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JUNE 1940

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THE shrill note of a reed pipe sounded. In came men carrying images of animals; and upon the flat rock were laid the simulated beasts, while dancers went through the olden ritual. . . . Murmurs of amazement sounded as Elaine was recognized, now without hump or scar, slender and perfect and lovely. (Drawn by John Richard Flanagan to illustrate "The Dance of Life," page 4)



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JUNE 1940

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KETTLEMAN took me home with him to see a suppressed film.

One of the great Hollywood directors, Kettleman is a queer genius, experimenting in queer directions. To all the accusations and criticisms hurled at the movies, he has one very true answer: "We make what we must; since ninety per cent of the public ignore intelligent pictures, as they ignore great symphonies, we give 'em what they demand."

"That answer," I told him, "is perfectly true; but it is not the truth at all."

He grinned faintly. "I guess so; it's a good excuse for making damfool pic-

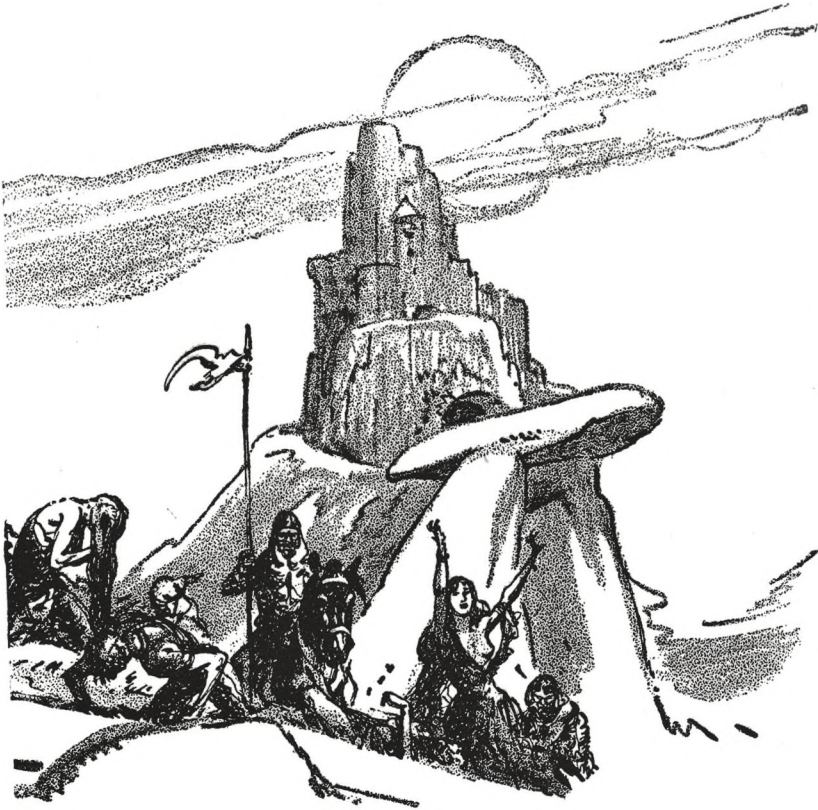
tures that are slipshod, historically incorrect and so forth. The one I'm going to show you is part of an educational program I dreamed of turning out."

"Why was it suppressed? Sex?"

"Heavens, no!" he rejoined. "It was to be a panorama of the theater in technicolor, but that fellow Donald, up in the studio, finally junked the idea. He claims people aren't interested in anything about the theater, that they want blood, romance, action! Funny thing is, this picture has all of these—and something more. It deals with the survival of acting and the stage in the darkest medieval ages. Donald saw only the opening, a

The Dance of Life

By H. BEDFORD-JONES



vista of hilltops in Normandy, and turned thumbs down without seeing the rest.”

“Nothing very dramatic about hilltops,” I commented.

“The greatest drama in all history was played on a hilltop outside Jerusalem,” he snapped. I told you the man was singular; his mental flashes were always at an angle, somehow.

Kettleman had a private projection-room in his big house. He took me in, supplied a drink and a cigar, and began to fuss with his projector. The room lights flicked off. On the screen facing us appeared a “still” in technicolor, a landscape aglow beneath a round silvern disk which, in another night, would be the fullest of full moons. A landscape, a hilltop interspersed with huge jagged bits of rock; in the distance, a castle tower and the glint of water.

“Hang it! The projector’s stuck—have it fixed in a minute,” said Kettleman. “A curious fact; the earliest French mystery plays went by the name of *puy*. Why? Because the word signified a hilltop. It was a reminiscence of earlier dramas back in pagan ages. Here you see a hilltop in Brittany, by the sea, in feudal days of blood and fire and universal war, when the drama was preserved in the hearts of common folk as a joyous relief from the horrors of an intolerable existence.”

“I didn’t know there was any drama then,” was my comment.

“The Dance of Life, the most ancient of all pageants, that of fertility, the earth-mother, an old pagan survival! Then, remember, the people were oppressed and ground down and trodden underfoot like weeds, by their lords and masters. The



A kindly soul, with a heart for the maids who were sport for soldier and noble!

people of the earth were like wild beasts, in that period."

"That same period," I objected, "gave us the most glorious of romances—look at the story of Tristan and Yseult."

"Bah! Look at the story of Jehan and Elaine!" he barked. The machine began to click; the film moved; the scene moved. Needless to say, it was a sound-film.

Yet for a space there was no sound. The figure of a woman, a girl, appeared like a wood-nymph girl with fluttering moon-glints and garlanded with pearls. Her figure grew more clear. She was actually clad in rags and tatters; twined in

her flowing red-gold hair were flowers. She moved with such symmetry, such utter grace, as apparently to mount upon the very moonbeams.

Dancing about those jagged ancient stones, approaching the flat central rock, she came to sudden frightened halt. She stood at gaze, transfixed. The high white moon etched her lissome shape, her masses of flower-starred hair, her profile of purest beauty and nobility. Behind her evident terror was a nervous strength; one sensed in her a singular desperate courage, as though she were faced by some unavoidable terror, and yet fronted it with heart unquailing.

"No, no!" A gasp broke from her. "You are dead—it cannot be you—"

From the central mass of rock, a shadow detached itself, stood out clearly, and came toward her. The girl's fright died. An incredulous cry of joy broke upon her lips, and her arms lifted eagerly.

"Jehan! Dear Jehan—you're real, alive, flesh and blood!"

"And can prove it, Elaine!" said he, as his arms went about her. They clung together, wordless, lip to lip and heart to heart.

"They said you were dead," she murmured. "All the village thinks you dead. Your poor mother died last month. And I—I have had no heart left."

