JUNE 1939

BLUE BOOK

OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE

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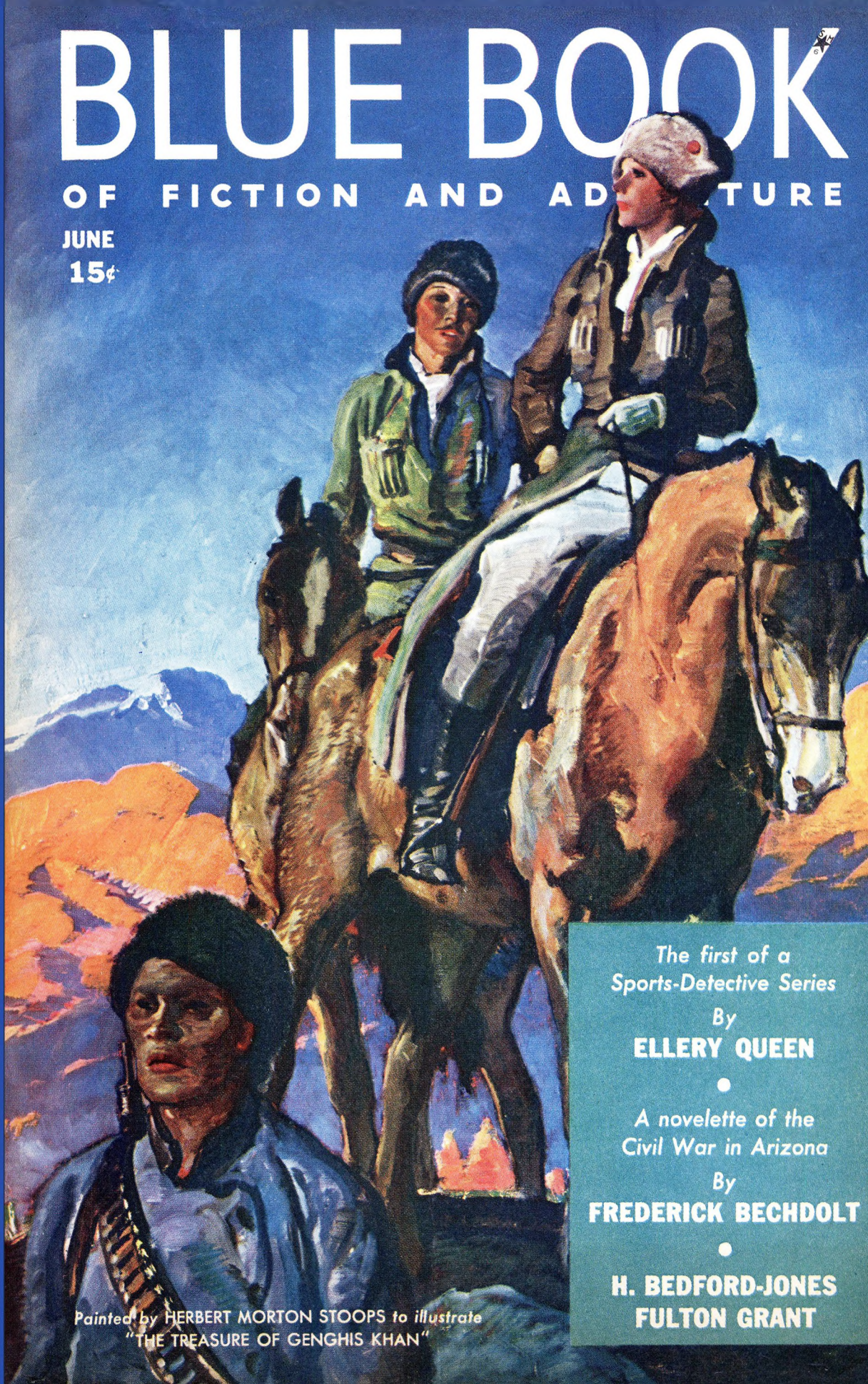

Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS *to illustrate*
"THE TREASURE OF GENGHIS KHAN"

The first of a Sports-Detective Series
By
ELLERY QUEEN

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A novelette of the Civil War in Arizona
By
FREDERICK BECHDOLT

•

H. BEDFORD-JONES
FULTON GRANT

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
VOL. 69 No. 2

Campbell headed back against the current; and when he saw how the craft walked upstream against that flood-tide, joy leaped in him.

From "Men of the River" ("Ships and Men"—No. XXX), beginning on page 19

BLUE BOOK

JUNE, 1939 MAGAZINE VOL. 69, NO. 2

Seven Short Stories

A Complete Short Novel

A Serial People Are Talking About

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

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

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Prize Offer for Real Experiences

THERE is material for a novel in every person's life, it has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of $50.

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

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

Sells 19 Features In Six Months

"I have sold, up to date, nineteen features to the Detroit Free Press and have been made their correspondent here," writes Mrs. Leonard Sanders of 218 Union St., Milford, Mich., on completing the N. I. A. course. Her skilful handling of feature stories was the reason given by the editor for her appointment. Mrs. Sanders' first feature was sold less than four months after she enrolled with N. I. A.

Next Month!

"Feud's End"

A spirited and deeply interesting novelette of West Point and the old army

By MEIGS FROST

"The Devil Is Dead!"

Be sure to read this—one of the most exciting pirate stories ever written—in our next issue. And with it will appear some of the best work of such writers as:

KENNETH PERKINS
H. BEDFORD-JONES
MEIGS FROST
GORDON KEYNE
FULTON GRANT
ROBERT MILL
SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

Coming!

ELLERY QUEEN is a sports-loving detective, and goes to horse-races, prize-fights and football games as well as to baseball. So it happens that some of his most interesting cases, like "Man Bites Dog" (see the next page) come to him at sports-events. Watch for another in an early issue.

Man Bites Dog

The first of a group of light-hearted sports-detective stories, by that great and good detective who wrote "A Challenge to the Reader" and "Four of Hearts."

Illustrated by Charles R. Chickering

ANYONE observing the tigerish pacings, the gnawings of lip, the contortions of brow and the fierce melancholy which characterized the conduct of Mr. Ellery Queen, the noted sleuth, during those early October days in Hollywood, would have said reverently that the great man's intellect was once more locked in titanic struggle with the forces of evil.

"Paula," Mr. Queen said to Paula Paris, "I am going mad."

"I hope," said Miss Paris tenderly, "it's love."

Mr. Queen paced on, swathed in yards of thought, while Paula Paris observed him with melting eyes. When he had first encountered her, during his investigation of the double murder of two famous motion-picture stars, Paula Paris had been in the grip of a morbid psychology. She had been in deathly terror of crowds. "Crowd phobia," the doctors called it. Mr. Queen had cured her by the odd method of making love to her. And now she was infected by the cure.

"Is it love?" asked Miss Paris.

"Eh?" said Mr. Queen. "What? Oh, no. I mean—it's the World Series." He was savage. "Don't you realize what's happening? The New York Giants and the New York Yankees are waging mortal combat to determine the baseball championship of the world, and I'm three thousand miles away!"

"Oh," said Miss Paris. Then she said cleverly: "You poor darling!"

"Never missed a New York series before," wailed Mr. Queen. "Driving me cuckoo. And what a battle! Greatest series ever played. Moore and Di Maggio have done miracles in the outfield. Giants have pulled a triple play. Goofy Gomez struck out fourteen men to win the first game. Hubbell's pitched a one-hit shutout. And today Gehrig came up in the ninth inning with the bases loaded, two out, and the Yanks three runs behind, and slammed a homer over the right-field stands!"

"Is that good?" asked Miss Paris.

"Good!" howled Mr. Queen. "It merely sent the series into a seventh game."

"Poor darling!" said Miss Paris again, and she picked up her telephone. When she set it down, she said: "Weather's threatening in the East. Tomorrow the New York Weather Bureau expects heavy rains."

"That's her!" cried Fenimore. "That's the dame!"

By ELLERY QUEEN

Mr. Queen stared. "You mean—"

"I mean that you're taking tonight's plane for the East. And you'll see your seventh game, day after tomorrow."

"Paula, you're a genius!" Then Mr. Queen's face fell. "But the studio—tickets. . . . Oh, Lord—I'll tell the studio I'm down with elephantiasis, and I'll wire Dad to snare a box. With his pull at City Hall, he ought to— Paula, I don't know what I'd do—"

"You might," suggested Miss Paris, "kiss me good-by."

Mr. Queen did so, absently. Then he started. "Not at all! You're coming with me!"

"That's what I had in mind," said Miss Paris contentedly.

THUS it came about that Wednesday found Miss Paris and Mr. Queen at the Polo Grounds, ensconced in a field box behind the Yankees' dugout.

Mr. Queen glowed, he reveled, he was radiant. While Inspector Queen, with the suspiciousness of all fathers, engaged Paula in exploratory conversation, Ellery consumed peanuts, frankfurters and soda pop immoderately, made hypercritical comments on the appearance of the various athletes, derided the Yankees, extolled the Giants, evolved complicated fifty-cent bets with Detective Sergeant Rylan, of the Inspector's staff, and leaped to his feet screaming with fifty thousand other maniacs as the news came that Carl Hubbell, the beloved meal ticket of the Giants, would oppose Señor El Goofy Gomez, the ace of the Yankee staff, on the mound.

"Will the Yanks murder that apple today!" predicted the Sergeant, who was an incurable Yankee worshiper. "And will Goofy mow 'em down!"

"Four bits," said Mr. Queen coldly, "say the Yanks don't score two earned runs off Carl."

"It's a pleasure!"

"I'll take a piece of that, Sergeant," chuckled a handsome man to the front

"Wha'd I tell you? It's going to be a massacree!"

of them, in a rail seat. "Hi, Inspector! Swell day for it, eh?"

"Jimmy Conlor!" exclaimed Inspector Queen. "The old Song-and-Dance Man in person. Say, Jimmy, you never met my son Ellery, did you? —Excuse me. Miss Paris, this is the famous Jimmy Conlor, God's gift to Broadway."

"Glad to meet you, Miss Paris," smiled the Song-and-Dance Man. "Read your 'Seeing Stars' column every day. Meet Judy Stark."

Miss Paris smiled, and the woman beside Jimmy Conlor smiled back; and just then three Yankee players strolled over to the box and began to jeer at Conlor for having had to take seats behind the hated Yankee dugout.

JUDY STARK sat oddly still. She was the famous Judy Stark who had been discovered by Ziegfeld—a second Marilyn Miller, the critics called her; dainty and pretty, with a perky profile and great honey-colored eyes, who had sung and danced her way into the heart of New York. Her day of fame was almost over now. Perhaps, thought Paula, staring at Judy's profile, that explained the pinch of her little mouth, the fine lines about her tragic eyes, the singing tension of her figure.

Perhaps. But Paula was not sure. There was immediacy, a defense against a palpable and present danger, in Judy Stark's tautness. Paula looked about. And at once her eyes narrowed.

Across the rail of the box, in the box at their left, sat a very tall, leather-skinned, silent and intent man. The man, too, was staring out at the field, in an attitude curiously like that of Judy Stark, whom he could have touched by extending his big, ropy, muscular hand across the rail. And on the man's other side there sat a woman whom Paula recognized instantly: Lotus Vernley, the motion-picture actress!

Lotus Vernley was a gorgeous full-blown redhead with deep blue eyes who had come out of northern Italy as Ludovica Vernicchi, changed her name, and flashed across the Hollywood skies in a picture called "Woman of Bali," a color-film in which loving care had been lavished on the display possibilities of her dark, full, dangerous body. With fame, she had developed a passion for press-agentry, Russian wolf-hounds in pairs, and tall brown men with muscles. She was arrayed in sun-yellow, and she stood out among the women in the field boxes like a butterfly in a mass of grubs. By contrast, little Judy Stark in her flame-colored outfit looked almost dowdy.

Paula nudged Ellery, who was critically watching the Yankees at batting practice. "Ellery," she said softly, "who is that big brown attractive man in the next box?"

Lotus Vernley said something to the brown man; and suddenly Judy Stark looked up; and then the two women exchanged the kind of glance women use when there is no knife handy.

Ellery said absently: "Who? Oh! That's Big Bill Traine."

"Traine?" repeated Paula. "Big Bill Traine?"

"Greatest left-handed pitcher major-league baseball ever saw," said Mr. Queen, staring reverently at the brown man. "Six feet three inches of bull-whip and muscle, with a temper as sudden as the hook on his curve ball, and a change of pace that fooled the greatest sluggers of baseball for fifteen years. What a man!"

"Yes, isn't he?" smiled Miss Paris.

"Now, what does that mean?" demanded Mr. Queen.

"It takes greatness to escort a lady like Lotus Vernley to a ball-game," said

Conlor rose. "Excuse me, Judy—" She cried: "It's Bill—something's happened to Bill!"

Paula, "to find your wife sitting within spitting distance in the next box, and to carry it off as well as your muscular friend Mr. Traine is doing."

"That's right," said Mr. Queen softly. "Judy Stark *is* Mrs. Bill Traine."

He groaned as Joe Di Maggio hit a ball to the clubhouse clock.

"Funny," said Miss Paris, her clever eyes inspecting in turn the four people before her: Lotus Vernley, the Hollywood siren; Big Bill Traine the ex-baseball-pitcher; Traine's wife Judy Stark; and Jimmy Conlor the Song-and-Dance Man, Mrs. Traine's escort. Two couples, two boxes—and no sign of recognition.

"Funny," murmured Miss Paris again. "From the way Traine courted Judy, you'd have thought the marriage would outlast eternity. He snatched her from under Jimmy Conlor's nose one night at the Winter Garden, drove her up to Greenwich at eighty miles an hour, and married her before she could catch her breath."

"Yes," said Mr. Queen politely. "Come on, you Giants!" he yelled, as the Giants trotted out for batting practice.

"And then something happened," continued Miss Paris reflectively. "Traine went to Hollywood to make a baseball picture, met Lotus Vernley and the wench took the overgrown country boy the way the overgrown country boy had taken Judy Stark. What a fall was there, my baseball-minded friend!"

"What a wallop!" cried Mr. Queen enthusiastically as Mel Ott hit one that bounced off the right-field fence.

"Big Bill yammered for a divorce, and Judy refused to give it to him—because she loved him, I suppose," said Paula softly. "And now this. How interesting!"

BIG BILL twisted in his seat a little; and Judy Stark was still and pale, staring out of her tragic honey-colored eyes at the Yankee bat-boy and giving him unwarranted delusions of grandeur. Jimmy Conlor continued to exchange sarcastic greetings with Yankee players, but his eyes kept shifting back to Judy's face. And beautiful Lotus Vernley's arm crept about Traine's shoulders.

"I don't like it," murmured Miss Paris.

"You don't like it?" said Mr. Queen. "Why, the game hasn't even started."

"I don't mean your game, silly. I mean the quadrangular situation in front of us."

"Look, darling!" said Mr. Queen. "I flew three thousand miles to see a ball-game. There's only one angle that interests me—the view from this box of the greatest li'l' ol' baseball tussle within the memory of gaffers. I yearn, I strain, I hunger to see it. Play with your quadrangle, but leave me to my baseball."

"I've always been psychic," said Miss Paris, paying no attention. "This is—bad. Something's going to happen."

Mr. Queen grinned. "I know what. The deluge. See what's coming."

SOME one in the grandstand had recognized the celebrities, and a sea of people was rushing down on the two boxes. They thronged the aisle behind the boxes, waving pencils and papers, and pleading. Big Bill Traine and Lotus Vernley ignored their pleas for autographs; but Judy Stark with a curious eagerness signed paper after paper with the yellow pencils thrust at her by people leaning over the rail. Good-naturedly Jimmy Conlor scrawled his signature too.

"Little Judy," sighed Miss Paris, setting her natural straw straight, as an autograph-hunter knocked it over her eyes, "is flustered and unhappy. Moistening the tip of your pencil with your tongue is scarcely a mark of poise. Seated next to her Lotus-bound husband, she hardly knows what she's doing, poor thing."

"Neither do I," growled Mr. Queen, fending off an octopus which turned out to be eight pleading arms offering score-cards.

Big Bill sneezed, groped for a handkerchief, and held it to his nose, which was red and swollen. "Hey, Mac!" he called irritably to a red-coated usher. "Do somethin' about this mob, huh?" He sneezed again. "Damn this hay-fever!"

"The touch of earth," said Miss Paris. "But definitely attractive."

"Should 'a' seen Big Bill the day he pitched that World Series final against the Tigers," chuckled Sergeant Rylan. "He was sure attractive that day. Pitched a no-hit shut-out!"

Inspector Queen said: "Ever hear the story behind that final game, Miss Paris? The night before, a gambler whose current alias was Sure Shot McCoy, and who represented a betting syndicate, called on Big Bill and laid down fifty grand in spot cash in return for Bill's promise to throw the next day's game. Bill took the money, told his manager the whole story, donated the bribe to a fund for sick ball-players—and the next day shut out the Tigers without a hit."

"Byronic, too," murmured Miss Paris.

"So then Sure Shot, badly bent," grinned the Inspector, "called on Bill for the pay-off. Bill knocked him down two flights of stairs."

"Wasn't that dangerous?"

"I guess," smiled the Inspector, "you could say so. That's why you see that plug-ugly with the smashed nose sitting over there right behind Traine's box. He's Mr. Terrible Turk, late of Cicero, and since that night Big Bill's shadow. You don't see Mr. Turk's right hand, because Mr. Turk's right hand is holding on to an automatic under his jacket. You'll notice, too, that Mr. Turk hasn't for a second taken his eyes off that pasty-cheeked customer eight rows up, who goes by the name of Sure Shot McCoy."

Paula stared. "But what a silly thing for Traine to do!"

"Well, yes," drawled Inspector Queen, "seeing that when he popped Mr. McCoy, Big Bill snapped two of the carpal bones of his pitching wrist and wrote *finis* to his baseball career."

BIG BILL hauled himself to his feet, whispered something to the Vernley woman, who smiled coyly, and left his box. His bodyguard, Turk, jumped up; but the big man shook his head, waved aside a crowd of people, and hurried up the concrete steps toward the rear of the grandstand.

And then Judy Stark said something bitter and hot and desperate across the rail to the woman her husband had brought to the Polo Grounds. Lotus Vernley's eyes glittered, and she replied in a careless, insulting voice that made Bill Traine's wife sit up stiffly. Jimmy Conlor began to tell the one about a famous columnist and the Seven Dwarfs—loudly and fast.

The Vernley woman began to paint her rich lips with short, vicious strokes of her orange lipstick; and Judy Stark's flame kid glove tightened on the rail between them.

After a while Big Bill returned and sat down again. Judy said something to Jimmy Conlor, and the Song-and-Dance Man slid over one seat to his right, and Judy slipped into Conlor's seat; so that between her and her husband there was

now not only the box rail but an empty chair as well.

Lotus put her arm about Traine's shoulders again.

Traine's wife fumbled inside her flame suède bag. She said suddenly: "Jimmy, buy me a frankfurter."

Conlor ordered; and Big Bill scowled. He jumped up and ordered some too. Conlor tossed the vendor two one-dollar bills and waved him away.

A NEW sea deluged the two boxes, and Traine turned round, annoyed. "All right, all right, Mac," he growled at the usher struggling with the pressing mob. "We don't want a riot here. I'll take six. Just six. Let's have 'em."

There was a rush that almost upset the attendant. The rail behind the boxes was a solid line of fluttering hands, arms and score-cards.

"Mr. Traine—said—six!" panted the usher; and he grabbed a pencil and card from one of the outstretched hands and gave them to Traine. The overflow of pleaders spread to the next box. Judy Stark smiled her best professional smile and reached for a pencil and card. A group of players on the field, seeing what was happening, ran over to the field rail and handed her score-cards too, so that she had to set her half-consumed frankfurter down on the empty seat beside her. Big Bill set his frankfurter down on the same empty seat; he licked the pencil long and absently and began to inscribe his name in the stiff, laborious hand of a man unused to writing.

The attendant howled, "That's six, now! Mr. Traine said just six, so that's all!" as if God Himself had said "six"; the crowd groaned, and Big Bill waved his immense paw and reached over to the empty seat in the other box to lay hold of his half-eaten frankfurter. But his wife's hand got there first and fumbled round; and it came up with Traine's frankfurter. The big brown man almost spoke to her then; but he did not—he picked up the remaining frankfurter, stuffed it into his mouth, and chewed away, but not as if he enjoyed its taste.

Mr. Ellery Queen was looking at the four people before him with a puzzled, worried expression; then he caught Miss Paula Paris' amused glance and flushed angrily.

The ground-keepers had just left the field and the senior umpire was dusting off the plate to the roar of the crowd when Lotus Vernley, who thought a

double play was something by Eugene O'Neill, flashed a strange look at Traine.

"Bill! Don't you feel well?"

The big ex-pitcher, a sickly blue beneath his tanned skin, put his hand to his eyes and shook his head as if to clear it.

"It's the hot dog," snapped Lotus. "No more for you!"

Tree blinked and began to say something; but just then Carl Hubbell completed his warming-up, Crosetti marched to the plate, Harry Danning tossed the ball to Bartell on second, who flipped it to Hubbell and trotted back to his position, yipping like a terrier.

The voice of the crowd exploded in one ear-splitting burst. And then an incredible silence fell.

And Crosetti swung at the first ball Hubbell pitched and smashed it far over Joe Moore's head for a triple.

Jimmy Conlor gasped as if some one had thrust a knife into his heart. But Detective Sergeant Rylan was bellowing: "Wha'd I tell you? It's gonna be a massacree!"

"What is everyone shouting for?" asked Paula innocently.

MR. QUEEN nibbled his nails as Danning strolled halfway to the pitcher's box. But Hubbell pulled his pants up, grinning. Red Rolfe was waving a huge bat at the plate. Danning trotted back. Manager Bill Terry had one foot up on the edge of the Giant dugout, his chin on his fist, looking anxious. The infield came in to cut off the run.

"Better come along, Master Mind. The old man wouldst have a word with thou."

Again fifty thousand people made no single little sound.

And Hubbell struck out Rolfe, Di Maggio and Gehrig.

Mr. Queen shrieked his joy with the thousands as the Giants came whooping in. Jimmy Conlor did an Indian war-dance in the box. Sergeant Rylan looked aggrieved. Señor Gomez took his warm-up pitches; the umpire used his whisk-broom on the plate again, and Jo-Jo Moore, the Thin Man, ambled up with his war-club.

He walked. Bartell fanned. But Jeep Ripple singled off Flash Gordon's shins on the first pitch; and there were Moore on third and Ripple on first, one out, and Mel Ott at bat.

And Big Bill Traine got half out of his seat, looking surprised, and then dropped to the concrete floor of the box as if somebody had slammed him behind the ear with a fast ball.

LOTUS screamed. Judy Stark turned like a shot, shaking. People in the vicinity jumped up. Three red-coated attendants hurried down, preceded by the hard-looking Mr. Turk. The bench-warmers stuck their heads over the edge of the Yankee dugout to stare.

"Fainted," growled Turk, on his knees beside the prostrate athlete.

"Loosen his collar," moaned Lotus Vernley. "He's so p-pale!"

"Have to git him outa here."

"Yes. Oh, yes!"

The attendants and Turk lugged the big man off, long arms dangling in an odd way. Lotus stumbled along beside him, biting her lips nervously.

"I think—" began Judy in a quivering voice, rising.

But Jimmy Conlor put his hand on her arm, and she sank back.

And in the next box Mr. Ellery Queen, on his feet from the instant Traine collapsed, was looking after the forlorn procession—until somebody in the stands squawked, *"Siddown!"* and he sat down.

"Oh, I knew something would happen," whispered Paula.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Queen shortly. "Fainted, that's all."

Inspector Queen said: "There's Sure Shot McCoy not far off. I wonder if—"

"Too many hot dogs," snapped his son. "What's the matter with you people? Can't I see my ball-game in peace?" And he howled: "Come o-o-on, Mel!"

Ott lifted his right leg into the sky and swung. The ball whistled into right field, a long, long fly, Selkirk racing madly back after it. He caught it by leaping four feet into the air with his back against the barrier. Moore was off for the plate like a streak, and beat the throw to Bill Dickey by inches.

"Yip-ee!" Thus Mr. Queen.

The Giants trotted out to their positions at the end of the first inning, leading one to nothing.

Up in the press box the working gentlemen of the press tore into their chores,

recalling Carl Hubbell's similar feat in the all-star game when he struck out the five greatest batters of the American League in succession; praising Twinkletoes Selkirk for his circus catch; and incidentally noting that Big Bill Traine, famous ex-hurler of the National League, had fainted in a field box during the first inning. Joe Williams of the *World-Telegram* said it was excitement; Hype Igoe opined that it was a touch of sun—Big Bill never wore a hat; and Frank Graham of the *Sun* guessed it was too many frankfurters.

Paula Paris said quietly: "I should think, with your detective instincts, Mr. Queen, you would seriously question the 'fainting' of Mr. Traine."

Mr. Queen squirmed and finally mumbled: "It's coming to a pretty pass when a man's instincts aren't his own. Rylan, go see what really happened to him."

"I wanna watch the game," howled Rylan. "Why don't you go yourself, maestro?"

"And possibly," said Mr. Queen, "you ought to go too, Dad. I have a hunch it may lie in your jurisdiction."

Inspector Queen regarded his son for some time. Then he rose and sighed: "Come along, Thomas."

Sergeant Rylan growled something about some people always spoiling other people's fun, and why the hell did he ever have to become a cop; but he got up and obediently followed the Inspector.

Mr. Queen nibbled his fingernails and avoided Miss Paris' accusing eyes.

THE second inning was uneventful. Neither side scored.

As the Giants took the field again, an usher came running down the concrete steps and whispered into Jim Conlor's ear. The Song-and-Dance Man blinked. He rose slowly. "Excuse me, Judy."

Judy grasped the rail. "It's Bill! Jimmy, tell me."

"Now, Judy—"

"Something's happened to Bill—" Her voice shrilled, and then broke. She jumped up. "I'm going with you."

Conlor smiled as if he had just lost a bet, and then he took Judy's arm and hurried her away.

Paula Paris stared after them, breathing hard. Mr. Queen beckoned the usher. "What's the trouble?" he demanded.

"Mr. Traine passed out. Some young doc in the crowd tried to pull him out of it up at the office, but he couldn't; and he's startin' to look worried—"

"I knew it!" cried Paula as the man darted away. "Ellery Queen, are you going to sit here and do *nothing?"*

But Mr. Queen defiantly set his jaw. Nobody was going to jockey him out of seeing this battle of giants; no ma'am!

There were two men out when Frank Crosetti stepped up to the plate for his second time at bat, and with the count two all, plastered a wicked single over Ott's head.

And of course Sergeant Rylan took just that moment to amble down and say, his eyes on the field: "Better come along, Master Mind. The old man wouldst have a word with thou. Ah, I see Frankie's on first. —Smack it, Red!"

MR. QUEEN watched Rolfe take a ball. "Well?" he said shortly. Paula's lips were parted.

"Big Bill's just kicked the bucket. What happened in the second inning?"

"He's—*dead?"* gasped Paula.

Mr. Queen rose involuntarily. Then he sat down again. "Damn it," he roared, "it isn't fair. I won't go!"

"Suit yourself. —Attaboy, Rolfe!" bellowed the Sergeant as Rolfe singled sharply past Bartell, and Crosetti pulled up at second base. "Far's I'm concerned, it's open and shut. The little woman did it with her own little hands."

"Judy *Stark?"* said Miss Paris.

"Bill's wife?" said Mr. Queen. "What are you talking about?"

"That's right—little Judy. She poisoned his hot dog." Rylan chuckled. "Man bites dog, and—*zowie."*

"Has she confessed?" snapped Ellery.

"Naw. But you know dames. She gave Bill the business, all right. C'mon, Joe! And I gotta go. What a life!"

Mr. Queen did not look at Miss Paris. He bit his lip. "Here, Rylan, wait a minute."

Di Maggio hit a long fly that Leiber caught without moving in his tracks, and the Yankees were retired without a score.

"Ah," said Mr. Queen. "Good old Hubbell!" And as the Giants trotted in, he took a fat roll of bills from his pocket, climbed onto his seat, and began waving greenbacks at the spectators in the reserved seats behind the box. Sergeant Rylan and Miss Paris stared at him in amazement.

"I'll give five bucks," yelled Mr. Queen, waving the money, "for every autograph Bill Traine signed before the game! In this box right here! Five bucks, gentlemen! Come and get it!"

"You nuts?" gasped the Sergeant.

The mob gaped, and then began to laugh; and after a few moments a pair of sheepish-looking men came down, and then two more, and finally a fifth. An attendant ran over to find out what was the matter.

"Are you the usher who handled the crowd around Bill Traine's box before the game, when he was giving autographs?" demanded Mr. Queen.

"Yes sir. But look, we can't allow—"

"Take a gander at these five men. . . . You, bud? Yes, that's Traine's handwriting. Here's your fin. Next!" And Mr. Queen went down the line, handing out five-dollar bills with abandon, in return for five dirty score-cards with Traine's scrawl on them.

"Anybody else?" he called out, waving his roll of bills.

But nobody else appeared, although there was ungentle badinage from the stands. Sergeant Rylan stood there shaking his big head. Miss Paris looked intensely curious.

"Who didn't come down?" rapped Mr. Queen.

"Huh?" said the usher, his mouth open.

"There were six autographs. Only five people turned up. Who was the sixth man? Speak up!"

"Oh." The redcoat scratched his ear. "Say, it wasn't a man. It was a kid."

"A *boy?*"

"Yeah, a little squirt in knee-pants."

Mr. Queen looked unhappy. Rylan growled, "Sometimes I think society's takin' an awful chance lettin' you run around loose," and the two men left the box. Miss Paris, bright-eyed, followed.

"Have to clear this mess up in a hurry," muttered Mr. Queen. "Maybe we'll still be able to catch the late innings."

SERGEANT RYLAN led the way to an office, before which a policeman was lounging. He opened the door, and inside they found the Inspector pacing. Turk, the thug, was standing with a scowl over a long still form on a couch covered with newspapers. Jimmy Conlor sat between the two women; and none of the three so much as stirred a foot. They were all pale and breathing heavily.

"This is Dr. Weldring," said Inspector Queen, indicating an elderly white-haired man standing quietly by a window. "He was Traine's physician. He happened to be in the park watching the game when the rumor reached his ears that Traine had collapsed. So he hurried up here to see what he could do."

Ellery went to the couch and pulled the newspaper off Bill Traine's still head. Paula crossed swiftly to Judy Stark and said: "I'm horribly sorry, Mrs. Traine." But the woman, her eyes closed, did not move. After a while Ellery dropped the newspaper back into place and said irritably: "Well, well, let's have it."

"A YOUNG doctor," said the Inspector, "got here before Dr. Weldring did, and treated Big Bill for fainting. I guess it was his fault—"

"Not at all," said Dr. Weldring sharply. "The early picture was compatible with fainting, from what he told me. He tried the usual restorative methods—even injected caffeine and picrotoxin. But there was no convulsion, and he didn't happen to catch the characteristic odor."

"Poison!" ejaculated Mr. Queen. "Taken orally?"

"Yes. I suspected it at once because—well," said Dr. Weldring in a grim voice, "because of something that occurred in my office only the other day."

"What was that?"

"I had a two-ounce bottle of a certain newly developed drug on my desk—a powerful poison that we sometimes use in minute quantities as a cardiac stimulant. Mrs. Traine,"—the Doctor's glance flickered over the silent woman—"happened to be in my office, resting in preparation for a metabolism test. I left her alone. By a coincidence, Bill Traine dropped in the same morning for a physical check-up. I saw another patient in another room, returned, gave Mrs. Traine her test, saw her out, and came back with Traine. It was then I noticed the bottle, which had been plainly marked *'Danger—Poison,'* was missing from my desk. I thought I had mislaid it, but now—"

"I didn't take it," said Judy Stark in a lifeless voice, still not opening her eyes. "I never even saw it."

Conlor gently stroked her hand.

"No hypo marks on the body," said Dr. Weldring dryly. "And I am told that fifteen to thirty minutes before Traine collapsed, he ate a frankfurter under—peculiar conditions."

"I didn't!" screamed Judy. "I didn't do it!" She pressed her face, sobbing, against Conlor's shoulder.

Lotus Vernley quivered. "She made him pick up her frankfurter. I saw it.

They both laid their frankfurters down on that empty seat, and she picked up his. So he had to pick up hers. She poisoned her own frankfurter and then saw to it that he ate it by mistake. Poisoner!" She glared hate at Judy.

"Wench!" said Miss Paris *sotto voce,* glaring hate at Lotus.

"In other words," put in Ellery impatiently, "Miss Stark is convicted on the usual two counts, motive and opportunity. Motive—her jealousy of Miss Vernley and her hatred—an assumption—of Bill Traine, her husband. And opportunity—both to lay hands on the poison in your office, Doctor, and to sprinkle some on her frankfurter, contriving to exchange hers for his while they were both autographing score-cards."

"She hated him," snarled Lotus. "And me, for having taken him from her!"

"Be quiet, you," said Mr. Queen. He opened the corridor door and said to the policeman outside: "Look, McGillicuddy, or whatever your name is, go tell the announcer to make a speech over the loudspeaker system. By the way, what's the score now?"

"I'll give five bucks," yelled Mr. Queen, "for every autograph Bill Traine signed!"

"Still one to skunk," said the officer. "Them boys Hubbell an' Gomez are hot, what I mean."

Ellery nodded. Then he went on:

"The announcer is to ask the little boy who got Traine's autograph just before the game to come to this office. If he does, he'll receive a ball, bat, pitcher's glove, and an autographed picture of Traine in uniform, to hang over his itsy-bitsy bed. Scram!"

"Yes, *sir,*" said the officer.

"King Carl pitching his heart out," grumbled Mr. Queen, shutting the door, "and me strangulated by this blamed thing! Well, Dad, do you too think that Judy Stark dosed that frankfurter?"

"What else can I think?" said the Inspector absently. His ears were cocked for the faint crowd-shouts from the park.

"Judy Stark," replied his son, "didn't poison her husband any more than I did."

AS Judy looked up slowly, her mouth muscles twitching, Paula said, gladly: "You wonderful man!"

"She didn't?" said the Inspector, looking alert.

"The frankfurter theory," snapped Mr. Queen, "is too screwy for words. For Judy to have poisoned her husband, she had to unscrew the cap of a bottle and douse her hot dog on the spot with the poison. Yet Jimmy Conlor was seated by her side, and in the only period in which she could possibly have poisoned the frankfurter, a group of Yankee ballplayers was *standing before her* across the field rail getting her autograph. Were they all accomplices? And how could she have known Big Bill would lay his hot dog on that empty seat? The whole thing is absurd."

A roar from the stands made him continue hastily: "There was one plausible theory that fitted the facts. When I heard that Traine had died of poisoning, I recalled that at the time he was autographing the six score-cards, *he had thoroughly licked the end of a pencil* which had been handed to him with one of the cards. It was possible, then, that the pencil he licked had been poisoned. So I offered to buy the six autographs."

Paula regarded Ellery tenderly, and Rylan said: "I'll be a so-and-so if he didn't!"

"I didn't expect the poisoner to come forward, but I knew the innocent ones would. Five claimed the money. The sixth, the missing one, the usher informed me, had been a small boy."

"A kid poisoned Bill?" growled Turk, speaking for the first time. "You're crazy from the heat."

"In spades," added the Inspector.

"Then why didn't the boy come forward?" put in Paula quickly. "Go on, darling!"

"He didn't come forward, not because he was guilty, but because he wouldn't sell Bill Traine's autograph for anything. No, obviously a hero-worshiping boy wouldn't try to poison the great Bill Traine. Then, just as obviously, he didn't realize what he was doing. Consequently he must have been an innocent tool. The question was—and still is—of whom?"

"Sure Shot," said the Inspector slowly.

Lotus Vernley sprang to her feet, her eyes glittering. "Perhaps Judy Stark didn't poison that frankfurter, but if she didn't, then she hired that boy to give Bill—"

Mr. Queen said disdainfully: "Miss Stark didn't leave the box once."

Some one knocked on the corridor door, and Mr. Queen opened it. For the first time he smiled. When he shut the door, they saw that his arm was about the shoulders of a boy with brown hair and quick clever eyes. The boy was clutching a score-card tightly.

"They say over the announcer," mumbled the boy, "that I'll get a autographed pitcher of Big Bill Traine if—" He stopped, abashed at their strangely glinting eyes.

"And you'll certainly get it, too," said Mr. Queen heartily. "What's your name, sonny?"

"Fenimore Feigenspan," replied the boy, edging toward the door. "Gran' Concourse, Bronx. Here's the score-card. How about the pitcher?"

"Let's see that, Fenimore," said Mr. Queen. "When did Bill Traine give you this autograph?"

"Before the game. He said he'd on'y give six—"

"Where's the pencil you handed him, Fenimore?"

The boy looked suspicious, but he dug into a bulging pocket and brought forth one of the ordinary yellow pencils sold at the park with score-cards. Ellery took it from him gingerly, and Dr. Weldring took it from Ellery, and sniffed its tip. He nodded; a look of relief came over Judy Stark's face, and she dropped her head wearily to Conlor's shoulder.

MR. QUEEN ruffled Fenimore Feigenspan's hair. "That's swell, Fenimore. Somebody gave you that pencil while the Giants were at batting practice—isn't that so?"

"Yeah." The boy stared at him.

"Who was it?" asked Ellery lightly.

"I dunno. A big guy with a coat an' a turned-down hat an' a mustache, an' big black sun-glasses. I couldn't see his face good. Where's my pitcher? I wanna see the game!"

"Just where was it that this man gave you the pencil?"

"In the—" Fenimore paused, glancing at the ladies with embarrassment. Then he muttered: "Well, I hadda go, an' this guy says—in there—he's ashamed to ask

her for her autograph, so would I do it for him—"

"What? What's that?" exclaimed Mr. Queen. "Did you say 'her'?"

"Sure," said Fenimore. "The dame, he says, wearin' the red hat an' red dress an' red gloves in the field box near the Yanks' dugout, he says. He even took me outside an' pointed down to where she was sittin'. Say!" cried Fenimore, goggling. "That's her! That's the dame!" He leveled a forefinger at Judy Stark.

JUDY shivered and felt blindly for the Song-and-Dance Man's hand.

"Let me get this straight, Fenimore," said Mr. Queen softly. "This man with the sun-glasses asked you to get this lady's autograph for him, and gave you the pencil and score-card to get it with?"

"Yeah, an' two bucks too, sayin' he'd meet me after the game to pick up the card, but—"

"But you didn't get the lady's autograph for him, did you? You went down to get it, and hung around waiting for your chance, but then you spied Big Bill Traine, your hero, in the next box and forgot all about the lady, didn't you?"

The boy shrank back. "I didn't mean to, honest, Mister. I'll give the two bucks back!"

"And seeing Big Bill there, your hero, you went right over to get *his* autograph for *yourself*, didn't you?" Fenimore nodded, frightened. "You gave the usher the pencil and score-card this man with the sun-glasses had handed you, and the usher turned the pencil and score-card over to Bill Traine in the box—wasn't that the way it happened?"

"Y-yes, sir, an'—" Fenimore twisted out of Ellery's grasp. "An' so I—I gotta go." And before anyone could stop him, he was indeed gone, racing down the corridor like the wind.

The policeman outside shouted, but Ellery said, "Let him go, Officer," and shut the door. Then he opened it again and said: "How's she stand now?"

"Dunno exactly, sir. Somethin' happened out there just now. I think the Yanks scored."

"Damn!" groaned Mr. Queen, and he shut the door again.

"So it was Mrs. Traine who was on the spot, not Bill," scowled the Inspector. "I'm sorry, Judy Stark.... Big man with a coat and hat and mustache and sun-glasses. Some description!"

"Sounds like a phony to me," said Sergeant Rylan.

"If it was a disguise, he dumped it somewhere," said the Inspector thoughtfully. "Thomas, have a look in the men's room behind the section where we were sitting." And as Rylan hurried out, Inspector Queen frowned. "Quite a job finding a killer in a crowd of fifty thousand people."

"Maybe," said his son suddenly, "maybe it's not such a job after all.... What was used to kill? A poison—a violent heart stimulant. Who was intended to be killed? Bill Traine's wife. Any connection between anyone in the case and that particular poison? Yes—Dr. Weldring 'lost' a bottle of it under suspicious circumstances. Which were? That Bill Traine's wife could have taken that bottle—*or Bill Traine himself.*"

"Bill Traine!" gasped Paula.

"Bill?" whispered Judy Stark.

"Quite! Dr. Weldring didn't miss the bottle until *after* he had shown you, Miss Stark, out of his office. He then returned to his office with your husband. Bill could have slipped the bottle into his pocket as he stepped into the room."

"Yes, he could have," muttered Dr. Weldring.

"I don't see," said Mr. Queen, "how we can arrive at any other conclusion. We know his wife was intended to be the victim today, so obviously she didn't steal the poison. The only other person who had opportunity to steal it was Bill Traine, himself."

LOTUS VERNLEY sprang up. "I don't believe it! It's a frame-up to protect *her*, now that Bill can't defend himself!"

"Ah, but didn't he have motive to kill Judy?" asked Mr. Queen. "Yes, indeed; she wouldn't give him the divorce he craved so that he could marry *you*. I think, Miss Vernley, you would be wiser to keep the peace.... Bill had opportunity to steal the bottle of poison in the Doctor's office. He also had opportunity to hire Fenimore today, for he was the *only* one of the whole group who left those two boxes during the period when the poisoner must have searched for some one to offer Judy the poisoned pencil.

"All of which fits for what Bill had to do—get to where he had cached his disguise, probably yesterday; look for a likely tool; find Fenimore, give him his instructions and the pencil; get rid of the disguise again; and return to his box. And didn't Bill know better than anyone

his wife's habit of moistening a pencil with her tongue—a habit she probably acquired from *him?*"

"Poor Bill!" murmured Judy Stark.

"Women," remarked Miss Paris, "are *fools.*"

"There were other striking ironies," replied Mr. Queen. "For if Bill hadn't been suffering from a hay-fever attack, he would have smelled the odor when his own poisoned pencil was handed to him, and stopped in time to save his worthless life. For that matter, if he hadn't been Fenimore Feigenspan's hero, Fenimore would not have handed him his own poisoned pencil in the first place.

"No," said Mr. Queen gladly, "putting it all together, I'm satisfied that Mr. Big Bill Traine, in trying to murder his wife, very neatly murdered himself instead."

"That's all very well for *you,*" said the Inspector disconsolately. "But *I* need proof."

"I've told you how it happened," said his son airily, making for the door. "Can any man do more? Coming, Paula?"

But Paula was already at a telephone, speaking guardedly to the New York office of the syndicate for which she worked, and paying no more attention to him than if he had been a worm.

"WHAT'S the score? What's been going on?" Ellery demanded of the world at large as he regained his box seat. "Three to three! What the devil's got into Hubbell, anyway? How'd the Yanks score? What inning is it?"

"Last of the ninth," shrieked somebody. "The Yanks got three runs in the eighth on a walk, a double, and Di Mag's homer! Leiber homered in the sixth with Ott on base! Shut up!"

Bartell singled over Gordon's head. Mr. Queen cheered.

Sergeant Rylan tumbled into the next seat. "Well, we got it," he puffed. "Found the whole outfit in the men's room—coat, hat, fake mustache, glasses and all. What's the score?"

"Three-three. Sacrifice, Jeep!" shouted Mr. Queen.

"There was a rain-check in the coat pocket from the sixth game, with Big Bill's box number on it. So there's the old man's proof. Chalk up another win for you."

"Who cares? . . . *Zowie!*"

Jeep Ripple sacrificed Bartell successfully to second.

"Lucky stiff," howled a Yankee fan near by. "That's the breaks. See the breaks they get? See?"

"And another thing," said the Sergeant, watching Mel Ott stride to the plate. "Seein' as how all Big Bill did was cross himself up, and no harm done except to his own carcass, and seein' as how organized baseball could get along without a murder, and seein' as how thousands of kids like Fenimore Feigenspan worship the ground he walked on—"

"Sew it up, Mel!" bellowed Mr. Queen.

"—and seein' as how none of the newspaper guys know what happened, except that Bill passed out of the picture after a faint, and seein' as everybody's only too glad to shut their traps—"

MR. QUEEN awoke suddenly to the serious matters of life. "What's that? What did you say?"

"Strike him out, Goofy!" roared the Sergeant to Señor Gomez, who did not hear. "As I was sayin', it aint cricket, and the old man would be broke out of the force if the front office heard about it—"

Some one puffed up behind them, and they turned to see Inspector Queen, red-faced as if after a hard run, scrambling into the box with the assistance of Miss Paula Paris, who looked cool, serene and starry-eyed as ever.

"Dad!" said Ellery, staring. "With a murder on your hands, how can you—"

"Murder?" panted Inspector Queen. "What murder?" And he winked at Miss Paris, who winked back.

"But Paula was telephoning the story—"

"Didn't you hear?" said Paula in a coo, setting her straw straight and slipping into the seat beside Ellery's. "I fixed it all up with your dad. Tonight all the world will know is that Mr. Bill Traine died of heart failure."

They all chuckled then—all but Mr. Queen, whose mouth was open.

"So now," said Paula, "your dad can see the finish of your precious game just as well as *you,* you selfish oaf!"

But Mr. Queen was already fiercely rapt in contemplation of Mel Ott's bat as it swung back, and Señor Gomez' ball as it left the Señor's hand to streak toward the plate.

More of Ellery Queen's inimitable sports-detective stories are to follow soon; and we shall share in the solution of baffling mysteries while watching a horse-race, a prize-fight and a Rose Bowl game.

This thirtieth story of the Ships and Men series tells of the first Mississippi packet-boat—and of wild days on the old river.

Illustrated by George Avison

Men of the River

By H. BEDFORD-JONES *and* CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

THERE are two places where the old Mississippi packet-boats were and are to be found, and I was in the other place, talking with Dan Fletcher and watching the shooting of some scenes of a movie, supposedly located at Natchez.

Dan Fletcher has some job in Sacramento, when he works at it. Like most people in California, he comes from somewhere else; in his case, it is Baton Rouge. As we sat watching the reaches of the Sacramento River, with the imitation cotton-pickers on the bank and the gorgeous old river packet-boat puffing, Fletcher laughed suddenly.

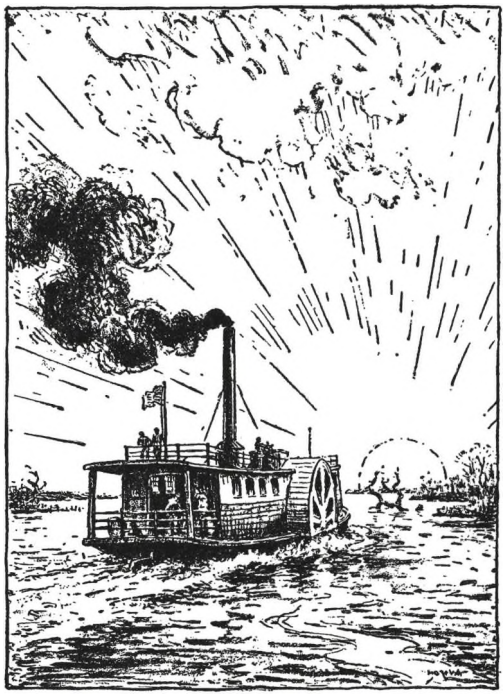
"Funny thing," he observed, "how all the Mississippi River pictures are made right here on the old Sacramento! And why not? I guess folks back East don't know that we have packet-boats here, and had them, for that matter, back before Civil War days."

"They didn't start here, however," I put in.

He nodded. "That's right." Producing a queer kind of knife, he began to sharpen a pencil with it. I have seen all kinds of knives in my time, but never one like this, before—and I said so.

"Curious, isn't it, why we do things?" Fletcher said. "Seeing that packet, made you say river packets didn't start here. That made me think of a yarn Cap'n Roche told me once, and thinking of him made me get out the dirk. He gave it to me, you see. He was the last of the old river captains—I mean the old breed. This was a knife he got when he was a youngster on the river, when fighting meant dirt."

It was a sturdy, viciously shaped little stabbing blade, the haft riveted through the center of a curved piece of ebony. It fitted into the hand like an invitation to murder.



"When you think of all those floating palaces in the old days," went on Fletcher in his easy Southern drawl, "it's hard to realize that the Mississippi is pretty empty now. Quality folks don't travel by packet; they have autos, and they're in a rush. My dad was a river pilot—"

"But who started that peculiar type of craft in the first place?" I asked.

"Steve Campbell started them," he said, staring out at the water and the puffing packet. "That's the story Cap'n Roche told me, the yarn I mentioned. It goes away back—a hundred years ago and over—when steamboats were new, just taking hold everywhere, and often burning up or meeting with disaster."

"Steve Campbell, eh?" I said, and shook my head. "Never heard of him. Some lawyer who formed a company and made a snug fortune?"

He gave me a pained look.

"You ought to know better. Things weren't done that way in America, back in those days; at least, not out West on the frontier. Campbell was an illiterate flatboatman. He used to take rafts of logs and trading goods down the Ohio, on down to New Orleans, and hoof it back. But he wasn't satisfied with that."

HE went on to picture this Campbell, and the man took shape before me. Young, shock-headed, a hard drinker and a ready fighter, but with a streak of canny Scotch thrift and a devouring ambition. Back from New Orleans, the last trip of the year, he landed in Shippingport in the early winter.

Just below the rapids of Louisville, the thriving Shippingport was the outlet for all the waters above, and for Kentucky and Ohio to boot. It was busy and bustling, even now; rope-walks, sawmills, timber-yards, and warehouses filling with winter goods to go down-river with the spring thaw. Boats with boatmen of all kinds, fur-traders, Indians, half-breeds, harpies, gamblers, and slick Easterners.

DURING two whole weeks Steve Campbell looked around in silence, spending most of his time just looking, and occasionally listening. Then one day he went over to the port where the flatboats and barges were drawn up from the ice, and looked them over. There he met Dave Blaney, and fell into talk.

Blaney was a little man, with a chip on his shoulder, and a quick eye and a whisky mouth; however, he knew ship engines—and he was out of work.

"I hear Squire Naylor had bad luck with his steamboat he built for river trade," said Campbell cautiously.

Blaney sniffed.

"Good boat, good engine in her too; but she smashed her paddles on logs and went ashore, wrecked."

"Her engine could be bought cheap," said Campbell. "Other men are building steamboats."

"They'll never work on the river," Blaney said in his cocksure way. "Look yonder, where Squire Naylor is building his new boat: Got bigger engines for her, but they're no better than the old ones, if you ask me."

"I've been looking at her," Campbell replied. "She'll carry a sight o' freight."

Blaney erupted in raucous laughter. "Sure, sure! She's built deep and heavy; a good job, but a poor craft. Steamboats won't never do anything on the river. Can't clear the bars; too many deadheads to stove 'em in; they can't turn quick. Load 'em down, and they draw too much water; can't get upriver against the current."

"Aye," said Campbell. "I've been thinking about that. Anybody who invents a boat that can break down them objections, will have something. Anybody who can fetch a load upriver will have something. Anyone can get down; it's getting back that'd be worth while. What do you know about engines?"

"Everything," said Blaney.

"Have you any money to invest?"

"A little." Blaney gave him a sharp look, and Campbell nodded.

"Meet me at ten in the morning, if you're interested, right here," he said, and walked away.

He investigated Blaney, as far as possible. The man had been discharged by Squire Naylor, who blamed him, wrongly, for the loss of his new boat. The Squire was a truculent, domineering, not-too-scrupulous man who had grown rich in one way and another. He had bought out the Frenchman's rope-walk and he meant to grow even richer in river trade.

Blaney was no angel, but there was nothing bad against him except that he had ideas. Campbell had ideas too; he meant to get ahead. Here in Louisville he discarded all his river ways. He dressed passably; he carefully patterned his speech on that of people who had schooling; and if he swigged a glass or two of raw whisky with his meals, this was only because it was customary. He did no drinking, as the river knew it. Both in Shippingport and in Louisville he was regarded as a canny Scot.

NEXT morning he tramped out in the snow and found Blaney waiting by the acres of drawn-up boats and rafts.

"If you'd hitch an engine to a flatboat," said Campbell, as they talked, "you'd be on the right track. Look at that barge yonder; she's from up the Allegheny."

They looked at the barge. Shallow draft, wide as sin, stoutly built.

"You want to build an engine boat for the river?" Blaney asked bluntly.

"Aye," said Campbell. "No need of building her; that long barge has the hull, and she's sound as a dollar."

"No cargo space, if you put engines in her and use her as a hull."

"I don't want cargo space," said Campbell. "People will pay money to travel down-river. They'll pay bigger money and lots of it to travel upriver. I want no more cargo space than will do for a deck-load, with wood for the engines. Take that hull, put in the engine from Naylor's wrecked boat, build a superstructure on most of the deck for cabins."

"Hm!" said Blaney. "That's a new idea. It'll weight the hull down almost to the waterline."

"Why not?" asked Campbell. "River waves aren't big. Can it be done by the time the ice goes out?"

"It can, if we both pitch in."

They repaired to the nearest of the many Shippingport taverns and settled down with paper and quills and ink. Blaney had a little money; not much, but a little hard cash went surprisingly far on the frontier. Campbell had more.

"Two thirds to me, one third to you," he said, as he wrote out an agreement. "Is that fair?"

"More than fair," said Blaney, and right he was.

THE agreement signed, they fell to figuring on loads and weights. With all allowances, they finished by estimating that the deck-line of the barge, when the engine was in and all else done, and men aboard, would come within a foot of the water.

"Plenty and to spare," said Campbell with a nod of satisfaction. "We can take a small load of fast freight and put a high price on it. Money's in passengers. Now get the engine bought, and keep a close tongue; I'll buy the barge, and we'll get to work on it. A rough job, no paint, no trimmings, no cabins, till we see how she handles. Agreed?"

Blaney was filled with wild enthusiasm, and it did not die down with time. He went off to see about the engine, and Steve Campbell bought the barge and had it taken to the shipyard opposite Sandy Island. With this began incessant labor, day in and day out.

Until the engine was installed and the decking built in, Campbell scarcely had time to do any more looking around; but he kept his eyes open none the less. Squire Naylor's new craft was building close by, and a beauty she was, the finest ever to be launched on the Ohio.

Campbell got the job done, got the paddles in, and went to work on the boxes. On the day he finished the paddle-boxes, he noticed Squire Naylor inspecting the other boat. Naylor had come down from Louisville with a jingling sleigh and a spanking team of horses. He was a tall, lean, dark man, affable enough, but with a glinting hard eye. Presently he came strolling over to where Campbell was at work.

"Queer contraption you're working on," said he.

"Aye," rejoined Campbell.

The Squire laughed. "So that's where the engine went out of my old boat, eh? Well, my man, I wish you joy of it, and of that rascal Blaney. I hear he's your partner."

