of wealth upon which was to be based the Third War, the future resurgence of the infernal Nazi devil-fight against the world!

The paper in Luring's fingers trembled. A flash of comprehension swept his brain; from odd words of Dorothea, of the colonel dying in an American prison-camp and muttering wildly, understanding came to him: *Zero, Zero, Zero!* Circles that meant nothing and everything. The first enclosed the past—yesterday's efforts and mistakes and failure, World War I. The second enclosed today's downward drift from near-conquest of the world, to nothing, the failure of this present war. The third enclosed tomorrow's hopes, from Nazi viewpoints, the future world conquest of which these madmen dreamed.

A symbol, nothing more; the Teutonic mind that insanely used the backward swastika as its emblem, had evolved these three zeros as a new symbol. Luring saw it almost clairvoyantly in this moment, understood it perfectly, as though someone had explained it to him. He tucked away the sketch, stood up, stiff with cold, and glanced at his watch. Ha! He must learn about that broken pillar of column, and meet Dorothea. He had best do that, then get back and contact Fleuri and see what the fellow was after, how he had learned about Luring.

"A leak in Washington, no doubt about that," he told himself, and went down to the kitchen. No one was about in the other rooms. In the warm kitchen he found the proprietor and his wife. They spoke English perfectly, being in the tourist business. Luring dispensed cigarettes and sought information.

He was given the register to sign, and glanced at the other names. Cecil had used his own, Dorothea that of the Widow Ruysdael, and Fleuri had registered from Paris. Luring assigned himself to London.

"I talked to the curator of the Institute in Middleburg," he said, "about the Roman antiquities. He said something about a broken column from a temple. Where is that?"

"Oh, that!" The proprietor, puffing at his pipe, laughed shortly. "They got it from the sea at very low tide, one time. It was set up among the trees on the dunes, half a mile north of here; in summer, it makes a beautiful little spot among the trees. The Germans broke it, though they did repair it, but the swine stole the beautiful brass plate that told of its history."

"It is still there, then?"

"Oh, yes! It outlasted the Romans, and has outlasted the Nazis, and will last forever, no doubt. It is said to be a beautiful piece of marble. You can see where the Boche broke the column from the pedestal, and replaced it with metal clamps."

"I'll go take a look at it. By the way, where are my companions?"

"The little widow went out a moment before you appeared. The others—I don't know. I think the other Englishman went for a walk. I have not seen the French gentleman."

"Oh," put in the proprietor's wife, "he went out to make some notes just after you came. He is writing a book."

"Thank you," said Luring, and buttoning up his coat, he went outside, like the others. But none of them were within sight.

Time was getting on. He was well warmed now, and stepped out briskly to keep his blood in circulation; the wind off the Atlantic was keen. However, he followed the road, and the top of the dunes and the trees there broke the wind very nicely.

Curious, he thought, how everyone seemed to have business here, where there was none! It was odd, also, about the smoke rising from various points where refugees had come back to bleak ruin; still, these Zeelanders were famed for clinging to destruction where their homes had been, a stubborn and unvanquished race. He thought of the Nazi remnants, even now perhaps planning to make a fanatic underground struggle. Undoubtedly more of them remained at large than anyone dreamed—scattered drops of evil and corruption still infecting the world.

Paths wound into the naked, wind-whipped trees and brush that topped the dunes. He saw a couple of shell-craters; the fighting had passed this way. He came to a larger path beside a frozen brook, and turned into it, for he had come nearly half a mile. Barely had the trees closed around him, than he sighted his objective ahead.

In summer, surrounded by verdant green, it must indeed have been a beautiful spot; now it was bleak and desolate like everything around. Beside the brook had been reared a small half-circle of stucco columns. Set in the center of these was a large and massive column of fluted granite—not of marble, as the innkeeper had said—its broken top rising to a height of eight feet.

It was the base of a plinth, some three feet in thickness, and had been one with its pedestal, somewhat larger and ornately carven. Both pedestal and column were water-worn to a beautiful smoothness; the sharp lines of fluting and carving were worn round. The pedestal was set in a square bed of concrete.

Luring lit a cigarette and examined the thing closely. Sure enough, some three feet above the pedestal, at the height of his eye, the column had been broken. A shell had struck it, to judge by the chipped mark of impact. Now a heavy clamp of metal, set deeply in on either side of the column, held the broken shaft firmly in place.

HERE, where the crack ran across, it was evident where the brass plate had been; four shallow holes showed where it had been fastened. And then Luring saw something else: A small circle showed inside those four holes, and outside this a second, and outside this a third—all three very lightly and perfectly scratched in the stone, as by a sharp compass. He started at sight of those concentric circles: their meaning occurred to him instantly: *Zero, Zero, Zero*—the symbol of tomorrow's Nazis who would dominate the world!

He stood before the column, smoking, ruminating. This was the marker. Somewhere near this very spot was the Nazi hoard. All about was sand, easily excavated. And yet—a great fortune, dumped into the sand and left? It scarcely seemed possible, even in this lonely and desolate spot.

He examined the column once more, seeking any further markings that might direct him, but found

none. The portion above the break was relatively small, as compared with the whole.

A step sounded on the hard sand; he turned to see Dorothea.

She came to him with hand extended. Her veil was pushed up; her features, whipped by the keen air, were extraordinarily beautiful.

Luring took her hand and kissed her fingers.

"How wonderful you look! Our seashore excursion is a trifle crowded, eh?"

She smiled, but fear widened her eyes.

"It is terrible! Perhaps it was a mistake to come. That Englishman—he followed me: I have walked miles to throw him off the trail! And I've seen him before, in Bois-le-Duc. He must be an English agent. I am afraid, afraid!"

Luring smiled. "Afraid? You, the brave Rhine maiden, you who moved so efficiently up to now, afraid? Impossible."

"But it is so!" This was true: he could feel her fear. She could knife a man to the heart without a quiver, without an atom of remorse, without a second thought; yet terror was shaking her now, as it had before.

"Have a cigarette and forget it," he said. She accepted; he struck a match. She pulled hurriedly. Her eyes flickered past him and around, then went to the column.

"So there it is," she said. "The third zero—the hope of our race! Do you know that the work was done two years ago? The Fuehrer himself directed the details—but you know as much or more than, I do, of course. The rest is in your hands. My responsibility is ended. The third zero—tomorrow, with its enigmas, its ambitions, its greatness! Well, I put it into your hands."

She opened her fur coat, put a hand to her throat, beneath her dress of black, and brought out a chain on which was hung a key. It was a large key, like that of a Yale lock, but curiously twisted. She put chain and key into his palm.

"We must leave here now, at once!" she went on hurriedly. "There is no time to talk. That Frenchman—I am afraid of him, too! He is another." She put her two icy hands on those of Luring, and looked up at him with the look of an angel. "It is getting dark: I am frozen. Let's get away from here. Tonight at nine, come to my room. It is Number Six, at the end of the passage. I'll leave the door unlocked. Then we can talk, make plans, go into everything!"

Pocketing chain and key, Luring rubbed her hands, warming them. She had not told him the secret as yet; had some cache been built under the sand, to be unlocked by this key? For the moment, he feared to disclose his own ignorance.

"Very well, little one: nine tonight," he said. He wanted very much to kiss those charming lips; instead, he only smiled. So she guessed Cecil to be a British agent! This relieved him of any sense of treachery toward his former friend, now his opponent. "Yes. I, too, take the Englishman to be an enemy. I am not sure about the Frenchman. We'll go into that tonight. They're putting heaters into our rooms. We'll find it comfortable. So let's be getting back."

She buttoned her fur coat, tossed away the cigarette, and they started out toward the road. Darkness was coming down; gray clouds had hidden the sun, the sand beneath their feet shuddered to the Atlantic surges on the outer beach.

"That is the third existing key," said Dorothea under her breath.

Luring was content, as well he might be. She needed no urging. This night he would have the final, the greatest secret from her lips; then, leaving the hoard safely hidden, he could go back to The Hague and cable for instructions. His mission had succeeded.

And, he reflected, the evening promised him attractive compensations for present hardships!

Chapter Four

NINE o'clock. . . . Luring sat in his room, warm now. He had extinguished the candle; there was no electricity here.

Tea had ended the afternoon, supper had succeeded it. Fleuri had returned during tea, voluble and full of silly details he had seen on his long walk—a laughing and cheerful fellow. Dorothea had been watching him covertly during supper. She herself had said little to anyone. Cecil had been wrapped in British hauteur.

"Odd that Fleuri hasn't approached me," reflected Luring. "He must know my name now. He can't guess that I know of his phone call, naturally. H'm! Under that surface polish of his, I'd put him down as a smooth rascal and a damned bad enemy. But what do I care? No matter what happens now, the jackpot's mine."

A pardonable conclusion. With that key in his pocket, at worst the whole sand dune around the broken column could be excavated and the hidden cache turned up, he thought, but that was only a remote contingency.

Nine o'clock and past. The battered old piano downstairs had long since fallen silent. Booted feet had echoed through the place; the hostel was abed. Luring removed his shoes, for he was not anxious to advertise his going, and in his stocking feet he opened his room door. A lusty, reverberant snore came faintly from somewhere. He stepped out into the hall, leaving the door unlatched, since he must return—sooner or later.

He passed down the hall, keeping close to the wall lest the flimsy flooring creak. Number Six was at the far end; he had noted it well and needed no guide in the blackness. His hand touched the door at last. No gleam of light came from beneath it. He groped carefully and found the knob, and turned it. As she had promised, the door was not locked. It opened and he stepped into the room, closing it softly behind him.

"Dorothea!" he said softly. There was no response.

The absolute silence puzzled him; impossible that she should not be here! Then he struck against something and groped for it—a chair, overturned.

Alarm shot through him. He fumbled for matches and struck one: he saw the black-clad figure of Dorothea lying across the bed, arms extended. Asleep? He went to the candlestick on the dresser; the candle had been burned down part way. He lighted it, stepped to the bed, and touched the girl's outflung hand.

It was cold, colder than it had ever been. There was no pulse.

Inexpressibly shocked, hardened though he was, Luring stood looking down at her. The exquisite features were relaxed, peaceful, touched with that shadowy and enigmatic smile of hers. He could not realize at first that she was dead, and had been dead for some time.

Her clothes were in disarray, her dress had been torn open at the throat; her handbag lay open on the bed, its contents tumbled in a heap. Everything in the room was disarranged—drawers were open. Whoever had killed her, had been frantically searching for something. Not money; a pile of silver and paper notes lay by the handbag.

Killed? Yes! Luring bent over her. He took out his handkerchief, and with this gripped the glittering thing that pinned the dress to her left breast. It came out easily; there was no blood—it must have gone straight into the heart. A knitting-needle, filed to a sharp point. He laid it on the bed beside her. It meant nothing to him, except that it had been the instrument of murder.

He could guess the object of that wildly hurried search—the key, now in his own pocket.

From her peaceful look, there had been no struggle. The killer must have stabbed first and searched after-

ward, probably before she divined his intent. It must have happened immediately after supper; she had not lingered downstairs with the others. *The others?* Luring thought back. He had remained there, smoking. Cecil and Fleuri had both been in and out, so far as he could recall. So had the people of the house. The sense of shock passing, his thoughts settled upon Cecil, who had certainly been on her trail.

As though to confirm his idea, something lying on the floor just under the bed caught his eye; he stooped and picked it up: A pencil, long and sharp—a bright yellow pencil; moreover, one of English make. Cecil—was it possible, then? Luring compressed his lips and pocketed the pencil.

He examined the objects dumped from the handbag, shielding his fingers with his handkerchief, though there was scant need to worry about fingerprints. Even should a police investigation take place, which was unlikely these days, no police were closer than Middleburg. Human life had become frightfully cheap, and the killing of a Nazi spy would occasion only a congratulatory curse. Nor, he reflected, would the body be likely to be discovered until sometime tomorrow.

Handkerchief, make-up articles, money, small odds and ends, and her essential papers; that was all. The papers showed her to be the Widow Ruysdael, of Belgian birth; forged papers, no doubt. The killer had not neglected the pockets of her fur coat, which lay flung into a corner of the big wardrobe. Luring looked over this garment and found that it had been purchased in Stockholm; evidently Dorothea had traveled.

Sitting down, Luring smoked until his jangled nerves gradually came back to normal. . . . And now—what?

Regrets were vain. He had in a way achieved his mission, even if the prime essential secret had been thieved from him by death's hand. The logical conclusion, the only one, was that somewhere near or about that broken column of the ancient goddess, search would reveal the hidden hoard—perhaps in a buried strongbox of some sort. To this he held the key.

And yet the obvious importance of the key was puzzling. Anyone could break into a strongbox, so why was the key so damned important? He took it out and examined it closely. It bore no indication; its surface was unbroken, except for a scratched mark—three concentric circles, the three Zeros. It was in no way remarkable. It was quite like the key of his room down the hall, in fact. These hostel keys were not hooked to markers in the American style.

He rose, put the candle on the bed, and made a minute examination for some clue as to the key's purpose. He examined the body, the garments, for a hidden indication, and discovered absolutely nothing. The dead cold hand bore a wedding-ring—perhaps part of her rôle as a widow, perhaps not. Inside or out, it told nothing. His search was fruitless.

Well, his own course was clear enough now: Get to The Hague, cable Washington, contact the proper authorities here, and go to work upon the search itself. But first—yes, first—have a word with Cecil, blast him! Not now, however—in the morning would be time enough; breakfast would be served at eight in the dining-room; there was no room service at this season.

He went to the bed, stooped, and touched his lips to Dorothea's hand. Then he blew out the candle, went to the door, and wiped the knobs with his handkerchief. He stepped outside and closed the door behind him. The hall was still dark and silent, except for that faint snore. Regaining his own room, he turned in.

But he did not sleep—at least, not for a long time.

Chapter Five

BREAKFAST at eight. The three men assembled in the chill dining-room. The morning was dark with cloud and threatening storm. Cecil looked brisk, shaven, a bit offish. Fleuri was gay and effervescent, his features very much alive, his dark eyes sparkling.

"Our charming little widow is not down, eh?" said he. "A warm bed feels good on a cold morning."

Luring extended the pencil he had picked up, to Cecil.

"I found this on the stairs. English make. Yours, perhaps?"

Cecil eyed it coldly. "Not mine, thanks."

Luring glanced at the Frenchman, who smiled and dissented.

"An excellent tool for one who writes books, eh? Think of the words waiting in that long lead! But no, monsieur; pencils are too precious to lose. Keep it as a souvenir of Domburg. It will serve to make sketches, unless your fingers freeze!"

Luring shrugged and pocketed it. Someone was lying—or else some yet unknown factor was concerned. He suspected Cecil's reticence, however, and it angered him.

Breakfast over, Cecil abruptly departed; they could hear his hard footsteps in the hall above, going to his room. Fleuri looked across the table at Luring; that square-chinned face of his was suddenly intent. He fingered his waxed mustache and said in English:

"Mr. Luring, will you grant me the favor of a few words in private, later in the morning?"

"Eh? Oh, of course," said Luring. "Why not now?"

Fleuri gestured vaguely. "The only sure privacy is in the open air, yes? Besides, I may be able to show you one or two excellent subjects for your pencil. There is a relic of the old Roman city that might interest you."

"You mean the broken column from the temple of Nehalennia?" said Luring deliberately. "I discovered it yesterday."

"Ah, you miss nothing!" Fleuri broke into a smile. "Exactly. The goddess, I believe, was some local deity in the ancient days. Shall we meet there—say, at ten o'clock?"

"If you like," assented Luring.

"Agreed, then. An author and an artist—we should collaborate, should we not?"

Luring did not miss the hidden significance in these words. He nodded.

"It is an idea, yes! We'll see."

Fleuri rose and disappeared. Luring saw him go out, a few moments later, with hat and coat. He waited until Cecil came down the stairs, then beckoned the big Englishman into the warm parlor. Cecil followed, and chuckled softly.

"You had a look in your eye, there at the table, Luring. What was your little game, about the pencil?"

Luring eyed him unkindly. "You knew it for a game, eh? And you knew the pencil?"

"Of course. It was mine," said Cecil coolly. "You don't expect me to say so in front of that bloody ass Fleuri, did you? And how the devil did you get hold of it?"

"Found it where you dropped it."

Cecil looked puzzled. "See here, old boy, we're at cross-purposes somehow. I lost that pencil yesterday on the way here, probably in that back-breaking jeep, or it was taken out of my pocket. Now, just what are you driving at?"

"Oh! Then you didn't drop it upstairs beside Dorothea's bed—last night?"

Cecil reddened. Swift anger shot into his bleak eyes.

"If this is a joke, Luring, it's a bit thick, if you ask me. Dorothea—you mean the Widow Ruysdael, as she calls herself?"

"Precisely. Whoever killed her last evening, apparently dropped this pencil."

The ruddy features lost their anger, became suddenly white.

"Killed her! Good God, man!" ejaculated the Englishman, his emotion unfeigned. "You don't mean she's dead?"

Inexpressibly shocked, Luring stood looking down at her. He could not realize that she was dead.

"Yes. I had a date with her at nine last night." Luring went on to tell of what he had discovered in Dorothea's room. "I couldn't well believe it was your doing," concluded the American, "but I knew you'd been on her trail, of course."

"Upon my word, Luring, this is all news to me—horribly bad news," Cecil said quietly.

"I believe you. I'm damned glad it wasn't you."

"But who, then? She might have picked up that pencil herself. Or—Fleuri. Or anyone. But it's plain enough who killed her."

"Plain? Why?"

"The instrument he used. Even before the war, a sharpened knitting-needle was rather a favorite German criminal weapon. I presume you've guessed she was a Nazi agent."

"At the very top," assented Luring gravely. "As she thought *me* to be; that was why she was going to give me, last night, the final secret in the matter of the three Zeros."

Cecil started. "The—you say the *final* secret?"

"Yes. Having given me everything but that."

The two men looked at one another, silent a moment. Cecil had lost his English calm.

"Look here, Jacobs isn't really in jail," he said awkwardly. "He told

me where to find you—I thought you were infatuated with her, were in danger—"

"No diplomacy, please," snapped Luring. "I imagine the truth is that there was a leak in Washington."

"I think not. When the head of your Army Intelligence pulls wires to send a chap across in a rush, y'know, word gets around. One puts two and two together. I recognized your name and took the job. Now, then, Jacobs was merely detained overnight— I say, do you think that this Frenchman got my pencil, then killed her, and left it as a clue to put the blame on me?"

"Anything's possible," Luring rejoined. "The body won't be found at once, of course, until the people here grow alarmed."

"Blast it!" Cecil said bitterly. "To think of her lying up there dead! I can't get over it, y'know. I was a fool to reject your offer."

"You were," said Luring bluntly. "And it's closed. If you'd said yes, I'd have been glad. Now I intend to take the entire jackpot and split with no one, old chap. Now Washington and The Hague will coöperate to squelch the third zero for keeps. You are out."

Cecil nodded. "Can't blame you a particle, my son," he said gloomily, then brightened. "I say! Your friend Jacobs may be along today. And what are we going to do about this fellow Fleuri?"

"I don't know what *you're* going to do," Luring said, "but I'm off now to meet him. I believe he wants to join forces with me. Wise man, that!"

HE took grim enjoyment in Cecil's demoralization. The trim efficient Briton had been knocked completely off-base by the repeated blows, and this last hit left him wordless.

"I think," said Luring, "it might be a good idea to lock Dorothea's door; anyone might barge in there at any moment, while if the door's locked that may postpone the discovery a bit and leave us more in control. Perhaps you'd like to look in?"

Cecil nodded and rose in silence. They went to the upper corridor, saw no one, and came to the room. Cecil stepped inside, and after a moment came out with a grimace. Luring took the key from inside the door, closed and locked the door from the outside.

"That knitting-needle," said Cecil, "indicates a German criminal's work."

"Say a Nazi agent and be done with it," Luring returned. "Well, I'm off for my talk with Fleuri. I'll smoke him out, at any rate. See you later. If you want to call in the authorities about Dorothea, go ahead; it's okay by me."

He passed along the hall and down the stairs, whistling blithely—merely for the effect on the Englishman. It gave him immense satisfaction to have thus reduced Cecil to chastened ineffectiveness. A little futility would do the cocky Briton good, he felt.

At the entrance, he was struck by an idea. He stood there for a moment, fumbling with his hat and overcoat, little reckoning the vital importance this momentary delay was to assume; then got into his coat, shoved the hat on his head, and left the hostel, getting into his gloves as he went. The keen, snow-threatening air put new life into him. The pounding of surf along the ice-rimmed shores made the sand quiver underfoot.

Success! The realization that he was actually on the threshold of triumph had meant more than he knew. Since that memorable V-E Day when Germany collapsed as a fighting nation, the nerves of the world had actually been getting more on edge every day. The victory had been stunning, the aftermath had been bitter with disruption and uncertainties. The slowly spreading rumors, the darkly mysterious prophecies of another war to come, and the disappearances—without any satisfactory proof of death—of the Nazi ringleaders, had pierced all hearts with anxiety. Whether those ringleaders were indeed dead or would become an embattled nucleus of a new and more terrible conflict to come, had been the great question. Now, with the amputation of their sinews of war, the end was assured.

"And I'd better waste no time fooling around here," thought Luring, as he strode along the rough highway. "My job now is to get a car and return to Middleburg immediately, since there's no telephone here. The hostel will be supplied by truck; I can certainly get back to the city today and send cables. If we have to tear that whole sand-dune apart, it can be done. A bulldozer will uncover the Nazi hoard if nothing else will."

As though to lend speed to his resolve, a few thin snowflakes came flickering past on the wind from the sea.

The desolate strip of dunes, the flooded countryside, icebound and dreary, showed no sign of life, though an occasional wisp of smoke rose from black ruins here and there. Luring strode on until he came to the wide path that led up beside the brook, and turned into it. Backward glances had shown him all clear, but he cared little whether Cecil shadowed him.

There was the broken column amid the stark little trees. He was a trifle ahead of the appointed time. Smoking, he waited. The ice and snow crunched beneath his feet. Old treasure-hunt stories in mind, he went close to the stone column and scanned it closely for some sign of a possible chart or plan that might lead to the hoard. There was absolutely nothing. Save for the scar of the shell that had broken it, and the three faintly scratched concentric circles, and the metal clamps sunk in the stone at either side of the break, the column was blank; smoothly water-worn and polished, it rose gracefully despite its bulk, the broken tip pointing to the sky like a finger.

Could that finger write, what stories of land and sea and history could it not reveal!

A FOOTSTEP crunched in the snow, a gay voice hummed a lilting air, and Fleuri appeared with cheerful greeting.

"Ha, my English artist! You are not sketching this morning?"

"Nor are you writing. What, no notebook?" rejoined Luring.

The other drew close, lighted a cigarette, and tossed away the empty container.

"Too cold. . . . What vile tobacco we have nowadays! Even the fine Belgian tobacco is abominable. . . . And where is our pretty widow—has she appeared?"

"You should know," said Luring. The shaft completely missed its mark. Fleuri looked astonished, then laughed and wagged a forefinger in air.

"I? No, no! My friend, only an imbecile plays games with a widow. The average man who thinks widows are always seeking what they have lost, is a fool. I assure you, and I have learned from much experience, that the pursuit of a widow is a very dangerous sort of pastime and usually ends in disaster."

So the Frenchman was uttering double meanings too, was he? Luring chuckled. But Fleuri rattled along, in garrulous mood, waving his cigarette at the broken column.

"Here we are, then—a column from a lost temple! There's an odd thing. And the temple was one to a lost goddess! Some little tribal deity of the Belgian shores, whom the Romans immortalized in the temple. The sea swallowed the temple, and yet the name of Nehalennia remains known to us after two thousand years. Why?"

"Sex appeal," suggested Luring. "There's snow in the air, my friend. I don't imagine you came here to discuss archaeology?"

"As represented by this broken column—certainly I did." The dark eyes of Fleuri twinkled at him. "This is, actually, a remarkable relic of antiquity. I have no doubt that it holds many secrets of the past. If one had the proper key to unlock those secrets —eh? Might be well worth while, my friend."

This was a straight hint and no mistake.

"Well, it's too damned cold to indulge in sparring matches," Luring responded bluntly. "Worth while, you say—to whom?"

"To anyone who possessed the key, naturally." Fleuri spread his hands. "You, for example, might have it."

"Very well, suppose I have?" asked Luring impatiently.

"You should be a practical man, my friend." The dark eyes stabbed at him. The long, graceful fingers indicated the scratches on the front of the column. "Why indulge in childish games such as this of the three circles? It would be much more sensible to combine with me, would it not? And far less perilous."

"Oh! Now we begin to get somewhere," observed Luring. "By the way, are you the Captain Fleuri who telephoned me at the hotel in Bois-le-Duc?"

A sparkling smile appeared on the other's face.

"Yes, of course. A pity I could not reach you; but I did not anticipate such haste to leave the city. And let me ask you a question in return. Why did you spoil my very neat trick with the yellow English pencil?"

"Spoil it?" echoed Luring. "How?"

"Bah! You need not appear so dumb. I had it all arranged to get that stubborn Englishman out of the way; the police would have pinched him for the murder, without a doubt! Then you had to spoil it all."

Luring stared at the Frenchman, suddenly wordless as he perceived the implications behind this speech. So Fleuri had been the murderer!

Chapter Six

FOR a moment the two men stood in silence. Then Luring spoke. "You did it, then."

"Naturally," said Fleuri. "Do you know that it took me six months to locate that young woman, and that for the past three months I have watched her like a hawk? It is so. And in the end, I had to use crude methods. Even then, I was too late. I suspected that you were the man she was to meet; she must have given you the key yesterday."

"Damn it, my feet are cold!" said Luring, to cover his inward confusion at this revelation. "Come to the point, my friend. You are, then, not a Frenchman."

"Any more than you are an Englishman." Abruptly, Fleuri switched to German. "You're the Party's trusted agent. That's what I was, once—before the smash. Now I'm on my own, do you understand? Out for myself. Ernst Kulze is his own man once more. Devil take the Party! It's dead and I mean to profit by it."

To Luring, the brief, hard words etched the full explanation of the man. A former Nazi agent, and a high one, he had learned about the hidden hoard and had set out to get it for himself. He, too, had been on Dorothea's trail, but for a long time, with dogged persistence.

"I learned everything, by degrees," said Kulze, as he now was admitted to be. "Much of it, just lately. She was a sharp one, that girl! But she would not be sensible, and she paid in the end. . . . You are cold, you say?"

"Rather," Luring responded.

"So am I. We shall finish our talk in warmth, if not in luxury. Now I shall have to get rid of that accursed Englishman, since you spoiled my plans. Well, then—"

He whistled shrilly.

Luring had become aware of a change in the man, but was given no time to think about it. The amazing fact that Kulze took him to be a Nazi agent in disguise, stunned him with surprise; perhaps his acceptance as such by Dorothea satisfied this clever fellow.

The crunch-crunch of steps sounded. Two men, apparently fishermen, appeared. They were warmly muffled to the eyes, and each held in his gloved hands a tommy-gun.

Kulze addressed them in German.

"All clear?"

"Yes, Captain," one replied.

"Good! Back to the base—your only duty is to watch this man and shoot him if he attempts to break away. . . . Come along, my friend. What, by the way, is your name?"

Luring, comprehending with fresh amazement that he was a prisoner, laughed shortly.

"If I told you, Captain Kulze, you might recognize it. But my old name is gone. I am Steve Luring, only."

"Good enough for me, then. You'll soon be warm."

Obeying the other's gesture, Luring started off with him. One of the two men came close and gave him a cursory frisking, making sure he had no concealed gun, then stepped back and allowed him to proceed.

Kulze led the way out to the road, but instead of turning toward Domburg and the hostel, swung off to the left. Luring followed. The two men, spreading out to right and left, tramped along in the rear.

At the moment, Luring did not apprehend danger particularly. He was consumed with astonishment, but he was also fully conscious that this man before him was not only a consummate scoundrel but one of the greatest ability. For any Nazi leader who turned to rend his own gang, and remained alive and powerful, had to be an extraordinary person. That Kulze was such a character, was pointed up by the sudden and complete change that had come over him. The sparkling, effervescent Frenchman had disappeared like a stage mask. Here was a calm, cold, efficient man, hard as an agate, unsmiling and alert—the man who had murdered Dorothea.

Aside from this, the situation held a rather bewildering element of unreality that seemed a bit absurd. A thin snow was drifting down. They were going somewhere—but whither, in this dreary waste of loneliness where there was nothing? The two men—where had they sprung from? Luring found himself puzzled and wondering.

AFTER nearly a mile of tramping along the dune, with the highway left behind, there came the answers he sought.

The blackened ruins of a farmhouse opened ahead. From them ascended a wispy thread of smoke, but this came from below the ruins. A German voice challenged, and Kulze replied. A large trapdoor opened; with a commanding gesture, Kulze led the way down a dozen steps into an underground chamber of some size. A stove was burning, three more roughly clad armed men stood at salute, and the place was lighted with electricity.

"The war," Kulze said to his captive, "taught all of us the value of underground living. Come."

Luring followed to another and smaller room and was admitted through a handsome door of glass. A bed, a chair, a desk, told that this was Kulze's room. The two guards were posted outside the door, where they could see what transpired in the room. Kulze buzzed an inter-office communicator on the desk, and spoke.

"I want you at once."

"At once, Captain," came the reply.

Kulze set out cigars, cigarettes, brandy and glasses, and motioned Luring to a chair.

"Make yourself comfortable. We are, as you see, somewhat elaborately installed, and very well fixed for the winter," he said. He was unsmiling, precise, quite unemotional.

A man appeared, entered, saluted. Kulze nodded at him.

"You may kill that message to the Middleburg police: it is no longer necessary. Have you established contact with Achtell?"

"I have Captain," came the reply. "He is at Vlissingen with the boat, as ordered. Storm warnings are up, but he says it will not worry him in the least."

"Good. Tell him at eight tonight, we'll be ready and awaiting him. We'll show a light as arranged; he can pick us up at the Domburg landing. Eight tonight. Have you had

any further word from the submarine?"

"We contacted Captain von Essen half an hour ago; he was lying inside the islands off the East Schelde channel; all goes perfectly. He will submerge for the day and come to the surface at six this evening—well after dark—to contact us."

"Good. We'll leave here by boat at eight and proceed north. Obtain a course from him, and a rendezvous; he should pick us up about midnight. That is all. Send Steinhovel to me."

The visitor departed. Radio, eh? Luring smoked thoughtfully. This fantastic thing was all too true. And a submarine? Or was that a bluff?

Another man appeared. Kulze spoke with him, low-voiced; Luring could catch only the name of Cecil. The man departed. Kulze came back, pulled a chair up to the desk, bit at a cigar and looked at Luring, who had removed his hat and coat and was smoking.

"I am being honest with you, my friend," he said quietly. "As you well know, this is a matter of many millions—a big thing. Those associated with me have pulled out of the wreck of our people and country. Essen, for example, got away with one of the new submarines. The half-dozen men here are former officers. It will pay you to think of that. You see, there is room for a man such as you in our crowd; the rewards will suffice for all."

THE change in him was more evident than ever now; Fleuri had completely vanished. This man was as emotionless, calmly assured as though discussing some everyday business matter, with no bombast or threats or display of weapons. The two men outside the glass door were efficient guards, yet could not hear what was said here.

Luring fully realized now that this fantastic situation was by no means so fantastic as he had thought—and that he was in an extremely tight fix.

"May I ask," said Kulze, "just why you were selected for the job?"

"Because," Luring replied promptly, "I was an expert in precious stones before the war."

"I see." The other nodded, with a satisfied air. "All the better; we need your special talents. No doubt you are fully acquainted with the secret of the hiding-place—the third Zero."

"No," rejoined Luring. He scented a trap here. As in any business conference, he decided that his best ally was honesty; he was skating on very thin ice, and dared risk no false move.

"No, I was informed only vaguely," he went on. "Dorothea was to supply the final details. She gave me the key, and was to have informed me fully last night, turning over the hoard to me."

"You are honest; I like that," said Kulze, thoughtfully. He poured whisky into the glasses. Luring accepted his, and drank. The German went on, unhurried: "You heard the orders given. A boat waits at Flushing, a sturdy herring-boat. It will pick us up here after dark, we go on north and meet the submarine. Thus, it is essential that we finish the affair and obtain what we're after, this afternoon. You can appreciate that."

"Yes."

"It does not matter now when Dorothea is discovered. We shall be gone."

"I locked her room door," said Luring. "They'll be slow to break in."

"Excellent idea. I should have thought of it, but did not," Kulze said, with a nod. He gave Luring a questioning glance. "You're a good man. Cecil really supposes you to be an Englishman. Well, tell me! Do you still consider your Party oaths and obligations to be binding, under the circumstances?"

"An oath is an oath, Captain."

"Nonsense! The leaders of the Party are dead or scattered. The third Zero is a myth, a dream of that madman Hitler. The sensible thing is to take what is ours to take, and seek safety."

"Where?"

"Never mind; that is arranged. I shall be glad of your coöperation. As you can well comprehend, when we leave tonight no blabbing tongues can be left behind us. I dislike such allusions; melodrama has no part in efficiency. But you understand."

Luring nodded. More and more, the machinelike, inhuman nature of this man impressed him.

"Must you have an immediate answer?" he asked musingly.

"No," Kulze responded. At this moment a rap sounded at the door; a man entered and saluted.

"A man on a bicycle has passed on the highway, from the direction of East Kapelle—a man of the country, by his looks. It was a bicycle with a box in front, such as postmen use."

"A mail delivery. Do not disturb him," said Kulze, and the man withdrew. "No, my friend, take time to consider well. I have six men here; we bought this property last summer and have constructed this dugout and have been comfortable. Today is our last day. At three o'clock, with or without your coöperation, I propose to uncover the hoard and pack it for transport. It can be accomplished even without the key, I find, but not easily. So be at rest until then. We'll lunch here, by the way. Do you play chess?"

Luring smiled and shook his head.

"A useless time-killer, Captain, for brains that might be put to better service."

Kulze pushed back his chair and rose.

"Well, there's a radio; this is our only guest-chamber, so make yourself free of it. I'll call you for luncheon; we all mess together here, naturally. . . . Until later!"

He left the room; however, the guards remained stationed outside the glass door.

LURING, thus left alone, smoked for a time, thoughtfully. He was no longer puzzled; he was thoroughly alarmed by his predicament. With each successive revelation, Captain Kulze stood out more clearly for what he was—master of the situation, precise and unerring and coldly efficient. His one slip had been in mistaking Luring for the Nazi agent, and this was pardonable, being predicated upon Dorothea's acceptance of him.

"I'm in a jam, and no way out," Luring told himself, quite correctly.

One of the small postwar receiving-radios put out by the B.B.C. stood on a chair. He fiddled with it for a time, picking up various Continental stations, but was in no mood for fluff, and finally switched it off with a smothered oath. Noon was approaching, when he became aware of a commotion in the large outer chamber. He went to the door.

Two of the guards were there, half supporting, half carrying a third man. They stood in talk with Kulze, who motioned toward the glass door. This was opened, Luring standing aside, and the two carried the hurt man inside; then Luring perceived that it was Cecil. They put him on the bed. He was streaming blood, but his eyes were opened. Kulze came in.

"Do you care to bind him up a bit?" he asked coolly, impassively. "Might save a bullet later on, of course; he grew nasty and had to be shot. He'll bleed to death soon enough."

"We might have need of a hostage," said Luring, and took note that the other did not miss the *we*.

"As you like. Here's a first-aid kit."

The guards went out again. Kulze followed, with supreme unconcern, and stood talking with them outside the half-open door. Luring was already on his knees beside the bed.

Cecil had a bad gash across the head, and a bullet had pierced his left leg above the knee, leaving a ghastly wound that promised to incapacitate him for some time. No artery was severed, however; Luring went to work deftly. He recalled the low talk of Kulze with a guard, who must have been sent out to take care of Cecil. There had, of course, been a battle on the cold dunes.

Then, as he worked, Luring was aware of softly breathed words at his ear. Cecil was conscious, was speaking.

"Hullo! I'm an awkward ass, what? Our fellows—your pal Jacobs—here any time now. I had word. Triangulation—wireless—"

A grunt of pain escaped him, and he lost consciousness. Luring worked fast, cleansing and bandaging. What had those two final words meant? Any hidden radio could of course be tracked down accurately by a system of triangulation. Was it possible that Cecil's associates had obtained some line on the station here, or that aboard the boat at Flushing?

"Very well done." Kulze came in, stood looking down at the job. "You're a gifted fellow, decidedly! We can take him aboard the boat and drop him off anywhere, of course."

"That bullet tore hell out of his leg," said Luring, "but went clean through."

He replaced the Englishman's clothes, and covered him warmly.

"Lunch is ready; if you care to wash—"

Luring nodded. So others of Cecil's men, and Jacobs, would be here today! That man on the bicycle must have brought the word. Kulze had made a mistake in not molesting the man; he should have taken every precaution on this, his last day here.