He was a young man, but shaggily bearded, clad in ragged garments, marked by hard travel and privation. Unlike the average peasant, there was no cringing in his manner; he held his head high, and the harsh lines of his features held a resolute, indomitable expression rarely found among the people of the earth. As they stood together, he turned the girl and pointed to the distant mass of the castle.

"And they think me dead also," he said, a bitter menace in his voice. "The noble Lord of Fécamp, his slender voluptuous ladies, his knights and men-at-arms—aye, they think me dead. Here, little heart, sit down and rest, while I tell you about it."

He drew her down on the great flat rock, where in olden days the Druids had performed their mystic rites. She nestled beside him, tremulous, still incredulous of his reality.

"You know how my sister was taken to the castle yonder, and how she killed herself after the Lord of Fécamp had finished with her and gave her to his soldiers," he said. "You know how I cursed them, how they came and seized me and took me to the castle; there they whipped me and loaded chains on me and made me a beast of burden."

The girl shivered, and touched his cheek with pitying finger. Yet there was nothing unusual in all this; the serfs of chivalry were born to such a destiny.

"AN English knight visited the castle two months ago," he went on. "He won me at dice from the Lord of Fécamp, and took me when he left for England. The ship was wrecked on the coast below here, for a storm seized us. Most of those on board were drowned; only a few escaped to tell of it. So I was accounted dead with the rest."

"We heard," murmured Elaine. "They mourned for the English knight."

Jehan laughed harshly. "He did not drown; I killed him, took his money and clothes, and got ashore. Elaine, it's wealth! Money, real money of silver and gold, clothes, arms! All hidden and waiting for us. I came to take you away from this horror, to the country of Eldigonde the sorceress."

The girl lifted herself and drew back, horrified.

"Jehan! Are you mad? Poor Jehan—you have suffered—"

HE broke into a swift, joyous laugh, and kissed her strong fingers.

"No, no, I'm quite sane, my dear! Far below here on the Breton coast, is a land of safety for you and me. The country is wild, densely wooded, a tangle of rocks and trees; no feudal lords own it. Instead, it's inhabited by free people of the earth who have fled there. In that wild land they live safely, freely, joyously! And the wise old woman, the sorceress Eldigonde, is the only ruler, for her wisdom is great. All the wealth for which I paid in blood and flesh and tears, is waiting there. I came to take you back with me. A boat is hidden here at the shore, below the castle. You'll go?"

"Yes, yes! It seems like some dream, Jehan—yes, of course I'll go!" she exclaimed in stammering haste. "I can't believe it's real. . . . But, Jehan! I can't leave until after tomorrow night. It is the festival, you know; the dance of life."

He nodded. "Aye. The dance of life, that we celebrate in secret to the moon! And God help us all if they find out about it, there at the castle. You remember how the Sieur de Courcelles burned eleven of his people alive, three years ago, for celebrating the festival?"

"There's no danger here, Jehan," said the girl. "Everybody at the castle will be drunk tomorrow night; the Lord of Fécamp is to celebrate his birthday, and has invited a crowd of gentry in. Besides, Felipe Brioux will be ready to touch off a signal-flare if there's any riding from the castle. No, it's safe."

"And you, my dear?" Jehan stroked her glossy hair. "Do you still wear the hump on your back and the scar on your face that Nanny Dubois taught you to paint on?"

She shivered slightly. "Yes, of course. Marie Lianceau was married last week to Pierre, and he had to take her to the castle for—the *droit de seigneur*. Oh,



"I—I am only a peasant, Messire Pierre," she said. "I am no lovely lady."

Jehan, it was terrible! She was out of her senses for two days afterward. Two of the castle officers were riding by the field where I was working, and saw me, and came over for a closer look; luckily they saw the scar and the humped back, and went away. But I was frightened."

"May heaven blast all these rulers of earth!" cried out Jehan passionately. He launched a torrent of curses, in a blaze of shaking wrath. "These lords and seigneurs who oppress and torture us, who own us body and soul—some day they'll be swept away! Their castles will be razed, they and their brood drowned in their own blood—you'll see!"

"Hush, Jehan! They'd hang you for saying such words!"

He laughed bitterly. "I'll say worse before I'm dead. But now, little heart, I must get away and find hiding over tomorrow; I dare not let another soul know I'm back. I did hope to see my old mother; but you say she's dead, so let it pass. She's resting at last, poor soul! I'll meet you here tomorrow night, after the festival. Then we'll go quickly."

"With all my heart, Jehan," she replied. One last embrace, one clinging, eager kiss of rapture, and he was gone, melting into the shadows whence he had come.

And high time. As the girl stood staring after him, a scuffle of *sabots* and the murmur of voices reached her; a dozen other girls of the village and district around had arrived to join her in a rehearsal of the dance.

They greeted her joyously, half fearfully, all in a tumult between terror and excited anticipation; there was one screw-backed old hag from down the shore, who hobbled along importantly. It was her place to see that the ancient ritual was followed, the dances and the songs rightly given, for thus they had been handed down from forgotten days.

So, laying off the wooden *sabots*, the girls circled and sang, postured and tripped among the rocks that the forgotten Druids had left behind. All was done blindly, in passive obedience to the croaked directions of the old hag; she herself did not know the meaning of the words uttered, for to her they were only sounds, just as the gestures and actions were meaningless things, relics of the dim past.

But luck followed upon the festival. When it was neglected, pestilence and bad crops came, and war. The old gods were forgot, their very names blown nowhere with the dust of centuries, their fanes all crumbled and their memories grown black beneath the stars; but racial instinct still preserved the rites of ancient days. To these poor folk, crushed under such oppression as the world has seldom seen, this yearly festival was a symbol of hope and beauty, an escape from the horrors of daily life, a prayer, half-realized, to the primal earth-gods and the forces of nature.

None the less, it constituted a fearful risk. In the eyes of chivalry, they had no right to happiness; woe betide them if they were caught at it! Then would rise the cry of "Sorcery!" with tortures and burnings and mutilation to follow. The Black Death and other fearful plagues had not yet come to sweep away nine-tenths of all people, rich and poor alike, and make human chattels valuable; the land was crowded; serfs were thick in field and village, to be mauled or killed or hunted down like wild beasts in drunken riot.

LATE under the moon, Elaine stole home to the thatched cottage, still in a fervent riot of thought, and tucked herself away. Weary as she was, sleep came hard. Jehan alive, here, within reach and touch! This in itself was a miracle; but what lay beyond seemed utterly incredible. That there should be any place beyond the reach of tyranny and cruelty was to her a fantastic vision, beyond the power of the brain to comprehend; yet Jehan had come to take her there!

