THE
BLUE BOOK
JUNE 1931
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"YOUTH RIDES VICTORIOUS"
- By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT -

Edgar Rice Burroughs - H. Bedford-Jones - Arthur K. Akers
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By DON CAMERON SHAFER

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The BLUE BOOK *Magazine*

The McCall Company, Publisher, 230 Park Avenue, New York.

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ALMOST every man who has plodded along in an ill-paid job knows how I felt a few months ago. I had no advantages of education—barely got through fifth grade. I had a job—yes, but it was a poor one, and it paid me only enough to skimp along on. There was no future in it for me—as far as that goes, it seemed to me that I had no future anywhere. $40 a week—if I was lucky—was just about the top figure I could expect to earn.

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Any man who clung desperately to a petty little unimportant underpaid job through a depression, the way I did, knows how I felt. There's no reason, though, why any man with real ambition needs to go through it again. Right now, when business is picking up, hundreds—yes, thousands of men will be needed, trained salesmen who can go out and get the new business that is coming in. Any man with average brains can do what I did if he has the ambition. This remarkable training is so amazingly clear and simple, it trains you so thoroughly, that you can hardly help succeed, if you really set out to do it. And once you are established as a successful man in the line, your worries about low pay and unemployment are gone forever!

Right now your copy of "The Key To Master Salesmanship" is waiting for you. Send for it today. Find out from it the hundreds of little-known facts and secrets—the real truth about the art of selling, which in so many instances have turned ill-paid, futureless routine workers into successful, highly-paid men. You incur no obligation—the book must prove its case. Simply fill out the coupon now and mail it in—don't hesitate any longer.

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The BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1931 Vol. 53, No. 2

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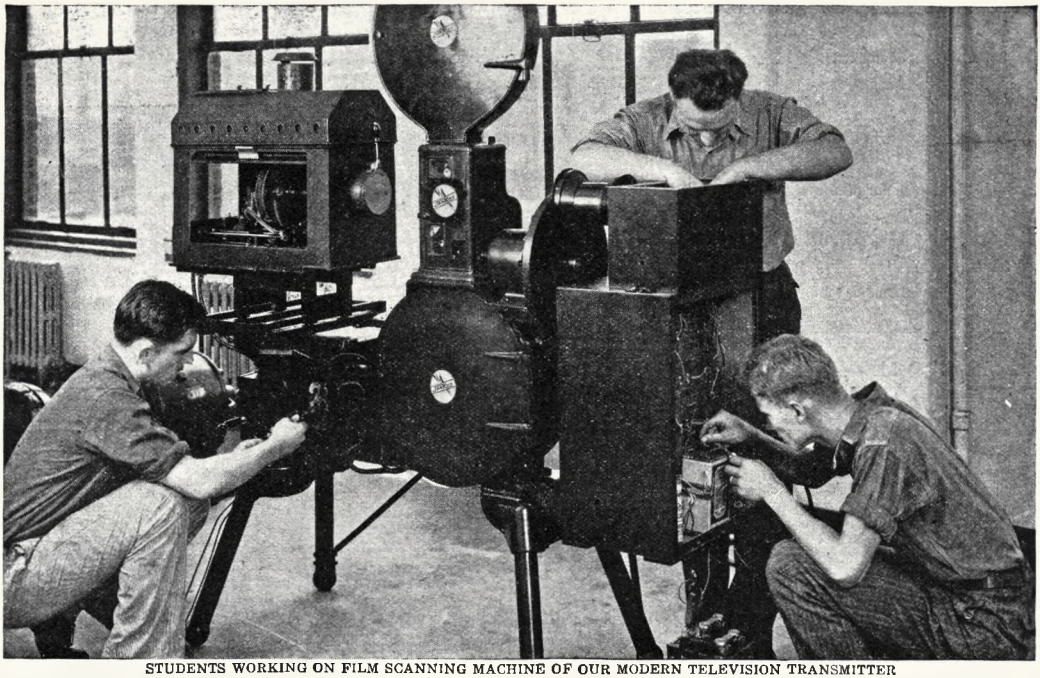

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of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE published monthly at Dayton, Ohio, for April 1st, 1931.
State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary In and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared John D. Hartman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Assistant Treasurer of The McCall Company, publisher of The Blue Book Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher: The McCall Company, 230 Park Avenue, New York City. Editor: Donald Kennicott, 230 Park Avenue, New York City. Managing Editor: E. M. Allen, 230 Park Avenue, New York City. Business Managers: None.

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Youth Rides Victorious

A fascinating romance of the old wild days when these United States were young.

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

GREGG SARGENT was his name, but in this wild land along the Pecos many men called him Texas. It was because of his soft drawl, and the lone star sewed in colored leather on each of his boot-tops—which things proclaimed his native State. The nickname fitted him neatly, for he was more than six feet tall, seething with youth, ready to try anything.

Some hundreds of miles to the east, plowed fields and the tight ways of the growing towns had started him upon his wanderings; these and the same urge which sets a wild goose to flying northward in the spring. Two seasons with the trail herds to Dodge, another cow-hunting in the mesquite thickets by the Nueces—long, weary months of hard riding; brief days and nights of harder play. Then one day some one had spoken of Silver City, and the name had sounded good to him; so he was on his way again.

It was an afternoon late in the spring when he came riding across the last wide mesa toward the flat bottomlands where the river wound, beyond whose farther bank men said there was no law. His wide-rimmed hat was slouched askew; in all his life he never wore one straight. His face was stained by sun and wind, and the bold eagerness of youth was in his eyes.

Here where the pale uplands began to break for the last step of the long flight which led down from the Llano Estacado to the Valley, he checked the golden buckskin with taut reins.

A buckboard blocked the road. A span of little mules were standing, the tugs unhooked, and at their heads a man of middle age, with a short black beard. The dark eyes that looked up at Gregg beneath the hat's slouched rim were narrow and the lips were clamped down under the heavy mustache in a tight line. And when he had bestowed a brief glance of appraisal and a nod, as casual as the "Howdy" which accompanied it, upon the newcomer, the man turned to another, who was busy with a hub-wrench at one of the front wheels.

"Done tol' yo' las' night to grease them wheels." His voice was low, and his stature was slight; but there was something formidable in his presence which made him seem larger than he was; it gave to his quiet words a potency.

The one to whom he spoke did not respond, and as Gregg glanced at this one, he was conscious of a quick dislike, though the back was turned toward him and but little of the face was visible. It was—he could see this much—a dead white face in startling contrast to the coal-black hair.

And now Gregg's hat was in his hand, and as he replaced it, a little more carelessly, if possible than before, he smiled at the woman on the buckboard's seat. She returned the smile, but there was worry in her eyes.

"If there's anything that I can do—" he called. The man at the mules shook his head, but seeming to take second thought, he answered:

"Yo'll run acrost my daughter somewhere ahead. Tell her to pull up and wait for us."

And the woman added swiftly:

"Yes, please be sure."

Gregg rode on, whistling softly to himself. What the tune was he did not know. It was his habit to whistle when he was thoughtful, and something that he had seen in those two men had set him to thinking. There is an instinct which, on rare occasions, awakens at the contact trying to tell one of a potential friend or a born enemy. And his was busy striving to proclaim to him the presence of both, back there at the buckboard. But being young, presently he turned his thoughts ahead.

"A girl," he mused, "is a curiosity out here." And as he urged the buckskin to a better pace: "I wonder if she's good-looking."

If he had known the answer to that question, he would probably have spurred the horse still faster and if he had known what she was about to do just now, he would undoubtedly have come on at the dead run.

Here where she rode, the fringe of cottonwoods and willows hid her from his eyes and he from hers. Ahead of her the Pecos ran, nearly bank full, and falling water; across the stream a sandbar showed, all wet and glistening like silver in the sun. A seasoned hand would have recognized what was known in the vernacular as a boggy ford, but where she had come from, there were no rivers; the ways of spring floods and quicksand bottoms were unknown to her. She drew up on the brink and looked at the tawny current swirling by with a sucking sound, and her eyes grew eager.

They were wide brown eyes with a habit of gazing straight ahead, unafraid and warm, alight with the brave joy of living. And their indomitability was in keeping with the way she held her head well back, as if she were always sure of the respect others were going to give her. The horse was rangy—her father's mount; she seemed very small in the huge stock saddle, with her knee crooked over the horn and one foot in a shortened stirrup. And she was saying to herself:

"If they come up, I'll have to make the crossing in the buckboard. I'll never get another chance like this."

That was undoubtedly the case; for the farther west one went from here, the scarcer the rivers, and the outfit was on its way to Arizona. She waited long enough to bestow one backward glance upon the road by which she had traveled, but the fringe of trees hid the rider who was following. She kilted up her long skirt.

"Come on," she told the horse. "We'll try it." And

He plucked her forth and flung her from him onto the firmer ground beyond.

the next moment she was feeling the cold touch of the current as it sucked at her limbs. The animal was swimming; only his head was visible, and the outstretched neck; she could hear his quick breathing and the hollow sound the water made, swirling against his flanks.

Now, for some reason, she was wishing she had not tried it. She was not afraid, but she had a feeling that danger lurked here, somewhere close to her and that she could not discover what it was nor where it lay. She kept her head and left the reins loose, and she did not stir, leaning forward in the huge saddle, looking straight before her. The sweep of the brown water made her a little giddy; there was no music in the sound it made—only an ugly suggestion as if it were eager to swallow her. The skirt had fallen, and it was soaked through, dragging at her limbs like lead. It seemed to her as if there were more of sand than fluid in that flood. She saw the tiny grains coating the garment's fabric in a thin film.

Past the middle, and the force of the stream was not so great here; she drew a deeper breath, and she was smiling at herself for having let those trepidations seize her, smiling in the triumph of having done what she had started out to do. The horse was coming to the shallows; his hoofs touched bottom. He floundered clumsily toward the sandbar.

She did not realize the cause for that clumsiness, and she did not read the meaning of the gleaming patches on the bar just ahead of her, until it was too late. Then, when they had come out at the river's very edge and the animal was striving frantically toward the duller patches of the dry sand, she knew. But even as the knowledge flashed into her mind, they had reached one of those shining puddles and they were down.

"Bogged down," she had heard her father say the words telling of the trail herds at the river crossings; and she said them aloud in the moment of the catastrophe.

The current itself had been more solid than this mass; it gave no chance for swimming, but sucked at the animal and rider, clogging their limbs. The horse was down to the withers, lunging forward, now heaving half his body out, now sinking again. No chance for him with her added weight; she pressed her hands upon the horn, shook her foot free of the stirrup and she leaped from the saddle. In the next moment she was more than waist deep, sinking fast, and the huge hoofs were striking close beside her; the flying sand and water blinded her. She thought she heard a shout somewhere near by.

That was Gregg's voice, and he was in midstream. The buckskin was swimming strong and free. The rider was leaning far forward, shouting as he came. Then his voice died. For it seemed to him that those threshing hoofs were about to strike her down. A moment later the buckskin was scrambling to the bank and he had left the saddle.

He threw himself upon the sand, and he seized her body in his arms. He plucked her forth and flung her from him to the firmer ground beyond. He dragged himself from the quicksand. Then he picked her up and carried her to the dry brown earth above the break of the bank.

It was in all her life the first time that she had known what it meant to taste real fear, and when he set her down, a sudden reaction came upon her; she was choking back the tears.

"Not hurt?" she heard him ask. She shook her head and drew her first full breath.

"Just scared." She tried hard to steady her voice, but could not, and she was angry at herself, and at him for seeing her with the tears in her eyes.

"Yo' had a good right to be scared," he told her gravely.

She was beginning to recover herself now, but the feeling hung on—of utter helplessness, of being in the grip of mighty forces; and then his arms about her, pressing her body, hard as steel. At length:

"I should have known better," she said a little wearily.

"Many an old hand has got worse than that in a boggy ford," he answered quietly. "I helped to bury two myself last year by the Canadian." He left her then and went to catch the horses; and when he returned, she was looking back across the river. Noting the anxiety in her face:

"Yo'r folks," he told her, "was hung up along of a dry axle. They'll be along soon. They asked me to tell yo' to wait for them." His smile had come back, and there

was a humorous gleam in his eyes. "We'll rub down yo'r hoss, an' by the time they show up, the sand will be dry; yo' can brush it off of yo'r dress, an' they'll never know what happened."

Her face had begun to take on a little more color, and she was smiling back at him. They set to work together at the horse; and when they had done, they heard the rattle of the buckboard in the timber across the river. He wiped a telltale film from the stirrup leather, and the two of them looked into each other's eyes a little guiltily.

"Nobody's goin' to know now, unless yo' tell 'em," said he.

"I never thanked you," she told him earnestly; "and if you hadn't come—"

"It wasn't anything to fuss about," he interrupted, and while he was speaking, the buckboard appeared at the brink of the other bank with the horseman following. They stood side by side watching the crossing, and when the little mules stepped out on the upper end of the long bar where the sand was dry and the footing firm—

"I'll leave yo' now," Gregg announced, "for if they had the two of us together, they might catch us lyin'." He swung into the saddle and rode away.

His hat was on the back of his head; his hair was stirring in the breeze; and he looked hard and fit, swinging in the saddle to the movement of his horse—hard and fit and ready for anything that might come along. But for the time being his cheerful carelessness had departed; and during all the rest of the afternoon he was not thinking eagerly of Silver City and what lay ahead of him: his mind was back there at the river; and he was feeling her in his arms; he was seeing her face as he had looked down on it when he was carrying her up the sand-bar. His lips moved more than once, and he said under his breath: "I could of held her in one hand."

CHAPTER II

ON the west side of the stream the timber stretched for half a mile, and at its edge, where the road forked, one branch leading to the village of El Paso, the other northward up the valley, there was a little building of unpainted boards. Within, a barrel lay on skids hard by the door, and in the middle of the floor there was a card-table; several pictures of full-limbed women in tights, clipped from the *Police Gazette,* adorned the walls. By some of its visitors the establishment was called a whisky ranch, and by others a deadfall—all according to the nature of the impressions which they had carried away on their various departures. There being no business this afternoon, the proprietor was sitting in the shade on the front step.

Sometime in years gone by he had borne a name of ordinary quality; but during his travels he had shed this and other names, if anything more readily than a snake sheds its skin, finally to pick up one which had adhered through thick and thin because of a certain poesy of description. Here on the Pecos it still remained, and for fifty miles up and down the river, men called him Kettle Belly.

Save for the swollen midsection which had inspired the unlovely appellation, he was rather lean than otherwise, and this lent to his figure a suggestion of unwholesomeness, accentuated by his soggy cheeks, where purple patches lingered, and by the shallowness of his shifty eyes. To Gregg in passing he brought the idea of a spider who had fallen on hard days and was hoping against hope for the arrival of some juicy fly; and because the cowboy's thoughts had more pleasant company, the latter rode straight by, bestowing only a brief glance upon him.

Sometime later the buckboard came along with the two women on the seat and the men on horseback, one before and one behind.

Kettle Belly's shallow eyes lingered on the rider in the rear, and when the vehicle had gone by, the latter drew rein. His face was colorless, his hair dead black; and the eyes were of a peculiar opaque gray, as if no light ever lingered on them and none ever came from within.

"Haynor!" Kettle Belly's voice showed glad surprise but the horseman made a quick gesture to silence him.

"I'll see yo' here tonight," he answered quietly, then rode on. A moment later the little cavalcade had vanished, and Kettle Belly sat alone.

SO he was sitting three hours later when the sound of hoofs came down the road, and one seeing him thus would have had reason to think he had not moved during the interval, just as a casual caller would have been justified in thinking that everything within the little room behind him was as it had been before—which latter impression would have been disproven by a close examination; for such personal belongings of any value as had been in the place that afternoon were now missing.

Haynor swung off his horse, dropped the reins over the hitching-rack and took his place beside the proprietor on the step.

"I thought," the latter said, "that the posse got yo' at Fort Griffin when us two an' Pike Landusky busted up las' summer."

"Done hid out in the river where we used to sink the hides; an' after they rode by, I slipped away," the visitor told him. "Where did Pike fetch up?"

Kettle Belly laughed.

"Him? He was ridin' with the posse all the time. They never did know he was mixed up with us till long afterwards. I heard tell he's in Arizona now, an' doin' well." He sighed heavily and shook his head. "If yo'd been a little later, yo'd not of found me here." He rose to his feet. "I'm goin' to close up." With that he went within and lighted a lamp. When he returned, leaving the door wide open, "Lookin' for visitors," he explained. "An' I'd jest as soon they'd think I hadn't gone. Come on." He went ahead, and Haynor followed, leading his horse; and when they had gone by the road for a few hundred yards, they struck off up a bypath into the cottonwoods. A raw-boned roan stood tied to a sapling in the middle of a little clearing, saddled and bridled, with a roll of blankets behind the cantle.

"He'll carry me to El Paso, an' I'll take the stage there," Kettle Belly said.

"Our outfit," Haynor told him, "is camped at the ranch-house five miles up the road. I took notice there was some cowboys droppin' in, before I left. Reckon they're due here soon?"

"A man gets to know the signs," the other answered. "An' a week ago one of them fellers made some mean remarks about my dealin' monte. Night before las', another goes an' beds down in front of my place after fillin' up on whisky, with a hundred dollars on him, an' when he woke up, of co'se 'twas gone. If yo' hadn't happened along this afternoon, I'd be ten miles on my way now."

"Where yo' headin' for?"

"Arizona," Kettle Belly replied decisively. "Fort Bowie. It's a cavalry post; an' them troopers will drink anything that bites. I got a recipe for makin' whisky that'll eat the hair off yo'r chest. Better come along."

"Not me. I had all I want of ridin' fast with a passel of lynchers burnin' the wind behind me."

"Plenty of time fer a good start. Them cowboys will see the lamp burnin' an' they'll fool around an hour or so waitin' fer me to show up before they get wise."

"Me," Haynor said, "I got a chance of my own. That's why I come back here this evenin' to let you in on it."

"Meanin' that outfit yo' was with when yo' done rode by my place?"

"It's easy money," Haynor explained, "if yo' organize the play. But easier for two than one."

"Or else," the other interrupted, "yo' would not have let me in." But the speaker ignored the remark.

"This feller—Savage is his name—is goin' on to Arizona. He's took two trail-herds through to the San Pedro valley, an' now he's fetchin' his family to his ranch. I hired out to help him in case of Injuns or the like. Well then, he has got money which he carries in a belt. I dunno how much, but there is plenty. More'n yo' ever got by rollin' drunks."

"How come yo' wanted me? It wasn't charity, yo' know."

"The idee is," Haynor went on, "it needs two men to make it safe. He's an ol' hand, an' quick with his six-shooter. I'd a heap ruther divide the cash than run the chance of bein' drilled between the eyes."

"What do yo' aim to do with the women?"

His companion laughed.

"Easy enough to handle them when we've killed Savage. An' with that money-belt, we've got a stake. Yo' say Pike Landusky is over there in Arizona. We can find him an' throw in with him. If he's doin' well, like you tell of, he's got to let us in."

Kettle Belly was silent for some moments, thinking.

"I never was a killer like yo' be." He made the statement without rancor or reproach. "It aint my game. But I would take yo' up, only for one thing. I cain't stick in this here country. Once I hit the trail, I have got to keep the news behind me till I'm in the clear. No. I am goin' on to Bowie. But I tell yo' what—"

He stopped speaking abruptly. The rattle of hoofs came down the road. The two of them stepped to their horses and placed their fingers over the noses of the animals, lest either of them whinny.

"Must of been ten of 'em in that bunch," Haynor said softly when they had gone by. They listened until the horses stopped by the board house.

"The time has come," Kettle Belly murmured, "fer me to pull my freight. Now, what I was goin' to say—this outfit yo'r with is bound for the San Pedro. Which road?"

"On the other side," Gregg reflected, "is Arizona territory." And the thought brought a new eagerness.

"First," the other told him, "they're goin' up river to John Chisum's ranch. Savage has got some business there. They'll lay over two weeks or so, from what I heard them say. Then they'll shove on by Fort Stanton an' across the White Sands an' the Animas to the stage road by Stein's Pass."

"Which takes 'em right past Fort Bowie," Kettle Belly resumed. "An' I'll be there more'n two weeks ahead of yo'. I'll know enough about the country, so we can find a place to pull it off."

He untied his horse and nodded in the direction of the one-time whisky ranch.

"All quiet down there. But those cowboys will be gettin' restless soon. Well, I wish 'em joy." They led the animals to the road.

"Fort Bowie," Haynor said. "I'll look fer yo' there."

"It will be yo'r first stop the other side of the Stein's Pass stage-station," Kettle Belly mounted as he was speaking, and rode away into the west. When the footfalls of his horse were growing faint in the darkness, Haynor swung into the saddle and departed by the north road to the ranch-house where Savage and his wife and daughter were sleeping.

CHAPTER III

AT Silver City, where he had been driving a ten-mule team for a week or more, Gregg happened to fall in with another irresponsible who was known in that portion of the world as Jerkline; and Jerkline told of ore in Arizona territory—rich ore, of course. All ore is rich when it is far away and the country is dangerous.

That settled it. In Silver City there were monte and poker and dance-halls; sometimes the Apaches raided within sight of the town; occasionally the citizens surged forth to lynch a man who needed lynching; but now the place had ceased to interest Gregg. He put in a few days more with the mules because he must accumulate a grub-stake. Then there came a night when he walked the wooden sidewalks with his wages in his breeches pockets and a set look on his young face. In those good old days the doors were always wide open, but he managed to pass them all. The dance-halls were not so bad, nor the saloons; but the memory of those entrances from which the clicking sound of chips came forth in a ceaseless long roll lingered with him late into the night.

The next morning he departed to join the more impatient Jerkline who had gone on before. Their rendezvous was the Stein's Pass stage-station, just beyond the Arizona line. As to the ore, Gregg had forgotten whether it was gold or silver, but that did not in the least detract from his eagerness.

So he traveled out of the gaunt pale mountains, and on the second day he came riding westward where the shallow ruts of the old stage-road made a faint mark on the level vastness of the Animas plains. Here on the valley floor which the first Spaniards had named because it seemed to belong to the dead, he rode on, keeping his pony to the running walk. The hours passed. By the middle of the afternoon the western range was drawing closer; the others were sinking lower on the skyline, save for one in the north beside the Gila's headwaters. A thin wisp of signal smoke rose from its backbone to remind the rider that the Apaches were still in business. He passed the charred remnants of a wagon outfit, and a little farther on, two oblong heaps of stones whose stark unpainted headboards cast sharp black shadows in the sand.

Mirage and dust-devils and signal-smoke and graves; he looked upon them, and his young face remained serene.

NOW the land began to rise. Boulders showed beside the road; tufted yuccas and clumps of tall bear-grass grew among them. The buckskin seemed to sense the end of the day's journey up there ahead, and it quickened its pace.

Gregg saw the narrow gut where the wagon track topped the divide.

"On the other side," he reflected, "is Arizona territory." And because that skyline marked a boundary which he had not crossed as yet, the thought brought a new eagerness to him. He came on up the long grade, and as he was drawing near the summit, he looked back. Far off a cloud of dust was advancing across the valley floor. When he had watched it for some moments, picking three small specks that crept onward in the midst of the brown haze.

"'Pears like a double rig," he told himself, "an' two men on hossback." He remembered that outfit by the Pecos—he had recalled it many times since he had ridden away from the girl on the river bank—but now he shook his head. "They would be past here long ago; and whoever this is, it will be after dark before they're up the hill."

The sun was sinking toward the gloomy pinnacles of the Chiricahuas, and the San Simon plains were glowing like burnished bronze beneath him when he rode down the first half-mile of the western slope to the Stein's Pass stage-station. Two huge wide-tired freight wagons were standing by the corral. Within the circular enclosure the mules were stamping flies and bickering among themselves. A clean-limbed saddle-horse was at the hitching rack. But of Jerkline's equipment there was no sign. The Mexican stock-tender who came slouching from the oblong of adobe bricks where the station-keeper and his hired help held forth against Apache raiding parties had seen no prospectors for several days.

"Like as not, he got hung up som'eres along the road," Gregg said, and the swarthy hostler shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" he replied in his native tongue.

IT was the period when the unexpected was the rule by which all men abided. Time enough to look for Jerkline when he came. For the present, Gregg dismissed him from his mind and went on with his unsaddling. When the horse had been watered and fed, he crossed the way to learn what the mud-colored building might hold for him by the way of diversion and of company. Of the latter he had already made some diagnosis from what he had seen here outside: mule-skinners, two; a horseman whose saddle and trappings indicated that he was from Texas; and of course the station-keeper.

The Mexican stock-trader sank down to resume his interrupted rest in a patch of shade beside the doorway. Gregg went inside. The room was cool, and its dimness was grateful after the long day's glare. They were there, the four of them, seated round a table at the further end. A film of gray dust which had settled indelibly from head to foot betrayed the teamsters; the station-keeper was a fat man, coatless, with sleeves uprolled and a bald head. But it was the rider from his native State who held Gregg's glance. He was facing the open door; and there was a tinge of somberness in his eyes, raised for the moment to appraise the newcomer; in the features there was a latent recklessness. Although he remained motionless, his poise held the suggestion of constant readiness, as if he were always about to spring.

"Cards?" one of the teamsters asked. The others answered in subdued voices. As far as they were concerned, Gregg had ceased to exist. He drew near the table, and his face had quickened; one hand was in his breeches pocket fondling the three heavy gold-pieces which he had brought with him in spite of the beguilements of draw poker and monte bank and Silver City's dance-halls.

The game went on: the soft rustle of the cards, the subdued clicking of the chips, the level voices of the four men. The dark-eyed young horseman spoke with a slow gentle drawl which brought to Gregg's memory the smother of dust and the deep uproar of the herds, hot sun upon the mesquite thickets and the smell of Texas rivers. His stack was growing larger as the hands followed one another.

"Me," Gregg was saying to himself, "I'm feeling lucky." But he thought of Jerkline and rich ore somewhere beyond, and to himself, "Got to hang onto yo'r grubstake," he made answer.

The station-keeper's throaty voice interrupted his thoughts.

"What say we make it stud?" A murmur of acquiescence followed, and the spectator's sweating fingers tightened over his gold-pieces. Stud was quick action, and quick action always did appeal to him. He leaned against the wall watching the cards fall.

"I could," he told himself, "win a grubstake for the next six months."

Sometime later the Mexican stock-tender came within the doorway.

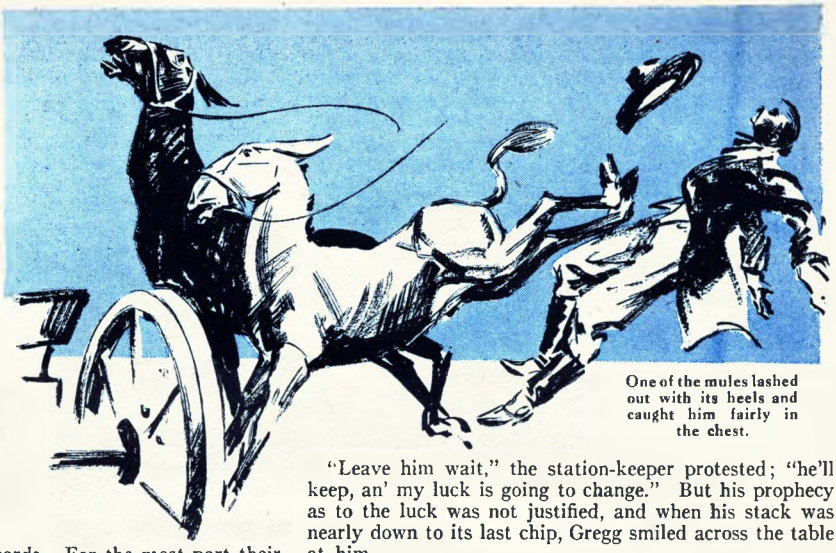
"The stage is at the bottom of the heel," he announced.

The station-keeper shoved back his chair and got to his feet with the impressive deliberation of the wide of waist.

"First time in six months the eastbound aint been late," he swore plaintively. "Jes' as my luck was goin' to turn!"

Passing the new-come guest on his way to the door, he jerked his head toward the table.

"Set in?" he asked, and without waiting for reply, continued on his way to the corral for the change of horses. Of a sudden Jerkline and the rich ore and the grubstake had become faint figures in Gregg's memory—a long, long way away. By the time the station-keeper was crossing the road, Gregg was sitting in the chair which the other had vacated. Before him was a stack of chips, and two gold-pieces were in the pocket where three had been.



One of the mules lashed out with its heels and caught him fairly in the chest.

Occasionally the dust-stained teamsters spoke of other matters than the cards. For the most part their remarks were concerned with rumors of a rich silver strike over in the San Pedro valley.

"Sure as I'm tellin' you, there's goin' to be a rush," one said. And his companion added:

"I hear it's bigger'n the Comstock. Country's liable to boom."

But the dark-eyed young rowdy of the saddle remained aloof. He sat there silent and somber; and hand by hand, the chips continued to move to his stacks with the seeming inevitability of water running downhill.

The stage arrived with a rattle of hoofs and a harsh scraping of iron tires on the hard earth. Voices sounded outside, and the jingle of harness. Gregg glanced through the doorway into the glare of the late afternoon sunshine and saw two men lifting something from the old Concord's interior. The object was as unmistakable as the oblong heaps of stones which he had passed down on the valley flats some hours before. Soon afterward the change was made; the fresh team rattled away at a brisk trot; the fat station-keeper returned. On the threshold he paused to fling some final directions to the stock-tender.

"Git Pedro to lend a hand with the diggin'. Yo'll find a pick an' shovel in the shed."

"Who was he?" one of the teamsters asked.

The station-keeper dragged a chair to the table and took his place among the others.

"Dunno. The Apaches got him a mile beyond the foot of the grade." He sighed as one who feels himself the victim of injustice. "An' of co'se that sot of a driver has to fetch him here! Them fellers seem to think I run a cemetery." He placed a gold-piece on the table. "Gimme ten dollars' wuth of chips, Brazos." The dark-eyed young horseman shoved the stack before him, and Gregg let the nickname sink into his mind.

"Brazos," he reflected, "that's a river. Well, one name's as good as another. And anyhow, he's from Texas."

Soon after that, he bought his second stack.

Luck seemed impetuous this afternoon. It was not long before he was exchanging the last of his gold-pieces for one more installment of chips. While the transaction was in process, the swarthy stock-tender thrust his head into the doorway to proclaim the completion of the grave.

"Might's well go take a look at him," one of the teamsters suggested.

"Leave him wait," the station-keeper protested; "he'll keep, an' my luck is going to change." But his prophecy as to the luck was not justified, and when his stack was nearly down to its last chip, Gregg smiled across the table at him.

"Us two, we're runnin' a dead heat," he remarked.

The inevitable descended upon both of them with the completion of the next deal, and the game broke up forthwith. Following the others out of the room, Gregg was whistling serenely.

"Jerkline," he assured himself, "will be along by mo'n-in', an' I can get enough off of him to pay my bill here."

The voice of the fat man interrupted his thoughts.

"Anybody wants to have a look at this here party, now's the time."

Gregg was still whistling when he joined the little group beside the shallow grave. He glanced at the dead man. The Apaches had not meddled with the features, although they had put in some time amusing themselves after their manner with other portions of their victim. Gregg had ceased whistling, and he stood there for some moments gazing down at the still face.

He understood now why Jerkline had not kept his appointment.

CHAPTER IV

THE last thing of which Gregg was conscious that evening, was the procedure by which Brazos went to his night's rest. Shortly after sundown the taciturn young namesake of a Texas river had made down his bed with considerable ostentation near the freight wagons. Now, a good two hours later, when the dusk had deepened into a blue gloom and everything was silent save for the pleasant munching of the animals in the corral, he rose and gathered up his blankets. For a moment he and his burden showed in silhouette against the star-flecked sky, after which they vanished somewhere among the clumps of coarse bear-grass that rustled faintly in the night breeze. Gregg smiled and settled down into his blankets.

"He's a wolf, all right." The reflection was not without admiration, and there was liking in the smile. When morning came after the manner of the summer dawns down by the border in a white blaze of sunlight, he was not surprised to find that Brazos and his horse had departed, leaving behind only a few faint hoofmarks leading toward the west.

"Wonder where he's headed for?" Gregg asked himself a little wistfully; he was thinking that he would not mind riding there with him—wherever it might happen to be.

The teamsters were hooking up with the customary accompaniment of sincere malediction. Among the animals in the corral were four which had not been here last evening, and Gregg remembered the dust he had seen down in the Animas. His prophecy had been correct; the outfit had not pulled into Stein's until long after dark. His eyes took on a sudden eagerness, for now he recognized the span of little mules, and a moment later, assuming such indifference as he could:

"I saw that brand last month," he said, "in the Pecos Valley."

"Bill Savage's iron," the nearest teamster replied. "He brought two trail-herds through from Devil's River, and he's got his home ranch over on the San Pedro. Now he's fetchin' out his family."

Without pausing by way of punctuation, he addressed his off wheeler in insulting terms.

Gregg crossed the road, to get his breakfast and to face the problem of settling a three-dollar bill for himself and horse, with nothing more tangible by way of wherewithal than regretful memories of his last month's wages.

BREAKFAST at Stein's was no meal to tempt a jaded palate; when he entered the fly-specked little dining-room, the fat landlord was standing in the open doorway, a hard speculative gleam in his small eyes. However, youth and surging health and a session at the tin wash-basin in the rear of the mud-colored oblong building combined to sustain optimism as well as appetite.

"And being as things stand the way they do, I may as well fill up while the going's good," the guest assured himself. By the time he was attacking his second helping of the *chili con carne* and Mexican beans, he was distinctly conscious of an unsympathetic atmosphere in his audience, which did not hinder him from ordering a third cup of bootleg coffee with the serenity of one to whom the future holds but golden promises. However, the moment arrived when he shoved back his chair.

"I might," he was thinking, "hock my rifle with him, till I lay holt of some cash." But remembering what he had seen of the luckless Jerkline, he dismissed the idea as impractical. "Mebbe he'll leave me work it out." This sounded better, and he was in the act of rising to approach his host and broach the proposition, when voices sounded outside. His resolution vanished, and he settled down into his chair again; he was wishing that he had put in a little more time with his pocket comb, for his hair was rebellious, and these were women's voices.

Since he had wandered westward beyond the Pecos, he had run across some women; but most of them had been far more companionable than respectable. As to the others, the few who were not Mexican had grown worn with toil and bearing children until they were like sun-dried rawhide to the eye. He knew that the two who were about to enter the room were of a different sort. Ever since he had recognized the team of mules, his mind had kept straying to the girl.

"I wonder," he was thinking, "if she told them how she got bogged down?" It came back to him—the feeling of her in his arms, and her face as he had looked down at it in that moment while he held her. Then they were in the room, and he was noting how alike they were, and yet how unlike. They both had the same brave straight-looking eyes of brown, but the mother's locks were streaked with gray, and there was a patience in her face, a droop to her body, as if she had borne the burden of much waiting. And the girl's head was back, as if she never meant to wait for anyone. The sun and wind of the harsh border country had not marred her delicacy of coloring. She seemed to radiate the joy of living.

She was smiling as her eyes met the cowboy's, and a look of understanding passed between them.

"I could pick her up in one hand," Gregg caught himself thinking—as he had that afternoon when he was leaving her—and was a little amused at his own boldness. The idea was appealing though; he let it linger for a moment.

Even if he had not known who they were, he would have recognized them for the wife and daughter of a cow-man, from the way they both bade him good morning. Only the women of the cattle country had this ease, born of assurance that the most casual stray male was going to yield them their due respect. The softness of their voices gave him a wistful feeling; it was not alone the easy drawl; there was in them an unspoiled sweetness that brought him back to the days—not many years ago but seeming strangely remote to him now—before he had forgotten gentler things.

"This," he was telling himself, "is no country for them."

He glanced at the girl again, and remembering what he had seen yesterday beside that open grave, he was seized by a sudden tenderness—a yearning to protect her.

Bill Savage came a step behind them.

"Haynor's hookin' up the mules," he was saying. "I aim to get an early start." And when he had ceased speaking, his lips clamped down tightly under his heavy gray mustache as if he feared he might waste a few more words. His eyes went to Gregg, dark eyes narrowed by long peering into the blazing sunlight. He nodded as negligently as if their last encounter had been the day before.

"Howdy!" With that, he turned to the fat station-keeper, to ask about the road across the San Simon valley.

Gregg had risen now and was standing erect beside his chair. He did not know that he made a good figure, nor that the tousled hair on which he had been wasting some regrets a few moments ago was of the sort that had an appeal to women, respectable or otherwise. He did know, however, that he would like to remain here a little longer in the presence of these two; and as a matter of fact, he had meditated ordering a fourth cup of coffee with that object in view; but the sight of Bill Savage talking to the station-keeper had reminded him of that unpaid bill, and it had occurred to him, bringing with it a genuine panic of dread, that the fat man was fully capable of introducing the subject within hearing of this audience. The opportunity to escape was passing fast; he knew the breed to which that narrow-eyed Texan belonged; they never talked for long.

AS he was starting out, the landlord turned to speak to him, but he did not pause.

"I'll be back directly," he called over his shoulder, and hurried on across the road. The freighters had departed, and the span of little mules were dozing in the corral sunshine. The man Haynor was nowhere in sight. Gregg caught up his pony and led it out to water at the trough beside the wagon-track. He put in some minutes grooming the animal with the wreck of a currycomb which some passing traveler had left on the top rail of the fence. This being done, it was in his mind to saddle up.

"But if that Polan' China saw me makin' ready for the road, he might get restless," he reflected; and he was leading the horse back to the corral, when a scuffle of hoofs and a rasping oath came to his ears from within the pen. Evidently Savage's man had come to hitch up the mules.

There was that in the nature of the sounds which proclaimed all was not going well; and in a country where the fine art of minding one's own business was practiced by all who had an eye to self-preservation, no man blessed with a modicum of wisdom would intrude his presence on a stranger involved in altercation with two able-bodied mules. Moreover there was a quality in that voice which Gregg did not like. He halted outside the gate.

Presently Haynor came out, leading the little animals. Their ears were flattened, and they hung back, watching him narrowly; the blue light of fear was in their eyes. Once, when he turned to glance over his shoulder at them, they swerved aside just as a boxer does when he avoids a blow.

He took them to the trough and stood waiting for them to drink. They dipped their soft muzzles into the water, but when he shifted his foot to ease his position, they flung up their heads and stood there trembling, divided between thirst's eagerness and dread of him.

As Gregg looked at him, noting the dead black hair, the face so strangely white for this country where the sun was hard at work twelve hours out of the twenty-four, and the peculiar opaqueness of his eyes, his own eyes became bleak, and he started toward the corral gate with his horse. He had a feeling that if he were to linger near this man, he would be sure to clash with him.

Something—it may have been the sound of the hoofs—brought the mules into a sudden panic. A cloud of dust rose, through which the forms showed dimly. When it subsided, they were some distance from the trough, and the sight of the little creatures—uncertain whether to break into headlong flight or to fight it out—made Gregg's lips go tight.

"I wish you were working for me," he was thinking.

Haynor was edging slowly toward the buckboard. A neck-yoke lay athwart the pole. He bent and picked it up. Then with the same catlike caution, holding the two tie-ropes in one hand and in the other the stout billet of hardwood, he began to approach the animals. One of them stirred uneasily. He waited for some seconds; then he came on again, until he was within reach.

His arm swept back its full length, and the dull heavy sound of the blow brought Savage and the station-keeper to the door of the building across the road.

Gregg let fall his halter-rope, and his lips had parted to release an epithet by which his feelings could find vent. But the words went unheard, for an hysteria of fear was upon the little mules, and they were fighting to save themselves after the only manner that they knew.

The air was full of flying hoofs. The thud of the falling neck-yoke came as an ugly punctuation to the other noises. Suddenly they rushed backward, dragging the man after them. He had dropped the bludgeon now, and was hanging to the ropes with both hands. They swept against the corral fence with a crash and rebounded like a pair of rubber balls. Then one of them lashed out with its heels and caught him fairly in the chest. He went down sprawling in the dust.

With the noise of his weapon, the body leaped in the air, then fell upon the rocks and lay with arms outspread.

When he got to his feet, the mules were a hundred yards away, and Gregg was yielding himself to joyous mirth.

"What are yo' laughin' at?" It was the manner of their speaking rather than the words themselves that made a challenge of them; and in those years to answer such a challenge meant to undertake a deed of arms. But before the cowboy could pick up the gage, his horse, already frightened by the tumult, had shied at some little sound within the pen, and the movement brought it alongside Haynor. He reached forth to shove it away.

"Don't touch my hoss." Gregg's laughter had departed, and his voice was ugly. The other's hand came back slowly to his side, and the two of them were standing looking into each other's eyes when they became aware of Bill Savage close by.

"I told you what I'd do if yo' abused them mules again." There was that presence in the cattle-man which made him loom large. "Now saddle up and hit the trail."

He followed Haynor to the corral gate and watched him catching up his pony.

"Me," the latter said when he had brought the animal

out and was knotting the latigo, "I got fo'ty dollars coming."

"I'll pay yo' at the San Pedro," Savage replied, "unless," he added grimly, "you want to try an' collect it now."

Evidently there was no such desire, for the saddling was completed in silence. While it was still in process, Savage addressed Gregg.

"Headed for Delight?"

It was the first time the latter had heard the name applied to a place, and he repeated it thoughtfully. It had to him a pleasant sound.

"In the San Pedro valley, where the new silver strike was made," the cattleman enlightened him.

"Why, sure." But Gregg's smile faded as quickly as it had come. He was remembering the fat station-keeper and his bill. "That is, when I can shove on. Las' night I got astraddle of a poker game, an' I'm in hock here."

"How much?" Savage allowed his tight lips to relax ever so little until there was at their corners the faint suspicion of a smile; and when he had learned the amount: "I'll settle that—an' pay yo' twenty dollars if yo' throw in with us."

"It's a go!" And as Gregg spoke, he saw a venomous look in the face of his predecessor.

"Keep yo'r eyes on him next time yo' run across him," Bill Savage growled when this other had ridden away.

Within the half-hour the outfit was moving, the two women in the buckboard and the men riding on ahead, their rifles athwart their saddle-bows. Two sets of fresh tracks showed where Haynor and young Brazos had gone before them into the west.

CHAPTER V

RIDING down the grade into the valley of the San Simon that morning, Haynor turned his head for a last look at the stage station and the pair by the corral gate, and during the moment while his eyes were on them his face was not a pleasant sight. When a man has been robbed and sent upon his way, he does not waste good wishes on his despoilers. And that was the way he regarded the matter.

As for the robbery, there were no two ways about it, so far as his viewpoint was concerned. He had been stripped of several hundred dollars, a good span of mules and a saddle-horse. So as he traveled on across the wide flat lands, he was promising himself that, when his turn came, he would make those two pay for the wrong they had done him!

He belonged to a breed which was not uncommon in the wild border country where, once you picked your code of action, you must abide by it, remaining consistent as a man of honor or a man of evil, in order to survive. And so far, there had been no trace of honor in Haynor's methods.

Such projects as the one which he had been cherishing were being successfully carried out all the way from the Pecos to the Colorado by others of his species, which was one of the reasons why men wore their firearms at all times, lest their names be penciled on some of the lonely unpainted little headboards by the camping places and the water-holes. The plan had been growing in his mind ever since that evening when he had talked it over with the man named Kettle Belly on the bank of the Pecos—until its details had become, to him, as if they were already accomplished; and he had come to regard that money-belt which his employer was wearing beneath his shirt, weighted down with twenty-dollar gold pieces, as his own. In his imagination he had spent its contents many times.

And now Savage had upset all his arrangements by discharging him. Even as it was, he was reflecting, he could have ridden on ahead and found a good spot for ambush. He could as a last resort have accomplished the murder by himself and had the spoils alone—if Gregg had not happened along at the crucial moment to take his place. For slaying two men, both of whom knew how to handle their firearms and kept their eyes open, was too large an assignment for one of his cult, to whom the sure thing is the only thing worth trying.

NO victim riding away from the scene of the crime ever cursed those who had plundered him more sincerely than Haynor did these two. And as he traveled onward, the grievance rankled more deeply; the memory of that money-belt gnawed sharper with each mile. At Fort Bowie, where he was to have met his fellow-conspirator, he failed to find the latter, but he met a teamster who had news of him. . . . On the second evening when he rode up to the old Wild Rose mine, whither the teamster's information had led him, he was still bitter.

It never had really been much of a mine, save in the over-sanguine imagination of some long-departed owner who had left a dump of country rock and a little stone house behind him. Now the dump was the nesting-place for many lizards and a few fat rattlesnakes; the shaft was falling in; and the cubicle of boulders was being used as a dwelling place by Kettle Belly.

"How come," this gentleman of fortune asked his guest that night, "yo' trailed me here?"

"A mule-skinner at Fort Bowie done tol' me. Leastways, from what he said about the way yo' looked, I knew it must be you."

As to the looks, there was not much chance for failure to identify their possessor.

"Bowie!" The latter swore feelingly. "I shore got a raw deal there. Been the same with every place I went. I never had no luck since us three busted up at Fort Griffin."

"Ever hear anything more of Pike Landusky?" Haynor asked listlessly.

"He's in the San Pedro Valley, makin' money, hand over fist; got a pull with the sheriff; an' we"—he made a gesture of disgust—"are here."

It was not much of a place at that, and to make it less inviting, there were a dozen swarthy men gathered around the embers of a cooking fire down by the dilapidated corral. Their steep-crowned sombreros and their bell-mouthed breeches with the leather facings proclaimed that they were from old Mexico. Now and again one of them came into the light of the dying coals, and his face stood out for a moment with the glow upon it, a savage picture emerging from the background of shadows. From the doorstep of the little rock house where the two were sitting, the dull glint of rifle-barrels was visible through the growing darkness.

"Who," Haynor asked with an oath thrown in for emphasis, "are they, anyhow?"

"Line dodgers," Kettle Belly told him. "I dunno what they got away with down there, but whatever it was, it didn't pay. Dead broke, an' eatin' me out of house an' home; an' if I even looked crossways at 'em, they'd cut my throat for me. Safer to be selling whisky to Apaches than havin' that bunch around—an' a heap more money in it. If I had a decent outfit, I'd be on my way, an' they'd be welcome to the place, yo' bet."

"From the mule-skinner's talk, I figgered yo' had made a stake already when they run yo' out of Bowie," his guest remarked.

"Easy come, easy go." The other sighed. "An' what little I'd saved up, I had to leave behind me. When two

"That was a fair fight. The other man went for his gun first, and Brazos beat him to the draw."

comp'nies of cav'lry troopers is lookin' fer yo', an' all of 'em wearin' their side-arms, a feller don't hang around to gather up the pieces."

"Must of been bad whisky yo' was sellin' up there."

"No worse than they allus got. It was the ca'tridges they stole to pay fer their drinks that made the trouble. Word had went round that I was peddlin' that ammunition to the Injuns from San Carlos. But what about that cow-man and his money belt?"

Haynor told the tale of his project's failure; and when he was done, the eyes of Kettle Belly were hard.

"Them cattle-drovers packs a heap of cash with 'em," he murmured regretfully.

"Good span of mules to boot, an' the saddle-hoss." The narrator swore sadly. "Oh, what's the use! Two men, an' both of 'em heeled. It would be suicide for us to try it now."

His auditor had cupped his chin in his hands and was gazing off into the darkness.

"No," he said at length, "I reckon yo' are right. It would need more than the two of us fer a sure thing." They sat there for some time in silence. The Mexicans had finished their evening meal and were lounging by the dying fire. Their cigarettes made tiny points of red in the gloom. One of them had got to his feet and was saying something to his companions.

A languid little flame rose from the bed of coals, throwing a wavering light upon his face—a fierce face, almost as dark as a negro's, with a hooked nose and a mat of long black hair about it.

"Looks exactly like one of them Apaches," Haynor muttered. .

"He's their boss," said Kettle Belly. "El Capitan is what they call him." He broke off with a low exclamation and edged closer to his guest. "That aint a bad idee."

"What aint?"

"Apaches. I bet they've played the game before. It's an old one with them bandits south of the line. Been used around here too. An'"—he swore quietly—"it worked."

"Me, I don't get yo'." Haynor's voice, however, showed a growing interest.

"If you're careful to pick a place where there aint too many tracks left, nobody's able to tell," the other went on as if there had been no interruption. "Strip one of them bandits down, an' put a han'kerchief round his head, an' yo'd take him fer ol' Geronimo himself. Where is this cow-man's outfit now?"

"They figgered on stoppin' over at Fort Bowie for a day. They'd be pullin' out of there by tomorrow. Say, this sounds good. Only trouble is—the money would have to go too many ways."

"Listen to me." Kettle Belly took him by the arm. "Other side of Sulphur Springs Valley is the place. At the point of the mountains. The's a water-hole there. It lays in a dry wash under the bank, right beside the road. They'll pull up to give the animals a drink an' fill their canteens. These greasers is layin' on the far bank, an' when the men is busy waterin' the mules, they open up an' get 'em both. Plenty of rocks to hide tracks. An' as fur as the money goes, yo' never seen a greaser with cash that could stay away from monte bank. Me, I can deal as well as ever. After we've rode back here, we'll get them twenty-dollar pieces quick enough."

They talked it over for some time, and Kettle Belly grew warmer as he went into the details.

"The road comes down a steep pitch to the bed of the wash between two high banks; so the' aint a chance fer 'em to look ahead till they're by the water-hole; an' when they're there, they aint got a livin' show."

"All right," the other said. "Call up that greaser boss."

CHAPTER VI

IT was the morning of their fourth day together, and Gregg had just finished hooking up the little mules. His hat was tilted back at a precarious angle, and he was whistling, for all the world looked good to him. So far the wild border-land through which they were traveling had not as much as showed its teeth at them.

"Like being paid for goin' on a picnic," he was thinking when he fastened the last tug. He looked up, to find, Nan Savage standing before him.

"I wish you'd shorten Father's near stirrup, so I can ride side-saddle," she said. "He's promised me I may go on ahead with you the first few miles this morning." Her face was alight with anticipation, and it occurred to him how little it had taken to bring that joy to her, and what a harsh country this was for a girl—sun and wind, monotony and danger. The feeling which had come to him the other morning at Stein's when he had seen her at the breakfast-table returned: the desire to protect her. And with it a greater tenderness born of a deeper longing which was beginning to possess him—so that sometimes, when she was not near, he would find himself seeing her face before him in his fancy.

"Fine!" he replied; and by the time he had done with the saddling, he was as eager as she—more so, perhaps; but he was not showing it as plainly. And as he helped her up into the big stock saddle, he remembered what he had thought when he had first laid eyes on her.

"Yes sir," he told himself again, "I could hold her out in one hand, easy."

When Savage and his wife appeared and took their places in the buckboard, the sky was turning a deep pink above the twin summits of the Dos Cabesas; the floor of the Sulphur Springs Valley was glowing with tints as delicate as the interior of a sea-shell. Off to the west, the steep granite cliffs of the Dragoons were changing color with the growing light. The cattleman pointed to the spot where the range ended like a lofty promontory fronting the sea.

"Ought to make the Point of the Mountains by the middle of the afternoon," said he.

The two saddle-horses seemed to have caught the spirit of their riders; they were tugging at the bits, dancing with impatience. Nan's knee was crooked over the horn, and her left foot was resting in the shortened stirrup. Before they had gone a hundred yards, she was leaning forward with loosened reins. Her animal broke into a run. Gregg spurred alongside, and their eyes met; the joy of youth and of the early morning was in them, and he could hear her laughter through the drumming of the hoofs.

"Do you think it's safe for her to go so far ahead, Bill?" her mother was asking. Savage flicked the mules lightly with the whip.

"Gregg will look out for her."

"You've taken a liking to him."

" 'Pears to have good sense," he replied quietly.

"I wonder why he left Texas," she remarked. He shook his head.

"Can't tell. Just to be shovin' on, the chances are. His kind don't settle down so easy." He waited for some moments before he unlocked his lips again, and then: "Sometimes they never do."

The two saddle-horses were running free; their bodies seemed almost to skim the earth at times. Gregg glanced over his shoulder; the buckboard and its passengers were beginning to shrink in the distance. Back there where they had started, the surface of the plain was bare; here a few clumps of creosote were showing beside the wagon track. And he remembered what Savage had said about Apaches a day or two before.

"Where yo' don't expect 'em, that's where they are."

He called to Nan to slacken up, but she merely looked around and laughed; and when he called again, she shook her head. He waited until they had gone another fifty yards. It was so hard to spoil her pleasure! So he was thinking as he looked into her face, alive with the joy of excitement. And then he thought of what he had seen when he had glanced down at Jerkline, just before they buried him and he called again. This time his voice was more peremptory. She was paying no heed. He reined in closer and his smile had departed. He leaned out from the saddle and seized her bridle, pulling up his mount at the same moment. The horses came down to a jolting gallop, and from that to a rough trot. Her eyes were flashing and he saw the line between her brows.

"Sorry," he said, "but it's Bill's orders."

She turned her head and bit her lip, but when her eyes met his again, her frown had gone.

"I didn't know we'd come so far," she answered quietly.

Back in the buckboard, Savage was pointing at them with the whip.

"Done told yo', he's got sense," he was saying.

"Reckon you'll hire him?" his wife asked. And to this he was even slower than usual with his reply.

"If I was dead sure he's got sand."

"Sand?" There was a certain note in her voice as she repeated the word. It was as if she had flinched.

"Don't fret, Mother. Where yo' are going to live, it will be safe. I'll make it that-a-way, and I'll keep it so. It wasn't of the home ranch I was thinking."

She waited for him to go on, but he remained silent. So finally she asked:

"What were you thinking of then, Bill?"

And when he spoke he was himself uneasy, as a man is who knows his words must bring pain with them.

"Don't amount to anything, but I'm goin' down acrost the line to buy some cattle next month, an' I'd like to have a good man along."

She had lived near the border long enough to know just what he meant: the lonely land down there beyond the boundary where renegades of two nations rode—where her husband would be traveling in a few weeks from now with a pack-mule laden down with the huge Mexican dollar pieces for the purchase of the trail herd.

The two riders were walking their horses, and when the buckboard overtook them, Savage nodded to his daughter. "I'll change with yo', sis."

The sun had begun its long morning climb, and the sky was like polished brass. The mountains seemed to form a circle about the plain, and they seemed always to remain in the center of the ring. A mist of heat-waves hung above the earth and in the distance several freighters' wagons with their long ten-horse teams looked like a string of tiny specks crawling on ahead of them. The cattleman reined closer to Gregg, and pointed at them.

"Makes us safer to have 'em in sight."

"Haven't seen a sign of Apaches these last two days," the other remarked.

NEVERTHELESS they kept their rifles across their laps, and scanned the land ahead of them as they rode on, and when morning had drawn on to noon and gullies began to show across their path they halted frequently to examine them before the buckboard and its passengers came up.

Noontide went by, and they began to climb the long easy grade to the wide pass, beyond whose summit the land fell away to the valley of the San Pedro. The freight wagons had topped the divide and vanished on the other side. Savage pointed at the spot where they had disappeared.

"There, at the Point of the Mountains, is a tank of sweet water. We'll stop and fill the canteens."

It was nearly midafternoon when they reached the place. A few oaks grew beside the road, and they pulled up in the little pool of shade.

"Them mules are too hot to drink," the cattleman announced. "We'll leave 'em breathe a few minutes before we go down to the water." He and Gregg swung from their saddles.

Some fifty yards ahead, the wagon track descended abruptly between high banks to the bed of the wash, where the water-hole lay. Off to their left, halfway between them and the foot of the sheer cliffs where the mountains ended, there was an isolated knoll of boulders. A rock house stood upon its crest, built by the stage company in years gone by and long since abandoned. Gregg found a canteen in the back of the buckboard.

"Goin' to fetch yo' a cold drink," he told Nan and her mother, and departed down the road. The girl pointed at his receding figure.

"I wonder," she said, "if he takes his rifle to bed with him."

"His being careful," Mrs. Savage answered, "is one of the things I like about him." But Nan tossed her head.

As for the rifle, Gregg was not aware that he was carrying it. It had become with him a habit, like his hat. Moreover the bed of the gully was hidden from his eyes, and in this land no hidden place was safe. Beyond the wash the road showed like a gray ribbon twining through the mesquite flats; and a remote cloud of dust betrayed the whereabouts of the wagons. Somehow the spot seemed very lonely to him: black shadows and white-hot sunshine and the frowning cliffs. And silence. There was something in that stillness that made him uneasy.

He passed into the close alleyway where the road went down into the gully. He came to the foot of the pitch and stepped out from between the earthen banks. The water-hole was in plain sight a few yards to his right. But he was not looking at it.

The bed of the wash lay before him. The rocks cast sharp black shadows on the sand. Beyond them the farther bank rose to the skyline. Some sotol weeds and clumps of bear-grass grew on its crest. One of these bunches of coarse grass was stirring. His eyes were fixed upon it.

For none of the others moved.

He had halted in the middle of a step. So he remained for the passing of an instant. But in that time he caught sight of something else.

At first it seemed like a bit of dingy cloth that some teamster might have dropped; a shred of rag that fluttered idly in the breeze. But the air was still. There was no wind. And now he distinguished a thatch of black hair and a brown back shining dully in the sunlight.

He was thinking fast. How many eyes were watching him, he did not know; but he was sure that, for every pair there would be a rifle whose owner would be itching to throw the weapon to his shoulder. As for himself, one step back would bring him into the shelter of the close banks which rose beside the roadway. Easy enough; but how about the women? And in that flash of time while he was standing there he had Nan's face before him again.

To give the alarm to the others; and to hold the road for them while they fled to safety. That was the idea.

There was only one way to accomplish both of those things with any sureness. Without waiting to bring his rifle to his shoulder he fired from the hip and, as he fired, he leaped to cover. Before the cliffs which overlooked the place had flung back the first echo, a dozen flat reports were answering the shot from the opposite bank.

CHAPTER VII

SAVAGE had led the two saddle-horses to the bit of shade where the buckboard was standing and he was busy loosening the cinches to ease their backs after the long hot ride up the grade.

"No colder water this side of the Agua Fria springs," he was saying when Gregg's shot brought the tidings of their danger to him. He dropped the latigo and pulled his rifle from its sheath beneath the stirrup leather.

"Take the reins, Nan. An' hold the team till I tell yo' what to do."

His voice was as level as if he were bidding her to do some ordinary errand about the house. There seemed to be no hurry in his movements. While he was speaking, his horse went down with a crash. He tied Gregg's animal to the rear of the buckboard, and all the while the noise of the rifles was growing louder; occasionally a bullet flicked the dirt near by. The mules were rearing and kicking in panic, threatened to overturn the vehicle. He went to their heads and straightened them out.

"Now, sis," he called, "the rock house on the hill! Get up there."

He leaped aside, and he had a fleeting glimpse of the two white faces as the team dashed past him. Then he turned to the business of the fight.

It had not taken long—at the outside, less than a minute from the time when the first shot had sounded down there in the wash.

During the interval Gregg had found cover behind a granite boulder at the edge of the bank, and had settled down to the work of holding the road. Two hundred feet from where he was lying the opposite bank rose to the skyline; the ground was higher there and he had the uncomfortable knowledge that they were looking down upon this spot.

As for him he could see nothing now excepting a few little puffs of white smoke that dissolved in the hot air almost as soon as they appeared. Occasionally he was conscious of the abrupt whine of a leaden slug close by and when he was thrusting his head out from his shelter a handful of gravel spurted into his face. He had fired four shots at the places from which the little jets of smoke rose and he had a feeling that he might as well have been shooting at the empty sky for all the good it did.

He pumped a fresh cartridge into the chamber. The movement brought his arm beyond the edge of the boulder and a bullet spatted beside his elbow; another buzzed angrily, richocheting from the rock in front of him.

And he was thinking: "Time for Savage to be getting into this."

In all his life he had never felt as lonely as he did now, and he had never longed for anything as keenly as he was yearning for the sound of the cattleman's rifle behind him. Then the loneliness vanished and the longing, and a fierce joy possessed him.

FOR they were moving over there among the clumps of bear-grass and the yuccas. He had caught sight of a thatch of black hair outlined against the clear hot sky and now a bronze body showed briefly, squirming like a snake. Before it disappeared his sights were lined upon it and he squeezed down the trigger. And as the smoke drifted away from the rifle's muzzle,

"Got one," he told himself.

The din of their firing swelling abruptly and the noise of the flying lead was like the droning of many bees above his head. He heard a flat dry report behind him. Savage had begun to take a hand.

The tufts of grass were stirring in half a dozen places. Always the movement was in the same direction; going to his left. Twice he got sight of the bare bodies, glistening dully in the sunlight; and one of them rolled over after he had fired and lay still.

Only one shot from Savage. Something had gone wrong back there. But there was no time to look around.

A man was moving down in the bed of the wash, a hundred yards or so off to his left. He had a glimpse of a headcloth that showed bright red in the sunshine but before he had drawn down his sights it was gone, leaving a sense of illusion where it had been. Now he understood what they were doing over there.

"If they cross to this side," he told himself, "they've got me, sure." Another turban was bobbing up and down among the boulders and he took a snap shot. It disappeared and a sudden silence had descended over the place.

The report of a rifle sent a score of echoes from the cliffs, and Gregg saw a handful of dry earth fly up beside his head. The shot had come from this side of the wash. Another followed. There were several of those marksmen over here now and his boulder was no longer hiding him. As he twisted his body about to face the new danger the bullets were kicking up the dust all around him.

"If Savage would only do something!" He had not felt fear before; there had been no time for it. In this moment when he realized that he was alone against large odds, dread came to him—dread for the women—the dread that makes a man desperate. He lay, flattened upon the earth, watching the broken land along the edge of the bank, wondering how many of them were creeping up.

A head emerged between two boulders. It was so near that he could see the black eyes glisten and the face—a fierce dark face with a hooked nose and a mat of frowsy hair about it. Already it was slinking out of sight again, but he had it outlined against the sky and he was pulling the trigger. And with the noise of his weapon, the body leaped into the air. It fell upon the rocks and lay there with arms outspread.

Almost at once the clamor of the rifles ceased, and Gregg heard Savage calling him. He did not wait upon the summons but ran to the pool of the shade beneath the pin oaks. The cattleman had already started for the hill. His right arm was hanging limp at his side.

"They've quit. I reckon yo' got their head man, that last shot." His face was set and the sleeve was dark with blood. "We better make the hill before they start another rush and cut us off."

Twice while they were climbing the slope the sound of shooting brought them to a halt and they dropped on their bellies while Gregg returned the fire.

"They winged me first thing before I'd fairly begun," Savage told him when they were going on again. "I can't hold my rifle."

High in the cloudless sky three specks appeared, growing larger, taking form. The buzzards were on hand, awaiting their turn. Gregg saw Nan crouching in the doorway of the rock house above them. She did not speak when they came up and her mother uttered only two words: "Thank God!"

Then they set to work at Savage's wound.

"Busted the bone." He pressed his lips tight and the sweat was standing out in big drops on his forehead as he spoke. Once he sucked in his breath sharply, stifling a moan. There was some water left in one of the canteens; they used it all to wash the bullet-hole. And after that they set the broken bone as best they could.

Once while they were working, the cattleman spoke to Gregg: "Anyone showed?"

"Got sight of two down in the wash a while ago," the cowboy told him. "That's all."

"Funny," the other muttered. "Apaches always try one rush anyhow." His eyes narrowed and he was silent for some time—a significant silence.

The wide landscape beneath them remained empty and the shadows lengthened; dusk came. There was no further sign of life along the slope.

"May's well make ourselves comfortable," Savage remarked finally. "We're here for all night."

Gregg fed the animals their grain and tied them to the wheels of the buckboard; and as he was returning to the rock house, he heard Nan speaking to her mother in an undertone.

"I'm not thirsty, but Dad—" Her voice broke; but when she saw him standing in the doorway she smiled up bravely at him.

AN hour or two later when it was black dark he came inside and touched her on the shoulder.

"Take my rifle an' keep watch for me," he whispered, "I'm going for water."

She started to remonstrate but he picked up the two canteens without answering her and slipped away into the darkness.

It seemed to her as if she had been here outside the door, waiting for many hours before she heard the clink of pebbles down the hill and his voice came softly:

"All right. It's me." Then she caught the pleasant wash of water in the canteens and she sobbed with relief.

"No one down there," he announced cheerfully. "Reckon they done pulled out."

Sometime near midnight when the sound of her father's deep breathing told her that he had dropped off to sleep at last, Nan stole out of the little house. A black blot in the shadows by the doorway caught her eyes. It was Gregg, sitting with his back against the wall and his rifle was across his knees. She dropped beside him. For a long while the two of them were silent, listening to the small sounds of the night.

"Yo' should go in and get some rest," he whispered at length.

"And you?" she asked.

"I have rode night herd too many times for this to bother me," he answered.

But she did not move yet, nor for another half-hour. At last, when he had bidden her a second time, she rose.

"The's eighteen buckshot in each of these bar'ls; and yo're goin' to get one of them loads if you don't shove on."

She stood there hesitating for a moment; then she bent her head until her lips were near his ear.

"I'm sorry I was so unreasonable this morning," she told him swiftly, and slipped away, half glad, half angry at herself for having said it.

As for the men who had sought their lives down there at the water-hole, they had indeed, as Gregg announced, departed. And that long since. And two of them had left some time before the others were done fighting. While Gregg and Nan were sitting before the rock house, these two were riding westward well on their way to Delight.

"No luck, as usual." Kettle Belly was speaking.

"If it had not been for that Texas feller," Haynor answered, "we would have made it. When he showed his nose, it was all off." He cursed Gregg at some length.

After they had ridden another mile, his companion laughed.

"I was just thinkin' of them greasers," he explained. "They are the ones that's got a kick coming. Me, I shore would hate to be with them now." And after some moments: "Well, anyhow, we'll find Pike Landusky an' he can take care of us."

But Haynor's was a more single-purposed mind.

"This makes twice that feller has done me out of a good thing," he growled. "Well, all I hope is that I meet up with him again some day."

CHAPTER VIII

IT happened that two troops of cavalry were coming by the next morning on their way to the new post at Fort Huachuca after three weeks chasing Indians. With them were a surgeon and several Tonto Basin Apaches who were serving as scouts. So Savage's wound got proper dressing and the fracture was reduced; and while the doctor was busy with the patient the native trackers put in an hour in the wash on their hands and knees. When they reported many imprints of rawhide sandals together with two pairs of high-heeled boots and the removal of three dead by the survivors on shod horses, the captain in command showed some surprise; but Savage merely remarked: "Just as I thought."

The surgeon looked around from packing his instruments and bandage rolls.

"If I were you," he said, "I'd lie over here today. By tomorrow you won't run so many chances of a setback, traveling."

So they watched the troop clatter away over the mesquite lowlands, and they waited until the next morning before they set forth. And on that last day of their journey into the valley of the San Pedro there was but little speech among them; for three of them were doing a good deal of thinking.

Nan found herself at times living over those moments beside the arroyo, when the noise of the rifles was in her ears and she was leaning back in the buckboard seat pulling on the taut reins, wondering what terrible thing the next minute was going to bring them. But curiously her mind kept going to another moment that had come earlier in the day: when Gregg had leaned out from the saddle and gripped the bridle of her horse. And there came back to her the feeling of rebellion and of helplessness that had seized her then, a feeling which brought with it a sudden thrill—that she was being mastered and that she could not help but like it. And because she liked it, she rebelled. It was a strange thing, this mingling of resentment and acceptance, something she had never known before.

And Gregg, who had for the first time looked across his sights to see men go down to death before his rifle, was thinking little of this large experience. He was living over again the hours while he had watched with her near

by; while he heard the soft sound of her breathing in the silence of the night and he was seeing her as she bent down to him, hearing her whisper those last words.

As for Bill Savage, his thoughts were of sandal tracks and the marks of high-heeled boots among the rocks; of the ranch house and the lonely range down by the boundary; of the wild raiders, red men and white, who came and went in foray and in flight; and of the tall young rider there ahead of him.

"I need a man like that," he told himself. And he thought of next month when his arm would be mended and he would be riding southward across the line with some thousands of dollars in the rawhide *aparejos* of his pack-mules to tempt every renegade along the border.

"Keeps cool when the lead is flyin'; I'd do well to take him along then."

So when they reached Delight late in the afternoon, he nodded to Gregg.

"After yo've put up the stock, I want to see yo'." And then he took Nan and her mother into the hotel.

THERE was not much of Delight, and only recently there had been less. On that hot summer afternoon the budding town stood forth, unmistakably divided into two dissonant portions. Here at the end where Savage and his party had arrived respectability and progress showed themselves, an aggressive minority, back to back and looking very lonely: the latter in the guise of a bleak gallows frame and a stark dump of brown-stained rock; the former being a two-story hotel of adobe bricks whose architect had done his level best to make it look as much as possible like one of those false-fronted wooden desecrations so common in the Rocky Mountain West. Nearly half a mile away, separated from these new arrivals by an interval of mesquite and tin-can heaps, the original Delight remained aloof on the low mesa overlooking the river bottom. Its buildings were constructed after the flat-roofed fashion of the Mexicans, and the inhabitants—many of them for good sound reasons of their own—were not looking with great favor on either respectability or progress.

Of these inhabitants and their relaxations Bill Savage was well aware, and he was thoroughly familiar with the traits of the breed to which his youthful bodyguard belonged. Not the least potent of these was a whole-hearted tendency toward utter irresponsibility at the moment the necessity for attending to business had ceased. Moreover the mud-colored cubes which constituted the unregenerate portion of Delight were in plain sight of the hotel corral.

"Better hire him before he stampedes down the road to Oldtown," was the way the cattleman put it to himself. So, when he had bestowed his wife and daughter and the luggage in the coolest rooms the house afforded, he came downstairs with that end in view. But entering the little office he found the landlord who was, as the old saying so neatly puts it, "laying for him."

Landusky was the landlord's name, and because of his home county in Missouri, some one had dubbed him Pike. The appellation had stuck. He was a rawboned man with small greenish-hazel eyes and a stubble of sandy hair, and his head came to a point where it should have rounded. This afternoon he was wearing a new nickel-plated star pinned to his wide suspender. The cattleman's eyes grew narrow as they rested on the adornment.

"How come," the wearer asked, "yo' got hurt?" And when he had heard the brief recital, he shook his head.

"Apaches," said he. "Who'd of thought it! They'll be raidin' the town next thing we know!" Which was perhaps overdoing it a little for one living in a country where men sometimes carried their rifles to their meals. But if his guest noted this, he made no sign of it.

"Been makin' some changes since yo' was here last," the proprietor remarked after they had settled themselves before Delight's first mahogany counter. "Done organized the new county, an' they're buildin' a co'thouse over in Chiricahua. Gov'nor's app'inted a sheriff."

Savage swallowed his beer in silence.

"Me, I been made dep'ty here," the landlord went on. "I'm aimin' to clean up the town."

"Think yo' can get away with it?" the guest muttered.

"Sheriff says he'll back me up." Pike's manner became more confidential. "Idee is, when a man gets short in Chiricahua, he heads fer Delight. Which is bad for the sheriff. An' them renegades down there,"—he waved his hand in the general direction of the mesa—"keeps folks awake at night, turnin' loose with their six-shooters, which is bad fer my business."

In the meantime Nan and her mother came downstairs to the ladies' parlor, with its poisonous green carpet and bright red upholstery.

Mrs. Savage was saying:

"It's not because I don't like him, dear. Your father never had a better man, and I'm hoping he hires him. But that young fellow has a way of looking at you; he doesn't seem to be able to keep his eyes off you at times. So remember, and be careful."

"Why, Mother!" but as the girl remonstrated she was realizing that Gregg was not the only one who had been looking thus and, with the realization, the feeling of rebellion returned. Moreover she was hot, vexed with weariness and conflicting tides of emotion.

LUCK so arranged it that soon afterward Gregg came seeking the cattleman. He had taken time to wash the dust from his face and his cheeks were glowing: his eyes were alight with eagerness when he entered the little room and came face to face with the two women. It was at Nan that he was looking.

"You wanted something?" she asked him.

"Looking for Bill," he said, and was about to go when she replied:

"Mr. Savage isn't here."

And now he could not miss the manner of her speaking. The emphasis she had put upon those first two words made him stiffen. He threw back his head and his lips were tight; his eyes had lost their friendliness. It was as if she had lifted her hand and struck him in the face.

"Tell *Mr. Savage,* when he comes, that I have gone on downtown."

With that he left; bewilderment and anger were possessing him, and he was hurt. In all his life none other had hurt him thus. When he reached the street he saw the flat roofs of the adobes on the mesa a half a mile away. Any place but the hotel now—and he was in that frame of mind which demands action.

"Well, he knows where he can find me," he told himself and started down the dusty roadway between the tin can heaps in the mesquite thickets.

If it had been any consolation to him to have known it—which it would not have been—Nan was doing some suffering on her own account just then. The moment she had begun to speak those words, she was wishing she had kept silent; and when she saw his face—his first involuntary flinching as if she had struck him, and the hurt, bewildered look in his eyes—she hated herself.

It seemed to her as if she had never been in a place so stuffy as this room with its green carpet and red-upholstered furniture, as if she had never hated a town as fully as she hated Delight. And her mother was saying:

"You shouldn't have spoken to him that way, dear."

Without replying, Nan walked to the door. She could

"Take yo'r hand off that gun. . . . That warrant yo' have got for me—drop it in front of yo'."

see down the little hallway through the office to the road. Gregg was out there now. . . . If only she could go after him.

It came to her what her tumult of feeling meant and her head went back. Who was he, that she should let her heart miss a single beat for him? But even as she was asking herself the question she thought of him slipping through the darkness with the filled canteens; and then, sitting there beside the doorway of the little rock house with the rifle across his lap.

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT halfway between the progressive portion of Delight and the old town, there was an oblong building of adobe bricks which had originally been a blacksmith shop. But in those bygone days the Apaches had raided the settlement with the idea of wiping it and its inhabitants off the map; and the smith had barely managed to save his skin by a quarter of a mile dash in time that would have done credit to any college conference in this latter age. Thereafter he had moved his business to a structure which was more convenient so far as neighbors were concerned and the old shop had remained abandoned until this afternoon. Passing its wide open door Gregg glanced within and halted at once.

"Halloa!" he called.

Two men were seated on opposite sides of the room facing each other and one of them was Brazos. Now, as Gregg's eyes became accustomed to the dimmer light in there, they widened with surprise. For the young namesake of a Texas river was bound hand and foot and body with a rawhide reata, until he suggested a package wrapped and tied for rough handling. And the one who sat across the floor from him with a double-barreled shotgun over his lap, was Haynor. It was the latter who replied.

"The's eighteen buckshot in each of these bar'ls; and yo're goin' to get one of them loads if yo' don't shove on."

"He's bad," Brazos said. "Been deputized this afternoon. It makes some men thet-a-way."

"Stick to a neck-yoke, Haynor. Yo're handier with that." Gregg's voice had grown soft and his eyes had grown hard. He nodded negligently toward the prisoner. "Nothing I can do for yo'?"

The latter's lips relaxed into a sardonic smile.

"Send me some flowers," he suggested lightly.

"Yo' don't aim to stay here long, I hope?" There was levity in Gregg's manner which brought an uneasy movement from the jailer. Brazos' smile grew wider.

"Stick around the camp if yo're anxious to win that money back I got off of you the other day," he replied. "The boys will look after me. Yo'll find 'em down the road, unless this here hired assassin keeps his promise about them buckshot."

"Not while I'm watching him." Gregg waved his hand, it was his left. "So long."

Taking his departure, he managed to keep the shotgun well within his range of vision, until the corner of the building came between him and the weapon's bearer. Then he hastened his steps. For it seemed as if developments were in prospect down there on the mesa which should be of a diverting nature, and in his present frame of mind he was ripe for anything in the way of action, without regard to whither it might lead him, or what its consequences might be.

Of the original and unregenerate Delight there were a half dozen flat-roofed adobe buildings where the old Tucson road climbed from the river bottom across the mesa's break. And two of them might be said to function as a civic center; the one by day, the other after nightfall. The latter bore a sign which had said:

ELDORADO
Jack Ryan, Proprietor

But the raiding Apaches and the frolicsome young riders who had come into the valley later on had erased more than half of the letters with leaden slugs. Now in the waning of the afternoon the establishment was deserted,

and its proprietor was with the major portion of the populace in Old Man Rinehart's store across the way, where the more sober deliberations of the community were always carried on during the hours of daylight.

Hither Gregg came from the home-made jail and among the faces he discovered one whose combination of sunburn and dust had a familiar look.

"Well, I see yo' are out of hock." The dusty features wrinkled into a smile and Gregg recognized their owner.

"So," he said, "that ol' bullfrog at Stein's told yo' his troubles the other mo'nin'?"

"He was lamentin', loud and plentiful. Me an' the other skinner had a bet up, whether yo'd pull out or stay an' wash dishes fer a week. Now I have got ten dollars comin' from him."

"I ran acrost a party from that stud game, up the road," the cowboy remarked quietly.

"An' if yo're hankerin' to lose some more to him, he'll be on hand by night," the freighter assured him. "These fellers mean business."

There was one characteristic as universal among the members of the gathering as the six-shooters which they wore beside their thighs: it was their hardness. Even in this savage land along the border where the stages carried shotgun guards and the most peaceful citizen went about his business weighted down with lethal weapons, they stood out as if they had been selected for that quality. Most of them were young, and of these the majority wore jean breeches, tucked into their high-heeled boots, and wide rimmed hats, none of which seemed capable of remaining level on its owner's head. Four or five others, whose sunburned faces were more deeply lined and their shoulders drooping with the weight of the years, where keeping to themselves in the rear of the store by the whisky barrel. And there was a woman.

SHE was sitting on the counter, leaning back supporting her body by one rigid arm—silent, watching the rest. Their hardness was reflected in her gray eyes; it was in her face, a trace of it, as if something had rubbed away a little of the bloom. But youth was there, and the glow of vital energy, and her hair was a copper-colored mass. She had the same sort of beauty as a tiger lily. Gregg was noticing how her tenseness seemed to set her apart still further from the others, when one of the group by the whisky barrel turned to face the crowd.

"Ol' Man Rinehart," the teamster said, "been here since Cochise was on the warpath. He's justice of the peace." A spare man and tall, he stroked his iron-gray mustache as he looked them over.

"How come," he asked, "this Brazos let a man like Pike Landusky arrest him?"

"Easy enough." The speaker was a burly young fellow whose dust-stained hat hung on the back of his head revealing a startling shock of flaxen hair. "Brazos set in a poker game las' night till nigh sunup. An' Pike found him fast asleep."

Old Man Rinehart nodded.

"Cain't hol' that ag'in' him. An' this killin' in Chiricahua?"

"That was a fair fight. I saw it myself. The other man went for his gun first and Brazos beat him to the draw." It was the girl.

"How does she get into this game?" Gregg whispered.

"Las' spring," the teamster told him, "She was dealin' faro over in Chiricahua at the Crystal Palace. When Brazos left the camp, she come with him. Her name," he added, "is Lou."

Old Man Rinehart was conferring with the group back there by the whisky-barrel. Some of the younger element were beginning to murmur impatiently in the front of the store. He turned again and held up a sunburned hand.

"Brazos," he said, "has minded his own business in Delight. An' if he didn't, we'd tend to him. His bein' short in Chiricahua has got nothing to do with us. This camp has always run itself." He paused and let his eyes go around the room. "Me, I have dealt the law here goin' on five years. And the p'int is, do I keep on or do we leave that bunch of pilgrims an' Dodge City faro-dealers over in Chiricahua take the play away from us?"

He ceased speaking and a voice came from the circle by the whisky barrel.

" 'Pears like a showdown."

"Me, I'm for goin' up the road an' getting Brazos now. No use in waitin'," the burly young rowdy with the shock of flaxen hair announced, and there was a general mutter of approval from the younger portion of the crowd.

"Rustlers, most of 'em," the teamster was telling Gregg in an undertone. "Runnin' greaser cattle off acrost the line. Aint one of 'em that aint smelt powder smoke."

The muttering was growing louder among them when Rinehart raised his hand again for silence.

"No use to go stampedin' up the road an' start a war," he bade them. "There's other things than Brazos to be settled now. This here Landusky gives it out today that he is runnin' the camp. An' that the sheriff backs his play."

"And," a voice cried, "he's made the rule, no man can turn loose a six-shooter in the town."

"Jest so," the justice of the peace replied, "an' if we don't do this thing right, we're liable to have a posse down on top of us an' lose out when the smoke has cleared away."

"No man can turn loose a six-shooter in the town!"

Gregg, hearing those words, was confronted with an inspiration. There was no working out of details. The plan had revealed itself in its entirety. And when Rinehart had hearkened to what Gregg had to say—it was, as many large ideas are, simple and brief—he nodded without hesitation.

"That does the trick." He raised his voice above the others in the room. "Now, boys, we've found a way to handle this thing right."

CHAPTER X

THE night had settled down upon the mesa and the untamed portion of Delight was visible from afar as a constellation of orange dots that twinkled at the throbbing stars above them. The Sheriff of Chiricahua sat on the front porch of Pike Landusky's hotel.

He sat with the back of his chair in front of him, striding the piece of furniture as if it were a horse; and his body was erect; he looked very tall in the pathway of light which flowed through the open doorway, bathing his lean face with the drooping mustache whose ends hung below his chin. He had timed his journey from the county seat so that he reached Delight long after dark, and he had brought with him a deputy. The deputy was sitting on the porch edge; their weapons were leaning against the building wall conveniently near by, the while their owners hearkened to Pike Landusky's tale of the morning arrest.

"And then," the landlord wound up, "I sent word acrost the hill to yo'. For if I'd started with him fer the county seat, there'd of been twenty of them renegades down there on hand to take him away from me."

He waved his hand toward the mesa and the Sheriff gazed through the darkness at the twinkling lights.

" 'Pears to me they're keepin' mighty quiet tonight," he commented.

"First time since I been here it's been this late without somebody turnin' his six-shooter loose," Pike replied. "It had got so bad that the comp'ny ditch-tender dassn't pack a lantern any more, fer fear one of them rustlers would take a shot at it. But today I done tol' 'em where to head in at. 'No fireworks in Delight,' says I, 'an' the sheriff's backin' me up.' "

The Sheriff looked thoughtfully at the distant lights; his eyes returned to his host. He sighed heavily. He was wishing that this other had been contented with one thing at a time. He turned to the man who had come with him.

"Reckon we better take this feller Brazos an' pull out while the goin's good."

"Got him locked up an' bedded down an' a man ridin' herd on him that would kill his own brother if he looked crossways at him," Pike assured him.

"I'll go hook up the team," the deputy said. He departed for the corral.

ON the second floor of the hotel Bill Savage was talking to his wife and daughter. He too had been regarding those lights uneasily, and now he said:

"If anything should start, mind yo' keep away from the windows." He turned away and departed, and his thoughts went to Gregg.

"Funny he didn't wait to get his wages anyhow before stampedin' down the road." And he wondered what might have happened. Somehow, it seemed to him, Nan was acting strangely too tonight. There was a constraint about her which he could not understand. He had come near the head of the stairs—for it was his intention to go down to Oldtown seeking the truant—when the silence down there on the mesa was shattered by a shot. He stood waiting. Another report followed and then a fusillade.

"If it is a fight," the cattleman was thinking, "it shore is a big one."

The rattle of the firearms died away as suddenly as it had begun. He could hear the voices of the officers beneath the window, then swift footsteps receding down the road.

"When we come nigh the blacksmith shop, sing out," the Sheriff was telling Pike Landusky. "I don't aim to have that man of yo'rs make a sieve of my hide."