In the large outer chamber, Luring and Kulze, the radio-man and two others sat down at a table laden with dishes; the other two men were doubtless on guard and would take their turn. The repast was plentiful and good.

Wary of pitfalls, Luring spoke as little as possible. The others chatted easily in German. He perceived that Kulze had told the truth; they were all men of some education and culture, ex-officers, and when Luring was introduced, he noted that two of the

"Take him! Search him!" Kulze ordered. Four men leaped upon Luring. To get clear was impossible.

names carried the particle *von*. They were efficient, alert, a ruthless lot.

During the meal, at which a considerable quantity of wine was drunk by all, Kulze maintained the cold impassivity which was his natural manner, evidently. Remembering that vociferous Frenchman Fleuri, Luring could not but marvel. The man was a superb actor. No wonder he had gone so far—and survived!

Luring returned to the prison-chamber; a guard remained outside the glass door. Cecil had not regained consciousness—or was asleep. Kulze came in, lighted a cigar and fished about with the radio, getting a news program that he wanted from the vast heap of ruins that had been Berlin; little or no reconstruction had yet taken place there.

While he was at this, a guard came in from outside with a report.

"A truck just passed, going to Domburg—the usual one, with supplies for the hostel."

Kulze merely nodded. "When the truck returns, stop it and talk with the men; learn if they have any word of a murder having been discovered at the hostel. Still snowing?"

"No. It has ceased and the wind has gone down."

"A good night for a sea trip, then. That's all."

The man departed. Kulze got his radio program and listened impassively.

He switched it off at last, cursing the Allied occupational forces, then glanced at his watch and turned to Luring

"The time has come for decision, my friend," he said, almost casually. "You have reflected on the matter?"

Luring nodded. Cecil, he thought, had been wakened by the radio, but still lay with eyes closed, apparently asleep.

"Yes," Luring replied, mindful of his rôle as faithful Nazi agent. He spoke musingly and reflectively. "Yes, I've considered. I have no desire to die uselessly. And yet, on the other

hand, there are the oaths we have taken! But it has occurred to me—" He paused.

"Yes?" prompted Kulze coldly.

"Well, oaths are only valid up to a certain point, *hein?* It is one thing to betray those who trusted me. I should not like to do that, frankly. But suppose I had no choice, suppose that you took the matter out of my hands? Then I might well consider myself free to join your venture."

He was very glad that he spoke such excellent German.

"Oh, I see!" Kulze looked at him, lips twisting under the waxed mustache into a faint smile. The gravely solemn air of Luring amused him. "Do you know, that's not a bad idea at all!"

He rose, went to the door, and at his word two guards came in. Kulze pointed.

"Search him."

Luring stood up and raised his hands. The two men began to go through his pockets. One of them came upon the key and the chain.

Kulze snatched at these quickly.

"Enough! Yes. This is it, the same chain that she wore about her neck—ha! So this is the key! How ordinary it looks! It should have been set in diamonds at the least." He pocketed key and chain together, and put out his hand to Luring. "Agreed, comrade?"

"Agreed." Luring gripped the thin, hard hand, with a sigh of relief, and brightened. "So it is solved. I have turned over the responsibility to you. It is for the good of the Cause."

"Our cause—certainly!" Kulze almost permitted himself a laugh, clapped Luring on the shoulder, and looked at the two grinning men. "He is one of us from now on. Steinhovel! At three o'clock—that is to say, in twenty minutes—we leave to get the hoard. Everyone will go. You will make sure that the doors here are closed; two men will watch the road, the others remain with us."

Steinhovel saluted and withdrew, the other guard with him. Luring touched Kulze on the arm and pointed to the bed.

"The Englishman? It is not safe to leave him here alone."

"With the doors closed and barred? Nonsense! He can't walk, either; just let him try!" And Kulze went outside, returning with a bottle of champagne and two glasses. "Now we drink to our fellowship, my friend! And to the golden future."

They drank the toast, and sat sipping. The champagne was admirable.

While Kulze betrayed no exultation, he was undeniably in a very pleasant frame of mind and showed it. The bottle empty, Kulze glanced at his watch again and rose.

"Get into your hat and coat and join us," he said. "I'll take a look around first and see that all's well."

He went out. Luring picked up his coat and donned it.

"Well," he said softly, in English, "the game isn't up yet but damned near it. My last card is played. If Jacobs and your chaps don't show up, we're done."

Cecil opened one eye, and winked.

"Ten to one, old chap," he murmured, "they came in the truck. It's a good gamble."

Upon this slim shred of hope, Luring jammed his hat on his head and departed.

Chapter Seven

So little snow had fallen as not even to sheet the ground, as Luring and Kulze walked together toward the dunes. At a little distance four of the Germans followed, one of them bearing a stout leather sack. The other two had spread out as scouts. Kulze's hand gave out a clinking sound as he walked; he carried a cold-chisel and a small hammer.

The wind had died down, but the clouds had thickened and darkened. Steinhovel, before leaving, reported that the truck had returned to Middleburg; the driver had been stopped, and had said nothing of any alarm at the hostel.

"Snow tonight," observed Kulze, sniffing the air and eying the heavy clouds. "All the better for us."

No one was in sight. The long chill dunes, the wastes of water and ice, were desolate. The naked trees along the slopes stood in slight patches of fallen snow. They came at length to the frozen brook and turned up the path. Apparently no arms were carried, or else they were hidden.

The column came into sight. Kulze gave Luring a glance.

"So you did not learn the secret? I'll give you a tip, then. If you had looked carefully in the sand here along the brook, you might have found numerous chips of stone. That was the only mistake made, when the hoard was laid to rest."

"I don't understand," said Luring.

The other chuckled softly.

"You will, quickly."

It was three o'clock. They came to the broken column in its little enclosure, where the light snow had drifted. The four Germans came up and joined them, standing clumped and eager, their bleak, hard faces avid.

"The third Zero!" Kulze put out his hand and touched the three concentric circles scratched on the stone. He laughed, with contempt and scorn, and spat aside. "The third Zero! Well, that's the end of it, comrades!"

He lifted the cold-chisel, adjusted it inside the small inmost circle, and struck it with the hammer. He was unhurried, unexcited, emotionless. Luring watched in astonishment as blow upon blow resounded and dust and chips sprang from the column in response. Then he understood: Within this third Zero the stone had long ago been chipped out; the spot had been filled in with cement, so perfectly colored and textured as to blend invisibly with the granite.

The little circle began to clear, and metal appeared. Kulze blew away the dust, and the metal took shape—the round end of a lock, the serrated slit for a key. So this, then, was the final secret!

Almost, but not quite.

Kulze worked his chisel carefully and cleared all about the keyhole, cleared the slit itself of dust, then threw aside his tools. Still perfectly calm, he felt in his pocket and produced the chain and key, put the chain back, and lifted the key to the slit.

It did not slide in.

He blew out the dust, blew again, tried again with the key, then stood like a statue, his eyes flitting from the key to the metal circlet in the granite. Suddenly he moved, swung around, and his eyes, wide and distended, glared at Luring.

"This—this is not the key!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"No? I'm sure it's the key to Dorothea's room at the hostel," said Luring.

Kulze glared at him for an instant, went livid with fury, and his quiet calm exploded in an oath that was almost a scream.

"Take him! Search him!" he ordered.

The four men leaped in upon Luring. He stood quietly, unresisting, upon his features an expression of dumb surprise—and this expression had the effect of checking Kulze's fury. He remained uncertain whether or not he had been tricked. Luring had hoped to the last that he would have some chance to make a break for it, but none was given him. Now he could only feign passive imbecility.

To get clear was impossible. Two of the men held his arms. The other two searched him—fiercely, swiftly, thoroughly, right to the skin. Even his shoes were removed and examined. His hat was knocked off, his hair searched, his overcoat gone over inch by inch. Then the searchers fell back, baffled, cursing, staring.

"That was the only key I had," said Luring. "I tell you there must have been some—"

A grimace contracted Kulze's lean face. He felt under his coat, and

a pistol whipped up in his hand. The two men holding Luring's arms jumped away. The pistol lifted—

Something unseen jarred Kulze, knocked him sideways so that he fell against the broken column. A shot exploded. A yell of alarm sounded; then more shots rang out, the *rat-tat-tat* of carbine clips. One man screamed. Steinhovel clapped both hands to his head and fell forward across the body of Kulze. All four dropped, one kicking until another bullet stilled him. They lay sprawled with their leader.

From close by, other shots sounded. Then the sounds ceased.

"Hi, Steve! Are you all right?"

Here was Jacobs, on the run, panting to a halt, carbine in hand. He grinned at Luring, who picked up his hat carefully. Another man appeared with a swift query.

"Where's Randolph Cecil?"

"He's all right, if you got the six. Did you?"

"Aye. These here, two others yonder."

"Then much obliged for showing up in time! Now we'll take the good news to Cecil. Get that big leather sack yonder, Dick."

Luring turned. He disregarded the limp body of Kulze and went to the column. He stood feeling in his hat—fumbling with it, as he had fumbled at the hostel doorway before starting out to meet Kulze. From inside the leather sweatband, he drew a key.

This was the key Dorothea had given him.

He did not, at the moment, pause to indulge in astonishment or other emotion at his rescue. Other men came up; English voices sounded; he ignored them. The key slid into the hole. It fitted. Luring turned it easily, and turned it a second time, as one does with European keys.

The top of the column lifted slightly at the break. Luring put his strength to it and pushed upward, guessing the full secret, now. Jacobs helped. The whole broken top swung up and away, revealing the mechanism attached to the clamps on either side—and revealed, instead of a solid stone lower part, a hollow drum filled with wrapped packages.

The center of the column, below the break, had been scooped out to hold the Nazi hoard.

Luring did no talking; the reaction had hit him. Jacobs, perhaps, guessed what lay in those packages; certainly no one else did. The British agents were puzzled. However, they dumped the packets into the leather sack, and carried it easily as Luring set out, Jacobs at his side, to regain the underground base.

Not so many men, only half a dozen in all, Luring perceived as they tramped along the road, but tongues were buzzing fast. Wireless triangulation, yes—a fishing-craft at Flushing had been nabbed, an outlaw submarine up north at the islands had been or was being nabbed. If Cecil were alive, all was well.

"Alive but wounded," said Luring. "Bring that sack of stuff straight to where he lies. He'll be glad to see it."

They came to the place at last, opened up the trapdoor, and everyone tramped down. A voice hailed them from the inner room. The lights were switched on, and they all crowded in past the glass door. Luring stepped forward and showed Cecil the leather sack, and took out a packet.

"Here, old man," he said. "First peek goes to you. Give him a knife, someone."

"That's not right, Luring," Cecil protested. "The honors go to you."

"Don't be so damned obstinate," said Luring. "We go fifty-fifty in this thing. Didn't your pals save me at the crucial instant? You and I are playing partners."

Cecil looked at him and smiled.

"Shake, will you?" he said, and Luring complied.

Then Cecil cut open the wrappings, to reveal the first glimpse of the Nazi hoard—which, ultimately, made of Quest, Incorporated, the world-wide organization it is today.

Short Cigarette

A brief drama by —

WALTER C. BROWN

HIS name was Vincent Everett —Sergeant Everett — turret gunner in our Liberator the "Double Seven," and good at his job, too. But outside of that, he was more or less a mystery, and pretty much a lone wolf. Our ten-man bomber crew was like one big family; but none of us ever called Everett "Vincent" or "Vince."

Everett never talked about himself, and when we'd sit around between missions yarning about our old jobs and the home town, he never chimed in. Apparently he had no home ties at all. The only thing he warmed up to was a game of cards. Suggest a game of poker or "21," and he'd have a deck out of his pocket before the words were out of your mouth. And that's how the trouble started—over a card game.

We always played with Everett's deck. And he won almost every time we played. He cleaned all of us out of pocket cash pretty regularly, and some of the boys went into the red. Sergeant Mike Halloran, our bombardier, got in deepest. Mike was down for close to two hundred dollars.

The lid blew off one night when Everett gathered up the cards at the end of a game and absent-mindedly started doing card tricks. They were darn' good tricks, too, pulled off as smooth and easy as any professional.

That brought Mike Halloran to his feet. "So that's how you hook us, Everett!" he yelled. "What a bunch of suckers we are, stackin' up against a card-sharp!"

Everett's face flushed, then turned white. "Take that back, Halloran!" he said slowly, rising. "What I win, I win fair and square."

"Yeah! Says you!" Halloran scoffed.

Everett threw down the deck. "Here, look at the cards!" he snapped. "If you find anything wrong, I'll eat 'em! I never won a crooked dollar in my life."

"What good is lookin' at the cards?" Halloran said. "You pull off the crooked stuff with your hands—"

Everett swung at him then, and Halloran swung back before Sergeant Gadowski got his big shoulders in between them and broke it up.

Halloran stood back, his red hair bristling, his eyes like cold blue fire. "Okay, Everett," he growled. "You've hooked me for a hundred and eighty-six bucks. Try and collect it! Just try and collect!"

"You'll pay it," Everett said.

"I sure will—when hell freezes over!" Halloran replied.

Everett didn't say anything more. He just picked up his cards and stalked away. After that, nobody ever mentioned "21" or poker again; and from there on, Everett and Mike Halloran walked past each other without a word or a glance. Up in the air, though, we were still a ten-man crew, one for all and all for one; but back at the field, with the mission completed, we were nine men—and Vincent Everett.

Sergeant Gadowski, the big blond Pole, made a half-hearted effort to patch things up. "Sure, I see him do those fancy tricks," he asserted; "but maybe when he plays with us, it is on the up and up. Maybe he wins just by good luck, and good playing."

"Don't be a sap!" Halloran snapped back. "It isn't natural for any guy to win all the time. You birds are sure-enough suckers if you pay Everett those gyp losses."

But Everett made no effort to collect his debts. He went about his work as usual; but off duty, kept entirely to himself. All in all, I guess he had a pretty tough time of it, even for a natural-born lone wolf like him, although he brought a lot of it down on his own head. Guilty or innocent, he rubbed everybody the wrong way with that superior "be-damned-to-you" attitude of his.

The final pay-off came on a God-forsaken little coral atoll in the far Pacific. Coming back from a mission, we'd run into a skyful of Zeros, and after one hell of a fight, we'd been shot down. Six of us managed to bail out—Lieutenant Bradley, our pilot; Lieutenant Lochner, navigator; Stan Gadowski; Mike Halloran; myself—and Vincent Everett.

It was pretty crowded on our rubber raft, but after some hard paddling, we made the beach of this pint-sized atoll of sand and coral, with its toy lagoon as calm and smooth as a deep blue mirror.

We had food and water enough for some time, but we knew that our prospects were anything but good, for one of the Nip flyers had spotted our raft heading for the string of atolls, and we knew the Japs would come looking for us.

SURE enough, the next morning we saw a black smudge on the western horizon, and soon a Jap escort vessel came plowing along to start the search. There were thirty or forty of these little atolls in our group, and the Japs began their search at the farthest end of the string, but we all realized it would be only a matter of hours before we were captured. There was simply no place where we could hide—on our atoll, or on any of the others. No trees or bushes, only sand beaches and broken coral, and a few tufts of salt grass.

"It's too damned bad the Japs spotted our raft," Lieutenant Bradley said. "We could hang on here indefinitely, and sooner or later we'd be picked up by one of our patrols. But now the blasted Japs are hot on our trail, and they'll make a thorough job of it, atoll by atoll. They want us as prisoners—very badly, so they can bang us around and try to get the dope on our new air bases."

"We've still got the raft," Lochner pointed out.

"And where can we go?" Bradley retorted. "To another atoll? They're all just like this one. . . . And we can't put out to sea again. There's a good six hundred miles of open water—"

Then Bradley broke off, suddenly, staring down at the raft.

"Listen, men: There's just one way we might fool those Nips. They know about our raft, and they'll keep searching until they find it. What they don't know, though, is how many of us were on it! So here's my idea: one of us could take this rubber boat and keep paddling west along the atolls until he's picked up by the Japs. He tells them that he's the lone survivor from the crash. Seeing the raft, they'd have no reason to doubt the story, and they'd call off the search. That gives the other five a better than even chance of rescue."

"You mean one of us gives himself up as a prisoner, so that the others can escape?" Mike Halloran asked.

"Exactly!" Bradley said.

We all looked sideways at each other. We realized that it was a good scheme—the only chance we had, under the circumstances. But it takes real guts to volunteer for a job like that.

"We all know that the man who goes out on that raft is going to have a damned tough time," Bradley went on. "At best, he'll be a prisoner in a Jap camp until the war's over. So, if you fellows approve of the plan, I suggest that we draw lots to see who goes."

We all chimed approval on that, and on the impulse of the moment, Everett pulled out his deck of cards. "We could cut the cards, Lieutenant—low man goes."

"Like hell we will!" Mike Halloran cut in. "I wouldn't trust that deck if it was shuffled in a concrete-mixer!"

Everett's face flushed angrily, but he said nothing as he put the deck back in his pocket.

"How about blades of grass to draw from?" Lochner suggested. "Or cigarettes? We could put one short cigarette in a pack and draw for it."

The cigarette idea was agreed upon. Bradley tore the top off a full pack, turning his back to us while he drew out one of the cigarettes, pinched off a half inch or so from its length, and then pushed it back into place, so that all the tops showed level.

"Ready!" he said, turning around. "It's understood now, men—we keep drawing in turn until somebody gets the short cigarette. . . . Here, Gadowski, draw the first one—for me."

The Pole came forward and pulled out a cigarette. It was a whole one.

"Now I draw mine," Gadowski said, and pulled out another, holding it up to show its full length.

"I'll draw next!" Everett said. He pulled a cigarette out slowly, drawing it up under his palm, so that it was pretty well hidden.

Mike Halloran was watching him like a hawk. "Don't take his word for it!" Mike burst out. "Make him show it!"

Everett swung around and faced Halloran. "Keep your shirt on," he said, and tossed the cigarette onto the sand at Mike's feet. Every eye leaped automatically to the torn, ragged end of that little white cylinder.

"That's what you were hoping I'd draw, isn't it?" Everett demanded bitterly. Then he turned around to Lieutenant Bradley. "I'm ready, sir."

Bradley looked at him. "Don't you want to leave a letter with us, or a message, Everett?"

Everett shook his head. "I've got nobody waiting for me, Lieutenant—nobody at all." He gave a sort of dry smile. "I guess I'm the right man for this job."

WE all went down the beach. One by one we shook hands with Everett, and wished him luck. At the last moment Mike Halloran stepped forward and offered his hand.

"Good luck, Everett."

"Thanks, Mike," Everett said, and pushed off, paddling westward. We watched until the off-shore current caught the raft and swept it from sight around the far bend of the neighboring atoll.

We sat down then, the five of us, on the sun-baked beach. We didn't feel like talking, and one after the other we lit cigarettes. Somehow we felt relaxed and confident, as if we had had some foreknowledge that Bradley's scheme was to work out exactly as planned, and that on the third day hence we would be signaling one of our own planes. . . .

Then we noticed that Lieutenant Bradley wasn't smoking. He was sitting with his pack of cigarettes in his hand, staring at it with a peculiar expression. For Bradley had just drawn a cigarette from the pack—a short cigarette, with the end pinched off!

But Vincent Everett had drawn the short cigarette! In fact, it was still lying there on the sand, where he had tossed it. I don't think any of us realized exactly what Everett had done until we picked up that fateful cigarette of his, and then found its missing piece pressed down into the sand under Everett's footprint.

We stood looking at each other, not saying anything for a minute, but I know we were all thinking the same thing. A guy who did that kind of cheating couldn't be anything but honest, right down to the bone.

Vince Everett may never know it, but he stands to collect close to three hundred dollars from the crew of the "Double Seven." The cash is ready and waiting, including one hundred and eighty-six dollars from Sergeant Michael Halloran. What else we owe him isn't to be measured in money.

The Mission Called X

The crew of the Weighty Katie were given leaflets to drop instead of bombs—but they found a way to deal with the situation.

by BURT SIMS

PUNCHY HALL, the left waist-gunner, let his cigarette fall to the grease-freckled cement. He put a toe of a G.I. shoe on its unwinking eye and erased it slowly. His voice held futile disgust:

"Of all the times it should happen—" The words steamed in the cold English air. "What a break! What a lousy, frowsy, achin' break!"

The pallid light of dawn touched the six faces, each as glum as its neighbor. Jo-Jo Smith, the ball turret, grunted and peered at a low band of dingy clouds to the east. "Maybe we don't even get through."

"If we turn back from this one," Punchy threatened with a dour face, "this war has had me, chum. Take off, fly around a couple hours formin' up, fly across the Ditch, get all nice an' frigid—an' then abort. An' on Mission X, too. Oh, *buh-ruther!*"

"Rough," sympathized Alec Wenholz, the right waist. "We have to turn back for any reason, this one doesn't count. That's no good."

"No part of it is any good," said Punchy. "Maybe we go all the way. No abort. But what a mission!" He shook his head. "What a way to finish a tour of ops! It's sad, Lord, sad!"

Bender, the engineer and top turret, was swinging his arms energetically to generate warmth. "Moanin' about it isn't gonna do any good. We got stuck, that's all."

"It isn't fair," complained Wenholz.

"An' on top of everything else," Punchy picked it up, "it aint the way we planned it. We might just as well be droppin' sofa-pillows."

Bender shuffled his feet. He had been Air Corps since the days when the old pineapple-nosed B-18 was the Army's best bomber. "We all feel the same way, Punchy. Only, when they tell you to carry leaflets, you carry leaflets, see? That's the Army. You don't run around tryin' to get someone else to carry 'em for you so's you can carry real bombs. You know what you carry?"

"Yeah," answered Wenholz. "You carry leaflets."

"Well," said Punchy unhappily, "they *look* like real bombs, anyway. An' they weigh almost as much."

"Only they're fused to explode at fifteen hundred feet," Wenholz pointed out with disdain. "They got about as much kick as a glass of ginger ale. All they do is split open an' let the

Kingston said: "You characters look awfully sad. . . . Get up them stairs, children."

leaflets scatter around. What kind of a bomb is that? *Leaflets.* Jupiter! The least we could do is put paper clips on 'em."

"Plenty of other guys are carryin' the real stuff," said Bender. Beneath the patience in his voice there was a note of wistfulness. "Thirty-five other Seventeens goin' along, y' know. They all carry the live stuff. We're the only one with the leaflets."

ROSS McGRATH, the tail-gunner, spoke for the first time since they had gathered alongside *Weighty Katie's* flank, seeking its slight shelter from the chill breeze. "We're the only one," said McGrath. "That's the trouble. They had to pick us."

Sneeze Wojahoojske, the radioman, slapped his gloved hands together once, and said, "Yup."

It was going to be the last mission for the crew of *Weighty Katie.* Only you never called it that. The words had an uncomfortable ring. You didn't give it a number, either; numbers have a way of coming up unlucky. When you're climbing aboard for the last one, you feel as though the string of luck which let you get this far has been drawn very tightly. No use straining it. So you call it Mission X.

Once this one had been scrawled in the log-book, thirty days of "rest and recuperation," as the orders read, awaited every member of *Weighty Katie's* crew. Thirty days, in the States. . . . Thirty days at home!

"Women," Jo-Jo Smith had said, when they heard the news. "American women."

"Hamburgers," Punchy Hall had grinned. "Real hamburgers."

"With onions," Wenholz added.

Anyway you said it, it meant the same thing! *Home.* After that, maybe more combat. But you didn't think of what comes after the thirty days. Right now, standing in the cold dawn beside the big friendly bomber, waiting for the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier and navigator, all you thought about was getting over the hump; getting Mission X into the log-book; coming down on the far side, where the velvet was. They could use some velvet.

Over Hamburg, on that very first one, the flak, something new and incredibly dirty, had slapped them, rocked them, clawed at *Katie's* staunch wings. *Katie* twisted and pitched suddenly as a burst wrenched off a section of the tail fin as large as a Nissen hut door. Rudder cables were shredded, control surfaces made almost unmanageable. But *Katie* brought them home.

Over Merseburg, the fighters came at them like waves on a beach. The 20-millimeter cannons winked rapidly and the scalding streams of lead hosed big hunks out of her wing and shattered the plexiglas nose. Jay Seeley, the bombardier, hunched over the bombsight with the blood streaming into his eyes and the freezing blast howling in his ears. *Katie* took them over the target. The fighters hit her again and again; but *Katie* brought them home.

Then they went to Big B, and that was the daddy of them all. The sleek 109's and the carrot-bodied 190's hammered at *Katie* from Initial Point to Target to Assembly Point, and when the Mustangs charged and broke up the attack, *Katie's* Number Two engine had been hit and smoke was coming in a gusty spout from Number Three. A moment later Number Two quit. Tindal, the co-pilot, punched the feathering button; the propeller blades turned their narrowest sides to the streaming air and disaster was averted—for a moment.

THEY still were in hostile air when Number Three gasped and died. Once again, swiftly, Tindal feathered the propeller to keep its flat sides from acting as a drag and slewing the big bomber out of control.

Belgium was friendly, now. The ground crews at the emergency field gaped as *Katie* settled sluggishly but carefully to earth. Her wings were shredded like battle pennants. Oil bathed her body like blood. Two engines were dead. The tail fin had been hit again, hard, and you could see three feet of sky through either side of it. Inside, the damage was as apparent. Half her instruments had been shot away. Lou Kingston, the pilot, was bleeding from shell splinters in both arms. Blood from the leg wounds of Punchy Hall and Alec Wenholz formed small neighborly pools on the floor of the fuselage.

That had been the roughest. That was the day for the Purple Hearts. That was the day a lot of boys made a one-way trip. But *Katie* brought them home.

Remembering all of this, Punchy came right up to today, and the leaflets. He rapped *Weighty Katie's* metal flank. "After all, this baby brought us through," he murmured. He cast a critical eye at the Fortress. "Maybe she doesn't look like much. Kind of

beat up, in spots. But quite a gal. Y'know? Quite a gal."

Jo-Jo Smith nodded reflectively. "Shorely, shorely," he said. Then he thought of something else. "Only not quite like my Mary Jane. Or even Ida." He squinted. "Ya know, she's long in the body, though, kinda like Ida."

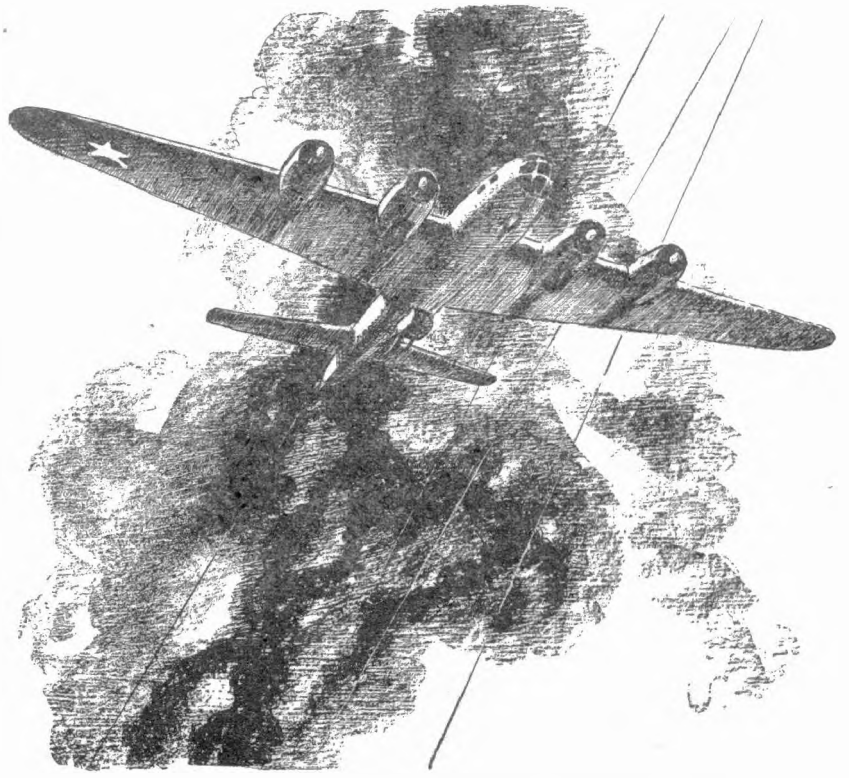
Punchy fell silent. The six of them stood there quietly, thinking. When you've been a member of the same crew for twenty-nine missions; when you've gone through all of it together, the fear and the fighting and the conquering of fear; when you've lived together, taken your passes together, read each other's mail, "sweated out" the same bursts of flak, the same enemy planes—then you know what each other thinks, and how he feels, about a great many things.

So they all knew that Punchy had been stating the case for *Weighty Katie*. To do it boldly, without subtlety, might have made it appear silly, and unworthy of great effort. But they knew—they all knew, and it made them all uncomfortable.

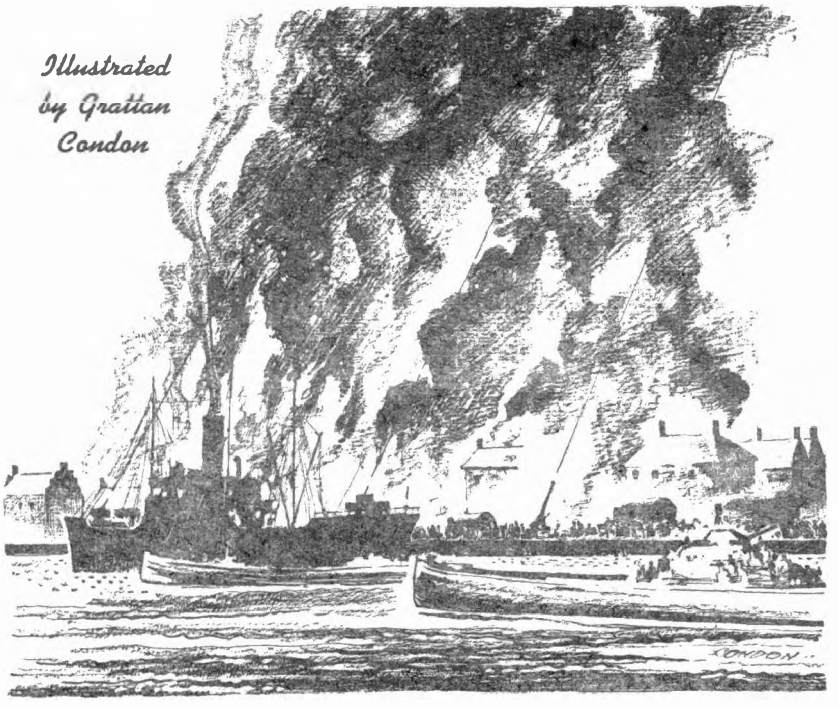
It was the sense of obligation. You don't put your faith of life into a mechanical miracle without feeling a debt of gratitude to its majestic power when it proves unfailing. But there was more to it than that.

One more, and they were going home. Each man had varied desires and plans. Each man looked at *Katie* and found what had been, and what still was, the means. In *Katie*, all the plans and desires were unified. She had welded them, given them strength, tempered in flame. The reward, as befitting an honorable performance of duty, would be a simple one: a hard job, well done. Like tangling once again with the fighters, and perhaps knocking down two or three of them—seeing destruction wrought upon the enemy, right before your eyes. Or laying the bombs squarely on a difficult target, and seeing the pinpoints of glaring blast and the billowing smoke. Something you could get your teeth into:

Mission X—wind it up with pride!



The bomb-release was set on* Salvo. . . . *Like a hooked fish breaking water,* Katie's *nose went into the clouds. Behind her, gathering speed for fourteen seconds, the paper-packed bombs sped toward the target.



Illustrated by Grattan Condon

BUT this short ride, to drop surrender leaflets on a pocket of Germans in Northern Holland, fell far short of that happy mark. . . .

Lou Kingston, Tindal, Jay Seeley and Quincy, the navigator, climbed out of the jeep. Kingston, a big, well-knit boy, said, "You characters look a-fully sad." He turned his warm friendly gaze on all of them. "There's nothing to say, is there?" He shrugged. "Get up them stairs, children."

"Sir," said Punchy, as they moved toward the fuselage door, "it's a helluva note, aint it?"

The pilot grinned briefly. "I told 'em that, Punchy. But they did their best to make it sound important. They want us to get through, if it's at all possible. These Heinies have been pretty stubborn. They're holding up the ground forces quite a bit."

"You said," Punchy queried, "if it's *possible*?"

"Yep. The joint is sort of weathered in, according to the witch doctors."

"Jupiter," said Wenholz. "If we have to abort—"

Quincy, the navigator, shook his head. "If the weather's as bad as they say it is, we'll need a Seeing-Eye dog."

Scattered middle clouds below them permitted an occasional glimpse of the Ditch, slate-gray and with speckled whitecaps showing. Ahead of the formation, stacking up from the coast of Holland, towered a ragged, ugly castle of clouds; storm clouds, standing like hostile guardians of the enemy shore. Punchy Hall, gazing from the left waist aperture, shook his head sadly. The formation drifted onward, climbing slightly.

As they drew nearer, slight rifts appeared in the bank of aerial putty. The formation crossed the Dutch coast, still on course. A moment later the lead plane nudged into the clouds. The others followed, each pilot straining his eyes to keep nearby bombers within sight. The wet gray mass swirled around the planes, swallowing one, then another. Punchy looked across the waist at Wenholz. Wenholz shrugged; they hadn't turned back—yet. . . . The formation leader bore onward, apparently hoping to find a break in the clouds at the aiming-point, a town beside a canal.

According to time and distance computation, they should be nearing the initial point within a few minutes. There the bombers would take their spacing, getting elbow room; there they would start the straight and level bomb run. Then they would pass over the aiming-point and the bombs would arch away. Punchy swore softly. Maybe!

Words crackled alive in his headset. "Pilot to crew," said Kingston. "Keep your eyes peeled, gang. We don't want a collision."

Jay Seeley, the bombardier, looked at his watch. He left the nose and went back to the bomb bay. The bombs were stacked neatly in the racks. They looked like the real thing. Each weighed almost a hundred pounds, packed with the paper leaflets and a very small explosive charge. He removed the pins. That armed them. Now, when they fell free, they would be "alive." So long as they held the pins, they wouldn't explode. He went back to his position in the nose.

A moment later Kingston's voice, heavy with disappointment, came through the intercom: "Pilot to crew. We're turning back. Orders from the group leader. The mission is abandoned."

They swore. Each one swore, individually, and as a unit. Disgust sparked through the intercom in a blue-hot stream. Kingston let them blow for a moment.

"Okay," he said then. "Okay, gang. Hold it down."

As the group commander radioed directions, the formation altered course slowly, feeling its way through the clouds, and took up a homeward heading. Jay Seeley returned to the bomb bay and replaced the pins.

Punchy Hall leaned disconsolately against his machine-gun, and stared into the endless gray below. So this mission wouldn't count. They would go back and wait, and maybe next time it would be leaflets again. Or worse, if possible. . . . The clouds thinned for a moment. He saw no other bombers. They were alone. It didn't matter. It had happened before. It's easy to become separated in thick weather.

A GAP suddenly opened in the clouds beneath the bomber. He could see land and sea. Only the land was *west* of the sea, not east. It couldn't be England—not yet. Abruptly, *Katie* bucked as though someone had planted a giant foot in her stomach. As Punchy reeled against the side of the fuselage he heard the explosion.

"Pilot to crew," rapped Kingston. "Everybody okay?"

"Radio operator to pilot," replied Sneeze Wojahoojske. "I got a little scratch. Practically nothin'. But the radios are out. They must have hit the antennas."

They were in a world of their own now, so far as communications were concerned. Only the intercom, the link between the crew, was operating.

Quincy said: "Navigator to pilot. Something new has been added, Lou. There wasn't supposed to be any flak there."

"Are we over enemy territory, Quincy?"

"Roger, Lou. That's Jerry stuff."

Jo-Jo Smith broke in excitedly, "Then that's enemy action, Skipper."

They all knew what that meant. If a plane is subjected to enemy action, the trip automatically counts as a combat mission. Even if it occurs while a plane is aborting—turning back. So this, after all, would be Mission X.

Bender growled. Punchy pounded his fist against the machine-gun. Wenholz shook his head. Down in the ball turret, Jo-Jo wore a frown. Ross McGrath, the tail gunner, snarled into the intercom, "We didn't even drop the dad-gummed paper!"

Lou Kingston's voice was thoughtful. "That was new flak, Quincy?"

"Roger. Brand-new location."

"Did anybody see anything?" the pilot asked.

"Right waist to pilot," answered Wenholz. "I might be wrong, sir—but there could have been a boat down there. I can't be sure."

Punchy's mind raced with the rest, juggling the bits of information.

"Hold your hats," said Kingston. "We're going to take a look."