"Aye," said Campbell, and glanced around in search of Blaney. But the little man had gone uptown.

Naylor laughed again, raspingly.

"This thing is a sheer waste of good money. Why, you've no cargo-space at all here! You might better have put your money into my enterprise."

Campbell caught a distinct note of hostility, and straightened up.

"Your enterprise, as ye call it, isn't worth a penny; like your boat."

"What?" Squire Naylor flushed darkly. "What's wrong with my boat?"

"Everything," said Campbell. "You've forgot to allow for cargo and crew weight; she'll draw too much water and can make no speed against the current. This boat o' mine will go over sandbars that'll hold yours fast."

"Bosh!" snapped the Squire angrily. "Everything about my boat has been figured out from a scientific standpoint."

Campbell grinned. "Then figure out how to keep logs from breaking your paddles."

"How do you aim to do it?"

"That's my business." Campbell turned his back and went on with his work. Naylor swore, and departed.

BAD blood there, hostility; but why? There must be a reason. He learned the reason later, when gossip and laughter came to him: Blaney had been talking. Blaney, after a drink or so, had been boasting that Campbell's new boat would run the Naylor craft off the river.

With morning, Campbell picked his time to remonstrate. He was showing Blaney just what the latter was to get made, in Louisville, to fend logs and snags from the paddles on either side of the craft.

"Any pilot can see a swimming log," he said. "The sunken ones won't damage; we'll slide over 'em, but they'd smash the wheels to kindling, as they did in Naylor's first boat. Get these steel guards made, at exactly the angle marked here."

"Why the angle?" demanded Blaney, scowling. "Why not straight?"

"A deadhead would break 'em off. We must aim to deflect a log, that's all—send it down under or sideways. By the way, Naylor was here yesterday. Acted sort of ugly. You've been doing some talking, I hear. That won't do. We don't want to make enemies."

Blaney flared up hotly. "A lot you should care—the toughest flatboatman on the river, and afraid of making enemies! You don't expect Squire Naylor's going to be a friend, do you?"

"Keep your shirt on, little man—" began Campbell good-humoredly.

Blaney gave him a torrid oath.

"Little man, huh? I'm as good as you any day, Steve Campbell, you big hulking lump! Off with your coat. I'll wrassle you here and now!"

Campbell laughed, and sent him staggering away with a shove.

"Get gone, get on your way, get those guards made!"

The little man swung around, half crouched, hand at his belt; at the look of vicious hatred in his eyes Campbell's laugh died in shocked incredulity.

"Yah! Lord it over me, would you?" spat Blaney. "I've had enough of your blasted arrogance, and of your damned advice as well. Always know best, don't you? Think that because you're bigger'n me, you can come the river bully over me! For two cents I'd let the worthless life out of you!"

Then, as Campbell did nothing and said nothing at all, Blaney mouthed another sullen oath and went off.

Campbell sat down, bit off a hunk of prime twist, worked it between his jaws, spat, and stared over across the river past Rock Island—No. 63 in the river charts—at Clarksville on the opposite bank.

"This is bad," he muttered. "The little feller is always sp'iling to show he's better'n the big feller; maybe I said a word too much! But it aint natural for him to show murder-sign like that, without he's had it in his heart a long spell. . . . Here, here, blast it, get civilized!"

HE had been muttering in the shiftless river-speech. With an effort he forced himself to a different level of talk.

"I can spill words as good as Squire Naylor, I reckon; and I'd better stick to it. Now, then, what about Blaney? Hanged if I know. Most likely he's got some grouch against me. Doesn't like my advice, says he. Do nothing, then; wait and see. He was right in one way, though: Squire Naylor won't be any friend in need."

It did not trouble Campbell that the Squire was said to be a bad enemy, with business interests up and down river, and no lack of men at his beck and call, from the courts down to the tavern-keepers. Campbell worried only about Blaney's attitude. For Blaney was his partner.

That same night they met face to face in the street, and Blaney apologized with warmth and frankness.

"You r'iled me, Steve; and I was full of liquor. Forget it all, will you?"

"Sure, sure," Campbell returned amiably. "Bad thing to fill up with liquor for breakfast. Lots of the boys do it, and—oh, Lord, I forgot you didn't want any advice."

Blaney grinned, and the spat was mentioned no more. But Campbell remembered. Every now and again he caught a glance, a word, a gesture. He knew that Blaney was an enemy, and he was helpless to do anything about it; he could not understand it. . . .

However, there was more than Blaney to worry him. With the thaws ahead and the boat just where he wanted her, the money ran out, as money will. Both he and Blaney were down to their last dollar, and this put an ugly glint in Blaney's eyes, as he sat with Campbell and figured on their needs.

"As soon as the ice goes out of the port," said Campbell, "we can try her out and make sure everything is right; until then, we don't need to spend a cent more. The lumber for the cabins, the furnishings, the paint, and a stove and dishes—I make it three hundred dollars to finish. But we don't need that now."

"We have to eat, don't we?" snarled Blaney.

"Charge it, the way I do." Campbell grinned. "You're known as my partner, so your credit's good."

"It's good enough on my own hook," snapped Blaney. "How'll you live for the next two or three weeks, till the ice goes out?"

"I've got a job at the yard, building log rafts. There's one for you if you'll take it."

"Thanks." The little man's tone was venomous with sarcasm. "Don't bother; I'll get along without slaving up to my knees in slush. Where do you aim to get three hundred dollars?"

"Borrow it," said Campbell cheerfully.

The other grunted, filled his pipe, and sat back with a scowl.

"I wish to hell I had my money out of this fool business!" he burst out suddenly. "It's crazy nonsense; I've found that out. There's no such thing as passenger traffic down or up. Government men or soldiers go by barge. Settlers and such couldn't afford to pay high fares; they can go free by raft or flatboat."

"There'll be a tremendous passenger business, quick as we start."

"All nonsense," snapped Blaney. "I tell you, I want my money out of it!"

"You're in, sink or swim," said Campbell with a dour look. Anger stirred in him. "You stay in. I need some one to handle that engine; you have to do it."

"All right," rejoined Blaney curtly, and departed.

CAMPBELL went to Berthoud, the merchant whose big warehouse was already crammed with goods waiting to go downriver when the thaw came. He knew the Frenchman well, had dealt often with him—knew him for a cautious, kindly, able man.

Berthoud puffed at his pipe and heard Campbell out, with occasional nods.

"You should have started your enterprise at New Orleans," said he at last. "There's no travel, no paying travel, from this point down; there may be some day, I grant you. But from New Orleans up, there'll be plenty. Get what you want at the shipyard, Steve, have it charged to me, and I'll carry you for it. They owe me a large bill anyway, and I've put money into Tarascon's rope-walk without much luck so far. . . . No, wait!"

He cut short Campbell's quick thanks.

"Wait. I'm doing this because I know you to be as honest as I am, maybe more so," he continued. "Not because I expect you'll succeed. I'm practically certain you'll fail, Steve, for two reasons: There's been a lot of talk; some of the Louisville pilots say your newfangled ideas may be right. Suppose they are? Suppose your boat works well? What will happen? You'll lose her. I'm not mentioning any names; but it's easy for a boat to burn, for instance."

Campbell's lean face hardened. "You mean Squire Naylor?"

"Lord, man!" Berthoud looked horrified. "No names, I said! Well, that's one reason anyhow. The second is that your partner, Blaney, is pretty thick with the Squire; and in my belief, that man Blaney is a thorough rascal."

"You're mistaken." Campbell frowned. "He may be a rascal, but Squire Naylor and he aren't friends. He used to work for the Squire and got fired."

Berthoud shrugged widely in typical French manner.

"Maybe; but my negroes know a thing or two. They've seen the two of them together lately, several times, in friendly talk. Earnest talk, too. Steve, you watch out for tricks! I don't want to make an enemy of Naylor. I do a lot of business with him. Don't say I'm lending you the money; just go ahead, and your credit's good with me. But watch out for tricks."

"Thanks," said Campbell. "Maybe you're right. There won't be no tricks, lemme tell you, if I'm sleepin' aboard that boat! Let 'em try any, and I'll show 'em what it means to be sired by an alligator and weaned by a streak o' lightning—"

River talk, blast it! But he went away grinning happily, with a warm spot in his heart for old Berthoud. And he said nothing, even to Blaney, about where the money was to come from if his boat succeeded.

BLANEY became friendly, sneakily friendly; this was a bad sign, for he cursed Squire Naylor lustily; and Campbell read treachery here, but held his peace. He needed Blaney desperately on that engine. He began to be aware that men talked of him behind his back, eyed him in passing, shook their heads after him. It got on his nerves. He felt himself surrounded by vague, indefinite enmity on all sides. But he worked away, earned his keep, and handed over his tools with a heart-leap when the rain came.

Two days of it, warm and drenching rain that cleared the snow down to black ground and sent all hands frantically to work, striving to get the big boats into the water while there was ice on which to slide them out. Campbell, drenched to the skin, saw his boat go out, and leaped aboard as she went. She rode steady and dry, the engine housed; he slept beside the engine that night as she lay moored, a rifle close at hand.

Afternoon—sunlight and flood-waters. He hazed Blaney aboard, got two black men at work with firewood, and steam began to rise. Finally he cast off and headed out, with a small crowd of men thronged along the shore to watch. The paddle-wheels churned nobly; and as the channel here followed the Kentucky shore, they were out past Sandy Island in no time, swept along on the rain-swelled flood.

Campbell was at the helm, trying with delight and a fierce exultation how she answered to the rudder, when Blaney came scrambling to his side.

"We've got to go back, Steve! Packing's worked loose around the shafts, and water's coming in!"

Campbell reached out one long arm, caught the little man by the shirt, and jerked him close. He glared into Blaney's face with red-rimmed, terrible eyes.

"How'd it get loose? You don't fool me, you fish-eyed swipe! If we go to the bottom, you'll go with her, lashed to the engine! Now we're heading back upstream, and you keep that water out of her if you have to stick your thumb in the hole!"

He shook Blaney once and cast him loose. In the little man's gray face, the glinting eyes were positively murderous; but Blaney, after one look, went scuttling back to his engines. Campbell laughed and swung the craft around, and headed back against the current.

His heart was high. The boat almost skimmed the water; she answered like a witch to the helm; she was perfect! And when he saw how she walked upstream against that flood tide, joy leaped again

Too late, the truth burst upon Campbell, as they closed around him.

in him. What a boat to take upriver from New Orleans! Why, those river merchants and planters would pay any price for such passage!

When they nosed in again and moored, Campbell caught Blaney's arm, clapped him on the back, and spoke in a surge of generous spirit.

"Forget everything between us, Blaney! The world's ours, I tell you! From now on, remember we're friends; both of us remember. To hell with the Squire! What say?"

"Done," said Blaney, grinning widely. But his eyes gave Campbell a shock, for in them was a lie, and vindictive enmity. He knew suddenly, in this moment, that he could expect no friendship from this man; and it sobered him. But he made no comment.

"Carpenters in the morning; three days of work, and she'll be ready enough for our purposes," he exclaimed. "A day to paint her, three more days to dry and put aboard cargo, and we're off for St. Louis and New Orleans!"

Next day Squire Naylor and his friends came down from Louisville to see how their new boat, launched and readied, would behave. Campbell, furiously at work, watched her chug and puff away with the party aboard; a fine, sturdy boat, built like other boats, solid and substantial. He saw her come back after an hour, and saw the party disembark with much cheering and jollity. He saw Squire Naylor striding over to where he was working with the lumber gang, and broke off to receive the visit.

"What d'you think of my craft now, eh?" said the Squire, a glow in his face.

"She's fine," said Campbell. "A grand boat, heavy and deep in the water; she'll lose money hand over fist for you."

Naylor's face darkened. "Why, confound you! D'you know I've got all the freight chartered that she'll hold, clear to New Orleans?"

"It's getting there that counts," said Campbell. "I'll be there and back before your craft passes Baton Rouge, if she gets that far."

The Squire made a furious gesture. Campbell, anticipating a blow, threw out his arm to ward it off. Naylor's stick struck the arm; his other arm went out,

and his fist sent the Squire sprawling in the mud. Campbell laughed at him as he scrambled up and departed, cursing and furious.

"Guess he didn't mean to fight after all," he said to Blaney, as the little man came running up. "I thought he aimed to hit me; he thought I aimed to hit him; and I did hit him. Come on, let's get this lumber aboard."

HE slept on the boat, and nothing happened. Superstructure and rough cabins were going up fast. Next day toward noon, Berthoud came strolling down, and Campbell went to meet him, beyond earshot of the workers.

"Steve, there's a lot of talk about people in Louisville wanting to take passage with you," said the old merchant. "Looks like there may be something in this passenger game, after all. I hear a party are coming out this afternoon to see you."

"No passengers," said Campbell firmly. "I want to make the downriver run with the boat, first, and get to know her. Passengers mean responsibility. . . . Besides, spring waters are in; it may be a dangerous trip. I'll take all the cargo I can stow and be content."

"All right; I'll give you all the barrels of whisky you can take down," Berthoud rejoined. "It's cheap, and it's insured, and if you get to New Orleans, it's a quick sale."

"Done," said Campbell. "Send word to town, will you—no passengers."

Blaney, when informed of this decision, scowled but made no comment. That afternoon half a dozen men showed up, asking about passage; Campbell, to save time, scrawled a sign to the effect that no passengers would be taken this trip, and stuck it up. He was knocking off work for the day, when a man on horseback rode up, dismounted, asked for him, and shoved a paper at him.

"Court order, Mr. Campbell; you're forbidden to take any passengers on your new boat until the proper officials have passed on her safety."

Campbell laughed, tore up the order, and tossed it into the river.

"Squire Naylor's been at work, has he? Well, look at that sign. I'm taking no passengers. To hell with the court and you likewise! I'll start to work from New Orleans; and when I get back here, I'll take all the passengers I please, and Squire Naylor can stew in his own juice. Good day to you."

He strode off, straight up to Berthoud's office, and found the merchant worried.

Berthoud listened to his story, then nodded.

"I understand things are in a turmoil, Steve. It suddenly appears that there is a demand, after all, for passenger service, and people will pay for it. It seems to have thrown confusion into the enemy ranks. Squire Naylor's associates complain that you've got the jump on him. If I were you, I'd get out of here at once; your idea of going to New Orleans and arranging with the authorities there, is excellent. How soon can you go?"

"Well," figured Campbell, "I can let the paint job wait till I get there. We'll have the necessary work done tomorrow. I can get off at sunset."

"What?" Berthoud was startled, for night travel on the river was unheard-of until now. "You'll not tie up at night?"

"Not much, if the night's clear! Get your load of whisky aboard tomorrow afternoon, and I'll cast off and be on my way. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

THAT night Campbell slept out on deck. Near midnight he was wakened by a slight thump. Roused, he caught a mutter of voices alongside, and sat up, throwing off the covering of his rifle. He felt the jar of bare feet on the planking, and stared aft. There, in the starlight, he caught the flashes of a hooded lantern. A boat had stolen upon him, and men had come aboard. Next instant, from the lantern, he saw a flame springing into a pile of paper and chips.

He drew a bead and pressed the trigger; to the rifle-crack, there was a yell, a heavy splash overside; at his rush, the dark figures vanished, and the boat pulled away hurriedly. He scattered the fire, kicked the lantern overboard, and went grimly back to his post. Nothing else happened that night.

"One of 'em paid in full, anyhow!" he said with some satisfaction.

With morning, he rushed the work. Noon came, and he sighted the first wagonload of whisky coming. He called Blaney and broke the news.

"Get uptown and engage six men for New Orleans. We're putting off as soon as our load comes aboard."

Blaney goggled at him, jaw fallen. "What? But the job aint finished, Steve! The paint—"

"Can wait for New Orleans. Get going! We're taking down a load of

whisky. I've got firewood coming aboard in an hour. All we need is the men."

"It's flood-water, Steve. Flatboatmen won't go; too dangerous."

"They'll go with me!" said Campbell. And he was right. "I'll take you all down safe—don't worry; I know the river. Have 'em aboard at four o'clock."

AT four o'clock they came rolling aboard, roaring drunk. Campbell answered their loud, maudlin greetings and shrugged; they were not men he knew, but they were rivermen, and he set them to work. The casks were in place and lashed down; steam was up. Campbell ordered the lines cast off, waved farewell to Berthoud, who had come down to see them off, and the boat moved out into the channel. The six men stood around Campbell, swigging whisky and watching the wheel with curiosity.

"Aint much like a flatboat steering-sweep!" said one, with a guffaw. "Steve, what's the boat's name?"

He looked at them, with a dawning grin.

"Boys, I've been so busy I hadn't thought of naming her! *River Packet*—that's her name. Break a whisky-bottle over the bow."

They did it, with a whoop.

At sunset Campbell got an hour's sleep. To the awe of the men, they were off Blue River, a good twenty miles—making ten miles an hour with the current, and the engine barely at half speed. When Campbell wakened, the negro cook had supper ready, and all nine of them sat around the board, black and white. Then, with dusk, Campbell took the wheel.

"Moonlight," he said. "Good night. I'll keep her going. Blaney, pick out two men to stand watch and keep the fires stoked; relieve 'em at midnight."

He caught an exchange of looks, a grin that swept the rough faces, and went off exultantly to his post. Behind, Blaney and the men talked long, before turning in.

The river was swollen, empty, majestic. All cares left behind, Campbell kept the craft steady; there would be no need of worrying about the course until they reached Flint Island and Harden's creek, and by that time the moon should be up, full and strong.

A bad place, at Flint Island. One had to hug the island shore close on the left, then make a quick pull out toward the right shore, to avoid an ugly sandbar below the island. Campbell had done it a score of times, and could do it even in the darkness; but moonlight would help.

The island grew, a black mass in the starlight. Behind, the first moonrise was trembling along the water. Suddenly he caught voices; the men were awake and up. One voice, thick with liquor, lifted and the words reached him hoarse and raucous.

"I tell you, he shot my brother last night! Now's the time."

Campbell twisted around, abruptly startled. One of the men on watch came to him with a quick cry.

"Steve! Look out for a deadhead—you're bearing down on her!"

Campbell strained to see. The man moved swiftly, caught up his rifle standing close by, and sent it flying overboard. Then came a rush.

It was unexpected, swift, deadly—all planned ahead. Too late, the frightful truth burst upon Campbell, as they closed around him, bore him off his feet, carried him aft. He loosed a roar of utter fury as he broke clear, got his back against the engine-house, and whipped out his knife. Then they were on him again.

Foremost was Blaney, cursing like a madman, shoved in by the others. A glitter in his hand: a knife, a queer sort of knife, a blade that issued from his clenched fist. Campbell hammered him, but he felt the blade bite into him, and again. With this, he cut loose. Blaney went down; another man went down. Campbell staggered, and a pole hit him over the head. He went to his knees on top of Blaney, and the latter stabbed up. With a groan, Campbell seized the little man, felt the knife go in again, caught Blaney up and hurled him overboard, screaming.

Then a rifle-barrel whaled him above the ear. He staggered, lost balance, and went toppling overboard, with shrill whoops of exultation ringing behind him.

NOT long after this, from a sandbar on the Kentucky shore, a pillar of fire shot up into the moonlit sky, as the barrels of whisky took the flames and fed them. The ruddy glare spread across the river. On the Indiana shore a dripping, hurt figure crawled out of the water on hands and knees, looked back at the spouting glare, and shook a weak fist; then crumpled and lay still.

A settler found him there unconscious, the next morning. . . .

Campbell opened his eyes to find himself lying in the settler's cabin. Above him was the sweet face of a girl, merry-eyed but now pitying. She had finished bandaging his hurts, and held a reddened knife in her hand—a queer sort of blade, riveted to a black, semicircular piece of wood.

"Hello!" said Campbell. "Alive, am I? Where'd you get the dirk?"

"It was sticking in you." And the girl shuddered. "My father had to pull it out. Here, take this hoe-cake and this milk—don't talk, yet. You're all right."

"But the boat isn't," said Campbell. "What's it worth, to be alive?"

"Worth a lot," said she, looking at him. "Maybe!"

THERE Dan Fletcher's voice trailed off; his story came to a conclusion, and the world of a hundred-odd years back died away. Once more we were looking out at the reaches of the Sacramento, and the movie crowd, and the paddle-wheeler churning up the water.

"That," I said in disappointment, "is a typical example of what might have been a good story! To finish it there is a crime, with your hero wiped out financially, and stranded."

He gave me an odd look, then laughed softly.

"We were talking of the first river packet, not of heroes," said he. "Don't many and many human stories finish on the coasts of disaster? Steve Campbell—but here, take a look at this bit of ebony."

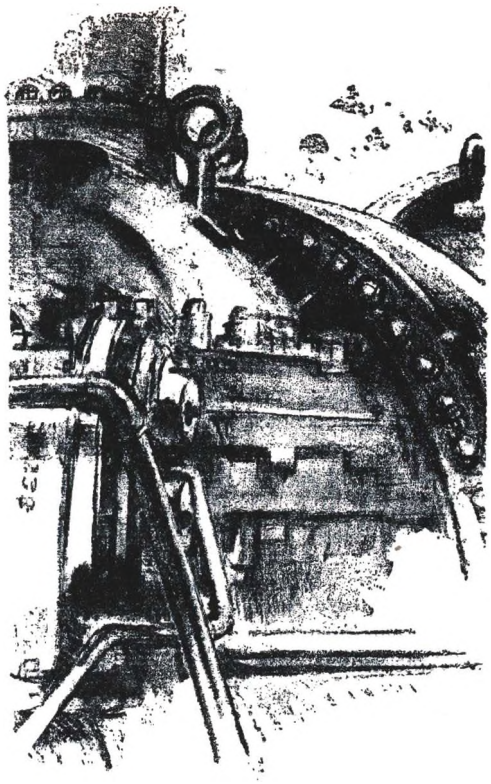
He passed me the queer knife again, pointing to the ebony handle. I looked at the spot indicated. Cut neatly into the black wood, but not deeply, since it is difficult to cut ebony, were the letters *S. C.*

"Campbell's story didn't finish there; he married the farmer's daughter." And Fletcher chuckled as he spoke. "Then he went on with her to New Orleans, and ended up with a whole fleet of river packets. He had one child, a daughter; she was my grandmother. That's how I got the knife—it's Blaney's deadly little dirk."

"Oh!" I said, and closed my fist about the thing. "I thought you said you got it, and the yarn as well, from old Cap'n Roche?"

"I did," replied Fletcher, smiling. "He was my grandfather."

Another vivid story in this famous series will be a feature of our next issue.



He had to fight something harder to handle than even hell and high water.

TRIED

By RAY

EING the general manager of the Eastredge municipal power-plant was no lead-pipe cinch, even without local political influence constantly trying to load the pay-roll with party workers who were too dumb to pass even the simple so-called merit system examinations for fireman and policeman. Then, top that with twenty straight days of rain over the watershed of the Ohio River, and the gauge rising a tenth of a foot an hour and you've got some idea of what a young fellow like Jim Maclaren was up against.

But so far, Jim had both feet on the ground and was managing to keep one hand and an ear free to handle the battery of jangling telephones on his desk:

by FLOOD

MILLHOLLAND

"Number Five construction crew, calling from Turnford, Jim—backwater from the White has knocked service kicking."

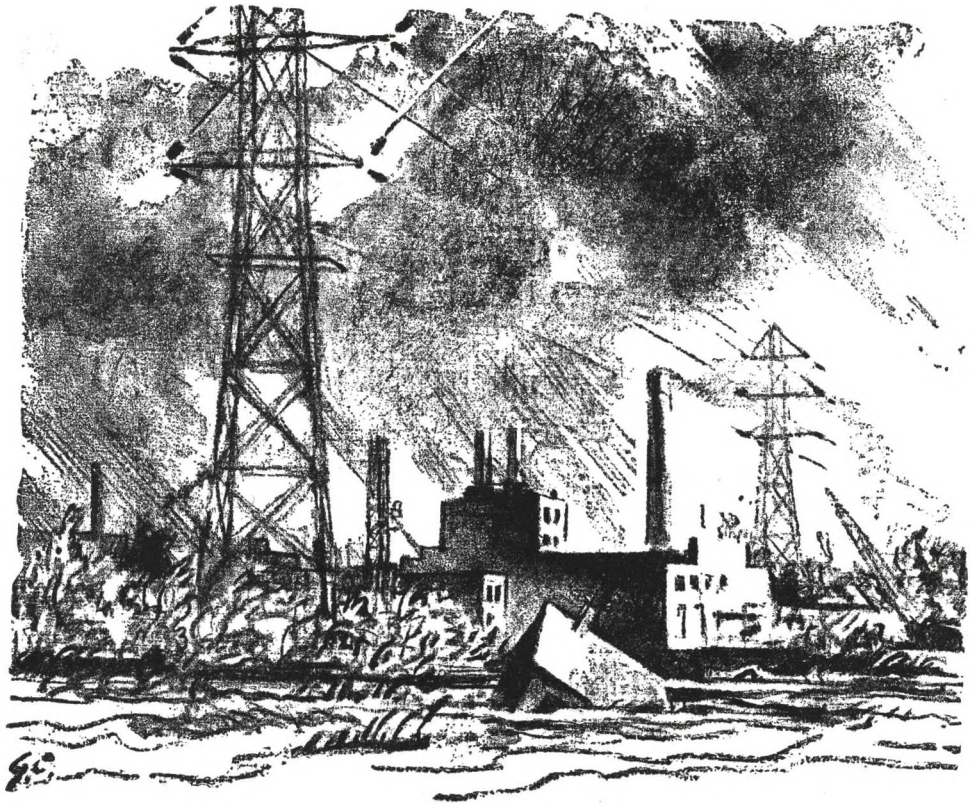
"Don't worry," Jim fired back at his excited foreman at Turnford; "I put that substation on high ground in case something like this ever did happen. Restring the break and go get yourself some sleep."

Jim stuck a red pin into his power network map and reached for his pipe.

Turnford was one of the communities in the county that bought its power wholesale from the Eastredge municipal plant. When the high line was being constructed, Jim had laid out a route along a high stony ridge, but the local Turnford politicos had run the towers down a creek bottom, and then had the nerve to present the city council with a bill that was thousands over Jim's original estimate.

His pipe wasn't even going good before Jim's ear was against another telephone receiver: "Number Two, Jim—Roydron high line washed out. Forty cases of flu in the hospital, and they had to operate on a mastoid case last night by candlelight. One of the nurses got burned when a can of ether caught fire. . . . I'm so close to my trouble all I can think of is that ten-mile stripe of yellow water tearing down emergency construction faster than I can throw it up."

Jim Maclaren jerked his map closer for a better look at the situation around



Roydron. "Not so tough as you think, Tommy," he told his Roydron foreman. "Use the Pennsley Baptist church for a high tower and span Wildcat Creek bottoms. Call me back in an hour and let me know juice is going through again."

THERE was a brief lull in the anvil chorus. Jim was reaching for a half-eaten sandwich when he looked up to see fat Gusty Wiley, the Eastredge political boss, push into his office unannounced.

"Howdy, Jim?" said Gusty. "You're doing great work, I was just telling the Mayor. All you need, I says to him, is to be let alone and you'll lick the trouble cold. We're counting on you, Jim."

"What's the angle this time?" asked Jim suspiciously.

A pudgy hand waved deprecatingly. "Everybody's got to pull together in a time like this, Jim. I sort of figured you could use another foreman for an emergency crew."

"Like that Mergan bum, eh?" challenged Jim.

"Sure. Mergan went down the line for the party in great shape last election. Besides, he could use the job."

"Nothing stirring," retorted Jim Maclaren. "You shoved him in as electrician at the City Hall, but he wired so many short circuits the Building Commission jerked his license. Nix, I can't have a dub like that playing horse with thirty-three-thousand stuff."

Gusty Wiley's political handshaking smile was gone. "Listen," he flung at Jim. "This thing has got the Mayor licked, see? He's running around in a pair of leaky rubber boots, interfering with the firemen and police trying to evacuate the East End, when he should be in his office running the show like a general fighting a big battle."

"Why cry on my shoulder about it?" asked Jim wearily. "You elected him, didn't you?"

"Now you're saying something," nodded Gusty. "I been running this town from the back seat for a good many years. Let the punks have the glory, I says, and I'll take care of Gusty out of the street-paving and sewer contracts. But things are different now; somebody's got to step in and really boss this job." He stabbed a hard thick finger against his chest. "I'm It, from now on till the flood is over, see?"

"Maybe we're getting some place after all," sighed Jim, downing a swig of coffee from a vacuum bottle. "And you can be a big help to the power-plant if you'll just remember that I'm cross and tired and need a bath. I love my work, but I hate interference."

It was Gusty Wiley's boast that politics should be an impersonal game—nothing could make him lose his temper. But right then his ears got red. He slapped his hand down on Jim's desk.

"I'm through kidding, Jim," he rasped. "You'll take the boys I name from now on, or—"

"Or what?" Jim pushed back his chair and walked around to the other side of the desk. He took the political boss by the arm and steered him to the door. He pointed to the causeway connecting the power-plant, on the bank of the river, with the town. "In a couple of hours there'll be three feet of water over that. Beat it before you get all wet. And just remember that I'll be here pushing juice through the lines as long as it's needed. When the trouble's over you can come back, but I'll still tell you I'm hiring experienced high-line foremen, and not ward heelers!"

Gusty's nod back from the door was that of a man unafraid and content to bide his time. "Get all the crowing out of your system while you're still high on the roost, my lad. But remember they don't fly too high for me to reach, when I reach!"

"Listen!" Jim jerked at the man's lapels and brought them chest to chest. "I've got the biggest fight of my life on. But it isn't with you; it's with the river. I've got to keep the power-lines hot, so that the hospitals can stay open and the Coast Guard and the Naval Reserve will have lights for night rescue—"

Gusty smiled confidently as he shook his head. "I've seen floods before—bigger floods than this one, see? I had the contract for building the South Levee. She'll hold. There aint going to be no washout here at Eastredge—except one that cleans you out from behind that desk, soon as I get the time to turn the hose on you!"

Jim Maclaren slammed the door in disgust. That was a politician for you! The heaviest flood in the history of the Valley booming down; but because the water wasn't already up in Main Street, it was just another "rise of the river"—just a chance to get in some job-grabbing while everybody else was busy fighting the river.

WITH a savage grunt, Jim swept up the nearest telephone from his desk and called the local Government weather bureau: "What's the river stage at Cincinnati? . . . Didn't hear you right—thought you said seventy feet. . . . You did say seventy!" Jim glanced anxiously out the window at the yellow, boiling flood lapping the base of his coal-reserve

stock piles. "And they still haven't seen the crest yet? . . . Umm! You're expecting another— Listen, not another *forty* feet rise here? You must be kidding! . . . Okay, but if that much water is headed down on this power plant, she'll be a submarine, and that's not kidding, either!"

Jim walked out on the gallery and went down the iron stairs to the level where the big steam turbines were humming. He stared up at the black vertical stripe he had ordered painted on the wall next to the river—marked off in feet the same as the river gauge outside.

Fogerty, his chief engineer, strolled over and asked: "Whatcha looking for, Jim?"

With a grim smile Jim Maclaren pointed up at a mark thirty feet above the floor of the turbine-room. "For a place to hang my deep-sea diving-suit. That's how high the river will get, Fogerty. And these turbines will have to keep on running!"

"You're nuts," grunted Fogerty. "Better make a deal with Utilities to start shooting juice in here over the Turnford-Roydron high line."

"Not built to handle the amperage we'll have to have for rescue work alone," replied Jim. "We'll make our own juice. Tell the grab-bucket operators to build themselves a ridge of coal ten feet higher than the siding trestle, and work their crawler cranes up on top. Get five hundred gallons of fuel oil up there too for the Diesels."

"You talk like it was a hurricane coming, not a flood," grumbled Fogerty. "We got lots o' time. Don't want to get the boys jittery. Get it?"

Jim shook his head. "I want the yellow-bellies scared out *now*. Now, understand? Because what's coming is going to take guts, and tough guts."

FOR the rest of the afternoon, he was on the long-distance telephone, ordering quick-setting Portland cement, brick, gravel and sand by the carloads. "You fellows get together," he told the material-supply warehouses, "and make up a solid train. It's got to roll in here by daylight. I've got less than four days to get ready for the worst, or be washed out."

He had two hundred laborers and all four of his Diesel crawler cranes waiting when the material rumbled in over the trestle. The fifteen-foot embankment of coal that he had ordered built during the night was already wet at the bottom. On top of this he had laid a narrow-gauge railway—double-tracked to keep the unloading gangs busy.

"Divide your men into three shifts," he instructed his brickmason foreman. "I want a four-foot-thick wall built right smack to the roof, all round. Watertight, understand? And remind your boys that they are handling fast-setting mortar and cement; it'll get hard almost as fast as it's mixed—unless they mix a lot of sweat with it."

"She'll be watertight, Jim," promised his foreman, and broke out with a wide grin. "What's the big idea—making a dry-well out o' this place?"

"You guessed it, Tom. But it's going to be a tighter race with the river. So hit the job with both hands."

UP in his office again, Jim cut loose with his strategy to fight the river along the whole front:

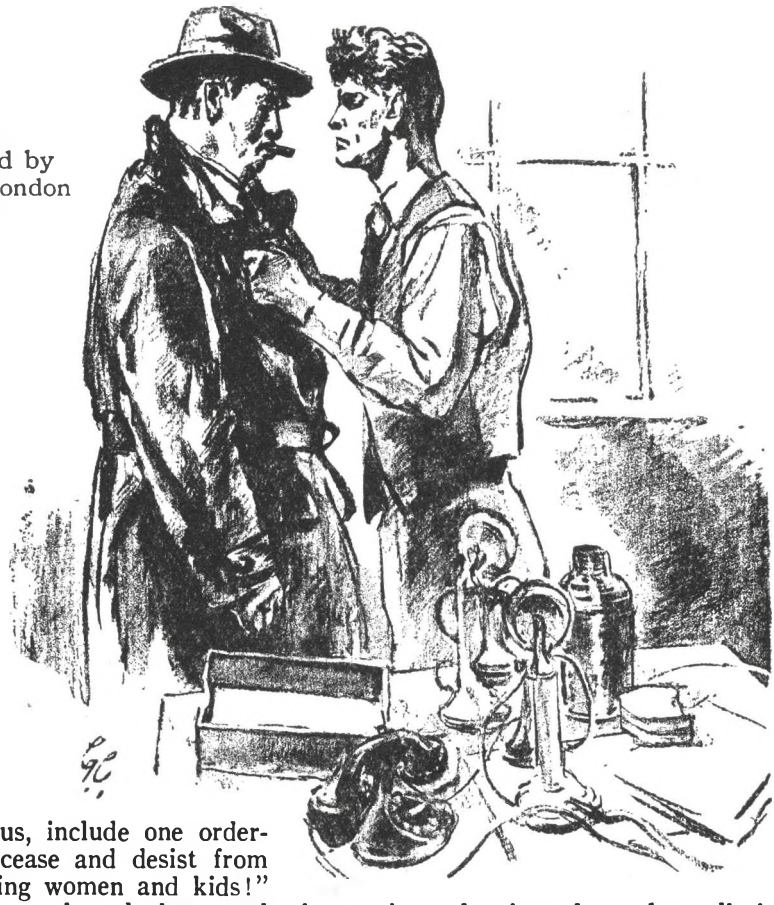
"That you, Caswell?" he called over a telephone. A feeble mutter came back over a line water-soaked almost to uselessness. . . . "Listen, Caswell, hoist a fifty-K.W. transformer onto the roof of the City Hospital. Got that? . . . Good. Anchor your heaviest tension-type insulators to the steel work, and span from Fourth to Eighth streets. . . . Sure, I know that's twelve hundred feet, but you've got to do it and make the job hold. Stick at it, big boy! And don't call me till you've finished."

He was on the phone again, this time calling the big tractor factory, high up on the bluff: "This is Maclaren of the municipal light plant," he told the factory manager. "I can let you have power for another twenty-four hours. After that, I may cut you off without a moment's warning; so have somebody staying by your furnaces and any other place that's dangerous, when the power fails."

He listened stonily to a long argument from the factory manager about the plant being in the midst of its spring rush of business. What was he down there for, the tractor manager wanted to know. To furnish power to legitimate business, of course; and he was going to do it. Or, by Judas, the manager was going to court for an injunction—

Jim listened to a lot more sarcasm, about "political job-holders" lying down on the job the moment the going got tough—and then cracked back into the telephone: "While you're getting an in-

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon



"Listen! I've got to keep the power-lines hot, so the hospitals can stay open!"

junction against us, include one ordering the river to cease and desist from rising and drowning women and kids!"

He slammed down the telephone and went down to the turbine-room, to see how things were coming along. . . . Fogerty met him with a late afternoon edition of the paper, headlines screaming flood news.

"We're getting a five-foot rise before morning, Jim," said Fogerty. "Outside, the water's within a foot of our floor in here. The gang in the fire-room are getting nervous."

"They're getting plenty to eat and regular rest, aren't they?" demanded Jim.

"Aw, it aint that, Jim," explained Fogerty. "They say the river'll keep on rising till the pressure smashes through. You can't blame 'em for not wanting to be drowned like trapped rats."

"They're sticking with the fires," announced Jim firmly.

"You're wrong," said Fogerty, shaking his head. "They're quitting at noon tomorrow. They held a meeting and decided that, and then told me."

Jim hurried along the runway to the long rows of stoker-fed boilers. "How about it," he asked each man in turn, "are you man enough to fight the river and stick with the fires?"

He got almost the same answer every time: "Sure. . . . Till tomorrow noon. Then we quit. We aint going to stay here an' see the river shove the walls in on us. That aint showing guts; that's being a damn' fool. We're getting out while the getting is good."

Jim didn't argue. Men under that kind of a strain—menaced by the crushing power of water against the outer walls of the power-house — weren't in their right minds. The instinct of self-preservation was telling them what to do. No use pleading with them that the minute the fires died, the whole city would be at the mercy of the flood—hospitals turned into cold barns—fire-alarm system dead—street lights darkened, with thousands trapped and at the mercy of fire as well as of the raging yellow water.

IT was midnight before Jim trudged slowly up the iron stairs to his office. This was going to be his last trip up there, he decided. After this he was going to stay down below with the men, so they couldn't be saying that he was staying up above the menace of the water and leaving them to be trapped if the new brick wall the masons were raising should fail.

He stood for a moment at the rain-blackened window, staring at a red glow. . . . Fire! Down in the Pocket some

"Howdy, everybody!" grinned Jack. "It's lights out for good —if we don't win!"

place—somebody had fled from the rising river and left a stove open full draft.

Up came the window. Red tongues of flame danced on the yellow flood water below. Fire-engine sirens wailed. . . . Then suddenly a dark cloud billowed up from the flames. The power-plant was still sending power to the electric pumps at the water-works. Jim shook his fist at the river and jerked down the window.

HOW long the telephone behind him had been jangling, he didn't know. He picked it up and grunted a tired and sleepy: "Maclaren is on. Shoot."

"This is Barnes, chief of police, talking," he heard. "The Mayor and the Council just met. They've voted to make Gusty Wiley flood dictator until the danger is over."

"That's okay with me, Chief," answered Jim. "Gusty knows every square foot of this town, and he can make people do what he says. But why tell me?"

"Because you've got a hundred and twenty men trapped, down there below the river, inside the power-plant," rapped the chief of police. "Gusty says they've got to be out of there by morning! We're going to move every man, woman, and child out of the Pocket tonight. Cut your switches off at daylight and send those men back to their families."

"How about the hospitals and water-pressure for the fire mains—to say nothing of drinking-water?" challenged Jim.

"I'm giving you orders from Gusty," the chief of police barked back. "And my men'll enforce 'em. Be out of there by daylight!"

Jim was back on the phone the next moment. . . . "City Hall? Get Gusty Wiley on the phone. . . . All right, I'll call him there. . . . Goslin's tavern? Chase Gusty out of the back room to the phone. It's important. . . . Gusty? This is Maclaren at the power-plant. I got an order from Barnes to abandon. I'm giving my answer in at the top—I'm keeping the lines hot. I've got men stationed all over town to cut out sections as the flood takes over, so there'll be no danger from short-circuits and live wires—"

Jim stopped short and listened to a rasping order from Gusty, political boss of Eastredge and now flood dictator.

"But the hospitals, Gusty!" Jim protested. "Man, can't you understand what'll happen there and to the fire-protection of the city, and to the drinking-water supply?" He nodded grimly as

Gusty repeated his order to abandon the power-plant. "I get you now. Dead people can't vote; so to hell with the dangerous cases in the hospital. But I've got a hundred and twenty *live* votes down here. Yes, and somebody gets to build a nice new municipal power-plant when this one is swept away. Well, all I got to say is, go to hell. I'm keeping juice in the lines till the river comes in through the roof!"

Gusty ordering the power-plant abandoned at daylight, and the men threatening to quit by noon the next day—Jim Maclaren paced his office grabbing at vague ideas, only to reject them as fast as they came to mind. In his nervous pacing up and down he blindly brushed against an all-wave radio receiver he had bought weeks ago with the intention of doing some special research during his spare time.

The radio tumbled to the floor from a low table and landed on a suit of oilskins Jim had tossed there after a hasty inspection of the power-house yard just before the flood waters came. . . .Radio? Radio? Why not try it?

JIM snatched up a telephone. It was dead; so was the second one. . . . The third one still worked. "This is the power-plant, operator. Get me the managing editor of Chanford City *Times*. This is a life-and-death matter, so jerk every plug on your board if you must!"

For twenty minutes that dragged like years to Jim he held the telephone, pleading into it every few moments, "Try again, operator. . . . I don't care what your supervisor says about my long-distance call having to wait its turn. . . . Listen, if you don't connect me with Chanford City, the power goes off and every wire in the main exchange goes dead! . . . Hello, hello! Editor of Chanford City *Times?*"

Jim took a long breath. "This is Maclaren of Eastredge municipal power-plant, talking. I've got a big newspaper story for you: A hundred and twenty men are marooned out here on the edge of the river. Water is already ten feet above the level of our turbine room. We're walled in and working like a crew in a submarine. . . . When we pull our fires, the whole city of Eastredge goes black—at the complete mercy of the flood. . . . Yes, that includes the lights for the hospital operating-rooms."

"Swell story, Maclaren!" boomed the editor enthusiastically. "Can you give me the names of every man? I'll print it as a list of flood heroes, with banner headlines screaming across Page One."

"Yes—I'll do it if you promise to print a special edition and rush it down here by airplane. Bomb the power-plant roof with copies of it. . . . It's a promise, eh? Okay—here come the names, right off the timekeeper's report—"

IT was three o'clock in the morning before Jim Maclaren finished giving the names of his men to the Chanford City *Times*. Groggy from lack of sleep, he groped his way out of his office and climbed down the iron stairs to the turbine level.

The brickmason foreman grinned proudly at the solid brick wall that had been going up all that time. "The mortar sets almost as fast as the boys can trowel it in place," he told Jim. "We got a twenty-four-hour jump on the water so far, and the boys are racing to hold their lead. . . . Look—nothing but a few trickles coming through the lower courses! A three-inch pump will hold against all the water that's making."

Jim nodded his approval and plodded on into the fire-room. The men feeding the boilers flung surly looks over their shoulders at him and ignored his attempts to cheer them up with a smile and a word.

Down the row of steam gauges he walked, checking individual boiler-pressure. . . . Number Six was dead—header valve cut off and the steam-pressure already down fifteen pounds.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Tramp iron got into the stoker hopper and busted a shear-pin," grumbled the boiler chief wearily.

"Get the repair crew on it and get her on the line again!" snapped Jim.

"What the hell!" shrugged the boiler chief. "The boys are knocking off at noon. I've argued and begged all night, but the only concession they'll make is a promise to pull the fires before they go, so's the boilers won't blow up when the flood hits 'em."

"Get me some tools and a shear-pin," Jim ordered over his shoulder, peeling off his coat and rolling up his sleeves.

Alone, he struggled with the massive parts of the stoker—disassembling the mechanism until he could hook out the piece of tramp iron that had got into the hopper with a charge of coal. . . . How long it had taken him to make the repairs and get the stoker working again he

had no idea, until he saw the steam gauge on the boiler climb back to standard pressure again.

"Cut her in on the main line!" he yelled.

Then he looked up at the clock on the wall of the boiler chief's little office. . . . Eleven-twenty—already some of the men were peeling off their overalls and washing up.

Without saying a word, Jim turned his back on them and walked on to the turbine room—up the iron stairs, up the monkey ladder and out on the roof.

THE broad, seemingly endless expanse of roof was bare. It must be eleven-thirty now. Jim scanned the leaden-gray drizzling skies for the sight of the airplane that the editor of the Chanford City *Times* had promised would bomb the roof with copies of that special edition. . . . Nothing in sight. Nothing—

Down the monkey ladder he climbed to the gallery. He stumbled into his office, shivering as he groped in a closet for an old leather jacket.

Suddenly a stone crashed through the window overlooking the river. He ran to the window and jerked it up. . . . Below, bucking the swirling yellow current was a Coast Guard power surf-boat.

"Stand by, to help aboard this mob of wild men!" roared the boatswain.

"Who are they?" Jim yelled down.

One of the civilians, in a yellow slicker, clutching a heavy case, as were the other three men, yelled back: "Short-wave broadcasting crew from WXXN of Chanford City. The Chanford City *Times* says there's a big story breaking with you and asked us to move in—"

"Right with you!" yelled Jim.

Working like a man racing against Death itself, Jim found a coil of heavy wire and lowered it to the Coast Guard surf-boat. . . . Up came the short-wave broadcasting equipment. Then with almost superhuman effort, he managed to hoist the first radio man to the window ledge. Between them they hoisted up the other two.

"Plug in anywhere, but make it snappy," begged Jim. "I've got to get below." At the door he turned: "How long will it take you to get on the air?"

"Not over an hour," answered the chief radio engineer. "We've got all the wire we need for our microphone leads. Want to drag a portable around down there and get personal comments from as many of the boys as possible—"

Jim grabbed the chief radio engineer's arm. "Come on," he begged. "And don't argue—just drag your wires behind you and bring your portable mike down into the boiler-room. The others can plug in as soon as they can."

"But this is only a dead mike now," objected the radio engineer. "That's just silly—"

"Silly, hell!" roared Jim. "My men are quitting—pulling the fires. In another ten minutes there won't be any juice. Come on!"

Down into the boiler room they went. The men were already raking out the fire from under Number One boiler.

"Listen, men!" bellowed Jim. "WXXN has sent down their short-wave broadcasting outfit. They want each one of you to say a few words—tell millions of people how it feels to slap the river in the face and make the old yellow devil like it. . . . Bill, you're first—step up and say a word to ten million people!"

The brawny fireman dropped his heavy fire rake and brushed his mouth sheepishly with the back of his hand. "Aw, hell, I aint no hand at shooting off my mouth into one of them cans—"

"Scared it'll bite you, Mistah Bill?" laughed a giant negro water-tender. "Gwan, and give the folks a numbah!"

BILL hitched up his belt and stepped up to the microphone the radio engineer was holding. With his fist clenched, as though ready for sudden attack, he blurted out: "Listen, you guys and dames listening in, this aint no powder-puff party. The river's ten feet above our heads outside and trying to push the walls in on us. Guess that's all—"

"Just a moment, Bill," said the radio engineer, pulling the microphone nearer his own lips, as if acting the part of a master of ceremonies before a live microphone. "Bill—how long do you think your gang of flood-busters can hold out?"

"I aint saying," grumbled Bill stubbornly.

The radio engineer cocked his head to one side and said confidentially into his dead microphone: "That's a grand answer, Bill. It's the old story of he-men doing tough jobs and being too modest to brag about their own heroism. . . . Now let's have another man—you over there with a bandage around your head. Step up, please—"

"That's Jack Daily," Jim whispered into the radio engineer's ear. "He went ten rounds with Dempsey once—"

"And now ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience," chanted the engineer into his microphone, "you're going to hear from Jack Daily, the man who gave Dempsey his hardest fight. But Jack Daily is putting up a ten times greater battle today, ten feet below the surface of the flood. And he is battling Old Man River to a knockout! —Step up, Jack."

"Howdy, everybody!" grinned Jack. "And don't think it's the malarky about the boys with me not being in a battle royal. This aint no five-minute knock-out they'll be taking if they don't put the Sunday punch to the river. It's lights out for good—if we don't win!"

JUST then somebody behind Jim Maclaren tapped him on the shoulder; it was another one of the short-wave broadcasting crew. "We're on the air!" he whispered in Jim's ear. "I've brought down the radio from your office, to hook in and let the boys hear the comments from WXXN, about what's going on here." He stepped over and relieved the other radio man at the microphone and began: "Okay, WXXN! We're standing by for studio comment. Take it away, Charley!"

"As we promised you at nine this morning, ladies and gentlemen," came booming out of Jim's little radio receiving-set, "we are now in direct communication with those one hundred and twenty heroes who have sealed themselves up in the Eastredge municipal power-plant and are still fighting the flood. How long they can hold out, no man can say. . . . Undismayed by the threat of death sweeping down on them in a roaring yellow flood, they are carrying on. We now turn you over to the City Hall at Eastredge, where Mr. Gusty Wiley, the local flood dictator, will say a few words."

"Eastredge still is in grave danger from this unprecedented flood," came Gusty Wiley's incisive words from Jim's small radio receiver. "So far, not a life has been sacrificed. The hospitals are full, but they are carrying on. . . . All last night, under street-lights and batteries of flood-lights mounted on our tall buildings, the Coast Guard, Naval Reserve and militia manned the boats that rescued thousands marooned in the flooded area. . . . Last night I ordered the power-plant abandoned at daylight, because I personally felt the crisis was past for the city, and it was high time for those men marooned out there to be got to safety. . . . I am now attempting to reach them with this word of encouragement: Stick at it, boys! If you can keep the wires from the power-plant alive for another twenty-four hours, we've licked the flood!"

Suddenly Jim held up his hand. His eyes swept the circle of men. "How about it, men? Are we going to stick?"

"Damn' right, we will!" roared the boiler-room gang almost in unison.

The radio engineer nudged Jim and whispered: "The mike was hot when you said that. It'll wow the listeners from coast to coast. Boy, what a story!"

Jim Maclaren was still shaking hands with his boiler-room crew and waving them good-naturedly back to their jobs, when Fogerty staggered in, carrying a heavy bundle of soggy newspapers.

"Heard a big crash on the roof, while ago, Jim," he panted. "Climbed up and found this. Dumped out of a plane, must have been. —Look at the headlines."

Jim ripped open the bundle and drew out a paper. Screaming black headlines declared: "WALLED IN ALIVE, MEN BATTLE FLOOD TO SAVE EASTREDGE."

WITHOUT comment, Jim passed out a copy to each man inside the walls of the power-plant. And after finding his own name listed in double-leaded type on the front page, to a man they carefully folded their copies and tucked them away.

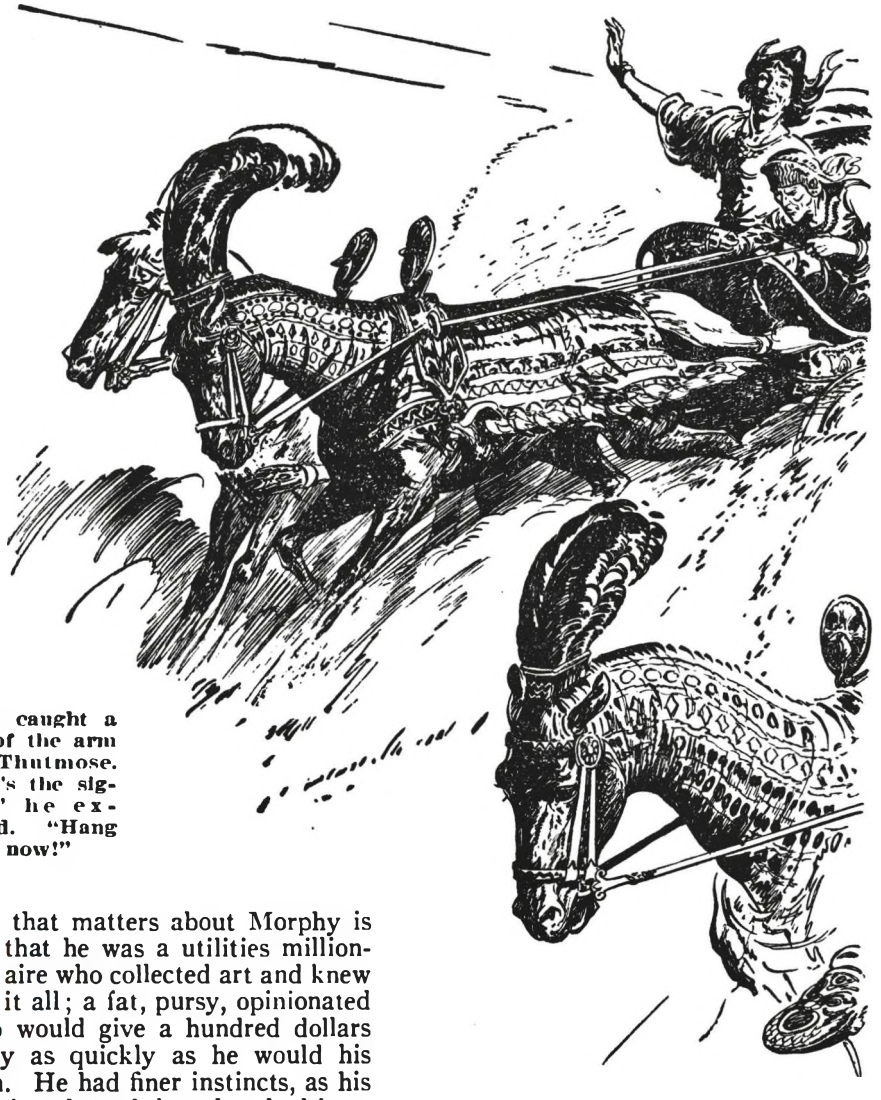
"I'm beginning to understand why you were so anxious to get the boys talking into a dead mike," smiled the radio engineer, as Jim dumped his tired body into a chair. "That would make another great story—"

"If you so much as whisper a word of that over the air," Jim growled, "I'll chuck you in the river!"

The radio engineer grinned and turned to the microphone he had set up on Jim Maclaren's desk: "We are now broadcasting again by short wave hook-up, direct from the Eastredge power-plant where Jim Maclaren and his crew of one hundred and twenty he-men are fighting their historic battle against the flood. The next voice you will hear, will be that of Jim Maclaren—"

The radio engineer looked toward Jim, then smiled and shook his head. "Sorry, ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience—but Mr. Jim Maclaren has fallen asleep! Our next bulletin will be broadcast at exactly one forty-five. And until then, the flood-busters bid you good luck and dry feet!"

The Lady and



Rishya caught a wave of the arm from Thutmose. "There's the signal!" he exclaimed. "Hang on now!"