While he was speaking, the Chiricahua deputy came up on the run.

"It would be in Jack Ryan's Eldorado," Pike Landusky informed them.

"All right," the Sheriff bade them. "You two take the back door. I'll take the front. Don't shoot till I give the word—unless you hear me turn loose."

They passed the blacksmith shop without suffering any casualties and saw Haynor standing in the shadows by the door with his shotgun over his arm. As they were drawing near the flat-topped adobe buildings, they separated. Once the Sheriff thought he heard a sound up the road whence they had come—as if some one were moving there. Ahead of him it was silent as if the town had been deserted.

He reached the Eldorado and skirted the building's wall and when he stood upon the threshold his shotgun was at his shoulder.

"Hands up!" he said.

A serene voice made answer.

"Evenin', Sheriff. Come in." It was the bartender, and his hands were above his head in compliance with the order. Thin wreaths of grayish smoke were still eddying lazily in the lamplight of the long room. The smell of powder fumes was heavy over everything. But of the men who had burned that ammunition there was no sign.

"What the—" the Sheriff's voice trailed off. His eyes were growing narrow.

"The boys," the bartender said, "done pulled out. Wasn't any trouble. Step up an' have something."

"You can put down your hands," the Sheriff bade him stiffly. And then his face tightened; he was beginning to realize what might have taken place. At first a faint suspicion, it grew swiftly to conviction. He remembered the sound that he had heard up the road.

"You two back there," he called, "come on with me—and quick!"

He did not wait for them but started at once. It had been, however, a long half mile down here from the hotel for the ground was rough and he was not accustomed to doing his racing on foot; and the farther he went now the more certain he became that he was going to reach the old blacksmith shop too late.

And in the meantime Gregg's plan was bringing swift events to pass.

With the firing of that final volley in Jack Ryan's saloon, the wielders of the six-shooters had departed, the while they slipped new cartridges into the chambers of their weapons. The mesquite swallowed them and they passed through the shadows of the thickets beside the road in silence. When they were opposite the blacksmith shop they split into two parties.

One of these detachments was below the building and the other above it. So they remained, hiding in the thickets while the Sheriff and his deputies passed them on their way to the Eldorado. When the sound of the receding footsteps had died away, they set to work to carry out the last details.

Thus it came about that Haynor found himself standing before the padlocked door looking down the road toward the mesa, with his sawed-off shotgun in his two hands like a hunter who waits for the birds to rise. And as he stood there watching he heard the sound of footsteps ahead of him. He leaned forward straining his eyes to catch sight of some form through the darkness.

"More than one of 'em," he told himself.

A voice came to his ears and he brought the butt of the weapon to his shoulder. If he could but get sight of some one moving! Then a new sound turned him rigid.

"If yo' move," it said, "yo' get both barrels."

It came from behind him and it was very near.

HE stood there stiff. His fingers were growing slippery with perspiration. And now he heard the man taking several steps toward him. The voice was in his ears again. No doubt of the speaker now—it was Gregg.

"Lay down that shotgun there in front of yo'."

He did so and more footsteps came toward him through the darkness. There must have been a score and they were approaching from two directions; and when they had surrounded him, he looked into Gregg's face.

It was not so much the smile that he saw there—though that was bad enough—that brought chagrin to him; it was the failure to find the shotgun whose presence the cowboy had implied. There was something in the idea of being held up under false pretences by one who carried only a six-shooter in his hand, that enraged him. His anger grew while they were taking the key from his pocket and it increased still more while they were binding him hand and foot with the reata which had enwrapped the prisoner.

So they left him lying in the blacksmith shop and dispersed; and by the time the Sheriff and his deputies found

him, two of the lawless ones had mounted a pair of waiting horses and were riding away up the road. Passing the hotel these two yielded to an impulse as old as the first trail herd, and fired a parting volley from their six shooters at the winking stars. Bill Savage looked from an upper window as they galloped through the pool of light before the door, and he swore; for one was Gregg and the other was Brazos.

"Which means," the cattleman told himself, "that I lose a good hand, and I am lucky if he aint raidin' my herds before the summer's over!"

One of the next day's developments took place in Old Man Rinehart's store. Some time near noon when there were none on hand to interrupt the task, the proprietor sat down to write a letter.

This letter he addressed to the commissioners of the County of Chiricahua, and signed it in his capacity of justice of the peace. It was a brief epistle and to the point.

"After this date," it said, "the justice court of Delight will run itself and back up its play and any officers that come here from the county seat, will take their own chances."

While it was being drawn up, Bill Savage was on his way to the home ranch down by the boundary with his wife and daughter.

"That Landusky feller," he was thinking, "is bad enough; but when they pin a star on Haynor, it's time for honest men to keep their eyes open." And with that his mind went to Gregg.

"If he hangs out with that rustler bunch two months, he'll be outlawed along with Brazos." As he was musing his eyes fell on Nan. "I wonder what's got into her this mo'nin'," he said to himself.

The buckboard rattled on: the mountain ranges down across the line changed color with the slow movement of the sun, growing ever more mysterious and in their mystery more forbidding. And Mrs. Savage was gazing at them, picturing to herself the days ahead of her next month, when her husband would be riding off there in the south with a fortune of silver in the *aparejos* of his pack-mule. She sighed; wishing that certain things of yesterday had not taken place.

"I'd feel safer if Gregg was to ride with him," she told herself.

And back in Delight, Pike Landusky was talking with Haynor and Kettle Belly Johnson before the mahogany bar of his hotel.

"The trouble with yo' fellers is, yo're not able to see ahead," he was saying. "No use in growlin' over what has happened. Make the best of it, an' things will come yo'r way. Me, that's my rule. Take what happened las' night fer instance; an' what's come along of it."

"Well, what about it?" Haynor demanded. "Fur as I can see, it ended up with me hog-tied and yo' an' the Sheriff made fools of."

Kettle Belly grinned.

"That's what yo' think," Pike said, "but while yo' been thinkin', me, I've been busy. An' before the Sheriff rode back to Chiricahua, he done promised me he'd get the county c'missioners to name yo' as constable. Which yo' can figger out fer yo'self what it will mean."

Haynor's face changed, and the other went on.

"Las' month I made a bid fer the Gov'ment beef contract for the post at San Carlos. An' this mo'nin's stage brought me a letter sayin' I'd got it. I don't reckon yo' two fellers seen anything in that?"

Evidently they did, to judge from their expressions, but the fullness of its possibilities was yet to dawn upon them.

"Cows," the landlord went on, "is cheap, if yo' buy 'em off the right parties. But I have something better cooked up than doin' business with these here rustlers." He looked about to see that the bartender was out of hearing and then lowered his voice. "This feller Bill Savage let it drop before he left that he aims to go acrost the line in a few weeks from now to buy a trail herd. An' if somebody was to ride down there an' take that herd—an' if they happened to kill him doin' it fer that matter—an' even if it got out that it was white men done it, the blame would be laid on these here renegades down in Oldtown. As long as me an' yo' is officers I reckon that would be the case."

"Thousands of cattle," Haynor said under his breath.

"Man," Pike told him, "yo' aint thinkin' fur enough ahead. Use yo'r brains like I do. Savage goes after them cows with a heap of money—a mule-load of 'dobe dollars. An' when the herd is gathered fer him, he pays it over. But supposin' before he pays it, he gets killed and the bunch that does the killin' gets the 'dobe dollars, what's to keep the same bunch from gettin' the cows too? Reckon that's better'n playin' Apaches fer a few hundred in cash an' a team of mules. An' remember, it's us that wears the stars now."

This, one of them was remembering. He had been turning it over in his mind ever since he had learned that he too was to have a nickel-plated badge of office pinned on his vest. Pike's voice broke in on his thoughts.

"I done forgot—Sheriff aims to swear out a warrant ag'in' this Texas feller fer helpin' in las' night's jail-break."

"Give it to me to serve," Haynor demanded.

CHAPTER X

NEARLY a month had gone, and the serenity of Delight remained unmarred. It was one of those sultry evenings which sometimes come along the border in midsummer with banks of clouds piled up along the horizon and heat lightning flashing intermittently.

During the afternoon a tenuous pillar of brown dust had showed far to the southward advancing down the valley of the San Pedro to reveal at length the forms of pack-mules and horsemen; and when the latter had emerged from the approaching haze, to clatter up the mesa on the flanks of the laden train with their rifles across their laps and their huge steep-crowned sombreros slouched low over their swarthy faces, the unregenerate portion of the town had awakened to a brief activity. Now the spasm of business had subsided. The pack-mules were munching their feed in Old Man Rinehart's corral, and the huge "dobe" dollars with which two rawhide *aparejos* had been bulging were in the possession of the bearded justice of the peace along with several kegs of mescal and other contraband goods, the while the leather-colored smugglers lounged about the place resting for the morrow when they would run the goods which they had purchased past the lonely customs stations on the line.

As a consequence of which incident the faro bank at Jack Ryan's Eldorado was getting a good play, for Rinehart's thick Mexican dollars on the layout lured other customers. Among these latter were Brazos and Gregg.

Of these weeks while they had been sharing each other's fortunes, they had spent the last two here in Delight. Neither had spoken to the other of the reason for their return but both understood it well. It lay in the hope that Pike Landusky might attempt to repeat what he had accomplished once before; which would, of course, bring one of those deeds of arms known in the parlance as a gun-play. And this in its turn should produce a dead deputy. More than once during those days of waiting for this consummation some bystander had mentioned the hotel-keeper's name and, seeing the look which had come into the eyes of his companion at these times, Gregg had said to himself, as he had done that night at Stein's Pass:

"Oh, he's a wolf all right." And because he was still calloused with youth's heedlessness, the reflection had brought no dismay with it. But Pike had remained at his end of town and the encounter had thus far failed to materialize; Gregg was beginning to find life growing monotonous in Delight; a restlessness had come upon him, the more poignant because, although he would have liked it better otherwise, his thoughts often strayed to Bill Savage—and to Nan, and her puzzling change of manner.

SO on this sultry evening when the storm off in the mountains was brewing and the mesa was breathless, he was sitting before the faro layout in an altogether unsatisfactory frame of mind.

"And even these chips that I'm playin'—I've bought 'em with another man's poker winnin's. Time I was getting some cash for myself." He scowled and shoved another bet upon the layout. Lou, who was sitting in as lookout for the evening, caught his eye and smiled down at him from her elevated chair. The dealer turned the cards with languid impassiveness. The case keeper clicked two beads upon the rack. Gregg's chips went the way most chips go in the long run. Brazos raked in the little heap that he had won; and he was preparing to place another wager when he felt a hand upon his shoulder and glanced around. It was the young rowdy with the startling shock of blond hair who had been so eager to burn powder in his rescue on that first afternoon when Gregg had come into Delight. The two of them conferred briefly and inaudibly.

"Take these and play 'em for me, as careless as if they was yo'r own," Brazos shoved his chips over to Gregg and rose. "I'm going with Bill." He departed in the other's company and Gregg settled down to the attack of the Eldorado's bank-roll. Save for the bearded justice of the peace who sat beside him, he had become the heaviest stakeholder in the game. The impassive dealer slipped the cards from the case, two at a time; the beads clicked on the rack; the chips and coppers slipped back and forth across the board. Lou watched from her elevated seat. This duty did not prevent her, however, from noting behind the bent backs of the players, the entrance of a lean man whose swollen midsection had brought unto him a nickname of poetic vulgarity. From the side of her eye she saw him looking over the long barroom as if in search of some one, until his glance fell on Gregg. Whereupon his loose lips tightened and he departed swiftly. . . .

Chance that evening was busy with more matters than the disposition of those stacks of colored chips which came and went across the layout of painted cards. So it happened that soon after Kettle Belly's exit Old Man Rinehart remembered certain tidings that had been brought to him and took time between bets to tell Gregg.

"I heard tell this feller Haynor has got a warrant fer yo' from the county seat."

His auditor smiled.

"I reckon he knows where he can find me." With which he placed his chips for the next turn. To him the news was not impressive after what had come and gone; some of these days he and Haynor were going to meet and settle their issue; what did it matter if the other wore a nickel-plated star and carried a legal paper in his pocket?

HE looked up and saw Lou's eyes upon him. There was something in them which he could not understand.

"Now I wonder what's she got on her mind,"—he turned the matter over in his own mind and found no answer.

And in the meantime Kettle Belly had found Haynor in the shadows by Old Man Rinehart's store.

"He's in there now," the former was saying, "astraddle of that faro bank. An' none of them rustlers with him."

"Listen to what I say an' get it right." Haynor was swaying ever so little and the smell of liquor was in the air, but he was one of that breed whose deadliness grows with drink up to a certain point, and he had taken good care not to indulge himself too far.

"Yo' will go in ahaid an' when yo' get beside him, I will be in the door. Start to talk with him an' I will come up behind him. When I sing out fer him to throw up his han's, he'll turn toward me an' by that time I'll be shootin'. So they can't say I got him from behind."

"Long as yo' don't ketch me in the line of fire," Kettle Belly murmured, "I don't care where you get him."

"Where yo' are standing," Haynor reminded him, "yo'll face the door an' see me comin'. Only one thing yo' need to look out for. If anything goes wrong—when he is turnin' at my call—then yo' have got to do the killin'—and be sure yo' do it quick or both of us are agoing to be out of luck." With that they started for the Eldorado.

"Me," Gregg was telling Old Man Rinehart some moments later, "I was never made fer faro bank. Monte or stud poker—those are my meat." As he was speaking he became conscious of a newcomer who had taken his stand beside him.

It would appear that this one was well gone in drink and imbued with that spirit of comradeship which includes all humankind. But as his hand descended on Gregg's shoulder his eye became furtive and it wandered, for the passing of an instant, toward the front door.

"Pardner," Kettle Belly was saying loudly, "yo' do not understand this game—" But that was as far as he got.

As Gregg was listening to the words, half angry at the interruption, and still in the beginning of his glance upward into the bad face with its small eyes and loose lips, he heard Lou's voice.

Where she was sitting she was facing the front entrance of the Eldorado and she was speaking very quietly.

"The door—" He saw her eyes on it, and he acted.

The stools on which the devotees of chance were sitting before Jack Ryan's faro bank were without backs, as was the custom with most faro banks. Wherefore he had nothing to impede his movement. He whirled and while he was making the turn his single-action revolver came from its sheath; it was in his hand and leveled before he gained his feet, to face Haynor.

And so, by the fraction of a second he was ready while the man who had come to kill him stood with his fingers still closing over the butt of his holstered gun.

And as Gregg stood there holding his cocked weapon, Kettle Belly cast aside all semblance of drunkenness. His revolver came forth and the hammer receded to the full cock. He was about to pull the trigger when Lou leaped from her chair; as she fell upon him from behind her arms twined about him in a tight embrace; they pinned his arms down to his side. Old Man Rinehart got up from his stool unhurriedly, to take the weapon from its owner's impotent hand. The commotion which this byplay had aroused subsided as suddenly as it had come and now Gregg's voice was the only sound in the room.

"Take yo'r hand off that gun," he was saying and when Haynor had complied. "Unbuckle yo'r belt." The holstered weapon crashed upon the floor and its former wearer stood rigid; his forehead was beaded with little drops of perspiration and he was breathing thickly.

Then Gregg remembered the news which the bearded justice of the peace had told him.

"That warrant yo' have got for me—drop it in front of yo'." He watched the process narrowly and when the folded paper had fluttered down. "Yo' can go now."

While he was departing followed by Kettle Belly, who went like himself, weaponless, Brazos and the shock-haired young rustler returned.

"Why," the former demanded, "didn't yo' kill him? Yo'll have to some day—if he don't get yo' first."

Otherwise neither of them made any comment on the incident, for they were in the grip of enthusiasm born of a new project. This the young namesake of a Texas river confided to Gregg before the bar.

"Several thousand cattle, down below the line Fronteras way," he said, "an' only greasers handlin' them. The's six of us, good men; an' it is like getting money from home. Those smugglers told us where they are an' all about it."

Hearing the plan as its details were unwound before him, Gregg felt his own enthusiasm returning. North of the line this project on which they were to embark would have been nothing more nor less than cattle-stealing. But Fronteras was in Mexico and, to his way of thinking—a way which was shared by many older and more careful men at the time—Mexicans did not count, when it came to fighting or to the rights of property.

So in the next dawn he rode southward with five other young irresponsibles, and thus missed the arrival of Bill Savage who came to Delight that day driving his two-mule buckboard, to get from the Tucson stage the shipment of silver dollars with which he was intending to purchase those same longhorns.

This picturesque tale of former days—when life was uncertain but never dull—continues with mounting interest in the forthcoming July issue.

The Hard-

"Get your coat and hat and doctor-bag!" said Broady. Houseworth stared at him. "You're crazy!"

A MESSENGER ran the telegram to the mill at the foot of the mountain, and it came up in the tram, weighted down with a chunk of Colorado coal. Broady tore it open with one wristlike finger. It was from Old Man Fleig. He wanted to know when Broady could come back to Joplin.

As Broady read it, into his mind swooped pictures of the level plains of Missouri—of his mother—of the Betsy Fleig mine—of that red-headed son-of-a-gun McGinnis; of that square-shooter, old dried-up Mr. Fleig. Into his huge figure flooded forgotten feelings of boyhood. He suddenly became aware of an extraordinary sensation, an actual lump crawling up into his throat.

"Why, you lousy, sneaking sniveler!" he addressed this lump. "Get back wherever you come from or, by Judas and the Twelve Apostles, I'll knock you for a gool! If I go back to old Missouri at all, I'm going to help out old Fleig. Not because you're homesick, you yellow, white-livered pussyfooting tumor!"

He rode down Hatchet Mountain in the tram, and drove the mill foreman's car to town. He found Stevens in his office. With him was Dr. Houseworth, president of the mining company. Broady greeted them expansively.

"How's the haywire outfit today? Take a squint at this." He handed over the telegram. "Gentlemen, about six weeks ago you got me out from old Missouri to do your washing. I took your hell-hole of a mine into the tub, and out she comes whiter than a clean shirt-tail. You could take a class of girls up there and they'd think they were back in Sunday School. The mine's coughing up ore night and day like a hippopotamus with double bronchitis.

Rock Man

III—On Top of the World

By CONRAD RICHTER

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

And the mill's clicking like Mrs. McGinnis' sewing-machine."

He seated himself in a chair, and went on, not noticing the others' silence.

"You don't need me any more today than a sultan needs his thirteenth wife. For half my salary you can get one of these young Solomons just out of mining college. He can watch the men working as fast as I can. And I can go back to old Missouri and ride that hoodooed steer of a Betsy Fleig mine."

The president did not speak for a full minute. And when he did, his voice sounded like a steel drill. He had a face like the mezzanine floor of a hotel and the manner of the gentleman behind the register. A practising physician of the town, he drew a monthly check from his mine as company doctor. But he had made a great deal more out of his mining ventures than his medical work. Still, he liked to be called "Doctor."

"You may remember, Irwin," he observed frigidly, "we expected you to keep this job for a minimum of six months."

Broady looked at him. He had always treated Old Man Fleig with plenty of respect, but this headwaiter rubbed him the wrong way.

"If I didn't remember, what the Sam Hill do you think I'm going to the trouble of asking you for?"

The president stiffened like a red-hot poker.

"Is that the way you talk to me, young man?"

Broady's grin had faded. He saw, but paid no attention to the warning signals of his friend Stevens. He rose to his huge feet.

"Excuse me for not talking to you the way a man like you ought to be talked to," he apologized. "I'll say it over again. You pot-bellied, fish-eyed old pill-peddler, have I got your mine yet in the shape you wanted—or haven't I?"

Astonished welts broke out over the president's face. He whipped to his feet.

"That will be enough from you!" he ordered, outraged. "You can go back to your mine and stay there till your six months are up. Then we'll talk about your future."

"I'm on my way," said Broady briefly. He started for the door.

The president mistook his mildness for submission.

"Just a minute," he called imperiously. "Before you go, you'll apologize for your insulting language!"

Broady halted at the door.

"Sure, I'll apologize to you! When Herby Hoover collects garbage for a living, and Henry Ford is chambermaid to a cow-stable, give me a call, and I'll come around."

"Broady!" remonstrated Stevens, shocked.

"How'd you like to play croquet with a stick of dynamite?" Broady asked him sweetly, and took his departure.

He wired Fleig a long day-letter of regrets and regards, and went back to the thin air of Hatchet. Down in the valley it had been warm with December sunshine, but up here more than two miles above the sea, the climate was Arctic.

He had little more than sat down for supper in the big eating-room at the boarding-house, when one of the younger men hurried up.

"Did you know, Mr. Irwin, that Kayle is pretty sick tonight?"

Broady forgot his plate of hot soup.

"Kayle! Why, he was out day before yesterday!"

"I know," nodded the other. "It hit him quick. We think it's pneumonia."

Broady pushed back his chair and made his way at once to Kayle's room. The moment he entered, he knew the boy was mighty sick. His face was livid against the pillow, and it was a constant fight for breath.

"What the hell, Kayle!" Broady demanded, but the huge fist that picked up the burning hand of the sick youth was as gentle as a woman's.

The boy smiled courageously from his pillow.

"Sorry to kick off this way, Mr. Irwin."

"Kick off in a pig's eye!" came back Broady. "You'll be back on the job cussing in a week!"

The boy watched him with sad, wise eyes. He spoke with an effort.

"I guess you haven't been up in the mountains much, Mr. Irwin. Pneumonia nearly always gets you at twelve thousand feet."

Broady's big face grew incredulous, then earnest. He got to his feet.

"Why the Sam Hill didn't somebody tell me yesterday? I'll run you down to town right away—"

The boy shook his head.

"You're new to this altitude business, Mr. Irwin. That's sure death—kills quicker than to stay up."

"The devil you say!" ejaculated Broady. He was genuinely moved. Then he broke out furiously: "Why hasn't that doctor been up?"

The boy tried to speak, then motioned with his head for his companion to talk for him.

"We phoned Dr. Houseworth," said the other man. "He sent up medicine on the tram and told us what to do." He hesitated. "It hasn't done much good so far."

"Damn his medicine over the telephone!" bellowed Broady. "Why didn't he come up himself? Wait till I talk to that bird!"

The boy's companion followed him out in the hall.

"It won't do any good to telephone, Mr. Irwin. Dr. Houseworth never comes up here. I've been around here going on five years, and I haven't seen him on the mountain yet. He can't stand the altitude."

"The hell he can't!" stormed Broady, and hurried downstairs.

The entire dining-room listened while he telephoned.

"This is Broady Irwin at Hatchet. We got a mighty sick boy up here. I want you to come up tonight and see him."

The voice at the other end was cool.

"I've already prescribed for that patient, Irwin. See that he gets his medicines. That's all I can do for him."

"Aren't you the doctor for this company?" demanded Broady hotly.

"I am."

"Well, what in hell do you call a doctor?"

The voice at the other end of the wire fairly froze.

"What do you have to say about it?"

"Nothing," retorted Broady. "But when you take money out of my men's pay-envelopes for medical attention, and then don't even come up to look at a sick man that can't come down to you, I've a pile to say!" He jangled the receiver hook murderously, but Houseworth had hung up.

The men in the big room looked at him sympathetically but with eyes which said they had known what the result would be.

"YOU can't do nothing, Mr. Irwin," confided Old-timer Tate from a near-by table. "Some of us once tried to get another doctor up here for a lad that was going West. He called us Houseworth's patients. Said it wouldn't be ethics, whatever that was."

"Ethics in the back of my neck!" bellowed Broady. He pushed back the telephone and got to his feet.

"Shall I get you a hot plate of soup, Mr. Irwin?" asked Tony.

"Yes," snapped Broady. "And sit on it till I get back to keep it warm." He picked up his hat and coat and left.

The ride down on the tram was cold and blustery, but Broady did not feel it. On the street he ran into the general manager.

"What's hauling you down here tonight?" wondered Stevens.

Broady glared at him.

"Where does this crusty bum of a butter-fingered doctor hang out?"

"What do you want with him?" demanded Stevens suspiciously.

"I want to apologize to him some more." Broady's voice was very grim.

"I won't tell you tonight," decided the cautious Scotchman after another look at Broady's face.

"Go sleep with a lobster, you Edinboro crab!" snorted Broady, and started on.

"Broady!" called the other, coming after him. "Whatever you're going to do, I wouldn't do it!"

"Go sit on your head!" retorted Broady. "If you haven't any head, feed yourself to the monkeys. And if you have no monkeys, try gargling a little drain-cleaner." He walked on a few feet. Stevens was looking after him. "If you call up that fat fish of a horse-doctor tonight," Broady warned, "I'll print *God Be with You Till We Meet Again* all over your stingy Scotch map!" He went on.

A druggist told him where the doctor lived. In five minutes he was on the front porch of a big house. A Mexican maid opened the door. Broady pushed past her.

"Where's the Doctor?" he demanded.

The frightened girl pointed to a closed white door. Broady flung it wide open and walked in. The medical mine-owner was reading in a wing chair by a comfortable fire. He looked up from his book. At the sight of his caller, he sat erect with mingled astonishment and anger.

"What do you mean by coming in here like this?"

"Get your coat and hat and doctor-bag!" said Broady. "And I don't mean tomorrow!"

Houseworth stared at him.

"You're crazy!"

"All right, I'm crazy," said Broady. His voice took on a metallic edge. "What are *you* going to be—crazy in your overcoat, or sane in a wooden undershirt?"

The physician got to his feet. His hand trembled.

"I have patients coming here tonight."

"They can see some other doctor. The boy you're going to is working for you some place where he can't see another doctor.

"But—I haven't had my dinner yet!"

"Neither have I," said Broady. "But I can give you a sandwich of a couple of your front teeth if you don't get started *pronto!*"

Doctor Houseworth moved at once toward the door. Broady followed. "Remember I'm sticking right behind you," he warned. "The wrong word from you to anybody—and they'll be scrubbing your floors for a week!"

"I'll put you in Canon City for this!" the Doctor hissed.

"I'll put you in Hatchet first," retorted Broady.

Within five minutes, in the Doctor's big car, they were rolling out of town toward the looming pile of Hatchet Mountain.

"You're taking my life in your hands!" the Doctor muttered. "The altitude's hard on my heart."

"It's hard on the heart of every son-of-a-gun you got working up there," returned Broady grimly. "But they're working just the same."

The night mill foreman gazed with astonishment as Broady, with the president of the company in tow, phoned to the trammer. But that was nothing to the expression of the men when Broady and the Doctor arrived in Hatchet and passed through the boarding-house on their way to the sick boy's room. As they entered, Kayle turned his face from his pillow. The look of bewilderment and hope that came into his eyes gave Broady the biggest kick of the day.

"The Doctor," he said gruffly, "couldn't see us roughnecks giving you the medicine, so he came up himself. All right, Doc. You fix up the kid, and I'll get supper steaming."

Broady retraced his steps to the kitchen.

"Hey, Tony!" he bellowed happily. "You can crawl off that plate of soup now, and start hatching out another for the Doctor!"

LATE that night when Houseworth settled himself in the tram for his return trip, Broady held out his hand.

"You did the kid a lot of good, Doc. We're all much obliged."

Doctor Houseworth apparently did not see the hand.

"I shall settle with you in a day or two!" he asserted with low hatred.

Broady's eyes narrowed, but his voice remained the same.

"Sure," he said heartily. "Come around any time. Always glad to apologize to you." He went back to the boarding-house whistling.

Next morning Stevens came up to Hatchet.

"Hello, Steve," greeted Broady. "You look like you dropped a nickel down a bum slot-machine, and spent half the night fishing for it."

"You crazy fool!" said Stevens. He drew Broady aside.

"It isn't that I didn't warn you. I've got to fire you!"

"H o t d a m n!" said Broady.

"Houseworth wanted to lock you up," declared Stevens. "It took me over an hour to change his mind."

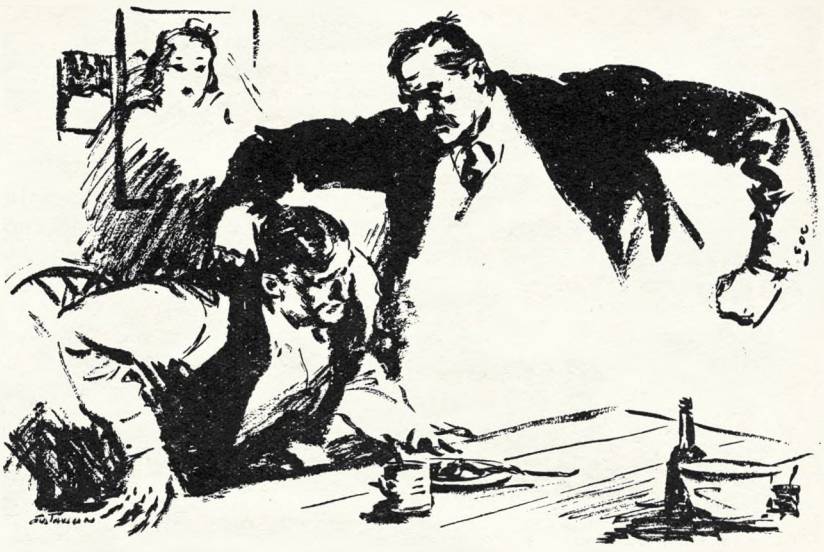
Broady put an arm about the general manager's shoulder.

"When you and I get to hell, Steve, I'm going to see that you get all the hot times you want free."

Stevens pushed the arm from his shoulder. He was exasperated.

"You'll take this seriously before you get through! The new superintendent's coming up tomorrow. You're free to go back to Missouri."

"Missouri?" repeated Broady. "What gave you the funny idea I was going back to Missouri?"



The newcomer seized Broady by the collar. That was the start of the festivities.

"Why, you contrary ground-rat, just yesterday you told Houseworth and me you wanted to go!"

"Sure," agreed Broady. "And did you or the horse-doctor tell me I could shake the dust? Yeah! In a pig's eye! And that's what I'm doing."

"What are you doing?" demanded Stevens. "You can't stay now. He'll throw you out."

Broady grinned.

"Best news I heard since the Year One. You sic him on, Yapper. Tell him he ought to do it personally."

The general manager washed his hands of it all.

"Wait till you see Howland!" he said significantly, and left.

About noon the following day the news spread through Hatchet that a new superintendent was on his way up in the tram. The men looked at Broady speculatively, but he appeared unperturbed. He was telling Tony that the new superintendent was going to give the men four meals a day instead of three when a stranger came in. The men looked up curiously. The newcomer was every inch of six feet and a half, with a body like a buffalo, and wore on his red face a drooping English mustache. He sat down his bag, and, with a curt gesture, stopped Tony and a tray of dinner.

"Here, you—show me the superintendent's quarters!" he barked.

It was amusing to see Tony's embarrassment. He hesitated, his heavy tray tipping perilously one way and then the other.

"But Mr. Irwin—he isn't out yet!" he stammered.

"He soon will be," rumbled the newcomer. "Put down that tray and pick up my luggage."

Tony was unhappily about to obey when Broady, who was an interested observer, sang out from his table:

"Keep on with that tray, Tony, and give the men their dinner!"

Tony, immediately brightening, was starting for a distant table when the big newcomer thundered like a bowling alley:

"Put down that tray, I tell you!"

Tony came to an abrupt and painful halt. He looked at Broady.

"Go on about your business!" said Broady.

"Stop!" shouted the newcomer.

"Do what I tell you!" bellowed Broady, "or I'll split you wide open and cut you up and feed you to the soup!"

Tony hurried to the farthest table without stopping again.

The stranger turned angrily to Broady.

"Who are you?" he demanded, bristling like a scrub-brush.

Broady looked at him steadily over his cup of coffee.

"Who the Sam Hill are *you?*"

The man drew himself up like a grizzly bear getting on his hind feet.

"I'm the new superintendent here."

"Who the devil says so?" came back Broady scornfully.

The newcomer started to move his ponderous bulk toward Broady's table. The room had grown intensely still. Not a jaw moved. The stranger towered over Broady's table. Under his walrus mustaches, his teeth suddenly bared.

"You're fired! Get your luggage and get out before I throw you out!" he roared—it was like a roar from an uncaged lion.

Broady finished his coffee. He looked calm, but a joyous light had come into his eyes.

"What's keeping your party?" he asked.

The newcomer slung off his overcoat. Then he strode around the table and seized Broady by the collar as he might a bag of wheat. That was the start of the festivities. The bag of wheat kicked back its chair and rose, twisting like a young Texas cyclone. Tony hurried to pull the tables out of the way. The miners had already left their dinner and were edging around to see the fun.

It was plain to be seen that the new superintendent had handled many a man before. But he had never met Broady.

"Come on, you old walrus!" Broady hailed him, his arms and legs working like pistons. "Get awake! Here's the first breakfast bell!" He landed a terrific crack on the lower knob of that red face. A half minute later the

men set up a shout. The first blood had splashed, and it hadn't splashed from Broady.

For long minutes there were no sounds in Hatchet but thumps and grunts and heavy breathing and the sound of men hurrying in the front door. Even the sound of the tram had ceased; the big trammer was stretching his neck to watch the show. Broady was working hard, but he looked as though he was having the time of his life. He liked them husky, and the bigger the better. He had a rising straight from the shoulder that never worked right on a little man. But it jolted a big fellow like a putt from a fifty-pound shot. The stranger began to look as if somebody had tied him to the flywheel of a Diesel engine, and every time he went around, he hit the concrete. Also, once in a while the roof fell down and a window caved in. Gradually, one after the other, his walrus mustaches drooped like twin crapes of mourning. His red face took on the bright color of a new steel railroad bridge, and his outgoing gasps puffed Broady's curly hair about like a leaking blacksmith's bellows. A few moments more, and he started to spin.

"Send him to the dump!" howled the men.

To their regret, Broady put down his fists and caught the big fellow from falling.

"Tony," he said, "help the gentleman on with his overcoat. We don't want him to catch cold up here in Hatchet. Get his bag and show him to the tram. See that he doesn't slide down the mountain." He took the big fellow's limp hand. "Give my regards to the Doctor, and tell him I apologize."

IT was about ten o'clock the following morning when the trammer sent word to Broady that the general manager and the Doctor themselves were on their way up in the tram.

A few minutes later they appeared in his office.

"Welcome to our city!" greeted Broady. He looked fine, although there were a few bits of court-plaster on his face.

Doctor Houseworth glowered. He unscrewed his vise of a mouth.

"Irwin," he said grimly, "either you get out, or we close down the mine!"

"Know any more Fourth of July orations?" inquired Broady.

"What do you mean?" lashed the other.

"I mean," thundered Broady, "that a couple of days ago I came to you like a gentleman, to quit. You told me I had a contract for six months and you were going to see that I kept it. Now, by Judas and the Twelve Apostles, that's what you're going to see me do!"

Houseworth stared at him.

"You can't keep it when the mine's shut down!"

"Tell that to the spinach."

"What do you expect to do?" demanded the astonished official.

Broady got to his feet, baring his teeth like a battle-scarred bulldog.

"I expect to stick here on the job till my six months are up! And you're going to pay me my salary! If you want to shut this mine down and give me nothing to do, that's your lookout!"

"You're crazy!" declared the president.

"Well, you're crazier if you expect me to dance when you yodel!"

The Doctor made an angry gesture to his general manager.

"We'll starve you out!"

"Starve ahead!" invited Broady. "I'm sitting on top of the world."

"Get all the men out here in front of the office. I want to talk to them a little."

When the small crowd of wondering miners had assembled in the snowy road, the Doctor opened the door from the superintendent's office.

"Today," he shouted, "is the last day for the Hatchet Mine! Except for the trammers and boarding-house, all work will stop at three o'clock with the end of the shift. The boarding-house will serve meals up until tomorrow breakfast, and the tram will run until six o'clock tomorrow night. The High Point Mining Company will pay all wages in full to every miner who calls at the office in town tomorrow. Get your belongings together and come down the mountain as soon as you can. Remember, tomorrow is the last day the tram will run!"

WHEN the surprised men had scattered, the president re-entered the office.

"Could you hear me in here?" he asked Broady exultantly.

"I may be cock-eyed," said Broady, "but my ears aren't in a sling."

"What do you have to say now about staying up here for six months?"

"Plenty," bellowed Broady. "I'm going to stay up here till they feed cows corn mash and milk out whisky. Put that in your mustache-mug, and drink it!"

Houseworth's face flushed. He shook an apoplectic finger at Broady.

"If you stay here after this mine is closed, you'll be a trespasser. If I find you, I'll have you locked up!"

"Yeah?" said Broady. "Well, don't ever let them find you trespassing in a slaughter-house without any clothes on, or they'll make hot dogs out of you!"

That afternoon the exodus from Hatchet started. Broady stayed in his office until six. He ate alone in the eating-room and spent the evening with Kayle, who was much better now and sitting up in a chair preparatory to going down next day. From his office window the following morning he could see the men entering the tramhouse. Some of them came over to say good-by, but most of them didn't. He could scarcely believe it when he saw Phil Morrison, Old-timer Tate and Pop Jones go away without coming in for as much as a final handshake. His jaws clamped and a frosty light came into his eyes. He'd stay up here alone, by Judas, till the stars fell out!

AFTER that he busied himself at his desk, and did not look out of the window. About four o'clock the lone remaining trammer came over to the office.

"How do those birds expect me to get down anyway?" he complained, scratching his head. "I can't run myself down the tramline."

"I'll let you down, Tom," Broady got up from his chair. "Everybody down?"

"Everybody's gone for the last hour. It's like a graveyard up here. You're going to have a heck of a lonesome time, Mr. Irwin. What are you going to do to pass the time?"

"Oh, I'll be picking daisies and watering the lawn and going to the movies," replied Broady amiably.

The two men walked slowly to the tramhouse, and the trammer entered the car. Broady started him easily down the long grade.

When the downgoing tram had vanished into the deepening twilight, Broady realized his long wintry siege had begun. He was alone in December on a snowy mountain two miles above the sea. A sense of solitude and shadows began already to creep upon him.

"Back, you crawling scum!" he warned. "Come any

closer and I'll stay up here till Cal Coolidge goes to the poorhouse."

Presently the tram, which returned as the other went down, loomed out of the dusk. He slowed down his lever, and the tram came to an easy stop. To his astonishment there were three men in the car—Phil Morrison, Pop Jones and Old-timer Tate.

"Tell him to gargle some B-B shot. I'm not locked up yet—not by a damn' sight!"

They grinned broadly at the expression on his face.

"What's the big idea?" demanded Broady. "Don't you ground-rats know that was the last run that the tram makes?"

"Sure, we know it," said Phil as the three clambered out. "You didn't think we were going to let you stick up here all alone, did you? Heck, no! We only went down to get our pay."

Broady felt a great warmth flood over him.

"You contwisted, cock-eyed, cow-kicked sons-of-guns!" he declared affectionately.

At that moment, like a sinister omen, the lighted filament in the electric globe died to a pale orange and went out. Broady looked out of the window. Every light along the single street of Hatchet had died with it.

"The lousy coyotes!" Broady ejaculated. "Why, they wouldn't give us their tin dishpan to wash our feet in!"

THE four of them had been at Hatchet several weeks when one day the telephone rang.

"Hatchet Mine," answered Broady laconically. "Superintendent speaking."

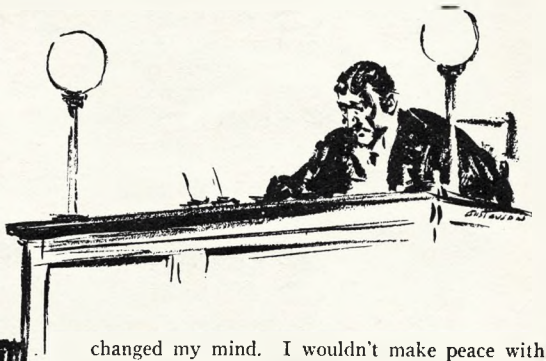
"You're not the superintendent any more," retorted the voice at the other end of the wire. He recognized it as Houseworth's.

"No?" retorted Broady. "Well, if I'm not the super here, you're the leading surgeon of forty States and fifty-seven foreign countries." He could almost feel the man stiffen over the wire.

"That's about enough from you." The Doctor's voice fairly trembled.

"Hell, no!" declared Broady. "I aint halfway through telling you yet. The weather's grand. I've gained five pounds. I'm working every day. Nobody's run off with the hole yet. I'm thinking of advertising the place as winter quarters for Barnum and Bailey's. But you better keep away from the monkeys' keeper, Houseworth. He might—"

"Listen, you!" broke in the Doctor's voice. "I called up to give you one more chance to come down. But I've



changed my mind. I wouldn't make peace with you now if you crawled to me on your hands and knees."

"No?" said Broady. "Well, the only way you can get me crawling on my hands and knees is by sawing off my feet."

"Go to the devil!"

"Nope. I like it too good up here. Fact is, I'm thinking of staying another six months—" He grinned; Houseworth had hung up.

When the provisions left secretly by Tony and his men had given out, Broady broke a path down the steep slope along the silent tramline. He returned the next day with a pack on his shoulders. He had hardly gotten back when the telephone rang.

"This is Dr. Houseworth," an irate voice said. "What do you mean by giving the Liberty Grocery an order on the High Point Mining Company?"

"Listen, big boy!" came back Broady. "When you gave me this job, you agreed to furnish board and salary for six months. What do you expect us to live on—snow and old iron?"

"Us?" demanded Houseworth.

"Sure. Me and my men."

Broady heard the man at the other end suck in a savage breath.

"Who gave you authority to employ men up there?"

"Horse-feathers!" said Broady. "Do you expect a superintendent to work a mine by his lonesome?"

Houseworth snorted.

"You can't work anyhow. The power's turned off."

"The hell you say! Well, it aint turned off from picks and shovels. Then we got steels and hammers, and plenty of powder. In fact, we've been double-jacking since you shut off the power. It's kind of slow, but we're crawling right along."

"They'll never see a cent from me!" shouted the Doctor. "I'll let the mine stand idle ten years before I pay any of you!"

"Make it a hundred," suggested Broady. "It sounds bigger."

"What's more," cried Houseworth, "that's the last order you'll give anybody around Oreville on the High Point Mining Company. I'm putting an ad in the paper at once that we will pay no bills whatever, incurred by you or your men."

"You're on, horse-doctor!" said Broady. "We'll be needing grub again in about a week. I'm coming down to get it, and the High Point Mining Company's going to

pay for it. Did you get that, or do you want me to tell it to you in Polish?"

Houseworth's voice fairly trembled.

"I've stood all I'm going to stand from you! If it hadn't been for Stevens, I'd had you arrested long ago. Now I warn you that if you come down to Oreville again, you're going to be locked up!"

Broady's eyes shone with anticipation.

"I'll be down Monday a week—with bells on! Meet you at the Liberty Grocery. Bring the fire department along, Houseworth!"

ON the promised day, Broady got started down the mountain early. He had made his purchases and was out on the street when he heard some one run behind him. It was Stevens.

"Get under cover, Broady! They're coming!" he panted breathlessly.

"Who the Sam Hill's coming?" Broady coolly wanted to know.

"Houseworth's got a warrant out for you! Hunt the shade *pronto!*"

"Hell, no!" said Broady. He looked around as a kid might look for the circus parade. A few moments later a car rounded the corner and came down the street. It bore in to the sidewalk and two strapping Westerners jumped out.

"That's him!" shouted one of them. "The big wide one!"

Broady slipped the pack of provisions from his back. When he turned, both men had pulled revolvers.

"You're under arrest!" curtly declared the larger of the two.

"I'm under hell!" retorted Broady. "Put down your guns, and I'll take on the two of you Jack-the-Beanstalk bulls."

"Don't do it, Wes!" warned the smaller giant.

"What kind of odds do you want?" taunted Broady. "Ring the fire bell. I'll take on the whole town!"

"You'll take on nothing," grimly informed the leader. "You're coming with us."

"It's news to me," said Broady.

"Is it?" came back the other. He fetched the barrel of his revolver within two feet of Broady's jacket. "Make it snappy!"

"Sure," said Broady. "When J. P. Morgan digs ditches for a living and John D. Rockefeller lays the pipe, then come around. I'll make it snappy." He didn't move an inch.

The gun shoved closer. When it came within a few inches of his belly, Broady suddenly knocked it from its owner's hand and jumped on him. For a few moments the pair rolled violently on the ground, while the second man ran for help.

IT was about thirty minutes later when Broady, with abundant facial and sartorial evidence of a long and bloody encounter, waited before a local justice of the peace. Behind the prisoner sat a company of officers whose faces likewise bore testimony of a recent upheaval. At Broady's side was Stevens, a very downcast-appearing general superintendent.

"You can't say I didn't warn you," he mourned. "You'll get plenty now." He lowered his voice. "Look at the face of that squire."

"I looked at him a minute ago," declared Broady. "That's how I got cross-eyed. Somebody must have used him for an ax to chop down a petrified tree."

"Not so loud!" whispered Stevens with agitation. "He'll hear you!"

"I want him to hear me—the peeled persimmon!" came back Broady. "Tell him to gargle some B-B shot. I'm not locked up yet—not by a damn' sight!"

The justice had plainly heard. He got to his feet glaring at the prisoner.

"What the Sam Hill!" ejaculated Broady. "The thing moves! It's actually alive! Blamed if it isn't a human being!"

The row of officers snickered. The face of the justice went a bull red. More trouble would have begun immediately if Dr. Houseworth, for whom they had been waiting, had not suddenly come in.

"Well, if here isn't the horse-doctor himself!" greeted Broady.

To the surprise of most everyone present, Houseworth completely ignored the remark.

"Hello, Irwin," he greeted as he might an old friend. "What are you doing in here? You don't mean to tell me these boys tried to arrest you!" He turned on the officers with a great show of rising indignation. "What does this mean, men? You've got the wrong man!" He glared angrily at their astounded faces, and then to the staring justice, who immediately looked like a small boy caught stealing cherries, and bewilderedly sat down.

PLAINLY, Dr. Houseworth was a big man in Oreville.

"Why—didn't you tell us to get this fellow?" stammered the biggest and bloodiest of the officers.

"There has been a bad mistake!" exclaimed the Doctor, outraged. "Here!" He handed each of the confounded men, including the justice, a gold-piece. "Forget it. I'll try to make it right with Mr. Irwin." He turned to the sarcastically grinning face of Broady, and began to apologize profusely.

"That's all right, Doc," Broady cut him short. "I had more fun today than an Irish bull-fight. You can start it all over again if you want to." He let the Doctor take his arm.

With General Superintendent Stevens following in a sort of daze, they passed outside.

As soon as they were on the street, Dr. Houseworth became the efficient business man. He spoke swiftly.

"You and I've buried the knife, Irwin! Stevens, see that the power is turned into Hatchet at once. We're going to open the mine. Irwin, perhaps you'll telephone to one of your men to run the tram until we can get regular trammers on the job. I'm going home to get into some heavy clothing. I'll meet you in a half hour at the office. I'm going along up to the mine."

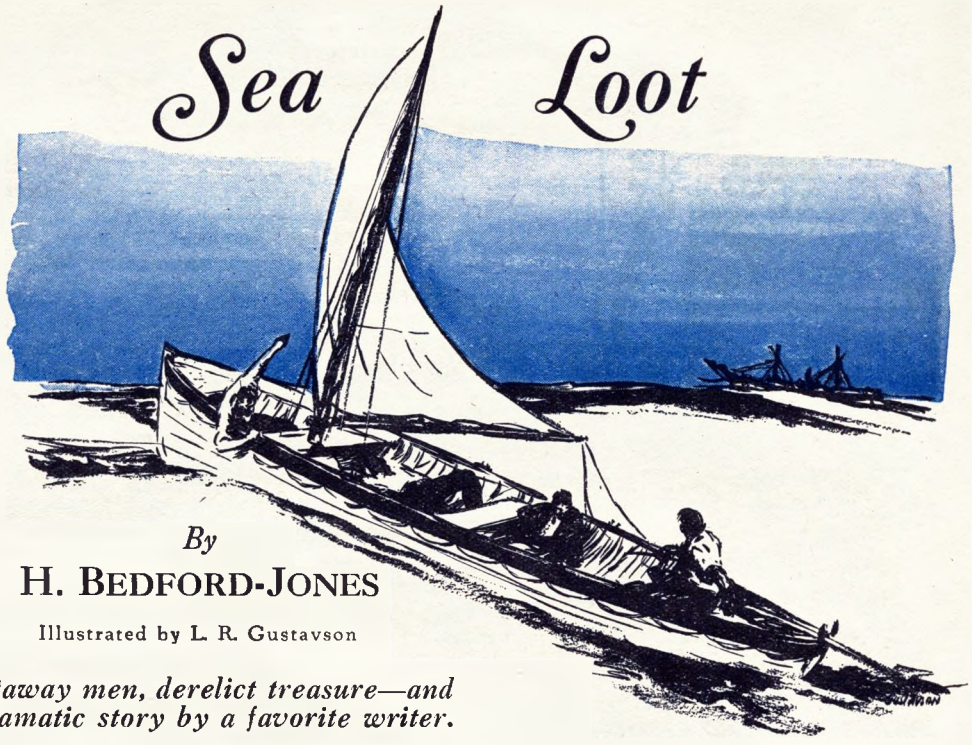
When he had gone, Stevens turned an amazed face toward Broady.

"Am I crazy, or is it just delirium tremens?"

"You're leaking in the roof and mildewed in the garret," said Broady. "You always were. But if you can't understand the sudden change in the wind, I'll put you wise. When Old-timer Tate got back to the mine he told me of a suspicious-looking stringer they had cut on the six hundred level a couple years ago. He asked if they could blow a few shots into it. That's what we've been working on. We're in only eighteen feet, and got the prettiest string of coarse gold you ever saw opened up. That's what I paid for grub with at the Liberty awhile ago—gold-dust. And I showed him a lot more that we didn't need to spend. It took just a little longer for the news to get around town than I figured. But at that it traveled to Doc Houseworth pretty fast!"

Another fine story in this exceptionally virile series will appear in an early issue.

Sea Loot



By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Castaway men, derelict treasure—and a dramatic story by a favorite writer.

THREE men were alive in the boat when they sighted the drifting ship's hull lifting on a far gray sea. Johnny, the negro, was dead, although they did not know it then.

Three men—Benson, the gaunt mate, the sandy-haired cockney Alf, and Lenger, the wide-shouldered, powerful man who had been captain of the ill-fated tramp *Colombia*, bound from Vancouver to Japan when some of her miscellaneous cargo exploded and settled her in ten minutes.

It was Benson who saw her first. He was in the bow, as the scrap of sail thrust her up a long, swirling sea. He caught sight of the hulk and tried to cry out, but thirst had swollen lips and tongue until he could make no sound. He waved his arm, and Lenger, always watching wolfishly, saw the gesture, then perceived the hulk and headed for it. Alf was in a huddle, but a dash of spray revived him and he came up, cursing in a wild mumble, until he too sighted the thing beyond. He fell silent, staring.

Benson stood up, holding to the mast to support his weakened legs—eight days they had been washing across the wide Pacific. Man after man had died, only the strongest surviving. Alf was strong and tough, hard to kill; Lenger was powerful, massive; Benson was thin and worn, but his strength came from inside.

He stared at the hulk, as they rose hissing on every sea. Her masts were gone, but a tangle of pounding rigging clung about her broken bowsprit; a three-master of some kind, queer-looking to a seaman's eye. Waterlogged, quite obviously, but safe enough from sinking; probably with some cargo that would keep her afloat indefinitely, a derelict. No boats. Smashed bulwarks. Not a sign of any living thing aboard. Her decks were little higher than the water-line. and the heavy seas, breaking over her, had swept clear everything that could be swept away. As she rolled, soggily, Benson could see that the thick glass of the cabin skylight, aft, was unbroken.

Slowly they rounded in under her stern, to get into her lee. Alf croaked out that Johnny was dead. The others paid no attention; they were seeking to get the hulk's name. All that met their eager gaze, however, was a badly smashed stern, and amid the wreckage some fragments of a gilded character.

"Hey, mister, what d'you make o' that?" sang out Lenger with an effort. He had taken a pull at their last bit of water, and now, as Benson came aft, handed him the pannikin with a few swallows in it. Benson drank greedily.

"Don't—know," he answered, and watched the skipper drain the last drops into the pannikin for the clutching cockney. "Might be Chinese, or some island boat—"

"Aye," said Lenger. He stood up, clutching his packet—his ship's papers, the only thing he had saved from the *Colombia*. "Get aboard her. Better make fast a line—may need this boat again. Alf, chuck that nigger overboard."

Alf obeyed sullenly, and Johnny went to his last rest with a string of cockney curses trailing after him.

It was hard work to get aboard, for they were all weak, but finally they clawed over the broken rail and staggered to their feet. The same unuttered thought was in all their minds. They had used the last drop of water. Unless they found food and water aboard here, they were done for. Nothing else mattered now.

"No use lookin' for'ard," grunted Lenger. "Everything's a ruin there."

True enough; besides, she was down a bit by the bow. They turned aft and passed down the companionway.

"Whoever had these," said Captain Lenger, "had money to burn. I'll take charge o' this case."

Here they found little damage done. Except for water that had sloshed down and stood ankle-deep, the after cabins were dry; the mess cabin and saloon, and three officers' cabins. Here there was not a sign of abandonment. A half-eaten meal, the dishes all mold, stood on the table.

"Damned chink or native schooner," said Cap'n Lenger, glancing around. "Masts went out and prob'ly killed half of 'em at one crack. Come on! Bound to be cabin stores—"

The three of them dived for the lockers and the lazaret. And so they found it—found more than they had bargained for, by a good deal.

THE cabin stores held everything from tinned meats to Australian fruit, in abundance; spirits and Chinese wine showed up, and, later, plenty of good water forward. But not these things held their eyes and thoughts, even as they opened tins and stood around making a greedy meal. Not these things, nor the boxes of cheroots and the tobacco, but the red-lacquered leather case that Alf had dug out of a chest in one of the cabins.

Benson found him at it, and angrily struck him aside, but not before he had opened it. And now it lay there among the moldy dishes on the mess-table, and the three of them looked at it as they wolfed the tinned food and biscuit.

"Blime! S'pose it's real?" muttered Alf.

"Aye," said Lenger, his eyes passing from one to the other of the two little trays into which the case was divided.

The lower tray was heaped with coins—gold coins of all descriptions. Two or three hundred of them, perhaps more, thought Benson. The upper lid, which had a hinged cover, was divided into tiny compartments, and in each compartment, glowing against deep red velvet, was a gem; most of them were pearls of varying sizes, but half a dozen or so were shimmering stones. One, a diamond, was as large as Benson's thumb-nail.

"Whoever had these," said Captain Lenger, his first hunger appeased, "was a collector, that's sure. He had money to burn, and he laid it into pearls and things. And I'll take charge o' this case, and the cabin it came from."

He replaced the tray in the lacquered case, closed it up, and stepped into the cabins. A muttered growl of oaths burst from Alf. Benson grinned and finished a tin of tomatoes. Before either of them could speak, the skipper rejoined them.

"We've eaten enough for this time," he said abruptly. "So lay off! Alf, you come for'ard with me and we'll look her over. Mister, give her a look aft as to damage; we'll see what we can do. Anyhow, we'll not starve. Move spry, now, and forget everything else."

Benson, wakened to realization of their situation, was quick to get on deck. Thirst and starvation banished, other things lay ahead; not that he liked Lenger any the better, however. He and the skipper had not got along from the start. There was an elemental brutality to Lenger, a sneering arrogance, that few men liked. Still, the skipper was efficient enough.

His brief inspection finished, Benson got forward and met Lenger in the lee of the smashed deck-house, just as a huge sea slithered up and burst in a drive of spray over the hulk.

"No control, sir," said Benson calmly, hanging on. "Rudder-post's smashed and the wheel's gone."

"Thought so from the look of her stern," said Lenger. "Useless to try and get up any jury rig, then. But there's a light spar or two for'ard hammering her, and her foremast went off a dozen feet above the deck. We could get in a bit o' that canvas and make a signal that might be seen, at all events, and cut away the rest of the junk."

They started forward. The next green deluge gave birth to Alf, holding an ax he had found. For the following hour the three of them labored, half drowned, getting in a spar and a jib from the wreckage, lashing the spar to the stump of the foremast, and freeing the hulk of the wreckage that pounded relentlessly at her. When at length a scrap of canvas was flopping from their hasty rig, they clawed their way aft and all but collapsed.

Their situation was not enviable, but was far from desperate. The hulk floated, and seemed able to float indefinitely, and there was no lack of food and water. Lenger gave one look at the horizon of shattering seas, and motioned below.

"She's calming down," he said. "What we all need is a good turn-to, so let's have it. If she goes down under us, we can't help it—but she won't."

Benson staggered into one of the three cabins, wedged his brine-soaked body into a dry berth, and was asleep on the instant.

When he wakened, it was to a level flood of golden light—sunrise, streaming in at the port of his cabin. He made his way out on deck and found Alf there; the cockney had broken out a breaker of water forward, and Benson helped him lower it several inches. Then he gave the sandy-haired cockney a grin of sheer delight.

"Water—plenty of it—sure feels good again, Alf! How's everything?"

"Right-o, sir." Alf rubbed his unshaven cheeks and blinked at Benson. With their nearly colorless lids, his

eyes gave an appearance of red-rimmed evil. "Are we still tykin' orders from him, sir?"

Benson nodded. "Absolutely."

"And wot abaht that—that there stuff we found, sir?"

"Salvage—"

"Salvage, me eye!" snapped the other viciously. "You know better, sir!"

Benson shrugged. "What of it? Forget about that stuff. We're not looters. We'll have all we can do to save our hides, without squabbling over a little money."

"A little, is it?" snarled the other. "A forchin, that's wot it is! And now he's went and locked 'imself in wif it!"

"He's the cap'n, Alf," said Benson quietly. "You'd better snap out of your fever and get back to hard sense, my lad."

"Yes, sir," responded the other after an instant. "Beggin' your pardon, sir."

Alf touched his forelock dutifully, but the gleam in his pale eyes belied the gesture of submission. After this, he scarcely spoke.

The day was fine, sparkling, the sea fast quieting. The galley had been swept away, but Alf located an iron rice-kettle in the fo'c's'le, together with a dead Chinaman. The latter was put overboard, and after kindling a fire in the kettle, Alf brewed some coffee and Captain Lenger responded to Benson's hails in time for breakfast. The three men ate ravenously, lighted a cheroot apiece, and then the skipper took charge.

"We may as well get to work making things shipshape aboard here," he observed, with all his old arrogance. "Mr. Benson, you and Alf can rig up a pump and we'll get the water out of the after cabins first of all—"

"Can't be done," said Benson calmly. Lenger fastened a dark gaze upon him.

"What d'you mean by that, Mister?"

"What I say," rejoined Benson. "If you'll take a look, you'll find that water is deeper in the mess-cabin than aft, just as this craft of ours is down by the head. We'd have to pump out the entire hold to dry up those after-cabins."

"Well, do it!" said Lenger. "Why not?"

"I'll tell you why not," struck in Alf, thrusting his jaw forward. "It's 'cos we're half dead this minute, that's why not! We're stiff and sore and weak, and—"

"You blasted wharf-rat!" said Lenger angrily. "Want me to kick you to work?"

"Hold on, Skipper," said Benson. "No use asserting your authority. You know very well it'd take a full crew to gain on that water—"

"By the Lord!" snapped Lenger, turning to him. "Want me to spoil your ticket, do you? Want me to log you for mutiny?"

BENSON regarded him calmly. "Don't be a fool, that's all," he rejoined. "We'll do what's necessary—"

"Mister, you've been too blasted cocky all voyage," cut in the skipper with cold anger. "You know sea law as well as I do. I'm as much your master this minute as if we were still aboard the *Colombia*."

"Quite true." Benson sent a thin stream of smoke downwind, and smiled into the flaming dark eyes. "Your authority is admitted, but you're in no position to enforce it. So calm down and accept matters."

That level gaze seemed to cool Lenger's heat. He glanced at Alf, then rose to his feet and went aft, where he paced the deck with swift, vigorous strides. The cockney uttered a chuckle and surveyed Benson with irritating complacence.

"That's handling him, for fair!" he said. "Strike me, if you—"

"Never mind the compliments," said Benson. "You're elected cook, so get things cleaned up, then we'll tackle the mess-cabin. It won't kill us to get that somewhat shipshape. Understand?"

"Aye, sir," returned Alf, but Benson did not forget how the little red-rimmed eyes peered at him.

CAPTAIN LENGER came out of his huff quite handsomely, lent a hand cleaning up the mess-cabin, and for the space of a few hours the three men were fair companions. But Benson did not miss certain trifles.

Lenger he did not trust; beneath that brutally impassive exterior, he knew well, there raged a whirlwind of anger. Alf he did not trust, knowing the cockney to be treacherous and deadly as any reptile. And among them all remained the thought of that treasure down below. So, at least, thought Benson.

Then, all of a sudden, he got a new lineup on things, got readjusted abruptly and almost before he knew it. The next day, this was, just before they lost count of time.

He came face to face with Lenger. Alf was rustling up a meal; the two men, master and mate, were alone there on the poop of the hulk. As will happen at times, their thoughts took possession of them. It was all in a look, a gesture—before Benson realized what was up, the skipper had swung savagely into him, evidently thinking to end everything with one blow. He was wont to boast that this was his way in a fight.

The blow drove in—a merciless, crushing smash to the belly. Fortunately, Benson sensed it coming and drew back, just enough to save himself from torture and knock-out. As it was, the unexpected foul crack left him groggy and sick.

Lenger hammered him, but a clinch saved him for the moment, got his brain clear.

"Blast you! Mutiny on me, will you?" growled the skipper, bringing up his knee viciously.

Benson countered this, and for two minutes they went hammer and tongs across the deck, all rules discarded. A terrific blow laid open Benson's cheek to the bone, and then he saw that the skipper was using brass knuckles. It brought a red mist of fury before his eyes. He did not recall the rest of it, until he woke up to find Alf tearing at him, screaming, clawing him away from the battered wreck that had been the skipper. And Benson, coming to himself with a shaky laugh, backed a step away—and then collapsed.

When he wakened, Alf was bathing his face, soothing him with the tenderness of a woman. He never forgot this wakening, nor his wonder at the little man with the red-rimmed eyes. After a bit, when he could sit up again, he asked Alf about it frankly.

"You had us both then and there, Alf. Why didn't you grab the chance? I figured you out as wanting it, right enough."

"Strike me pink, sir!" said the cockney, and grinned at him. "And you bein' wot you are? Blime, sir, you and me is pals, that's wot! If it was you as 'ad found that 'ere box, and not 'im, you ha' divvied it up—aint that so, sir?"

"Sure," said Benson, squinting painfully at the man.

"Well, sir, now's your time to get it! Fair done up, 'e is—blast 'im!"

Benson shook his head. "Leave it be, Alf. If he's that dirty and low-down, let him have it. He'll get no good of it. Thanks for fetching me around."

Lenger emerged from that frightful mauling a scarred, scowling, sullen brute, no longer master. He stayed much to himself, and they left him alone. It was Benson who

aided Alf in getting up the jury rig, in getting a makeshift rudder to work, in standing watch. Lenger accepted the food they gave him and said nothing.

Benson was tempted, in the days that followed. He knew the red lacquer box was there for the taking, but he left it alone. Alf could have grabbed it and had refrained; this shamed him a little. Whatever the man's motives had been, Alf had refrained—and Benson held his hand. Lenger cowered below over his treasure, unshaven and brutish, and they left it to him.

None the less, Benson often wondered why Alf had refrained. . . .

The days passed in monotony. They had not so much as a compass, drifted before vagrant winds, lost all track of time. And Benson found himself friends with the man he had feared and despised.

They made plans for the future, against the day they would be picked up. From the cabins they got odds and ends of things worth taking off—clothes, souvenirs, odds and ends of all kinds. Alf had a big duffle-bag packed full, crammed with all sorts of junk, and Benson had another holding some gewgaws, a set of carved chessmen and such things. Nothing of much value. It made an intering game, an occupation.

Benson was far more interested in his companions. He discerned in Alf a growing contempt for the skipper, a lack of any fear—and strange to say, Lenger took it. The little cockney seemed to have the whiphand of him.

"Knows as 'ow 'e's a ruddy 'og, that's wot it is," Alf confided to Benson one afternoon, as they sat smoking the stringy black Chinese tobacco they had found. "It's like you said—no good will come of it, and ruddy well 'e knows it! Look, 'ere 'e comes now. I'll arsk 'im."

Lenger, pacing the deck, approached them, and Alf hailed him.

"Hey, Cap'n! Wot abaht that 'ere loot dahn below? Is it a split?"

The skipper met the baleful glare of those apparently lidless eyes, and glanced at the watching, intent Benson. He put a hand to his lips, hesitant.

"Why—why, I'll do the right thing, my man, the right thing," he said. "You know that—eh, Mister? Yes, the right thing. You leave it to me. Must find the owners if we can."

With this, he turned and went below. Alf spat on the deck and sniffed.

"Ho, yus! Do the right thing by 'is blooming self, that's wot 'e will!"

Oddly enough, however, Benson took the little man's scorn and contempt to be somewhat assumed. Beneath it he divined a fierce exultation which he could not understand. And in the manner of Lenger, he found a singular peace-at-any-price attitude. Lenger could not forget that the mate had thrashed him, and very soundly. He was playing good dog.

Then came the day and the hour, all of a sudden.

IT was just as dawn was breaking. Benson took over the watch from Alf, and was watching the sun-rays shoot up, when he caught a sniff of something burning. Whether Alf's makeshift galley had spilled embers the previous night, they never knew. Before Benson had made sure of the dread fact, Lenger was coming on deck, sputtering curses and half-strangled. Alf came running, to Benson's shout. The three of them did what they could—it was little enough.

Lucky indeed they had kept the boat trailing, lucky no weather had arisen to tear her loose; lucky all around, Benson called it. They got stores and water into her hurriedly, chucked in their duffle-bags of plunder, and by the time they shoved off, a billow of black smoke, shot with flame, was mounting into the sky from the hulk.

The skipper had saved one of the Chinese chests of red teak, a handsomely carved thing, and his treasure was locked in it, and he kept the key. Benson caught a grin on Alf's face as he glanced at the chest, and remembered it later on.

"Better get that mast stepped," said Lenger.

"Leave it be," said Benson, squinting at the horizon. "If we have any luck, some ship may see this smoke and pick us up."

"All right, Mister, all right," said Lenger placatingly. "Just as you want it."

They were picked up two hours later by the *Penguin,* bound for Tientsin with general cargo.

THE change that came over Captain Lenger, once aboard the *Penguin,* was amusing to Benson. The skipper became himself on the instant, and fairly radiated energy and authority. Shaved, bathed, supplied with fresh garments, all three of them felt better, for that matter.

"Mister," said the skipper, when he had time for a word with Benson, "I want to see you and Alf in my cabin, say in half an hour."

They found him chewing a long cheroot and looking very cheerful.

"It's about that stuff we found," he said, regarding the two of them with all his old challenging arrogance. "Keep your mouths shut about it, understand? I'll not trust you by dividing it up now; it wouldn't do for you to have gold aboard here. We'll be at Tientsin in three days. We'll all go up to the Hotel de la Paix in the French settlement—it's a good quiet place, and classy. Then we'll see about the stuff, get it valued and so forth."

When Benson and Alf left the cabin, they exchanged a look.

"Square of him, eh?" said Benson. The cockney sniffed.

"Wyte and see, sir—wyte and see! Wot's 'is ruddy gyme, I wonder?"

They discovered soon enough. . . .

At Tientsin the three of them were heroes, for they had long since been given up as dead. From the Taku anchorage up to the French hotel in the Rue du Consulat, their progress was something of a triumph, with newspaper men flocking around and the skipper posing mightily; but eventually they landed safe with their duffle-bags, and the show was over.

They were not broke, of course; Captain Lenger got money from the line's agent, and for a day was very busy. They had rooms adjacent, three of them, in the single corridor of the little hotel. Alf disappeared on business of his own, Benson was off trying to line up a berth and getting a new outfit of clothes; and next morning the skipper summoned them out of bed to meet him in his room.

A hasty shave, and Benson picked up Alf and they joined Captain Lenger. He carefully closed the door and motioned them to chairs.

"We'll divvy up that stuff now," he said, going to the table and taking up three checks that lay there. "I took the gold around to the Yokohama Specie Bank and checked it in; here's the result, equally divided. A bit over a hundred dollars for each of us."

He handed out the two checks. Alf blinked at his, then raised his red-rimmed eyes to the skipper in a ghostly grin. Benson's brows lifted in surprise.

"Wasn't there more gold in that box, Cap'n?"

Lenger shook his head regretfully. "Looked like a lot, but some was phony. You can ask the bank—here's their receipt for it, showing the amount. All fair and square,

Mister! As for the jewels, now: Well, that was a facer, I can tell you. They were all fakes, every last one of 'em. I took 'em to a jeweler in Taku Road, and he laughed his head off."

"Well, sir," said Alf, rising, "it's werry square of you, that's all I 'as to say—werry square, sir. I 'ope you'll 'ave all the luck you deserve, Cap'n."

Benson shook hands with the skipper, and followed the cockney out. In the corridor, Alf swung around and grinned nastily.

"Hey! You savvy 'is trick, do you?"

"Sure," said Benson, with a nod. "He turned in some of the gold, kept the rest. And the jewels were real enough. He's just putting us off, and we've got to take it."

Mr. Sun Ho smiled. "I had hoped that I might recover those jewels," he said, "but I see that the usual futility of human hopes holds true."

"Got to tyke it, 'ave we?" A snarl curled the lips of Alf. "You wyte and see, sir! Where'll you be today?"

"Busy," said Benson, wondering what the little man could mean. "If I get a berth, I'll try to ship you—"

"You meet me 'ere tonight at six for dinner, sure!"

Benson agreed, and went his way, as did Alf.

Meeting with no luck whatever in the way of getting a berth, Benson did not return to the hotel until late in the afternoon. He was changing to a clean shirt when Captain Lenger knocked and entered, looking disturbed.

"Evening, Mister," said the skipper. "I wish you'd come over to my room, will you? Might need you to back me up—there's a queer Chinese chap there askin' questions."

"Sure," said Benson. "Can he speak English?"

"Better than us," said Lenger sourly. "I'm sailing with the *China Maru* for 'Frisco tonight—she leaves at midnight. The line's givin' me another ship if I want it. Say the word and you can go back with me."

Benson got into his clean shirt, wondering. Why this offer? Lenger wanted something in exchange, no doubt.

"Nope, I'll stick out here and see what I can land, Cap'n," he rejoined. "Thanks all the same. Well, come along and we'll see your friend."

Lenger led the way to his own room. He was, obviously, ready to leave—his things were all packed and ready. Beside his table sat a bland, chubby little Chinaman, dressed in the finest of Western garments, a diamond blazing in his cravat. Only his wisp of a graying mustache showed that he was older than appeared at first glance.

"This is Mr. Sun Ho," said the skipper. "Meet my mate, Mr. Benson. Was with us."

"I am honored," said Mr. Sun Ho, shaking hands with Benson. His eyes were heavy-lidded, slow, but very piercing. "I hope my questions will not weary you. I am interested in your story, gentlemen."

"Sit down, sit down," said Lenger irritably. "Have a cheroot, Mister. Now, Mr. Sun Ho thinks maybe we were aboard a ship he owned—he owns a lot of 'em. The hulk, I mean. He says maybe it was the *Fang Tung*, a sort of yacht that got blown to sea off the Taku River here a month ago. His son was aboard her."

"And his family," said Mr. Sun Ho quietly.

Benson shook his head. "There wasn't a sign of a name aboard her, Mr. Sun," he rejoined. "Not a living soul, either. She was badly smashed up. Couldn't say if she was your ship."

"Will you describe her, please?" said the yellow man. Benson did so, and Mr. Sun Ho made no comment.

"I am interested in recovering a small fortune that was aboard," he said. "It is evident that my son and his family are no longer with us. But he had, aboard her, an ancient collection of jades, very valuable, and some jewels that came to us from my ancestors. Upon them I place a high value—much more than their worth. Whatever you can tell me will, of course, be held confidential."

Benson looked at the skipper, who spoke up promptly.

"There wasn't any jade, Mr. Sun Ho," he said abruptly. "We found a cash-box with some money in it, that's all. A few gold pieces, and some that were bad. I turned 'em in at the bank yesterday—you got that receipt, Mister?"

Benson had it, and got it out. Mr. Sun Ho smiled suavely and rose.

"Evidently it was not the same boat," he said. "I had hoped that I might recover those jewels, but I see that the usual futility of human hopes still holds true. I regret to have troubled you, gentlemen. Good night!"

He shook hands and departed. When the door had closed, Benson gave the skipper a hard look.

"Why didn't you tell him about that stuff?" he snapped. Lenger shrugged.

"The paste jewels? That wasn't what he was after."

"You're a damned liar!" said Benson. "You don't fool me for a minute. Probably it wasn't his ship at all, for there were no jades. Still, you lied about the gold and the stones, and you know it damned well—"

"Mister, you tryin' to insult me?" Lenger glowered at him, and Benson uttered a contemptuous laugh as he turned to the door.

"Insult you, Lenger? It couldn't be done," he said.

Afterward, he regretted that he had not told Mr. Sun Ho about the red lacquer box and what was in it; but reflection banished his regret. Whether the jewels had

been real or false, mattered little. The yellow man had evidently not been able to tell if the hulk was his ship, and certainly Benson had seen no jade aboard her.

Half an hour later, Alf showed up in Benson's room. He was a little drunk, wore a glorious outfit of new clothes and a glaring green necktie, and was highly excited.

"I met the ruddy skipper," he said, with a grin. "Checking out, 'e was. Leaving the 'otel."

"He's off home tonight on the *China Maru*," said Benson. "What's the joke?"

"Come and see," said Alf. "Dinner, and it's on me! A swank dinner at the Astor 'Ouse, and a taxicab over to Victoria Road. You and me. I sye, I 'ave something to show you!"

"Show it now," said Benson.

Alf refused. He strutted out like a lord, commanded a taxicab, and took Benson over to the Astor House Hotel. Not until they were seated at a table and a bottle of champagne had been opened, did he give even a hint of what was behind his mystery. Then he produced an envelope, sealed, and tossed it grandly to Benson.

"Pals, and 'ere's to us!" he said, lifting his glass. "Your share, that's wot that is."

Benson tore open the envelope and to his amazement disclosed a packet of crisp new ten-pound notes.

"What is it? Did you win in the lottery?"

"Not by 'alf!" said the cockney triumphantly. "Share and share alike, aint it? Well, that 'ere ruddy Lenger, 'e collared one box—but I turned up four others 'e never got a sniff at! Jydes, that's wot they was, and inside one was a name and address 'ere in Tientsin, and I dropped in there today wif 'em. Turned 'em over, I did, like an honest man. And blime if the Chink didn't up and 'and me four 'undred quid for you and me—strike me pink! Two 'undred quid for each of us!"

Benson sat stock still. "Jades!" he exclaimed. "See here, was that man Mr. Sun Ho?"

"That was the nyme," said Alf, with a leer. "Did 'e come to see the skipper?"

"He did," said Benson, and Alf chuckled evilly to hear of the interview.

"Didn't I sye to wyte and see?" he declared, with a wink, and lifted his glass again. "And I sye it again—wyte and see, and 'ere's luck all around!"

Benson pocketed the money, in wonder. . . .

Early in the morning, Alf came into Benson's room, holding a copy of the Daily *News*. He lit a cigarette, and regarded Benson solemnly.

"I said to wyte and see!" he observed. "Where was we larst night, pal?"

"We," said Benson, having bound a towel around his aching head, "celebrated. We wound up in the Hung-ping-Lu a bit after midnight, had a fight with two Jap gendarmes, and it cost me a five-pound note to square it. They escorted us home."

"And a werry good job as they did," said Alf. "That Mr. Sun Ho did 'is bloomin' work fast, if it was 'im! Look at this."

He extended the paper. Benson took it, glanced at the finger-marked paragraph, and saw that he had come to the end of the story. It read:

> The body of Captain Adolph Lenger was picked up at eleven last night, floating off the Tanku landing, by a police launch. The body bore two fresh stabs. It is supposed that Captain Lenger, who had booked passage on the *China Maru*, was on his way aboard and was robbed and murdered by his coolies. Our readers will recall that Captain Lenger gained recent fame—

Benson laid down the paper. He perceived that Mr. Sun Ho probably had all his jewels by this time.

Boomerang Bullets

A powerful story of police and gangster warfare, by the gifted author of "Nobody's Yes Man."

By FORBES PARKHILL

Illustrated by Paul Orban

IT lacked eight minutes of midnight when the patrolman on the beat heard the crackling reports of the automatic pistol. Although the sounds came from the Tolliver Garage, he knew well enough they were caused by no backfiring car. Immediately he beat a tattoo on the sidewalk with his nightstick. And he took his time about it. Fogarty wasn't lacking in courage. But he had dogged a beat in the riverfront district long enough to know when to be prudent.

It lacked six minutes of midnight when the officer, reinforced by the flatfoot from the Walnut Street beat, cautiously entered the broad door of the garage. He held his service revolver in his right hand and an unlighted electric torch in his left. Except for the cubbyhole of an office, the garage was but dimly lighted. Outside, a dozen persons clustered in doorways, in readiness to dart to safety should bullets begin to fly.

In the office the patrolmen found the grotesquely sprawled body of the proprietor, riddled with bullets.

"Tolliver was stubborn, Ed," said Fogarty, a bit nervously. "That's why he got his. Wouldn't kick through, I guess. It was Kiscus and his boys that took him, most like. You better phone. I'll look around."

The beam of his torch swept the gloomy interior of the garage as he made his way between the rows of cars. It came at rest on two other human forms, huddled on the oily cement floor within a yard of each other near the work bench in the rear. Fogarty made a clucking sound with his tongue. The beam of his torch searched the darkest corners before he resumed his advance.

One of the figures was that of a mechanic, in greasy coveralls. He had been shot thrice through the abdomen. A foot from his outstretched right hand lay a heavy S wrench. The officer gave this body but a passing glance. It was the other which absorbed his attention.

It was that of a youth in his early twenties, flashily dressed in gray topcoat and cap. The officer bent down and disengaged a .25-caliber automatic from the limp fingers. One side of the youth's face was drenched with blood from a gash above his left eye. Fogarty rolled his head over. The other side of his face was smeared with oil from the unclean floor. He was breathing heavily, with a gurgling noise, somewhat like a man snoring. Apparently the gash on his brow was his only injury.

"Better not, buddy!" Fogarty obeyed the command and raised his hands.

Fogarty heard running footsteps and twisted about suddenly, the revolver still in his hand. It was another harness man, attracted by the rapping of the nightstick.

"You know Kiscus Lub when you see him, Malloy?" asked Fogarty.

"I never seen him with my own eyes, but I heard—"

"You think this is him?" Fogarty indicated the prostrate youth with a gesture of his revolver.

"It's about his age. Dressed like the description in the police bulletin. If his eyes wasn't closed, we could tell for sure. Slitty eyes, Kiscus has got. Blue, like ice."

Fogarty knelt and thumbed back an eyelid. The eyeballs were rolled upward, but the edge of the iris showed blue.

"It was this way," explained Fogarty heavily. "Kiscus, he came in the office and gave Tolliver the works. Then—"

"He got Tolliver, did he?"

"In the office. Then he run for the back door. The mechanic took after him with the wrench. The mechanic must of been a fool. Kiscus let him have it, through the belly. But those little steel-jacketed bullets aint got much 'stop' to 'em. The mechanic bent the wrench over his head. They both dropped, and the mechanic died."

"It must of been a big job, for Kiscus to tackle it himself."

"Uh-huh. And a swell pinch, for me—for us, Malloy."

At the sound of a distant siren Fogarty holstered his revolver and hauled the unconscious youth to a sitting posture by one limp arm. "Get his other arm over your shoulder," he told his companion. With their inert prisoner draped between them they reached the doorway just as the "wagon" drew up at the curb with shrieking brakes. Two members of the wagon crew piled out to aid them, and the officer who had telephoned emerged from the garage office.

An enclosed car silently rolled up alongside the police machine, and halted. A machine-gun began to bark, in sharp, sudden bursts. One of the officers pitched forward on his face, shot through the back. Another, tugging at his revolver, whirled about to face the enemy. A spasm of pain suddenly flickered across his face. He dropped his gun, clutched at his abdomen with both hands, bent double, and slowly eased himself to the sidewalk.

The patrolman who had just emerged from the office staggered. Behind him a row of tiny holes suddenly appeared in the plate glass window. He leaped aside, reaching for his holster. The machine-gun was spouting flame in short bursts of six or seven bullets each. The narrow street echoed and re-echoed, the staccato *slap-slap - slap - slap* of the weapon magnified until it sounded as if a dozen compressed-air riveters had cut loose all at once.

The officer caved in suddenly, as if one leg had been jerked from under him. He raised himself on his left elbow and opened fire on the sedan. The machine-gun in the car began to chatter again. Dust flew from the front of the fallen patrolman's uniform and a brass button went spinning across the sidewalk. He slumped back against the base of the window, still propped up on his elbow, but did not stir again.

Two men armed with automatic pistols darted around the rear of the sedan. Neither was masked, but both had drawn their caps low over their faces. The snarl of the machine-gun within the car ceased as they came into view. The echo died away. The street was oppressively silent.

Malloy had leaped free of the prisoner at the first shot. He yanked forth his revolver and sprang behind the police machine. A bullet smashed through his shoulder and the weapon fell from his hands. He rolled under the police car.

Fogarty was left with the unconscious prisoner draped upon his right shoulder, blocking his draw. He backed away, permitting the youth to slide to the sidewalk, and reached for his gun just as the two gangsters rounded the rear of the sedan.

"Better not, Buddy," advised the stockier of the two, softly and with no particular rancor in his voice. The muzzle of his squat automatic jerked upward significantly. Fogarty obeyed the unspoken command and raised his hands. The second gangster seized the unconscious youth and dragged him toward the sedan.

"What do we look like, Buddy?" queried the stocky gangster in a businesslike voice, addressing the officer.

Fogarty moistened his lips. "I couldn't recognize you if I seen you again," he said huskily.

"You're a wise copper." He plucked the officer's revolver from its holster and flung it, spinning, inside the open doorway of the garage. "You got to live." He began backing toward the sedan. The bloody-faced youth had been dragged inside the car. The stocky gangster sent a bullet through a rear tire of the police machine just as the sedan leaped forward. He hopped on the running-board as it roared away down the street. He made no attempt to climb inside, but remained on the running-

board, pistol in hand and facing the rear, until it skidded around the first corner. Then he dropped the weapon in a coat pocket, opened the rear door and clambered within.

"He aint dead, is he, Sog?" he asked as the sedan turned another corner and doubled back on its original course. It was dark within the car.

"Who? Kiscus? Not him, Wink. Rap on the head. He's tough. He'll be O. K. in ten minutes. Say—you hear a siren?"

"Yeah. Homicide squad. It'll take 'em five minutes to find out what happened. We're all right. Ease over into the front seat. Too crowded back here."

The sedan rounded another corner and headed into a heavy-traffic street. It was proceeding at a leisurely pace now, keeping with the traffic and waiting patiently for the "go" lights.

"I told Kiscus he better not try—" came a voice from the darkness.

"Chop it, Sog," Wink advised curtly. "He knew what he was doing. Everything turned out O. K."

"Only thing is, Wink, them bulls. Burning old Tolliver down aint so bad. But them bulls—"

He broke off, short, as a groan arose from the floor of the car.

"Yeah?" demanded Wink. "If Kiscus comes awake and hears you crabbing, you'll wish you hadn't. They had him, cold. He'd of burned for it, if we hadn't pried him loose."