The bomber nosed downward in a shallow, diving turn. At five thousand feet the clouds were thinning out. Punchy could detect patches of brown beneath them. The bomber began a slow resumption of level flight. At three thousand feet they were plowing through the fringes of clouds which drooped like the hem of a skirt. The ground was plainly visible now, with great inundated plotches, and occasional windmills and farmhouses perched on higher ground. They were over Holland, all right, and traveling northeast.

Two or three miles ahead of them Kingston saw the open watery plain of the Zuider Zee. A moment later he saw the ship, a vessel of about three thousand tons.

"Left waist to pilot," cried Punchy. "There it is! At ten o'clock."

"Roger," replied Kingston calmly. "You see it, Jay?"

"Like the nose on your face," answered the bombardier.

"Take a good look."

As they swept nearer, Punchy could discern a string of trucks on the wharf, a cluster of buildings, files of men. Angry black puffs suddenly blossomed around them. The Germans had depressed their heavy-caliber antiaircraft guns and were firing at long range but at low level. *Katie* scrambled into the protecting clouds. As they roared onward, Kingston said: "Jay, did you replace the pins in those bombs?"

"Roger. Want me to pull 'em out?"

"No, no! Paper wouldn't hurt those guys. Not by itself."

Seeley's voice was excited. "Roger McDodger! I get yuh, Lou!"

Punchy whirled to stare at Wenholz. The right waist-gunner's head was bobbing up and down with unrestrained approval. He waved both hands at Punchy, hands on which the fingers were crossed like a Viennese pretzel. Punchy crossed his own and waved them back.

"Pour it on 'em," cried Jo-Jo Smith.

"Extra, extra," said Sneeze Wojahoojske, stirred out of his usual economy of speech.

"Get your mornin' paper, Herman," taunted Ross McGrath. "Boy, this one'll kill yuh!"

The bomber swung into another turn, circling. They emerged from the clouds. Two miles ahead of them lay the evacuation ship. With the clouds shouldering them into a low-level attack it really was a task for the

fast medium bombers. But with the radio gone they had no method of notifying anyone of their discovery. And time was precious.

The bomber lunged forward, full throttle, straight and level. Silhouetted against the clouds at three thousand feet, it presented an excellent target. Kingston warned, "We can only try this once, Jay."

"Don't I know it," answered the bombardier fervently.

"I'll be indicating a one-eighty," the pilot told him.

Katie's gunners hunched over their weapons. Abruptly, hot fingers of tracers arched at her from the ground. Self-destructive twenty-millimeter cannon shells powdered around her. *Katie's* guns flung back a savage rebuttal, as her bomb-bay doors opened. The antiaircraft fire was intense, almost a solid barrier of flaming steel. Blistering fragments pinged into her flanks, slashed at her wings. Kingston fought to hold her straight and level. Three thousand feet was like marching by in slow cadence. The four engines thundered a song that sang one hundred eighty miles an hour—but to trained gunners that's no great handicap, when the target flies a straight and true line.

Punchy sprayed one gun emplacement, then another, hosing the leaden stream at everything that moved. The metallic clamor hammered in his ears. Nervous perspiration was drenching his body. He was looking into a boiling acre of smoke and flame.

Katie lurched with a suddenness that meant damage to control surfaces. Kingston's wide wrists swelled as he virtually heaved her back on course. In the plexiglas nose, Jay Seeley peered through the bombsight, holding his breath. The calculations, made almost instantaneously, must not be in error.

The bomb release was set on *Salvo;* the bombs would fall together. They swept over a cluster of buildings. He triggered the release. He said, "They're gone."

Like a hooked fish breaking water, *Katie's* nose went into the clouds. Behind her, gathering speed for fourteen seconds, the paper-packed bombs sped toward the target. Five of the tight steel casings lanced into the ship's forward section. Each of the missiles, weighing nearly a hundred pounds, was traveling better than one hundred and seventy miles an hour at impact. Like battering-rams, they punched through the wooden planking as though it were of no greater strength than the paper the bombs themselves carried. . . .

The Intelligence officer stared at them incredulously. "Are you guys kidding me?"

They grinned, shaking their heads. They had it, now, the pride. Lou Kingston said, "That's the straight poop, Dan. We took a quick look. It was sinking by the bow, an' about five or six of the trucks were burning. The fire was spreading to the wharf. Apparently they had tried to sneak the whole pack of cornered Heinies out under cover of the weather. We were told to give 'em leaflets—and leaflets they got!"

"But with those bombs . . . that paper—" He was still mumbling to himself as they filed out of Interrogation.

Outside, Punchy Hall halted. He faced westward, and made a smacking sound with his lips.

Wenholz nodded. "An' with onions," he said.

But in Sports They Mean—

A Quiz by Bud Cornish

SCISSORS are something that a lady uses when she cuts a thread or makes over last year's hat: *mousetrap* is something a man sets in the cellar to catch that cheese-nibbler who's been eating the asbestos off the furnace-pipes since cheese has been rationed. But in the world of sports, those and other words are associated with various pastimes. You know your sports? Still, you might have trouble putting some of these together!

The object is to pair the word in the first column with the sport in the second column with which it is associated. A score of twelve is hittin' 'em; ten entitles you to read tomorrow's sports page without a guide.

1—Scissors	A—Billiards
2—Decathlon	B—Harness-racing
3—Stone	C—Golf
4—Mousetrap	D—Swimming
5—Knuckler	E—Boxing
6—Hobble	F—Badminton
7—Shuttlecock	G—Baseball
8—Free style	H—Lacrosse
9—Balkline	I—Hockey
10—Cleek	J—Wrestling
11—Slalom	K—Tennis
12—Blue line	L—Football
13—Inside home	M—Curling
14—Love	N—Track
15—Second	O—Skiing

The Answers

1—J Wrestling hold, around head or body, made by clamping legs in the manner of closing scissors.

2—N Ten track events by one competitor, on a point basis.

3—M Stonelike, pumpkin-size ball with handle, slid toward a target on ice.

4—L Football defensive play allowing opponent to smash through unmolested, only to be blocked when through from side. Ball-carrier usually goes through hole thus opened.

5—H Baseball pitch, or pitcher who throws it. Ball thrown with two or three fingers bent so knuckles contact it.

6—B Harness device on horse's legs to force him to a certain gait, often a pace.

7—C Feathered ball batted over badminton net.

8—D Race in which any style stroke may be used by swimming competitor.

9—A Billiard-table markings that make sections from which ball or balls must be driven before run can continue.

10—C A club in golf, with head pitched to loft the ball somewhat.

11—O A skiing-run over a course studded with natural obstacles, requiring extreme skill in changing course quickly.

12—I Dividing-line on hockey rink beyond which no attacker may advance before the puck has crossed.

13—H One of ten positions on a lacrosse team, similar to forwards in basketball or wings in hockey.

14—K Zero in tennis scoring is "love." (Zero in love is the temperature when you come home late from a poker game.)

15—E Bottleholder and advice-giver in a boxer's corner.

Grandma Splices the

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

"I DON'T object to his 'decks' and 'bulkheads' or his 'Aye-aye, sirs,'" Mr. Noble protested. "I don't mind his talking like John Paul Jones. I don't even object to his calling this house a *ship!*" Mr. Noble rattled his morning newspaper impatiently. "But why, *why* does he have to go around shouting 'Hubert' all the time?"

"*Roger,* Father. . . . It's *Roger*—not Hubert," his wife corrected as she poured the breakfast coffee. "Grandma says it means 'Message received' . . . It's something like 'O. K.' He has Grandma talking that way now. Last night she called the stairway a *ladder,* and this morning she was singing some wild sailor song about bell-bottomed trousers with Navy blue coats. Somebody in the song kept climbing up the *rigging.* I tried to tell her it didn't sound ladylike, but you know Grandma!"

Mr. Noble applied himself to his newspaper, muttering between gulps of coffee that it was all right with him—glad to have the boy home, no matter how he talked—but that he, Mr. Noble, personally did not believe that Admiral King and Secretary Forrestal went around shouting "Roger!" at each other.

It was just yesterday that the Nobles' only son, with a shipmate in tow, had arrived back home on a ten-day leave from an aircraft carrier which had been "somewhere in the Pacific" for the past six months.

Although the Nobles, Senior, had walked from the railway station—having given the car to the two boys for some mysterious secret mission—they were home ahead of the Navy and were in the living-room waiting for the boys.

"He really shouldn't have brought us these presents." Mrs. Noble struggled with the wrapping on a bulky package.

"No, he shouldn't—not without a set of instructions." Mr. Noble removed the pipe from between his teeth to stare in open-mouthed bewilderment at the oblong of colored beads he held in his hand. "What in the Sam Hill is it? Looks like a Chinese bean-bag."

"Oh, no. Charley told me," his wife volunteered. "Down at the station—while you were getting his—er—his *ditty* bag."

"HIS *whaty* bag?" Mr. Noble transferred his puzzled expression from the handful of beads to his wife.

"*Ditty.* His ditty bag," Mrs. Noble explained in a superior tone. "That little suitcase, of course! And my! Isn't it real pretty? I mean your fob. Charley said he got it in Alaska. From some real Indians, and it's made of Indian beads. It's a fob, Charley said. A fob for your—now what did he call it? Oh, yes! I remember: a fob for your *chronometer.* Chronometer, I guess that's what they call a watch in the Navy."

"But I'm not in the Navy," protested Mr. Noble, "and I'm not going to wear a string of Indian beads on my wrist-watch."

"Don't mumble through your pipe, Henry. And don't grumble at Charley when they come in." Mrs. Noble was carefully unfolding what appeared to be the final layer of wrapping on her package. "We want to have everything nice for Charley and his boatmate."

"*Ship*mate, Mother, not *boat*mate." Her husband beamed. "That's one I do know."

"Shipmate, boatmate, they're both the same thing, Henry Noble." Mrs. Noble brushed aside her husband's correction and the last of the wrapping with one impatient gesture. Then she held aloft a rather large but badly bent piece of wood. "Well," she gasped. "Well, what—"

"A boomerang, Mother! A boomerang from Australia! Just what you needed!" Mr. Noble coughed so hard he sprayed pipe-ashes over his vest.

Mrs. Noble glared accusingly at the pipe while she recovered her composure, to enthuse over the present. "Why, that's sweet of Charley! He always was the thoughtful one. But what's it for? What shall I do with it?"

"Do with it? *Do* with it? Why, you throw it, of course. You can hunt kangaroos with it, Mother. Next time you see a kangaroo, you can just—"

Main Brace

By LIEUTENANT HAROLD COFFIN, U.S.N.R.

"And you can just stop making fun, Henry Noble. It's a souvenir, and I'll just put it right up here on the mantel. I wonder," she added with a start, "I wonder what was in that package he had us bring home to Grandma? I took it to her room." Mrs. Noble moved her husband's pipe-rack from its accustomed place on the mantel to make room for the boomerang.

"What's the name of the sailor Charley brought with him?" Mr. Noble asked as he searched helplessly for a new resting-spot for the pipe-rack his wife shoved at him.

"Barney," Mrs. Noble replied. "Barney Green. You know, he was the friend Charley wrote about from his shoe camp."

"*Boot* camp!" The correction exploded from the hallway. "Boot camp, not shoe camp," Grandma announced curtly as she swept into the room. "Where is he?" the old lady demanded. "Where is Charles? He brought me a grass skirt—a hula skirt. From Hawaii. He's been places, all right. Wish I could go to Hawaii. See the world. Too old to join the Waves, though," she chuckled. "Where's Charles?"

"He'll be along soon, Grandma," Mrs. Noble explained. "We walked from the station; we left the car for Charles and his friend. They had to stop at the U.S.O. Charles said he had to see a lady about a bundle. Wasn't it nice," Mrs. Noble turned to her husband, "the way that nice, friendly Shore Patrol officer took so much interest in the boys? He was getting them to try their sailor hats on in a new way—to see if it wouldn't be more becoming!"

"Hrumph!" from Grandma.

"Didn't sound very friendly to me," Mr. Noble admitted.

"Oh, but he *was!*" his wife insisted. "I heard every word. He said he would like to have the boys as friends. He even spelled it out: 'I've got a notion to make you *p, a, l's,*' he told them."

Grandma interjected another snort. "*P, a, l! P, a, l!* In the Navy that stands for: *'Prisoner at Large!'*"

"Well! I never! And where did you learn all this?" asked Mrs. Noble.

"Still know how to read," Grandma snapped. "Read it in 'The Bluejackets' Manual'—that book Charles left when he was home last time. We can't *all* be landlubbers around this house."

"Landlubbers!" Mr. Noble laughed. "Listen to that, Mother! Grandma's talking just like your son. Maybe she can act as interpreter for us—translate some of this salty double-talk he's picked up."

"Here she is!" blurted Charley. "Folks, I want all hands to meet Sue Dianne."

BUT further translations were forestalled as the front door burst open to admit a two-sailor task force, smartly fitted out in Navy blues on which rows of service ribbons supplied the only dash of color. As they rolled into the room, both boys reached back to sweep off the immaculately white sailor hats which had perched miraculously far back on their heads.

"Ahoy there, Grammaw!" Charley Noble picked up the little old lady with one sweep of his arm and saluted her with a hearty smack. "Right on the target, eh, Grammaw?"

Mr. and Mrs. Noble were trying to entice the guest into the family circle with gestures of hospitality. Mr. Noble put down his pipe and reached to relieve the sailor of his bags and hat.

"Just toss your gear on the deck," Charley called. "Right over there against the bulkhead. And come over here and meet Gran. —Grammaw, this is Seaman First Class Bernard William Green, B.A."

"Glad to be aboard," gulped the red-faced Bernard.

"How d'ye do, Bernard," acknowledged Grandma. "Didn't know you were a college man. You don't look old enough."

"Oh, he didn't get that B.A. in college," Charley laughed. "Barney won the B.A. on our flat-top. Stands for *'Brickibus Aureatus'*—or just plain 'Gold Brick.' And you don't have to call him Bernard. It's 'Barnacle Bill' for short."

"Well, you just make yourself at home here. And I'm glad to hear you're a dog-fancier." Mrs. Noble tried to cover the guest's embarrassment with small-talk. "Do you have one of your own at home? A chow,

I mean. Charley wrote that you are especially fond of chows."

"Why—er, no—that is, yes. . . . I like dogs, I guess. But I don't have no chows, Mrs. Noble," he stammered.

"Roger! I have it!" Charley cut in with a whoop. "You're dead right, Mother. I said he was a *chow-hound*. That's Navy. Means he likes to *eat* all the time. *Food* is '*chow*.' Get it? And ol' Barney's also a sack-hound," Charley declared with pride, "*and* a liberty-hound *and* a—"

"Aw, knock off, willya, Charley. Knock off!" growled Barnacle Bill with a deprecatory shrug of his shoulders in the manner of one who has been embarrassed by too much praise. "You're pretty good yourself when it comes to sack duty."

"That's fine, son! Glad to hear it." Mr. Noble had entered the conversational mêlée. "Handy with the heavy stuff, are you? What do you have to do—pile the sacks on your boat?"

"Gosh, Skipper," Charley turned to his father, "don't be a hoot! That's *awful* lubberish. In the first place, our flat-top isn't a boat; it's a *ship*. Then, you don't 'pile' things; you *stow* 'em. And everybody knows that a sack—well, that it isn't a *sack*. A sack is a bunk, or a hammock—a bed. 'Sack duty' is when you *hit the sack*—I mean, when you *calk off*, or that is, when you *sleep!*"

"All right. All right," his father conceded, "but you're not on a ship now. Just close the door, and we'll go in to lunch." Then, as his son stepped to the door, "or whatever it is you boys call a door in the Navy. Let's see, walls are 'bulkheads'; the floor is a 'deck,'" Mr. Noble ticked them off on his fingers. "The ceiling is a—"

"An 'overhead,'" Barney contributed with a smile. He was more at ease now, thawing out. "Ceilings are *overheads*, Mr. Noble."

"DOOR, door—let me see," Charley mused.

"Don't tell me you're stumped, son!" his father pounced. "You mean the Navy doesn't have a word for it? That you just have to call a door by its right name?"

"Well," Charley decided, "we *could* call it a *watertight* door—but I don't guess that it's watertight, is it?" He frowned at the cracks where the door met the frame. He was puzzled. Something or somebody had let him down—he couldn't decide whether it was the door or the U.S. Navy. He was roused from his study by his mother calling them to lunch.

"It's on the table," she added.

"Roger!" Charley shouted. "Roger. Wilco. Out!" He grabbed his shipmate by the arm and propelled him gayly toward the dining-room. "Chow down! And with*out* the chow-line! Come and get it, Barney!"

Luncheon was a gay scramble of questions and answers: the passing of platters of food; the filling and refilling of plates. Grandma was a silent spectator. She appeared to be taking mental notes on a few of the more startling nautical references which had not been included in "The Bluejackets' Manual." Once or twice she had to butt in to untangle misunderstandings, because the boys—as Mr. Noble later remarked to his wife—"didn't seem to realize that they weren't speaking English."

The Nobles had no difficulty in drawing out the boys. Their sea stories would have done credit to a chief boatswain's mate.

"Gee, Mrs. Noble, thanks a whole lot for the chow—I mean food. It was swell!" Barney enthused.

"Why that's all right, Barney. We're very glad to have you."—Mrs. Noble paused, took a deep breath, then blurted it out—"to have you *inside the ship!*"

"She means she's glad to have you aboard," Grandma explained.

"Anyway, that reminds me," Mrs. Noble turned to her son. "We almost forgot to thank you, Charley, for those nice presents. It was real thoughtful, and you're—"

"He's *four-O!*" Barney cut in.

"Roger!" snapped Grandma.

"And did you get that other bundle, Charles?" his mother wanted to know. "The one from the U.S.O.?"

"What bundle?" Charley demanded.

"Why, you know. You took the car—said you had to see a lady about a bundle."

"Aw, no, Ma! I didn't say *that*. What I mean is—" Charley broke off.

Barney was blushing, and Mrs. Noble, noticing the obvious embarrassment of the boys, decided not to push the question. Later that afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Noble mentioned the peculiar behavior of the boys which had resulted from Mrs. Noble's reference to the bundle at the U.S.O. "Probably another present," Mrs. Noble suggested.

"Yeah," admitted her husband, "could be an outrigger canoe, from the South Seas; or an Indian totem pole—to go with my watch-fob!"

Right after lunch Charley and his shipmate, Seaman First Class Bernard William (Barnacle Bill for short) Green, had gone off—or "gone ashore," as they put it—to do the town. They took the family car after assuring Mr. Noble that, as service men on leave, they could get extra gasoline coupons.

WHICH brings us to the Noble breakfast-nook on the following morning, where we left Mr. Noble reading his morning paper and addressing his wife on the subject of the linguistic peculiarities of sailors in general and two sailors in particular.

Mr. and Mrs. Noble had the breakfast-nook to themselves. It was early as Mr. Noble—having played hookey from the office on the previous day when he met the boys—was back in his regular routine.

Mrs. Noble said that Grandma had stopped singing in the bathroom long enough to report that the boys were still pounding the sack.

"Sack!" Mr. Noble snorted. "Sack — roger — starboard — port — abaft — deck—bulkhead—" Then the muttering stopped. Mr. Noble's coffee cup hanged the saucer with a splash. "Mother! Listen to this!" The newspaper trembled as he read from it in an unsteady voice:

"Daring Daylight Theft at U.S.O.—stolen ration coupons could flood black market with ten thousand gallons gas." The story went on to relate that the bundle of gasoline coupons had been brought to the local U.S.O. by Mrs. H. William Harrvie, a volunteer worker who divided her time between the O.P.A. and U.S.O. offices. The robbery had occurred yesterday morning sometime between the hours of ten A.M. when Mrs. Harrvie had arrived at the U.S.O. and eleven-thirty, when the volunteer worker discovered the theft as she prepared to take the coupons to the O.P.A. headquarters.

"Army and Navy authorities have been called in on the case," the newspaper stated, "to investigate the possibility that servicemen visiting the U.S.O. may be implicated."

Mr. Noble read the final ominous sentence: "Two sailors are said to be under suspicion."

"Two sailors," Mrs. Noble repeated weakly. "Between ten o'clock and eleven-thirty yesterday—"

"And they were driving around in the car all afternoon, *and* half the night," her husband recalled. "Said they could get gasoline coupons because they were on leave!"

"But—but Charley *couldn't!* He *wouldn't!*" Mrs. Noble defended.

"I don't know, Mother. He might not realize the seriousness of the thing.

And of course we really don't know anything about this other boy—this friend of Charley's. Remember how evasive they were when we asked about that mysterious errand at the U.S.O.? Charley has some explaining to do to me. Right now!"

"No, Henry, let me handle this," Mrs. Noble insisted. "You'll just get to shouting and we never will learn what happened."

She finally managed to shoo her husband out of the house with reassurances that she would telephone a full report to him at the office.

Mrs. Noble concealed the newspaper from the boys when they came down to breakfast. Although it was difficult for her not to come straight to the point, she first of all fed them a big breakfast. They were on the fourth cup of coffee when she burst out with the accusation:

"Charley, you're hiding something from me! What were you doing at the U.S.O. yesterday? And where is the bundle that you were going to see about?"

"Gosh, Ma, I didn't say it was a bundle. That is—what I mean is—" Barney tried to excuse himself from the table, but Charley grabbed him by the blouse. "Belay it! As you were. Don't try to abandon ship *now!*" And Barney, with a weak "Roger," came back to his chair.

"Well, Charley, I'm waiting," his mother reminded him.

"Aw, gee whiz, Ma! Guess I do have a confession to make. We meant to tell you sooner but—well, gosh! No use sitting here beating our gums about it *now*. Tell you what I'll do, Ma. I'll shoot the works—confess all—bring the evidence here at fifteen hundred this afternoon."

"Fifteen hundred? What's that?"

"Three o'clock to you, Mrs. Noble," Charley replied. "O.K., Ma?"

"Well, I don't see why you have to wait until then. But if you'll promise to return everything to the U.S.O.—Charley, Charley, why *did* you do it?"

"No promises, Ma. See you at fifteen hundred!" And with that the boys were out of the house.

THE Nobles were a glum and nervous pair as they waited for their son shortly before three o'clock. Mr. Noble had been summoned from his office. Blithely whistling what Mrs. Noble referred to as "that song," Grandma appeared to be entirely unconcerned.

Three o'clock. Five minutes after three. Ten after. A car door slammed in front of the house.

"They've brought somebody with 'em," Grandma reported laconically from the window.

"Maybe it's the police!" worried Mrs. Noble. But before she could get

to the window, steps sounded on the porch.

Mr. Noble, frowning, moved to the door and opened it.

The trio on the porch—Charley, Barney, *and* a young lady—were all hanging back, each one trying to shove the other two across the threshold. "Oh! Hello, Skipper," Charley greeted his father. "What are you doing at home?"

"Come in. Come in!" Grandma commanded. "Going to stand outside all day?"

Charley took the girl by the hand and led her into the room. Barney followed reluctantly. The girl was a pretty brunette—small but adequately curved. Her startled-fawn expression changed to a friendly smile as she turned to Mrs. Noble with a pleading look in her large brown eyes.

"She doesn't look like a policeman to me!" Grandma chuckled.

"Here she is, Ma!" blurted Charley. "Folks—Ma, Pa, Grandma—I want all hands to meet Sue Dianne."

He took a deep breath and before "all hands" could acknowledge the introduction, he had launched on his explanation: "Met her last year—at the U.S.O. Wanted you folks to meet her then, but there wasn't time—on a seventy-two-hour liberty."

"That's fine, and we're glad to have Sue Dianne with us," Mrs. Noble acknowledged. "But what about that other matter? Where's the bundle from the U.S.O.?"

"Gee, Ma, I kept telling you it wasn't a bundle. What I said, Ma, was a *package*. I said I had to see a lady about a package—those were my very words. And here's the package!" He placed an arm around Sue Dianne in a possessive embrace.

Grandma whistled. "*Some* package!"

"Grandma! Charley! Behave! Both of you," Mrs. Noble demanded.

"Then you didn't take those ration coupons?" There was a note of relief in Mr. Noble's voice and his question was more in the nature of a statement.

"What coupons, Dad?"

"The gasoline coupons. The ones that were stolen from Mrs. H. William Harrvie at the U.S.O."

"Oh, those!" Sue Dianne spoke up. "They weren't stolen at all. Mrs. Harrvie found them at home, where she'd left them. They were there all the time."

"Which proves you can't believe all the *scuttlebutt* you read in the papers!" chortled Grandma.

"Hey, pipe down, everybody!" demanded Charley. "I don't know what this coupon business is all about, but what about Sue Dianne and me?"

And then, after a period of apprehensive silence:

"You see, it's this way: Sue Dianne wanted to wait, but gosh!—I can't leave a pretty gal like Sue Dianne down there at the U.S.O., can I? Adrift among all those wolves? And she insists on doing something for the war effort. And I've got just eight more days of leave." Charley paused for a quick gulp of air, then continued: "I figured if she just *had* to do something for the war—well—I'm part of the war effort—and that's the way it is!"

A FEW moments later Mr. and Mrs. Noble found themselves alone on the davenport. The U.S. Navy, accompanied by the U.S.O., had gone "to see a man about a chaplain."

"Sue Dianne. . . ." Mrs. Noble mused in bewilderment. "We don't even know her last name."

"Doesn't matter, Mother," her husband chuckled. "It will soon be Noble!"

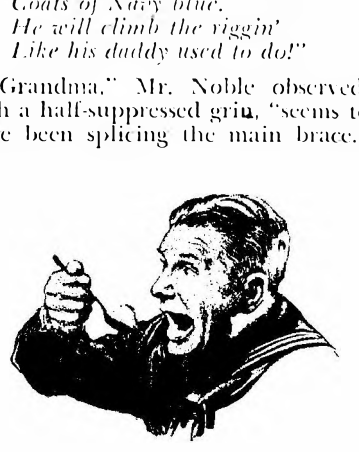
From the pantry came a song:

"If you have a daughter
Bounce her on your knee,
But if you have a son
Send the rascal out to sea!"

The voice was a thin and wavering whisky soprano; and the tune was slightly off-key. But every word was distinct:

"Singing bell-bottom trousers,
Coats of Navy blue,
He will climb the riggin'
Like his daddy used to do!"

"Grandma," Mr. Noble observed, with a half-suppressed grin, "seems to have been splicing the main brace."



HAWAII PEARLS

THINKING of Annabel, Jonathan stopped in a five-and-ten and bought a garish greeting card to send her. On the card was a photograph of an atypical gook girl, dressed in a shimmering cellophane night-club imitation of an island *ti* skirt and nothing else, so that her decorations in front were engagingly visible. She was posed beneath a palm tree and a burgundy moon, which a small printed legend guaranteed was hand tinted. A bit of verse, entitled *"Greetings From Hawaii,"* read:

'Neath tropic moon
With sea so blue
I watch her dance
And think of you

To this Jonathan added with his pen, *"Like hell I do,"* by way of signature.

He moved out through the crowded store, and at the sidewalk the brown man brushed against him and said, "Sorry," and Jonathan turned quickly, stiff-legged, and grabbed his arm and held him.

He said: "I'll take that back."

The brown man goggled out of soft frightened eyes. His clothes were immaculate and white, dazzlingly white in the sun of the street, and his white hat had a feather lei for a band. His nose was wide and flat, the nostrils porcine. He was startled and frightened, and his arm trembled under Jonathan's hand.

Of a sudden he wrenched back and broke away, whirled in a frantic, awkward pirouette and dived out of sight in the crowd. A sailor he had knocked off balance swore after him, and a few curious heads turned. That was all.

Jonathan found his notebook on the sidewalk at his feet. The brown dip would have been disappointed in it, anyway. It contained no money, and only Annabel could decipher the scribbled notes. Or had he been after money?

Find the hula girl; case the Jordan Project C rooming-house; talk to the man named Mickey Brokaw—and now something more for calculation, and time was short. Hurry-hurry-hurry was the soul of Captain Bishop, and

Jonathan saw the pickpocket fling the girl away from him. A knife was in her hand.

Our old friend the crime expert Jonathan of Army Intelligence is faced with a weird wartime problem.

by William Brandon

Captain Bishop was an earnest honest man, and he had seemed extremely well-informed.

Jonathan moved on, slapping his notebook against the heel of his hand in thought. The people surged in a jam around him on the narrow sidewalk—Army, Navy, mainlander warworkers, *kamaainas* of a dozen different bloods. They passed with exactly the shambling shoving gait of a crowd at a circus. It was carnival, Jonathan thought, carnival Honolulu, and the carnival rhythm of war. After all, what was the derivation of the word? O flesh, farewell! And the revelry thereof! But a tempo doubtless still too slow for Captain Bishop. And so first, find the girl. . . .

Off Fort Street, the hula girls were enshrined in little alleyway theaters and in white-lighted photo concessions, cornered by the din of amusement arcades. Here any of the thousands of servicemen could have his picture taken beside a scantily dressed island girl, one print for fifty cents, three for a buck. The girls usually swarmed over the subjects in a rousing libidinous manner, remorselessly accentuating what might be called the genre aspect of the resultant portraits.

He had the address, and it was not hard to find the place—Play-Lani. A juke-box was booming the Hawaiian War Chant, to which a group of Marines, a little oiled, were singing an indecorous parody. The hula girl was overpainted, but she was young and pretty. Her body was slender and graceful, and she was very much aware of it, consciously modeling for the camera and the onlookers. A red-faced buck sergeant held her in his arms, and she clung close against him, turning her head to face the camera booth over the curve of her slim arm. She had an oddly attractive smile, laughing and almost shy. There was a trace of Oriental slant to her eyes. A raffish wench, but piquant, Jonathan thought. An appealing combination, to be sure.

The photographs were taken against a backdrop that pictured a grass shack and a peculiarly Nipponese volcano. *A hapa-haole* barker stood on a dais by the camera booth, inviting the GIs to take their hands out of their pockets and be not bashful. The buck sergeant stepped down, amid cheers, and his place was taken by a tall, reedy Navy yeoman, equally red-faced.

"Here, brave sailor boy!" the barker chanted, grinning broadly. "All sailor boy want picture with pretty Lanuaha! Everyone get picture with pretty Lanuaha! Come close, no push, picture line, picture line for Lanuaha!"

The yeoman gingerly embraced Lanuaha, and she made a face and showed him how to do it. His mates laughed, howled him on.

JONATHAN edged closer in the crowd. He worked his way to the low railing around the concession, hastily scribbled a note and passed it to the barker, with a glance toward Lanuaha.

The barker laughed gleefully, put two fingers beside his pockmarked nose and made an owlish eye, and retired from his podium to enter the camera hut. A moment later he stuck his head out and shouted good-naturedly: "All through now, all quit now, everybody! Come tomorrow."

The yeoman was finished, and Lanuaha too disappeared inside the booth. The crowd, with a call or two after her, began to drift away. Presently a man Jonathan had not seen, probably the photographer, emerged from the booth and came over to him. He was short-legged and barrel-chested; his black eyes were in an anxious squint, and the front of his head was bald. He might have been a Portuguese.

He said: "Mr. Jaffrey? Glad to know you, Mr. Jaffrey? My name's Ferrer." He hoisted his short fat legs over the flimsy railing, and once across it, bent this way and that to brush his trousers carefully, grunting and puffing with the effort. He said: "She'll be

out right away. Come and have a drink, do you mind? I want to talk to you myself." He took Jonathan's arm and guided him past the pinball machines and the twelve Daring Views of Artist's Models for one penny the look, to a counter where malted milks and pineapple floats were offered. He talked rapidly, and constantly squinted up at Jonathan's face with something like concern. He said: "She is a very fine, clever girl: but you know—"

"Well," Jonathan said. His pineapple float was thin and not very cold. He had no idea what Mr. Ferrer meant.

Mr. Ferrer squinted at him intensely. "But you are an old friend of hers —you wrote that on the note to her, I'm sure?"

"Oh, yes," Jonathan said. "Certainly. Naturally." He didn't like the way the thick little man craned up at him. He didn't like Mr. Ferrer's eyes. There was a shine of paranoia in that squint. It was uncomfortable.

Now Mr. Ferrer smiled. He had not touched his drink, or looked at it. All his attention was for Jonathan.

He said: "You are not any more her old friend than you are Mr. Jaffrey. I'm right about that, I guess? You wear white pants and a hula shirt, and you have got a shop badge hanging around your neck there, so you look like someone, a welder, you look like someone working here on Oahu; but now I will tell you the truth. You are an Army rank of captain, really, aren't you? You used to be a teacher in a college before the war, but now you are in the Army Intelligence, because once you wrote a book about criminals. Now you are being an Army detective, could I say? Because you are in Hawaii in disguise of a war-worker." Mr. Ferrer's smile spread to his eyes. He almost laughed. Jonathan thought for a moment that Mr. Ferrer was going to slap him on the back in good-fellowship. Mr. Ferrer inquired: "Am I right, sir?"

Jonathan looked down at the little man and considered him. Very interesting, the ugly little eyes, with their almost eager shine. He replied: "You said your name was Ferrer?"

"Yes, Ferrer, Dominic Ferrer."

The hula girl was overpainted, but she was young and pretty and very much aware of it.

"Not Brokaw?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Ferrer said earnestly. "His name was Gifford, and he never changed his name." He hunched his shoulders and spread his hands. "You see, I only want to help you. I have a great patriotic love for the U. S. Army, and I am sorry for Lanuaha, and I was sorry for the young man Gifford you are here to look for. This name Brokaw I don't know. I will tell you anything I can. I want you to know my feelings; that is why I spoke to you. I am honest with you; you are honest with me. It was easy to know you; Lanuaha said who it must be, just when she read your note. She has been waiting for you to come here; she knows all about you. I guess that Gifford told her, once."

"Apparently," Jonathan said.

"I will tell you anything about Jimmy Gifford," Mr. Ferrer offered. "I talked to him many times. I am sorry for them both, and I hope sometime they can be happy."

Jonathan said: "Can you tell me where to find him?"

"Anything but that," Mr. Ferrer said with sadness. "How I wish so much I could!"

Jonathan looked into his glass. He noticed for the first time that it was not clean. Because he had been thirsty, his appetite had blinded him until the pineapple float was gone, and now he was perplexed, like a man who suddenly sees his bride as homely. He would remember that for Annabel; she would question the feeling.

He said: "Can you tell me if he's still alive?"

"But he must be! He only has reason to be hiding, isn't that all? She is ready now. Talk to me again later, won't you?" Mr. Ferrer gave Jonathan his damp hand and a polite squint, and left him.

THE girl Lanuaha was in a white dress with a yellow belt, and wore a yellow flower in her hair. She had removed much of the make-up. The gamincsque grin was half hidden now by a smile that was winsome and lovely. Jonathan wondered if he shouldn't have his picture taken with her.

She said: "You are Captain Jaffrey?"

"So they say," Jonathan admitted.

"Let's get out of here, shall we?" There was no accent to her voice. It was as Stateside as draw poker. "I've only got a minute now, but later we can have more time—maybe you could go out to my house this afternoon and wait? You wouldn't mind?"

"What kind of talk is that?" Jonathan studied her candid eyes quizzically. "I understood you were anxious to see me."

"Oh, but I am!" She made an impatient gesture, and her look was imploring. She took his arm and they

moved out into the passing crowd of the street while she talked. "You don't know how I've waited—but now something has just happened. . . . Here, this is where I always eat, and it's quiet." They went into an Oriental curio shop, through a long narrow room hung with silks, cheap dolls and racks of postcards, and attended by a few listless Japanese or Korean salesgirls, and entered a sort of restaurant in a separate room at the rear. There were a few little round ice-cream-parlor tables and a smell of smoke and cooking from beyond a ragged Chinese screen that apparently marked the kitchen. Jonathan was alarmed to see the customers eating with chopsticks.

Lanuaha laughed at him and said: "They've got forks. It's the only place downtown they know how to cook—and my uncle owns this store. Have you ever had a sweet and pungent shrimp, Captain Jaffrey?"

SHE fell into a sort of pidgin to order the lunch, and spoke animatedly for a moment with the high-cheeked Chinese boy who waited on their table. A little fat man of uncertain nationality stuck his head around the kitchen screen to look dourly at them. Jonathan presumed he was the uncle.

The girl smoothed her skirt and sat up properly and looked at him and said: "Now."

Jonathan said, "Well," and spread his hands. "Jimmy Gifford."

She said simply: "He just went away."

Jonathan shook his head. "I don't know anything about the man except his name."

"Oh. . . . Well, he came here two years ago in the Army—" She paused, and her finger traced a wavering way across the tabletop, and she looked inward for a moment, fleetingly transformed by an extraordinary gentleness that played upon her introspection like a flickering light; and she was obviously arranging the way she would tell this thing. She said simply: "I met him then, and after a little while we thought we would be married; but he was going Down Under, and he wanted to wait until he came back. So—he was gone a long time, and when he did come back, he had been wounded." Her eyes were lowered. "He had been so badly hurt. He was not the same. Sometimes he would forget things. Sometimes he would forget who he was—and everything. They gave him a discharge, a—you know—psycho."