Pen drawings by
John Richard Flanagan

ALL that matters about Morphy is that he was a utilities millionaire who collected art and knew it all; a fat, pursy, opinionated man who would give a hundred dollars to charity as quickly as he would his right arm. He had finer instincts, as his art-collecting showed, but they had been thickly overlaid with gross materialism.

As we talked business, I mentioned Norman Fletcher's experiments. At this, Morphy showed interest and asked for more. He knew who Fletcher was, naturally; the wizard of Pan-American Electric was one of the most famous scientists in the country. I described some of the experiments Fletcher had allowed our local Inventors' Club to witness, and then Morphy exploded.

"The man must be insane!" he exclaimed violently. "He must have gone off at an insane tangent, rather. He may be the greatest electrical genius in the world today; but all the same, I say he's a madman. . . . No, I don't know him. What of it?"

I merely smiled, and he actually purpled with anger.

"Now see here," he said, transfixing me with his fiery little eyes, "since you know him so well, go and ask him to perform his blasted tricks for me. I'll be

the Unicorn

This eighth story in the Trumpets from Oblivion series explains the strange and dramatic origin of the famous unicorn myth.

By
H. BEDFORD-JONES

in the city two days. Make an engagement with him for me, and I'll give my time to see his show. Tell him to trace the origin of the unicorn and virgin legend, and I'll pay whatever he likes—if he can do it. But he'd better not try any trickery with me."

It was like that—brutal, domineering, insulting, typical of the man. He cut me short—and I was so furious that I drove straight out of town to the Pan-American laboratories where Norman Fletcher was established, and poured out the whole thing, insults and all.

But Fletcher, white-haired and kindly, heard me out, and then chuckled.

"What you need, my friend, is to hear the third movement of the Seventh Sym-

"In yon," said Akhenaton, "I have confided my city, my palace, myself and those

phony; it's a great restorer for frayed nerves," he observed. "Hm! Morphy is a big man in his way. He's on the board of directors of the Pan-American, too. Where can I reach him in town?"

I told him, and he scooped up the telephone and presently got Morphy.

"This is Norman Fletcher," he said affably. "I just received your message —or should I say your orders? Yes, of course I can do it. But why should I do it?"

He listened, and tipped me a wink.

"My dear sir, your desires and your money are matters of utter indifference to me," he rejoined. "Certainly, I can show you how the whole unicorn legend originated, and the basic truth behind it. —Pay me, you say? You can't pay me, Mr. Morphy. I'll gladly put my invention at your service tomorrow evening, on one condition. There are suffering, starving people in the world, victims of oppression, injustice, hatred; I'd like your check for five thousand dollars toward a relief fund."

I could hear Morphy bellowing over the wire. Presently he calmed down, accepted the offer on condition that the performance was satisfactory, and rang off.

"Why on earth did you give him an out?" I demanded. "Now you'll not get his money."

Fletcher, a shrewd old Yankee if there ever was one, ruffled up his white hair and smiled again.

"Blustering, domineering, stingy, Morphy may be; but he's a big man in his way and does know art," he said. "A man doesn't grow big in the world by being petty at heart. Artistic appreciation, also, points to concealed qualities. Be here at eight tomorrow night."

I love. That is now ended. I shall confide the City of the Horizon to another."

I WAS prompt. There were just the three of us; the elephantine, suspicious Morphy, the urbane and beaming Fletcher, and I. Fletcher took us into his private laboratory, with the massive granite walls, the easy-chairs, and the keyboard that was like a small organ. I lit one of his cigars and listened, as he briefly sketched his ideas and work.

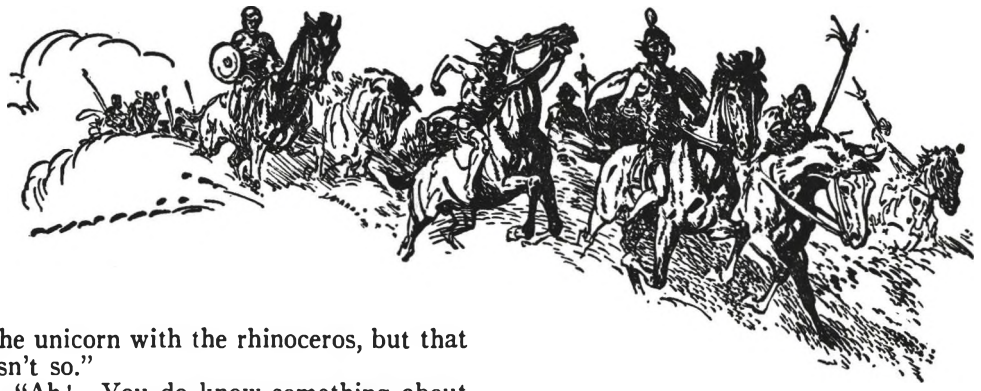
He believed that all the old legends and myths of mankind had a foundation in fact. To discover this fact, he reached back into the past with his marvelous inventions, which put into play all the wizardry of ultrasonic waves and other discoveries for which, as Fletcher frankly said, the world was as yet unprepared.

"If I can recapture light and sound from the past, recreate scenes and voices from thousands of years ago, find again the lost moments of the human race—is that any more incredible, or more difficult to explain, than the color in a rose-leaf?" he said calmly. "It is not television, though I do use certain principles of television. My chief difficulty is picking up voices, turning them into English, and synchronizing them properly. But tell me, Mr. Morphy, how you happened to pick the subject of the unicorn."

Morphy, who looked rather sullen, chewed at his unlighted cigar.

"Because the story of the unicorn has entered into the ancient art and mythology of the world. I've got Fifteenth Century tapestries depicting it. I've got cups of unicorn's horn, supposed to detect poison in any liquid and save the owner from it. The world believed in such an animal for thousands of years."

"Even fifty years ago, explorers announced that they had come upon its traces," assented Norman Fletcher. "It's usually supposed that people confused



the unicorn with the rhinoceros, but that isn't so."

"Ah! You do know something about it!" Morphy brightened. "Right. In China, long before a rhinoceros was known, the unicorn story was in existence. In Egypt and elsewhere, the same. Marco Polo thought the rhino was the fabled unicorn, and started the confusion that exists today. The original yarn goes back to the Greeks—the story that the unicorn could only be captured by a pure virgin; and the unicorn was a kind of deer with a single horn."

"Which, as the naturalist Cuvier pointed out, is physically impossible," said Fletcher. "Because its frontal bone must have been divided, and therefore could not have a horn. . . . One moment, while I start the tubes heating."

He reached out to the keyboard before him. The room lights dimmed and faded. On the blank stone wall facing us, gradually became more effulgent the peculiar light which indicated that his apparatus was at work.

Morphy, becoming animated, went on speaking.

"The unicorn was an heraldic emblem in Scotland, and James I put it into the royal arms of England; but as I said, the story started with the Greeks. And Pliny distinctly says it is the Egyptian oryx, a kind of antelope. So the story came from Egypt, no doubt."

"ANCIENT Egypt," assented Norman Fletcher. "And until the French Revolution, food at the French court was tested for poison by means of a unicorn's horn, or what passed for it. The unicorn of Herodotus and Pliny, however, is the oryx of Egypt—today known as the gemsbok. On the other hand, the legend of the unicorn and the virgin princess has definitely been traced to ancient India. How can these conflicting theories be reconciled?"

"They can't," Morphy asserted dogmatically. "That's the devil of it! We'll never know the facts, if there were any. We'll never know how—how— Good Lord!"

His voice failed. His eyes bulged as they stared at the wall; his jaw dropped. And no wonder. In front of us, that wall of solid granite was apparently dissolving beneath the play of light. Where that light fell upon them, the stones actually thinned and vanished, until we were looking through them, as through a window opening.

Not upon the outside night, however. Instead, a scene of sun and sky and sand grew before us.

A low word came from Fletcher.

"Egypt! I'd recognize those cliffs anywhere!"

EGYPT and the Nile bank, indeed. Two figures took shape there; a man on horseback, armored, stern, harsh of eye, speaking with another man—some official, by his gorgeous robes and collar of rank—who stood beside him.

"Yet it is beautiful, Horemheb!" said the latter, staring at a far scene.

"To you, Senefer, Chamberlain of the Palace, it may be beautiful," dryly replied the soldier Horemheb. Sarcasm filled his voice. "The City of the Horizon! The glorious capital of the heretic Pharaoh, Akhenaton—the scoundrel who has turned his back on the old gods of Egypt and founded a new religion of peace and beauty—*arrgh!*"

He spat in scorn. The chamberlain sniffed slightly.

"Aye. He proclaims that God is a spirit, forsooth!"

"A spirit! Who ever heard such nonsense?" snapped Horemheb hotly. "All the old gods, the old customs, banned; the royal family lives without dignity or formality. The Pharaoh talks to common folk in the streets. He invites foreigners to the palace itself; he gathers so-called wise men from the whole world. A prince from India arrives and is made

a guest in the palace. Egypt is going to the dogs, I tell you!"

"True, Horemheb. But I'm in charge of preparing this place for the princess and that same prince from India. I see the sail of their boat coming. Do we meet tonight?"

Horemheb turned his horse. "Yes. The meeting is at my house. Tutankhamen will be there, and the others. I can count on you?"

"Assuredly," replied the chamberlain.

Horemheb kicked in his spurs and was gone at speed. The scene widened. Here along the western bank of the Nile, slaves were at work putting up tents and gay pavilions; behind these, a broken ridge of sand cut off the view of the desert.

Senefer, the palace chamberlain, returned to the neglected work, hurrying the slaves. Coming slowly up the river was a gorgeous palace barge, and he eyed it with a sneer.

"Pharaoh's daughter, who scoffs at the gods!" he muttered. "Tonight will see the end of you and your heretic father alike, and a new king sits in Egypt tomorrow!"

Here, obviously, was disaffection, discontent, treachery. But, with bland features, the chamberlain lifted his voice. A figure appeared on the sand ridge, a dark, shaggy desert man, the chief hunter.

"They're coming!" called the chamberlain. "Bring the horses."

Over the ridge came more desert hunters, bringing loose but saddled horses, and two light chariots superbly teamed. Their leader came to the chamberlain and saluted him.

"All ready as ordered, Lord. Who hunts?"

"The Princess Meryt, or Merytaton if we must be formal," snapped Senefer. "Thutmose, chief sculptor and artist of the city yonder. Lastly, the prince from India who's a guest in the palace. *Arrgh!* If old Amenophis were Pharaoh now, the rascal would have been flayed alive at the frontier instead of being a guest under the royal roof!"

THE chief hunter glanced at the approaching barge, then downriver at the scene there.

"It's beautiful, beautiful!" he murmured in awe. "Loveliest of all the world's cities!"

He spoke the truth. Here on the west bank of the Nile was open desert; opposite lay the city in distant view, where the huge limestone cliffs drew back in a semicircle and enclosed the City of the Horizon.

Quays bordered the river. A verdant stretch of cultivated land was cool to the eye. Behind lifted the palace and temples and other buildings, dotted by lakes and pools, shaded by giant tamarisks and trees of Asia and Syria. The Pharaoh had abandoned imperial Thebes for this city of his own building. Heretic he might be, but in his heresy was embodied an ineffable beauty.

IT was still very early in the morning; the sun was barely up.

Now the palace barge slid in at the bank, and slaves held the gangplank. A number of the palace attendants came ashore, taking possession of the tents. The Princess Meryt followed; a radiant, tender girl, in years a mere child, but budding into womanhood with the precocious development of youth under burning skies. With her was the prince from distant India, Rishya the traveler and scholar, a young man gravely golden whose Sanscrit tongue stumbled heavily over Egyptian speech. He was one of the numberless foreigners brought from all lands to appease the thirst of the Pharaoh for knowledge.

Last came Thutmose the sculptor, a young man who loved hunting and celebrated it in his sculpture, which had cast aside all the stodgy formality of the past. Youth was building a new Egypt these days, to the bitter resentment of the older generation.

"We'll go at once," said the princess to Senefer. "We can return here for shelter in the heat of the day. Get the archers mounted."

The chamberlain strode off, as archers of the guard came ashore. The three were alone for the moment; Princess Meryt turned to the other two.

"I'm afraid," she said simply. "We can't manage it, Thutmose."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the sculptor, a flashing laugh in his bold eyes. "You two made appeal to me; an hour or two of privacy, away from all the world! I'm arranging it, so don't lose heart. You can't back out now."

"Oh, I'm not backing out!" The girl's eyes sparkled, an excited flush in her cheeks. "I'm just afraid, that's all!"

The two men laughed. Thutmose gave the Indian prince a glance.

"Can you handle your team, once I strike out at full pace?"

Rishya nodded. "Trust me. I've handled horses all my life. But if the Lady Meryt fears for her safety—"

The princess whipped around angrily. "My safety? It's yours I'm thinking about, Rishya! I've schemed this thing; Thutmose has undertaken to manage it at this end. This is our one and only chance to get away for an hour or two, and be alone. I told my father, and he laughed. Just the same, if anything should go wrong, you'd be the one to get blamed."

Rishya's white teeth flashed in a hearty laugh. He made no reply, for now the chamberlain returned, the chief hunter came up, the two chariots were brought. Light, graceful cars they were, with blooded horses from the royal stables.

Thutmose dismissed the charioteers. He mounted into one car and took the reins and started his horses off in the lead. Rishya mounted into the second car, a tall and sinewy figure; his flowing robes, his close-wound turban with jeweled aigret, were regal. The slaves muttered that he looked like some god, rather than a foreign prince. When Princess Meryt scrambled in beside him, the chamberlain protested that the regular palace driver should be at the reins, rather than a foreigner.

The princess silenced him with an angry word, and they were off. Mounted archers and the hunters rode on either flank. Firmly lashed inside the chariots were bows, shafts, sun-parasols, and baskets of food and wine. Rishya, as they topped the rise, flung the girl beside him a smiling glance.

"You can still change your mind," he said warningly.

She laughed, clinging to the handgrips as the car swayed. She wore a thin golden gossamer gown, such as the palace ladies used in summer, a cloak over it, and a tightly fitting cloth cap.

"Not for the world, Rishya. I don't turn back. Besides, this is our only chance."

A chance to be alone together! These Egyptians were queer, thought Rishya; privacy was the one thing they could not command. Informal as was the court of Akhenaton, he had found it stiff and rigid and terrible. Things were different in India, thank the gods!

YET with all his heart he desired a little time alone with the princess; and by help of Thutmose, it was possible, for the artist and sculptor was himself a lover, and was willing to risk much in serving these two. Thutmose alone knew just where they were going, and how to find the ancient shrine of Hathor, and its tiny oasis far out in the desert. They had come, on this pretext of hunting; it was the only way.

Straight out into the desert swept the horsemen, westward toward infinity, the sun at their backs.

RISHYA, managing the team superbly, was conscious of the girl's presence, of her kindling beauty, of the singular quickening spirit within her, so like that of Akhenaton himself. There were no sons in the royal house, and Meryt was the eldest daughter of the doomed line.

Doomed it was, as Rishya had already conjectured; for Akhenaton was sickly. He would die young, hated by his people because he had turned from the old gods. They could not understand the strange faith he had invented—belief in a Heavenly Father, a god who was an intangible spirit, present always in the sunlight that renewed the life of all things.

"Are you content?" Rishya asked, as the horses settled down to the pull. She looked up at him with radiant eyes.

"With you, yes. Here in the desert—ah, it's wonderful! If it could be like this forever!"

"Only for a day," he said gravely. "A day, to dream of afar in after years—a day, one day, to enter in my book of memories! I shall tell all India about you, Princess."

"That's no consolation," she rejoined. "Give up India and stay here!"

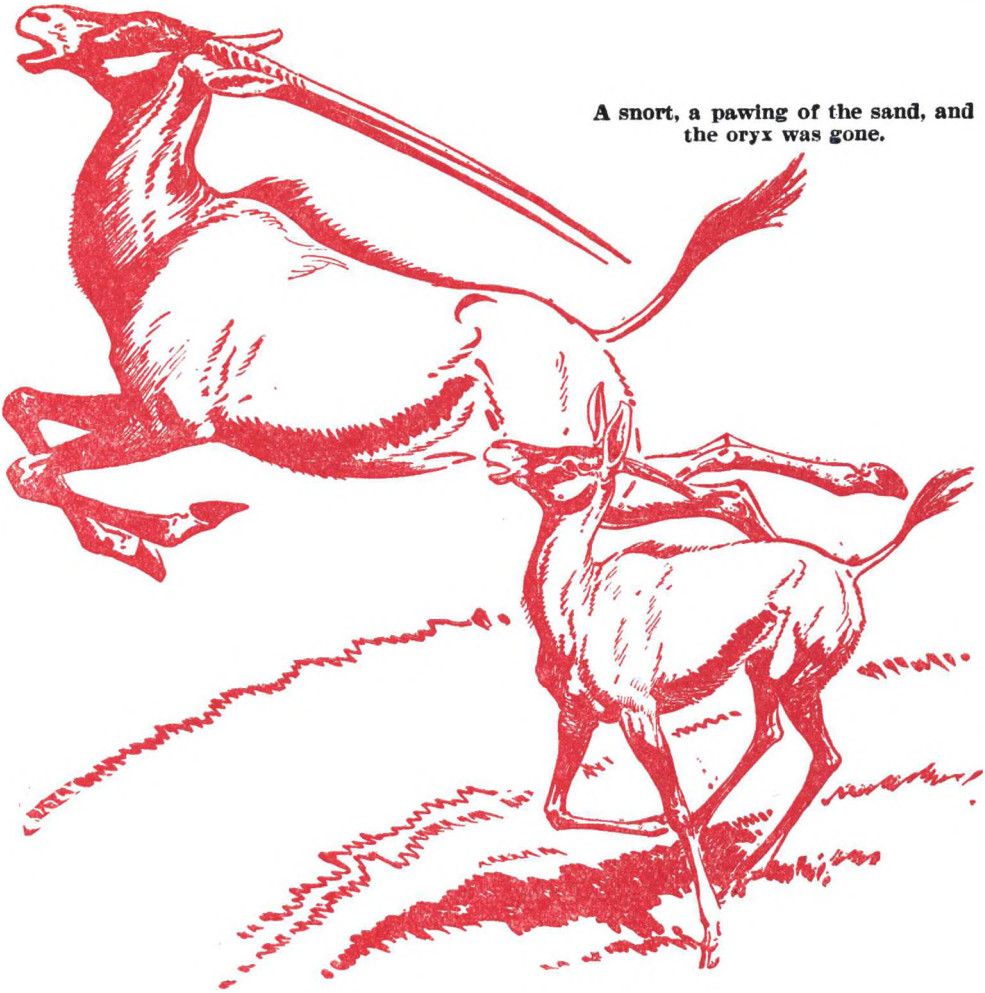
"And die of heat and hatred? No, thanks! Your people don't like foreigners."

Both had the same thought, and the truth was bitter. Egypt had no place for Rishya, and for Meryt was no escape from the destiny of a king's daughter. Suddenly, she caught at his arm, with a low word.

"Look! Look what Thutmose is doing—another man in his chariot!"

The sculptor, indeed, had slowed his horses. A rider had swung in beside his car, with a few low words; then, swinging from the stirrup, dropped into the chariot. Another hunter took charge of the riderless horse. What it all meant, Rishya did not understand, but a moment later, caught a wave of the arm from Thutmose.

"There's the signal!" he exclaimed. "Hang on, now—hang on!"



A snort, a pawing of the sand, and the oryx was gone.

Until now, they had all been plowing through soft, wind-blown sand in which the horses sank fetlock-deep. But ahead rose a stretch of higher ground, more graveled and dotted with brush. Toward this, Thutmose directed his car, and Rishya followed suit with a swirl of the lash.

The horses leaped, with the light cars bounding and careening after, and both teams burst into mad and furious speed. Yells of consternation and dismay arose from the guards and from the desert hunters, whose shaggy mounts were no match for the superbly blooded palace horses. Meryt, clinging desperately, saw the others falling behind and behind, and her voice rose in shrill encouragement. Then she sank down on the cushions and gave all her attention to keeping her grip on the hand-rail, while Rishya balanced like a seaman as the chariot rocked and swayed.

Thutmose had picked his ground well. Once across the graveled stretch, the two chariots were half a mile ahead of the others; now they plunged into broken ground, following a long wadi of soft sand that turned and twisted. A couple of miles of this, and they emerged suddenly on more gravel, where the wheels left no traces, only to dive anew into a maze of dry washes.

An hour later, the horses foam-lathered and spent, both chariots drew up at a little group of trees, sunk in a depression amid the sand. Here was a tiny spring of water; amid the trees was a ruined shrine of Hathor, goddess of love, erected by some forgotten ruler; nothing else, save the tracks of wild beasts. The ruse had succeeded. The hunters and guards were lost. The three were now alone—with the fourth. This was a dark, lithe man who took charge of the horses, while Thutmose approached the princess and Rishya.

"Who is he?" said the sculptor, to their questions. "One of my slaves—a spy, who took this way to get speech with me. He has full details regarding a conspiracy. I'm going to wander off with him and get the story. You, my children, shall have the place to yourselves. And keep your weapons handy, Rishya; there are beasts about."

Conspiracy? Little they cared, either of them. Here was solitude; cushions, food and wine from the cars, bows and quivers close to hand, the horses watered and tethered—and each other. Nothing else really mattered.

"I'm leaving tomorrow, leaving Egypt and you," said Rishya. "Our first day and our last day together, Meryt; let it be beautiful as yourself!"

"Why?" She looked at him, desperately calm. "Why must it be beautiful—when it hurts?"

"Because I'm going to tell all India about you, about this day, about my love!"

This, for some reason, amused her; she was between tears and laughter. She spread out her cloak on the cushions, and Rishya lay at her feet. In her gossamer-woven gown, all her loveliness was but half-hidden; beauty, in those days, delighted the eye and took no shame. She was child and woman at once, wise with her father's wisdom, heart-heavy with her own hopelessness, and there was love between them. . . .

Akhenaton, meantime, sat in the courtyard of his palace in the City of the Horizon, where fountains plashed and lotus-flowers floated on the pools—and his scribes sat with him. Before him came men from all countries, black Nubians, Syrians, Hittites and people from the ends of the earth, relating to him their wisdom and stories of their gods, so that he might dictate what he willed to the scribes, and his reflections thereon.

Little he dreamed, as he sat there, that his wisdom and empire and religion and dynasty would die and be forgotten of men, while the adventure of his daughter, out in the desert this same day, would become a legend immortal.

IN the desert by the shrine of Hathor, in the solitude denied to princes, was love; and with it were tears and laughter, sighs and smiles—heart-hunger satisfied, in the hours that could never come again. The sun climbed to the zenith and onward, and Rishya, suddenly mindful of the sculptor, sprang to his feet and looked around. No sign of Thutmose. He turned to Meryt.

"I must find him. We dare not linger too long!"

"Find him, then, and call before you return. I'll take a little dip in the pool."

Rishya swung away, his heart full to overflowing. They must leave, they must part; the perfect memory would remain through life, but the moment of parting was bitter.

Presently he found Thutmose, sitting with the slave under the shadow of a high rock, talking, eating, drinking. The sculptor greeted him with a laugh.

"A wonderful tale, this, for the ears of Akhenaton! I forgot all about you two. Where's the Princess Meryt?"

"Taking a dip in the spring. Ah! Give me a drop of that wine!"

He finished off the leathern bottle. Thutmose scrambled up.

"We'll have to get started. Best not leave her alone, either. Come along! I'll go back with you; then you can have ten minutes to make your last pretty speeches, while we get the horses harnessed."

They walked back among the little grove of trees. Rishya called aloud, and the voice of Princess Meryt answered:

"It's all right—but be careful, careful! Come and look. Don't frighten the darling."

Wondering, they stole forward and came upon amazement.

NEAR the pool of the well, Meryt was seated, playing delightedly with a tiny, knock-kneed baby antelope. The little beast nuzzled her; she stroked it, caressed it, and the picture was one of such grace and charm that it held all three men motionless and silent.

Then, abruptly, the hand of Thutmose clamped on Rishya's arm, and a low breath like a suppressed groan escaped the Egyptian.

"Don't move—don't speak! Too late now to reach the weapons. That's the most savage of animals—ah, ah! We can't help her—"

Rishya looked, and his heart stopped. Approaching the princess was the mother of the baby antelope—an oryx, head half lowered, and eyes fastened upon the girl. The two long, straight horns were deadly. The beast itself was deadly, savage, moving with grim swiftness.

All was motion; there was no time to think, to act, to move. To Rishya came the horrible thought of the girl impaled on those frightful horns—but even as he froze, the princess looked up, saw the oryx, and a cry of delight escaped her. She stretched out her hands, with no more fear than if the beast were one of the tame palace animals.

Rishya comprehended the frigid silence of his two companions. A cry, a move, might startle the beast into fury; other-

wise, there was just the chance. And, as they stared, the chance won. The baby oryx escaped from the girl and came uncertainly to its mother. The mother, absorbed in its safety and in the sight of the princess, halted.

The girl's outstretched hands stroked the inquiring muzzle, touched the horns, patted the long head. Astoundingly, the oryx moved forward a little, sniffing; the perfumes with which Meryt was anointed had caught the keen sense of smell. The eager voice of the girl, and her unafraid hands, were friendly. The oryx actually thrust forward her head, nuzzling the princess as the baby oryx had done, with an unmistakable evidence of affection.

In the twinkling of an eye, everything changed. The baby oryx went unsteadily away. The mother followed; then halted, as the three men broke into motion. A snort, a pawing of the sand, and she was gone with her offspring in the lead—gone among the trees, over the first sand-rise.

"We have seen one of the most beautiful things in this world," said Thutmose, in an awed voice. "Fear inspires fear; beauty and affection inspire affection—away, away, for I have work to do before night comes!"

And, in a frenzy of haste, he rushed them away on their return drive.

WITHIN the hour, however, grim reality fell upon them all. Merytaton was the eldest princess of the royal house; her disappearance had caused swarms of cavalry and chariots to be sent out, scouring the desert. The first company of searchers who encountered the two chariots wasted no words; the princess was whisked away, and Thutmose and Rishya, bound, were taken in as prisoners. The enormity of their offense was terrible, in Egyptian eyes. Impalement or flaying alive were the least of the anticipated punishments.

Back in the city, Rishya sat alone in the cell assigned him. He cared little what might happen; this one day had left life-memories with him. Love, and loveliness beyond compare! That picture of Meryt and the oryx was graven in his heart. He put it into a stately Sanscrit poem—the king's daughter and the horned beast, savagery conquered by love and beauty. He was still occupied by this when they came for him, and took him to the palace for sentence by the king.

It was sunset, the thrilling and incomparable sunset of Egypt, the vista of the Nile and the western deserts all touched with green and gold. The scene awaiting him, however, was scarcely what either he or his guards had anticipated.

The courtyard, gay with tiles and frescoes of bird and beast, held only Akhenaton and the queen whom he cherished above all the world, Nefert the beautiful. Pale, thin, delicate in feature, the king was not yet thirty; Nefert had borne their first child at twelve, for marriage came early in this land. He smiled, and ordered the guards away, and told Rishya to be seated, and the eyes of the queen rested on the stranger with tender sympathy.

"My guest and friend," said Akhenaton, "you have been guilty of a great crime. In the eyes of the world, love is the greatest of all crimes; in the eyes of Egypt, the beauty and affection of the royal house is not for strangers. The Princess Merytaton is to marry a noble of the land, in order that heirs to the throne may be found. You cannot see her again. This night you leave the City of the Horizon, for you are banished."

Rishya looked from Akhenaton to the sweet queen, and drew a deep breath.

"I do not desire to see her again," he replied quietly. "I have nothing to deny, since you know all. Today I have seen her more lovely, more exquisite, than she will ever again be seen. I have put her into a poem; I shall tell all India of her beauty!"

"Let us hear your poem," said Akhenaton, who had been very curious in regard to Sanscrit and the customs and beliefs of India, whose Vedic hymns were so like the religious hymns he himself had composed.

Rishya recited the sonorous Sanscrit lines he had composed, and explained their meaning. As he did so, Thutmose was brought in between guards, and stood waiting. Akhenaton beckoned him forward and dismissed the guards.

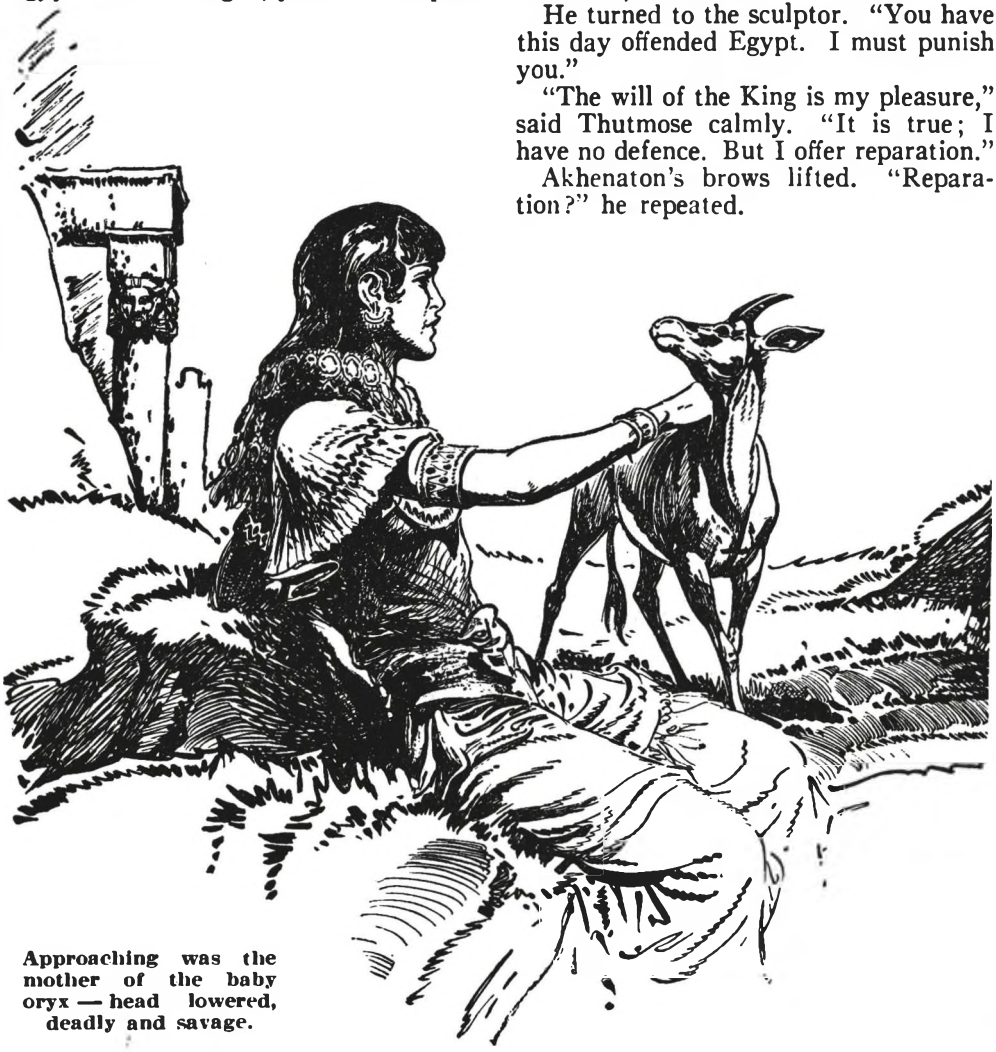
"A strange story," he said thoughtfully. "A symbolic and beautiful story—you say the oryx actually treated her with affection? The spirit of the Lord was evidently with her; the Aton, the ruler of heaven and earth, the Father of all! And you saw this thing, Thutmose?"

THE sculptor saluted the king, and extended a scroll.

"Lord, I saw it, and made this drawing, a design for a stele—a sculpture in which the occurrence shall be commemorated forever!"

Akhenaton unrolled the scroll. The queen leaned over his shoulder, looking at it. He uttered an admiring word, and showed it to Rishya. There, in the new style of art which discarded the old formality, appeared the figure of Meryt in profile, sitting and caressing the oryx.

"Admirable!" exclaimed Akhenaton. "You shall do this stele for the temple, and make copies to send to every city of Egypt! But I forgot; you must be punished for your crime, Thutmose. We'll settle that in a moment. First, Rishya, while I do not understand the words of your poem, they stir me; and I do understand you. What reward can I give you, as a poet? I, who am a poet also, appreciate such things. Name your reward."



Approaching was the mother of the baby oryx — head lowered, deadly and savage.

"That scroll in your hand, lord of Egypt," said Rishya quickly. "And the picture it holds. Give me this, and I shall bless you."

Akhenaton smiled, and removed the golden gorget or collar he wore.

"The Lord forbid that I disdain the blessing of any man as noble as yourself! Take the scroll, and this collar with it, my friend. In an hour, a chariot will be ready to take you to the frontier. Letters to my governor in Syria and beyond, are being written. Until you depart, remain with us, I command you. And now, Thutmose!"

He turned to the sculptor. "You have this day offended Egypt. I must punish you."

"The will of the King is my pleasure," said Thutmose calmly. "It is true; I have no defence. But I offer reparation."

Akhenaton's brows lifted. "Reparation?" he repeated.

"Yes, Lord. Even now, as we speak, a plot is being formed against you at the house of Lord Horemheb, commander of the city garrison. Besides Horemheb, certain captains of the army and some of the priests of Ra are concerned in it. Also, the noble Tutankhamen is to succeed you on the throne—he is to marry the Princess Merytaton tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" echoed Akhenaton, incredulous. "He is to succeed me?"

"You are to be killed this night."

The sun had dropped below the horizon. A chill stole across the courtyard; a dread, silent chill that gripped them all. Nefert watched the sculptor with eyes big in a livid face, one hand at her heart. Akhenaton seemed unable to believe what he heard.

"Tutankhamen? A young man, one of the greatest nobles in Egypt. . . . Horemheb? The first soldier in Egypt. And they wish to kill me! How do you know all this? If we know it, there is time to prevent."

"There is none," said Thutmose quietly. "One of my slaves has entered into the plot, has learned all its details. You cannot count upon the loyalty of the troops here; only your palace guards are faithful."

"And you," said the king.

"And I," repeated the sculptor.

Queen Nefert leaned forward.

"Akhenaton! You must act, act!" she exclaimed impulsively. "Send for the regiments of Nubian archers downriver, at the concentration camp. You can trust them—"

"They could not get here before dawn," said Akhenaton. "Let me think."

"At least, send the guards and seize these traitors!"

"Let me think," repeated the king, and she sank back with a helpless gesture, her face tragic.

Thutmose spoke briefly, answering her demand.

"If you send to seize them, they'll know they're under suspicion; and they'll strike at once."

"Precisely," murmured Akhenaton, smiling a little, and fingering his lower lip in a way he had.

A DRIFT of perfume wafted across the courtyard. The laughter of children came from the royal apartments; the little princesses were at play. At last Akhenaton's head lifted, and he glanced at Rishya with a gentle smile.

"My poet from afar, we have talked much of beauty and peace, and the Father of all things, Aton, the Lord," he said slowly. "And today's happenings—

what were they, if not a sign from the Lord? The savage heart yields to affection; the eyes and hand that know no fear, conquer the beast of terror. Why not?" He beckoned to one of the guards, and ordered a chamberlain to come, and presently the official stood before him.

"Go to the house of the Lord Horemheb," he said, "and ask him to come here at once, for I would speak with him. Take the same message to the Lord Tutankhamen; if you find him at the house of Horemheb, so much the better. Wait! Take a collar of honor to Horemheb—Nefert, give me the collar you wear."

The queen took the golden ornament from about her neck, and the chamberlain departed with it. Akhenaton looked at the sculptor.

"The others who are in the conspiracy—the captains. Name them."

Thutmose did so. The king nodded, fingering his lip, and presently sent for a scribe. Queen Nefert leaned toward him, with eager breath.

"I see! You're going to seize those two when they come, unsuspecting!"

"My dear, there's one thing you should have learned by this time," said Akhenaton, drawing her to him and embracing her, as he often did in public—to the huge scandal of the court officials. "That is, your husband is not a liar, and has no fear. Only fear leads to tragedies, my dear. Therefore, tomorrow morning Tutankhamen will not wear the royal uræus of Upper and Lower Egypt—not yet awhile, at least!"

He released her, looked at the scribe who had appeared, and told him to wait. Lights were brought,—for now the swift darkness of the desert was falling,—alabaster lamps, whose soft glow filled the place with a tender radiance. A guard came in, saluted, and announced Horemheb.

"Let him enter," directed Akhenaton. "Luckily, his house is close by."

DOUR and truculent, the soldier marched in, casting a wary eye around and then saluting the king with obvious relief and assurance.

"My friend," said Akhenaton, "you served my father Amenophis faithfully, as you have served me. I am no warrior, as you know; to me, war and strife and blood are abhorrent. Yet Egypt must have soldiers, and you are the first soldier of Egypt. In you I have confided my new city, my palace, myself and those whom I love."

He paused. Horemheb saluted him again, but across the dark, stern features passed a slight quiver of alarm; to his conscience, those words must have been ominous.

"That is now ended," went on Akhenaton. "I shall confide my palace and the City of the Horizon to another." Again he paused, and in the warrior's eyes the alarm deepened. Then he went on, smiling: "In you, Horemheb, I am placing a greater trust—I confide all Egypt to you. The court orders for tomorrow will announce that you are captain-general of my armies and minister for war, responsible only to me; the post will carry with it the rank of prince, and such treasury grants as may be necessary to sustain that rank. That is all. Come to me in the morning, and we'll discuss the measures to be taken on the frontiers."

THE pallor of his face succeeded by a dark flush of joy, Horemheb saluted again, expressed his thanks in a few words, and withdrew. As he went, he passed Tutankhamen, who was just entering. The king beckoned the latter forward—a pale, handsome young noble, richly attired, who saluted the king and queen and stood waiting uneasily.

"My friend," said Akhenaton, smiling, "as you know, I have no heirs of the body. Today I was discussing with the council the marriage of my eldest daughter to the noble Saakareh, and it was suggested that her sister, Ankhsenpaaton, should also be married to a man suitable in birth and qualities to succeed to the throne in due course. At the council meeting tomorrow I desire to propose your name, but we thought best to mention the matter first to you, tonight. If for any reason this marriage, with the rank and estates involved, be not to your taste, speak freely."

The young noble was utterly overcome. He was not the type to make a bold bid for a throne, though he might serve as pawn in the hands of others. Here, unexpectedly, he saw himself given princely rank, a daughter of the Pharaoh, a future assured and solid without the least risk, with possibly succession, ultimately, to the throne itself.

He stammered out his joy, saluted the queen in gratitude and delight, and Akhenaton turned to the scribe. He gave the names of the captains whom Thutmose had mentioned.

"To this, estates in Lower Egypt," he said. "To that, command over ten regi-

ments. To another, commander of a thousand horse, the rank of general of cavalry. Make out the letters and affix my seal."

Tutankhamen withdrew. Queen Nefert looked at her husband, swallowed hard, and shook her head in silent wonder. The king laughed heartily, as he met the gaze of Rishya.

"You, at least, understand me," he exclaimed. "Even if Thutmose fails to comprehend, and the queen thinks I have lost my mind—you, I believe, understand."

Rishya bowed. "Yes, Lord; 'twas well done," he said gravely. "They will know that you've learned something; they'll abandon the whole plot. Each man for himself now. Your lack of fear has conquered them; your affection has checked their savagery."

"Exactly," said Akhenaton, with a nod. "The lesson which I learned today. And now, my friend, say farewell. Your chariot and escort are waiting. Go, and tell India and the lands beyond, how Egypt is ruled by the Lord of Peace, the Father of all things!"

So Rishya took his departure. Thutmose the sculptor walked out with him to where the chariot waited, and before the great gates of the palace, said farewell.

"It was very noble and beautiful," said Thutmose. "Just the same, it's not a bit practical. Beautiful theories don't work in Egypt; only bloodshed brings obedience. If Akhenaton carries his theories to extremes—well, you'll hear of others ruling the land of Egypt, that's all!"

"I'm afraid you're right," said Rishya sadly, and stepped into the chariot.

LIKE an echo the words lingered. The scene was enfolded in darkness; then it was swept away, melted, dissolved into nothing. Before us rose the gaunt naked stone wall, with the light dying upon it, and the room-lights went on suddenly. Yet the words still lingered in the air.

"And, by heavens, he was right!" burst out the voice of Morphy, thick with excitement. "That's exactly what did happen! The heretic king and his religion were swept away! Look here, I've studied the art and history of Egypt—how does it happen that every damned detail in this picture was correct? Even about Tutankhamen, King Tut, you know—his marriage to the second daughter and how he eventually got the throne—how on earth did you do it, Fletcher?"

Norman Fletcher sighed, leaned back in his huge easy-chair, and reached for a cigar.

"Morphy, *I* didn't do it. This wasn't a picture. You saw what actually happened three thousand years and more ago. More, you saw how the unicorn story started—how it went from Egypt to India."

I leaned forward with quick objection.

"Hold on! You're wrong there, Mr. Fletcher. Nothing about a unicorn in that story. It was about an oryx—the original of the unicorn, perhaps, but it explained nothing about a single horn."

FLETCHER looked at me and smiled. Morphy uttered an explosive oath.

"I've got it! I see it now—by heavens, Fletcher, you're dead right about it! That picture Rishya carried with him to India, eh?"

"Just so," said Norman Fletcher.

"But," I exclaimed, exasperated, "what about that picture? What about a unicorn?"

Morphy chuckled, and turning to me, he explained:

"In Egyptian art there was no perspective at all. They didn't understand it. They made a profile picture of an oryx—and only one horn showed. Get it? There's your unicorn in a nutshell! That's how the story got to India; that's how Greek travelers learned about it from the monuments of Egypt. No perspective!"

"Then," said Fletcher quietly, "I take it you're satisfied with the experiment?"

Morphy stared at him.

"Satisfied? Man, it was wonderful! Illusion or reality, I don't care which; it brought every detail of that period to life! Do you know that Akhenaton was probably the first ruler in the world to preach a religion of peace and purity—a god who was a spirit? Do you know that some of the hymns he wrote were the originals of some of the Hebrew psalms? That's a fact! Ask any Egyptologist! The Hebrew literature owes a lot to that old Pharaoh!"

"In that case," Fletcher rejoined, "the oppressed peoples of the Old World will owe a lot to you, I'm happy to say."

Morphy stared at him blankly, uttered an exclamation—and promptly drew out his checkbook.

"Princess of the Evil Eye," another colorful story in this unique series, will be a feature of our next issue.

War Comes

His thoughts traveled ahead of him, to the stage station on the mesa —and to the girl.

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

JACK SCURRY said: "Yo're crowding yo'r luck, Saunders. Some day it's going to change." But Saunders only chuckled indulgently, as stubborn old men so often do.

"I've been told that before," he replied, "but I'm still here."

They were standing in the doorway of the adobe house which the Butterfield Stage Line had erected here before the Civil War had put it out of business. The building looked like a little block of mud in the midst of the savage landscape. Behind it, the mountains rose dark against the hard, pale morning sky. Before it, the narrow strip of mesa broke down to flat-lands which reached away and away toward mysterious mountain ranges in the west and south. The plain was strewn with fragments of lava, and dotted with clumps of greasewood; the colors blended into a deep bronze which seemed to stir beneath the heat-waves. The stage road twisted across it like a slender ribbon.

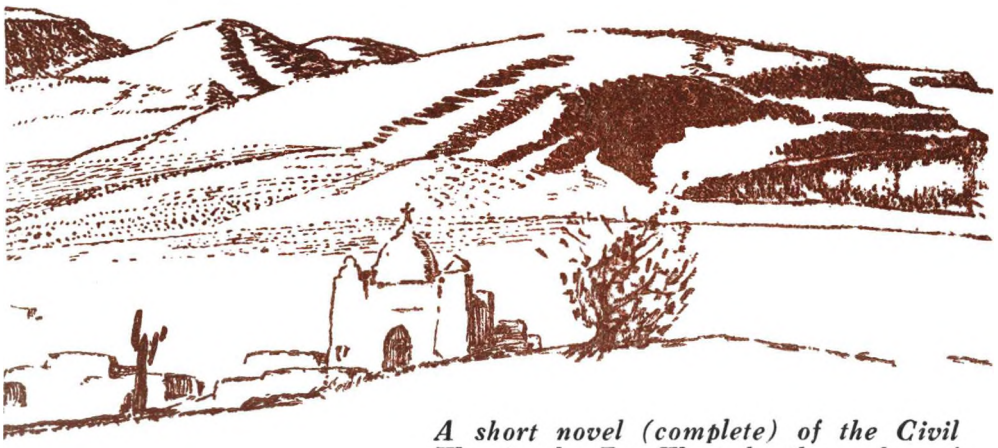
Scurry was smiling; it was his habit when he was weighing a question in his mind. For it had happened more than once that the answer to his problem had meant life or death; and because he had learned how potent a factor blind chance is in bringing a correct decision, the smile was always twisted. He was gazing at the road, and the lids were low before his eyes. His face looked like a sardonic mask. In this land, where it was common sense for a man to work overtime at minding his own business, one might well hesitate before giving an old-timer a piece of his mind. It was several moments before he spoke:

"Not many traveling that road these days—and most of them that do, would cut a man's throat for half a dollar. I bet there's twenty men in Tucson know about yo'r placer in the cañon."

"There's two who knew last month." Saunders' stubborn blue eyes were gleaming. His thick jaw was thrust forward. His heavy thatch of white hair glowed like a halo in the shadow within the doorway. "But what they knew aint bothering 'em now." He chuckled again. "Ask Pedro. He helped me bury 'em back of the corral."

Scurry shook his head. "Mebbe yo' won't get the jump on the next ones," he murmured. "A man cain't go on keep-

to ARIZONA



A short novel (complete) of the Civil War in the Far West, by the author of "Bold Riders out of Santa Fe."

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

ing gold-dust in baking-powder cans in this country very long without running into trouble. And there's the Apaches. We're pretty well organized over in Bonita Cañon, but I lost three men the last week."

"I fought Injuns," Saunders retorted, "when you were wearin' a little breech-clout." He turned his back upon the other; when he reappeared a few minutes later, he was wearing a heavy canteen and a powder-horn slung from his shoulders, and was carrying a muzzle-loading carbine. "Time I'm going to work," he announced. "So long."

Scurry was still standing in the doorway when Luisa came into the room from the kitchen. He turned abruptly as he heard her footfall. It had taken him ten hours to make the journey from Bonita Cañon to the old stage station the day before. And during all that time he had been thinking of things which he would like to say to her. Thus far, he had said none of them.

"Not gone yet?" she asked.

He gazed at her beneath lowered lids. Her skin was like pale gold, and her eyes were like black pools. These things had come to her from her Mexican mother, whom Saunders had buried five years ago at the Point of the Mountains.

But the fineness of the girl's features was a heritage from paler ancestors. Scurry thought as he looked upon her, how wide was the gulf of years that lay between them. When a man has been fighting Indians since he was a growing boy, and soldiering for weary months in a savage land, the span between nineteen and twenty-five can seem enormous. He moistened his lips, and told her:

"I'm shoving on right now."

On his way to the corral, he glanced back; she was still standing there in the doorway looking after him. She waved her hand, and he waved his. A moment later he passed the corner of the house and saw Saunders starting up the gulch where he was working his dry placer. There was something about the set of the broad back which made Scurry frown.

"If it wasn't for her," he muttered, "I'd say the Injuns ought to jump yo'."

Pedro, the Mexican man-of-all-work, was lounging at the corral bars. He was holding Scurry's saddled horse, and as he handed over the reins, he smiled. A little man with a face that was the color of a chocolate-bar, his teeth were as white as snow. When Scurry had swung into the saddle, Pedro called:

"God go with you." And Scurry answered the benediction with a smile that was not crooked.

CAPTAIN JOHN SCURRY: that was the way he was listed in the official roster of the Texas regiment which had marched westward from the Rio Grande

to occupy Arizona in the fond hope of moving on to California. But it was seldom that any man used the title, addressing him; and one who saw him riding down the empty road to Tucson that morning would have no reason to think he was a Confederate soldier, for he wore no sign of uniform and none of rank. His double-breasted flannel shirt, which had once been blue, was sadly faded now; his boots were the color of dried rawhide, and his wide hat was thoroughly disreputable. The rim was pulled down over his eyes, and he was sitting very straight in the saddle—a lean, erect figure, dusty and hard like the land through which he rode.

THE sun climbed higher in the cloudless sky; the heat-waves shook above the plain; a mirage arose before him and disappeared. As the day wore on, the landscape shifted slowly; he left the plain behind him and passed through a narrow cañon in the southern mountains. It was near the middle of the afternoon when he saw the flat-roofed adobes of Tucson by the winding green strip of cottonwoods and willows which marked the course of a stream. The day was growing late when he rode into the village.

The corral which had been used by Esteban Ochoa's big wagon-trains before that bold Mexican gentleman had chosen banishment in preference to espousal of the Confederate cause, was near the old wall of mud bricks which the Spaniards had built to protect the settlement from marauding Indians. A lank, sandy-haired Texan appeared from the shady side of a pile of baled hay, where he had been indulging in the daily siesta like the rest of Tucson's population. He bestowed an indifferent nod on the traveler.

"How's the boys getting on at Bonita, Jack?" he asked.

"Fair," Scurry told him. "The Apaches jumped us last week. I lost three men: Billy Tyler and the Shadler brothers."

The other swore gently and took the horse; he was leading the animal away when a thought struck him, and he paused to seek further tidings.

"Ol' Man Saunders making out all right at the stage station?"

"All right," Jack Scurry said. "Leastways, he was this mo'nin!"

"Some of these days," the corral-keeper announced, "that outfit's going to be plumb out of luck. A man cain't keep ten thousand dollars' wuth of gold-dust in a Godforsaken place like that and get away with it. I done tol' him so myself a dozen times." He set to work unsaddling the horse, and Scurry departed down the narrow street. He was thinking of the girl who had stood in the stage-station doorway waving good-by, and felt thankful no one had overheard that remark about Saunders' gold-dust.

In this, however, he was wrong. A pursy man, whose face was marked by a network of broken veins, had appeared

between two old freight-wagons while the corral-keeper was delivering his opinion. Before it was finished, he had stepped back out of sight. Now he made his way in silence to the willow thicket beside the little watercourse. Here was a bare space among the undergrowth, where the sandy earth was patterned by a lacework of shade and sunshine. In the middle of this lay three blanket-rolls, and two of these were being used as pillows by a pair who lay flat on their backs. They sat up at his approach. One of them was a mean-looking little man who wore a flaming red shirt. The other was bare to the waist of his tight jean breeches; his body was the color of an old saddle, and the high cheek-bones and the thin lips proclaimed the fact that there had been an Indian or two among his forefathers. They were not a prepossessing trio; and there were sheriffs back in California who had offered sizable rewards in the hope of seeing their faces again. The fat man said:

"Listen to this—" He recited the conversation which he had overheard; and when he had finished, the mean little man in the red shirt announced:

"Luck's turned."

The half-breed asked: "When do we go?"

"We got to lift an outfit first," the fat man said, "and hosses too. Aint any sense hanging around this part of Arizona after we do the killing. These Texans are too handy with a rawhide rope."

CHAPTER II

"SEÑOR," the peddler cried, "behold!" He held the rosary in his brown hand. "The cross is of silver, and the beads are of the finest jet."

He held it out at arm's-length above the other stock in trade: the plaster images of saints, several ebony crucifixes, some colored prints of the Madonna and Child. All were carefully arranged upon a blanket which he had spread at the edge of the narrow street. He stood before a blank adobe wall, leaning forward, a bronze-skinned personification of eagerness. He had come all the way from Sinaloa with the little pack-train of some Mexican players, sharing their belief that the Confederate occupation of Arizona and the withdrawal of American customs inspection at the boundary would mean prosperity. The first three weeks of the journey had been enlivened by as many brushes with bandits, and during the last ten days they had been dodging Apaches. Tonight the troupers were going to try their luck with a Tucson audience in the plaza before the old church. As for him, he had been crying his wares ever since the passing of the afternoon siesta; his voice was growing hoarse, and this was the first passer-by who had shown the faintest sign of being a prospective customer.

"Señor! It has been blessed!" he rattled on in the mongrel Spanish of the border. For all the sign that Jack Scurry betrayed, one would have said that he did not understand a single word. But his eyes remained fixed on the small silver cross and the beads of jet which were coiled around it in the brown palm.

"How much?" he asked in Spanish which was poorer than the peddler's. The latter named a figure swiftly, and Scurry handed the man his money; he thrust the rosary into the pocket of his jeans and walked away without another word.

"When yo' get back to the stage station," so his thoughts were running at the moment, "I bet yo' lose yo'r nerve and don't give it to her."

With the approach of evening the narrow street was waking up. Various lanky swine, their hind legs tethered to stakes by rawhide ropes, were emerging from the shade where they had been enjoying their siestas along with the town's population; numbers of flea-bitten dogs were sallying forth; dusky men with bright-striped serapes about their shoulders were smoking in doorways, beside which strings of scarlet chili peppers hung from the roof-poles. Three women, whose faces were almost hidden behind their black *rebozos*, were on their way to the plaza church. A flag, its red field crossed by two blue bars studded with white stars, was hanging from a jackstaff over the wide door of the largest building.

Jack Scurry passed beneath the flag and entered the only room in Tucson which boasted a wooden floor. It had been the office of that same Esteban Ochoa, whose wagon-trains had been bringing supplies from the distant States before the Confederate occupation; now it was the headquarters of the Texan staff. But the soldiers from the Rio Grande were, as they would have put it themselves, rustling their own grub; and as there was no money to pay out, there was no necessity for a disbursing officer. The solitary aide, who put in his time here killing flies and trying to ac-

quire a taste for Mexican cigarettes, had called it a day and departed. Scurry went on to the room beyond.

The floor here was made of adobe which had been wet with bulls' blood and pounded hard. The walls were whitewashed, the ceiling low; there were two stingy windows; there was a flat-topped desk made of pine boards which had once been portions of packing-boxes. Colonel Hunter was sitting behind the desk. He acknowledged Scurry's negligent salute with a careless gesture.

"How goes it, Jack?" he asked.

A HOMEMADE chair with a seat of dried rawhide stood before the desk. Scurry turned it around so that its back was foremost, and he strode it as if it were a horse.

"Enemy's on the march," he said. "They'll reach Bonita Cañon, where we are camped, in a few days." He paused to roll a cigarette, and when he had lighted it, "I cain't get used to this greaser tobacco," he complained.

"Me neither," Colonel Hunter nodded. "Plumb sure this news is right?"

"A couple of prospectors fetched it," Scurry said. "They came into camp night before last. They were on their way from Yuma to the Salt River, but the Apaches jumped 'em, and they had to leave the country. Aint a doubt about their story being true."

The cigarette was burning unevenly. He tried to correct it, swore and threw the cigarette away. Then he went on.

"They passed the Yankees fifty miles out of Yuma; that was ten days ago. It's the California column, three regiments, twelve hundred men. They've got two field-pieces, and General Carleton's in command."