If, indeed, it were all real and not a dream. . . . She awakened in the morning, suddenly to clasp hands to bursting heart. True or real? She could not credit it, until she found on her finger the circlet of gold Jehan had put there at parting. A gold ring! She stared at it, then hurriedly tore it off and hid it from sight. There was no such treasure as that anywhere in the district; only a knight might hope to possess a gold ring, or one of the pretty beauties at the castle.

“UP, slut, up!” came the voice of her bent and twisted father, roaring angrily. “Our lord’s overseer has commanded that the entire upper field be finished today—up and out!”

Elaine had scant love for her father, who viewed her innate delicacy with sneering derision. He was a brute like most of his kind, warped by hard labor and torments. Perhaps there was truth in the story that she sprang not from him, but from that night when her mother, a bride, was handed over to the lord of Fécamp. This “right” had instilled new blood in many a peasant family; and amid the cringing, tortured serfs was to be seen many a head held proudly, such as that of Elaine or of her lover Jehan.

She dressed swiftly. Her father looked on with an evil grin while she donned the false hump she had invented for safety’s sake, tying the straps over her shoulders and below the budding round of her breasts. Over this, her ragged robe. Then, while he taunted her about the good price he should get for betrayal of her ruse, she swiftly applied the magical paint Nanny Dubois had given her, making a red ugly scar that drew her cheek and lips askew. A kindly soul, old Nanny, with a heart in her shriveled deathly corpse for the poor maids who were sport for soldier and noble!

A swallow of thick soup, a rush for the field, and the work was forward, with clump of wooden shoe and drip of sweat, and many a groan for aching back and loins.

Today, however, aches and pains were forgotten, in the glorious vista that spelled an end to barbarous oppression. Freedom and safety! It seemed too good to be true, in this nightmare of a life.

Afternoon brought guttural cries of warning flitting across the fields, from hovel to hovel. Armed men were riding from the castle! They came—the Seigneur himself, a band of visiting knights



“You’re no peasant lass, nor any sorceress neither!”

and lords, ladies on their palfreys, men-at-arms in helm and chain-coat, pennons flashing and gay laughter ringing as the dun deer fled before, and the horns sounded high. A stag broke from covert and fled across the field of springing grain; with shout and horn, the riders plunged after, hounds baying wildly. It was the natal day of the Lord of Fécamp, with a stag of ten hurtling to the kill!

ELAINE ran with the others, all scurrying like frightened quail as the rout headed for them. She saw her father trip and fall. The dogs went over him in a rush, but one of them turned to spring at him; struggling up, he fought the beast frantically. With a torrent of oaths the Seigneur himself rode down the panic-stricken man, lashed him with a whip, and sent the men-at-arms to finish him. A lance went through him, and another. The twisted body relaxed, and the laughing ladies kneaded it into the mud as they galloped over the poor clay.

Two of the castle riders wheeled their horses as Elaine ran, screaming, to the side of the dead man. They reined in, laughing, but as they sighted her scarred face and the hump between her shoulders, they put in spurs and went on at a gallop, with a coarse exchange of jests. The other folk crept out from hiding and bore the spattered corpse home.

“Lucky they didn’t take a notion to ride all of us down!” said somebody.

Grief? Elaine felt none, pretended none. This father of hers had been her chief potential enemy, in fact. Now she was alone, but not for long; tonight would end all of that, forever. So her father was laid under the earth. Before the grave was filled, the castle overseer arrived and gave orders that she was to marry a widower of the district, on the morrow. Hump or no hump, she could breed new serfs to labor in the fields.

"And," he added with a laugh, as he departed, "when the ceremony's done, you'll go up to the castle for the usual entertainment. You're no proper quarry for the Seigneur, my lass but the men-at-arms are not over-particular."

Elaine assented humbly, and repressed a shudder. What if Jehan had not come back last night? Fate would have been hard at her heels.

THE long afternoon dwindled into sunset, and she ate a lone supper and thought of Jehan, hiding somewhere along the rocky shore. Her father's death would make no difference to the celebration of the festival; the dance of life was something that rose above mortality and human chance.

With darkness, there was a hush and a stir over the whole countryside. From near and far, shadowy figures were stealing along the winding roads and across the fields, toward the hilltop where the ancient rocks thrust up toward the stars.

In the vague starlight, they wended toward their goal, slipping from bosque and covert to converge on the one point, silently enough, like animals. Only, now and again, a clucking of tongues sounded as crones and wise women from scattered points came together; old outcast hags like Nanny Dubois, who practiced wizardry of nights, and brewed herbs to make the sick well, and afforded the poor folk shrewd but subtle advice in all problems of their wretched lives.

On the hilltop, along the hill flanks, dim serried ranks of half-seen figures gathered. They waited tense, expectant; they had stolen away for this one night of freedom and joyous celebration in secret. Grouped beside one of the great rocks, Elaine and her companions bided motionless the moment of their appearance, for other things came first.

The first orange light of the rising moon trembled up the eastern sky. From all that assemblage came a murmurous gasp of greeting, a breath that passed along the hillside and died into silence.

Shapes appeared in the dim, slowly growing glow, capering amid the high rocks; grotesque shapes, clad in the guise of wild beasts.

The Dance of Life had begun.

It was an eerie, uncanny thing; for as yet the golden round of the moon was not up. Monstrous shapes disported themselves, masques of wicker and fur which had been long weeks preparing in hidden places. All was done in silence, save for hoarse breaths and pantings of effort. Closer to the great central stone worked the rhythmic movement until, as the circle of the moon lifted gradually, all that wild company stood revealed for one moment, full-etched in horn and hoof and claw and bestial ecstasy.

The shrill note of a reed pipe sounded. Suddenly and completely, the strange figures separated, leaped away, and scurried into cover. They vanished, and in among the rocks came men clad in skins, to the thin tremulous music of many reed pipes, dancing and weaving in upon the flat central stone.

They carried burdens, images of animals; in olden days, no doubt, these had been real animals for sacrifice, but now the creatures of earth and sea were too hard to come by, too utterly valuable, for such offering. Upon the flat rock were laid the simulated fish and beasts, while the dancers went through the olden ritual of oblation and festival. It was a strangely wild and vivacious thing to see, and mightily stirred the hearts of the watchers, so that ejaculations and eager voices began to rise on all sides.

EVERYWHERE the grain was springing in the sown fields, life was stirring anew in leaf and beast; and here beneath the moon was the festival of fertile earth and joy. The men drew back; the thin pipings changed to a different air. Elaine sped a quick word at her companions, and the tattered gowns were flung aside. She leaped forth, and they after her, clad in little besides the flowing disarray of floating hair and twisted ropes of flowers.

What a dance this was, beneath the flooding golden light of the risen moon! The slim figures swept among the old monoliths in steps of wild abandon; murmurs of amazement sounded as Elaine was recognized, now without hump or scar, slender and perfect and lovely. "A miracle, a miracle!" swept the murmured words, but she heard them not, nor cared. For, somewhere in the outer darkness,

she knew that Jehan watched, hidden, and she flung herself into the jocund exhilaration of the piping music and the floating steps.