The Chinese boy brought some soup and a pot of tea and two small fragile cups, and a large bowl of little rolls of crisp roasted pork. Jonathan declined. The girl bent her head and ate hungrily.

Jonathan was certain the door had moved. He felt sweat in his hands.

Jonathan said: "You were married?"

"No." She pushed the dish of soup away, and folded her hands on the table and glanced covertly at a tiny watch on her wrist. "No, Jimmy said to wait." Her eyes were hidden. "He said to wait until he was better. But he stayed here, in the Islands. He got a job, a war job. It was with Jordan Project C. They were doing something on windward Oahu; they were building something. I never knew what. Jimmy worked for them with boats. He operated small boats. He knew all about boats."

The boy brought rice and a plate of cakes. Lanuaha stopped speaking until he had gone. Then she said abruptly, her eyes still lowered: "So one day he brought the pearls. He only asked me to keep them for him; he wouldn't say anything about them. I—I even thought he might have stolen them."

A radio or juke-box in some store near by blared suddenly in loud swelling music—"*There goes that song again . . . we used to call it our serenade.*" The girl lifted her eyes, and Jonathan was startled to see that she was an Asiatic. He had forgotten, while she talked. Where a moment before she had been warm and alive to her emotion, her expression was now masked by the sheerest of Oriental veils, but so cunningly fashioned as to conceal none of her loveliness. It was as if the shades and highlights had been subtly retouched on a painting that had before been troubling and was now left pretty.

Jonathan said: "He mentioned the pearls, when he called Intelligence here, just before he disappeared. From what I can gather, he didn't say more than that he had something we should see, some pearls. An appointment was made for him, but I understand he didn't show up."

The girl said slowly: "He was sick."

"Then you think he might have had an attack of amnesia or something of that kind, and wandered off—"

She said in her soft voice, still speaking very slowly: "Why do you think I'm working at this job? Everyone comes by there, everyone. Some day Jimmy—" She hesitated, and her short upper lip quivered; then the veil was swept aside, and she covered her face with her hands and began to cry.

Jonathan bent over the table and touched her arm. She shook her head furiously.

The little fat man, *hapa* Chinese, *hapa* Portuguese, *hapa* Hawaiian, *hapa* Japanese, *hapa* perhaps a dozen races, came out of the kitchen wiping his fingers on the tail of his shirt, and stood by the girl with his hands on his hips and spoke to her roughly in some language Jonathan did not identify. She got up from the table, and ran back to the kitchen with a flash of her high red heels. The fat man, the uncle, Jonathan was now convinced, turned with his fists still on his hips and glared at Jonathan for a time, his short clipped white hair bristling on his round head, and then waddled away, puffing in vexation.

OTHER patrons in the restaurant had watched the whole scene with complacent antique calm; and now, with an air only a little bemused, they returned to their own affairs. Jonathan sat at the table by himself, with the rice and the cakes and the cooling tea, feeling foolish. Annabel would know what to do here. A woman in tears fell in the decent order of things to another woman; but to a man it was a calamity sweeping the ground from under his feet, as a fist-fight (Jonathan thought) might affect a woman.

The uncle returned presently with a folded note which he thrust into

"All sailor want picture with pretty Lanuaha!" the barker chanted. "Come close, no push, picture line."

Jonathan's hand. He said, "You go now, she say," and flipped his hands casually from his wrists like a man shooting a basketball. His eyes took in the untouched food on the table, and he added: "Unless you eat?"

"No," Jonathan said. "But I want to pay the check."

The old man's eyes slanted contemptuously. "Pay?" he asked. "When you make her sick?" He shuffled away.

The note said:

One block mauka from Ala Moana bus stop Kaala five six o'clock Ita house L. Kaneawaiawa.

Jonathan went out through the curio-store to the street, looking at the note as he walked. At the door he stood frowning: and one of the salesgirls, one with an oval Hokusai face and the shapely legs that all these women seemed to have (doubtless from barefootedness, Jonathan thought), came up to him and said: "Yes?"

Jonathan said, "What is this *mauka*?"

She giggled and pointed. "It means that way."

"You mean north?"

She shrugged. "It can be any way. It can be south too, or east or west. *Here* it is *there*." And she pointed again.

"That sounds interesting," Jonathan said. He got out his notebook and a pencil to write the word down, while the girl giggled at him again, and discovered that a number of the pages of the notebook had been ripped away. He was astonished and shocked, not so much at the loss, as at the cleverness of the brown man, the pickpocket who must have done it, and his own carelessness in not seeing the loss until now, and the pointlessness of the whole thing. There was nothing of importance in his scribblings here. A fool would know he would not carry important notes—if there were any he should possess—in a ten-cent scratch-pad in his pocket.

NO one realized better than Jonathan himself that although he might be well qualified for success in his avocation of a cloistered study of the devious laws of criminal behavior, he was bound to be a sad sample of a cop. The admirable detachment with which he could at times explore the human race dissolved when he met his subject, not in the bookish abstract collective man, but in the individual singular, face to face. It is a weakness shared by most thinkers, who can create Utopias for all the world in their libraries, but are unable to carry through peaceful negotiations with their plumbers.

Jonathan's original duty with military intelligence had been work concerned with training curricula. He had been ostensibly fitted for this on his record as a young and brilliant teacher. His involution in the case of Jimmy Gifford, as in other similar cases in the past, left him subject to an occasional wave of plain wonder as to what the hell he was doing here at all.

Jimmy Gifford had once been a student of his at Jordan University. Jonathan hadn't known him well; the boy had left school after two years to enter the Army; but he remembered him. Once, on a summer vacation, Jonathan had run across him at a place on Chesapeake Bay, and had sailed with him a time or two. He remembered Gifford's enthusiasm for boats.

Now in this war winter, Jonathan had been held over from a training study assignment to the western Pacific, to talk to Jimmy Gifford again—sick in a little native nursing home in Honolulu. Captain Bishop had taken him to see Gifford, and had explained what they knew of the case.

The boy had been invalided out of the Army and had stayed on Oahu, working as dockmaster on a construction project, living in a rooming-

house used as a company dormitory. He had telephoned Army Intelligence with some incoherent story about pearls, and the day following had disappeared from his work and his living-quarters. Captain Bishop had located him, after several days, in the nursing home where he was still kept; but he had been unable to answer any questions. An Army doctor had pronounced him suffering from shock, severe mental disturbance culminating in strong amnesiac symptoms. There were, further, two knife-cuts in the region of his neck and left collarbone. It was the doctor's opinion they were self-inflicted, a suicide attempt being not unlikely in the violent early stages of hysteria. However, according to Captain Bishop, Gifford's room at the Jordan Project C dormitory showed signs of a fight as well as traces of blood on the floor and walls.

IT had been Captain Bishop's idea that Jonathan, as a psychologist and as an old acquaintance of Gifford's, would be able to get the boy to talk. Captain Bishop seemed to be very much interested in Gifford, and surprisingly well informed of his connections on the island, considering the little Gifford had been able to tell him. There was, for example, a man named Mickey Brokaw, a resident in the Project rooming-house, who had left the day after Gifford's disappearance, and there was the hula girl who visited Gifford at the nursing home. Naturally, Captain Bishop had been keeping the nursing home under watch. It was Captain Bishop's belief that a line on Mickey Brokaw would be picked up from the hula girl or the people she worked with, and this line he was exceedingly anxious to have.

Preliminary contact with the hula girl had gained nothing. She had claimed ignorance of Gifford's whereabouts—a lie—but had been convincingly earnest in wishing to help in any search for him or any investigation of the apparently criminal operations he had stumbled upon—whatever they may have been. She freely admitted to possessing the pearls he had mentioned in his telephone-call to Captain Bishop. She said he had given them to her without any explanation. Captain Bishop, carefully concealing any knowledge of the nursing home, had arranged with her for Jonathan to talk to her later.

The entire affair summed up, Jonathan was bleakly convinced, to strictly nothing. But Captain Bishop was interested out of all proportion to the significance of his information—any information, at least, that he had passed on to Jaffrey. And the girl was lying. And Jimmy Gifford, Jonathan believed, after his talk with him, had been attacked with, very likely, intent to kill—and didn't give a damn. Gifford had rallied to only a rare moment or two approaching rationality the day before, at Jonathan's visit; and Jonathan had learned nothing directly. But he thought he knew more now of Gifford's illness than the doctor who had diagnosed it. Jonathan saw it as an emotional crack-up before a problem of such towering proportions that Gifford's mind had fled before it into the escape of blankness. Blankness not complete—he had recognized Jonathan, and had listened with interest to his story of what he was doing in the Army—but blankness that closed in instantly at any thought of himself. Blankness that shut away even the distant glitter of animal fright that had appeared, for a moment, at Jonathan's mention of the knife-wounds.

THERE was nothing to any of it; there was no answer to the girl's pretending such distress at Gifford's disappearance and yet visiting him daily—with an appearance of stealth, Captain Bishop had said: she had switched cabs on her way out, driven past her destination and walked back; no answer to the Portuguese photographer's intimate knowledge of Jonathan's position, which could only have come through Jimmy Gifford by way of the girl Lanuaha; no answer to a pickpocket's interest in a few pages of notes on Honolulu people; and above all, no answer to the honest reality of the girl's grief and Gifford's shattering horror of the problem facing him.

And so now *one block mauka at five six o'clock Ita house I.. Kaneawaiawa.* Jonathan put the note away in his pocket with the violated notebook, and his mind stopped turning, to grin sardonically and ask him what the hell he was doing here.

He walked down the street through the sun-filled warmth of the afternoon, and found a saloon with a fat bouncer posted in the doorway—silent announcement that the drinking-hour was now on—and went in and had a drink of island whisky. The place was crowded with people dressed like himself, shirttails out. It had been Captain Bishop's idea for him to go civilian. The whisky would have made excellent varnish. Jonathan

drank it glumly and kept surveillance back up the street to the uncle's curio-shop and restaurant. A weathered sign above the place that he could read from here said *Y. J. Ita, Importer, Art.*

He never did see the girl come out.

IT was a section of the city without paved streets and sidewalks, with rows of flimsy wooden houses built cheek to jowl on high slatted foundations, with the island *motif* of smothering vegetation here etched in infinitesimal gardens in the tiny yards—a palm, a splash of color hibiscus, a caged dove hung beneath a flowering vine—with the peeling temples and grimy poi factories and sake breweries of the poor. Here was crammed the Orient in the coolie, a world away from the modern buildings and lively commerce of Bishop Street, centuries removed from the luxury midway of Waikiki. An old woman walked barefooted in the dust, trailing her fingers negligently against the wabbly palings of a fence. There was no past and no future here, no war and no peace, but a vast timelessness in the thousand wrinkles of the woman's face, shadowed under the ragged brim of a pandanus hat.

The bus-driver had understood the note quite well—leave the Ala Moana bus at Kaala road and walk one block mauka "toward the mountains" and find an apartment-house owned by someone named Ita. The apartment-house, a crumbling tenement, had the name on a sign on its fence: *Ita Apts. See Y. J. Ita, Importer, Arts,* which was all as it should be; and among the multitude of doors opening on an inner court Jonathan found one on which was thumbtacked the penciled card reading *L. Kaneawaiawa;* and he was lifting his hand to knock, when something in the writing of that name arrested him and he stood for a moment studying it.

The girl had not written it; the penmanship was altogether different from that on her note in his pocket. Yet it was a familiar hand.

Jonathan knocked.

The girl was dressing, but called for him to come in. He waited gingerly in a dim bare room and heard her moving about beyond. He resisted the impulse to move into a corner, to investigate the gloom behind a half-opened door. He was distinctly afraid it was important that his fear did not show through.

The girl's voice said: "I'll be out in just a minute. Have you learned anything yet?"

"Yes," Jonathan said without inflection. "Yes, I have."

She evidently did not hear him. She said, "Oh, darn it," and after a minute: "Isn't there a pair of shoes under the couch? Will you please hand them to me?"

Jonathan found the shoes and straightened with them in his hand, and the door of her dressing-room opened, and her slender arm stretched out waiting; and Jonathan felt the door of darkness at his back and turned quickly. He was certain the door had moved—it stood now more widely ajar. He tried to make himself casual and tried to watch that door and walk away from it toward the girl's room. He felt sweat in his hands.

He placed the shoes in the girl's hand, and she said abruptly, as though she just then understood: "What did you say?"

"I'll tell you," Jonathan said. "I'll tell you when you come out."

The arm was still, half withdrawn.

"No. Something has happened. What is it?"

This time he saw the door move perceptibly—and he felt the terrible naked terror that he had once seen seize a blind man at the blast of a motor horn. Captain Bishop had suggested that he carry a gun. Jonathan had laughed at him.

What in the name of God was he doing here?

The girl's voice said with a curious coaxing: "Please! Please! What has happened?"

Jonathan swallowed. He said: "We found him. He—"

The girl threw her door wide, and she was fully dressed, as Jonathan had seen her last, the red-heeled shoes still on her feet, and the spare shoes incongruous in her hand, and her face was white and stiff.

"He's dead," Jonathan said. "We found him in a nursing home in Mehameha. He was murdered."

He could see no change in her expression. She did not answer him, and he could have believed that she had not heard him.

She put her hand lightly against the front of his shirt and moved past him, very quietly; and once beyond him, she ran to the half-open door across the room and threw herself into the darkness behind it. She ran on her toes with little rapid steps, and she disappeared still holding the shoes in her left hand.

JONATHAN rushed after her. The door slammed shut—and burst open instantly under his shoulder. He heard a man curse in a foreign tongue, and in the half-light he saw the porcine brown man, the pickpocket, snatch at the girl's wrist and fling her away from him. A knife was in her

Jonathan grabbed his arm and held him. He said: "I'll take that back."

hand. Jonathan hit the brown man under one ear, and when the smooth face snapped around to him, he drove his right hand into it with enough force to knock down a wall. He was scared, and he kept punching at the brown man's head until it dropped away. He stepped back, and the focus of his vision enlarged, and the brown man was on his face on the floor and the girl was gone.

"YES, it's a tragedy," Jonathan said. "It's a tragedy of scope."

"Scope?" Captain Bishop repeated, a frown between his eyes. "I don't understand what you mean."

"Little emotion and big emotion," Jonathan explained. "The big emotion is the war, and the little emotion was tied up in Gifford and his girl."

"Oh, yes," Captain Bishop said. He cleared his throat. "Yes, I see. But the girl was a vicious monkey. She was willing to see you knocked off."

"She helped plan it, I suppose," Jonathan said. "She got everything out of Gifford about me she could, and that dip Mickey Brokaw got a sample of my handwriting, and they wrote the letter we found, and forged my name to it. They would send it to you for a false lead after I disappeared. Brokaw must have worked hard on copying my writing—he still copied it when he wrote her name on the card they put on the room they'd picked to kill me in. She has a typical mind—no moral sense, no sense of guilt, very little conception of reality, but room in it for a strong animal passion. What we call love."

"You're clinical about it. I'd say she was nuts about the kid, and simply slipped her trolley."

"That's all true. She protected him from the bunch she worked with; she hid him after they had tried to kill him—she understood them and she understood herself. It probably seemed to her that it would all be settled well if I was out of the way, if the investigation was safely turned aside, and if she still kept Gifford. As simple as that. But her love for Gifford drove everything else out when I told her Gifford had been murdered. Simple emotion again—she wanted to get even with the gang, and turned against it at once. She never doubted me. I'd have been out on a limb if it had occurred to her that I was giving her a snow job."

"And Gifford?"

"His reason wasn't controlling him. He was sick. When he learned what he'd done, he couldn't accept it. His mind left him. . . . How is he now?"

Captain Bishop shrugged. "They think he'll be well again in time. He's being sent Stateside."

"Yes, the girl's presence kept him under. Away from her, he'll— She's

The girl ran across the room and threw herself into the darkness behind it.

the one that interests us. She seems to have had no realization that she herself was cracking that kid up. I believe she did love him. She seems to have had no understanding of his position in regard to the racket she was in. She probably looked on the business herself as nothing much worse than any black-market affair. Her uncle was making money out of it, and so was she, and so were the others and no harm done. It was unfortunate that Gifford learned of it, but it was certainly inevitable, from his close association with her. I doubt if she was very careful about keeping things from him. That hula joint—she told me she'd been working there in hope of seeing Gifford in the crowds, and of course that was a snow job—he was bound to happen on to the deal. . . . But I'm not entirely clear about that place myself. Where did it fit in?"

"Just a drop. All importers are carefully checked, and her uncle's transactions have been watched especially since he came under suspicion, so that hula stand made a perfect setup for a drop—the Jap agents brought their pearls there, and completed their business in the security of a crowd. You say black market, and I guess that's near enough; but the connection with giving aid and comfort to the enemy is more direct. The Japs have been cut off from a world market for their pearl fisheries and they badly need world credit—and it's the little rackets like these that help provide it. They didn't smuggle Jap pearls straight in here to sell, of course; the pearls, probably traveling the long way around, may have come halfway around the world to reach old Ita, for all I know."

They sat in the shadow of the Banyan Court and the peace of this place was urgent.

But Jonathan could not put the girl Lanuaha out of his mind.

He said: "What do you think happened to her?"

CAPTAIN BISHOP understood the question and shook his head. "She didn't do the Dutch, if that's what you mean. I'll risk a bundle on that. She'll be around. She'll be around for a long time to come, here and there. We'll never see her again. She'll forget this. It'll be just another incident in a long and busy life."

Jonathan said: "I doubt it." He remembered the veil of her face and the glimpse beneath it. She was a creature of the alleys of the world, and a type. He had said to himself. She was without understanding but she was instinctive and universal. He wondered what Annabel would say of her; and at first he knew, then was not so sure. He said: "I don't know."

McNair asked: "Are you leaving, or does my next shot cripple you?"

The GO-DEVIL

High stakes for the winner of this race to pipe oil through the jungle . . . . a complete novel,

by H. Vernor Dixon

MURPHY said: "There is a bad odor in my nostrils. Just get a whiff of that jungle."

Scott Regan turned away from him and rolled down the window of the small twin-engine amphibian. He looked down from six thousand feet on the town of Puerta San Cano, located on the northeasterly slant of South America. He asked Murphy: "Are you sure this is it?"

Murphy leaned over Scott's shoulder and nodded. "That's the place. I'd know the smell of San Cano anywhere."

Scott grinned. "Is it that bad?"

"In spades! But you know what these jungle ports are."

Scott straightened his tired shoulders and eased off the power of the plane's engines. He pulled the nose up to kill speed, let down the flaps, then lowered the nose to a slow circling glide over the harbor. As the plane descended he leaned against the left side of the cabin and studied the jungle and the town below.

Beginning with the coast line, as far as he could see was solid green jungle, unbroken except for the wide, sluggish and muddy Parita River. Thousands of tributary streams fed into the Parita, but the dense jungle formed a canopy over them and they could not be seen from the air.

The river, where it emptied its cargo of silt and jungle refuse into the ocean, was slightly more than a half-mile wide. On the north bank of the river's mouth was the impenetrable wall of the jungle. On the south bank, however, Puerta San Cano was slowly but surely pushing the jungle back from the river. A half-dozen piers, one of modern concrete and steel, shoved into the river harbor like thin, timid fingers. The dirt streets of the town fanned back from the fingers and faded into the jungle.

Scott looked east and south of the town and studied the black mass of the McNair refinery, located on a high bluff dominating the town and the harbor. He could distinguish the bubble towers, pipe stills and condensers and, as the plane swung closer, the clay towers, strippers and gas separators. His black eyebrows raised a fraction and he whistled with surprise. The refinery was considerably larger than he had expected.

But it was the jungle, which he would have to fight, that interested him. Deep in the jungle, one hundred forty miles from the port, was the great Tacano Oilfield, discovered and developed four years before by Jeff Bennett. For two years the crudes had been transported downriver in specially built river tankers, loaded aboard ocean tankers and shipped to the United States and Canada for refining. Then part of the finished product was shipped back to South America in the form of lubricants and high-test aviation gasoline for use in the giant new airfields up and down the coast. The transport problem, combined with other factors, held the production of the field down to a tenth of its capacity.

Scott knew the history of the field and most of Jeff Bennett's background. The unknown in his mind was Allen McNair, owner of the refinery. He knew, simply, that McNair had offered to use all of Bennett's crudes and had poured millions into a refinery for that purpose.

McNair and Bennett had miscalculated, though, in the amount of tanker traffic the river would bear. The muddy Parita had turned out to be an unwilling partner in the whole scheme. Unpredictable rains and sudden floods washed out dock installations, wrecked tankers, and held up transport operations for weeks at a time.

The only possible solution was the construction of a pipeline from the field to the refinery. Bennett and McNair, in desperation, had combined their assets and placed an open bid on the construction market in the States. Scott had walked away with the bid and the contracts with little difficulty.

The necessary construction priorities had then been easy to obtain, as the Japanese war was draining gasoline and oil from the States at an alarming rate. A refinery was badly needed at Porto San Cano to take over part of the burden of fueling the freighters running from the South American ports to those of war-ravaged Europe, thereby releasing even more fuel for the Pacific. Construction of the pipeline, therefore, carried the blessings of all the American Republics. It was up to Scott to do the job.

He gave the idling engines a short burst to keep them warm and nudged Murphy with his elbow. "What's the setup down there, Murph?"

JOSEPH MURPHY, CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER and general manager of all the Regan enterprises, leaned back in his seat with an expression of weary futility. He was a man in his fifties, short and chunky, with powerful shoulders, bushy gray eyebrows, a beet-red face and eyes that never missed a trick. He had been with Scott Regan for the past eight hectic years and cherished every minute of them.

He had known some amazing characters in his lifetime, but never one quite like Scott Regan. Scott was in his thirties, which was young in the construction business, and yet he was already becoming a legendary figure. He had secured the "right of eminent domain" from presidents and prime ministers, where more powerful and influential groups had failed, and was hated and admired wherever in the world crude oil had to be transported.

In appearance, and in the unpredictableness of his nature, Scott should have been a failure. He was well over six feet tall, with the build and rugged dark features of a prizefighter and a battered face that looked as if it had been chiseled from teakwood. Which was all right, except that he had the fighter's weakness for blondes. More than one had taken him close to the abyss of fail-

ure, but he always, somehow, managed to land on his feet.

His character was contradictory almost to an extreme, with ruthlessness walking hand in hand with sentimentality and a lawless spirit that was oddly mingled with stubborn honesty. He had often told Murphy, "I'm exactly what the other man thinks I am, except that underneath is a guy he doesn't know about. That is where I have the edge on him." Murphy believed it, though he could never understand how a character compounded of contradictions should be so spectacularly successful.

SCOTT LEVELED OFF AT THREE THOUSAND FEET, and a mile east of the port and started a straight approach for the landing. He was busy looking for floating objects on the water, but asked Murphy, "Well, what about it?"

Murphy shook his head in sad resignation. "Look: I spent two months here looking this situation over for you and making a report. I beat my brains out, and when I got back to New York I explained everything in detail. But you weren't listening. You were too busy backing that cheesecake musical-comedy."

Scott sighed with pleasure. "She was a nice gal, that Susan."

"But she couldn't sing. Anyway, now you ask me what it's all about."

Scott grinned and eased the wheel back, and the hull settled the last few feet toward the river. At the last moment, just as the wing was beginning to lose lift, a speedboat riding high on the step curved around the concrete pier and crossed the path of the amphibian. Scott swore and slammed the throttles open. The engines roared; the hull hit the river and bounced back into the air; the propellers caught hold, and the keel of the plane barely scraped over the bow of the speedboat. As he flashed by, Scott saw the white blur of a frightened face staring after him, and the shining lights of the sun on deep auburn hair.

He snapped the throttles back and landed on the river beyond the pier. The ship slowed in the water and came to a halt and then started to drift back. Murphy was smiling, a bit on the shaky side because of the close call, but Scott's face was black. He swore steadily and viciously about the "fool woman" all the way back to the pier.

Murphy nodded at a huge freighter they passed and said: "That one is ours."

Scott stopped swearing and said: "Okay. Start unloading first thing in the morning. We can't waste time on this job. McNair is letting us use his warehouses. By the way, what kind of a person is he?"

"That," Murphy replied, "is one of the many things you weren't listening to in New York. Furthermore, that was Mrs. McNair you almost decapitated a moment ago."

Scott stared at Murphy, then laughed. "That," he said, "would have been a fine way for me to make McNair's friendship. What kind of a woman is she? I didn't get a very good look at her."

Murphy stared off into space, with a worried frown between his eyes, and replied, "She can't be described. You'll have to find out for yourself."

Scott glanced at him sharply, then opened the throttles a fraction and taxied inshore to a ramp that had been built for him. He cranked down the wheels, gunned the engines and rode up onto dry land. The speedboat was tied alongside the ramp. He turned off the engines, stretched his arms and winked at Murphy. "Let's get out."

Murphy chuckled: "That's for me. My bottom feels like it's made of corrugated tin."

Scott stood on the concrete apron, stretching his arms and legs and looking beyond the town toward the jungle. A smile of satisfaction tugged at the corners of his mouth. He had beaten jungles before. He knew their tricks and their whimsies and the dangerous pitfalls deep in their steaming green hearts. He knew the ways in which a jungle had to be fought and how to use apparent obstacles to his own advantage. It was a job he relished. There was no doubt in his mind that this job would be like all others he had tackled, with the same ultimate conclusion.

He smiled at Murphy and said: "I'll lay you a bet, Murph'."

"What're the odds?"

"Five bucks will get you ten if I don't beat the deadline by at least a week."

Murphy looked at San Cano with narrowed eyes, thinking of the two months he had spent there previously. "I don't know," he said. "There is something screwy about this place."

"We have built bigger pipelines than this one, in worse jungles."

Murphy said quietly, "I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking of the people. I've met them—you haven't."

Scott lit a cigarette and studied Murphy's expression. He knew Murphy well enough to realize that he was puzzled and worried. "Okay," he said. "We'll go over the setup tonight."

"Sure."

CHAPTER TWO

A GROUP of people crossed the concrete ramp toward the airplane and Murphy stepped forward to meet them. Most of them were natives, with two uniformed guards in charge. Walking in front of the crowd was a South American, a roly-poly little man, with a most amiable smile and the pleased expression of a cat that has just caught a mouse. He was wearing a linen suit, which accented his smooth swarthy skin, black eyes and jet-black mustache.

Murphy shook hands with him and introduced him to Scott as Commissioner Ramos de Veya, to which the Commissioner added, "Of the house of De Veya," which meant nothing to Scott. De Veya continued, informing him, "I am the petroleum coördinator and commissioner of transportation. It is with great honor that I welcome you as a humble official of my country."

Scott said: "That is very kind of you."

"No, señor; it is we who are impressed with your kindness. Your pipeline will be the final link to bring our country a great petroleum industry that will lift our humble citizens to the stature of decent living human beings. In our hundreds of small villages—"

Murphy interrupted with a smile: "Thanks, Commissioner; but Mr. Regan is interested more in the job than in the future. What you do with your hundreds of villages is none of our business."

The Commissioner laughed and slapped Murphy on the shoulder. "Very well, my friend. No politics. You are frank. I like that." He twisted his head and shouted at the group of natives. They immediately descended on the amphibian and started passing out the luggage. De Veya told Scott: "It is all arranged. The men will take your belongings to your quarters and guards will watch the aeroplane. Do not bother your head about it. I will personally attend. You will find the Señors Bennett and McNair at Mama Soo's. They await you there."

Murphy said, "I could use a tall, cool one. Come on, Scott."

They shook hands with the Commissioner, who promised to meet them later, and started toward the main

street of San Cano. As they walked, Murphy explained: "The Commissioner takes charge so he can go through our luggage. It's just one of the customs. McNair has the guy under his thumb, but he isn't a bad egg."

"Honest?"

Murphy grinned. "What, after all, is honesty, señor?"

Scott chuckled and turned his attention to San Cano. There was the one dirt street, about four blocks in length and a block removed from the river, with other and narrower streets branching off, to fade into the jungle which pressed close on the town. There were many little shops and stores, most of them on the verge of collapse, each with an upper story and a sagging balcony. The town was a contradiction of decaying buildings and brand-new saloons, obviously built for the influx of North American workers.

Scott was more interested in the people they were passing. Natives were predominant, but there were hundreds of white men, workers and skilled technicians from the refinery, and in addition, the two hundred men of Scott's crew who had landed the day before from the freighter. Many of them yelled at Scott, and he paused now and then to shake hands with men who had worked for him for years.

Halfway down the street Murphy stopped and said: "Here we are."

Scott looked at the building before them. It was the only three-storied structure in the town and seemed older than the others, but not as decrepit. A wide screened porch ran about its four sides and a constant stream of people passed in and out. Above the doors was a sign:

MAMA SOO'S
BEST DAMNED FOOD AND DRINK SOUTH OF PANAMA

They went into the main room and headed toward a small table where two men were seated. At the far end of the bar, which took up one side of the room, was a hotel desk and a rickety stairway going to the floors above. A gaunt-looking woman sat at the desk and regarded them with an unblinking stare. Along the opposite wall were a number of booths filled with refinery workers at dinner. Another room, on a higher level, was separated from the main room with strings of glass beads dangling from the ceiling evidently intended to give the establishment elegance and tone. The atmosphere was heavy with the odors of Chinese cooking, stale beer, sweat and jungle decay. Two slowly revolving electric fans hanging suspended from the ceiling only served to mingle the odors.

In the smaller room beyond, Scott saw a dozen or more white women sipping at cold drinks, their eyes staring blankly into space, seeing nothing. Last stop, he thought. Poor devils!

Murphy whispered in his ear: "The woman at the desk is Mama Soo. She was upriver most of the time while I was here, so I hardly got to know her. Quite a character and a power around here. It won't hurt us to be friendly with her."

Scott glanced back at the woman and noticed her intense eyes still fixed upon him. Acting on impulse, he waved at her and called, "Hi'ya, Toots!" Mama Soo continued to stare at him, and then, slowly, her face softened into a smile. She nodded at him and turned to say something to a Chinese at her side. Scott continued with Murphy to the small table.

JEFF BENNETT WAS ON HIS FEET, waiting for them. Scott's first impression of him was that of a blue-blood, an aristocrat. The arch of his nose was high and thin, his lips were merely a wide slit in an austere face and his blue eyes, though friendly at the moment, were clouded with a lifetime of reserve. Scott thought he had a faint "holier-than-thou" attitude, but it was not irritating or even very noticeable.

He had known many men like Bennett and most of them had been stuffed shirts. He wondered, though he knew he was an excellent petroleum engineer, what he was doing in the oil business and particularly in the jungle. He would have fitted much better on the wide veranda of a New Orleans plantation-house.

Murphy shook hands with him and introduced him to Scott. The two murmured the usual banalities, then Bennett turned and said questioningly: "Allen?"

ALLEN MCNAIR GOT TO HIS FEET and held out his hand in a manner that was obviously patronizing. Scott stiffened and closely appraised the man as he shook hands with him. Every inch of McNair's strongly compact body radiated power and authority. He had high cheekbones, hair prematurely graying at the temples, deeply sunken eyes, sensuous lips twisted into a wry smile and olive-smooth skin. The cut of his clothes revealed unusual personal interest in his tailoring and his boots gleamed without a spot of dust.

Scott glanced at Murphy and Murphy's eyes almost imperceptibly narrowed in warning. Scott smiled and said: "Glad to know you, McNair. Too bad you and Mr. Bennett couldn't have run up to New York to conclude our contracts. Plenty of details were left hanging in midair."

McNair shrugged and said with a smile: "Awkward for you, perhaps, but not us. You are the one with a deadline to meet."

Scott dropped into a chair. "There is always some sort of deadline," he said. "I haven't missed yet. The twentieth of August is safe enough, or I wouldn't have signed the contracts."

The others sat down and Bennett ordered Tom Collinses from a Chinese waiter. They were quickly brought to the table. Scott sipped his drink and watched the two men over the rim of his glass. McNair was very much at ease, but Bennett seemed to be withdrawn, his mind miles away from the group. Apparently he was a person who lived within himself, in a world of his own making. But Scott had the feeling, too, that Bennett was waiting for something—perhaps another person.

McNair lit an expensive cigar, blew the smoke toward the ceiling, then said: "You seem very confident, Mr. Regan. But a word of warning may not be out of place. The rains here are extremely heavy and the jungle is thick. We haven't even been able to widen the Indian trails for roads. I honestly don't see how you're going to push a pipeline through, especially in the time allowed."

Scott was puzzled. McNair seemed to be indifferent as to how long it would take to complete the pipeline, yet he and Bennett would be the ones to suffer if the line was a failure. Scott would lose heavily if he did not meet the deadline, but he did not have a refinery and an oil-field at stake.

He thought to reassure McNair by saying, "Pipelines have been pushed through to the Orinoco Basin of Venezuela and from the Petrolia and Rio de Oro fields of the Barco concession to the Caribbean Coast. A five-hundred-mile pipeline is operating to Barranquilla along the Sierra Cordillera and through the Magdalena valley jungles and swamps. I don't mean to boast, but I have built pipelines through jungles and across deserts that would make this one look like a small lateral."

Bennett interrupted, saying: "Mr. Regan is a specialist, Allen. He knows what he is doing. I dare say that Mr. Regan's international fame is not built upon failures."

McNair said arrogantly: "Yes, yes, I know all that. But we are not gambling for pennies. I want Regan and Murphy to understand thoroughly—"

"Maybe," Scott interrupted, "that might not be a bad idea—an understanding." He leaned his elbows on the table and looked into McNair's eyes. He said: "As Mr. Bennett put it, I am a specialist. I am here to build a pipeline for a certain sum. How I do it is my business. I don't go around looking for advice, and I don't want it unless I ask for it. So let's understand right now that you are not talking to the hired help."

"I see." McNair puffed at his cigar, his narrowed eyes fixed steadily upon Scott's. A smile tugged at his lips, and he took the cigar from his mouth to say something, but his eyes suddenly swung away, toward the entrance.

Scott felt a sudden tension and glanced toward Bennett. The older man's eyes widened and his thin frame became tense and stiff. Bennett's hand, holding the glass, shook visibly and the ice tinkled dully. Scott turned about and looked toward the door.

A WOMAN WAS CROSSING THE ROOM toward them. She was young and tall and rather statuesque, with a lithe body that seemed to float across the floor rather than walk. She was unusually beautiful and yet Scott could not define it. Her eyes were large and slumberous, but all expression had been erased from them. They seemed almost vacuous. Her mouth, too, was large and rather wide, in contradiction to a very thin nose and hollow cheeks. Each separate unit of her face and body was not particularly attractive in itself, but the composition, as a whole, was oddly beautiful.

Scott did not notice at once that the thick hair falling about her shoulders was a deep and familiar auburn. He grinned and said to the group at large: "Now, there is something worth going after."

He realized his blunder when the woman paused at their table. McNair said stiffly: "My wife, Mr. Regan. Seely, this is Scott Regan, about whom you have heard so much."

Mrs. McNair nodded coolly to Scott, still with no trace of expression in her eyes, and shook hands with Murphy, whom she had met before. She sat across the table from Scott, between Bennett and her husband. Scott tried to control the embarrassment his blunder had caused, by mentioning the close call on the river. McNair was immediately interested and asked questions, but Seely McNair seemed to have forgotten the incident entirely. She let her husband do all the talking and said yes or no only when McNair asked her a direct question.

Scott catalogued her as beautiful, but dumb, and looked from her toward Bennett. Bennett was watching Mrs. McNair from the corner of an eye. His whole attention was focused upon her and his mind was no longer miles away. It was Bennett who lit her cigarette, ordered her a drink and held her chair. It was all done inconspicuously, but smoothly, a habit of long standing. Scott looked from one to the other and then at McNair, who was paying no attention to them. Scott wondered what was going on. It could not be a cheap affair, as Bennett was old enough to be her father, and yet— Scott shrugged it off and ordered another round of drinks.

McNair said: "Before my wife entered, I am afraid that you and I, Mr. Regan, got off on the wrong foot. I confess I know little about the construction of pipelines. Perhaps the difficulties I have in mind are more imaginary than real. But let me assure you that you will get all possible assistance from Mr. Bennett and myself."

Scott nodded. "I'll need all I can get, particularly in recruiting native help."

Bennett said: "We anticipated that. Commissioner de Veya—I believe you met him?—is already taking care of that."

Murphy turned to Scott and informed him: "I told the Commissioner how many men we would need when I was here before. Most of them are coming from the capital, which is about four hundred miles upriver. I don't think we'll have any trouble there."

McNair yawned and stamped out his cigar, then smiled at Scott. "You and Murphy are probably tired from your trip. No sense talking any more tonight. We can go over the whole matter in detail tomorrow."

"Suits me."