Colonel Hunter leaned back in his chair; he looked like a man who is well satisfied. He said:

"I got good news from New Mexico, this mo'nin', Jack. It's the first post that's come through in two months. General Sibley's men licked the Northern troops at Valverde. That was six weeks ago. Sibley sent a dispatch-rider to me then, but I reckon the Indians must have got him. When he wrote this last letter, he was in Santa Fe, and he aimed to send me reinforcements as soon as he took Fort Union. If we can delay that California column a few days until those troops show up, we can handle them mighty nicely."

"*If* is a big word sometimes, Colonel."

"All depends on how yo're organized," Colonel Hunter told him. "How many men have yo' got at Bonita Cañon?"

"Six holding it down when I left," Scurry said. "No telling how many will be there when I get back. If I had twenty more, we might delay those Yankees for a day or two." He was silent for a time, considering. "The's ten miles of mesquite thickets on the flat below us. They're plumb sure to send their advance guard on before the main body marches through. All we got to do is ambush those that ride ahead, and make it hot enough for them. Carleton would smell a trap, and he'd be mighty careful to be sure of everything before he continued his advance."

"Sounds good to me." Colonel Hunter fiddled with some papers on his desk. "It would be better still if there was a larger force for yo' to fall back on. Suppose I take a hundred men to the stage station and send twenty on to Bonita. By the time the Yankees fought two skirmishes and shoved us back to Tucson, Sibley's reinforcements would be here."

"Well," Scurry drawled, "I'm getting sick of fighting Indians. This will be a change."

"We've got a few days' leeway," Hunter said. "It's going to take time to gather this crowd of mine together. Most of 'em are up the valley chasing Apaches. And we'll have to outfit with grub. We'll figure on marching two days from now."

Scurry dismounted from his chair.

"I'll meet yo' at the stage station, Colonel, and guide the men to our camp. I'll start back tonight. Like as not the boys will be needing me before I get there."

It was in his mind to make his departure in the cool of the early evening; but a clown changed his plans—a Mexican clown from Sinaloa, his face bedizened with streaks of red and yellow paint. He walked down the narrow main street of the village, crying his tidings: "The Perilous Romance of Sebastian and Estancia," to be enacted in the plaza at eight o'clock, by players who had delighted the president of Mexico and every other dignitary of the Republic.

CHAPTER III

THERE were two large bonfires blazing, one on either side of the plaza. The flames of a dozen torches were orange tongues licking the blue darkness

of the desert night. The light lay in a glowing pool that wavered like the surface of a pond into which a stone has been thrown. The ripples laved the mud-colored walls of adobe buildings and crept up the pale brown front of the old church; they flowed across the empty space where the troupe of strolling players from Sinaloa had been bowing to the plaudits of Tucson's small but well-mixed population, a few minutes before.

Then, as the crowd fell silent, *Estancia* appeared up-stage and came forward. And when she unrolled a flag, whose red field was crossed by two blue bars studded with white stars, the applause rose and the audience sprang to their feet.

All save one. He sat alone, unnoticed, it would seem. But it happened that Jack Scurry saw him.

IT has become a well-known fact that those soldiers who are tasting the true flavor of war at the front are not so prone toward overpunctiliousness concerning patriotic demonstrations as the others behind the lines, who have more worry to spare on such matters. But the luck which had given Jack Scurry a brief vista across several rows of benches before the crowd shifted, closing in once more, had allowed him to see, on that young face, a defiance which was tinged with insolence. His own face hardened.

The audience was relaxing after its two strenuous hours of Latin-American melodrama. Fat señoras and slim señoritas were clustered on the benches, vicariously living over some of the more delicious moments of thrilling love. Old women with skins like wrinkled parchment were hawking *dulces* and steaming *enchiladas*. Lounging caballeros in flaring trousers with leather straps along the legs, peons in rags, shod with rawhide sandals, and any number of cynical dogs were regarding the scene with varying emotions. There were two score or so of Texans from Hunter's regiment, who weren't much better off sartorially than the peons, and there were a handful of gamblers who looked immaculate in comparison with the other males. Small boys were running in and out among the crowd; some of its older members were calling greetings to friends.

What with all of this, Jack Scurry would have given up the idea of hunting out the youth who had remained seated when he should have been doing honor to the Confederate flag, had it not been for the insolence in the wide gray eyes.

"The Injuns done called it a day," said old Saunders.

That rankled. The youth was near the fringe of the crowd when Scurry overtook him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Well?" The insolence of the gray eyes was present in the voice. "What do you want?"

"'Pears to me yo'r laigs are sound," Scurry replied calmly. "Leastways, yo're able to stand up now."

They were facing each other across an empty row of benches. The meeting of their eyes was like a duel. But the anger which was rising within him did not prevent Scurry from appraising this other carefully. He was not much more than twenty, tall and straight as an arrow, with a mass of straw-colored hair; and those wide gray eyes that kept Scurry's antagonism alive—they were the eyes of one who has never known what it means

"It's going to take time to gather this crowd of mine together," Hunter said. "Most of 'em are up the valley chasing Apaches."

Men and boys of three races were crowding in to see the fun; women were scuttling away to safety. One particularly obese matron, whose blocking ability would have got her a long way if she had only belonged to the sterner sex and a later generation, thrust Scurry aside with such expeditious vigor that by the time he had recovered his breath, the yelps of the last canine casualty were growing faint in the distance. The pilgrim was nowhere in sight. Jack Scurry shrugged and turned away.

His indifference would have been short-lived if he had only been able to see around a corner and hear low voices at a hundred yards' distance. There was a crooked little alley leading off from the square, a dark lane between windowless walls of sun-dried bricks; and there was not even a prowling dog about. But the middle-aged Mexican who was doing the talking spoke barely above a whisper. He was the wagonmaster of that same Esteban Ochoa whose loyalty to the Northern cause had brought him exile, and he was gripping the pilgrim by the arm. He said:

"This Rebel mus' wait for some other day, Señor Brand. It is news that I bring to you. We have been expecting it for weeks, and now it has come."

"You can let go my arm, Santa Cruz," young Brand bade the other quietly. "Tell me this news."

"It is the soldiers from California." Santa Cruz had learned his English along

to meet opposition, whose sureness in himself brings contempt for others. Otherwise the face was good-looking; there was a freshness in the cheeks and lips which told of sheltered living. Jack Scurry thought of his own boyhood and the hard school he had gone through.

"A pilgrim," he told himself; and he said aloud: "If yo' don't like our flag, why didn't yo' stay back East and fight for yo'r own?"

"I take it, from the way you talk," the other replied coldly, "that you're one of Hunter's Texans. I haven't heard of any fighting your gang's been doing yet." He leaned forward, thrusting his flushed face closer. "And when I stand up for a flag, it won't be for that Rebel rag."

PERHAPS the issue might have been settled then and there, and some things would not have happened afterward as they did, if two dogs, who were less punctilious concerning preliminaries, had not picked the narrow space between the men to settle some dispute of their own. Before this combat had fairly begun to get warm, a dozen other curs were piling in, and the air was full of dust and snarls.

the trail to the distant Missouri River, but his rhetoric was still Spanish-American. "They are marching up the Gila. They will be here soon."

"That story's come a dozen times before," Brand said.

"It is the truth," the wagonmaster assured him. "Listen to me: The young son of my sister, he is the boy at the mess of the Rebel officers. He stands behind the chair of Colonel Hunter, and he swings the fan with the long handle to drive away the flies. He has good ears, that boy, and he hears some things which he tells me. You onderstan'? Well then, thees evening when the officers sit down for their meal, there is moch said. And it is what I tell you. The California men, they are coming, and the Texas companies will ride out to meet them."

"When do these Rebels march?" Brand asked. And the Mexican replied:

"I do not know. But we can wait and we will learn. And when my sister's son brings me the word— They will be watching me, señor, because I know the roads. They would not think of you, because—"

"I understand," Brand interrupted curtly. "They think I'm green. All right, I'll show them, Santa Cruz."

BY the time this brief conference was finished, Jack Scurry was halfway down the main street; he had dismissed the pilgrim from his mind. For there were other matters of graver importance than this insolent young Yankee awaiting his attention: there was the little rosary in the pocket of his jeans breeches; there was the lonely adobe house at the edge of the mesa, where he had seen a girl standing in the doorway that morning when he rode away; there was the camp at the mouth of Bonita Cañon, a day's ride farther on, the last westward outpost of the ambitious Confederacy. He went down the narrow street, where the dust was deep and the pitfalls were numerous, to the corral beside the old adobe town wall. He saddled up his horse and set forth on his journey.

There was a late moon in the sky, and the plains were vague mysteries reaching away to mountain ranges which were like black shadows against the stars; the cañon which connected them was filled from wall to wall with thick darkness.

His thoughts roved back and forth: they traveled on ahead of him; they lingered at the stage station on the mesa with a girl; sometimes his hand slid into his pocket, and at these moments when his fingers touched the beads or felt the smooth metal of the little cross, his heart grew bold with resolution.

AT last the dawn leaked white into the eastern sky; the white changed to faint pink, and this grew warmer until the heavens throbbed and the wide plain took on tints as delicate as the inside of a seashell. The brief interval of transformation attained its climax, and then the sun appeared. All things became stark in sharp reality. From the summit of a range of mountains far to the northward a slender thread of smoke twined up against the paling sky. Jack Scurry saw it, and his eyes became bleak. After the manner of those who often ride alone, he spoke to his horse as one would to a companion who understands what is being said:

"Apaches again. I reckon we'd get lonely without 'em."

The sun had mounted for the span of the first two hours when he turned the horse up the side road to the flat-roofed building which stood like a solitary sentry at the edge of the mesa. Pedro was basking in the slanting rays at the corral bars, smoking his after-breakfast cigarette. Old Saunders' square back was in brief evidence near the mouth of the dry gulch which gashed the mountainside behind the building.

"It is," Pedro asked in Spanish as he took the reins which Scurry handed him, "good luck with you in Tucson, señor?"

"It is good luck," Jack Scurry answered; and he was thinking, as he said it, that during the weeks while he had known this Mexican, the little man had never inquired as to his business, riding back and forth in this wild land.

"Some day I will go there. It will not be long." Pedro was smiling; his teeth were very white; his eyes were alight. There were moments afterward when Scurry remembered the prophecy and its failure of fulfillment. But his mind was not on Pedro now; nor were there any forebodings in it; hope was surging high within him, and his hand was thrust into the pocket of his jeans breeches, his fingers fondling the jet beads of the little rosary. By the time the Mexican had led his horse beyond the opened bars, Scurry was halfway to the house. . . .

It is a curious thing, the bashfulness which some men feel when they confront a girl. And there is something pathetic about it when the man is, as has so

often been the case, as bold in action as he is timid when it comes to love. In those days, when there was much fighting and the most of it was of a hair-raising quality, when women were extremely scarce, and of the few who were in evidence only the rare exceptions owned even an approach to good looks, the ordeal which Jack Scurry underwent that morning was natural enough.

LUISA was standing in the doorway as he neared; and her eyes were upon him. It was the warm light in those eyes which left him speechless, left him without words to utter, and seemed to bring an awkwardness to his limbs.

"Back already!" she cried. "Did you have a nice time in Tucson?"

"I was busy," he muttered; and as soon as the words had passed his lips, he had a sinking feeling of their ungraciousness. She turned and she went quickly through the room into the kitchen beyond. He did not hear her sigh; and because her back was toward him, he did not see the look in her face. He found a chair and slumped down beside the long table where the passengers who had made the journey to California in the days before the Civil War used to gather for wayside meals. He was sitting there regarding the opposite wall with unseeing eyes, and he was making a final effort to summon his vanished resolution, when she returned with his breakfast. His effort was in vain. He ate in silence, and in silence she regarded him. She was standing in the doorway, a little figure against the white morning sunlight, with skin the color of pale gold and dark hair stirring in the faint breeze. When he had finished at last, he rose; his hand went once more to the pocket of his jeans, but it came forth empty. He swallowed, hesitated, then started toward the door. She drew aside to let him pass.

"Got to be shoving on," he said.

Luisa was still standing in the doorway when he rode away. She waved her hand, and he waved in answer. He did not turn his head to look back again; and as he traveled down the hill, he was cursing himself for an awkward fool. The dust rose from his horse's hoofs and enwrapped him in a brown cloud. He never knew that she remained there upon the threshold watching the cloud until it melted into the heat haze.

Loneliness had been her portion ever since she could remember. To stand in a doorway gazing over a wide landscape; to watch the dust-signal of some departing traveler recede until it had vanished, or to seek for the first faint haze which would announce the approach of a new guest: these had been her habits from the time she was a little girl.

Of the few companions whom she had known, all were men: solitary men who stopped in passing, then rode away. And only one of them had given her any sign of the attention which a young girl craves. Her mind went to him now.

It was in Tucson, one of those sun-drenched days in the late winter when the touch of the still air is a warm caress. Her father had come in to buy supplies for the next few months, and she was walking up the narrow street from the corral of Esteban Ochoa, when the youth came around a corner so suddenly that had she not stepped aside, they would have collided. There followed one of those experiences with which all of us are familiar; for as she strove to avoid him, he swerved his course in the same direction. They halted and confronted each other, smiling. She remembered his fresh young face, the wide gray eyes which were a little too bold in their assurance. She remembered his voice as he begged her pardon. It was the only time a man had spoken to her as if she were entitled to some consideration as a woman; and Luisa had cherished the memory.

The picture faded as quickly as it had come. She was looking at the plain once more, but it was empty. She turned and went back into the house.

CHAPTER IV

ON the second evening after Jack Scurry rode away, Luisa was standing in the doorway watching the wide plain. She was facing the western sky, where the riot of color faded slowly until the purple mountains along the horizon became dead black, and a solitary star appeared above them. The old stage road, which looped and twisted like a ribbon which has been carelessly thrown aside, was barely visible now. Where it approached the southern mountains through which the narrow cañon led toward Tucson, a cloud of dust betrayed the presence of approaching horsemen. But she did not see it, for her eyes were fixed upon the more distant reaches in the north into which Scurry had ridden, from which he might ride again.

It was a large cloud of dust; and if either of the men had caught sight of it, he would have hastened to announce the news. But Pedro was busy at some belated task in the corral, and Saunders was in the house. So the twilight deepened and darkness crept up from the flat-lands to the mesa. Luisa closed the door and went to the long table. She lighted the kerosene lamp, and the radiance flowed through the window so that the house became a beacon, visible from afar. . . .

A fat man whose face was marked by a network of little broken veins looked through the haze of dust and caught sight of it. He said:

"There's the place, boys. We'll be dividing up that gold-dust in an hour from now." His voice was high-pitched, with a throaty huskiness. "Tomorrow mornin' we'll be shoving on to California."

"Le's hope we get fresh hosses then tonight," the half-breed growled. "I could of stole better than these with my eyes shut."

"We're lucky to have laid holt of what we've got, George," the fat man reminded him. "Them Texans was catching up everything in Tucson that had four legs this last two days. Must be, there's something going on. I wonder what they're up to."

The half-breed made no reply, but cursed the pack-animal which he was leading. The voice of the mean-looking little man in the red shirt rose through the fog of dust; it floated off into the night, as rich as the low notes of a great organ, as soft as a prayer.

"California! Frisco! The Bella Union! Portsmouth Square!"

"And vigilantes, Jack!" The fat man laughed. "I don't think I'd go north of Monterey for a few months yet, if I was you."

"I'll take my chances," the man in the red shirt said. "They've forgot me now."

The dust was thick; the pack-horse, which the half-breed was leading, stumbled often and its hoofs stirred up great clouds. The signal rose into the sky, but the darkness hid it—even as it hid a thinner column of dust which rose some miles behind them. The light before them glowed below the clustered stars.

"How many men we got to handle, Fat?" the half-breed asked. "Or do you know?"

"Two men," the fat man said. "But one of 'em is a greaser. It will be easy. I hope this miner has been lucky."

"I hope so," the half-breed told him, "—for your sake. If I have to ride fast, keepin' the news behind me, I want to carry something with me. I get peevish if I don't. The's big travel on the Tahoe road this year," he added. "The Comstock mines are shipping bullion every day now."

"Half an hour, and we'll have our fingers into Saunders' dust," said the other.

AFTER Luisa lighted the lamp, she sat down at the table. The long room was still; she was thinking of the different places where she had lived during her father's wanderings: the camp on the Agua Fria where she had played among the pack-saddles and blanket-rolls when she was a tiny girl; the stone house without a window, in the brown, oak-dotted hills near the boundary where she had stood in the doorway one blazing afternoon while her mother stood beside her, shading her eyes with her hand, watching a dozen Apaches trotting up the valley flats. The adobe house at the Point of the Mountains with the mound of rocks behind it where Saunders had buried her mother. There were other camps; but all had a common quality: a loneliness which she had accepted as one does the daily portion of life.

NOW the silence was broken by a slow footfall. The door to the kitchen opened, and Saunders entered. He was carrying a little buckskin sack in one hand, and in the other a baking-powder can. He set them down on the table, then went to the fireplace at the end of the room and took a pair of gold scales from the smoke-stained mantel of hewn oak. When he returned to the table, he picked up the buckskin sack and held it for a moment. Then he spoke to her: it was the first time since he had come in from work that evening, save once, when he had bidden her to refill his plate at supper. He said:

"A little better'n three ounces. The gravel is getting richer near bedrock."

He fished a pair of steel-rimmed glasses from one of his pockets; and when he put them on, the lenses flashed briefly in the lamplight. He seated himself at the other end of the table, and she watched him weigh the dust. His big back was bent in a tight arc; his head was bowed, and his bushy white hair gleamed like snow when the sun is shining on it. She had a view of his face in profile, the pursed lips, the blue eyes intent on the little heap of dust. He poured the dust into the baking-powder can, and rose from the chair. He walked heavily across the room, and the kitchen door banged behind him. She heard the outer door close a moment later.

There was a huge slab of rock before that rear door. It served as a rude step, and it served another purpose. She knew what her father was doing now as well as if she were looking at him. He was kneeling beside the stone, lifting it from place.

Always before, this proceeding—which was as regular a portion of the daily routine as the evening meal—had roused no emotion. But as she sat here tonight, picturing it in her mind, she was afraid.

Fear was not new to her. She had endured it many times, but at such times there had been something tangible which had aroused it: once it had been the news that the Indians were out; and only last month she had seen two men stealing up the gulch where her father was working. A little later she had heard two rifle shots—and the men had never reappeared. The cold hand that had clutched her heart on those occasions had not closed as tightly as now, when there was neither sight nor sound to alarm.

The room was still. There was no movement anywhere outside that she could hear. But for some reason the very silence made her heart beat faster.

Or was that a sound? It might have been the thud of hoofs. The dust was heavy on the road which led from the brink of the mesa to the corral, and a horse would not make much noise. The door of split oak planks was thick. She was not sure—it might have been imagination. As she listened, she thought she heard the sound once more.

It would, she told herself, be Pedro; he was late tonight with his work in the corral. She remembered now that he had spoken of some trouble with the well: the sweep had been broken, and he was going to mend it. That was it, no doubt; he had finished the task and was watering the horses at last. But the answer failed to drive away her fear. She sat there facing the front door, staring at it as if she hoped to see through it into the night and solve the secret which the darkness held.

BUT then she heard another sound; if she had not been listening intently, she would not have caught it. It must have been horrible out there beyond the thick door. In here, where nothing moved, it was barely audible, and yet the horror of it turned her cold. It was a hoarse, rasping sound, but it was not like the rasp of metal; there was a softness in it, a sort of choking softness, which was eloquent of death's presence. It died away, and the silence that followed was filled with terror.

She did not scream. For she had spent her life, ever since she could remember,

in remote places, where you could scream at the top of your voice for hours on end and get neither help nor answer. She sat motionless, staring at the door.

Two or three seconds passed. And while they were passing, something made her conscious of a presence. Her eyes left the door, and she turned her head toward the window. It was one of the few glass windows in this part of Arizona; the stage company had brought the sashes across the plains and had installed them in some of the stations. The lamplight was flowing through the panes, leaving an area of brightness outside. And within this she saw a face.

IT was a blur of white beyond the glass, but she saw the eyes looking into the room. The light was shining on them. Then, just as she caught sight of it, the face vanished.

The outer door of the kitchen closed with a bang. She heard her father's footfall. There was no deliberation in the step now; he was running. He burst into the room. His blue eyes were gleaming; his white hair was tossing; his lips worked, and she heard the whispered curses. She sprang from her chair as he passed her. He reached the corner where his muzzle-loading carbine stood, and he grasped the weapon by the barrel.

The front door flew open, and a man leaped across the threshold. He was wearing a red shirt that glowed in the lamplight like fresh blood. Luisa saw the pair who followed him, but her eyes hung upon the leader. He was holding a long-barreled pistol in one hand; and as he ran toward Saunders, he raised the weapon.

The old man was starting to throw the butt of the rifle to his shoulder; his thumb was on the hammer and his finger was seeking the trigger. Luisa was gazing at the muzzle of the pistol, waiting for the spit of powder-smoke to fly from it, waiting for the report. But the pistol swept on upward. Then it descended, and the dull noise of the blow was followed by the scrape of boot-heels on the earthen floor. She saw her father falling; he lay on his side and the blood was running from his forehead.

The fat man said: "Go easy, George. We want him later. We got to find out where he keeps the dust." He was standing within the doorway; the half-breed was beside him, and there was a knife in the half-breed's hand. The blade was red—red drops fell from it.

"We got to work on him." The fat man's voice was unctuous. He passed his tongue over his thick lips.

"He'll be all right," the man in the red shirt answered. "Give him five minutes. He'll be ready then."

The fat man's eyes went to the table. The pair of gold scales lay where Saunders had left them. If any of the trio had seen the girl, they seemed to have forgotten her already. The half-breed closed the door.

"Been weighing the day's clean-up," he said. The fat man nodded and licked his lips again. The two of them came on into the room and stood beside their companion. They bent over Saunders.

"Yes, he'll come to," the fat man said.

Luisa had not made a sound. Their backs were toward her now. She started edging around the table.

The front door was less than ten feet away. If she could only reach it before they turned their heads, there was a chance. If she could open it and gain the outside, the chance was magnified tenfold. It was the only hope to save her father. She was not thinking of herself then. The fear which had clutched her heart a little while before had left her now.

She was sliding her feet along the earthen floor, one hand upon the table's edge, her eyes on those three bended backs. She reached the corner of the table and started to cross the interval. One step, another, and a third. Her hand was on the latch when the man in the red shirt raised his head and caught sight of her.

She had thrown the door open and she was springing across the threshold when he leaped after her. He seized her and dragged her back into the room. The half-breed closed the door. The fat man stood beside her father's still form. He looked her over from head to foot.

"A girl," he murmured. "They never said there was a girl." He smiled and licked his lips.

CHAPTER V

THE little pool of spring water was less than three feet wide; it was walled around by stones, and the wall rose with the steep slope of the cañon bed on the upper side. An eight-foot rattlesnake whose back was patterned with a chain of diamond-shaped shadings

"If yo' two are figuring on getting married—" the old man began.

had crawled down among the fragments of granite to slake its thirst while the man was drinking at the lower edge. The two of them were lying on their bellies, oblivious of each other's presence, when Jack Scurry came up the gulch to fill his canteen. It was twenty-four hours since he had left the stage station.

"Yo', Lum," he said in his soft Texas drawl, "if yo' don't mind what yo're doing, yo'll butt the brains out of that snake."

Young Columbus Gray withdrew his head and arose unhurriedly; little drops beaded his blond curls; they glittered in the hot morning sunshine like expensive jewels while he looked about him for a rock of proper size. He found one, and after he had slain the reptile, he cursed Arizona and all its fauna with searching thoroughness. The other members of the party came up from the camp where the ravine widened toward its mouth, in time to be in at the death. Old Jim Bradshaw, whose gray mustaches drooped below his unshaven jaws, said:

"Long as they don't bed down with me, I don't fuss with 'em."

"I was hoping it was Apaches," Bob Ellis announced regretfully, "or the Yankees."

"If Hunter's men don't show up right soon," Scurry told them, "we're liable to get jumped by both of 'em. I saw a signal-smoke at the summit of the range when I was catching up my hoss an hour ago; and the way I reckon, the California column cain't be very far away by this time."

He filled his canteen in the spring, and the others followed him down the rocky little gully. When they were nearing

their camp young Columbus Gray halted abruptly and pointed to the west.

"Somebody coming," he said.

HALF an hour later the cloud of dust, which had betrayed the approaching horseman, disgorged him at the fringe of the mesquite bushes where the gully came down to the flat. He was a lathy man, fair-haired, and his sandy unattended beard grew in sparse tufts, failing to camouflage his youth. He looked about him at the bed-rolls and the sooty cooking-utensils, at the long-barreled rifles and the cap-and-ball revolvers, at the men who wore the pistols. There was nothing military in their appearance, no sign of uniform or soldierly equipment; their flat-heeled boots were yellow as dried rawhide; their dusty jeans breeches were patched, and the seats of most were reinforced by buckskin. But the weapons were well oiled. And there was a hardness in the members of the squad which showed through dust and sunburn. Because he was not new to the land and its ways, he was content to take them for granted as he found them; if he had any curiosity as to their purpose or their business, he put it aside; and when Jack Scurry let the information drop that they were prospecting, the wayfarer may have noted the absence of shovels and picks and gold-pans; but if he did, he kept his thoughts to himself. It was young Columbus Gray who asked for news.

"And," he added, "as long as it's less than six months old, we're honin' for it."

"I got some," the stranger said, "I was in luck. It happened that the day I left Fort Yuma, an express-rider came with Frisco papers and the latest dispatches from the war. There's a new general got command of the Union army in the West. Fellow by the name of Grant. He met up with Buell's forces in Tennessee and they fought a big battle at Shiloh. He's got 'em on the dead run. The Alta *Californian* says they held a big celebration in Frisco and the town went crazy."

Columbus Gray was the only member of the small audience who spoke then and he said but little; that little, however, made up in profane emphasis for what it lacked in quantity.

"Me," the stranger spoke placidly, "I don't get much chance to bother my head about the war. I been playing a lone hand along the Gila for the last two years and I don't keep track of things. But if you fellows happen to be Texas men, which I might judge to be the case from your way of talk, you better not be too free with them sentiments."

"Meanin'?" Jack Scurry asked.

"Well," the other replied good-naturedly, "there's quite a bunch of troops behind me. Not more than a day's good march away, I'd say. California men. They're on their way to Tucson."

Soon after that he rode away, leaving his destination unannounced, and unsought-for. Even the bad news of the new Union general who had wrought such devastation to Confederate hopes on the western front, was forgotten for the moment. Jack Scurry went silently about the business of saddling his horse. When he had finished, he told his companions:

"I'm riding to meet Hunter's men; I'll hurry up those reinforcements. They're due now at the stage station. We can drive off the California vanguard easy enough, when I fetch 'em here."

He was leaving when young Columbus Gray called after him:

"When yo' get to the stage station tonight, Jack, be shore an' give that girl my love."

Scurry waved his hand by way of answer; but he did not turn his head lest they perceive the telltale expression on his face. Soon his hand slid to the pocket of his jeans, and he fondled the beads of the rosary.

ON this hot morning he rode out of the stony foothills to the wide flats, where the white sunshine was a blinding glare obscured at moments by the gray fog of dust which rose from the hoofs of his horse.

The mountains were growing smaller in the distance behind him; they had become a portion of a wide circle composed of several ranges which some trick of perspective had blended into one; they surrounded the wide plain. The tracks of the horseman who had preceded him left his own route; they departed into the north, where the sky was smudged by a faint dust-signal. Sharp fragments of lava were scattered all over the plain; they ranged from burnished copper to deep black, and heat-waves shimmered above them. Far to the right, where several ridges united in a castellated wall against the hard sky, a thin column of smoke appeared; it changed from black to white as it rose.

"More Apaches," Jack Scurry told his horse. "I wonder if it's me they're after, or do they aim to jump the camp?"

The morning slipped behind him slowly; with the approach of noon the mountains ahead of him were beginning to loom higher; details of glaring ridge and darkened cañon grew more distinct. The wall parted as he drew nearer, and he saw the dwarf pin oaks on the steep slopes beside the pass. It was the first hour of the afternoon when he rode up to the waterhole which lay beneath the overhang of eroded granite at the summit. He made the approach with the care of a hunter who is stalking big game down the wind, for any of those bunches of bear-grass might turn out to be a camouflaged Apache. After he had watered his horse and drunk his fill, he rode away until the flanking hills had drawn apart and he traveled upon another open plain. Then he halted and ate his lunch.

SEVERAL hours later, when the shadows were growing long under the western range, he saw the adobe stage station, backed by the peak which the Mexicans called the Picacho. The late rays of the sun revealed it at the edge of the mesa, and they revealed the old stage road beneath the bluff, a slender ribbon twining across the flats; they showed also the branch road climbing up the hill to the building. The sun set and the gray twilight deepened into a gloom whose blackness was tinged with blue. The house had disappeared. Where it had been, a single light glowed like a distant star.

The darkness played queer tricks on him. The level plain assumed disguises: vague shapes seemed to arise out of its expanse, only to melt away with his approach. Now and again he drew rein and sat rigid in the saddle, listening to the stirring of the faint breeze among the clumps of greasewood. Always he watched his horse's ears, for in those years when the war-parties of Cochise and Mangus Colorado were making southeastern Arizona a dead land, with blackened walls where settlements had stood, there were two hours of greatest danger, evening and the crack of dawn. And a white man's horse did not like the smell of Indians. But the ears of his mount betrayed no sign of an enemy.

Until they were near the junction of the side road which led up the mesa, and the light in the stage station glowed above them, lambent and large within the blue cloak of the night. Then the ears of the horse went forward sharply, and Scurry pulled up, snatching his cap-and-ball revolver from its leather sheath.

He heard a sound. It came out of the gloom ahead of him: the dull hoofbeats of a horse. His tenseness relaxed a little then, for the Apaches were seldom mounted; they always did their fighting from ambush and on foot. Moreover this rider came alone upon the Tucson road. But Scurry kept the pistol in his hand. As the blended figures of man and animal emerged out of the night, he called the old Spanish challenge of the border, "Who goes?" and a voice answered:

"All right. Put up your gun. I'm white and honest, and I'll take a chance on you."

A clear voice, good-natured and undisturbed; there was something familiar in its sound. The pistol slid back into its holster; the traveler rode nearer; Jack Scurry uttered an unamiable grunt.

The man was leaning forward in the saddle, shrouded by the gloom, but Scurry knew him at once. His mind held the picture of the last time when he and this other had met: He saw the young face, the insolent gray eyes; he heard the voice tinged with contempt. . . . The vision passed; and when he spoke now, his own voice was as steady as if the meeting had been arranged beforehand:

"So yo're here?"

But he was thinking of others who should have been at this spot to meet him, others of whom he saw no sign. And he was thinking that perhaps it was not coincidence which had brought this one instead of them.

"I'm here," Brand replied easily. "And what of it?" He leaned forward in the saddle, looking more closely; then he whistled between his teeth.

"So it's you!"

JACK SCURRY smiled that twisted smile of his. He said: "Yo' didn't figure on meeting me, I reckon."

Silence up there on the mesa where there should have been the stir of many men. Only one light where there should have been campfires twinkling. And this Yankee down here, who had defied the Stars and Bars. Scurry shot a question harshly:

"How come yo're riding this-a-way?" And he added: "What's yo'r name?"

"Brand." The answer was as sharp as the query. "Not that it's any of your business. And I ride where I please."

His right hand was resting on the leather holster beside the horn of his saddle; the fingers were fiddling with the buttoned flap. Jack Scurry said:

"It would be plain suicide if yo' was to try and pull that gun."

It happened then, as it had happened on that other evening, when the two were facing each other. But this time there was no element of comedy in the interruption.

It came with a puff of warm air which swept down from the mesa. And when the horses caught the taint which was borne on the faint wind, they wheeled so abruptly that both of the riders were nearly unseated. During the next few moments the men were busy getting the animals in hand.

CHAPTER VI

THE little breeze died as abruptly as it had begun. The horses were quiet again. There was no sound except the quick sobbing of their breath—as if they had been running a hard race. The darkness was like a canopy whose thick folds were pierced by the light in the window at the mesa's edge—a curtain of deep purple enclosing a narrow circle within whose bounds everything was blurred as by a faint mist.

Jack Scurry spoke under his breath:

"That wind came down the hill. . . . Whatever they smelled is up there somewhere."

And Brand whispered:

"Indians?"

"Mebbe. 'Light off." And when they had swung from their saddles: "Yo' lead the hosses. Don't crowd me too close. If I want yo', I'll blow like a snake."

The animals were docile now; the dust was deep along the steep grade, and it muffled the sound of the hoofs like a soft blanket. Scurry's revolver was in his hand; the fingers which clasped the butt were damp with sweat.

Yet danger was an old story to him. He had been doing this sort of thing, one way or another, all along the road from Mesilla on the Rio Grande to Tucson, through savage passes in the arid mountains and over the long flats, across strips of green valley which turbaned warriors rendered more hideous than the surrounding desert. Silence and desolation; the smell of smoke and the smell of drying blood. An old story, but this time it was as if he were a scared boy, scouting out the road for the first time.

It was the picture in his mind which made the sweat spring to his brow and made his fingers slippery: the picture of a slender girl; dark hair and a golden skin; eyes that were as soft as black velvet.

"Give her my love"—young Columbus Gray's words recurred to him, and he cursed the night for its silence. He went on slowly. Now and again he halted, listening for some little sound; and once, when Brand drew too close, Scurry warned him back with a whispered oath.

Just before he reached the summit of the mesa, he dropped on his hands and knees and waited for Brand to come within earshot.

"Stick here," he muttered, "till I signal." Then he went on upward, hugging the dry earth as closely as a stalking cat until he had passed the dangerous interval wherein a moving form would show against the skyline. He could hear one of the horses mouthing its bit under the mesa's break; he could hear the faint shuffle of his own feet in the thick dust. Other than these sounds, there was no sign.

The window was not more than thirty yards ahead of him. The light flowed from it in a golden stream; the stream cascaded upon the beaten earth beside the building whose wall stood black against the stars; within its area objects were distinct: a discarded singletree bleached by aridity, a pair of wagon wheels.

His eyes were fixed upon the source of that golden stream, and he was thinking:

"She's in there now. The others too, her father and the Mexican. Or are they? I wonder—"

Then he remembered that his concern was not yet with what lay within those adobe walls; and with the memory there came a sudden sense of his own negligence. His eyes returned to the earth before him.

A DEAD man lay across the road, so close by that if Scurry had taken another step, he would have trodden on the body. It lay upon its back, spanning the pair of ruts which the wagon-trains and the occasional mail stages had gouged there during the days before the repercussions of a distant war had practically put a stop to all travel. The fingers of one outstretched hand reached forth into the stream of lamplight. It was as if they had been cut off and left there, for they were stark and real; the rest of the still form was so vague that they did not seem to be a part of it.

When Jack Scurry dropped on his knees, his hand touched warm blood. He knew what had frightened the horses now. He waited for some moments, making certain that the silence about him was unbroken by any movement of men; then he hissed like an angered snake.

He heard the soft thud of footfalls in the dusty road, and he said to himself:

"He's got sense even if he is a Yankee. Some men would have fetched along those horses and roused the whole place."

Brand's form emerged out of the darkness; it hovered over the kneeling man for a moment and sank down beside him. His breath came between his teeth in a sharp, sibilant inhalation. He whispered:

"It was Apaches."

"No," Scurry told him softly. "If it was, he'd of been mussed up a heap worse than this. All they did was cut his throat."

He got to his feet, and Brand rose beside him; they stood there looking off into the darkness, listening.

"It's Pedro," Scurry muttered. "Way he's laying, he would have been coming back to the house from the corral. The one that did it must have slipped up behind him. That one will be in the house now, I reckon, and others with him."

Brand pointed toward the window, but Scurry shook his head.

"Chances are, they'd see us if we looked in. Stick behind and back up my play now."

He started toward the door; Brand followed. They felt their way through the darkness. The earth was beaten hard here before the house, and it was as level as a floor. They went as slowly, lifting their feet as carefully, setting them down as stealthily as a pair of prowling cats. The pool of light lay on one side, and on the other was blackness. They heard the murmur of voices, and Scurry halted before the door.

"I'll deal." The voice was a windy tenor. A chair scraped noisily on the floor. "First ace gets her."

THE tongue of the heavy homemade latch stuck for an instant in the slot; it rattled and came free. Jack Scurry flung the door open. He saw two men. They were standing at the table in the middle of the room; he saw their faces turned toward the doorway, and he saw two long-barreled pistols leveled upon him. He swore.

"These aint the men we're looking for." He was glancing over his shoulder toward Brand. His voice was filled with disgust. He closed the door with deliberation.

A second passed, perhaps—it was little more than that. Brand started to say something. The first word died before it passed his lips as Scurry threw the door open again.

HE threw it open with his left hand, but this time he did it more quickly than before, and he held his revolver in his right hand. The two men had replaced their weapons in their holsters. If he had waited another second, they would have realized the trick and snatched the pistols out again. It had been a matter of proper timing—and sufficient luck. He was smiling crookedly as he stood there on the threshold; his eyes were two slits that gleamed in the lamplight. He said:

"Put yo'r hands out on the table."

The fat man was bending forward, holding the deck in his left hand; his right hand was still near his pistol. He dropped the deck and planted his hands, palms down, upon the table. The half-breed was a little slower in obeying. His eyes were venomous; and as he slid his hands forth in compliance with Scurry's command, he seemed to hesitate.

Then Scurry saw the man in the red shirt. He was a pace or two away from the table; he was standing behind Luisa, holding her wrists in his two hands. He was staring over her shoulder at the doorway; his jaw had dropped, and his mouth was agape, revealing a row of yellow teeth.

"Turn her loose," Scurry growled, "and then join your friends." He edged aside as Brand pushed past; then he stepped inside and closed the door behind him with his left hand. He spoke sharply: "Mind yo', Brand, what killing's done, I'll do myself."

Brand slipped his index finger from the trigger of the leveled revolver, and lowered the hammer with his thumb. The man in the red shirt watched him with frightened eyes, then obeyed—he went to the table and laid his hands upon it as the other two had done before him.

Luisa stood fast. Her slender wrists were striped with the red marks of the gripping fingers. Her wide eyes were like black pools. She was gazing at Brand, and her red lips were parted slightly. His eyes were fixed on her.

"Keep cases on that little man," Scurry bade him. "He's mean." He walked around the table, plucking the weapons from the captives' holsters.

Brand said: "Look."

He nodded toward the corner beside the door which led into a back room. Scurry saw Saunders. He was lying on his side; and his arms were pinioned with rope, tied so tightly that the elbows had been drawn behind his back. His feet were bound with more rope; a thin trickle of blood was oozing from a cut on his forehead, his eyes were closed, and he was breathing heavily. There seemed something wrong in the contrast of his white hair to the thread of scarlet that crawled across his pale cheek.

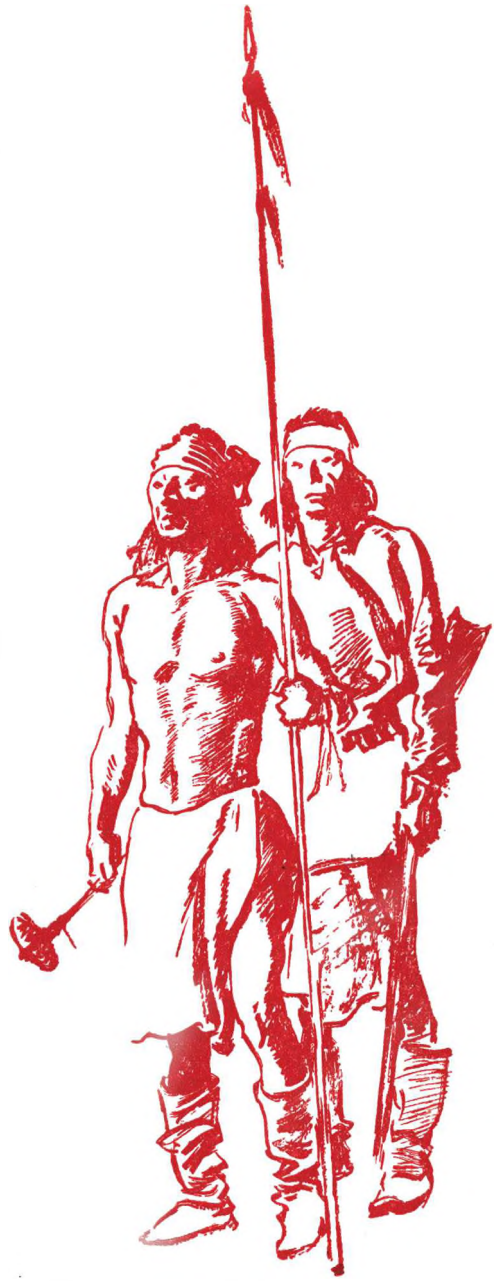
"So!" Scurry's nostrils widened, and his eyes were merciless as he swung upon the group around the table. He fingered the hammer of his cap-and-ball pistol. He was thinking of the men whom Colonel Hunter had promised to send, whom he had come here to meet. He fiddled with the hammer of the weapon, cocking it, letting it down, cocking it again.

There are moments when the weight of the years seems to climb upon a man's back, when he feels old. Jack Scurry had not passed his twenty-fifth birthday, but the white-haired man who lay in the corner of the room with his eyes closed and the blood on his face, had never known a greater weariness of spirit than that which the younger was feeling now.

For as he stood here he was remembering when he started out with the Rebel column from San Antonio; when he had set forth with high hopes of the conquest which was to be achieved: the occupation of the Southwest, the possession of California and the Pacific ports; the weary marches through the desert, the thirst and blinding dust; the day when he and three others had stood off fifty Apaches in Stein's Pass from dawn until the column showed up at sunset; the stark bodies of companions, with buzzards hovering above them in the blazing sky.

AND what had it all come to? The occupation of Tucson, where four men out of every five were avowed Southerners—just the conquest of a friendly village in the midst of an empty desert. That was all.

And this expedition of his today had turned out to be the pursuit of another mirage. He regarded the trio at the table more closely.



He knew the breed. He had seen specimens of it in Tucson. They came from the West; they came from the gold diggings in California foothills, and from the long road across the Sierra to the Comstock Lode: sluice-box thieves, stage-robbers, fugitives from vigilance committees. He remembered the voice which he had heard before he lifted the latch the first time. "When they saw Luisa," his thoughts ran, "they figured the old man could wait. Cut the cards for her, and later on they'd work on her father to find out where he kept his dust."

He felt a passing regret that he had not fought it out with them when he first flung the door open. If it had not been that there were too many things at

stake—the men who were waiting for him in that lonely outpost at the cañon mouth, these two others at the old stage station whom he and young Brand had happened along barely in time to save—if it had not been that it was extremely necessary for him to live for these people and for the Confederate States of America, he would have set about that killing in the manner which appealed to him.

He glanced at Brand and found him still looking into Luisa's eyes.

CHAPTER VII

IN the morning Scurry had set forth seeking reinforcements, eager for the sight of a girl's face. In the evening he had found an enemy and three men who needed killing; and he had seen Luisa's eyes wide with eagerness when Brand came into the room.

A man must meet emergencies as they arise. He said:

"I want yo' to watch those fellows closer, Brand."

If he noticed the hardness which came into the young face as he spoke, he made no sign of it. He was regarding the weapons which he had taken from the prisoners. They lay on the floor: three of those long-barreled cap-and-ball six-shooters which were known in the parlance of the day as horse-pistols, and three deadly-looking bowie knives. He bent down and picked up one of the knives. He walked over to the corner where Saunders was lying, and he cut the ropes which bound the old man's limbs.

"Look after yo'r father, Luisa," he bade the girl. "He'll be all right in a few minutes." His voice was gentle, but he held his face averted while he was speaking; and when she started to say something by way of answer, he went on by her as though he had not heard. He passed through the door which led into the rear room, and he disappeared.

Brand was watching the prisoners, and they were watching him across the muzzle of his leveled revolver. The meeting of their eyes was like a combat. Three pairs against one, but his remained unwavering, and there were moments when theirs sought one another. His lips had settled to a tight line, for the same wish that had held Scurry a few minutes ago had him in his possession now.

The wish to kill became so strong that he ceased to hear the murmur of Luisa's voice in the corner of the room where she was ministering to her father. The only thing of which he was conscious was the demeanor of the men at the other end of the long table. He was wishing that one of them would make some little movement that would give him an excuse to squeeze down on the trigger.

The door of the back room opened and the tension broke. Brand heard Luisa's voice again; he heard Saunders' voice mingling with hers. He glanced at them out of the side of his eye: she had got her father into a chair and was bandaging his forehead.

Jack Scurry came in. He was carrying a lighted lantern and a long-handled shovel. The members of the trio at the end of the table were regarding the latter article with an interest which left their faces gray and their lips parted. Little beads of perspiration were standing out on their foreheads, and their eyes were glittering in the lamplight.

Scurry set down the lantern and the shovel beside the front door, and he drew his revolver from its holster. He pointed it at the fat man who had been dealing the cards when he and Brand had entered the house. The fat man uttered a thin cry.

"No," Scurry said, "not just yet. Come outside with me."

The fat man picked up the lantern and the shovel at his bidding and preceded him through the front door. It swung shut behind them. For some time after that, the only sound in the room was the thick breathing of the two remaining prisoners.

The silence was broken by a quick footfall, and Brand heard Luisa whisper:

"What is he going to do?"

He shook his head.

"If you hear anything," he told her softly, "you mustn't let it frighten you. They need killing."

She drew a deep breath, and she said:

"I hope he does it soon."

BUT the night outside yielded no sound. Brand held his eyes on the pair across the table. Their lips were moving and their eyes were fixed on him.

"Your father?" he asked under his breath.

"It wasn't as bad as it might have been," she said; and then he put the question which was heavy on his mind:

"This Texan—what's he doing here?"

She did not reply as promptly as she had before. He had spoken in a whisper,

but she had detected his antagonism. When she answered, she told the truth:

"I do not know. He rides by often."

He remained motionless, frowning. After some moments he edged a little closer to her.

"Will you help me? I've got to get away without his knowing it tonight. I must ride on. He'll stop me if he can."

THE two prisoners were standing with their hands palms downward, on the table. They did not stir; the only sign of any movement was in their shifting eyes and in their lips. The room was so silent that they could hear the faint hiss of Brand's whisper, but they were more cautious than he: the words which slipped between their lips were scarcely louder than their own breathing:

"What's the shovel for?"

"A grave."

"Four graves, you mean."

There was a long pause, and then the half-breed murmured:

"*His* mind's on that girl."

Another pause.

"He'll look at her pretty soon," the half-breed whispered. "Can you reach that lamp?" And the man in the red shirt answered:

"He'll get me if I move."

"When he looks at the girl," the half-breed told him, "we tip the table over and the lamp goes with it."

Brand was waiting for Luisa's answer; he turned his head toward her. The half-breed whispered: "Now!"

But when their fingers were about to clutch the table's edge, the night outside yielded its first sound. . . .

The digging of the grave had taken considerable time, for the earth was hard from drought, the hole was wide and deep, and the fat man was not used to work. After the task was finished, Jack Scurry stood over the silent form in the roadway. He said:

"Yo' were only a greaser, Pedro, but yo' had right for a better man than this to bury yo'." Then his voice took on a harder note: "Get busy, now."

A late moon had risen before the fat man threw the last shovelful of earth upon the low mound. The mountains in the east were as black as ink. Dense shadows lay beside the greasewood bushes, and little pools of silver shimmered in the spaces between them. The pair started toward the house. They halted before the door.

"Open it," Jack Scurry said.

The latch rattled. The sound was startling in the stillness of the room. The pair at the table's end were standing motionless when Scurry looked across the fat man's shoulder. They were breathing heavily. He shoved the fat man forward and stepped across the threshold. The pair backed away from the table. Without looking at Brand, he said quietly:

"Ride herd on these three while I go out and catch up our hosses."

When he returned some minutes later, he asked Luisa:

"Can yo' get us a bite to eat?"

She slipped away into the kitchen, and he stood regarding the prisoners. There was something in that crooked smile which held them motionless.

Hunter's men who had not come? These four whom he had found here: a Yankee and three cutthroats? There were several questions, and he must furnish the correct answers to all of them.

He was pondering over his problems after Luisa brought the meal. It was not a sociable affair, that supper. No one spoke a word. Two men at one end of the table, and three at the other. The members of both groups were watching one another so closely, that oftentimes their forks came empty from the plates to their mouths.

Saunders was sitting silent in his chair. His head was bent forward and his eyes were open, but they held the dazed look that one sees in the eyes of a man who is stricken with giddiness.

"Get him to bed, Luisa," Scurry bade her. "And go get some sleep. Yo' can make down here on the floor, Brand. I'll take the night guard."

"A man can do his best," so he was reminding himself, "and that's all."

DURING the following hours, he sat at one end of the long room with the captured weapons beside him and his pistol on his lap. The house was silent, save for the deep breathing of the sleepers: the three prisoners lay with the length of the floor between him and them; Brand was stretched beside the outer door. There was plenty of time to review the situation, and he went over it again and again.

The lamplight threw deep shadows upon the sleeping men; it shone upon their faces, and there were moments when they were like the faces of the dead. It flowed out through the window, making an orange spot in the night.

The Apaches saw it from the old stage road on the flat ten miles away. There were more than fifty of them, and the mutter of their voices was like the chattering of quail. Men, all of them, and they were all on foot. Young men. They had left the horses in the mountains with the squaws and children, the old men and the light impedimenta. They had left the ragged garments which made them look like scarecrows when they were in camp. They were stripped down to the dust-soiled turbans which bound their lank black locks, the strips of loin-cloth and the knee-high moccasins with flinty hide soles. Some of them were carrying lances; others had bows and arrows, and there were a dozen bearing smooth-bore muskets.

The lances were wet with clotting blood, and there was blood on the brown hands and the dusky faces. The stains on the weapons came from the body of the rider which lay beside the road, and the others from the horse they had slain. For the desert was never prolific in game, and in those lean days a well-fed horse was almost a godsend. Moreover they owned no matches, and to make a fire by rubbing sticks takes time. They were very hungry, and so they were eating the raw horsemeat, and thanking the good luck which had brought it.

"Turn her loose," Scurry growled, "then join your friends." The man watched him with frightened eyes, then obeyed.

And while they ate, they looked toward the fleck of orange at the edge of the distant mesa, and their talk was eager.

But according to their way of thinking and the way that their fathers had thought before them, the night was not the time for fighting or for pillage. It was in the darkness that the spirits of the dead returned to the earth where they had once abided. And these ghostly visitants did not like to be disturbed by the rude ventures of the living. The killing of the rider had been in the nature of an accident, for he had come a little while ago when they were bedding down in a mesquite thicket near the road. It had not been of their seeking; and for that reason it was no sin of theirs.

As to the house on the mesa, that was different. It must wait for the morning.

So they settled down to sleep the night through. And when the stars in the east began to show the first faint pallor, they were on their feet. Fifty soiled turbans bobbing up and down as the wearers dog-trotted across the level plain. The first dim light of the dawn was leaking over the black, serrated mountain ridges in the east.

The naked warriors were lying in the road, scooping up handfuls of dust, smearing it over their turbans, covering their black locks, coating their bare bodies.

When they came to the summit of the grade, they scattered, dropping on their bellies again.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK SCURRY finished his third cup of coffee and shoved back his chair; he sat there for a moment or two looking around the table. There had been some queer assortments of breakfast

guests in that room during the brief era of the Butterfield stages, but none could compare with this gathering. On his left hand, old Saunders with a fillet of bandage binding his brow, and the light of rage in his blue eyes. The only words which he had uttered had come on his entrance to the room. He had bestowed one glance upon the prisoners and another on Scurry, and his voice was heavy with contempt:

"If I'd known yo' wasn't going to kill 'em, I'd of 'tended to it myself." Thereafter he had lapsed to sullen silence.

Young Brand was sitting at Scurry's right, and he was frowning at his plate; but the lines that cut his forehead were not so much of anger as of thoughtfulness. He had the look of a chess-player who finds himself bewildered by unexpected developments, while he awaits his opponent's next move.

These three at one end of the long table, with Luisa standing behind them, and Scurry's cap-and-ball pistol before him within easy reach. At the other end the half-breed and the fat man and the man in the red shirt, and all of them were afraid. There was an unsavory quality in their fear; it showed in the gray pallor on their faces, and in their constantly roving eyes; it seemed to justify old Saunders' grim comment.

THE flame of the lamp was getting sickly; outside the single window the world was growing light. Within the room, the radiance was departing. Saunders looked at Scurry, and the contempt in his blue eyes grew heavier.

"What do yo' aim to do with 'em now?" he asked.

The crooked smile which had been so often in evidence was gone. Scurry's face was without expression; but when he began speaking, it was not in answer to the other's question. He was addressing the young fellow on his right.

"The's no need of bothering yo'r head about riding on today, Brand. If yo' was to try it, yo'd never make it. My outfit's guarding the road. Nobody's going to get past with news for the Yankees. And the Apaches are out. I'm leaving yo' here to look after things.

"As for yo' three,"—he bent his eyes on the trio at the other end of the table,—"I'm taking yo' with me. Yo're in the Confederate Army now." He picked up his six-shooter, and his voice became more abrupt. "Get up and move. We'll saddle our hosses and shove on."

He heard Saunders swearing under his breath while he was herding his new recruits to the door. He did not look around, and he said no word by way of good-by. This thing to which he had made up his mind, was alone in his thoughts now. It needed all his concentration to carry it through. He was well aware of this; he had been weighing its possibilities all night long, and he knew how slight they were.

NOW the twilight of dawn was lifting as he walked out toward the corral. There was a thin, bright streak on the highest ridge of the range behind the mesa, and objects were growing distinct: the stiff clumps of greasewood, the line of rocks where the tableland broke down to the plain. He could hear the horses moving restlessly in the corral, but he held his eyes on the three men before him, and his thoughts remained with them.

They were walking as men walk when they go to the gallows; their limbs were limp and their shoulders were bowed; their eyes were on the ground. He was telling himself:

"If they were worth the powder to blow 'em up, they'd be figuring on their chances to get away now. Mebbe I should have killed 'em." And then his mind went to the men who should have been here when he rode up last night—Hunter's men. Where were they now? And what had happened in Tucson? His thoughts roved to the camp which he had left yesterday morning—young Columbus Gray and old Jim Bradshaw and the other dust-stained men of Texas. And this was the help which he was bringing them!

If he had not been so intent on these matters, he would have taken note of some things which were closer to him. He would have listened to those horses trotting around the corral; he would have looked more closely at the clusters of greasewood. He would have learned how soon this last desperate hope, at which he had been grasping all through the long night, was to come to its end.