The steps quickened; the music quickened, as the dancers neared the central stone, their lissome shapes transfigured by the moonlight and lifted afar from everyday semblance. Never had those drear-eyed watchers beheld such grace and beauty, except at this annual festival; as the reedy pipings struck into swifter rhythm, as the voices of the dancing girls took up the ritual of strange unknown words, the men dancers joined in.

AND suddenly all was a wild ecstatic rapture, the dancers bursting into evasion and pursuit among the jutting rocks, the watching throngs swept by a contagious frenzy into hoarse cries and panting exclamations—until, without warning, a fearful frozen silence struck them all.

One wild and terrible scream, from the moonlit spaces beyond the hilltop, wailed across the night, and was followed by the blare of a hunting horn.

The awful realization smote one and all, as a rushing clatter of hooves sounded. The watcher had failed, the castle folk had surprised the festival! Shrill and despairing shrieks flared up, to be drowned in a roar of shouts and clarion cries. The phantom watching figures melted like mist, as knights and men-at-arms came charging, with glint of mail and flutter of pennon and thrust of red-tipped lance.

"Kill!" rose the shout. "Kill! Sorcery—kill!"

There was killing enough, without mercy, amid frantic fleeing and mad pursuit. Old Nanny Dubois was plucked up bodily by a spear and hurled atop one of the jagged rocks, to shriek away her life. Swords glinted; horses trampled.

But the little group of girls, shimmering golden in the moonlight, could not flee, for the circle of armed men had ringed in the hilltop and came plunging at them, with wild fierce laughter and eager hands. Hither and yon they drove in terrified flight, to be run down or pulled down by knight or squire among the Druidic stones.

Elaine, crouching in blank panic, was aware of a wild ringing voice above her, a man stooping from the saddle, his arm circling her body. She was lifted, scooped up, held in an iron grip despite all struggles; while the rider, with a voice tri-

umphant, thrust in his spurs and sent the powerful destrier plunging down the hillside and away, through the silvery blood-smear moonlit night.

The stark cries lessened; the roaring laughter died away upon distance; the great steed slowed his pace and halted. The rider, holding her in his arms, leaned forward and kissed her, and looked laughingly into her face, and then looked again, his hot mirth dying out.

And she, staring up helplessly, saw that he was a stranger, a young knight handsome as a god, no doubt one of the Seigneur's guests. There was no cruelty in his face, no barbaric fury. Instead, he seemed gentle and bright with youth.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Here's a prize if ever was one, but not what I thought. You're no peasant lass, nor any sorceress neither! That is, unless I'm bewitched myself."

"Have mercy, have mercy!" Her voice fluttered at him wildly. "I've done no wrong—let me go, I pray!"

He caught sight of the golden ring which she had put on her finger. The soft moonlight concealed her work-hardened hands and feet; she lay in his arms, her flower-starred hair flowing about him, her heart palpitating against his own, her warm fresh loveliness all real and glowing.

"Maiden, who are you?" he demanded curiously. "Some sweet naiad from the land of Prester John? Some nymph crept out of the sea to dazzle men with her beauty? Perhaps the Lady Morgana herself, come from the morning star to find a lover among men? Quick! Your name!"

"Elaine," she gasped out, her eyes wide upon his smiling features and glorious youth. She had never dreamed a man could be so nobly handsome.

"Elaine! A name of poesy, of old romance!" he said, and suddenly gripped her hard, and kissed her lips. They were not brutal kisses, but most sweet and lingering, so that the terrified heart within her melted, and a silver fire like moonlight coursed through her veins. Then his head lifted.

"**C**OME, sweet lady, your promise!" he said, breathing hard as he looked into her eyes. "I am Pierre de Louhac, your very humble servitor and liege knight; for my sins, I am a poet, with a lute at my saddle-bow where a helm should ride. Promise me that you'll not fly away upon the moonbeams, or glide into the water, or

vanish in the thicket—swear it, by the True Cross! Then I'll set you down, and if we kiss again, it shall be of your own free will."

"I swear it, I swear it!" she panted desperately.

He gently let her slide to earth, and dismounting, took the cloak from his shoulders and fastened it about her throat, so that it enfolded her slim body. And he sighed a little as he stooped and kissed her hand.

"Now for my lute, and you shall tell me whence you came, Lady Elaine. For I wot well you are no mortal creature, but some lovely lady come from the bounds of fairyland. Even though you be some fair sorceress—but that cannot be, since you swore by the Cross. Therefore you must be all gentle and lovely as you look, since it is impossible that so rare an ornament of heaven itself could have sprung from earthly stock."

She stood trembling, knowing too well, alas, that she was no fine lady at all, but a poor humble peasant girl with a fate worse than death awaiting her in the Seigneur's castle.

They were in a craggy desolate spot above the shore, a lonely place with the world shut out and only the silvery meadows of the sea sparkling away below. She watched with eyes of wonder as Pierre de Louhac loosed a lute from his saddle bow, and the great horse arched its heavy neck and muzzled him lovingly. She did not know that man and beast could feel love and friendship; she had not known that any belted knight, born to oppress and rule and kill, could be so gentle as this man before her.

"Be seated, sweet lady!" he exclaimed, smiling at her as he strummed upon the lute. "How beautiful you are, with flowers in your hair, and your eyes like two stars! Come, sit on this high rock looking toward the sea!"

She complied, not certain whether he were a bit insane, or playing some cruel jest, or just what he seemed. Soon, however, she perceived that there was no guile in him, and no cruelty at all.

"I HAVE come from the south, Lady Elaine," he said, "where the wine and the heart is sunny, where people of the earth are not slaves but free. I rode with the Lord of Fécamp tonight to the hunt, little dreaming that the hunting was of poor folk making merry! No blood is on my hands this night; but when I saw you, destiny came upon me; and I knew that

I, Pierre de Louhac, had been fated to capture some sweet queen from the land of the fays, and so I took you."

She comprehended his compassion, his youthful fervent ardor, his imagination; and she held forth her hands to him, smiling faintly. The music of his voice was wondrous to hear, and there was naught to fear from him.

"I—I am only a peasant, Messire Pierre," she said; "I am no lovely lady."

He laughed aloud.

"**N**ONSENSE! When did a peasant lass wear a golden ring? When did ever a peasant have such beauty beyond the world as yours?" He swung a hand toward the far-glinting sea. "Look out yonder, Lady Elaine, and tell me whence you came! From some far land of Lyonesse, it may be, or from a palace glorious, on some far mountain crest; or did the dancing moonbeams bring you from heaven itself to delight the hearts of men?"