"Good! By the way, you have a small hacienda on the edge of town. There is only the one bedroom, but it was the best we could do. Comfortable and clean. Mama Soo has a room here for Murphy. Now, if you will excuse us—"

All of them got to their feet and shook hands. It was now dark outside and the lights of the establishment had been turned on. McNair explained that a young Chinese boy standing at the desk would show Scott to his home; then the three of them walked toward the door. About halfway across the room Seely McNair turned about and came back for her purse left on the table. She picked it up and looked directly into Scott's eyes for the first time.

"Evidently," she said, in a low husky voice, "you had a scene with my husband."

Scott grinned. "What makes you think that?"

She stated simply: "I know him. Otherwise, he would have kept you talking half the night. Mr. Regan—"

"Yes?"

"For your own good, don't cross him. You either play on his team, or you don't play at all."

Scott wanted to laugh, but he said: "Thanks. I'll remember that."

McNair's voice cut across the room like the crack of a whip: "Seely!"

Her eyes held Scott's a moment longer; then she moved quietly away to rejoin her husband and Bennett. They went out the door together. Scott stared after them, then chuckled: "That's an odd trio."

Murphy nodded. "Damned odd! I told you there's something screwy here. That sure wasn't my idea of a proper reception committee."

"Peculiar, all right. That woman—she probably hasn't a thought in her brain."

Murphy glanced at Scott and growled: "You're slipping, chum. She does plenty of thinking behind that beautiful but blank face of hers. But look: let's break it up. I'm corked."

Scott crossed the room with him toward the desk, thinking of Seely McNair and half-regretting that she was not a blonde.

CHAPTER THREE

SCOTT lay in bed in the early morning listening to the rain beat on the tiled roof of the hacienda, and putting the scenes of the night before in order. He had met Mama Soo and talked with her for a moment, long enough to realize that she did exert considerable influence in the community. He felt that that meeting had been profitable, as she had told him, "I like you. You take life as it comes and help yourself with a free hand. Your friend Murphy, now—he sees too much and he doesn't like what he sees."

Murphy had laughed and replied: "I like what I'm seeing now."

There had been something oddly attractive about Mama Soo. She was a middle-aged woman, but her skin was very smooth and her coal-black eyes very much alive. She was a mixture of all bloods, including Chinese. Scott

doubted, though, that Soo was her proper name. She had probably used hundreds at various times in what had obviously been a colorful life. . . .

He slid his feet out of bed to the tiled floor of the bedroom and looked about him. Throw rugs were scattered on the floor, the walls were plaster and the few pieces of furniture were of heavy teak. A mosquito netting was draped over the bed and another over the single window. It was a simple room, but fairly comfortable.

The rest of the house consisted of an enormous living-room, strictly tropical-Spanish in its furnishings, a large kitchen and quarters for the help, a room that had been arranged as an office, a dining-porch and a large walled patio.

Wong, the young Chinese boy, had shown him about, prepared dinner and put his personal effects in the closet. Scott had a hunch that Wong was also being paid by McNair, but he was efficient and pleasant and spoke good English. Scott decided to keep him and let him hire the rest of the help. Wong had said he would need more, as he was strictly Number-One Boy.

When Scott heard the rain stop, he got out of bed and reached for his slippers. Wong, dressed in a white jacket and dark trousers, but with bare feet, was instantly in the room. He handed Scott his slippers and robe and turned on the shower for him. Scott wondered, amused, if Wong was going to wash his back, too. But Wong grinned widely and hurried out.

Scott had breakfast in the patio, still damp from the rain, and watched the lizards run about the wall.

Murphy arrived to have coffee with him and explained that he had a jeep outside. "A gift from McNair. We can use it around town."

Scott asked: "Have you been down to the freighter yet?"

"A few minutes ago. Unloading has already started. De Veya has a mess of natives on the job, besides our own crew."

Scott pushed his coffee aside and lit a cigarette.

"How about this De Veya? Do we put him on the payroll?"

"Naturally. Unofficial, of course."

"Same old handout, no matter where you go! The guy looked through our papers, all right. The briefcases and maps were here when I arrived last night, but they were not all in place. You know, Murph', it's a funny thing; all he had to do was ask and I'd let him go through them. We're here for a construction job, not espionage."

"Fellows like De Veya are born suspicious." Murphy finished his own coffee and asked, with a grin, "What do you think of the setup now?"

Scott shrugged. "Someone is always playing politics. Who's getting elected in this one?"

Murphy replied soberly: "That I can't figure out. Bennett hit it lucky by discovering the oil-field, but McNair is the real power here. Bennett is a good engineer, but personally ineffectual. He talks about building a hospital and modern homes for the workers and remodeling the town, and all that sort of thing. I guess he means it, but he lives too much in a dream-world. My hunch is that whoever wins the jackpot, it won't be Bennett."

"He may be smarter than we think." Scott got up and stretched his arms. He walked toward the gate with Murphy and asked him, "What about Mrs. McNair? Where does she fit?"

Murphy said lightly, but emphasizing each word: "Hands off, Scott."

Scott's temper flared for a moment. "Since when did I start chasing married women?"

"Now, now, I don't mean it that way. She's just a different sort of dame, and McNair is green-eyed where she is concerned. Mama Soo was telling me a rumor about them. Just before they were married, McNair's closest rival for her hand suddenly dropped out of sight and hasn't been heard from since. That was in California, when Seely McNair was some sort of débutante. Just a rumor, you know. Then, down here last year, Bennett's field supervisor, a nice young guy, was bitten by her exotic beauty. Something happened about a stolen payroll, and the kid left here in disgrace, broken. But no one seems to believe he was the kind to steal anything, including a payroll."

They went through the gate and climbed into the jeep, waiting in the muddy road. Scott got behind the wheel and started the engine. He said: "There's something else on your mind."

Murphy scratched his head, then grabbed the seat as Scott spun the car about. "Yes," he said, "but it's all just gossip."

"Let's have it."

"Well, before coming down here, McNair was no great shucks in the refining business. He worked for old man Johnson in Texas. Remember him?"

"Sure. I did some exploration work for him once."

"Is that right? Anyway, McNair comes down here with all the dough needed to build a refinery, and no one can figure out where he got it. Except that Johnson has been a tired old man since he left, and sometimes babbles about women with auburn hair and green eyes. Just gossip, of course."

"Yeah. Sure."

Scott was thinking of Bennett's change of attitude when Seely had joined them at the table, but he kept his eyes on the road. The hacienda stood in a large clearing a mile from the town, connected by a narrow road that wound through the jungle. It was like driving through a green tunnel dripping with water. Scott was glad when the road suddenly plunged out of the jungle and turned onto the main street of San Cano.

He stopped the jeep at the lip of the concrete pier, and he and Murphy got out. A number of the pipeline engineers and gang foremen were standing about, waiting for them. Scott told them to set up an office and make themselves useful. Then he asked for complaints. The only complaint was that their living quarters were scattered all over, some in town and some in the village at the refinery. This made it difficult for them to get together, except on the job.

Scott realized that he was rather far away, too, and separated from Murphy, who usually lived somewhere near him. He wondered if it had been planned that way and why. He told the men he would see what could be done.

Murphy had to superintend the unloading of the freighter and distribution of the equipment. Scott slapped him on the arm and said: "I'm going on a survey flight. Tomorrow I'll take cameras along and map the territory. See you later."

He walked around the pier to the concrete ramp, where the amphibian was tied down and under guard. He got in, started the engines and warmed them up, then spun the plane around and taxied down into the water. He glanced to the side of the ramp and saw Seely's speed-boat. She was sitting at the wheel, dressed in jodhpurs and a silk shirt open at the throat.

She cupped her hands to her mouth and called to him: "Where are you going?"

He jerked his thumb up and replied: "Exploration flight, up to the oil-field and back."

"How long?"

"Two or three hours."

"Mind if I go along?"

He did not want her company, but could hardly refuse. He taxied alongside the speedboat, and she got in the plane. She came forward and dropped into the right-hand seat. He leaned across to fasten the safety belt about her lap, and was suddenly conscious of her every curve and the perfume of her body. She looked into his eyes, once, then settled back with a little relaxed sigh. He reached for the throttles and gripped them hard to steady his hand.

In a very few minutes they were at two thousand feet over San Cano and leveling off to head inland above the Parita. Scott held a survey map on his lap and checked it against the curves of the river and the tributary streams as they passed over them. He saw a number of native villages close by the river, and a few clearings farther inland. The map was reliable, and that was one worry he could forget.

He was making notes on a scratch-pad and had forgotten about Seely, when she leaned toward him and said: "You'll probably have to follow the south bank of the river."

Scott nodded. "More streams on this side, but it would cost too much to span the Parita. I was just wondering how far I could get away from the river. Lots of water down there."

"More than you realize. Some of the streams can't even be seen from the air."

"Aerial cameras will pick them out. That's what this plane is for."

She leaned back, with a little smile, and stretched her smooth arms behind her head. "It's nice up here. I had almost forgotten what it was like."

Scott looked down at the muddy Parita and marked off another check point on the map. He glanced at Seely and asked, "Like it?"

"I love it. It's like escaping to a new world, a simple world with one problem, flying skill." Her eyes clouded momentarily as she said: "Below, it's so confused, out of focus. I had a proper perspective once. Now—I'm not so sure."

Scott remarked: "Maybe it will return, up here."

She glanced at him sharply, then looked away. All expression faded from her face and her eyes were again cool and aloof. Scott continued making notes about the terrain over which they were passing, but part of his mind was considering Seely.

Murphy's gossip about her and McNair pointed to him as a ruthless individual who used any means toward a desired end, including blackmail, and a wife who was willing to cooperate. Even if only partly true it did not put either of them in a favorable light. Scott wondered, then, if Seely was a willing or unwilling partner in McNair's schemes. Inasmuch as he was not involved in the "politics" of the region, he decided to keep an open mind. . .

They finally arrived at the great Tacano Oil-field and swung in a wide bank over the hundreds of derricks and storage tanks. Scott had seen so many oil-fields that he was not particularly interested in this one, except to note that it was unusually large and still growing. He could follow the curve of the field with a glance and knew that, eventually, it would be at least three times larger than it was at present.

He told Seely: "Plenty of millions waiting down there. Does Bennett own this outright?"

"Yes."

"Lucky man! If he doesn't take a hundred million out of it in the next ten years then I don't know the oil business." On a sudden hunch he turned to Seely and said bluntly: "It's a great temptation for someone else to muscle in, isn't it?"

Seely stared straight ahead and replied, in a voice so low he could hardly hear: "I wouldn't know." Then she looked at him, her eyes partly veiled under lowered lashes. "I believe, Mr. Regan, that you are here to build a pipeline?"

Scott chuckled and turned the plane back toward the river. "You mean mind my own business? You've got something there."

He put the maps away and settled back for a leisurely flight to San Cano. Seely had nothing to say, so Scott turned the new idea over in his mind, considering it in the light of the gossip Murphy had told him.

As San Cano came into sight down the river he told Seely, as if neither of them had spoken for the past hour: "Yes, that's why I am here, to build a pipeline, and then get out of this infernal hole. I am not interested in anything more than that."

She said flatly: "That is very wise of you."

"But," he continued, "I am interested in that pipeline. That is the bottleneck between the field and the refinery. Whoever controls that pipeline runs the whole works." A passing look of fear appeared in Seely's eyes, and Scott knew he was on the right track. He said: "Of course, I am just the guy who is building it. Bennett and your husband will own it fifty-fifty as soon as I pull out. Until then, I don't think I would like to be caught in the middle of a tug-of-war."

Seely looked at him from the corners of her eyes, and Scott was puzzled at the light of pitying contempt in their depths. "Evidently," she said, "you wish me to pass that information on to someone else."

Scott shrugged. "You can kick it around all you like. But if you pass it on, you might add that anyone who steps on my toes usually regrets it."

Seely's lips parted in a smile. She leaned back in the seat and said conversationally: "You aren't very subtle, Mr. Regan. Obviously, you are referring to my husband. Tell me, now: do you really think you can make a man like him regret stepping on your toes?"

Scott frowned at her, more puzzled than ever. "I don't get that. What do you think I am, a milliner's assistant?"

"Hardly," she laughed. "But after all, Allen's stature is so tremendous. He permits nothing to stand in the way of what he wants. He is absolutely and utterly ruthless. He is the most powerful and fascinating person I have ever known."

Scott mumbled: "Well, I'll be damned. You are sure crazy about the guy."

She looked into his eyes and it was a long moment before she replied. Then she said tonelessly: "Crazy about him? I'm scared to death of him."

Chapter Four

After landing at San Cano, Scott spent the remainder of the day helping Murphy distribute the equipment to the warehouses near the pier. Huge angle dozers were taken from the freighter and run ashore, also rooters, R.D.8 tractors, angle fillers and pipe-layer combinations and shoe-equipped tractors for bending joints in the ditches. Backfilling and boom equipment piled up and the long pipe lengths came ashore in a never-ending stream. When Scott and Murphy quit that evening another shift took over and the work of unloading continued all night.

Scott had little opportunity to talk over the local situation with Murphy. There was too much work to be done. A small warehouse was acquired near the wharves and converted into engineering offices. Also, portable field offices were readied to be moved into the jungle and

river barges and tugs hired to move equipment up the Parita. The river had been a bottleneck for Bennett and McNair, but it was a broad and beautiful highway to Scott. With the help of the river, work could be started at a dozen different points.

Most of Scott's time was spent in the air. Aerial cameras were fastened to the sides of the amphibian and Jimmy Hallon, the flight cameraman, went along to operate them. He was young, studious and eager, and knew his job thoroughly. He and Scott flew back and forth between the refinery and the oil-fields, mapping and photographing a strip a hundred and fifty miles long by forty miles wide.

When it was all put together in one clear picture the field scouts, who had been surveying the jungle trails, filled in the detail the cameras had missed.

MURPHY CAME OUT OF THE JUNGLE, where he had been setting up a construction line, and joined Scott for a late dinner at Mama Soo's. McNair and Bennett and Commissioner de Veya were also present. Scott was in high spirits, with completion of the preliminary surveys, and ordered the best meal Mama Soo could command. Liqueurs were brought at the end and the men sat back to smoke.

Scott told the group: "It's like any other jungle, no better and no worse. Matted undergrowth and the usual number of unusual streams to cross. The tough part is shoving through a permanent pipe road thirty-five feet wide. But that is always tough."

McNair turned his cigar in his mouth and commented: "I should imagine a thirty-five foot road through that jungle would be an impossibility."

Murphy shook his head. "We've done it before. Ever get a good look at those bulldozers of ours? There isn't much can stop 'em."

Scott said: "They'll push through all right. We start first thing in the morning. Now, there are a few points to be cleared up." He asked De Veya, "How about right of eminent domain? We're going to cut through some private property, you know, and probably a couple of villages. As a matter of fact, the final stage of the line cuts right through the property of the hacienda I'm living in. There will be others in the way."

The Commissioner smiled and bobbed his head up and down. "Cut through anything you like, señor. That matter is already arranged with the Government. You are free to follow any route you choose."

"Good. Now, I need a permanent camp at about the middle of the line. About seventy miles up the Parita, at the big bend, there's a collection of buildings—"

De Veya interrupted: "That is the Monterey trading-post. Mr. Bennett bought it out some years ago as a repair stop for his tankers."

"I need it, the whole works."

Bennett smiled and asked: "Isn't that a rather peremptory request?"

Scott shrugged. "I need it, that's all. You'll have to move everyone out and turn it over to me."

Bennett glanced at McNair, who nodded his assent, then looked back at Scott. "Very well. I had counted on making certain concessions over and above our contractual terms."

Scott said bluntly, "You want the pipeline, don't you?"

Bennett replied coldly: "I said that you could have the post, Mr. Regan."

Murphy said conciliatingly: "We really need it badly."

Scott stamped out his cigarette and lit another, then turned his attention back to the group. "One thing more we need. I would like a written and signed lease on the river barges and tugs we are using, to expire on the deadline of August twentieth. Which of you men owns them?"

McNair chewed at his cigar, his eyes searchingly fastened on Scott's. Twin spots of color appeared in his cheeks. He said: "Mr. Bennett and I own the boats jointly. But—correct me if I am wrong—you seem to be under the impression that faith and trust have no place in our dealings with one another. We cabled you in New York that all necessary transportation would be available for your equipment. Isn't that sufficiently binding?"

Murphy was desperately signaling to Scott to soften his demands, but Scott ignored him. "I am afraid not," he replied. "This is simply business, McNair. I have to protect myself. If I don't meet that deadline, this venture will wipe me out clean."

McNair looked startled and surprised. "Why, I thought you were extremely well off. You have built pipelines in Arabia, the States, Mexico—all over the world. Don't tell me you've been taking losses on them."

Scott scratched his head, a sheepish expression in his eyes. "Well, you see, I live pretty high—"

Murphy started to laugh, and explained to the others: "What he means is that he has a weakness for blondes, particularly the species found in show business. I would just like to have ten per cent of the dough he has poured into beauty parlors, musical comedies and exclusive dressmaker's establishments. Too bad," he said, lisping, "I'm not a blonde with dweat big blue eyes."

Bennett looked shocked and embarrassed, but McNair leaned back and laughed heartily. "Well," he said, after he had recovered, "I suppose we all have our weak points. Is it worth it, Regan?"

"I enjoy myself."

"Hasn't any one woman ever pinned you down?"

Scott chuckled: "Not yet. I'm not the pinning kind."

"Don't fool yourself. You and I are a great deal alike. When our type falls, we hit harder than any other. Y' know, I'd like to be around when it happens to you! Should be fun to watch."

Scott smiled at him and, for the first time, felt friendly toward the man. It was obvious that, for some reason, McNair had suddenly taken a liking to him. Scott began to doubt the gossip about McNair. He was simply a hard character who appreciated hardness in others.

Bennett cleared his throat and said sarcastically: "I dare say you two understand each other, but I don't appreciate your humor. Now, returning to business—"

McNair glanced at him and an odd smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. It lasted but a second and was gone. He got up from his chair and threw a raincoat over his arm. He told Scott, "We'll sign the releases and have them at your office tomorrow. Frankly, if I were in your shoes, I'd protect myself in the same way." He turned to Bennett and asked, "Coming, Jeff? Seely is waiting for us. Gin-rummy tonight."

BENNETT GOT TO HIS FEET, but paused to look down at Scott. "If you would care to join us—"

McNair said quickly: "He's too busy, Jeff." He glanced down at Scott and one eye slowly closed. "Aren't you, Regan?"

Scott nodded. "Sure. Murph' and I have a lot to go over."

"That's what I thought. Well, good night, gentlemen. Anything you need, feel free to call upon me."

He took Bennett's arm and hurried him out the door. Scott looked toward Mama Soo seated at her desk. She was looking toward the doors, an inscrutable expression in her eyes. He glanced at Murphy, who was curiously regarding him. Murphy's eyes turned down to the table and he started breaking matches with his fingers.

Scott pushed his chair back and growled: "All right, kick me for a fool. For a minute, there, I rather liked the guy. So I was wrong."

Murphy muttered: "I'll say you were! Any man who'll use his wife—"

"I know. It all makes a pattern. You can't get away from it."

Murphy said, with heavy sarcasm: "You're his pal."

Scott laughed without humor. "Yeah. For some reason, he suddenly got it into his head that he and I have the same degree of character, or lack of it. In a few days he will be around with a juicy proposition. He was letting me know, when he winked at me, 'Don't spoil my game and I'll let you string along.'"

Murphy grinned and crossed his hands behind his head. "I think you and I have come to the same conclusion, Scott. Let's check."

"All right. The refinery is a sweet deal, but the heavy money is in the oil-fields. McNair is out for control of those fields, in some way or other. One angle is throwing his wife at Bennett, probably the same method he used with old man Johnson. That seems to be proceeding satisfactorily. But he is missing no bets. He has another angle and I think the pipeline looms larger in his schemes."

Murphy agreed. "I think the same way. We're basing all this on thin air, but little signs point that way. Now, do you know why you're suddenly his pal, aside from his thinking you're the same type?"

"You interest me strangely, chum."

Murphy laughed, "You're nuts. Anyway, I believe he was afraid of how his wife would react to your manly beauty. Or possibly that you would tumble for her. Either one would throw a monkey-wrench into his setup with Bennett. But now, after our little conversation, he thinks you're safe. He's willing to let down his guard."

Scott nodded soberly. "I guess that's it." He pushed back his chair and exclaimed bitterly, "What a beautiful character that woman must have!"

Murphy walked to the desk to talk with Mama Soo, but Scott wandered outside. He stood on the dark street, with a raincoat pulled over his shoulders, listening to the nightly downpour spattering in the street puddles and racing along the roofs of the town. The smell of the decaying-growing jungle was sweet and sickening in his nostrils.

The porch lights of Mama Soo's place made yellow pools on the street, but there were few other lights on in the town. There was the shrill crying of a night-bird in the air and sudden laughter and the tinkling of a piano from farther down the street. A truck went by, its tires squishing in the mud, hauling a load of pipe to the barge landing.

Scott ran through the rain to the parked jeep and crawled in. He sat there for a moment, not moving, frowning into the night. He thought of Seely with a sickened feeling in the pit of his stomach. He took a deep breath, swore for a moment, then started the engine and headed out of town.

Chapter Five

SEELY McNAIR'S sedan was parked in front of the hacienda. She was waiting for Scott—seated at one end of a rattan couch in the living-room. A magazine was open on her lap and a glass of gin and bitters was on a small table by her elbow. The single floor lamp burning in the room was behind her shoulder, so that her face was partially in shadow. She looked up at Scott, as he entered, and put the magazine aside, but made no attempt to rise.

He glanced at her curiously, then crossed the room and handed his raincoat to Wong, who disappeared into the kitchen. He was back in a moment with a tall glass of bourbon and soda. Scott took it from him and nodded toward the kitchen. Wong grinned with understanding and padded silently out of the room.

Scott pulled a cane chair to a position just before the couch and sat down facing Seely. He raised his glass to her and sipped at it, then said: "This is quite a surprise. I understood you were playing gin-rummy tonight, with Bennett and your husband. I left them just a moment ago."

She nodded and said softly, "I know." She was silent for some time, her eyes fixed steadily upon his. She seemed to be trying to probe behind the surface of his eyes, appraising him anew. Finally she stated, in a voice hardly above a whisper: "I had to see you for a moment alone—tonight."

HER LONG APPRAISAL HAD MADE SCOTT nervous, but now he relaxed and put his drink aside. "All right. Anything I can do—"

"You can do a lot." She crossed her legs, took a cigarette from the table and tapped it on a fingernail. Scott leaned forward to light it for her. In the brief flame of the match her half-narrowed eyes studied him more closely and then slid away. She threw her head back and mumbled, "Thanks."

Scott held his curiosity in check and waited for her to continue. She stared beyond him for some time, her eyes looking off into space. Then her eyes came down to his and for the first time there was some expression in their depths, a surge of emotion so close to the surface as to be almost out of control. Her eyelids closed for a moment and when they opened she had herself under control.

She asked bluntly: "Just what do you think of me, Mr. Regan? What sort of person do you think I am?"

Scott was startled and stammered: "Well, I—I hardly know you—"

"But you must have formed some opinion of me," she persisted. "Mama Soo claims you're no fool. I think highly of her opinions. So you must have formed some picture—" She paused and puffed at the cigarette, then said, "Perhaps I can tell you what that picture in your mind is like. You undoubtedly believe that I am a cheap sort of adventuress, with no scruples, no morals and the sole aim in life of pushing my husband ahead by whatever means are at hand. Not a very pretty picture, but a convincing one."

Scott pulled at his lower lip and stared at her, then nodded. He replied, "I guess that's about it. You asked for it, there it is. Now, you didn't drop by here to tell me what I think of you."

"Not entirely. But that is important." She ran her fingers across her eyes in an impatient gesture and said, more to herself than to Scott, "I sometimes think of myself the same way, but for other reasons. I suppose it is because I lack courage. I am really a coward. I try not to be—God, how I try not to be!—but it is always there. I can't escape it."

Scott leaned forward, one eyebrow raised like a question mark. "You said once before that you were afraid of McNair."

"Yes," she breathed, "I am. You don't know him—how he is, I mean. How far he will go in—well—whatever he is after. You see, he is literally an egomaniac. He believes in himself, only in himself. The rest of the world exists solely as a motion-picture, put on for the benefit of Allen McNair."

"And you're part of that picture?"

"Not exactly. I am one of his prized possessions, something he owns, to be displayed, or to be used."

Scott shook his head, puzzled. "I don't understand why you're telling all this to me. No one has ever considered me as a father-confessor before."

"But I have to tell you," she cried, then looked toward the kitchen door and lowered her voice to a whisper. "You have to understand. Mama Soo says that you already have a fair idea what the situation here is like. It isn't too hard to see, or even very clever, but it is effective. I know."

Scott said casually: "I suppose you would have reason to know."

Her eyes widened and her hand trembled as she crushed out the cigarette in a tray. "Yes," she said, "I know. Evidently, you have heard all the gossip. I won't go into that now."

Scott said impatiently, "Just what the devil are you getting at anyway? Maybe this is all juicy stuff for the ladies' knitting society, but from where I sit—"

She interrupted: "You sit in the middle. That is why I am here. Believe me," she said anxiously, "I couldn't rest until I had explained it to you."

Scott snorted: "So this is a friendly warning?"

"You could call it that," she answered, staring down at the floor, then looking up quickly at Scott. "But it is more than that. It is justification, too—self-justification. You see, Mr. Regan, you and your pipeline are squarely in Allen's way."

She paused, and Scott barked: "Go on. Now we're getting somewhere." He asked, "McNair doesn't want the line?"

"But he does want it. He has to have it to make the refinery pay. It is your deadline, the twentieth of August, that is important. That is also Jeff and Allen's deadline. Each of them put up an equal sum to build the pipeline. On its completion they are to share in it fifty-fifty. But if it is not completed by the twentieth of August, then Jeff's share in the line is reduced to forty per cent and Allen's raised to sixty per cent. That is the agreement."

Scott stared at her, then chuckled. "I'll be damned! How did Bennett ever agree to a fool arrangement like that?"

"Well, Allen originally wanted to build the line himself and own it outright, but Jeff wouldn't agree to that. He insisted upon having it built by an outsider. Allen finally agreed to that, after considerable delay, then, while they were negotiating with you, he threatened to pull out unless the forty-sixty clause were inserted, as, he claimed, to protect him. He has certain commitments with tankers that have to be met if the line is not in operation at the time agreed upon. Jeff was desperate to get the line under way and continue exploiting the oil-fields, so he broke down and agreed to that clause."

PICKING UP HER GLASS, she sat back, watching Scott over the rim. He stared into space, putting the pattern together in his mind, and arriving at the obvious conclusion. He looked at Seely and nodded with understanding.

"McNair," he said, "would like to have that sixty per cent. Then he would have majority control and run the pipeline as he sees fit. He could put on the squeeze with a gradual boost of pumping rates, until they became prohibitive and run Bennett out of business. Then your charming husband would take over the Tacano Oil-field. Very neat!"

"You seem to forget—"

"No," he interrupted, "I am not overlooking that at all. After all, that is the key to the whole plan. McNair intends to see to it that I don't meet the deadline. Isn't that right?"

The answer was in her eyes, but instead of replying she asked, "What would you lose if you failed to finish in time?"

"About a half million. It would clean me right down to my shorts."

"Well, now you know." She put her empty glass aside and got to her feet. She looked at Scott as he arose and said. "I had to tell you. I couldn't let it go on that way. At least, I had enough courage for that."

"I'm grateful to you, of course."

She looked away from him and a flush crept into her cheeks. "You don't really trust me, do you? You still wonder if there is perhaps some other reason why I have told you. But I don't really blame you." Her eyes came back to his and she smiled and held out her hand. "Good night."

Scott took her hand and studied her with a deep frown. She seemed suddenly to have changed to another person. Her listlessness had disappeared, her studied manner of indifference was gone and her eyes were now very much alive. The full impact of her unusual beauty swept over him and he felt his pulse quickening. But in the back of her eyes was an odd light, like the interested awareness in the eyes of a surgeon, poised with a scalpel in his hand. She was conscious of his close scrutiny and her lids slowly lowered. Scott let out his breath, which he had not been conscious of holding, and dropped her hand.

She looked at him a moment longer, then turned on her heel and walked across the room with fluid grace. Scott followed her to the door and held an umbrella over her head as she ran to her car. She slipped behind the wheel, smiled and waved at him and drove off down the jungle road. Scott stared after the car until the tail-light disappeared in the heavy rain, then thoughtfully walked back into the house.

WONG CAME IN FROM THE KITCHEN and stood patiently in the center of the room. Scott sat down on the couch and smiled at Wong.

"Well," he said, "what's on your mind? I imagine you heard the conversation."

Wong smiled broadly and bobbed his head up and down. "Yes," he replied. "It was interesting. I am amused."

Scott chuckled. "Oh, so you're amused. What was so funny about it?"

Wong stepped closer to the couch and asked, seemingly apropos of nothing at all: "When you return to the United States, would it be convenient for you to take along a Chinese houseboy?"

"Yourself?"

Wong said eagerly: "Yes, sir. I desire an education. I have the papers for entry, but I need also a job and security while I study."

"Why are you picking on me?"

"Because it is engineering I desire to study. With you I would learn two ways, at the university and in your employ."

"I see." Scott rubbed his chin and carefully erased his smile. This was a crucial moment in Wong's life. The boy almost trembled as he awaited Scott's decision. Scott said slowly: "Well, it is always possible. I don't know. But look here, Wong: I really have no reason—"

Wong interrupted quickly: "Begging your pardon, sir, I would make it worth your while. You see, Mr. McNair thinks I am in his employ."

"A sort of one-man private Gestapo?"

"Something like that, sir."

Scott lit a cigarette and blew the smoke to the ceiling. When his eyes returned to Wong's, he said: "You're offering me a bargain. Okay. You string along with me and let me know what brews in this jungle, and I promise to take you back with me when I leave."

Wong sighed and closed his eyes for a moment, offering a silent prayer to his private gods. Then he relaxed, and

his smile returned. "Thank you, sir. I promise you will not regret this. Mama Soo, too, will be grateful."

"That is what I imagined. And now, about Mrs. McNair—"

Wong spoke rapidly, confident in what he was saying: "As she claims, sir, she is a very frightened woman. She does not think it possible to separate herself from Mr. McNair. He is the kind who would destroy any possession of his rather than lose it. She is made unbalanced by his power and his ruthlessness, just as a cobra is fascinated by the eyes of a mongoose, and yet it is such a little animal."

"You think she overrates him?"

Wong thought a moment, then replied: "It is not so much overrating the real person, as it is the image of him she has built in her mind. It is a psychic disturbance."

Scott smiled and observed: "You don't need an education! But go on. I see what you mean."

"Thank you, sir. Mrs. McNair, though, is an intelligent woman, and is apparently aware of the contradiction. She would like to erase that image from her mind and so free herself of her fears. She hasn't the courage to do it herself, so it must be done for her. You,"—he grinned,—"have been elected."

Scott threw his head back and laughed. When his laughter had died to a chuckle, he said: "So that is why you were amused. Evidently you don't believe a word she had to say."

Wong regarded him soberly for a long while, then shook his head and replied: "Quite to the contrary, sir. Every word she said was true. I am explaining only why she wanted you to know it."

"Oh." Scott frowned and viciously crushed out the cigarette. "In other words, she wants to see how McNair makes out when the odds are even."

"Exactly. She will be, now, an interested spectator, but with a stake in the outcome."

"Gosh, and I thought I was down here just to build a pipeline! I guess I'll have to keep my eyes open—and," he added, "your ears."

"Yes sir. My ears."

He bobbed his head up and down, then turned about and disappeared into the kitchen. Scott listened to the rain sweeping across the tiled roof and decided, finally, to mind his own business and await developments. Building the pipeline was problem enough without burdening his mind with other complications.

Chapter Six

ON the following day the huge bulldozers shoved their ugly snouts into the jungle from three different locations. Murphy had put four crews to work and added the stimulus of competitive bonuses. The first crew was headed west from McNair's refinery to cut a road through the jungle thirty-five feet in width. The pipeline would be buried toward one side of the road. The second crew, starting from the Monterey Post, renamed Mid-camp, was working east toward a junction with the first crew. The third and fourth crews worked under a similar arrangement between Mid-camp and Bennett's oil-fields.

Two pipe-laying crews, headed east and west from Mid-camp, would follow along behind the road-building crews.

Scott Regan had originally intended using four pipe-laying crews, but the surveys had shown the need of an additional pumping-station, and there were not enough men to go around. It did not worry him, however, as he anticipated completing the road ahead of schedule, and this would then enable him to pour more men into the pipe-laying crews.

Scott flew up and down the Parita River and personally checked all work in progress. He conferred with Murphy and his staff of engineers and surveyors, sketched rough blueprints for the plotting staff, okayed all requisitions, bullied square-jawed foremen into line, and even helped the natives load the barges delivering pipe and supplies up and down the river. He wasted no time and would allow no one to waste their time or his.

But he was forced to spend considerable time at the Tacano Oil-field, where the gathering lines were being constructed. The main pipeline, the trunk-line, was to run from the fields to the refinery. But many smaller lines had to be built from the tanks out in the oil-fields to bring the oil into the main pumping-station, located near Bennett's house. The gathering lines, from two to eight inches in diameter, were placed aboveground, as it was never cold enough in the jungle to congeal the oil. Murphy was busy with the crews in the jungle, and so Scott supervised the construction of the gathering lines and spent his nights at Bennett's house.

IT WAS AN EXTREMELY MODERN HOUSE, with wide panes of glass, thick slabs of concrete and a slate roof with an unusual overhang. The rooms were air-conditioned, with the walls colored in cool shades and containing modern furniture of leather and chrome. Bennett spent most of his time at the McNair place in San Cano, so Scott had the house to himself.

He did not see Bennett or the McNairs until the gathering lines were well under way, and the foundations had been placed for the main pumping-station. Then he flew the amphibian down to Mid-camp and took a truck back into the jungle in search of Murphy.

A two-way road had been built from the Mid-camp wharves to connect with the pipeline a mile back in the jungle. It was muddy and rutted by trucks and chewed up by passing bulldozers. Great mora and greenheart trees met overhead, with rope trees winding through them everywhere and dripping with orchid plants. Filling all the spaces, towering above a man's head, were the masses of verdant ferns, their roots springing from ankle-deep moss. Brilliant colored birds flitted like shadows through the trees, and great snakes slithered off into the moss and ferns as the passing truck disturbed them.

Scott drove slowly, holding the truck in the deep ruts and watching for snakes—one truck-driver had pulled into a camp with a sixteen-foot python angrily lashing about where it had become tangled in the truck's chassis. When a python slid across the road in front of Scott, he stopped and let it pass, then continued on. He forded a clear blue stream, the tires churning in the sand, then plunged out of the narrow green tunnel onto the wide pipeline road.

The road had already been pushed out a few miles in each direction, and the pipe-laying crews were hard at work. Big booms were swinging pipe from the trucks to a cradle built about two feet above ground and jockeying them into place, above the three-foot ditch, so that the pipes met end to end. The juncture had to be perfect. As soon as the ends were in exact alignment, tack-welders placed a number of small welds around the pipe and moved on to the next section. Other welders then came along and completed the welding around the pipe. With two gangs handling it in that manner, the work was moving along beautifully; Scott watched it, as he drove by, with satisfaction.

He found Murphy standing just aside from the boom equipment, conferring with his engineers over a set of blueprints. An incongruous note was a black panther lying at their feet, shot by one of the guards that morning.

It looked rather small on the ground, almost as if it could be draped about a woman's shoulders. But Scott frowned when he thought of what it had been when alive, the deadly evil and malevolent hatred gleaming from its slitted yellow eyes. Allen McNair was squatted on his heels by the panther, rubbing a hand over the soft black fur.

Murphy nodded at Scott as he stepped from the truck, but continued talking with the engineers: "Be careful of your slant. Keep it at the angle we've already determined, and we'll get away from the cost of a gathering pump. Those babies run into money. Let gravity handle it wherever possible. Oil should flow pretty freely down here, anyway."

The engineers nodded and walked away, and Murphy turned to face Scott. He looked pleased as he shook hands and informed him:

"She's going fine. We're at least two days ahead of schedule. How is it at Tacano?"

Scott said: "Okay. It's moving along. But look, Murph': didn't we buy a whole bunch of walkie-talkie radios?"

"Sure. They're in the warehouse at San Cano. What were they for?"

"What the devil do you think? I don't see any telephone poles strung through here. Get those radios out, and scatter them up and down the line so we can keep in touch with the crews. Have Jimmy tune them all to the same frequency, and put one in Bennett's house and another in my place. I can't be flying all over the joint to talk with somebody."

He turned away from Murphy and shook hands with McNair. He asked him: "Come out to look things over?"

McNair glanced over the hectic work in progress, then looked back at Scott. He said: "You certainly have a fast-moving organization, Regan. Now I understand why you weren't afraid of the jungle—or the deadline."