They passed the fresh grave, and the line of light was widening on the ridge behind the mesa; the first suspicions of shadows were beginning to betray themselves beside the greasewood bushes and the rocks. They reached the corral bars.

Scurry said: "Go on in."

Then one of the horses raised its head and snorted loudly; the others broke into

a mad gallop, circling within the enclosure. The fat man had already started to obey the order, and had one foot across the lower bar, his body bent between this and the one above it. But now his knees buckled under him, and he slumped down; his head was resting on the dusty earth inside the corral, his limbs astride the bar. Several inches of feathered shaft were protruding from the back of his neck, and the slender stem of wood was still trembling. A dozen other arrows were buzzing like huge wasps. A smooth-bore musket banged loudly at the mesa's edge.

The man in the red shirt yelled; his voice broke, and the yell ended in a shriek that was like the scream of a woman. He threw both arms above his head and started running toward the steep hillside. A dozen slender forms appeared around the corner of the corral fence. The dust was spilling from their backs as they seemed to emerge from the dry earth, and their frowsy black locks were tossing as they raced after the fugitive. An arrow thudded into the earth between Scurry's feet; another hummed by his ears. The air seemed to be full of them.

He was running toward the house. He saw a thatch of black hair edging beyond a clump of greasewood before him, and fired his revolver at it. He saw Luisa standing in the doorway. Her arms were at her side, her hands clenched; her face looked white as paper. The half-breed shot by him, speeding like a frightened dog. He was within twenty feet of the threshold where the girl was standing when he fell forward, sprawling. The blood was already beginning to spread over his brown features when Scurry leaped over him a second later.

INTO the adobe wall several bullets thudded; puffs of dust rose from the dry earth about him, as he ran. Luisa's form vanished abruptly from the doorway, and Saunders appeared where she had been. His blue eyes were blazing. He threw the butt of his musket to his shoulder, and the report of the weapon almost deafened Scurry as he leaped across the threshold. The door banged shut behind him, and Saunders dropped into its sockets the heavy bar which the station-tender had used on more than one occasion. The room was filling with a fog of powder-smoke.

Scurry looked about him. Luisa was standing against the wall where her father had thrown her; young Brand was crouching at the little window, revolver in his hand. Old Saunders ran to the kitchen. He shouted over his shoulder:

"Done lost yo'r army, Scurry." A moment later the sound of a heavy bar falling into place came from the rear room. Saunders reappeared. "They'll rush us now," he said.

SCURRY went to the window. "Keep yo'r head down, kid," he told Brand. He waited for a moment until the firing outside lulled. Then he looked out. From this side of the house there was a view which covered a portion of the lower hillside. The man in the red shirt was scrambling up among the rocks, and as Scurry was looking, a lance struck the fugitive between the shoulder-blades. He seemed to fling himself upon the nearest boulder, embracing it as if he loved it. Two naked Apaches leaped upon him. The sun had appeared above the ridge, and its first rays made their lance points glitter. The bare space of earth before the house was empty save for the body of the half-breed; there were several feathered arrows sprouting from it. The horses were racing around the corral and the sound of their hoofs was very loud against the stillness which endured all about. The dead man made a blotch between the two lower bars.

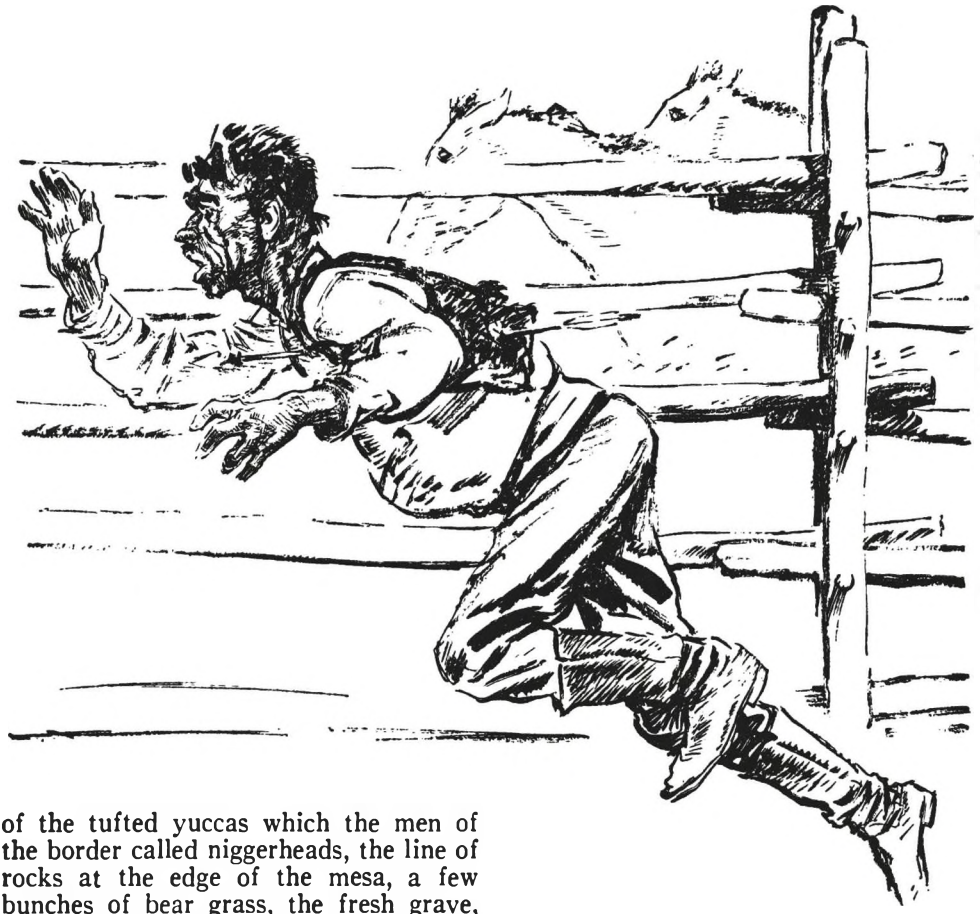
Saunders was gathering up the weapons. He laid them on the long table: a double-barreled shotgun, three pistols, and three bowie knives. Besides these, there were the carbine which he was carrying, and the revolvers in the hands of the pair at the window. He glanced over his shoulder at Luisa.

"Fetch in the ammunition," he bade her. "There's a can of powder under my bed, and the two horns are hanging on the wall." When she returned a moment later, he divided up the guns.

"I'll take the kitchen window," he said. "Yo' men hold it down in here. She'll help with the loading." He patted his daughter on the shoulder. "Go easy with that powder, Sis. This is liable to be an all-day job."

Jack Scurry noted the gentleness that had come into his voice. It was, he reflected, the first time he had heard Saunders speak to Luisa as if she were a girl.

With the suddenness of the Arizona dawn, the world outside had become hot, bright sunshine and black shadows. Everything was starkly outlined: the dark green clumps of greasewood, several



of the tufted yuccas which the men of the border called niggerheads, the line of rocks at the edge of the mesa, a few bunches of bear grass, the fresh grave, the three unburied dead. One of the bunches of coarse grass stirred gently; all other things were still, except for the drumming of the hoofs in the corral and the occasional snort of a frightened horse. If it had not been for those sounds, it would not have seemed true that the space between the house and the brink of the bluff had been crowded with violence and hideous with noise a few minutes before. It seemed impossible that there was any living being out there now.

A puff of powder-smoke arose above one of the rocks. There was a tinkle of broken glass, the thump of a bullet against the opposite wall, the bang of the musket. White puffs blossomed above the mesa's edge; another shower of glass fragments fell from the window. Scurry said:

"They'll rush us in a few seconds, Brand. I'll turn loose first. When I pass back my empty gun, it's yo'r turn. And take yo'r time." He glanced over his shoulder at Luisa. "I reckon I can use that shotgun when the time comes."

Their eyes met briefly while he was speaking. Hers were very wide, and they were soft with a light which he had never seen in them. When he looked out of the window again, the line of rocks at the edge of the mesa was alive with squirming forms; dark bodies appeared behind the brush clumps, and in the instant when they sprang into sight, they seemed to melt into the earth again.

"Coming from the corral!" It was the voice of Saunders, and a moment later his carbine bellowed in the kitchen.

The air outside was dark with flying arrows, and they were thudding into the adobe wall. A score of naked warriors rose out of the earth; the nearest were less than a hundred feet from the window, and they were racing toward the building.

Scurry was firing deliberately. The powder-smoke rose in a thick fog before him, a sour, hot fog that choked him; and sometimes it obscured the outer world until the dark, naked forms were like dim shadows leaping nearer.

"Yo'r turn now, Brand," he said.

HE dropped on his knees below the windowsill, and was conscious of another there beside him. It was Luisa, and she had the double-barreled shotgun

The half-breed was within twenty feet of the threshold when he fell forward, sprawling.

in her hands. He snatched it from her and he cried:

"Keep back!"

She smiled. There was a look in her eyes that made his heart stand still for a moment; then she was gone. He turned toward the window again.

Brand was standing before it, his feet wide apart, his body leaning forward as if he were bracing himself to meet a shock; his head was bowed, and there was something in the mass of straw-colored hair which made him look very young. He was frowning—the puzzled frown of youth confronting odds for the first time, of youth not knowing exactly what to do, but none the less, determined to meet the situation standing up.

The window had become an empty square; a few fragments of glass and shreds of broken sash hung from its edges. Just beyond it, the lank brown bodies were surging. Brand raised his revolver and fired. The smoke swept back into the room, enwrapping him.

The burnished lance-point that swept through the cloud seemed to have come out of nowhere; the strips of cloth which streamed from the shaft were like the pinions of a scarlet bird that swooped onward, following the metal spearhead. Young Brand fell on his face, and the shaft broke under the weight of his body.

The square space where the window had been was filled with swarthy faces, with thatches of frowsy black hair, tossing to the struggling of the lean brown bodies. When Jack Scurry pulled the trigger the first time, the roar of the shotgun seemed to shake the thick adobe walls; the second report followed so closely that the noise of the two was blended. He leaped back to the table and seized the first weapon his hand fell upon—a bowie knife. But when he whirled to face the window once more, the Apaches were gone.

OUTSIDE, the dust-clouds were settling in the hot sunshine. Six bodies lay just beyond the window; save for the loin-cloths and the moccasins, they were naked, and there was something pitiable in their lean bareness. The voice of Saunders came from the kitchen:

"Got two."

Jack Scurry was reloading the shotgun. Luisa was kneeling beside young Brand. She said:

"Help me move him."

Scurry tamped down the wad on the second charge of buckshot and glanced out of the window: the dead Indians had the place to themselves.

"I'll carry him," he told her. He bent and picked up Brand. He bore him in his arms beyond the range of the window; and when he laid him upon the earthen floor, he dropped beside him. The girl was standing over him, but he did not look at her until he had pulled the lance out. Her face was white, and her dark eyes looked very large in contrast to its pallor.

"Coming again!" Saunders shouted.

THE second rush was not nearly so fierce as the first had been; and after it was over, there was an interval of quiet. Jack Scurry was standing beside the window when he felt Luisa's hand upon his arm. He started, for she had come so silently that he had not heard her, and his nerves were taut with watching.

"He's bled a good deal," she said; "but I think—"

"He'll be all right." He was trying to make his voice comforting, for he saw that her face was working.

Her hand tightened upon his arm and she whispered:

"Be careful. Oh, please!"

It seemed a long time he was standing there, watching the space before the house. Once he caught sight of several brown bodies through the rails of the corral; they were in sight for a fraction of a second, slipping toward the hill; then they vanished, and there was no other movement—

Until he heard some one upon the roof. And soon afterward the sound ceased.

Several minutes passed. He was thinking of that roof. It was made of a wattle of willow branches laid over with adobe. And when he first caught the acrid smell of wood-smoke, he thought that perhaps it was his imagination, because he had been fearing just this thing. But a moment later, he knew that it was real.

The room was ceiled with boards which had been whipsawed in the Superstition Mountains and hauled nearly a hundred miles. The dry years had shrunk them, and the wide cracks were leaking smoke. A thin red line of flame showed through the fumes.

Saunders came in from the kitchen with the shotgun in his hand; he laid it down on the table and nodded to Luisa.

"Give it nine buckshot for each barrel," he bade her, and added grimly: "No need of saving ammunition now." And while she was busy loading, he told Scurry:

"Only one bucket of water in the house. I reckon we have got to make a run for the hill."

Jack Scurry shook his head. "We cain't leave Brand."

"They'll smoke us out inside of ten minutes," Saunders reminded him. "We got to leave him then." The two of them looked into each other's eyes. The smoke was settling down upon them; it billowed lazily in the close air. Scurry's crooked smile had returned.

"Take Luisa," he said. "I'll stand 'em off behind until yo' make the rocks. Then I'll come back here. They'll rush the house mebbe. If they do, yo've got a chance. And if they don't—" He shrugged. "Yo' might make it anyhow."

"It's our best bet." Saunders nodded. "It's even money for us. But yo' lose, Jack."

"I've shoved my chips out on the table," Scurry said.

"You're crazy." The voice came from behind them, and the two men turned abruptly. The wounded man was on his knees; one rigid arm held the weight of his body; there was no color in his face. "You've got to go, Scurry—" His voice dropped to an indistinct muttering, and the arm buckled under him.

"Better get moving," Scurry bade the older man. Luisa's hand was on his arm. He looked into her face, and his features softened. He said:

"Go with yo'r father, now."

HE heard her speak his name. Her voice was low; her eyes were fixed on his; he read refusal in them, and he read the reason why she would not leave him. But before she could say the words, an arrow buzzed between them like an angry wasp and thudded into the wall across the room. A rattle of smooth-bore muskets sounded outside, and Saunders snatched the shotgun from the table and ran toward the window. He shouted:

"They're coming, Jack."

The smoke was yellow; it was so thick that Luisa's face was barely visible, but the light in her eyes showed through the saffron wreaths that enwrapped her. Jack Scurry's hand went to the pocket of his jeans, and when it came out this time, it was holding the rosary, the jet beads and the little cross of silver. He thrust

it into her hand. There was no hesitation now; there was no opportunity for halting over words.

"It is for you," he told her swiftly. "I brought it from Tucson." He felt the warmth of her little palm in his. "I wanted to give it to yo' the mo'nin' when I rode through."

The clamor of the muskets was growing louder outside. Old man Saunders' shotgun bellowed within the window. Jack Scurry picked up the carbine from the table; and as he ran to take his place beside the other window, it seemed to him that there was something lacking in the uproar, some sound that should be present and was not.

Saunders shouted, but he could not catch the words; the shotgun roared again. Scurry thrust the barrel of the carbine through the broken sash, and his eyes traveled along the sights. His finger squeezed the trigger, and he flung the smoking weapon from him, turning for another.

And in that moment while he was reaching for the gun, while Saunders was brushing past him, returning to the window, the scene which he had glimpsed outside was still before him: brown forms that were squirming like snakes among the rocks at the edge of the mesa; soiled white turbans bobbing where black shadows lay between the clumps of greasewood and the bunches of coarse bear grass. The thin, elusive streaks of flying arrows; rich puffs of black-powder smoke dissolving in the clear morning air. And over it all, the loud clamor of the guns.

Now he knew what it was that had been lacking in the room a moment before; it was still absent: the snarl of ricocheting lead and the angry buzz of arrows. The Apaches were firing at the side of the mountain. They were squirming through the brush and the rocks, and they were dropping over the edge of the mesa.

Old Saunders fired his final shot, and when he turned away from the window, he said:

"Somebody up there on the hill. The Injuns done called it a day."

He went to the front door and flung it open. The air that swept in was sweet; the smoke-cloud retreated before it.

It was as Saunders had said: the Apaches had called it a day, and had departed as men who have knocked off work. For with them, there was no romance in war; it was a matter of making a living after the manner of their fathers. They did not know those traditions of brave action with which others glorify battle. In this grim business of shedding blood, they were altogether logical; and when danger became too great, they were ready to forgo the risk. A poverty-stricken crowd, hungry and poorly armed, they forsook the plunder whose attainment had been within arm's reach, and set out for the *rancheria* in the distant mountains, to don once more the cast-off clothes of white men and to become a bunch of tawny scarecrows.

CHAPTER IX

YOUNG Columbus Gray let his long legs dangle over the low eaves after he had tossed down the empty bucket.

"Needn't fill it up again," he said. "I got it all out now." He wiped the perspiration from his cheek with his shirt-sleeve. "These dirt roofs sure can burn once they get started."

Jim Bradshaw and Bob Ellis had carried Brand into the bedroom, and Luisa was looking after him; Saunders was on his way to the corral. The last wisp of sour smoke had dissolved, and the clear air was once more untarnished.

"Where's the others?" Jack Scurry asked.

"The Yankees got 'em." Columbus Gray's face became sober, and his voice lost some of its lightness for the moment. "If they'd been with us, we'd of been able to put the Apaches on the run a little quicker than we did. Being just the three of us, we had to play it safe. It took considerable time to climb the bluff and sneak up there among the rocks where we could pour the lead into 'em."

But the rout of the Indians was not concerning the listener just then. He said:

"So the California column came! When was that, Lum?"

"Yesterday afternoon." Gray eased himself down from the roof, and the two men seated themselves, each on one heel. "It was," he went on, "the advance guard. I reckon the' was fo'ty or fifty of 'em. We stood 'em off more than two hours. They didn't know their way in the mesquite, and they didn't know how many the' was of us. When it was coming on dark, us three pulled out and caught up our hosses."

He gave Scurry a look which the latter did not understand, but there was some-

thing in it which brought foreboding. Then he asked:

"Yo' didn't get word from Tucson, Jack?"

Scurry shook his head.

"We did." Gray made the announcement quietly. "It was Tom Slaughter brought the message. I reckon he had orders to ride right through and didn't stop here. We found him ten miles out. The Apaches had got him, and they had taken most of his clothes, but they missed his hat some way or other, and this was in it."

He fumbled in a pocket for a moment; then he handed Scurry a folded paper; it was soiled with dust and stained with blood. It read:

Captain John Scurry, Third Regiment, Sibley's Brigade, Texas Volunteers:

This date, a post arrived from Mesilla with word that Sibley's troops met the New Mexico militia and the Colorado regiments at Glorieta Cañon and were defeated. The entire command is retreating down the Rio Grande and will fall back to San Antonio. Upon receipt of the message, our companies immediately began the evacuation of Tucson. We will march to join the main body. If possible, you and your men will overtake us; if conditions prevent your doing so, you will use your own judgment as to future movements.

There was one brief paragraph by way of postscript. It said: *"Hard luck, Jack."*

The window had become an empty square: beyond it brown bodies were surging. Brand raised his revolver and fired.

And the signature to the message was Colonel Hunter's.

As Scurry read, that crooked smile twisted his lips. But when he had finished, the smile had vanished; his face had become wistful. He was silent for a little while, and then he said:

"Reckon we're through, Lum." He nodded. "Well, we did the best we could. The fun is over now."

HE rose to his feet and stood there looking across the wide plain below the mesa.

Hard luck, Hunter's note had said. It had been a brave venture, and ambitious. He was thinking of the high hopes with which they had set forth a few months ago: New Mexico, and Arizona, and on to California, where they would find aid to capture the Western ports. He was thinking of the long road, where the dust was heavy and sometimes the smell of blood tainted the dry, hot air. And it had ended in misfortune. A luckless expedition. A lost cause.

"Chances are," Columbus Gray said, "the Yankees won't be along before tonight. We've got plenty of time to get a head-start, Jack."

"Plenty of time." Scurry nodded in agreement; but his voice was dull.

"We can catch Hunter's outfit before they make the San Pedro," the boy went on.

Scurry made no reply. He turned and went into the house. Bob Ellis and Jim Bradshaw were seated at the long table, where the three cutthroats had stood at his orders the night before, with their hands before them on the board. They glanced up at him, and Bob Ellis said:

"Saunders has gone to catch up the hosses."

Old Bradshaw sat silent, stroking his long mustache. Scurry went on through without a word, and into the bedroom.

LUISA was not there. Brand was lying on the bed where the two men had placed him. His shirt was open, revealing a wide bandage. His eyes were fixed on Scurry.

"How yo' making out?" the latter asked.

"Doing fine." Brand's voice was weak; the arrogance had departed from his eyes, and they looked very tired. Scurry bent over him and examined the bandage.

"Missed the lungs," he said. "That's lucky. The'll be a surgeon with the Yankees, like as not. He'll fix yo' up."

"They're coming?" Eagerness had made the voice a little stronger.

"They'll be here by tomorrow at the latest," Scurry told him. "Yo' are going to have yo'r own flag to stand up for then."

Brand smiled, and looked him in the eyes.

"You'd better clear out of here," he said. "You can catch your regiment if you ride hard."

"The boys been telling yo'?" Scurry asked.

The other wagged his head from side to side on the pillow.

"No. I knew it when I left Tucson. I was on my way to meet the California troops, to tell them." His smile widened, and the light of amusement was in his eyes. "But I lost out when I met you."

"We've both of us lost out," Scurry told him quietly. "Funny, the way things happen."

He looked down into the young face, and he was thinking of the other time when he had been regarding it: that evening in the Tucson plaza, and of the change which had come over him since then—the anger which had vanished and would not return. It made, so he was reflecting, a good deal of difference when you'd fought beside a man, and found him blessed with courage. Luisa came into the room while he was standing there.

He saw the rosary upon her neck; he saw the light which came into her eyes when she beheld him. He remembered how it had come there when he gave her the little necklace. He remembered the words which he had spoken so readily in that moment, when he had thought death was awaiting them. And a curious thought occurred to him.

He had been a good fighting man. And he had lost. He had been a miserable lover, afraid to speak when he was face to face with her; believing, when he saw her glance with welcome and relief upon another, that the other had her heart. He reached out and took her hands.

As he had been before, so now; he was silent again. But the diffidence which had arisen on those former occasions like a wall between them was no longer present.

A voice reminded him that they were not alone.

"If that's the way you feel about it," Brand was saying, "you needn't clear out, Scurry. I'll keep my mouth shut when the troops come. I don't think one Rebel more or less is going to make any difference here."

Old Saunders had gathered up the horses in the corral when he saw his daughter walking toward the bars with Jack Scurry.

"What," he demanded, "is the idee of yo' two holding hands that-a-way?"

And Scurry said: "Remember what I told yo', a few days ago? About yo'r holding down this place alone?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Saunders demanded.

It was Luisa who answered.

"When the troops come through, Father, we're going with them to Tucson. And you are going with us."

The old man shook his head, and his mane of white hair tossed in the sunshine.

"If yo' two are figuring on getting married—" he began, but his future son-in-law interrupted him.

"We're coming back here with yo'," he announced quietly, "after the wedding."

IN the springtime, this was. When the month of October was drawing to its close in those golden windless days which make the Southwestern border an enchanted land during the autumn, the

chocolate-colored little peddler from Sinaloa was sitting before a blank adobe wall with his wares arranged upon a blanket between himself and the dusty roadway. Dogs of various species were beginning to bestir themselves in the warm afternoon sunshine, and placid pigs were standing meditatively, tethered to stakes by hind legs. But business for the peddler was not so good.

THE California column had marched on into New Mexico, leaving behind some troops to clean out the Indians. The Apaches were not as busy as they had been, and Carleton's men had got rid of most of the white renegades who had been infesting the trails ever since the beginning of the Civil War. The players from Sinaloa had taken advantage of more orderly conditions to depart for the land south of the border, but the little peddler had chosen to remain. It was, so he had said more than once, better to make a poor living here where he could go to sleep at night with reasonable certainty of waking up the next morning, than to run the chances of those mountain roads beyond the boundary. And anyway, he liked this part of the country pretty well.

He had rolled himself a cigarette of thin corn-husk and villainously odorous tobacco, and he was sitting there in the balmy sunshine, enjoying the delicious drowsiness of the afternoon, when he saw a tall figure approaching down the narrow street. He sighed at the interruption, and rose to his feet. He was old in his trade, and he could appraise customers the moment he clapped eyes on them, but he would have needed to own clairvoyant perceptions for the choice that he made when his hand descended to his wares now. It was sheer luck that guided his fingers to the pair of diminutive moccasins.

"Señor!" he cried. "Behold! They are made of doeskin. And the lining, it is of squirrel fur."

The face of the customer was like a sardonic mask, because of the smile, which was crooked, and the lowered lids before the eyes. There had been other customers since that day in the spring, and many weeks had gone by. The little peddler did not remember this one, but the latter remembered him.

"Still here," he said. The peddler bowed. He noted that the narrow eyes were fixed on the small moccasins. Their length was not greater than that of his forefinger.

"The skin of a young doe," he cried. "Feel it, the softness."

"How much?" Jack Scurry's hand was in the pocket of his jeans, and as the peddler named the price, the hand came forth. He took the tiny moccasins, and he was standing there with them upon his palm when a footstep sounded behind him. He turned his head, and his smile lost its crookedness; his eyes widened, and with the light of welcome that had come into them, there mingled that proud self-consciousness which one sees sometimes upon the face of youthful husbands.

Brand was smiling also, but in his smile there was the arrogance of the unmarried male, which is not uncommon at such moments as this. He said:

"I see you two are not wasting much time, Jack."

"We're doing our best," Jack Scurry told him.

With which they dropped the subject and walked down the street. And when they parted at the plaza where they had met one night a few months before, Jack Scurry said:

"I'll see yo' in the mo'nin' at the corral, Brand."

HE turned into a side-street, and when he had gone a quarter-mile or so, he entered the flat-roofed adobe house to which he had brought Luisa a few days before. The moccasins were still in his hand; and when she saw them, she uttered a low cry of delight. Thereafter for some time they talked of a certain matter which was impending in the not far distant future, and the things which they said are not worth recording here, for those who have said such things will know what they were, and those who have not would probably fail to get much of a thrill from them. When they had finished, Scurry remarked:

"I saw Jim Brand this afternoon, and the deal is settled. He's pulling out with me in the mo'nin'. Way the gravel is running, the three of us can make good money. And with him to help yo'r father hold down the place, I'll be able to come to town every week after this."

"That's such a relief, Jack," sighed Luisa, and her eyes were warm with the light that he loved.

Mr. Bechdolt's short novel of the Civil War in California (one mining-camp seceded!) will follow in an early issue.

Moon

By BEATRICE

THE three white men and the one white woman sat together that night, on the edge of the end of the world, and looked forth: Harold Laycock, who had no vices save the all-embracing vice of being what Solomon, wisest of men, could not endure —a fool; Richard Blaxland, an imperfect but a lovable man; Stanley Gipps, who was (so Richard uncharitably thought) more like something that had just crawled out from under a stone than a decent human being, and who, if everyone had their deserts, would have been stamped on with the heel of a heavy boot and thrust under the stone again for good. Richard thought this; but he didn't say so, for he was newly appointed assistant resident magistrate of Cape Cloudesley and could not afford to make enemies.

Damaris Laycock was a missionary's daughter. Dick Blaxland was to remember that, long after. Not that Damaris' parents had brought her up a prude. In the first place, they had not been prudes themselves; in the second, they were dead, and had left her to be educated at a secular finishing-school "down South" (which means Australia) and to marry, far too young, Harold Laycock.

She came back to Papua, the dark bewitching land that holds men fast against their interest and their will, at the end of a seventeen-year sentence in the prison of Harold Laycock. She was still in her early thirties, and looked less. Almost excessively tall, with long limbs not quite free from a certain graceful awkwardness; neck like a princess'; head like a queen's; deep eyes that made you forget all the rest of her face, Damaris passed unnoticed nowhere; least of all in the magnificent solitudes of Papua and Cape Cloudesley, where there were, at that time, but the three white men and no other white woman at all. . . .

It was far too hot to endure the house, being in the southern summer, New Year, with the southeast trades long dead and the northwest not yet born; air like wet warm tea, and not a sound on the headland of Cape Cloudesley save the rumor of the distant reef, and near at hand the screaming of a million blood-maddened mosquitoes. Richard Blaxland, A.R.M., sat with his guests, the Laycocks, plantation people, invited for the week-end from forty miles up the coast, and Gipps, a recruiter, who had simply drifted in. And all of them panted, and fanned, and sought for a cool breath, and scratched mosquito-bites, and thought of Sydney. And a long, long way below, twinkling in the moonlight between the moveless vanes of palms, the mysterious waters of the Cloudesley fiords, restless where all was restful, heaved and coiled and spun like sapphires melting in an alchemist's crucible.

Nobody had spoken for quite ten minutes; Richard, because he could watch Damaris in the silence, and long for her, as he had longed during all the year now closed, without betraying himself by words; Laycock, because he was counting up plantation expenses, and didn't like the result; Gipps, because he had drunk a whisky or so too many, and was feeling sleepy. As for Damaris, she had the gift, rare among women, of talking only when she had something to say. She sat like an Egyptian statue, hands on knees, long limbs draped, quiet; head raised on splendid neck, and eyes looking out across the desert of the unplowed dark seas. And the heart of Richard Blaxland, in the breathless silence, seemed to fling itself against those statued knees.

If she saw him—if her profile, clear as a coin, was set so that it commanded the black-and-silver etching that was Rich-

A weird drama of the South Seas.

# of Evil

GRIMSHAW

ard's shape—she made no sign. She had made none, through all the months when they had been casually meeting, up and down the lonely coasts of Cloudesley, most solitary spot in Papua. Richard was a capable magistrate, a good trainer of wild tribes; he knew what was in men's hearts before they told him; but he had never known what was in the heart of this woman. Unless—unless—the very closeness of her reserve suggested that if you could only find the key, you would enter upon a very Aladdin's garden of treasure, the existence of which was unsuspected by Harold Laycock, owner of all legal keys to Damaris' heart.

"And what good would that do you, fool?" brusquely he asked himself. "She's rare. She's martyr stuff. The more she loved you, if she did love you, the less she would give in. She doesn't hate Harold—he's too insignificant to hate. But she is wretched with him—and all the same, she'll stick it till she dies. . . . Or—till he dies."

And now Richard Blaxland turned himself round in his chair, and sent at fattish, slack-mouthed Harold, fighting mosquitoes, a look that would have killed, if looks could slay.

Harold, unaware, flapped his handkerchief, and said: "Fine station this of yours, Blaxland, but gosh-awful lot of mosquitoes; I think it's even worse than mine."

"Cloudesley's beautiful," came Damaris' low voice. "I've seen the fiords of Norway, and Mitre Sound in New Zealand, and none of them come up to it. Lovely," she said, and again, with fading voice: "Lovely—"

There was a wistfulness in her tones to which the magistrate dared not listen; it recalled too clearly the days and nights when he had tried in vain to fill an empty heart with Cloudesley's sapphire-silvered beauty.

Damaris rose and went into the house. Laycock and Gipps were talking.

"It's a bonzer lot of villages, over there. And fun to be had. My oath! And boys—I'll recruit a hundred of them before tomorrow."

"You've never been there; how do you know?" Laycock asked interestedly.

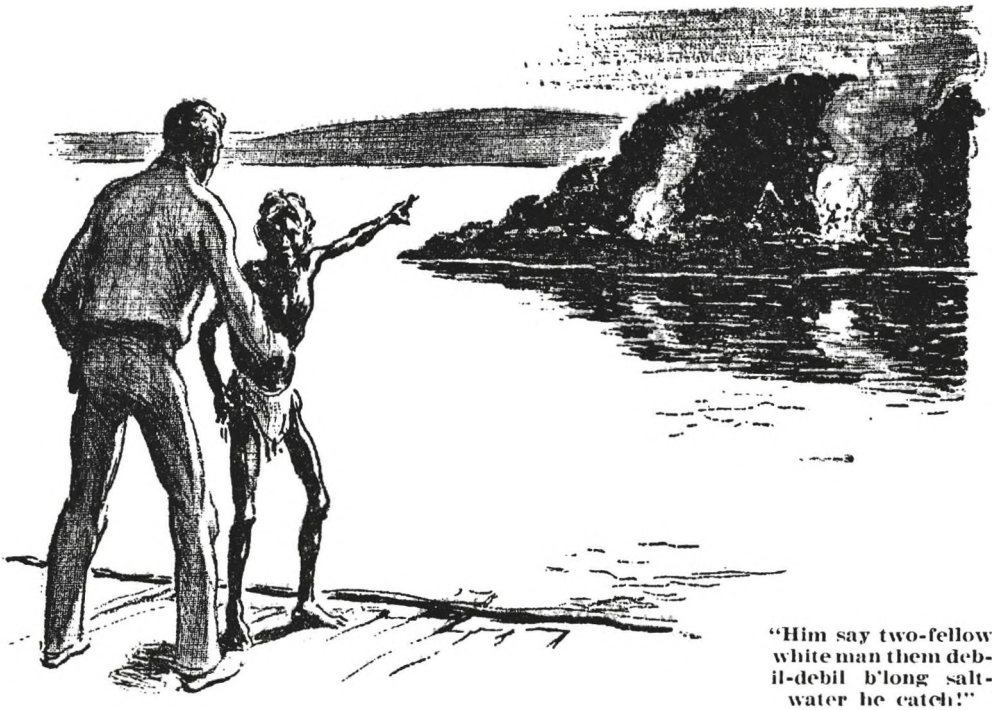
"I've heard, up north. I'd ought to've been here before. . . . Lookit—you come along too. The Missus has gone; you can slip away, and I lay I'll show you a thing or two."

"I—I— No, I'm not going out again tonight," Laycock declared loudly. "Hope you'll have luck. Good place, eh?"

"Couldn't be better, I reckon," the little recruiter said. "Full moon, harvest moon too; the nigs will all be dancing and half drunk on betelnut, and I can gather them in like dropped nuts. There's plantations wanting them, Moresby way. I'll get a trip to Sydney out of this."

A TRIP to hell, thought Richard suddenly, filled with loathing for the man. He knew things about Gipps that ought to have hanged him ten times over, if only proof, other than the mere say-so of wild natives, had been procurable. He was waiting to catch the fellow, but it had been a long wait; and even now there seemed no chance of sheeting home to the little villain the sickening crimes that had been whispered about. Gipps was too clever.

But it seemed—it seemed—as if there was one thing Gipps did not know about the Cloudesley district, clever as he was. The Cloudesley district under harvest moon—with king tide rising, coiling and flowing, hundreds of feet below the hill crest where they sat.



"Him say two-fellow white man them debil-debil b'long salt-water he catch!"

Mechanically, Richard rose to his feet. He couldn't sit still any longer. In his mind deep tides, as dark and mysterious as the king tides stirring the Cloudesley fiords, were rising, rising. He wanted to think. . . .

Leaving the others out in the comparative cool of the headland, he went into his airless, mosquito-netted office, sat down and turned over again and again the files of papers that might, under certain circumstances, have accused Stanley Gipps of murder, often repeated; of kidnaping; of crimes against native girls. The records failed. He knew; he could not prove. There were no witnesses; and wild reports, however convincing to a man who knew the native languages like the fingers of his own hand, would never justify arrest. Gipps might have been a New York gangster for cleverness, a Foreign Legionnaire for daring and resource. With the huge untamed spaces of savage Papua to help and hide him, the wild tribes who feared him as the devil, for associates and helpers, he might continue for years to curse the country with his poisonous presence.

Blaxland sighed—looked up from the files of papers, and with a great leap of the heart, saw Damaris.

She was leaning, very tall and awkwardly graceful, against the doorpost of the room. She had come in silently, closing the door behind her. From outside, the two could be seen through the half-transparent walls like goldfish in a tank, but nothing that they said could be heard.

Damaris said, not looking at Richard —though he was something to look at, tawny-haired and bronze-faced, with his broad shoulders and blue eyes: "I had to come. You're terribly worried. Is there anything I can do?"

At first he was conscious of disappointment choking him like a fruitstone in his throat. "You missionary's daughter," he thought, "you have to go about doing good, I suppose; well, I don't want to be done good to!" But almost at once, as he raised his eyes, he saw that she was with difficulty, keeping back tears.

Damaris, always so impassive and self-contained!

"There's nothing," he said, worshiping her with his eyes, and knowing he did, and thinking that the foolish cur her husband had, years ago, before God's altar, declared that he so worshiped her—he! "Nothing new. But—"

He had risen, was standing by her, nearer than ever before. It came that he had to tell her about Gipps, and he did, and saw her cheeks, pale with the heat that makes white roses of the women of Papua, turn red, then white again.

She said, drawing her long ivory hand up and down the hot woodwork of the hot door in the hot room: "I wonder why God lets such creatures live!"

"The Government wouldn't let him live long, if we could sheet things home,"

Richard assured her. "Maybe we shall some day." But he spoke without assurance.

"If you can't do anything," she said, "put it away. Don't think about it any more at present. He will have to behave himself in your district." There was not much in what she said, but it calmed him like a cool wind blowing. Damaris, he thought, would always have that power to soothe and calm, by the loveliness of her, permeating like an exquisite scent each word and thought.

Presently she spoke again.

"I'll call Harold now; I think, if you don't mind, we'll go to our room; it's nine o'clock, and one can always manage to sleep after that if one's going to."

NINE o'clock. The end of the long New Guinea evening from six o'clock sunset on. The gaping space that must somehow be filled. Study. Write. Sit outside and look at the stars. Read till you tire of reading. Or drink—if your guardian angel nods and forgets you. They all knew it; they all fled from it to each other, as tonight. And now it was nine, blessed nine, sooner than usual.

Laycock and his wife came indoors, took their night quinine, went to their room. Gipps, part drunk, came swaggering along to the mosquito-room.

"Thanks for putting me up, old chap," he said offensively; well knowing that the only white man in forty miles could not have refused; knowing, too, that Richard Blaxland resented and disliked his familiar address. "I'll be off now; sleep down in the village, and get away with my launch tomorrow morning."

Richard said: "Your launch?" His long brown hand, lying on the table before him, suddenly felt cold. His launch! Stanley Gipps was always a boaster. Why, it was no more than a dinghy with an "outboard."

"You won't do much recruiting with that," he said.

"Well, of course," Gipps told him, helping himself to one of Richard's cigarettes, and lighting it. "I've got the schooner half a mile down the coast." He grinned as he spoke; it was plain that he did not care whether the magistrate guessed or did not guess, that he already had illegally recruited boys on board, and did not mean to bring them within hail of the Government station.

The dinghy would be lying at the little Government jetty, a couple of hundred feet below. Gipps would start it and run out across the fiord, a couple of miles of sea, to the villages among the groves of palm beyond. Gipps knew the country; not the Cloudesley fiords, but nearly all the rest of New Guinea. He could take care of himself. As for the tales that Richard had overheard, when his police boys were talking to prisoners,—tales that he couldn't have understood, if his knowledge of the tangled native languages hadn't been what it was; tales that nobody, not even the police boys, knew that he knew,—why, you couldn't believe more than a quarter of the stuff New Guinea natives talked of evenings with each other. . . .

"Any complaints?" Stanley Gipps was saying, mocking the tone of an army officer. Richard answered him civilly. "I am not aware of any—at present." There was a warning in the words, if Gipps chose to take it so.

"Well, then, I'm off," the little blackbirder said, swaggering out of the room, and leaving the door open. Richard got up and shut it—flapped at the cloud of mosquitoes that had made their way in, and sat down again. He was breathing

Illustrated by
R. L. Lambdin

He curtly told Damaris to wait in the house.

quickly, as if he had been running. That might have been due to the heat of the night; every minute seemed to add a degree or two to the already intolerable wet warmth of the house, the room, the hill. Or it might have been due to a thought that raised an ugly head, once or twice, from the depths of his mind.

The guardian angel was asleep that night, when he should have been on duty. Guardian angels in Papua may be excused an occasional lapse—they have to work so hard. Richard's hand went instinctively to the lock of the sideboard, and the guardian angel never noticed.

ON the couch in the mosquito-room, Richard Blaxland slept heavily. Later he woke drenched in sweat, with aching head and dry tongue. And the ugly-faced thoughts looked up again, and grinned at him.

He found a bottle of tepid soda, went to the bathroom, came back somewhat refreshed. It was still night; the full moon still sailed her glittering galleon, sinking down the western sky. Nothing in the house or on the headland stirred; but there was a sense abroad, one could not say where, of expectation; of a world that only waited some mysterious signal to burst into the flame of tropic dawn.

Returning from the outside tin hut that was the bath, Richard came upon Damaris, wrapped in a kimono of leaf-green silk that fell away from the ivory pillar of her neck, and startlingly emphasized the contrast between neck and heavy night-black hair. Noiseless green slippers were on her slight bare feet.

She said: "I'm rather worried about Harold; have you seen him?"

"Seen him?" Richard repeated, standing very tall and lean in his girdled bathrobe, before her. "Did he go out?"

"Hours ago. It's nearly morning."

Something deep inside Richard cried: "My God!" Something that merely used his lips said, coolly: "Had you any idea of where he meant to go?"

The ivory of her neck, the lilies of her cheeks, suddenly flushed to rose-marble. But she faced him gallantly.

"I think—perhaps—the village on the hill." There was a native village, on the slope that joined the headland to the range. They had walked there during the afternoon; and Harold—Richard now recalled—had hung behind the party, laughing and joking in an undignified manner with the red-painted village girls in their little grass crinolines.

Richard knew well that white men who—even in a district that was under control—went looking after native girls at night might raise trouble. Damaris knew it also; this was what had alarmed her, sent her looking for him. But it was no thought of the kind that now was shaking the magistrate's control almost unbearably. As well as if the devils of the sea had risen up to tell him, he knew that Harold had not gone to the hill village.

One of the worst characteristics of Stanley Gipps was his way of dragging willing or half-willing acquaintances into orgies. Like other lost souls, he wasn't content until he had lured some heretofore decent spirit into his own particular hell. Richard would send out his police at once, would have the hill village combed through and through; but he knew, before he called his orderly and summoned the sergeant, that it would be useless.

He did not even accompany the file of smartly marching men who left the station within five minutes. It would have been his duty under other circumstances, but not now. He flung on clothes, took his service revolver and sped down the winding track that led to the little jetty, faster than he had ever run on level safe ground. He curtly told Damaris to wait in the house.

After him came, without orders, his own personal boy, on whose dark face no emotion showed. Only, he breathed hard as he followed his master and as he stood beside him on the moon-drenched jetty, staring at the sea.

Dawn was near, but the east had not yet begun to pale. All the silver river of the fiord showed plain between its embracing walls of black high woods. In the villages at the far side, where Stanley Gipps had gone, lights of native fires faintly glimmered; you could hear, if you stood very still, the throb of native drums.

RICHARD'S boy, listening, caught his master's arm with a cry.

"E, Taubada!" (Chief) "He makem dead talk!"

Richard didn't know the drum language; no white man does. He knew, however, that his boy did not lie. "What do they say?" he asked with stiffened lips.

"Him say," the lad told him, "two-fellow white man them debil-debil b'long salt-water he catch!"

"When the moon is full, and there is king tide, the devil-fish come up here to play."

"Two?" Richard heard himself ask.

"E, Taubada, two-fellow. Altogether him go finish."

"Get out the launch," the magistrate commanded. While the boy opened the doors of the boathouse, and loosened the chain, Richard fixed his eyes upon the surface of the fiord. Was there, or was there not, a certain strange movement on its surface: a stir, a disturbance?

The boy had no doubt on the subject.

"Taubada," he faltered, as Richard swung into the launch, "you no askem me go; me too much fright." Richard took him by the arm and pitched him in. You couldn't steer and run the engine safely, going out of the little bay. "Take the wheel," he ordered, "or I'll break your neck." Sobbing, the lad obeyed. "Sun closed-up come," he murmured as if for consolation.

Out from the shadows of the cliffs they went, into the river of moonlight; and now Richard left the engine. "Run her," he curtly said, taking the wheel. They were through the shallows, swaying above the bottomless deeps of the fiord. The boy was the better pilot of the two; but if what Richard supposed was true, no hand but his own could be trusted on the wheel—presently.

It wasn't presently; it was at once. They struck the scummy boiling of the sea in fifty yards beyond the shallows. From the engine hood came a scream like a dying horse as Richard's boy, venturing to look out, collapsed upon the bottom boards of the launch—that launch that was reeling now to one side, now to the other, weighted by the lashing arms of a myriad of giant octopuses.

THEY rolled and tumbled under the horrified staring of the moon, their frightful black-and-white eyes returning stare for stare; the loops of their feelers, thick as a man's leg, were shot with slimy brilliance; suckers like white saucers gaped in the midst of the tumble of ballooning bodies and tentacles. The depths of the sea were vomiting polyps; the clean Pacific was fouled. "My God," thought Richard, "I should not have brought the boy; I sha'n't get clear of this." A fathom of gray-spotted feeler struck the gunwale like a whip, fastened, began to pull. Another followed. Steering with one hand, Richard grabbed the ax that was always carried in the launch, and chopped at those gripping tentacles. But he couldn't sever them; the drag increased, the launch dipped, spun.

From the shelter of the engine-hood the boy screamed to him: "Back, back, Taubada! By'n'by debil-debil he catchem propeller!" But Richard went on. He

knew what had happened to Gipps' dinghy with its little outboard motor; he knew that his own chance of getting across was of the slightest; but he could not turn and flee. He struck again at the nearest of the gray glittering arms, missed it again. A livid balloon and two unseeing black-and-white eyes rose from the deep like a ghost from a suicide's tomb—rose, overhung the gunwale of the launch and—sank back. The clutching arms relaxed. Into the quiet sea red gold was spilling; in the west the moon was a ball of salt, cold and pale. It was day.

And from the clean cold waters of the fiord the unseemly devils were gone.

The boy came out from under the engine-hood, sat down flat on the floorboards, and sobbed.

Richard steered the launch on.

They reached the native village at the opposite side. Savages, brown and naked and feathered, ran down to meet them. There was an aura of excitement about the villagers, a dancing, lip-licking frenzy that the magistrate well knew. Bloodlust. . . . It had, in the night, been fed.

"Taubada," the chief told him, standing meanwhile on one excited leg like a stork at feeding-time, "—Taubada, this two-fellow white man him kava-kava" (mad). "Him go boat, night belong big devil. When the moon is full," he went on, breaking into native, "and there is king tide together with it, the devil-fish come up here in the fiord to play and to make love like men; two nights in the year, Chief, and never any other time; and this place is their play-about place, and the play-about places of the sea-devils are not known, except it is here. Chief, if you had seen the men before they left, if you had known of the devils, they had not died." He licked his betel-crimsoned lips enjoyably. What he had heard, what seen, he would never tell.

The magistrate repeated, heavily: "They had not died—"

No one saw his face as he turned to the shore again.

DAMARIS had gone home to the plantation, days ago. There was the house to close, furniture to pack, the loose ends of her life in Papua to gather and bind up. It would be Sydney after this, and friends of her parents—retired mission folk, who were old and house-bound, all adventure spirit burned away. She, in her early thirties, burned quite otherwise; she loved the cruel splendid land; she would have given her right hand to stay in it.

But she went on packing. For Richard, whom she loved, had given her no smallest hint of hope for the future.

There would be one more chance. In a fortnight the coastal steamer would call at Cape Cloudesley station. Then they were bound to meet. And if she could find courage, there was something that would have to be said.

SHE did find courage. Richard's face gave it to her; the haunted, wan face of a man who had scarce slept or eaten for weeks; the face of one who had almost lost hold on life. She thought, while swords of pain went through her heart: "He will kill himself." And then as the smoke of the steamer stained the turquoise of the Cloudesley sky, she came to him and said, bravely: "Richard, I must speak to you."

He looked up from his reports, rose, handed her a chair. He said nothing.

She began simply: "I'm a missionary's daughter."

"Yes," said Richard. ("She's going to tell me that she never can have anything to do with me; well, I knew that.")

"I was born in the country."

"Yes."

"I spoke the native languages before my own."

He looked at her strangely. Whither was this leading?"

"Richard—I knew about the Cloudesley fiords."

"If you knew that," said Richard, rising and standing before her like a criminal before his judge, "you know what I've done."

"Do I?" she asked, coming a little nearer. Her eyes were wells of pity and of—love? That could not be!

Richard said: "I never meant harm to Harold—except for wishing him dead. I don't know, God help me, how far I'm responsible for Gipps' death. But however it works out, I believe I've his blood, and your husband's too, on my hands."

She said: "That will trouble you, maybe all your life." It was like a sentence—all his life—punishment for the one mad moment. . . . No escape. He had heard it, in the voice of his own conscience, before ever Damaris, pityingly, spoke. He looked at her, and his eyes said dumbly: "Yes."

Her hands had taken hold of his. She was saying: "You'll want me—you must have me—to help you to bear it."

Illustrated by
Earl Blossom

A colorful story of the Canal Zone police—

By ROBERT MILL

The Siren Sounds

SCREENS and partially closed blinds which shut off the fierce rays of the noon tropical sun made the room in the headquarters of the Canal Zone Police, in Balboa Heights, a welcome haven after the hot streets.

This relief was not noticed by the rather stout man who stood before the desk of the lieutenant in charge. Perspiration streamed down his face.

Lieutenant Wilson concealed a smile. "Another tourist gypped by a taxi-driver," was his mental verdict.

"Yes sir?" he said aloud.

The agitated man took a step forward.

"For God's sake, help me," he pleaded. "My son has been kidnaped."

Lieutenant Wilson straightened in his chair and his eyebrows lifted in half-circles.

"We don't go in for kidnaping here," he stated.

The stout man made a gesture of resignation. "That was all I could get out of those brown monkeys over in Panama City. I came here hoping to find Americans. I—"

"Just a minute." Lieutenant Wilson pulled up a chair, and almost forced the man into it. "I'll be back in a minute," he promised.

Then he walked down a hall to a closed door, which he opened without knocking; he entered, and carefully closed the door.

Seated at a desk in the office was a young man. He, unlike Lieutenant Wilson, who wore the khaki of the Canal Zone Police, was clad in the conventional white of the tropics. He was lean, tanned, and had the general appearance of being a rather able citizen. He looked up as Wilson entered.

"Hello, Bill. Another speeding case?" He sighed. "Nothing ever happens here. You know, Bill, I have just made up my mind: I am going back to the States."

Wilson checked a smile. The same complaint regarding boredom, and the same threat to leave the Zone, had been heard almost daily from Lieutenant Howard White, almost from the day when exceptional ability had won him his post as head of the detective bureau.

"Postpone the resignation a week or two," Wilson advised. "We have a kidnaping."

White shook his head sadly.

"Not here. Children are our best crop. Everybody I know has more of their own than they want. Why take from anybody else?"

Wilson eyed his friend without favor. "It's tough that the Zone can't furnish you with your quota of battle, murder and sudden death. But bear up under it. I have a distracted father out there. He might not understand your yen for trouble, having quite a bit of his own."

Lieutenant White sat up straight.

"You wouldn't fool me? Don't give him a chance to skip. Bring him in."

As he sat waiting for them, his heart pounded a little faster at the thought of what might be ahead. Action, danger, hard work—all the things that he loved.

WILSON returned, and did the honors:

"Lieutenant White, in charge of our detective forces." He paused.

The stout man supplied the rest: "Hersan. George Hersan, of Los Angeles."

"Have a chair, Mr. Hersan," said White. Mentally he was sorting the thoughts the name prompted. Banker and railroad man—sportsman, philanthropist. Worth, at a conservative estimate, a million or so.

"We arrived this morning on the *Neptune*," the banker began. Even under this strain he was the man of business, terse and to the point. "We are on a world cruise. Mrs. Hersan wanted to do some shopping in Panama City. I accompanied her. Walter—he is our son—insisted on going along."

"How old is Walter?" asked the man behind the desk.

"Eight."

"Go on, Mr. Hersan."

"Mrs. Hersan was attracted by a window in Central Avenue. Walter said he would wait for us under the awning outside. I knew it would be a long session, so I agreed, first telling him not to go away, and to keep out of the street."

He paused to mop his face with a handkerchief.

"When we came out, the boy—Walter was gone."

He sat staring straight ahead, trying to control his emotions.

"You went to the Panamanian police?" White prompted.

"Yes; they went through the motions. They even found one man who remembered seeing the boy in front of the shop. This man said there was a disturbance in a side-street, and that he believed the boy walked in that direction."

"And then?"

Hersan shrugged. "Then the police over there said there was nothing to it. They claim the boy went sightseeing, that he is old enough to take care of himself, and that when he is tired he will find his way back to the ship."

He leaned forward in his intensity. "Do you believe that?"

"Postpone the resignation. We have a kidnaping."

"How long ago did this happen?" White parried.

"Three hours."

"You've kept in touch with the ship?"

"Yes. Not a sign." His expression showed that he was waiting an answer to his original question.

Lieutenant White studied his man. Here, he decided, the truth would be the kindest.

"No," he said, "I don't believe the boy wandered away sightseeing."

The self-control of the banker vanished.

"My God! Tell me what to do. I'll do anything. I'll—"

LIEUTENANT WHITE cut in on the outburst:

"Get your baggage from the ship, and you and Mrs. Hersan take a suite at the Tivoli Hotel. You occupy one of the outer rooms, alone. It will have a connecting door with the room beyond, where we will plant one of our men. He will get in contact with you. It will take a bit of doing, because this is the tourist season, but we can swing it. Our Uncle Samuel happens to be the proprietor of the Tivoli.

"The newspapers will be after you. Reporters don't change their spots in Panama. Talk to them. But take your cue from the Panamanian police. Tell them you believe the boy is off on a sightseeing tour of his own. You might even invent a similar escapade that happened at home in Los Angeles. Naturally, you can explain, Mrs. Hersan is very much worried, but you are sure the boy will show up safe and sound."

He saw the surprise on the face of the banker.

"After all," White explained, "that may be the solution. But if it isn't, every minute we can make the right parties believe we are looking for a lost boy, instead of one that has been kidnaped, is just that much time gained."

Hersan nodded assent. Then his face wrinkled in a worried frown.

"We must have an understanding," he asserted. "I am a father. My first concern is the safety of my son. You are a policeman. You—"

"I am also a man," White interrupted. "In addition to that, I happen to take pride in my work." His eyes narrowed. Only the sincerity and the kindness in his voice disputed the impression that he was very angry. "Here, my first job is to return your son to you, unharmed. When that is accomplished, I'll be free to play cop."