The sedan turned off into a side street and headed down toward the river. Its destination was a two-story building housing a garage and filling-station, and separated from its nearest neighbor by the width of several vacant lots. The car rolled into the garage and the steel door descended behind it.

"You be changing the license plates, Sog, while we take Kiscus upstairs," Wink directed. The injured youth was semi-conscious, now, and made an effort to stand as they dragged him out into the dim light of the dingy garage interior. Wink draped one of his arms about his own shoulders, and assisted him up a narrow flight of stairs, followed by three of his companions.

Upstairs, he pressed a light switch, disclosing one room of a richly-furnished apartment, oddly out of place in this dingy building. He lowered the youth into an overstuffed armchair. "I'll get you a drink, Kiscus. You'll be O. K. in a minute. Everything's—"

He broke off abruptly, stepping back a pace, blinking rapidly.

"Well, I'll be—" he began, astounded. "I'll be a dirty— Why, *it aint Kiscus!*"

"I won't tell!" put in the soda-jerker. "I *promise* I won't."

An astonished growl and an oath or two came from his companions. The bloody-faced youth opened his eyes and looked about him, still in a daze. His eyes were not the slitted and crafty eyes of Kiscus Lub, gang-leader and racketeer. They were blue, but wide and frank. Wink leaped forward, clutching him by a shoulder and shook him.

"Who the hell are you, anyway?" he demanded.

"Don't!" implored the youth. "It makes my head hurt." He glanced about him. "Where—where am I?" He raised his chin and straightened his tie.

Wink cursed him.

"Who are you?" he demanded again.

"Me? Claffey. Wallace Claffey. I jerk soda down at Baur's. What—"

"You louse! Where did you get that coat?"

Claffey's eyes wandered to the sleeve of the gray topcoat. He started with surprise.

"Search me! It isn't mine. I wasn't wearing a coat when—"

"Where's Kiscus?" Wink snapped, his eyes batting furiously.

"Who?"

"You know who I mean!"

"Kiscus?" The youth's brows wrinkled. "You don't mean Kiscus Lub, the—"

One of the gangsters snorted contemptuously. "Nobody home, Wink. Plain boob."

Wink wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Yeah. And we took three-four bulls just to get—*him!* Question is, where's Kiscus?"

"We better go back and scout around. Huh?"

Wink scowled and blinked. "You're bright, you are: Yeah—go back and walk right into—"

He broke off as the youth rose uncertainly to his feet, muttering:

"Say, I got to be going now, boys. I—"

Wink hurled him violently back into the chair.

"You set right where you are! You'll be going, soon enough. But not where you think!"

He turned to his companions, blinking. "It's too late to do anything now—but wait. If they got him, they got him. He'll have to beat the rap the best he can. If he made his getaway, he ought to be showing pretty soon."

"If they'd got him, Wink, they'd of got him right at the start. We'd of seen him. I betcha he's—"

Ignoring his companion, Wink turned again to the youth.

"What was you doing at Tolliver's, Buddy?"

"Me? I was waiting for Davy. Me and him—"

"Who the hell's Davy?"

"He's the mechanic. His shift would of been up at midnight. Me and him, we was going to—"

"What happened? I mean, how much did you see?"

"You mean the shooting, and all? Well, me and Davy, we was in the back, where he was working at the pits.

We heard shots in the front office, and stepped out to see what it was all about. A guy was running towards us. He shot Davy. I started to run. This guy, he picked up Davy's wrench and took after me. I don't remember any more."

"He's lying," scoffed one of the gangsters. "Kiscus wouldn't hit anybody with a wrench. He wouldn't leave any witnesses."

"His gun was empty, I guess," spoke up the soda-jerker, a bit nervously.

"Buddy," said Wink to the youth, his voice businesslike and containing no animus, "you know too much."

YOUNG Claffey's face, already pale under its grease and blood, shaded off a bit whiter.

"Honest, boys, I don't know anything!" he quavered. "You let me go, and I'll promise—"

Wink shook his head. "Promises don't go, Buddy."

"I—I tell you what I'll do, boys. I'll give myself up to the coppers, and let 'em think I'm—I'm your friend, and I won't tell 'em who I really am for a whole week, and that'll let your friend get away, and—"

Again Wink shook his head. "Sorry, Buddy."

"Aw, please, Mister—please! I got a sister, and a—"

"What you aim to do with him, Wink?" broke in one of the gangsters harshly.

Wink shrugged wearily, and significantly patted the automatic in his pocket. "Afterwards," he remarked, jerking his head toward the river, "we'll let him take a swim. . . You like to swim, Buddy?"

Downstairs, a door slammed. Wink snatched out his automatic and tiptoed toward the head of the stairs.

"It's Kiscus," he flung over his shoulder. "Now watch us catch hell!"

Kiscus Lub entered the apartment with the stealthy tread of a cat. He was slender, lithe, lacking a trifle of being medium-sized. Without topcoat and cap, he stood before them in a blatantly striped but faultlessly tailored business suit. His platinum-blond hair was slicked straight back.

He was younger than any man in the room except the youthful prisoner. Yet he dominated the gangsters by the sheer force of his personality. It was not reflected in his chin, which was rather weak. His eyes constituted the key to his character.

The lids were slitlike and cruel. Behind them gleamed two spots of icy, merciless blue.

"Well?" he demanded coldly.

No one spoke. Wink shuffled uneasily.

"A swell bunch of saps!" His tight lips barely moved when he spoke.

"It was this way, Kiscus," spoke up Wink uncomfortably. "You see, we—"

"Who's your friend?" demanded the young gang-leader, ignoring the proffered explanation, and nodding toward Claffey.

"Him? Why, he's the goof you socked—"

"*I* know it. What I mean, see, is why did you drag him here?"

"We thought he was you, Kiscus. He's wearing your coat, or one just like it."

Kiscus turned slowly and spat down the stairway. "A swell bunch of saps! Whyn't you wait for me with the car where I told you to?"

"We did, Kiscus. We heard all the shooting, and we waited and waited, and you didn't show, and we thought maybe Tolliver'd got you, so—"

"So you left me to leg it back here, while you—"

"We drove 'round front, and thought we saw the flatfoots packing you away in the dooley wagon. We wasn't going to stand for that, so we showered down on 'em, and—"

"And saved Sonny Boy!" Kiscus looked at the prisoner, and sneered.

"That's all right, Kiscus," said Wink anxiously, batting his eyes nervously. "I'll 'tend to him. I'll take him for a ride and a dive."

"You'll keep your hands off'n him, see?"

"Jeez, Kiscus, you aint going to let him run out on us, are you? He knows too much—"

"I won't tell!" put in the soda-jerker falteringly. "I—I *promise* I won't!"

"Listen, you saps!" rasped Kiscus, ignoring the youth. "Why you s'pose I put my benny on Sonny Boy? Or did you think, maybe, he'd slipped it off me while I wasn't looking?"

"*I* know!" Wink exclaimed brightly. "You're smart, Kiscus. Just like a whip! Aint he, boys? Aint I always said—"

"And you go and gum it all up on me! After I frame it so's the coppers will think it's me, you blow your tops and burn down a lot of flatfoots! How many times I got to tell you, see, that I'm against killing—when it aint necessary?"

"But with this here soda-yanker, Kiscus! If there was ever a case where it was necessary—"

"You leave Sonny Boy to me, see? You gummed the game once on me. But it aint too late to go ahead with the frame."

"You mean—"

"I mean, we'll take him back and dump him out near Tolliver's."

"Cold meat?" asked Wink in businesslike accents.

"Yeah. A clip of these steel-jackets will mess his face up so his friends can't identify him at the morgue. They'll think it's me, see? I'll put some letters in his pockets to make sure. I never been in the Bertillon room, and they haven't got my prints. They'll say: 'Kiscus got his. He got it in the battle at the garage. When his boys seen he was dead, they tossed him out.' And if they think I've kicked off, they won't bother themselves to look for me, see?"

Wink gazed at his leader in admiration. "Boys, didn't I tell you he was smart, like a whip? . . . Shall we give it to him here, Kiscus, and lug him out the tunnel?"

"Not if he comes quiet. If he makes a fuss, let him have it. Doesn't make much difference. Only, I hate to use the tunnel when it aint necessary. Somebody might get onto it. Some day, see, we may need it, bad. Wink, you ease yourself out to the filling-station, and give us the highball if everything's clear."

CLAFFEY gazed at his captors as he heard Kiscus pronounce his death-sentence. He wiped his face with his hand, and stared uncomprehendingly at the blood on his fingers. When one of the gangsters jerked him roughly to his feet he made no show of resistance. Resistance meant immediate death. Compliance meant a few minutes' respite, possibly a chance to fling himself from the sedan. Meekly enough he preceded them down the stairs and into the car.

Sog, standing at a window, relayed Wink's signal to the driver. The steel door arose slowly, and the car began to move. As it reached the curb a sudden bedlam of noise burst forth—revolver-shots, hoarse shouts, the tinkling of shattered glass. Claffey felt the car jerk to an abrupt stop.

"The cops!" shouted Sog. "They must of trailed—"

His words were drowned out by the crashing, crackling detonation of the gangsters' machine-gun. The prisoner,

The gang-leader whirled about, cursing. Claffey pulled the trigger.

shrinking against the back seat, could see the weapon jerking spasmodically as its holder sprayed leaden death through the windshield. Within the sedan, the noise was well-nigh deafening. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and Claffey heard Kiscus calling out, his voice unshaken and cool:

"Back inside, boys! They'll nail us in a minute if we stick here!"

He seized the prisoner by a shoulder, twisted him about, and shoved him toward the door.

"Make a break, see, and you're through!" he rasped.

But the soda-jerker had no intention of making a break —not so long as he felt the muzzle of Kiscus' automatic jammed against his back. From the corner of his eye he could see the driver slumped across the wheel, the back of his head blown away. And then he was out on the sidewalk, darting for the garage doorway.

Sudden, vicious little spurts of orange flame were stabbing the darkness from doorways across the street. The boom of police riot-guns accompanied the sharper reports of revolvers. Leaden slugs splattered against the brick walls of the garage. The stalled car afforded them a momentary barricade against the gunfire of the police.

As he dived through the doorway Claffey caught a fleeting glimpse of Wink, collapsing across the curb at the corner, just beyond the adjoining filling-station. Bullets began to clang against steel as the door slowly descended. Sog, snarling, whirled upon Claffey.

"You little rat! You crossed us! You—"

"Lay off that stuff!" barked Kiscus, turning his automatic toward Sog. "How could he have crossed us? If you want to use that gat, use it on them flat-foots out there, see?"

"We—we better duck for the tunnel!" gasped Sog, panicky.

Kiscus spat. "I'll blow off the first guy that stirs a leg toward the tunnel before I give the word! Wink, he's still kicking. You s'pose I'm going to leave him lay, you saps?"

"But how—" began the terrified Sog. Kiscus, oblivious of his frantic demand, turned upon his prisoner. One of the garage plate-glass windows crashed to the cement, shattered under the blast from a riot-gun.

"Listen, Sonny Boy. You want to live, don't you?"

Claffey gulped and nodded.

Kiscus spat again. "You see Wink, out there on the corner? Hop out and drag him in here!"

"But — but," stammered the youthful prisoner, "there isn't one chance in a—in a million that I can get through those bullets alive!"

"O. K.! If you don't want to, I'll rub you out, right now. I'm giving you your chance, see—one in a million. Take it or leave it."

Claffey skinned out of the topcoat. He knew his chances might be a shade better without the garment which might lead the police to mistake him for Kiscus. "I—I'll try!" he gulped.

"And listen here, Sonny Boy. No crossing. Understand? We'll be at the windows with our gats trained on you, see? The machine-gun, too. Boys, if he tries to make a breakaway instead of grabbing Wink, burn him down!"

"I—I understand!" gasped the youth as Kiscus, with his pistol, pointed out the side door which gave access to the filling-station, which now was closed for the night. He had no intention of carrying out Kiscus' orders—not if he could escape the police bullets long enough to make a breakaway.

He knew he would be reasonably safe from the police guns until he left the protection of the filling-station and broke into the open. By that time he hoped to be sheltered from the guns of the gangsters by keeping the filling-station between himself and the garage. But as he slipped from the side door he heard Kiscus sending his two remaining gunmen to the corner windows, so one or the other could keep him in sight all the time. The crafty Kiscus had guessed what was in his mind.

"But even if I *do* drag Wink back, Kiscus will kill me!" he told himself as he scuttled toward the filling-station. A bullet whistled ominously past his head as the police spotted him. "He dassn't let me live—now. I know too much!"

And then he was in the open, beyond the filling-station, crouching low, zig-zagging as he ran. Something tugged at the flapping tail of his coat. He saw a flash behind the garage, and knew it was surrounded. He was but ten feet from the prostrate Wink, now. He saw him lift his head feebly—saw the fallen automatic which lay in the gutter.

He stooped to snatch up the weapon, and staggered under what felt like the blow of a fist on his shoulder. As his fingers closed on the pistol he felt suddenly dizzy. He knew he had been hit, but curiously enough he felt no pain. His shoulder was numb, that was all.

The shock of the impact had spun him half around. It flashed upon him he could never make it across the open, with both police and gangsters blazing away at him. But back alongside the filling-station an unoccupied car stood on one of the two grease pits.

It did not occur to Claffey that it was somewhat strange that a car should be standing there at that hour of the night, when the station was closed. His only thought was that it might afford him some protection from those flying bullets.

He staggered toward it. And then he suddenly changed his plans as he spotted the unoccupied grease pit. Sunk in the ground and cemented, it afforded a bullet-proof refuge from the guns of both sides. The next instant he flung himself into it.

Panting, he crouched in the bottom of the pit, striving to control his dizziness. His shoulder was still numb, but by flexing his arm he could tell it was not entirely out of commission.

His outstretched fingers came in contact with wood. He could hear the barking of revolvers, the boom of the riot-guns, the *slap-slap-slap* of the gangsters' machine-gun as the battle raged unabated.

His fingers groped along the wooden surface. If it were a door, he hoped it would enable him to crawl into the adjoining pit, which, with the car standing over it, promised slightly better protection. It proved to be a door, locked on the farther side. Groping along the bottom edge, his hand came in contact with an oil-soaked mass of cotton waste.

He wondered absently why a door between two open greasing pits should be locked.

THE oiled waste gave him an idea. He wet his forefinger, and cautiously held it above the rim of the pit. Then he found he could see the filling-station windows without exposing his head above the rim, by backing to the opposite side of the pit. He raised Wink's pistol, holding it in both hands to steady it. He wasn't dizzy any more.

He drew the trigger. The automatic jerked suddenly at the first shot, startling him, and he missed his mark. He wasn't accustomed to handling firearms. He tried again. This time the bullet smashed the glass cylinder surmounting one of the pumps. The glass shattered on the cement driveway, and a pool of gasoline spread slowly about the bases of the other pumps. Claffey touched a match to his handful of oily waste, flung it like a hand-grenade toward the pool of gasoline, and dropped flat in the muck at the bottom of the pit.

He was conscious of a blinding flash and a terrific explosion. It was followed by a steady roar, as if from the draft of some tremendous furnace. The pit was lighted up by the reflection, almost as bright as daylight. Claffey was afraid a spark might fall into the oily sludge in the bottom of the greasing pit. "If I was in the other pit now, with that car over me like a roof, I'd be a sight better off," he told himself nervously—and tried the door again.

But it resisted his best efforts.

"Anyways," he muttered, "with the wind the way it is the garage will be afire in a minute, and those tough babies will have the choice of being roasted alive, of being shot, or of surrendering."

Cautiously he poked his head above the rim of the pit. Even though the breeze was blowing the flames against the garage and away from him, the heat was terrific. He was about to duck down again when he heard a familiar creaking of metal above the roar of the blaze.

"It's the steel door of the garage!" he cried excitedly. "They're going to try to make a rush for it!"

Almost as he spoke a fresh volley of shots from the police in the doorways opposite the garage entrance burst forth. He saw harness bulls and plainclothes-men running toward the entrance, which was hidden from him by the corner of the garage building.

AN instant later he learned the reason as another car rolled slowly into the street, angling past the stalled sedan, and heading slantwise between the curbs. A roar of triumph went up from the officers as they redoubled their firing.

The youth gasped. For he could see the car was driverless, empty!

"It's just a stall! It's a play to attract the cops, while they make their get-away in t'other direction! If I can only—"

And then he heard a rasping noise, almost at his elbow. With a start he realized some one was unlocking the door between the pits. Then he remembered the gangsters had spoken of a tunnel. It all flashed upon him, now.

This was the tunnel exit, cleverly concealed between the grease pits! And that machine on the other pit—that was their get-away car! They could climb into it, unseen, and roar away into the darkness before the police could wake up to what was happening. The tunnel was Kiscus' ace in the hole, created as a means of escape in just such an emergency as this!

Claffey scrambled out of the pit just as the door burst open and Kiscus, gun in hand, stepped forth. Across the street the empty decoy car crashed into a brick wall, but Claffey had no time for a backward glance. Holding the automatic in both hands, he rested it on the rim of the pit and said:

"Drop that gun, Kiscus, or I'll—"

The gang-leader whirled about, cursing. "You dashety-blanked little rat, I'll fill you so full of—"

Claffey pulled the trigger. The automatic spouted flame. Kiscus pitched forward into the oily smudge. The youth drew a quavering breath, but kept his weapon trained on the door. A scant moment later Sog and his companion appeared, crowding together madly in their eagerness, and almost stumbling over the body of their fallen leader.

"Up with 'em, you—less'n you want what Kiscus got!" barked the youth.

A moment later he rose to his feet, waving an arm wildly as he shouted for the police.

Less than a minute later the gangsters who remained alive, including the wounded Wink, were shackled wrist-to-wrist with handcuffs while a trembling, blood-stained and grease-smeared youth looked on. His knees had suddenly grown unaccountably weak, and he had seated himself on the curb.

"Twas a slick and a nervy piece of work, me lad," said the police inspector, patting him on the back. "'Tis a pity there isn't a reward coming to you for the work you've done this night!"

"I—I didn't do it for a reward," faltered Claffey. "I wouldn't of had the nerve to shoot him, only—only, he was the one that killed my brother, Davy!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Defense of London" deals with an attempt to blackmail a whole nation, and culminates in an amazing battle high over the English Channel.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

BLAKE'S chambers in the Temple were on a third floor, facing south, and under the branches of the trees shading his four windows he could get lovely glimpses of the Thames and the full extent of the peaceful Gardens. Red Lion Court and the buildings housing the Daily *Bulletin*—upon whose staff he was one of the most efficient correspondents—were but a few steps away on the other side of Fleet Street.

He was smoking an after-dinner pipe one evening when the door of his living-room opened and a young woman of striking appearance came silently in and seated herself on the other side of the table with her face in the shadow.

"Well, I say!" expostulated Blake. "Thanks a lot for droppin' in so informally, y'know—an' all that! But who the dev— Beg pardon!"

"Oh, come, Pem! . . . I've not changed as much as all that, you know!"

She leaned forward and he got a clear glimpse of her face in the light from the table-lamp.

"But—deuce take it all—you can't be Jess Burton! Why—dammit—you're *dead!* Stood up against a wall, outside of Moscow with a dozen other men and women —an' shot down by the bolshis with machine-guns! We ran your obituary in our sheet!"

The young woman smiled faintly. "Fortunately, I only got a couple of flesh-wounds—but had sense enough to collapse on the ground, where I bled a bit—looked worse than it was. The cowardly maniacs left us there and went off after vodka. Percy Cushing of the New York *Herald* wasn't badly hit—he had done just what I did. We got out of the cursed country together—I don't know how. Cushing's a top-hole sport—hope we meet again, sometime. Well, I walked into Stringer's office an hour ago as if I were a stranger. Nobody recognized me going up. But you should have seen his face when I went in and closed the door—fancy he doesn't know yet whether he's drunk or balmy. He told me about these 'digs' of yours in the Temple—said you'd done yourself very well—so I thought I'd take a chance on catching you in. How did you ever have the topping luck to get these chambers?"

"Barrister who had 'em was takin' over a first-chop connection in New York. I found I could get 'em for a scarcely more than nominal rent if I cared to refit an' decorate at my own expense; the rooms needed it badly. I put in modern plumbing—electric current—furniture that I'd picked up at auctions of fine old pieces. Jolly comfortable guest-room with its own bath the other side of that door —separate entrance from the hall. I say, Jess! If you've not picked out any digs yet, or happen to be stony—why not use it? What?"

"That's a mighty kind suggestion, Pem! I'm not exactly stony—Stringer just handed me fifty quid; he wants me to rest up a bit before I tackle any risky assignment. But these chambers of yours are delightful. What sort of wireless arrangement do you call that outfit in the chimney corner? Is it really good?"

"You can judge for yourself, presently. The part in the lowboy is a nine-valve super-heterodyne with four screen-grid valves—specially hooked up for me by a friend over in Schenectady who knows exactly how to figure an' balance the resistances. In the cabinet on top there are five more tubes ('valves', we call 'em, here) an' four auxiliary coils for different wave-lengths—operatin' a short-wave adapter—five to a hundred an' fifty meters, givin' a much wider range than the European an' American relay broadcastin' stations, which are all between thirteen-point-ninety an' forty-nine-point-ninety meters. The adapter works through the super-het, below, when on the high-frequ'ncy channels—or you can switch it off an' use the super-het alone for the regular broadcastin' channels between two hundred an' five-fifty meters. Last night, I got a murmur from a chap who sounded as if he were in Russia—workin' on a wave-length of seven-fifty-nine-point-two kilocycles or exactly three hundred an' ninety-five meters. You notice the set is calibrated in kilocycles—single control—but includes a micrometer-condenser if you want to split your kilocycles pretty fine and get a minimum separation."

"H-m-m—somehow, that three-ninety-five meters has a vaguely familiar sound. I seem to remember that the Bucharest government is three-ninety-four-point-two—using twelve kilowatts. —Wait a bit! . . . I have it! Your 'three-ninety-five' is the experimental station they've recently completed near Campulung—up in the highest part of the Bukovinian Carpathians. I've heard they had an antenna-output of forty kilowatts—which is a lot for Europe, taking the average. What sort of talk were you getting—Rumanian?"

"Too much static to be sure."

"About this time in the evening?"

"Just about. I rather vaguely got an impression that the chap was tryin' to hit the half-hour exactly—as if he knew the custom of the Wireless Intelligence Bureau up yonder in Whitehall to listen for European pick-ups on the half-hour, particularly, and the rest of the world on the quarter an' three-quarters."

"I say! . . . Let me tune that set a bit—see if I can catch the same chap, now. That would be seven-fifty-nine-point-two kilocycles, wouldn't it? I'll have to guess at the 'point-two' without a vernier. Somewhere inside this sixteenth of an inch on your drum-scale, I'd say. Here's a carrier-wave coming in—I'll have the modulation in a second."

A few words came weakly but clearly through the dynamic speaker built into the lowboy.

"Quick, Pem!" the girl exclaimed. "You always were good at shorthand! Get pencil and paper—take this down!"

"Whitehall take down and relay. Whitehall—Whitehall—Whitehall—Whitehall. Catch and relay."

Then followed a long jumble of words that made no sense, after which the call for Whitehall was repeated, with the same jumble afterward. Jess Burton had been listening intently to the tones of the voice, a puzzled expression in her face:

"I say, Pem! . . . Is it absolutely certain that Brad Akerson was killed in Tomsk three months ago?"

"International Press man saw him shot—saw and identified his body as it lay on the ground with the others. Didn't dare go too close because he himself was disguised as a moujik with gunny-sacking bound around his feet. Just about the same kind of identification as yours was when we got it."

"Then there's at least an even chance that Brad wasn't killed! I'd almost swear that was Akerson talking from that Carpathian station. Some sort of code, I fancy."

"By Jove! . . . If it really was Akerson, it's entirely possible he was usin' the *Bulletin's* 'Z' Code—foreign correspondents. It's tricky as the deuce, yet simple enough when you know it—an' can be used quickly. I drilled in it several nights until I knew it fairly well; no code-book or list is permitted, d'ye see—too much risk of gettin' into the wrong hands. One has to memorize it either from Stringer—or Fahys—or Williamson. Now—wait a bit! I'm quite sure I got every word that came through the speaker—I'll type it out and then see what I can do in the way of decodin'!"

An hour later, he had typed the following:

Revolution brewing under surface several months. Disaffected Ukrainians, Bukovinians, northern Rumanians now declaring new Balkan State—47 to 49 north latitude between 24th and 28th meridians, east. Have seized lethal-gas and munitions plants of Soviet near Kamenetz-Podolsk—burned all buildings—loaded equipment narrow-gauge railway—transported it up into mountains near railway line over Dorna Vatra Pass. Have seized experimental wireless station near Campulung. Red Army expedition sent in from Ukraine wiped out with lethal gas from planes before penetrating twenty miles. New State in need of money and supplies—has notified Polish city near border to deliver fifty million *lei* and listed supplies at designated spot in mountains next Sunday morning, otherwise city will be destroyed. Punitive expeditions being mobilized at Balta—lower corner Poland—but neither realize what they're up against. Revolutionists under name "Carpathians" developing new methods attack and defense—have possession formula Soviet's most deadly gas, not yet tried out. Later communication if possible.

As the two read this over a second and third time they looked at each other with serious expressions on their faces. Exceptionally brilliant press correspondents, they k n e w, better than anyone in the British Parliament, the sort of conflagration this spark might spread to if not checked within the next few weeks.

Blake reached for his telephone and was put through to the Foreign Office. He asked if his friend Captain Phil Barrington was there and could come to the Temple. In twenty minutes, Barrington was admitted by the devoted Wong Kuen—whose life Blake had saved two years before—but stopped short in amazement as he recognized Miss Burton. When condensed explanations had been made, he turned to Pemberton Blake.

"Must be something in telepathy, after all! Message was sent around to me by the Marquess of Lyonesse—picked up an hour ago an' decoded by his Wireless Intelligence Bureau in Whitehall. He knows this Labor Governm'nt will avoid takin' any action on it, but followed out his custom of giving us in the F. O. everything of importance he picks up."

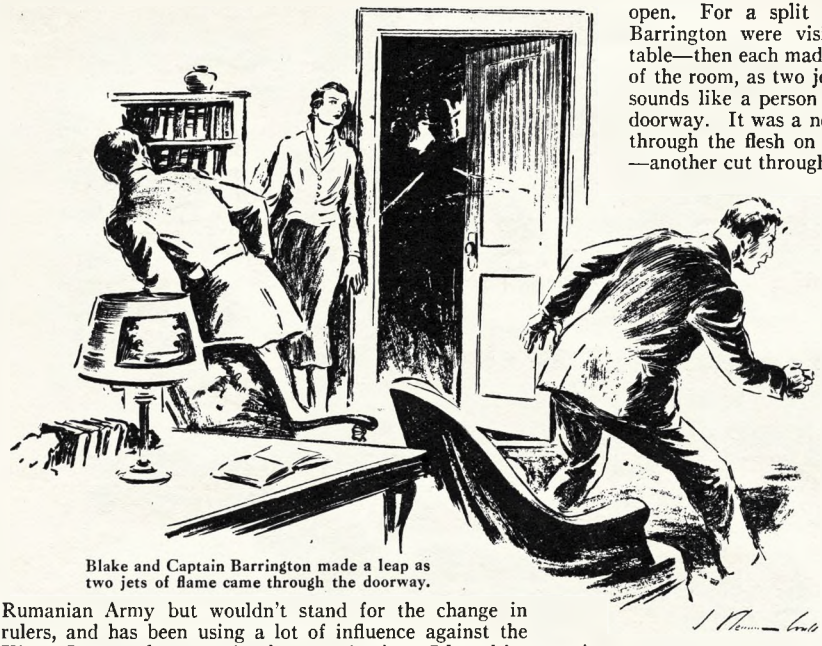
"Is the F. O. putting the lid on—or can we publish it?"

"If you don't mind chancing starting something which may get way beyond your control in the way of general panic, I fancy there'll be no objections raised by Governm'nt. This Labor lot will laugh at it as a purely alarmist rumor. Sanderson himself would have looked at it that way when he took over the F. O.—it was generally considered that we were little more than a 'spy system' which the country could dispense with altogether. But he hadn't been Secretary a week before he found London a nest of political spies from every nation on earth—secret conferences of the Cabinet getting to the other Chancelleries within a few hours, and that in sheer defense we had to know what was goin' on in them. But their policy is not to muzzle the press when they can avoid it—the more publicity the better, as they look at it."

"Did you get into that upper corner of Rumania at all?"

"As far as the mountains—not up into them—wild country. Knew there was something brewin' but couldn't find a loose end. Bunch of men took me back to Jassy and warned me I'd be shot if I tried to go up again. There's a rumor that whatever may be goin' on is being organized by George Lanescu, who was formerly a General in the

They hurled bombs at the line of multiple presses and jumped back into the protection of the stair-well as the bombs exploded.



Blake and Captain Barrington made a leap as two jets of flame came through the doorway.

Rumanian Army but wouldn't stand for the change in rulers, and has been using a lot of influence against the King. Lanescu has a genius for organization—I heard indirectly that he has placed small groups of exceptionally efficient men in every European capital and that whatever he's up to would be kept on the mysterious side—no information permitted to leak out. As an indication that this is no joke, I'm convinced that I was followed from Jassy down to Bucharest, shadowed wherever I went in Paris, and my cab trailed by another one just now, when I came from Downing Street to the gateway of the Temple. But two of our secret-service men are followin' me about."

"Any idea why no report of that Red Army Expedition bein' destroyed hasn't leaked out to the news-sheets?"

"That's been puzzling me a lot. There are several top-hole news correspondents in Bucharest at this moment—others in Warsaw—Prague, and western Russia. Yet I'm fairly certain none of them knows a word of this—which means that every man of those two brigades was killed, so that no word has come back from them—that Moscow, the Rumanian an' Polish governm'nts are secretly much alarmed and are trying to mobilize expeditionary forces without giving the slightest information as to where they are going to be used. Candidly, old chap—it may be a bit of a risk for your sheet to publish that message tomorrow. I certainly shouldn't say how the information reached you—might mean the death of the man who sent it. There's no doubt at all that Lanescu—or whoever's at the head of that revolutionary State—has unscrupulous secret agents here in London, an' that they'll stop at nothing to prevent their plans leaking out. Judgin' from what this wireless man says, they've worked out new methods of attack an' defense which give 'em an immense advantage just now—the devil only knows how much harm they can do before a successful remedy is found—"

At this moment Miss Burton thought she heard a faint rustling sound from the next room—the one with its own door into the hall—and she whispered to the two men:

"When I open the door into that other room, jump for the corners on each side of it, instantly!"

Tiptoeing around by the bookcases, she reached for the knob—silently turned it—and suddenly shoved the door open. For a split second, Blake and Captain Barrington were visible in their chairs by the table—then each made a flying leap for the corners of the room, as two jets of flame, accompanied by sounds like a person coughing, came through the doorway. It was a near thing—one bullet plowed through the flesh on top of Barrington's shoulder—another cut through Blake's coat under the arm. Then the Captain thrust a hand around the door-jamb and fired three shots into the dark adjoining room, toward its hall-door. There was a groan of pain—footsteps stumbling down the two flights of stairs—the sound of two more shots at running men under the trees of Temple Gardens, presumably from Barrington's secret-service men. While Jess was binding up Barrington's shoulder, he remarked:

"There are likely to be more than two of them in that lot—may be watchin' at the gate for us. I'll not be surprised if they've cut your phone-wire. If you're keen on publishin' that message in the morning, we'd best sneak out through Middle Temple Lane, pick up a cab in the Strand, an' drive round a bit. Then back to where you'll get into the rear entrance of Red Lion Court—an' so up to your editorial rooms."

This was done; the Captain drove away to his club after dropping them. But for Miss Burton's prompt action he knew that he and Blake might be dead at that moment—but such risks were a part of his professional work, and the press correspondent's also, to some extent.

When Stringer had read the decoded message through a second time, as Blake and Jess Burton sat watching him, he ran his fingers through his graying hair, wiped his spectacles with a somewhat inky handkerchief, and slowly reached for one of the telephones on his desk, asking the switch-operator to put him through to Grosvenor 9900.

"It's a scoop right enough—but one isn't so sure that it may not be loaded. I'm putting this up to the Marquess himself. You two may not be aware of the fact, but—this in strict confidence, mind—the Trevors own this sheet outright, an' God knows how many others. We're fairly certain among ourselves that they, with Earl Lammerford, control a majority of the press syndicate's shares as well. —This'll be the Park Lane house now!"

"Are you there, Grosvenor 9900? Aye? Daily *Bulletin* speakin'. Would the Marquess be disengaged for a few moments? . . . Thank you. . . . Are you there, Marquess? Stringer speakin'—managin' editor, you know. I say! Did Your Lordship get that code-message from the Carpathians? . . . You did? What would you say about our publishin' the gist of it—front page? Too much risk—or not?"

"I've been considerin' that, Stringer. Publication might start a panic if they actually carry out their threat against that Polish city an' the leading Continental sheets take it up—but it seems to me we need that sort of a jolt to make the people understand what we're up against. They'll not, of course—I fancy you couldn't drive it through the skulls of the general mass. But if those rotters actually can destroy a whole city population in spite of any defense yet

known, it's time we knew it and began to figure out a defense against that sort of thing! Aye—spread that information across the front page! It's substantially correct—I had another tip this evening from a man who may not get out of those mountains alive. He says this new State is in a mighty strong position, geographically—able to exact almost any tribute it wishes—for some time, at least. Warns me it's exceptionally well organized. As a matter of cold fact, you may not be able to get a single copy on the streets in the morning. I've asked Scotland Yard to give you protection—but I fear they'll not take me seriously enough. Barrington called me up to report that shooting in Blake's chambers. The rotters know the information is now in your hands. Take all the precautions you can!"

STRINGER and Miss Burton conceded that it was Blake's privilege to do the front-page story while the editor did the leader for inside—but Stringer insisted upon their all working in the composing-room on the top floor. It struck him that any possible attack would be concentrated upon the editorial offices and the press-room—so he gave strict orders that nobody was to be admitted anywhere in the building unless known to the other employees. Acting on another hunch, he had the first fifty thousand copies off the presses stored temporarily in a sub-cellar. He would have protected the rest of the edition, but was given no time to do so. Two men in the overalls and paper caps of press-feeders came up the stairs with several others after a breath of air and a cigarette on the sidewalk. They stepped inside the doorway of the big pressroom, hurled bombs at the line of multiple presses, and stepped back into the protection of the stair-well as the bombs exploded—killing four men, wounding a dozen others, and completely smashing six of the eight big presses. Meanwhile another man wrecked four of the editorial rooms with bombs, not knowing they were unoccupied; a fourth managed to smash six of the motor-delivery lorries in the basement courtyard—destroying most of the stacked newspapers as well.

While the police were guarding the building and ambulances were removing those killed or injured, Stringer was organizing a makeshift gang to get fresh plates cast from the matrices and take them around to an emergency plant in the next Court, where they were running off sheets within forty minutes, while the battery of linotypes feverishly set the slugs to replace three of the forms which had been destroyed. The first edition—those fifty thousand copies from the sub-cellar—was being delivered to the news-dealers at five in the morning. Before six, another was ready. Altogether, the sheet wasn't two hours late. Its front-page information, fully enlarged upon, was public property for any other paper to repeat—which all of the afternoon Continental papers did.

That evening Blake and Jess Burton were in the living-room of his Temple chambers when Wong Kuen fetched in the Marquess and Marchioness of Lyonesse who, some time before, had been attracted by Blake's journalistic *coups* in Continental cities and knew more than Miss Burton supposed about her own hair-raising adventures in various places.

"Stringer gave us the impression, Pem, that you recognized the voice of the man who broadcasted that message from the Carpathians—but our chaps in Whitehall didn't catch anything familiar in it. Who did you fancy it was?"

"Miss Burton was the one who got it first, and I presently agreed with her—though the man had been reported killed in Tomsk some months ago. We're fairly certain that he was Bradley Ackerson—one of our best Daily *Bulletin* men."

"And you fancy he may have been in that Carpathian experimental station?"

"Sounded to me about the right strength for that—coming from east to west against the Hertzian drift."

"H-m-m—we learned a few things about that station when it was goin' up. Among other things, a powerful receivin' set is right alongside of the transmitter. So—"

"If he had current on the receiving set an' tuned it to the exact wave he was using for transmission, he'd prob'ly catch anything broadcasted back to him—what? Of course if he has but the one antenna he would have to use a switch every time he stopped listening, to speak. I thought of that—wondered if there mayn't be some easy way for me to use my telephone here, connected with some broadcastin' station."

"Simplest thing in the world, Blake! I'll take a month's lease of a private wire for you—with one switch here, and another in my underground operatin'-room at Park Lane. You don't call the exchange at all; just switch your phone into the private circuit, which goes to a loud-speaker at my end. Give my operator the wave-length you want. He immediately switches you in circuit with our beam-station down in Devon, which automatically broadcasts whatever you're sayin' at this end—amplified an' fed into the microphone at Trevor Hall. I happen to know there are several private barristers' wires in the Temple—a number of 'spares' were laid in the conduit for that purpose. Connection could be made by tomorrow night. You may easily get valuable information with such facilities."

The connection was made by dinner-time the following night. In the various European Chancelleries a number of men were anxiously awaiting Sunday morning to see if the Carpathian threat would be carried out in case the money and supplies were not delivered—but noon came without a word from Poland or any part of eastern Europe, though a number of news-correspondents in Warsaw were trying to get telephone-communication with the threatened city.

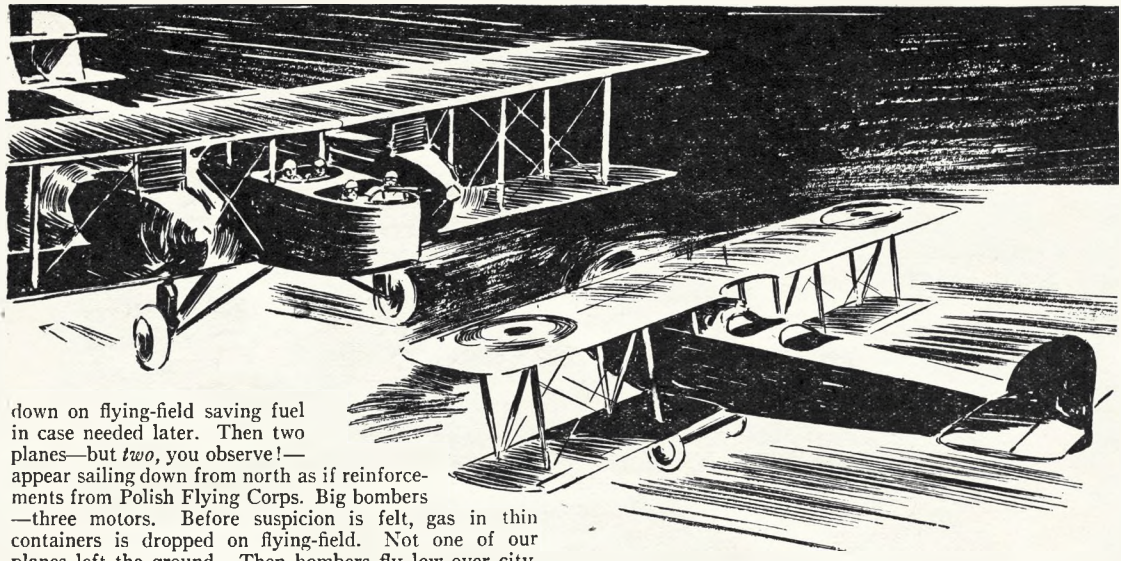
Along toward evening, Blake recalled that he knew a wealthy manufacturer in the suburbs of Warsaw who was a wireless amateur, talking with all the world on short-wave code, and using a radio-phone outfit besides—a man who also was an experienced aviator. Among the wireless data he had collected was the Geneva list of European amateurs, with their frequency and call-letters—so he had no difficulty in finding what he was after. Switching in the private circuit and being connected with the powerful transmitter in Devon, he began calling:

SPX8—SPX8—SPX8—SPX8—SPX8—SPX8
LIVORCSY—LIVORCSY

Blake repeated this at each quarter-hour. Presently, at half-past eight, he got an acknowledgment in Polish, and immediately asked if Sigismund Livorcsy was speaking—saying that he was Blake of the London Daily *Bulletin*. As the acquaintance was based upon valuable service which the Londoner had rendered the Pole some time before, the response—in very fair English—was most cordial.

"DON'T want to take up much of your time, old chap—but Fleet Street is frightfully anxious about that city down south. Has anything happened?" he asked.

"I regret to say, my friend, that something most appalling has happened! You would assume, of course, that I would fly down there this morning in search of information. Well—it is a miracle that I did not the fate of the others meet! Twenty thousand went out of town for week-ending; others would not believe disaster could happen, and they go to church and Sunday-morning tasks as usual. Six planes were sent down by Government as protection. For ten hours no hostile plane is seen; squadron comes



down on flying-field saving fuel in case needed later. Then two planes—but *two*, you observe!—appear sailing down from north as if reinforcements from Polish Flying Corps. Big bombers—three motors. Before suspicion is felt, gas in thin containers is dropped on flying-field. Not one of our planes left the ground. Then bombers fly low over city, dropping eggs in methodical way which is horrible to observe—showing much drill. In half an hour no creature is alive—human or animal. I see in my glasses how people lie in the streets as they rushed out from houses. I am seen; bombers climb after me, but I have faster and lighter ship—also machine-gun, with which I try to kill pilots. Why I fail to hit them is not understandable—they seem thoroughly protected against fire of machine-gun. With ammunition exhausted, I fly home. They could not catch me and did not follow. Gas presumably disperses itself in few hours, but the home-come will be most terrible for those who week-end in other places. Call me at this time on evening of Thursday. Perhaps I have some news for you—perhaps no. But we shut down the top on press dispatch from here—absolutely!"

"You don't want us to print what you've told me?"

"No, that is not my meaning. But give impression that information comes from Russia, Rumania or Czecho-Slovakia. All Europe should know at once of this danger. Behind Polish borders, however, silence of death is maintained until we something get back for this!"

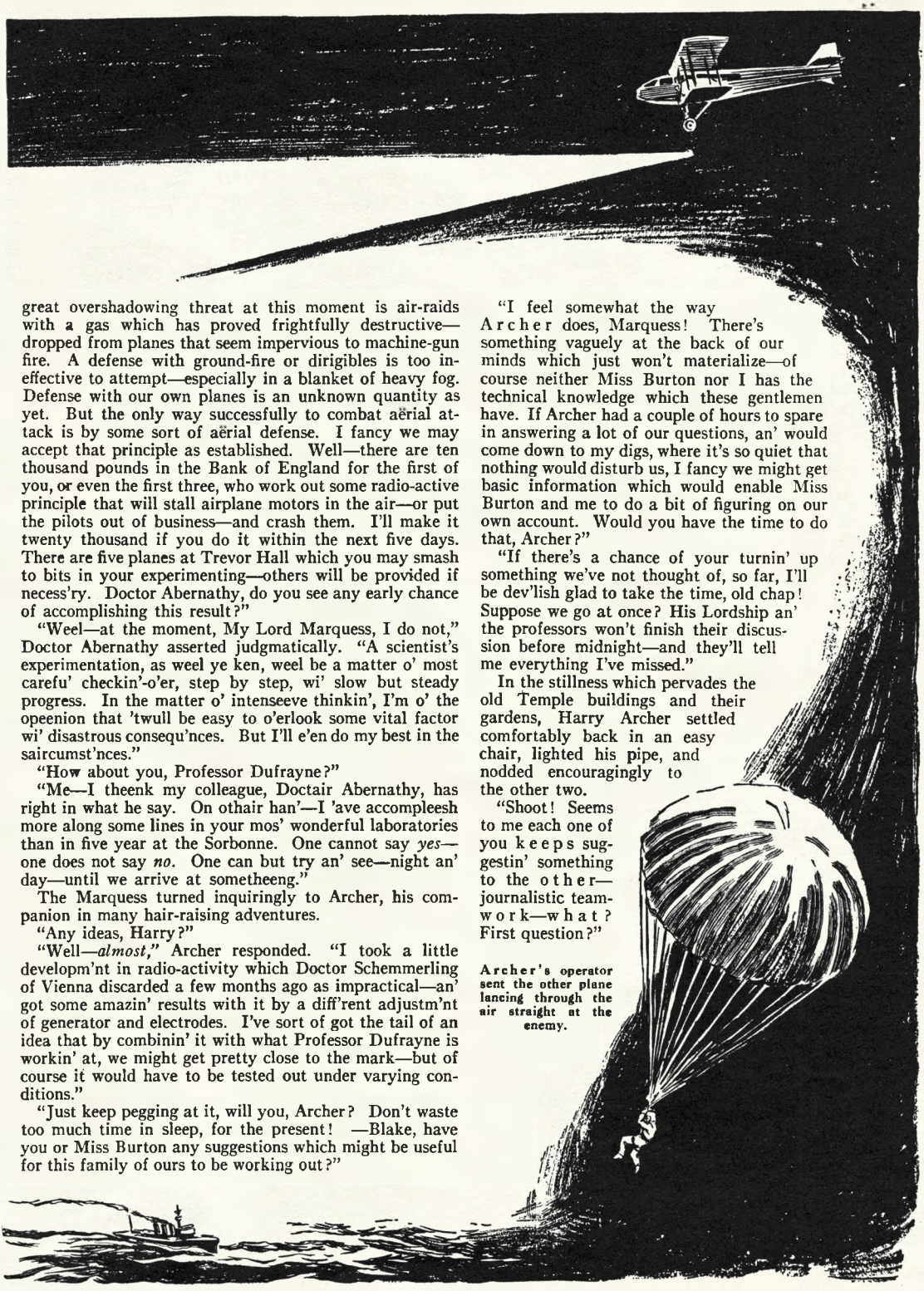
The Daily *Bulletin* was on the streets an hour later with a special four-page edition describing what had happened in the Polish city—and was the first sheet in all Europe to report it. Another hour later, every sheet in the great press syndicate controlled by the Trevors was on the streets with the news. The public began to chill with fear. If this mysterious Carpathian State could do a thing like that successfully, there was no safety for any city—no limit to what such a State might demand.

On Tuesday, an expeditionary force from Poland, acting with a larger one from the Ukraine, crossed the Carpathian borders preceded by squadrons of bombing and combat planes—but the terrain under them appeared absolutely deserted. Many villages were too small to waste the limited supply of gas upon, but still there was no sign of life in them. When the troops were fifty miles inside the borders, however, deadly gas seemed to be oozing from vents in the ground. Men dropped where they stood; tanks halted wherever they happened to be, with dead men inside. The bombing planes dropped their own gas but there was nobody in sight where it struck—and none of it would go down into the ground-vents. In their curiosity to find what the actual conditions were, the pilots flew lower, supposing themselves still far enough above ground to be safe—but one after another crashed. There were but three of the planes which reached and crossed the borders. Thursday evening Blake got the story from his friend Livorcsy, who had seen the whole affair through his glasses, from a safe altitude.

Further attempts to invade Carpathia with any sort of military force were postponed indefinitely—but every Congress and Parliament in Europe was excitedly arguing the matter—the War Departments desperately trying to work out some temporary defense against the other raids which were momentarily expected. One of the Balkan States paid fifty millions—three millions, sterling—and was granted immunity. It could scrape together the money, but was in no position to fight. At that stage in the situation the Marquess of Lyonesse called the fourteen leading scientists associated with him in the experimental work at Trevor Hall for a conference in Park Lane. His chief electrician, Harry Archer, with Blake and Miss Burton, were also included in the invitation. When they were comfortably seated in the big Jacobean library, with tobacco and various drinks within reach, the Marquess rapidly summed up his reasons for calling them together.

"Gentlemen, one after another of you—leading scientists in your various lines—has become associated with me down at Trevor Hall because I offered you better facilities, more thoroughly equipped laboratories, and guaranteed you more remuneration from your work than you could obtain anywhere else. Up to now, we've all been working in the careful, scientific way, checking everything as we went along, but making rather amazing progress, all the same, in the development of aviation, electrical utilities and varied branches and uses of chemistry. At this moment, however, we are faced with a most serious emergency which demands intensive work, to defend ourselves against the greatest menace yet developed. The average person among the masses doesn't believe half of what he reads in his news-sheets. If he did—if he knew what we know—London would be in panic-stricken chaos at this moment.

"We must look after these people before our own safety—unless we callously disclaim all responsibility presumed because of our better education and intelligence. The



great overshadowing threat at this moment is air-raids with a gas which has proved frightfully destructive—dropped from planes that seem impervious to machine-gun fire. A defense with ground-fire or dirigibles is too ineffective to attempt—especially in a blanket of heavy fog. Defense with our own planes is an unknown quantity as yet. But the only way successfully to combat aërial attack is by some sort of aërial defense. I fancy we may accept that principle as established. Well—there are ten thousand pounds in the Bank of England for the first of you, or even the first three, who work out some radio-active principle that will stall airplane motors in the air—or put the pilots out of business—and crash them. I'll make it twenty thousand if you do it within the next five days. There are five planes at Trevor Hall which you may smash to bits in your experimenting—others will be provided if necess'ry. Doctor Abernathy, do you see any early chance of accomplishing this result?"

"Weel—at the moment, My Lord Marquess, I do not," Doctor Abernathy asserted judgmatically. "A scientist's experimentation, as weel ye ken, weel be a matter o' most carefu' checkin'-o'er, step by step, wi' slow but steady progress. In the matter o' intenseeve thinkin', I'm o' the opeenion that 'twull be easy to o'erlook some vital factor wi' disastrous consequ'nces. But I'll e'en do my best in the saircumst'nces."

"How about you, Professor Dufrayne?"

"Me—I theenk my colleague, Doctair Abernathy, has right in what he say. On othair han'—I 'ave accompleesh more along some lines in your mos' wonderful laboratories than in five year at the Sorbonne. One cannot say *yes*—one does not say *no*. One can but try an' see—night an' day—until we arrive at sometheeng."

The Marquess turned inquiringly to Archer, his companion in many hair-raising adventures.

"Any ideas, Harry?"

"Well—*almost*," Archer responded. "I took a little developm'nt in radio-activity which Doctor Schemmerling of Vienna discarded a few months ago as impractical—an' got some amazin' results with it by a diff'rent adjustm'nt of generator and electrodes. I've sort of got the tail of an idea that by combinin' it with what Professor Dufrayne is workin' at, we might get pretty close to the mark—but of course it would have to be tested out under varying conditions."

"Just keep pegging at it, will you, Archer? Don't waste too much time in sleep, for the present! —Blake, have you or Miss Burton any suggestions which might be useful for this family of ours to be working out?"

"I feel somewhat the way Archer does, Marquess! There's something vaguely at the back of our minds which just won't materialize—of course neither Miss Burton nor I has the technical knowledge which these gentlemen have. If Archer had a couple of hours to spare in answering a lot of our questions, an' would come down to my digs, where it's so quiet that nothing would disturb us, I fancy we might get basic information which would enable Miss Burton and me to do a bit of figuring on our own account. Would you have the time to do that, Archer?"

"If there's a chance of your turnin' up something we've not thought of, so far, I'll be dev'lish glad to take the time, old chap! Suppose we go at once? His Lordship an' the professors won't finish their discussion before midnight—and they'll tell me everything I've missed."

In the stillness which pervades the old Temple buildings and their gardens, Harry Archer settled comfortably back in an easy chair, lighted his pipe, and nodded encouragingly to the other two.

"Shoot! Seems to me each one of you keeps suggestin' something to the other—journalistic teamwork—what? First question?"

Archer's operator sent the other plane lancing through the air straight at the enemy.

"Am I right in the belief that it is now possible to fly a plane by wireless control from the ground—with nobody inside of it?" Miss Burton asked.

"Er—quite so. The stunt was first successfully tried on a torpedo-boat or some small craft in Massachusetts Bay—tried again with an obsolete battleship off the Virginia Capes durin' naval maneuvers. Then it was tried on a plane in the air; the pilot took his hands off one set of controls, and the other set was worked from the ground by wireless. Then tried with the plane on the ground. It didn't get into the air, first time, and was partly smashed. Finally did get one up with nobody aboard—made a perfect flight an' perfect landing."

"I SUPPOSE the equipm'nt to do all that was much too heavy to be carried in a plane," Blake conjectured.

"The way it was first tried—aye. But afterward it was found that the generator need be only slightly larger than those used for wireless phone-communication in the plane itself to provide all the power necess'ry to handle the controls an' motor-valves. The wireless coils an' switches to handle an' direct that power, of course, require no more strength than what one picks out of the air to run his receivin' set—which is negligible."

"But you'd have to generate enough strength of wireless current in the plane which was controllin' the other one in the air, to do it successfully."

"Less than five hundred watts—which is what is now bein' used between planes in the air for two-way phone conversations. One antenna stretching from the wing-tips to a central upright rod—the other reeled out astern of the rudder. All this has passed the theoretic stage, d'ye see. I've gone aloft at Trevor Hall in one plane carryin' the wireless equipm'nt and taken another one off the ground by wireless-control, only—flown it about—landed it again in our runway."

Miss Burton asked the next question:

"As I now understand, you can control an empty plane in the air, absolutely—take it up off the ground at any moment it may be necessary? And pilots now talk to each other over a distance of one or two hundred miles while in the air? I'd heard rumors of that, but wasn't sure it actually had been done. Well—we've got that much to depend upon! Now—during the recent war, searchlights on the ground were only good under the most favorable conditions. I suppose some day it will be possible to work a searchlight from a plane."

"I'm doing that right now," Archer observed. "The light is good for a mile on a clear night—very strong at a thousand feet even in rain—usin' less than four hundred watts from the regular wireless generator."

"Then, if your plane were as fast or faster than an enemy plane you could spot it with your searchlight, no matter where it went or how long you were chasing it?"

"I see nothing at all to prevent that except fog—and it's easy enough to use a neon-light, which penetrates pretty thick weather."

Blake's tone was almost incredulous.

"You mean that, in the air over a London fog, you could actually locate enemy planes?"

"Never tried it—but there isn't a question as to its feasibility."

"Suppose you got in touch with enemy planes the other side of the Channel? You couldn't very well have hydroplanes on the water and others on land all the way up to London—to be picked up by wireless control and used to fire on the enemy! At least—not practically."

"Wouldn't try it in any such fool way as that! I'd have a squadron of wireless-controlled planes right up in the air with me—"

"But you couldn't operate more than one at a time by wireless!"

"No, there'd be a mighty good pilot in each of those other planes, flying it until I was ready to use it. When I phoned him I was ready, he'd simply set the switches, aim the machine-guns straight ahead in line with the fuselage, an' step off with his 'chute. The enemy planes couldn't stop that one by killing its pilot because it wouldn't have anybody aboard. I could fly it straight toward the other bus, pouring in machine-gun fire as it came—"

"But these Carpathian planes are said to be impervious to that!"

"Don't quite swallow it! We'll spot the defense pretty soon."

"Suppose the pilot came down with his 'chute into Dover Strait?"

"His flying-suit would keep him afloat for awhile, prob'ly; the sheep's-wool lining doesn't absorb water—too full of oil. And he could kick off the suit if it became waterlogged. He'd have a small float on a cord—with chemicals that would blaze up in contact with the water. And if we had a couple of hours' warning, as is likely, there'd be destroyers patrollin' the Strait from Chatham dockyards."

Miss Burton had written out her questions and Archer's replies. Blake had jotted down a lot of stenographic memoranda. They looked at each other with dawning comprehension—though the thing was still nebulous in their minds.

"My word, Jess! . . . That covers pretty much—eh? I say, Archer! In a case of actual warfare, as a Carpathian raid would be—er—well—I fancy the Marquess wouldn't really stick at the risk of losin' a few planes,—or even twenty,—would he?"

"Now wait a bit, Pem! Let me see if I can puzzle out exactly what you mean. By Jove! Are you suggestin' that we fly those wireless-controlled planes straight into each enemy bus—an' send *both* of 'em to the ground in one eternal smash?"

"Well, from what you've said, it seems to us rather practical, isn't it? Wouldn't need any further waste of time in experiments. What?"

"Well, I'll be damned! Right under our noses all the time—and we never saw it!"

A WEEK went by. A town in Czecho-Slovakia was ordered to pay five millions, with several tons of supplies—and paid it. Then came a message to the British Premier demanding twenty millions, sterling—with the alternative of having one square mile in the heart of London bombed with lethal gas. No time-limit was set, but it was assumed that there would be no attack for two or three days at least, while Parliament was considering the threat.

In the evening, however, Blake tuned his receiving set to 395 meters and although he hadn't dared hope for it, got Brad Ackerson's familiar voice calling for Whitehall to relay.

Even before Brad had finished, Blake had motioned Jess to switch in the private circuit and the beam-station at Trevor Hall was all set to relay his own voice:

"I say, Brad! . . . Pem Blake speakin'! Are you gettin' this?"

"Aye—clearly. Had to reduce volume until I barely hear you! Take this down, quickly! . . . Six bombers left for London at eight, with a full load of gas—can prob'ly make it in six or seven hours, flyin' straight line. Course would take 'em over North Sea between Ostende an' Dunkerque. Due around three o'clock, I'd say! Got all that?"

; "Aye. Call me this freq'ncy any time I'm in my digs—can be ready to relay-back through my phone in two minutes! We'll try to stop 'em! Now shut up an' get into a safe place if you can—I know about where you are! We're not startin' any expeditionary force that way—but with an hour's warning I fancy we can stop 'em here!"

Asking the Marquess' operator to switch him through from the library above, Blake repeated what he had learned—then said:

"Your Lordship will take this up with Archer, of course. Now may I make a suggestion? In the possible contingency that Brad was overheard an' those planes have been phoned to change the time of attack, Archer's squadron might miss bein' on the right strip of French coast to catch 'em that side. Some of the press-syndicate sheets will be able to get planes and send their best men up in them to form a patrol a hundred miles back from the coast. When they spot those six Carpathian planes, they can phone our squadron where, and the direction in which they're headin'. Then we can be ready for 'em at the French Coast. What?"

"CORKING suggestion, Pem! . . . I'll phone 'em as soon as I get Harry Archer started in Devon—he'll be nearly two hours getting to the mouth of the Thames—another to Dunkerque. Anything else?"

"Aye! Miss Burton and I wish very much to be on one of Archer's planes an' see the show."

"No! When Harry finds 'em it'll be some scrap—no tellin' what plane he may use, an' lose, at any moment—or how. You couldn't be of the slightest use—would stand a fifty-fifty chance of bein' killed. But an extra plane is comin' up for me—one I frequ'ntly fly myself. The Marchioness an' two old friends will be aboard—we'll be pleased to have you also. Be at our hangars just outside the lines at Croydon, within an hour—I'll have 'chutes for you both."

The Marquess refused to let the Daily *Bulletin* publish advance reports of the impending attack—but had a hundred of the latest perfected gas-masks sent to the buildings in Red Lion Court with instructions that Stringer was to distribute them among his force and be constantly on the alert for any sounds of a raid. If they were successful in stopping the enemy planes, Jess Burton could be phoning in a description of the flight from Trevor's own ship.

The Marquess was ready to go up when the Croydon floodlights revealed Archer's squadron of fifteen fast planes passing over them—which reduced their speed until he came up.

An assistant of Archer's announced, some fifteen minutes later, that his generators, receiving set and radiophones were in readiness for a talk in ordinary tones anywhere within a five-hundred-mile range. The plane was a large cabin type with four powerful motors driving her—carrying no weight save fuel, wireless-equipment, and the eight persons aboard. In a moment Trevor, with earphones inside his helmet and a microphone-transmitter strapped just under his chin, was talking with Archer in his flight-commander's plane, then with the pilots in each of the other fourteen—all of whom said their wireless-control equipment was in perfect working order. Then the operator picked up one of the press-syndicate planes over near Luxembourg—who said that the Marquess' orders had been carried out as far as possible with a patrol-line of twelve planes covering a hundred-mile line, north and south. He thought they were certain to spot anything crossing it from the east.

At half-past two in the morning, one of the syndicate-planes reported six unknown ones approaching on a line headed due west. One of them switched off to chase him—but upon finding his bus the faster, rejoined the others. From his exact location, the Marquess and Archer knew the approaching planes would pass directly over Dunkerque—and were lined up, waiting, when they reached there. Each of the British planes had the R. F. C. device painted distinctly upon its sides together with a black and white target which made them easily distinguishable from enemy craft even at night.

Archer prudently avoided getting close enough for machine-gun fire—but suddenly a beam of neon-light flashed from the lower end of a steel rod eight feet below the cockpit and spotted the middle enemy-plane, which he thought must be that of the commander. It had but one machine-gun pointing astern—but a stream of rapid-fire came from that to a point just below the searchlight, which the gunner evidently supposed would just about hit the pilot. The eight-foot clearance fooled him, however, and the bullets flew wild. Speaking to his own pilot of the next plane, Archer said:

"Fancy the destroyers are along here yet, Frank?"

"Aye, sir—and several French ones out of Dunkerque. This is just about where we expected those planes, d'ye see—so the navy can't go wrong!"

"Very good! Are you all set, Frank—your controls switched on?"

"Aye, sir—everything's ready!"

"Then jump! We'll handle her!"

All this happened in much less time than it takes to describe it. When the pilot stepped off—to be picked out of the water by one of the destroyers—Archer's wireless-operator speeded-up the motors of the other plane and sent it lancing through the air straight at the enemy spotted by the searchlight. Being entirely ignorant of the fact that the oncoming plane had nobody in it, the Carpathian never dreamed that it would crash into him, and concentrated his fire as the bus approached. But with a rending, crumpling smash, it sheared off his starboard wing as if with an ax, taking two motors with it. Then both ships, in flames, hurtled down into the dark waters of the North Sea.

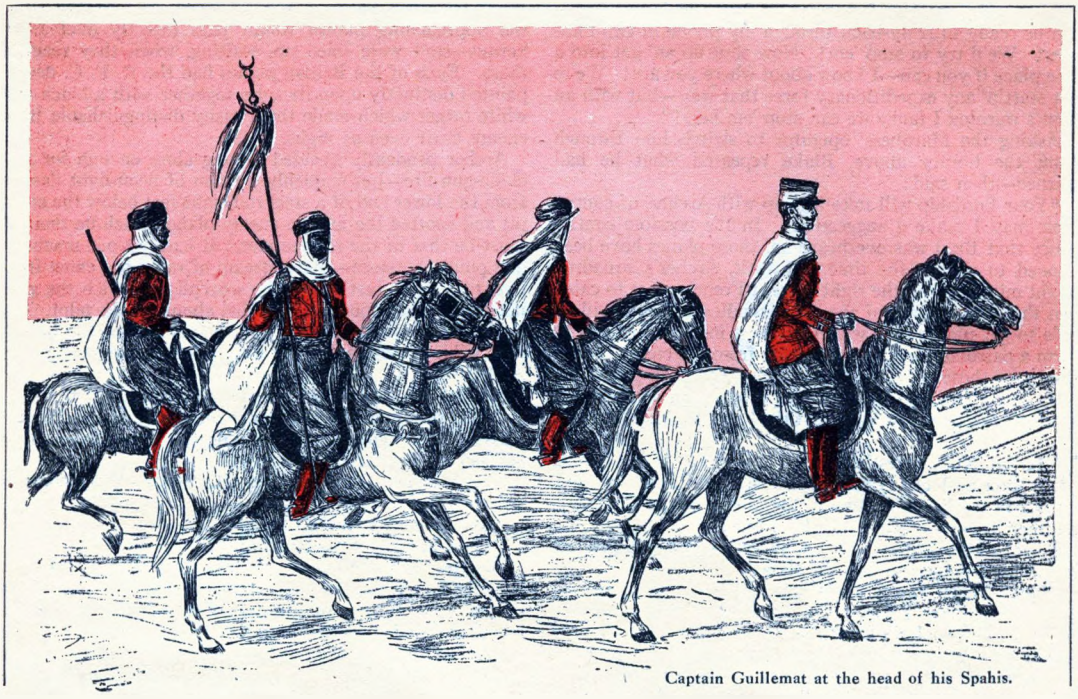
Before they struck, a string of sharp, crisp orders came from Archer:

"Numbers Three, Five, Seven, Nine, Eleven—stand by! Spot the rest of those planes with your searchlights! Lively now! . . . They'll be approaching the Thames in ten minutes! *Good work!* Number Four—stand by. All set, Burroughs? Lock your throttle wide open and *jump!* Number Six—stand by! All set, Claflin? *Jump!*"

THE performance was repeated twice more with clock-like precision—Archer's operator taking over the control of another pilotless bus a few seconds after each crash and falling torch of streaming gas-flame. The remaining two Carpathians banked sharply and put on all the speed they had, to fly back home. Without in the least understanding how it happened, they had seen four of their squadron go down like giant torches from over a thousand meters—and had had quite enough. But that didn't suit the Marquess and his flight commander in the least. They doubled back after their quarry and sent them down on French ground. Two could play at the game of leaving no man alive to carry home the news!

Meanwhile Jess Burton was tensely pouring the story of the fight through the wireless phone from the Trevor plane into Stringer's ecstatic ear, as his pencil flew over a "take-sheet" in the Red Lion Court office. It was one of the most colorful bits of journalistic description ever printed—and was on the streets of London before breakfast-time.

The defense of London was assured; the Free Lances had scored again.



Captain Guillemat at the head of his Spahis.

A Soldier of France

III—The Rebellion of the Arabs

By ARMAND BRIGAUD

Illustrated by the Author

THE strife in Ouargla was strictly connected with the unrest seething in Ouallen. In both towns the Beni Gheoud semi-sedentary Arabs, spurred by the El Monhadi Chambas, were at loggerheads with the Ben'Ibrahim and Beni-Sissin.

Laperrine had sent to Ouargla two companies of the Second and one of the fourth battalion of the First Foreign regiment; there was every reason to believe that these troops, together with the two Senegalese companies posted in Ouargla, would convince the Arabs by their very presence that they had nothing to gain by starting any strife. On the contrary, the gesture of a lone Légionnaire precipitated one of the worst street battles I ever saw.

As soon as he had reached Ouargla, Commandant Rénaud of the First Foreign regiment had taken charge. His first move had been an order to the inhabitants to surrender their firearms and swords within twenty-four hours. Rage and protests from the Arabs!

Rénaud had been firm: "If you don't surrender your weapons peacefully my soldiers will search for them, house by house," he sent warning to the local chieftains. The leaders of the three or four hundred Monhadis who had entered Ouargla before the unrest came swaggering to him. Rénaud made them wait a full hour in the courtyard of the two-story house where he had placed his headquarters. At length an *adjutant* notified them that the Commandant would see them.

Rénaud, his brick-red face rivaling in fiery color the flaming crop of bristling hair that topped his scowling countenance, answered their bold greeting with a growl.

"Inshallah Sidi," a beetle-browed Sheikh began, "why must we give up our guns? We are not of this town. If we should ride away weaponless, we would become easy prey of any other Bedouin tribe, or of the *razziahs* of the Oued Messabud—may Allah confound them!"

"Give up your weapons or get out of town before the twenty-four hours are past!" Rénaud shouted. Then he turned his shoulder to the El Monhadis chieftains and began speaking with Captains Roberti and Woerth.

Arabian guile suggested to the El Monhadi speaker a way around the ultimatum.

"Sidi, may I have your ear a moment?" he pleaded.

"Go quick to the point," Rénaud growled.

With one of those graceful, courtly gestures which are

God's gift to the Arab, the El Monhadi took his sword and presented it, hilt foremost, to Commandant Rénaud.

"Your wish is my law. I lay my weapons at your feet; and my friends, leaders of our people, are ready to surrender their weapons too. But our men are stubborn, unruly. We shall persuade them to bring their weapons, but we can not say how many days of arguing we will need for that purpose. Yet our earnest wish is to please you."

"You will have to do all your arguing before the twenty-four-hour limit expires," Rénaud snapped.

"We will try. And if our men refuse to lay their weapons by that time—"

"They will be treated as dissidents, and seized, or shot if they resist," Rénaud interrupted. "The audience is ended. You can go."

Muttering with baffled rage, the Bedouins withdrew. One hour later they rode out of Ouargla, glowering at the cordon of Senegalese surrounding the town.

Rénaud sighed, relieved, convinced that the greatest factor of discord had been eliminated. The citizens of Ouargla began rushing to the receiving dépot which had been established for the purpose in a caravanserai, carrying with them weapons of all descriptions, which were duly inventoried and stored under the names of the owners. Every officer of the force assembled in Ouargla felt sure that the best and most modern weapons had been buried; but one must not be too discriminating because the Arab stands for a certain amount of sharp treatment and no more.

Ouargla at once settled to its usual peace-time routine of activities. The women spun, pounded the eternal *kuscous* and went through the usual chores in the seclusion of the windowless rooms and sun-baked patios. The men began walking lazily along the winding, broken alleys, or lay under the hot sun heeding not the scores of large black flies walking on their arms and faces. The wealthiest squatted in the coffee-houses, which are stretches of rug-covered ground surmounted by an awning and contiguous to the pantry—a mere hole in the wall where thick black Arabian coffee is studiously filtered, and hard, extremely sweet cakes are stored.

The local merchants brought the samples of their dates, figs and precious olive oil to the square, which by unwritten law was divided in three sections, corresponding to the three tribes inhabiting the town.

The above-mentioned foodstuffs are not only sold to local buyers. Ouargla is an important center of the Sahara, where nomads coming from east and west stop to barter camels, horses—all kinds of goods made by their women or pillaged in some unknown desert affray—for food or any kind of supply which they may lack.

Thus for three measures of dates the local merchant acquires from a Bedouin a bale of woolens, useful for the making of burnouses and gandourahs; a few hours later the negro freed slave and retainer of a minor Sheikh of another nomadic tribe will furtively barter a finely carved silver belt—a gift for the preferred wife of a rich man—for that very bale of wool; and two or three days later the belt will be sold for good gold coins. The dusty open-air marketplace of Ouargla is therefore a lively trading place.

Freed from the overbearing menace of the El Monhadis, the Beni-Sissin conceived the ambitious plan of cornering the market at the expense of the other two rival tribes. To reach that purpose they decided to use the age-long lever of all partialities—bribery. And the one who had unwillingly put that idea in their mind was a sergeant of the Légionnaires, who had accepted a curiously carved silver ring from a Beni-Sissin elder, and then had surrendered to the latter's pleas that he would be allowed to keep his carved steel dagger, an ancient heirloom of rare Arabic workmanship.

The sergeant had not connected the gift of the ring with the permission, for the very fact that the old man had come with his dagger one full hour after he had offered the ring. He had let an old tribesman keep a blunt weapon; that was all. Among scores of grizzled natives, all bearded and all wrapped in burnouses, he had failed to notice that any particular individual had addressed him twice.

But the Beni-Sissin reported excitedly that the bribe had worked. With the tendency of the Arabs to generalize, his fellow-tribesmen reasoned thus: the sergeant is a minor officer; he would never do what his superior officers would not do. We bribed him with a ring; we surely can bribe the chief of them all with something much more valuable. Yet the scowling countenance and thundering voice of Commandant Rénaud discouraged them.

Then they noticed that Rénaud had entrusted all dealings with the peaceful people of Ouargla to Captain Woerth. There was a reason for it; while Rénaud was hard and impatient, Woerth was soft-spoken, calm, tolerant; he was a born diplomat and very efficient. Rénaud had well chosen him as the ideal *liaison* officer.

But the Beni-Sissin reasoned differently. "Things are breaking right," they decided after a long secret council. "The chief, the hard man, does not wish to show any weakness. Surely the other one will accept gifts intended for him. Otherwise why should he choose a minor leader as a middleman? Inshallah, that chief of chiefs is a wise man!"

The orderly of Commandant Rénaud was a Russian who had undoubtedly seen better days. Rénaud, who had a kind heart under a rough demeanor, had given him that soft job to pull him out from the tear and wear of life among the Légionnaires of a company where destiny had collected one of the toughest bunches I ever saw. Légionnaire Stransky, which was most certainly an assumed name, had proved grateful to the Commandant, and most reliable. Money or other valuables of his master were sacred to him.

But Stransky's respect for the property of his master failed to extend to the latter's Egyptian cigarettes. These the Russian seemed to consider his legitimate prey. An inveterate smoker, he worked such ravages in Rénaud's stores that the Commandant soon noticed the tobacco expense was drawing too heavily on his budget.

The author of this extraordinary biography of battle is a French cavalry officer who has fought in scores of actions great and small, in the Sahara, on the Western Front, in Serbia and elsewhere. He has told you of his baptism of fire in the attempted relief of Marrakech; of his return to action as an officer of the Spahi after having been invalided to France; of his meeting with Père Foucauld, that amazing soldier-priest of the Sahara; of his attempted assassination by Arabs and of the battle which followed. Here we have the story of the fierce uprising and fight in the desert town of Ouargla, and the subsequent march against the bold Tuareg.

Yet Rénaud was a man of understanding. "Poor rascal," he thought, "he cannot lose any more money in Monte Carlo, nor entertain gilded empty-headed women. What if he smokes? *Diantre!* After all, one must find compensations—and I am otherwise satisfied with Stransky's services." Thus instead of discharging or reprimanding the Russian, he concocted a very transparent subterfuge: he kept on buying on the side Egyptian cigarettes for his personal usage, locking carefully in his valise those that he carried not on his person, and replenished a generous, easily reachable box with evil Algerian fags. Stransky understood and was deeply insulted. Of course he was not in condition to remonstrate; but he sulked, and with a turn of ideas peculiar to the Russian mind, he decided that he had no reason to feel indebted to Rénaud, who was a tyrant. However, he studiously covered his rage.

When the bribing embassy of the Beni-Sissin decided finally to work out their scheme, they did not go to Woerth; instead they addressed their steps toward Rénaud's house. With Arabian circumspection they decided to mention their offer only if they would find an opening for it, but they thought that it was much better to deal with the one who had the power, because thus they would surely know how to stand.

In ordinary circumstances Rénaud made a policy of being very democratic and easily approached. The four Beni-Sissin were ushered without difficulties into the sun-baked room where the soldier-clerks of the battalion worked. When a careful search revealed that they had no weapons with them, Adjutant Klotz led them to the temporary study of Rénaud, of which Klotz was inordinately proud, because he was the one who had directed the soldiers who had cleansed it thoroughly, and who had borrowed from a local Jewish trader the set of furniture which actually graced it.

That wondrous set had come from a Biskra caravan a quarter of a century before. It consisted of a desk, two chairs, a Turkish sofa, an immense cuckoo clock out of commission, and various hideous lithographs representing, of all things, Tyrolean folk-dances and similar sundry Alpine subjects. When Klotz had led him to that retreat, Rénaud had instantly hated the very sight of it, but he mastered his feelings and thanked Klotz, a good-natured Alsatian of peasant stock who innocently believed that he had shown rare good taste in preparing that room for his commanding officer.

The Sissin entered that study a moment after Rénaud's departure through the rear door toward the Senegalese barracks; however, Stransky boredly informed Klotz that the Commandant was expected back any time; so the *adjutant* ordered the Sissin to wait there.

Sergeant of Algerian Tirailleurs.

The following inquiry could not make out clearly what passed between the Russian and the Sissin delegates; most likely the garrulous Arabs kept on jabbering and Stransky nodding, until the tribesmen talked themselves into believing that the soldier was a middleman to whom they could confide their desire. A bag of money changed hands.

Stransky was by no means unsophisticated. He realized that the natives were after some doubtful scheme and that they were making a blunder, but he had not the firmness to refuse that gift; after all, nobody could know that he had tricked the Arabs, because it was well known that he had never been able to utter or understand more than a word or two of their language. He refrained from calling Klotz because the very sight of the money had dazzled him, and he was afraid that the intervention of the assistant officer could spoil his luck.

The Sissin went away without waiting for Rénaud. Soon afterward rioting broke out in two parts of the town, and the disposal of repressive measures kept Commandant Rénaud and Adjutant Klotz so busy that they forgot to investigate why a group of natives had come and gone away without explaining the object of their visit.

When evening came, the town was outwardly peaceful. Among the soldiers of Rénaud's battalion was a sturdy Russian named Lodomiroff, a veteran with ten years' service. He was not a man with whom Stransky cared to associate habitually, but the orderly decided to honor him with his company for that evening, because Lodomiroff had been before in Ouargla and knew thoroughly its barbaric amusement-places.

The two went to a native coffee-house, which opened on a twisting, cane-roofed alley, in defiance of Rénaud's order which forbade soldiers to mingle with natives. In ordinary times the tribesmen assembled there would have most likely resented the intrusion of the white askari, but the mailed fist of the military hovered on the town, cowing the natives. Only low murmurs mingled with the shrill music of the flutes when Stransky and Lodomiroff entered the low-ceilinged hall.

What happened after was related plainly by a disguised goumier, or native policeman, who squatted there to listen to the conversations, which is the best way to detect a coming trouble in any Arabian community.

"They sat on a pile of cushions, near a low table. The bearded one" (Lodomiroff) "asked loudly for service. That son of a swine, Ali the Tunisian, the innkeeper, came to them scowling, but the orderly of the commandant showed him a gold-piece, and Ali's face became at once wreathed with smiles.

"I knew what would soon happen, but I had no way of interfering without disclosing my calling, which was against my orders. So I was unable to assist them.

"A short while later four Bedouine dancers came to whirl in the middle of the room. They danced as Bedouines do, whirling round and round so that the thin veils covering the lower parts of their bodies spread like large flowers. Presently Ali the innkeeper tiptoed to the Légionnaires and whispered close to their ears. I saw the orderly of the Sidi Commandant place in the clutching hand of that accursed of Allah a fistful of coins.

"Ali beckoned to two dancers who went to a rear door followed by the soldiers; a Bedouin arose growling to bar their way, but Ali motioned him to sit down with a knowing wink and an impatient motion of his hand. I knew what that meant and I slipped out to give warning."

ADJUTANT GIALPIERI, commander of the Légionnaire and Senegalese platoons on night duty, had readily understood the gravity of the goumier's warning. He rushed to Ali's place with twenty men, but he was unable to find any trace of the dancers or the soldiers; Ali sullenly insisted that he did not know where they had gone. Gialpieri arrested him, together with the toughest-looking among his customers.

The rear door described by the under-cover man opened on a small bare room leading into another alley. Gialpieri's men inspected unsuccessfully the immediate surroundings; then the *adjutant* sent instructions to all squads patrolling the town to look for the two soldiers.

A couple of hours later a patrol of Légionnaires pounding drowsily the moon-bathed and shattered slabs of a square near the southern outskirts of the town noticed a suspicious-looking group of natives who were edging their way in the shadow of the near-by buildings toward the open desert looming through the palm-trees of the oasis a couple of hundred yards farther along.

The Légionnaires shouted to them to halt and closed in on them. A few moments later they confronted two tall Bedouins crouching on the load of two camels, followed by a negroid and two girls on foot. The corporal commanding the patrol looked suspiciously at the women; he took notice of the unveiled faces and the peculiar tattoos marking their cheeks. One of the Bedouins jumped down from his camel and tried to escape, but he was caught and beaten into submission. The corporal declared the five under arrest.

A later survey discovered blood-stains on the gandourahs of the Bedouins and, most damnable evidence of all, two slashed and bloody Légionnaire outfits bearing the matriculation numbers of Stransky and Lodomiroff, wrapped in a dirty burnous and stuck into the load of one of the camels.

The negroid was a meek-looking individual. The contusions marking his skin, and his cringing attitude toward the other prisoners, pointed out that he was their menial rather than a culprit. While threats and questions brought only sneers and glares from the Bedouins and the girls alike, the half-breed seemed hesitating and ready to turn against his former masters.

Rénaud had left his cot to take charge of the inquiry. He studied the prisoners awhile and finally decided to center his efforts on the negroid. But instead of trying to frighten him, he spoke kindly to him, pulled out a cigarette from his case and placed it in the trembling hand of the fellow. The effect was immediate. That man was like a stray dog, hungry for kindness. Instantly he became like putty in Rénaud's hands.

A few moments later he told what had happened to Stransky and Lodomiroff. The two Berheza Bedouins were the evil masters of the two women and associates of Ali the innkeeper, who had sent warning to them to lay in ambush for the two soldiers and the money they were carrying with them. As soon as the Légionnaires had entered with their brazen guides within the gloom of the house the Bedouins had jumped on them with drawn knives.

Stransky was overcome at once, and that saved his life, for his aggressors thought they had killed him with a single blow, while he had only fainted. Lodomiroff had tried to fight back; the Berhezas had slashed and pierced him with the peculiar cruelty of the Arab.

The two were found on the slimy floor of a house near the southern boundaries of Ouargla, pointed out by the negroid. They were covered with blood and completely naked—their aggressors had robbed them even of their blood-stained shirts.

Lodomiroff was dead, but Stransky soon reacquired his senses under the deft ministrations of a military surgeon; he confessed that the Bedouines had lured them to their doom, but he refused to say where he had found the money which had caused his mad quest for pleasure in a land where disaster inevitably overtakes the white man who steps outside of the law. In the excitement of the moment nobody thought of connecting his sudden wealth with the visit of the Beni-Sissin to Rénaud's headquarters.

Early next morning the Sissin traders went with their wares to the central square. Merchants of the other two local tribes were already on the sections of cobblestones allotted to them. The Sissin chased them away, shouting that the soldiers would support their aggression.

A detail of Senegalese soldiers was on the square. Unable to make out what it was all about, they tried to induce the Sissin to retreat within their boundaries. The Sissin became furious and turned against them. In the meantime the merchants of the other two tribes ran back to the square at the head of a mob of followers who jumped on the Sissin traders and partisans, and on the soldiers struggling with them. From the near-by alleys a flock of Sissin tribesmen emerged, yelling and brandishing all kinds of weapons.

The Senegalese, struck from every side, broke into a near-by house, ran to the terrace-roof and thence escaped from one roof to another toward the place where their company was quartered, closely pursued by a swarm of howling tribesmen.

The square became a bedlam of frenzied natives tearing at each other. When they had surrendered an enormous number of weapons to Rénaud's men, the inhabitants had protested that they had not hidden a single gun or dagger. But now practically every one of them brandished firearms, knives, swords. These weapons had been studiously buried under the earthen floors of their houses or at the foot of trees in the tiny gardens behind their dwellings; now they had been unearthed and flashed in the sun.

THE Sissin conquered the square. Men of all ages, gray-bearded ones and boys with straggling down on their lips, clawing women shrieking like wounded eagles, children so small that they were obliged to use both arms to lift their daggers or clubs, they united their efforts so well that they threw the rival tribesmen out of the coveted marketplace. In their frenzy they made the mistake of pursuing their foes across a maze of alleys; and that proved their undoing, because they became scattered. Their rivals mingled with them; they were getting over the effects of the surprise and they outnumbered the Sissin three to one. They cornered them within the bends of the narrow alleys, in the courtyards of the caravansaries; they flowed back to the square carrying in their midst numbers of desperately struggling Sissin.

The fight was spreading to a larger area with the passing of every minute. The various patrols on police duty found

The street was the scene of a running fight. Far in front, Rénaud shouted: "Following sections, smash that hornets' nest!"

themselves confronted by such numbers of enraged tribesmen that they were obliged to retreat to the temporary barracks.

At length the bugles sounded the alarm. Ten or twelve minutes later a Senegalese company rushed at the double toward the zone where the fighting raged. As soon as they reached an unusually large alley leading to the square that was the object of this fierce competition, loud yells of women perched on the neighboring roofs warned the natives who were fighting there of their arrival.