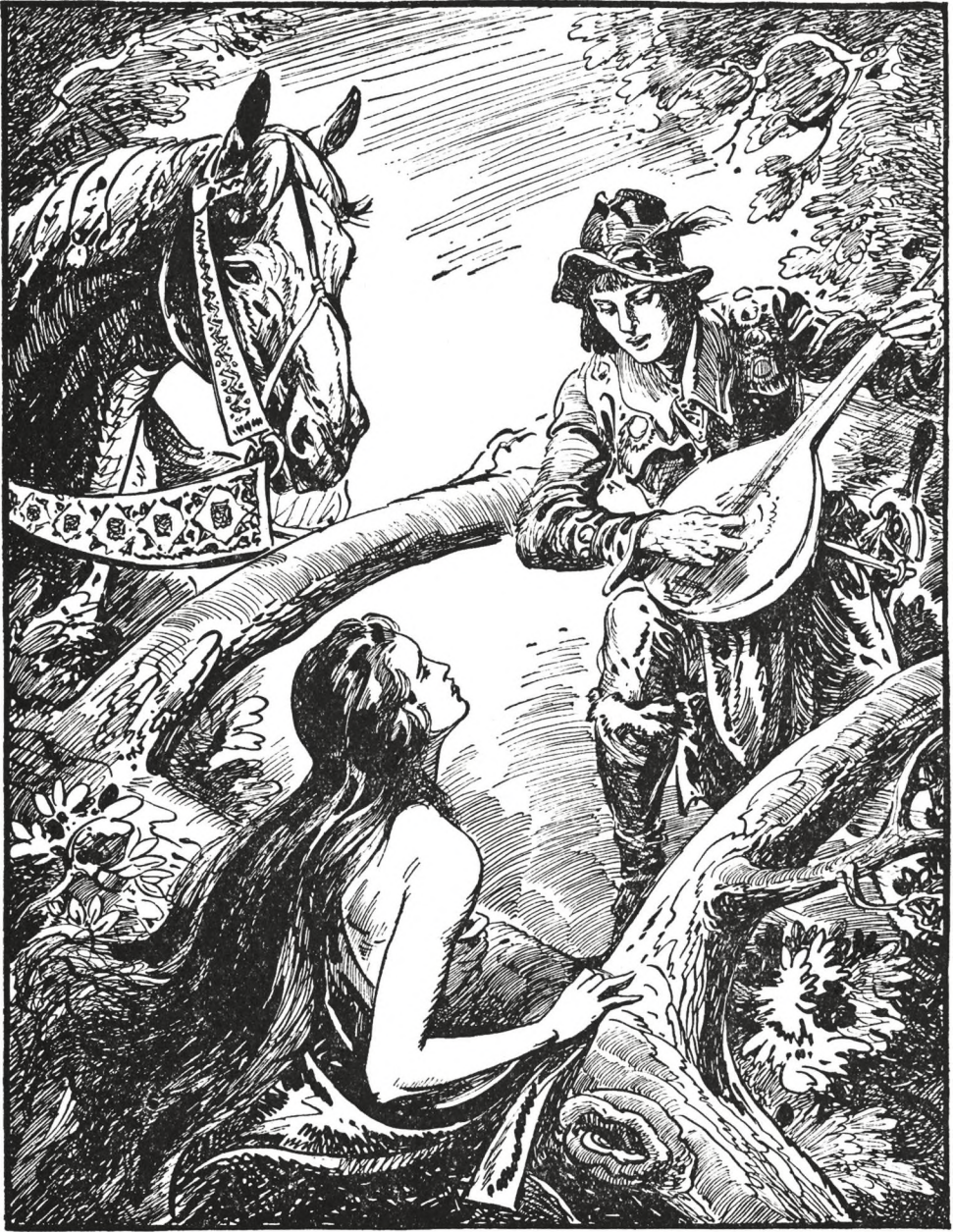
Under his glowing words, something of the rapt ecstasy of that hilltop dance, so terribly checked, crept back into her heart. She laughed, and shook back her hair; when a flower fell, he caught it up and crushed it against his lips.

"A song for a flower, then; and perchance another kiss, to make you mortal maid!" said he gayly, and fingering the lute, struck into song.

What he sang, she knew not, for the words were strange; but she nestled in the warm cloak and gave herself up to enchantment and dream as his voice rose in golden glory.

Dream? Enchantment? She knew it could not last, and abandoned herself to the moment with a surge of venture audacious. The frightful vision of Nanny Dubois writhing and dying upon the high rock died away. To her lips came all the old stories of elves and sprites, of mermaids from the sea and the gently-caressing nymphs in forest depths; as she murmured of these things, Pierre de Louhac listened, entranced.

"It is like the tale of Tristan, who died so happily for fair Yseult!" he exclaimed. "You came to me tonight, sweet Elaine, like a benison to heal inward hurts. All this land is adrift with evil and dark cruel things, and the only sure kind touch from any hand is that of Death. Look: tonight I was in sorrow and wonder that such things could be, and you have made all life bright for me! What was the dance we interrupted?"



"Thus," he cried, sweeping the strings, "and thus! A salute to life!
A salute to life and love and ecstasy!"

"The dance of life," she said. "I know not what it means, for it has come down from olden times, but that is the name given to it. The dance of joyous life and hope and springing leaves and fertile fields."

"Kiss me," he said, looking up at her, a glow in his face. "Kiss me, and then dance for me alone—just a step or two! Throw aside the cloak, and dance."

She leaned forward. Her white arms found him, and her lips. Again that wondrous singing fire coursed through her

veins; and springing suddenly upright, she let fall the cloak and danced with a burst of heedless happy rejoicing. She danced as never before, in glorious abandon—and suddenly caught up the cloak, laughing, and whirled it around her body.

"Ah, to die upon such loveliness!" sighed Pierre de Louhac, with the look of one rapt in dream. "You are my captive, fair Elaine, but I am yours a thousand-fold! Will you ride with me?"

"Ride with you?" She stood staring, brought back to earth. "Whither?"

"Across the world!" Laughing, he flung out a hand. "Mount and ride! You shall be my lady fair, clothed in silks and satins and jewels; I will ever be your true and loyal knight, singing your praises under every roof we reach! We'll go to the Lord of Fécamp's castle here and now, and I'll uphold you as queen of beauty!"

"No, no!" She shrank; that name abruptly broke the charm, the thought of that castled keep of terror and doom. "Oh, you are mad! And I'm mad to let you bewitch me!"

She crumpled, in a flood of tears.

HE, not knowing all that lay in her heart, was bewildered and all astray. He could not know that she was in tears for her friends and companions, the girls who had danced, now taken to the castle. And Jehan, far-wandering in the night, lost and desolate, or perchance dead!