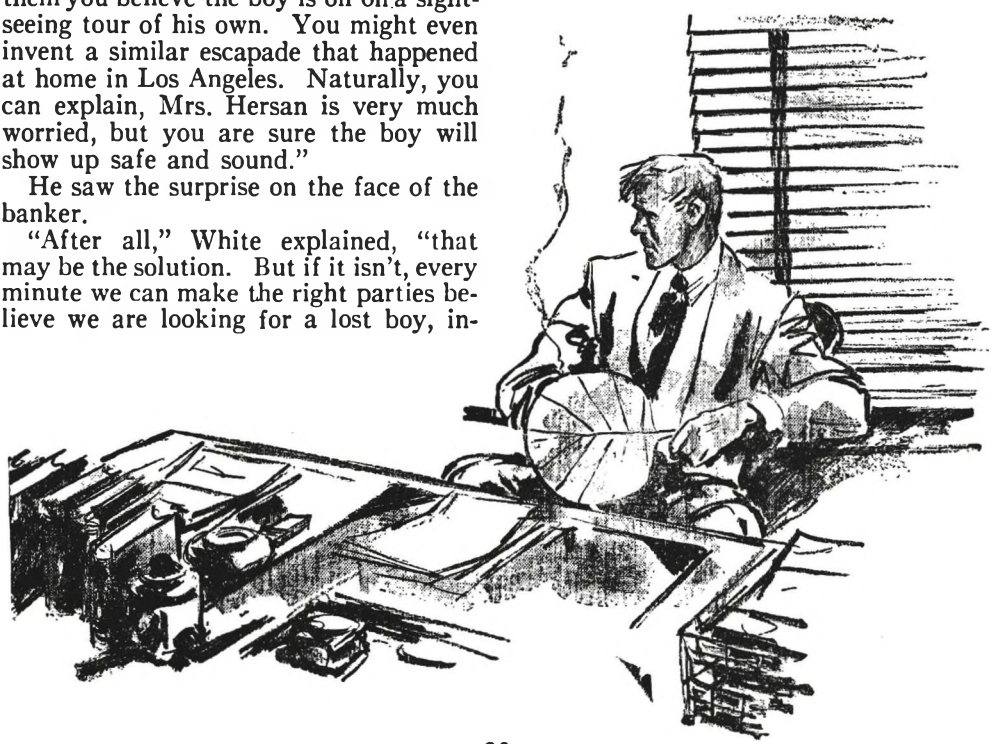
He sat erect. "We'd better have an understanding, Mr. Hersan, as you suggested. If I came to you for advice about railroads, I certainly wouldn't try to put across any pet theories of my own. Police work is just as specialized."

The quiet voice of Lieutenant Wilson cut in:

"Lieutenant White has just returned from Washington, where he attended the school conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, of the Department of Justice."

Hersan was standing, his hand outstretched.

"This—this means a lot to me. I place myself in your hands."



Lieutenant White of the Canal Zone police.

The eyes of the man behind the desk flashed his gratitude.

"Thank you," he said quietly. . . .

That night, undercover men of the Canal Zone police, accompanied by detectives of the Panamanian police, prowled the narrow streets of Panama City. In the same office in the headquarters in Balboa Heights, the same young man kept vigil at his desk. Chance visitors were treated to a monologue on the undesirability of the Canal Zone, its climate, its customs and its people. The monologue was interrupted only occasionally by the telephone bell. Once the call was answered, the tirade continued.

By eight o'clock in the morning the final report was in. There was no trace of an American boy who had disappeared from in front of a shop on Central Avenue.

White picked up the papers, which a black boy from Jamaica had placed on his desk. They both carried the story. Both stories intimated that the boy had wandered away. Both stories also stated that Mr. and Mrs. Hersan were at the Tivoli. White nodded with satisfaction.

Then he had a visitor, Inspector John Wilkes, his immediate superior, who entered the office without knocking. He was a fine figure of a man. His hair, prematurely gray, crowned a face that hinted both strength and kindness. He had the build and the gait of a boxer.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Nothing on the search, sir," said White. "Didn't expect there would be. Nothing ever happens here."

Inspector Wilkes smiled. "Outside of that—" he prompted.

White swallowed his dislike of the temporary delay, and continued:

"We have had a watch on airplanes, trains, ships and roads. Nothing there. Won't be. The boy will stay in Panama City. The next break will be at the Tivoli."

"Who is there?" asked Inspector Wilkes.

"Harrison."

The Inspector nodded approval. "Good man."

"By the way," said White, "I chalked up a telephone call to Washington. Several dee-vices I wanted. Never thought we would need them here, but apparently we do. They put them on the first plane. Should be here in plenty of time." He glanced at his watch. "Can't be a break before afternoon. Nothing to do but sit here and stew in this infernal heat. This country—"

Inspector Wilkes stood in the doorway, his eyes twinkling.

"Not bad," he admitted. "Not bad from a man who shivers when the thermometer drops below seventy-five."

SHORTLY after five o'clock that afternoon Detective Harrison entered the office. He produced a letter, which he handled gingerly.

"This came in the afternoon mail."

White studied the envelope, with its crudely lettered address.

"No chance of prints here," he declared. "Too many postal and hotel employees. How about the letter?"

"Only Hersan," said Harrison. "I have a copy of his prints here for comparison and elimination." The detective grinned. "He didn't like the idea, but he came through."

"Good boy," said White.

He used a pair of tweezers to remove the letter and unfold it. They stood side by side, reading the message, which had been formed with letters clipped from newspapers:

WE haVe the BOY PLAY wItH US and You GET hiM BaCK plAy WitH cops and yoU nevER See hiM AGain geT 3o ThoUsAND in u s MONeY in FiveS TEns & tweNTIes marK It OR Give oUT SeRIAl NUmBerS and BoY dIEs takE MORniNG TrAin FOr COLON

thURSdAY go to wasHInGTOn hoTeL
YOU wILL Find inSTRuctIoNS TheRE

"All right," said White. "Tell Hersan to go to the Central American Bank tomorrow morning and get the money. Have him go alone. I'll fix things with the bank. They will give him the money in a sealed package. Tell him not to open it.

"The next morning, Thursday, I want him to take the early train for Colon. Again alone. You stay right on at the Tivoli. Have Hersan register at the Washington on the other side." He grinned. "Nice of them to pick a hotel also run by our Uncle Samuel. That makes it easy for us to have Martin waiting in the next room."

He saw the look of disappointment on the face of the man beside him, and hastened to explain:

"I am not pulling you off of it, but there is no use giving them a chance to recognize the same face."

Harrison nodded. "I am going back to the hotel. Shall I leave this letter with the fingerprint division?"

"If you will," said White. He grinned. "I am going calling."

WHITE had bathed, shaved, donned clean clothing and dined very well indeed when he piloted an automobile to an attractive villa in the residential section of Panama City. There he was received by a handsome Panamanian, of pure Spanish stock, who greeted him with enthusiasm in Spanish:

"My dear friend! Enter—my house is yours."

White kept a straight face as he said:

"I want more than your house, dear friend. To be exact, I want thirty thousand dollars."

There was a puzzled look on the face of the Panamanian.

"I do not understand. It is a loan you wish?"

White smiled. "No. I am joking. Tomorrow morning you will have a visitor at your bank, an American named George Hersan."

"George Hersan," the Panamanian repeated the name. "But yes. I have heard of him."

"Hersan," White continued, "will ask you to cash a check for thirty thousand dollars. He will want the bills in three denominations, fives, tens and twenties."

"But certainly. He shall be accommodated."

"Thank you," said White. "He will request that the money be given him in a sealed package."

"That is easy, dear friend."

"This won't be so easy," White warned him. "Hersan is to be given a package resembling the money, but the actual money is to be delivered to me. Also, there must be strict secrecy." He hesitated. "A boy's life depends upon this."

The eyes of the Panamanian shone.

"I think I understand. The boy, he is not merely lost. Yes, yes. It can be arranged."

He leaned forward eagerly.

"I shall leave word that when Hersan arrives, he is to be shown to my office. Carlos, my brother, acts as a paying teller. He will bring the money to my office. We will make up the two packages there, one of paper cut the proper size, the other of the money. Hersan takes the dummy. The money is delivered to you. That is satisfactory?"

White stood up. "Splendid. Would it be asking too much to have the money delivered at my quarters?"

"I shall bring it there myself."

"I won't try to thank you—" White began.

The Panamanian bowed. "You have done me a great honor, my friend."

JUST before noon on Thursday, Hersan appeared before the desk in the Washington Hotel, which is in Cristobal, at the Atlantic, or Caribbean, entrance to the Panama Canal.

"You have a reservation, sir?" asked the clerk.

"Yes. The name is Hersan."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Hersan. We have mail for you." He produced a letter. Then he tossed a key to a black boy. "Show Mr. Hersan to 224."

The large, airy room overlooked Limon Bay, the breakwater of which forms the harbor of Colon and Cristobal, the twin cities, so unlike, which are separated only by an almost mythical line.

When the boy departed, Hersan paced the floor nervously. Soon a connecting door swung open, and a young man entered the room.

"Detective Martin, Mr. Hersan." He spoke in a low tone, for the walls of tropical hotel rooms are open near the ceiling in order that air may circulate better. "You have the letter?"

"Yes." Hersan produced it, and the detective pocketed it.

"I would like to—" the banker began.

"For God's sake, don't kill me! You're an American. You—"

"Sorry," said the detective. "Orders. I'll be back as soon as possible. But first—"

He returned to his room, and when he reappeared, he carried an oblong package done up in heavy paper.

"We will trade packages, Mr. Hersan."

Hersan produced a similar package, and the exchange was made.

"I won't keep you waiting any longer than necessary," Martin promised, as he returned to his room.

TEN minutes later, Detective Martin took the elevator to the first floor. He occupied a chair on the veranda on the shore side of the building for a short time. Then he walked to the other side of the building, pressed a button and entered the car that answered the signal.

The driver, in response to his orders, drove to one of the many drinking places in Colon. Martin dismissed him, entered the place and sipped a cool drink. Then he returned to the street, and walked away in an aimless manner.

He paused to look at shop windows as he passed. He crossed the invisible line that separates Colon from Cristobal, the latter in the Canal Zone. In Cristobal, he first paid a visit to the post office. At the general-delivery window he asked if there was any mail for Gerald Young. Told there was not, he returned to the street.

There a quick glance assured him he had not been followed. Only then did he enter the Cristobal police station.

Inspector Wilkes and Lieutenant White, both in uniform, sat in the office to which Martin made his way. The detective saluted.

"Hersan is at the Washington. The packages have been changed. Here is the letter."

White went to work. Soon the message, untouched by human hands, was on the desk before them:

TakE niGHt TRAiN for PANAMA city HAVe MONeY WIth YOu STanD ON BacK plaTFoRM WheN you See LIGhT fLASh TWicE on RighT SIDE of TrAcK get REAdY WHEn you sEE thRee flAShES ThROW MOneY on RAilS TheN Go tO TIVOLI IF you HAve COmE CLEan You WIll GET worD THEre HoW to FINd YOUr SoN safE if YOu DOublE CroSS Us oR calL IN copS BOY wiLL BE deaD

White looked up. "Got that?"

"Yes sir," said Martin.

"Good. Tell Hersan to play it just that way."

Martin saluted, and was gone.

INSPECTOR WILKES removed an unlighted cigar from his mouth.

"It will be close. Think we can make it?"

"Yes," snapped White. "Thank God that plane got in on time this morning." He leaned back and began a check:

"The baggage-car is out at Gamboa, where we could work without being observed. It should be ready now. We will call the railroad, and have them pull it in so it can be cut on when the train is made up.

"The Panamanian police here and in Panama City know what we want, and are waiting for the word. We will give it to them.

"Our men are ready in both places.

"We have a man for each car on the train, and they know the signals."

He leaned forward, his entire body tense. "We are ready to go."

Inspector Wilkes threw the cigar away.

"You called the turn on the railroad pay-off. How do you dope it out from there?"

White sat gazing at the white wall through half-closed eyes.

"This is a mob from the States that had Hersan marked before he left Los Angeles. The railroad pay-off is safest." He grinned. "That's what they think.

"The signal will come between here and Gatun, or between Gamboa and Panama City. That's certain. The territory between is jungle. No roads. I am betting it will come at this end."

"Why?" demanded Inspector Wilkes.

"The boy is in Panama City. We know that. No chance to move him. Smart trick to shift the action to this side."

"Fair enough," Inspector Wilkes admitted. "But from then on?"

White shrugged. "In the lap of the gods," he admitted. "But logical. Look at it from their standpoint. They are in strange and dangerous country. They have a package of money. That package is convenient to carry. They may rip open a corner to see that it is money. That is all right with us. But I can't picture city mobsters hanging around in the jungle to make an accurate count."

He yawned and stretched.

"No, the smart thing to do is to take the package to some safe hide-out. If the pay-off is on this side, that hide-out will be in Colon. Then things will happen."

Inspector Wilkes produced a second cigar, and placed it in his mouth, unlighted.

"Fair enough," he repeated. "But how about a slip-up after that?"

White shook his head. "I am not God. All I could do was ask myself what I would do if the boy was mine. I did that. The answer was, go ahead."

Inspector Wilkes leaned forward. "I have a boy of my own. I asked myself the same question. The answer was the same."

GEORGE HERSAN stood on the rear platform of the chair-car on the evening train that left Colon. One hand held a package that rested on the railing. The banker glanced about as the train ran slowly along Front Street, with its colorful Hindu shops, and headed for the open country.

The click of the wheels kept time with the pounding of the man's heart. He gave a start as the conductor appeared at his side, and collected his ticket. But nothing had happened when the train pulled to a stop at Gatun.

A few passengers left the train. A few came aboard. The train pulled away from the settlement and headed toward the jungle.

The beating of Hersan's heart exceeded the speed of the clicking of the rails as two rays of light flashed amid the undergrowth on the right side of the track. His grip on the package tightened. He stood tense, waiting.

Inside the chair-car, a man walked to the forward platform, stood there a moment, and then returned to his seat. In the next car, a man nodded to a trainman. The trainman made his way forward, and entered the baggage-car, carefully closing the door behind him.

In the baggage-car two men sat about radio equipment. The trainman spoke to them, and one man sent a message on its way:

"First signal one mile beyond Gatun."

Hardly had the message been cleared, when the baggage-car had a second visitor.

"Forty-two seconds later," he said.

"About half a mile," the trainman estimated.

The keys clicked out the message:

"Pay-off about one and one-half miles beyond Gatun."

Trainmen went through the train announcing that the next stop would be Panama City. This was greeted by storms of protest. They answered them by declaring that a train would be waiting on the Pacific side to bring back passengers bound for the way stations that would be passed by. The train rushed on through the night.

IN the Cristobal police station, two men sat waiting. Inspector Wilkes leaned forward in his chair, staring straight ahead. Lieutenant White was tense in his chair, his eyes harrowed.

A man entered the room and handed a slip of paper to Wilkes.

"One mile beyond Gatun," said the Inspector.

White's eyes opened.

A second message was delivered.

"Half a mile beyond that for the payoff." Inspector Wilkes turned to a telephone and called an official number. "Accept only official messages on telephone, telegraph and radio," he ordered.

White looked at his wrist-watch. "At least an hour," was his verdict. "But we might as well get organized."

Colon, in the Republic of Panama, is a congested city, with three main thoroughfares. There is Front Street, one side of which is lined with Oriental bazaars, while the other side is swampland that leads down to the harbor. Then comes Balboa Avenue, known in the vernacular as Bottle Alley.

Cabarets. Shooting galleries. *Cantinas*. Sordid lodging-houses. Barbershops. Shady hotels. Narrow, squat, cell-like houses that seem to house literally scores of negroes. Next, a street given over to even more questionable activities, which, in the vernacular, is known as Cash Street. These three streets, for a length of six or eight blocks, constitute the heart of Colon.

It was through this heart of Colon that Inspector Wilkes and Lieutenant White drove in an open automobile. Up Bottle Alley, across a side-street, down Cash Street, through a different side-street. Then over the same route.

Outwardly everything was normal—for Colon. Flashing neon signs. Streets crowded with representatives of a score of races. Tin-pan music. A sprinkling of uniforms. Artificial gayety and artificial laughter. Coney Island, with palms in silhouette against a tropical sky.

Tonight, however, the uniformed Panamanian policemen walked with added alertness. Scattered about in the crowd were their detectives, and plain-clothesmen from the Canal Zone police. Inspector Wilkes and Lieutenant White were not the only occupants of cruising automobiles. All these men were waiting.

It was shortly before midnight when two rather flashily dressed men, obviously Americans, made their way along Cash Street. They paused before a crib-like house, the entire front room of which was open to the street, revealing a brass bed as the principal article of furniture. On the street before the house sat a dusky girl, heavily painted.

"Hello, baby," said one of the men.

"Ullo, baby," the girl replied. "You late."

The two men turned their backs on her as they walked through the open room, opened a door, and entered an inner room. They closed the door and snapped on a light. The heavier of the two men threw open his coat and produced a package, one corner of which had been torn open, revealing packages of banknotes. The package was tossed on a table.

There was the gleam of anticipation in the eyes of the men as they bent over the package.

"Wait," said one of them. He produced a knife, and severed the strings around the package.

The other man reached in, and began to draw forth bundles of money, which he tossed to his companion. The second man began to count feverishly.

There was a grin on the face of the men emptying the package.

"This," he declared, as he reached in, "aint hay."

His hand encountered a bundle of money. It stuck. He tugged. The money came loose.

"Who-o-o-o-o-o-o!"

THE deafening roar of a siren sounded in the small room. They fell back, startled.

"Who-o-o-o-o-o!" screamed the siren.

One man recovered his composure enough to rip the package apart. A small metal object fell to the floor. He picked it up and sent it crashing against the wall.

"Who-o-o-o-o-o!" the siren wailed on.

The man jumped upon the metal object in futile rage.

"Who-o-o-o-o!" the ominous roar continued.

Perspiration streamed from the faces of the two men. They glanced about

them like men in a trap. Then one took the initiative.

"The ——!" he roared. He began to stuff money into his pockets. "Let's get the hell out of here! Scram!"

They bolted towards the street, drawing revolvers as they ran.

"Who-o-o-o-o!" wailed the siren.

Their mad rush sent the dusky girl sprawling. Her screams mingled with the turmoil. The crowd passing in the street scattered. A Panamanian policeman charged toward the two men. A revolver cracked. The policeman fell.

A car swung dizzily around the near-by corner, its tires screaming. Inspector Wilkes, who was at the wheel, reached for the emergency brake. White vaulted to the street, directly in the path of the two men.

The kidnaper in the lead fired again. The bullet thudded into the automobile behind White. The Canal Zone policeman fired. The kidnaper went down.

"Stick 'em up, you!" White ordered his companion.

A revolver clattered on the pavement.

MORE policemen closed in. The crowd surged about.

"Who-o-o-o-o!" sounded the roar of the siren in the crib-like house, clear and triumphant above all the bedlam.

The Colon police station was not far away. Soon White, a lieutenant of the Panamanian police and the uninjured kidnaper were alone in an office there. The prisoner cowered in his chair.

White stood with folded arms, regarding him. The policeman's heart was pounding. This was the test. Up to date, the gods had been kind. Now a boy's life hung in the balance.

He spoke to the Panamanian in Spanish. The Panamanian, who had been educated in the United States, took his cue, and shrugged his shoulders in assent.

White walked to the door of the room, and threw it open, revealing a short hall, a door and the street beyond. White and the Panamanian drew their revolvers.

"Make a break for it," White ordered the prisoner.

The man sat staring at them.

"What—what do you mean?"

"Just an old Spanish custom," White told him. "A wise guy like you should have heard of it. Down here they always give kidnapers a chance to escape." He shrugged his shoulders. "Saves the expense of a trial."

The man was on his knees before them.

"For God's sake don't kill me! You're an American. You—"

White's lips were tight. This was a shot in the dark. Even as he uttered the words, he was afraid they might be the truth:

"You didn't hesitate about killing a boy."

"No, no! The kid aint been touched. We put him with some black people in Panama City. That's straight. Here!"

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a slip of paper with an address written on it. White took it, and walked from the room.

Inspector Wilkes and a Panamanian official sat in a near-by office. They looked up as White entered.

"Any luck?" asked Inspector Wilkes.

White handed him the slip of paper. He bolted toward a telephone booth.

Soon he was back. The three men sat waiting. Inspector Wilkes chewed his unlighted cigar.

"Later," said the Panamanian official, "I must have a look at this clever siren device."

White grinned with enthusiasm.

"It's a gem," he said. "Small but deadly—and noisy. You put it in the center of the package, and one sheaf of the money acts as a trigger. It's tough, too. Take a sledgehammer to shut it up, until the battery runs down. They worked it out in the laboratory of the Department of Justice. Certainly came in handy."

The minutes ticked on. Then Inspector Wilkes was called to the telephone. When he returned, he was beaming.

"They found the lad. Bound and gagged, but otherwise unharmed."

He turned to White. "Hersan was on the telephone. Said he and Mrs. Hersan must see you before they leave."

WHITE shook his head.

"We can skip that, sir. I knew this case wouldn't last. Nothing to do but sit and stew in the heat. I have said it before, and now I mean it: I am going back to the States."

Inspector Wilkes' eyes were twinkling, but his face was very straight.

"Hersan said something about having a place for you in his organization."

"No," said White regretfully. "Be just as bad in Los Angeles. When I leave here—"

He glared at them as they broke out laughing.

Tiny David comes back next month in a specially good story.

The Treasure

A BITTER wind was whipping down from the eternally snowy crests of the Tien Shan—the Peaks of Heaven, as the Chinese called them—which, white and rosy red in the sunset, closed in three sides of the horizon.

The four servants, faithful and devoted men, stretched the skin tent and made camp among the rocks to one side of the ancient road. Deserted as it seemed, that road held peril; at any moment it might erupt looting riders. Alec Campbell, the lean-jawed Scot missionary, rubbed his red mustache and grimly eyed his younger sister, Marcia.

"Not so blasted romantic now, eh?" he said sardonically. "We've had to drop everything and run for our lives. Towns looted and burned, every tree hacked down, corpses littering every road; our bare lives hanging on chance and the efforts of four brave fellows. Running for life, quite literally."

"All the same, it's glorious!" declared Marcia, sipping her tea.

She was a lovely thing, as a red-haired woman sometimes is. All gold and ivory, sapphire eyes, a slim springing flame of energy and laughter; ever doing the unexpected, and with a will of her own.

She was a sore trial to the grim-eyed brother, with her unconventional ways. Now the mission was wiped out. Peril had drawn them together in spirit; the two of them, with four servants, had escaped the bombings and massacre. Even so, they still looked at things differently. They were always on opposite sides of life.

Here in Sinkiang, in far western China, the world had come to chaos. The murderous war that Japan had started in the east, had reached to the west; it had turned into a whirlwind of blood and death and plunder, bandits and local chieftains fighting one another with indiscriminate savagery.

"Glorious? Glad you think so," grunted Campbell. He was poring over a map while he drank his tea. "Clear cut off from China; our one chance is to get down to Tibet and safety. We're skirting the Tien Shan, with the Gobi Desert to the north and the south, and only the one road west and south—"

"Nonsense, Alec; you're too pessimistic!" she broke out. "We're alive; we

# of Genghis Khan

A colorful story of desperate adventure in the Gobi country.

have arms and horses and supplies and servants and an American flag. Only the one road? But what a road it is, to thrill the blood! The great Silk Road of ancient days, that carried the commerce of Rome and China two thousand years ago! The road Marco Polo traveled, the road across the singing sands of the Gobi!"

"Where everything's a welter of blood today, blood and destruction!"

She gestured grandly, and waved her cigarette—Alec Campbell disapproved of his sister smoking cigarettes.

"And who's doing the killing, Alec? Mongols, as in the days of Genghis Khan. White Russians, who for twenty years have been refugees in these parts. Red Russians of the Soviets. Mohammedan tribes, fighting for Allah. Japanese secret agents, Chinese cut off from home and fighting for existence! Soldiers of fortune on the glory road!"

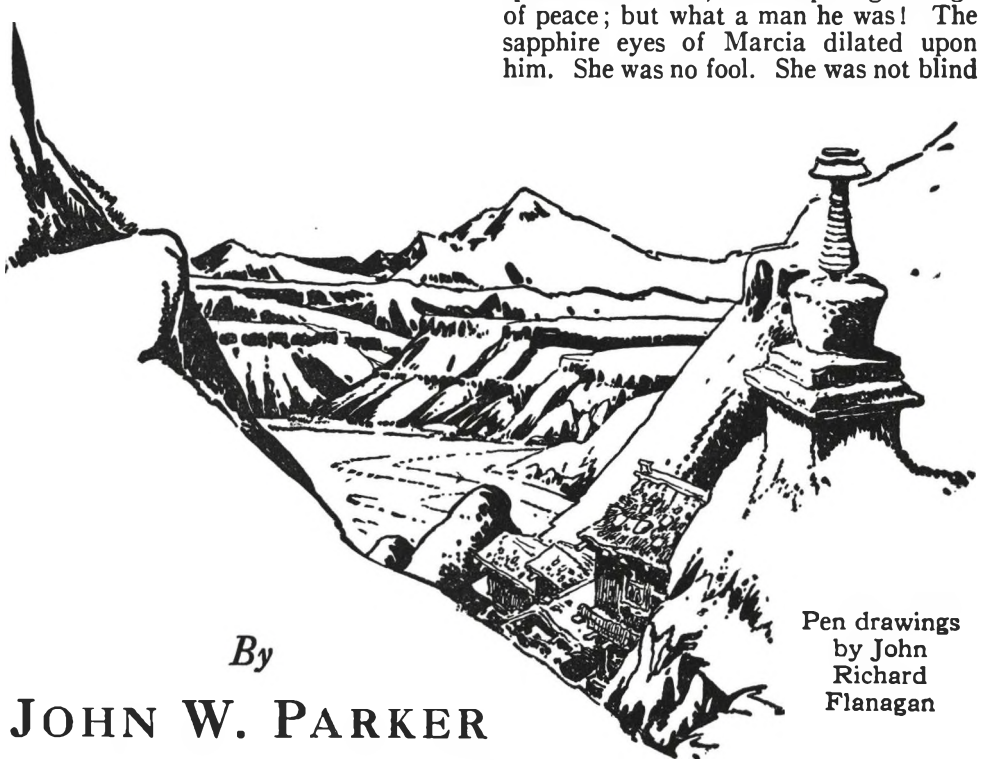
"Glory!" snapped Alec Campbell. "With a fertile province destroyed and reverting to desert! With women and children lying dead, with massacre on all sides! It won't look so darned glorious when some filthy Mongol puts a rope around your white neck and drags you away at his stirrup."

Marcia laughed. "That hasn't happened yet, Alec; and I can shoot as well as you, or better. You're too serious. You don't get a thrill out of all these things; even these snowy Heaven Peaks breathe romance and—" She broke off, caught her breath, uttered a low word: "Look! *Look!*"

THE Chinese, with clucks of alarm, were diving for their rifles. Campbell turned as he sat, twisting around. He uttered a sharp command, and the four Chinese became quiet.

"Only one man," said he. "Wait. Let me talk."

Only one man, sending his horse up from the ancient highway, heading in to speak with them, hand upflung in sign of peace; but what a man he was! The sapphire eyes of Marcia dilated upon him. She was no fool. She was not blind



By

JOHN W. PARKER

Pen drawings by John Richard Flanagan

"Once," she said quietly, "is enough for always, Pete."

to disease, danger, filth, cruelty; yet behind these realities of the flesh, she could discern other things, deeper realities, flashes of the spirit in all these people grappling in a terrific struggle for the survival of the fittest.

This man was fit. He had removed his fur cap, and in the sunset light an aureole played about his thick fair hair. The four Chinese stared wonderingly; Marcia stared in admiration. He rode like a centaur. He was trim, clean-shaven, lean and powerful. A rifle was booted at his saddle. An indescribable air of pride and assurance sat upon him; even his horse stepped proudly along, yet his high-boned features were relieved from stern harshness by gray eyes that danced and glittered, unafraid and joyous.

He drew rein and dismounted with lithe grace, clicked his heels, bowed.

"Who are you?" demanded Alec Campbell in sour suspicion. The other laughed.

"A hungry man seeking food, friends, companions and assistance! You're the missionary Campbell and his beautiful sister; I've heard of you. Seeing the American flag, I dropped in—"

"Your name?" barked Campbell.

"Vorokhin. Petroff—or Peter, in English—Vorokhin."

THE name was like a thunderbolt. Impossible! General Vorokhin, the dashing cavalry leader—the man who had carved out kingdoms and lost them, whose squadrons had fought mythical battles—this man, alone?

"Where are your men?" demanded Campbell.

"Dead."

The one word held everything; pride, sorrow, acceptance of fate. It was Marcia who made answer, going quickly to the Russian and extending her hand as she looked into his gray eyes.

"You're welcome, of course. Here's tea; our supper is almost ready. Our men will take care of your horse."

"Thank you." He stooped above her hand and kissed it, and smiled. "In return, I'll give you what no other man on earth could give you. Ah! It's good to be among human beings, instead of beasts."

Alec Campbell relaxed, thawed to the spell of the man; for he did exert a spell. His personality was sharp, incisive, clean, like a sword of gray steel. No pretense about him, little of the usual Russian brag and boast. And he spoke English surprisingly well.

IN the fading sunset, they sat talking while the meal was being prepared. Vorokhin had left his lieutenant and five hundred men at a secure retreat in the heart of the Gobi; he had come here with a score of riders, thinking to penetrate this district of blood and destruction with a few men, where an army could not have come.

"I was wrong," he said simply. "At daylight this morning they caught us. I alone escaped; the bullet is not molded that can kill me. I came on, alone."

"Where in heaven's name are you going?" exclaimed Campbell. "Everything behind us is a chaos of death and terror."

"I was going here, or within three miles of here," said Vorokhin, and smiled. "Tell you later. Now you'll go with me, and all's well again. I've heard about you two, about your escape, and how you've headed west. You're people of destiny, like me."

He eyed Marcia with undisguised admiration, which she repaid. Campbell thought the man insane; she knew better, and yet she wondered. Coming here, within three miles of here? But here was nothing. Not even a village was near here. To the right rose the naked precipices and black rock gorges of the Tien Shan. Ahead and to the left, the track that had been a road skirted the desert edge, where every oasis and village had been wiped out. Hereabouts, Chinese and Turgut leaders were exterminating each other like wolves.

The simple meal was served. Vorokhin talked; the feel of power, of poised and careful assurance, came from him more strongly. Still a young man, but feared, famous, a figure of strength in this chaotic world. A man who could still laugh—not cruelly, but confidently, warmly, heartily. Laughter was a rare thing in Sinkiang.

"Suppose we get one thing straight," said Alec Campbell as they talked. "You say we're going somewhere with you. Well, we're not. If any of these Mongols, Chinese or Turguts found us in your company, we'd be shot instantly, or worse. We've come through safely so far, because our papers are clear and we're known to be free of any alliance or political ties. We'll go nowhere with you."

Vorokhin darted a laughing glance at Marcia, and produced cigarettes.

"Let's discuss it, as the daylight dies!" he said lightly. "What you say is quite true—but by the way, I promised you something, Miss Campbell. Here it is."

He fumbled in his pocket, leaned forward, and dropped a heavy object into her hand.

"A present," he went on. "Payment for dinner, if you refuse presents. A memento of destiny, if you refuse payment! But at any rate, it's now yours."

There was just light enough to see what the thing was. A ring, a heavy ring of massy gold, very curiously chiseled, and set with a black stone. Its size was astonishing; it was far too large for her.

"It would almost make a bracelet!" she exclaimed. "What is it?"

"I must come to that gradually," said Vorokhin. "I got it from a man who died three weeks ago; one of my Mongol captains, a very intelligent fellow who knew his business. He was trapped and badly wounded, in a certain place close by here. A small valley, a canon, that ended in a blank wall. In the wall was a hole. Seeking a place to hide from his pursuers, he crawled through the hole. He was there three days, until he was able to get away."

HE paused, to light a fresh cigarette. "The hole had apparently been broken by an earthquake, in a wall of stone built in the face of the cliff," he resumed. "Behind the wall was a dead man, a skeleton. My captain was half out of his head with terror, but he took this ring from the finger of the dead man; he took what else he could find; he made his way back to me, and told me the story before he died. That's why I've come here."

Alec Campbell took the ring and examined it frowningly.

"Queer!" he said. "That setting is black jade, which hasn't been found in China for two thousand years!"

"Precisely," said Peter Vorokhin, smiling slightly.

"If the ring came from a man's finger, that man must have been a giant."

"He was. That proves the story."

A SILENCE followed. The towering white peaks, directly overhead, had lost their roseate glow and stood white in the greenish sky of gathering night.

"You," said Vorokhin, "are well acquainted with Mongolia. I reckon you know the tale about the burial of Genghis Khan, the conqueror of the world?"

"Why, yes," Campbell rejoined reflectively. "He was buried somewhere near Karakorum, his capital, in the utmost secrecy; all his vast treasures were buried with him. The place, however, remained unknown; the tomb has never been found."

Vorokhin laughed softly.

"True; but from my Mongol captain I learned otherwise. The burial at Karakorum was only a blind. The body of Genghis Khan, and all his treasure, were brought into the heart of the Tien Shan —the Heaven Peaks! He was laid to rest in a wild gorge where no man would ever find him; the real tomb was hidden from sight forever. The ring you see was taken from his body three weeks ago."

"Nonsense!" said Campbell, and held a match to his lips. The flare brought out his harsh, intolerant features strongly. But Marcia leaned forward with a catch of her breath.

"That explains the size of the ring!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Genghis Khan was gigantic in size. His descendants, to this day, are marked by their great height!"

"Precisely," said Vorokhin. "It is not three miles from here; I can find the spot, I'm certain. We'll get off before dawn, and be there in an hour or two."

"None o' that!" The dry tones of Campbell cut in harshly upon the vibrant timbre of the Russian's voice. "For all I know, you may be trying to trap us. Anyhow, we'll have none of your moonshine tales. We must be on our way westward."

"Yes?" said Vorokhin. "You mentioned that your water is low. You'll find none within thirty miles to the west; the wells were poisoned by the Turguts.

But in this gorge is a small spring of cold water, enough to give you a good supply."

Campbell was silent, puffing in astonishment and chagrin. They needed the water badly, it was true.

"Why should we go with you?" he demanded. "For the water, yes. For the tomb—no! Why should you have wanted us to be with you?"

"I like company," said Vorokhin. "I like you. I need your help to carry away more of the treasure. I can take you safely through the bloody district ahead of you, by side trails. You see? If the story of this tomb and treasure is true, I plan to come back later with my own men, with all the men I can gather, and get the whole treasure. Then, with money, I can get men and munitions, an airplane or two, everything I need—and I'll start my own little kingdom in the heart of the Gobi. Other men have done it. I can."

"Is that your only reason for wanting us along?" asked Marcia.

"No," he said, his face veiled in the dusk. "No. Since I have seen you, I want you along, always."

"You impertinent rascal!" snapped Campbell angrily. "D'ye talk like that to every woman you meet for the first time?"

"I've never before met one like this." Vorokhin stood up and turned to Marcia. "I want to talk with you; I think you want to talk with me. Come for a walk before the full darkness blackens out the stones."

"Marcia! You stay here!" Campbell barked.

The girl rose, with a quiet word.

"Don't be silly, Alec. This man is worth talking to."

"You confounded romantic little fool!" groaned Campbell, and let them go.

ROMANTIC? Perhaps. A fool? Very far from it. She had heard this Russian use the very American word *reckon* a moment ago—and she was able to take care of herself in this world of barbarians; or thought she was, which amounted to nearly the same thing.

Any comprehension of her actions, any understanding of her soaring spirit, was impossible to Alec Campbell. He had seen his wife murdered by looting soldiers; and to him, life had become a gloomy, bitter thing.

That walk in the darkness lasted into the starlight, lasted until Campbell savagely came seeking them; they laughed and accompanied him back to camp. It was all a revelation to Marcia. The Russian was indeed only half Russian, for his mother had been an American girl. Hence his use of the word *reckon*—and hence too, probably, his adventurous spirit. A man of steel and iron, he opened his life to her simply and freely, displayed his whole background, the ethics of his life and all its motivation.

"WE'RE going with Pete in the morning," she said to her brother as they came back to camp. It was "Pete" and "Marcia" with them now. "We need water; you know it. We must have it. Very well, take one day off and get it! One day won't sink us."

"And if any of these guerrillas find us in his company, we'll be shot."

"Granted. If they don't, we'll get clear, and he'll give us protection. One more risk, one more gamble, is a little thing."

"All right," he said, growling. "We must have the water. But the scoundrel has dazzled you, I'm afraid!"

"He has; and it's glorious to be dazzled!" she rejoined with her short, clear laugh. "Poor Alec! I'm truly so sorry you can't see things as I do, and just give in to them! You'd get so much enjoyment out of life, despite its tragedy. Think what it'll mean to us if we do find a treasure there—Pete says we can take all we want."

Campbell growled again. "Treasure! More like, he hopes to cut our throats and make off with our stuff. I never yet saw one of these Russians I'd trust!"

"I have," she said, and went happily to bed. . . .

They were up before the dawn, striking camp and loading the horses. Vorokhin, trimly efficient, joined them at breakfast in the gray light. It was barely half a mile, said he, to the beginning of the gorge he sought. The horses could follow the gorge for a couple of miles; the last stretch must be made on foot. There was no road.

"I suppose there's no danger, either?" said Campbell with heavy sarcasm.

Vorokhin flashed him a smile. "Danger? All life's danger, my friend; it misses us daily by a hair's breadth! Yes. Any passing natives or Chinese might pick up the trail and follow. Some of these hawkers and desert men are wonderful trackers. We can leave our men and the horses by the spring, which is the end of road for the horses, anyway, while we go on to the tomb."

The man came bursting wildly through. "Master!" he cried, his words half drowned by the water. "They are after me—half a hundred of them—the horses dead—"

"And we're caught in a blind alley if anyone jumps us?"

"Right," said Vorokhin cheerfully, and his eyes twinkled at Marcia.

Then he gave his orders, sending out two of the four men to make sure the roads were clear and no one was in sight to catch sight of them. The other two brought back reports from the first two. Vorokhin, Marcia and Campbell rode forth with the packhorses, and finding all clear, went straight to the gorge that angled off the road.

IT looked like nothing at all, promised no opening ahead; to take the horses into that boulder-strewn niche seemed plain madness. Unexpectedly it twisted and widened into a regular defile that wound under the black sheer precipices of the mountain flanks above. It rose steeply, also.

Getting the animals over those rocks was a hair-raising job, however. No shale or gravel; everything here was massive—huge slabs and boulders thirty feet high. The sun was well up when a clump of green brush appeared, and a faint trickle of water that seeped from the heart of the rock wall.

"Looks good," observed Vorokhin as they dismounted. "Exactly as my captain described. This argues well for the rest of the way."

Campbell looked at the apparently impossible path ahead of them, a tangled mass of rock that was more like a hillside than a defile, and grunted. The four Chinese were making camp and preparing to collect the water from the trickle, hobbling the restive horses, who were avid for the water, and gathering brush for a fire. Vorokhin issued curt orders.

"No fire; use the primus stove for cooking. One of you go down the gorge and keep watch. Marcia, you have a rifle? Bring it. You too, Campbell. No telling what we'll find up ahead. I'll take my own. Pistols as well."

Alec Campbell gave him a hard look. "You don't expect fighting ahead?"

"Why not?" replied the Russian coolly. "My captain was chased up there and penned for three days; so obviously some of the bandits hereabouts know this place. Ready?"

"Ready," said Marcia eagerly.

Vorokhin attacked the rocky scarp. She followed, and Campbell came last.

There was no waste of breath in words. Now and again Vorokhin paused briefly to give the girl a hand over some particularly bad spot; the climb was steady, arduous. In her heavy woolens, even with furs discarded, Marcia was shapeless; but her bright head, her ringing laugh, her radiant self, put to scorn the bitter wind sweeping down from the snowy fields above. She wore heavy felt Mongol boots, as did the other two; and their value was evident among the sharp rock-edges.

In this upper gorge was a perfect and eerie desolation. The only token of life was a hawk, wheeling high and far in the blue sky. Vorokhin kept glancing about alertly; in his efficient, watchful manner, Marcia had the sense of something held back, something he had not told them. So strong did this feeling become that she broached it. Alec Campbell had fallen behind; she stood beside Vorokhin, waiting, and spoke abruptly.

"What is it, Pete? There is something you haven't told us."

He gave her a startled glance, and admiration leaped in his face.

"Ah! What a woman you are! You and I can go far together, little golden dove! Yes, you're right. There's one thing I didn't tell you; one thing, about that Mongol captain of mine. I'll not bother telling it, unless necessary."

"Well?" she demanded. "Just what was it?"

"I didn't tell you," replied Vorokhin, "how he got out of here. Come along!"

"Wait! What do you mean? Didn't he go out the way he came—this way?"

"With Chinese rifles waiting for him?" Vorokhin laughed. "Not much!"

Then he was on again, and she following, wondering. What other way could there be out of this place?

NONE, apparently, for now the end was in sight. The gorge ended abruptly. It was like a well of black, naked rock sunk in a mountain's heart. In the end wall, however, showed a hole. Closer approach, too, proved that a portion of this wall had been built with hands; enough to mask the entrance of the tomb, at least. Some earth-shock had dislodged a few massy stones, giving easy access to the hole.

"This is rather ridiculous," exclaimed Alec Campbell, puffing. "Any Chinese could walk into this place, as your captain did."

Vorokhin, at the opening, paused and turned.

"So? Remember, Genghis Khan was conqueror of half the earth; the greatest

artisans were drawn from all quarters to build this place. Have you a flashlight?"

The sudden transition brought a laugh to Marcia's lips. Campbell sourly produced a flashlight, whose batteries were half expended; Vorokhin told him to keep charge of it, and went at the hole. He disappeared within. Marcia heard a protest from her brother, ignored it, and scrambled after. Campbell followed.

THE flashlight beam pricked out the walls of a passage. The place had a wild-beast smell; bones lay strewn about. The walls were smooth as though water-worn, and now Marcia caught the sound of rushing water.

"Ha! That captain of mine told the truth!" cried Vorokhin eagerly. "Come on!"

The passage ended abruptly, to rebut Campbell's argument. It narrowed to a three-foot width, the rock ceiling eight feet high; and here was a solid sheet of water, fed by the eternal ice and snow of the peaks above, that sluiced down into some far chasm. Two feet from this water, the rock floor ended in nothing. Standing on the lip of wet stone, Vorokhin laughed exultantly.

"You see? Safe for the ages. Only a man utterly desperate and pressed by death, like my Mongol captain, would go on. Four feet, said he, and you're over the gulf. Jump straight through the stream, but jump high so it won't carry you down—"

As he spoke, he leaped high and straight. The flashlight beam faintly pierced that wall of rushing water, to show rock beyond. Vorokhin broke through, disappeared.

"Stop, stop! For God's sake, stop!" Alec Campbell desperately clutched Marcia as she drew back for the leap. His face was agonized. "This is madness! The man's gone—"

She laughed and patted his cheek, though she was frightened enough.

"Can't quit now, Alec!" she shouted above the water-roar. "Go to it, old chap!"

And breaking from him, she took two swift steps and hurled herself at the water. It caught her, beat her down, drew a gasping cry of terror from her—then she struck something solid and was caught in the strong grasp of Vorokhin.

Darkness here; she clung to him, and he held her firmly, surely. The blazing vigor of him flowed into her; it was an instant of revelation, of joyous madness, of sudden ecstasy. Their faces touched; his lips touched hers; she responded.

All in the brief instant. Then he was drawing her away from the water. The dim glow of the flashlight made itself seen. Light and all, Campbell came through the wall of water, rolled on the stone floor, and picked himself up. He flashed the light at them and around. The three stood staring.

Space and darkness. No passage here, but some vast cavern studded with gigantic boulders. A heap of them, beside the water, grotesquely balanced. One in particular was held at an impossible angle; a wedge-shaped rock, immense. Vorokhin pointed to this one, excitedly.

"Look! It was placed there, was held by beams that have rotted. Why? Look at the shape of it— But I forgot. The light, Campbell! Switch it off!"

Campbell obeyed. In the sudden darkness, Vorokhin caught the girl's hand, lifted it, pointed with it.

"There! You see the other way out? A wolf, a fox—some animal—made it."

UP among the boulders appeared a point of light; daylight.

"Well, what's all this yarn about a treasure?" demanded Campbell.

"Not far. Use the light, and you'll see. Straight back from the water, he said."

There, another passage, very wide but not high, and at the end a chamber in the rock. No need of the flashlight now. About the walls were enormous candles, or the remains of them. Enough to flare up from a match, and to light sheer insanity of riches.

A hewn stone sarcophagus in the midst. Its cover had been pried off, and the air had caused the man inside to fall into dust and ashes. That cover, sealed with bitumen, must have kept Genghis Khan fairly intact until the Mongol captain broke in. That it had been Genghis himself here entombed, was certain: the conqueror's name, in huge Chinese characters, was upon the stone coffin and rudely painted on the walls around.

The riches of a barbarian, plunder of half the world, heaped here. Arms and weapons of the most gorgeous; wealth—Byzantine, Persian, Chinese, Arab—in porcelains, precious metals, works of art. Much was crumbled and gone, but the huge teak chests ranked around the stone sarcophagus had not crumbled.

Two of these chests had been broken open. Vorokhin went to one of them, and

"Marcia! Here!" Vorokhin was at the chest now. "Here's the

tossed out careless handfuls of gold coin —ancient coins of strange shapes and sizes.

He flung the coins across the rock floor almost disdainfully, while Alec Campbell stared open-mouthed, and Marcia, slow to comprehend the reality of all this, gazed around. Then Vorokhin spoke her name, eagerly.

"Marcia! Here!" He was at the second broken chest now, and turned suddenly to her. He thrust a double handful of shimmering things at her, and laughed joyfully.

"Here, take them! Here's the real wealth. Think what'll happen to the world's jewel markets when we produce these stones!"

real wealth! Think what'll happen when we produce these stones!"

A sharp cry escaped her. Jewels, indeed—a mad, incredible, impossible mass of precious stones, set and unset, good and bad, spoiled and perfect.

Vorokhin dumped them all out on the floor, persuaded Alec Campbell to fill his pockets, and thrust jewels into his own clothes until they were lumpy and stuffed, then urged still more upon Marcia.

Rings, strings of jewels and pearls, glinting rubies, huge carven emeralds—all these, and the huge pile on the floor, from one chest alone. There were a dozen more of the teak chests in sight. The girl realized dimly that here was wealth incalculable, wealth that would shame the fabled jewels of the richest Indian rajah. And theirs for the having.

"Now that it's true," said Vorokhin, "I'll change plans, my friends."

He sat down on a chest and regarded them calmly.

"We'll take what we can, bring my men back here, and get the mass of it," he said. "Then—why should I fight for barren desert lands? Here's wealth for me and my men. We can go back to the world, leave Asia—"

"Listen!" Alec Campbell swung around. "What's that? Did you hear it?"

ALL three listened. It came again, a faint, far sound.

Vorokhin started up.

"A rifle! It must have come from the cave, from the first approach, to reach us in here! Good Lord, how long have we been here?"

"I don't know; my watch was broken when I fell," said Campbell helplessly. "Must have been a long time—"

He turned and put, suddenly, for the passage and the rushing stream of water that veiled everything beyond. The light of the candles followed him from the tomb-chamber; Vorokhin strode after, and Marcia with him. The Russian unslung the rifle from over his shoulders.

Campbell, ahead, played his flashlight on that torrent of snow-water. Upon them fell a sense of futility. They could hear nothing, by reason of the water's noise, but the vibration of shots seemed to reach them.

"Look!" And Vorokhin swung aside, caught Marcia's arm, and checked her, against the rock wall. "Tell me something: When we get out of here, will you seek the future with me? All of life for us together?"

She stared at him. "This is no time for such talk!"

"It is." He had to raise his voice to be heard, but he raised it; he was in a blazing earnest. "I must know, here and now! Everything we do depends upon it. Will you take freedom with me, the whole wide world, the snow-peaks and the far horizons?"

She broke into a half-angry laugh. What a man he was! He could do nothing as anyone else would do it.

"Yes, then!" she cried at him. "Are you satisfied?"

His face lit up. He swung around, started toward the waterfall. What he meant to do, Marcia never learned. For at this instant, the flashlight playing on the water struck a face, a human face, the face of one of the Chinese servants.

The man came bursting wildly through, as in a headlong leap. He plunged down on the wet rock beside Campbell, who stayed his fall. Vorokhin helped him up, but he sagged in their hands; bullets were through his body.

"Master!" he cried out, his words half drowned by the water. "All dead—they are after me, in the cave—half a hundred of them—the horses dead—"

He went limp in death. And as he did so, bullets began to come through the veil of water.

One whipped past Marcia's face. A cry escaped her; she realized that men were on the other side of that water, firing blindly into it after the escaped Chinese. Presently they would venture to follow him. . . . But no!

Campbell was shooting, and Vorokhin was emptying a pistol into the water. He shouted at Campbell, gestured.

"The light! Out with it! They can see it—"

Too late! Campbell whirled half around. The flashlight fell from his hand and went out. He never spoke again.

Marcia and Vorokhin, between them, got him back into the lighted room, but he was dead before they laid him down. Wide-eyed, struck to the heart by horror and grief, the girl fell on her knees beside him, hugged his face to her breast.

VOROKHIN, after a moment, gently disturbed her. Stooping, he picked up Campbell as though the dead weight were nothing, and looked into the girl's face.

"In this country," he said, "death is always close, and grief has a long time to wait. He shall have burial with the conqueror of the world."

A cry of protest from Marcia; he disregarded it. Going to the open sarcophagus, he leaned far over and deposited Alec Campbell there. Then he was erect, striding back to the dazed and stricken girl, seizing her two hands, crying vibrantly to her—sending the impulse of all his keen, powerful energy into her.

"Quick! Some day we'll come back and take care of him. First, we must act before they come to kill us. With me, with me!"

He compelled her. One anguished glance back into this lighted chamber where the huge candles guttered, this room of death and treasure beyond belief —then she was going out into the darkness, holding to Vorokhin's hand, letting him urge her along. He struck a match, found the flashlight, picked it up. A bul-

let buzzed and whistled between them. He thrust her back against the rock wall, pressed the searchlight in her hand.

"On the big wedge of rock!" he shouted, his lips at her ear. "Any engineer would know what it's for. I'll chance it, but must have light. Quickly!"

She did not comprehend at all, but she obeyed him by sheer blind force of his will. Tears scalding her eyes, she threw the beam of light on the enormous balanced rock, as he darted toward it. He had picked up Campbell's rifle, came to the rock, and with the rifle-butt began to hammer at the bottom of the rock—at smaller stones and bits of ancient wood wedged there.

Again and again. Marcia wildly thought he had gone out of his head; she screamed at him, then screamed anew in sudden frantic terror as the huge rock moved. It moved, toppled, seemed to hang in the very air—and suddenly plunged.

There was a terrific crash that shook the rock. Something hit her; Vorokhin was beside her, catching and staying her, supporting her. Another crash, a frightful concussion that sent dust and rock fragments all around them chokingly.

"The light!" cried Vorokhin. "The light!"

She still held it, and pressed it on again. The water was gone; the huge rock had toppled forward, completely closing the opening there. The water was flowing over it and vanishing. An exultant shout burst from the Russian.

"You see? It closes the chasm below—the water flows out through the passage now! Come, come at once! To the other opening!"

To Marcia, everything now became a horrible unreal nightmare, a vague fantasy through which she moved like an automaton. She scarce realized anything around her. With Vorokhin's help, she was climbing amid rock masses toward the pin-point of daylight above. The feeble, dying flashlight lit their way.

"Alec! *Alec!*"

A spasmodic cry, an effort to turn and win back, a frightful remorse at leaving her brother there in the tomb of Genghis Khan—this too was an unreal memory.

IT was the sunlight that brought her back to herself: the sunlight of high noon, pouring down around them. She had no memory of emerging into the sunlight, but found Vorokhin carrying her. Then he laid her down in a patch of brush.

"Wait here," he said. "A mile away, according to my Mongol captain, is a small village with a horse-herd. I'll be back."

Abruptly he was gone. She was alone on a high mountainside in the sunlight.

The unnerving horror of the experience returned upon her; she flung herself face down, in a burst of sobbing, and lay long, unmoving.

At a touch, she roused, and sat up. Vorokhin stood above her. She came to her feet, blinking. Two half-wild shaggy horses were near by, bridled; the Russian held their reins. He stood silently watching her, his eyes intent upon her face.

MARCIA gasped. He looked so cool, so poised, so brown and powerful—as though nothing at all had happened! Perhaps it had not. She caught at him suddenly.

"Oh, it's not true—tell me it's not!"

"All true, little golden dove. All true. We've lost your brother, as I've lost many a friend, hundreds of them. But by God, I'll not lose you!" he cried fiercely. "Not except by your own choice. We must ride, and ride fast and far. We can do it. We have jewels enough for life ahead—come!"

"Where?" she asked blankly.

"Have you forgotten your word to me, down there?" he exclaimed. "But I'll not hold you to it. You shall choose again, later, when you're recovered and well and strong—"

Marcia put out her hand to him.

"Once," she said quietly, "is enough for always, Pete. I'm ready."

He laughed—a quick, ringing little laugh, savagely joyous. He made no move to touch her, however; in this moment she had no heart for kisses, and he knew it. He bowed over her hand, brushed her fingers with his lips, and turned to the horses.

Ten minutes later, as they were riding side by side, Marcia suddenly drew rein and turned a startled face to him.

"Pete! We can never reach that place again—by the way we came. It's closed forever, now. But the hole we came out of, in the hillside— Can you find it again?"

His eyes widened upon her in abrupt dismay.

"No," he said, and then shrugged. A smile came to his lips. "I meant to mark it well—and the only thing I could think about was you. . . . Let it go. We both have found treasure enough for life!"

A Million for ohn

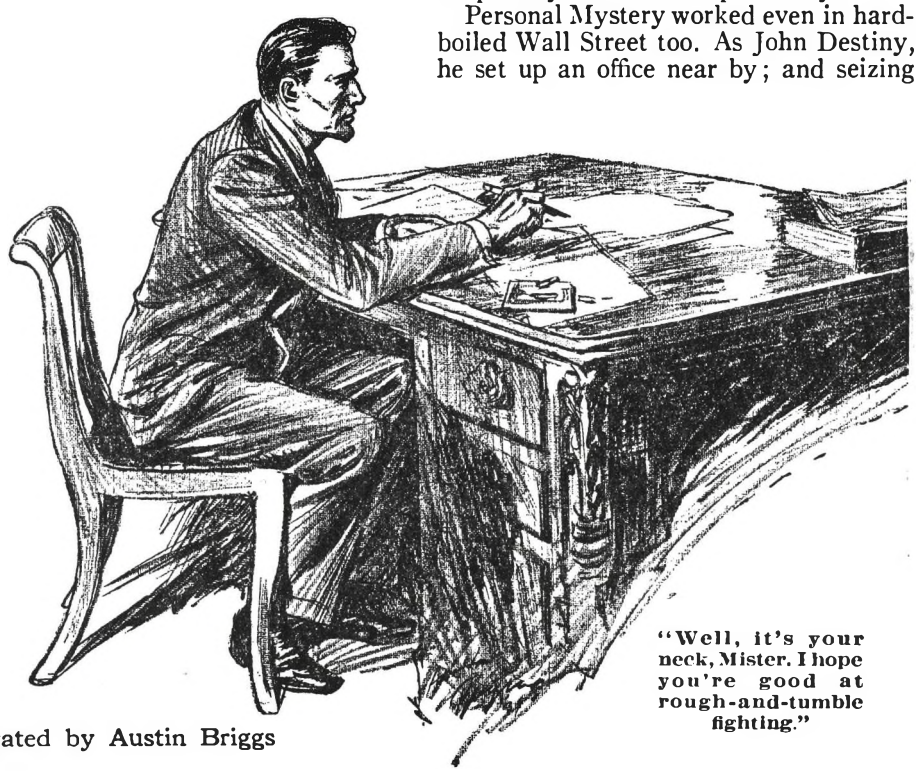
The Story So Far:

"I AM a success," said the wealthy manufacturer Ephraim Brood to Bentley Dewert, "because I own the secret of success. If you've read 'The Count of Monte Cristo,' you've seen it work. Personal mystery made the sailor *Edmond Dantes* over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo*. Let people *imagine* things about him. Didn't talk about himself. Lawrence of Arabia was another: an able and daring officer, yes; but personal mystery made him a world figure."