The Sissin and their rivals alike at once forgot their quarrel and turned menacingly against the soldiers. Several tribesmen approached close to the soldiers. An ominous rumble came from their midst. Suddenly a native lunged and struck down a Tirailleur with a stroke of his sword; a bullet shot away the sun-helmet from the head of the lieutenant commanding the company.

The officer blinked his eyes under the sun and coolly ordered the foremost soldiers to fire a salvo which passed above the head of the tribesmen; but instead of disbanding, the Arabs replied with a hail of bullets; two Tirailleurs were hit, and fell moaning to the ground.

That was the last straw. The lieutenant realized that to insist on mild methods would act as oil on fire; the emboldened mob would inevitably consider that his meekness was dictated by cowardice. He refrained from ordering a bayonet attack, fearing that the natives would overwhelm his men by sheer strength of numbers. He shouted an order for which the Tirailleurs waited with uncommon eagerness—for his word had hardly been uttered when the guns of the foremost soldiers lowered in perfect unison. A score of black fingers pressed on the triggers.

When the crashing noise of the volley abated, the Arabs were running pell-mell toward the square. A dozen tribesmen lay on the uneven bed of the alley, their flowing garments heaped around them.

But from every roof, from every latticed window, a hail of bullets, stones and all kinds of missiles fell on the Senegalese. Every house had become an embattled fortress. The Tirailleurs battered down door after door, seized the Arabs within and conquered with sustained rushes the contiguous chain of terraces topping the roofs. They cleared thus the white-walled buildings encasing the alley, and thence they extended their attack to the surrounding blocks of houses. A couple of companies of Légionnaires

soon came to help them. That was the whole force that Rénaud dared to throw within the city, because, not knowing the origin of all that trouble, he was firmly convinced that the riot had been planned by the El Monhadis Chaamba Bedouins.

"Expecting that the bulk of my men will be busy within the buildings," Rénaud thought, "a thousand or more horsemen will appear at Ouargla's gates. They will come sure to find around the town only a thin cordon of men, too few to oppose effective resistance. Their fondest hope will be to corner my force scattered into the intricate maze of alleys of this Arabian town—a veritable rat trap. But they will encounter a warm reception."

As a result, a half company of Légionnaires had been ordered to join the Senegalese company thrown in a chain of outposts around the town. The remaining company and half, and the goumiers, Rénaud kept in readiness as a mobile reserve, to be thrown against the El Monhadis.

We reached the outskirts of Ouargla when all that turmoil raged fiercest. Leaving the troop in care of Lieutenant Enteli under the shade of the palms confronting the town from the north, Captain Guillemat motioned me to follow, and rode toward a squad of Senegalese leaning on their guns on a clearing between two groups of dilapidated buildings. A few minutes later we met Commandant Rénaud, who received us with stentorian pleasure.

"Guillemat, you are an old hand at this game. Your men will become my reserve and you will command the whole force defending my shoulders against trouble coming from the desert. I can use the company and a half that I was keeping ready for that event. And I can use that lieutenant too," he thundered, motioning at me with his *cravache*. "Most of my officers are lost in the town, hunting after Arabs in their infernal Mohammedan holes. —Have you had any experience with infantry?" he asked, staring at me with his blazing eyes.

"I have been informed that not long ago he held honorably some temporary command in a Légionnaire outfit," Guillemat answered for me.

"*A la bonne heure!* Where at?"

"In Morocco, near Souk el Arba and Ben Guerir, in one of the actions of Mangin."

"How is Mangin?" asked Rénaud. "With his Chinese whiskers and pointed beard, and his shaved sunburned skull, he looks like a Mrbet, but he gives hell and brimstone to the fanatic Moors." (At that time the leader who later became General Mangin, one of the greatest generals of the world war, had not the cropped mustache and the shaven chin which was reproduced by the press all over the world. He looked exactly as Rénaud, one of his oldest friends, described him among the sun-baked houses and the crashing noises of enraged Ouargla.) "But *alors*, you are almost one of us, I want you to feel perfectly at home with me," Rénaud shouted. He spurred his horse alongside mine, and laid with a sound, friendly pat his hamlike hand on my shoulder. "A stout sound fellow," he smiled, digging his fingers into my muscles. "Let us go. Guillemat will excuse us," he concluded, winking broadly.

"Of course," Captain Guillemat smiled back at him, bowing to the neck of his horse with affected courtliness.

"By the way," Rénaud asked, "Guillemat, you come from a comparatively civilized center. Did you bring any good cigarettes?"

Without a word Guillemat pulled out a package of Turkish Ihakas and proffered it to him. Rénaud grasped it with a sigh of relief. He was going to light a cigarette when the strange, stirring voice of Père Foucauld rang near us.

"I beg your pardon—may I be of any help?"

Rénaud jerked on the saddle. The dusty, shapeless frock of Foucauld, and his unkempt hair, contrasted greatly with the martial cut of our uniforms. Yet Rénaud, who towered head and shoulders above the hermit bowed to him with a deferential, intrigued attitude.

"Père Foucauld, glad to see you. What are you planning to do?"

"Why this strife?"

"I don't know. I thought at first that the El Monhadis were back of it, but up to now they have failed to make any appearance."

"Whatever the reason of this madness, I trust that the muezzins will call for peace—from the top of their minarets—if you or your men did nothing against their faith."

"We did nothing to stir them against us. But they would not do that if I asked them."

"Perhaps," Foucauld said dreamily. "But the chief Mrbet is my friend. I will try."

Rénaud stared at him, doubting. Then he thought that Foucauld's power in the Sahara was almost uncanny. Where a battalian would have been in danger, that Christian priest who preached the Koran as well would likely pass without encountering the slightest trouble. But before Rénaud could quite make up his mind, Foucauld had disappeared into the next alley.

Billows of thick smoke were rising above two or three

houses near the center of the town and climbed lazily toward the sky. Bullets fired within the buildings had probably struck the dry planks and matted shrubs of the ceilings, stirring the fires.

Captain Guillemat turned his horse and rode back to the troop. Keeping my mount abreast of Rénaud's long-maned Berber pony, I took place with him at the head of the company and a half, former reserve troops; ere long we reached some of the alleys where the fighting among the two factions had raged fiercest until the advent of the soldiers had made them join in common cause against us.

THESE thoroughfares were littered with swarthy bodies sprawled in the absurd positions assumed in falling by those who are instantly killed, or lying stretched tensely as the last struggle for breath had left them.

Some of these dead were women; they looked extremely soft-limbed and pitiful, with glassy eyes filled with watery tears; here and there we confronted a still more pitiful testimonial of the unreasonable rage of the Arab: tiny children trampled to death, or with skulls and ribs bashed in against the cobblestones, or huddled at the foot of the buildings against which they had been pinioned by the unreasoning, maddened mobs.

But the most impressive dead I saw that day was an old man. His gaping mouth seemed distended in a soundless cry, and the coarse gray beard sprouted high and stiff above the scrawny neck and collar-bones. His forearms rested on his elbows and stuck above the body; the contracted, bony fingers seemed to claw at an unseen foe. . . .

We finally reached the zone where the Arabs had decided to make a stand against the Légionnaires and the Senegalese.

A dusty lieutenant of the "Etrangères" emerged from an alley whence came a bedlam of shouts and reports of firearms.

"My men are rolling back the Arabs nesting here without much trouble," he announced, "but Captains Woerth and Loir, who are operating to our right and left, are meeting a stiffer resistance. Up to this moment I have been obliged to send back to the dressing-station only a corporal and five privates, none of them in bad shape."

"Very well, Gifford—carry on," Rénaud growled.

We stood for several minutes, waiting. Rénaud had sent messengers to the other companies, to ask how things were getting on. Behind us the six platoons of the Légion filled the thoroughfare in a column of fours. Several of them had lighted cigarettes; the acrid scent of the strong black Algerian tobacco came to us, mingled with unwholesome flavors coming from the houses, from the corpses of the Arabs who had been pulled by our men alongside the buildings, from the heaps of rubbish scattered everywhere.

Suddenly on the air above us floated an eerie voice, broken now and then by bursts of shouts and firing. We lifted our heads toward the point from where the sound apparently came, and saw a white-mantled man on the platform surmounting a minaret; for a minute or two the muezzin stood there, hands grasping the parapet, head stretched toward the space beneath; but the next instant a bullet, fired at random and whizzing near his head, probably frightened him; ducking, he abruptly disappeared into the low door leading to the stairway of the minaret.

"I am afraid Foucauld's idea will not work so smoothly," Rénaud commented.

From two other different points voices of muezzins rose steadily, dominating the uproar. Their call to forbearance and peace in the name of Allah was not unheeded, because in the area immediately beneath them the clamor of fighting diminished in intensity, but around the central square the battle kept on raging as fierce as ever.

The corporal sent by Rénaud to Loir came back, relating that the Captain was held at bay by a stubborn resistance in the Gheoud quarter. The Gheoud had barricaded the entrance to a group of alleys with loose stones, piled débris of masonry and piled earth. The men that Loir had at his disposal were too few to cope contemporaneously with the Arabs firing from the roofs, and with those who defended the barricades. Therefore Loir had thought that the thing to do was to conquer the terrace roofs and shoot down from there the natives filling the alleys.

But the tops of the buildings were uneven and treacherous in their twisting continuity; worse, the men charging on top of a block were enfiladed by the fire of the Arabs who stood on the buildings lining the opposite sides of the neighboring alleys.

Loir's company suffered heavy losses; when they finally bayoneted and shot their way to the heart of the Gheoud resistance, they found that a break in the continuity of the buildings isolated the barricaded center of the quarter.

Loir's veteran sergeants had noticed among the Gheoud dead several tough-looking Arabs whose eyelids were unmistakably inflamed by the mild ophthalmia produced by the glaring refraction of the sun on the sands of the desert. Evidently several El Monhadis had remained in Ouargla with their allies the Gheoud.

When he heard that, Rénaud growled with rage. The next instant we leaped down from our horses and ran, followed by our six sections, to join Loir's hard-pressed men.

We reached at the double-quick a long, straight alley. Huddled against the buildings on the two sides, Légionnaires were incessantly firing at a barricade which barred the opposite end of the thoroughfare some hundred and fifty yards farther.

Rénaud stormed through that bullet-racked passage, shouting to Loir's men to fall in line and follow. . . .

Up to this day I have a very muddled vision of what happened after; copious smoke seeping through the shutters and the cracked door of a house on fire obscured the alley; we ran like a stampeding herd, amidst a bedlam of hurrahs and screams of wounded, the crashing sound of scores of hobnailed boots quickly pounding on the cobblestones.

For a few moments the wide shoulders of a Légionnaire charging in front of me shook in the rapid cadence of the run; then the man suddenly crumpled down; the fast clip of the charge led me past his groping figure before I could perceive if he had stumbled or been laid low by a bullet.

WE reached the barricade yelling at the top of our lungs. Tall shapes of Arabs suddenly sprang on top, brandishing guns and waving gleaming swords and daggers. I darted toward them, stumbled on a loose rock and instinctively tried to jump again to my feet, using as a lever the hilt of my sword; but the polished steel slid on a huge stone, and I fell again, my mouth striking against a protruding piece of shattered masonry.

When I clambered to my feet, the Légionnaires were vaulting to the other side of the barricade; I caught a fleeting glance of two burly soldiers pinioning down a great rascal of an Arab, his swarthy bare legs kicking to the wind, and I rushed on.

The street behind the barricade was the scene of a running fight, with Légionnaires stabbing at fleeing Arabs mingled with them. A young soldier, a beardless boy, lay bareheaded in a pool of blood, the pallor of death on his handsome childish face.

A burst of rifle-fire came from the top and the windows of a huge house to our left. Far in front, Rénaud shouted: "Following sections, smash down that hornets' nest!"

I jerked around, saw a platoon streaming in perfect order, sergeant at the head, above the barricade; I pointed to the house with my sword, shouted an order, and jumped against the door, followed by a swarm of soldiers.

But the door held. The Arabs crowding the terrace above turned their guns on us and sent a hail of bullets which ricocheted on the cobblestones around our feet; three Légionnaires were hit almost simultaneously and fell moaning to the ground. That confounded house constituted a menace to us—it was a serious stumblingblock.

Then I heard some one calling: "Make room, monsieur le Lieutenant, if you please!" I turned and saw a gigantic Légionnaire advance slowly, carrying close to his belly an enormous boulder.

The stone was so big that three average men could have hardly lifted it; yet that fellow carried it, panting but grinning. A tuft of yellow hair sprouted from beneath the visor of his bonnet, clamped far back on his head. His narrow, slanting Russian eyes loomed like brown pin-points on his large, stolid countenance. The knuckles of his red ham-like hands appeared white under the skin in the effort of clutching at that enormous stone.

The big fellow lumbered through the aisle that his shouting comrades had opened for him. Four or five paces away from the door, he stooped, clutched more firmly at the boulder. His neck and his face became crimson; his straining muscles seemed ready to burst through the clothing of his coat. With a mighty heave he lifted that enormous rock above his head, balanced it for a second, then catapulted it against the closed door.

A rending, crashing sound; the boulder bounced back into the alley, raising a small cloud of dust. Long cracks appeared on the massive door, yet it still hung unsteadily on a hinge. But when a live battering ram of soldiers catapulted a second time against its battered surface, the door suddenly collapsed, and the soldiers rolled to the hard slabs of the floor behind.

The blinding flashes of a crashing salvo leaped almost scorching our faces as we rushed inside the building. We were exasperated by the street fighting, frenzied with the pent-up rage which had convulsed us when we had found ourselves marooned in front of that door, exposed like caged beasts to the hail of bullets coming from above. We tore like madmen against the Arabs, who in their floating garments appeared in the dim light like embattled wraiths. We smashed our way into a second and larger room, and from there to an inner courtyard. . . .

The following fighting was so rapid that I only remember clearly of a bareheaded, snarling native sitting astride of a kicking Légionnaire, and of the insane, tearing fury which guided my sword-stroke to his neck. The tribesman collapsed sidewise almost on my feet; I sidestepped and ran to the opposite wing of the porch, where a party of Légionnaires was crowding a handful of Arabs toward another door.

The Sissin and their rivals alike made common cause and turned menacingly toward the Senegalese.

We broke into that other section of the building. After a short scuffle we sprang to a stairway leading to the floor above.

We were a couple of steps under the next landing, when a swarm of tribesmen emerged from the door on top of the stairs and charged down on us. I was crowded against the wooden banister, which snapped with a rending crack, and I plunged to the floor below.

Luckily it was a jump of only nine or ten feet. Although a sharp pain ran through my ankle and hip, I succeeded in arising, just in time to ward off the sword-blow of a charging Gheoud. In that moment another party of Légionnaires streamed within the room, and others still kept on coming from the courtyard. The long, needlelike bayonets of the soldiers swept down the Arabs, chased them up the stairway. While I painfully climbed up the stairs along with a rapid succession of yelling soldiers rushing by, I heard the noise of rapid scuffles, the heavy treading of the Légionnaires' boots receding from one room to another, to the third floor.

WHEN I finally climbed to the terrace topping the building, a thundering shout of triumph warned me that all opposition had been conquered.

The roof was a shamble of dead Arabs. A dead Légionnaire had been dragged to a corner and covered with an Arabian burnous; he was a huge man; the tips of his boots protruded from under the edge of the garment. Another soldier sat against the parapet racked with cough and vomiting blood, the unmistakable sign of an injured lung.

A corporal tried to bandage his wound, shouting to two men to be ready to carry him to the dressing-station as soon as he could get through with that first aid. A group of trembling Gheouds stood in a corner staring with fearful eyes at the bayonets that a detail of Légionnaires pointed menacingly at their stomachs.

The fighting was apparently subsiding all over the town, but I still heard scattered screams and reports of firearms coming from the maze of alleys where Rénaud had disappeared with the bulk of the six platoons. Leaving the soldiers detailed to watch the prisoners within the house, I ordered the others to the street, where I soon mustered a couple score men unscathed or slightly wounded. I was going to lead them on at the double quick when a distant *"Vivet!"* followed by crashing hurrahs warned us that the last Arabian resistance had been shattered.

I had twisted my ankle to a corner opposite to the one it had assumed when it doubled under me during my fall. That rough device is painful, and naturally it does not mend the injured ligaments. But it snaps muscles and tendons back in the right place, and thus restores the use of the limb until the inevitable aftermath takes place; in a couple of hours that sprained ankle would swell one third more than its usual girth, temporarily curtailing my walking activities; but for the time being I was able to move about with reasonable speed. I led my Légionnaires onward, until we caught up with those who had followed Rénaud; then while the soldiers lighted their cigarettes, I limped up to the Commandant and I reported what we had done.

"Very good!" Rénaud commented. "This is the second time you led Légionnaires to the assault. The day will come when you will have a permanent command in our corps."

I proffered my thanks, for his words were intended as a compliment; but I made an inward wish that his prophecy would not turn true. I admired the wonderful records and remarkable qualities of our crack Infantry Corps, like the Chasseurs à pied, the Zouaves and the Légion; but I was a cavalryman and I loved my branch of the service.

Modern weapons have rendered the usefulness of cavalry almost negligible; but before the World War cavalry officers still entertained the hope that it would demonstrate again its value as in the times of Murat and Kellerman. Besides the natural feelings of a trained cavalry officer, there was a factor highly important: Not only in the past cavalry used to be a corps of daring daredevils who faced greater dangers but none of the unpleasant chores inherent to the marching infantrymen, but for a Frenchman it was the national arm *par excellence.*

What had persuaded the Arabs of the three factions of Ouargla to forget and forgive their internal struggle and to ask quarter from the French, was not the irresistible advance of our men, nor the plea for peace of the muezzins, whose voices had proved unable to overcome the clamor of the affray. It was rather the scourge of the spreading fires.

Rough tree-trunks, gathered with infinite pain, in a country where vegetation is notoriously poor, constitute the supporting frame of the upper floors and roofs of the Arabian houses. On those trunks are diagonally laid planks of wood or stout branches; the space separating the rough-hewn planks, or the knotted branches is stuffed with strong brush. From the ceiling side that vegetable canopy is cement-coated only in the houses of the wealthy; in most dwellings it remains bare, dry and covered with dust. It constitutes an ideal nesting place for spiders, scorpions, lizards and other kinds of pests peculiar to Arabian towns.

The upper side, which is the frame on which rests the floor above, is matted with a coating of lime and sand cement, on which are laid thin slabs of stone or baked clay.

As a result, Arabian houses quickly catch fire and burn like blazing torches, leaving the hollow shell of the walls. And the fire inevitably consumes the precious house supplies and stored food-stuffs, which are very hard to replace in the Saharan country.

That was the reason why, with shameless Arabian adaptability, the snarling and embattled defiance of the natives of Ouargla suddenly gave way to cringing protests of repentance and submission. Leaders of the three factions forgot their differences; they came to the soldiers waving high their empty hands in sign of surrender; and when they were brought to Rénaud's presence they asked for forgiveness—and help.

Commandant Rénaud ordered them to bring their sons as hostages, to make sure that rioting should not break anew as soon as the worry of the fires would be eliminated. Then he sent part of the soldiers to help the natives, who tried feverishly and without any method whatever to put out the fires. Military order and efficiency soon banded the efforts of the tribesmen, but it took the remainder of the afternoon to tame the conflagration.

EVENING found Rénaud and a court formed by a captain and two lieutenants sitting in the main hall of the caravanserai-headquarters with the local Mrbets and chieftains, trying to identify the reasons of the uprising and to identify the chief culprits. With the help of Foucauld and the Mrbets, who were anxious to keep the friendship of the military because the revolt had been stirred by greed and not by religious reasons. Rénaud had already caught a glimpse of the truth. Therefore his questions and the questions of his officers were straight to the point and not casual ones.

After a lengthy fencing of words, for the Arab is garrulous and very hard to corner verbally, the Sissin were obliged to tell the truth. The source of Stransky's sudden wealth was thus explained; but paradoxically the orderly's knavery had helped out the authorities, by indirectly encouraging the Sissin to try their bid for power while the battalion of Légionnaires was in Ouallen.

Finally about twenty Arabs were picked out and sentenced to various jail penalties. The Sissin were given a fine greater than the ones imposed on the other two tribes, because they had originated all that trouble. A careful search uncovered all kinds of weapons where the Arabs had again hidden them; swords, daggers and rifles were ruthlessly seized, despite tearful protests of the natives.

A couple of days later the Sissin sat on their allotted section of the square facing the merchants of the other tribes, who squatted near by on the zones which belonged to them; the men of the desert who came to trade were allowed to enter freely in Ouargla; the square, the caravansaries, the open-air shops and coffee-houses echoed again with whining Arabian voices, while purchasers and sellers argued for hours with quick, wide gestures of their brown hands, intense motions of every feature of their faces, as Arabs usually do. For among Arabs the approved way to come to a business transaction is by no means a plain and a snappy one. The one who sells inevitably asks ten times the honest price; and the one who wishes to buy offers inevitably one half or less the real worth of the merchandise; then they talk and talk, protesting on their life that they are telling the truth, that by such an offer they are ruining themselves, and so forth, until at length, hoarse, tired, but convinced that they have closed an advantageous transaction while having a good time, they agree on the price, moaning that in so doing they are losing their very gandourah. Then the one who sells pulls out all the contraptions necessary to the brewing of two tiny cups of thick black coffee, and with the drinking of the Arabian national beverage, the deal is closed as surely as if ten notaries sanctioned it.

It must be said in justice to the Arab that once he closes a trade, he will stick to it, even if he later finds out that he has struck a bad bargain. Unfortunately Arabs do not always follow that same clear, unfaltering procedure in their dealings with non-Moslems.

Where learning and modern civilization have built a bridge between the more gifted natives and Europeans, as in Algiers and Tunis, most Arabs act loyally toward the Christians. But the Saharan people still consider that the faithful can do as he pleases with the Roumi—when the military are not near in force.

Ouargla had resumed its none too feverish activities of peace when news came from Ouallen announcing that the trouble brewing there had faded without outward explosions, thanks to the measures of Colonel Laperrine. Yet the troops quartered in the two towns were ordered to remain there for another month, to enforce peace among the natives—for nothing soothes the Arabian mind as well as knowledge that a sizable number of soldiers is close by.

As a result, we spent a dreadful month in Ouargla. The sights of that sun-baked town are quickly seen; its barbaric amusements are few and not appealing to white men.

FOR a week or so chess and piquet proved a diversion. Rénaud organized a piquet and chess tournament, which never came to an end—we soon grew bored with it. In those conditions of forced inactivity the scourge of the insect pests became nerve-racking. The worst of all were the large black flies which bred by scores of thousands in the filth of every Arabian town of the interior. Accustomed to the natives, who allow them to walk on their limbs and faces without bothering to chase them away, they pestered us until we grew almost demented.

In the desert the awe-inspiring magnitude of the landscape captures and soothes the mind of the white soldier; but the Saharan towns portray the moral and constitutional decay of the Arabian race, a sad remnant of that breed of warriors who once threatened to conquer the world.

Arabs are apparently tall, enduring, stalwart. Those physical qualities last under the influence of various factors: The pure, reviving air of the desert, moderation in eating (because food is scarce); lack of alcoholic beverages (forbidden by the Koran); steady exercise, due to the need of wandering incredible distances to seek into the oases and few grazing lands of the Sahara food for men and herds alike. But when the Arab settles in a town the hereditary disease that lurks in his blood sets at once to work. Men become old at an age when males of other races are in their prime; women are physical wrecks in their early twenties.

It is a wide-spread belief that the Moslem religion renders the Arabian mind stagnant; I don't think so, because in Algiers and Tunis where the authorities long ago taught the natives to take advantage of the many dispensaries established everywhere, the contemporary Arabian generation is very active and efficient. The ataraxia and indifference to progress of the Arab of the interior is rather due to the poisoned blood undermining his mind; and their communities paradoxically remind one of dead and partly decayed corpses returned to faltering life. . . .

But nothing is everlasting in this world, and even the worst experiences are bound to come to an end. The order finally came to leave Ouargla. The next day the battalion of Légionnaires left for Touggourt. Our troop had a different destination. We were going to the Tuareg country.

The Tuareg are ethnically divided into three great branches: The Hoggar, or Tuareg of the North, roving chiefly between the mountains of the same name and western Sudan; the Ouellimiden of the Adrar mountains (midway between the Hoggar and the Niger River) and the middle basin of the Niger; and the mongrel Tuareg of the Aïr, who have an admixture of negro blood.

A LARGE raiding party of Ouellimiden had swooped north and thirty-six entered the zone of desert bordering on the Hoggar. They had already intercepted and massacred a party of Hoggar Tuareg returning with their herds from eastern Sudan.

That outrage to one of the three great clans of the Hoggar had aroused the whole confederation of tribes which recognized Moussa as their leader.

Following the advice of the French authorities, Moussa tried to dissuade his subjects from organizing counter-raiding parties; with the far-seeing vision of all men of genius, Moussa had realized for a long time that the rule of violence was rapidly becoming obsolete, even on the Sahara. Besides, he had visited France only two years before, and according to his lights had conceived a great respect for the might of the French.

It is necessary to state that the beauty of Paris, the greatness of French civilization had left him and his cousin Bou Chikka supinely indifferent; but the sight of a French group of heavy artillery at target practice, and the fording of a river executed for their benefit by a dragoon regiment, had filled them with unbounded admiration. The horses of the dragoons had chiefly captured their respect and fancy. The great lean bay, roan and golden-pelted mounts bred with the patient crossing of several generations of Irish steeple-chasers, English thoroughbreds and pure Asil Arabians looked to them wondrous, almost supernatural, accustomed as they were to the small, woolly Berber horses of the Tuareg and the Bedouins.

But regardless of what had captured in France the admiration of the keen mind of this intelligent barbarian, Moussa's wish to coöperate with the French was as earnest and sincere as it was powerless.

To explain better this assertion, I will relate a few points

of inter-tribal constitution of the followers of Moussa ag Amastane.

The Northern Tuareg are divided into about twenty clans of varying strengths. The Isakamaren and Imeman clans number ten thousand members each, but incessant warfare and other causes have reduced the components of many clans to a few dozens.

Up to the end of the last century the Hoggar tribes seldom made war on each other, but they were bound only by common customs and a common language. *Amenokals* or supreme chiefs had been time and again tentatively chosen, but their power had never really extended to more than three or four tribes.

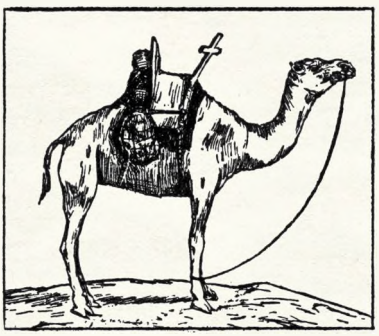
The Hoggar Tuareg waged from remote times inceasing war against the numberless Chaamba Bedouins who wandered north and west of their mountains, the Senoussi Arabian and Fezzan tribes, the Aïr negritic Tuareg of the east, and the Ouellimiden Tuareg of the Adrar Mountains and the Niger River. Their valor was remarkable, but the number of their enemies was so great that, on suggestion of Dassine—a woman of great power in the Hoggar—and with the active support of the Taitoq tribe, the candidacy of the Imeman Moussa was brought to the fore.

Moussa had established a gallant record since his early youth. When fifteen years old, he had taken part in a great *razzour* or raiding party which had ravaged the Aïr territory. A large band of Aïr tribesmen had ambushed them on their way back. Caught by surprise, Moussa's party suffered severe losses and was obliged to leave in the hands of the Aïrs the rich booty it had seized during a full month of pillaging activities.

However, as soon as they succeeded in shaking off pursuit, the youthful Moussa rallied his fellow-tribesmen, led them back and routed with a surprise attack the Aïrs, who were returning leisurely to their villages, sure that the Hoggar raiding party would never dare to renew the struggle.

During the previous affray Moussa had seen two Aïrs engage in single combat and kill his elder brother and one of his uncles. In the mêlée that followed the second part of the struggle, the youth attacked one after another these two Aïr warriors and slew them, but suffered deep lance-wounds which pierced both his thighs.

When he returned to the Hoggar, the wounds had festered; for almost three months Moussa ag Amastane was compelled to inactivity. But that turned to his advantage, because he spent that time near the retreat of a Mrbet of a philosophic turn of mind, a gifted man who sharpened Moussa's judgment so that later his wisdom and organizing ability became famed among the Tuareg.



Since that time Moussa's warlike record was a succession of gallant achievements, and his advice was sought from far and wide. But his evident aspirations to the supreme leadership incensed so the most influential high-caste members of his own clan that he was obliged to seek safety in flight. The Taitoqs offered him sanctuary, made of him their chief and openly advanced his candidacy for *Amenokal ag*—chief of chiefs.

Hoggar Tuareg descend from a score of races, but chiefly from the Celtic mercenaries driven by the Carthaginians to die in the desert. Those ancient warriors wandered to the Hoggar, where they found a more ancient race. Strangely enough, Tuareg tradition mentions the earlier inhabitants of the Hoggar with terms similar to those used to describe the mythical Atlanteans by that egregious historian and liar of antiquity, the Greek Herodotus. It is hard to say if the scattered individuals found in the Hoggar by the oncoming mercenaries were the most improbable Atlanteans. Most likely they were descendants of stranded Trojans or prehistoric Cretans. At any rate, the Celtic immigrants evolved a rudimental civilization much like the Gaul and German primordial constitution of the times which preceded the Roman conquest; and they imposed their customs on the Berbers, who fled to the Hoggar when the second or colonizing Arabian invasion swept Tunis clear of its original inhabitants.

As in every Celtic, or near-Celtic race, women have always commanded respect and held great authority among the veiled tribesmen. In Moussa's time the leading lady of the Hoggar was his cousin Dassine.

General Laperrine named Dassine the "Sappho of the Hoggar;" and her achievements fully justify that title. When I later met Dassine, that remarkable woman was nearly forty-five years old. At that age she had the appearance and bearing of a woman not over thirty, and her beauty was simply fascinating. One can easily imagine what she must have looked like in her early twenties, when young Moussa struggled for power like a western politician.

Unlike the average Tuareg women, who are tall and beautifully strong,—the Diana type,—Dassine was small and shapely, like a figurine of Tanagra; her brown eyes and her mouth held a strange, almost uncanny fascination; her voice was harmonious and her conversation most brilliant. Dassine was the leading poetess of the Hoggar, and I firmly believe that her poems properly translated could grace any volume of Western poetry. I say "Western," because the literature and turn of mind of the Hoggar Tuareg is more kind to Western than to Oriental thought.

When Dassine was young, the heart of every single Tuareg warrior turned to her; the married ones too bowed to her wish; Tuareg are monogamous, but divorce among them holds full sway, with full equality among men and women. It is not too much to say that every married Tuareg would have cheerfully given up his tent-home for her sake.

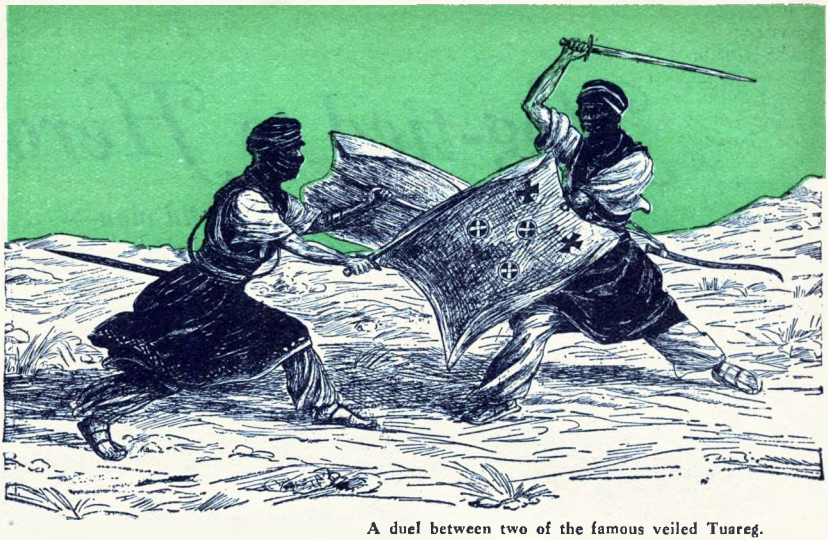
Dassine had a strange, puzzling character. She knew only too well that Moussa was madly in love with her, but she never encouraged his suit; that extraordinary woman made a policy of never mingling affairs of the heart with political activities. The man whom she married later was a rich high-caste Tuareg who had a decided distaste for tribal politics.

But there is no doubt that Moussa became *Amenokal* thanks to the support of Dassine—and the obstinacy of an Imrad or inferior-caste tribe, the Taitoq, whom he promptly rewarded by elevating them to the Kel'Rela or supreme caste. He banded the tribes together and routed one after another the enemies of the Hoggar.

Tuareg relations with the French had been up to that time strained. Moussa readily accepted Colonel Laperrine's advances, favored French infiltration in the Sahara and gained precious concessions for his people. But Moussa's authority over the tribes was by no means an absolute one. Tuareg of every clan paid him tribute in money, herds, all kinds of goods (most of them pillaged, of

course); they did so abundantly but of their free will, without any obligation whatever. When Moussa decided to call a particular clan or all the clans to wage a war, the Tuareg came at top speed from every part of the Hoggar. On the contrary, an order to keep peace was not so agreeable to Tuareg nature, and it was indifferently observed, because Tuareg allegiance to the *Amenokal* is a matter of election rather than of duty.

Laperrine knew that Moussa was trying his best; but he knew his Tuareg too. He was firmly decided to stop the recurrence of a tribal war because he believed that it was time to make Tuareg conscious that the punishment of pillagers was a Governmental and not a tribal prerogative. The best way to enforce these principles was of course a display of sizable forces.



A duel between two of the famous veiled Tuareg.

Senegalese units were rushed from Bourem and the eastern border, meharists from everywhere. The troop of Sudanese Spahis was already on the zone of strife; Guillemat's troop was ordered there too.

We were ordered to leave our horses behind, because it would have taken too long to go from Ouallen to the Eastern Tanazerouft on horseback. Besides, we would find plenty of horses where we were going. We were going to travel on camels, who can cover in a day and without water three times the distance which a horse can negotiate in the same time.

When the moment of our departure came, I saw the saddles and other encumbrances of the troop loaded on a score of meharas, and our Spahis approach without misgivings the swarm of shaggy brutes which were going to be their mounts for almost a week. A burly Senegalese meharist led to me by the bridle a huge single-humped white mehari, and with a curious howling sound made it kneel in front of me.

The uncanny, long-necked beast stared at me, winking; oddly, its full-lipped snout and melancholy eyes reminded me of an old and most respectable lady of my mother's acquaintance—Madame de R—, who during my childhood used to regale punctually my birthdays with twenty-franc gold-pieces and books of pious literature, enlivened by pictures of children with short jackets and large sailor hats, and florid beaming men attired in swallow-tailed dresses which sprouted under their shoulders like sparrows' wings.

I walked around the mehara, who curved his sneaky neck, scanning all my movements. My glance fell on the high, forbidding wooden saddle.

Guillemat came to me and laid a friendly hand on my shoulder. "Never been on a camel before?" he whispered. The expression on my face showed him clearly that such was the case. "Don't worry; they are easier to ride than horses, and you will learn soon to lead the shaggy brutes. Ahmed will ride behind you," he said, motioning to the Senegalese. "He will be ready to help you if necessary."

A few moments later I swayed on that wooden saddle a few paces behind Guillemat, who rode straight and unconcerned on his mount. The first moments were rather difficult, because instinct dictated me to fasten my legs on the saddle as I used to on horseback, and the mehara saddle had no resemblance whatever to a cavalry saddle. At length I realized that I had just to sit and relax, and things went better for a while.

But the motion of the camel soon proved most trying. In spite of its forbidding appearance, the wooden saddle was most comfortable. The motion of the beast, however, was similar to that of a tiny boat on a disturbed sea. Soon I felt that the inside of my stomach was surging to meet my throat.

The blood left my face; a cold perspiration moistened my forehead in spite of the blazing sun. Then, before the following troop, the inevitable happened: leaning over the side of the saddle, I vomited convulsively.

When I straightened again my body on my swaying perch, the hazy desert seemed to whirl around me; I kept on riding, cursing Africa and the meharas, too ill to realize the poor show that I was unwillingly putting up in front of my soldiers. But toward evening I felt vastly better. When we halted for the night, I was passably hungry, and I partook heartily of the evening meal.

The day after, I mounted on the camel with the feeling of a martyr going to the arena, and I winced when the great beast arose from his kneeling position. But when we swung on for our second day of march, I realized with pleasure that everything was well; from that day on, I found it as comfortable as did any other Saharan.

We rode on and on, between saffron sands and coppery skies. At night the brilliant canopy of stars shone on us from a depth of purest blue. A week later we saw to our left a towering mass of rugged mountains. Guillemat turned to me and pointed at them with his *cravache*.

"That is the home of the veiled Targui," he said with a faint smile.

The breeze had abated, and a sudden stillness enveloped us. Spahis and meharisti alike had abruptly interrupted their conversations. The mention of the Tuareg had produced its usual depressing impression.

(Another thrill-filled episode in the tumultuous career of this true son of battle will be described in our forthcoming July issue.)

Hog-tied to Heroism

A dark detective, a wild man—
and much sustained excitement.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

"YOU is done made a mess out of de lodge-votin'—dat's all! An' Samson G. Bates gwine make a mess out of you fo' hit, too!" Columbus Collins, tall gangling head of the Columbus Collins private detective agency (colored), was giving his undersized and underbrained assistant, "Bugwine" Breck, a chance to see himself as others saw him.

"I cain't he'p hit is de other jedge in de 'lection outcount me, can I?" feebly protested the overall-clad Mr. Breck. "Dat boy knowed mo' numbers dan I is, dat's all!"

"Aint keer how many numbers he knowed—Samson give you two dollars to see dat de lodge 'lection fo' Commander come out *right*. An' whut you gwine say when dey aint but sevumty-two brothers votin'—an' you two jedges turns in a majority of *eighty-six* fo' Latham Hooper, runnin' against Samson?"

Bugwine's troubled eyes showed an extra inch of white. That was what had been bothering him too. Ever since he had squandered Samson's bribe-money in advance of the polling. For Samson was no man to have down on a boy! Not Samson G. Bates, who was the "Big Nigger" of both Baptist Hill and Rock Cut, with a powerful finger in every fiscal and fraternal operation in those dusky neighborhoods.

"And 'nother thing," Mr. Collins delved into his helper's shortcomings, "—how about dem clues on who hitch dat rope to de freight train durin' de meetin', so hit jerk all de back pillars out from under de lodge-hall when hit start? Took de railroad all night to git de lodge brothers sorted out an' de lodge-room off de track ag'in in dat cut! De lodge boys puttin' up de twelve dollars an' sixty cents rewawd fo' who done hit. Dat been two weeks ago, an' you aint smell out de crim'nal yit! Whut sawt of detective is you, nohow?"

"'Spectin' 'pawtant developments inside fawty-eight houahs," misquoted Bugwine uneasily, fumbling with the straw hat that he wore winter and summer.

"Save dat fo' de newspapers!" snorted his superior. "You wouldn't know a clue if hit come up an' smack you in de mouth."

"Aint *nobody* smack me in *my* mouth!" demurred Mr. Breck.

"Samson Bates gwine ram yo' neck down around yo' ankles, though, is you aint make has'e! 'Side from dat, you better git busy on de great lodge-hall myst'ry, an' git dat twelve-sixty rewawd, befo' you is ridin' in a shawt black box, up in front of yo' cred'tors, wid a wreath restin' on yo' vest, an' a card on hit readin': *Starved to death!*"

"Done been carryin' ouah bear-trap an' mazdafyin'-glass all over D'mop'lis now!" defended Detective Breck. "Handcuff de crook wid de b'ar-trap in a minute, is I find him. But cain't see nothin' an' cain't cotch nothin'. De lodge brothers all say dat big Bullfrawg boy done hit: He wuz sore at dem fo' firin' him out de lodge after he pawn de off'cers' robes to git in a crap game wid—"

"Dar you go!" interrupted Columbus witheringly. "Bullfrawg been gone from heah gwine on three weeks now, an' you still aint try to pin de crime on nobody else, jes' becaze some dem brothers think *he* done hit! Whut's de matter wid de agency's trade-mark: 'If you cain't cotch de crook, create one'?"

Bugwine shifted the more uneasily, and began to bear a close resemblance to a boy who was being smoked out into the open against his will.

"Well," he confessed reluctantly, "dat gal, Hysteria Ballard, been takin' up heap of my time lately, an' I—"

"Uh-huh! *Uh*-huh! *Women!* Neglectin' yo' bus'ness fo' women! Whut dey sees in you I cain't make out! —Li'l pigeon-toe' runt like you! An' numb from de ad-'noids up! Runnin' round wid Bullfrawg's gal—an' Bullfrawg not gone good yit!"

"Dat gal all busted out wid classy looks," protested Bugwine weakly. "An' maybe she let drap a clue 'bout Bullfrawg—"

"Yeah, an' maybe Bullfrawg come back an' let drap a plank on yo' favorite haid, too—is he find you messin' around wid he gal!"

Bugwine felt it time to change the scene and subject. "Le's us git on out an' see de cullud carnival," he proposed placatingly. "Lodge boys done gimme couple tickets to de side-shows, 'count me bein' retained fo' dey detective."

"Whut's a side-show!" scoffed Mr. Collins. "Aint never nothin' *to* 'em!"

"Is dis time—one of 'em got a wild man in hit."

"Mumbles which?"

"Wild man. Man whut dey cotch in de woods down 'long de river—wild, de sign say. Sho' is look cu'ious. Aint shave an' aint w'ar nothin' but a old sack and a mean look. Y'ought hear him holler jes' fo' victuals-time."

"Whut dey got him in?"

"Cage. But trees all around shakes when he git after dem bars."

"Too tame fo' me," Columbus continued to withhold his O. K. "I likes my wild men *wild*."

Bugwine's jaw dropped at such temerity. "You means a sho' 'nough wild man aint wild enough fo' you?" he demanded incredulously.

"Is dey tame enough to cage, dey's too tame fo' me to pay 'em no mind," outlined Mr. Collins. "Co'se now, if *you's* skeered—"

"Aint skeered of nothin'," Mr. Breck interrupted with what sounded like a safe statement at the time.

"Yeah? Well, you showed dat when you took up wid Bullfrawg's gal. —Either you aint skeered or you aint got no sense. How you know Bullfrawg aint comin' back?"

"Boy whut hitch a whole freight train to de lodge-hall aint comin' back twel de brothers gits over bein' sore at him," argued Bugwine thickly. "De twelve-sixty rewawd dey offer shows dat: when dem boys wants a nigger *twelve dollars' wuth,* dey *wants* him!"

"Still tells you you better lay off dat gal, an' 'tend to yo' detectin'. Dat Hysteria gwine git you all mess' up in a knot in yo' business."

"Jes' to show you aint no sense to whut you says," retorted Bugwine stubbornly, "I takes de tickets an' takes her to de carn'val, 'stead of you. I aint skeered of nobody."

With which ringing declaration on his lips, and the impressed and impressionable Hysteria on his arm, the holidaying Bugwine stepped spang into a fresh phase of the current knot in his affairs. For it hadn't been in his calculations to come face to face with the vengeance-vowing Samson G. Bates in a narrow passageway on the carnival grounds or anywhere else! Yet that was precisely what he found himself doing. Samson—whose cause, candidacy, and two-dollar fee he had betrayed! And with no honorable—or attainable—exit at hand!

Bugwine's knees knocked, while visions of a nurse, telling him to sit up and drink something, flashed across his panic-stricken mind.

"Uh-*huh!* So hit's *you,* you li'l bowlaigged shrimp, is hit!" rumbled Samson.

Bugwine essayed a snappy come-back that would impress his wide-eyed companion—and achieved a couple of squeaks and a gurgle that were no help to him.

Samson continued to swell and glare. But his next remark, seeming to hark back to some previous policy as it did, was disturbing in a different direction.

"Quit shiverin' so hard round de ears, boy!" he admonished the palpitant Bugwine. "*I* aint gwine do nothin' to you. 'Sides, I's too busy runnin' de Midway, heah at de carn'val, fo' foolin' wid you."

"Y-y-you means you aint sore 'bout de lodge 'lection no mo'?" Bugwine fumbled hopefully with an overall button and the facts.

"Aint say dat. Aint nothin' I hates wuss'n a double-crosser. Jes' says *I* aint gwine mess up *my* hands wid you, dat's all!"

Samson stood coldly aside. But Bugwine didn't like his accent: it seemed to imply things that gave a boy gooseflesh and low blood-pressure. Nor his expression: he had seen a cat look that way once, just before there was a lot of inquiry about where the canary had gone. Nevertheless: "You see dat Samson Bates back down when I stand up to him, aint you, gal?" Bugwine demanded of his girl-friend when he was again in the open, breathing freely and moving fast.

"You aint skeered of *nobody,* is you, Big Shorty?" Hysteria admired him as she strove to keep up.

"Grizzly b'ars takes lessons from me when I gits started," conceded Mr. Breck, pulling down his vest. "'Bugwine always gits his man.' Aint skeered of nobody!"

For all of which broadcasting, once in front of the widely discussed wild man's cage, Mr. Breck kept his eye on its bars. With iron so cheap, a boy couldn't help wondering why half-inch bars had been used for them when thicker ones would make the customers feel so much better.

For this wild man was of a dark, shaggy, and fearsome type. He might have been Alabama-raised, as rumored, but his wildness was not to be discounted on that account, qualified Bugwine, as he first glimpsed him growling realistically over a ham sandwich at the back of his cage. Then the caged man looked up, to peer through the growth of weeks upon his face, and hurl himself howling against the slender bars.

"Aint he wild an' woolly, though!" gasped the taken-aback Hysteria. "Sho' would hate to have him git loose an' git after *me!"*

Undetected, Bugwine paled a couple of times at that idea, too. "Let's us git on oveh heah an' see de sword-swallerer perfawm," he suggested hurriedly. A little extra distance wouldn't hurt even a brave man, with all that yelling and bar-wrenching going on back of them.

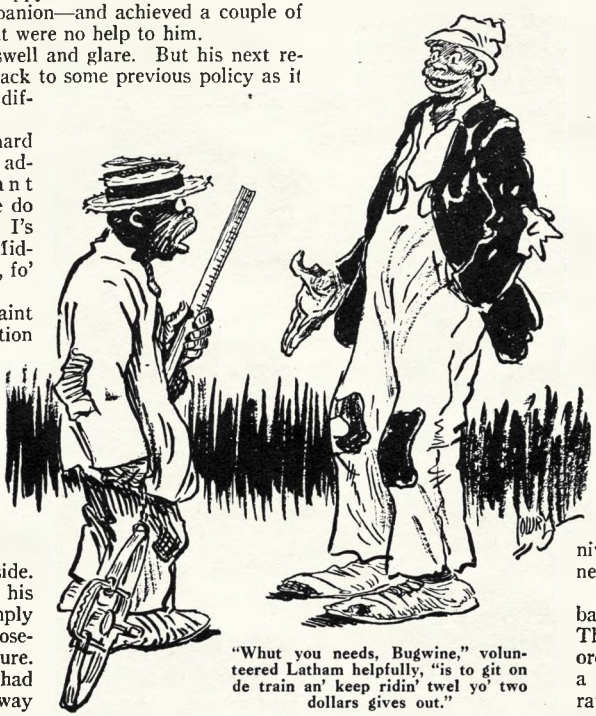
"Whooo-eee!" Hysteria wiped a relieved forehead as they gained the shelter of the sword-swallower's booth. "Somep'n sho' must stir him up back dar! Dat wild man skeer me!"

"Aint nothin' skeer me," outlined Mr. Breck modestly. "Dat's my business, not gittin' skeered."

"Wonder whut Samson G. Bates doin' runnin' de sideshows, nohow?" queried Hysteria idly as they watched a languid-looking darky swallowing a rubbery-appearing sword, as per billing.

"Profit in hit fo' Samson somewhar: dat man aint never do nothin' fo' nothin'," Bugwine voiced a combination of old experience and new worry. "Le's us go git some ba'becue: watchin' dis heah boy done git me in de notion of swallerin' somep'n too."

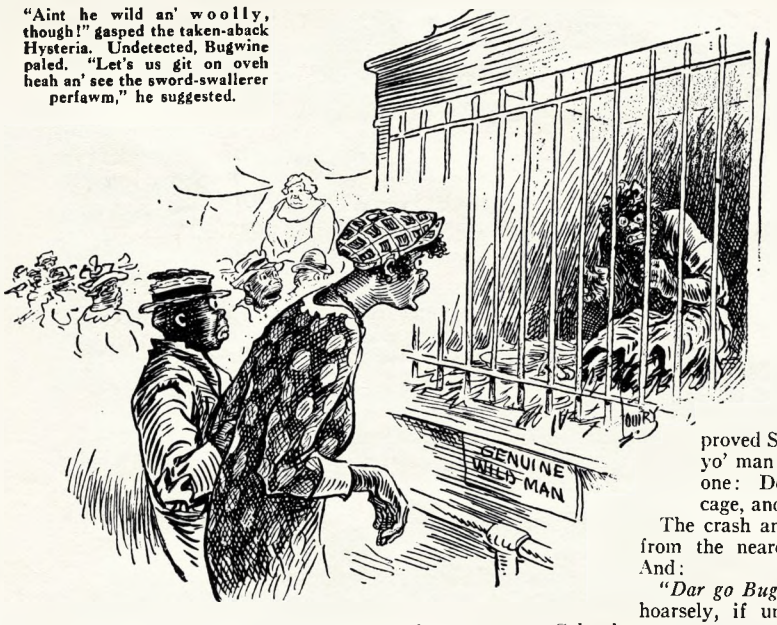
Which was how it came about that Bugwine and Hysteria were still near the carnival grounds when the big news broke.



"Whut you needs, Bugwine," volunteered Latham helpfully, "is to git on de train an' keep ridin' twel yo' two dollars gives out."

Drifting into the near-by barbecue-stand of Bees'-Knees Thompson, they had scarcely ordered suitable refreshment at a catsup- and tabasco-decorated table when loud talk at an adjoining table betrayed the presence of the loud or senior member of the detective agency, Columbus Collins.

"—Me an' Bugwine," Detective Collins was taking adjacent diners publicly into his confidence, "aint nothin' but human bloodhounds. Us smells 'em out whar others jes'



"Aint he wild an' woolly, though!" gasped the taken-aback Hysteria. Undetected, Bugwine paled. "Let's us git on oveh heah an' see the sword-swallerer perfawm," he suggested.

sniffs about! Keeps ouah mouth shet an' ouah eyes open. Aint miss nothin'. An' us always gits ouah man!"

A muttered, "How 'bout gittin' de boy whut jerk over de lodge-hall?" was lost in the sudden clangor of steel on porcelain that followed Bees'-Knees' slamming of two platters of hot barbecue in front of the assistant blood-hound and his lady friend.

Into this festal scene suddenly intruded Business.

Yet, to the outward eye, it was only Samson G. Bates entering, soft-footing it hurriedly into the door from the direction of Rock Cut, with frequent backward glances—glances that did not cease their nervous roving until they rested upon Private Detectives Collins and Breck.

Bugwine, having downed Samson once already that day, kept his seat in outward bravery if inward trepidation. Besides, Samson didn't look at him long. Instead, he was making for the table of Columbus Collins.

"Likes to see a man nourish hisse'f ahead of a big job, Mist' Collins," Samson drew back the chair beside Columbus, and opened a conversation with him that Bugwine was to remember all his life. "Aint no better way to git up de old stamina." But Samson's manner continued too agitated to match his brave words.

"Sho' aint!" agreed Columbus in mid-mouthful. "Let old rabbit wrop hisse'f around enough eatin'-victuals, an' he argue wid a wildcat: makes him feel dat stout."

"Dat one time you aint lay yo' finger on de main p'int, Mist' Collins," concurred Samson. "—You lay yo' *whole hand* on hit! Man in yo' line of business cain't affo'd to be skeered of nothin', nohow."

Columbus swelled visibly. Public endorsement by Samson G. Bates this way never hurt anybody's business!

"I always gits my man!" he submitted the facts, bare and unadorned.

"Pre-zact-ly! Dat's huccome I hurries over heah to retain you while de trail still wawm, an'—"

Something psychic in Bugwine just here told him to drop to his hands and knees and start for the nearest door while the crawling was good. Only, the message must have been delayed in transit; for he was still in mid-floor when the full import of Samson's mission flattened him.

"Yessuh," Samson was growing increasingly loud-voiced and impressive, with everyone listening to him. "De management aint want to 'larm nobody—specially twel after de best detectives is been engaged. But now dat de Collins detective agency is fixin' to take de case, de bad news can be spilled—"

"Shet dat do', an' let nobody leave de room!" interrupted Columbus importantly, blasting Bugwine's hopes in a fresh place. "Us smells 'em out whar others jes' sniffs about. Us a'cepts de case, Mist' Bates—jes' name hit."

"Dat's de sperrit!" approved Samson in elephantine relief. "Git yo' man! An' dis case is to cotch a bad one: De wild man is jes' bust out of he cage, and—"

The crash and tinkle of outward-falling glass from the nearest window-sash halted Samson. And:

"*Dar go Bugwine!* —After him now!" came hoarsely, if unconvincingly, from the startled Columbus.

"Dar go Bugwine, you means," amended Samson significantly. "Now hit's up to you boys to git yo' man—like you all time braggin' 'round!"

The rangy Columbus swapped feet uncertainly, and regretted his birth and boastings. Right in front of everybody, he had talked too much. There wasn't but one boy in the world who wanted the job of catching that wild man less than the fleeing Bugwine: and that boy was Columbus Collins!

"You means you retains me an' Bugwine bofe to cotch de wild man?" he checked up. If there was any hope of a misunderstanding about this thing, Columbus wanted it cleared up right now.

"Sho' is. An' he's dange'ous too! Gwine take couple of good men—as good as you an' Bugwine *says* you is—to do hit."

Columbus' mouth flapped foolishly and didn't say anything. In fact, he was in the grip of a feeling that far too much had been said by him already. Even the alternative of sawing the job off on Bugwine looked remote, because, at the rate he had been moving when he passed through that window-sash, Bugwine was probably remote too, by now!

"Stand back, eve'ybody, an' lemme git de yardstick an' de b'ar-trap!" the cornered Columbus essayed a new grip on his professional status. "Eve'body keep out de way twel I 'xamines de sidewalks fo' footprints."

Which was but a bluff. The only footprints that interested Columbus were his own—going away from there! Besides, as the situation penetrated surrounding mentalities, none were left to stand back. The spectators weren't bothering with streets and sidewalks at the moment. They were too busy scattering across lots, diving beneath barber-shops, and swarming up trees. Any escaped wild man that got his clutches on a denizen of the Hill had his work cut out for him first, was the idea!

Nor was Columbus far behind them. It had come over him during the first four seconds that in a jam like his a boy needed to be alone to do a lot of thinking; and that the place for that was as far under the old freight depot as

possible. Also, it was an old refuge of Bugwine's; quite possibly Mr. Breck would be under it too, ere now, making a conference possible.

Thus inspired, with his heart in his mouth and his feet in a blur, Mr. Collins made the last hundred yards of his nine-block dash to the freight house in slightly under nothing, flat. There, gratefully yet cautiously, the great detective crawled into its welcome obscurity. If there, Bugwine would be far back and hard to come up with until he knew who was coming too. But at length Columbus made him out, a dark and bulky Bugwine half-hidden behind the farthest chimney there.

"Naw, you aint skeered of nothin', is you!" grunted Mr. Breck's chief scathingly, as he wormed his way painfully and purposefully toward him. "Huccome you git so fur so fast, you—"

"Arrrrrghhhhh-oooof!" snarled the supposed Bugwine, whirling savagely on him.

And beneath the freight depot there was only dust. The dust of Columbus, in whom sudden success had gone not to his head but to his heels! For inadvertently he had found not Bugwine but the wild man! And, what was far worse, the wild man had simultaneously found him! After which antelopes might have envied but never equaled the frenzied footwork of Mr. Collins!

Three miles and no time at all later, the speeding *Sherlock* of Baptist Hill looked back and, puzzled, slowed down to thirty miles an hour. Below the knees, he perceived, no wild man was in his class!

"Dawg-gone!" panted Columbus hoarsely. "Dat funny! Dem wild man's as easy to lose as dey is to find! Wonder huccome?"

Which fervent comment and question suddenly seemed to jar loose the overburden from a whole new stratum of thought; and what lay exposed there in the way of a new vein of action—a fresh solution for a pressing personal problem—dazzled him.

Cautious back-tracking, after due delay, revealed nothing that did not fit in with the scheme. If the wild man had followed him, he hadn't followed him far. Indeed, it grew doubtful if he had left the shelter of the depot. Regardless of all which, Columbus perceived that the headwork was all done. The rest merely required muscles, not mind, and would be simple even if not easy.

Meantime, by taking a nine-block detour around the fearsome neighborhood of the old freight depot, a boy could get back on Baptist Hill without being seen in the wrong places or by the wrong people. And all this brainwork, he further realized, surely did take it out of a boy. What he needed was barbecue with which to build himself up. As an upbuilder, Bees'-Knees Thompson's barbecue and sauce had no equals. Also, Columbus had credit there.

The first thing that met his eyes as he eased into Mr. Thompson's establishment simply confirmed the seaworthiness of his own intellect. During the flights of Columbus and time, certain bolder—and hungrier—spirits had returned. Among them—and under the latter heading—was Bugwine. Bugwine might leave unfinished business behind him, but never for long unfinished barbecue. Already he was back at his platter, making the rafters ring with his fork and spoon. And with the less-traveled Hysteria dining diligently beside him.

"Aint skeered of nothin', is you?" Columbus hailed the diner abruptly. "Huccome you git so fur an' back so fast, den?"

Mr. Breck nervously introduced half a foot of daylight between himself and his chair. He was in no mental condition to be spoken to sharply by anyone, it seemed. Once already in the course of his resumed meal he had gone out and climbed a telephone pole when Bees'-Knees had accidentally dropped a stove lid.

"Been out to git ouah b'ar-trap," he defended himself, producing it.

"Boy, you aint need no b'ar-trap—you needs wings!" Columbus deprecated him.

"Aint cotch *no* wild man widout de b'ar-trap to handcuff him wid," explained Bugwine sullenly. He sensed that Columbus was working him into an uncomfortable position, without seeing what to do about it. "When you gwine fotch him back to de carn'val cage?"

"Yeah, when is you? Mist' *Breck* aint skeered of nobody," Hysteria intruded herself pointedly, and loyally, into the conversation.

Columbus recognized the key to a ticklish situation when it was thus thrust into his hand—one that was right in line with his recent resolve under the influence of his big bright idea. By her remark, the last obstacle to his scheme for a graceful personal side-stepping was being removed for him.

"Co'se he aint!" he agreed in tones so honeyed that Bugwine again stirred uneasily in his seat. When Columbus grew complimentary there was a catch in it! "Dat whut I got 'sistant fo'—not to be skeered of nothin'. All he have to do is do de de-tail work after I gits a case all thunk out."

Bugwine looked longingly toward the door. There was something ominous in all this.

"—What I means," continued Mr. Collins suavely, "is I done *locate* de wild man now. So all *Bugwine* got do is go dar an' cotch him—"

The gurgle of the frog-eyed Mr. Breck as he collapsed in his chair might have

"I git Samson fo' dis!" howled the erstwhile wild man. "He aint say nothin' 'bout me gittin' cotched in no *b'ar-trap!* Lemme loose!"

been ascribed to numerous causes, none of them correct. But only the dead could have withstood the heroic remedy Columbus immediately introduced between his slackened jaws. At the second spoonful of Bees'-Knees' famous tabasco, Bugwine rallied magnificently. Only with difficulty was he pried loose from three successive ice-water pitchers on near-by tables.

"Me cotch *who?*" he at length sputtered when his internal fires had died down to mere glowing embers.

"De wild man—dat who!"

A glance at Hysteria finished sealing Bugwine's doom. He had been trapped more firmly than any bear-trap could accomplish, by his desire for a lady's favor. For her eyes were glistening expectantly. And Columbus was taking foul advantage of him by shoving an obvious opportunity to become a hero directly toward him!

"Whar he? Lemme at him! R'arin' to git de wild man!" Bugwine forthwith laid it on with a wide brush, if feebly.

"Right under de old freight depo' whar I lef' him," rejoined Columbus. "An' you better make has'e befo' he leave dar an' git somewhar else."

HYSTERIA shuddered delighted at being allowed to sit in thus on history in the making. Bugwine bit a segment from the saucer out of which he had been drinking his coffee. His business had him backed into a corner all over again! What he needed was air and exercise—both of them well away from that freight house. Yet he had to make a good impression on Hysteria now or lose her. Columbus had him hog-tied to heroism with the bonds of that necessity. And:

"Mist' Breck aint skeered of nobody," Bullfrog's ex-best girl cut off his final fading hopes of retreat.

A boy with as much business behind him as Bugwine, was all the time getting his future complicated by his past. Based on whom he met and what he heard. Now he unexpectedly bumped into a new chapter of an old story, in the form of Latham Hooper, the recent accidental beneficiary of Bugwine's unfortunate bungling of his ballot-box stuffing. Latham was too cheerful to fit the times or to bode anybody any good.

"Nigger," he congratulated the worried Mr. Breck on sight, "hit sho' is good thing you sees me first!"

"Yeah?" acknowledged Bugwine unhappily.

"Samson G. Bates done bust out in a fresh place in Rock Cut about you, dat whut!"

"Samson skeered to mess wid me no mo'," returned Mr. Breck. But it sounded unconvincing, even to himself.

"Dat big Bates boy, he's slick, dat's all. I's friend of yourn, 'count de lodge election, an' I aint tellin' you no lie. I wuz under de barber-shop, waitin' fo' my wife to git on by, an' I heahs Samson in dar talkin' 'bout you. He still sorer'n a gum-boil on a goose's elbow at you 'bout dat lodge 'lection—"

"He say he aint sore no mo'," objected Bugwine.

"Dat jes' to git you off yo' guard. He layin' fo' you jes' de same. I heahs him. He done frame somep'n on you, whut I couldn't make out whut. Dat two dollars still stuck in he craw like a hawg caught under a fence."

Old fears reared their ugly heads for Bugwine—old sayings of Samson's that he collected or crippled. Like Bugwine's boast, Samson always got his man. But with Mr. Bates it was no boast. He did it. So Latham's warning had called up two active dangers where there had been but one a moment before. Even if Bugwine managed the wild-man business now, he still had Samson on his neck. And *vice versa*. Samson was sore at the lodge too; and, on account of the lodge, sore at Bugwine as well. Not to speak of the still-unsolved freight train and lodge-hall grievance.

"Whut you needs, Bugwine," volunteered Latham helpfully, "is to git on de train an' keep riding twel yo' two dollars gives out."

"Done spend dem two dollars," mourned Bugwine. "Dat huccome heap de trouble. How 'bout gittin' me up another good notion? I's de one whut git you de election as Commander, aint I? How 'bout you gittin' me out dis jam wid Samson, den? I got plenty trouble wid dat wild man waitin' fo' me, widout stoppin' to mess wid Samson!"

Sweat attesting to this rolled from the squirming Bugwine. His eyes were begging like a panhandler in a blizzard. Hysteria, and his own brave bragging, had him signed up as a hero, while a wild man and a dangerous creditor still stood between him and making good. If Latham didn't have a heartening idea shortly, Bugwine would have a heart-failure of his own.

Latham regarded him pityingly in his overalls, his straw hat, and his misery. "—You aint no size," he ruminated aloud. "And you aint got no sense. . . . Both of *dem's* against you—"

Bugwine shivered and suffered on the hoof.

"—So aint nothin' left fo' you but scheme up some way to set a trap fo' Samson."

"Huccome trap?" Bugwine's brain battled in its fog.

"Only way to bust a balloon," still soliloquized Mr. Hooper, "is stick a pin in hit. Den whar is hit? Only way to git de best of Samson Bates is to git de laugh on him: git him in a jam somewhar out in front of eve'ybody —make him feel like a busted balloon right out in public, an' you *got* him. Set a trap fo' Samson dat way, an' he lay off you."

Mr. Breck's doglike eyes stood out an extra half inch, then clouded in sympathy with the brain back of them.

"Yeah, but how I gwine *do* all dat to Samson?" he pressed.

"Well, now, *dat's* somep'n you got figure out fo' yo' ownse'f—soon as you gits through 'tendin' to yo' wild-man cotchin'," Latham kicked him back down from briefly viewing the Promised Land. Mr. Hooper, too, seemed suddenly in a hurry, as though remembering something. "Craves to git me behind a good stout door now, pussonal," he explained his new haste, "twel I looks out an' sees you gwine by wid dat wild man handcuffed to you in yo' b'ar-trap. He liable git out from under dat freight depot is you aint make has'e an' grab him."

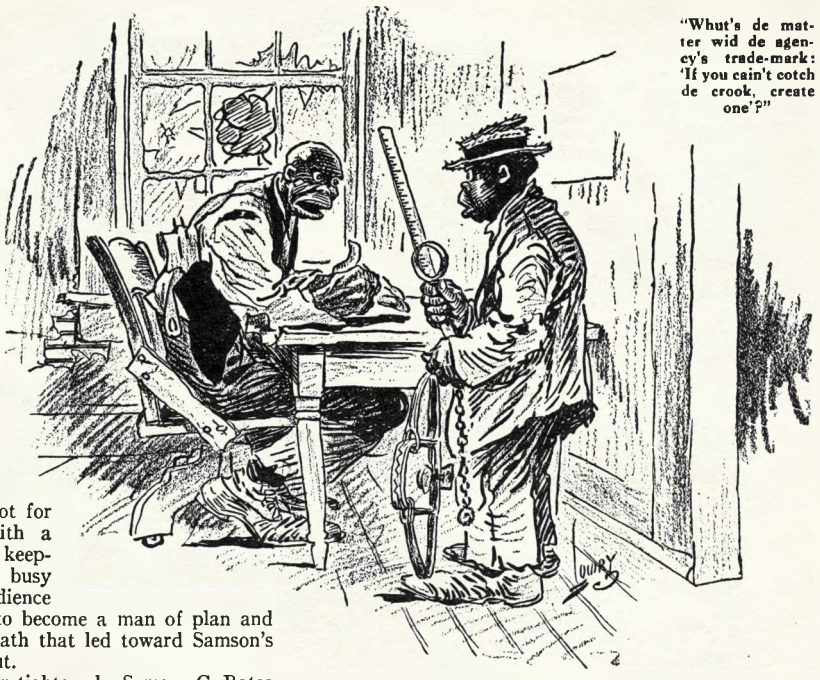
The sweating Bugwine all but gibbered at the picture thus presented. Then Latham was gone. Not only was Bugwine slowly nearing the depot whose dark nether regions concealed the fearful wild man he was commissioned and committed to catch, but his approach to it reminded him of the other half of his predicament: just beyond it, and reached by a little-used path running through bush-covered vacant lots, lay Rock Cut; and Rock Cut, Bugwine recalled, was one of Samson's alternate haunts.

THROUGH darky-deserted streets shuffled that trembling little sleuth Bugwine Breck. In their emptiness the clank of the handcuffing bear-trap at his belt echoed ominously. His professional yardstick rattled in the dust at his heels. For Bugwine was *en route* to his doom.

"Aint skeered of nobody," he lied feebly to himself, and hoped Hysteria was happy watching him. His feet lagged, and a cold perspiration collected on his back and brow. Dusky, wall-eyed faces peered out from tight-shut barber-shops and barbecue-stands along his reluctant route—at Bugwine who was about to die, but who wasn't fixing to salute anybody but Saint Peter!

And, as is often ascribed to the doomed, fragments of the past raced through his head. Bullfrog—Hysteria—Samson—the domineering Columbus—Latham—the re-

curring clank of the bear-trap. . . . And just then, suddenly, brilliantly, Bugwine had it! An idea—just when ideas were worth their weight in platinum! One that would halve his dangers by effectively humiliating Samson, as Latham had suggested! Publicly, and for as long as Bugwine chose to leave him thus, it would hold him securely in the scornful eye of Baptist Hill. It would pillory him for ridicule, puncture his pomposity, render him as dangerous as a deflated balloon. In the fine glow of all which, Bugwine had almost overlooked his impending entry beneath the freight depot for hand-to-hand encounter with a wild man. Just now he was keeping his imagination happily busy with something else, in obedience to which he turned aside, to become a man of plan and action in the weed-grown path that led toward Samson's other hang-out in Rock Cut.



"Whut's de matter wid de agency's trade-mark: 'If you cain't cotch de crook, create one'?"

On Baptist Hill the tension tightened. Samson G. Bates had long since hurriedly left it for his other haunt in Rock Cut. After which time passed, but no news came.

Self-locked in a closet in an inner room in the speakeasy where he headquartered, Columbus, Bugwine's chief, kept an anxious eye to a knot-hole in its outer wall which commanded the street leading to Rock Cut and the fatal freight house. At intervals Columbus shuddered—at what had doubtless already happened to his heroic assistant. And again he could hear the growl, feel the hot breath of the accidentally discovered wild man that had sent him forth from beneath it a brief while back.

It was at the height of these racking imaginings that suspense was broken, only to be recreated in a brand-new way—recreated by a frenzied vocal outbreak from the general direction of the freight depot and Rock Cut.

At it, from doors, trees, roofs, windows, and manholes there emerged, descended, and otherwise appeared the citizenry of Baptist Hill—a citizenry cautious yet curious.

In the rear of the oncoming denizens of the Hill, as befitted a prudent man not seeking the limelight until its safety should have been tested, limped and shuffled Columbus Collins, the great detective, ready to grab the glory, if glory there should be.

Then and thus it was that the uncalculated breaking of a limb in one of Franklin Street's taller trees precipitated to earth and a climax one Bugwine Breck—a Bugwine in whom breathlessness vied now with fear, and a faintly forming satisfaction vied in turn with both. For, when the cause of the pandemonium in the weed-grown pathway ahead to Rock Cut should be revealed to the fast-gathering gallery, it meant the end of oppression of Bugwine by Samson. Latham had said so! Not even a Samson G. Bates could live down the humiliation of being publicly found caught by Bugwine in a bear-trap!

But just here, in the very dawn of Bugwine's scarce-tasted triumph over Samson, a horrid thought crept in: perhaps his plan had gone agley. For the trapped one didn't *sound* like Samson!

Then again the outward aspect of things instantly altered before a new element—a backward surge and sudden rout set in among the front-rank spectators who had come too near to Bugwine's trap. A wave of them overwhelmed Bugwine forthwith, passing like an army over his prostrate form and features in a panic as mad as it was inexplicable. They took again to trees, they swarmed up poles, they fled behind hard-slammed doors; first and swiftest in their forefront was the valiant Columbus, leaving the luckless Bugwine to sit up feebly and confront, tight-held in the bear-trap he had set in the path, not Samson, but—the wild man! The wild man, grown suddenly vocal and voluble! As the laboring brain of Bugwine took in what straining eyes and ears were relaying to it, he perceived with sudden lifting of his soul that in blundering might be victories!

No more would Columbus browbeat him. For, unsuspectingly and unexpectedly, he had captured the wild man! No more would threat of Samson hang above him, for Samson now had new troubles of his own! No more would poverty and failure dog his steps, for he would have money—reward-money—twelve dollars and sixty cents, to be exact! For the old and baffling case of lodge-hall versus freight train was also solved. Everything was revealed and settled now—in the outbursts of the trapped one.

"I git Samson fo' dis!" howled the unshorn and erstwhile wild man, "—hirin' me to hitch de train to de lodge-hall, so he'd git even wid de lodge fo' 'lectin' Latham—den tellin' de lodge boys I done hit! An' keepin' me hid out from 'em twel I looks like dis, so aint nobody know hit's me in de cage. . . . An' den unlockin' hit an' tu'nin' me loose, to git him even wid two dumb detectives by skeerin' 'em to death. —Dat's all right: But he aint say nothin' 'bout me gittin' cotched in no *b'ar-trap!* Dat's whar I quits bein' 'wild' an' gits *wild!* Lemme loose from heah, boy, an' you c'n *have* Hysteria—I's too busy. . . . But befo' I leaves town fo' good, in front of all dem mad lodge boys, I's gwine cripple dat Samson fo' life fo' all dis—or my name aint *Bullfrawg!*"

The Land Of Hidden Men

An American's tremendous adventure in the remote Cambodian jungle is here described by the same inimitable talent that created Tarzan.

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The Story Thus Far:

"NO farther than this," announced the Cambodian.

The young white man turned in astonishment upon his native guide. Behind them lay the partially cleared trail along which they had come. Before them was the primitive jungle, untouched by man.

"Why, we haven't even started yet," exclaimed the white man. "You cannot turn back now. What do you suppose I hired you for?"

"I promised to take my lord to the jungle," replied the Cambodian. "There it is. I did not promise to enter it. There are wild elephants there, my lord, and tigers, and panthers which hunt by day as well as by night."

"Why do you suppose we brought two rifles?" demanded the white.

"There are other things deep in the jungle, my lord, that no man may look upon and live."

"What, for example?" demanded King.

"The ghosts of my ancestors," answered the Cambodian, "—the Khmers who dwelt here in great cities ages ago. Within the dark shadows of the jungle the ruins of their cities still stand, and down the dark aisles of the forest pass the ancient kings and warriors, and little sad-faced queens on ghostly elephants. Fleeing always from the horrible fate that overtook them in life, they pass forever down the corridors of the jungle, and with them are the millions of the ghostly dead who once were their subjects. We might escape, my lord, the tiger and the wild elephants, but no man may look upon the ghosts of the dead Khmers, and live."

Impatient of the Cambodian's fears, Gordon King left him and set out into the jungle alone. King was a young American who had recently graduated in medicine. Having an independent income he had no need to practice his profession, and well realizing, as he did, that there are already too many poor doctors in the world, he had decided to devote himself for a number of years to the study of strange maladies. For the moment he had permitted himself to be lured from his hobby by the intriguing mysteries of the Khmer ruins of Angkor—ruins that had worked so mightily upon his imagination that it had been impossible for him to withstand the temptation of some independent exploration on his own account.

It was not long indeed, before King actually did come upon a vast vine-grown ruin of an ancient city. But already he was hopelessly lost, for a fall had broken his compass, and the thick growth made sight of the sun impossible. He spent the night in a deserted tower room. And he spent the next seven days in desperate wandering, keeping alive by shooting wild pig and other game, and in constant danger from leopard and tiger and cobra.

And then one day when fever was already making him dizzy he saw far down a jungle aisle an elephant. It was not alone; there were other things preceding it—things that could not be in this deserted primeval jungle! He closed his eyes and shook his head. It was only an hallucination brought on by a touch of fever, of that he was certain. But when he opened his eyes again the elephant was still there and he recognized the creatures that preceded it as warriors clothed in brass. They were coming closer. King crawled back into the concealing underbrush. The caravan passed within fifty feet of him, but he heard no sound. There were archers and spear-men—brown men with cuirasses of burnished brass. Then came the elephant trapped in regal splendor, and in a gorgeous howdah upon its back rode a girl. He saw her profile first and then something attracted her attention and she turned her full face toward him. It was a face of exquisite and exotic beauty; but a sad face with frightened eyes. Behind her marched other warriors and presently all were gone down the aisles of the jungle in spectral silence.

"Weeping queens on misty elephants! Gad!" he exclaimed. "What weird tricks fever plays upon one's brain! I could have sworn that what I saw was real."

Slowly he staggered to his feet and pushed on. Soon, however, he collapsed. And as he lay looking out into a little clearing, speculating upon his fate and trying to estimate the number of hours of life which might remain to him, he saw a strange figure enter the clearing. It was an old man with a straggly white beard growing sparsely upon his chin and upper lip. He wore a long yellow cloak and a fantastic headdress, above which he carried a red umbrella. He moved slowly, his eyes bent upon the ground.

"Damned fever," muttered King, and shut his eyes.

He kept them closed for a minute or two; when he opened them the old man was still in sight. But now there was another figure in the picture—a great, vicious, yellow-fanged face, yellowish-white and tan with broken markings of dark brown stripes that looked almost black—a hideous head and yet, at the same time, a gorgeously majestic head.

The tiger was creeping rapidly toward the old man. His speed gradually accelerated.

"I can't stand it!" cried King. "They may be only an

In the same brief instant Che saw a heavy javelin streak lightninglike from the jungle.

hallucination, but—" Jumping to his feet, he snatched up his rifle, squeezed the trigger—and fainted.

Days or weeks later King recovered consciousness. He had been cared for by a native hunter Che, with his wife Kangrey and little son Uda. They told him that by killing the tiger he had saved the life of the priest Vay Thon.... Gradually King recovered strength, but another calamity befell him: in the absence of his hosts a band of monkeys raided the hut and made off with King's clothing and weapons. Perforce he had now to dress in skins like the natives, and he learned to use bow and arrow; in throwing the javelin he had been proficient since college days. And he soon had use for these primitive weapons; for returning from a short excursion into the jungle one day, he saw little Uda at play, digging with a sharp stick in the leafy mold of the ground—while at the edge of the clearing a great panther was crouched, watching him.

King saw the beast gradually drawing its hind feet well beneath its body as it prepared to charge. *(The story continues in detail:)*

CHE, returning early from a successful hunt, approached the clearing. He too moved silently, for thus he always moved through the jungle. Along a forest aisle he could see the clearing before he reached it. He saw Uda digging among the dry leaves, which made a rustling sound that would have drowned the noise of the approach of even a less careful jungle animal than Che.

Che smiled as his eyes rested upon his first-born—but in the same instant the smile froze to an expression of horror as he saw a panther leap into the clearing.

Kangrey, emerging at that moment from their gloomy dwelling, saw it too, and screamed as she rushed forward bare-handed, impelled by the mother instinct to protect its young. And then, in the same brief instant, Che saw a heavy javelin streak lightninglike from the jungle. He saw the panther crumple in its charge and as he ran forward he saw "the pale one" leap into the clearing and snatch Uda in his arms.

Che, realizing, as had King, the fury of a wounded panther, rushed upon the scene with ready spear as the pale one tossed Uda to Kangrey and turned again to face the great cat.

But there was no necessity for the vicious thrust with which Che drove his spear into the carcass of the beast, for the panther was already dead.

For a moment they stood in silence, looking down upon the kill—four primitive jungle people, naked but for *sampots*.

It was King's first experience of a thrill of the primitive hunter. He was trembling slightly, but that was reaction to the fear that he had felt for the life of little Uda.

"It is a large panther," said Che simply.

"Only a strong man could have slain it thus," said Kangrey. "Only Che could thus have slain with a single cast so great a panther."

"It was not the spear of Che. It was the spear of the pale one that laid low the prince of darkness," said Che.

Kangrey looked her astonishment and she would not be convinced until she had examined the spear that protruded from beneath the left shoulder of the great cat. "This, then, is the reward that Vay Thon said would be ours if we befriended the pale one," she said.

Uda said nothing, but squirming from his mother's arms he ran to the side of the dead panther and belabored it with his little stick.

The next day Che invited King to accompany him upon his hunt. After a hard day they returned empty-handed and King was convinced that in the search for small game a lone hunter would have greater chances for success. In the morning, therefore, he announced that he would hunt alone in another part of the jungle and Che agreed with him that this plan would be better.

Marking his trail as he had before, King hunted in unfamiliar territory. The forest appeared more open. There was less underbrush and he had discovered what appeared to be a broad elephant-trail, along which he moved with far greater speed than he had ever been able to attain

before in his wanderings through this empire of trees and underbrush.

He had no luck in his hunting and he had about determined that it was time to turn back when his ears caught an unfamiliar sound. What it was he did not know—there was a peculiar metallic ring and other sounds that might have been human voices at a distance.

"Perhaps," soliloquized King, "I am about to see the Nagas or the Yeacks, or some other of those terrible jungle man-beasts that Che talks about."

The sound was steadily approaching and as he had learned enough from his intercourse with Che and Kangrey to know that no friendly creatures might be encountered in the jungle, he drew to one side of the elephant-trail and concealed himself there behind some shrubbery.

He had not waited long when he saw the authors of the sounds approaching. Suddenly he felt of his head, but it did not seem over-hot. He closed his eyes tightly, as he had upon other similar occasions, and then opened them again, but still the vision persisted—a vision of brown-skinned soldiers in burnished brass cuirasses over leather jerkins that fell midway between their hips and their knees; heavy sandals shod their feet; upon their heads were strange helmets, and they were armed with swords and spears and bows and arrows.

They came on, talking among themselves, and as they passed close to King he discovered that they spoke the same language he had learned from Che and Kangrey.

Evidently the men were arguing with their leader, who wanted to go on, while the majority of his followers seemed in favor of turning back.

"We shall have to spend the night in the jungle as it is," said one. "If we go on much farther, we shall have to spend two nights in the jungle. Only a fool would choose to lair with My Lord the Tiger."

They had stopped now almost opposite King, and he could clearly overhear all that passed between them. The man in charge appeared to be a petty officer with little real authority, for instead of issuing orders, he argued.

"It is well enough for you to insist upon turning back," he said, "since if we return to the city without the apsaras, you expect that I alone shall be punished; but let me tell you that if you force me to turn back, the entire truth will be made known, and you will share in any punishment that may be inflicted upon me."

"If we cannot find her, we cannot find her," grumbled one of the men. "Are we to remain in the jungle the rest of our lives searching for a runaway apsaras?"

"I would as lief face My Lord the Tiger in the jungle for the rest of my life," replied the petty officer, "as face Lodivarman if we return without the girl."

"What Vama says is true," said another. "Lodivarman the king will not be interested in our reason for returning empty-handed. Should we return to the city tomorrow without the girl, and Vama charged that we had forced him to turn back, Lodivarman, if he were in ill-humor, as he usually is, would have us all put to death; but if we remain away for many days and then return with a story of many hardships and dangers, he will know that we did all that might be expected of brave warriors, and thus the anger of Lodivarman might be assuaged."

"At last," commented Vama, "you are commencing to talk like intelligent and civilized men. Come, now, and let us resume the search."

"Help me down," said the girl. "Perhaps you are mad, but you seem quite harmless."

As they moved away, King heard one of the men suggest that they find a safe and comfortable camp site where they might remain for a sufficient length of time to impress upon Lodivarman the verity of the story they would relate to him. He only waited until they were out of sight before he arose from his place of concealment, for he was much concerned with the fact that they were proceeding in the general direction of the dwelling of Che and Kangrey. King was much mystified by what he had seen. He knew that these soldiers were no children of a fevered brain. They were flesh-and-blood warriors, and for that reason a far greater mystery than any of the creatures he had seen in his delirium, since they could not be accounted for by any process of intelligent reasoning. His judgment told him that there were no warriors in this uninhabited jungle, and certainly none with the archaic accouterments and weapons that he had seen. It might

be reasonable to expect to meet such types in an extravaganza of the stage or screen; and doubtless centuries ago warriors such as these patrolled this very spot which the jungle and the tiger and the elephant had long since reclaimed.

He recalled the stories that his guide had told him of the ghosts of the ancient Khmers which roamed through the somber aisles of the forest. He recalled the other soldiers that he had seen, and the girl with the frightened eyes, who rode upon the great elephant; and the final result was a questioning of his own sanity. He knew that a fever, such as the one through which he had passed, might easily affect one's brain either temporarily or permanently, and his thoughts were troubled and not a little frightened as he made his way in the direction of the dwelling of Che and Kangrey. But that he took a circuitous route so as to avoid the warriors evidenced the fact that either he was quite crazy or, at least, that he was temporizing with his madness.