Perplexed, he touched his lute, and sang a plaintive, tender little song that went straight into her heart. Her sobs quieted; presently her head lifted, and she spoke to the youth, very sweetly and sadly.

"Dear Messire Pierre, I must tell you the whole truth: I am no lovely lady from sea or moonbeam land; I am just Elaine, a serf of the Lord of Fécamp, a laborer in his fields, a chattel of his hand. Tonight was the festival, and we who danced were his serfs. You saved me from those wolves, and I am grateful; but now mount your horse and ride away. You know the truth. It is a sad and sordid truth, and all your dreams are nothing. I am a peasant, and you are a knight, and the little play is ended. Ride away, and scorn me."

Pierre de Louhac stood up, and smote his lute joyously.

"Not so, by the loving wounds of God!" he said, with earnest impetuous words. "Gentle lady, that man is lonely and desolate and old, who looks upon life with bitter disillusioned eyes, and sees things at their worst. May the blessed saints preserve me from being such! Your loveliness is the most rare and beautiful thing I have found in this life of evil. You are Elaine from across the sea, and I shall hold you so until I die."

"Will you not listen to reason?" she exclaimed. "I can never be one of your fine ladies—"

"No, for you are above them all!" he broke in hotly. "Reason? It's the curse of all mankind. As you danced tonight

the dance of life, so we two shall go through the world, joyous and triumphant, not looking with gloomy dark eyes upon things as they are, but touching them with poesy, lifting them into what they should be! When you touch my cheek with your hand, it is an angel from heaven who comes down to inspire me to song; when you ride behind me, it is all the beauty and mirth of the world perched at my shoulder."

"But you are a poet, dear Pierre," she said, smiling.

"And you shall be one too, if you love me a little," he replied.

"You are like a dream," she answered. "You are not like other men I have seen."

He fell to laughing. "Why, that's love, no less! Ho! Sweet Elaine, you've hit upon the very truth of life and youth and love! A kiss upon it!"

She leaned to him, and he caught her in his arms, his finger-tips caressing her fair body as his lips caressed hers. She clung to him, yielding and abandoning all reason, in this embrace that blotted out the whole world.

But the great horse, forgotten, whinnied shrilly in the moonlight, and shook himself with a clank of gear. Pierre de Louhac leaped up, and caught at his lute, laughing.

"Thus," he cried, sweeping the strings, "and thus! A salute to life! A salute to life and love and ecstasy! There shall be no grief and evil in the world; the sunlight shall shimmer upon every heart. You and I, fair Elaine, shall go down to the golden ways of romance hand in hand. Hark, how good gray Ramon summons us!"

Indeed, hearing his name, the powerful destrier shook himself again, and turned his head, looking upon his master. Elaine came to her feet, and drawing the cloak more closely about her, shivered. From afar came a riotous blast of horns, a shrill distant sound of savage voices. A harsh, clanging bell rang thinly.

"Something has happened!" she exclaimed in quick alarm. "Listen! It's the tocsin from the castle—something has happened!"

PIERRE DE LOUHAC laughed aloud. "Aye, this has happened; you and I have met!" he cried, while his fingers touched the lute at his breast. "All the world shall ring wild peals, but they have naught to do with us. Ours is the dance of life, sweet Elaine; let the whole dreary earth reëcho to the dance of death, and

we shall behold it not. For ours is the springing tender blade of green, the song in the morn, the smile of the sun on the budding earth, love in the heart and a brave salute, a salute to life—"

His words ended upon a jerk, that shook his whole body.

The lute was riven asunder with a splintering, rending crack. Out of the dark dusky wood close by, came the ringing twang of a bowstring. Pierre de Louhac spun around, and clutched once at the feathered shaft which stood out of his heart, and out of the riven lute; he looked at Elaine, and tried to speak, but no words came. Then he fell, and she stood in palsied, stricken horror.

From the dark covert sprang a swift lithe figure.

"So you're safe, Elaine!" It was Jehan, strong and resolute, in his hand a long English bow of yew, longer than himself. "I've had the devil's own time tracking you here. I put a shaft into that hound of hell—aye, through the Lord of Fécamp himself! Hear the tocsin and the horns? They're riding and killing this night, to make up for it."

The girl's lips were loosened. She broke in upon him with a long and wailing shriek that was echoed from the rocks and smothered by the trees and the moonlight.

"You've killed him! Jehan, Jehan, you've killed him! And he was so kind, so gentle— Oh, it can't be true. Not you, Jehan, not you!"

"**F**AITH, you seem sorry to see me!" said he, with his quick, harsh laugh.

From her lips came another cry, wild and incoherent. She collapsed, all of a sudden, and lay quiet in the moonlight; her bare arm protruded from the cloak, and her hand touched the dead hand of Pierre de Louhac as he smiled at the moonlight.

"Now, here's a queer business for you!"

And wagging his shaggy unshorn head, Jehan came forward, unstrung his bow, and stood looking down at the silent, senseless girl. Gradually his face softened.

"Poor child!" he murmured. "Poor frightened, hunted lass! It's just as well, and saves a power of trouble. The boat's close by, and ere dawn we'll be far down the Breton coast. Poor lass! The devil's paid out; and this fine noble lord is an-

other heartless tyrant gone to hell—two in one night. Lucky I came along just in time to save her from him!"

With which, he went to Pierre de Louhac and took everything of value from the body. Then, shouldering the senseless figure of Elaine with scarcely an effort, he strode across to the shadows and plunged out of sight. For a little, the crashing of brush could be heard as he made descent to the shore and his hidden boat; then silence.

Across the silvern moonlit stage a slow figure moved. It was the massive shape of the horse, coming to the man who lay on his back in the streaming light, a feathered shaft pinning the broken lute to his breast. Upon this stage the moving figure ceased. The horse stood with head drooping, its questing muzzle nudging the white still hand that would finger the lute no more.

THE film had run to its end. A snap, and the room lights whipped on. Kettleman turned to me.

"Like it?"

"Of course. But where does it link up with the theater?"

He waved his hands excitedly.

"Confound it, everywhere! This pagan or instinct from pagan days, was essentially theater. It kept the stage alive; upon this pantomime, mimicry and ancient ritual was based the sense of drama that later flowered into being. From a naked hilltop came a naked stage, which in course of time evolved painted scenery!"

"But why make a tragedy of it and kill off the poet and dreamer?"

"They're always killed in real life," he said testily. "You dullard, couldn't you see any symbolism in the thing?"

"Well, all I could see was that the girl lost her vision and was carried off to fulfill a barbarous destiny of motherhood to a lot of starveling brats."