Dewert took the fantastic job. With the five hundred dollars capital Brood provided, he bought new clothes, put up at the fashionable Washington Towers—and bribed the clerk *not* to let another guest, a French airplane-buyer, know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and before the dust settled, a certain airplane-manufacturer had paid Mr. Destiny six thousand dollars to keep away from the airplane-buyer.

Personal Mystery worked even in hard-boiled Wall Street too. As John Destiny, he set up an office near by; and seizing his opportunity, got himself so much talked about as a mysterious new operator (presumably a "front" for well-known and powerful interests), that the all-too-clever and none-too-scrupulous broker Ryster paid him ten thousand dollars for an option on his "holdings" of a certain stock—which in reality amounted to just one hundred shares. It is to be admitted, of course, that our hero had help in this deal from Pyramid Jo Caddis, another tough broker, who hated Ryster.

In another quarter, however, Dewert ran into trouble. One night he was great-



"Well, it's your neck, Mister. I hope you're good at rough-and-tumble fighting."

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood," said Dewert—who had been fired from his newspaper job and was hunting for another. "But—well, just how does it concern me?"

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-*actor*. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula to the world. Need a stooge—somebody to *live* that book. While I write it! That's your job. Pay you money to be my stooge. You'll make a million dollars. How's that for a job? Want it?"

J. Destiny

The seventh exciting month of a young man's attempt to make a million dollars in one year by means of "Personal Mystery."

By FULTON T. GRANT

ly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, and was wondering what sort of personal mystery he could employ to make her acquaintance, when the old fellow choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley took them to his rooms, called a doctor, and politely left them alone. When he returned they had gone, leaving no word.

The newspapers soon supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the asylum in which, she believed, he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared.

They got in touch with Dewert again, however; and he learned that Graymaster's supposed insanity was based on his knowledge of a certain paralyzing light-ray which would be of the utmost value in war. Bentley was able to save Graymaster from a gang of foreign conspirators determined to get possession of the old man's secret, but was himself captured by them. . . . Personal Mystery—and plenty of nerve—worked again, however: Dewert came out of the fracas with a whole skin and a check for fifty thousand dollars; but he knew the excitement had just begun.

And now a not-so-crazy inventor mistook the *P(ersonal) M(ystery)* lettering on Dewert's office door to mean *Promotion Management*, and brought him a weird gadget designed to reduce the expense for fuel in power-production. Tough old Pyramid Jo Caddis took a hand in that deal also—and when the cards were played, an all-too-suspicious holding-company management had paid the inventor and his promotion associates half a million dollars to keep the already outmoded gadget from cutting into their business.

The Personal Mystery business was slow for a time after that; and Dewert was moved to start something by dressing up in a white evening suit, driving about in an expensive white limousine, and so on. He became the talk of the town—the "mysterious White Knight." Then the reporters found out his identity; and the foreign enemies of the Graymasters found him also—with a bullet. It was shortly after he left the hospital that he was summoned to conference with Senator Pinkton, the mineral-water magnate, and offered a job at a million a year—for one month! *(The story continues in detail):*

SENATOR Axel G. Pinkton's quiet, rumbling voice rose and fell with its peculiar, almost hypnotic modulation. It was hard for Bentley to concentrate

upon the *sense* of it, because the musical *rhythm* of it demanded his attention independently. And because, of course, he was still desperately anxious about Lorraine Graymaster—so anxious that, could he have accomplished anything, he'd have given up this Pinkwater business and posted back to New York. But it was too late for that; and on her own account, he couldn't wire the police. He'd have to trust to a telegram to Hartswell to save her—if, indeed, she wasn't already beyond rescue.

SENATOR Pinkton rumbled on, musically, vibrantly, looking a little like a great white lion, with his snow-white mane of hair and his shaggy eyebrows.

"Now, what I am proposing to do," the Senatorial voice went on so mellowly, "is in the nature of a laboratory experiment—"

There it was again—a trick of using just the right words to make things seem to explain themselves.

"I propose to consider the officers and executives of Pinkton's as a group of guinea-pigs—inoculate them with a rare new bacterium and watch for the result over a period of time. . . . You, young man, are the bacterium. . . . Of course, the patient may die, but—"

Bentley had to stop him then.

"Just a minute, sir—" If he let him go on, he'd be agreeing and saying yes, and then they'd all be crazy. "Just a minute, sir," he said. "If I understand it, you want me to step in here into a business about which I know nothing and care less. You want me to take over the control—just for one month—and run things any way I happen to fancy?"

The Senator nodded casually.

"About the size of it," he admitted. "A certain situation here has forced me into the alternative of liquidating the company or trying a drastic measure."

Fighting through a kind of fog in his brain, Bentley stood up from his chair. It was a violent effort to save his last shreds of common sense.

"Pardon me, sir," he made himself say. "But I'll tell you what I think: I think you'd better go to a nice sanitarium and take a long rest. That's what I think, sir. And if I listen to you much longer, I'll be a candidate for the same sanitarium, only I'll need a strait-jacket. I don't want to be rude and hurt your feelings, but nobody with a lick of sanity—"

"Gently, my young friend." Senator Pinkton had raised his hand. It was a gesture of restraint which had quelled rioting legislators, and it effectively quelled Bentley's outburst.

"Do not," said the Senator's musical bass, "fall into the error of supposing that what I propose is the loose fancy of a gullible old fool in his dotage. I have, thank God, a few years of lucidity ahead of me still—even at seventy-six. Since you have been so—ah—frank, let me assure you that I have no illusions as to the risks such a scheme involves, and I have arranged to minimize those risks."

There he went again, away from the crux of the thing, talking about "risks" and acting as though it were all logical.

"The position I offer you is one of authority, but not one of—ah—trust. I am aware, believe me, that a young whippersnapper who has played the buffoon, a sort of modern Barnum, in order to create a legend about himself for purposes of personal gain, may be and probably is, the greatest rascal out of jail."

Bentley bristled at that.

"Rascal, hey? I don't have to stand for that, Senator!"

"Endeavor to control your impulsive nature, my young friend," said the Senator. "No personal affront is intended. Still, you venture, for reasons you consider valid, to question my sanity. I presume I may question your honesty for similar reasons, eh? For all I know,—or care,—you may be a model of integrity and nobility, pathetically misunderstood by an unappreciative press—"

The room was thick with his irony.

"But obviously I cannot make such an assumption. Let us admit that what I plan is—ah—a trifle irregular, not to say far-fetched. But I assure you, young man, that only by refusing to be governed by accepted methods have I been able to build what is the greatest single-unit enterprise in the country—from a mere bottle of spring water."

THERE was no challenging the man. He vibrated on:

"To put it in words of few syllables, I don't care a tinker's dam for your opinion—or your moral character. I am quite able to protect my interests against your—ah—human frailties, if any. I contemplate taking a gamble, and I offer you the chance of gambling with me—assuming that you are a gambler, Mr. Destiny. If even half of the newspaper stories about you are true—"

He lifted his heavy shoulders significantly. Bentley was speechless.

"You claim to value your abilities," the Senator went on after his pause, "at a million dollars a year. A high value, sir. Very high. But I'll take you at your word. I'll call your bluff, if bluff it be—for one month. That would amount to something like seventy-eight thousand dollars. I'll pay you that sum, win, lose, or draw. And why? Because I believe, not in you personally, but in a theory of mine. Because only a young man with imagination can save my company from the extermination which has been started by a lot of bungling, near-visioned fools."

BENTLEY stared. This madness had method, all right. Fancy having the courage to gamble on a hunch like that!

"If I can only appeal to that thing in you which determined you to create the White Knight, my young friend, if I can only kindle a spark of your genius, your ambition, your inventiveness, then I have confidence—"

He was certainly kindling something now. Bentley's face became tense and eager. Still, behind the picture that the old man was painting lay a dull, commonplace stratum of practical common sense. This was a sort of challenge. You hate to pass up a challenge like that. And yet—

"Well, Senator," he managed to say, "I'll admit you've got me going. It sounds exciting. But I've got to tell you that you've given me more credit than I rate. There's no reason I shouldn't try a fling at your job—only, I haven't any of that thing people call 'business experience.' I never sold anything in my life. I wouldn't know where to begin. I used to be a newspaper man before I—before I got into my present profession. Not a very good one, either. And it's only fair to tell you that I detest Big Business. The whole set-up, the whole psychology of it, just makes me sick. I'd do some crazy thing that would ruin your outfit in a week. No sir, I'm afraid you've got the wrong man."

That, Bentley felt, was a good speech. An honest speech. Might as well come clean with a grand old sport like the Senator. Personal Mystery was all right, but it wouldn't be fair to risk ruining a business that an old man had spent a lifetime in building up. So, having said that, Bentley sat back and watched its effect.

But the anticipated effect of Bentley's pronouncement upon the Senator was not, so to speak, the "anticipated" effect.

The grand old man got slowly from his chair. He needed, Bentley felt, only a Roman toga to toss him back a thousand years or so into the classical Forum.

A queer unexpected smile moved the Senator's lips. He came around the desk and laid a hand on Bentley's shoulder.

"My boy—" he said, and then he paused. "My boy, you'll do. After that picturesque recitation of your shortcomings, you'll do. I'll play that gambler's hunch of mine."

"But—but wait a minute, sir. I—"

"We've done enough waiting, young feller," the Senator broke in. "And enough talking. So you aren't a business man? Well, I don't want a business man. Too many business men in this world. It's a type. It's a formula. Pinkton's and Pinkwater are suffering from business men. What I want right now is a *sportsman*. Not exactly a gambler of the professional type, but a man who *loves* to gamble. I think you're it, son. I think you'll do. Now let us dispense with this futile cross-chatter. That job is open to you. Will you take it?"

And before he really knew it, Bentley had answered. A crazy impulse, it was. Perhaps, for a moment, he was hypnotized. Auto-intoxication of the imagination, perhaps. But his mouth opened, almost despite common sense, and the words came out, almost of themselves.

"Yes," he said, "I'll take your job, Senator. I'll take it, all right. I still think it's crazy, but maybe I'm crazy too. If I wasn't crazy, I wouldn't be here. If you weren't crazy, you wouldn't want me here. But since we're all crazy, sir—well, I'll take your job. Only, don't say I didn't warn you."

They shook hands.

"Now," said Axel G. Pinkton, "let's get down to business, young feller. I'm due back in Washington, and I've got to start pulling wires to keep you out of jail." And he walked out.

IT is nine-seventeen in the morning. A human stream of employees of the Sudso Soap Company has filed through the narrow hallway where are established six automatic time-clocks. Already the click of typewriters can be heard in a great commercial symphony from the great room where a hundred besmocked young ladies are transcribing the dictaphone records of yesterday's dictation.

Ephraim Brood, who lives up to the promptness he requires of his employees, has been at his desk for exactly seven-

teen minutes and seven seconds. A boy carrying a mail-basket taps at his door, and upon invitation enters.

"Telegram for you, sir."

"Urrumph!" growls Brood. "Give it here." He opens the yellow envelope, rustles the folded paper within, spreads it upon his desk, and begins to read. It is a brief, rather enigmatic message from a city in the Midwest.

Brood snorts violently as he reads it.

"Damned young puppy!" he exclaims, but he reads it again.

BROOD SUDSO N. Y. HOLD EVERYTHING STOP NEED THIRTY DAYS MORE STOP DRINK GLASS PINKWATER DAILY DEWERT

An executive of the factory braves the lion, opens the door to Brood's sanctum, and peers in, while a long file of waiting executives, less daring or of lesser importance, remains outside to await the production manager's report.

"'Morning, Chief—" ventures the daring one.

The ruddy face and massive jaw lifts at him. The great bellowing voice of Ephraim Brood blares at him,

"Pinkwater!" roars Brood. "Yah! Pinkwater! Get out of my sight!"

The report of the retreating production manager is not favorable. This hour is not, it seems, propitious.

SAME time, different place.

The place was the city-room of the New York *Chronicle,* specifically the desk of City Editor J. C. Hartswell. He had been engaged in what the staff referred to (more than likely in whispers) as "raising hell." About one stick of copy was needed for page eleven of the noon edition, and Hartswell had been pawing through the overset, endeavoring to find such a piece. While thus engaged he had been blowing off much steam by bellowing across his desk at the staff in general, pointing out their shortcomings. The staff let him rave. Typewriters clicked merrily. It was almost institutional, this early-morning ranting of Hartswell's.

Presently a copy-boy arrived, loaded with mail, papers, and the early news-bureau cables and telegrams. He dumped them irreverently on top of the make-up dummy; but before the lightning in Hartwell's eyes could strike, he said:

"There's a personal telegram for yuh, Chief. I put it on top of the other stuff." Then he fled.

Hartswell glanced at the unopened wire. The word *Personal* intrigued him. "Who the devil—" he growled, and tore it open. As his eyes fell upon the first line, he gave vent to an oath so powerful, so startling, that half the staff stopped typing and wondered.

What he had read was:

J. C. HARTSWELL PERSONAL CHRONICLE NEW YORK

J. C. PLEASE FIND LORRAINE GRAYMASTER LAST SEEN NEWARK AIRPORT THREE P.M. WEDNESDAY STOP BIG STORY IS ABOUT TO BREAK BUT PLAY UP SOCIETY ANGLE ONLY NO MATTER WHAT YOU DIG UP STOP WILL GIVE YOU ALL EXCLUSIVE IF YOU PLAY IT MY WAY YOURS FOR A MILLION BUCKS BENTLEY DEWERT

To say that Hartswell gasped, stared and then swore at the telegram is to understate. It exhausted his replete vocabulary and left him without adequate means of expression of the whirl of criss-cross emotions it caused in him:

"Dewert, hey? Well, I'll be a damn' so-and-so! And the Graymaster frail! Say, how would that nitwit ever know society's prettiest gift to the newspapers? And what does he mean, 'last seen Newark airport Wednesday?' What does he mean a big story is breaking? That dumb bunny wouldn't know a big story if it was painted green! Or would he? Well, we'll give it a whirl, but if I—" He left the sentence hanging.

"Copy!" he bellowed. A boy appeared.

"Go find Annie Lessing in the society-room," he ordered. "Tell her I want her—*now,* not this afternoon."

Presently the *Chronicle's* veteran society reporter flounced into the city-room.

"Hello, J. C. What's on your mind? I've got to get right over to Forest Hills and cover the Sturgis wedding—"

"Forget it. Listen, where's the Graymaster frill?"

"Lorraine? I wouldn't be sure. She was in Tuxedo last week. Why? What's she done now?"

"She went some place by airplane Wednesday, maybe. You grab a hack and get down to Newark airport and make them show you all passenger-lists beginning then. Snoop around and see if anything funny happened, too. And listen, Annie—remember Dewert, who used to cover ships? See if you can dig up some dirt that couples him with Lorraine. Here's some more. Try and get a line on the White Knight—"

"That duck is *Ledger* property, Chief. Better lay off."

"Maybe," said Mr. Sommerswie, "you aren't interested in this, Pop."

"Don't argue with me. I know what I'm doing. And here's still another—wait a minute—"

He stared at the telegram, read the date-line and the address of its origin.

"While you're checking passenger-lists, make a note of all passengers who flew to Pinkton—that's a stop on the Denver route—you know, Senator Axel G. practically owns it. Be smart, Annie. This might run big. Use your social contacts to check on Graymaster. Keep on the phone with me—call here every hour. On your way, now—drop all your other stuff. Put somebody else on the Sturgis wedding and hop onto Graymaster. Got it?"

"But listen, J. C.—"

"Shut up and get out.

Miss Annie Lessing, with a flounce of her dignity, turned and went out of the door.

"Stuffed shirt!" she hissed privately. "All he wants of one poor girl is a scoop on Graymaster, a pass at the White Knight, and—say, what's this about young Dewert?"

BANTON D. SOMMERSWIE, account manager of the Trans-Universe Advertising Service, was a man on the job. Rumor had it—and in the advertising profession, rumor is oft-times as good as television or radio—that Pinkwater had dispensed with the services of advertising manager Jo Blick, and hence with those of Blick & Stevens, their former agency. And so Mr. Sommerswie, after spending five hours in one of those two-by-four closets, complete with dictaphone, visualizing pad, a gross of pencils, a Roget's Thesaurus, dictionary and scrap-basket, but entirely devoid of telephone or means of outside communication, and called waggishly by members of the profession, "thinking boxes," emerged with an armful of papers and a headful of sure-fire ideas. He descended upon the art department. He fell upon the plan department like Sennacherib upon Babylon. His visitation of the research-department and the retail-merchandising board was like a holocaust and left them burning in such wise as he departed. For seven hectic days Trans-Universe dreamed no

dreams which were not tinctured by Pinkwater, nor did the merest stenographer escape the Pinkwater deluge. For the Pinkwater account was, as the entire advertising world knows, worth sixteen millions of dollars a year.

And then, on March 1st, with an enormous volume bound in finest morocco under his arm, and cheered by a hundred Trans-Universe employees, all of whom cursed him privately, no doubt, Mr. Sommerswie took the train for Pinkton. He arrived the next morning, took rooms at the Pinkton Palace Hotel, hired a special limousine to drive him to the Pinkwater works, chartered a fleet of busses for future reference, engaged fifty seats for a championship wrestling-match to be held next evening in Springfield, paid in advance for fifty places and fifty fine repasts at Springfield's famous Coq d'Or restaurant, and then set out for Pinkton's, Inc.

Arrived at the factory buildings where the sulphurous smell of Pinkwater, bubbling in its incessant springs underneath a vast concrete dome, greeted him half a mile away and doubtless spurred him to greater, deeper, more vital thoughts of purging a nation of its inner woes, he descended from the car and strode into the building which houses the mere business offices of Pinkton's plant with the energetic step of a man sure of his future.

A slightly nodding elderly gentleman in uniform sat at a desk in the lobby. Mr. Sommerswie was prepared for just such guardians and began with a breezy:

"Howdy, Pop!"—giving his name and pulling a wrapped package from his coat pocket and setting it on the desk in front of the ancient doorman. "Here's a li'l' present from the greatest advertising agency in the world," he announced. "Now you phone in and tell the Senator I'm here, like an answer to his prayer."

The doorman ignored the package. He had heard a thousand variations on this theme, and was not unduly impressed.

"Senator aint here," he stated. "Gone back to Washington."

Mr. Sommerswie had the next name ready.

"Tell Percy P., then."

"He's in Florida."

Your up-and-coming agency contact man is hard to discourage. Sommerswie pulled a slip of paper from his wallet, studied the carefully typed list of names thereon, and urged:

"Charlie Soones, then."

"Aint here. He's fired.

"George Bruder?"

"He's fired too."

This was something like a quandary, but Sommerswie tried once more.

"How about Tom Leris, the Senator's Man Friday?"

"He's here, but he won't do you no good. He aint fired yet, but he might as well be."

"What the hell, Pop? What's wrong with this place? Everybody crazy?"

"Destiny's wrong."

"Huh? Now, listen here—"

"Yup. Feller named Destiny. He's the works now. You gotta see him, only he won't see nobody."

Sommerswie reached again for his package and began unwrapping it. It was time, in the curriculum of procedure for salesmen, for an important gesture. The paper removed, a pint bottle appeared. It bore the label of a costly brand of whisky.

"Maybe," said Mr. Sommerswie, "you aren't interested in this, Pop. But of course, if you should suddenly be called away for a minute—"

There was a brief pantomime of facial expressions. Presently Pop and the bottle vanished out of a door. Presently, also, Sommerswie the dauntless salesman penetrated another door and entered into the mysteries of the inner offices.

THEY could all go to hell. Bentley Dewert had arrived at this decision by a process as involved as it was painful.

Having sent off his various telegrams he had proceeded to the Pinkton offices and located the private office which had been assigned to him. He had a good feeling, now. It was satisfying to know that he had at least done something about Lorraine. That wire to Hartswell, he concluded, was a master-stroke. Given Hartswell's nose for news, he'd leave no stone unturned until he had either located the girl or had found her suspiciously missing—which, of course, would be news, and the story of it might bring Lorraine's situation to the attention of the authorities—without giving away anything. Good old J. C.! He'd probably roar like a lion and swear like a mule-skinner, but he'd get action. He'd play ball.

But as though the Fates were determined to toss trouble in Bentley's way, other worries now beset him. It began with a stream of angry, protesting men. Hardly had he got seated in Percy Pinkton's former office, when a

veritable army of lesser executives and department-heads swarmed upon him.

He tried, at first, to listen to them, tried to treat them with courtesy and restraint. "If I'm going to accomplish anything here," he reasoned wisely, "I'd better get an earful and find out what's going on. These fellows will naturally resent me, but maybe I can fix that—if I'm smart."

But he couldn't. Either he was not, as he expressed it, "smart," or else the men were too resentful. They came in open hostility. They damned this and they double-damned that. They stood around and banged his desk. Vainly he tried to grasp the root of their complaints. They shouted him down. He was an intruder and an interloper and probably a crook besides. . . . He must have some slick hold on the Senator. . . . And they were going to show him where he belonged.

Did he expect them to be timid, downtrodden, pen-pushing little men—title-heavy puppets whom the weight of the Senator's personality had crushed and humbled? They were nothing of the kind.

They were wolves—hungry wolves, each jealous of his little personal fragment of a golden pie whose crust might be cracked by this intruding blunderer. Wolves showing sharp teeth, too. Where Bentley sought information, he got sullen, negative grumblings. Where he sought advice, he got warnings. They began by telling and refused to be told. They made it plain that he had no business there, and that they would take nothing from him. It was a sort of declaration of war.

Then, toward eleven, they got under Bentley's skin. Their very arrogance, their impertinence, made him forget, for an instant, that he was, after all, the presumptuous intruder, and a large, troublesome fly in their corporate ointment.

"They can all," he determined about then, "go to hell!"

And straightway he set about sending them there.

First a Mr. Soones, who was burdened with complete charge of dealer-distribution, and who seemed to be a man of influence beyond that which his title suggested, began it by dropping the mask of caution.

"Now let me tell you where you stand, Destiny," he said suddenly, after giving resentful answers to Bentley's questions. "And maybe you'll get wise to yourself. We know all about the Senator. He's an old man, and he's crazy. Looks like you've worked some kind of a gag on him and almost got away with it. But it won't go down. You're outnumbered. What you don't know is that Pinkton's isn't just a company; it's a community. Everybody in this town is Pinkton's. Pinkwater built our houses and raised our children and started our schools. It aint the Senator who really owns this business, stock or no stock: It's us. Maybe you're a smart city slicker—by the newspapers you must be pretty smart, feller; but you're a long way from home out here. You behave and keep your mouth shut, and there won't be any trouble; but don't start leading with your chin, because you'll make a lot of people sore."

"I see," said Bentley. It was a tremendous effort to keep from tossing the fellow out of the window. "I see, Soones. I see what you mean. Now you go back to your job, and I'll think it over."

Then another one. This was George Bruder, who had held the title of assistant in the sales-manager's office until the Senator had removed his boss, and who now was inserting his feet in larger shoes.

"I don't care a damn," he asserted, "what you do in the other departments, Destiny; but lay off mine. Or else—"

"Or else what?" queried Bentley with menacing calm.

"Or else you might leave here fast—in an ambulance."

"I see," said Bentley quietly, concealing his doubled fists under the desk. "Well, thanks for the warning."

MR. TYSON ran the bottling works and headed several hundred expert workmen. He was rough, blunt.

"Any queer business from you, feller," he said, "and my men quit. We don't need unions here because we *are* a union. You can't ride over us, and get away with it."

"Can you make your men work?" asked Bentley, apropos of nothing.

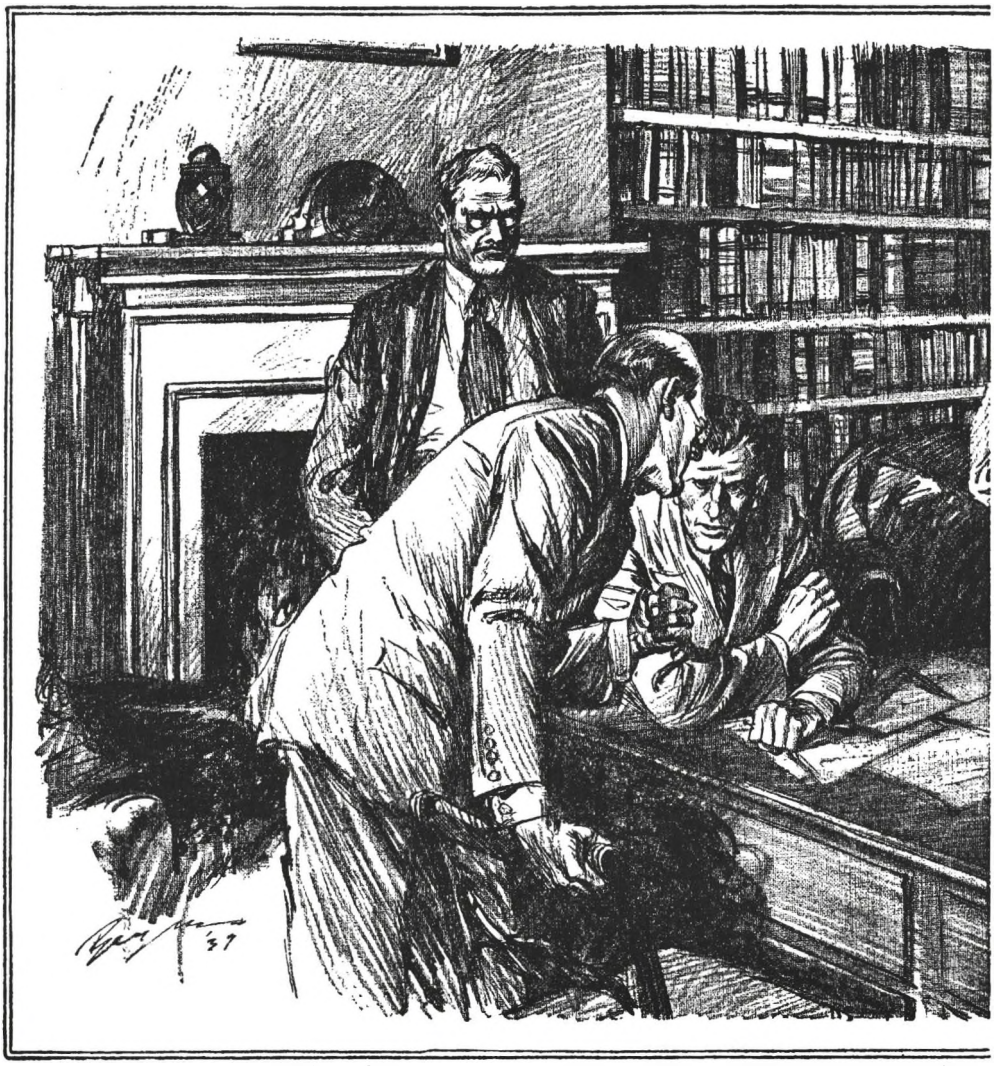
"I own 'em, body and soul. I—"

"Then I suggest you get them working, and we'll talk about the rest of it later."

Tyson went out, growling, and others crowded the door, ready to say their say.

It was then that Bentley came to a decision.

"They can all go to hell. I'll show 'em!"



"Now let me tell you where you stand, Destiny. Maybe you're a

Which was very human, very laudable, but not very clear. What would he show 'em? His job was to sell more Pinkwater to more people. He had to show results in a month. Secretly, under all his temper, he didn't blame these men much. A greenhorn sitting in the chair of authority in a business about which he knows not the first elementary thing, is not in an enviable position.

There was a gentler tapping on his door. It was eleven-seventeen. Bentley's anger had stopped merely smoldering and had grown into a deeper resentment. "To hell with them!" he thought. "They can't push me around."

Then he said aloud: "Come in." Whoever this one might be, he had the decency to knock, at least.

Bentley did not look up as he heard the door open and close. He had discovered some pink forms in one of the desk drawers and was writing the names of *Soones, Bruder* and *Tyson* with grim emphasis on three of them.

"Hello," said a voice. "Did I hear the coyotes barking in here?"

Bentley looked up, ready to flare again.

"If that's a dirty crack, I can write your name on one of these slips, feller," he said. Then, in an instant, he regretted it. This was a young man, nearly his own age. He had a friendly grin on his wide homely mouth. He was puffing at a grimy pipe, and his keen, likable blue eyes were alight with a twinkle which was nothing less than friendly.

"Don't," said this casual young man, "get sore. I'm not worth firing. Besides, I've been fired from a lot of better jobs. And anyhow, I didn't come here to start anything."

The grin remained. This fellow was different. He didn't belong to the other set. And suddenly Bentley sensed that he was making a friendly overture.

smart city slicker; but you're a long way from home, out here!"

"Sorry," he said. "I'm afraid I've let that gang get my goat. Sit down. What's your name? What can I do for you?"

The lanky fellow sat down, completely at his ease or not caring for appearances. He poked his long legs under the opposite side of Bentley's desk, and slowly knocked the ashes from his pipe into Bentley's ash-tray.

"I'm not a big-shot," he said finally. "I'm Jim Burrow. I have a job down in the laboratory. It isn't much of a job, but I have fun at it. I came here to hand you the monthly report on our analysis of the water—in case you're interested. I heard the noise of battle in here. I thought you might need somebody in the cheering-section."

They looked at each other for seconds without a word. Then Bentley stood up and reached out his hand.

"Thanks," he said. "I was just before getting sorry for myself."

They shook hands. Burrow lighted his pipe, slowly, deliberately, making sucking noises. Then he said:

"It's none of my business, of course, but it's only fair to warn you that you're up to your neck in a pretty dirty business. Maybe you know what you're doing, though."

"I wish," said Bentley, "I did."

Burrow contemplated that. Then he said,

"Well, it's your neck, Mister. I hope you are good at rough-and-tumble fighting, no holds barred."

"I've been around," said Bentley. Burrow's face lightened up at that, but he dropped the subject quickly.

"Well, here's the analysis report. My job's done."

He laid a typed manuscript on the desk. Bentley picked it up, looked at it, laid it down.

"Is it important?"

"I wouldn't know. File-closers in the army don't ask questions of their generals. Anyhow, I make one of these every month and hand it in. I'm not even sure anybody reads it, now that the Senator's gone. Still, it *could* be important."

Bentley shifted quickly back to what was on his mind, hoping to catch Jim Burrow off-guard.

"Did I gather," he said suddenly, "that you don't quite approve of our head executives, Mr. Burrow?"

The chemist gave him a sidelong look.

"Maybe you gathered it, but I never said a word. I'm deaf, dumb and blind —but not *too* dumb." He got up out of the chair. "Well, there's no harm in wishing you luck. I'll be going back now. I've got a boss who doesn't appreciate my sense of humor. Be seeing you."

And he walked to the door. Bentley was puzzled. Clearly this young fellow had come with a mission—either to warn him of something or to figure him out. But he was not committing himself. At the door, however, he stopped an instant and said over his shoulder:

"This cubbyhole looks bullet-proof, Mister. Maybe you'd better keep the door locked, though."

Then he walked out and closed the door quietly, still grinning over his pipe.

"Now, what in hell," asked Bentley of the atmosphere, "did he mean by that? I wonder just what it is I've stepped into."

BEFORE Bentley Dewert had read the report of the laboratory, it was nearly noon and he was convinced that, when finished, he understood no more about the chemical composition of Pinkwater than he had before—or very little more. Certain things, of course, were clear. Any young man with rudimentary college chemistry behind him could grasp them. For instance, it was clear that Pinkwater belonged to the general class of spa-waters known as "sulphureted" waters, along the line of the famous French springs at Aix and Bagnères and Cauterets. It seemed certain, likewise, that the broad lines of composition included, with sulphureted hydrogen, such salts as carbonate of soda and sodium chloride in very small quantities. But right there Bentley's chemical knowledge failed him.

"Maybe it isn't important," he told himself; "but being as green as I am at this thing, I have a hunch I ought to know what I'm putting out before I try anything."

Which was very plausible and true.

All in all, there were three sections to Burrow's report, with a little addendum at the end which appeared to be the man's own private note. The three sections seemed to be monthly analyses, as though, for some reason which was beyond Bentley, the actual composition of Pinkwater changed slightly with the seasons—not much, apparently; only fractions of grains. But still there were changes.

"Good Lord," he said to himself, "I thought water was always water. How can water out of the same spring be different at different times?" Puzzling, but not perhaps very important.

The addendum at the end comprised a handwritten sheet of yellow manila paper upon which the following cryptic statement was scrawled.

It is noteworthy that the increase in the quantity of the new element previously mentioned as X is quite regular. We have not, as yet, been able to break it down into its basic substances beyond the surmise that it is present because of seepage and due, presumably, to crop failures in this region, after which acres of corn and other grain were turned under. It is certain that the X element is of organic nature. It seems to possess some of the aspects of an ester, specifically, an acetate. It responds superficially to tests for butyl and other acetates. While its quantity is still negligible, we feel that it is increasing and could, presumably, have some effect upon the medicinal value of Pinkwater. Therefore I repeat my recommendation that the laboratory be furnished with the equipment needed to make more accurate tests.

(Signed) J. D. Burrow, Asst. Chemist.

Bentley smiled.

"That lad hasn't any ax to grind, anyhow," he said aloud. "Wonder how an idealist ever kept a job in this outfit."

And just then Mr. Sommerswie found his office.

Mr. Sommerswie did not bother to knock. He merely stepped in, beaming professionally, hugging the heavy leather-bound volume which contained his company's Great Plan, and said, in the doorway:

"Good morning. I'm looking for a Mr. Destiny."

Bentley's mood had bettered.

"You see him. Who are you, and what's on your mind?"

"I," stated Sommerswie, not without pride, "am your lucky break. I am the Trans-Universal Advertising Agency. Right here, Mr. Destiny," he went on, tapping his portfolio, "is the solution to all your advertising problems—the product of a hundred of the country's best minds."

Bentley interrupted him:

"I seem to remember that I told the man in front that I didn't want to see anybody," he said.

Sommerswie had the answer.

"I wouldn't know about that," he said. "But now that I'm here—" He made a significant gesture.

IT was only eight o'clock in the evening; no time to be going to bed. But Bentley was, none the less, going to bed, with a determination about it which is peculiarly that of a man who is not only tired, but seeks his bed as a sort of refuge from a waking life which has almost overcome him. A pardonable sort of ostrich-playing: Some people take to drink; others go to bed and hide.

"Lord, what a day!" was Bentley's murmured dictum. "And thank God it's over. If there's anything in what they call 'subconscious cerebration,' I hope it works on me tonight, because the conscious one is a washout."

He pulled the light-cord and the little room was filled with darkness. Outside, the wind howled, as though the March lion were coming apace and sending his distant warning to mankind. Inside, there was only calm, relentless cold. It was like Miss Rylan's boarding-house of sordid memory. Like it, only worse, being countrified, without even the odor of a thousand cooking-ranges and the din of a million motor wheels and the clang of near-by street-cars. And colder, too. At Miss Rylan's, at least there had been a radiator which *suggested* heat, and a water faucet labeled *"hot,"* in a manner calculated to stimulate the imagination. Here there was neither radiator nor faucet at all. If you wanted water, they brought it in a porcelain pitcher. If you insisted upon *hot* water, they gave you a small mug of it—and a dark look. But as to heating, they considered it effete, not to say sissified. You just did without it.

Subconscious cerebration! As he lay there, it seemed as though the stolen phrase had turned to mock him. There was cerebration, all right. His mind seemed to be whirling. With his eyes shut and the wind blowing a thin snow against his window, the sound in his head seemed like grating gears and wheels, grinding out pictures of this most incomprehensible and bewildering day. He found himself counting events as sleepless old ladies of another generation counted sheep.

A bad morning, to begin with. He had expected something of the kind, of course, but he hadn't anticipated its extent. He hadn't counted on open warfare with the whole executive staff. He hadn't expected them to storm his office and declare their hostility and practically threaten him. He hadn't handled that very well, either. Maybe it wasn't just right to discharge the most outspoken ones. Well, it was done now.

Then that fellow Burrow. There was a nice lad. He could like Burrow; but he had furnished another enigma. Plainly, Burrow didn't belong with the others. Plainly, he had little use for the so-called officers of the company. But just as plainly he had given Bentley a warning.

"This office looks bullet-proof," he had said. Now what did that crack mean? Surely they wouldn't go that far. Or would they?

Then this man Sommerswie. Not that he himself counted for anything. Just another salesman—a pretty good one, too. He had come breaking in, unasked and unwanted. He had started the old game of wanting to throw a party for the whole staff of executives—dinner, wrestling-match in Springfield, and all that. But when Bentley had pinned him to business, the man had taken out his big advertising plan and had spent the whole afternoon telling Bentley how to market Pinkwater.

That was where doubts began to come in.

In the first place, Bentley knew he couldn't use Sommerswie's plan. Nor any other ordinary plan, no matter how good and how completely worked out. That wasn't what the Senator had hired him for. On the contrary, it was just to get away from such usual business practices that he had his job.

Sommerswie had spent an afternoon pouring out a jargon of merchandising terminology. He talked in lines and power-line-rates and distribution-points and high-pressure areas and dealer coöperation and radio-hook-ups and national surveys and consequent budgeting. He had a bookful of copy and beautiful drawings, flyers, folders, booklets, envelope

stuffers and miniature bill-posters. He had a gift of logic and of persuasion. Presumably he knew his business, and had done considerable work to acquire the Pinkwater budget for his company. If Bentley were to take over the company for a year instead of a month, all that would be interesting, if not important. Pretty sound, it seemed, as Sommerswie went through the stuff.

But all that was *out*. No good. It wasn't his job to use any of it. Whatever he did, must be practically the contrary of all those things. And it must work.

Fine, but just what?

There was no answer to that one.

Eight o'clock to bed, nine, ten, eleven o'clock, still thinking. And at midnight, when he was chewing his seventh aspirin tablet, he managed to put a name to his problem.

"Reverse English, that's what it is," he mused, as though talking to an invisible interlocutor. "Boil it all down, and it amounts to just that: doing a job backward, getting the right results by the wrong method. Not playing the rules. It's like Personal Mystery, in a way—"

A neat comparison, that. It helped. He sat upright in bed and fairly shouted:

"That's just it—it *is* Personal Mystery. Same thing—not quite so *personal*, maybe. Only, my victim is the whole of America—what Sommerswie calls a national reception market. Make 'em want Pinkwater by *not* accenting it, *not* selling it in the ordinary way—get 'em hooked on the mystery of it."

But he lay down again, ruefully. Easy to say, but hard to do. Just how does one get mysterious about a sulphur spring's water? So it all started over again.

Sleep, of course, did come finally. It always does sooner or later. And it was early in the morning when he had gone downstairs in the little boarding-house to which the Senator had recommended him, that the first inkling of a solution was born—born during an incongruous breakfast of a slab of cheese, a chunk of pie and a large pork-chop. They feed you well, if curiously, in Pinkton.

"It's like any problem with an unknown," he thought. "Just call it X. . . Say, that's an idea!"

The "X" did it. It *was* an idea.

AS Bentley entered the business building of Pinkton's, his mind was so preoccupied with its new image that he did not focus upon the changed atmosphere, did not even perceive it. That the old man known as Pop should not be at his reception-desk was a trivial matter. That the stenographers and the female force of the large office should be crowding about in whispering groups, to jump into a nervous silence as he passed through the hall, did not penetrate his concentration. Nor could he, perhaps, even know that men were not working, but sitting down, deep in the earth under the dome which capped Pinkwater Springs, engaged not in the filling of an endless belt of bottles, but in hoarse, nervous argument, growling and petulant remonstrance.

"That guy must be crazy," they were saying. "If he fired Soones and Bruder, we'll all get canned sooner or later. To hell with him! We'll fix his clock for him!"

These things were; but Bentley knew nothing of it, saw nothing, heard nothing—cared, at the moment, nothing.

Nor did he even feel the resentment in the cold voice of the switchboard-girl when he demanded to be put on the laboratory telephone line, and when Mr. Sislon, the head chemist, said stiffly to him after his demand:

"Burrow, hey? He's got plenty work to do, Mr. Destiny."

Bentley did not perceive the lilt of malice in Sislon's reply.

Presently, however, Burrow came. It was nearly nine-thirty. He was unchanged. He smoked his inevitable pipe and wore his inevitable grin, and sauntered into Bentley's little office as though for a mere lab' assistant to visit the new manager-in-chief were a very ordinary thing indeed.

But as he closed the door he said:

"Hello." And added after a moment of watching Bentley narrowly: "Did I see a lot of mean faces around this morning, or was it just a delusion of my poor warped mind?"

Bentley chose to ignore that. He had other things on his mind.

"Sit down, will you?" he invited Burrow. "I want to ask you some questions."

Again that sharp, penetrating glance. Burrow sat slowly in a chair.

"Shoot," he said. "Maybe I'll answer them."

Bentley fired away.

"I've been reading your analytical report," he stated. "And I was interested. What about this X business? Off the record, just what do you think it is?"

Burrow seemed relieved, even pleased. But he only said:

"You've got me stumped. All I know is what I put in that note—it's an ester. It's organic. It responds to tests for acetates—a vinyl acetate, perhaps. But I can't be any more definite. I've asked for more equipment, but Sislon doesn't think it's very important. Maybe it isn't, either. Why? What about it?"

"Just a hunch," Bentley said. "Suppose you let your imagination work a little. What *could* it be? What general change could it make in the medicinal value of Pinkwater?"

Burrow grinned.

"If any, huh?"

"Any what?"

"Medicinal value."

Bentley grinned back at him.

"Would that be treason? Are you suggesting that you don't quite believe our advertising—that Pinkwater keeps the nation fit?"

BURROW made a short and derisive exclamation.

"Well, do you?" he countered. There was a moment of silence. They understood each other.

"Never mind that," said Bentley, intent on his plan. "Getting back to your X element, you haven't answered my question. Could it have any effect?"

"I doubt it—in quantities so small. Still, I'm no medical man. To be sure, you'd have to try it on guinea-pigs and all that. And even then—" He shrugged.

"What *could* be the medicinal properties of an acetate?"

"That's a large order. If it fell into the alkaloid class, it could be a narcotic, a stimulant—practically anything. Belladonna, for instance—atropine—dilates the arteries; and there are hundreds of vinyl derivatives that do this and that in proper doses. What are you getting at?"

Bentley thought an instant; then he said:

"You mentioned the word *stimulant*. Are there any acetate stimulants?"

Burrow grinned largely.

"Lord, no—not commercially used or known, so far as I'm aware," he said. "But if anybody ever finds one,—something to replace alcohol without its detrimental effects,—it's worth a billion dollars. I suppose a hundred laboratories have been working on that. Come on, what's on your mind, Mr. Destiny? Believe me, there's nothing like that in Pinkwater—if that's it."

"You'd call it impossible, then?"

Burrow made a queer gesture.

"Nothing's impossible in modern chemistry," he said. "But it's damned improbable. Quite a picture, you suggest—a whole country drinking this Pinkwater stuff and getting a cheap jag! Wow! Think of the money you'd save, at twenty cents a bottle! No sir, that's out. What we've got, if we've got anything, is pretty simple—a lot of corn-crops plowed under—chemical action of the soil on the decaying and fermenting grain and other organic matter—and finally a slight seepage into the springs, molecules combining to create basic salts that don't quite belong there—maybe a hundredth grain in five hundred gallons. Gosh, no, Mister; my report was purely academic. I like to work on things like that. Funny that way, see? But don't go and romanticize it. Come on, now, what's eating you? You've got some screwy idea on your mind."

Bentley did not reply. He studied the molding along the ceiling. He made idle marks with a pencil on his scratch-pad. A faint smile hovered over his lips, butterfly-like, seemed to perch there and stay at rest. He was like a man in a dream. In fact, he *was* a man in a dream. The blue cloud of smoke from Burrow's pipe floated around him as though coming from some Aladdin's lamp. A genie would presently appear to obey his least request. He had rubbed the lamp; now he could snap his fingers, and lo, the whole world was his and in his power!

"Hey!" cried Burrow. "Hey, are you sick? Got a hang-over? What's wrong, Mister? You're present but not voting."

Bentley heard him speak as through a dense fog. It recalled him to reality.

"Oh—oh, yes," he said, with a quick smile. "Guess I was doping off. I'm all right. Thanks, Burrow—thanks a lot. Glad I had this chat with you."

Burrow seemed to sense his dismissal. He stood up, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, his pipe fuming thoughtfully. Presently he said:

"Well, I'm on my way. My boss is grouchy this morning. But before I go, I'd like to say one thing—" He seemed to hesitate. Suddenly all the half-bantering manner slipped away from him, and his face was very serious.

"Well," said Bentley, "say it."

"I hate," said Burrow, "to see a feller knifed in the back—not that I'm long on butting into other people's business, either. But you've started badly here, Mr. Destiny. For one reason or another, the men you fired were—well, the wrong ones.

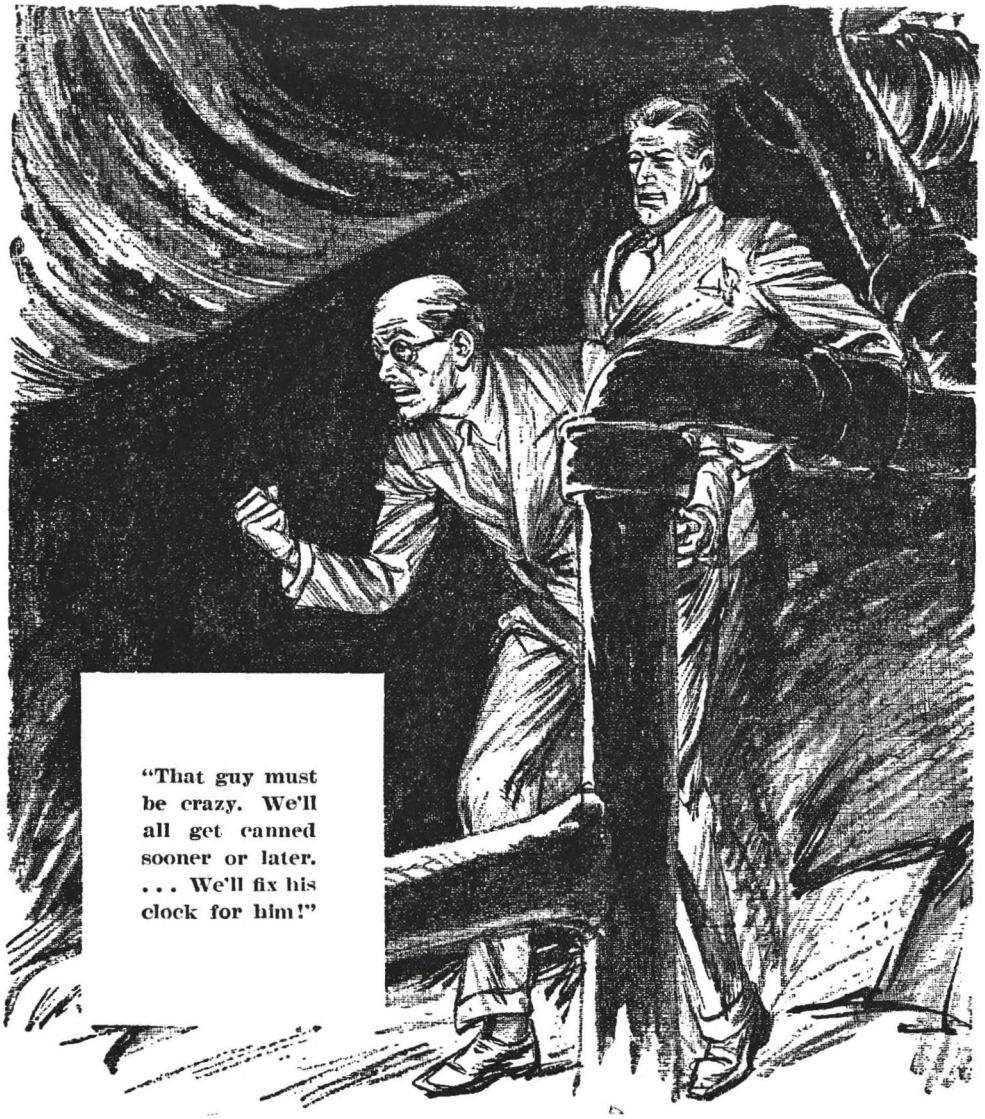
I mean wrong for you. Besides that, everybody here knows about your White Knight business in New York, and they've got you figured out for a city slicker who has worked a gag on the Senator."

"So what?" demanded Bentley.

"So this: personally, I'd rather see you here than—well, than some others I could name but won't. Maybe you're a crook, but you don't quite look the part. I don't think they give the Senator credit enough. He put you here for something. You're going to do something. I'd suggest you do it fast and sudden, before something unpleasant happens to you."

"Unpleasant?"

"Yeah, like finding yourself sluicing down the spill-water culvert that carries off the overflow from the spring. You



just can't understand how these boys feel about Pinkton's. They live in it; they live for it; they live from it. Bad enough to have an outsider step in, but they think you're going to take their little graft away from them—and maybe you are. They aren't big-shots, and they aren't killers; but even a rabbit will fight if he's in a corner. You fired three of 'em. Probably they came in here and sounded off—they would; I know 'em. But they were the wrong ones. There's a lot of things going on you'd never guess. If you want to get an idea, just check a few figures. It's true that sales fell off last season, but that doesn't account for more than half the money that doesn't appear where it should appear in the balance sheet. Me, I'm only a little lab' assistant. Nobody pays any attention to me, see? But I've got a good pair of eyes—and ears, too. I can add two and two and get the right answer every time."

"Then you'd say there's some crooked work."

"Mister, I wouldn't say a word. I'm the three Chinese monkeys—see not, hear not, speak not, see? But I was thinking that if you're on the level,—and I'd gamble you are,—you'd better take steps, Mr. Destiny. Big steps, and fast ones."

Then he walked out and closed the door.

Bentley sat very still for minutes. Presently he murmured: "That guy is distinctly on the up and up. Maybe I'd better take his tip. In fact, I will!"

IN the bright lexicon of good salesmanship the word *fail* is conspicuously absent. It can, furthermore, not be said of Banton D. Sommerswie that he was not a smart, able salesman. He had a record to prove it.

And yet Mr. Sommerswie retired for the night after a four-hour conference

with Mr. Destiny, oppressed by the prickly feeling that he was no nearer to Pinkton's sixteen-million-dollar budget than he had been when he left Chicago. Less near, if anything.

"That damned Destiny," he summed it up, "knows less about advertising than I do about astronomy. We'll have to reach behind him somehow."

And it was with this determined thought that Mr. Sommerswie awoke in the morning.

FOR it was perfectly true. Having bribed his way into the Pinkton offices, having at length located this new Mr. Destiny and turned loose his high-powered persuasion, Mr. Sommerswie had begun to sense that this extremely young man was both inattentive and entirely ignorant of the matters in hand.

And when he had come to the end of his long exposition and had brought up the idea of signing a contract, this Destiny fellow had merely smiled and said:

"Contract? Contract for what, Mr. Sommerswie? Can't I just buy magazine and newspaper space and put things in it if I want to? I don't think we need to talk contracts, Mr. Sommerswie."

That had been the end of the conference—certainly not a shining success. And Mr. Sommerswie, loyal to the prime rule of good salesmanship, was going to make a flanking attack.

The judicious gift of another bottle of whisky proved the open-sesame for reëntrance to the Administration Building—not to Mr. Destiny, this time, but to a man who by repute had been closer to the Senator than any other, in the days when Axel G. Pinkton had been actively in command—a Mr. Tom Leris. Mr. Sommerswie had come into possession of bits of knowledge concerning Mr. Leris. It was common report, for instance, that Leris, risen from a mere secretaryship, had ambitions for a vice-presidency, that he was loyal but vain, honest but greedy, a paid yes-man who wanted to change his coat. Such bits of rumor are valuable. Mr. Sommerswie would use it. He knocked at the door marked, *"T. Leris, Assistant to the President."*

There were voices inside. Plainly, Mr. Leris was not alone in his office. Voices were raised, excited, angry. Small blame to Mr. Sommerswie if he listened while one voice was shouting:

"And I don't give a damn, Leris. That crook has got to go. Either you make the Senator understand, or we'll take things in our own hands. There's Bruder and Soones and Tyson gone. God knows who's next. I tell you, it's insanity. The old man's out of his head. This damned squirt will run us into bankruptcy. No, by God, if you can't handle it, we'll call a strike; and if anything happens to this damned Destiny when things are rough—well, it's just too bad."

Mr. Sommerswie smiled to himself and knocked again, more loudly this time.

The door opened.

"Well, who are you? What you want?" a voice demanded.

Sommerswie announced his name and mission briefly. There were three men in the room. All stared at him. All frowned at him. He was undaunted.

"My agency has worked hard to produce the finest sales-campaign Pinkwater has ever had, gentlemen," he said. "Aware that there was some—ah—trouble here, and that two departments have been—ah—released, we went all-out to give you something really good. We deserve a hearing at least, gentlemen. But when I talked to your new man, Destiny, yesterday, I must say I got the impression that he was not—well, not quite a trained executive. Now if I'm talking out of turn—" He concluded with an eloquent gesture.

But he did not talk out of turn.

"Come in and sit down."

He was not quite sure which one of the men inside had invited him in, but he came in, and he did sit down.

Names were mentioned and exchanged. And Mr. Sommerswie grasped one thing: they were glad to see him.

"Hell, no," said one of them. "You aren't speaking out of turn. You see, Leris? That's just the kind of thing we have to watch out for. That guy will ruin this business if we don't do something. Now, Mr. Sommerswie, coming in, gives me an idea—"

And the conference was on.

THE morning dragged heavily. . . . It had been all very well to snatch at a vague inspiration and to put on a bold face, but when it came to crystallizing an idea,—putting it on paper so that it would make sense,—the thing was not so easy.

Worse still, Bentley could not shake off his concern for Lorraine Graymaster. True, he had done all he could do—at least as much, in fact, as though he had been in New York himself. Hartswell

would uncover something. But would that save the girl from—from whatever it was? Perhaps he ought to have made a clean breast of it and told the cops. No, he couldn't, quite. That formula—God knows what it was—was not his to give away. If Lorraine would take all those chances, if Ross and His One-eyed Highness would go to all this trouble—kidnaping, shooting, murder,—then the formula was bigger than just people. In a sense Lorraine trusted him—tacitly, but actually. He couldn't let her down, couldn't give her away.