"'Weeping queens on misty elephants!'" he soliloquized. "'Warriors in brass!' A mystery of the Orient! Perhaps after all there are ghosts. There has been enough evidence accumulated during historic times to prove that the materialization of disembodied spirits may have occurred upon countless occasions. That I never saw a ghost is not necessarily conclusive evidence that they do not exist. There are many strange things in the Orient that the Western mind cannot grasp. Perhaps after all I have seen ghosts; but if so, they certainly were thoroughly materialized, even to the dirt on their legs and the sweat on their faces. I guess I shall have to admit that they are ghosts, since I know that no soldiers like them exist in the flesh anywhere in the world."

AS King moved silently through the jungle, he presented an even more anachronistic figure than had the soldiers in brass, for they at least personified an era of civilization and advancement, while King, to all outward appearances, was almost at the dawn of human evolution —a primitive hunter, naked but for a sampot of leopard skin, and rude sandals fashioned by Kangrey because the soles of his feet, innocent of the calluses that protected hers and Che's, had rendered him almost helpless in the jungle without this protection. His skin was brown from exposure to the sun, and his hair had grown thick and shaggy.

That he was smooth-shaven was the result of chance. He had always made it a habit, since he had taken up the study of medicine and surgery, to carry a safety razor blade with him against what possible emergency he could not himself have explained. It was merely an idiosyncrasy, and it had so chanced that among several other things that the monkeys had dropped from his pockets and scattered in the jungle the razor blade had been recovered by little Uda, along with a silver pencil and a handful of French francs.

He moved through the jungle with all the assurance of a man who has known no other life, so quickly does humankind adapt itself to environment. Already his ears and his nostrils had become inured to their surroundings —to such an extent, at least, as to permit them to identify and classify easily and quickly the more familiar sounds and odors of the jungle. Familiarity had induced increasing self-assurance, which had now reached a point where he felt that he might soon safely set out in search of civilization; but today his mind was not on this thing; it was still engaged in an endeavor to solve the puzzle of the brass-bound warriors. But presently the baffling contemplation of this matter was rudely interrupted by a patch of buff coat and black stripes of which he caught a momentary, fleeting glimpse between the boles of two trees ahead of him.

A species of unreasoning terror that had formerly seized him each time that he glimpsed the terrifying lord of the jungle had gradually passed away as he had come to recognize the fact that every tiger that he saw was not bent upon his destruction, and that nine times out of ten it would try to get out of his way. Of course, it is the tenth tiger that one must always reckon with, but where trees are numerous and a man's eyes and ears and nose are alert, even the tenth tiger may usually be circumvented.

So now King did not alter his course, though he had seen the tiger directly ahead of him. It would be time enough to think of retreat when he found that the temper and intentions of the tiger warranted it, and further, it was better to keep the brute in sight than to feel that perhaps he had circled and was creeping up behind one. It was, therefore, because of this that King pushed on a little more rapidly, and soon he was rewarded by another glimpse of the great carnivore and of something else which presented a tableau that froze his blood.

Beyond the tiger and facing it stood a girl. Her wide eyes were glassy with terror. She stood as one in a trance, frozen to the spot, while toward her the great cat crept.

She was a slender girl, garbed as fantastically as had been the soldiers who had passed him in the jungle shortly before; but her gorgeous garments were soiled and torn, and even at a distance King could see that her face and arms were scratched and bleeding. In the instant that his eyes alighted upon her, he sensed something strangely familiar about her. It was a sudden, wholly unaccountable impression that somewhere he had seen this girl before, but it was only a passing impression, for his whole mind now was occupied with her terrifying predicament.

To save her from the terrible death creeping slowly upon her seemed beyond the realms of possibility, and yet King knew that he must make the attempt, and he recognized instantly that his only hope lay in distracting the attention of the tiger. If he could center the interest of the brute upon himself, perhaps the girl might escape.

He shouted, and the tiger wheeled about. "Run!" he cried to the girl. "Quick! Make for a tree!"

As he spoke, King was running forward. His heavy spear was ready in his hand, but yet it was still a mad chance to take. Perhaps he forgot himself and his own danger, thinking only of the girl. The tiger glanced back at the girl, who, obeying King's direction, had run quickly to a near-by tree into which she was trying to scramble, badly hampered by the long skirt that enveloped her.

For only an instant did the tiger hesitate. His short and ugly temper was fully aroused now in the face of this rude interruption of his plan. With a savage snarl and then the short coughing roars with which King was all too familiar, he wheeled and sprang toward the man in long, easy bounds. Twelve to fifteen feet he covered in a single leap. Flight was futile. There was nothing that King could do but stand his ground and pit his puny spear against this awful engine of destruction.

IN that brief instant there was pictured upon the screen of his memory a tree-girt athletic field. He saw young men in shirts and shorts, throwing javelins. He saw himself among them. It was his turn now. His arm went back. He recalled how he had put every ounce of muscle, weight and science into that throw. He recalled the friendly congratulations that followed it, for everyone knew without waiting for the official verdict that he had broken a world's record.

Again his arm flew back. Today there was more at

stake than a world's record, but the man did not lose his nerve.

Timed to the fraction of an instant, backed by the last ounce of his weight and his skill and his great strength, the spear met the tiger in mid-leap; full in the chest it struck him. King leaped to one side and ran for a tree, his single, frail hope lying in the possibility that the great beast might be even momentarily disabled.

He did not waste the energy or the time even to glance behind him. If the tiger were able to overtake him, it must be totally a matter of indifference to King whether the great brute seized him from behind or in front—he had played his ace and he did not have another.

No fangs or talons rent his flesh as King scrambled to the safety of the nearest tree, and it was not without a sense of considerable surprise that he found himself safely ensconced in his leafy sanctuary, for from the instant that the tiger had turned upon him in its venomous charge, he had counted himself already as good as dead.

NOW that he had an opportunity to look about him, he saw the tiger struggling in its death-throes upon the very spot where it had anticipated wreaking its vengeance upon the man-thing that had dared to question its right to the possession of its intended prey; and a little to the right of the dying beast, the American saw the girl crouching in the branches of a tree.

Together they watched the death-throes of the great cat; and when at last the man was convinced that the beast was dead, he leaped lightly to the ground and approached the tree among the branches of which the girl had sought safety.

That she was still filled with terror was apparent in the strained and frightened expression upon her face. "Go away!" she cried. "The soldiers of Lodivarman the King are here, and if you harm me, they will kill you."

King smiled. "You are inconsistent," he said, "in invoking the protection of the soldiers from whom you are trying to escape; but you need not fear me. I shall not harm you."

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I am a hunter who dwells in the jungle," replied King. "I am the protector of high priests and weeping queens—or so, at least, I seem to be."

"High priests? Weeping queens? What do you mean?"

"I have saved Vay Thon the high priest from My Lord the Tiger," replied King, "and now I have saved you."

"But I am no queen, and I am not weeping."

"Do not disillusion me," insisted King. "I contend that you are a queen, whether you weep or smile. I should not be surprised to learn that you are the queen of the Nagas. Nothing would surprise me in this jungle of anachronism, hallucination and impossibility."

"Help me down from the tree," said the girl. "Perhaps you are mad, but you seem quite harmless."

"Be assured, Your Majesty, that I shall not harm you," replied King, "for presently I am sure there shall emerge from nowhere ten thousand elephants and a hundred thousand warriors in shining brass to succor and defend you. Nothing seems impossible after what I have witnessed; but come, let me touch you—let me assure myself that I am not again the victim of a pernicious fever."

"May Siva, who has protected me from My Lord the Tiger a moment ago, protect me also from this madman."

"Pardon me," said King, "I did not catch what you said."

"I am afraid," said the girl.

"You need not be afraid of me," King assured her, "and if you want your soldiers, I believe that I can find them for you; but if I am not mistaken, I believe that you are more afraid of them than you are of me."

"What do you know of that?" she demanded.

"I overheard their conversation while they halted near me," replied the American, "and I learned that they are hunting for you to take you back to some one from whom you escaped. Come, I will help you down. You may trust me."

He raised his hand toward her and after a moment's hesitation, she slipped into his arms and he lowered her to the ground.

"I must trust you," she said. "There is no other way, for I could not remain forever in the tree; and then too, even though you seem mad, there is something about you which makes me feel that I am safe with you."

As he felt her soft, lithe body momentarily in his arms, King knew that this was no tenuous spirit of a dream. For an instant her small hand touched his shoulder, her warm breath fanned his cheek. Then she stepped back and surveyed him.

"What manner of man are you?" she demanded. "You are neither Khmer nor slave. Your color is not the color of any man that I have ever seen; nor are your features those of the people of my race. Perhaps you are a reincarnation of one of those ancients of which our legends tell us; or perhaps you are a Naga who has taken the form of man for some dire purpose of your own."

"Perhaps I am a Yeack," suggested King.

"No," she said, quite seriously, "I am sure you are not a Yeack, for it is reported that they are most hideous, while you, though not like any man I have ever seen, are handsome."

"I am neither Yeack nor Naga," replied King.

"Then, perhaps, you are from Lodidhapura—one of the creatures of Lodivarman."

"No," replied the man. "I have never been to Lodidhapura. I have never seen the king, Lodivarman, and as a matter of fact I have always doubted their existence."

The girl's dark eyes regarded him steadily. "I cannot believe that," she said, "for it is inconceivable that there should be anyone in the world who has not heard of Lodidhapura and Lodivarman."

"I come from a far country," explained King, "where there are millions of people who never heard of the Khmers."

"Impossible!" she cried.

"But nevertheless quite true," he insisted.

"From what country do you come?" she asked.

"From America."

"I never heard of such a country."

"Then you should be able to understand that I may never have heard of Lodidhapura," said the man.

FOR a moment the girl was silent, evidently pondering the logic of his statement. "Perhaps you are right," she said finally. "It may be that there are other cities within the jungle of which we have never heard. But tell me—you risked your life to save mine; why did you do that?"

"What else might I have done?" he asked.

"You might have run away and saved yourself."

King smiled, but he made no reply. He was wondering if there existed any man who could have run away and left one so beautiful and so helpless to the mercies of a tiger.

"You are very brave," she continued presently. "What is your name?"

"Gordon King."

"Gordon King," she repeated in a soft, caressing voice. "That is a nice name, but it is not like any name that I have heard before."

"And what is your name?" asked King.

"I am called Fou-tan," she said, and she eyed him intently, as though she would note if the name made any impression upon him.

King thought Fou-tan a pretty name, but it seemed banal to say so. He was appraising her small, delicate features, her beautiful eyes and her soft brown skin. They recalled to him the weeping queen upon the misty elephant that he had seen in his delirium and once again there arose within him doubts as to his sanity. "Tell me," he said suddenly, "did you ever ride through the jungle on a great elephant escorted by soldiers in brass?"

"Yes," she said.

"And you say that you are from Lodidhapura?" he continued.

"I have just come from there," she replied.

"Did you ever hear of a priest called Van Thon?"

"He is the high priest of Siva in the city of Lodidhapura," she replied.

King shook his head in perplexity. "It is hard to know," he murmured, "where dreams end and reality begins."

"I do not understand you," she said.

"Perhaps I do not understand myself," he said.

"You are a strange man," said Fou-tan. "I do not know whether to fear you or trust you. You are not like any other man I have ever known. What do you intend to do with me?"

"Perhaps I had better take you back to the dwelling of Che and Kangrey," he said, "and then tomorrow Che can guide you back to Lodidhapura."

"But I do not wish to return to Lodidhapura," the girl demurred.

"Why not?" demanded King, abruptly.

"Listen, Gordon King, and I shall tell you," said Fou-tan. "Let us sit down upon this fallen tree, and I shall explain to you why it is I do not wish to return to Lodidhapura."

For only an instant did the tiger hesitate. His short and ugly temper was roused.

CHAPTER V

The Capture

AS they seated themselves, King became acutely conscious of the marked attraction that this young girl of a forgotten age exercised over him. Every movement of her lithe body, every gesture of her graceful arms and hands, each changing expression of her beautiful face and eyes was winsome. She radiated magnetism; King sensed it in the reaction of his skin, his eyes, his nostrils. It was as though ages of careful selection had produced her for the purpose of arousing in man the desire of possession and yet there was enveloping her a divine halo of chastity that aroused within his breast the protective instinct that governs the attitude of a normal man toward a woman Fate has thrown into his keeping.

"Why do you look at me so?" she inquired suddenly.

"Forgive me," said King. "Go on with your story."

"I am from Pnom Dhek," said Fou-tan, "where Beng Kher is king. Pnom Dhek is a greater city than Lodidhapura; Beng Kher is a mightier king than Lodivarman.

"Bharata Rahon desired me. He wished to take me to wife. I pleaded with my father, the—I pleaded with my father not to give me in marriage to Bharata Rahon, but he told me that I did not know my own mind, that I only thought I did not like Bharata Rahon but that he would make me a good husband and that after we were married I would be happy.

"I knew that I must do something to convince my father that my mind and soul sincerely revolted at the thought of mating with Bharata Rahon, and so I conceived the idea of running away and going out into the jungle that I might prove that I preferred death to the man my father had chosen for me.

"I did not want to die. I wanted them to come and find me very quickly and when night came I was terrified. I climbed into a tree, where I crouched in terror. I heard My Lord the Tiger pass beneath in the darkness of the night and my fear was so great that I thought I should faint and fall into his clutches; yet when day came again I was still convinced that I would rather lie in the arms of My Lord the Tiger than in those of Bharata Rahon, who is a loathsome man whose very name I detest.

"Yet I moved back in the direction of Pnom Dhek, or rather I thought that I did, though now I am certain that I went in the opposite direction. I hoped that searchers sent out by my father would find me, for I did not wish to return of my own volition to Pnom Dhek.

"The day dragged on and I met no searchers, and once again I became terrified, for I knew that I was lost in the jungle; then I heard the heavy tread of an elephant and the clank of arms and men's voices, and I was filled with relief and gratitude, for I knew at last that the searchers were about to find me.

"But when the warriors came within view, I saw that they wore the armor of Lodivarman, and I was terrified and tried to escape them, but they had seen me and they pursued me. Easily they overtook me and great was their joy when they looked upon me.

"'Lodivarman will reward us handsomely,' they cried, 'when he sees that which we have brought to him!'

"So they placed me in the howdah upon the elephant's back and took me through the jungle to Lodidhapura, where I was immediately taken in to the presence of Lodivarman.

"Oh, Gordon King, that was a terrible moment! I was terrified when I found myself so close to the dreadful king of Lodidhapura!

"That day he was ugly and indifferent. He scarcely looked at me, but ordered that I should be taken to the quarters of the apsarases. And so I became a dancing girl at his court.

"Not in a thousand years, Gordon King, could I explain to you what I suffered each time that we came before Lodivarman to dance. It was with the utmost difficulty that, half fainting, I went through the ritual of the dance.

"I tried to hide my face from him, for I knew that I was beautiful, and I knew the fate of beautiful women in the court of Lodivarman.

"But at last, one day, I realized that he had noticed me. I saw his dead eyes following me about. We were dancing in the great hall where he holds his court. Lodivarman was seated upon his throne. The lead-covered walls of the great apartment were gorgeous with paintings and with hangings. Beneath our feet were the polished flagstones of the floor, but they seemed softer to me than the heart of Lodivarman.

"At last the dance was done and we were permitted to retire to our apartments. Presently there came to me a captain of the king's household, resplendent in his gorgeous trappings.

"'The king has looked upon you,' said he, 'and would honor you as befits your beauty.'

"'It is sufficient honor,' I replied, 'to dance in the palace of Lodivarman.'

"'You are about to receive a more signal manifestation of the king's honor,' he replied.

"'I am satisfied as I am,' I said.

"'It is not for you to choose, Fou-tan,' replied the messenger. 'The king has chosen you as his newest wife. Rejoice, therefore, in the knowledge that some day you may become queen.'

"I could have fainted at the very horror of the suggestion. What could I do? I must gain time. I thought of suicide, but I am young and I do not wish to die. 'When must I come?' I asked.

"'You will be given time to prepare yourself,' replied the messenger. 'For three days the women will bathe and anoint you, and upon the fourth day you will be conducted to the king.'

"Four days! In four days I must find some way in which to escape the horrid fate to which my beauty had condemned me. 'Go!' I said. 'Leave me in peace for the four days that remain to me of even a semblance of happiness in life.'

"The messenger, grinning, withdrew and I threw myself upon my pallet and burst into tears. That night the apsarases were to dance in the moonlight in the courtyard before the temple of Siva, and though they would have insisted that my preparation for the honor that was to be bestowed upon me should commence at once, I begged that I might once more, and for the last time, join with my companions in honoring Siva the Destroyer.

"It was a dark night. The flares that illumined the courtyard cast a wavering light in which exaggerated shadows of the apsarases danced grotesquely. In the dance I wore a mask, and my position was at the extreme left of the last line of apsarases. I was close to the line of spectators that circled the courtyard, and in some of the movements of the dance I came quite close enough to touch them.

"All the time that I was dancing I was perfecting in my mind the details of a plan that had occurred to me earlier in the day. The intricate series of postures and steps, with which I had been familiar since childhood, required of me but little mental concentration. I went through them mechanically, my thoughts wholly centered upon the mad scheme that I had conceived. I knew that

The spear met the tiger in mid-leap. King had played his ace, and he did not have another.

at one point in the dance the attention of all the spectators would be focused upon a single apsaras, whose position was in the center of the first line, and when this moment arrived I stepped quickly into the line of spectators.

"Those in my immediate vicinity noticed me and to these I explained that I was ill and was making my way back to the temple. A little awed by my close presence they let me pass unmolested, for in the estimation of the people the persons of the apsarases are almost holy.

"Behind the last line of the audience rose a low wall that surrounds the temple courtyard. Surmounting it at intervals rise the beautifully carved stone figures of the seven-headed cobra—emblem of the Royal Nagas. Deep were the shadows behind them and while all eyes were fixed upon the leading apsaras I clambered quickly to the top of the low wall, where for a moment I hid in the shadow of a great Naga. Below me, black, mysterious, terrifying, lay the dark waters of the moat, beneath the surface of which lived the crocodiles placed there by the king to guard the Holy of Holies. Upon the opposite side the level of the water was but a few inches below the surface of the broad avenue that leads to the stables where the king's elephants are kept.

"To Brahma, to Vishnu and to Siva I breathed a prayer; then I slid as quietly as possible down into the terrifying waters of the moat. Quickly I struck out for the opposite side, every instant expecting to feel the hideous jaws of a crocodile close upon me; but my prayers had

been heard and I reached the broad avenue in safety. I was forced to climb two more walls before I could escape from the royal enclosure and from the city. My wet and bedraggled costume was torn and my hands and face were scratched and bleeding before I succeeded. . . .

"At last I was in the jungle, confronted by dangers more deadly, yet far less horrible, than that from which

I had escaped. How I survived that night and this day I do not know—but just now the end would have come, but for you, Gordon King."

As King gazed at the sensitive face and delicately molded figure of the girl beside him, he marveled at the courage and strength of will, seemingly so out of proportion to the frail temple that housed them, that had sustained her in the conception and execution of an adventure which might have taxed the courage and stamina of a warrior. "You are a brave girl, Fou-tan," he said.

"The daughter of my father could not be less," she replied simply.

"You are a daughter of whom any father may be proud," said King, "but if we are to save you for him we had better be thinking about getting to the dwelling of Che and Kangrey before night falls."

"Who are these people?" asked Fou-tan. "Perhaps they will return me to Lodidhapura for the reward that Lodivarman will pay."

"You need have no fear on that score," replied King. "They are honest people—runaway slaves from Lodidhapura. They have been kind to me and they will be kind to you."

"And if they are not, you will protect me," said Fou-tan with a tone of finality that evidenced the confidence which she already felt in the dependability and integrity of her new-found friend.

As they set out in the direction of Che's dwelling, it became apparent to King immediately that Fou-tan was tired almost to the point of exhaustion. Will power and nerve had sustained her so far, but now, with the discovery of some one to whom she might transfer the responsibility of her safety, the reaction had come and he often found it necessary to assist and support her over the rough places of the trail. She was small and light and where the going was exceptionally bad he lifted her in his arms and carried her as he might have a child.

"You are strong, Gordon King," she said once as he carried her thus. Her soft arms were wound closely around his neck; her lips were very close to his.

"I must needs be strong," he said. But if she sensed his meaning she gave no evidence of it. Her eyes closed wearily and her little head dropped to his shoulder — and he carried her thus for a long way, though the trail beneath his feet was smooth and hard. . . .

Vama and his warriors had halted in a little glade where there was water and while two of them hunted in the forest for meat for their supper, the others lay stretched out upon the ground in that silence which is induced by hunger and fatigue. Presently Vama sat up alert. His ears had caught the sound of the approach of something through the jungle.

"Kau and Tchek are returning from the hunt," whispered one of the warriors who lay near him and who, also, had heard the noise.

"They did not go in that direction," replied Vama in a low tone. Then signaling his warriors to silence, he ordered them to conceal themselves from view.

The sound, already close when they had first heard it, approached steadily and they did not have long to wait ere a warrior, naked but for a sampot, stepped into view and in his arms was the runaway apsaras whom they sought. Elated, Vama leaped from his place of concealment, calling to his men to follow him.

At sight of them King turned to escape, but he knew that he could make no speed while burdened with the girl. She, however, had seen the soldiers and slipped quickly from his arms. "We are lost!" she cried.

"Run!" cried King as he snatched a handful of arrows from his quiver and fitted one to his bow. "Stand back!" he cried to the warriors. But they only moved steadily forward. His bowstring twanged, and one of Lodivarman's brass-bound warriors sank to earth, an arrow through his throat. The others hesitated. They did not dare to cast their spears or loose their bolts for fear of injuring the girl.

Slowly King, with Fou-tan behind him, backed away into the jungle from which he had appeared. At the last instant he sped another arrow which rattled harmlessly from the cuirass of Vama. Then, knowing that he could not fire upon them from the foliage, the soldiers rushed forward.

Kau and Tchek had made a great circle in their hunting. With their arrows they had brought down three monkeys and now they were returning to camp. They had almost arrived when they heard voices and the twang

of a bowstring and then they saw, directly ahead of them, a man and a girl crashing through the foliage of the jungle toward them. Instantly, by her disheveled costume, they recognized the apsaras and they guessed from the attitude of the two that they were backing away from Vama and his fellows.

Kau was a powerful, courageous and resourceful man. Instantly he grasped the situation and instantly he acted. Leaping forward, he threw both his sinewy arms around Gordon King, pinning the other's arms to his body, while Tchek, following the example of his companion, seized Fou-tan. Almost immediately Vama and the others were upon the scene and an instant later Gordon King was disarmed and his wrists were bound behind him; then the soldiers of Lodivarman dragged the captives back to their camping place.

Vama was tremendously elated. Now he would not have to make up any lies to appease the wrath of his king, but could return to Lodidhapura in triumph, bearing not only the apsaras for whom he had been dispatched, but another prisoner as well!

King thought that they might make quick work of him in revenge for the soldier he had killed, but they did not appear to hold that against him at all. They questioned him at some length while they cooked their supper of monkey meat over a number of tiny fires; but as what he told them of another country far beyond their jungle was quite beyond their grasp, they naturally believed that he lied and insisted that he came from Pnom Dhek and that he was a runaway slave.

They were all quite content with the happy outcome of their assignment and so, looking forward to their return to Lodidhapura on the morrow, they were inclined to be generous in their treatment of their prisoners, giving them meat to eat and water to drink. Their attitude toward Fou-tan was one of respectful awe. They knew that she was destined to become one of the king's favorites and it might prove ill for them, indeed, should they offer her any hurt or affront. Their treatment of Gordon King, however, was not dictated by any such consideration and so it was fortunate, indeed, for him that they were in good humor.

Regardless, however, of the respectful attention shown her, Fou-tan was immersed in melancholy. A few moments before she had foreseen escape and counted return to her native city almost an accomplished fact and now, once again, she was in the clutches of the soldiers of Lodivarman while simultaneously she had brought disaster and, doubtless, death to the man who had befriended her.

"Oh, Gordon King," she said, "my heart is unstrung; my soul is filled with terror and consumed by horror, for not only must I return to the hideous fate from which I had escaped, but you must go to Lodidhapura to slavery and to death."

"We are not in Lodidhapura yet," whispered King. "Perhaps we shall escape."

THE girl shook her head. "There is no hope," she said. "I shall go to the arms of Lodivarman, and you—"

"And I?" he asked.

"Slaves fight with other slaves and with wild beasts for the entertainment of Lodivarman and his courts," she replied.

"We must escape then," said King. "Perhaps we shall die in the attempt, but in any event death awaits me and worse than death awaits you."

"What you command I shall do, Gordon King," replied Fou-tan. But it did not appear that there was to be much opportunity for escape that night, for after King had eaten they bound his wrists behind his back again and also bound his ankles together securely while two warriors remained constantly with the girl; the others, their simple meal completed, stripped the armor and weapons from their fallen comrade and laid him upon a thick bed of dry wood that they had gathered.

Upon him, then, they piled a great quantity of limbs and branches, of twigs and dry grasses, and when night fell they lighted their weird funeral pyre, which was to answer its other dual purpose as a beast fire to protect them from the prowling carnivores. To King it was a gruesome sight, but neither Fou-tan nor the other Khmers seemed to be affected by it. The men gathered much wood and placed it near at hand that the fire might be kept burning during the night.

The flames leaped high, lighting the boles of the trees about them and the foliage arching above. The shadows rose and fell and twisted and writhed. Beyond the limits of the fire light was utter darkness, silence, mystery. King felt himself in an inverted caldron of flame in which a human body was being consumed.

The warriors lay about, laughing and talking. Their reminiscences were brutal and cruel. Their jokes and stories were broad and coarse. But there was an undercurrent of rough kindness and loyalty to one another that they appeared to be endeavoring to conceal as though they were ashamed of such soft emotion. They were soldiers. Transplanted to the camp of modern Europe, given a modern uniform and a modern language, their campfire conversation would have been the same. Soldiers do not change. One played upon a little musical instrument that resembled a jew's-harp. Two were gambling with what appeared to be very similar to modern dice and all that they said was so interlarded with strange and terrible oaths that the American could scarcely follow the thread of their thought. Soldiers do not change.

VAMA came presently and squatted down near King and Fou-tan. "Do all the men in this far country of which you tell me go naked?" he demanded.

"No," replied the American. "When I had become lost in the jungle, I was stricken with fever and while I was sick the monkeys came and stole my clothing and my weapons."

"You live alone in the jungle?" asked Vama.

King thought quickly; thought of Che and Kangrey and their fear of the soldiers in brass. "Yes," he said.

"Are you not afraid of My Lord the Tiger?" inquired Vama.

"I am watchful and I avoid him," replied the American.

"You do well to do so," said Vama, "for even with spear and arrows no lone man is a match for the great beast."

"But Gordon King is," said Fou-tan proudly.

Vama smiled. "The apsaras has been in the jungle but a night and a day," he reminded her. "How can she know so much about this man, unless, as I suspect, he is, indeed, from Pnom Dhek?"

"He is not from Pnom Dhek," retorted Fou-tan. "And I know that he is a match for My Lord the Tiger because this day I saw him slay the beast with a single spear-cast."

Vama looked questioningly at King.

"It was only a matter of good fortune," said King.

"But you did it, nevertheless," insisted Fou-tan.

"You killed a tiger with a single cast of your spear?" demanded Vama.

"As the beast charged him," said Fou-tan.

"That is, indeed, a marvelous feat," said Vama, with a soldier's ungrudging admiration for the bravery or prowess of another. "Lodivarman shall hear of this. A hunter of such spirit shall not go unrecognized in Lodidhapura. I can also bear witness that you are no mean bowman,"

added Vama, nodding toward the blazing funeral pyre. Then he arose and walked to the spot where King's weapons had been deposited. Picking up the spear he examined it closely. "By Siva!" he ejaculated. "The blood is scarce dry upon it. Such a cast! You drove it a full two feet into the carcass of My Lord the Tiger."

"Straight through the heart," said Fou-tan.

The other soldiers had been listening to the conversation and it was noticeable immediately that their attitude toward King changed instantly and thereafter they treated him with friendliness tinged by respect. However, they did not abate their watchfulness over him, but rather were increasingly careful to see that he was given no opportunity to escape, nor to have his hands free for any length of time.

Leaping forward, Kau threw his arms around Gordon King, while Tchek seized Fou-tan.

Early the next morning, after a meager breakfast, Vama set out with his detachment and his prisoners in the direction of Lodidhapura, leaving the funeral fire still blazing as it eagerly licked at a new supply of fuel.

The route they selected to Lodidhapura passed by a chance close to the spot where King had slain the tiger and here, in the partially devoured carcass of the great beast, the soldiers of Lodivarman found concrete substantiation of Fou-tan's story.

CHAPTER VI

Lodivarman

IT was late in the afternoon when the party emerged suddenly from the jungle at the edge of a great clearing. King voiced an involuntary exclamation of astonishment as he saw at a distance the walls and towers of a splendid city.

"Lodidhapura," said Fou-tan, "—accursed city!"

While King had long since become convinced that Lodidhapura had an actual existence of greater reality than legend or fever-wrought hallucination, yet he had been in no way prepared for the reality. A collection of nipa-thatched huts had comprised the extent of his mental picture of Lodidhapura and now, as the reality burst suddenly upon him, he was dumfounded.

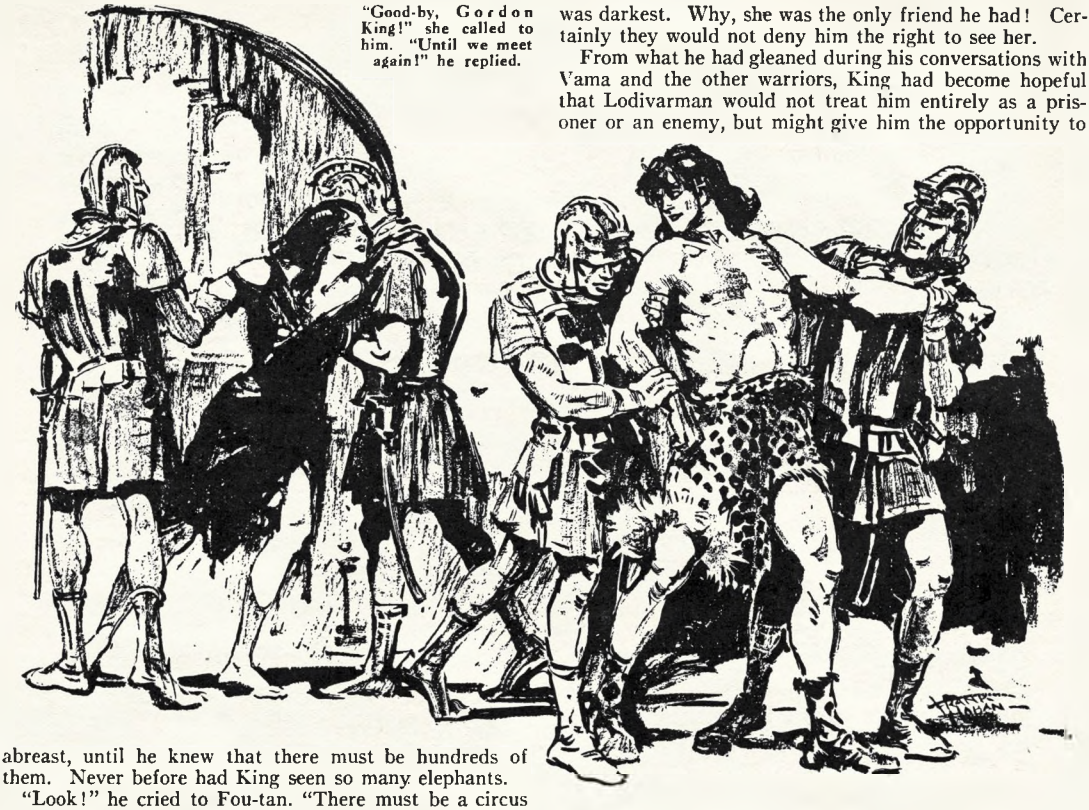
Temples and palaces of stone reared their solid masses against the sky. Mighty towers, elaborately carved, rose in stately grandeur high over all. There were nipa-thatched huts as well, but these clustered close against the city's wall and were so overshadowed by the majestic mass of masonry beyond them that they affected the picture as slightly as might the bushes growing at its foot determine the grandeur of a mountain.

In the foreground were level fields in which labored men and women, naked, mostly, but for their sampots. The thatched huts were their dwellings. They were the laborers, the descendants of slaves—Chams and Annamese—that the ancient, warlike Khmers had brought back from many a victory in the days that their power and their civilization were the greatest upon earth.

From the edge of the jungle, at the point where the party had emerged, a broad avenue led toward one of the gates of the city, toward which Vama was conducting them.

To his right, at a distance, King could see what appeared to be another avenue leading to another gate—an avenue which seemed to be more heavily traveled than that upon which they had entered. There were many people on foot, some approaching the city, others leaving it. At a distance they looked small, but he could distinguish them and also what appeared to be bullock carts moving slowly among the pedestrians.

Presently, at the far end of this distant avenue, he saw the great bulks of elephants in a long column they entered the highway from the jungle and approached the city. They seemed to move in an endless procession, two



"Good-by, Gordon King!" she called to him. "Until we meet again!" he replied.

abreast, until he knew that there must be hundreds of them. Never before had King seen so many elephants.

"Look!" he cried to Fou-tan. "There must be a circus coming to town."

"The king's elephants," explained Fou-tan, unimpressed.

"Why does he have so many?" asked King.

"A king without elephants would be no king," replied the girl. "They proclaim to all men the king's wealth and power. When he makes war his soldiers go into battle upon them and fight from their backs, for those are the war elephants of Lodivarman."

"There must be hundreds of them," commented the American.

"There are thousands," said Fou-tan.

"And against whom does Lodivarman make war?"

"Against Pnom Dhek."

"Only against Pnom Dhek?" inquired King.

"Yes, only against Pnom Dhek."

"Why does he not make war elsewhere? Has he no other enemies?"

"Against whom else might he make war?" demanded Fou-tan. "There are only Pnom Dhek and Lodidhapura in all the world."

"Well, that does rather restrict him, now, doesn't it?" admitted King.

For a moment they were silent. Then the girl spoke. "Gordon King," she said in that soft, caressing voice that the man found so agreeable that often he had sought for means to lure her into conversation. "Gordon King, we soon shall see one another no more."

The American frowned. He did not like to think of that. He had tried to put it out of his mind and to imagine that by some chance they would be allowed to be together after they reached Lodidhapura, for he had found Fou-tan a cheery and pleasant companion even when her hour was darkest. Why, she was the only friend he had! Certainly they would not deny him the right to see her.

From what he had gleaned during his conversations with Vama and the other warriors, King had become hopeful that Lodivarman would not treat him entirely as a prisoner or an enemy, but might give him the opportunity to serve the king as a soldier. Fou-tan had rather encouraged this hope, too, for she knew that it was not at all improbable of realization.

"Why do you say that?" demanded King. "Why shall we not see one another again?"

"Would you be sad, Gordon King, if you did not see Fou-tan any more?" she asked.

The man hesitated before he replied, as though weighing in his mind a problem that he had never before been called upon to consider and as he hesitated a strange, hurt look came into the eyes of the girl.

"It is unthinkable, Fou-tan," he said, at last, and the great brown eyes of the little apsaras softened and tears rose in them. "We have been such good friends," he added.

"Yes," she said. "We have known each other but such a short time and yet we seem such good friends that it is almost as though we had known each other always."

"But why should we not see one another again?" he demanded once more.

"Lodivarman may punish me for running away and there is only one punishment that would satisfy his pride in such an event and that is death; but if he forgives me, as he doubtless will because of my youth and my great beauty and his desire for me, then I shall be taken into the king's palace and no more might you see me than if I were dead—so you see, either way, the result is the same."

"I shall see you again, Fou-tan," said the man.

She shook her head. "I like to hear you say it, even though I know that it cannot be."

"You shall see, Fou-tan. If we both live I shall find a way to see you and, too, I shall find a way to take you out of the palace of the king and back to Pnom Dhek."

She looked up at him with earnest eyes, full of confidence and admiration. "When I hear you say it," she said, "the impossible almost seems possible."

"Cling to the hope, Fou-tan," he told her, "and when we are separated know always that my every thought will be centered upon the means to reach you and bring you away."

"That will help me to cling to life until the last horrible minute, beyond which there can be no hope and beyond which I will not go."

"What do you mean, Fou-tan?"

"I can live in the palace of Lodivarman with hope until again he sends for me, and then—"

"And then?"

"And then—death."

"No, Fou-tan, you must not say that. You must not think it."

"What else could there be—after?" she demanded. "He is said to be a—a leper!" The utter horror in her voice and expression, as her lips formed the word, aroused to its fullest the protective instinct of the man. He wanted to throw an arm about her, to soothe and reassure her, but his wrists were bound together behind him and he could only move on dumbly at her side toward the great carved gate of Lodidhapura.

The sentry at the gate halted Vama and his party though his greeting, following his formal challenge, indicated that he was well aware of the identity of all but King; a fact which impressed the American as indicative of the excellent military discipline that obtained in this remote domain of the jungle king.

Summoned by the sentry, the captain of the gate came from his quarters within the massive towers that flanked the gateway to Lodidhapura. He was a young man, resplendent in trappings of gold and blue and yellow. His burnished cuirass was of the precious metal as was his helmet, but his weapons were stern and lethal.

"Who comes?" he demanded.

"Vama of the King's guard, with the apsaras from Pnom Dhek, who ran away into the jungle, and a warrior from the far country whom we took prisoner," replied the leader of the detachment.

"You have done well, Vama," said the officer. "Enter and go at once to the palace of the king, for such were his orders in the event that you returned, successful, from your quest."

The streets of Lodidhapura, beyond the gate, were filled with citizens and slaves. Tiny shops with wide awnings lined the street through which Vama's captives were conducted. Merchants in long robes and ornate headdress presided over booths where were displayed a bewildering variety of merchandise, including pottery, silver and gold ornaments, rugs, stuffs, incense, weapons and armor.

Men and women of high rank beneath gorgeous parasols borne by almost naked slaves, bartered at the booths for the wares displayed; high-hatted priests moved slowly through the throng, while burly soldiers elbowed their way roughly along the avenue.

MANY turned to note the escort and its prisoners and the sight of Fou-tan elicited a wealth of ejaculation and many queries; but to all such Vama, fully aware of his importance, turned a deaf ear.

King was amazed by the evident wealth of the city, by the goods displayed in the innumerable shops and by the grandeur of the architecture as they approached the center of Lodidhapura. The ornate carvings that covered the façades of the great buildings, the splendor of the buildings themselves, filled him with awe and when at last the party halted before the palace of Lodivarman the American was staggered by the magnificence which now confronted him. They had been conducted through a great park that lay below and to the east of the stately temple of Siva that dominated the entire city of Lodidhapura. Great trees and gorgeous shrubbery shadowed winding avenues that were flanked by statues and columns of magnificent, though sometimes barbaric, design. And then the palace of the king burst suddenly upon his astonished gaze—a splendid building embellished from foundation to loftiest tower with tile of the most brilliant coloring and fanciful design.

Before the entrance to the palace of Lodivarman stood a guard of fifty warriors. No brass-bound soldiers these, but resplendent in shining cuirasses of burnished gold, whose haughty demeanor bespoke their exalted position and the high responsibility that devolved upon them.

GORDON KING had difficulty in convincing himself of the reality of the scene. Repeatedly his Yankee head assured him that no such things might exist in the jungles of Cambodia and that he still was the victim of the hallucination of high fever—but when the officer at the gate had interrogated Vama and presently commands were received to conduct the entire party to the presence of Lodivarman, and still the hallucination persisted in all its conclusiveness, he resigned himself to the actualities that confronted him and would have accepted as real whatever grotesque or impossible occurrences or figures might have impinged themselves upon his perceptive faculties.

Escorted by a detachment of the golden warriors of Lodivarman the entire party was conducted through long corridors toward the center of the palace and at last, after a wait before massive doors, were ushered into a great hall at the far end of which a number of people were seated upon a raised dais. Upon the floor of the chamber were men in gorgeous raiment—priests, courtiers and soldiers.

One of the latter, resplendent in rich trappings, received them and conducted them toward the far end of the chamber where they were halted before the dais.

King saw an emaciated, unwholesome-looking man, seated upon a great throne. To his right and below him were somber men in rich garb and to his left a score of sad-eyed girls and women.

This, then, was Lodivarman, the great king of Lodidhapura! The American felt an inward revulsion at the mere sight of this repulsive creature and simultaneously understood the horror that Fou-tan had evinced at the thought of personal contact with him.

Before Lodivarman knelt a slave, bearing a great salver of food into which the king continually dipped with his long-nailed fingers. He ate almost constantly during the audience and as King was brought nearer he saw that the delicacies intended to tempt the palate of a king were naught but lowly mushrooms.

"Who are these?" demanded Lodivarman.

"Vama, the commander of ten," replied the officer addressed, "who has returned from his mission, to the honor of the king, with the apsaras for whom he was dispatched and a strange warrior whom he took prisoner."

"Fou-tan of Pnom Dhek," demanded Lodivarman, "why did you seek to escape the honor for which I had destined you?"

"Great king," replied the girl, "my heart is still in the land of my sire. I would have returned to Pnom Dhek for I longed for the father and the friends whom I love and who love me."

"A pardonable desire," commented Lodivarman; "and this time thy transgression shall be overlooked; but beware a repetition. You are destined to the high honor of the favor of Lodivarman—see that hereafter, until death, thou dost merit it."

Fou-tan, trembling, curtsied low and Lodivarman turned his cold, fishy eyes upon Gordon King. "And what manner of man bring you before the king now?" he asked.

"A strange warrior from some far country, glorious King," replied Vama.

"A runaway slave from Pnom Dhek, more likely," commented Lodivarman.

"Even as I thought, Resplendent Son of Heaven," answered Vama; "but his deeds are such as to leave no belief that he be either a slave or the son of slaves."

"What deeds?" demanded the king.

"He faced my detachment single-handed and with a long shaft slew one of the best of the king's bowmen."

"Is that all?" asked Lodivarman. "A mere freak of Fate may account for that."

"No, Brother of the Gods," replied Vama, "there is more—with one spear-cast he slew My Lord the Tiger."

"And you saw this?"

"Fou-tan saw it, and all of us saw the carcass of the tiger the following morning. O King, he drove his spear a full two feet into the breast of the tiger as the great beast charged. He is a marvelous warrior and Vama is proud to have brought such a one to serve in the ranks of the army of Lodivarman."

For a while Lodivarman was silent, his dead eyes upon King, while he helped himself from time to time to the tender-cooked mushrooms.

"With a single cast he slew My Lord the Tiger?" demanded Lodivarman of Fou-tan.

"It is even so, great King," replied the girl.

"How came he to do it? Surely no sane man would tempt the great beast unless in dire predicament."

"He did it to save me upon whom the tiger was preparing to spring."

"And, so I am doubly indebted to this stranger," said Lodivarman. "And what gift would suit your appetite for reward?" he demanded.

"I desire no reward," replied the American, "only that you will permit Fou-tan to return to her beloved Pnom Dhek."

"You do not ask much!" cried Lodivarman. "I like your ways. You shall not be destroyed and instead you shall serve me in the palace guards—such a spearman should prove worth his weight in gold. As for your request, remember that Fou-tan belongs to Lodivarman the king and so may no longer be the subject of any conversation, upon pain of death. Take him to the quarters of the guard!" he directed one of his officers, nodding at King, "and see that he is well cared for, trained and armed."

"Yes, most magnificent of kings," replied the man addressed.

"Take the girl to the quarters of the women and look to it that she does not again escape," commanded Lodivarman, with a gesture that dismissed them all.

AS he was escorted from the audience chamber by one exit, King saw Fou-tan led away toward another. Her eyes were turned back toward him and in them was a haunting suggestion of grief and hopelessness that cut him to the heart.

"Good-by, Gordon King!" she called to him.

"Until we meet again, Fou-tan," he replied.

"You will not meet again," said the officer who was escorting him, as he hustled the American from the chamber.

The barracks to which King was assigned stood a considerable distance in the rear of the palace, not far from the stables in which were housed the King's elephants; yet, like the latter, within the grounds of the royal enclosure. The long, low buildings that housed the soldiers of Lodivarman's royal guard were plastered inside and out with mud and thatched with palm fronds. Along either wall, upon the hard-packed dirt floor, were pallets of straw, where the common soldiers were bedded down like horses. A space of some four feet in width by seven in length was allotted to each man and into the wall above his pallet pegs had been driven upon which he might hang his weapons and his clothing, a cooking pot and a vessel for water. Along the centers of the buildings was a clear space about eight feet wide, forming an aisle in which soldiers might be formed for inspection. Just beneath the eaves was an open space running the full length of both walls, giving ample ventilation but very little light to the interior of the barracks. The doors were at either end of the buildings.

The building to which King was escorted was about two hundred feet long and housed a hundred men and was but one of a number of similar structures, which—as he later learned—were placed at strategic positions just inside the wall of the royal enclosure, where five thousand men at arms were constantly maintained.

At Vama's request King was assigned to his unit of ten to replace the soldier whom he had slain in the jungle, and thus the American took up his life in the unit of ten, with Kau and Tchek and Vama, and the others with whom he was already acquainted as his companions.

From a naked jungle hunter to a soldier of a Khmer king, he had crossed in a single step long ages of evolution, and yet he was still a thousand years from the era into which he had been born.

CHAPTER VII

A Soldier of The Guard

THE life of a private soldier of the royal guard of a Khmer king was far from thrilling. Their most important assignment was guard duty and this fell to the lot of each soldier once in every four days. There were drills daily, both upon foot and upon elephants, and there were numerous parades and ceremonies.

Aside from the care of their own weapons they were called upon for no manual labor, such work being attended to by slaves.

Once a week the straw which formed their pallets was hauled away upon bullock-carts to the elephants' stables, where it was used to bed down the great pachyderms, and fresh straw was brought to the barracks.

Their leisure, of which they usually had a little at various times during the day, the soldiers utilized in gossiping or gambling, or listening to the story-tellers, certain of whom were freely admitted to the royal grounds.

Many were the stories to which King listened; stories of ancient power and stories of kings who owned a million slaves and a hundred thousand elephants; stories of Kambu, the mythical founder of the Khmer race; of Yacovarman, the king of glory; and of Jayavarman VIII, the last of the great kings. Interwoven throughout all the fabric of those hoary tales were the Nagas and the Yeacks, those ever-recurring mythological figures that had figured in the folklore of the people beyond the jungle, in the dark dwelling of Che and Kangrey, and now in the shadow of the palace of the great king, Lodivarman.

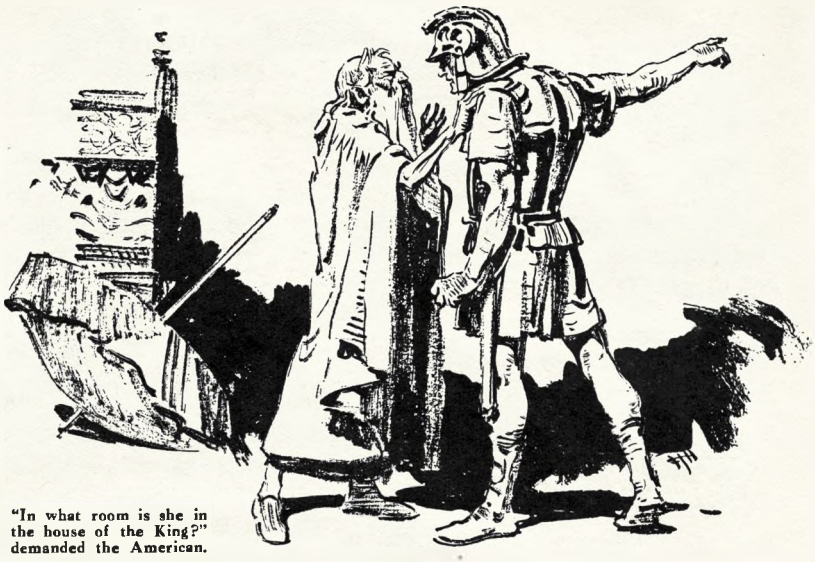
Or, when there were no story-tellers, or he tired of listening to the idle gossip of his fellows, King would sit in silence, meditating upon the past and seeking an answer to the riddle of the future.

Recollection of his distant home and friends always raised a vision of Susan Anne Prentice—home and friends and Susan Anne—they were all one; they constituted his past and beckoned him into the future. It seemed difficult

to think of life without home and friends and Susan Anne when he thought of them, but always the same little figure rose in front of them, clear and distinct, as they faded slowly out of the picture: sad eyes in which there yet dwelt a wealth of inherent happiness and mirth—a piquant face.

Invariably Gordon King's thoughts, no matter how far they roamed, returned to this dainty flower of girlhood and his brows would contract and his jaws clinch as he speculated upon her fate and chafed and fretted because of his inability to succor her.

One day as he sat meditating thus he saw a strange figure approaching across the barrack yard. "Ye gods!" he exclaimed, almost audibly; "one by one my dreams are coming true! If it isn't the old bird with the red umbrella that I saw just before Che and Kangrey rescued me, I'll eat my shirt."



"In what room is she in the house of the King?" demanded the American.

King had had considerable difficulty in differentiating between the fantastic figures of his fever-induced hallucinations and the realities of his weird experiences in the jungle, so that though Che and Kangrey had insisted that there had been an old man with a long yellow robe and a red umbrella and although King had believed them, yet it was with somewhat of a shock that he recognized the reality. As Vay Thon passed among the soldiers they arose to their feet and bowed low before him, evincing the awe and reverence in which they held him. He passed them with mumbled benediction, gazing intently at each face as though he sought some particular warrior.

Seeing that the others rose and bowed before the high priest, King did likewise and when Vay Thon's eyes fell upon him they lighted with recognition. "It is you, my son," he said. "Do you recall me?"

"You are Vay Thon, the high priest of Siva," replied the American.

"He whom you saved from My Lord the Tiger," replied the priest.

"An obligation which you fully discharged when you commanded Che and Kangrey to nurse me back to life."

"An obligation that I may never fully discharge," replied Vay Thon; "and because of this I came to search for you, that I may offer you proof of my undying gratitude."

"How did you know that I was here?" asked King.

"I have talked with Fou-tan," replied Vay Thon, "and when she described the warrior who had rescued her, I knew at once that it must be you."

"You have seen Fou-tan and talked with her?" asked King. "And she is well—and safe?"

"Her body is well, but her heart is sick," replied the high priest; "but she is safe—those who find favor in the eyes of the king are always safe, while the king's favor lasts."

"Has she—has he—"

"I understand what you would ask, my son," said Vay Thon. "Lodivarman has not yet sent for her."

"But he will," cried King.

"Tonight, I think," said Vay Thon.

The anguish in the young man's eyes would have been apparent to one of far less intelligence and discernment than Vay Thon. He laid his hand in compassion upon the shoulder of the American. "If I could help you, my son, I would," he said, "but in such matters kings may not be crossed even by the gods."

"Where is she?" asked King.

"She is in the king's house," replied Vay Thon, pointing toward a wing of the palace.

For a long moment the eyes of the American, lighted by determination, were riveted upon the house of the king.

Vay Thon, the high priest of Siva, was old and wise and shrewd. "I read your heart, my son," he said, "and my heart goes out in sympathy to yours, but what you plan is impossible of execution—it would but lead to torture and to death."

"In what room is she in the house of the king?" demanded the American.

Vay Thon shook his head sadly. "Forget this madness," he said. "It can lead but to the grave. I am your friend and I would help you, but I would be no friend were I to encourage you in this mad venture that I can only too well guess is forming in your mind. I owe you my life and always shall I stand ready to aid you in any way that lies within my power, except in this. And now, farewell and may the gods cause you to forget your sorrow."

As Vay Thon turned and walked slowly back in the direction of the temple, Gordon King stood gazing at the house of Lodivarman; forgotten was Vay Thon, and forgotten were his wise words of counsel. King seemed hypnotized; a single figure filled the retina of his mind's eyes—a tiny figure, yet it crowded out all else.

The afternoon was drawing to a close. The warriors who were to relieve the palace guard at sundown were already buckling on their brass cuirasses, straightening their leather tunics, adjusting their helmets, polishing weapons until they glistened even in the dark interior of the barracks.

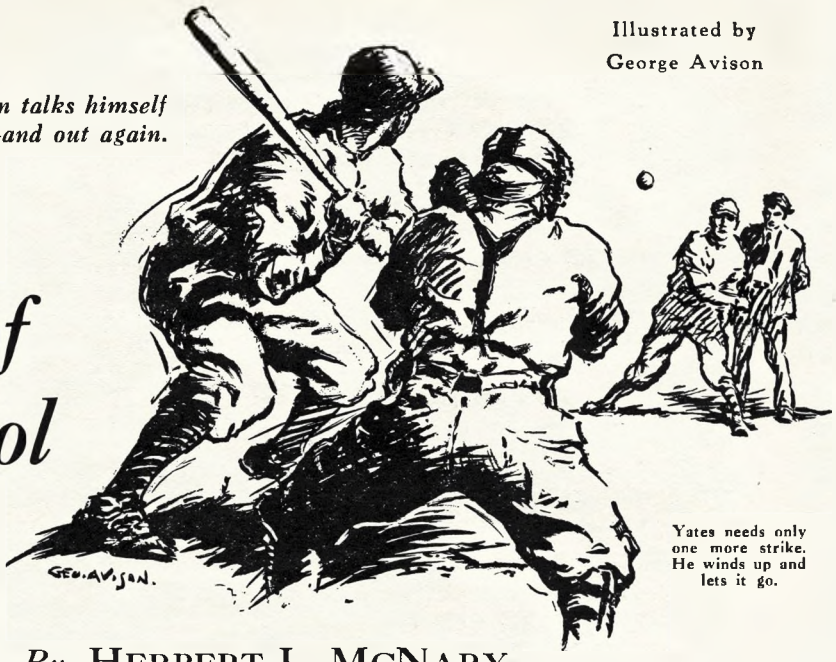
Gordon King was recalled to his surroundings by two tardy warriors who were hastening to accouter themselves for guard duty and in that instant was born the mad scheme that, without the slightest consideration, he was to attempt to put into execution.

Gordon King risks his life in the palace of the Khmer ruler—in the next, the July, issue.

Illustrated by
George Avison

A whirlwind salesman talks himself to baseball triumph—and out again.

Out of Control



Yates needs only one more strike. He winds up and lets it go.

By HERBERT L. McNARY

THE Romans were floppin' along after one of the worst starts in baseball history. An epidemic of flu had imposed itself for a stay on the team like a sheriff's attachment and couldn't be pried loose. The old machine had begun to run down and we had a lot of expensive parts—which is always the way when you carry along a bunch of stars year after year. The only reason we was in eighth place is because they don't have nine teams in the league.

Then to make matters worse the old man tries to recuperate his baseball losses by playin' the stock market—an' he has the usual result of goin' flatter than ever.

I dropped into the office one mornin' and I find the old man almost in tears.

"What's happened now?" I asked, frightened-like, 'cause I've seen him lose out on a pennant by a run an' never bat an eyelash.

"It's the end," he moans.

"What d'ye mean, the end?" I asked.

He don't answer but just points to a bunch of books in the corner. I picked one up an' looked at it. It's got a beautiful soft leather bindin' of blue decorated with plenty of gold. The title is in gold, too, an' is "McGlook's History of the World." I laid the book down an' look back at the old man; he is still heartbroken.

"Doyle, I bought those books. I paid three hundred dollars for ten books."

"I wouldn't worry 'bout that, Mr. Brandon," I says soothingly, 'cause I see he's all broken up. "You'll get the three hundred bucks somehow."

"It isn't the money, Doyle," he sobs. "I've paid thirty thousand for a player without a yelp. I've seen myself rained out of a forty-thousand holiday crowd without saying a cuss-word—but when a man in my financial difficulties allows some one to come in and sell him a bunch of books he'll never read, for three hundred dollars, it's a symptom."

"I wouldn't say that, Mr. Brandon," I says. "All of us have our moments when we're li'ble to be imposed upon. Jest send the books back an' demand your money."

The old man shook his head. "I haven't paid for them yet. The agent is coming this morning."

"Then don't give him the money."

"I can't talk him out of it," protested the old man. "You don't understand! I never met anyone like him."

"Then let me talk to him," I exclaimed. "I'll make that baby think he's an umpire that called a strike when the ball bounced over the plate."

I'm sittin' in the old man's chair when this book gunman comes in. He aint a bad-lookin' young chap—tall an' wiry,' with a bright smile and plastered blond hair, an' a manner as breezy as a tropical hurricane.

"Pardon me—where is Mr. Brandon?" he asked.

"I'm battin' fer him," I says, "an' I'm knockin' out a home run. You c'n run home with them books. The sale is off."

"Oh, I'm sure there is some mistake—"

"There is no mistake."

"But I'm certain," he insisted. "Mr. Brandon is a man of prominence, a man of position. There is a degree of culture and knowledge demanded of him. As his assistant you must realize that."

"I'm not his assistant," I says. "I'm a scout."

"Ah-h-h!" he cries. "A scout! You are fully acquainted, of course, with—er—scoutology? You know the beginning and extent of the Boy Scout movement—page 89, the Indian scouts of Cooper's—page 371, the influence of Scott's Waverly novels, the manner in which scouts were employed by the ancient Greeks, the Philistines, the Pharisees and the Hebrides—page 1235? Can you in your travels about the country speak intelligently of its geological and entomological development? Can you trace a glacial run—page 1541? Can you tell the age of each and every volcano in the State of Iowa—pages 2023

and 2024? Can you answer why is a pudding-stone? Can you explain the Six Nations, the League of Nations, Carry Nation—"

When he was gone the old man came back into the room an' shook me out of a daze.

"Did you make him take back the books?" he asks.

"No,"—I blinked,—"I bought a set fer myself! He's comin' back tomorra to see you."

The old man is so worried that when he goes home his folks get alarmed an' he has to tell his troubles. His daughter Rosemary thinks she can fix him up, so the next day when this portable broadcasting station fer McGlook's History o' the World shows up, there's three of us in the office—Rosemary Brandon, the old man an' me.

"Mr. Yates," Rosemary opens, "I want you to cancel those book sales."

"But I can't," he protested, an' with that smile o' his you could fergive the judge what sent you to the chair.

"But you don't understand," insists Rosemary. "It isn't the money. It's the effect such purchases will have on my father and Mr. Doyle. The Romans have been going so badly Father is in a rather desperate financial condition. He has been under a great strain and he is frightened to think he could have agreed to purchase your books in view of his situation."

"You say, Miss Brandon, that your father's troubles are due to the Romans not being a paying proposition. Then the solution is clear. Make the Romans pay; then your father can buy my books and pay Mr. Doyle, so that he also can live up to his agreement."

"But the Romans can't be made to pay," explained Rosemary.

"Oh, yes, they can," insists Yates with a smile. "The success of any enterprise depending upon public patronage is merely a matter of perfect salesmanship. *I* can make the Romans pay."

"You're pretty confident," grunts Brandon.

"Naturally! Salesmanship is a matter of perfect confidence; confidence is a matter of perfect control."

"Well, it would take a first-division place to make this outfit pay," declares Brandon, "and if you could do that I'd buy a hundred sets of books."

"Splendid!" cried Yates, pullin' out his order-book. "I'll take that order now."

"Hey, wait a minute," shouts Brandon, but his daughter breaks in.

"Daddy, I'm sure Mr. Yates can help you," she says.

"How?" asks Brandon in that blunt way of his.

"First," suggests Yates, "it will be necessary that you employ me as a ball-player."

"Do you play ball?" asked Brandon, surprised.

"Of course," he answered. "I play every position, except that of catcher. I object to wearing a mask."

"You would," I said. "And for what teams have you played, by the way?"

"Only for my college team. I felt it was my duty."

"What success did you have in performin' your duty?"

"I confined most of my efforts to the pitching-box, since that was our greatest need. I succeeded in pitching several no-hit games, although I was deprived of the credit of some of these, due to controversies with the umpires."

"Maybe you was so wild nobody got a chance to hit the ball," I ventured. But he remained unruffled.

"I never walked men. My whole theory of success in life is based upon perfect control. Naturally I would manifest this perfect control in a baseball game."

"Naturally," I agreed. "And what was the college and when did all this happen?"

"Bennister College—two years ago."

I sat upright. I had him now.

"And who was the coach?"

"Mr. Gainor—'Chuck' Gainor, he was called."

"What are you after, Jim?" asks Brandon.

"Nothin'," I evaded. Yates had crossed me up.

"Well, Mr. Brandon," asked Yates, "what position do I play?"

"You don't play," snaps Brandon.

"Dad—"

"Please, Rosemary, be sensible. You know how hard it is to find real ball-players and how much seasoning a man generally must go through before he is big-league caliber—"

"But you forget," interrupted Yates pleasantly, "that I learn quickly and that I make it a point to learn thoroughly. Take McGlook's World's History—"

"I already took it," roared Brandon, "and I'll be a glass-eyed umpire if I'll take *you!*"

"But you don't know until you have tried him," insisted Rosemary,—just like a femme,—"that he won't be just the man you need to make the Romans a pennant-winner."

"Thank you, Miss Brandon," bowed Yates, while Brandon and me make gurglin' sounds. "Your judgment in me will be rewarded. And because *you* have requested it, I shall cancel the sales I have made." And, s'help me, if he didn't take out the pair of orders from his wallet an' tear 'em right in front of our eyes.

"Now, Mr. Brandon," says Yates, "when do I start to earn my hundred-set order?"

"Oh, Lord!" gasps Brandon, and he looks at me with eyes like those of a stranded fish.

"We'll have to tell Rollings about him—he's the manager," I explain to Yates; then I turn back to Brandon, slippin' him a wink. "Why not have Mr. Yates come back tomorrow mornin' when Rollings is havin' a workout?"

Brandon can't put it in words, but Yates helps him out.

"That will be satisfactory, gentlemen. Until tomorrow, then. Miss Brandon, did I understand you to say you were going to lunch?" The pair of 'em go out together.

"What's the idea of the wink and wishin' him on Rollings?" asks Brandon when the door closed.

"Listen, he tore the orders, didn't he? Let him work out with the team for a few days till I get the dope on him. Chuck Gainor's an old side-kick of mine; we were together at Little Rock. When I get the dope from Chuck and confront Yates with it, he'll just fade right out of the picture."

But the trouble was I couldn't locate Chuck. None of the old-time ball-player friends I had scattered around the country could help me out.

Meanwhile, we had to stand for Yates workin' out with the team and we took plenty of grumblin' from Rollings.

I'd got hold of an old uniform for him an' stuck him in the outfield at mornin' workouts after tellin' Rollings that Yates was a friend of the old man's. There's always a lot of ambitious sand-lotters shaggin' flies at mornin' workouts, so one more didn't matter.

Yates had the fundamentals all right, but you need more'n fundamentals when you try to judge a line drive that's got plenty of English on it. Of course the old man an' I thought he'd get discouraged an' quit when he saw how rotten he was—but not that baby!

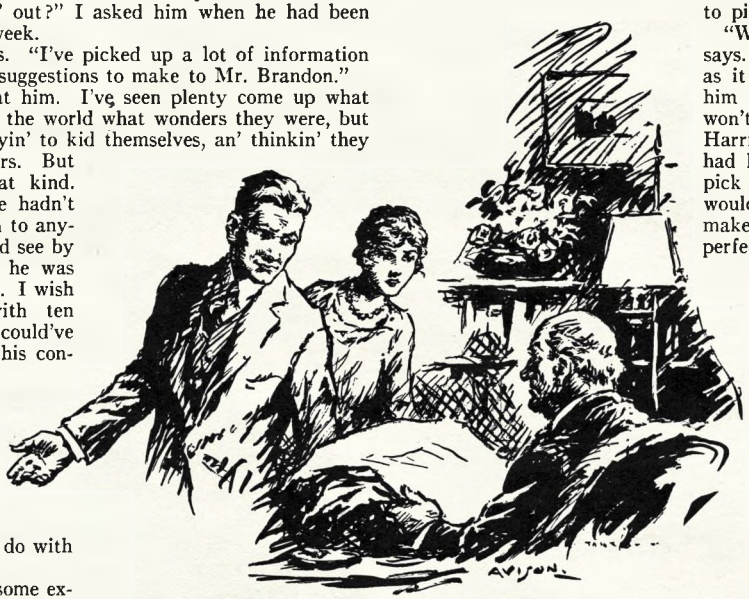
"How y'makin' out?" I asked him when he had been with us 'bout a week.

"Fine," he says. "I've picked up a lot of information an' I have a few suggestions to make to Mr. Brandon."

I just looked at him. I've seen plenty come up what was ready to tell the world what wonders they were, but they were jest tryin' to kid themselves, an' thinkin' they were kiddin' others. But Yates wasn't that kind. Outside o' me he hadn't opened his mouth to anyone, but you could see by one look at him he was perfectly satisfied. I wish some rookies with ten times his ability could've had one-tenth of his confidence.

Well, Yates wasn't quittin', an' the old man tells me on account o' Rosemary he can't drop him, so he asks what c'n we do with him.

"I gotta make some explanation to Rollings and the players," says the old man.



"Last night Yates comes into the library to advise me how to run my team, and Rosemary backs him up. I've been in baseball thirty years; he hasn't been in that many days."

"Well," I says, "if we keep him in the outfield he'll get beaned, an' if we try him in the infield he'll get his head knocked off by the first line drive—an' in either case we'll get bagged fer manslaughter. Won't your gal stand fer turnin' him loose?"

"No. I told her there wasn't room fer him in the outfield or infield and she said to use him as a pitcher, because we need pitchers."

"Leave it to a woman to try to solve our troubles with that kind of logic," I says. "But at that, the more I think of it, the more I think of it. He aint a ball-player, but after all, pitchers aint ball-players. They aint supposed to hit or catch infield flies or nothin'. We c'n say he's a college boy—that McGlook line will come in handy there—an' a son of an old friend o' yours an' that you promised to give him a tryout. We c'n use him to pitch to batters. By the way, have you been talkin' t' him lately?"

"No."

"Well, don't! He's got some suggestions 'bout runnin' the team that he wants to make to you."

"Good Lord!" says the old man. "Keep him away from me! I'll lock my office."

The next A. M. I got hold of Yates. "Listen," I says, "Miss Brandon pointed out that we're hard up fer pitchers an'—"

"Then I'll be a pitcher," chirps Yates.

"Wait a minute," I says. "It aint as easy as all that. A pitcher has to have some stuff."

"I'll get it. I'll watch Harrison an' do everything he does." You'd have to hear how nonchalant Yates said this to appreciate it. This Harrison *was* the Romans—not only was he the greatest pitcher but he had a personality that made him the biggest favorite in the game. For years the old man had been gettin' all kind o' offers fer him, but he knew that if he was to ever let Harrison go he might as well make out his last word an' testament right then an' there. Th' only time we got a crowd was when he was advertised to pitch.

"Wait a minute," I says. "It aint as easy as it sounds. Watchin' him for a coupla days won't make you a second Harrison. Even if you had his speed an' could pick up his curve, you wouldn't have what makes him what he is—perfect control."

"But I have perfect control," declared Yates. "You forget that I pitched several no-hit games due to my ability to always put the ball where I wanted."

"Oh, you're still stickin' to that story, are you?"

"Of course. I'll go to the pitcher's box, and you stand at home plate with a cigarette in your mouth, and I'll knock the cigarette—"

"You will, in a pig's eye!" I roars. "But I'll tell you what I *will* do. I'll go behind the plate with a glove an' see what control you got."

So, with Rollings lookin' on and wonderin' what it was all about, I go to the plate and Yates takes the mound.

Well, after about a half hour I've got to admit Yates called the turn. He aint got much else, but he sure has control. No matter where I stuck my glove he put the ball into it.

Well, we're hooked. Rosemary had insisted that we make him a pitcher and Yates had shown that he could put the ball where he said. Then I had the nice job of wishin' him on Rollings.

"Cripes," explodes Rollings, "aint our team bad enough without signin' up a relative—or whatever he is—of the boss?"

"You can use him to pitch to batters," I argues. "It ought to help 'em get confidence when Yates can always put 'em where the batter wants him. All you got to do is to tell Yates on the quiet what each guy wants, an' let him pitch it. That's good psychology."

Y'see, I knew Rollings had a weakness for psychology.

Rollings gives in. And Yates has been pitchin' in battin' practice for a couple days when I get a telegram. It's from Chuck Gainor. Some one of the old-timers I had asked about Gainor had run across him and made

him think the call was urgent. Chuck wanted to know what in the name of so-an'-so (collect) I wanted, and he gave me his address and telephone-number. I got him on long-distance. I asked him did he ever know a guy named Yates who went to Bennister College. And then for several minutes—for which I was payin' heavy rates—Chuck lets out a string of cuss-words.

"For two years," he says, when he cools down, "I've been tryin' to forget that guy! He talked me out of a fat job an' into a nervous breakdown. He's the prospect I wrote you about—but thank God you didn't get him."

"I got him," I says.

"Then God help you," says Chuck. "That guy can knock the dust off a Scotchman's dime with his control, but he'll talk himself into and out of the electric chair—an' you'll go the first half with him."

"How about these no-hit games that umpires wouldn't give him?" I asked.

"He pitched 'em. Give him the weaknesses of a big-league team an' I bet he'll give *you* a no-hit game—but as an old friend, Jim, if you value your reason, get rid of him."

Well, it was too late then. I couldn't do anything. Besides from the day Yates starts pitchin' in battin' practice we begin to win games. Sittin' on the bench give him a chance to size up things. With him the fact that we are losin' games is a discovery and he acts upon it. Everyone else, especially the fans and newspaper guys, knew it long ago.

Just before I drop in on the old man one mornin', I gets word that Claymore has been let go. He's our center-fielder an' had been with us a dozen years or more. The old man couldn't trade him 'cause no one wanted to take over his big contract, an' if he tried to waive him he'd have to let him go fer nothin', on account o' his bein' a ten-year man. Since to give up somethin' fer nothin' in them days was clear lunacy, I figured the old man must've pulled off somethin' foxy—an' I breezed in to get some inside dope. But I found the old man in a stew.

"Is that true 'bout you cuttin' Claymore loose?" I asks.

"I'm just beginning to realize it," he says. "Before the season opened I could have sold him for twenty thousand—and today I let him go for nothing."

"Why?"

"Why? Because this Yates talked me into doing so. He said I'd be saving a fifteen-thousand-dollar salary. An' I fell for the argument. I could save a lot of salaries if I gave all my property away."

"What did you let him talk to you fer?" I asks. "I thought you was goin' to keep your office locked!"

"I can't keep my house locked."

"You mean—"

"I mean Yates is callin' on Rosemary. Last night he comes into the library to advise me how to run my team, and Rosemary backs him up. It makes no difference to them that I've been in baseball thirty years and he hasn't been in the game that many days."

BUT Yates pulled a break at that—in the first place the kid we put in Claymore's place starts to go like a house afire now that he doesn't have to worry 'bout competin' with a big reputation, an' then a couple other old-timers that had been gettin' by on past achievements read the handwritin' on the wall when Claymore got his permanent vacation, an' started to shake some new life into the old bones.

Rollings had let Yates pitch to the batters with some misgivin's, but Yates had the right dope 'bout havin' control. He laid that ball over so pretty that the batters began takin' toe-holds an' whackin' the balls over an' against the fences. What's more, that first afternoon the Romans kept up their sluggin' an' rapped out twenty-one hits fer fifteen runs. Ordinarily this was a week's work. Ball-players are more superstitious than sailors on Friday the thirteenth, an' the Romans led the pennant race in the old Superstition League. The manager was the worst o' the lot. He'd throw a fit if a pigeon lit in front o' the dugout, or if the bats was pointed the wrong way. Personally, I never had no use fer superstitions, although if the first guy I was to meet in the mornin' was left-handed I might as well go back to bed, an' a load of barrels always means luck. Well, the Romans figured their heavy battin' was due to Yates pitchin' to 'em in battin' practice, an' he won a regular job at that.

IN the old days specially, a rookie might o' had small-pox, the way the regulars avoided 'em. Ball-players looked upon rookies as rivals fer their bread an' butter, an' when it come to helpin' a guy along they'd say: "Let him loin fer himself, the same as I had to!" Well, these reg'lars was willin' to listen to Yates, who could talk—an' how. He first did a job on Jay Kirk.

Kirk was one o' the guys what did a Babe Ruth on the ball before the days when ev'ryone was takin' a toe-hold on the lively apple. But this year he was goin' tough. His battin'-slump started with the first game an' had kept up—an' so far he hadn't knocked a ball out o' the orchard. He kept complainin' that he knew this was goin' to be an off year for him. Yates overheard him in one o' these moans after a strike-out.

"Mr. Kirk," he says, "you're a victim of your own self-delusion. You are mentally restricted because of self-imposed inhibitions."

"You're a liar!" cried Kirk. "I haven't taken a drink fer a week, an' if you start sayin' anythin' 'bout my relatives—"

"I'm speaking about your batting," declared Yates. "You show no evidence of marked physical deterioration; consequently, your trouble is mental. You tell yourself you're not going to hit—and you don't. If you told yourself you *would* hit, you very likely would."

"Yeah?" says Kirk. "I suppose if I told myself I'd get a home run, I'd knock it over the fence."

"Naturally."

Kirk got a big kick out o' this; he tapped his head an' pulled what was a wise-crack for him—"Nobody home!" When it came his turn to bat again, he announces with a big grin as he picks up his three bats that he's gonna get a home run. He tells the catcher the same thing when he gets in the box an' yells it down to the pitcher. Maybe the pitcher got mad an' decided to breeze one by so fast Kirk couldn't see it. But Kirk had good eyesight, an' he met that ball. It went over the right field fence, an' fer all I know it's goin' yet. You oughta see the blank look of amazement on Kirk's map as he rounded the sacks.

"How did y' do that?" he demands of Yates when he comes into the bench.

"I didn't do it," says Yates. "You did."

"Bologny!" says Kirk. "If it's bad luck to tell the secret, that's kayo with me, kid—but don't be a piker. Gimme a few more homers." An' that's the way the rest o' the team felt about it.

Under that influence it's no wonder the team begun to climb out o' the cellar. An' some of the fans remembered how to get to the park. With Yates doin' so much talkin' to the team I figured the old man had escaped his influence, but I pick up the paper one mornin' an' I get a bath o' cold sweat.

"*Harrison Traded to Cincinnati!*" read a headline.

That's what glared at me from the front page. I didn't need to go farther to guess what abuse went with that announcement. Harrison was an institution.

There was all kinds of wild threats about boycotts an' appeals an' injunctions. The old man was called ev'rythin' from a traitor to a lunatic. I had to look through pages o' mud-slingin' before I found we'd got a shortstop an' an outfielder fer Harrison.

I managed to get in to see the old man, although he looked as if he expected a mob to break in on him carryin' a rope fer a neckin'-party.

"Is this jest a rumor," I asks, wavin' the paper, "or is it the truth?"

"It's the truth," he wails. "*He* talked me into it! Cincinnati has been tryin' to make a deal, and they call me at the house last night. Yates is there and he keeps telling me that Harrison works only once a week and that I'm crazy not to trade him for two men I can use every day—and I fell for the argument."

"Well, if you value your health," I says, "you'd better hire a bodyguard."

"I'll call up the police right away," says the old man.

"Not the police in this town," I says. "You'll get no protection from them, after tradin' Harrison. You'd better cable fer some London bobbies, or some one what don't know what baseball is."

Fortunately fer us the team went on the road. An' while attempts was made to burn down the home grounds an' there was parades with guys carryin' placards readin': "This park is unfair to organized baseball," the Romans was winnin' ball-games on the road. The two babies Cincy give us fer Harrison made good—an' how! The shortstop filled a hole you could drop a mountain in, an' a team with a bum shortstop is like an airplane with a missin' cylinder.

A winnin' ball-team is a cure fer a lot o' ailments. Although the fans wouldn't admit it, they was beginnin' to call up the papers before supper to see if the Romans had won another game, an' the day we got back there was twenty-five thousand out to the park explainin' to each other that the only reason they was there was because they had the day off an' no other place to spend it.

Fer a team that started off in last place it looked like we really had somethin'. But we was weak in the box, an' finally this weakness began to tell. We was beginnin' to blow ball-games we thought was already won.

"I gotta swell bunch o' five-innin' pitchers," yelped Rollings one day after he'd seen a six-run lead shot to Jericho. "I wish I had some one who wouldn't go to pieces as soon as men got on bases."

"You have," says Yates. "Me."

"Mr. Randall," Yates says, "a hitless period is about to begin now. You will oblige me by striking out on your well-known weakness for an inside curve. Thank you."

Rollings looks at him as if seein' him fer the first time. Yates had been pitchin' to the batters regularly in practice an' to fair speed he had added a curve that was a slight improvement on the old roundhouse. But I knew Rollings wasn't thinkin' about Yates' pitchin' ability—he was wonderin' how far Yates' luck would go. He turns to Hank Dolan the catcher, who was jest takin' off his armor.

"D'you think there would be any chance o' his gettin' by, Hank?" asks Rollings.

"If he could talk to 'em instead of pitchin', he'd blind 'em with that line of his," says Dolan offhandedly.

"I can do both," says Yates. "There's nothing in the rules that says I can't talk."

"There's one thing you *can* do," says Hank, showin' more interest now that he saw Rollings was serious. "With that control of yours you c'n put the ball where I tell you—an' that's more'n some o' these flingers c'n do."

"Yeah—but c'n he put it there with men on bases?" says Rollings.

"Certainly," declares Yates positively. "I have perfect control under all circumstances."

Well, we was playin' a double-header that day with Philly. Rollings starts Fillingham in the second game, an' sends Yates out to the bull-pen to warm up. We start off with a lead jest like we done in the first game, an' then in the sixth innin', Filly starts to crack when a coupla errors puts men on bases. You've noticed how teams usually get hits an' runs in bunches. That's because with men on bases the best o' pitchers get nervous. They tighten up a bit, an' it shows in their control. Now control aint merely a matter of balls an' strikes. Control is hittin' a target the size of a dime with all you got on the ball, an' hittin' it in a pinch. Almost ev'ry player has his grooves, the places where he likes 'em, an' the place where he don't. Maybe only a couple of inches separate 'em—an' it's those inches what make control.

Filly makes one of these miscalculations an' a double ties the score. He gets three an' two on the next, an' walks him. The next batter dumps a sacrifice, but the play is made at third an' ev'ryone is safe. Rollings sends out a high sign for Yates.

Three on, nobody out, the score tied; Casey Randall

at bat fer Philadelphia—an' Casey battin' at a .500 clip just then. That was a tough situation to start a chap off in! Hank meets Yates at the box an' tells him what to pitch to Casey. Then Yates walks into the plate.

"Mr. Randall," he says, "you've been hitting for .500 the past week or so. You must realize that this is far above your normal stride. You must be familiar also with the law of averages. That means to secure a proper adjustment you must undergo a hitless period. That period is about to begin now. You will oblige me by striking out on your well-known weakness for an inside curve. Thank you."

Casey stares at him like he's seen some new brand o' cuckoo, an' begins to worry about the way he's standin' an' his grip on the bat. Yates coolly pitches to the exact spot Hank tells him to, an' the mighty Casey fans—jest like the Mudville one.

Lebourveau is up next an' Yates comes in to him.

"Mr. Lebourveau," he says, "you're going to attempt to hit and I'm going to attempt to stop you. That makes the situation appear even—but such is not actually the case. I am contending against just you alone, but in addition to myself there will be eight other Romans ready to prevent you hitting safely. The odds are nine to one against you. Ponder that, if you please."

Lebourveau looks wild-eyed to the bench an' makes three feeble swings at the ball. Yates talks the next guy into loftin' an easy fly.

We won that game in the ninth, an' the next day the papers was full o' Yates' pitchin'. A couple days later he goes in to save a game again an' talks himself into another victory.

THIS was before the time o' pitchers like Marberry an' Moore. Now most teams have an emergency pitcher they use for finishin' up games. Yates was the first one, an' ev'ryone give the credit to him. Rollings said he was the seventh son of a seventh son, an' had the luck. Hank said he talked the batters outa hits, but the old man had a version o' his own.

"His success is due entirely to his remarkable control," said the old man. "Hank knows where he should pitch the ball and he is able to put it exactly where Hank tells him. Luck has nothing to do with it, and as for his talking—I wish he would cut it out. It is bound to get him into trouble. He has already talked Rosemary into becoming engaged to him."

"Well, maybe she'll be happy with him," I says.

"Happy?" exclaims the old man. "How can any woman be happy with a husband that's going to have the last word?"

Well, the way I figured it, how Yates did it made no difference alongside of what he did, an' between the games he saved an' the games we won, we walked right through the league. Before Labor Day the old man had to buy a hundred sets o' McGlook's History of the World—that bein' the agreement if we made the first division.

Finally the race come down to the final series with the Giants. If we should beat 'em all three games we would win the pennant. It don't look possible, but in baseball anythin' is possible.

The first game is a pitchers' battle without a run bein' scored fer seven innin's. Then in our half Rollings sends in a pinch-hitter after Dolan has moved Stevenson along with a sacrifice, an' the pinch-hitter comes through with a single that scores the run. Yates goes in an' not a Giant reaches first after that. In the second game Fillingham holds a lead until the eighth, when the Giants get the tyin' runs on bases. But Yates takes up the burden an' forces Thomas to hit into a double play. That brings us down to the last game—an' if we c'n win this, the pennant's ours.

Blackly is pitchin' this game fer us, and his stuff is workin' perfect. We go into the ninth leadin' four to two and we're already figgerin' who'll start the World Series fer us. But McGraw gets after his team an' the Giants stage one of their customary ninth-inning rallies. Two is out with nobody on, an' the fans are leavin'. Then Dolan gets hold of one and parks it in the stands.

Well, that's only one run, but the fans on the way out slow up. Blackly lets the home run unnerve him. Mac sees this and he sends up his batters with instructions to lay into the first good one they see. Before we know it there's Giants on first and second. The fans is all back now, howlin' like madmen. Rollings is tearin' his hair and wigwagging, like a guy what's tipped over a hornets' nest, for Yates to warm up.

Four bad balls with the fans screamin' and stampin' at every pitch. Was that a madhouse?

Out goes Blackly and in comes Yates. Maybe everyone else in that park had exaggerated hysterics, but Yates was as cool as frozen fish. Yet all I c'n think of is the boss' statement that Yates would dish the works on us yet. Well, he had only one guy to work on.

I look to the plate to see who it is, an' I see Mac has sent up Dummy Cramer. Dummy is deaf an' the only reason the wise McGraw sent him up was that he couldn't hear all the bedlam and was the only man he had on the bench who wouldn't be rattled by the uproar.

Hank comes out to Yates an' we find out afterwards that he tells him Dummy's weakness is an inside knee high, and his strength is an outside knee high. He wants to know c'n Yates give him the inside an' make sure of avoidin' the outside. Yates says of course he can. Then Hank tells him to lay off talkin' to Dummy, because bein' a deaf-mute he can't understand him, anyway.

Well, Hank first calls for a curve that cut the corner like a restaurant cuts ham. He has Yates pitch a waste ball that Dummy don't go after. Then he signs for the curve again. Dummy ticks it and it sails foul for the stands. Hank goes back and Yates runs in automatically to the plate. I c'n see he says somethin' to Dummy. Then he goes back.

The park is quiet now. All them Giant fans know Yates' reputation fer savin' games. When they see it is two an' one they know he is in form. Yates needs only one more strike. He winds up an' lets it go.

Bam! Dummy connects, an' the ball sails to the fence fer two bases—an' home come the runs that win the Giants the pennant.