"Isn't that the fate of every woman?" he cried triumphantly. "And like every woman, she retained the most precious, the rarest, the most beautiful thing in life—a secret memory!"

"Hm! Well, maybe," I admitted. "All the same, perhaps it's just as well that the picture was never released. Ideas, they say, are dangerous unless explained fully."

Kettleman has not spoken to me since that day.

The strange story of Captain Yardabout—Typhoon Sammy, who sought and defied a hurricane.

By **JACLAND MARMUR**



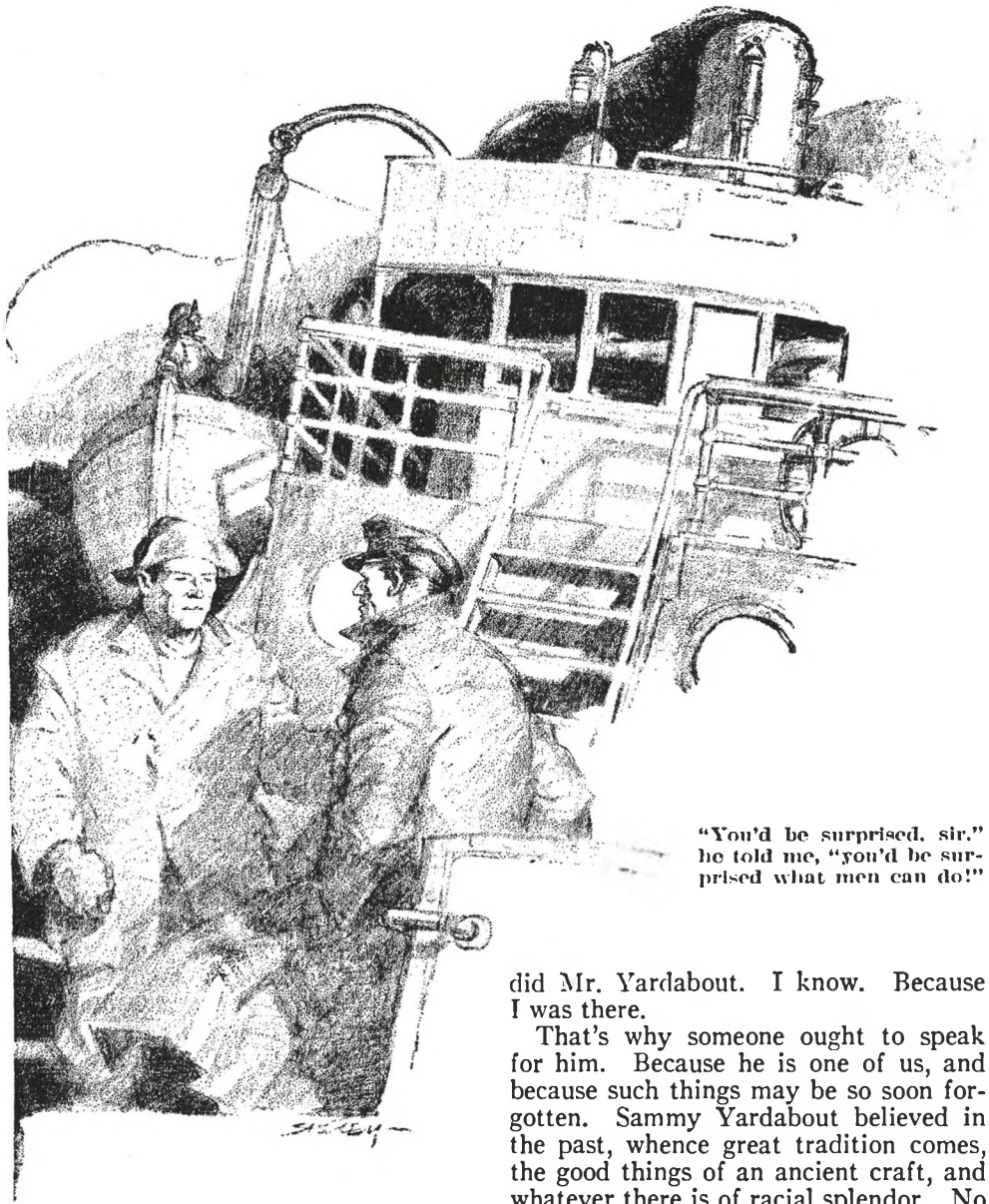
The Iron Whirlwind

IF ever you have sailed these coasts, it is quite likely you have seen that Eastern harbor after the fury has passed that way. How the stillness is unnatural, and it will be some time before the smell of sandalwood and wine returns. There are broken spars in the channel; the keels of small craft, up-ended, float like strange black chips in the swollen fairways still glinting with the green flame-points of storm. Perhaps you've seen the North Point shore scattered with wreckage; the Kowloon sands inside Rumsey Rock a refuse heap of crippled junks fantastically torn apart; the splintered remains of sampans spotting the foreshore where inert coolies lie, still guarding what was once the whole of their earthly wealth, and the rescue squads wandering among them in the quiet dusk. If you have, you will know what a South China typhoon is; and you will understand, too, a junior third's expression of dismay when he saw that barque drop away from the East Point godowns across the way from the Blue

Funnel dock, in tow for Lye Mun Pass, all chipper and neat and ready for sea.

"Is that fella mad?" he wanted to know, tossing up his arm to point her out. "Can't he read a signal flag at all?"

Just as he spoke the first warning bomb exploded, and then two more—because the black cross was flying on Black-head Hill. Typhoon advancing on Hong-kong! To the north and east a pale haze hung upon the land and over the shimmer of blue water. But the surcharge of excitement was plain. The battlewagons in man-of-war row were looking to their ground tackle. A sleek gray cruiser, signal halyards full, went nervously prowling for safer anchorage, while all the merchantmen took to doubling up their mooring-lines. The high-pooped junks



"You'd be surprised, sir," he told me, "you'd be surprised what men can do!"

went scuttering like ugly beetles for the typhoon refuge north of the coaling chamber, coolies at the long ungainly sweeps shrilly crying to each other. Because the *Teet-Kiey*—the iron whirlwind—had made his sign in the sky.

AND there was that flash barque, tall and lovely—a startling sight nowadays—calmly heading out for sea! No wonder the junior said what he did. You couldn't expect he would know why. He was green on the coasts of Cathay; and he didn't know anything about Samuel Yardabout, who hunted a hurricane the way Captain Ahab hunted a white whale all the days of his life. Grim Captain Ahab found what he wanted, because the fever of his desire consumed him. So

did Mr. Yardabout. I know. Because I was there.