Scott smiled lightly. "This is an old story with us. I don't agree to set any deadlines unless I know they can be met."

"So I see."

McNair continued talking, but he was obviously making idle conversation. Murphy looked from one to the other, winked at Scott and walked away to join his engineers. As soon as they were alone, McNair's attitude changed. He kept the tone of his voice on a casual level, but there was tension behind his words and a hard light in his eyes.

"About this deadline," he said: "isn't it possible for you to run into trouble? I mean, river crossings that will slow you down, possibly a change of route here and there—" He paused and waited.

SCOTT LOOKED INTO HIS EYES and saw, behind the hardness, a look of friendly understanding. Scott's hands clenched at his sides. He said, also speaking casually: "That is always possible. We can't anticipate everything. But our schedule is set up to allow for that."

"Yes, of course. And your personal deadline is what?"

"About a week before the twentieth of August. The way work is going, we should finish about a week even before that."

"Then you have a leeway of two weeks in case—well—trouble develops."

"Not," Scott smiled, "that I anticipate trouble."

"Oh, no. But still—" He looked away from Scott toward the wall of the jungle, and the green was reflected in his eyes. He picked an orchid from a vine, crushed it in his hand and said, "You and I are much alike, Scott. Our goals are big goals. We don't bother with small-fry stuff. And we don't let anything stand in the way of reaching that goal—whatever it may be."

"I don't let anything stand in the way of completing a job, if that is what you mean."

"Well, partially. What I am really getting at is that I like you and the way you run your organization, and I don't want you to worry about that deadline. Personally, I don't think it should have been put in the contract at all. Allen was the one who insisted on it, against my objections."

Scott held back a smile and said: "But it is there and I have to meet it."

McNair looked into Scott's eyes and said, "Forget it. Understand? Take your time and do a good job."

"I'm afraid that's out of the question. If I don't have oil running into your refinery by midnight of the twentieth—"

McNair slapped his arm and said good-naturedly: "I will personally make good your losses. You have my word for that. Do we understand each other?"

"Well—"

"You drop around to my office as soon as you get a chance. I'll make out an iron-clad contract that will void your losses." He laughed and said: "Of course, this will be just between the two of us. Bennett's an old fool. He would put up a protest. Naturally, you understand that my primary consideration is getting a good pipeline—and to hell with the time-limit."

"Naturally."

MCNAIR'S LAUGHTER DEEPENED, and he slapped Scott on the back. "I knew we would get along," he said. "See you later?"

"Sure. I'll drop around."

Scott watched him board a truck heading toward the Parita River, where he had left his speed-boat. He stared down the road until the truck disappeared, then went in search of Murphy. He found him in a construction shack in a small clearing hacked out of the jungle.

He told Murphy what had taken place. Murphy's bushy eyebrows raised and he asked: "So?"

"So I am going to get that contract, that's all. It puts us in the clear, and ties McNair in a knot. Y' know, Murph', he wouldn't mind playing dirty, that boy. We don't mean anything in his sweet life."

"You still intend beating the deadline, don't you?"

"Do you want a broken skull? Of course I intend shoving this thing through as fast as possible."

"He'll get wise to that. And when he does, then what makes you think he still won't play dirty?"

"Nothing. Paying my loss is small change alongside what he is after. In the meantime, though, he thinks I am stringing along, and that gives us time to complete most of the work. He may pull something then, but our schedule will be wide open. Anyway," he added reflectively, "this setup here is none of my affair, and I can't run the risk of a loss. That contract will protect me no matter how it works out."

Murphy leaned back against a shelf of blueprints and said: "Well, it's the smart thing to do. But I can't picture you allowing anyone to step on your toes even if you don't take a loss."

Scott nodded and looked away from him. He stared out at the jungle through narrowed eyes and mumbled: "I don't see how Jeff Bennett has failed to stumble across this situation. He can't be that dumb."

"Love," Murphy observed with a beatific expression, "is blind. So I've heard."

Scott glanced back at him, startled. "Do you really think Seely is stringing along that way?"

It was Murphy's turn to be startled. "So now it's 'Seely,' is it? Since when have you two become so chummy?"

Scott laughed and winked at him. "Plenty of things you don't know."

"Uh-huh. But no one can stop me from guessing."

Chapter Seven

SCOTT let a week go by before calling on McNair. His office at the refinery was as modern as Bennett's house, and in fact had been designed by Bennett.

McNair explained to Scott: "Architectural design is a hobby of his. Look here." He took a large roll of blueprints from a drawer and spread them on a glass-top table. "This is some of his stuff. Two hospitals, one at Tacano and one here, workmen's houses, recreational parks, gymnasiums—all that sort of thing." He shoved the prints aside and said, with a laugh: "The great humanitarian, Mr. Jeff Bennett."

Scott sat on the edge of the desk and lit a cigarette. He asked: "Is he sincere about it?"

"Oh, sure. He's going to build all this stuff for the natives out of his own pocket. Plenty of the materials have been sent for already. He believes in what he is doing, no doubt about that." He paused, then added: "The hypocrite!"

"Why do you say that?"

McNair walked to a window and looked out over his refinery. His hands were clasped behind his back, and the fingers were nervously flexing. He replied, with an affectation of bitterness: "Well, he thinks he's so damned pious and righteous, and yet he shadows another man's wife like a dog." McNair spun about and scowled at Scott. "I'm telling you, if it were anyone else, I'd beat him senseless. The situation is intolerable to me, but I can't rectify it at this stage of the game. Later—" He smiled and chuckled.

Scott watched him closely, and realized that his whole attitude was a pose, and not a very good one. He agreed lightly: "That would be annoying. Yet I don't imagine a man of Bennett's age would force his attentions upon Mrs. McNair."

McNair said impatiently: "No, no. That isn't it. The trouble is that he is constantly with her. Seely is so big-hearted she simply can't refuse the man, so she is with him all the time; drives, walks, out in the speed-boats, that sort of thing."

Scott looked down at the floor and said: "It sounds to me as if he is spending too much time away from his business."

He glanced up quickly and surprised a crafty smile tugging at McNair's lips. It was hurriedly erased, but the smile lingered in his eyes. McNair said: "Yes. A pity, isn't it?" He turned away toward his desk, but Scott was sure he was laughing to himself.

McNair placed a contract on his desk and said: "Here it is, Scott. Better look it over."

Scott crossed the room to the desk, picked up the contract and studied it. There were no loopholes. The contract stated simply that if Scott Regan failed to meet his deadline, all penalties and disbursements would be absorbed by the treasury of the McNair refineries. It was signed by Allen McNair, and witnessed by Commissioner Ramos de Veya.

Scott nodded, and tucked the contract into the pocket of his leather jacket. "Good enough," he said. "This will protect me."

McNair leaned back in his swivel-chair and narrowly studied Scott. He put the fingers of his hands together and smiled broadly. He asked: "We understand each other?"

"It's plain enough."

"Sure." McNair got up and put an arm on Scott's shoulders. "The main thing," he said, "is to build a good pipeline and not a rush job. I said from the very beginning that you hadn't enough time to do a proper job of it. Now you can take all the time you want and forget the deadline completely."

"I said it was plain enough."

McNair was suddenly expansive and jovial. "Fine, fine." He glanced at his watch and asked, "How about spending this evening with us? A few cocktails, dinner—"

"I'm pretty busy."

"I won't take no for an answer."

"Sorry, but I have a meeting with Murph' this evening."

McNair's expansive mood faded the slightest degree. He repeated: "I still won't take no for an answer. We'll expect you at, say, eight o'clock."

Scott glanced at him, puzzled; then his curiosity got the better of him. "I'll be there."

He drove down from the high bluff on which the refinery was located and looked for Murphy in San Cano. He found him in the small office where all the blueprints and survey records were filed. He and Murphy talked about the various problems encountered along the pipeline, but Scott's mind was not on the conversation. He was thinking of the deal made with McNair.

It would be relatively easy for McNair to keep a check on the progress of the pipeline. In a very few weeks he would become convinced that Scott had not slowed down the work. Orders had already been given to Murphy to increase the bonuses offered to the men and speed up the work. McNair would feel, then, that he had been double-crossed. Scott grinned at that thought. McNair's explosion would be something beautiful to behold.

But his smile faded quickly before a sober thought: McNair, also, was not the kind to trust anyone, including Scott Regan. The contract had been given to him in the hope that Scott would play along with him, simply another angle in all the others he was pursuing, including the distraction of Bennett with Seely's charms. But he would naturally protect himself against that contract. He must have taken some sort of precautionary step already. Scott frowned, and wondered what that might be. He did not doubt that it must exist.

AFTER HIS CONFERENCE WITH MURPHY, which was unsatisfactory, he made his way to Mama Soo's. He leaned against the bar, under one of the big fans, and ordered a Planter's Punch. Mama Soo walked over to join him, and watched as he gulped down the drink.

When he had cooled himself sufficiently, he put down the glass and sighed. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead and said, "That's better. This jungle humidity never did agree with me."

Mama Soo asked: "You have spent much time in jungles?"

"Too much. Why the hell can't someone discover an oil-field at Forty-second and Broadway for a change?"

"You go where the oil goes."

"Well, I'm the guy who has to get it out." He reflected a moment, then said: "To tell you the truth, Mama Soo, most of the time I enjoy the work, even when I do have to dig jiggers out of my toenails and leeches from under my boots. But tonight I am just—well—I don't know—"

Her smooth features remained expressionless as she said: "You are perhaps losing your perspective. No? One does not mind doing a certain work in the jungle, but when you have to cleave through human decay, it changes your perspective."

Scott grinned. "Now I know where Wong gets his chatter." He took another huge gulp of his drink, then shrewdly looked into her eyes. "Maybe you got something there. Perspective. I hadn't thought of that."

Mama Soo beckoned the Chinese bartender, who placed a pony of Bols gin before her. She sipped at it, and watched Scott through the backbar mirror.

After a moment of silence she said: "One rarely thinks of it until your sense of values has been thoroughly distorted. Then it is too late. Then you have played the other man's game too long."

Scott tensed, and turned his full attention upon her: "Go on. What about the other man's game?"

"It is one of dissemination and many, many subtleties. It is like the jungle. You can never see far in any direction, and you are not sure the trail you are following may not be going about in a circle." She turned to look squarely into his eyes and smiled. "That is not your game, Scott Regan."

"No. I'm not a subtle guy."

"Your game is a direct one. Whatever you do, it is there for anyone to see. As you Americans put it, it is your nature to put your cards on the table."

Scott stared off into space and mumbled: "I haven't been doing that, have I?"

"No." She said gently: "In this jungle you play the wrong game. It is not wise for you."

"You're right. That isn't my nature at all." He finished his drink, and smiled, and patted her arm. "Thanks, Mama Soo. I needed that little lecture. But how do you know so much about me?"

"I like you, so I watch you." She paused, then added slowly: "Like I watch Seely McNair. She is like you."

Scott stared at her with astonishment, then laughed. "Now you are really off on the wrong foot."

"No," she said seriously, "I am right. But I mean that at one time she must have been like you, direct, with a clear mind, a good person."

Scott scratched his head and squinted at her. "Do you really believe that?"

"I do. I watch and I observe the little things. I make a picture of her, and for months it does not alter. She is like the picture I have made."

"And what is that like?"

Mama Soo frowned, and sipped at her drink while turning the picture over in her mind. Then she said softly: "As I say, she was once a good person. Her dignity has undoubtedly always been with her, but behind it has been the little spirit of the hoyden. It was that which must have first attracted her to Allen McNair, that and a cloistered life which did not allow her to know about men like McNair."

Scott leaned his elbows on the bar and cupped his chin in his hands. "This is getting interesting. What next?"

"Well, he fascinated her. Not the love, though. I am sure of that. He married her, and took her away from the life she knew into a life of intrigue and excitement. She was dazed and thrilled by everything, and that is when her perspective began to change. At first it was not noticeable. But after a long period of time, she became conscious of the fact that Allen McNair had reversed her sense of values. It was all just a charming game of intrigue, business intrigue, the accepted sort, until that time. Then she thought of her husband, and her eyes were open. She saw what he was like, and what she saw frightened her. It was too late. She lacked courage to break away. Her husband, she was afraid, was too powerful for her." Mama Soo said slowly and distinctly: "You see, she has never seen him beaten—by anyone."

Turning about, Scott leaned his back against the bar. He felt the heat of the jungle pressing upon him and smothering his reason. He looked at the people drinking and laughing in the room, and at the lizards walking along the walls. A bar bum was banging at an out-of-tune piano on a raised dais. Two natives were solemnly counting out American money on a green-covered table. There was moss on their boots, covered with crude oil.

Scott shook his head to clear it and looked at Mama Soo. "Wong," he told her, "wrapped it all up in a nutshell."

"What did he say?"

"He said that I was elected."

"Wong," she replied noncommittally, "is a nice boy. He thinks."

She squeezed his arm and walked back to her desk at the end of the counter.

Chapter Eight

It was raining when Scott left Mama Soo's, but it quit as he was driving out the main street and he could see stars overhead. Some of the natives had told him there would soon be a break in the weather and that the heavy nightly rains would cease for a few weeks. There would be showers, but the watertable of the country would lower until the heavy rains started again, and much work could be done. Scott looked up at the stars and felt better. Matters were not going badly at all.

Scott reached the hacienda and changed to a linen suit, then started for McNair's house near the refinery. He had to drive into San Cano, double back through town and take another road that skirted the base of the bluff, towering almost four hundred feet above the town. Dozens of waterfalls cascaded down the face of the bluff, which was covered thickly with green moss and lichen, to crash thunderously into deep frothy pools by the side of the paved road. Slippery log bridges spanned the streams, each of them forming a little gap in the solid mass of the jungle.

Scott muttered to himself: "A man needs gills to live in a country like this."

The bluff lowered after a few miles, and the road curved around the edge and up the steep grade. Scott came out on top of the plateau and saw the lights of the refinery ahead. Here, on top, the jungle had been cleared away with fire and dynamite, and the bright moon shed its silver rays on the scarred trunks of massive greenheart trees and the great ferns creeping over fallen logs to take possession of the plateau.

He curved off the main road leading to the refinery and drove through a straight road that seemed to be cut through a jungle-like park. At the end was McNair's place, situated almost on the edge of the bluff. In the moonlight, Scott could see the carefully tended gardens, lawns and rock-pools and white gravel pathways. He parked the car and walked up a series of pathways and steps to the main porch of the house.

He paused at the glassed-in and air-conditioned porch to look out over the bluff. Below were the black roofs and occasional lights of San Cano, and the silver mouth of the Parita. To the east was the ocean, its muddied edges lapping at the jungle. The view was breath-taking. He could see to the horizon in almost every direction.

McNair met him at the door, and Scott commented: "You surely picked a beautiful location for your home."

Allen looked beyond him and down at the lights of the town. "It had to be good," he replied. "This is my permanent home."

Scott regarded him curiously and said: "That surprises me. I wouldn't think you would put out permanent roots anywhere."

Allen smiled, amused at some thought of his own. "Well," he said, "there is enough to conquer here for ten men. I have plans, too. Only I don't put them on paper. This is big country, Scott."

He turned away, and Scott followed him into the living-room. It was a huge square room divided into three sections by the placement of the furniture. Half of the room contained long comfortable couches, deep chairs and low glass-topped tables. One quarter of the room was given over to a gaming section, and the other quarter was the bar.

Two Chinese in white uniforms were mixing drinks at the bar. Commissioner de Veya was standing by them, smilingly giving directions for a special rum mixture of his own. He seemed delighted to see Scott and warmly shook hands with him. Jeff Bennett was in the gaming section, seated before a backgammon table and listlessly arranging the pieces. He was indifferent to Scott's presence, but courteous. Commissioner de Veya's wife was seated at the table with him. She was almost a duplicate of her husband, roly-poly, good natured, black hair and black eyes and a ready smile. Scott saw intense shrewdness behind her smile, however, and rather sensed that it was she who pulled De Veya's political strings.

Seely entered the room as one of the houseboys passed around the tall drinks. She was wearing a daring two-piece dress, with a short flowered jacket and a snug skirt that was like a sarong. Her midriff was bare. Scott glanced at Bennett and saw his old eyes become youthful and hungry again.

Seely greeted Scott courteously enough, but her manner was cool, indifferent and remote, as it had been the first time he had seen her. Her eyes never looked directly into his; and when she spoke, her voice was a low, husky monotone. He thought of what Mama Soo had told him, and realized that her manner was always the same when McNair was about. She was like a person who had been drugged, or a sleepwalker.

She sat upon a low couch near the backgammon table, and Scott was about to sit at her side, but was astonished to find himself a moment later at the backgammon table, with Bennett seated beside Seely. McNair had managed it before Scott was even aware of what was taking place.

He looked at Allen, who was standing before the table and smiling down at him with tight lips. Then he looked at Seely. She smiled lightly at Bennett, who was offering her a cigarette, then her eyes swung to her husband. Scott was not sure, but he thought he detected a passing shadow of deep rage and humiliation in the green depths of her eyes. But, he thought, it could have been something else, too. Why start looking for ghosts?

Bennett asked him about the progress of the pipeline, and Scott explained how well it was going. Commissioner De Veya listened to the two of them, then his eyes sparkled and he said, "It is a very big thing for my country, señors. I do not think any of you understand how big. Puerta San Cano, as we know it, a dirty, malaria ridden pesthole, will cease to exist. Streets will be paved, hospitals built—schools, churches, hotels. It will be very grand, indeed."

Bennett said quietly, talking as if from a pulpit: "Of course, the big thing will be regular and secure employment for the natives. That one factor alone will alter the face of your country."

De Veya smiled and nodded, but looked anxiously at Scott. "Do you see how it is, Señor Regan? Do you see the romance of it, and the economics?"

Scott laughed. "I'm afraid not, De Veya. I have never been accused of being a man of imagination."

De Veya was aghast. "But that I refuse to believe!" he cried. "It could not be so. I know something of you, señor. I know how you have gone into the back countries, the mountains, deserts and jungles, and have built your pipelines to the sea. You have altered the face of more than one small country. Imagination is required to do that."

Scott shrugged. "Well, possibly. But with me it's just a job, something I like to do."

De Veya would not let the subject drop. He talked about it at great length, especially how the lives of the humble natives would be affected, and Scott was surprised at the intensity of his words. De Veya was not speaking idly, and he was not interested in the others. His words were directed solely for Scott's ears.

Scott thought it over as they went into the dining-room, with its soft pastel jungle murals. De Veya, he realized, was not particularly interested in the outcome of McNair's bid for control. He undoubtedly knew every detail of what was taking place, but managed to play along in the middle, collecting his private levies from all concerned. However, he was interested vitally in the completion of that pipeline. He was letting Scott know, by his sincere display of concern over his country and his people, that—win, lose, or draw—the pipeline must be finished. That was all right with Scott. He meant to finish it, sooner even than De Veya realized.

Scott paid little attention to the meal. He was not hungry, his mind was filled with conflicting thoughts, and he was tired. He half-listened to the chatter of the others and, without being aware of it, rudely stared at Seely at the end of the table. He was trying to puzzle her out and not doing a very good job of it. Toward the end of the meal he saw McNair narrowly watching him and then became irritated with himself for having been caught.

"Elected or not," he decided, "I refuse to run. She means nothing in my life."

When the meal was over, they returned to the living-room. Scott was in bad spirits, and mixed a huge highball instead of taking a cordial with the others. Mama Soo's words, "That is not your game," kept pounding in his head, increasing his irritation.

At a break in the conversation, Bennett suddenly turned to him and said: "You seem to be in a low mood tonight, Regan. Isn't the work going well?"

"Sure it is. The work's okay."

A faint smile tugged at Bennett's thin, ascetic lips. "Perhaps it is the lack of blondes in this country that lowers your morale." Everyone smiled, and Bennett continued: "Personally, I don't understand your tastes."

Scott looked from Bennett to Seely and back again. "That," he snapped, "is obvious."

Bennett's face turned white as he sharply sucked in his breath. The De Veyas glanced at each other, considerably startled, then politely looked off into space. Allen McNair's face turned a dull brick red, and a wild wave of temper pounded in his veins. He seemed almost on the verge of striking Scott, who was coolly watching him, but managed to get his temper under control. He hurriedly changed the subject, and called the houseboy to fill up the glasses.

Scott relaxed and sat back, feeling better than he had before all evening. He glanced sidewise at Seely and saw her studying him as if she had never seen him before. When he caught her eyes, an almost imperceptible smile formed about her lips. She held his eyes a moment longer; the smile faded, and she looked away.

He finished his highball and decided that he had more than worn out his welcome. But when he arose to leave, McNair's earlier friendliness returned in greater force, and he urged him to stay. Scott wanted to go, but Allen protested so vehemently that he could hardly refuse. He returned to his seat and had another highball.

Señora De Veya was talking about the delights of living in the country's capital, when the sound of a dull explosion filtered through the room. She stopped talking, and they all listened, looking from face to face.

Bennett tilted his head on one side and said: "Sounded rather close. I wonder what that could have been?"

Scott frowned and looked at McNair, who asked quickly: "Are your men dynamiting tonight, Scott?"

"No. We have no night crews anywhere. That explosion sounded to me as if it came from San Cano."

He got to his feet, and the others followed suit. They walked out to the porch and saw a dull glow in the sky. They went out to the gardens before the porch and looked down at San Cano. There they could see a fire burning near the main dock.

Scott mumbled: "Good Lord, if that's one of the warehouses—"

McNair hastened to reassure him: "It's two blocks away from the warehouses. It's hard to tell from here, but I would say it's one of the saloons at the beginning of the main street. Good riddance."

Bennett was worried and asked: "Do you think it will endanger the town, Allen?"

"No. It doesn't look like a very big fire. The men down there should have it under control in short order. No sense running down ourselves. We can see from here if it gets any worse."

THEY STOOD THERE ON THE LAWN silently watching the fire until, a half-hour later, the red glow started to recede. They turned back toward the house, all speculating at once on the nature of the fire. Before they reached the porch an automobile skidded around the gravel driveway and came to a grinding halt.

Murphy got out of the car and walked toward them. He was smiling, but it was a bitter smile and his eyes were hard and his mouth was hard. He stopped before Scott and stared at him.

"Well," Scott snapped, "what was it? Anything of ours?"

"That," Murphy explained, "was the end of our main office, the engineering office."

"You mean—"

"I mean that some so-and-so placed a stick of dynamite under the building and touched it off. The lovely flames you were watching were burning all of our blueprints and survey records. Not one of them is left. You figure out what that means."

Scott felt the blood draining from his face. He saw ahead of him weeks of back-breaking work replacing the prints and additional weeks of flying up and down the Parita, re-mapping the territory. There was no doubt now, that the deadline could never be met.

He turned and looked at McNair, who was watching him closely. This, then, was McNair's precautionary measure! It was in his eyes, the vicious twist of his mouth and the arrogant set of his shoulders. It was all neatly timed with the signing of the contract and the detention in McNair's home.

Scott's feet shifted apart, and his hands drew up to the level of his hips. He bit out between clenched teeth: "You take no chances, do you? That was very well done, McNair. I should have expected something like this. I guess I underestimated you."

McNair's lips parted in a smile, but he made no reply. Bennett, however, barked: "Here, here! What is this all about? What are you saying, man?"

Scott kept his eyes on McNair, but told Bennett: "Why don't you open your eyes, you blind fool? McNair is pulling you through one of the sweetest swindles I have ever watched. Think it over. If I don't meet my deadline, you're sunk. Now it looks as though I won't meet it. Isn't that so, McNair?"

McNair turned slightly away from Scott, then shifted back and swung for his chin with a hammerlike right fist. Scott was expecting it. He stepped inside the swing, hit McNair high on the forehead with his left fist, then smashed his right squarely into his face. The man spun about and almost went down, but recovered himself and swung a hard right that caught Scott on the neck. Scott was slightly off-balance and went to his knees. He quickly got up, with wild elation surging through him, only to face McNair standing a few feet away, with an automatic in his hand.

McNair smiled. He wiped the blood from his face with his left hand and purred: "Not that I am not enjoying this little brawl, but this is neither the time or the place."

Scott stood before him poised on the balls of his feet. "You damned coward! Throw that gun away."

"Not now, my friend. Some other time. Suppose we say the day you finish your job?"

"Any day is good enough for me."

"I think that particular day is best." His casual manner disappeared, his back stiffened and he roared: "Right now you are on my property. Get out! And make it fast!"

Scott took a step toward him—the gun barked and a slug tore through the sleeve of Scott's coat. McNair asked: "Are you leaving, or does my next shot cripple you?"

Scott lowered himself back to his heels and looked over the group. The De Veyas had stepped into the background, seemingly anxious to get away. Bennett had not moved, but was staring at McNair with wide eyes. Seely was standing in the light of the porch. Her eyes were darting from Scott to McNair with a frenzied light in their depths that faded when she saw Scott relax.

He looked back at McNair and the gun, then turned on his heel and took Murphy's arm. "Come on."

The two walked to the automobile and got in. They drove down the driveway a short distance, then Scott stepped out and got in the jeep. As he curved out of the grounds, he looked back and saw McNair still standing where he had left him. Scott swore under his breath, then he started to smile and soon he was laughing.

Well, he thought, this was certainly putting his cards on the table, with a vengeance!

He drove down the road from the bluff, whistling a tuneless melody off-key.

CHAPTER NINE

AFTER a few days of investigation Scott changed his mind about not being able to meet the deadline. When his plan had been sketched out, he had breakfast with Murphy at the hacienda one morning and explained it to him.

"The important thing," he said, "is that the engineers have all studied those blueprints and remember most of them. We can fill in the missing details as we go along. If you come to a spot where you have to stop work temporarily, skip it and go on to the next while the surveyors work out the problem. In other words, keep the line going even if you have to leave gaps in it."

Murphy nodded with approval. "We can do it."

"I'm counting heavily on your experience in the field."

"Thanks. I'll keep it going. But about the pumping-stations?"

"I have already cabled New York for duplicate prints on the job we did in Maine. When they arrive we can alter those prints to fit the local situation. Fortunately, all the plans for the main pumping-station at Tacano are in the hands of the engineers doing the work. Now, another thing, forget all your coefficient-of-expansion stuff. We can't bother with it now. Stick in expansion joints and let it go at that."

"They work out just as well, if you ask me."

"Sure." He drummed on the table with his fingers for a moment, then said: "The last thirty miles of line going into the refinery is on an incline, to get up that bluff. Build your road and dig your ditch in there, but don't lay that pipe until the last."

"Why?"

"It's too close to the refinery, smack under McNair's eyes. He could wreck it before we could put it into operation. So let that be the last job."

Scott leaned over to finish his coffee, then sat back and smiled at Murphy. "I think we can beat it, Murph'."

Murphy's eyes twinkled as he said: "The funny thing about this job is that you don't have to beat it. With McNair's contract in your pocket, the deadline really doesn't exist for you. I wonder," he asked, "if you shouldn't put that paper in a safe place?"

Scott laughed and shook his head. "That contract is safe, no matter where I put it. Whether or not I cooperate with McNair, he is counting on the possession of that contract to influence my judgment."

"I don't get that."

"Well, suppose we get into a tight spot that means plenty of work and expense: With that contract in my pocket, I can say, 'Aw, the hell with it!' and relax. I can't lose. That is exactly what McNair wants. Only that isn't what he is going to get."

"Good. I hate to think of the guy getting away with this deal. Bennett may be a stuffed shirt, but still—"

"Have you seen him the past few days?"

"No. I heard that he went back up to Tacano. I'd hate to have his thoughts right now."

"Yeah." Scott stood up and stretched his arms. He said casually: "I'm making a survey flight up the river, today. I think I'll call on Mr. Bennett."

A FEW HOURS LATER Scott landed the amphibian at a Tacano wharf and walked up the path to Bennett's house. He unlocked the front door with his key and went into the living-room. Bennett was in rumpled pajamas, seated near one of the wide windows. His eyes were bloodshot, his chin covered with a gray stubble, and he looked as if he had not slept for nights.

Scott dropped into a chair opposite him, lit a cigarette and patiently waited. Bennett finally turned his head and looked wearily at Scott. "Well, Regan?"

Scott felt a sudden surge of sympathy for the man and asked: "How do you feel?"

"Not very well. It is not conducive to gayety to find that you have made a ridiculous fool of yourself."

"So you see it now?"

"Of course. I guess I have always known it, but when you reach my age and a young woman of her beauty—" He paused, and closed his eyes with pain.

Scott said: "I guess she did a good job of it."

Bennett opened his eyes and stared at him. He shook his head, slightly, but with firmness. "No. It wasn't Seely. It was Allen—and, of course, my own senile foolishness. He threw us together constantly. He would arrange a meeting, for example; then he would find some way to excuse himself and leave me with his wife." He paused, then said bitterly: "I don't like to talk about it."

Scott persisted: "But you say it isn't her fault."

Bennett looked away and was not going to reply, but changed his mind and said: "No. Never at any time did she show any particular desire for my company—or anyone else's, for that matter. She is the most thoroughly detached woman I have ever known. That was what first aroused my interest in her. I knew she was not happy, and I realized early that she had built a wall around her, behind which she was hiding. That piqued my curiosity. From there it was one step to senile infatuation. I was the one who did a good job of it."

"A bachelor, aren't you?"

"Yes. I have never married."

"Well, then, don't blame yourself too much. Aristotle played piggyback for a young maiden, too."

Bennett snorted, but he also smiled. He said: "I have been used, Regan."

Scott laughed. "You sure have. McNair pulled the strings, and you jumped. But tell me something; weren't you really aware of what he was after?"

"Never. He waited until I was kicking up my heels like a young colt before he started pulling strings. As a matter of fact, I rather liked the man. I had heard ugly rumors about him, but I discounted them as so much rubbish."

"How about that deadline-clause between you two?"

BENNETT SHRUGGED. "I was against it, couldn't see the necessity for it at all, but when he insisted, I felt I could gamble as well as the next man."

Scott frowned and blinked at him. "How do you mean?"

Bennett stared at him, puzzled. "Well, surely, man, you don't think I would sign a clause unless it was equitable, do you? After all, it works both ways."

Scott shouted: "What! You mean to say that if I do meet that deadline, then you gain control of the line?"

Bennett puffed out his cheeks as if Scott had accused him of being a moron. "Well, certainly," he replied. His eyes cleared, and he leaned toward Scott and pointed a finger at him. "Look here, Regan; I admit I've acted the fool, and that I certainly have nothing of which to be proud, but don't forget I am still an oil-man. I know this business inside and out. Blind or not, I wouldn't sign that clause, or any other, unless it worked both ways." He slouched back in his chair and mumbled: "Of course, that was no worry to McNair."

Scott got to his feet and said: "I think it *will* be a worry to him."

Bennett shrewdly appraised him, then asked: "You think you can meet it?"

"I think so. That is, if you're willing to cooperate." He paced back and forth before Bennett and told him: "There is a whale of a lot at stake here: McNair will fight for it with everything he has. I don't intend to let him get away with it. But I have one weakness."

Bennett asked quickly: "What is that?"

"Men. Aside from the native laborers, my men are all skilled technicians, and I need every one of them on the job. I can't spare any of them for guard duty, and yet every foot of the line should be guarded and patrolled. You, on the other hand, have plenty of men here in the oil-fields—"

Bennett interrupted, his excitement growing: "Help yourself to them. Take all you want. I'll foot the bill and see that you get the best of the lot."

Scott leaned over and slapped him on the shoulder. "Okay. That's all I need."

"If you do need anything else—"

"I'll let you know. See you later."

He turned to go, but Bennett said: "Just a minute, Regan."

Scott paused and looked back at him. Bennett rubbed his chin with a shaking hand, while staring out the window; then his eyes swung slowly to Scott's. Every line in his face had deepened, and in his eyes was the sharp look of fear.

He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue and said haltingly: "The other night—right after you left—I—well, Allen had a few things to say. He said something about a contract—an agreement between the two of you—"

Scott nodded: "That's right. I don't really have to meet the deadline, Bennett. I'm in the clear."

"Yes. That is what he said. He implied that, as you had nothing to lose, you would eventually tire of being the man in the middle and relax your efforts."

"Could be. I guess you'll have to take a chance on that."

Bennett looked down at the rug and mumbled: "I'm getting old, Regan. But there is a plan I am anxious to put into effect while I am still able. I would like to change living-conditions in this country, use my wealth for the benefit of others—"

Scott said kindly: "I know about your plan."

Bennett looked up at him with a slight smile. "You do? So much the better." He sat forward eagerly and said: "You see, my idea for changing conditions—" He paused and looked at Scott, and the light in his eyes faded. He said softly: "You're sympathetic, but you are not interested. I had thought to appeal to you." He shook his head, then frowned at a new thought that had crossed his mind, and glanced sharply at Scott. "Just why," he asked, "are you so willing to put up a fight over a matter in which the victor couldn't possibly be yourself?"

Scott scratched his head and replied: "Well, I hadn't thought about it in exactly that manner—"

Bennett sat back in his chair and his hands dropped listlessly at his sides. His eyes dulled and he whispered hoarsely: "Never mind. I already know the answer."

Scott shouted angrily: "Then suppose you tell me."

Bennett wearily passed a hand over his eyes. "It isn't worth the effort. Young or old, I guess we're all alike."

Scott blurted: "So now I'm getting elected again. By God, I'm getting fed up with this business! That dame means nothing to me. Understand? Nothing! Every blasted time I turn around, someone is shoving her in my face. What am I supposed to be, the knight in shining armor? Damn it all, Bennett, I'll do my own picking and choosing, and it won't be another man's wife. You hear?"

Bennett shook his head, but did not bother to look at him. Scott stared at him for a moment, then left the room and slammed the door behind him.

Chapter Ten

SCOTT gave little thought to anyone during the following days. He and Jimmy Hallon flew up and down the Parita making a new set of aerial photographs, which they put together in a huge map at Mid-camp. Field surveyors added the necessary detail as they went along.

Murphy kept the pipeline moving through the jungle without too many interruptions, but a good deal of the time he was working in the dark. He ran into trouble, finally, on the section west of Mid-camp. He radioed to Scott, who was at San Cano, asking for his help.

While Scott was waiting for new sets of spark plugs to be installed in the amphibian's engines, Seely McNair approached the ramp in her speedboat and tossed him a line. He pulled her in alongside the ramp and helped her from the boat. She took a cigarette from him and sat on the wharf, dangling her booted feet over the edge. Scott lowered himself to her side and leaned back on his elbows, looking down at the muddy Parita.

Seely twisted her head to look into his eyes and said, "You seem worried."

Scott shook his head and smiled. "Not too much. It's just one of those things. Murphy has run into rock. I'm going up to have a look at it." He glanced at her and asked, expecting to be refused, "Care to go along?"

"Thanks. I would like to."

He turned onto his side and looked her up and down. She was wearing jodhpur boots, linen riding-trousers and a white silk waist, with her hair caught up in a colorful scarf. There was no particular expression in her sloe-berous eyes, but they were at least alive and no longer flat and vacuous.

Scott chuckled and said: "I don't think McNair would like it."

She looked away from him toward the jungle on the other side of the river. "What he likes," she said after a moment, "is no longer a matter of concern to me."

FROWNING, SCOTT STARED at the back of her head, annoyed because he could not see her expression. "Since when," he asked, "did all this take place? I thought the guy fascinated you?"

"He did. Very much so." She turned about, pulled her feet under her and leaned on her knees. She looked down into his eyes, coolly, unemotionally, and said: "You were responsible. When Allen fired at you that shot went right through me."

Scott smiled. "I thought I was the one he was shooting at. At least, I had that impression." There was no answering smile in her eyes, so he said, "I know what you mean. But just how did it affect you?"

"It is difficult to explain. In a few words, though, it shocked me back to reality. It was not what I expected of him. He was acting out of character, my idea of his character."

"In what way?"

She stated simply: "He was afraid."

Scott pushed himself from his elbows and sat erect. He shook his head and said: "I'm afraid you're wrong about that. He isn't afraid of me. The way I've figured it out since then is that he was more worried about hurting me than getting hurt himself. He wants me to miss the deadline, sure, but he also wants that pipeline finished. That is my specialty. It isn't his. If anything happened to me,—seriously, I mean,—he would have to complete the job and run the risk of botching it."

There was a faint suggestion of a smile in Seely's eyes. "Do you really believe that?"

"It makes sense to me."

"And yet it is wrong. You don't really know Allen at all. If you will remember, he started the fight."

"No. He saw it coming. He just beat me to the punch, that's all."

"Nevertheless, he moved first. Couldn't he have reached for his gun then just as easily?"

"Well—"

"Of course." She leaned toward him and said earnestly: "He wanted to knock you down and give you a beating, not a crippling one, but still a beating. That is his nature. That is the way he always reacts. Especially if I am present."

Scott smiled ruefully. "Well, he succeeded. He did knock me down."