Honest, it was a couple minutes before even the Giant fans realized what had happened. We were stunned. As for poor Yates, he jest stands there on the mound.

WELL, we're a blue bunch in the dressing-room. Hank gives his version that Mac must have out-smarted us. Hank says he ordered the inside knee high and Yates pitched it perfect. But Dummy has stepped back from the plate, which makes the ball outside for him.

We're still cryin' over spilled milk when Mac comes in.

"Well," says Mac, "Yodeling Yates certainly talked you fellows out of the pennant."

"How do you make that out?" demands Rollings.

"Why, when he come into the plate on that foul he told Dummy what he was goin' to pitch. Dummy just stepped back and it was in his groove."

"B-b-but," stammered Yates, "he couldn't hear me. He's a deaf-mute."

"Sure," admits Mac. "But didn't you ever know that deaf-mutes are lip-readers?"

Thicker Than Water

The author of many underworld stories here turns home to a drama of his native farm-lands.

By SEVEN ANDERTON

Illustrated by William Fisher

IT was a warm morning in early October when Laban Cartwright the Fifth entered the offices of a commission firm in the Chicago stockyards district. Laban was visiting a city larger than North Platte or Grand Island for the first time. He had arrived in Chicago during the night, escorting twelve carloads of Cartwright beef from its native Nebraska ranges.

Laban the Fifth was twenty-two years old—tall, lean and tanned to a nut-brown by Nebraska's sun and wind. He wore his "best" suit as easily as he might have worn his work-garments, and his keen gray eyes looked with intense interest and without fear upon the new and strange sights. There was no timidity in his entrance to the offices of the commission firm through which the Cartwrights had done business for generations.

Laban had escorted this shipment of beef for three reasons: Six of the twelve carloads of beef belonged to him. He had expressed a desire to bring the shipment to market. The rest of the Cartwrights, owners of the other six carloads, had decided it would do no harm to let the youngest Laban take the trip.

Halting at a railing just inside the door of the commission firm's outer office, Laban asked a woman who sat at a desk labeled "Information" if he might see Mr. Clay. The woman nodded her head and pressed a button on her desk.

Two or three minutes passed and then a girl came across the outer office and approached Laban. He saw her coming and his heart suddenly skipped a beat. She was small and very dark; her hair, so black that its high lights were blue—like the bloom on grapes—was unbobbed and clung about her proud little head in a wavy dusky mass. She moved with a gentle grace. Laban found himself wondering whether she could possibly be real.

The girl's eyes had found Laban, and she too felt her heart give a queer beat. The tall brown figure, vibrant with youth and health, made her suddenly aware that walls were confining. His broad shoulders, narrow hips and gray eyes, accustomed to searching distant plains for stray cattle, seemed to dwarf the busy outer office. He should have been dressed in a leopard-skin, she thought, and armed with a war-club of flint. Such a man should only be set in countless square miles of sun-bathed open.

She looked up into his lean, brown face.

"You wished to see Mr. Clay?" she asked. "I am his secretary. Mr. Clay is out of the city. He won't be back until tomorrow morning. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I don't know," answered Laban, conscious only of her nearness and the fact that her eyes were large, soft and of deepest brown. "My name is Laban Cartwright, the Fifth. I just got here from Nebraska with a dozen carloads of beef."

"Oh," said the girl, "in that case Mr. Shively can look after your business quite as well as Mr. Clay. Come, I'll take you back to Mr. Shively's office."

Like a man walking in a mist, Laban the Fifth followed her across the outer office and into a corridor lined with private offices. His twelve carloads of cattle had suddenly become unimportant. He wanted to hear her throaty, musical voice again. He wanted to gather that small supple body into his long arms and kiss those rosy lips. . . . . Sometimes it happens like that.

"Mr. Shively, this is Mr. Laban Cartwright. He has just arrived from Nebraska with twelve cars of beef." The girl was speaking to a stocky man behind a huge desk in a spacious office.

"Pleased to meet you," said Laban, with difficulty tearing his eyes from the girl and extending his big brown hand to Shively.

"Thank you, Miss Neville," said Shively. "I will take care of Mr. Cartwright."

The girl turned to leave the office. Laban's eyes followed her.

"Good-by, Mr. Cartwright," she said, flashing him a smile as she closed the door of Shively's office.

"Good-by," answered Laban, almost choking on the word.

In company with an assistant of Mr. Shively's, Laban went down to the yards. The market was on the up-grade and they sold the cattle at a good price. But Laban couldn't get his mind on beef—he was blinded to everything else by the vision of big brown eyes and a dazzling smile.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, Laban signed the necessary papers and saw a fat draft on its way to the Nebraska bank and the coffers of the Cartwrights. At two-thirty he was once more standing at the rail in the outer office of the commission firm.

"I want to see Mr. Clay," he told the woman at the information desk.

The woman nodded and pressed a button on her desk. Laban waited with eyes fixed on the door through which the person he most wanted to see would appear. Then the door opened and she came; a strange, wistful smile was on her face.

For six hours Yvonne Neville, secretary to John Clay, had been trying to make up the monthly report of Mr. Clay's purchases and sales, but her efforts had been rendered ineffective by the constant vision of a tall brown-faced youth. All day she had been dreaming wild dreams with Laban Cartwright as their nucleus. Now, like one in a dream, she walked across the outer office toward him. He had come—as she had known he would.

"Mr. Clay is out of the city," she said, halting before him.

"I know that," answered Laban. His eyes went to the spinsterish woman at the near-by information desk.

"Would you care to come back to the office?" the girl asked. She had hardly needed his prompting glance.

Laban nodded. He couldn't trust his voice. The next moment he was following her across the outer office.

"Come to a movie with me tonight," said Laban the Fifth, when they were in the private office of the absent John Clay. It was not a request; it was a command. Men who are backed by six generations of other men accustomed to taking what they want are likely to run true to form, even in Chicago.

"All right," answered Yvonne Neville, after all not so far removed from a female ancestor who had gone to her new home with a husband who held her hair in one hand and a stout club in the other.

Ten minutes later, Laban left the office. In his pocket he carried a slip of paper on which was penciled the address at which he was to call at eight o'clock.

He was five minutes early when he rang the bell of the apartment on the near North Side where Yvonne Neville lived. She opened the door, he closed it behind him. The next moment she was in his arms and their hungry lips had found each other. . . . .

They did not go to the movies. It was too late for a show before they could realize it. They had spent more than twenty years in ignorance of each other's existence—and youth, under such circumstances, suddenly feels that an eternity is encompassed in a score of years. It was nearly midnight when Laban finally became able to think coherently, to a degree.

"Yvonne," he said softly to the soft and beautiful bit of femininity in his arms.

"Yes, Laban," she murmured.

"Nebraska isn't like Chicago."

"Isn't it?" Her voice implied that the matter was of small importance.

"No," he answered gravely, turning her face up until he could look into her eyes. "Our women work hard."

"So do I work," she said. "Hard."

"But not like our women," he argued, his brow clouding. "You work on a typewriter in an office. You couldn't carry water from the windmill and cook for a threshing-crew of thirty men. You couldn't—"

Her hand on his lips silenced him. Her brown eyes looked unwaveringly into his.

"I am young and strong," she said. "Even if I am small, I can do anything that it is necessary for your wife to do. Are you sorry you asked me—"

"You know I'm not," he interrupted. "I am only warning you because I want to be fair. My family—"

She silenced him again. "Laban, dear," she declared, "if you lived in the Fiji Islands and your family were cannibals, it would make no difference to me. I'm going to send you home now so you can come back here for breakfast at eight o'clock. Then we'll go downtown and get married before you can change your mind."

Thus it happened that Mrs. Laban Cartwright the Fifth called on her former employer at ten o'clock the following forenoon, displayed her new wedding-ring and her new husband—and informed Mr. Clay that he needed a new secretary. Mr. Clay wished them luck and saw them aboard a train for Nebraska. Starry-eyed with happiness, Yvonne watched the miles of countryside slip past as the train sped toward the new land where she was to make a home for the tall young plainsman she had married.

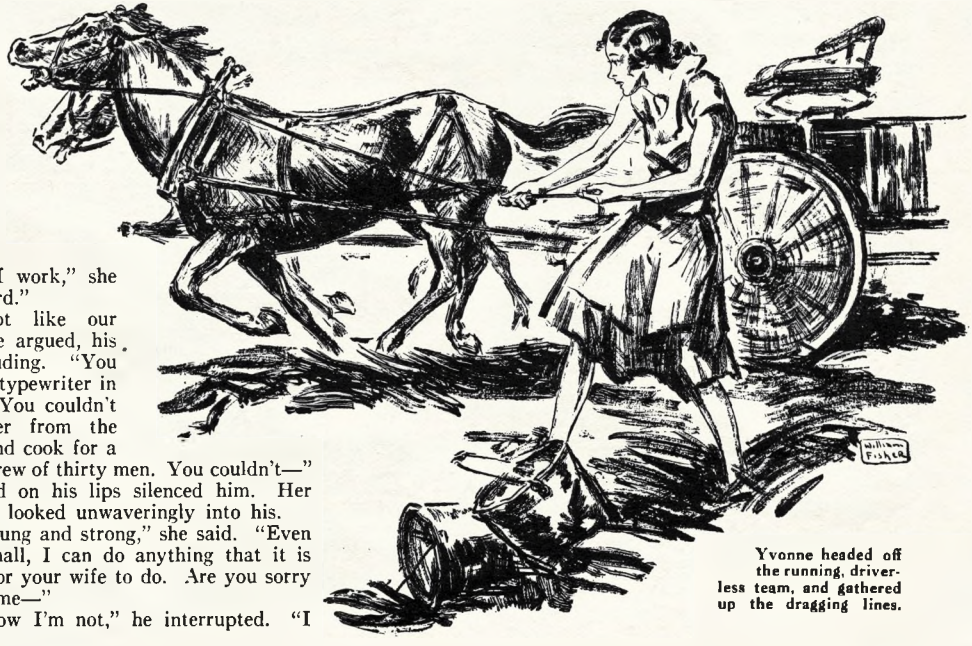
THE Cartwright clan had been set to welcome Laban the Fifth heartily. The highly satisfactory check for the beef had arrived at the bank and the clan was ready to celebrate the fact that another Cartwright had proven his ability to cope with the world at large. But when Laban alighted from the train with a brand-new wife, there was a sudden change of attitude on the part of the clan. Laban and his bride soon learned that they had reckoned without the Cartwright host. Proudly the youngest Laban introduced his wife to the clan—but the introduction could hardly be described as a success.

"That's what comes of sending a brat that aint dry behind the ears off to Chicago," said Susan Cartwright, grandmother of Laban the Fifth.

"Young Labe has sure raised hell and put a chunk under it," observed his Uncle Ben.

"It wouldn't have happened if his mother had lived," declared his Aunt Jane. "What could the boy be expected to know about women?"

In one way, the Cartwrights could hardly be blamed. Laban the Fifth had certainly gone against precedent.



Yvonne headed off the running, driverless team, and gathered up the dragging lines.

For almost a hundred years the youngsters of the house of Cartwright had mated with the sons and daughters of the most solid and prosperous of the neighbors. For the past two or three years it had been hoped—even planned—that Laban the Fifth would marry Della Martin, only daughter of old Bob Martin, and thus bring more acres and another fat bank-account into the clan.

Instead, he came home from Chicago and presented to the clan a bride who had not a penny to her name. And her name was Yvonne. That name alone was enough to alienate the entire Cartwright tribe. *Yvonne*—in a family that had treasured its Susans, Barbaras, Janes and Marys through more than six generations!

To understand the situation in which Laban and his bride found themselves, it is necessary to understand something of the origin of the Cartwrights.

IT was early October in the year 1840 when Laban Cartwright—Laban the First—halted his ox-drawn covered wagon on a high knoll four days' journey west of where the city of Omaha now sprawls on the western bank of the Missouri River. He was in the heart of what was in time to become the sovereign State of Nebraska—though then it was not even a territory. As far as Laban Cartwright's deep-set gray eyes could see, the unsurveyed acres of fertile virgin prairie belonged to God, the somewhat nebulous Government, and himself. There was nobody to dispute his title to any spot upon which he might choose to erect the house of sod he would call home.

He selected a site in the fertile valley of the Platte River and unloaded his wife and his plow. Weeks later, standing in the doorway of the sod house erected in sun-to-sun days of back-breaking labor, Laban Cartwright and his wife gazed upon all their worldly goods. They possessed one team of oxen, one milch cow heavy with calf, one wagon with bows and canvas, one plow, a bushel of potatoes, two bushels of wheat and three bushels of yellow corn, besides their clothing and personal effects.

Among those personal effects were a muzzle-loading shotgun and a forty-five-caliber revolver, for which weapons they carried a considerable supply of powder, shot and cartridges. Every potato and every grain and kernel of the wheat and corn had to be saved for seed in the spring. With winter drawing on the Cartwrights faced the problem of subsisting on the land until a distant harvest time. Their nearest neighbors were sixty miles distant. The country was infested with Indians, hostile and only slightly controlled by scattered and inadequate Government troops. Buffalo roamed the plains in shaggy herds. Prairie chicken, quail and rabbits were plentiful.

"Well, Barbara," said the gaunt pioneer, "this is our home."

"Yes, Laban," answered the wife. "Our baby will be born here."

The husband's only answer was a nod as his lean arm pressed the woman close against his side. Four months later their first-born arrived in that isolated sod house. Laban Cartwright the Second came into the world without benefit of surgery, and mingled his first lusty protest against the indignities of life with the howl of a blizzard that was ruthlessly burying the humble home in a mountain of frigid white crystals. While the pioneer mother hugged the tiny baby to her breast beneath the covering of buffalo-hides, Laban the First fought the bitter cold from the single room with a constantly tended fire of twisted hay and dried buffalo dung.

Thus the clan of Cartwright had its beginning. As the years slipped past, his wife presented Laban the First with five more sons and four daughters. The youngest of her brood was six years old when they buried her on a wind-swept hilltop, half a mile from the crumbling sod house which her strong young hands had helped her man to build.

With the passing of years the clan of Cartwright, having multiplied mightily, now held title to the choicest acres of two counties. For more than two-thirds of a century, the descendants of Laban the First had pitted their strength, ingenuity and stubborn will against the elements and the brown Nebraska soil. The tall gaunt sinewy men and sturdy level-eyed women of the Cartwright tribe had battled blizzards, tornadoes, drouth, flood and prairie fires—and they wore the wreath of victory with a stolid pride. Vast herds of cattle now grazed over the Cartwright ranges. Broad fields of corn and wheat yearly filled the Cartwright granaries to overflowing. In that section of Nebraska circling the spot upon which Laban the First had erected his house of sod, to be a Cartwright was to be royalty.

It was to the bosom of such a clan that Laban the Fifth brought home his city-bred bride.

"*Yvonne!*" sniffed Aunt Kate Cartwright. "A girl with a name like that couldn't learn to make butter in a hundred years."

"Yvonne!" snorted Uncle Dan. "Young Laban won't have a penny left six months from now."

It didn't help matters any when these and other similar prophecies failed of fulfillment. Young Laban, having heard and sensed the verdict of his tribe, invited the clan, singly and collectively, to go to the devil. Then, drying the tears of his little bride, he put her into his car, drove out, and bought the Pennington farm.

The Pennington farm was a fertile quarter-section, three miles from town on the newly paved State road. It was the best-improved farm in the county, having a five-room bungalow with a furnace, hot and cold running water and electric lights. The first payment wiped out three-fourths of young Laban's bank-account. He started farming with less than five hundred dollars in the bank and with six per cent to pay on a debt of fourteen thousand dollars. The clan loudly and noticeably washed their hands of the youngest Laban and his city bride.

"Of course, Yvonne couldn't carry her water from the well," sneered Laban's cousin Carrie. "And hot water for her *bawth* must run out of the faucet into the tub."

"Listen to this," said Aunt Jane to her husband, upon returning from town one Saturday afternoon. "Laban's little Yvonne came into Jackson's store this afternoon and asked them how they sold flour. Ted Jackson told her they had it in sacks from twenty-five pounds up. She said she only wanted two or three pounds, because she only used it to flour steak and liver! She'll kill that boy with a frying pan—and she won't hit him with it, either."

But Laban the Fifth survived the frying-pan, became more and more in love with his dark-eyed wife, worked like a Trojan and went his proud and lonely way, regardless of the attitude and verdict of the outraged Cartwrights.

ON her part, Yvonne Cartwright, steadfastly devoted to her hard-working young husband, fought bravely to learn the ways of the strange land and stranger people, and cried only when her man was in the fields. She was always smiling or singing when he came to the house.

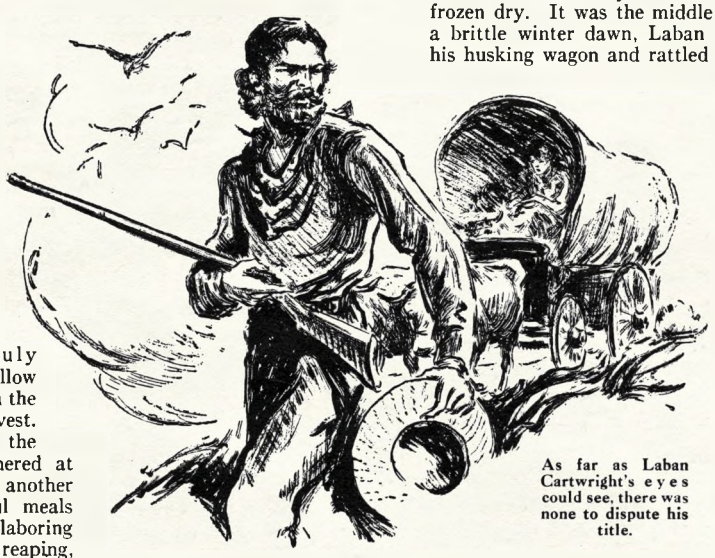
Though she was an orphan who had for years longed for a family, Yvonne soon found herself wishing that the multitudinous relatives of her husband were non-existent. Laban the Third, her husband's gaunt, gray grandfather, was still hale and hearty in his late sixties.

There were times when Yvonne was desperately homesick for the little Chicago apartment where the preparation of her simple meals had been so easy. She missed the forty-dollar check that had been hers weekly; she missed a lot of things that she had put behind her when she had

followed Laban Cartwright into this new land. But she kept all that from Laban.

It was a lonely winter and spring for Yvonne. Nobody called on her. The women she met when she drove to town to do her Saturday shopping were openly hostile. She wondered why, not realizing that they envied her her clothes and her manner of wearing them—and many other things.

"When harvest-time comes," said Cousin Sue darkly, "Laban will wish he had a cook instead of an ornament." Cousin Sue had a mole on her chin and a mustache of fine black fuzz, but she could bake biscuits that melted in the mouth.



As far as Laban Cartwright's eyes could see, there was none to dispute his title.

Laban the Fifth made no comment. He was proud—as proud as Lucifer—and he carried on with the independent arrogance of a true Cartwright. July came and the yellow wheat-fields nodded in the sun, ready for the harvest. The other women of the Cartwright clan gathered at one farmhouse after another and cooked bountiful meals for their menfolk laboring side by side at the reaping, and later at the threshing. None of them offered to help Yvonne, nor asked her to help them. They made grim remarks to each other about Laban the Fifth and a certain lesson that he was due to learn.

Working from sunrise until sunset and doing his chores by lantern light, Laban carried on. Yvonne learned to milk, and often she had all the lighter chores done when her sweaty and dust-stained man came following his weary team down the lane in the gathering dusk. Night after night they sank into the sleep of exhaustion a moment after their heads touched the pillows. What help young Laban absolutely had to have, he hired. Alone, but game, Yvonne wrestled in the kitchen with the task of preparing meals for numbers of hungry, sweat-drenched men. The wheat was finally harvested and threshed.

"That helps a lot," smiled Laban, exhibiting the check for the wheat crop to his wife. "If we do as well with the corn, we will be able to meet this year's payments on the farm and have a nice little roll left over to go in the bank."

"That's fine," said Yvonne, smiling gamely. Then timidly: "Maybe your people won't think you picked such a poor wife when they hear that we've made our way this year."

Laban folded her into his arms. His gray eyes narrowed a little and his lips tightened.

"Don't you worry about my people," he said. "You are worth the whole kit and caboodle of them."

With the harvest and threshing out of the way, there came a breathing-spell. Young Laban leisurely plowed his ground and sowed his winter wheat. Then they waited for frost, and time to husk the bountiful crop of corn ripening on the "east eighty." They also waited for the coming of Laban the Sixth, expected in January.

The corn dried slowly. Every day Laban, with Yvonne at his side, would walk into the field and inspect the backward grain. He was impatient to begin the task of gathering the yellow ears into the crib. All signs pointed to an early winter. Many of the stalks had fallen with the weight of their heavy ears. If snow came before the crop was gathered, those precious ears would be buried until spring and their quality seriously injured. During their tours of inspection, Laban showed Yvonne how the husking was done, laughing at her attempts to imitate him.

At last the mercury fell and soil and grain were frozen dry. It was the middle of November. In a brittle winter dawn, Laban hitched a team to his husking wagon and rattled off down the lane.

Half an hour after her man had gone to the field, Yvonne, coming from the cow-barn with two brimming pails of milk, heard a wagon clattering along the frozen lane toward the house. Then a winded, driverless team came in sight—the team her husband had driven to the field.

Yvonne dropped the pails of milk and headed off the running team. Gathering up the dragging lines, she climbed into the wagon and managed to turn the horses around and head them back toward the field.

She found Laban desperately dragging himself toward the house. His right leg was broken just below the knee. The young team, naturally high-strung and on edge from a long period of inactivity, had started to run when the first ear hit the bump-board. Leaping for the lines tied to the side of the wagon, Laban had been dragged under the rear wheel.

Stopping the now weary team, Yvonne managed to follow her husband's white-lipped instructions and remove the rear endgate. Then she helped him into the wagon and drove as carefully as possible to the house. There she tied the team to the windmill and ran to the house, where she telephoned for Doctor Ross, physician to the Cartwrights for more than two decades.

Two hours later the broken leg was in a plaster cast and Laban was in bed. Doctor Ross departed, after instructing Yvonne in the care of her injured husband. Sitting on the edge of the bed, Yvonne looked down upon Laban's pain-whitened face. Catastrophe had overtaken them. The broken leg would keep Laban out of the field for at least a month. Winter was dangerously near—and the corn must be cribbed before the snow buried the fields.

"Dear," said Laban, covering his wife's little hand with his huge brown paw, "you'll have to drive into town and try to hire a man to husk the corn."

"All right," said Yvonne. "I'll go right away."

Two hours later Yvonne returned from town. Her errand had been fruitless. Despite the high wages being offered, corn-huskers were not to be hired at a moment's notice. There were six jobs for every man. She reported her failure to her helpless husband.

"But never mind, dear," she concluded. "Mr. Jackson

promised to watch for a man for us. He will send out the first one that he finds. In the meantime, I'm going out and husk what corn I can."

Her husband's protests were in vain. He couldn't get out of bed. She laughed, kissed him, and departed, promising to be back to the house at noon to look after his needs.

In town, Doctor Ross entered his office and picked up the telephone. Presently he was talking to Laban the Third, present head of the clan. The Doctor talked without mincing words. When he had finished he snapped up the receiver in a manner that said plainly: "If you don't like what I've said, go plumb to hell."

It was half-past eleven o'clock. Yvonne, in a rolled-up pair of her husband's overalls, was husking corn. She had been in the field more than an hour, but there was less than two bushels of corn in the wagon. Gamely she stuck to her self-imposed task. But she wondered how she was going to get the team unharnessed at night and harnessed again in the morning. Then she set her lips tightly. She would manage it somehow!

Yvonne's small, tender-skinned fingers were bleeding where they had been cut by the tough and frozen husks. Tears trickled down her olive-skinned cheeks and dropped in salty splashes on the stubborn husks with which she wrestled. She brushed the tears away with the back of her lacerated hand and stuck to her hopeless task.

The sound of a wagon, rattling over the frozen ground, drew her attention from her task. She stood erect and turned toward the sound. Approaching at a swinging trot, came a bay team, drawing a careening husking-wagon. In the wagon stood Laban the Third and Laban the Fourth. Behind their wagon came others, many others. Yvonne stood in puzzled, open-mouthed wonder. The first wagon drew up beside her. Laban the Third, tall, gaunt and grizzled, but hale and erect at sixty-seven, climbed down and faced her.

" 'Lo, Yvonne," he said. "You skedaddle back to the house and look after your man. He's askin' fer you. I'll take this wagon."

The voice of the old man was gruff, but his eyes were kind. Yvonne suddenly found herself unable to speak. She turned without a word and hurried away across the field toward the house. Realization had suddenly come to the girl. Dozens of husking-wagons, more than half of them manned by two overall-clad men, were coming down across the field in a long line. Into each wagon the yellow ears were flying with resounding thumps against the bump-boards. The Cartwright clan had rallied to the aid of a stricken kinsman!

Pushing aside the brittle brown stalks, Yvonne stumbled on toward the house where her man lay helpless in his bed. Tears were coursing unashamed down her dusty cheeks.

Aunt Jane looked up from several pots that were simmering on the stove as Yvonne opened the kitchen door.

" 'Lo, Yvonne," she greeted. "You run right on in and take care of your busted-up man. There are plenty of us womenfolks here to get grub on the table for that bunch out in the fields."

Yvonne was too full for words. She merely inclined her head and hurried on through the woman-filled kitchen. She dropped on her knees beside the bed where her husband lay.

"Darling," she sobbed, "they are all here—all your folks! The men are out in the cornfield with more wagons than I thought there were in the world. The kitchen is full of women. I'm so ashamed of all the things I have thought about all of them!" confessed Yvonne.

"Forget it," chuckled her husband. "They have all thought—and said—worse things about you."

"But you don't understand," sobbed the girl-wife.

"Don't I?" retorted the youngest Laban. "They are all doing exactly what I would do if anything like this happened to any of them. We Cartwrights may fight and wrangle over things, but when trouble happens we never fail each other."

When the sun sank below the western horizon that night, the last of young Laban's corn was in the cribs. Through the gathering twilight almost two score of wagons rattled on their homeward ways. In most of the wagons, a silent woman rode beside her weary man.

"Game little devil, that woman of Labe's," was the verdict of the men.

"Laban got a mighty good woman—even if he did find her in the city," was the declaration of the women.

"I love every one of them!" sobbed Yvonne, her dark head pillowed on the broad bosom of Laban the Fifth.

"You do just now," observed her husband. "There will be lots of times though, when you'll hate them like the devil hates holy water. But you will always know, from now on, that they will all bat for you, in a pinch—and you'll do the same for them. You are one of the clan now, sweetheart."

"I guess I am," she murmured happily.

Yvonne managed to follow her husband's white-lipped instructions. . . . She helped him into the wagon.

Keep-agoin' Kelley

A noted fire-horse survives the coming of the motor-engine to win fame in another field.

By JONATHAN BROOKS

Illustrated by Arthur Lytle

"WHAT you loafin' for?" the Chief yelled at us. "When there's a downtown two-alarm, you come on the run!"

"North End's not here yet," Dewey said.

"Never mind," says the Old Man. "Our boys got 'er whipped. But next time, don't jog in like that."

Dewey got off the wagon and told him, but the Chief wouldn't believe it. He saw North End was five blocks slower than we were, but he couldn't see how Kelley could pace Charley into a dead run, and still have the biggest hold on the doubletree. Nobody else saw how, but plenty saw it done. We certainly gave North End the laugh; yes, and East Side, and West Side too. Fastest team in town, even with Kelley pacin'. But it was too good to last. . . .

"Charley can't drag that hose, himself!" Dewey was sore.

"I'm trading you my black horse," the Old Man said.

So Kelley left us for the Old Man's buggy at Headquarters. Next time we saw his red hide and low-swingin' head was the day of the fire at the ax works. We were pullin' ladders off a truck, and a second and third had been sent in. Somebody yelled and we jerked a ladder out of the way just in time. There was a rush, and a cyclone blew by!

"Old Man thinks the fire's over in Springfield," yelled Dewey. It was funny. Kelley dragged the Chief and a kid drivin' for him past that blaze like an express. The Old Man drives back himself.

"Drug us a mile in the country," he laughed. "Old Keepagoin' sure takes you a ride!"

"Paces, don't he?" says Dewey.

"Yeah," the Chief says. "I'll do my own drivin', now. The kid can't hold him."

The Chief's an old man, but he weighs two hundred and ten, so he thought he could hold Keepagoin' Kelley, the red pacing fool. Maybe he could. But he told me once he had to learn a trick to stop Kelley. He'd swing on one rein a block before the fire, like he was going to turn. Kelley would slow. Chief would jerk the other rein, and Kelley had to stop—or hit a tree or fence.

Chief got cocky with Kelley. Old Keepagoin' traveled so fast he could cover the whole town. Before long he begun to show up on first calls out in South End. He'd reach a fire before us, and bawl us for bein' slow. Dewey didn't like it. O'Connor, at North End, told the Old Man to get the hell outa there with his runaway!

"Gotta have *somebody* here early," the Chief laughed at him. "If you guys can't run five blocks while I do a mile out from town, I'll have to get some drivers."

"Aw, get us some race-horses," said O'Connor.

I got a transfer to Headquarters to work on the steamer, and heard a lot about how the four stations felt with the Old Man watchin' them at every bunch of smoke. He got to be a regular hawk, all because of Kelley's speed.

And he was a sight, sittin' up there in his rubber-tired buckboard, feet braced and hands fightin' to hold this red pacin' fool! His white mustache bristled in the wind, and his old eyes sparkled like stars. But I'm tellin' you this—our whole city got a reduction on fire-insurance rates because, after Kelley'd been haulin' the Chief a year, we got our work down so much better!

The whole town was proud of Kelley. People would run for blocks to get to Main Street or High, to see him pacin' high, wide and handsome for a fire in the suburbs.

In the barn he was a mild old plug; never offered to do anything out of the way. Ate hearty, and fattened up a little in spite of the strenuous work the Old Man give him. His only trouble was pacing. I inquired around, and learned he'd been on the track six years. But he never got enough pacing, see? Any time he got in between shafts, he put his head down and went—and kept goin', as tight as he could. Once the Chief went to a funeral, and drove Kelley—but it was a bad mistake, for Kelley thought all life was a fire-run!

He was always gentle and friendly. Sound as a dollar. You couldn't fault him, except he hit himself when he was goin' full speed. Struck with his right forefoot, and we had to put a quarter-boot on him, so he wouldn't cut himself to pieces. And game— Listen! Once I made a run for the Chief by myself. It was a thrill, but when I saw I didn't have a chance to hold Kelley, it was a chill! About a mile past the fire we came to the end of a street with a brick wall in front of us. Old Kelley slid himself to a stop!

"What's the matter, kid?" they asked when I got back.

"Nothing," I lied. "Had a nice run."

"You must have," they said. "What's all that blood?"

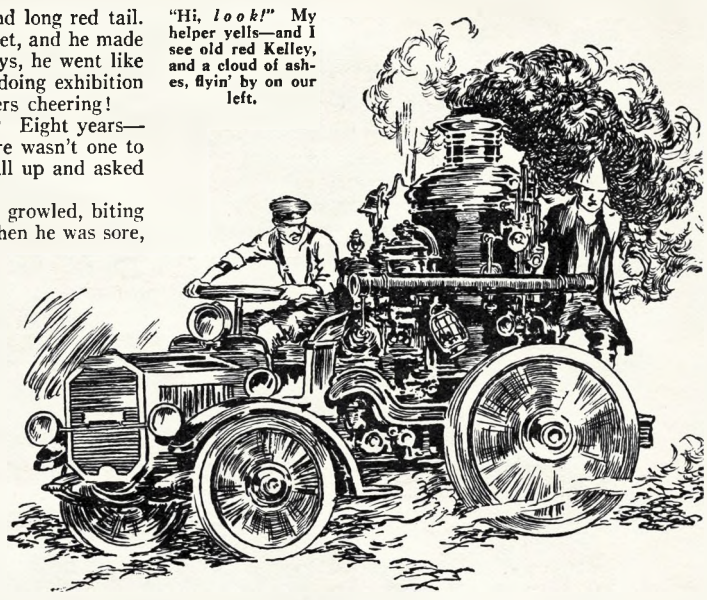
My shirt and face were covered with blood! We looked, and I'd taken old Kelley out without his quarter-boot. But did the pain of cuttin' himself hold him back? Not him! He'd have bled to death before he slowed down. An hour later Chief went to a three-alarm on the West Side, and Kelley didn't whimper; whirled the Old Man out there like he'd never had a scratch!

Kelley was a picture horse; he had a white face, and

four white stockings, a long red mane, and long red tail. We got some leather pads to protect his feet, and he made a *clup-clup* noise on the pavement. Always, he went like the wind. He may have thought he was doing exhibition miles—what with the crowds at the corners cheering!

This thing went on—how long, you say? Eight years—with hardly a day, fair or foul, when there wasn't one to five runs. This old dynamo-heart ate it all up and asked for more. But there's an end.

"Of all the infernal messes!" the Chief growled, biting his mustache. Nobody said anything. When he was sore, we kept still. "Goin' to motorize the Department," he said. "Automobiles. Burn gas, instead of oats. We got the best horses in the Middle West, but out they go! D'you think the Board appreciates what we've got, what we've done?"



"Hi, *look!*" My helper yells—and I see old red Kelley, and a cloud of ashes, flyin' by on our left.

We got the story. The underwriters reduced fire-insurance rates here again, and gave us A-A rating. Chamber of Commerce got busy and figured this saved the city half a million dollars. Asked the underwriters, how can we save some more? They said, motorize; you've got the lowest rate for a horse department, but it is not as good as motor departments. Besides, a factory here that makes motor fire-trucks got busy after business. Home-town appeal, see?

"Chief," I said, "does that mean *all* horses are out?"

"That's what they said," he muttered.

"Of all the dumb tricks!" I said. I was the Chief's assistant, now. "Kelley, too? Don't they know Keepagoin' got us this A-A rating? Do they think if the Chief, thanks to Kelley, wasn't on the necks of these four stations, we'd be where we are? Don't they know old Keepagoin' *paced* us into this half-million saving?"

Bill Hanlon said if Kelley went he'd go, too. Joe Orset said the same, and Tompkins, and—well, it looked like a general strike.

"Wait, boys," said the Old Man. "Think I'm a yellow pup? They whipped me on the Department, but I'll keep Kelley!"

Everybody yelled, and we went over to Kelley's stall and held a reunion, right there! I think the old red horse knew what was happening, because I'm telling you—after we got this apparatus, and the factory supplied fat-heads to drive these red and brass trucks, and gasoline smelled to hell all around, old Kelley lets out a link. The Old Man gives him his head, to prove he and Kelley are right. If you thought Keepagoin' moved before, you should see him settle down to show up these machines! He was tearin' himself!

"Old Kelley got four cylinders, or six?"

That was Bill Dewey, one day. Chief and I paced out to see how South End handled a two-alarm. Bill stood pop-eyed when he heard us comin', because they'd just got there and hadn't throwed a drop yet!

"Only one—a cylinder you call a heart!" I said.

Old Kelley kept right on putting out his foot, and the Old Man kept right up to now, or a little sooner. Maybe we weren't proud of our old picture pacin' horse! But this extra speed meant the end of Kelley.

"Chief was on hand early," said a paper one day.

"Kelley holds his own with the motors," said another one.

Somebody wrote a story about how Kelley outstepped the high-priced motor apparatus, and people laughed at the equipment hustling to hold its own against an old horse. Then there was a backfire: People begun to crab at the waste of money. If a horse can outrun machines, why put taxpayers' money in machines? The factory crowd gets busy, and there is a battle.

We get up a petition, and every guy in the five stations signs it, and gets everybody he knows to sign it. One of the papers goes to bat for us. But the Chief carries the load. He goes to the mat with the Mayor, the Board, Council and Chamber of Commerce, and fights 'em to a standstill. He's been puttin' out fires for this town since it was a pup. We've got the lowest insurance rate and the lowest loss per capita for cities our size. He'll run this Department!

That draws fire to him, away from Kelley. One editor, with auto advertising, says it is not necessary to keep a man until he is a hundred. New blood, with modern ideas, can do as well, he said. Of all the low-down! It was just as well *his* newspaper didn't catch fire!

I get hold of the boys, and they'll stand by me. So I go to the Chief and tell him we'll walk out with him.

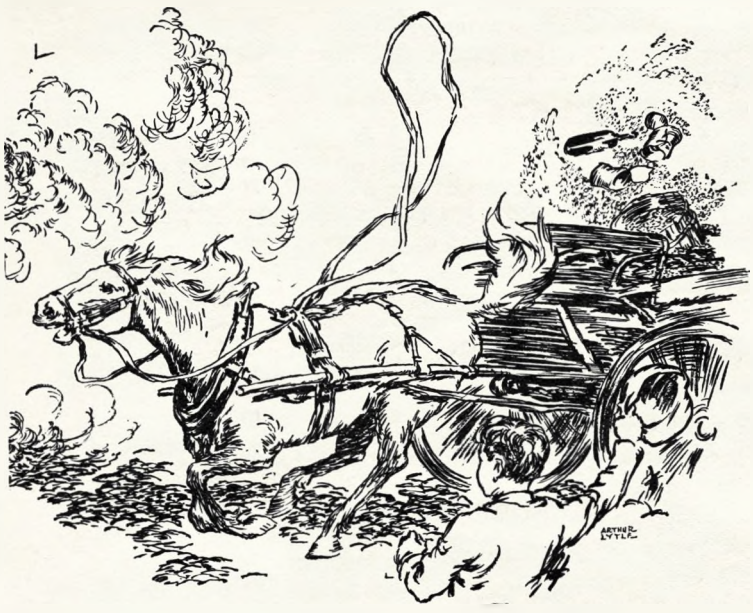
"Listen, kid!" The Old Man was always there early with the cold water. "Much obliged! But I'm an old man, nearly seventy. My girl's almost through college. The boy's an invalid, and the missus is not well. I'm a poor man. All I've got is a little farm, and I've got to hang onto this farm till next year—when the girl finishes college, and maybe she can teach. Then, with my pension, I'll get along, somehow; but I've got to hold on for a while."

The Old Man blew his nose. "I didn't tell you, but during this ruckus, they've bought a roadster with brass lamps and a siren on 'er. She'll be here in a few days," he said.

"But, Chief—" I begun.

"No use—I'm licked," he muttered.

That was the end of old Keepagoin' Kelley. We give him a farewell banquet in the station, and to hell with even a three-alarm, see? When the ashman that bid twenty-five dollars for him come to take him away, we loaded his wagon with oats and hay and threw in a good blanket. This guy would keep old Kelley in a shanty, probably. If you think it was any fun, sayin' good-by to Kelley—



Well, I'll say this for motors. In the old days, the ladders and the steam were slow to a fire. But motors are geared, maybe. Hose is still light, but the ladder truck has a little more power, and the steamer more yet. We go on a call now, and the three of us are nose and tail. I'll hand 'em that. But it changes my job, on the steamer. I used to drive, and my helper built the fire so's to get steam up. But I can't drive a truck, so my helper runs it. I build my own fire. One chilly morning in the fall, we're on a downtown call, all of us.

We roar out, *bonging* to beat the band—the Chief, with his chauffeur, hose, ladders, then us—not a half block apart. I duck down in behind my engine. I've got my fire kerosened so she'll start, and I reach in between the grates with a torch to light 'er, then climb back up.

"Hi, *look!*" my helper yells.

I peek around in time to see old red Kelley—damn his hide—and a cloud of ashes, flyin' by on our left! Maybe you think there's no jump in my chest! Kelley!

"Runaway!" hollers my helper.

"That's what *you* think," I snaps.

The ashes clear away and I see old Keepagoin' take the ladders, just ahead. Then the hose! He'll get to the Chief—and good Lord, he's got no bell on his dray—he'll crash! My heart's in my teeth. I'm hangin' on with one hand, leaning out to see what happens. The Chief slows for a corner, but old Kelley keeps goin'—"*get there*" is his motto, same as always. He swings right on, and a block down Main Street he skips, hops, puts out his feet and slides to a stop where there's a crowd. He beat Headquarters and its new automobiles! The crowd gives him a hand.

The Chief gave him an arm around his neck, and patted his nose. That was how they stood when a reporter come up with his camera. It wasn't much of a fire,—the hose guys didn't even get to swing an ax,—but I wish you'd seen the story that *Dispatch* boy wrote about this run, and Keepagoin' Kelley!

But he didn't get the important thing. The ashman come along cryin', and without battin' an eye, we bought old Kelley back for ten bucks—chipped in in two minutes —and presented him to the Chief. This, on top of everything, gets the Old Man. He sort of wilts, and damn' near cries! A man who's been on big bad fires, pulled out people alive or dead, and—But this was *Kelley*, see?

Back home— But wait! They've tore out Kelley's stall to make room for the red roadster. No place for Kelley. The Old Man hasn't got a barn. Who wants Keepagoin' in a livery-stable? If it wasn't for the Water Department, we could still have Kelley on the job. If the Board would put some jet in the water plant and make 'em give us pressure when we need it, we'd have a lower insurance rate without losin' Kelley, or buyin' all this expensive apparatus, see?

What I'm gettin' at is this. The Old Man goes to pieces. Things have got out of his hands. He's been hard in the hand and head, runnin' this Department like a he-guy—rough on us, but doin' the job! Not a guy in the department who wouldn't go to hell for him without a hand extinguisher! Regular tyrant—and when a man like that loses his grip, he loses it all at once. Sickness in his family, hard up for cash, old age, modern ideas jammed down his throat—all of 'em combined 've got the Old Man.

"Kid," he says, after we've taken Kelley to a livery-barn, an old frame shack, liable to burn quicker'n whiskers—no place for Keepagoin'—"I'm all done. Can't go. You make any runs for me, and have Ed handle your fire."

I ask him where he is going, and he says the Mayor's office. He don't come back for a week. The city's poor, but will pay his wages to January first; then our fund takes hold of him. After thirty-seven years of fightin' every damn' fire in town, the Old Man is done, just before seventy! We give him a dinner that *is* a dinner, and old Bill Dewey cried! Things won't be the same, without the Chief—and Kelley.

"But boys, there's this," the Old Man said. "I've got a little barn on my farm. Old Keepagoin' will have a home as long as he lives. Or,"—and he blew his nose,—"as long as *I* live."

Believe me, there'll never be another Old Man, any more than there'll ever be another Kelley!

Christmas week, we got a telephone-call from the farm. The old lady was all upset, and no wonder. The gang said I'd better go, and I called up Bill Dewey, and we went.

The Chief had gone in a lane with Kelley harnessed to a buggy, and got out to talk to a man about some wood. His wife wanted him to come to dinner. She hobbled out in the yard and rung an old dinner-bell. The Old Man jumped for the seat, of course, because he had the lines in his hand. Kelley went through a gate hells'-bells-for-breakfast, because he knew when the bell rings and the harness is on, the crew looks out for itself.

Well, the Old Man can't make the seat. He breaks his leg and sprains his shoulder. And there he is, an old man, laid up. The old lady can hardly get around, and the invalid boy is no help. The girl is due back at college in a few days, and they need help. I felt sorry for him,

—but it's hard to feel very bad about the Chief. He's got his tail up!

"Didn't have the sense to unhook Kelley," he said. "Or tie him. Tough on the folks—but I'll be out in a few days!"

Poor old Keepagoin', *he* was the one to feel sorry for! We went in the barn, and if you'll believe it, Kelley was the ashamedest horse you ever saw. He sorta perked up when we showed at his manger, but then he hung his head again.

"If you guys hadn't let them ship us out here, this never would have happened." That's what he seemed to mean. A horse can't express himself, like a dog, but a blind man could have seen how bad old Kelley felt. We tried to kid him out of it. Bill found him an extra feed, thinkin' the old lady didn't know how much to give him. I give him a good rub, and put a blanket on him. You talk about pacers bein' cold-blooded horses? It's a lot of hooey! There never was a warmer-hearted horse than Kelley, and when he went somewhere, he went a-boiling!

We took turns, Bill and I, going out on our days off to cheer up the Old Man and give Keepagoin' a rub. Kelley's so low his hipbones begin to stick out, and a couple ribs show. I'm sure it's not because he's overworked, for he's not been out o' the stall. But one day in February he sure cheers up. Chief's around now, on a crutch, r'arin' to go.

"Let's drive in town for some tobacco," he says.

I hook up Kelley to an old sleigh, and come past the porch. When Kelley saw the Old Man, I thought he'd stand on his head! If a horse could talk, he'd give a college yell! He danced and kicked like a colt in pasture.

"Started behind—and hauled two men! Sell your pacer to us, Mister?"

On the way in, four miles, we get to talk. The Old Man is blue, for while he knew he would have expenses, he never knew Kelley would break a leg for him. It costs more to live in the country, unless you've been there in the summer and raised your grub. Finally, this house is heated with stoves,—no furnace,—and his wife is half sick because she can't keep warm. I never saw him so low.

"We'll stick it out," he said. "But I don't see how, and keep Ellie in school."

It is a shame a man can put in his life fightin' fires, and then retire with only a pension—which he helped build!

We come to town. First thing I know, I'm in a horse-race. We hear a yell in a crowd, and Kelley almost jerks this old heavy sleigh out from under us. We're off—a block late, but we're off!

Kelley's going! He blame' near tears my arms out. Dodges some people, swings around in the gutter past a team, and sets sail! Down the street go three horses to light cutters, and Kelley's on their trail. Chief's braced, and I decide to let Kelley pace. *Let* him? Try and stop him!

"Three-alarm!" yelled the Old Man.

In two blocks we cut their lead in half. Two more, and Kelley goes around. Can't run over them, so he swings, skidding, into the gutter again. Misses some people on the curb, and swings in sharp to miss a milk-wagon. Takes the lead! I can't see any finish-line, but that don't matter, for we keep going. If it hadn't been for a bridge, we'd be going yet.

We finally stop, and turn around. Back to town we go, looking for a store. We come to some people standing around the horses that had raced. The crowd left them to look us over.

"Heavy square-cut sleigh," says one guy, real excited. "Started behind—and hauled two men! Sell y'r horse, Mister?"

"Two hundred for him," yells another one.

"Great galoshes," says a third. "He's not rough-shod—he went that clip on pads, on ice! Three hundred—four?"

"Gee whiz, kid," says the Old Man. "I'd hate to give up Kelley, but you know, we've got to do something—"

"Hold on," I said. Why are these people shoving money at me?

In the little store, we pick up the dope. One of the horses in that race has been winning free-for-alls at county fairs the last three years. He's a favorite to win the Ice Derby at Ogden, next week. He can step, that little gray nag. But old Keepagoin', slip-shod, and after draggin' a heavy sleigh four miles, has left him like he was tied! These local sports want to clean up on the Ice Derby.

"Sell your pacer to us, Mister?" one of the guys asked me, again. He thought Kelley was my horse.

"No, he's been in the family fifteen year," I said. "We'll keep him." The guy couldn't believe Kelley's age!

I buy liniment for Kelley, and when the Chief's warm, we start home. He wants to know what I'm up to, and I tell him I'll let him know. I don't tell him I've queered the sale. I've got an idea.

These people at Ogden, sixty miles north of here, know their business and are good sports. If I was to name any better sports, the only people I could name would be the gang right in this Department. Up at Ogden they've got a lake, and every winter they race horses on it, Saturdays. Late in February they put on a big ice carnival with the Derby as the big feature. It's for pacers. They charge fifty bucks to enter, and the first-place money is one thousand dollars. They get great crowds from all over.

Bill Dewey busted into this job. Every guy in the Department worked, and kicked in. The day came; Bill and I are a committee, with a sub named Fisher, who can get off without asking. Bill and I ask the Board for leave, and get turned down. We go to the Mayor and he's heard about the stunt and the Old Man's troubles.

"No," he says, winkin' at us. "If you go, you'll be absent without leave, and the Board, the Council, and I, will be there watching you!"

About fifty more went along, too. We ask 'em on the train to lay off betting, so's not to shorten the odds, and they all say they will. At first we got some five to one, but pretty soon it was down to three, and then only two to one. Made me sick, and Bill too, for we were layin' the money. But even so, when it was all down, we stood to win about fifteen hundred dollars if only old Kelley—

"You get the Chief, Bill," I said, after noon at the hotel. "Fisher and I'll bring out Kelley."

SO I rub Kelley's white stockings with some liniment against the hard pounding on the ice, and the cold, and put on the quarter-boot, and we hook him to a sleigh Fisher has rented—a little light spider. Kelley's sharpshod so he can pace on glass, even, and out we go. There's a big crowd, thousands and thousands from all over.

The track's parallel to shore, about twenty-five yards out, all swept off, slick as buttered onions. Seven other pacers jog around to keep warm. Kelley makes eight. He's drawn outside, farthest from shore—Number Eight. So we go over, and stand. I'm afraid to jog old Kelley for fear he'll think it's time to go, and you know, when Kelley thinks it is time, he *goes!*

"Hello, kid," I hear the Old Man's voice. He's nere without his crutch. "Kelley, too," he says. "So this is what you're up to, hey?"

"Thought you'd like to see the old horse go," I said.

"See him go? Go with him, you mean, kid!"

"But Chief, you're not— Your leg—that shoulder—"

"Hell with 'em," snaps the Old Man, his white mustache bristling. "No strain—I'll be pushing, not pulling!" he says. He goes around to say hello to Kelley, and Keepagoin' is tickled to see him. He reaches out his white muzzle, grabs the Old Man's coat, and begins to dance, like the bell's rung and the door's stuck so he can't get out to his hook-up. That gets the Old Man. He'll drive!

They yell for everybody to get back and score down slow. The Old Man climbs in, and Bill and I hold Kelley's bridle. We turn him around and walk him back from the start a piece. Our crowd roots for us.

"Boys," says the Chief, when we swing the right way of the track, and old Kelley is fighting to get his head, "Kelley and I are not goin' on any more runs without each other!"

I've thought about that a lot, since, but right then I was busy lettin' go of Kelley's head, and jumpin' back. They're scoring down, and Keepagoin' is on his way!

"Go!" the judge hollers. At the same time we hear a fire gong, and then a bunch of sirens going—and Kelley takes the road! I see the Old Man's head snap back and I see that spidery cutter slithering hither and yon.

Our Mayor rang that gong, and the Board and Council worked their sirens—the very guys that ditched us out of Kelley and Chief! But they can't make Kelley think he's goin' to a three-alarm. He knows it is a horse-race, and the Old Man, *his* Old Man, is going with him. So he went—boy, he went!

We duck out on the ice, away from the course, a straightaway, and start toward the finish, straining our eyes. A cloud of icy snow, kicked up by the calks, keeps us from seeing. Old Kelley and the Old Man disappear in front of the cloud. We keep movin' out on the lake, and pretty soon we see it is a three-horse race—Kelley, and this little gray pacer, and a big black horse from a Grand Circuit string. Are they goin'—well, Kelley's white stockings seem to melt right into the ice. We can't see 'em, he picks 'em up and lays 'em down so fast. Then the gray drops back, leaving Kelley and the Grand Circuit.

"Boy, if he can take him—" groans Bill Dewey.

"Sure, he'll take him," I said. The pair are just about out of sight, but the crowd line along the shore yells so we know there's a horse-race. When they slide by the little stand way down shore, old Kelley's flattened out so he looks like a low red streak of fire on the ice.

Grand Circuit is stepping some himself, and they make it a horse-race, nose and nose, right down to the finish—so hot you'd think the lake would melt right under them. The crowd down at the end takes up the yell that's followed the horses along the shore, to welcome these two fightin', flyin' racers home. And right with the yellin' we hear a siren going, and bells a-bongin', and we know our gang has got down there to root old Kelley home!

"They've finished—they're out o' sight," pants Bill. "I can't tell—"

But I'm smarter. I hear the siren still screaming, and the gongs still a-bongin', and I know that means the Mayor, Council and Board are celebrating! Kelley's won!

"He's in front!" I yell—and we start down there. When we get almost there walking, Grand Circuit is back, and the gray horse, and the others. But Kelley is not back yet.

"Fire's not out," laughs Bill. "Old Keepagoin'—"

But I'm worried. Maybe the Old Man can't pull him down; maybe his bum leg, or his sprained shoulder— So I hurry. Bill comes too, and Fisher. Pretty soon we see a little huddle, way down the ice, that's not moving. We break into a run. Before we get there, and it's a quarter of a mile, we hear a shot. Oh, Lord! Seems like a year before we reach 'em.

Chief's sitting on the ice, with Kelley's head in his lap. He's got his gun in his hand, and there's an ugly red blotch on poor old Kelley's white face. Blood is on the Old Man's clothes, and the Old Man is lifting his gun hand kind o' queer. Boy, we *move!* Old Bill grabs the gun, and I put my arm around the Chief!

"You haven't shot your—" Bill can't finish.

"No,"—the Old Man smiles sick-like. "This is Kelley's blood. His boot came off, and he cut himself to pieces with those calks. But did he quit? Killin' himself every step—but you saw him go! Down there's open water—been cutting ice. I tried to swing him—but he crossed his legs and down he went! Threw me out; sled went over him."

"Good Lord, Chief!" says Bill Dewey. "Hurt you?"

"Don't know. Broke my leg for me, once," says the Chief. "Broke *his* for me, this time! I had to shoot him, boys; I couldn't see him suffer. Keepagoin' Kelley—he's gone, all the way!"

THAT night we get everything cleaned up. Collect the thousand for winning. Take fifteen hundred net from our bets, holding out the pot our gang made up for the Old Man—and Kelley. The Mayor shows up, with his Board and Council, and we see why the odds on Kelley melted so fast. Those fellows can't do anything for the Chief officially, but they show their hearts was in the right place by bettin' enough dough to win another fifteen hundred for the Old Man. And the Mayor says he'll sure lay on the school board for a job for his girl, next year.

The Old Man wasn't going to take the money, at first—only the thousand Kelley won him, till we shove it on him, hard. But old Keepagoin', damn his hide, won't—

The Murder in the Park

A fascinating mystery in which the accusing finger of suspicion at first wavers, then at last points definitely.

By WILSON E. ALBEE

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

SCARCELY slackening speed for the turn from Baker Street, Detective-sergeant Clarence Mills swung the long blue police car into the Panhandle and sent it hurtling along the curving driveway.

Leaning slightly forward, both hands gripping the wheel, every nerve and muscle in his lean body was set for instant action. His alert blue eyes swept the road ahead. Trees, shrubs and lawn whirled past in a blur of green.

Slumped low in his seat beside the driver, Parker Gates, police reporter for the San Francisco Evening *Times*, braced himself against the lurch and swing of the car as it made the turn. His ears were buried in the high, upturned collar of his overcoat against the biting swirl of air over the windshield. A battered felt hat was pulled tightly over his head.

Mills touched a button on the steering-wheel, and the crescendo scream of his siren pierced the early-morning stillness.

Ahead the big red eye of the stone traffic monument at the Stanyan Street crossing blinked its intermittent warning. Mills removed his foot from the gas-throttle and placed it tentatively upon the brake pedal. Again the siren's wail rose and fell above the roar of the exhaust.

Motorists, obedient to the warning, pulled to the side of the road and stopped. Mills' foot descended upon the gas-throttle. The pulsing roar of the exhaust increased. The car shot ahead.

Then, from the right, a machine suddenly nosed into the intersection a hundred feet away. Startled by the screaming siren, the driver looked up, saw the red side-lights of the big car hurtling down upon him, jammed on his brakes and stalled his engine.

Mills knew that he could not stop in that distance. Escape to the left of the traffic signal was blocked. He yanked the wheel sharply to the right, sharply back to the left, straightened out with a dangerous swing and shot through the gap separating the stalled machine and the stone traffic monument.

Two inches either way, and the police car would have piled up, a tangled mass of wreckage. With an angry roar and a defiant scream of its siren, the blue machine leaped into the wide main driveway of Golden Gate Park.

A mile farther on, Mills turned the machine abruptly to the left and entered, at slackened speed, a narrow lateral roadway. Following its graveled twists and bends for a short distance, the car rounded a sharp turn. A uniformed officer stepped out ahead and held up his hand. Mills brought the car to a stop at the side of the road.

"Hello, O'Bannon," he greeted the officer. "What now?"

Gates emerged from in hiding under his overcoat. With both hands he reached up and lifted the tightly pressed-down hat from his head, disclosing a red line where the band had hugged his forehead and above which was an abundance of dark brown hair.

"Greetings," he grinned, saluting the officer with a pudgy hand. "I hope you've picked us a good one this time and not one of your worthless park bums."

"Good mornin', Sergeant," said O'Bannon in a broad, Irish brogue, touching his cap with an immense, hairy hand. He turned to the reporter.

"And you, young man—shame on ye and yer tribe! It's gory souls ye have within yer carcasses. Nivver satisfied to have a poor, lonely wan with no money end his throubles with a bullet. No!" His big hands opened before him in a gesture. "Ye want 'em young, and ye want 'em purty, and ye want 'em rich and famous. Well,"—he aimed a knotty forefinger toward the other side of the road,—"dip yer scra'min' newspaper type in the blood av that wan, an' the divvil take the lot av ye!"

He stepped across the roadway to an opening through the trees and shrubbery. The two men followed him.

"It was along here I was walkin' just half an hour ago —six-thirty o'clock by me watch, Sergeant," explained the policeman. "I see something through the openin' here, and went over to have me a better look; an' there lay the poor gurrel just as ye see her now, Sergeant, with the gun on the ground and not a flicker av life in her body." He paused to remove his cap as he gazed upon the sight. "Rest her soul!" he added. "She's too young to have throubles the likes av that."

The three stood surveying the scene—O'Bannon, his uniformed bulk looming large; Mills, tall, lean, wiry, angular of features, giving the impression of being ready with quick hand and keen brain; Gates, shorter, inclined to corpulence, his dark eyes beneath thin, dark brows ever darting about, it seemed, in search of something new upon which to hang a bigger and more sensational headline.

The section of the park in the center of which they stood was heavily wooded. From the road where O'Bannon had hailed them, a narrow driveway had been cut through the trees and shrubbery leading into a circular clearing some hundred feet in diameter, where machines could be left while their occupants wandered about in the adjacent man-made wilderness. There was a damp crispness in the air, and the earthy smell of green things growing. Above the trees the last thin draperies of a night fog were being dissolved by the morning sun.

The eyes of the three men focused upon a green-painted bench beneath the low-hanging branches of a tree directly

across from where they stood. Upon that bench, enshrouded in a fur coat, lay the body of a girl. She lay upon her right side, her neatly shod feet hanging down, her head resting upon her shoulder with the right arm flung over the end of the bench, her fingers loosely pointing downward. On the ground directly beneath this hand could be seen the polished surface of a small revolver.

"Suicide?" asked Gates.

"I think so," replied the officer. "You can see for yerself."

In the top of one of the near-by trees birds twittered and gossiped. A squirrel—just a gray flash against the shadowy green—skimmed silently over the grass and vanished. The drone of a motor speeding along some distant park driveway penetrated the stillness.

While O'Bannon remained at the entrance to watch for the coroner, Mills and Gates crossed to the bench and stood looking at the still form. The girl's expensive fur coat had fallen partly open, disclosing a blotch of coagulated blood on the front of her printed silk dress. The coat, too, was considerably stained, but neither upon the bench nor upon the ground was there much blood.

The girl wore no hat. Her bobbed hair, which had been permitted to grow to some length, fell in a short cascade of bronze waves, partially hiding her face. Her left arm and hand hung limp across her body. Two slight but quite apparent parallel scratches were on the back of her fourth finger where the mark of a ring could be seen, but there was no ring. On the bench lay a small brown leather vanity case.

Gates moved around to the back of the bench, careful to avoid stepping where his footprints might be confused with any which had previously been made.

"Lord!" he exclaimed as he leaned over and carefully lifted the wealth of hair from the girl's face. "She's a looker, and no fooling!"

He reached for the small handbag on the bench, opened it, and exclaimed:

"Look here, Mills!" He withdrew a roll of bills and handed them to the detective. Then he took out a small mirror, gold compact, lipstick, two tiny lace handkerchiefs, a few odd pieces of silver. Nothing more. No card or scrap of paper which might give a hint as to the girl's identity could be found. He turned the vanity case slowly around, examining it on all sides for a monogram. There was none.

"Fifty-five dollars," announced Mills, handing the currency to Gates, who put it back with the other articles in the case and laid it back on the bench.

Mills turned his attention to the girl, studying her face, the position of her body, the marks on the ground in front of the bench. Then he took a handkerchief from his pocket and, stooping over, carefully lifted the revolver from the ground.

The revolver was a .32 caliber of the hammer type which was opened by a catch to expose the chambers for loading.

Turning it carefully over, he paused and gently drew from the mechanism a single silk thread of no more than an inch in length. Against the white of the handkerchief in which the gun was held, the thread showed a light tan color.

"That may mean something," he remarked to Gates, who stood at his side. "The girl wears nothing, as you can see, that will match this thread." He placed it carefully between the leaves of his notebook.

For a moment longer the men studied the revolver, one chamber of which had been discharged. Mills wrapped it carefully and placed it in his pocket. They turned their attention to the ground to study what the marks there might reveal.

"Funny," remarked Mills, "how that pistol lay on the ground. See!" He indicated with his finger. "It lay flat on its side. There is no mark to show that it struck muzzle-first or handle-first—just flat on its side; and it is a drop of at least a foot from her hand to the ground. Yet the indentation it made in this soft dirt is hardly noticeable."

He turned his attention back to the girl. She was, he judged, twenty-two or twenty-three years of age. Her face was that of a person of breeding and culture. The profile was of medium convex type. The features were very delicately modeled and suggestive of a sympathetic nature. Her eyelashes were long and slightly curled. Carefully Mills lifted one eyelid. The eye was light blue.

While Mills remained studying the girl, her clothing and the ground in front of the bench, Gates walked very slowly back around the circular parking space and to the entrance, stopping frequently to scrutinize the various marks in the soft earth.

At the entrance he paused to examine a recently made scar on the bole of a tree and the tire-marks which were adjacent to it. Taking out his penknife, he cut a small piece of the bark from the tree and placed it in his pocket.

Following the tire tracks from that point, he stepped out onto the driveway opposite the parked police car and followed along the edge for a short distance until he came to the clear imprint of a man's foot at the edge of the road. Almost opposite this he noted a few drops of oil, as though a car had stopped there. The tracks could be followed a little way into the shrubbery in the direction of the bench upon which the girl had been found, and then vanished as the ground became more firm. He could find, however, no impression in the dirt or the grass which would indicate that a woman had walked there.

Returning to the oil drippings on the roadway, he again

"The girl's voice was angry, so I threw on my flash and looked in."

studied the man's footprint there, and then walked through the shrubbery toward the bench, coming out directly behind it. There he found Mills nodding his head reflectively and holding in his hand a shoe which he had removed from the girl's foot.

"What do you make of this, Gates?" the detective asked as the newspaper man approached.

Gates took the shoe in his hand. Mills stooped, took the other shoe from the girl's stiffened foot and held it up. Considerable earth clung to the sides and bottom of each shoe, but on neither was there earth clinging to the toe.

It was apparent that if the girl had walked through the park to the spot chosen for her last act in this life, as her footprints indicated, she had either been uncommonly careful not to scuff her toes, something almost impossible of accomplishment in view of the uneven character of the ground and the fact that it must have been quite dark when she arrived there, or there must be some other explanation for the absence of dirt on the toes of her shoes.

Turning the shoes over, it was noted that on both sides of the instep on each shoe there were unmistakable prints as though the shoe had been gripped from the bottom between fingers and thumb, and these marks must have been made after the shoes had been tracked through the dirt.

It was possible that the girl had made the finger-marks herself, conceivably to shake sand from the inside of her shoes after reaching the bench. But would she have taken that trouble had she been in that state of mind which was leading her the next moment to shoot herself through the heart? Then too, an examination of her fingers revealed no signs of the dirt-stain which would have been left from gripping the muddy shoes.

The two men turned their attention to the girl's footprints. With their eyes they followed the trail across a short space of the soft earth to where the prints seemed to start at the edge of a grassy slope. Walking to that point they sought to follow the trail back farther.

At the edge of the grass were other broader marks, indistinct because of the more solid nature of the ground which was covered with short grass, but beyond that there were no prints or disturbances of the grass whatever. The girl's prints simply started from the edge of the grass and led in an almost straight line to the bench.

Another thing about the trail attracted attention. On each side and parallel to the girl's tracks, the ground had been disturbed and brushed over.

"It looks," said Mills, "as though an attempt had been made to cover some other trail here." He stooped down and examined the nearest of these marks. Over the surface of the ground was clearly shown such a mark as might have been made by some one brushing with the side of the hand.

Mills stepped carefully along the trail until he came to one of the marks which had been less thoroughly covered than the others. Carefully he began to remove the loose dirt which had been brushed into the more compact depression, and before many moments had uncovered the portion of a man's right shoe-print. The print was not quite flat, but was tilted slightly to the inside.

Arising, he sought a similar print on the other side of the girl's tracks and quickly uncovered that.

He turned to Gates.

"Now what do you make of it?" he asked.

THE reporter stood a moment studying the uncovered marks and the prints left by the girl's shoes.

"Just this," he said. "Here, give me that other shoe."

He stepped back to the grass next to where the girl's footprints started, placed one hand inside of each shoe, leaned over forward and pressed, first the right and then the left shoe into the soft earth, walking on hands and feet toward Mills, his own footprints falling on each side of the trail which he made with the girl's shoes held on his hands.

"A simple matter now to return and brush over my own footprints," he said, covering several as a demonstration.

They walked over to where slight drippings of oil were to be seen near the bench. Many of the footprints there had been brushed or scuffed over, but there were several which had been missed entirely. One of these, which was especially clear, Mills marked with a stick.

"I will get a plaster cast of that one," he remarked. "It may help later on."

From his vest pocket he took a small bottle, and into it placed some of the soil—a soil which he knew had been hauled into the park from a distance, and was not common.

"That may come in handy also," he remarked, returning the closed bottle to his pocket.

A POLICE photographer arrived in a small car, and Mills set him to work. A moment later the coroner and his assistants, accompanied by several other newspaper men, appeared at the entrance to the clearing.

"Listen, Gates," said Mills. "This is murder as sure as anything, but whoever did it has attempted to make it appear as a suicide. It may help us if we can let him think, at least for a time, that he has got away with it. You'll get a better story later if you let it go at suicide for the present."

Gates agreed readily; he knew that this was true.

"Bigger and better headlines is my motto, and you know it, Clarence. Don't let these birds from the other papers get wise to the murder angle. I'm taking one of those shoes." He indicated a bulge in his overcoat pocket. "Give it to you later."

Gates vanished toward the car line and a telephone, and Mills went to meet the coroner and give him whatever data was necessary for his immediate records.

It was late in the forenoon when Detective-sergeant Mills and Parker Gates met in a small conference-room of the detective bureau in the Hall of Justice.

"Well," said Gates as he slid into a chair, "spill it."

"Not a great deal to spill just yet," replied Mills, sitting down by the desk. "After you left the park, I gave the coroner the lay; and he agreed, so far as your beloved brethren of the press are concerned at the present, to let them have the impression that he thought it was suicide. In fact, the old boy himself half believes it is suicide."

"Let him keep on believing it for a while. What else did he say?"

"The coroner couldn't quite account for the fact that there was so little blood on the bench and ground. He said the coat had absorbed considerable and might have stopped the flow from spreading." He leaned back in his chair, bracing himself with one hand against the desk.

"The shot was directly through the heart," he continued, "and brought almost instant death, he said. Another thing that troubled him a little was the position of the body. As you remember, she had apparently been seated in the middle of the bench. Now, if the shot killed her instantly, she would have slumped over on the bench, all right; but the coroner said that a convulsive action sufficient to throw her arm and the revolver which she held in her hand over the end of the bench was an unusual thing. The gun was held so close to her body when the shot was fired that it burned her dress and flesh. She had been dead about eight or nine hours, he thought."

Gates glanced up at the high windows across which could be seen the shadow of the steel bars covering them and then back to his companion.

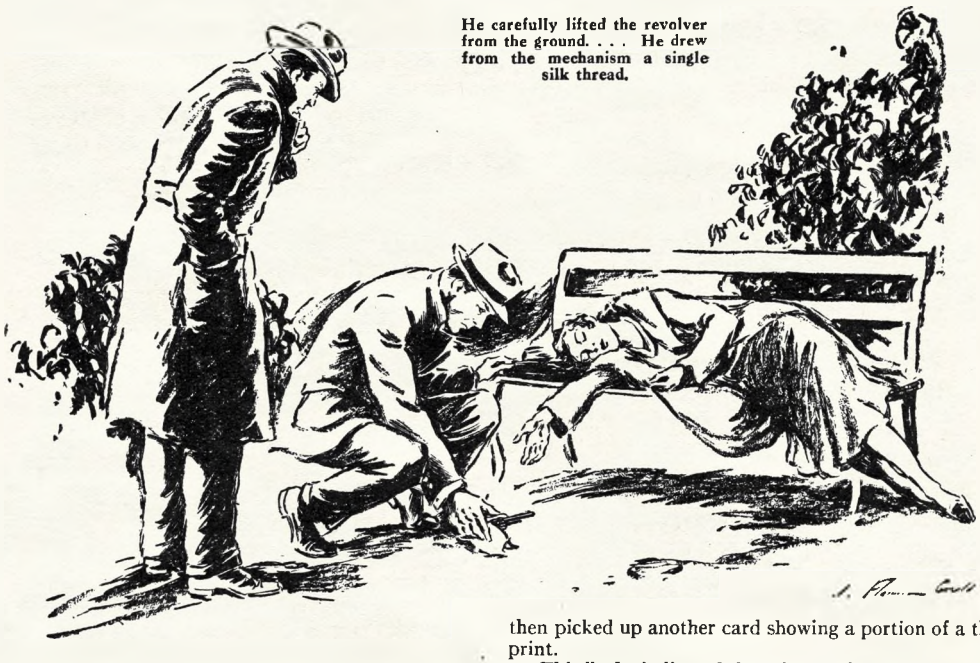
"That would place the firing of the shot at between ten-thirty and eleven-thirty last night," he commented.

"Yes."

"Any identification?"

Mills let his chair tilt forward to its natural position.

"No," he answered. "Not a thing definite. Her fur coat was bought from a store on Grant Avenue. I've just been there with it. They looked up the records and said



He carefully lifted the revolver from the ground. . . . He drew from the mechanism a single silk thread.

it had been purchased for cash about six months ago, and they could give me no information as to who bought it. Her vanity case, the label shows, was purchased in Sacramento, but I doubt if we will get anywhere there, because it is not an unusual box, and was most likely a cash purchase also."

Gates contemplated the shadow of the window on the gray-painted wall a moment.

"I may have better luck," he said. "This shoe,"—he tapped the wrapped parcel which he had brought in with him,—"may be the key. When I left you this morning, I took it to a friend of mine who is in the shoe business. We got the address of the manufacturers and wired them. Just before I left the office, their return wire came in with the advice that the shoes made from private last No. 17289 were for a customer of the Selber & Worthen Bootery in Sacramento. I have wired our correspondent there, Clem Salbridge, to look it up. Ought to be getting something from him before long."

Detective Mills smiled and slapped his companion on the knee.

"Good work," he commented. "I thought that was what you were up to when you carried the shoe away with you this morning. We will hope for the best." He reached into his pocket and took out a large envelope.

"Now," he commented, taking several cards from the envelope, "here is something interesting. It proves positively that the girl was murdered."

He spread the cards out on the desk.

"Here are two prints—one taken from the handle of the gun, the other from the girl's right hand. They are identical."

Gates leaned over to look at the cards.

"I thought you said they proved she was murdered. That proves that she herself held the gun—proves suicide," he said disappointedly.

"I mean just what I said," replied Mills. He reached into his pocket, took out the pearl-handled revolver and then picked up another card showing a portion of a thumb-print.

"This,"—he indicated the print on the card,—"was taken from inside of the gun." He broke the gun, opening the chambers. "Right here." He indicated the flat surface which fitted against the back of the cylinders when the gun was closed. "It is not the girl's fingerprint." Two other cards he took from the envelope and laid on the desk. "Nor were these two prints made by the girl. They are of a thumb and forefinger, and were taken from the sides of one of the shells in the cylinder—made by the person who dropped that shell into the gun."

Gates made a gesture of deprecation.

"But the person who loaded the gun may not be the one who fired it," he said. "Those inside prints may have been made weeks or months ago, may have no relation whatever to the case. They mean nothing."

"Correct you are," admitted Mills; "but just the same I would like to talk to the party who loaded the gun." He hitched his chair to a more comfortable position.

"Here, however, is the big point. Timkins, our identification-bureau expert, knows his stuff when it comes to getting fingerprints from any kind of surface without missing any. He went over this gun thoroughly, but he could not find a fingerprint of any kind on the barrel, on the outside of the cylinders, where it must have been handled, or"—he paused significantly—"on the face of the trigger."

"No mark on the trigger!" Gates exclaimed in astonishment.

"Not a sign."

Gates arose from his chair, took a turn about the four corners of the room and sat down again.

"Somebody must have pulled that trigger," he asserted.

"Somebody did," assented Mills.

Gates' dark eyes rested a moment upon the gun as it lay upon the desk. Then, picking it up, he broke it to be sure none of the cartridges remained in the cylinder. Snapping it closed, he tried the action. He was surprised at the ease with which it worked, the barest pressure of the finger being required to snap the hammer.

There was an eagerness in his manner now. He put the gun back on the desk and brought one fist to the palm of the other hand.

"I see it," he exclaimed, "as plain as day! The clean barrel, no mark on the trigger, the girl's palm mark on the handle of the gun, the silk thread caught in the hammer, no dirt in the muzzle, the light indentation in the ground. But—let's start at the beginning. Let me tell you what I see."

He glanced at Mills, but without waiting for his assent, continued:

"You saw me trace those tire-marks out there in the park. I went out onto the driveway. That's where we start now. . . . No, let's start with the automobile. I may be wrong, I may be right—but at any rate, it's something to go on."

HE rose and stood with hands thrust deep into his pockets. "The tire-marks were broad, fairly deep—about a thirty-three by six tire, I should guess. Wheel-base, judged from the deeper marks where the car stood, about one hundred twenty-two inches. Four-door inclosed model, because the tracks show where the driver got to the ground from the front seat, stepped into the back and out again, carrying something heavy. I say carrying something, because these second prints went deeper into the dirt. I say an inclosed car, because the broken branches and disturbed leaves of the tree overhanging the spot where it stopped show that. When we find that car, there will be a fairly distinct scratch running along its right side made by the point of one of the broken branches. The car is painted black, for I found a bit of the paint clinging to that broken branch.

"A trunk, or at least trunk-rack, will be found on the back, as shown by the distance between the tire-marks and a tree at the entrance of the clearing into which the machine backed in getting out. It has bumpers on the back, and"—he reached into his pocket and tossed onto the desk for Mills' examination the bit of bark he had cut from the tree—"a piece of bark like that clinging to the back bumper."

"Whoa! Whoa!" called Mills. "Say, do you furnish photographs with the lecture, and just what was the engine number of that machine?"

"I will furnish both if you give me time," returned the reporter with a slight show of heat. "That's the car I visualize, and that's the kind of a car I swear was used until you produce a different one."

Mills grinned good-naturedly.

"All right, all right, Mr. *Sherlock Holmes*. I'll be a good *Doctor Watson*. Want your needle?" He tossed the small bottle of earth, which he had brought from the scene of the murder, upon the table. "Might add that some of this is sticking to the tires some place."

"Exactly," Gates agreed heartily. "Some of that dirt will be found not only clinging to the tires, but in the nail-holes of the rubber heels worn by the murderer. Also, a cut will be found on the right rear tire. Front tires both have good treads, but the rear tires are fairly well worn."

"I saw that too," commented Mills.

Gates warmed up to his visualization of the scene at the park.

"Action! Camera!" he exclaimed. "It was midnight, or thereabouts. No moon, trees silhouetted dimly against a dark sky. Hardly a living soul in the whole of Golden Gate Park except for the traffic to and from the beach along the Main and South drives. A machine, an inclosed machine, cut across one of these lanes. Inside of that machine lay the dead girl—shot to death by the driver. The machine wandered for a time around the curving wooded roads until it came to an especially dark and lonely spot.

"Here the driver stopped, switched off his lights and waited to see whether anyone else was near. Satisfied, he got out of the machine. Perhaps he used a flash-light, but not for more than an instant's stab of light at a time, for he didn't want to be seen. He walked into the shrubbery a ways and came upon the green bench and the small clearing—a spot admirably secluded for his purpose.

"Back to his machine he started his engine again and drove into the clearing and to its far side under the overhanging branches of a tree. The branches scraped the side and top of the automobile. But it was better that way. They helped to conceal him from any chance passer-by."

Mills sat intently listening. "Following closely," he commented. "Go on."

"The driver shut off his engine, got out and walked to the bench. Then he returned, opened the rear door of his machine, stepped in and lifted the lifeless form of the girl from the floor. He carried her to the bench and placed her in the position in which we found her. Again he returned to the machine—I followed these maneuvers by his tracks when we were out there this morning, Mills. He returned and got the revolver and the girl's handbag which he placed on the bench.

"From his pocket he took a tan silk handkerchief and wiped the gun carefully to obliterate any of his own fingerprints. A thread of the handkerchief caught upon the hammer, but he did not notice. He forgot completely the inside of the gun, the parts he had touched in loading it. He pressed the handle of the gun into the girl's hand to get her prints upon it—wanted to make it look like she had shot herself.

"He knew the trigger action was set on a hair. He was nervous and in a hurry, and he was afraid to press the girl's finger against the trigger with sufficient force to make a print there, because he feared the gun might go off and attract attention. Either that, or in his hurry he simply neglected it.

"The girl's arm hung over the end of the bench. He stooped down and carefully laid the gun on the ground beneath her hand—not dropping it, mind you, from the position of her hand. That's why the mark of the gun in the dirt was so shallow, and why there was no dirt in the muzzle or chambers."

GATES paused in his recital, walked across the room and back. Mills waited without comment.

"Then what did he do?" asked the reporter, and answered his own question. "He knew that his tires were making clear marks in that soft earth. He knew that he was making footprints every time he took a step. You noticed how he had scuffed over most of them? Of course! But his own footprints gave him another idea. Some one might have seen him drive into the park, might have noted the number or might remember the description of his car. In some way those tire-marks might get him into trouble, and he thought it was a hopeless task to obliterate all of them."

The reporter paused, stood in front of Mills with feet spread apart.

"What would he do? Why, make it quite obvious to anyone who should discover the body that the girl had

The boy started to answer. Bronson's hand clamped across his mouth. "Get out!" he roared at Mills.

walked to the bench. He removed both of her shoes, crossed to the other side of the clearing and made her tracks to the bench just as I demonstrated it to you this morning."

Gates sat down in the chair beside the desk.

"This done," he continued, "and having covered, as he thought, all of his own tracks, he gripped the shoes by the bottom and shoved them back on the girl's feet. He climbed back into his automobile and started backing out of the clearing, not being able to drive on around the circle because of the position of his car under the tree. He did not dare turn on his lights. He backed into a tree, moved forward again, then backed and got out onto the driveway and drove away."

Gates drew a cigarette from his pocket and lighted it, awaiting the detective's comment. Mills toyed with the piece of bark on the desk.

"It's all written in sand, as the saying goes," said Gates, "but I think it's the right dope."

"Yes," agreed the Sergeant. "A rope of sand, but many a man has been hung by a rope of sand after those working on the case found something to make the sand stick together tight enough."

Gates blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"And I have a hunch, Mills, that you and I are going to discover the proper kind of glue, once we find out who the girl is."

"Who she is and why she was killed," added Mills.

"We know that the murder motive was not robbery," said Gates, "because of all that money left there in her vanity box."

"It was not money the killer wanted," the detective affirmed, "but something else. Did you notice her left hand?"

"No. Not in particular. Why?"

Mills picked up the revolver, spun it around his finger.

"The ring finger showed a mark as though she had been wearing a ring," he said, "but there was no ring. Also, on the back of that finger there were two parallel scratches —not deep, but scratches such as might have been made by the finger-nails of some one violently pulling a ring from her finger."

"Good Lord, Mills!" Gates suddenly exclaimed, bringing his fist down upon the desk and then reaching for the telephone. "Call the coroner. Here, I'll do it myself."

He removed the receiver from the hook and snapped a number to the telephone operator. There was a brief pause for the connection.

"Hello—coroner's office?" he spoke into the telephone. "This is Gates of the *Times* speaking for Detective-sergeant Mills. Say, do us a favor. Have some one look under the fingernails on the right hand of that girl brought in there from the park this morning. See if there are any bits of skin there. I'll hold the line."

After a pause of several minutes, the answer came back affirmatively over the wire. Gates hung up the receiver.

"Just so," he said. "The girl tore that ring from her own finger—made those scratches herself. There's our motive, Mills—a love quarrel. A row with her husband, if she was married; a row with her fiancé if it was an engagement ring."

It was shortly after one o'clock when the telephone on Mills' desk rang. It was Gates calling from his office, where he had been awaiting the telegram which had just arrived from the Sacramento correspondent of the *Times*. He read it over the wire to Mills:

"'Selber & Worthen say shoe last No. 17289 specially made for Miss Lila Casper. She is the twenty-two-year-old daughter of Joseph Casper, president Central City & Northern Bank, this city and is now visiting Miss Ethel Bronson, daughter of Garland Bronson, San Francisco broker. Left here ten days ago. Expected home about end of next week.'

"That's our lady of the park bench, all right," added Gates as he finished reading the telegram, "but I'm keeping it out of the paper until the second home edition. That will give us time to see Bronson before he knows what has happened. And by the way," he added, "the wire says *Miss* Lila Casper, so it must have been an engagement ring that she tore from her finger."

Fifteen minutes later Mills and Gates stepped from the elevator on the eighth floor of the McCoal Building in California Street. They walked down the long corridor until they came to a suite of offices upon the doors of which gold lettering read: "GARLAND BRONSON, *Broker.*"

Inside, they were greeted pleasantly by a girl, who took the card Mills handed her and went to an inner office.

In a moment she returned with word that Mr. Bronson was busy just at that time but would see them in a few minutes.

They sat down in the spacious reception hall. Five minutes elapsed; then the girl returned with word that Mr. Bronson would see them. They followed her across a long room where numerous stenographers and bookkeepers were at work, and through a door at its far end.

THE room in which they found themselves was large and square. Windows occupied most of the space of one wall. On two of the other walls there hung paintings of brilliantly contrasting colors. To the right of the door through which they had entered, and almost in the center of the room, was a huge mahogany desk behind which sat a heavily built man of forbidding visage, his keen, dark eyes fixed ominously upon them.

"These gentlemen to see you, Mr. Bronson," the girl said.

She indicated chairs for the two men, then, answering a silent signal from the man at the desk, picked up a folder of papers, replaced his pen in its swivel onyx holder, and retired to the outer office, closing the door carefully behind her.

Bronson half turned and faced Gates and the detective, whose chairs had been placed at the side of his desk. Crossing his legs, he rested his carefully kept and rather large hands upon the arms of his chair and coolly surveyed his visitors.

Both Mills and Gates were conscious of the tenseness which seemed to pervade the room. There was an inexplicable feeling that Bronson was measuring them as antagonists. His manner was openly unfriendly.