But he was very miserable. A terrific sense of inadequacy and helplessness gripped him.

"It's all got me down," he admitted secretly. "I feel like a scared hen crossing the road. I don't know which direction to flutter in."

AND he was deep in this blue mood when Mr. Leris came into his office.

"A matter for immediate discussion, Mr. Destiny—"

"Well?"

Leris was a cautious man.

"You've made a bad beginning here," he said evasively. "You've begun by making enemies and affronting people."

"Yeah, I know. I fired a couple of—"

"Three," said Leris precisely. "Taking advantage of a most irregular authority, you have discharged three able men of long tenure with the company. Not only that, but since the Senator virtually closed out both the sales and advertising departments, the lack of executive authority here is seriously crippling our activities. Valuable and important contracts have lapsed and are lapsing. The effect of this on the employees is—ah—"

"Well?"

"To be frank, there is a spirit of rebellion."

"Let 'em rebel."

Leris shook his head. "All very well from your viewpoint, but a serious trouble of that kind would endanger the future of the company—even you, sir, selfish as your motives may be, do not want that, I'm sure."

He was leading up to something. Bentley challenged him.

"Just what are you after, Leris?"

"Briefly, I want to avoid trouble. The department heads are ready to quit. A feeling of worry and suspicion has spread to the rank-and-file employees. Something like a strike—only far worse—is in the making. Since you hold all the authority, nothing can be done without you. Personally, I feel that the Senator must have been out of his mind to put you there. But since you are here, for God's sake, act—do something! You would not tactfully receive the executives yesterday. You took a high-handed manner toward the representative of Trans-Universe who brought in a competent sales-advertising plan. You have done nothing, are doing nothing. Your desk is piled with important reports and matters still untouched. Your attitude is that of a—of a dog in the manger—"

Bentley's face was red.

"All right," he said. "But you didn't come here just to give me generalities. What, exactly, is it?"

Leris was ready:

"Most important of all," he said, "is the fact that our fiscal year begins in two days, yet because of the Senator's wholesale housecleaning, we have no advertising agent and no renewal contracts with the press—nor even a line of copy for the next year's advertising. At a meeting of the entire executive staff, sir, it has been decided to accept Trans-Universe as an agent and—"

Light began to dawn on Bentley.

"I think I get it," he said. "This fellow Sommerswie has been going behind my back."

Leris ignored the utterance.

"It is a matter of catching closing-dates," he said. "Trans-Universe is an able agency. Our budget appropriation is ready. A signed contract, now, will save a bad situation . . . and satisfy the executives, Mr. Destiny. I am here to ask you to put your signature on this contract."

He held out a folded document.

"Suppose I don't want to," said Bentley. He resented all this. They couldn't force his hand that way. Damn that fellow Sommerswie!

LERIS spoke very slowly.

"If you refuse, but I hope you don't—there will be an explosion here—a miniature revolution—violence. I doubt if you understand the structure of Pinkton's, sir. Here is a town of five thousand souls—over a thousand families; and every family is supported by Pinkton's. This is not a mere corporation: it's a community. Men and women are thinking of bread and butter. You haven't the right to refuse, Mr. Destiny."

Yes, Tom Leris was right; he didn't have the right to refuse. You can't take

bread away from people—for a gag like Personal Mystery. And yet—and yet the Senator wanted him to do something dramatic, something new and startling. He was in a spot. How could he act?

THEN, as his tired brain groped for some solution, his conversation with Burrow came back to him. Damn it, he *would* do something! He'd make 'em give him a chance!

"All right," he said. "I'll sign your contract. But I'll do it under one condition."

"What? What condition?"

"You fellows," said Bentley, "are convinced that I'm a crook and a fool. Maybe I'm one, but I'm not both. If you want to hand your advertising to Trans-Universe, it's all right with me, but you'll do it my way—you'll use my own ideas of copy."

Leris stared. "You are hardly experienced enough to—"

"That's just it. That's why the Senator put me here. I've been here just two days—hardly that, even. Nobody has given me a friendly chance. Nobody has even tried to find out what I'm here for. You've all been suspicious and mad and short-sighted. The executives started riding me from the first. I would have been glad to learn things about this firm, but nobody would give me a chance. And now you come wanting me to hand over some of my authority. You threaten me with strikes. You want my signature. I'll give it to you, but I'll have my way about it. I've been getting some ideas all this time, and we're going to use them."

"I think," said Leris slowly, "that you're insane."

"Maybe I am, but that's my answer to you, Leris. I've got less than a month, now, to show some results here—you know the Senator's idea. When I'm gone, you can do any kind of advertising you like. Now, if you want that contract signed—on my terms—hand it over."

Leris still hesitated. This young fellow was a madman—and conceited, at that. Still—for one month—

"Very irregular," he said at last, handing the document across. "Very irregular indeed, but I feel it may suffice to postpone trouble. . . . And it's only for a month, as you say."

Then he added, not without sarcasm:

"I wonder if you realize the job you've set up for yourself, Mr. Destiny. Copy is required for one hundred magazines and newspapers immediately. I trust that writing it will not—ah—overtax your powers."

"It won't," Bentley said, handing him back the signed contract. "Give that to your sneaking Sommerswie, and tell him I'll have his copy in two hours."

Leris shook his head, as though in an utter daze, which doubtless he was. Then he slipped out of the room, assuring himself that even if this young fool produced nothing,—and of course he could produce nothing,—there was always Trans-Universe to fall back on.

When the door was closed, Bentley's hard smile vanished. The full realization of what he had agreed to do weighed heavily upon him. Taking pencil and paper, he said aloud:

"Now, if there are any gods in control of Personal Mystery, let 'em stand by to help me!"

Then he went to work.

IT was ninety minutes later. The pile of scrawled-over paper scattered and heaped on Bentley Dewert's desk had been growing minute by minute. So also had his confusion, his mental bafflement.

"So," he mused ruefully, "I call myself a writer, eh? And what was that wise-crack I once made about me being a Personal Mystery expert? What a laugh! Look at that pile of nothing."

There was the pile. He had named it accurately—as nothing. It is one thing, he had discovered to his sorrow, to brag and bluff and talk big to a pompous little man like Leris, to say what he'd do, to promise two-hour miracles. But when it came to writing a piece of advertising copy which should contain all the elements of drama, of thrill, of novelty which he had promised himself to put in it—that was different.

"But I've got to do it," he thought. "I've got to, now. I've put myself in a spot. And whatever it is, it's got to be good—exciting, new, dramatic—something unheard-of and full of mystery."

But it wasn't. You can't hide from your own knowledge.

He had started with an idea. There was *something* to be done with Burrow's new X-element. It had all the earmarks, all the mystery. But beyond the mere feeling that he was on the right track, he got nowhere. Nothing jelled; nothing made any plausible sense. And time was hurrying on.

"I wish," he stated, finally, "I could get a drink. Maybe that would help."

Bentley had been obliged almost to fight his way through a surly crowd.

Perhaps it was that wish that turned the tide. Perhaps there was some subtle hark-back of dim recollection. For in his tired, fagged-out brain that little word *drink* made a tinkling echo. A subconscious picture became suddenly vivid.

"That's it!" he almost shouted.

And vicariously, non-existently, that mythical drink poured into his bloodstream, giving Bentley that mysterious thing which ad-writers love to call "a lift." Let us call it *inspiration.*

"A drink—why, of course—like the old days of Prohibition. Tell people they can't, and it's just the thing they want to do most. Apply it to Pinkwater. Make it a privilege. Make it a mystery—there's the Personal Mystery, if any!"

He was excited. He gripped his pencil with a new fervor. It fairly flew across sheets of paper. Caption followed upon caption, word upon word; ideas chased each other across pages. Ten minutes, twenty, twenty-five—then, all but exhausted, he sat back and looked upon his work, and felt that it was good.

"That," he commented aloud, "ought to panic 'em. If it doesn't, nothing I can ever do *will* panic 'em. But will it sell Pinkwater? Well, it won't be long now before we know. Either Personal Mystery scores a hit, or I leave here with my tail between my legs—or on a shutter, if Burrow is guessing right."

The caption he had written on top of the page of handwritten copy read:

WARNING TO DRINKERS OF PINKWATER!
Mysterious New Element May Be Dangerous Stimulant

He nodded satisfaction. He did not even re-read the copy.

"That'll do it," he decided. "Now if I can only get this into the papers before some of those wise birds get wind of it and start throwing their weight around—"

Acting upon this precaution, he rang for an office-boy. When the young man appeared, he instructed him briefly but specifically.

"Take this to Mr. Leris' office, son," he said. "There will be a man named Sommerswie waiting there. I'm putting this stuff in a sealed envelope for him—" He chose an envelope from his drawer, inserted the copy and sealed it as he spoke. "Hand this to him. Don't let anybody else get it, see? And tell Sommerswie that I said I'll cancel his contract if I hear anything about this until it comes out in the papers. Tell him not to open this until he gets back to Chicago. Is that clear?"

It was. The boy nodded and departed. Bentley lifted the telephone-receiver and put in a call for Mr. Burrow in the chemical laboratory.

When finally the young chemist's voice came over the wire, he said:

"Burrow, this is Destiny. Listen carefully. I want you to collect every item of all the reports and records you've made of that X-element. Can do?"

"Sure. Nobody cares a hang about them but me. Why?"

"Collect 'em, put 'em in your pocket, and come around and have lunch with me some place. Don't attract any attention. I've lighted the fuse. The fireworks are just about to go off."

Then he hung up.

THE following day, Sunday, was for Dewert one of suspense, worry and uncertainty. Jim Burrow, plain-spoken and direct, had not shared Bentley's enthusiasm for the sales-campaign. To the contrary, in fact!

"I had a hunch you were a screwball," Burrow had said. "And now I know it!"

And sometime later, when Bentley left the office to go "home," he had been obliged almost to fight his way through a surly and threatening crowd of workmen. . . .

IT was early next morning when the first plane from Chicago dropped out of the skies over the Springfield airport and taxied to a standstill. There was only one passenger. He was a big, blank man, heavy, strong-jowled and solid as an advertising executive of national consequence ought to be. Ten minutes later, when he had alighted from a taxicab and stamped into the outer room of the Pinkwater Administration Building, the elderly doorman, yclept Pop, recognized a friend.

"Why, hello, Mr. Sommerswie. . . . Hey, what's the matter? You can't go—"

Pop's exclamation, wasted on empty air, had been caused by Mr. Sommerswie's powerful striding through the lobby without so much as a nod to the doorman—much less a pint of Scotch. He walked straight to the tidy offices which bore the sign, *T. Leris.* At the door he did not knock, but with features grim and jaws set, he strode in and all but crushed the astonished Mr. Leris with his sudden and vigorous presence.

"Now, by God, don't blame me for this, Leris!" were Sommerswie's first words. "I couldn't help it. I don't run Trans-Universe, myself. I can't—"

Tom Leris, whatever else, was a calm individual.

"Blame you for what, my dear Sommerswie?" he inquired. "And what are you doing back here again? I thought we attended to your business yesterday. Now I—"

"Yeah?" There was a world of meaning in Sommerswie's word. "Yeah? That's what you think. That's what I thought—yesterday. Now you listen to me, Leris. You're gonna be plenty sore. You're gonna see red and white and maybe pink, as soon as you get a load of that crazy ad. But I want you to know I didn't do it. No sir. I didn't. I'm no damned fool. It was my boss—my ex-boss, now. It was Pete Blaisinger, that's who did it."

"Did what, Sommerswie? What are you talking about?"

"This," said the ad man, snatching a proof-paper from his pocket and flinging it down on Leris' desk. "This insane damned thing. This, and that crazy man Destiny."

"What—what is it?" Leris spoke the words as though he hoped he did not know the answer, but feared that he did.

"That—that *thing* is an ad, Leris. It is Pinkwater's newspaper campaign. It will appear tomorrow in more than fifty

newspapers—quarter-pages, Leris, in big, bold, black type. And your young Destiny wrote it—that's who. I wanna get it straight, Leris. I want you to know. When I got to Chicago and saw this thing—when I opened that envelope and read this God-awful blurb, I was gonna take the plane right back here, see? But Pete Blaisinger, he wouldn't see it. He says, 'Hell,' says Pete, 'it isn't any of our business. If you don't run this as is, you'll lose that contract, and we don't want to lose that contract, see?' That's the kind of a guy Blaisinger is—money-starved, see? He don't think any more of a sixteen-million-dollar budget than I do of my left eye, see? And Blaisinger runs Trans-Universe, see? Pete Blaisinger, not me, Leris. Me, I wouldn't have let you in for it. Give 'em a break, is my way, Leris. I woulda telephoned. I woulda come back here last night. I woulda— but Blaisinger, he says no. So the copy is out, and there'll be hell to pay."

He paused; then:

"So I quit, Leris. I quit right there and grabbed the early plane, and here I am, Leris. That's all I can do. It aint an apology; it's an explanation. And maybe if Pinkwater needs a new advertising manager when the smoke blows away—"

Quite possibly Leris had not heard this last. Very possibly he had not, for his eyes were round and all but protruding. His eyes were consuming the printed proof-sheet before him, and they stared as though they could not believe what they saw there. Small blame to the eyes.

For what he read was:

WARNING . . . TO PINKWATER DRINKERS!

Mysterious New Element Found
May be a Powerful Stimulant

There was the caption, bold and black across the top of a large quarter newspaper-size sheet. It fairly screamed at Mr. Tom Leris' inborn conservatism. It was like an insulting thing. And following short after this amazing headline in the form of an open letter, ran the text of an advertisement such as the Tom Lerises of this world (and probably no one else, either) had ever seen nor imagined.

It was incredible, impossible, unreal; but there it was:

To the twenty million of the Pinkwater Family:

The scientists in Pinkwater's research laboratories, ever watchful of the springs from which the nation's precious mineral-water conditioner is drawn, have made a discovery which is, we believe, our solemn duty to report to Pinkwater drinkers.

A new and hitherto unknown chemical element has made itself apparent in the health-giving springs, probably by some soil-seepage. Its present quantity is small, almost negligible; yet it is daily increasing. What, chemically, is this X-element? We do not yet know; to some tests it reacts after the fashion of an ester, an acetate, revealing some properties similar to butyl, vinyl, amyl, and other known acetates.

A Non-Alcoholic Stimulant—or Poison?

Owing to the results of certain tests, it is thought that the new element may reveal properties of a stimulant, properties commonly associated with alcohol in certain forms, yet possibly without alcohol's detrimental effects.

We can, however, make no such claims at present. We can only report facts, and offer a frank caution to the millions to whom Pinkwater has become a symbol of national health.

COLLABORATE WITH OUR SCIENTISTS—REPORT YOUR EXPERIENCES

Show us the same confidence which we have shown in you by printing this honest statement.

Signed,
PINKTON'S INCORPORATED
Bottlers of Pinkwater . . . . The Great National Conditioner

To affirm that Mr. Tom Leris was amazed, astounded and startled beyond mere speech would be to understate. Mr. Tom Leris was groping in his brain for comprehension. Then, presently, a glimmer of light dawned. He did not speak to the waiting Sommerswie. Instead he lifted his telephone and asked for the laboratory.

"Sislon?" he demanded of the head chemist. "I want all those vague reports that came from your shop about some new chemical or something that is getting into the springs."

The words were good, but the time was badly chosen, for at that very instant other executives of Pinkton's came through the door into Mr. Leris' office.

Sommerswie, intent upon his own situation, cried out:

"Tell 'em, Leris. Tell 'em I quit. Tell 'em I didn't do it."

And presently, after questions and answers, the whole fantastic story came out.

"So that's what it is? Where's that damned Destiny? I told you, Leris, we should have run him out yesterday."

"Call the Senator."

"Get Destiny in here."

"To hell with you and your messing around, Leris. We'll settle this guy's hash our way now."

Excitement. Confusion. Anger. The offending and bewildering advertisement was read and re-read aloud.

"Element—what element? My God, this'll ruin us. This'll bring the Federal Bureau down on us—"

"Gawdamighty, we shoulda kicked that guy to hell outa here!"

And Leris, trying gently, diplomatically, to calm them:

"Now wait a minute, gentlemen, I did see something about a new element—"

And the others not having any of that.

"New element, nonsense! And even if there was, you don't go warning people off—"

And chief chemist Sislon coming in, a little puzzled and much disturbed.

"All those reports are gone, Leris," he was saying. "This damned guy Destiny grabbed 'em yesterday. He made Burrow bring 'em in. Burrow's the guy that worked on that angle. What's up? There isn't anything in those reports, anyhow. There's always some kind of a seepage into a spring, and it doesn't ever mean a thing. What's up? What you want that report for?"

They told him. They shouted it at him. They waved the printed proof of that unbelievable advertisement in his face for him to read.

And he read it, too. Then he too went crazy.

That was bad, but there was worse to come. The loud talking in quiet Tom Leris' office could not hope to pass unnoticed. Others heard. Others came. Others joined the shouting. An office-boy, perhaps intent upon his job but more likely stung by curiosity, stuck in his head in time to hear the words:

"It's ruin—that's what it is. And that damned Destiny did it. The Senator's a fool, a tired old fool, worn out and used up. He ought to have been retired years ago. Every time he does something, it's queer, it turns sour; and now, by God, this whole outfit is finished."

That was enough for the office-boy. Rumor, they say, has ten thousand ears; but an office-boy may have as many tongues. The pent-up excitement which had smoldered all through the Pinkton plant began shooting out little flames, small at first but bright.

That same office-boy was called back into Leris' office: "Get young Burrow at the lab—bring him here. No matter what he's doing, he comes here, *now*."

The boy went. Fuel was added to the fire. Burrow, sensing trouble and knowing a little, came nervously.

"Read that, Burrow." This was his boss, talking. "Read that and see what your tinkering around with bright ideas has produced. Read that, and tell us about your damned X-element."

Burrow read, then grinned.

"So," he answered, "what?"

Sislon, his boss, was categorical, profane, voluble.

"God's life!" he roared. "He says, 'So what?' So this, you young so and so! You're fired, that's what. Did you give those reports to Destiny?"

"Sure, why not? Nobody else cared about 'em."

"I thought so. Get out, before I tear you in two."

"Wait a minute—" This was cool Tom Leris, trying for sanity. "Wait a minute, Burrow. You dug up this thing; is there any chance that—I mean, is it possible—"

Burrow caught on. He grinned again.

"That we've got a natural, non-alcoholic stimulant? Gosh, no. Besides, that ad doesn't say so, does it? Chemically speaking, it doesn't say much of anything. It's a gag, that's all. It's—" But a big arm, reaching from behind, pulled the young chemist back, then flung him toward the door.

"Get out, before somebody kills you, you—"

Burrow did not wait to hear the epithet. He had heard a deeper rumbling in the air. He ran down the hall.

IT was already nearing noonday when Bentley finally came to his decision, and it was after a bad morning. Bad, because of that troublesome subtlety which we call "worry."

This Pinkwater business was bad enough. But he had made his play, and the result was now in the lap of the gods. It was J. C. Hartswell, city-editor of the New York *Chronicle*—or more specifically, it was what Hartswell might, or might

not, be doing about Lorraine Graymaster, that was consuming Bentley with a steadily mounting anxiety.

"The poor kid," he repeated to himself for the thousandth time since arising. "She may be dead, for all I know. Not a line in the papers. Not a line! I wonder if that old buzzard let me down."

RISING early, Bentley had bought the first copies of the New York papers. There should be, he had been convinced, some mention of Lorraine. Either she was missing or she wasn't. Surely Hartswell could have run some mere reference to her—a social note, some line to the effect that "Society's busiest gadabout-girl leaves New York flat—"

But not a line in all the paper mentioned Lorraine Graymaster.

And so Bentley worried.

"Of course he couldn't reply to my wire," he told himself. "He might not even know that I'm Destiny. He couldn't just reply to Pinkton, in general. But I did tell him to play up the society angle, and I promised him a story. God knows, there's a whale of a story going to break in this espionage business some day."

But from all evidences in the *Chronicle,* Hartswell had ignored the whole thing.

Mechanically, Bentley had gone to the Pinkton offices. Outside his door, there was murmur, but deep in his worries, he knew nothing of this. Somewhere, in remote metropolises, that crazy advertising scheme of his would be appearing in the papers, but he had forgotten it.

"I can't stand it," he told himself, suddenly standing up at his chair as though to emphasize his determination. "To hell with Pinkwater. To hell with Brood and the money and—and everything. I'm going back to New York. I've got to find that girl. I've got to do something—anything—"

He began putting on his hat and his coat. He was going back to New York. That, at least, was definite.

Then a pounding down the hall, a bursting in his door. Then Jim Burrow's large, able body catapulting into his office, his usually humorous face tense in a frown, as he half shouted:

"On your way, feller! This is it. Hell's popping loose all over the lot, and you're gonna be a human sacrifice. Come on, get going, Destiny!"

He grabbed Bentley's shoulder in his powerful hand and began trying to drag him to the door. Bentley resisted.

"What in blazes are you talking about? Let go of me, Burrow."

No time for politeness.

"You crazy fool, I'm trying to get you out of here before they come and pull you apart. It's that damn' fool ad of yours."

Bentley glanced at a clock.

"It's only been in the papers for a couple of hours. They couldn't have even seen it yet. You're crazy."

"Crazy, hey? Then just listen a minute."

He held up his hand. The murmur outside the windows was raising its pitch. Shrilling above it, a loud, raucous voice was lifted up.

"Are we gonna stand for it? Are we gonna let some crazy crook step in here and bust up this place? Are we gonna let an old bozo who's been dead above the ears ever since he went to Washington, sell us out to some city slicker? Aint we got jobs here? Aint we got wives and children here? It aint the Senator that owns Pinkwater; it's us, the workmen, aint it? Are we gonna stand for it?"

And a great roaring answer came through the window.

"No! No!"

"He fired Bruder, didn't he? And Tyson and Soones, didn't he? They was good men, wasn't they? They was town boys, wasn't they? Are we gonna stand for it?"

"No!"

"An' listen, you know what he done now? He's crazy, see? Screwy! He run an ad in all the papers tellin' 'em to lay off Pinkwater! *That's* what he done. He's warned people off. He's gonna run us ragged. He's gonna ruin us. He's working for some outfit that wants to grab the company. Maybe he's workin' for some other springwater outfit. Imagine that, men, he's tellin' the world there's something wrong with Pinkwater! Looka that ad, men. Looka that! Are we gonna stand for it?"

"No! No, no, *no-o-o-o-o!*"

"Then let's run him outa here!"

"Let's run him outa town, boys!"

"The bum's rush, hey!"

"Yeah—yea, yea, yea!"

"Let's go, boys, let's get him on his way."

And the torrent of feet had begun.

This was a new and noxious business. "What the devil is all that about?" he demanded of Burrow.

The chemist stared at him.

"Feller," he said queerly, "you're way out in the fog. I've been trying to tell you that you've been sitting on dynamite. Now listen carefully. They just called me into Leris' office. That ad salesman —Sommersby—something like that—he was there. That's how they knew about your gag. Sislon—that's my boss—he was there. Half the department heads were there. It was a council of war. They don't have any sense of humor, those lads. They're sore. They don't figure psychology when it comes to risking their bread and butter. And so the rumor of it is spreading. The whole place is mad, clear mad, feller. And you're it. Now will you get going? They'll pull you to pieces. Ask me why I'm here? Ask me why I'm mixing into it? I don't know, feller. I'm just a darned fool. But if you don't get started, I'm going to duck. Come on, get going!"

Bentley nodded. "I don't see why, but—" he started to say.

Burrow had opened the office door and was looking down the hall. The rumbling sound of a mob purred in on them.

"You don't have to see why," he said. "And in a minute there won't be any why. Nor any you. Nor any me, either, I guess. Here they come. We're caught."

TOM LERIS had a sense of duty, and he had a long habit of referendum to the Senator. Greedy and ambitious he might be; but when it came to a showdown, it was hard to act without the Senator.

"Now just a minute, gentlemen," he was saying. "Things are getting out of hand. I'm going to telephone through to Washington. We can't have any serious outbreak here."

Somebody said: "Nuts to the Senator! He's just as bad as Destiny. He's an old fogy. He's a crackpot. 'Twas him that let us in for it. To hell with him!"

But Tom Leris had put in his call.

Outside there was confusion, anger, thundering of a mob.

"The bum's rush, boys. Let's go, let's toss him outa here."

Perhaps it was not fear. Call it Tom Leris' sense of fitness. Pinkton's could not explode without Axel G. Pinkton knowing it.

"For God's sake, gentlemen, somebody go out there and call those men off before there's serious trouble. Maybe the Senator'll listen to reason now."

"To hell with the Senator!"

Then the telephone rang.

At the corner of the hall, next to the office where Bentley and Burrow were trapped, there was a fire-hose. Burrow, with shrewd presence of mind, was hastening to unwind it from its reel. The thudding of feet down the corridor was like the stampede of a thousand steers. Bentley stood at the window. Hundreds of men were pouring out from the sundry buildings of the Pinkwater plant, shirt-sleeved, burly, excited men.

"The bum's rush! Go get him, boys!"

Burrow called out: "Grab this hose, feller, we've got one chance in a million."

He flung a limp coil of cloth-covered hose-line inward. Bentley fought out of his daze. So it was a fight, after all? Well, let's fight. A man likes to fight.

"Okay, Burrow, turn it loose," he yelled, grabbing the nozzle.

The hose wiggled, then stiffened in his grasp like a live thing. The gurgle and swish of water smote the air. The dull roaring down the hall rose in a swift crescendo to a blaring shout:

"Out! Take him out—drag him out!"

And the rush was on.

The hallway was narrow. Only four men tightly abreast could rush its length, but a solid mass bulged their way down toward Bentley's door, screaming, yelling, swearing, behaving like the mob they were.

"Destiny! Destiny! Come outa that, you lousy crook!"

And more of the same.

Then a figure stepped out of the door to the office they were mobbing. He was a tall, lanky, personable young man. In his hand he lugged something brass and tubular.

"Greetings, boys," he said. And then *swish!*

The tremendous burst of water smote the foremost. Blinded, staggered, their wind knocked out, they yielded. Behind them the surge of unseeing, unknowing bodies pushed them forward. The stream of water hurled them back. Bodies slipped and piled on the floor. Partitions creaked and cracked.

"Back—give way! For God's sake, they'll kill us."

Swish, swish, swish.

And when the flow of humans met the flow of water, it was the humans who gave way.

In less than a minute the hall was cleared. The hose flooded its stream down an empty channel. In the yard outside, yelling, screaming voices re-

sounded. But no more mob ventured down that corridor.

Burrow grinned. "Some fun, hey?" he said.

Bentley nodded. "So far, so good," he said. "I've got to get out."

"Just an optimist at heart, feller," said Burrow. "That'll hold 'em awhile, but they'll stick around. They're plenty mad. And say—why am I in this? My name isn't Destiny!"

Bentley jerked his hand toward the door.

"Don't," he said, "let me detain you, Burrow."

Burrow replied, clearly:

"Nuts, feller. I think you're screwy, but I like you. I'll stick. Now what?"

There seemed no good answer to that.

IT was the Senator's voice on the wire. It was clear; it was strong; it was level; it was faintly excited.

"That you, Leris? I want Destiny. Why can't I get Destiny on this phone? What's going on out there?"

"I was just calling you, sir—" Leris began.

"I'm calling you," snapped the Senator. "Now you listen to me."

But Leris was in no mood for listening.

"The very worst possible has happened, sir," he started to explain. "I was afraid this Destiny fellow would ruin us and he's done it. Have you seen that awful ad? I'm sorry, sir. It was done without consulting me, sir. I would never have let it go, sir. I'm afraid it's too late to call some of the insertions back, sir, but we're trying. I can save the rest of it. We can apologize or print some explanation tomorrow, sir. But right now there is trouble here, sir. There is a sort of a strike. The men have gone wild, sir. I'm just about to call the police. We mustn't have violence, sir, even if this young fool Destiny—"

"What's that? What violence? Now you listen to me, Tom Leris, and don't take so much on yourself. Who in thunder do you think you are? I saw that ad. That's the greatest thing that ever happened to this company. It's wonderful. It's been out in the Washington *Dispatch* since the eleven o'clock edition. It's a smash. It's got every drug-store in the city crowded with people. Everybody is buying Pinkwater. Must have sold ten thousand bottles an hour. Why didn't I hear something about this X-element before? What's the matter with your reports? . . . Answer me, Leris, and stop jabbering."

"But—why—but it's absurd, sir. It was just an academic report, sort of amusement for one of the chemical assistants. It doesn't mean anything. There isn't really any new element—that is to say, it's not one ten thousandth of one per cent. Sislon is right here, sir. Sislon says—"

The Senatorial voice roared over the wire.

"Sislon is fired. Sislon's a fool. Academic, hey? Amusement, hey? That's the greatest bit of bluffing ever done in the history of advertising. I told you that boy would put something over. Now you listen here, Leris—"

"But Senator—"

"Shut up—this call costs money. I want you to make out a check for John J. Destiny—a treasury check, understand? I promised him seventy-eight thousand dollars for his month. I'll double that. That's the greatest advertising gag since Barnum. Tell him I'll double his money. Give him a check for one hundred and fifty-six thousand dollars. Give it to him now. Make him sign a contract for six months or a year. Understand me, Leris? I want that boy. He's good. He's got it. If we keep on selling Pinkwater for one week at the rate they're crowding the drug-stores, we'll double any record month in our history. Mysterious X-element, hey? Maybe a stimulant, hey? My blessed word, Leris, you're blind as a bat. Every Tom, Dick and Harry in this city is trying to get stimulated—twenty cents a bottle!"

"But Senator, it isn't true."

"Who cares if it's true? We didn't say it was true, did we? That boy's smart. That was a perfect advertisement. Give him double his money and a contract. Find the chemist who reported on that element—X-element, ho-ho-ho!—and double his salary. Give him Sislon's job. . . . Shut up, you fool. Do what I say."

The wire went dead.

Leris staggered, toppled, and collapsed into a chair.

"Gentlemen," he said shakily. "Gentlemen, this is—ah—this is—most irregular—most irregular. . . . That—that terrible thing is working—selling—Pinkwater. . . . Ah—"

Leris had fainted.

The next episode in the career of Mr. Destiny is even more exciting. Watch for it in our forthcoming July issue.

I Bomb the Navy

By COLONEL WILLIAM C. BROOKS

LEE and I were *the* air force of the Government of Nicaragua. We were pretty much on our own after we got into the air, but on the ground we had more bosses than a polygamist. Actually only the President and the commander-in-chief of the Federal army were supposed to give us orders, but we had to try and please everyone. Our worst complications were the youngsters, sons of prominent families and politicians.

I had bought a thousand aërial bombs in New Orleans but they were never delivered in time to do us much good. There was a queer old man working on the flying-field who said he knew how to make bombs, so we set him to work.

He delivered to us a hundred bombs, made of dynamite and scrap-iron wrapped in green cowhide. There was an attached fuse, and we had to smoke while we flew, so we could light them. Of course we never knew where these bombs would explode, in the air or on the ground, but at least they made a great noise and were very effective against the rebel troops.

This inspired the youths of Managua with the urge to invent new and better bombs. From that time on, we didn't think so much of our jobs. They made bombs that had clockwork attachments to set them off at a certain time, and we were never sure when that time was. We put that class of bombs to one side and dropped them as soon as we could. Few of their bombs contained anything other than dynamite—lots of noise, but little else. Then one of the amateur bomb-makers came with an aërial torpedo.

The rebels had a boat on Lake Nicaragua—a flat-bottomed side-wheeler. It could make the shallow parts of the lake, and in case of necessity could travel up and down the San Juan River. They were using it to bring in ammunition, and it was a mighty big thorn in the side of the government. Glory awaited the man or men who could destroy or capture the rebel navy, and the youthful bomb-maker was ambitious.

Aërial torpedoes are intended to be dropped in the water, and compressed air drives them toward their target. A gyro compass directs their course. This bomb-maker didn't know that. He'd seen a picture of one in a book of war pictures, and that was all he needed: an idea. The bomb was six feet long and a foot in diameter, made from a piece of corrugated-iron roofing. It had fins to guide it through the water, but no driving force. The detonating charge was in the nose. It was a fuse embedded in a tube filled with black powder that led to the dynamite. Lee estimated that there were five hundred sticks of explosive in that monstrosity. And it was our responsibility!

The bomb-maker's father was a cabinet minister, and the marvelous torpedo had been well advertised before we ever knew of its existence. With great ceremony and pomp it was delivered to us at the Managua flying-field.

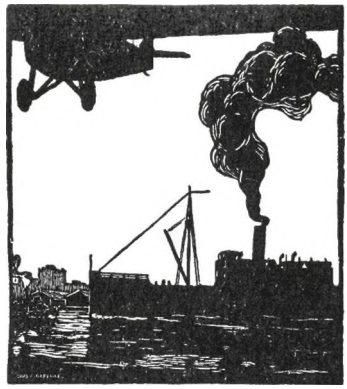
LEE and I looked it over carefully. We protested, long and loudly, that it was not practical. We tried to tell them something about real torpedoes, although neither of us knew much more about them than the young Nicaraguan. All we got for our protests were cold looks, with the implication that the courage of the North Americans might not be as great as they had been led to believe. That *was* an insult. Anyone who had the nerve, or was insane enough, to fly over the Nicaraguan jungles in an old patched-up Swallow with OXX 6 motors should have received proper credit, we thought. We had to do something about it; and the only thing we could figure out was to drop the bomb. But how?

"Bill," said Lee, looking rather sad and forlorn, "we've got to put an end to this sort of thing. If they don't blow us up on the ground with one of their time bombs, we'll sure get blown out of the air with one of these things. . . . I think I've got a scheme that will work."

He proceeded to outline his idea, and as he talked, he waxed enthusiastic. Lee's sense of humor was diabolical. The

REAL EX-

LIFE'S high moments of adventure are described in these true stories contributed by our readers. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see Page 3.) First a famous soldier of fortune tells us, through his friend Tracy Richardson, of his hair-raising adventure with a home-made bomb in Central America.



young torpedo-maker, who could speak fair English, came over and listened, and he too grew enthusiastic. Which convinced me that I was the only sane person in Nicaragua—and I had heard remarks made about myself.

We proceeded to carry out Lee's idea, and it did have its points. There was no such thing as frames from which to suspend bombs. Anyway, no bomb rack in the world would have handled the varied assortment of bombs we had presented to us to drop. Our method was to heave them over the side of the plane by hand, and pray they would not explode until we were clear. Of course that method was impossible with this baby whale: it would have to be suspended beneath the plane.

We lashed it to the undercarriage with rope, so tied that a strong pull on the right end would loosen the fastenings and let the torpedo fall clear. We could have passed the rope up into the fuselage and yanked it from there, but that was not Lee's idea. His scheme was for the inventor to ride the undercarriage, and at the proper time pull the rope. Then there was the fuse. That had to be lighted by hand, and that was something that could not be done from the cockpit.

"You," said Lee to the young bomb-maker, "shall have the honor of being the first Nicaraguan aërial bomber. You ride the undercarriage, smoking a cigar; and when we signal, you light the fuse and pull the rope—and then God help everybody."

THE bomber was tickled pink over the honor thrust upon him, and he never had the slightest idea it might prove dangerous. All set, every other activity was abandoned until we got information from our spies as to the whereabouts of the rebel navy. It came. The boat was unloading supplies at San Ubaldo.

"God watches over fools!" was a marine officer's benediction as we took off. Lee and I were in the cockpit. The torpedo was lashed securely to the undercarriage, we hoped. On the cross-bar clung the bomber. We had taken the precaution to tie ropes from the struts to a heavy leather belt around his waist. Whatever happened, he could not fall while we were in the air. Lee cut a hole in the floor of the fuselage so he could watch the bomber.

Down to the Tipa Tapa River we flew, and followed it down to Lake Nicaragua and then down the shore-line to San Ubaldo. Sure enough, there was the boat. They were not unloading but loading, swimming cattle out to the boat and hoisting them aboard. We circled a time or two, and then came into the wind. Lee crouched to signal the bomber when to pull the rope. The boy looked up at Lee, and my partner reported that the bomb-maker was white as a sheet, but smiling, the smile of a person who knows that whatever happens, it can't get worse.

Lee reported that the bomber had lighted the fuse. He signaled for him to pull the rope. Then things happened fast. Lee stood up in the front cockpit, and his face was drawn and white, his teeth gleaming through drawn lips. I roared: "What's wrong?"

Lee didn't have as strong a voice as I did, but I got him, and I almost lost control of the ship. "The fuse is lit and the boy's fainted!" I made out Lee's words. "I'm going over the side and get rid of that thing."

I didn't worry about Lee. I'd seen him do too many jobs of wing-walking in the old Gates Circus days. It was how long the fuse would burn that had me in a dither.

Lee went out of the cockpit and onto the wing like a squirrel on a grapevine. Then he disappeared over the leading edge, and I couldn't see him any more. I made another turn and again came into the wind headed toward the boat,

which was now trying frantically to escape. I could see puffs of smoke, so knew that some one was shooting at us, but I never did hear the bullets. They would have had to hit me, I think, for me to have been conscious of them.

I felt a knock on the floor of the cockpit and thought it was a signal from Lee. I held the plane steady and looked over the side.

The motor gave a stutter and cut out. Then it started again. I kept my head inside the cockpit, looking for the trouble. I had bumped into the throttle, and it was half closed. We were losing altitude fast. I opened it wide and felt the ship leap into the air. We were almost over the boat, so I circled again, wondering when the blast was going to come, and in what direction the force of the explosion would go. I felt Lee kicking on the floor again, and I looked over the side just in time to see the steamer rise up out of the water while a billow of smoke mushroomed on all sides of it. Then it just sort of melted from sight.

Somehow Lee had managed it. Good old Lee. The bump, when the plane had seemed to leap in the air, I now realized, had been when the plane had been relieved of the weight of the bomb. I turned the ship and headed back to Managua. Our job was done. The marine officer had been right: God had taken care of two fools.

Lee clambered back over the wing and into the cockpit. He sank into his seat, and the grin he gave me was mighty weak. I shouted to him: "How's the kid? O. K. for a landing?"

He nodded, and that was the last I saw of him until I set the plane down on the field at Managua.

We untied the youngster, and the crowd carried him away on their shoulders. No one paid the least attention to us, and we were glad to slip away to where we could get a bottle of cognac.

The kick-back came a few days later, when it was discovered that the boat we had destroyed did not belong to the rebels, but to a good patriotic government man. He'd been doing a bit of cattle-stealing on his own account. He couldn't make a complaint, and the government was glad to hush up the story.

The thing that pleased Lee and me was that no more youngsters wanted to go with us as bombers. They still continued to make bombs, and we had to drop them; but we at least went on our own.

Old Teak Log

A weird adventure from Siam.

By DAVID

LATER I met Old Teak Log in person, but I first heard of him from an old tin-miner named Miller as we sat on the veranda of a Chinese hotel at Bangnara, south Siam. I was new to the country, an American missionary, and in my twenties.

"It was the flood season for the river," Miller explained. "The ferry-boat, hollowed out of a log, was tied to an overhanging cable of thick rope which sagged from bank to bank between two great trees. Two men in the ferry, one in the front and one in the rear, propelled the light craft by slipping the ropes, which connected it to the overhead cable, in the direction they wanted to go.

"My wife's father stood on one bank of the torrent and we on the other. He had come all the way from England to visit us and now, at the last moment, within eyeshot, he could not come to us except across this violent strip of water. But he was determined to come, and he finally persuaded the ferry men, at what seemed a great price to them, to take him over, bags and all.

"But the bags were heavy and sank the boat too deeply into the water. The frail craft bounced and leaped and tore loose from the supporting cable. All were lost. We never did find their bodies. 'Old Teak Log' probably got them."

The tale sent shivers down my back.

"But who is Old Teak Log, that probably got them?" I asked.

"The most vicious crocodile in the Chumpon region. He is so huge that he looks just like an old muddy log of teak when he is sunning himself on the river bank; people call him 'Old Teak Log.'"

FLETCHER

My work required me to travel constantly in south Siam. I often had to spend days paddling along the short, narrow streams which flowed east and west from the central mountain ridge of the peninsula. A few crocodiles were to be found in most of the streams. But none of them as large as Old Teak Log was reported to be. The ones I saw were not over six feet long.

One day the chief customs inspector at Bandon took me for a hunt into a neighboring swamp in which almost forty thousand people live in little houses built on long, storklike legs, high above floodwater. The swamp was not impenetrable to them, for they were born and brought up in it, but to the uninitiated, foreign or Siamese, it was sheer folly to enter without a competent guide.

We saw crocodiles that day, fairly large ones, but none that approached the mythical dimensions of "Old Teak Log" which lived near Chumpon. I had a few shots at fast-diving, medium-sized ones, but didn't get a hit. They're faster than a pheasant on the wing when scared.

One calm, moonlit night I traveled on the *Valaya,* an East Asiatic Company coasting steamer, with my old friend Captain John Peterson. I had hailed him from a small launch off the coast at Bandon and asked him to take me to Chumpon. He agreed, and we spent the evening in the idle family talk of old friends.

About ten P.M. he slowed up off a point which he assured me was Chumpon, and dropped a rope ladder over the side. We were a couple of miles off the coast, but it didn't matter because the sea was calm and peaceful. My sampan, arranged for in advance, slid out of the darkness into the pool of light at the foot of the swaying ladder. I waved farewell and trotted down backward into the slightly restless boat. The gay lights of the steamer quickly left us alone on the silent sea.

At first the darkness seemed oppressive and unfriendly. It came alive and became a glistening fairyland of golden moonlight, a silver street upon the water, liquid fire dripping from the oars. I found myself holding my breath because of the sheer beauty of the scene.

It was the season of spawning. The sea was alive with millions of fish-eggs. As the oarsman strained to his task, the boat shot forward lightly to throw out a V of shimmering fire to either side of us. We seemed on a lake of fire.

It was a shock to pass from such a scene into the mouth of the river which we could smell like something alive and crawling. In a few minutes we docked in the river and I was escorted to a native shack where we were to spend the rest of the night. All of fairyland vanished as I stepped into the fetid interior, which reeked of garlic, dried fish and mangy dog. I hastily returned to the fresh air to spend the night outside.

Walking along the river bank I saw a motorboat, the one that would take me up the river in the morning. "Why not sleep there?" So I did, lying on a long seat-bench.

Dreams beset me. The liquid fire became real. I was burning hot and was being punched by fiery pokers while hot tweezers gouged out chunks of my cheeks. I awoke to find the dream only too real. Mosquitoes hovered over me in droves.

IN sleepy disgust I tried again. This time the dream was more violent. I was at sea in a sampan. The waves were dashing higher and higher, and the boat was going to overturn. I could feel it slipping away beneath me, and awoke with a howl, grasping the seat-bench for support. This time the dream was more real than ever. The boat was slanting over into the water. My startled eyes fell on the long snout and front legs of a crocodile. His efforts to get in were causing the craft to tip over. As he rolled in, I rolled out—out the other side, to safety on the bank.

My frightened senses told me that he was huge. He was far and away the largest crocodile I had ever seen. He

filled the motorboat and slopped over outside. A vague memory teased me.

"Chumpon, near the coast—"

"Old Teak Log—huge—"

Could this be he? Probably not. But the rest of the night I walked in the moonlight and batted mosquitoes. At least they were smaller than crocodiles.

At dawn I regaled the sleepy natives with my tale of thrills. They were only mildly interested. Yes, the big fellow's home was upstream a way in a great, deep pond formed by an elbow of the river. Was he Old Teak Log? Maybe.

As soon as possible I told Miller about my experience. There was no doubt about his interest. He was sure it was Old Teak himself. For weeks he deviled me to try to catch Old Teak. He was moved by a spirit of revenge, I more by curiosity. We talked of shooting, of trapping, of dynamiting, of poisoning, and even of fishing. A dredgemaster, an engineer, offered us a solution which we decided to try:

"First fence off that elbow of river with stakes; second, build a dam along the stakes; third, pump out the water and shoot your crocodile."

WE chose a week at the height of the dry season. A host of shouting, happy coolies drove stakes and packed earth. A gas-engine pump was started, and we sat down to wait. The water fell, inch by inch, foot by foot, until we could see a crocodile lair up under the bank. A frantic churning and splashing told us that the catch was more than one crocodile. We had a family.

"I've been waiting for this—let me do the shooting," pleaded my friend.

Rifle poised, he ignored the smaller bodies and singled out the monster. Even then, with the huge body helpless before him, it took many shots to end the ceaseless writhings. When it was all over, we jumped down into the pond and examined the catch.

In both of our minds was the question: "Was the monster Old Teak Log or not?" There was no way to prove it.

Miller poked morbidly around in the lair, under the bank. I thought him mad when he fell on his knees and began scooping out handfuls of muck.

"What's up?" I shouted.

"I'm finding things," he yelled. . . .

Presently a golden disk nestled in his hand: The back of a watch.

"Look! The initials of my father-in-law!"

By MAJOR

FOR several years before 1894 the Wild West show I ran made plenty of money. I had a fortune in the bank and I was satisfied. Then one day a representative of an amusement company called on me; his concern had bought the midway concession at the exposition which was to open in Antwerp in May. The agent pointed out that a Wild West show had never played Antwerp before, and I was induced to sign a contract to play there for the summer.

From the start the trip ran into difficulties. All our advertising posters had to be scrapped and a new set printed in French and Flemish. I left New York with sixty-eight thousand dollars in cash on deposit in Philadelphia, after paying all boat fares, and carried twenty-five thousand dollars cash in my pockets.

Our opening day was delayed three weeks. The company had built a "velodrome" with a restaurant beneath the grandstand, and the biggest bar I have ever seen. Loafing around, I found that our two main items of expense would be beef for ourselves and feed for the horses and buffalo. Both were twice as costly as at home.

One of the features of my show had always been a military drill which exhibited the uniforms and tactics of the fifty great nations of the world. In America, of course, the United States troops had been leaders of the presentation; but I figured that in Belgium the proper thing to do was to give this position to the squad of Belgians.

An influential Belgian accompanied me to the fort near by. I told what I

Pawnee Bill in Europe

He stampedes his circus across an international boundary.

GORDON LILLIE

wanted, and the commandant was willing, but he added that he thought I should pay the soldiers. I was willing to do that and told him to fix his price. He set a price of thirty centimes a day apiece, with evening dinner and feed for their horses thrown in. Thirty centimes amounted to about three cents in American money, so I didn't kick.

About three weeks later there was trouble. I don't know whether the soldiers got the idea, or it was the commandant behind it, but I was summoned to the fort and told that I would have to pay more money. What actually happened was that our show was about the only solvent outfit connected with the concession, and we paid our bills promptly. Therefore I must be rich.

I put the best face I could on the matter and asked what the new charge would be. He didn't know, so I acted very liberally. I voluntarily doubled the pay of every man, and the satisfied Belgian soldiers remained with us for the entire stay at this advanced price of six cents a day.

OUR stay in Antwerp was about three months, but long before that I was broke, and borrowing everywhere I could. Finally the feed men attached me.

There were two rays of hope. The owner and manager of the Blackpool in London had sent his agents over to see me and suggest I come there to play. Then a man from Holland apepared.

"Well," said the Hollander as he walked in on my wife and me, "you make bad business."

"Rotten," I told him.

"Would you like to go to Holland with your show?" he asked.

"I haven't got any show," I said, and pointed to the gendarmes standing around the lot.

"If you have money, you have show," he said.

"You don't say!"

"I give you money. You come to Holland," he suggested.

It was a joke to me until he handed me three thousand francs. That took care of the most pressing bills.

That morning I called the cowboys and the Pawnees over.

"Listen," I said; "this man De Hunt wants me to go to Holland and show. I'm going if I can. Now, I owe you all back pay. Take your horses as pay, because the courts will sell them to pay the feed bill. Lead all the loose stock you can, and drive the buffalo ahead of you. Hit out for Holland."

Once the idea got over to the Pawnees, they were tickled. I think they got a laugh out of the way the Belgians feared them. The cowboys were sure to raise cain anyway.

"Just a minute," I said, as they began to whoop and prance. "All our stuff is supposed to be locked up. I'm going to fix the watchman at the gate. When you go out, you have only fifteen or twenty miles to go. Go it—don't stop."

It cost me ten francs to fix the watchman. I told him:

"These men will overpower you. That's your explanation."

The Pawnees abandoned their tents and tepees. I told them I'd stick in Antwerp and get them back for them.

That night when the gendarmes figured everything was quiet, and were getting careless, the gates of the place opened, and a mess of cowboys and Indians and horses and buffalo ran through them, yipping, giving war-whoops, firing shots and brandishing tomahawks. They chased the gendarmes right off the place, but they had to have a little fun about it first, scaring them half to death. We put on a better show that night than we ever had before; and believe me, those Pawnees had on all their war-paint.

You'd think from the way the gendarmes ran that they were running the gantlet, or at least expecting to wear red nightcaps if they didn't take to their heels. And the "savages" entered into the spirit of the occasion just as much as those gendarmes. Even the horses

were in fine fettle—you'd think they were made of quicksilver!

There was only one gendarme who caused any trouble. He came running up panting, with a double-barreled shotgun leveled, but I grabbed him before he could do any shooting. Not that he'd have done any harm, for he was so excited I doubt he could have stopped shaking long enough to take aim.

I told him that the Indians were on the warpath, and that if they found a gendarme with a gun they'd take it away from him and probably burn him at the stake. He went right back where he came from.

It did me good to see all our wagons roll out and rumble through the streets of Antwerp, making plenty of noise. I had to stay behind and look innocent, but afterward the boys told me nobody tried to stop them, and they didn't see a gendarme in the city.

Figuring that they might have trouble when they crossed the border, they decided it would be a good thing to stage a buffalo stampede.

There was only a little bridge where the revenue officials waited. So, a mile away from it, the boys stirred up the buffalo and started them going. There were more yells, shots, and war-whoops loud enough to be heard a mile away. By the time the boys got to the border, there wasn't a Dutch or Belgian revenue official in sight. So the show got into Holland without any trouble.

I guess that was one of the reasons why, whenever we played in a Holland town, the permit always read that I must keep the wild Indians off the streets.

I HAD not much stuff left back in Belgium when it was put up for sale. I bid on it in De Hunt's name, and got it back, and had it shipped to Holland. I had a little trouble with the butcher. He had taken our stage-coach and two prairie-schooners and locked them in his stableyard. Fortunately I had brought back two Indians with me to move the stuff, and the butcher soon came down on the fancy price he'd set.

We opened in Brada, Holland, and played the entire country. We charged a gulden admission—about forty cents in American money, and nearer our price; when we finished in Amsterdam, I had enough to bring the show home.

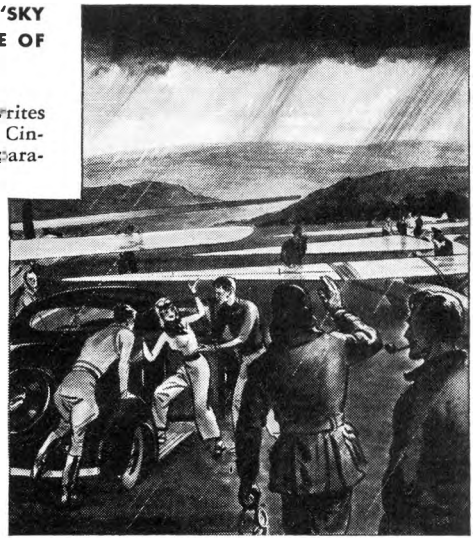
I arrived in New York on Christmas Eve with less than five dollars in my pocket.

"TEN YARDS AHEAD WAS DEATH"

GRETCHEN REIGHARD

DEATH LURKS ON HIGHWAY FOR "SKY CINDERELLA," WAITRESS-HEROINE OF THE AIR

❶ "Give me flying, I'm ground-shy," writes Gretchen Reighard, the famous "Sky Cinderella" of Mansfield, O., waitress, parachute jumper and licensed glider pilot.



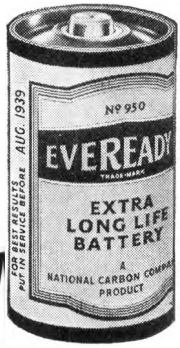
❷ "I've had my share of close calls in the air, but my narrowest escape was on the highway!

"I left Elmira in the rain after the National Glider Meet with 380 miles to drive before morning to get back to work in Mansfield. My nerves were already shaky and I had to drive faster than was safe or I'd never make it.

❸ "As darkness fell it rained harder and harder. Solid sheets of rain dimmed my mud-splashed headlights. The road was deserted. I was getting a swell case of jitters. But I gritted my teeth and drove on. I just *had* to get back.

"I swooshed down a hill, skidded the turn at the foot of it, and dimly made out a sign 'Bridge Ahead.' Then I saw the end of the bridge. In the diffused light of my head lamps the road looked all right.

"But just to make sure, I rolled down the window and poked my flashlight out . . . and my heart nearly choked me! Ten yards of wet planks between me and Kingdom Come! My flashlight showed me the jagged end of that broken bridge, and none too soon. The raging creek had washed away the whole center span! 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries had saved me from many a broken leg in night jumps, but this time they went the whole way. From now on I'm sticking to batteries that stick to me. (*Signed*) Gretchen Reighard"



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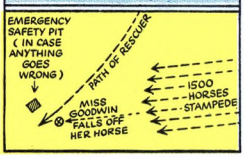

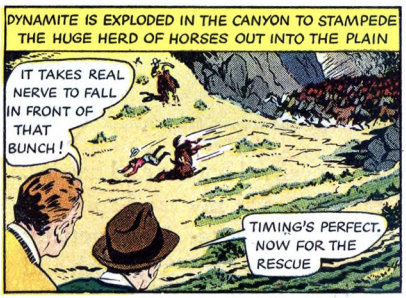

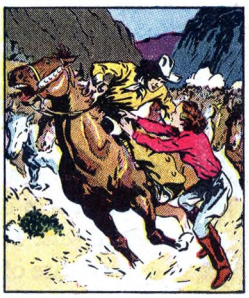

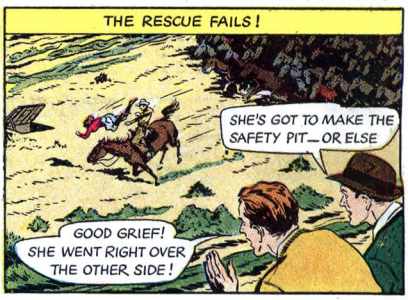

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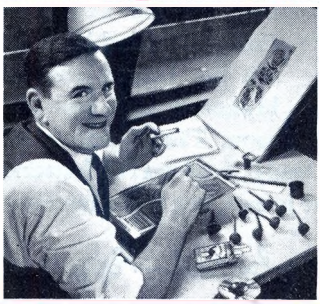

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