"Yes. But at that moment something happened. I was watching him while you were getting to your feet. For a second or two he had both hands to his face. That one blow of yours had almost caved it in. For the first time in his life he felt real pain. When he looked at the blood on his hands, the expression in his eyes was almost sickening. It was obvious to him, then, that he might be the loser if the fight continued. He has never been beaten, Scott, in any way. It would kill him to be beaten. The mere thought of it turned his face pale. That is when he reached for the gun. He was afraid."

Scott tore a sliver from the wharf and sailed it downriver. "I don't know," he said. "I'm no psychiatrist."

She placed a hand on his shoulder and said: "Neither am I, but I know Allen. I wanted that fight to go on. I prayed for it! I don't blame you for not facing a gun,

but when you turned away, I felt as if I was falling through space."

Scott said quickly: "But about your change of attitude—"

She dropped her hand from his shoulder and again turned away from him. "That was later," she said, in a whisper so low that he could hardly hear her. "I lay awake all night, seeing his eyes in the dark and seeing the sudden fear growing in them. His invincibility was doubtful, shattered. Not that it was over for him. He has to restore his confidence in himself. He will find the opportunity to have it out with you some day, at a more favorable time. But it was over for me. I am no longer afraid of him." She turned back to him with shining eyes, smiling, almost laughing. "Scott, do you hear? I am not afraid of him! I'm free!"

Scott was embarrassed by her sudden display of emotion and also felt that, somehow, he was becoming personally involved. He got to his feet and said lamely: "Well, that's nice. Glad to hear it."

She stood up and faced him and started to laugh. "You," she said, "are being just a little ridiculous."

Scott's face darkened. "I don't see—"

"You don't see a lot," she interrupted. "Evidently you feel that I am now going to throw myself at your head."

"Oh, now, wait a minute. I haven't said anything—"

"Your attitude is saying it for you." She put a finger to her lips as the smile deepened in her eyes. "You know, Scott, I think you are just as conceited as Allen."

He stared at her and then he started to laugh. "I guess you're right. To be honest with you, I did have something of that sort in mind. Do you forgive me?"

"I owe you too much to be forgiving you." She tucked a hand in his arm and asked: "Now, do you still wish to take me along?"

"Sure. You know, Seely, maybe we do talk the same language after all. Funny, isn't it?"

"Yes. Isn't it?"

Scott walked to the amphibian and revved up the engines, then helped Seely in. They took off downriver, circled over San Cano, then headed upriver. He leveled off at three thousand feet, where they were above the humid heat of the jungle. Seely took off her scarf, shook her hair loose and smiled at Scott. She stretched her arms, like a person awaking from a long sleep and sighed deeply. Then she started to talk.

FOR A TIME SCOTT PAID little attention to what she was saying, but after a few minutes he listened closely. Seely was explaining herself, but not really to Scott. She was trying to recapture what she had been. She talked of her parents, her home in California, her years in finishing-schools. "I was a type. You can almost tell what finishing-school a person has attended simply by looking at them. They are all turned out in the same mold." Her father had been an oil-man, owner of a rather large lease in Wilmington. That was how she had met McNair. Her father had said he was a man destined to "go places."

"We knew little of his background," she said, "except that he had risen rather fast. He was a dashing person, even amongst oil-men. Emil Johnson, for whom he worked right after we were married, was crazy about him. He would have backed Allen in any venture he had in mind. But Allen, of course, had his own ideas."

Scott was on the verge of asking her about the rumors concerning Johnson and McNair, when she changed the subject back to herself. She talked of the little things she liked, good horses, riding at dawn, sailing, swimming in the surf with paddleboards and stuffing herself with hot-dogs at country fairs. Out of her words emerged a picture of Seely that was a far cry from the woman at Scott's side. She recognized that variance as quickly as Scott.

When they landed at Mid-camp and were driving through the jungle in a light truck, she told Scott soberly, "I don't expect to be the same person again. It isn't possible. But at least I can go on from this point and construct an entirely new life."

Scott said: "I suppose you'll be leaving McNair."

"Yes. But not quite the way you're thinking. I just can't suddenly walk out. He wouldn't permit it and, anyway, there are a number of matters involved that have to be cleared up."

"But if you have made up your mind—"

She shook her head. "Believe me, Scott, he wouldn't permit it. Not yet. But later it will be possible." She paused, added thoughtfully, "Easily possible, I hope."

Scott glanced at her and knew what was in her mind. He thought, "No getting out of it. I am still elected!"

THEY PASSED CONSTRUCTION CREWS at work on the road and finally caught up with the advance crew shoving their bulldozers through the jungle. Murphy waved to them from one of the many small shacks scattered along the road. Scott halted the truck and got out and shook hands with him. He nodded at Seely, plainly puzzled by her presence, but too worried to comment on it.

Murphy walked down the road with Scott and paused by the side of a huge ditchdigger half-hidden in the jungle foliage. He pointed down into a shallow trench and said, "There it is. We were going to start the ditchdigger today, but you can't dig in that stuff. Solid rock. Better than fourteen miles of it."

Scott looked about him at the jungle walls. The foliage, though dense, was light stuff, with very few large trees. He looked back at Murphy and said, "A blind man would know there was rock in here. How did you happen to drive in this direction?"

Murphy shrugged. "No maps, and the field surveyors failed to notice it. They have been working pretty hard, Scott. They're tired. I don't blame them too much."

"No, I guess not. But to blast our way through this stuff with dynamite will put us weeks behind."

"I know. Look; how about placing the pipe on top?"

Scott shook his head. "That pipe has to be placed at least twenty-six inches deep. Otherwise the whip of the pipe, when the oil comes through, might crack it."

They walked back to the truck and Scott turned the problem over in his mind. Seely and Murphy remained silent, watching him. He finally nodded his head and walked over to some of the road-building equipment. There were three R.D.8 angle dozers and a rooter, used for road-building and scarifying. The rooter was an extremely heavy mass of steel with two prongs that dug down into the ground as it was dragged behind a tractor. Another three-foot steel prong stuck straight up in the air.

Scott examined the rooter, then called over some of the workmen and asked them to turn the thing upside down. They thought he had gone crazy, but brought over two of the heaviest R.D.8's, hooked some cables onto the rooter and turned it over. It was now reversed, with the two smaller prongs sticking up in the air and the long center prong resting on the ground.

Scott was satisfied and had it hooked onto a tractor. He got into the driver's seat, threw it in gear and began dragging the rooter behind him. The long prong bit into the ground and buried itself for a depth of three feet. When it hit the rock the great tractor shuddered and wobbled, but it kept going and the prong broke through the rock, smashing it into loose stuff that could easily be scooped out by the ditchdigger.

He traveled a distance of a few hundred feet and the enormous ditchdigger crawled along behind him. The trench was dug as quickly as if it had been in loose soil. Scott got down from the tractor and walked back to the truck with a grin.

Murphy slapped him on the back and told Seely: "There is one of the reasons why we beat schedules. This one trick will put us weeks ahead, instead of the other way around."

Seely smiled at him, but turned to Scott and told him: "I'll have to explain your cleverness to Allen. I'm sure he will be appreciative."

Scott smiled, and slid behind the wheel of the truck. Murphy looked from one to the other, his bushy eyebrows darting up and down like danger flags. Scott saw that he was anxious to speak with him privately, but shook his head and started the engine. He wanted to talk with Seely some more before analyzing her with Murphy.

They drove back down the road, between the green walls of the jungle, watching the construction crews at work. Scott pointed out the various operations to Seely as they went along, and explained how a pipeline was built.

On that particular section the gang was laying pipe by the firing-line method, a fast way of working that could only be used in level country. The pipe had been "strung" along the ground by trucks traveling along the survey stakes. Then the pipe was placed on low skids, with five forty-foot sections in alignment. The pipe was tack-welded as it was slowly rotated by men with pipe-tongs. Then cranes mounted on enormous tractors picked up the pipe and lowered it into the trench. A bell-hole was dug at each joint, and another gang of welders moved in, completing the welding of the sections, and welding the whole thing to the pipe already in the ditch. By the time they finished that operation, the next two hundred feet was ready and the men moved on, following the welders.

Work at that point was going fast. Scott pointed out the men swabbing out the pipes, ejecting snakes and all sorts of small animals, while others were coating and wrapping them. They first put on a primer, followed by a hot asphaltic enamel, then wrapped with felt and tar paper, and over all that, another coating of asphalt. Machines straddling the ditch did all the actual work.

They swung away from the pipeline and turned into Mid-camp, a huddle of old buildings on the edge of the river. Barges were landing equipment and supplies on a newly constructed wharf, and trucks as quickly hauled it all off into the jungle. Scott parked the truck near the wharf, talked with one of the foremen for a moment, then returned to Seely. They walked down the river-bank to where the amphibian was anchored in the mud.

As they approached the plane, Scott asked: "About that Emil Johnson affair: is that where McNair got his money for the refinery?"

Seely came to a halt with a distressed expression in her eyes that gave way to a look of determination. "Yes," she replied. "Partly. It was a miserable thing, and I was pretty naïve—then. I thought I was simply being nice to Mr. Johnson, until he began writing love notes to me."

Scott glanced sideways at her, amused. "Really?"

"Yes. Allen, of course, used the letters for all they were worth. Johnson bought them from him. He was using much the same tactics on Jeff Bennett."

"I know. Bennett is a rather badly broken man."

"I'm sorry for him, but—" She paused a moment, then said firmly: "Really, Scott, I can't feel too sorry for him. Jeff was an out-and-out hypocrite. He has some fine ideas, but they mostly revolve around 'the white man's burden.' Señor de Veya is perfectly capable of modernizing San Cano himself. This country will take huge royalties out of the fields and the refinery, and will have the money to do it with. But Jeff regards himself as the great white man from North America who is going to help the miserable native in spite of himself. Eventually the natives will resent that. It is all right to assist people, but when you begin considering them as your personal burden—"

Scott nodded. "I see what you mean. But we're getting off the track. If Allen only got part of the money for the refinery from Johnson—"

She threw her head back and smiled at him. "You certainly have a single-track mind."

"It saves me a lot of switching problems."

"I can imagine. Anyway, the balance of the investment is a bond drawn against our oil-wells in Wilmington. You see—"

"Perhaps," said Allen McNair, "I can explain it better."

Scott spun about on his heel. McNair was standing directly behind them and a few feet up the river-bank. His booted feet were planted wide apart, and his fists were clenched on his hips. He shoved his Panama hat to the back of his head, revealing adhesive tape on the bridge of his nose, and smiled down at them, arrogantly confident. Looking up at him, with his broad shoulders and barrel chest outlined against the jungle, he seemed to take on the stature of a giant.

Scott momentarily considered a headlong rush up the bank, but knew he would get a heavy boot in his face and thought better of it. He looked up at McNair and growled: "How the hell did you get here?"

McNair nodded toward the amphibian, where a speed-boat was tied to one of the wheels. He replied: "I've been upriver talking with our friend Jeff Bennett. I saw your plane here, coming down, so I stopped." He looked at Seely, his eyes narrowing, then turned his attention back to Scott. "You're taking quite an interest in my personal affairs, aren't you?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"No reason that I know of. Good policy. If I were in your shoes, I'd not only be interested, but worried."

"I'm not worried, McNair."

"No? Then suppose I come down and tell you the facts of life."

Scott glanced at Seely. All expression had been erased from her face, and her lids were lowered to mere slits of green light, but her eyes moved anxiously.

He looked back at McNair and nodded. "Okay."

McNair came down the bank and stood at Seely's side. He placed his hand affectionately on her arm: she winced as his fingers dug into her skin, but she made no move to pull her arm away. He patted her shoulder and dropped his hand. Seely raised a hand to cover the finger-marks left on her arm.

Scott looked away from her and said: "You can start your explaining, McNair. Better make it interesting."

McNair appraised Scott for a moment, then said: "No worry about that. I'll give you the whole situation in a nutshell: All my life, Regan, I have fought for one thing, to be top man. Down here that opportunity has presented itself." He held out his fist and opened the fingers. "I have it right in the palm of my hand. Understand? In a few weeks it will be an accomplished fact. And in a very few years this will be known as Allen McNair's country." His voice began rising to a shout as he continued: "I'll have all the money I want and all the power I want. I'll run the country. I'll pull the strings, and the two-bit politicians in the capital will do the jumping."

Scott shook his head and commented: "Delusions of grandeur. You're off the beam, McNair."

McNair smiled and lowered his voice: "Perhaps. But this particular delusion is working. Nothing can stop it. I won't allow anything to stop it. Do you realize what is at stake here?"

"I have an idea."

"Sure you have. Any fool can see it. With my refinery making it possible, these properties are going to be the wealthiest in the world. And I will control the whole works. But I have had to gamble—heavily. Jeff told me that he explained our situation to you. But that isn't all of it. Seely was just about to tell you the rest of it."

Scott glanced at her, but she was still watching the two men and had nothing to say. He looked back at McNair and asked, on a sudden hunch: "She has an interest here?"

"That's right. A big interest. She inherited her father's field in Wilmington, but in trust. I hadn't enough cash to build the refinery, but Seely's trustees were interested, and went on bond for me. However, they were not interested in the pipeline. I had to gamble my investment to have that built."

Scott started to smile. "I see. And that little deadline clause with Bennett is held only against your interest?"

McNair returned his smile. "Don't get any ideas, Regan. But you are right. That's my gamble. If this situation worked out against me, it would wipe me out."

Scott laughed: "Well, well! You really have put your neck into the noose."

"I don't think so. But there is the picture. Now," he chuckled, "put yourself in my shoes and consider your position."

Scott considered, instead, the dangerous, almost maniacal light in his eyes. McNair was telling him, as plainly as if it had been put into words, that the situation between them had passed the milder consequences of a physical encounter. McNair would stop at nothing to accomplish his purpose. The gamble was too great, and the killing instinct was in every line of his face. Scott realized, with a shock, that the man was holding his life in the palm of his hand.

McNair said grimly: "We don't have to waste words, Regan. You're in the clear. Stay in the clear. Don't get in my way. Finish your pipeline, when I tell you to finish it, then get out." He put a hand into his pocket, over the bulge of the gun, and asked softly: "Do we understand each other?"

Scott slowly nodded, his own eyes narrowed and burning with the feeling of being trapped.

"Sure," he said. "I guess we do."

"You're beginning to see it from my angle, aren't you?"

"Sure."

McNair relaxed, and his forward-hunched shoulders settled back into place. His hand came out of his pocket and took Seely's arm. He smiled at Scott and said pleasantly: "Drop by the house sometime. Glad to have you." He looked at Seely and asked: "Aren't we, my dear?"

Seely was staring at Scott, warning him with her eyes not to make a move. McNair squeezed her arm and asked in a louder voice: "Well, aren't we?"

"Yes," she answered. "Of course."

McNair nodded briefly at Scott, then led Seely to the speedboat. She looked back at Scott once, a haunted, beaten look, then turned away. Scott watched the boat curve away from the muddy bank and head downriver with a burst of speed. He walked wearily to the amphibian, feeling as if he had just lost something of great value.

Chapter Eleven

A FEW nights later, at the hacienda, Scott talked the situation over with Murphy. Wong padded in and out of the living-room, pausing now and then to listen to the conversation. Murphy sat in a corner of the couch, puffing at a cigarette, while Scott paced back and forth before him.

"The guy," Scott said, "is crazy. No doubt of that. He is shooting for the moon, and means to get it."

Murphy said: "Well, there's nothing unusual about what he is doing. I've seen it happen in oil-fields before. Oil-men have no special claim on virtue, you know."

"I've seen it, too. But this is a little different, Murph'. This man is really dangerous. I don't mind putting up a fight when you know where you stand, but when it comes to a shot in the back—"

"Do you think he would go that far?"

"I know he would. The devil of it is, my hands are tied. I can't simply strap on a gun and go after him. Suppose I beat him to the punch and shot him? Then what? I could be tried for murder, with no real defense. If I was gambling for his stakes, I might do it. But there is no gamble where I am concerned. I have absolutely no reason to go gunning for a man, even McNair."

Murphy chuckled grimly. "He certainly has you right where he wants you. Naturally, you will protect yourself."

"Sure. I'm packing an automatic from now on. But beyond that—" He shrugged, an eloquent gesture of negation.

Murphy took a Tom Collins from Wong and sipped at it, watching Scott over the rim of the glass. He put it down and said: "Well, Scott, if you want my advice, I'd say to take it easy and let him have his way. I don't think anyone could condemn you for that, even your own conscience. You would be very foolish to risk your life in a game where you have nothing at stake. That's what McNair wants, of course. It's hard to swallow, but it is also common sense."

Scott sat down opposite Murphy and stared into space. "I have a feeling," he said, "that something is missing, that I do have something at stake. Funny, isn't it?"

Murphy raised his glass and said: "Yeah." He watched Scott, but made no further comment. Scott was occupied with his own thoughts, so Murphy got to his feet and stretched his arms. "I think I'll run along. Mama Soo has some fried shrimps for me tonight."

"Sure. Go ahead. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Okay. About the pipeline: do I slow down, or don't I?"

Scott looked up at him and shook his head. "Not yet, Murph'. Keep it going on schedule."

"We're ahead of schedule. That rooter trick of yours did it for us."

"Then keep it ahead of schedule. I have to think this thing out. I'm not going to bow out just because he wants it. Anyway, I still think something is missing."

Murphy walked to the door, but paused to look back at Scott. He opened his mouth to say something, with Seely's name on the tip of his tongue, but thought better of it and walked out of the house.

Scott sat on in the semi-gloom of the living-room, lighting one cigarette upon another. He was hardly conscious of Wong's presence, until Wong stood directly before him and patiently waited.

Scott looked up at him and asked: "Well?"

"I would not presume," said Wong, "to advise you, sir, but I really don't believe you are in too much danger at the moment."

Scott smiled. "You don't think I'll be sniped at?"

"No sir. Mr. McNair may be mad, as you say, but he is not mad enough to pull his house down about his own head. After all, sir, if a shooting took place, Mr. Bennett could have the deadline clause voided in court and nullify the whole thing."

"Maybe."

"It is a risk he would not like to take. It is your pipeline that is really in danger. I have seen some very odd characters in San Cano lately, bushwhackers, pork-

knockers, men from deep in the jungle. They hang about the cheap saloons and seem to have lots of money, which is unusual for that type."

"You think McNair has hired them?"

"I am sure of it. Those men know the jungle. They could be all up and down your pipeline, and the guards would never know."

Scott drummed on the arms of his chair. "I see. A little wrecking operation here and there, not big enough to seriously damage the line, but big enough to slow down the work."

Wong smiled and nodded. "That is it. I still do not presume to advise, sir, but perhaps Commissioner de Veya—"

Scott got up and slapped him on the shoulder. "Wong, you can consider yourself a permanent member of my staff. De Veya is the answer to the whole problem."

Commissioner Ramos de Veya, however, was highly doubtful. Scott had luncheon with him at Mama Soo's the following day and explained the whole situation. It was obvious, from De Veya's patient attitude, that he already knew all the details, but Scott went over them point by point.

At the end, the Commissioner shrugged and said: "There is little I can do, señor. I am a representative of my country. All we desire is the completed pipeline, and it looks as if we will get that, no matter how this situation resolves itself."

"But what about the pork-knockers from the jungle? What sort of man is that?"

De Veya smiled lightly and replied: "Very tough, señor. Very bad men. We have never been able to control them. They hunt diamonds and gold back in the dry ravines. They are a law unto themselves."

"But can't you round them up, send them back into the jungle?"

De Veya laughed and violently shook his head. "No, señor. I am deeply sorry, but there is nothing we can do with them." He leaned his elbows on the table and said casually: "Anyway, señor, I think you are being, shall we say, a bit unwise? It is not your fight. Relax. What do you care who controls the line? I myself witnessed a certain little document that should ease your mind. So relax. A little siesta—no?"

Scott pushed his coffee aside and abruptly got up from the table. He stared down at the smiling Commissioner, then walked over to the bar and ordered a liqueur. Mama Soo joined him on the other side of the bar, and sipped her ever-present pony of gin.

Scott watched De Veya leave the room and told Mama Soo: "I guess McNair pays the guy more than I do. I should have known I couldn't get anywhere with him."

Nodding, Mama Soo asked: "You worry about the men from the jungle? Wong told me. They are a thing to worry about, those men. The Commissioner himself had them brought in."

Scott started to laugh. "Well," he said, "that cuts it. A babe in the woods, that's me. Mama Soo, you're looking at a guy who has himself wrapped up in a knot. I thought I was as smart as the next guy, but that McNair has tripped me up at every turn."

"Except," said Mama Soo softly, "he fails to take one thing into consideration."

"What is that?"

"You!"

Scott stared at her and snorted. "Oh, sure. He's scared to death of me. I'm a tough cooky, I am."

Mama Soo smiled. "You are tough, Regan. You are like a steel coil inside, waiting to explode. But you need a reason for that exploding." She polished the bar with a cloth and said: "That reason is in you even now. I hope you do not take too long finding it."

Scott sadly shook his head. "We always come back to the same thing, don't we? Mama Soo, you're an incurable romantic." He tossed some coins onto the bar and leaned over to pat her cheek. "But I love you."

She looked deeply into his eyes and said: "Twenty years ago you would have said that—and meant it. Now—well, now," she laughed, "run along. Run along. You make me think too much of the past."

Scott walked down to the amphibian and got a radio call from Murphy to fly up to Mid-camp. He met Murphy at the river bank and drove back into the jungle with him. As they proceeded along the pipeline, Murphy explained, with tight lips, that the pork-knockers were already at work. One of the ditch-diggers had been scientifically broken in a place that would take at least a week to repair. Welding equipment had been stolen, pipes were wrecked with lead plugs, and steel filings had been found in much of the machinery.

Murphy said: "They slipped in from the jungle last night, overpowered some of the guards and went to work. Someone has sure as hell instructed them in exactly what to do to cause the most damage without actually destroying the equipment."

Scott went up and down the line and made a thorough inspection of the damage. He could think of nothing to tell Murphy except to double the guards and hope for the best. He flew up to Tacano and talked Bennett into sending more men for guard-duty. Aside from the guards, Bennett offered no other help. He was brooding, and more interested in salving his own injured conscience than in beating the deadline. Thoroughly disgusted, Scott left him, for the flight back to San Cano.

Just before evening it started to rain, and so Scott came down closer to the surface of the river and followed it through the jungle. The rain drummed against the windshield and lowered visibility, but he could make out objects on the river and knew he would get into San Cano without difficulty. He sat back and relaxed.

He thought, bitterly, that McNair held all the aces. It was no good fighting him. It would be better to coast along quietly and let Bennett and McNair fight it out. He would take a small loss on damage done to equipment, but even that would be trivial in comparison with the profit on the contract. "It's not my fight," he thought. "The devil with the whole business!"

He glanced at the air-speed indicator and the clock on the panel and estimated he would arrive in San Cano in another ten minutes. He looked ahead and down at the river and spotted a wide wake on the surface. As he shot over it, he looked down through the cabin windows and recognized Seely's speedboat, traveling fast. He eased the wheel back, banked to the left and started to circle around the boat. Seely stood up in the front cockpit of the boat and waved to him. Scott grinned and dipped his wings at her.

He was straightening out to continue on, when he saw the huge mass of floating deadwood in the middle of the river. Seely evidently saw it at the same moment, as she started to spin the wheel of the boat. But she was traveling too fast and was already too close. The bow of the boat started to curve away, but hit one of the large logs, shot over it, teetered crazily for a moment and then crashed on the river upside down. It immediately started to sink.

Scott jammed his throttles open and again banked around. When he was upriver from the wreckage, he banked back, closed the throttles and settled toward the muddy water. He hit and bounced; they stayed on the surface. He taxied past the flotsam, being careful not to rip the thin hull of the plane, and swung around downriver from the half-submerged speedboat. He saw Seely splashing feebly on the surface and taxied toward

her. Then he saw her arms go limp as the bow of the amphibian slid by her head.

Scott closed the throttles, ripped off his coat and jumped back into the cabin. He opened the door and lowered himself into the water, but held onto the plane with one hand. Seely was just out of arm's reach. After a slight pause, he let go his hold and swam to her, then towed her back to the plane before it could drift away. She was unconscious and a dead weight, so that it took all of his strength to work her out of the water and into the cabin of the plane. He placed her on the floor between the seats and squatted there a moment, breathing heavily.

He saw an ugly gash on her forehead, but first rolled her over and worked the water out of her lungs. Then he put antiseptics on the gash and held spirits of ammonia, from the first-aid kit, under her nose. She failed to revive, and her breathing seemed very difficult.

Scott hurried back to the controls, spun the plane about and took off downriver. When he reached San Cano, he landed almost upon the ramp and taxied up out of the river. He lifted Seely in his arms and stepped out into the rain. The sudden jungle darkness descended and hid even the town from view. There was no one in sight. Scott swore under his breath and started running up the street.

When he burst into Mama Soo's, the place was filled with diners and drinkers. Everyone paused in whatever they were doing, and all eyes turned toward the strange figure he made, soaking wet, carrying the unconscious form of Seely. He paid no attention to anyone, but hurried to the desk and toward the stairs.

When Mama Soo came around the counter, he said, gasping for breath: "Accident on the river. I'll take her to Murph's room. You get the doctor."

He went up the stairs, breathing harder with each step, then down the hallway to Murphy's room. The door was locked, and he roared for the key with a voice that could be heard all over the establishment. Mama Soo came down the hallway and unlocked the door, informing him that one of the Chinese help had gone for the doctor. Exhausted, Scott placed Seely on the bed.

Mama Soo turned him about toward the door. "You go out. I'll take care of her."

He stepped back into the hallway, closed the door and leaned against the wall. When the gray-haired doctor arrived, smelling strongly of Bourbon and soda, he explained what had happened, then jerked his head at the door. The doctor disappeared inside for almost half an hour. When he stepped back into the hallway, Mama Soo was with him.

Scott asked: "Well?"

The doctor yawned and shrugged. "Shock, that's all. A little gash on the head, but that will heal. She is sitting up." He wet his lips, and his little eyes gleamed. "Now, then, considering the odd nature of the case—"

Scott took a water-soaked wallet from his pocket and handed him a twenty-dollar bill. The doctor was disappointed, but tucked the bill in his pocket and headed for the bar.

Mama Soo smiled and told Scott: "You talk with her. I'll send up some brandy."

Scott wearily patted her arm. "Thanks. I can use a quart of it."

He stepped into the room and softly closed the door behind him. A single light was on by the bureau, and the room was half-dark. Seely was propped up in bed by the one window, with drawn blinds. She was wearing a pair of Murphy's pajamas. A broad piece of tape held a bandage in place on the side of her forehead. She was drying her hair with a towel, but as Scott entered, she paused and stared at him.

He crossed the room to stand by the side of the bed and looked down at her. "How do you feel?" he asked.

She attempted a smile, but it was very weak. "I don't know," she whispered. "Weak, tired—I suppose I'll feel worse later. Right now I'm happy just to be here."

"Yes. That was a pretty close call."

"I know."

"Closer than you think. A split second later, I wouldn't have been looking back and down at the river."

She shuddered, then went on drying her hair. Her eyes slid away from his to look at his wet clothing. "But you're all wet!" she cried. "Why didn't you change?"

Scott laughed. "Nothing to change to. Maybe Murph' has something."

He went to the closet, looked over Murphy's meager selection of clothes, and chose a white shirt and blue denim work trousers. He looked back at Seely, a question in his eyes, and she nodded. He went into the bathroom, took a hot shower, then pulled on the shirt and trousers. The cuffs of the trousers hit about midway between his knees and ankles. He rolled up the sleeves of the shirt and padded back into the bedroom in bare feet.

Seely was just closing the bedroom door. She turned to face him, holding a tray containing glasses, ice and brandy and soda. She quickly glanced down at herself and was suddenly embarrassed. Murphy's pajamas were a trifle large for her and not at all revealing, but like most pajamas, the blouse was minus half its buttons.

She scurried across the room, put the tray down on a small table, slid back into bed, and pulled the sheet up to her shoulders. Then she blinked at Scott and smiled, and said: "The boy was knocking at the door. I couldn't let him stand there."

Scott stared at her without replying, his eyes sober and unwavering. He crossed to the table, mixed two glasses of brandy and soda, handed one to Seely and then sat on the edge of the bed. During the entire operation his eyes never left hers. She smiled shakily, raised her glass to his and drank. She sighed and looked into his eyes, and the faint smile faded.

Scott said: "Look Seely: a lot of things happened on that river. I think you should know."

She held her lower lip between her teeth and nodded. "All right."

"It isn't easy for me to tell you." He lifted his glass, drained it, and then continued: "For a moment you were out of my reach. I was afraid to let go and swim for you. If that plane had drifted a few feet away, I would never have been able to tow you to it in that current. We might've made it to shore, but you know what the croc's are like along those banks. I thought of those things."

She said softly: "Yes?"

"People are selfish, you know. We're born that way. We don't do heroic things. Sometimes heroic things happen to us, but we don't actually do them. I'm as selfish about my life as the next person—maybe more so; I've had to fight harder. Anyway, for a fiftieth of a second you were almost a goner. And then I found myself swimming toward you."

Her eyes swung wildly away from his. "Please, Scott."

His face darkened. "Oh, no, you don't. You're going to listen. I have never had to say this before, and mean it, but I'm saying it now. At the end of that fraction of a second I knew that there was only one thing in the world that meant anything to me. I guess I've known it for some time, but it took a shock like that for me to recognize it. That's how stupid I am. I have to be hit over the head before I know what the score is."

She breathed: "You aren't stupid, Scott, just slow."

"Maybe it's six of each. Anyway, that's how it is. I'm in love with you, Seely. I want you to leave McNair. I want you to marry me. As a matter of fact," he smiled, "that's how that is going to be, too."

He got up and mixed another drink at the small table. Seely spoke to his back: "You're terribly confident, aren't you?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know why not. But still—Scott, I'm sorry, but I am not in love with you, or with anyone."

Scott turned about with a grin. "Then that leaves the door wide open." He took a deep drink, then said: "I still say that's how it will be."

She shook her head. "Please, Scott; you have the wrong idea. I admit I tried to arouse a contest between you and Allen. I had to see if he could be broken. I was wrong. He isn't broken at all. He is as arrogant and confident as ever."

Scott waved his hand with impatience. "Let's not get off on that. I've had enough of it." He finished his drink and placed the glass on the table, then stood over her. "We'll talk about it tomorrow. Murphy is up in the jungle, so you stay here tonight. Mama Soo should have a room for me somewhere. Good night, Seely."

She looked up at him and managed a smile. "Good night."

He leaned over, placed his hands on her shoulders and lifted her out of the bed. He held her in his arms a moment, and crushed his mouth against hers. Then he lowered her to the bed and walked out of the room. Her hand went to her lips, and her eyes opened wide as the door closed.

Mama Soo was waiting for him at the head of the stairs. She looked at his wide, confident grin, and nodded with satisfaction. "So!"

"You!" he snorted. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She threw her hands up in despair. "And now you ask that? You blind fool." She placed a hand on his shoulder and asked shrewdly: "And about the McNair?"

Scott laughed.

"You said I had to have a reason, didn't you? All right. What more do you want?"

"Nothing," she smiled. "Nothing at all."

Chapter Twelve

IN the morning, Scott was told that McNair had called for Seely during the night and taken her away. He felt a letdown as he put on his dry clothes, but after breakfast his confidence returned. He hurried to the amphibian and flew up to Mid-camp, where he conferred with Murphy.

"From this moment on," Scott told him, "we're hitting the ball with all we have. No strangers allowed on the length of the pipeline. Spread the word. Shoot anyone on sight. Let it be known in the oil-fields and down at San Cano."

Murphy chuckled. "You feel like playing rough."

"And dirty, if that's what they want. We may not stop the damage altogether, but we'll cut it in half."

"I hope. One of our barges was sunk yesterday. Plenty of pipe and a tractor went to the bottom of the river."

"Yes? Okay, then. Put guards on the barges. Put guards on everything. Offer a bonus to any man who shoots a guy caught tampering with our equipment. In the meantime, I'm camping out on the line. Murph', we're going to shove this thing through on schedule."

Murphy captured a little of his excitement and said: "That's okay by me. But why all the sudden enthusiasm?"

Scott evaded the question by replying: "I'll tell you later. Right now I'm too busy."

He caught a truck going to the pipeline, dropped off at one of the construction shacks and had a hasty conference with the engineers and field foremen. Then he proceeded to drive himself day and night, allowing no time for rest and no time for thought. He traveled back and forth on the pipeline road, and was seemingly everywhere at once. Wherever the work fell off, he pitched in and brought it back to a higher level. He did welding, drove pipe-trucks, directed slack-laying and even acted as assistant to the common laborers, carrying tools that were needed. Wherever he happened to pause lor a moment there was work to be done, and Scott did it. He set an example to the men that was tremendous. They watched him, winked at each other and then worked their heads off.

THE TWO GANGS WORKING OUT of Mid-camp had completed all the laying of the pipe and had put in the backfill. Scott moved them all to the link connecting the main pumping station at Tacano and shoved it through to completion. Then he took every gang on the job, with the exception of the guards, and placed them on the last thirty-two-mile link up the grade to the McNair refineries. He was two days ahead of schedule, but he was well aware that at this point he could expect serious interference.

It started first in Puerta San Cano. All of the pipeline men had moved into the town and were living in the cheap rooming-houses above the saloons. Their evenings were naturally spent in the saloons. Fights, too numerous to ignore, broke out between them and the refinery workers. Scott noticed that it was his welders who were usually in the middle of everything and quite often wound up in hospital or the San Cano jail, an antique brick structure at the end of the main street. Scott tried to keep the men out of the saloons, but it was hopeless. They took orders from no one, including Scott, and were rather enjoying themselves. But welding on the line slowed down and the leeway of two days slid through his fingers.

Scott desperately shoved the work ahead and on the afternoon of the day before the deadline the pipe was all in and most of the backfill was finished. He checked the main pumps at the bottom of the grade and conferred with his engineers at Tacano on the radio. The first three pumping stations were working and the pipeline was filled with crude oil all the way from Tacona to the last pumps below the grade. Scott left the radio, sent more angle dozers to the top of the bluff, then drove into San Cano along the pipeline road.

Murphy met him on the street, and together they entered Mama Soo's, where Jeff Bennett was waiting for them at a table. Bennett was worried and nervous, a far different man than when Scott had first met him. The fact that he was on the verge of making or losing millions had finally impressed itself upon his mind. He no longer looked like an ascetic, but more like the harassed businessman.

Scott shook hands with him and asked: "Where's McNair?"

"He should be along presently. I told him you wanted us here."

"And De Veya?"

"He's with Allen."

"Good." Scott sat down, stretched his long legs under the table and sighed with relief. He said: "This is the first time I've been able to relax in weeks. I'm really corked."

Murphy smiled and winked at him. "After tomorrow night you can sleep for a month. And you need it. Those bags under your eyes are carrying porters."

Bennett leaned over the table with a puzzled expression. He said: "You seem rather confident, Regan. I hope I'm wrong, but I had the impression that this conference was to tell us of your failure to meet the deadline."

Scott shook his head and replied grimly: "It's a fifty-fifty chance. The crews are working on the backfill right now. All the pipe is in and the pumps are working. We'll start the go-devil through in a few hours. When it comes out the end of the pipe at the refinery, my job is through. Let's hope that gadget plops into the tank before midnight tomorrow."

"It can be done?"

"Yes."

Bennett passed a hand across his eyes and sat back in the chair. He was obviously forcing himself not to arouse his hopes. Murphy looked at him sympathetically, but turned his attention away as McNair entered the room.

Commissioner de Veya was with him. Seely was walking between the two men, her eyes seeking Scott across the room. He twisted about in his chair and smiled at her, then looked up at McNair as the three of them stopped at the table.

McNair's eyes were hot and burning, his lips were thin and pale and there were new shadows and lines in his face. Every muscle of his body was taut and tense. He looked like a Jack-in-the-box about to spring into space. His tension, however, was more apparent than real. Deep in his eyes was a smile of confidence. He had gambled and, apparently, he thought he had won. He even looked down at Bennett with pitying contempt.

The three of them took their places at the table and Scott ordered a round of drinks. The fans were listlessly revolving overhead, but the atmosphere of the room was close to that of a steam bath. Commissioner de Veya picked up a menu and waved it before his face. It was the first time Scott had ever seen him look hot and uncomfortable. He smiled inwardly and thought: "He has placed all his bets on McNair. Now he wonders."

SCOTT'S EYES TRAVELED SLOWLY around the circle; then he sat back and smiled. "Well," he said, "this is a happy little gathering. All of us still alive, too. I wouldn't have bet on that a month ago."

McNair's lips tightened as he said: "I don't know, Regan. I think you have taken an exaggerated view of this whole situation."

"That so? Look, McNair: I wouldn't turn my back on you with a whole squad of police present."

McNair laughed, and placed his hands on the table. "That little fancied danger," he said, "has passed. Right now I feel almost affectionate toward you."