The broker appeared to be about fifty years of age. His black hair showed a sprinkling of gray and was brushed back from a rather low but exceptionally wide forehead. From beneath heavy, overhanging brows his black eyes, set off by large-rimmed eyeglasses, peered with peculiar intentness. From the eyeglasses a wide, black ribbon hung about his neck. A prominent nose set above a tight-lipped mouth and wide, square chin gave one an impression which corresponded startlingly with his reputation in the financial world—a cold, calculating human machine, relentless in its driving power, all but impossible to swerve once its course to a given objective had been set. He was dressed meticulously in an excellently tailored business suit of deep brown.

Bronson did not speak, his silent gaze being a more insistent demand for an explanation of the visit than any words could have been.

Detective-sergeant Mills leaned back comfortably in his chair.

"Mr. Bronson," he began, "You have a young lady, a Miss Lila Casper, of Sacramento, visiting at your home. Do you happen to know where she is at present?"

Gates glanced toward the detective. He was rather puzzled by the way in which word of the girl's death was being imparted. But no doubt Mills was seeking some reaction by this approach.

Bronson did not move; nor did the expression upon his face change.

"Why do you ask that?" he demanded.

The voice was low, but there was an insistent, metallic quality about it. There was no hint of the anxiety which one would naturally expect when a representative of the police department made inquiry as to the whereabouts of a guest.

Mills' blue eyes rested steadily upon the face of the broker. He had not expected an evasion of so simple a question.

"It is of considerable importance that we know, Mr. Bronson. She has been a guest at your home, has she not?" he repeated the question.

"Miss Casper has been visiting my daughter," was the reply, "but I fail to see in what way that concerns the police. I am very busy, gentlemen, and will appreciate it if you will come directly to the point of your visit." He leaned slightly forward in his chair, his eyes intent upon Mills.

Mills met his gaze. "You say Miss Casper has been visiting your daughter," he said. "Do you mean that she is no longer here?"

"I do not keep myself informed of every move of my house-guests," replied Bronson stiffly.

The detective, for some reason of his own, chose to delay mention of the girl's death.

"When did you see her last?" he asked.

The broker's brows knit slightly with growing impatience.

"Again, may I ask if the time at which I see the guests in my house is of special concern to the police?"

Mills wondered if this attempt to evade answering the questions about his house-guests was merely the host's natural caution, or if there might be something behind his evasiveness.

"The police are specially concerned," he said quietly, "in investigating the death of your guest, Mr. Bronson."

The detective had tilted forward in his chair, perhaps the better to watch the effect of his words upon Bronson. Gates, keenly alert to the drama being enacted before him, watched closely. But if either expected any startling effect from the bluntness with which the word of the girl's death was revealed, he was foredoomed to disappointment.

Bronson did not move. The mask of his face, if anything, became more inscrutable. He gazed calmly at the detective, let his glance wander to the face of Parker Gates, then back to that of Mills. When he did speak, it was with the quiet business tone which he might have used in making routine inquiry as to the reliability of certain stocks and bonds.

"You are, of course, quite certain of your identification of the body?" he asked.

"Yes, quite certain," replied the detective.

AGAIN Mills wondered at the coolness of the man. The blunt declaration that his house-guest was dead should, by all criteria, have produced some reaction. The fact that it did not was significant—but of what?

Mills was further mystified by the coldness of Bronson's next words.

"Upon what do you base that identification?" he asked.

The detective detailed the tracing of the girl's shoes, and added: "We would like, however, as a matter of form and positive identification, to have you view the body, which is now at the morgue."

Bronson nodded ever so slightly, and for a moment studied the polished surface of his desk.

"How did she come to her death?" he asked.

Gates, intent upon every shade of inflection in the broker's voice, every muscular move of his face, wondered at the studied disinterest of that question and the calmness with which it was put.

"She was found early this morning on a bench in Golden Gate park, a bullet through her heart and the gun on the ground beneath her hand," answered Mills.

"Suicide, then," commented Bronson with perceptible relief. "Ah, yes, it must have been!"

The broker arose from his chair abruptly and paced the length of the room. Returning to his desk, he sat down again, removed his eyeglasses and began to polish them carefully with a handkerchief which he drew from his breast pocket. Neither Mills nor Gates spoke, but both pairs of eyes were fastened upon that handkerchief. It was of tan silk.

BRONSON replaced the glasses upon his nose, returned the handkerchief to his breast pocket.

"You will pardon me, Mr.—" he glanced at the card on his desk—"Mr. Mills, for my evasion of your questions when you first asked them. My training, you know, has all been toward caution, to find out what the other fellow knows and thinks before letting him know what I know and think. A good business policy, Mr. Mills—a good policy in your business, I should think."

Mills agreed with a silent nod, and Bronson continued:

"I will tell you, then, all I know. Miss Casper is the daughter of Mr. Joseph Casper, president of the Central City & Northern Bank of Sacramento. She and my daughter Ethel were roommates in a University of California sorority house to which they both belonged. Joseph and I have been friends for many years. The two girls have visited each other at frequent intervals. Miss Casper arrived here on one of those visits about ten days ago."

The speaker picked up Mills' card from the desk and idly bent it back and forth in his fingers.

"The two girls, my son Benjamin and myself had luncheon together yesterday noon," he continued. "Miss Casper seemed in the very best of spirits at that time and spoke to me of a dinner and theater party which she wished to give in honor of my daughter later in the week. I was working here at the office alone until past midnight last night and left home this morning before the others were up. Therefore I have seen none of the young folk since our luncheon yesterday."

He got up from his chair again and paced the room slowly. Behind his back his hands clasped and unclasped.

"This will be a terrific blow to Joseph Casper. He is a widower, you know. Lila was the living picture of her mother, and the whole life of the man has been centered upon his daughter. Every breath he drew was for her. Why, gentlemen,"—he turned and spread his hands, palms upward, before him,—"this may kill him. His heart will not stand it."

Mills studied the broker as he walked slowly across the room, his eyes following the figure in the thick carpet.

"Is it not strange, Mr. Bronson," he asked, "that your daughter was not aroused by the fact that Miss Casper failed to return home last night?"

Bronson halted in his pacing and turned slowly around to face the detective. For a moment he said nothing.

"Perhaps she was," he remarked finally. "Please remember that I have not seen her since yesterday noon." He resumed his walking. "I cannot conceive of Lila—Miss Casper—" he amended, "taking her own life."

"If you will pardon me," Mills interposed, "we are not so sure that she did take her own life."

Bronson spun on his heel. For the first time during the interview he betrayed excitement.

"Murder?" he questioned, a note of belligerence in his voice. "You are suggesting she may have been murdered? Nonsense, man. Who would murder a girl like that?"

Mills shrugged his shoulders.

"One never knows," he said. "It is one of the things which we must find out. The position of the body, the gun beneath her hand and the position of the shot suggested suicide immediately. But there are other circumstances which we must consider."

Bronson attempted a chuckle. His effort failed.

"But of course there is nothing much for a detective to do about a suicide, not a great deal of mystery with which to pique public interest," he said insolently. "You are a detective, Mr. Mills, as your card informs me, and I suppose you must have your little drama, your headlines in the newspapers. You must conform to the popular conception. But let me warn you,"—he stood stiffly facing the detective,—"I am not the man upon whom you can practice your theatricals."

Gates, silently watching, noted the sneer in the tone and manner of the speaker, but to him there was something lacking in that sneer, an unconvincing note. The broker resumed his nervous pacing of the floor; he wheeled about at the end of the room.

"Come," he said. "We must make certain. This may not be Miss Casper at all. There must be some ghastly mistake!"

He pressed a button on his desk, then walked quickly to the closet in the corner, flung open the door and drew forth his hat, a pair of gloves and a walking-stick.

"Miss Tyson," he said to the girl who appeared in response to his summons, "I will be out for a short time. Tell anyone who calls to wait." His manner was abrupt.

Mills and Gates arose from their chairs, picked up their hats and started to follow him from the office. Scarcely had they taken a step, however, when the door through which Miss Tyson had just passed was flung violently open, and a youth burst into the room.

"Father, I—" he blurted out in a voice pitched high with excitement. Then as he saw the two strangers, he stopped suddenly, his mouth still framed for the next word of his unfinished sentence.

"Benny!" Bronson stood as though turned to stone. A flush spread over his face, then left it pale. Mills and Gates, every sense alert, stood watching. Miss Tyson, an expression of surprise and bewilderment upon her face, stood with one hand resting against the door-jamb.

Young Bronson appeared to be about twenty years of age. His black hair was disheveled. Across his face was a smudge which he had attempted to wipe off. His gray suit was wrinkled, torn in several places and spattered with mud. In some respects he resembled the older man—the same wide, comparatively low forehead, heavy brows and black eyes. But the strength of chin was lacking, as was the firmness of the mouth.

DESPERATELY the youth sought to gain control of himself.

"Father," he repeated uncertainly, his wide eyes resting upon Bronson, "I must speak to you alone—immediately."

Bronson had regained his self-possession. He stood now surveying the boy, the color sweeping back into his face, and some of the coldness into his voice.

"Another fool wreck, I suppose," he burst out.

"Yes, I—"

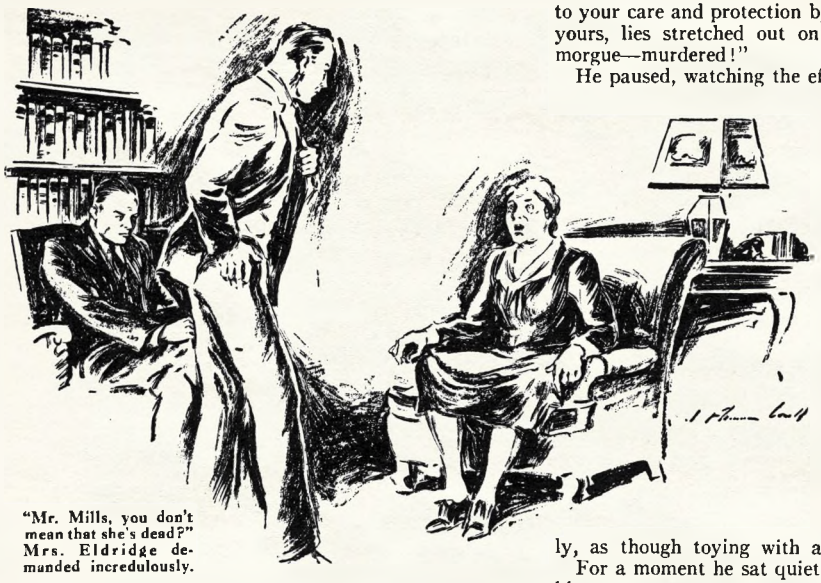
The boy's reply was cut short by his father.

"Go wash your face and hands. Brush those filthy clothes and then come back here to me," he ordered imperiously.

The youth started across the office toward the door of the adjoining room.

"One moment!" Mills' voice was low, commanding.

The youth stopped, half turned, a startled expression upon his face.



"Mr. Mills, you don't mean that she's dead?" Mrs. Eldridge demanded incredulously.

Bronson, just then in the act of laying his hat, gloves and cane upon his desk, turned his head sharply toward Mills, scowling brows lowered, the heavy jaw thrust out.

"What's that?" he barked. The hat plopped to the top of the desk. He straightened up, turned directly toward Mills, gripped the cane, then flung it clattering across the desk and stepped forward, hands clenched.

Mills eyed him, calmly alert.

"Steady, Bronson," he warned. "If there is nothing wrong here, there is no call for such excitement. If there is, I am going to find it."

Gates, secretly prayerful that the drama would continue to some startling conclusion, moved casually toward the boy, who stood agape, watching his father.

The detective deliberately turned his back upon the angry broker and faced the youth. "What happened?" he asked shortly, his blue eyes searching the boy's face.

"Don't answer him!" Bronson commanded, taking long strides to the youth's side.

Mills threw back the lapel of his coat.

"What happened?" He rapped out the question.

The boy's eyes fixed upon the detective's silver shield. A groan escaped his lips.

"I knew it! I knew it!" he moaned.

"Benny!" The broker's voice was harsh.

"Knew what? Where were you last night?" Mills shot the questions.

"I—" The boy started to answer. Bronson's hand clamped smartly across his mouth.

"Get out! Get out!" he roared at Mills, his face livid. "You are overstepping your authority here, and I'll make you pay. By God, I will!"

He propelled the youth across the room, flung open the door, pushed him through and slammed it closed. He turned to glare at Mills, who stood watching, a queer smile hovering about his lips.

"A nice bit of that drama of which you were speaking a moment ago, Bronson," he said, "staged for the purpose of—what?"

The smile left his lips.

"Think, Bronson!" he admonished the broker. "You are on dangerous ground. A guest of yours, a girl trusted to your care and protection by her father, an old friend of yours, lies stretched out on a cold marble slab at the morgue—murdered!"

He paused, watching the effect of his words. A change had come over the man standing with his back against the door. Huge drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead. He looked sick. Again that tan silk handkerchief came from his pocket and he mopped his face and neck.

"I'm sorry," he said in a flat, lifeless voice, moving toward the big chair at his desk. "I have been under a strain—upset. You must pardon my actions. Of course, you are attempting to do your duty. That's what you're paid for—paid for." He repeated the words slowly, as though toying with a thought.

For a moment he sat quietly. A crafty light crept into his eyes.

"I suppose you boys have your ups and downs," he continued, "your strong and your weak moments. This happened to be one of my weak ones. Sorry. Nerves all shot. Fighting, always fighting in this game for a dollar or two. Dog eat dog, and it doesn't pay. Take all you can get the easiest way you can get it, and let the other fellow do the worrying."

Again that crafty light in his eyes. The hint of a smile played about his lips. He opened a desk drawer, then rose.

"Made something of a fool of myself," he remarked apologetically. "Smoke?" He stepped toward the two men, extending a cigar to each.

"Thanks, I don't smoke," Mills rejected the cigar. Their eyes met.

"Thanks, I do." Gates accepted the offering, promptly biting off the end and striking a match.

"My mistake," said Bronson, meeting again the cool gaze of the detective. He returned to his desk and dropped the remaining cigar into the drawer and closed it with deliberation.

"About the girl," Mills reminded him. "We were going down to identify her."

"Yes, yes," said Bronson, extending his arm and glancing at a watch bound to his wrist by a gold strap. "Suppose I meet you there in half an hour."

Mills studied him a moment, debating.

"All right. In half an hour." He turned, and with Gates trailing behind him in a cloud of cigar smoke, left the office.

"MAN," exclaimed Parker Gates as he and Mills stepped from the elevator, "what a yarn this is turning out to be!" Sweeping the lobby with his eyes as he emerged from the cage, he headed directly for a telephone booth.

Mills stepped quickly to his side and laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"Not so fast, old-timer. Not so fast! We don't know the half of it yet, so don't spoil it by going off half cocked," he admonished.

The reporter slapped him reassuringly upon the shoulder.

"Not for the world and seven other planets," he declared.

"We've got to be careful," continued the detective.

"This thing is dynamite until we find out a whole lot more than we know now."

Gates made a movement of departure.

"I'm on my way right now to do some of that finding out," he announced. "This Benny boy needs plenty of looking up, and the office may have a tip as to what kind of trouble he has been into."

"That's all right," warned the detective, "but be careful what you tell them to print. Better confine it to the identification of the girl," he urged.

WHEN, five minutes later, Gates made his way across the street, he was suffering more than ever from repressed enthusiasm. He leaped into the machine beside the detective.

"Listen, Mills," he said. "There is some delightful lowdown on the Benny angle of this thing. He went out on a big time last night and was in a bootleg joint near South City at one-thirty this morning when a Federal squad crashed in on the party. It seems that our little Benny was in a belligerent mood—smashed one of the drys over the head with a bottle, and knocked him cold."

Mills whistled softly, his surprise being well simulated.

"Then," continued Gates, "Benny and some of his pals attempted to make a get-away in Bronson's automobile and draped it around a telephone pole in the marshes along the Bay Shore highway. One of them, Eric Vandier, was badly hurt and was taken by somebody to the San Mateo hospital. But Benny and the rest of his little playmates vanished. The Prohibition agents are now taking the town to pieces hunting for them. They want Benny for lese majesty and assault."

He looked to the detective for approval. Mills nodded.

"That checks with what I got from headquarters while you were phoning," he said. "At my request they are sending a man down here to shadow Benny for anything he might reveal by his movements. If he tries to get away, they'll tag him with the assault warrant."

"Wonder what kind of a machine Benny was driving," mused the reporter.

Mills started the engine. "Headquarters is getting that information for me," he said. He worked the car out of the parking space and into the street.

"What did you make of Bronson?" he asked.

Gates fixed his eyes on the street ahead.

"A cool one," he commented. "Too cool when he should have been excited, and too excited when he should have been cool. He knows, or thinks he knows, something that is eating his nerves. Relieved when you suggested suicide. Shot to pieces when you mentioned murder. Clear crazy when you attempted to question his boy."

"And the handkerchief?" questioned the detective.

"Nothing to it that I can see," replied Gates, reaching into his pocket. "I thought there might be, so I lifted it from his pocket for a closer examination." He held the square of silk up for Mills' inspection. "Not a thread missing or disturbed. Besides, I don't think it quite matches the thread you took from the gun."

Mills took his eyes from the traffic long enough to glance at the handkerchief.

"No. It's a bit too dark," he decided.

They drove for a block in silence.

"Bronson is terribly worried about something," suggested Mills, "and I think it has to do with Benny." He thought for a moment. "I don't think he knows where the boy was last night. He's worried about that. Right on top of our quizzing him about the girl's death, in pops Sonny all messed up after a hard night. We must find out where he spent every minute of last night."

They parked at the curb in front of the city morgue and went inside to await Bronson. Promptly on the half-hour he drove up in a sporty maroon roadster.

"Not a chance of that car having been mixed up in the affair," said Mills decisively.

The formality of identification was brief and positive.

Bronson was taken into the room where the body lay. As the covering sheet was pulled back from the girl's face, a gasp escaped his lips and his face turned ashen.

His voice was scarcely audible when he spoke:

"It is Lila Casper!" He turned and walked from the room.

In the coroner's office the broker sat down heavily in a chair.

"I suppose," he said wearily, "that I should be the one to notify her father." He sighed disconsolately. "I fear the result, gentlemen. I fear for Joseph Casper. That girl in there was his whole life." He arose, as under a weight. "I will telephone him from my home."

Detective-sergeant Mills was standing by the door.

"You are going home now?" he inquired as Bronson reached him.

"Yes," was the reply through white lips. "I must tell my daughter of this terrible happening." He would have passed on, but Mills' voice detained him.

"There are a few points that I must clear up," stated the detective. "Perhaps you will not mind if we accompany you."

Was it fear that Gates saw in the broker's eyes?

"Certainly, Mr. Mills. You must pursue your inquiry, I suppose."

With a slight bow to the coroner, he passed out the door and walked to his car.

The police machine followed the maroon roadster from the coroner's office across the city and into the driveway of Bronson's residence. Bronson had alighted, and awaited the two men at the steps.

"We will make this as brief as possible, Mr. Bronson," Mills gave assurance, "but I would like to speak with the various persons here one at a time."

Bronson nodded. As they crossed to the entrance, the door was opened by an elderly woman whom they soon learned was the housekeeper.

"If you gentlemen will step into this room,"—Bronson indicated with his hand what appeared to be a small library off the main room,—"I think it will be most suitable for the interviews."

GATES stepped into the room, but the alert eye of Mills had caught a fleeting expression upon the broker's face as he handed his hat and gloves to the housekeeper. He turned and stepped to the side of the woman.

"If you please, Mr. Bronson," he begged, "I would like to see this lady now." He urged her gently toward the door without awaiting the broker's acquiescence.

"But—" Bronson hesitated, showed himself at a loss, and then continued: "I was going to have Mrs. Eldridge summon the other servants for you."

"Please have some one else do that." The detective was inside the room now with the woman preceding him.

Bronson turned on his heel and walked away. Mills closed the door, then turned with a triumphant smile. He had won an opportunity to question at least one of the servants before Bronson had issued an injunction to silence.

The housekeeper stood waiting uncertainly. Mills placed a large, comfortable chair so that the light from the broad, low window would fall fully upon the occupant's face, and invited her to be seated. Then he strolled a few paces toward the window. Gates found himself a chair.

The housekeeper seated herself. "I don't understand

what this is all about," she said pleasantly, "but I guess it must be all right."

She was, Mills judged, past fifty years of age. A motherly woman of ample proportions, a round, good-natured face, crinkly gray eyes and small, but capable-looking hands.

"Yes," Mills answered her implied question as to the proceedings. "It is quite all right—else, you know, Mr. Bronson would not have brought us here. You are Mrs. Eldridge, I believe Mr. Bronson said."

The woman smiled up at him.

"Yes," she said, "I am Emma Eldridge, and I have been serving the Bronson family for over twenty years."

"That is quite a long time to be with one family," said Mills, a congratulatory tone in his voice.

She sighed. "It seems only yesterday," she declared, "that Benny and Ethel were cradle babies and I came in to take care of them. I have practically raised them, you know, since Mrs. Bronson passed away ten years ago."

She rambled on through her early associations with the family. Mills was finally forced to break in upon her recital.

"This is all very interesting, Mrs. Eldridge," he said, "but there are a few questions we would like you to answer."

"Questions?" she echoed, creasing her forehead. "Are you policemen or something?"

"Yes, Mrs. Eldridge," replied Mills. "I am from the detective bureau of the Police Department. My name is Mills. And this,"—he indicated the newspaper man,—"is Mr. Parker Gates, who is also an investigator."

Mrs. Eldridge wriggled in her chair.

"My, my!" she exclaimed. "Real detectives! Such thrilling experiences as you must have! But what on earth could two real detectives be wanting to question me about? Has Benny been getting himself into some kind of a scrape? Is that it?"

"Benny had a little automobile smash-up last night," Mills told her. "But he was not injured," he hastened to add as the housekeeper started and half arose from her chair.

"Oh! I'm so glad of that." She settled back with relief. "I just knew something like that would happen when he left here last night, and then when he didn't come home—goodness! That boy will be the death of me yet." She drew in a deep breath and expelled it slowly. "He's always getting into some mischief—innocent little pranks, you know, nothing that hurts anybody. He had me worried last night, though. . . . Tell me, was that girl with him?"

GATES turned casually away from a row of book-titles he was examining and watched the woman's face. Mills spoke with studied indifference.

"What girl is that, Mrs. Eldridge?" he asked.

"Oh, you know." There was a tinge of impatience in her voice. "Miss Casper, Miss Lila Casper, who has been visiting Ethel for the past ten days. Benny is so mad in love with her that he just can't eat or sleep, and I think—do you know what I think?" She grew indignant. "I think she's just playing with him." Her lips compressed. "Yes sir! She is engaged, you know, to that Mr. Woodhead, or Woodhouse, or whatever his name is, up there in Sacramento, and I don't think it's right for her to let Benny care so much for her. Do you?"

"Outrageous," agreed the reporter. "She ought to be ashamed of herself." Then he added: "But she was not with him when the car was wrecked last night."

"Well, I thought when he didn't come home, and she didn't either, that he had found her last night and that they had gone some place together."

"Was he hunting for her last night?" Mills asked.

"Oh, my, yes—and he was pretty mad too."

"Mad? But what was he mad at her about?"

"Oh, land sakes! You should have seen him. Benny is so funny when he gets mad. He came into the house just after Miss Lila had gone out. He came to me and he said: 'Where is Lila, Mrs. Eldridge?' And I said, 'Why, she just went out all by herself, Benny.' Well, Mr. Mills, you should have seen his face. Honestly, I thought he was going to bite me; but do you know what he did?" She giggled.

"No. What did he do?" encouraged the detective.

"Why, he walked right over to the sideboard—we were in the dining-room—and drank a great big glass of that awful liquor." She grimaced. "Boys do such funny things when they're mad, don't they, Mr. Mills? Well, he nearly choked on it, and I said to him: 'Benny, that just serves you right for trying to swallow that awful stuff.'"

"What did he do then?" asked Mills.

"WELL, as I was saying," she continued, "Benny was pretty mad. I asked him what he was going to do, and he looked at me and made a mad face and said: 'I'm going out and find her.' He just fairly screamed it at me, Mr. Mills. Then he walked straight out the back door and a minute later I heard him go tearing out the driveway, in one of the automobiles."

"What time was that?"

"Now, let me see. It must have been about twenty minutes to nine, because when Mr. Bronson called on the telephone and asked for Miss Lila, it was just half-past eight. She asked me what time it was when she got through telephoning, and I remember looking at the clock out there in the hall. She left the house almost immediately, and Benny came in just after that."

"Mr. Bronson telephoned at half-past eight?" asked Mills.

"Yes. That's what time it was."

"Was it to meet Mr. Bronson that Miss Casper left the house?"

"Now, I don't know about that. I didn't stay to hear what she said on the telephone, but it was just a few minutes later that she left the house."

"Was Miss Bronson with her then?"

"Oh, no. Ethel left yesterday afternoon to stay all night with a friend who is ill, and didn't get back until ten this morning."

"When Miss Casper left last night did you notice whether she was wearing a diamond ring?"

"Yes, she wore her diamond. I know that because she hadn't been wearing it since she came here, and just when she was ready to go and at the door, she thought of it and asked me to go up to her room and get it for her."

"Was it an engagement ring?"

"Yes. I think that Sacramento man gave it to her."

"Did she seem cheerful when she left, Mrs. Eldridge?"

"Well, she seemed to have something on her mind, but she didn't say anything about what it was, and I didn't ask her."

Mills studied the top of the table a moment.

"I understood you to say that Mr. Bronson was a widower, did I not?"

"Yes," replied the housekeeper, "Mrs. Bronson, poor soul, passed away about ten years ago. Mr. Casper—Miss Lila's father—is a widower too, you know, and I've often thought that maybe it was because neither of them had a mother that Miss Lila and Miss Ethel were such good friends."

"Perhaps it was," said Mills. After a moment he asked:

"Have you ever noticed, Mrs. Eldridge, that Mr. Bronson was especially interested in Miss Casper?"

"Land sakes, no!" she denied promptly. "You never would notice if he was especially interested in anybody, he's that taken up with his business." She paused a moment to consider. "He liked her all right, I guess, but I don't think he wanted Benny to marry her. I don't know why; but to tell you the truth, Mr. Mills, I don't want Benny to marry her either, because she is older than he is, and I don't like the way she acts, her being engaged to that Sacramento man."

Mills walked to the window and looked for a moment into the garden; then he turned and walked back close to Mrs. Eldridge's chair and stood before her.

"I must tell you something," he said, "something that will be a shock to you, so please prepare yourself."

"You're not going to tell me they are married?" she exclaimed.

"No," said the detective in a kindly tone, "they will never be married, Mrs. Eldridge. Miss Casper is dead."

For a moment the woman sat perfectly still, uncomprehending.

"Mr. Mills, you don't mean that she's dead?" she demanded incredulously.

"Yes," he assured her. "She was found dead in Golden Gate Park this morning."

A look of consternation came over the housekeeper's face. Her eyes began to blink rapidly.

"Oh, oh!" she exclaimed. "The poor girl, and I've been so mean to think what I have about her." She drew a handkerchief from her pocket and rubbed her eyes. "But it's the truth—her being engaged to one man and letting another one fall in love with her, and that one my poor Benny. This will break the boy's heart."

A CHANGE swept over her. She suddenly stiffened to an erect position in her chair, gripping its arms.

"Who killed her?" she demanded in a tense whisper.

"We don't know that." Mills gestured slightly with his hands. "She may have shot herself."

Mrs. Eldridge considered. "No," she pronounced, "I don't think Miss Lila would do that. She didn't seem that kind. Loved life and good times too well. But then, you can't tell. The girls today are different from what they used to be, Mr. Mills." She paused to wipe her eyes again. "There was something worrying her when she left here last night. I thought at the time, 'Now, that girl has made up her mind about something she is going to do, and she is going to do it, whether she likes it or not.' That's just what I thought. There was that expression on her face."

Gates stirred himself and leaned forward in his chair.

"You have no idea what it was she intended to do?" he asked.

"No, not the slightest idea. She never talked to me much about her affairs." Mrs. Eldridge was weeping now, and dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Had this man she was engaged to been here to see her?" asked the reporter.

"No, he hadn't, but I don't know why."

"Do you know whether she'd received any letters from him, or whether he'd telephoned her?"

"I suppose she got letters from him. I noticed several with Sacramento postmarks on them, and I know she wrote some. I don't remember of seeing any addressed to this Woodhouse, or whatever his name is, but she may have mailed them herself. Then there were some to her father —one every day—and some to different girls." She brushed her eyes again with the handkerchief. "One letter I remember of her getting," she continued, "because it had a funny name in the corner—*Pelts,* or something like that. That was day before yesterday."

"And telephone calls, Mrs. Eldridge. Do you know about those, especially any for her yesterday?" pursued the newspaper man.

"Well, there was the call from Mr. Bronson last evening, and I think some one called her quite early in the afternoon yesterday. It may have been long distance, because she had to wait several minutes. She happened to answer the call herself that time, and I didn't stay around to hear what it was about."

Gates leaned back in his chair and nodded to Mills to indicate that there was nothing further he wanted to ask.

"I think that is all, Mrs. Eldridge," said the detective. "Thank you a lot."

He stepped forward and politely assisted her from her chair. Gates arose and opened the door. The housekeeper, softly weeping, left the room.

BRONSON was waiting in the adjoining room when his housekeeper came from the library weeping and dabbing vigorously at her eyes with her handkerchief. He looked after the retreating figure of Mrs. Eldridge, then turned to the detective.

"I hope," he said, "that you were not too rough with her. She is an old family pet."

"No," responded Mills, "we were not; but apparently she did not know until just now that Miss Casper was dead."

Bronson dismissed the subject with a shrug.

"My daughter will be ready for your inquisition in a few minutes," he remarked ironically. "In the meantime I have assembled the servants. They await your pleasure."

Although he expected little, if anything, from any of the others with whom he might now talk, Mills called, one after another, the butler, chauffeur, upstairs girl and cook. Their contributions were negligible. It was quite evident that Bronson had given them orders not to talk.

"My daughter will come to you now," volunteered Bronson as the last of the servants left the library.

Ethel Bronson, a girl of twenty-two years, came from across the large room. Her dark bobbed hair was brushed severely back. She wore a somber afternoon gown. Her dark eyes were red and swollen from weeping, and she carried a small handkerchief with which she touched them frequently. She walked across the room, seeming to gather resolution as she advanced, and seated herself defiantly in the big chair. Her rounded chin lifted, and she set her lips in a firm line as she faced Gates and the detective.

Mills strolled to a position with his back to the window facing the girl.

"We are awfully sorry, Miss Bronson, to have to disturb you at such a trying time as this must be to you," he said, "but as your father has probably told you, the circumstances require that we seek answers to some of the questions confronting us. . . . Perhaps it would be easier if you were to tell us, in your own way, anything which you think has a bearing upon this tragedy."

"There is little that I can tell you," she said. "What is it that you wish to know?"

Her manner indicated plainly that she had taken the defensive. Following his failure to get anything definite from any of the servants, with the exception of Mrs. Eldridge, Mills was beginning to lose patience. Yet he realized that more might be gained at present by gentle than by strenuous methods.

"As you prefer. You were away from your home, I understand, from about three o'clock yesterday afternoon until ten o'clock this morning."

"I was," she answered briefly.

"Before you went away—sometime shortly after luncheon, I believe—Miss Casper received a telephone call. Do you happen to know who was calling her?"

"I didn't know that she received a telephone call at that time. I must have been in my room."

"Do you know of any reason why Miss Casper would want to take her own life?"

"None whatever."

"Any reason why anyone else would want to take her life?"

"No. I do not." Her answer was given in a voice so weak that it belied the brave front she was attempting to put on.

Mills waited until she had composed herself.

"Miss Bronson, was Miss Casper engaged to be married?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, she was."

"To whom?"

"To Mr. Frank Woodson, a stock-and-bond salesman of Sacramento."

"Has he been here to see her?"

"No."

The girl seemed to feel herself on safe ground and volunteered further information: "No, he has not been to see her. In fact, it was on his account that Lila left Sacramento to visit here with me. They had quarreled, and she told me that he was driving her mad with his efforts to bring about a reconciliation."

The detective considered a moment.

"Did she tell you what their quarrel was about?" he asked.

"Not in so many words, but I gained the impression that it was because she was permitting some other man to pay attention to her."

"Do you know who that other man was, Miss Bronson?"

"I believe it was some one who worked in her father's bank—a Mr. Peltos, Sigrid Peltos, I think his name was."

"Was she much in love with him, do you think?"

"Frankly, I don't know. There seemed to be a fascination of some kind." She glanced down at her hands, then added: "Yes, I guess she must have been in love with him—at least enough for her to be willing to break her engagement with Mr. Woodson."

"What sort of man is this Mr. Peltos?" asked the detective.

"I don't know. I've never seen him."

"Was the diamond ring which she had here with her an engagement present from Mr. Woodson?"

"Yes, she told me that it was, but she did not wear it at all while she was here."

"Have you any idea at all where she intended going, or who she expected to meet, when she left here last night?"

"None whatever, but I do know that it was not—" She stopped abruptly, bit her lower lip and did not finish the sentence.

Mills looked at her sharply.

"You knew it was not—whom? Were you going to say your brother, Miss Bronson?"

"I know that it was not my brother," she finished in a calm, assertive voice. "Miss Casper had gone from the house before he returned from a neighbor's."

Mills elevated his brows ever so slightly.

"But," he remonstrated, "your brother left the house again immediately upon finding that Miss Casper was not here—and with the announced attention, he told Mrs. Eldridge, of finding her. Is that not true, Miss Bronson?"

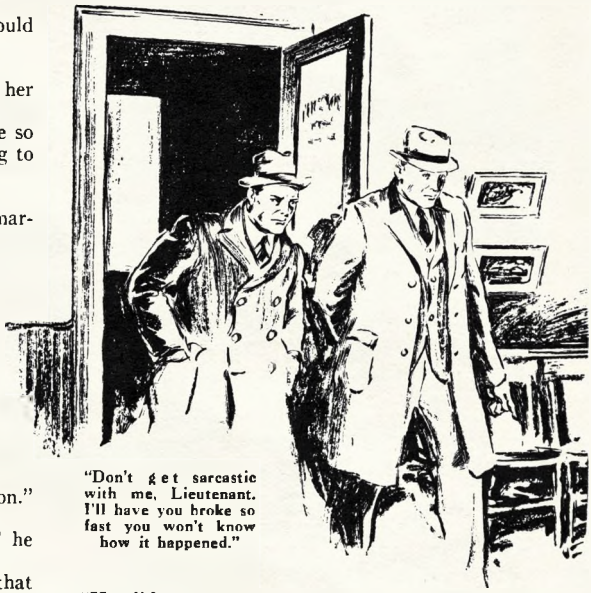
She looked straight into the eyes of her questioner.

"I know nothing of that. I was not here," she snapped.

Mills stepped a bit closer to the girl, his eyes fixed upon her.

"What time did he return?" he asked slowly.

She did not answer, but turned her eyes from his.



"Don't get sarcastic with me, Lieutenant. I'll have you broke so fast you won't know how it happened."

"He did not return at all last night, Miss Bronson." Mills tones were measured, soft. "You know that. Miss Casper left this house and did not return—will never return."

The girl appeared to shrink in her chair, her fingers pulling and twisting at her tiny handkerchief.

Mills continued coldly:

"The fact that your brother and this girl, who was a guest in your home and with whom your brother was deeply in love, remained away all night may mean nothing, Miss Bronson—may be a mere coincidence. Perhaps they did not see one another at all after leaving the house. Perhaps they did. The coincidence of their almost simultaneous disappearance may, however, be accountable for the attitude of yourself and your father toward this investigation."

He turned and stepped back by the table.

"Is it not a fact, Miss Bronson, that you and your father have been just a bit afraid of what that coincidence, if we may term it such, might mean?"

The girl's nerves were near the breaking-point, but she raised her head sharply.

"We have been afraid of nothing," she snapped. "Coincidence has nothing whatever to do with this case."

"A sentiment, Miss Bronson, with which I most heartily agree," stated the detective. He decided to fire a shot based upon what he thought was close guessing.

"Miss Bronson," he began, "this morning when you arrived home and found that both your brother and Miss Casper had gone out at about the same time last night, and that neither of them had returned, you telephoned your father at his office. What did he tell you to do?"

Anger flared in the girl's voice and eyes.

"It is none of your business what he told me to do," she said.

The shot had told. Bronson's behavior in his office was explained.

"Thank you, Miss Bronson. I think that is all for the present," said the detective.

The girl rose from her chair and walked quickly from the room. Bronson, pacing restlessly back and forth, met her near the door and walked with her to the stairway. Mills waited until the broker returned to the library door.

"Now, Mr. Bronson," he said, "if we can have a few moments with your son we will be about finished here, unless there is something you wish to add." He was watching Bronson's face closely.

The broker spoke with oily politeness, the barest hint of an upward curl at the corners of his mouth.

"I am most dreadfully sorry, Mr. Mills," he said, "but Benny apparently has been detained and has failed to return home. Perhaps he will be here later."

The shadow of a smile hovered about Mills' mouth and eyes.

"I have no reason to doubt your statement, Mr. Bronson. Perhaps he has been detained, and a little later will do just as well at the present for our interview. . . . By the way, you have telephoned to Mr. Casper, I presume?"

A shadow fell across the broker's face.

"Yes. And let me tell you that it was a terrible message for one man to have to deliver to another. Joseph said he would leave for here immediately. He will arrive at about seven-thirty this evening. I will meet him at the Ferry Building and bring him directly here—that is, unless he desires to view the body of his daughter first."

"Perhaps," suggested Mills, "it will be just as well if I don't attempt to see him tonight. I can see him in the morning when he has had an opportunity to recover somewhat from the shock."

"That will be better, I think."

The detective and the reporter obtained their hats. Bronson saw them to the door and closed it as they walked down the steps.

Arthur Torres, the close-fitting uniform of his rank as lieutenant of detectives accentuating the slimness of his figure, turned from the window as the door of the headquarters office opened and Mills, followed by Gates, entered the room.

"Good afternoon, Lieutenant," Mills saluted.

"Hello, Torres," Gates greeted him.

Torres nodded smilingly and strolled across the room to his desk. "Now what have you two bloodhounds been up to?" he asked.

"We've been sniffing the greensward out in the park," replied the reporter.

The Lieutenant sat down in his swivel chair and took an ancient blackened pipe from a drawer.

"Yes, so I've been told. You asked for one man to watch one of your 'sniffs.' We sent two. Should have sent half a dozen. He gave them quite a chase."

"Who is that?" inquired Mills innocently.

"Bronson—young Bronson." Torres took out a knife and began cutting the ashes and hard cake from his pipe bowl, leaning over the waste-basket as he did so.

"Picked him up, eh?" A smile spread over Mills' face. "I thought so when Bronson apologized for his absence when I wanted to talk to the kid awhile ago."

Torres tapped the pipe on the edge of the waste-basket.

"Who said anything about picking him up? It was airplane stuff." He blew through the pipe. "The kid changed clothes up there in his dad's office, and the boys almost missed him when he went out the back entrance of the building from the freight elevator and got into a waiting automobile."

The Lieutenant began filling the pipe.

"The boys grabbed a taxi," he continued, "but couldn't keep up. Slick, that boy—or his dad. They went down Third Street. Our boys were about a block and a half behind when they saw Bronson's machine turn in to the curb at the Southern Pacific depot between a couple of other cars. By the time they got near the station, the Bronson car was coming back empty. They hopped into the train-sheds."

Torres' long fingers carefully tamped the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

"And then?" prompted Mills irritably.

"He wasn't there—hadn't been in the station at all. Clean get-away."

Deliberately Torres lighted the pipe, puffing great clouds of smoke. Mills looked dejected. Gates took his hands from the desk, shrugged his shoulders and tilted his hat over one ear.

"Hicks!" he commented.

"Yeh," continued the Lieutenant between puffs, "hicks! They went back in front, and the taxi-starter put them wise. Said the big black car had driven in beside a taxi.

Young Bronson hopped out of his machine and into the taxi, and away they had gone on out Third Street. The boys lit out in another taxi for all the thing would do—nearly smashed a couple of times. Then they showed some sense. One of them got out at Visitacion Valley and telephoned to the airport to hold all planes. They had a hunch that was where the lad was heading for. They got there in time to see a big plane just soaring over the field." He paused and puffed in silence a moment.

"Got away!" ejeculated Mills.

Torres removed the pipe from his lips and looked up at his two listeners, his gray eyes crinkling.

"The big plane was just landing from some place else," he explained. "Young Bronson was there waving a fistful of greenbacks at an airport official and raving because he wouldn't let his chartered plane take off. He's upstairs now weeping his eyes out for Papa."

The detective and the reporter heaved sighs of relief.

"I could brain you with a feather—a canary-bird feather," ejaculated Gates. "You ought to write novels, Torres."

"The kid is scared stiff," continued the Lieutenant. "I had a short session with him. He declares that he didn't see this murdered dame at all after dinner-time last night and knows nothing about her death—crazy with grief over it."

"He was in love with her," Gates remarked.

"Better have a talk with him, Mills, right away, because I've got to notify his old man that we have him, and when the old boy hears that, I guess we won't have Sonny in our clutches much longer than it takes Papa to get down here. By the way," he added, "better give me all the newest angles on the case."

Mills proceeded to detail the developments. When he had finished, Lieutenant Torres nodded, and reaching into a drawer, handed the detective a typewritten report.

"Better look this over before you go up to talk to Bronson's boy," he suggested. "It's about the trouble he got into last night at South City, and the report on the car which you asked for."

"Good," said Mills, taking the papers. He and Gates began a study of the sheets.

TAKING the events in chronological order, the report stated that Benny Bronson had arrived at the inn alone at about one o'clock in the morning and parked his machine. He had been drinking heavily, judged by appearances and actions, and was in an ugly mood, several times threatening to trounce one of the waiters. He had continued drinking with a group of friends who had come there earlier.

Then, at about one-thirty in the morning, the Federal officers suddenly burst through the doors on a raid. Young Bronson was seen to strike one of these officers over the head with a bottle, knocking him unconscious. He had then leaped through a window, followed by several of his companions, and escaped in an automobile.

The wrecked machine, a four-door sedan, had been found upside down in the marshes along the Bay Shore highway, so badly smashed that it was hardly worth salvaging, the report continued. In addition to damage from the wreck, it had been stripped of all tires and other accessories. The right side of the car, which had side-swiped a telephone pole, was nothing but a mass of twisted metal and splinters. There had been considerable blood inside the car, especially in the back seat, from where the head of one of the occupants had evidently been thrust through a window.

Eric Vandier, one of the youths in the party, was seriously cut and had been removed to a hospital further down the peninsula. He had refused to furnish police with the names of those in the party, and the persons who had taken him to the hospital had vanished before the nurse on duty had been able to obtain their names.

"All tires missing." Mills whistled softly. "That's bad. Certainly looks like he was trying to cover up."

GATES shook his head negatively. "Benny must have been pretty drunk about that time and badly shaken by the smash-up. I seriously doubt if he would have given the tires, and the marks they had left in the park, a thought. Chances are some one coming along later stripped the car."

Mills did not quite agree.

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," he said. "Benny had sense enough to make a fast get-away after striking the officer. . . . Came alone and got there about one in the morning," Mills added, referring to the report. "That looks bad, too. The girl was murdered sometime before midnight. That would have given him plenty of time to finish the job in the park and drive around for a few nerve-settling drinks before he reached the inn near South City."

They went upstairs to get whatever statement Benny was willing to make.

As the jailer with clanking keys opened the cell door, Benny lay stretched face down on his white iron cot.

Mills shook him by the shoulder. The boy raised himself on his elbows and looked up at them. Then he moved his legs slowly over the edge of the cot and sat up. He was still showing the effects of the previous night's dissipation. He rested his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

"Come, Benny, we want to talk to you," said Mills kindly.

"Did you bring my father?" asked the boy.

"He's coming soon," the detective assured him.

Young Bronson raised his head, a sickly smile upon his face. "Terrible mess I've got into, isn't it?" he said.

"Plenty," commented Mills succinctly, seating himself on the cot. Gates remained standing near the cell door.

"You must have gone a trifle berserk last night," suggested the detective.

The boy lowered his head.

"Yes, I guess I did all of that," he admitted remorsefully.

"What made you hit that officer with a bottle?" he was asked.

Benny looked up, a woe-begone expression upon his face.

"I don't know," he answered. "I don't think I knew what I was doing until I saw him there on the floor; then I kind of came to my senses and got scared to death. I thought I'd killed him." Anxiety overspread his countenance. "I didn't, did I?"

"No," Mills reassured him, "you didn't—but he is in the hospital pretty badly used up."

"I'm awfully sorry." The boy's voice was penitent.

"Was it because of hitting the officer that you were going away on that airplane?" asked Mills.

"Yes," the youth answered frankly. "Father thought I'd better stay away until the trouble had blown over a little."

"Your father arranged for the plane and had your change of clothing brought down, did he?"

"Yes, he did."

"Where are the clothes you had on last night?"

"At Dad's office."

"How did you happen to go to that place in South City?" the detective inquired.

A wan smile spread over the youth's face.

"I don't remember of getting there at all," he confessed. "I've been there before, of course, but I don't re-

member anything about it last night until I saw that cop on the floor and everybody was yelling. Somebody gave me a shove, and I just kept on going, trying to get away."

"Where were you before you went there?" asked Mills. . . . "Wait. Better start at the beginning and tell me the whole story of last night."

"I'll tell you all I can remember." The boy pressed his hand hard against his forehead.

"I went to a friend's house for a little while after dinner, to look over a new radio he had; then I went home. Nobody was there but Mrs. Eldridge,—she's our housekeeper,—and I asked her where Lila was. Mrs. Eldridge said she had just gone out by herself. I didn't think she should have done that,—that is, go out all alone at that time of night; it was about half-past eight,—so I said I would see if I could find her. I went out and got one of the cars and drove around the neighborhood looking for her. Thought I might take her to wherever she wanted to go, so she wouldn't have to take a street-car."

"Just a minute," Mills interrupted. "What did you do when Mrs. Eldridge told you Lila had gone out alone. Weren't you pretty sore about it?"

"Sure, I was sore."

"You were in love with her, were you not?"

BENNY raised his eyes and looked squarely into Mills' face.

"There's no disgrace in that, is there? A girl like her? Yes, I was crazy about her, and it made me sore to have her go out like that, maybe to meet somebody else."

"Yes," encouraged Mills. "What else did you do?"

"You mean the drink? Yes, I took a stiff jolt of some stuff we have there, and I guess that started me. Anyway, I couldn't find Lila, so I stopped in a place and had several more drinks, and started out again. Then I stopped at another place."

"Then what?" asked Mills.

"I don't remember. Honest to God, I don't know what I did from that time on until the fight in South City."

"What time did you get to that second place?"

"I don't know—about ten o'clock or a little after."

"This is serious, Benny—perhaps much more serious than you think," admonished the officer.

"What do you mean?" the youth asked quickly.

"You can't account for the time between about ten o'clock last night and one o'clock this morning. It was during that time that Miss Casper—the girl you started out hunting for—was killed in Golden Gate Park."

The youth shuddered, terror in his face.

"Don't think that! Please don't think that," he pleaded. "Why, I thought the world of Lila Casper—I wanted her to marry me. I wouldn't have harmed her for anything. You can't think that of me." A sob choked his voice.

Mills' voice was kindly.

"I don't think you would if you were in your right mind, Benny. I know you wouldn't," he affirmed. "But you don't know yourself what you did or where you were during those hours."

The boy's hands trembled in his lap.

"No, I don't know what I did, but I know I did not do that thing. I never found her at all." He was positive.

"Why did you have the tires taken off of your wrecked machine?" Mills rapped out the question.

Benny looked up, puzzled.

"Tires taken off of my machine?" he asked. "Who took the tires off of my machine?"

"That's what I am asking you."

"I didn't know they were gone. Some bum stripped it, I suppose."

"You didn't tell anyone to take them off?"

"Certainly not!"

Mills thought a moment, his eyes upon a line in the concrete floor.

"Did Miss Casper have a ring of some kind?" he asked

"She did not care much for jewelry, but she had an engagement ring."

"Did she have it on last night?"

"She brought it to San Francisco with her, but didn't wear it once. I think she had some kind of a row with the fellow she was engaged to, and they split up."

"Do you know what the trouble was about?"

"She said it was over some other fellow. I asked her if it was me, but she said no. I thought it was this other fellow she was going to meet last night."

"And who is this fellow?" prompted Mills.

"Oh, a fellow from Sacramento."

"Don't you know his name?"

"Yes. His name is Sigrid Peltos. He works in her father's bank."

"What did she tell you about him—anything?"

The boy looked up and smiled weakly from the corner of his mouth.

"Yes—plenty!" he said. "I guess he was a mighty nice fellow, but she made me sore at him, because she was always ragging me about the way he wore his ties and the way he didn't get drunk, and the way he never swore about anything, or even smoked cigarettes, and was always polite to the ladies."

A door at the end of the long cell corridor opened. Lieutenant Torres entered, accompanied by a uniformed policeman. They approached the cell. Torres carried a dark overcoat and hat.

"Put these on a minute," he ordered as the jailer unlocked the door. "This your coat?" He held out the garment.

"Yes," replied the boy, rising and taking the coat and hat. "Where did you get it?"

"You left it in that South City bootleg joint last night," said the Lieutenant.

Young Bronson put on the overcoat and hat and stood apprehensively waiting to see what it was all about. The officer studied him closely, then nodded his head.

"I think that's him," he said. "It was dark, and I couldn't see very well, but I think that's him."

Torres nodded and addressed Bronson.

"It looks bad for you, boy."

A look of bewilderment was on the youth's face.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"Nothing much," said Torres a bit sarcastically, "only Officer Sykes happens to have seen you in a parked automobile at Land's End about ten-thirty o'clock last night quarreling with Miss Casper!"

FOR a moment the youth stood agape. The color left his face entirely. His eyes bulged. He tried to speak, but succeeded in nothing more than a choking sound. Then he collapsed on the bed.

Mills had arisen and stood looking at the Lieutenant and Officer Sykes.

"You sure of that, Sykes?" he demanded.

The officer shifted a bit uneasily.

"Well, now," he said, "you know how it is on a dark night. But I turned my flash on them, and I think this was the man. Yes sir," he said more confidently, "I am willing to swear this is the man."

"And the girl?" asked Mills.

There was more assurance in the officer's voice when he answered: "The girl—there's no doubt at all about her. I got a good look at her face. Yes, I've been down to the morgue, and I know that is the girl."

"How did you happen to look into the machine?"

"It is a part of my duty to walk around the edge of the cliff there and keep an eye on the automobiles that park. It was rather cold and windy last night out on the point, and there were only a few machines. As I walked along I heard loud talking coming from one of them. Now, a nice, friendly quarrel is good for the best of us, and I don't object; but the girl's voice was high and angry and it sounded too serious to me; so I stepped over, threw on my flash and looked in. Then I told them to take their fighting some place else. They drove away, and that was the last I saw of them until I find the girl in the morgue—and the boy here."

Suddenly Benny stood up. There was anger in his face and voice.

"You did not see me there, Officer. I tell you I did not see Miss Casper after dinner-time last night. I did not! I did not, I tell you!" He was almost hysterical in his denial.

Gates had hardly taken his eyes from the boy during the identification. He watched him now, closely.

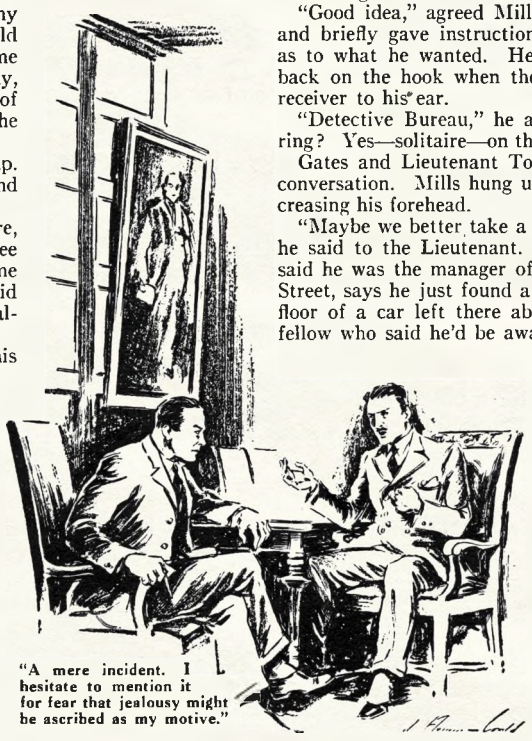
"Come," suggested Torres to the others, "leave him alone for a while to think it over."

Benny turned to Gates as they started to leave the cell. Tears stood in his eyes.

"I didn't do this thing—I couldn't!" His voice was tremulous.

"I don't believe you did," said Gates quietly.

They left the cell. The door clanged shut behind them.



"A mere incident. I hesitate to mention it for fear that jealousy might be ascribed as my motive."

Returned to the office after the interview with Benny Bronson in his cell, the four men discussed the developments. Officer Sykes left shortly for his own station.

Lieutenant Torres shrugged his shoulders. "It looks to me," he said, "very much like a case against the boy."

"Yes," agreed Mills, "it looks like the end of the trail for Benny."

Gates held up a hand in protest.

"Not by a jugful," he pronounced. "I don't believe the boy killed her. At least, I'll need a lot more proof to convince me he had anything to do with it. He was drunk—nobody denies that; and I don't think he would have been keen enough in that condition to make even the clumsy attempts at putting a new face on the crime that were made."

Lieutenant Torres leaned against the side if the desk and shook an admonishing finger at the reporter.

"Just let me tell you this about liquor," he said: "You never can tell what it will do to a man. It affects men differently, and among the differences are that it gives some of them a devilish cleverness."

Torres moved toward the chair behind his desk.

"I better let the old man know we have the kid here," he remarked.

Gates and Mills stood silently while Torres telephoned. The conversation was brief.

"Whew!" exclaimed the Lieutenant as he hung up the instrument. "Hang out the storm-signals! We're due for a big blow. The old man is on his way down here."

"And you'll certainly know when he arrives," commented Mills. "We had a taste of his talents this afternoon, eh, Gates?"

"Nice party," remarked the reporter. "By the way—that long-distance telephone call that Mrs. Eldridge spoke about might be worth tracing."

"Good idea," agreed Mills. He took up the telephone and briefly gave instructions to the telephone-supervisor as to what he wanted. He had just placed the receiver back on the hook when the bell jangled. He lifted the receiver to his ear.

"Detective Bureau," he announced. "Yes—a diamond ring? Yes—solitaire—on the floor of the car."

Gates and Lieutenant Torres listened to the one-sided conversation. Mills hung up the receiver, with a wrinkle creasing his forehead.

"Maybe we better take a run down and look into this," he said to the Lieutenant. "A man named Brown, who said he was the manager of the B. & T. Garage on Ellis Street, says he just found a diamond solitaire ring on the floor of a car left there about midnight last night by a fellow who said he'd be away for a week or two. Might be something to it—probably not, but you know this murdered girl left the house last night with a diamond ring. It was missing when the body was found."

"Hop to it," said Torres. "I'll take care of Bronson when he comes in."

"And welcome to it!" said Gates with a wry face.

At the garage a few minutes later Mr. Brown, the manager, swung open the door of his small floor-safe and took out an envelope. From it he took the ring and handed it to Mills.

Pretty fine sparkler, eh?"

Mills took the ring between his fingers and turned it about, studying it. The stone weighed perhaps a carat and a half and threw off a pure blue-white light. The setting was of platinum and gold with a peculiarly woven filigree work about it.

"Where is the car you found this in?" asked the detective.

"Upstairs," answered the manager.

He led them to the rear of the second floor where the car was parked. It was an open touring car. The manager led them around to its right side and opened the door.

"The ring was right here," he explained, indicating a spot on the floor where the base of the seat curved slightly to meet the door.

Mills took out his flashlight and examined the interior of the front compartment. There were no signs of blood, nor were there any in the rear. He turned the light upon the registration card, which was in a holder attached to the steering post.

"Frank Woodson!" he exclaimed aloud as he read the name.

"No!" ejaculated Gates, unbelieving, as he leaned over to get a look of the name for himself. He read, "Frank Woodson, 276 Hanchett Street, Sacramento."

"That's the man they said the girl was engaged to!" he exclaimed. "The one they said hadn't called to see her."

They examined the interior of the car minutely, but found nothing of interest—nothing except that the carpet had been removed from the floor of the back compartment. The seat-coverings were given a thorough scrutiny for blood-stains, but there were none.

"What time was this car brought in here?" he asked, turning to the manager.

"The tag says eleven-thirty last night," said Mr. Brown.

"What did the man look like who brought it in?"

"Wait a minute." Mr. Brown turned and called to a mechanic who was working on the other side of the big room. The man left his work and came over to the group.

"Say, Joe, you took this car in last night, didn't you?" asked Brown.

"Yes, I took it in," replied the mechanic.

"What did the fellow look like that brought it?"

"Gosh, I'm not sure." The man took off his greasy cap and scratched his head. "So many come and go. He was a young fellow—oh, twenty-five or so. He had on a light overcoat and some kind of a light hat. I think he had blue eyes, but I couldn't say for sure. Kind of a rosy, round face."

"Did he say anything to you?" asked Mills.

"Not much. Said he would probably leave the car here for a couple of weeks and would either come for it or send some one after it, because he was leaving town."

THE detective and reporter examined the interior of the machine again carefully, then turned their attention to the outside. The two front tires were well worn, but the two rear ones were fairly new and of the same make as those shown by the tread-marks in the dirt at the murder scene in the park. On the back of the machine were trunk and bumpers, but there was no sign of the car having been backed into a tree. In the dust on the top there were marks as of tree branches brushing over it, a few scratches on the right side and one broken curtain window.

Completing the examination, Mills turned to the manager and instructed him not to let the machine leave the garage, but to keep any person who called for it waiting on some pretext and telephone the detective bureau immediately.

They left the garage, Gates smiling, Mills thoughtful.

"Well," said the reporter, "it looks as if I have a chance to prove that Benny did not do the killing."

"A chance," said Mills. "Yes—a chance, but it will take proof and plenty of it. However, we'll forgo the pleasure of listening to the compliments Bronson will pass to Torres when he bails the kid out, and see if we can find where Woodson went from here."

"He probably stayed in one of the hotels right around here," suggested Gates. "Let's have a look.

They crossed the street and entered the Bisdarck Hotel and asked for the register sheet of the previous night. Near the bottom of the page was the bold, flowing signature: *"Frank Woodson, Sacramento."* The time recorded was eleven-forty P.M.

Mills questioned the clerk, who happened to be the one who had been on duty when Woodson registered. The clerk referred to the register and a card-file on the desk, then stated that Woodson had been called, according to his instruction, at five o'clock that morning and had checked out shortly after that. His description of the man tallied with that given by the garage mechanic. No, he had not asked about train or boat departures.

"He seemed tired and somewhat depressed," was all the clerk could add.

On the drive back to the Hall of Justice the discussion concerned this latest phase of the investigation.

"I don't see that this strengthens your contention of Benny's innocence very much," Mills told his companion.

"On the other hand, I think it does," Gates maintained. "Woodson was the fiancé of the dead girl—that is, until they had their quarrel, which must have been only a short time ago. Remember, Miss Bronson said the girl had told her that she and Woodson had had a row and that he had been driving her mad with his efforts to make it up again?"

"Yes," agreed Mills. "She said that."

"All right. Now, the telephone-call you are having traced is probably from Sacramento and probably from Woodson. I think he must have telephoned her for a date to discuss their disagreement. She must have consented, deciding, most likely, to have the thing out once and for all. Before last night she had not been wearing her engagement ring. But last night, just as she started out, she thought of it and asked Mrs. Eldridge to go back upstairs and get it. Now, why did she do that?"

"Go ahead, answer it," urged Mills.

"For one of two reasons," continued the newspaper man. "She either thought that she and Woodson might make it up and wanted to have the ring with her, or she had decided to give it back to him and tell him to be on his way."

"Consider this," suggested Mills. "If Woodson came here and killed the girl and went to all that trouble of trying to make the murder look like a suicide, do you suppose he would be so dumb as to leave a wide-open trail here at the garage by his car and by his signature at the hotel? Not much!"

"Add this to your consideration," proposed Gates. "If he killed the girl, he must have been under a tremendous mental and nervous strain—possibly temporarily demented—at the time of the killing and while he was fixing the body in the park. Is it not conceivable that he may have returned to his right mind with no remembrance of the killing, or that he might have been so exhausted from the strain by the time he returned downtown that he neglected further caution? Or perhaps he thought that he had covered his tracks so completely that further caution was not necessary."

"Such cases have been known," admitted the detective reluctantly.

"We found no blood-marks in the back of his car," continued Gates, "but neither did we find the carpet upon which the body must have been placed—it had been removed from the floor. Why?"

The argument was brought to an end by their arrival at the Hall of Justice.

STRIDENT tones issued from the detective bureau as Mills and Gates opened the door and walked in, apparently just at the end of a violent tirade.

Bronson stood near the center of the square room, head and shoulders thrust forward, hands clenched at his sides, glaring across the large flat-topped desk behind which sat Lieutenant Torres.

"I tell you it is a damnable outrage!" he stormed.

Torres turned to the newcomers.

"Mr. Bronson and I have just been having a nice, quiet little discussion of the general inefficiency of law-enforcement agencies—especially the Detective Bureau."

To Gates, who was watching Bronson closely, it seemed that the veins in the broker's neck must burst as they swelled with his anger. He puffed out his cheeks, and in a voice made hoarse by rage, he bellowed:

"Don't get sarcastic with me, Lieutenant! I'll have you broke so fast that you won't know how it happened; and believe me, I can do it!" He leaned toward the detective,

resting his clenched fists upon the desk. "How do you like that?" he asked in a choking whisper.

Torres' foot came to the floor with a thump. The good humor left his face; his eyes contracted.

"Mr. Bronson," he said, "you have just threatened to have me broke—thrown out of the Department. Maybe you will—tomorrow. . . . Very well. I'm going to break you—now!" His hand banged on the desk.

"You think a lot of that boy of yours, don't you, Bronson?"

"Certainly I do!" snapped the broker.

"We are holding him on a charge of assault sworn to by the Prohibition people. Probably would not amount to much if handled in the right way. You might get him out of that." He paused, leaned a bit forward. "I'm going to charge him with murder!"

DEAD quiet settled over the room. Bronson's jaw dropped. He sank into a chair.

"Murder!" It was only a whisper that he uttered.

"Two can play at this game of bluff, Bronson," Torres said quietly. "I'm calling you on that threat. You're big, Bronson, in the financial district. You've got friends—big men. Maybe they're big enough to get me out—or maybe not. Maybe you and your friends are big enough to keep a rope from around your son's neck—maybe not!

"I wasn't going to do this tonight, Bronson, but you've forced me to it," continued Torres. "Maybe I go out of here tomorrow—on your orders. But tonight your son stays here, charged with murder—on my orders. Get him out of that if you can!"

"You will not dare do this thing, Lieutenant." It was a statement, but it failed to carry conviction.

"Wouldn't I, though!" sneered Torres. "But that's what I'm doing right now. Get me right, Bronson: Your kid is upstairs in a steel cell, arrested on a charge of assault sworn to by the Prohibition director. You have an order from the judge to me to release him on bail on that charge. It won't take me long to get a murder warrant, and meantime I hold him—release or no release. Listen, Bronson." He leaned forward. "Your son was madly in love with this Casper girl. Did you know that?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I knew that."

Torres' eyes were fixed steadily upon him.

"Ten minutes after she left your house last night alone, he came in looking for her. He flew into a rage when he found she was not there, took a big glass of that jackass whisky you've got out there, and said he was going out to find her. He drove away in one of your cars. He admits driving all over the neighborhood hunting for her, and also that he picked up plenty of drinks along the way. Now he says he don't remember anything that happened or where he was or who he saw after ten o'clock." There was an ominous significance in the pause. "You and I and the coroner know what happened after ten o'clock."

Bronson shifted in his chair uneasily. Torres continued:

"He doesn't remember—maybe. But a policeman does remember that at ten-thirty o'clock last night while he was making his rounds along the cliff at Land's End, he was attracted to a parked machine by the violence of a quarrel going on inside. He turned his flash in to see what the trouble was. Today he has identified the occupants of that machine as the murdered girl and your son. That was one thing that happened after ten o'clock."

He paused to let the import of his statement sink in. Bronson sat dumbly watching him.

"The girl was never seen alive after that, as far as we can learn," continued the Lieutenant. "You son showed up in a South City gin-mill alone and in an ugly mood at one o'clock this morning—tried to whip a waiter and split a Prohibition officer's head with a bottle—nice, playful little fellow."

"The sand out there in the park was in excellent condition last night to take impressions, Bronson. The car in which the body of Miss Casper was carried left clear impressions of its tires. They answer the same purpose for an automobile as fingerprints do for the human being. We have photographs of those tire-impressions—wanted to compare them with the tire-tread on the car your son was driving. Smart boy you have, Bronson. All of the tires had been removed from his car by the time we got out to the wreck. I wonder why. But there was blood in the car—plenty of it. Some came from the victims of the smash-up, no doubt, but—was it all from them?" Torres shrugged insinuatingly.

Bronson's eyes had left the Lieutenant's face. He stared fixedly at a spot at the base of the wall.

"Now, here's where you come in, Bronson." Torres' eyes glinted. "After hiding out for most of the morning, the boy got to your office while these two men were there." He swept a hand toward Mills and Gates. "Unfortunate circumstance. You sent home for a change of clothing for him, chartered an airplane for an unannounced destination, took precautions against the boy being successfully followed on the way to the airport—tried to get him out of the jurisdiction, maybe out of the country. Accessory after the fact, Bronson. A crime in itself. Maybe I'll keep you here tonight too!"

Bronson tried, but failed, to speak.

"Maybe you break me, Bronson," continued Torres tensely, "but what happens to you?"

Bronson sighed deeply, arose heavily and walked slowly across the room to gaze unseeingly out of the window.

"I know when I'm licked," he said, his voice flat and lifeless. "Lieutenant, I apologize. I was excited—hasty. My words and threats, were ill-considered. You have your duty to perform as police officer. I have my duties to perform as a father. I have done nothing that any father would not have done in attempting to shield his own."

HE paused, half turned to gaze out the window again, and then continued:

"We must all continue to do our respective duties. I assure you, frankly, that with every dollar I possess and every ounce of influence I can exert, I will seek to defend my son against this charge. He is not a bad sort, though I admit he must have gone a bit wild last night, but nothing can convince me that he did this thing—that he murdered Lila Casper, the girl with whom he was, as you say, madly in love." Again he paused. The three men waited silently for him to continue.

Bronson drew out his watch and glanced at it.

"In a little over an hour," he said, "unless I am detained here, I must go to meet the grieving father of this girl—a lifelong friend of mine. Can you imagine, gentlemen, what that meeting will be like if my boy is here in prison charged with the murder of that friend's daughter—his only child?"

He spread his hands hopelessly before him.

"I stand ready to put up any amount of bond, make any pledge you may ask," he continued in a voice made tense by emotion, "as a guarantee that neither my son nor myself will leave your jurisdiction. But in God's name, Lieutenant, do not make that charge of murder now."

He stood waiting, a pathetic figure. The intent look upon Torres' face softened.

"I like a fighter," he said, his smile broadening. "I don't blame you for fighting for that boy. He's got good stuff in him. I don't want to hold him on a murder charge, but—you heard the evidence. What would the papers do

to us if we turned him loose under those circumstances?" He looked inquiringly at Gates.

Bronson also turned toward the reporter, his face brightening slightly.

"You are the only newspaper man who knows these circumstances?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes, and thank a kind Providence for that," breathed Gates fervently. "Otherwise!"—he kissed his fingers to the ceiling,—"the Evening *Times* and Parker Gates would be two entirely separate propositions after the first editions of the morning papers."

"The Evening *Times*," repeated Bronson with growing confidence. He turned to Torres. "I can protect you there," he asserted. "Certain of it. Close friends of mine own it."

"Oh, you needn't bother about that," said Gates a bit testily. "I'll take care of that if you can stop any of those people we questioned at your house today from talking. I'm sure there won't be any leak here."

"Very well," assented Torres. "Your word is good with me, Bronson. You've fixed up the bail on the assault charge." He took up his telephone and conversed briefly.

WHILE they waited for Benny to be brought from upstairs, Gates walked to the window with Bronson, and they stood there conversing.

"By the way," asked Gates, "do you happen to know the man to whom Miss Casper was engaged—Frank Woodson, I believe his name is?"

"Slightly." Bronson turned from the window and looked at the reporter questioningly. "An excellent young man as far as I know. Quite a favorite with Casper."

"What did he look like?"

"Oh, I'm not very good at that sort of thing, but I should say he was about twenty-five or -six years old, say five feet ten or eleven inches tall, medium build, light hair, blue eyes and a round, rosy face. Quite a pleasant chap to meet. Why?"

"Probably nothing at all," said Gates. "Do you suppose there would be a letter or something written by him among Miss Casper's things at your house?"

"Possibly. Would you like me to look?"

"We would appreciate it greatly if you would."

"I'll take care of that immediately upon getting home and will have my chauffeur bring it here." He paused thoughtfully. "Is he mixed up in this affair?"

"We are merely checking up on all possibilities," replied Gates.

The door opened, and Benny, accompanied by an officer, walked into the room. Bronson strode eagerly to meet him. In a few moments father and son had left the building and were on their way home. . . .

As the door closed behind Garland Bronson and Benny, Mills took up the telephone. After a moment's conversation he replaced the receiver and turned with a smile to Gates.

"You win on one count," he said. "That long-distance phone-call which Miss Casper received yesterday was from a pay station at the Southern Pacific depot in Sacramento, and it was from a party who gave his name as Frank Woodson. The call was for five minutes and went through at two-ten in the afternoon. Now, one more thing—" He produced the ring and laid it on the table. "This was found on the floor of a car registered to Frank Woodson of Sacramento—the man with whom Lila Casper broke her engagement just before she came down here."

Torres picked up the ring and examined it.

"You should have had Bronson or his son identify this ring when they were here," he commented. "No doubt it is the ring missing from the girl's finger."

"I'll get Casper to identify it when I see him in the morning," Mills apologized for his oversight, then continued: "All the members and servants of the Bronson family whom we questioned declared that Woodson had not been here to see Miss Casper. Yet we find his car parked in a garage here at eleven-thirty last night, probably a short time after the girl had met her death, and in it we find the ring, indicating that the girl had been in the machine. Also there is his telephone call from Sacramento, which might explain her having left the Bronson home alone."

"But how do you know it was Woodson driving the car?" asked Torres.

"We don't know that, but we will as soon as Bronson gets home and sends his chauffeur back with some of Woodson's letters," broke in Gates. "I asked him to do that." He went on to tell Torres of finding Woodson's name on the hotel register.

The discussion was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Torres. A small man in the livery of a chauffeur entered the room.

"From Mr. Bronson," he said, and placed an envelope upon the desk. "He said you were waiting for it." Saluting, he turned and left the room.

Torres slit open the envelope with his finger and from it took three smaller envelopes, all addressed in a bold hand, to Miss Lila Casper at Bronson's address. The heads of the three men came together over the desk as they examined the letters. Mills picked up one of them and turned to the last page. There, in the same bold, flowing hand as had been seen on the hotel register, was the name *Frank*. The last name had not been signed. He handed the letter to Gates.

"And that is that," commented the detective, looking at the reporter for confirmation. "The man who wrote these letters is the one who signed the hotel register."

"Not a doubt of it," agreed Gates, studying the signature.

They read the letters through, but aside from the poetic declarations of undying devotion and pleadings for a reconciliation, there was nothing which might have a bearing upon the tragedy. No mention was made of the other man to whom Miss Bronson, Mrs. Eldridge and Benny had alluded as having caused the break between Woodson and Miss Casper, except in one place where Woodson expressed distrust of "this brunette sheik" and importuned Lila to forget him.

"The 'brunette sheik' must be this fellow Peltos Miss Casper and Benny both referred to," commented Gates.

"We have our hands on Benny," said Mills, "and I think we'd better have Sacramento check up on these other two —Woodson and Peltos."

"Right," agreed Torres. "I'll wire them right away."

MILLS and Gates spent the next hour in an adjacent restaurant. When they returned, Torres handed Mills a telegram. It was from the Sacramento police department and said:

FRANK WOODSON AND SIGRID PELTOS BOTH HAVE EXCELLENT REPUTATIONS AND RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS HERE STOP WOODSON LEFT HERE FOR SALT LAKE CITY ON 2:25 P.M. SOUTHERN PACIFIC TRAIN YESTERDAY STOP DEPOT MASTER SAYS HE SAW HIM READY TO BOARD TRAIN JUST BEFORE LEAVING TIME STOP OFFICIALS STATE TICKET HE PURCHASED WAS USED AND BERTH OCCUPIED STOP PLANNED TO STAY AT UTAH HOTEL, SALT LAKE CITY STOP PELTOS IS PAYING TELLER AT CASPER'S BANK AND WAS WORKING AT OFFICE UNTIL FIVE LAST NIGHT AND AT USUAL TIME THIS MORNING STOP NOTHING SUSPICIOUS

"Now what do you make of the situation?" asked Torres when they had finished reading.

Neither of the men answered for a moment. Gates took a turn about the room.

"Peltos seems to be accounted for," he said, "but it's a dead certainty that Woodson could not have been here in San Francisco and on the train going to Salt Lake City at the same time."

"Obviously not," said Mills. "Yet we seem to have about as much proof that he was in one place as the other. Here in San Francisco we have an automobile registered in Woodson's name parked in a garage, his signature on a hotel register and the description of the man who left the auto and who signed the hotel register tallying with that given by a person who knows him. In Sacramento we have the word of the railway ticket agent that he purchased a ticket for Salt Lake City, the word of the station master, who knows him, that he boarded the train, and the word of others that he used the ticket and slept in the berth. Now, just where was he?"

"Perhaps he left the train at some station and motored back," suggested Gates.

"Now it is my turn to blush," said Mills. "The train left Sacramento at two-twenty-five in the afternoon. His berth was slept in. Now, please tell me how he would get back to San Francisco by ten-thirty or eleven-thirty o'clock in his automobile if he stayed on that train until after the berths had been made up at night."

"Well, there's one way to settle it," commented Torres. "I'll telegraph to the Utah Hotel and find out if he arrived and at what time." He reached for a pad of telegraph blanks and turned the messenger call-button on the wall.

They had not long to wait for the return message:

FRANK WOODSON KNOWN PERSONALLY HERE REGISTERED FROM SACRAMENTO AT ABOUT TWO P.M. THIS AFTERNOON

Torres took up his telephone and called the Southern Pacific information bureau. As he asked several questions, he jotted notes upon a telegraph blank.

"Check," he said when he had hung up the receiver. "The train which left Sacramento at two-twenty-five o'clock yesterday afternoon was due at Salt Lake City at one-fifty this afternoon. Woodson registered at the hotel about ten minutes after the arrival time of the train."

"That being the case," said Mills, a puzzled expression on his face, "how can we account for his signature—his own signature—being signed on the Hotel Bisdarck register by a man answering Woodson's description at eleven-thirty o'clock last night, at the same time that this same person was sleeping in his berth on the way to Salt Lake City?"

Torres picked up the telegrams and studied them.

"Something mighty queer about this business," he said. "He must have a double working for him."

"In that event,"—from Gates,—"which was the double?"

ARRIVING at the Bronson house shortly after ten o'clock the next morning, Mills and Gates were promptly admitted and a moment later Bronson appeared. He looked tired and haggard as he extended his hand to each of the men in turn.

"Glad to see you," he said. "Joseph—Mr. Casper, you know—will be down in a moment, but I doubt if he will be able to shed a great deal of light upon this affair." He motioned them to their seats, selecting one for himself at the side of the table nearest the door.

"This has, as you may imagine, been a severe blow to Mr. Casper—an extremely severe blow," he continued. "But as a whole, he has taken it rather better than I expected that he would. His heart, you know, is not as good as it might be, and I had serious doubts at first that he would be able to withstand the shock."

There was a slight sound in the hall. Mrs. Eldridge appeared at the door and ushered in a little man with bristling side-whiskers of a reddish tinge, and great gray eyes which seemed to illuminate his face. He wore a rather formally cut dark suit which fitted him closely.

The three men stood up to meet him as he advanced, and Bronson introduced them.

"Now, gentlemen, let us be seated." Casper indicated chairs as though presiding at a directors' meeting. "We have business of importance. This crime—this dastardly crime—must be solved. The slayer of my daughter—my only child—must be found. We will find him!"

THERE was the calmness of conviction in his voice. He seated himself rigidly in a big chair.

"Mr. Bronson tells me that you have been working most diligently upon this case. Where have you got?"

"We have scarcely had time yet, Mr. Casper," said Mills.

"Time! Ah, yes. It takes time to solve these things, but we must waste none of it. We must hurry, hurry!"

He stroked his side-whiskers vigorously for a moment. Then, as though catching himself in some action against which he was guarding, he lowered his hands again and began gently stroking his knees. His mouth set firmly, and he continued in a patently repressed voice:

"It is for you to solve this crime—solve it as quickly as possible." His wide eyes moved from one to the other of the men. "Both good men. I can see that. But I too am good at puzzles, and I will help you solve this thing. Who knows—I may find the solution first. Now, a few facts—a very few which I have. Understand first that my daughter did not kill herself. Mr. Bronson tells me that there was some suggestion of that. An utter absurdity, gentlemen. Lila had everything in the world that she desired. A good home, many excellent friends, her own automobile, a liberal monthly allowance in addition to her salary at the bank, a joyous disposition. No! It is unthinkable!"

Mills had leaned forward interestedly.

"Pardon me, Mr. Casper," he said, "but did you say that your daughter was working in your bank?"

"Yes," replied Casper. "She had charge of the savings department—an efficient manager she was, too. Took it up to keep herself busy—wanted to do something useful."

"I see," said Mills.

"Yes," continued Casper, "and she was happy in her work, happy in everything. She was to have been married before long to Mr. Frank Woodson, an admirable young man—smart, industrious, on his way to wealth and influence. I looked forward to the event and to her continued happiness."

"If you will pardon another interruption," Mills apologized, "do you happen to know where Mr. Woodson is at the present time?"

"Yes—in Salt Lake City. He left by train from Sacramento day before yesterday. I attempted to get him by telephone yesterday afternoon after Mr. Bronson had telephoned me of Lila's death, but he had left the hotel for a trip of a day or two by automobile to call upon some of his clients who live far in the country." He ground the palms of his hands together. "It will be a terrible blow to him. I left a message at the hotel for him."

"Do you recognize this ring?" Mills asked, extending it to Casper, who took it and examined it closely.

"Ah, yes." Casper nodded his head slowly. "It is the ring which Mr. Woodson gave to my daughter when they became engaged. A beautiful stone and setting." He handed it back. "The shattered dream of youth."

Mrs. Eldridge appeared at the door and beckoned to Bronson. He arose, excused himself and left the room.

"She was wearing the ring, of course," said Casper.

"No," returned the detective. "It was not on her finger. It was found on the floor of an automobile which was parked in a garage."

Casper arose from his chair—abruptly, eagerly.

"You have found the automobile of the man who killed her?" he demanded tensely.

"I don't know," said Mills.

"But you have looked this man up? You have arrested him?" There was an imperative note in the banker's voice.

"No, not yet," said Mills slowly. "He is out of the State, according to what you just told us."

"What do you mean?" Casper demanded.

Mills watched him closely.

"The car in which this ring was found was registered to Frank Woodson," he said.

For a moment Casper teetered on his heels as though he had been struck a blow.

He sat down, his eyes fixed upon the face of the detective and dilated more widely than ever.

"But that is an impossibility—a physical impossibility. Frank was on the train going to Salt Lake City at the time Lila was killed. No! An utter impossibility."

Mills explained in detail the discoveries which had been made in relation to Woodson's movements. Finally he took from his pocket the hotel register sheet which he had secured earlier in the morning from the Bisdarck.

"Would you recognize that signature?" he asked, spreading the sheet out on the table before Casper and indicating with his finger where Woodson's name was signed.

The banker studied it a moment. An expression of surprise and pain came over his face.

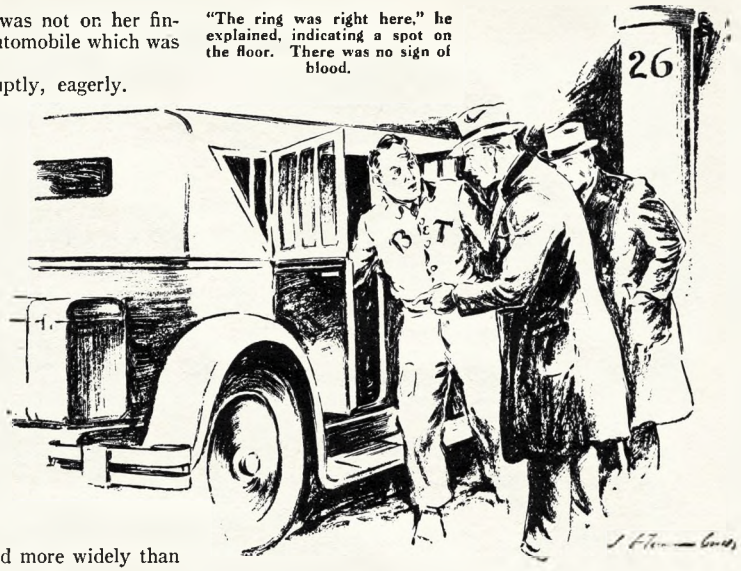
"Unbelievable! Unbelievable!" he exclaimed softly. "That is his own signature—I am positive of it, would know it any place." His jaws clamped tightly. He drummed with the tips of his fingers for a moment. "Frank must have an explanation of some kind, and we will get it!"

Bronson reëntered the room, a worried expression upon his face which he seemed particularly anxious to conceal from Casper.

"Another thing which you may possibly be able to help us in identifying," said Mills, drawing the pearl-handled revolver from his pocket, "is the gun with which your daughter was shot." He placed the pistol on the table. "Do you remember of ever having seen this before, Mr. Casper?"

For a moment it seemed that Casper would lose the control which it could plainly be seen he was striving to maintain. Then, with an almost imperceptible shudder, he reached out, took up the gun and turned it slowly in his hands.

"Yes,"—he broke the gun, looked at the empty chambers,—"I have seen this gun before." He weighed it in his hand. "Because of the numerous robberies, we have made it compulsory at the bank for each of those working at a window accessible to the public to have a gun within reach at all times. The ones we purchased were heavy automatics, and my daughter did not like their ugliness, so I bought this one for her. It was in her drawer at the savings-deposit window the last time I saw it." His fingers moved caressingly over its shiny surface. "So this is the gun which took the life of my daughter! I suppose you must keep it for evidence."



"The ring was right here," he explained, indicating a spot on the floor. There was no sign of blood.

There was silence for a space. Mills replaced the gun in his pocket. He turned again to Casper.

"You have a man by the name of Peltos—Sigrid Peltos, working in your bank, have you not, Mr. Casper?"

"Yes," the banker answered with an inflection of inquiry in his voice. "He is my paying teller. Why?"

"Were you aware that your daughter had become quite deeply interested in him?" asked Mills.

"Interested? I don't quite understand what you mean, Mr. Mills. Please explain. They were friends, yes, but merely friends—fellow-workers in the bank."

"You did not know that it was because of Mr. Peltos that your daughter and Mr. Woodson had about decided to break their engagement?"

"No!" Casper said in surprise, frowning. "I did not know that they contemplated breaking their engagement."

"Apparently. Your daughter told this to both Miss Bronson and Benny Bronson," said Mills. "I wondered if Woodson might have come to San Francisco to see her about it."