Scott stared at him, trying to find that last trump card in his eyes. There was no doubt that he had one. He looked away, and Murphy nodded at him. Murphy was wondering, too.

Bennett cleared his throat and said to McNair: "Regan was just telling me that he thought he could meet the deadline. It will afford me great pleasure to see that happen. You have tried to pull one of the rottenest deals I have ever witnessed. Watching you crash with it tomorrow night will be worth all I have gone through."

McNair coolly reminded him: "This isn't tomorrow night."

Bennett shouted, almost hysterically: "But you're through. You thought of Regan as just a pawn, and Regan has beaten you."

Scott interrupted: "Wait a minute, you two! I don't have time to sit here and listen to an argument." He took copies of the original contracts from his pocket and tossed them across the table to De Veya. He said: "The reason I've asked you all to be here is to have the observance of the deadline thoroughly understood by everyone. You're the referee in this, Commissioner. Suppose you interpret that deadline clause." He grinned and added: "To everyone's satisfaction, of course."

The Commissioner picked up the contracts, found the clause and read it through. He shoved the papers aside and said with a smile: "I really know it by heart. The interpretation is simple. The pipeline must be in working operation before midnight of the twentieth."

"And working operation means what?"

"Exactly what it says. Oil must be delivered into the refinery to meet the terms."

"Does it have to be oil?"

THE COMMISSIONER'S SMILE DEEPENED. He glanced sidewise at McNair, who smiled and nodded at him. He looked back at Scott and replied: "It has to be oil."

Scott's lips tightened, and tiny muscles bulged along the line of his jaw. He said: "You've been reading up on your pipelines, haven't you? You know damned well I have to shove that go-devil through with a block of water. I'll be lucky to get it through before midnight. Following that, for at least eight or nine hours, the pipeline will be delivering water, not oil." He slammed his hand on the table and said: "But I construe that as being in working operation. You can use that pipeline for delivering jellybeans, for all I care. No matter what it delivers, I consider that to be in working operation."

De Veya shook his head and said with great patience: "I am the petroleum coördinator, señor. It is I who will do the interpreting, and I say that it must deliver oil."

Bennett looked from one to the other and cried: "I agree with Regan. I can't see what difference it makes what the line delivers."

De Veya sadly shook his head. "I repeat," he said, "that I will do the interpreting. If oil is not delivered before midnight of the twentieth, I will so inform my Government and advise that the terms of the contract have not been met. That is final."

Scott snorted and sat back in his chair. Murphy raised his eyebrows and shrugged. The new obstacle was no surprise to him. He had told Scott that De Veya would interpret the contract in that manner.

Seely, who had been listening quietly, was bewildered. "I am afraid," she said, "that I can't quite grasp what is going on. What on earth is a go-devil?"

Murphy leaned over the table and explained: "To put the line in operation, Mrs. McNair, it has to be tested for leaks and possible obstructions. That is done with either water or air shoving a go-devil through the pipe. The go-devil is a gadget made of steel springs, rubber and steel rollers, that adapts itself to the shape of the pipe and can squeeze around curves. That pipe probably has plenty of small animals and other miscellaneous junk in it. As the go-devil is shoved along, it scrapes the inside of the pipe, cleans it and comes out at the pumping station at the refinery."

Seely nodded, partially understanding. "I see."

Murphy grinned. "You don't see all of it. As that go-devil travels, it makes a funny scraping sound. A man walks along the ground above the pipe listening to the go-devil. If the sound should stop, it means the pipe is plugged. In which event, a crew must dig down, cut the pipe open, remove the obstruction and then weld it all together again."

Seely nodded with full understanding and said: "That would take time, wouldn't it?"

"Right. One such obstruction would probably beat us. That go-devil travels at the pace a man can walk. It takes time to go the full distance of thirty-two miles."

"And all this talk about water, what does that mean?"

Scott looked up and replied, instead of Murphy: "We're shoving the go-devil through with water pressure. When the test is over, all the water has to be emptied from the pipe. That will take hours."

"Do you have to wait until the water is out?"

Scott smiled. "Oh, no. Water and oil won't mix. We'll start the oil through right away, shoving the block of water ahead of it. But it will still take hours." He drummed on the table with his fingers, then told McNair: "I still think we can beat it. That backfill will be finished by morning, and we'll be on our way."

McNair looked nervous for a moment, then glanced at the Commissioner and was reassured. "Let us know when you start," he said. "I would like to be on hand."

Scott grinned. "Don't worry. You'll be there."

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked around. Wong was standing behind his chair and asking: "A moment, please?"

"Sure."

Scott got up and followed him across the room. As he left the table, he noticed an anxious frown deepening in McNair's eyes. He and Wong stopped by the bar, and Mama Soo left her desk to join them.

She said to Wong: "You tell him. I do not understand it myself."

Wong said nervously: "I do not understand it too well, either." Then he asked Scott, "What is a lead plug?"

Scott felt his heart sinking and his lips going dry. "A lead plug," he answered, "could mean anything. But in a pipeline it means murder. What do you know about lead plugs?"

"Nothing, sir. It is just that we heard there were three lead plugs in the pipe. Mr. McNair reached two of your men and paid them off. They installed the plugs."

Mama Soo asked: "What does that mean?"

Scott leaned his elbows against the counter and stared into space. Tired lines appeared about his eyes and mouth. He replied slowly: "It means I am licked. Someone melted large gobs of lead and placed them in the pipeline. The go-devil could never force them out. It means that the line has to be torn up in three different places. There isn't time for that. . . . Well, I have to hand it to McNair. He is no pipeline man, but he certainly learned all the tricks in a hurry."

"So you are beaten?"

"It looks like it."

Mama Soo cried: "You can fight it. You can find a way. I know you can."

He shook his head. "Not this time. This does it."

He turned away from them and walked back to the table. When he sat down, he looked about the group with a bitter light in his eyes. He studied McNair, De Veya and Bennett, the three of them waiting for him to say something. The three of them put together meant nothing in his life. What happened between them was their business. He was in the clear. He could not even feel sympathy for Bennett.

But it hurt his pride, and something more than his pride, to think of McNair getting away with this.

Murphy nudged him with his elbow and asked: "Something wrong?"

Scott nodded. "There are three lead plugs in the line. You know what that means." He looked at McNair and forced a smile. He said: "Maybe you made a mistake, giving me that contract. Otherwise, you'd be taking me to the cleaners as well as Bennett."

McNair stared at him, then sat back in his chair and lit a cigar. Every muscle in his body relaxed. He blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling, and his lips twisted into an easy smile. All traces of surface tension vanished. He looked again as he had looked when Scott had first seen him.

He raised an eyebrow and said: "I don't think so, Regan. You're welcome to it. Small stuff." He puffed at the cigar, then suddenly laughed. "So you finally admit it's no go?"

"I guess it looks that way."

Bennett's face turned a chalky white. He asked hoarsely: "You can't make it?"

Scott shook his head, irritated because he felt ashamed and too embarrassed to meet Bennett's eyes. He leaned forward to rise from the chair and looked across the table at Seely. She was staring at him wildly, almost hysterically, with the same fear in her eyes that had been present when she had struggled through the water to reach the amphibian. Then she turned her head slowly and looked sidewise at McNair, and her whole body went limp, as it had in the river. Her eyes went dead, and her hands fell nervously into her lap.

McNair watched her through narrowed eyes, then turned his attention back to Scott. The expression in his eyes was like a slap in the face as he puffed contentedly at the cigar.

Scott pushed himself up from the chair and let out a deep breath. A sharp light sprang into his eyes, and his whole face seemed to come alive. Murphy started to smile and said: "Well?"

Scott jerked his head and walked away from the table. Murphy followed him to the door, where they paused. Scott grasped his arm and said: "Murph', it's possible. I just had an idea."

Murphy felt like laughing and had difficulty restraining a shout. "Let's have it."

"Right. We won't wait for the backfill to be completed. Now, you know those extra pipe-valve combinations we got for the pumping stations? Throw 'em on a truck. Round up our best welding crews, load another truck with acetylene torches, get out two angle dozers with slack-laying equipment, and rush it all out to the line right now. There's a radio in the pumping station at the bottom of the grade. Put another in the jeep, and hold it at the line."

Scott glanced at the clock above the bar. It was a few minutes after three P.M. He muttered to himself: "Backfill in by morning, but that's at the far end. Fourteen hundred pounds pressure. She'll take it all. Might clear a plug or so." He looked back at Murphy and chuckled. "I must be going nuts. You know it can't be done, don't you?"

Murphy nodded with glee. "Sure. But I'm a little nuts too."

He jammed his hat on, slapped Scott on the back and ran from the room. Scott returned to the table, with eyes only for Seely, who was looking blankly at him. But at least she had come out of her coma. He helped her up from the chair.

Then he said to Bennett: "You had better come along too. You have a trilling interest in what's going on."

McNair took the cigar from his mouth and viciously crushed it in an ash tray. He snapped at Scott: "It's none of your business, Regan, but Mrs. McNair is obviously in no condition—"

Scott interrupted: "Her condition is my business from now on." His voice lowered to a deadly tone as he purred: "Unless, of course, you'd like to take exception to that."

McNair pushed his chair back, but Commissioner de Veya gently placed a hand on his arm. He smiled up at Scott and said: "We will see you later. No?"

"Any time. We'll be somewhere along the pipeline. Simply follow the sound of the go-devil."

"If," De Veya chuckled, "it makes a sound."

Chapter Thirteen

MURPHY had taken the jeep to the warehouses, so Scott, Seely and Bennett got into Seely's car. They first stopped at the hacienda, where Scott dug out the engineers' pressure reports on the pumping stations. Then they drove down the pipeline road to the main pumping station at the bottom of the grade.

The place was a madhouse and filled with pipeline men, except for those working on the backfill at the other end of the line. It had begun to rain, and was already fairly dark in the jungle. Floodlights were turned on, and the storage tanks of the station glistened white in the background. The big valves on the outside were closed, with armed guards standing over them. On the other side of those valves was eleven miles of pipe loaded with oil.

Scott glanced at the valves, then hurried into the station. The go-devil was lying on the floor. He picked up the contraption of steel and rubber and handed it to one of the pump men.

"Open the valve and put it in," he said. "Shove it along with water."

The man shook his head and asked: "Do you know what you're doing, Mr. Regan? The pipe at the other end is still bare. If this station pressure should hit that section, without the backfill to hold it down, the pipe will start whipping and tear itself to pieces."

"That's at the other end of the line. Don't worry. That backfill should be in by the time pressure reaches it. Go on. Stow that go-devil away and let's get going."

The go-devil was dropped into an open valve and Scott hurried outside. He turned on the water valve and walked around the building to the point where the pipeline trench started up the thirty-two-mile grade. Seely and Bennett joined him and watched him squat close to the ground. In a moment there was a dull scraping sound under their feet and the dull thud of steel against steel, muffled by a few feet of dirt. The go-devil had started its journey.

An automobile drove into the midst of the crowd standing about, and McNair and De Veya jumped out. McNair's face was a beet-red color.

He stopped before Scott and shouted: "What the devil do you think you're doing?"

Scott answered grimly, but with pleasure: "I built a pipeline, and I'm going to finish it, in my own way."

"You're mad. You hear? You're stark, raving mad. You know damned well that go-devil thing's not going far."

"Maybe. On the other hand, fourteen hundred pounds of pressure is no joke. You'd be surprised what that can clear."

"You'll wreck the pipe. I forbid it."

Scott's eyebrows went up with surprise. "Really? You're on my property, McNair. Either shut up or get off." He turned to De Veya and said: "You can get the hell out of here. I don't want you around the natives. Make it fast."

De Veya rocked back on his heels with shock. He blustered, "You tell me to leave, señor—"

"Get out."

Scott started toward him, slowly taking off his jacket. De Veya wet his lips and said, "Well, I— After all, it is temporarily your property and—" He edged away from Scott and called to McNair: "Are you coming with me?" McNair looked at him and shook his head. "No," he replied. "I think I'll stay. He hasn't ordered me off."

De Veya drove away in a hurry, and Scott smiled and buttoned his jacket. He looked curiously at McNair, then at Seely. Her face, damp with rain, was a smooth mask.

She looked down the pipeline road, at the many lights winking in the dark, and commented: "Nice evening for a walk."

It was a strange procession that started along the pipeline road through the walls of the jungle. Murphy had arrived with the trucks and needed equipment and also a number of raincoats. Flashlights were distributed with the coats, and the party started off through the heavy downpour.

The go-devil had progressed some distance ahead, and Scott hurried to reach it. He listened for the sound, then walked along on the loose dirt directly above that sound. McNair and Seely walked on the tractor-built road alongside the pipeline, and Murphy followed behind them. Back of him were at least two hundred men, all pipeliners, their cigarettes glowing in the rain and dark, and the shuffle of their feet sounding like suction cups in the mud. Behind them, far enough back so that the noise would not interfere, were the trucks and angle dozers. The grim procession was stretched out for possibly a half-mile. Every mind was concentrated on the rubber and steel contraption scraping along in the pipe two feet underground. Even Bennett, who rode in the jeep, tried to listen to the sound.

They moved along as silently as possible; the hours fell away and the miles fell away. When the sound of the go-devil finally slowed and ceased, everyone came to a halt. The jeep was brought up to where Scott was standing, and he radioed the pumping station for more pressure. Whatever had blocked the go-devil was broken loose with pressure and the scraping sound picked up again and moved along.

Murphy asked Scott: "Do you think that was one of the lead plugs?"

Scott shook his head and wiped the streaming water from his face. "No," he replied. "That was something else; maybe a dead snake, or a small animal. A lead plug wouldn't have broken loose so easily."

Scott ran to catch up with the go-devil and walked along above the sound. Shortly before midnight, about ten miles from the pumping station, Scott came to a halt and listened. There was no sound. He walked ahead and then ran ahead. In a moment he was back and stood over the spot where he had first stopped. He took a white stake from the jeep and drove it into the ground. He looked at Murphy and nodded.

ALL OF THE MOBILE EQUIPMENT was brought up, and Scott stepped to the jeep and called the pumping station on the radio: "Build up your pressure to its limit. But don't go over fourteen hundred. We'll try to force this thing out."

He stood by the white stake and listened intently, but after fifteen minutes or so, there was still no sound. The operator at the pumping station called back: "She's been on fourteen hundred for ten minutes. I'm afraid of this pressure, Mr. Regan."

Scott said: "Okay. Turn all the pressure off and let the water back up. It won't do the trick."

He waited until he was sure pressure was off, then turned to the men.

"Let's go," he said shortly. "Run one of those bulldozers through and root up the ground for fifty feet in either direction from the stake. Then get that slack-layer around the pipe, and pull it up as far as you can."

The men went to work at once. Scott dropped into the back of the jeep, pulled the leather jacket over his head and lit a cigarette. He puffed at it until the rain put it out, then tossed it away. He swung his legs over the side of the jeep and faced Seely, who was standing in the mud, watching the men at work.

In spite of the oversize raincoat she was wearing, her clothes were caked with mud and she was wet to the skin. Her auburn hair was soaked and all cosmetics had been washed from her face. She looked as if she had just stepped from a shower. But Scott noticed, in the occasional gleam of flashlights, that an odd little smile was playing about her lips.

She evidently felt him watching her, as she turned and looked into his eyes. She stepped closer to Scott, so that McNair could not hear her, and asked softly: "Do you think this is one of the plugs?"

Scott nodded. "Must be." He glanced at Bennett, who was huddled over in the front seat, oblivious to everything but his own misery, then looked back at Seely. He told her, speaking of Bennett, "I'm beginning to feel sorry for the guy. I don't think I can beat it. This is just whistling in the dark. We may reach the pumping station before midnight tomorrow, but--" He shrugged

SEELY WHISPERED: "You mean De Veya's interpretation of working operation will beat you?"

"That's about it."

"Then why don't you use oil to shove the go-devil through?"

Scott chuckled: "That's a sensible question, but you don't understand the danger involved. We have to cut through that pipe with torches. Set that oil on fire, and that would be the end of thirty-two miles of pipe and maybe a few lives as well. It isn't worth the risk."

She looked toward McNair's broad back, and a speculative gleam grew in her green eyes. She turned back to Scott and asked: "Do you mind if I borrow one of your trucks? I'd like to get my car back at the pumping station."

"Help yourself. Take a couple of the guards along. And by the way, better get some sleep somewhere. I'd like to have you in at the finish."

"That," she said, with emphasis, "I wouldn't miss for the world."

She glanced again at McNair; her smile deepened and then she walked away toward one of the trucks. Scott watched her disappear in the rain and wondered what was in her mind. Bennett, too, had turned about to watch her go. He looked back at Scott and shrugged.

The men had bared the pipe, lowered an angle-dozer boom over it and lifted it to the top level of the ground. Scott walked to the pipe and pounded along it with a hammer until he struck a spot that gave back a hollow sound. The obstruction would be to the left of that.

He stood back and told the welders: "Cut out an entire section. Be sure you cut it clean and don't worry about the water that will come out. We can plug that."

There was ten miles of water in the line, but the slant was back to the pumping station and gravity was in their favor. And with the pipe lifted above ground, it would prevent all but a trifling amount of water from coming out the end.

The men pulled on their masks, wheeled the oxy-acetylene tanks into place, turned on their torches and started to work. The night immediately became a weird picture of blue flame, showering sparks and the sputter and hiss of water against hot steel. The torches went through the pipe as if it were so much cheese; water spilled out of one cut and with it came a mass of debris, dead snakes, birds, the go-devil and a large chunk of lead.

Scott had a look at the lead and turned on McNair, who was standing grimly by, a smile of satisfaction in his eyes. Scott said: "No wonder you were afraid the pipe would burst. Something would have to give before that plug would pass through. Nice job, McNair. Who taught you that one?"

He turned away before McNair could answer, and directed repair operations. The cut-out section of pipe was swung from the trench and tossed aside. Another section was lowered from a truck to fit neatly into place. In the middle of that section was a valve that opened to the outside and another valve that closed the inside of the pipe. Scott opened the outside valve, dropped the go-devil in and then closed it.

He told Murphy: "We haven't time to start it from the station again. This little trick will get around that."

Murphy grinned. "Not bad. Got any more up your sleeve?"

"I'd better have."

The section was placed snugly between the two open ends of the pipe, and the welders closed in to weld it into place. The pipe was again joined together and lowered into the trench. An angle dozer shoved over the backfill, and Scott opened the inside valve. He radioed the station to turn on pressure; there was a sudden hiss of water, and then the welcome sound of the go-devil again scraping its way down the pipe.

Scott glanced at his watch, and beads of perspiration blended with the rain on his face. It had taken almost two and a half hours to remove the obstruction, and he knew there were at least two more in the pipe. That meant an additional five hours added to the time it would take to travel the remaining twenty-two miles.

He asked Murphy to follow the go-devil for a while and walked over to the jeep. McNair went along with him, trying to light a cigar, but failing. Bennett leaned out of the jeep and lit it for him with a wind-lighter. McNair looked into his eyes over the tiny flame, and took pleasure from Bennett's beaten expression.

He looked back at Scott, who shook his head sadly and observed: "Brother, you're really a heel of the first order. Plenty happy, aren't you?"

"Any reason why I shouldn't be? Regan," he said expansively, "it's too bad you and I wound up on opposite sides of the fence. You're a fighting man. I like fighters. I could have set you up with a sweet deal in this country. Starting tomorrow, anything I say around here goes. You should have strung along."

"I don't like the odor you leave in my nostrils."

McNair's eyes narrowed for a second, and then his easy smile returned. "I'll see that that won't trouble you too long." He puffed at the cigar for a moment, shielding it from the rain with his hands, then asked casually: "By the way, just what is it that you're fighting for now? You can't beat the deadline, and we all know it. But you're putting up a good scrap, anyway."

Scott rocked on the balls of his feet and replied: "The answer to that is coming down the road."

McNair looked back to where two headlights were winking in the rain. He glanced at Scott, his eyes burning with sudden hate, then stepped into the middle of the pipe road. Seely's car slewed about and skidded to a halt in the mud. Seely ran down the window on her side and looked out.

McNair asked pleasantly: "Going into town?"

"Well, I—"

"Fine. I'll ride along with you."

HE OPENED THE OPPOSITE DOOR and stepped in. Scott started around the car, but Seely shook her head at him. He stopped, and noticed that same odd smile playing about her lips. She soundlessly formed the word *No* with her lips.

He looked past her and told McNair: "I'll be expecting you before midnight. Bring De Veya along."

McNair chuckled: "Don't worry. You'll be on my property then, at the refinery. That is," he added thoughtfully, "if you get that far."

Seely winked at Scott, put the car in gear and disappeared down the road. When the tail lights were out of sight, Scott turned to Bennett and said: "She has some-

thing brewing in her mind. I wonder what the deuce it could be?"

Bennett was not interested. He sagged back in the seat, pulled the raincoat about his thin shoulders and dropped his chin onto his chest. In a moment he was asleep. Scott turned away from him, disgusted.

Chapter Fourteen

THE second obstruction was discovered just at dawn. The all-night crew went off duty, and a new crew of men took their places. The rain had stopped, and the men were able to work without that interference. Scott and Murphy slept in one of the trucks while the repairs were being made.

The work was speeded up, and in two hours the go-devil was again scraping along in the pipe. Scott radioed the main pumping station for more pressure and shoved it along at a lively clip. He had to walk fast to keep up with the sound.

The sun climbed into the sky and turned the jungle into an outdoor steam-bath. Scott shed his clothes as he walked, and stripped down to trousers and boots only. Whenever the go-devil stopped, he stumbled and almost fell. The obstructions, however, were all minor and soon cleared by building up pressure. But there was an unusual number of them. The last half of the line had been installed in a hurry, and the men had been careless about swabbing out the pipes. The daylight hours drained away, and in the evening the downpour started.

The second shift of workers went off duty as it got dark and were driven into San Cano. Shortly after they left, the go-devil hit the third lead plug. Pressure failed to release it. Scott drove a white stake into the ground and stumbled through the mud to the jeep. Bennett had left to sit in the more comfortable cab of a truck. Scott sat behind the wheel, alone, waiting for the third shift of welders to show up.

After a short rest, he picked up the walkie-talkie and radioed the pumping station to turn off pressure. The operator at the other end said: "Okay. By the way, Mr. Regan, I just received word that the backfill is all in at the far end."

"Fine. That's good. You saved me the trouble of driving down to look it over."

He was about to sign off when the operator said hastily: "Wait a minute. What are you going to do about your welders?"

Scott stared at the instrument in his hand and said: "Welders? I'm waiting for them now."

The operator screamed: "Waiting for them! Hell's bells, don't you know they're all in jail? Big riot in San Cano. Couple of places smashed up, and all of our men slapped in the can. My God, I thought you knew."

Scott swore violently and dropped the radio. He yelled at Murphy, who was directing the crew digging up the trench, and put the jeep into gear. Murphy jumped into the machine as Scott went by. Scott shoved the accelerator to the floorboard and told Murphy what had happened as they skidded down the muddy road.

Murphy hung onto the windshield and said: "McNair's trump card. He has you licked already, but he's making sure of it."

Scott nodded, but kept his attention on the muddy road. At the point where the pipeline road passed the hacienda, he swung off and took the road into town. He skidded onto the main street and came to a halt in the center of San Cano. Most of the lights were out, but they could hear brawls and fights going on all over town.

He and Murphy jumped out of the jeep, grabbed wrenches from the tool kit and started down the street. They picked up a group of pipeline men in front of Mama Soo's and charged into a short order restaurant where a fight was in progress. It was a mix-up between pipeline men and workers from McNair's refinery. They lit into the battle with clubs and chairs, cleaned the place out and went back to the street.

More pipeline men joined them, and they roamed the main street of San Cano, gathering men and cleaning out fights as they went. Cars were smashed, windows were broken and practically every bar in town was wrecked. But in a short time they had undisputed possession of the street and had stopped all the fights.

The men gathered around Scott with broken noses and black eyes and wide smiles of pleasure. One of them yelled: "How about the men in jail, Regan? What do we do about them?"

Scott's lips thinned, and his teeth shone whitely in the dark. "Do?" he replied grimly. "That jail's not very big, is it? That's no problem."

He jerked his head at one of the men, and the two disappeared in the direction of the warehouses. In a few moments they were back with one of the most powerful bulldozers. It clanked down the street, with hundreds of men streaming behind, and turned in the direction of the small brick jail.

Scott threw the bulldozer into its lowest gear, edged it against a corner of the building and simply kept going. The bricks crumbled, and the whole corner collapsed. Then cables were dragged inside, as the frightened jailers ran out, and made fast to the steel walls of the corridor. The bulldozer slowly, almost lazily, backed away. The building shuddered and began coming to pieces. The welders poured out, yelling crazily to each other, and then the whole steel corridor came down. The jail no longer existed.

The men were hurriedly piled into trucks and sent pell-mell out to the pipeline. Scott and Murphy returned in the jeep. When they arrived at the white stake, Scott tried to use the radio but it had been broken when he dropped it. He swore under his breath, doggedly set the men at work on the obstruction, had the section yanked out and the new valve section welded into place. It was almost midnight before it was finished. A messenger had been sent to the pumping station with instructions to turn on pressure at a certain time. It was timed so perfectly that as soon as the section was in, the go-devil was again merrily scraping on its way.

The last pumping station was only a short distance ahead, located at the refinery on the edge of the bluff. Scott took a chance on the go-devil not getting stuck again and drove up to the station. Floodlights were on and there were a number of automobiles parked about, including Seely's sedan and the truck in which Bennett had been riding.

Scott dropped to the ground, his shoulders drooping and his arms wearily, disjointedly, swinging at his sides. He knew he was licked, but his head was high and there was a flaming light shining in his bloodshot eyes. He entered the station as if there was all the time in the world to beat the deadline.

It was twenty minutes before midnight.

SEELY AND MCNAIR were standing by the pumps, and Bennett was leaning against the main line valve. His face was haggard and his hands were trembling with nervousness. He opened his mouth to say something to Scott, then closed it with an audible click of his teeth.

McNair had changed to a fresh linen suit and Panama hat. A raincoat hung loosely over his shoulders. He held a watch in his hands, idly winding it. His eyes, narrowly turned upon Scott, were without expression. He

was simply waiting, watching the minute hand on the watch, and then looking up to coolly regard Scott.

Seely, too, was waiting, but her green eyes were flecked with amber lights and were very much alive. Scott was still puzzled at the obvious excitement dancing in her eyes and the knowledgable smile tugging at her lips. She was wearing slacks and a short jacket, with a jockey-like cap pulled over her forehead, the long visor forming a shadow over her eyes. She made no move toward Scott as he entered the station, but he felt as if she had.

Commissioner De Veya was standing in a corner of the station, apparently amused by Scott's wet and muddy condition. A uniformed official was standing at his side. Scott guessed that he was from the capital, acting as another witness.

Scott leaned back against the wall and lit a cigarette. He half-closed his eyes and waited, as the minutes ticked by. No one felt in the mood to say anything. There was too much at stake.

A SCRAPING SOUND echoed hollowly inside the station and then came to a halt. All eyes swung to Scott. The outer door opened, and Murphy came in, shedding water from his raincoat. He looked about at the group, took off his hat and slapped it wetly against his leg.

He looked at Scott, cleared his throat and said: "Well, it's here. I followed it into the station."

Scott nodded. "I heard it."

McNair slid his watch into his pocket and stepped to the main valve. He looked back over his shoulder at Scott and barked: "How do you get this thing open?"

Scott shoved himself away from the wall and walked to the valve. He placed his hand on it and looked into McNair's eyes. "For the next thirteen minutes," he said, "this is still technically my property."

McNair smiled and stepped back. "Help yourself."

Scott spun the valve. The pipe to which that particular valve was connected emptied into a diversion tank within the station, and would be used in the future to keep the pipe clean. It was strictly a bypass. When the valve was opened, a column of dirty water shot through the air and down into the open tank. Scott stood back and watched it, his arms folded and his feet planted wide apart. Miscellaneous débris came from the valve, and then the go-devil plopped into the tank, the sound of its splash rebounding from the white walls of the station. The water slowly began to clear to a pure column, and the bottom of the tank was covered. Scott's job was finished.

He turned his head and looked at De Veya. "Well," he said, "there it is. As far as I'm concerned, the pipeline is now in operation."

Seely stepped to Scott's side and looked down into the tank with an attitude of tense expectancy. When Scott moved to turn off the valve, she pulled his hand away. "Oh, no. Leave it alone. Please."

He shrugged. "What's the use? It will probably be ten hours before the oil reaches this end."

She said dreamily: "I like to watch the water spout out. And maybe the oil will be here before then. Who knows?"

Bennett, who had been listening to them, suddenly came out of his revery and screamed at McNair: "I'll fight this hold-up. Understand? I'll take it into court. That pipe is in operation right now. It doesn't have to deliver oil. I'll fight you with everything I have."

McNair stated flatly: "You won't have much to fight with." He glanced at the smiling Commissioner, then back at Bennett: "Anyway, Jeff, why scream at me? Señor de Veya interprets the contract for his country. I have nothing to do with it."

Bennett cried: "You've paid him off. We all know that. And I mean to fight it."

McNair chuckled: "Now, you're getting all excited. The only courts you can fight in are those right in this country. I should imagine," he said dryly, "that the Commissioner's interpretation will carry some weight—in his own courts. Better bow out gracefully. We'll get together on a deal where you won't be hurt too badly."

"You mean I'll be wiped out."

"Well," McNair growled, "what do you think would be happening to me right now if oil was coming out of that pipe instead—" He paused: his eyes opened wide; his mouth sagged foolishly and he stared incredulously down into the tank.

The plug of water had suddenly ceased, and a thick column of black oil was shooting out into space. There was no doubt about it; it was black, high-gravity crude straight from the main storage tanks at Tacano. Its viscosity could be seen a mile away. It was pounding into the tank with a deeply satisfying and particularly gratifying gurgle. It soon covered the water, floated upon it and inched its way up the walls of the tank.

Scott blinked down at the oil, unable to believe his eyes, feeling a deadening numbness steal over him. He looked up at the clock on the pumphouse wall. It was still a few minutes before midnight. The pipeline was in operation, even according to De Veya's interpretation, within the limits of the deadline. Scott shook his head. It couldn't be true.

Then he turned about and looked at Seely. He heard Bennett jabbering excitedly in the background, and a loud roar from McNair, but his mind was focused on Seely. She was watching him through lowered lids, still waiting.

Scott said: "So you took the risk for me."

She nodded, her eyes fastened on his. She said in a whisper: "I bribed the men at the last station. They were willing to try it, anyway."

"But if that plug of water had drained out when the men were working on the pipe—"

She bit her lip and said: "Please, Scott. It had to be done. Don't you see?"

He was too tired to think. He mumbled: "Maybe you're right. I don't know."

HE HEARD MURPHY YELL, and spun about on his heel. McNair was facing him a few feet away with the automatic in his hand. His eyes were mere slits of light, and the tiny muscles along his jaw were throbbing with insane rage. Scott looked at the unwavering muzzle of the gun, and a knot tightened in his stomach. McNair's finger was perceptibly tightening on the trigger.

The gun went off at the instant Murphy hurled himself sidewise at McNair's arm. The bullet ricocheted off the stone floor and plowed into the opposite wall. Murphy grabbed wildly at the gun, twisted it from McNair's hand and tossed it into the tank. Then Murphy sagged back against the valves, breathing hard and smiling tightly at Scott.

Seely stepped aside and the others in the room moved back against the walls. McNair looked down into the tank, then tossed his hat aside and started taking off his coat. Scott balanced on the balls of his feet, waiting—and beginning to smile.

It was McNair who lashed out first, with a stinging left that caught Scott high on the cheek and spun him half around. He followed up with a right, but Scott was inside the punch and caught McNair flush on the mouth with his own left. With the feel of the blow, all of Scott's weariness dropped from his shoulders. He proceeded grimly to the business of throwing his punches as fast as possible. He had a hunch that McNair was the more skilled fighter of the two. He had a better shift and a better defense, and knew what to do with his feet. Scott realized he would have to make every blow count,

and his own rage grew within him until it was as murderous as McNair's maniacal fury.

No one in the station interfered. No one had any desire to interfere. They stood back against the walls and silently watched.

McNair quickly began to feel sure of himself and moved around fast, stinging Scott with his left. But Scott brushed the blows aside and bored in, swinging with all the strength of his arms.

They fought around the dispersal tank and over to the open door of the station. Scott was conscious of the sound of heavy rain outside and backed toward the door. His cleated boots would give him a slight advantage in the mud and slow McNair down to a slugging match. Scott twisted under one of McNair's blows and backed out the door. McNair followed him, hardly conscious of the rain beating on his head. The others came to the door to watch.

The pipeline crews left their trucks and formed around the station to watch the fight in the full glare of the floodlights. Neither Scott or McNair noticed them.

It was De Veya who first noticed the effectiveness of Scott's blows. He stared at McNair's smashed face bobbing in the light and shouted: "Someone stop this. Regan will kill him."

He started out the door, but Murphy grabbed him and shoved him back.

Dimly, as if from a distance, McNair heard De Veya's words. For the first time he became conscious that he was slowing down, that he was taking more punishment than he was giving and that he was breathing so hard his lungs seemed to be on fire. He faltered for a moment and Scott caught him off balance. He slipped and fell backward into the mud. Scott picked him up and smashed him down again.

McNair scrambled to his feet and for a brief moment looked wildly in Seely's direction. In his eyes was a growing light of fear. He turned back to Scott and put everything he had in his next blows, but Scott was like a raging animal. He threw his sledge-hammer punches in a certain rhythmic cadence, and now most of them were landing. McNair's guard was lowered and Scott was rocking him from side to side.

McNair now fought only to get away, but Scott doggedly followed him and smashed him to the ground.

McNair lay on his back, staring blankly up at him, partially shielding his face from the rain. In his eyes was the animal fear of survival. Scott looked down at him, and suddenly he felt sick. The man had broken too thoroughly for Scott to feel any pride in what he had done. He wiped the rain and blood from his face and turned away.

Seely ran out into the rain and took his arm. She led him to her car and helped him inside. She slid behind the wheel, started the engine and headed the car down the grade toward San Cano. Scott's head drooped forward and his eyes closed.

Seely drove through San Cano and around the wharves to where the amphibian was parked on the concrete ramp. She took the first-aid kit from the plane and stepped back into the car. Scott's eyes had opened, and he was watching her.

She turned on the dome-light of the car and smiled at him. She said: "These antiseptics will sting."

He shrugged and said through thick lips: "I don't think I could feel anything."

She poured the antiseptic onto some cotton and washed the open cuts of his face. He winced and changed his mind about being able to feel. She sponged his bruised mouth, put adhesive tape over the cuts and then sat back. She nodded with satisfaction and commented: "Not a bad job."

Scott sat up and managed a faint smile. "I'd hate to see myself in a mirror."

"You will in a few minutes. We're going to Mama Soo's, where you'll have a nice hot bath and some dry clothes and a hot dinner. Then you and I have a few things to talk about."

"Okay by me." He looked out the window at the rain beating on the amphibian and asked: "Why did you stop here?"

She looked down and replied: "Subconsciousness, I guess. I've been thinking about it for some time."

Scott was puzzled. "The airplane?"

"Yes." She looked up and her eyes traveled over his face. "Scott, how long would it take us to fly back to the States?"

He took in a quick breath and smiled. He put an arm about her shoulders and asked:

"Did you say *us?*"

"Yes. Would you wait for me till I get my divorce?"

"Wait?" he chuckled. "For years, if it takes that long."

"It will seem years to me, but I don't think it will take long. Allen won't interfere. And then," she smiled, "a wedding with bridesmaids and flowers—"

Scott interrupted by asking her: "You're not afraid any more?"

She shook her head. "Not since the night at Mama Soo's."

Scott turned off the dome light and watched the black rain slanting across the windshield. He looked past Seely in the direction of the jungle, then held her closer and kissed her mouth. His bruised lips hurt, but he held her more tightly as her arms crept about his neck.

She shuddered slightly. Scott patted her back and whispered in her ear: "It's all right. It's all over now." Then he started to chuckle and said: "You know, for a guy who was strictly in the middle, I didn't do badly at all."

She sat back and looked at him. "You're conceited."

"Sure. Why not?"

She smiled and said: "But it's a different kind of conceit. I like it."

Seely returned to his arms and placed her head on his shoulder. She looked out at the rain beating on the muddy river and thought of the crash in the speedboat. She wondered if she really could have avoided it, if she had wanted to.

It doesn't make sense, folks

A man's a fool to go around with his pants pocket burning with extra folding money when he ought to buy an extra Bond, because that loose lettuce is the stuff inflation is made of. When that extra dough goes hunting for civilian goods (that are as hard to find as Crosby in a tuxedo!), it tends to push up prices. Besides, it doesn't make sense when twelve million kids are fighting our battle for any of us to hike up the cost of living by buying anything we can live without.

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