"This is the first I've heard of it, I assure you, Mr. Mills," replied the banker. "We must learn more about it. Peltos is an efficient worker, and he has a charming personality, but—we must learn more about this business."

For a time they discussed various angles of the case.

"I am counting upon you," said Casper as Mills and Gates arose to take their departure. "You may likewise count upon me, but please do not forget to keep me fully informed of any new developments. We will find the one who did this thing."

Bronson accompanied them to the door and down the steps toward their parked automobile.

"That telephone message I received awhile ago," he said, "was from Sacramento. I thought you should know about it. I don't know what Casper will do when I tell him about it. Evidently the bank officials feared the effect upon him, so they asked me to inform him as mercifully as possible that the auditor has found Miss Casper's accounts something over five thousand dollars short."

Gates whistled softly. Mills looked at Bronson questioningly.

"When did they make this discovery?" he asked.

"Evidently this morning."

"But Miss Casper has been away from the bank for ten days or more," objected Mills.

"Yes, but as I understood it, there was merely a brief checking up and no formal audit of her books when she left for this short vacation. The present audit, it seems, discloses that the shortages occurred some time prior to her departure, and the discovery was made in the course of a general audit of all of the bank books."

ON the train going to Sacramento that afternoon Gates spoke to Casper of that missing five thousand. "Just what connection, if any, do you believe there is between this shortage in your daughter's accounts and the crime which has been committed?" he asked.

Casper turned his head slowly toward his companion.

"That, my young friend, is what I have been puzzling about ever since I was told of it. That there is some connection, I am convinced, but what it is remains to be seen. I cannot imagine any reason which would induce Lila to take the sum of five thousand dollars, or any other sum, from the bank. Why, good Lord, she had a liberal allowance—a most liberal one—and had she been in need of more funds, she knew that she had but to mention it to me. I have never failed her."

Abruptly he turned back to the window and sank into moody silence. . . .

The train was moving through the outskirts of the city. Passengers were reaching to the overhead racks for their luggage. Casper stirred, sighed deeply and sat up from the reclining position into which he had slumped.

"I have had a hard two days, and there are harder ones ahead," said the banker. "Lila is gone, and nothing can bring her back. I will miss her in these last days of my life to which I had looked forward with such joy." His face hardened. "And the man who took her from me is still alive and at liberty!"

It was after closing time when Casper and Gates alighted from their taxicab in front of the Central City & Northern Bank. They found the doors locked, but through the windows they could see clerks still at work over their books. Casper ushered the reporter into the main lobby of the building and on past the elevators well toward the rear, where he unlocked a small door. They entered his private office directly.

The room, the walls of which were of walnut panels topped a foot or so below the ceiling by a scroll-strip, was perhaps a third longer than it was wide. It was lighted by two large frosted-glass windows at one end, and by a heavy brass electrolier suspended from the center of the ceiling. Across one corner next the windows stood a large flat-topped desk. Opposite this against the wall was a book-case filled with red and black volumes. Across from the door through which they had entered was a door which Gates decided must lead into the bank, and at the end opposite the windows was another door above which, in raised brass lettering, were the words *Directors' Room.*

"Here," Casper said to Gates, "let me have your hat and coat." He hung them on the tree beside his own. He motioned the reporter to a chair beside his desk and moved to his own seat. "Now, Mr. Gates, what is your plan of action?"

"I presume you will make a thorough investigation of the shortage charged to your daughter's accounts," said the reporter.

"A most thorough investigation, Mr. Gates. You may, I believe, safely trust that part of it to me."

"In no better hands," commented Gates. "As for myself, I first look up Woodson and Peltos. We must assure ourselves about them."

Casper nodded with approval.

"You may start this moment," he remarked. "I will have Mr. Peltos step in now, and you may talk with him while I go into details with the auditor about the shortage."

He pressed a concealed button in his desk. Almost immediately the door leading into the main part of the bank opened, and a young lady entered. Casper asked her to have Mr. Avery and Mr. Peltos step in.

The girl departed. A moment later a short, pudgy individual wearing thick-lensed glasses and a solemn expression entered the room. Casper greeted him.

"Mr. Avery, shake hands with Mr. Gates of San Francisco," he said. They acknowledged the introduction. "Mr. Avery is our auditor," Casper explained to the newspaper man.

The door opened again, and a man somewhat taller than Gates entered, the light from the windows and the electric globes glistening upon the sleek jet of his hair, which ran well down on his forehead. From beneath unusually heavy eyebrows, which grew together above his nose, a pair of eyes matching the hair in the depth of their color, rested upon the occupants of the room. He closed the door softly and advanced deferentially toward Casper.

"You may know, Mr. Casper," he said with a low note of concern in his voice, "that we all sympathize deeply with you in this terrible loss that has come upon you. Everyone in the bank suffers with you." He offered his hand to the banker.

Casper took the hand with a listless motion, his big eyes resting upon the man for a moment.

"Thank you, Mr. Peltos," he said. "I know I have the sympathy of all in this institution, but that will not bring back to me the daughter that has been taken from me." He turned to the reporter.

"Mr. Gates, meet Mr. Peltos, our paying teller," he introduced them. "Mr. Gates wishes for a few words with you, Mr. Peltos."

"You may use the directors' room," suggested Casper, opening the door for them and switching on the lights. "You will be undisturbed. I will be busy here for a short time with Mr. Avery."

They stepped into the room, Gates closing the door behind him. Down the center of the room was a long walnut table matching the paneled walls. Ranged along each side of the table were heavy chairs with low, rounded backs. There were no windows in the room, but near the ceiling were ventilator openings at spaced intervals. The two seated themselves.

"One cannot help but feel deeply for Mr. Casper," Peltos commented. "He is so alone now, you know. The girl was his only child—his only relative, so far as I know. He was very fond of her."

"Yes," agreed the reporter. "He was very fond of her, and he is bearing up much better than was to be expected. I think a part of his strength—most of it, in fact—comes from his determination to run to earth the man who committed the crime."

"But we understood here that it was a case of suicide." There was repressed surprise in the teller's voice.

GATES took a pencil from his pocket, rolled it beneath his palm on the table.

"So we thought at first," he remarked, "but our evidence soon contradicted that theory."

"You have evidence, then, that Miss Casper was—murdered?"

"Indisputable evidence," Gates asserted.

"What sort of evidence, may I ask?" There was polite caution in the inquiry.

"Later, perhaps, Mr. Peltos," replied the newspaper man.

"Every moment counts. Even at this instant the murderer may be making his way to safety."

"You think, then, that the person you suspect of killing Miss Casper is making his escape now?" There was an eager interest in the question.

The reporter's face was a mask. "Attempting to—hoping to," he commented.

"You know, then," Peltos asked, "who this person is?"

"Suspect," corrected Gates. "Merely suspect who he is. We thought perhaps you might be able to assist us in some way." There was invitation in his tone.

Peltos crossed his legs, fingered the crease at the knee of his trousers and looked up from beneath his dark brows.

"Perhaps," he said. "But first you must understand my position. God knows I want to help."

HE studied a panel in the wall a moment. "It was not generally known," he continued, "but Miss Casper and I were practically engaged—at least I considered such a happy event as being practically assured for the very near future."

"Yes?" There was simulated surprise in Gates' query. "But I understood she was engaged to Frank Woodson."

A shrug and supercilious pursing of the lips greeted his remark.

"That engagement, I must tell you," said Peltos, "was to have been broken off. In fact, from what Miss Casper told me, it had already been broken off. She intended returning the engagement ring to Mr. Woodson immediately upon coming back from San Francisco."

"When did she tell you that, Mr. Peltos?"

"Just before she went away," answered the teller.

"I see," Gates observed. "You realize, of course, Mr. Peltos," he remarked, "that in an investigation of this sort we can only arrive at the solution through a process of elimination. During that process it is unavoidable that some should be questioned, merely as a matter of form, who have not the slightest connection with the crime committed. I have taken it for granted that you would have no objection to telling where you were and what you did on Monday night—the night of the murder." He glanced questioningly at the teller.

There was just the mere hint of contraction in Peltos' dark eyes. "Not the slightest," he replied. "I worked here in the bank until five o'clock Monday evening. The building watchman will certify to that, for I spoke to him as I left. I strolled about the streets for a short time and then went in to the Danzig Cafeteria for supper. It was about seven o'clock when I came out of there, to find the evening so pleasant that I decided to take a short drive alone. I got my automobile and drove north into the country for about fifteen miles, then returned to my apartment and read until eleven o'clock. Then I went to bed."

Gates nodded. There was a disarming frankness about the way in which Peltos had related his activities of the evening. Apparently he dismissed the subject.

"You suggested a moment ago," the reporter reminded him, "that you might be able to throw some light upon this crime."

"A mere incident." Peltos shrugged. "I hesitate to mention it for fear that jealousy might be ascribed as my motive." He touched his tight little mustache lightly as though pressing it in place. "I assure you that such is not the case. I had no reason for jealousy. It was definitely settled that Miss Casper and I were to be engaged shortly after the breaking of her engagement to Mr. Woodson." He placed a slight emphasis upon the name.

"I understand," said Gates.

Peltos crossed his forearms on the table.

"Mr. Woodson is supposed to have gone to Salt Lake City on the two-twenty-five train Monday afternoon," he said evenly.

"Yes," agreed Gates.

"He did not go on that train!"

"How do you know that?" Mills asked.

"He was seen driving toward San Francisco fifteen minutes after that train had gone."

"You are positive of that?"

"There can be no mistake—I saw him myself! I had stepped out to do an errand. I saw him while I was on my way back here at about twenty minutes to three."

"How did you know, Mr. Peltos, that Woodson was supposed to be leaving on that train?"

"He was in the bank that morning to cash a check, and I heard him tell one of the clerks that he was leaving for Salt Lake City at that time."

Gates nodded. That settled one question, then. But, did it? He turned to Peltos.

"That train was due in Salt Lake City at one-fifty Tuesday afternoon. Woodson registered at the Utah Hotel at two o'clock—ten minutes after the train arrived at the station. How could he have got there at that precise time if he was not on that train?"

A supercilious smile spread over the teller's dark face.

"Have you forgotten, Mr. Gates, that we have airplanes? Please do not misunderstand me; it is not in my heart to wish to get Mr. Woodson into trouble. It is merely an incident which you, from your experience, will know how to value."

Airplane! The suggestion impinged upon Gates' consciousness. Why in the name of common sense had he not thought of it before?

"I will check up on that." He spoke calmly enough, though his nerves tingled with eagerness to be on the trail Peltos had suggested. The teller stood up.

"I trust, Mr. Gates, that you will not mention that it was I who gave you the suggestion. You understand how it is. I cannot conceive of Woodson having anything at all to do with this, but—" He shrugged eloquently. "If there is nothing more, I still have work to do in the office."

"Very good," said Gates, rising. "If I think of anything else, I can reach you here or at your apartment, I suppose."

"Quite easily."

They stepped back into Casper's office.

THE banker was at his desk working over account books which the auditor had left with him when Gates and the teller emerged from the directors' room. He laid down the pencil with which he had been making figures and nodded to Peltos as the latter went out into the banking room. When the door had closed, Gates took the chair by the side of the banker's desk.

"Were you able to obtain any information from him?" asked Casper, nodding toward the door.

Gates related the result of the interview in the director's room. Then he walked to where his overcoat was hanging and took from his pocket a folded newspaper. This he spread out on the desk, searching through it until he came to the air-mail schedules. A moment he studied them; then, marking several of the figures with his pencil, he looked at Casper, a light of discovery in his eyes.

"Mr. Woodson, or the person who registered as Woodson, left a call at the Bisdarck hotel where he stayed in San Francisco, for five o'clock Tuesday morning," he reminded the banker, tapping the schedule meaningly with his pencil.

Casper sat still, his eyes on the schedule, and made no comment.

"The plane which left Oakland airport at seven o'clock Tuesday morning arrived in Salt Lake City at one-forty-five Tuesday afternoon—just five minutes prior to the arrival of the Southern Pacific train which left here at two-twenty-five Monday afternoon—the train upon which Woodson was supposed to travel!"

Gates waited for some sign from the banker. Casper's eyes were still fixed upon the newspaper page. A pallor spread over his face. Suddenly he looked up, his wide eyes narrowing, hardening. He clenched his small fist.

"We will follow this," he said in a low, passionate voice, "to whatever end it leads. My faith is shaken—destroyed!" His clenched hand fell inertly to the top of the desk. "No! I will not say that. God forbid that I lose all faith in my fellow-men. I must have proof of this, Gates. Proof!" His voice gained in volume. "Woodson was to have become my son-in-law, the husband of my Lila. He could not have done this thing! Good God, he could not have done it!" He slumped back exhausted in his chair.

"I will investigate this thoroughly," said Gates, "before we do anything about it."

Gates left the office through the door into the main lobby of the building his mind busy with speculations. It all worked out so perfectly, now that he had checked the airplane schedules. How simple Woodson's scheme had been, how neatly it checked up now!

Gates reviewed the happenings and formulated his theory as he went. Woodson, he knew, had been seeking desperately for a reconciliation with Lila Casper. Apparently she had refused him. He had probably brooded over the affair. Possibly he was in dire need of the money which he knew marriage with her would bring from her father. Perhaps insane jealousy had seized him, and he had decided that if he could not have her no one else would. He had cunningly arranged his alibi at the Southern Pacific station, purchased his ticket, reserved his berth, taking care to let it be known at the bank and in other places that he was taking the Monday afternoon train to Salt Lake City.

From the station he had telephoned to Miss Casper, doubtless arranging to see her that night, persuaded her to meet him at some place away from the Bronsons' home, for he wanted no one to see him with her on that night. Possibly he had admonished her to say nothing of his coming visit. He had then arranged for some one to board the train in his stead and make use of his ticket, occupy his berth, possibly use his name. Then he had slipped away from the station, secured his car and driven to San Francisco.

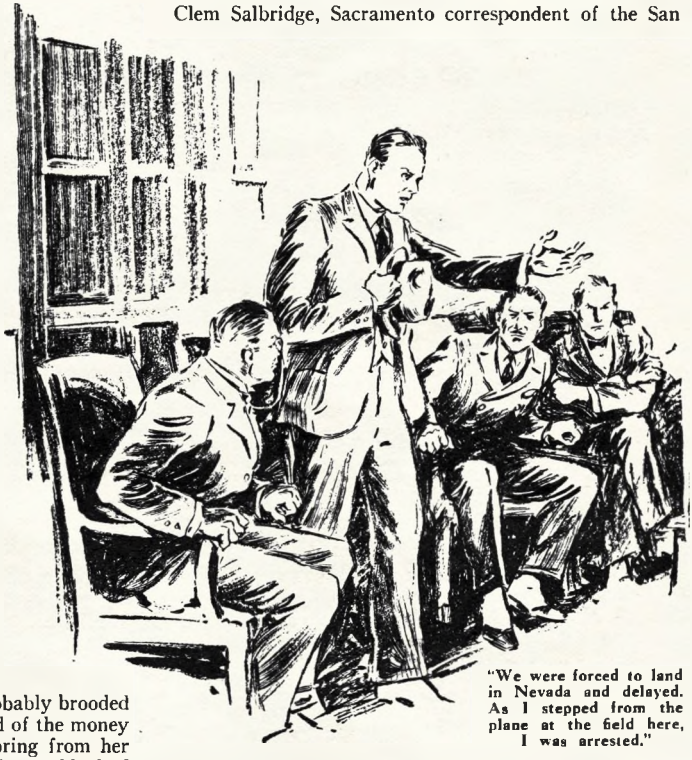
But how had Woodson come into possession of the pearl-handled revolver? Gates wondered as he walked. Perhaps Lila had taken it with her. Woodson may have bribed a janitor or some one at the bank to secure it for him. The reporter was unable to explain this fully to his own satisfaction, but it was a minor detail.

The fact stood out that Woodson had had ample time to drive to San Francisco, meet Lila when she left the house at eight-thirty, argue with her over their reconciliation and then—the shooting, the drive into the park, arrangement of the body and the false footprints.

Woodson had arrived at the garage and parked his car at eleven-thirty. The rest was clear—an early-morning boat across the bay, a few hours in an airplane, and arrival at the hotel in Salt Lake City just as passengers from the train were arriving.

Gates turned into a building and took the elevator to the second floor.

Clem Salbridge, Sacramento correspondent of the San Francisco Evening *Times*, shook his head slowly as Gates finished his recital of events which had led him to the conclusion that Frank Woodson may have committed the murder.



"We were forced to land in Nevada and delayed. As I stepped from the plane at the field here, I was arrested."

"I know him well," he said. "I can't imagine him, under any set of circumstances, doing such a thing; and even if he did, he would stay and face the music. He's that kind."

"Evidently this particular music was not to his liking," remarked Gates with sarcasm.

They were seated in Salbridge's office awaiting word from Detective-sergeant Mills as to what had been done on Gates' tip that Woodson might have used the airplane route in getting to Salt Lake City.

The telephone rang. Salbridge took up the instrument, then motioned Gates to a booth in the rear of the office.

A few minutes later Gates returned and took his seat, an expression of mingled triumph and defeat upon his face.

"Woodson has vanished," he announced.

"What?" exclaimed Salbridge. "You don't mean that!"

"Yes. Mills wired Salt Lake City to pick him up, but he beat them to it. All they could find was that he had checked out of the hotel, chartered a private plane and flown away—nobody knows where. He left at noon today."

"He's probably flying back here," Salbridge decided. "When Casper telephoned to him yesterday, he left a message saying what he wanted, didn't he? Well, there's your

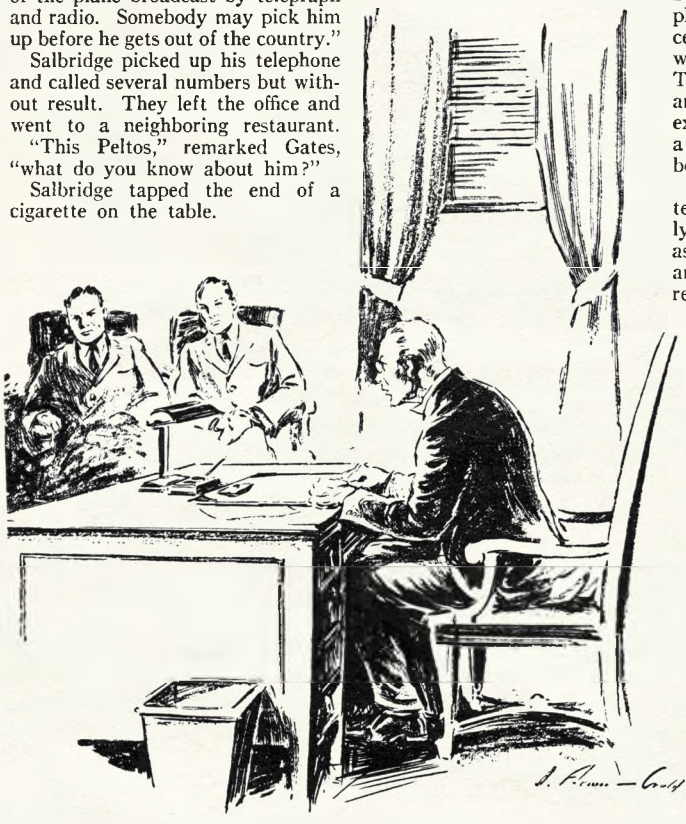
answer to that. Woodson may be in town some place right now. It's about five hours' flying time."

"I think it will be longer flying time than that to where Woodson is headed," commented Gates. "But," he added hopefully, "there is a chance. Mills has had a warrant sworn out, and Woodson's description and a description of the plane broadcast by telepraph and radio. Somebody may pick him up before he gets out of the country."

Salbridge picked up his telephone and called several numbers but without result. They left the office and went to a neighboring restaurant.

"This Peltos," remarked Gates, "what do you know about him?"

Salbridge tapped the end of a cigarette on the table.



"As far as I know, he is all right." He exhaled a cloud of smoke. "But I may not know far enough," he added.

"There was nothing I could lay my finger on in the talk I had with him today," said Gates. "Nothing definite, but still—" He took a swallow of coffee. "His answers were straightforward enough. He seemed quite frank, quite open about everything, and yet at the end of that interview I wasn't satisfied with him."

They were silent. A white-clad waiter deferentially inquired as to their further needs, scribbled undecipherable figures upon a pad and left the check.

"I have a hunch," said Salbridge finally. "I know this town pretty well, know it the way you know San Francisco. Know a lot about its people—including bankers. Let's take a walk."

The two left the restaurant.

GATES looked up at the big gilded clock set in the face of a marble pillar as he entered the Central City & Northern Bank. Its hands pointed to ten minutes of three. Casper had asked him to be in his office promptly at three o'clock.

"Ten minutes," he muttered to himself, "and then—who knows?" It was with a feeling of impending crisis that he walked slowly down the long banking room. . . . Something was about to happen. Gates had seen it in Casper's eyes that morning when he and Salbridge had finished the recital of their night's investigations—investigations made on a "hunch" which had taken them into the guarded portals of an exclusive "club" on the edge of the business section, into the smoke-laden atmosphere of a river dive. Thence they had proceeded to a quiet apartment house and done what even the police would not have dared. They had come away with a pair of shoes and a tan silk handkerchief. They had also examined minutely an automobile parked in a private garage, the lock to which they had been forced to pick like a couple of burglars.

Gates paused at one of the desks and pretended to be filling out a slip while he covertly studied the faces of the bank employees as they worked behind their windows—pleasant, intelligent faces for the most part, he reflected. There was the one directly opposite him, a youth with thick, slicked-back hair and alert blue eyes; the one to the right with the bushy red hair and the brilliant tie to match; the one next to him with the rimmed glasses which gave him an owlish look of solemn wisdom, and at the end, the fluffy blonde girl who had taken the place of the banker's murdered daughter at the savings window.

Gates' eyes swept back to the first window on the left—that of the paying teller. Peltos looked up from his work and nodded pleasantly. Gates nodded in acknowledgment.

Glancing at the clock again, the reporter continued on to the rear and knocked gently upon the door bearing in brass letters above it the word: *"President."*

"Ah, right on time," Casper greeted him as he stepped inside. "The others will be here directly." He glanced behind Gates to see if there was not some one following. "Where is your friend Mr. Salbridge?" he inquired.

"He was delayed at the office," replied Gates, "but will be here in a few minutes. Mills and Bronson are driving up and should be here directly. Mills is bringing the things you wanted."

"And Woodson?" inquired Casper.

Gates nodded.

"They have agreed to bring him over here from the city prison as soon as Mills arrives to take charge of him."

"Good!" The little banker rubbed his hands together. "You will not regret the time you have spent upon this case!"

A number of chairs had been brought in from the director's room, and to the arrangement of these Casper now turned his attention. Six of them he placed in a semicircle before his desk. Near the door leading to the banking room he placed the first, then ranged the others down the length of the room, leaving a space of about a foot between them.

A knock sounded at the door. Casper opened it. Mills and Bronson entered.

From beneath his arm Mills took a package and set it down on the desk.

"The things you asked me to bring," he explained to Casper.

"Ah, yes." The banker stepped eagerly to the desk and unwrapped the package. From the paper he took a large block of plaster. With hands that trembled slightly he reached into the lower drawer of his desk and took out a pair of shoes. One of these he fitted into the deep imprint in the top of the plaster cast. It fitted, even to the notch in the rubber heel.

MILLS, who had been watching him, took the cast and shoe and examined them carefully. Placing the plaster cast upon the desk, he took out his knife and carefully picked the dirt from several of the round nail-holes in the heel. This he scraped into a little pile on a sheet of paper. From his pocket he took a small bottle, removed the cork and poured from it another tiny pile of dirt beside the one on the sheet. He examined them closely through a pocket microscope, and nodded his head.

"This is, without the slightest doubt, the shoe worn at the scene of the murder," he confirmed. "Not only does it fit the impression exactly, but the dirt I scraped from the nail-holes in the heel is the same as the sample I took at the time from in front of the park bench upon which Miss Casper's body was found. There are wide differences in soil, and the park superintendent informs me that this particular soil is found in but few places."

Bronson and Gates had joined the others at the desk.

"And that is not all," chimed Casper, reaching again into the desk drawer and bringing forth a tan silk handkerchief. He spread it out upon the desk. At one corner it was wrinkled where a thread had been pulled.

"You have the thread which was caught on the gun?" he asked of Mills.

The detective took out his pocketbook and extracted the bit of silk. He straightened out the wrinkles in the handkerchief and placed the bit of thread upon it. There was no question. The thread found clinging to the gun had been pulled from this particular handkerchief.

"Good work!" exclaimed Mills. "I suppose—" He turned inquiringly to Gates. "Your work?"

The reporter bowed solemnly. As he did so, his eye caught a movement at the door.

"Oh," he said, stepping toward the newcomer and taking him by the arm, "let me introduce my fellow in crime—in fact, the one who was responsible for the success of our little expedition last night—Mr. Clem Salbridge."

The introduction was acknowledged enthusiastically by Mills and Bronson. Casper extended his hand, greeting the Sacramento newspaper man.

"I don't see, then," said Mills, "why we need all this." He waved his hand to indicate the preparations Casper had made for the meeting, and looked inquiringly at Casper and Gates. "This evidence seems to me quite sufficient for conclusive action."

Casper had picked up the pearl-handled revolver which Mills had brought with the other things, and was fondling it. He broke it and looked into its empty chambers, snapped it closed and laid it back on the desk.

"Ah, evidence!" he exclaimed in a voice slightly higher and louder than his ordinary speaking voice. "For what does it count? Every day we have evidence in our courts. But we also have smart attorneys, and we have a million and one technicalities by which those attorneys free the guilty and send them back among us to continue their murders and robberies, and to laugh at the courts, the judges and their helpless victims." There was bitterness in his tone. "I am seeking stronger evidence than these, Mr. Mills." He waved his hand over the exhibits on his desk. "I am seeking a confession—a confession to be made here before you men. That is why I have arranged this little gathering. You will accede, I hope."

Mills shrugged.

"If you are sure that by this we are not giving the criminal a chance to make his escape," he said.

"Do you think that I, who am more anxious than any of you to see justice done in this case, would leave such a possibility?" He turned his attention to putting the plaster cast, shoes and handkerchief into the lower drawer of his desk. The little gun, however, he placed in the wide top drawer.

Mills and Gates walked to the far end of the room.

"I am in the dark about a lot of this," said the detective. "Tell me all about it."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when there came a heavy knocking at the door. They turned. In the doorway, holding a light hat in one hand and the other hand thrust deep into the side pocket of his light overcoat, stood a round-faced, rosy-cheeked man surveying the group, a defiant light in his blue eyes. Behind him stood two uniformed policemen.

Indignation was written upon the face of the new arrival. Mills turned toward him.

"You are Mr. Woodson?" he inquired.

The man in the light overcoat surveyed him. "I am," he returned tersely.

Salbridge came forward with low greetings. Casper, too, advanced, a mingling of concern and elation showing upon his face.

Mills stepped to the door, conferred with the officers briefly and they departed.

A moment Casper stood nervously pulling at his side-whiskers; then he rapped sharply upon his desk.

"Now, gentlemen, if you will kindly be seated," he requested in a board-of-directors' tone of voice while he walked from behind his desk. "Mr. Mills, you will, if you please, take this chair." He indicated the one next the door and farthest from his desk. He ushered Gates to the chair next to Mills, and Salbridge next to him. One chair he skipped, then placed Woodson, and nearest to his desk, Bronson.

"Now, there is one other," he remarked as he pressed a button on his desk. "Will you please ask Mr. Peltos to step in?" he asked the girl who appeared at the door.

Casper's eyes hardly left the door for the minute or more which elapsed before the paying teller entered the room. The banker stepped across immediately and closed the door behind his employee. Only Mills and Gates, who were closest to him, saw his quick movement in locking the door and pocketing the key.

"Mr. Sigrid Peltos," intoned Casper, introducing the paying teller to the members of the group and motioning him to the vacant chair.

Mills surveyed the teller with interest. In build he greatly resembled Benny Bronson, a likeness which was heightened by his dark hair and complexion. He bowed with a graceful motion of the body to the various members of the party, and took the indicated chair, scarcely glancing at Woodson, who sat beside him.

ALL eyes centered upon Casper as he returned to his desk and seated himself. The room fell silent.

"Now, gentlemen." There was repressed excitement in Casper's voice. "We have come to an important moment." He paused. The muscles of his face tightened.

"The books of life are carefully kept," he continued, letting his gaze rest momentarily upon one and then another of the men seated before him, "and the books of life must balance, just as the books of this bank must balance."

His gaze sought Woodson, Peltos, Bronson.

"Throughout my life I have attempted to keep that

truth in mind—balance. At times, as have the most of us, I have had great debits in red upon the pages of my ledger of life, but I have sought always to make it up in clean figures on the credit side—to keep the account balanced. We must all do that, gentlemen. Sooner or later the Great Auditor will check us up, and if He finds us wanting, we must pay."

The speaker paused again, folded his hands before him and continued in a deliberate, low monotone:

"A great tragedy has been visited upon me. All that I held most precious has been taken suddenly and violently away—my daughter."

His eyes rested upon Woodson.

"Frank," he said in a quietly penetrating voice, "you were in San Francisco Monday night. You saw Lila there—had her in your automobile. She was murdered; shot to death and left on a bench in the park."

HE paused as his voice failed him. In a moment he regained control of himself.

"You were supposed to have gone to Salt Lake City from here on the Monday afternoon train. The officers discovered that you had made all arrangements—that you had taken care to let it be known that you were going on that train. But you did not go on that train, Frank. You went to San Francisco and remained there that night. Your ticket and berth on the train were used by some one else. You arrived in Salt Lake City at the same time as the train upon which you were supposed to have gone. A clever ruse, Frank."

Woodson was seated on the edge of his chair, his face livid, then ashen. His mouth half opened as though he would speak, but Casper held up his hand for silence. The banker's eyes moved around the room, then back to the man he was addressing.

"The circumstances aroused suspicion," he continued, "especially when you left Salt Lake City suddenly in a privately chartered airplane for an unknown destination. The law acted. That is why you were arrested and brought here."

Again he paused, his eyes aglitter. "Perhaps you can explain."

Woodson fumbled with his hat and got slowly from his chair. He stood awkwardly a moment.

"This is all so unreal," he began. "My mind fails to grasp the reality of what I have been told—that Lila Casper, the girl who was to have become my wife, is dead. That I myself am under arrest on suspicion of having murdered her." His voice choked.

He looked toward Mills and Gates; drew a deep breath.

"I will tell you just what I did on Monday night, and why," he continued. "Several weeks prior to that time Miss Casper and I had had a disagreement. But it was nothing really serious—at least I hoped that it was not. She went to San Francisco to visit Miss Bronson. I was miserable while she was away and wrote her several letters imploring her to let me call upon her there and try to straighten things out. She did not answer my letters.

"Things came up which made it necessary for me to go to Salt Lake City on business. I purchased my ticket for the two-twenty-five train last Monday afternoon and went to the station to take that train. I had a few minutes to wait and got to thinking of Lila. I telephoned her at Mr. Bronson's home, and was more than delighted when she consented to see me. For some reason she did not wish me to call at the house, but designated a corner near there where we would meet at eight-thirty that evening."

Woodson seemed to be living again those moments in anticipation of a reconciliation with the girl. In a stronger voice he continued:

"I was elated and rushed from the telephone booth intending to get a refund on my ticket. Instead I met a friend of mine who told me that he was going to Salt Lake City. He had not purchased his ticket. I sold him mine and hurried away, got my automobile and drove to San Francisco."

A dark shadow overspread his face.

"We met as agreed, but it was not for a reconciliation, as I had hoped. Miss Casper had determined definitely to break our engagement. We drove around through the outlying districts of the city while I attempted to persuade her to reconsider. She took exception to something I said to her, and flung the engagement ring which I had given her into my face."

He hesitated, was unable to go on. Everyone in the group was leaning forward with absorbed interest. Peltos, in the chair next to Woodson, turned half around, his black eyes fixed upon the speaker's face, a smile faintly discernible upon his dark features.

"I did not know what became of the ring until this afternoon," continued Woodson. "I understand that it was found in my car, and was one of the links in the chain of circumstances against me. . . . Lila's action seemed final. I drove her back to Mr. Bronson's home and left her at the curb. Then I drove out into the country seeking to regain control of myself.

"Finally I drove back downtown and into a garage, where I parked the car. Across the street there was a hotel. I registered there. There was a schedule of air-mail planes tacked to the door in my room. From it I discovered that there was a plane leaving the Oakland airport at seven o'clock next morning for Salt Lake City, arriving there at about the same time I would have arrived had I taken the train I intended to take from Sacramento. I left a call for five o'clock in the morning with the hotel clerk and caught the plane.

"Almost immediately upon reaching the hotel at Salt Lake City I started out on a trip to call upon some of my distant clients. The next day I happened to telephone back to the hotel, and they gave me the message which Mr. Casper had left Tuesday afternoon. I rushed back and chartered a private plane and started my return to this city. We were forced to land for engine repairs in Nevada and delayed. As I stepped from the plane at the field here, I was arrested."

He sat down, his fingers twisting at the hat in his hands.

NO one spoke for a moment, and all eyes turned back to Casper.

"You have Mr. Woodson's story, gentlemen," said Casper. "You may check up his statements following this session if you desire to do so. Now, I understand that Mr. Mills has something to tell us." He turned toward the detective.

"Yes," said Mills, speaking without arising from his chair. "I am sorry to say that Benny Bronson, Mr. Bronson's son, was for a time under suspicion due to an entanglement of circumstances. We have been able to trace his every movement from eight-thirty o'clock Monday evening, at which time Miss Casper left the Bronson home, until late the next day, and find that it would have been impossible for him to have seen Miss Casper or had anything to do with the murder."

Casper spoke again in a dead monotone.

"It is a pity that the innocent should be dragged under the shadow of suspicion even for a moment, but so many times it happens that others must suffer some reflected disgrace of the guilty. But in the end the guilty must pay in full—must strike a balance on the book of life."

He shifted his position. His eyes gleamed.

"We owe much to these three gentlemen," —he indicated Mills, Gates and Salbridge—"for the revelations which I am about to make and for the admission which is about to come from the lips of one here present."

THE moment's pause following his words was vibrant with its intensity.

"Last night," he continued, "our two friends of the press took things a bit into their own hands. Perhaps they violated one or two of the statutes, but the end justified the means. Their nimble wit and their nimble fingers gained them entrance into an apartment and into a private garage. From these two places they picked up the threads of evidence which lead unerringly from the murder in San Francisco to the murderer in this room."

He paused impressively.

"They found," he continued, "the automobile in which Lila was slain, found where this arch-fiend had attempted, but failed, to clean away all of the stains of her precious blood, found that the tire-tread of that automobile matched in exact detail the marks left by the death-car at the scene of the murder. They even found upon the side of that machine a scratch which their investigations had led them to believe would be found there, and a bit of bark on the bumper where it was caught when the machine backed into a tree in getting away from the scene.

"They went further: They obtained the tan silk handkerchief with which the gun had been wiped, and which left a telltale thread clinging to its mechanism. They found the shoes worn by the killer."

He reached into the drawer, lifted the plaster cast and placed it on top of his desk. Then he fitted the shoe into the impression. Beside this he spread out the tan silk handkerchief. Then from the top drawer he drew the pearl-handled revolver and put it carefully in front of him.

The little banker waved his hand above the exhibit in a gesture of finality. His wide, burning eyes swept around the semicircle of tense faces and came to rest when they met the now dilating orbs of Sigrid Peltos.

"I too made some discoveries," continued Casper, his voice a harsh whisper. "Our auditor found that my daughter was some five thousand dollars short in her accounts. The amount accrued from three different shortages occurring over a period of several weeks, and all prior to the time she left for San Francisco. The first was for two thousand dollars, and the second and third for fifteen hundred dollars each."

With a slow movement which suggested the tensing of a spring, the banker arose from his chair, his face drawn.

"It is a peculiar thing, Peltos," he addressed the teller directly, "that those amounts and the dates upon which they were taken correspond so closely to the dates and amounts of your gambling debts." There was a deadly cadence to his words now. "It is a peculiar thing that only the first amount is indicated by certain changes on your books—changes which you thought had been effectually hidden, but which indicate to the auditor and myself that you withheld the amount, later replacing it on the very date that the amount shows short on Miss Casper's books. A clumsy effort, Peltos!"

Casper leaned far over the desk.

"Peltos,"—he spat out the name with venom and hatred, —"you killed my daughter!"

Peltos leaped to his feet.

"It's a lie! A lie!" he cried, his face distorted.

Instantly the others were on their feet. Chairs toppled to the floor.

"Down! Sit down, all of you!"

Casper's voice rasped with the intensity of his feeling. He swept the group with the pearl-handled revolver which he had seized from the desk.

"This gun is loaded," he shouted, "and I'll shoot the first man who makes a move. You, Mills,"—he swung the gun toward the detective,—"up with your hands!"

With quick, catlike steps he moved across the room, keeping to the wall, the gun ready. Mills stood still watching the banker.

"Up, I say!" Casper ordered, leveling the gun directly at the detective's heart. "Up!"

Mills knew by the menace in the man's voice, his distended, glaring eyes, the contorted face, that the banker had gone violently mad—knew that the threat to shoot would be carried out. Slowly he raised his hands, hoping for an instant's opening during which he could spring upon the crazed man. But Casper leaped behind him and deftly, quickly lifted the police gun from Mills' shoulder holster. Then he was back behind his desk, triumph upon his face.

"Now, sit down!" he ordered.

"Casper!" Bronson's voice broke the stillness. "Casper!" His efforts to bring the banker to his senses, to restore some glimmering of reason by shouting his name, failed, and no one dared move as the little banker swung the two guns in his hands with rhythmic, deadly menace.

"Now, Peltos," said Casper in a strained, hoarse voice not recognizable as his own, "I know what you did not think I would ever know. You gained some evil influence over my daughter—trapped her into loaning you that first two thousand dollars, told her it would be all right. You blackmailed her, bullied her into giving you those other amounts. You sought to hide your crime and place the blame upon that innocent girl, and when she threatened to expose you, you killed her!"

The guns swung in their half-circle of threatening death.

"Tell these men what you did!"

Peltos cringed in his chair—tried ineffectively to speak.

"Tell them!" barked Casper. The hammer of the small gun clicked into firing position.

BROKENLY, wildly, Peltos spoke, trembling to his feet. "I did! I took the money, lost it gambling," he babbled. "There was to be an audit of my books. I borrowed from her, showed her how to fix her books. Then I told her she had to give me more, and more.

"She went to San Francisco. Another audit was to be made of all the books. She demanded the money back—I did not have it. I went to see her Monday night without letting anyone know that I was going. I waited. I was in front of the house when Woodson came, but he didn't see me. I called to her when she came back—we drove about. I had taken her little gun—the one you have—because it was easier to carry. I threatened to kill myself if she insisted upon having the money. She fought with me over the gun—tried to take it away from me—it exploded during the struggle. I—I left her in the park, then came on home."

He slumped into his chair and dropped his head into his hands, sobbing.

"You heard him, gentlemen!" The toll of death rang in Casper's voice. "He killed my Lila—a red blotch on his ledger of life—and he must pay!"

Mills leaped for the desk, but too late. The pearl-handled revolver barked sharply and Peltos crumpled.

The banker tottered. The two guns clattered to the top of the desk. A groan escaped him as he pressed a hand against his heart. Mills seized him under the arms and eased him into his chair.

"The books are—balanced!" gasped the little banker. His head lolled to one side. He was dead.

THE END

REAL EXPERIENCES

A race for life against the closing jaws of the Northwest Passage ice-pack is tellingly described in this most remarkable narrative.

By
D.W. Gillingham

Beating The Polar Pack

YOU must know, to begin with, that this voyage into the Western Arctic which I made as a university undergraduate in the fo'c'stle of the Hudson's Bay Company's steamship **Baychimo* in the summer of '25 was the first of its kind to be attempted. The *Baychimo,* a German coaster before the war, was the first steel vessel to round Point Barrow, to the astonishment of the Eskimos and the concern of the veteran traders along the coast who, with scorn in their voices, would point to the twenty-foot dent in our starboard bow, inflicted by the ice during the voyage in, and say: "She'll never go back!" And almost saw their prophecy come true. She replaced the ill-fated four-masted schooner *Lady Kindersley* which the year before had been nipped by ice off Point Barrow with all the posts' supplies on board, and in consequence had to penetrate farther east than any ship heretofore to relieve the remote posts on Victoria Land.

I shall go back to that day at the end of August when we returned from Cambridge Bay on Victoria Land to Herschel Island, empty of cargo, with our red and scarred flanks high out of the water, and over four hundred miles of ice-covered water ahead of us before we reached Point Barrow. It had been a hard voyage—one eternal rush to get the cargo on shore and race back to Point Barrow before the dreaded Polar pack drifted down like a gate and locked us in for the winter. We had worked day and night, one hour at the wheel or swinging the lead, another hoisting overboard the two huge scows we carried on the for'ard deck, loading them with cases of food, lumber and coal and gasoline drums, towing them ashore by launch, unloading them, plying back and forth for hours, from dawn till dawn sometimes, in fog and rain and snow.

* Mentioned, readers will recall, in Captain Putta's "Pirates of the Frozen Seas."

We took on a valuable cargo of white fox skins at Herschel, and then started on the last lap for Point Barrow. It was a calm, serene day, and we were happy.

But our happiness was short-lived. When we came to the last point of the island, we were confronted by an impenetrable ice-barrier—old ice, new ice, in blocks the size of houses and slabs that stood on end, with one shoulder resting on shore and the other wedged in a great ice field that reached to the horizon. It was unexpected enough to be startling, ominous enough to be depressing.

We were held a month at Herschel. We made twelve attempts to crash the barrier, and so depleted the fuel that when we did get out, we almost met disaster that time in Bering Sea. Twelve heart-breaking attempts, nosing into every lane, ramming, bunting into pans with sickening crash and shock, backing up, trying again, gaining a mile or ten, then turning in a panic when the wind changed, and escaping outside as the ice closed in behind us. Always back we would go to the harbor, with less coal in our bunkers, fewer sound plates on our flanks, and shorter time to reach Point Barrow.

The tension among the men became so great, with the poor food and misfortune facing them, with those days of waiting and listening for the prevailing to swing to the northeast, to sweep down upon the shore and carry the ice out on the reverse current, that there would be many a squabble, and the dispute settled with fists. Until you have suffered misfortune and ship's abuse like that, you can never know the sea nor understand these sudden outbursts of petty grievances, in profanity and blows. But most of the time we got along with excellent fellowship.

Once the ice did open up, and the *Baychimo,* seizing the opportunity, crashed fifty miles through the barrier.

But the barometer started to fall, the ice got thicker

and a mirage so distorted the horizon that it was impossible to see what was ahead. Then the wind changed, and we turned tail and fled. There was almost mutiny aboard then. But the captain said he had the safety of his ship and men to consider first, which was true.

The ducks and geese had long ago left for the south. Some mornings the whole sea would be dead under a film of ice. Finally the cove froze up tight.

We were given orders to prepare the ship for wintering. We dismantled the decks of all running-gear, unshipped the ventilators, boarded up the galley and lashed tarpaulin-covers over the instruments. We were set to work making duffle trousers and canvas mitts, while the native women on shore were busy sewing thirty pairs of *mukluks* for us. "Sparks," unable to get in touch with the outside, one evening in desperation tapped out an S. O. S. Stations all down the Pacific Coast paused to listen, but only got fragments of the message, as we learned afterwards, which the newspapers interpreted variously in eight-column headings. "Thirty-three Men Face Death in the Arctic," said one.

Shortly after six bells on the morning of September 20th, the mate came to us with a final order to get the lines ready for mooring the ship alongside the sandspit, which was a natural wharf. We had already sunk deadheads in the sand, and helped hastily erect a house on shore. Now we all set to work with a will. There was no use grouching. We accepted our fate with good humor, and the crew had become a sort of club in which we planned activities for the winter.

That was a day to be remembered. We had picked up the anchor and stowed away the great chain in the locker for the last time, as we thought, and were steaming toward the beach when the captain's voice from the bridge bawled out: "Mr. Coe, stand by the windlass!" Then: "Let go!" And down plunged the anchor again, with a furious rattling.

The mate swore. We stared with gloomy impatience at the bridge, where the captain and the ice-pilot had been talking together. Now what were they up to? The helmsman, coming off duty, said that the skipper had decided to wait one more day on chance of the barrier breaking up. We received the news sullenly. What if the barrier did break up? It would be too late for us. The Polar pack would be down on Point Barrow by now.

You will not wonder at my believing in miracles now. You will not wonder when I tell you that thirty-five hours after that order was given to drop the anchor, a northeasterly gale sprang up, and a party of men from the ship tramped hopefully across the island to have a look at the barrier, and returned at dusk with the incredible news that it was moving!

THE men, forgetting their reasoning about the Polar pack, in a fever of enthusiasm prayed that the barrier-smashing wind would continue—and it did. It blew; it howled; it sent great fountains of spray off the bergs around us and hurried them, clashing and groaning, out into the darkness of the Arctic ocean. It was still blowing the following morning, though a thick fog smothered everything.

We decided to make a final dash for liberty. We weighed our chances; everything seemed against us. A ship should be around Point Barrow by the first of September, and here it was the end. But perhaps this northeasterly wind would have taken the Polar pack out from shore a few miles. Perhaps if we rushed, we could sneak through. If the wind changed quickly, we would be out of luck. But the effort was worth the chance.

At five bells we weighed anchor—and a queer-looking craft, half dismantled, short of coal, short of food, battered and scarred, but with her tall funnel aft spouting black smoke, vanished in the fog.

The fog billowed about us in chilly clouds. We were cruising at half-speed towards the barrier, expecting any minute to plow into it, "*kr-r-ump!*" when the fog suddenly lifted like a curtain and revealed miles of open water, blue open water, with not a sign of that great upheaval anywhere. It had been carried out to sea!

FOR three nights and three days we raced toward Point Barrow, with not an ice-field to interrupt our flight. It was amazing, exciting, dangerous. Normally we would have anchored each night, but as the passing of every hour meant one less chance of beating the pack to the Point, we kept on through the dark, steaming by ghosts of bergs at a speed of fourteen knots an hour, more than the old *Baychimo* had made in months. The firemen worked like slaves. But the ones who suffered most were the men who stood in the chains, half-frozen, swinging the lead-line and calling the depths up to the bridge, where the ice-pilot had command. It would have been colossal irony to run our nose into a mud-bank then.

No moon arose to guide us through the night of October first. A blizzard swept the decks, sheathing everything with ice. We were heading into it when there loomed up ahead a gray phantom huge as a battleship. The telegraph rang "*Full astern!*" and the wheel was swung hard over. The *Baychimo's* propeller thrashed, brought us to a stop, drew us back from a solid wall of ice fourteen feet high, stretching on either hand into the night. We stared at the Polar pack, as the ship turned and slowly followed the edge of that great ice-continent, southward.

A few hours later a troubled group of officers gathered on the bridge for a consultation. We were lost, completely. We had left the Polar pack somewhere in the night, and the compass and soundings told us nothing. We might have wandered into the heart of the ice-pack, or gone miles past Point Barrow.

The ship moved cautiously ahead again after a while. We expected to be confronted again by the pack, but we could not find it. Puzzled, the captain took up his night-glasses. When he lowered them after a few minutes, he pointed into the night and shouted: "Isn't that a church-spire off the port bow?"

The officers jokingly remarked that he was "seeing things." Then a faint sound reached the ship, different from all other sounds. "Dogs!" some one yelled, and every man of us on deck took up the cry, "Dogs!"

The blizzard had ceased, and dawn was coming. The mate gave a rapid order to the man at the wheel. Gradually, like a picture forming on a negative in solution, there appeared the outlines of a church-spire and a group of housetops.

"Point Barrow on the port bow!" sang the look-out. We were then within four hundred yards of this most northerly village on the continent. When we dropped anchor, the residents came on board and told us that the Polar pack, twenty-four hours before we arrived, had moved back from the Point like a gate, letting us through. And later we heard that about the same number of hours after we had steamed away from the village, it had swung back, this time sealing the Arctic Ocean for the winter.

I can remember when the ice-pilot, a kindly German, huge of frame and bow-legged, came down the ladder from the bridge, the immense *mukluks* that encased his feet shuffling on the steps, I can remember him turning to a group of us with a grave look and saying:

"That was an act of Providence, nothing less than an act of Providence, boys."

A Persian Falcon Hunt

As a rule we do not choose Real Experiences offered by professional writers, but Mr. Baum's work as a museum hunter has brought to him many unusual adventures—of which the following is the most recent.

By **James Edwin Baum**

FALCONS, hawks, kites, eagles, kestrels and that whole crew of feathered, aërial buccaneers have always intrigued me. Their fierce eyes, their high-headed fearless bearing and their predatory habits make them, to me, as interesting almost as the larger carnivorous animals. I had read of the medieval sport of falconry as practiced in Europe long ago and I can remember a feeling of distinct disappointment in my younger days when I learned that the ancient and romantic sport of our ancestors had been allowed to die out.

Therefore, imagine my enthusiasm a few months ago when a Persian friend came to me in Teheran, the capital of Persia and said, in his almost unintelligible French, which out of charity I shall not attempt to imitate:

"Would you like to go with me tomorrow into the desert to try our luck with my falcons?"

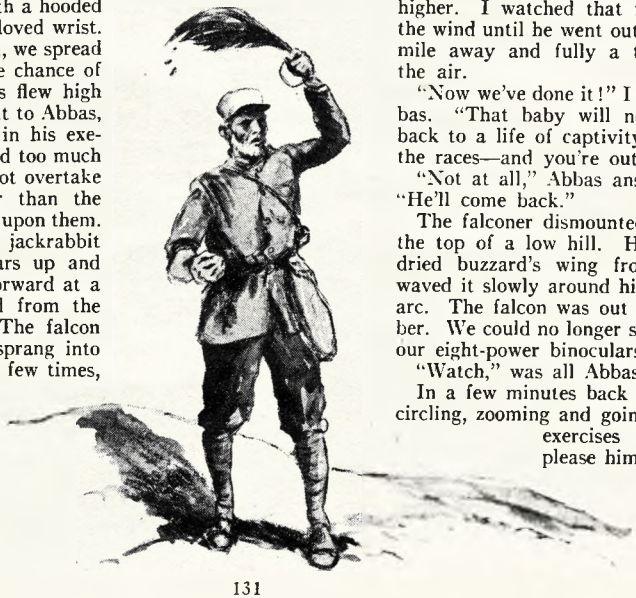
Would a puddle-duck navigate a barnyard pond?

"I'm your huckleberry," I said, somewhat ambiguously, explaining at once that I meant *yes* with the lid off.

This Persian grandee was something of a sport—for a Persian. He never hunted gazelle, ibex or mouflon with the aid of beaters or drivers, as most Persians do. He scorned such easy methods. When Abbas Khan went shooting he stalked the game in the good old-fashioned, Western way, and what he shot he shot himself without the aid of anyone else. I knew we'd have a real hunt.

We left Teheran early in the morning, passing through the Kazvin gate, an ornate tiled structure in the thick mud wall of the city. We rode due south, followed by two falconers, each with a hooded bird perched upon his heavily gloved wrist.

About ten miles from Teheran, we spread out over the sandy plain on the chance of starting a rabbit. A few ducks flew high overhead and I pointed these out to Abbas, but he shook his head, saying in his execrable French that the ducks had too much altitude and the falcons could not overtake them unless they were higher than the ducks and could thus drop down upon them. We had not gone far when a jackrabbit jumped up and sped away, ears up and strong hind legs shoving him forward at a good clip. Off came the hood from the bird on one falconer's wrist. The falcon saw the rabbit instantly. He sprang into the air, flapped pointed wings a few times, rising to a height of perhaps a hundred feet. Then forward and downward he plunged with wings folded back. The way he overhauled that jackrabbit was a revelation in speed. The rabbit might have been standing still.



The falcon dropped upon him in full career, seized his head in powerful talons, yanked the head back and spilled the rabbit in a complete backward somersault. We urged our horses forward; by the time we got there, however, the rabbit was almost dead and the falcon was tearing him savagely with beak and claws. The downright savagery of that comparatively small bird astonished me. He was a born killer and the big jackrabbit didn't have a chance against the needle-sharp claws and knife-like beak. One of the falconers dismounted, walked slowly up to the bird and lifted him from his victim, apparently without a protest. A small piece of meat was cut from the rabbit's loin and fed to the killer. The hood was slipped on and the bird again placed on the falconer's wrist.

"That's all easy enough," I said to Abbas, "but suppose the rabbit had got away? The falcon would then have been loose in the air. How could we ever have caught him again?"

"You'll see," Abbas returned, smiling at my ignorance.

Soon another rabbit jumped from the edge of a large irrigated cotton-patch. The other bird was loosed, and like a flash he was after the speeding animal. But this time the rabbit saw him coming like a bolt from the blue. There was a comparatively brushy stretch of ground in the center of the field and the rabbit made for this. He got there just about one jump ahead of the falcon, dived in, and disappeared. The falcon zoomed upward, let out a disappointed cry—probably a cussword in the falcon tongue—and sailed off, rising higher and higher. I watched that falcon drift with the wind until he went out of sight about a mile away and fully a thousand feet in the air.

"Now we've done it!" I exclaimed to Abbas. "That baby will never again come back to a life of captivity! He's gone to the races—and you're out a falcon."

"Not at all," Abbas answered, yawning. "He'll come back."

The falconer dismounted and walked to the top of a low hill. He untied an old dried buzzard's wing from his belt and waved it slowly around his head in a wide arc. The falcon was out of sight, remember. We could no longer see him even with our eight-power binoculars.

"Watch," was all Abbas Khan said.

In a few minutes back came the falcon, circling, zooming and going through aërial exercises that seemed to please him a lot. The falconer laid the old buzzard's wing upon the ground at his feet, put two or

three small pieces of raw meat on the brown feathers and waited. The falcon dived down swiftly, came to a stall directly over the buzzard-wing, and settled upon it as gracefully as a duck dropping into a pond. He immediately began eating the meat. The falconer walked up slowly, lifted the bird, replaced the hood and set him on his gloved wrist.

The performance astonished me.

"Well, I'll be damned!" I remarked to Abbas.

"There's nothing wonderful about it," Abbas stated, surprised at my surprise. "You see, we never feed these birds except upon the lure. A lure can be anything, a piece of carpet, a white cloth, anything easily seen at a distance. We happen to use an old buzzard wing. When the falconer goes into their quarters in my house, a large room with perches in the four corners, to feed them, he first swings the lure around his head as you saw him do a moment ago. Then he lays it upon the floor and the birds fly over. They soon learn that any time they see the buzzard wing moving around his head it means food. Hunger alone brings them back. I should not dare to take one of my birds out unless he were hungry. I would surely lose him if I did. But as long as they're hungry they always come straight to the lure."

Later in the day, after sundown, when visibility was poor, one falconer removed the hood from his bird. It is customary to allow the falcons to take a look around on their own hook about every fifteen minutes. Falcons can see farther than we, even with the aid of our eight-power glasses.

This time the bird dipped his head sharply and stretched his neck and appeared to be eager to have the thong that held him cast off his leg. He saw something. The falconer turned him loose. Straight as an arrow he flew toward a range of hills about three-quarters of a mile. We could see nothing there.

We followed at a gallop to the summit of the hills. There, the feathered buccaneer had a bustard down and was tearing it to pieces. How he could have seen that bustard, probably on the ground, I can't imagine. Falcon eyes certainly must be like small, extremely powerful telescopes!

The bird was lifted from his kill, the buzzard wing spread upon the ground and pieces of bustard meat laid upon the wing. Both birds were allowed to eat as much as they pleased, for the day's hunt was over; we had killed five jackrabbits and one bustard.

Riding back to Teheran over the moonlit desert, Abbas Khan regaled me with tales of hawking in the old days when the sport of falconry was practiced by all Persians of standing.

"Even today," he observed, "the Turkomen, a wild tribe in the north along the eastern border of the Caspian Sea, are great falconers. Not only falconers," he added, "but they use eagles too. Big golden eagles are trained to take gazelle and I have heard, also wolves. You see," he explained, "the eagles work with a pack of fighting-dogs. A gazelle or a wolf speeds away. The powerful birds are loosed and by diving at the gazelle's eyes and beating his face with their wings, they delay him, cause him to lose his stride time and time again, which gives the slower dogs a chance to catch up. I have not seen it done: however, it is quite possible. You see, we Persians do not have anything to do with the Turkomen. They are a rough, uncouth and savage race and in the early days had a bad habit of raiding into Persia and stealing horses, camels, sheep and anything loose and light enough to carry off. We do not like the Turkomen; in fact, we Persians disapprove highly of Turkomen—and for this reason I have never been in their country."

On the 600-Foot Tower

A Navy radio mechanic found himself atop a huge steel antenna tower swaying violently from a suddenly released strain.

By **G. L. Simmons**

IN 1929, at the time this took place, I was stationed at one of the largest and highest-powered radio stations owned by the U. S. Navy.

The antennæ system of the station is an immense affair. It consists of six steel towers of the tripod type, laid out in rectangular shape in pairs. They rise to a height of six hundred feet. At this height there is a platform, and extending from the platform to an additional height of fifteen feet is a steel lattice post, commonly called a "king post." This post at its top houses a sheave, or steel block, in which runs the "down-haul" cable, made of three-quarter-inch flexible steel wire.

Between each pair of towers there is what we term a "triatic," composed of approximately one-inch steel cable, and supporting sixteen brass blocks equally spaced along its twelve-hundred-foot length. Through these blocks run the sixteen antenna wires proper. There are three of these triatics, one between each pair of towers. Thus the weight of the antenna is distributed and carried by the three triatics, over eight miles of wire being supported between the towers at a height of approximately five hundred and ten feet, allowing for sag.

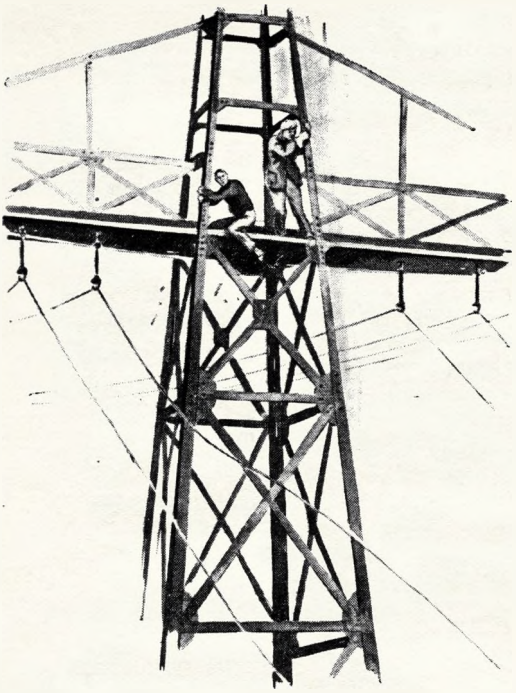
The purpose of the down-haul cable is to hoist and lower the triatics, and thus the entire antenna. When in place, the triatics are secured by means of a chain which relieves the cable of constant strain. Naturally, when it is desired to lower the antenna it is first necessary to take the strain of the triatics with the down-haul cable and then unshackle the chain.

Our most important routine pre-winter job was that of completely overhauling the entire antenna system. At times during the winter snow and sleet caused an additional strain on the wires and cable, and should any casualties occur it meant that our station would be useless.

Due to the continuous need of our transmitter for handling communications, it was extremely hard to get a very great length of time for our work. It was decided finally that the work should be done one November day.

The day prior to starting our work on the antenna was a busy one. Various blocks, tackles, guy-lines, tools, spare insulators, and other materials that might be found necessary were loaded into the trucks. Our job would require the use of all station personnel, with the exception of one man who would remain at the station to handle the telegraph line and telephones. The men were divided into groups and assigned to towers with specific instructions as to their individual job.

Bright and early the following morning all hands were



at their stations standing by for the signal that would tell us the transmitter was shut down.

When the signal was given, the men detailed, or rather the ones who had volunteered to work aloft,— we always had more than needed, — started up. There were two men for each tower; their work consisted of unshackling the chain after the weight of the triatic had been taken with the down-haul cable. I went up Number One tower which was one of the end towers. Numbers One and Two towers were paired off, and being end towers, were where the first unshackling would take place.

Work was progressing smoothly and the ground crew had started taking the strain while we were climbing aloft. To reach the top it was necessary to climb hand-over-hand up a steel rung ladder. There being no protection against falling, a slip meant the end. Including rest periods, climbing time is approximately twenty-five minutes with tools, although it has been done much quicker going up "light."

Upon reaching the top we signaled the ground crew that we were ready. The men on Number Two tower reached their positions about the same time as ourselves and also signaled they were ready.

Word was received that we should unshackle our end on Number One tower first. This called for one man climbing the king post and doing the actual unshackling, with the other on the platform to keep the chain strain off the shackle. The latter position was mine. On Number Two tower the men were in the same positions as we were; as soon as we were unshackled the strain would be taken off their chain and then the first triatic would be ready to lower.

While we were doing this, the crews on Number Three, Four, Five, and Six towers were taking their time getting aloft, since they could do nothing until we had partly lowered Number One triatic—the first unshackled and the last to be shackled when hoisting the antenna.

The ground crew for our tower was slowly approaching the point where we would be ready to unshackle. Then things began to happen. They still had about twelve inches to go before we could do anything and the strain on the down-haul cable was terrific. They tried again and gained two inches, with still another try bringing two inches more. By now the cable was creaking at every turn of the winch on the ground and was practically stiff from the strain, for, in addition to the strain of the triatic it also had its own considerable weight to support, since it was six hundred and fifteen feet long.

Operations ceased for the time being to see if there was anything that could be done to relieve the strain. Finding nothing that would overcome it, the word was passed along to stand by—they had decided to take more strain, as there was no other way to lower the antenna.

With more creaking, another two inches was hauled in; it seemed as if another inch would surely part the cable— it was so taut it would sing, meaning an awful strain for a cable that size and length. At this point the ground crew decided any more strain would be dangerous. Still, the triatic had been put up; it must then have taken the same strain. So they made still another attempt and brought in another inch or two.

Further effort was futile and it was finally decided that for some unknown reason no more strain could be had. We were asked if we could get the pin out of the shackle with the strain still on. We told them we could, and waited for word to do so. When we received word that everyone was clear, we started. One of us took the lock-nut off and we started driving out the pin. The strain was still on the chain and when we had driven the pin half through, so it was hanging on a chain link, the pin parted —the additional strain causing the cable to part also.

When the cable parted it was with a crack like a gun, the break occurring about seventy-five feet below our platform. At the sudden release of the strain the unlooked-for happened. The tower itself made a quick swing back of about four feet; nothing but sheer luck kept us from being catapulted from the tower into space. In some way we managed to hang on, although it must have been at least a full minute before the swinging completely stopped.

The time it took for the tower to swing that first four feet was only a fraction of a minute and yet it seemed an eternity to me. I had visions of myself hurtling through six hundred feet of air or crashing to the ground with the tower, for I was sure that, even if I held on, nothing could keep the tower from going over. Adding to the confusion was the whistle of triatic, insulators, and wire rushing to the ground. We later found that the same swing had happened to Number Two tower and that they had the same miraculous luck as ourselves.

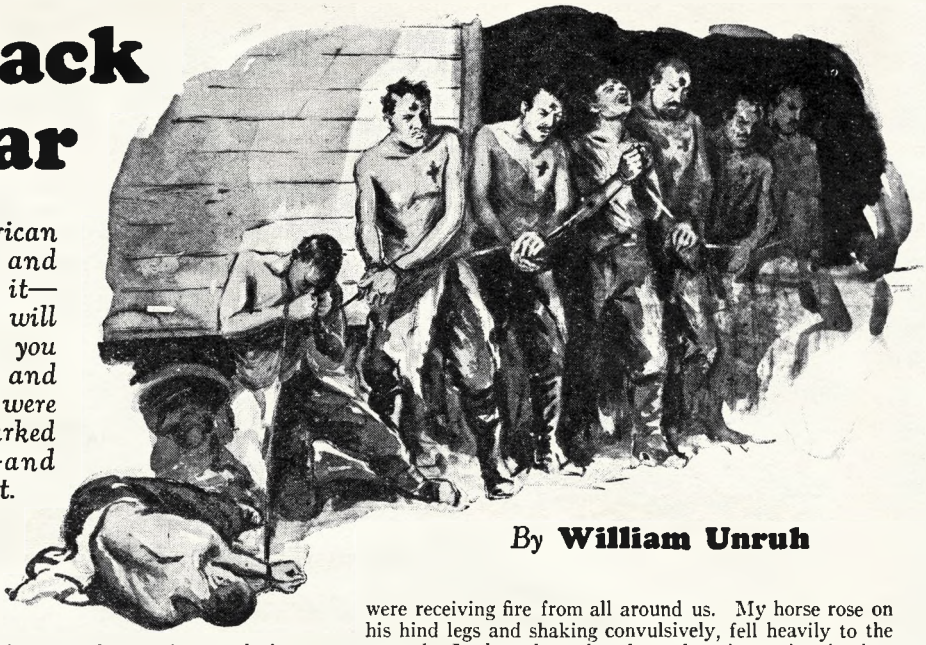
The ground beneath the towers at that end is used for a hog farm. We recovered from the shock of that first long swing in time to see the hogs racing for shelter. But in spite of their mad scramble some of them were too late, and were pinned beneath the wire and insulators. Fortunately they were the only casualties.

We worked the rest of the day and until eleven P.M. lowering the antenna, straightening it out, replacing broken parts, and carrying out the overhaul. We did not mind the additional work as it was compensated for by a very good roast-pig barbecue.

The following morning at three o'clock we started in a dense fog to complete our work. In spite of this handicap we had our antenna up and the transmitter on the air by two-thirty that day. We had to lengthen the chain two or three feet and the only explanation I can offer for the fact that we were unable to get the strain off the chain was contraction of the triatic, due to the cold weather.

Cossack War

He's an American citizen now, and very glad of it—how glad you will realize when you read how he and his comrades were lined up, marked as targets—and several shot.



By **William Unruh**

AT the time of this story, the Russian revolution was in its third year, and getting more bloody daily. The Red and White armies fought desperately for supremacy.

I, having become stranded between nowhere and starvation, joined a regiment of Cossacks under the leadership of Ataman Orloff, a hardy warrior of the old school, who served in the White army under General Wrangel.

Soon I was given command of a scouting patrol of fifty men to be used for outposting and patrolling the lines.

One dark, foggy night, that caused us to be especially on the lookout, after placing half of my men at different posts, I took the remaining twenty-five to ride the extreme boundary or dead line, which was about two miles out in the field of battle.

While patrolling, we came upon the remains of a village, and decided to give it the once-over. Due to its situation this village had been the scene of many a bloody clash between the patrols of the two fighting factions. Cautiously we entered the street, looking warily about and leaning low upon the necks of our horses, ready to stifle any neighing by placing hands over their nostrils.

Nothing stirred. Only utter destruction and desolation surrounded us. We slowly rode down this street about two blocks, then turned to the right and down this street which led to the depot, just at the outskirts of the village. Beyond the depot and the tracks lay the open country.

Soon we entered a large court, opposite which could be seen the depot looming in the darkness. This court had served for loading purposes and taxi service. The buildings surrounding this court, which had been warehouses, and were built mostly from solid brick, remained in fairly good condition.

We had arrived in about the middle of this court and I was just about to get off my horse, when suddenly a loud voice came through the night from the direction of the station.

"Put up your hands—and don't move, or you are dead men," the voice commanded.

"We'll see you in hell!" I cried, and fired in the direction of the voice. The next instant panic broke loose, for we were receiving fire from all around us. My horse rose on his hind legs and shaking convulsively, fell heavily to the ground. I released my feet from the stirrups just in time to prevent being caught under him. Then, dropping behind his body, I began to fire. My men were dashing around the court to find some avenue of escape, but everywhere were met by the fire of our hidden enemy. I beheld one after the other fall from their horses. Realizing, that we were completely trapped and there was no use to resist, I called to my men and bade them to surrender, which they did.

The firing ceased, and immediately we were seized by the Reds. There were about a hundred of them. They took from us everything of value, and after completely disarming us, they marched us to the other side of the depot, where the remains of a box-car stood upon the shell-battered tracks.

Here they halted, and by the dim light of a lantern they lined us up by this box-car. There were only nine of us left, out of twenty-five. While they were placing us side by side, one of my men, seeing an opening among them, tried to break through. He was shot in his tracks.

Then we were tied together wrist to wrist with telephone wire, such as we used for field service.

"Now, comrades," cried the leader, "let's have a little target-practice. Strip them and paint a mark upon their foreheads and hearts, and let's see if we can hit them."

This plan was cheered by the Red brigands, and immediately we were stripped to the waist. Then, having no paint or other material to mark us with, they dragged our dead comrade into the middle of the crowd, and dipping their fingers into his blood which spurted from several wounds, they painted marks on our foreheads and hearts.

Having thus marked us, the leader picked two men, whom he stationed at a distance of ten feet directly in front of the man to be shot. The man to aim at the heart knelt down, while the other man, who was to shoot at the head, remained standing behind the first one.

This being done, the leader told the man with the lantern to hold it close to the target.

"When I count *three*, fire," instructed the leader, and raising his hand, began to count.

"*One*—"

Silence reigned, during which I could hear my heart beat.

"Two—"

"I'll see you in Hades, you dirty rats," said our friend calmly. "I am a Cossack, and not afraid to die. Shoot!"

"Three—"

Two shots echoed through the night, and man Number One sank to the ground without uttering a sound.

Two other men took position—and the second man went down. I was fourth from the end; soon I would be next.

I resigned myself to my fate and all fear left me. Instead, I felt an intense hatred for these butchers.

Again two men were lining up, and while the others were examining the body, I thought I heard the stifled neighing of a horse behind us in the darkness. One of the Reds must have heard it also, for he called to the others to be quiet. They all were quiet and listened, and we could hear very plainly the stamping of hoofs close behind us.

Suddenly, there came from the darkness the war-whoop of charging Cossacks, and the next instant they were upon us like a hurricane, chopping the fleeing Reds right and left as they ran for cover.

Those of us still able to move, quickly dropped on the ground and crawled under the box-car to escape the danger of being mistaken for Reds by our rescuers, and killed also.

Only to the perfect training of the Cossack horses, which were used to obstacle-riding in the dark, did we owe our safe escape from being trampled to death, and except for a few bruised ribs and minor scratches, we were uninjured.

Soon, however, we were recognized by our men by calling the watchword, and untied. The battle had almost quieted down but for a few Reds, who had gained shelter in the depot and were firing desperately from windows and doors. But they were soon finished by the hand grenades which our men hurled into the building, blowing the depot and its occupants into atoms.

We sought the chief to thank him and his men, and found him on the other side of the burning building, where he was nursing his horse, which had lost half of its ear.

We were a sorry-looking sight, the six of us. Naked to the waist, with the still-moist bloody marks upon our bodies, we resembled a bunch of wild Indians on the war-path, more than anything else.

"Don't thank me," said the chief; "thank one of your men, who came and called us. He had escaped somehow, and if it hadn't been for him, I would have been no good to you fellows."

"One of my men?" I asked in surprise. "What do you mean, Chief?" Then, looking around, I saw in the light, a man sitting upon his horse, and smiling. His face was smeared with blood from a wound which had nearly torn off half his broad chin.

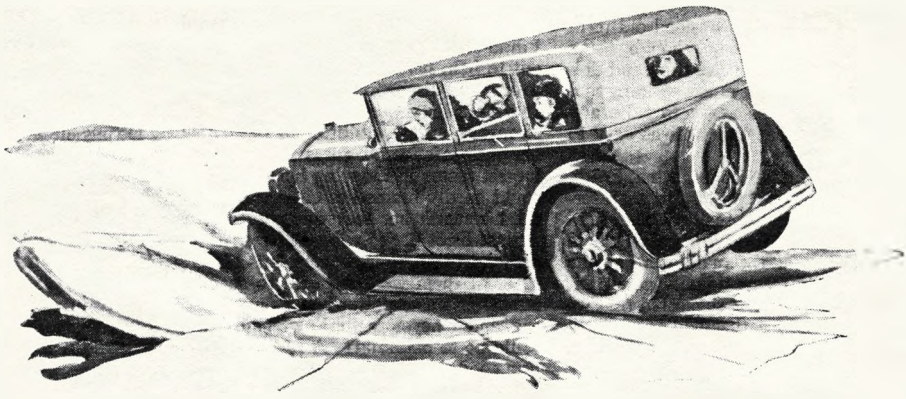
"Granzow!" I cried, and almost pulling him off his horse, I embraced him as I would have a brother. "Tell us how you did it!"

"Well," he growled embarrassedly, "there isn't much to tell. When we were attacked I got this scratch and it gave me a idea. I don't get very many bright ideas, as you know! I slumped upon the neck of my horse, which is the sign for him to lay down. Both of us lay there deader than them Reds in that fire, and didn't stir. After you were marched to the other side, me and my horse came to life again—mighty quick too—and here we are."

"The devils!" growled the chief. "But let us go back to camp. We have more business to attend to tomorrow."

We placed our dead and wounded upon enemy horses, which the men found tied to a fence just behind the buildings, and slowly returned to camp, where we waited for what the next day would bring.

Granzow and I remained close friends, till later, in Constantinople he was stabbed by a Greek and died in my arms, smiling.



Up in the Lake Superior country they often drive across the thick mid-winter ice. Mr. Simpson, with his family in a closed sedan, broke through!

Buried Under Water

By **P. M. Simpson**

HAVE you ever been close to death—so close you could fairly reach out and shake hands with the "divil" himself? I have—and I'll tell you about it.

Some people make the claim of having been born with the fear of the water in their hearts, but I was never endowed with any such faculty. As a child my experiences on the water were varied; more often than not, they were thrilling, and almost always with an element of danger in connection. Of course, as a child, a healthy normal boy, I had an inherent fear of getting too much water on my face and neck and behind my ears—but other than that, no amount of narrow escapes served to instill any fear of water.

When a boy, I learned to "swim like a fish." My home was in a small lumber town in northern Minnesota which was almost surrounded by water. Our "gang" spent most

of our time in the summer dressed only in swimming-tights—fishing, running on the floating logs, diving, and so forth. As I grew up, I continued to spend a great deal of my spare time in and on the water, always loving it.

Some years later, my family moved to a larger city, a harbor city where large shipping boats came and went at all hours of the day and night with their cargoes. It was in this city that I met the girl who is now my wife. They say people are attracted to their opposites, and this is not without an element of truth, for soon after our whirlwind courtship and wedding I found that she did not share my ardent love for the water and water sports. That of course curtailed my fun somewhat.

Nevertheless, I did succeed in teaching her to swim a little, as well as in later making our little five-year-old daughter Judith a proficient swimmer.

MY daily work was across a bay, and the distance being six miles, I drove my car to work each day. During the winter months, I drove across the ice as it shortened my route considerably. At these times, my wife Edith always worried about me—especially after I had told her a little experience I had one day in coming home.

I had been driving peacefully over the ice, thinking mostly of the apple pie Edith had promised to have for me when I got home, when suddenly a bluebill duck swooped down in front of my car. I knew there must be open water where there were ducks, so I immediately applied my brakes. At the same time I could see open water ahead. Of course, the car didn't stop—four-wheel brakes were then unheard of—but when it had slowed down sufficiently to permit me to jump, believe me, I jumped! The car kept right on going. Regaining my footing, I watched; I could hear the ice cracking around the car, but it finally stopped, without going under. I cautiously crept up to it, crawled in, slid it into reverse gear and drove backward until I got onto solid ice. I then turned around, drove back over the ice and went home by way of good old terra firma. I stopped long enough on my way, though, to go into an office and take out an additional five thousand dollars on my life-insurance policy. With much scolding and many tears, Edith made me promise never to take any more chances like that—and at that time it was easy to promise.

A month later, with the incident almost forgotten, Edith, little Judy, the maid and myself were out for an afternoon's drive. The air was crisp—but it really was a grand day for motoring. My wife sat in front with me (I hate back-seat drivers) while Judy and the maid were in the back seat. We had just eaten an exceptionally good dinner and were all in very happy spirits. I suggested that we take a drive across the bay. The weather had been freezing cold for many weeks, so I felt there could be no possible cause for apprehension, and because Judith seconded my suggestion, my wife reluctantly consented. So out we went. The ice was smooth and we were all enjoying it immensely. Nearing the opposite shore, the roadway led between two large boats which were frozen solid in the ice about one hundred feet apart. None of us had any thought of impending danger. We were passing opinions as to the possible contents of those large abandoned ice-shrouded boats, when suddenly my wife screamed, "The ice is cracking! We'll go under!"—and almost at the same instant I realized the same thing! Automatically I slammed on my brakes, but of course we couldn't stop. We were then about two hundred and fifty feet from shore and the car kept right on going. By that time, Judith and the maid were both screaming frantically. A million thoughts flashed through my mind during those few seconds that passed from the time we felt the ice giving away until we felt, and saw, that we were breaking through—and it seemed that I died a million deaths! There the four of us were—trapped like rats! I thought of jumping, but there wasn't time for all of us to jump, so I stayed with my wife and baby. Down we went, until the car was completely submerged; still we kept going down! Can you imagine such a sensation? I wonder how we escaped going stark mad! As I remember it now, my wife was the only one of us who was really calm. I think she was frightened or stunned into speechlessness. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the car settled on fairly solid ground. Buried alive! Trapped in a closed car, heaven only knows how far from the surface, and the icy water already seeping in around the floor-boards! Judith began hammering with her fists at the back window, attempting to break it. Had she succeeded, I'm afraid this story would never have been written. I jerked her away from her frantic endeavors, hurriedly ordered everyone to take off their coats and shoes and instructed Edith to help me. We couldn't open any doors or windows because the pressure of the water against them was too great. Bracing my back against one side of the car and with my feet braced against the opposite door, I told Edith to hold the door-handle back while I attempted to push it open with my feet. *Zwish!* In less time than it takes to tell about it, I felt myself being literally "shot" to the surface. After floundering around a bit, I managed to secure a hold on the ice and looked around. Sure enough, there was Edith hanging on almost alongside of me! I boosted her onto solid ice and grabbed Judith, who was by now paddling in the water trying to get a good grip on the slippery ice, but without much success. I pushed her to safety and then looked around for the maid. She was about fifteen feet away, her head showing above the icy water, and screaming for help. I knew she couldn't swim a stroke and wondered how she was keeping up. However, I didn't waste much thought on it at that time, but started out to help her. I swam through the viciously cold water to her and discovered she was standing on top of the car! It took a little persuasion on my part to get her to trust to my swimming abilities to the extent of letting me get her onto safe ice. I guess the freezing cold water was the largest factor in inducing her to let me be of assistance. I could hardly blame her either, for the touch of something solid beneath her feet was very comforting, even if cold. At last I got her to where the rest of my family were huddled on the ice—their garments already frozen stiff. All three of them were too cold to speak. The nearest place of shelter was a power-house on the shore, to which we all ran, and I never really knew before what a blessing a fire could be to mankind! A furnace was roaring, and it took us a good two hours to get warmed.

WE found out later that the only thing that saved us was the fact that at the particular point in the water where our car went down, the propellers on these large boats coming into dock had paddled up sand and rocks and made a sort of island—and somehow by the grace of God, we managed to land on that. Had we broken through fifty feet closer in to the shore or fifty feet farther out, we would have gone down to a depth of about forty feet, and undoubtedly stayed there!

My car was later pulled up out of the water by means of hooks and for the sum of two hundred and fifty-eight dollars, it was made almost as good as new—*almost!*

On Page 5 of this issue will be found full details of our prize offer for stories of Real Experience.

What Do *You* Say About

PROHIBITION?

We are much interested in what our readers say about alcoholic beverages. When we use the word "say," we really mean the word "do"—for actions talk and tell one's personal feelings.

Below we have asked a number of questions. Won't you answer them for us? The first one will tell us what you do, and the other questions show something about the business and social background of the people on each side of the prohibition question. Are the people who observe the laws poorer or richer than those who do not? Are they younger or older? Do more people drink in the large cities than in the small places?

If enough people reply, we will tell you in Blue Book just what you readers *do* about prohibition. Naturally no names will be used. You do not need to sign your reply. Merely cut out the coupon, fill it in and mail it to

Donald Kennicott, Editor, Blue Book Magazine
230 Park Avenue, New York City

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1. In spite of Prohibition do you use alcoholic beverages——

   Frequently?..... Occasionally?..... Never?.....

   At places where they are sold?..... At parties?..... At home?.....

2. Are most of your social and business acquaintances observing prohibition?.....

3. What is your age?..... Sex?..... Are you married?..... Children?.....

4. What is your occupation?.....

5. Do you live in a house that you own?..... A house that you rent?.....

   A rented room?..... An apartment?.....

6. Do you carry life insurance?..... How much? $.....

7. Is the place in which you live a large city?..... A small city?.....

   A rural community?..... A village?.....

8. How much do you earn per year? $.....

9. What is your favorite recreation?.....

10. How do you plan to spend this year's vacation?.....

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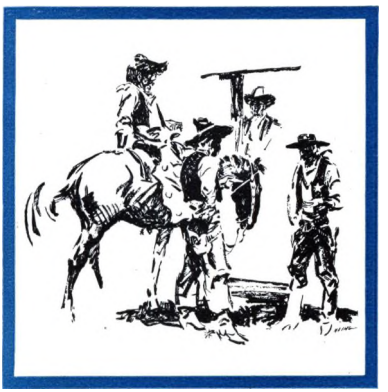
Hours You Can't Forget



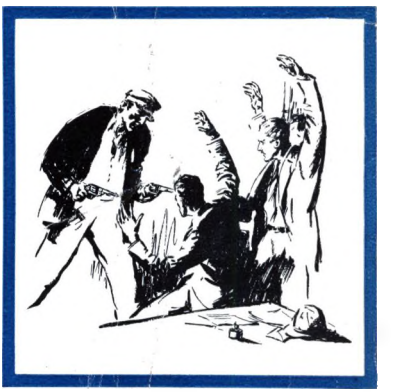
A NAVAL officer was in charge of an old tramp laden with depth-bombs and other munitions in the North Sea when the steering-gear jammed, the ship began rolling badly—and a hundred depth-bombs loaded with T.N.T. broke loose and started rolling too. . . . A Texas cowboy went fishing, and a Brahma bull—"the fightin'est bull there is"—chased him into the river, and went right into the water after him!

A YOUNG South American student tried to rescue a woman who'd been kidnaped by bandits and got into trouble strange indeed. . . . Two Australian prospectors located the same mine; one of them tells the thrilling story of their race by land and sea to Thursday Island to file on that claim. . . .

A young surveyor in the Northern Michigan woods was mistaken for a game warden by an outlaw trapper, was made captive, imprisoned in an old cabin—and rescued as he was about to be murdered. . . .

A CANADIAN lumber-camp foreman undertook to break a log-jam, slipped between two logs and found his foot caught and crushed in a gigantic vise. And the jam had begun to loosen. . . . A newspaper man set out to help a sheriff save a criminal from a mob—and found himself in the criminal's place. . . . A coon-hunter stumbled into the brush-hidden shaft of an old mine, landed far below in the deep water of the sump, and three days later, given up for dead, made his way to the surface. . . .

THESE and other equally fascinating true stories of real experiences will appear in the forthcoming issues of this magazine. Perhaps you too have been through some unforgettable scenes and could set down the story for your fellow-readers. The rules that govern this monthly Real Experience contest will be found on page 5 of this issue.



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