That's why someone ought to speak for him. Because he is one of us, and because such things may be so soon forgotten. Sammy Yardabout believed in the past, whence great tradition comes, the good things of an ancient craft, and whatever there is of racial splendor. No matter how obscure, he's the man who keeps a flag aloft in a place of honor and dignity. Because flags are not held proudly in a wind by rope halyards, though you might easily think they are. It is really a simple thing for artillery and modern demolition bombs such as Canton City knows today to reduce to rubble the stoutest masonry and with amazing ease to murder men in droves. But a racial past has deeper roots. That goes down to the obscure courage, to the quiet, almost forgotten wisdom of the dead. And such things are not so easily destroyed, no matter how many bombs are ready in a barbarian fighting-plane marked with an empire's livid circle or with a crooked cross. If Sammy Yardabout could stare a typhoon in the eye,

do you suppose a bomb would ever bother him?

This isn't to say he looked heroic. He didn't. Not ever. He never wore a uniform, contending with his enemy. He never took a hero's stance, picturesquely calling men to follow him into battle-smoke for phony glory or a mutilated death. His struggle was in solitude, because it was authentic. He thought of it as purely personal, a matter strictly between himself and his own particular God. But about that alone he was wrong. It had to do with all of us who make bread upon the oceans' wastes where the great gales often blow. I suppose that's why an old China hand like Sammy was such a prime joke along the coasts. Men vaguely recognized themselves, in him. So that's just what he was. A damn' sailor's joke—Sammy and that typhoon he was always looking for!

Everybody knew about him in those days and, of course, everybody laughed. From the Sunda Strait far away to the south; in all the exotic little harbors indenting the Malay shore: all along the coasts of China-land and clear over to the crazy trading-ports inside of Palawan that jest was known and relished by men who followed the sea. Some grizzled skipper out of the Sulus, his gaunt face as brown as the mahogany logs tiered under chains along his schooner's deck, would sigh a tremendous sigh of relief when his glass showed signs of rising to give him some hope the fury meant to pass him by unharmed this time. He'd be squinting to windward where the cirrus was breaking up, watching the huge unhurried swells pour in a wine-dark flood under his ship to curl away beyond, giving a loud slap to his shortened canvas and a rolling shove to the hull beneath his feet. That way he'd stand for a minute on his poop, feeling profound relief.

"Now if Typhoon Sammy was here," he'd tell his mate, "he'd be cursing like hell to think we're skinnin' by. By all holy he'd swear that gale was downright scared to tangle with him. He'd say it deliberately curved away. . . . Shake out them reefs, Mister, an' get the tops'ls to her. . . . Poor ol' Typhoon Samray."

THAT'S how it was. Poor Typhoon Sammy! You heard about him everywhere. It seems he came to the Eastern Seas in a fine smart sailing-ship called *Nirobe*, when he was young and full of sap and all the world was just an oyster easy enough for any bright lad to

crack. He tangled with a typhoon in the middle China Sea and he came off second best. Well, good enough: who wouldn't? We've all of us had that acrid, bitter-tasting lump of gall that is naked fear, fouling our throats when that hurricane batters us down. You just swallow as soon as you can and try to forget it, hoping for better luck next time. But not Sammy Yardabout. That wasn't good enough for him.

SO he quit his chief mate's berth in the *Nirobe* to go back and hunt his typhoon out and give it battle once again. He hunted everywhere. He went from one fo'c'stle to another, picking only ships in the typhoon trades. And nothing happened. The ship he was in skinned through. A voyage after he'd quit, that ship would catch it. Or maybe the voyage after, she'd come limping in with a battered hull, a splintered superstructure, and some of her men with broken bones. It seems fantastic, and it got to be legendary. If Sammy Yardabout was in the fo'c'stle of your ship, you were safe enough from the weather. It might pipe a little or scurry about, but the big wind howled in some other latitude, perhaps just over the horizon edge. He used to shake his fist sometimes when he thought no one would see, hurling silent challenge across an empty ocean space. It did no good. But he kept on hunting for his enemy and he never meant to quit.

You saw him everywhere along those coasts. Sooner or later some one was bound to point him out. . . . "There goes Sammy Yardabout. Says he's looking for a hurricane and he means to beat it down and sit for master after if he does. That's a laugh. He must be daft. Looking for a typhoon. Imagine that! Balmy. Quite balmy, that's what I always say." . . . And so he got to be a joke. Because Sammy believed in things, and that's always funny to men who would like to but can't.

So he batted about the East for the Lord knows how many years. With his luck, as he put it, against him. From the Sunda Strait, through the Natuna channels, along the Sulu Archipelago, and up as far as the Yangtze Kiang—till he joined a ship that was my first command. The old *Pandora*, if you remember her. I do. And that's how I got to be shipmates with a legend and a myth. He was in the third mate's watch. And I heard them having good sport of him down in the forward well just before true

darkness came after we cleared the Horsburgh Light out of Singapore Strait, bound for the port of Hongkong by way of Manila Bay. . . .

That sea can be like deep blue glass at evening when the monsoon sleeps. At such a time you can imagine a world at peace, its men serene, and all things in it beautiful. It seems impossible to consider there is evil anywhere. There is such a quiet hush upon the ocean and the scent of the land is sweet, pursuing the ship like a memory. There is just the murmur of the sea, drowsily disturbed by the bow wave; and there is the gentle throbbing of your engines underfoot.

The slow, easy roll of the bridge was a pleasant thing: and the voices of the men below drifted upward gently, like the murmur of the wise holding counsel at dusk or the voices of the brave recalling heroic deeds.

"Why, Sammy!" one of the ranging shadows on the forehatch said in a jocular tone. "You still down here with us poor blokes? Aint you the lad's got a ship of your own in his fist whenever you've a mind?"

"I can sit for master any time I want, if that's what you mean. In sail, anyhow."

It was a deep, low voice said that. It came from the man with a pipe in his mouth, a deepwater felt hat on his big head and a blue denim jacket cut like a reefer coat over the white of his singlet. He seemed very large in the half light, and what he said he said with conviction.

Someone laughed. "He means he's just down here for his health and the fancy grub. Who aint? Aint we all of us skippers in the bud?"

"That's not true," said Samuel Yardabout, his voice grave with dignity.

"Aint it?" The bosun stood up. He was an old man, the bosun, and to him the joke had lost its savor. "Sammy," he said, "stop kidding yourself. Some men are born for the quarterdeck and others are born to live under the bows. I know what I'm talking about. I seen it all my life. We'll live in the fo'c'stle till we die. So will you. We'll dream a little about sittin' for mate or master, but that's as far as ever it goes. We got the time: who says we aint got the sense? Well, why don't we? You tell me that; why don't we? Somethin' always gets the payday an' we'll do it the voyage after that. Sure. Like hell, we will! It's no good, Sammy. Better give up. You're down here with us an' that's where you'll



"I too have
been through
hurricane."

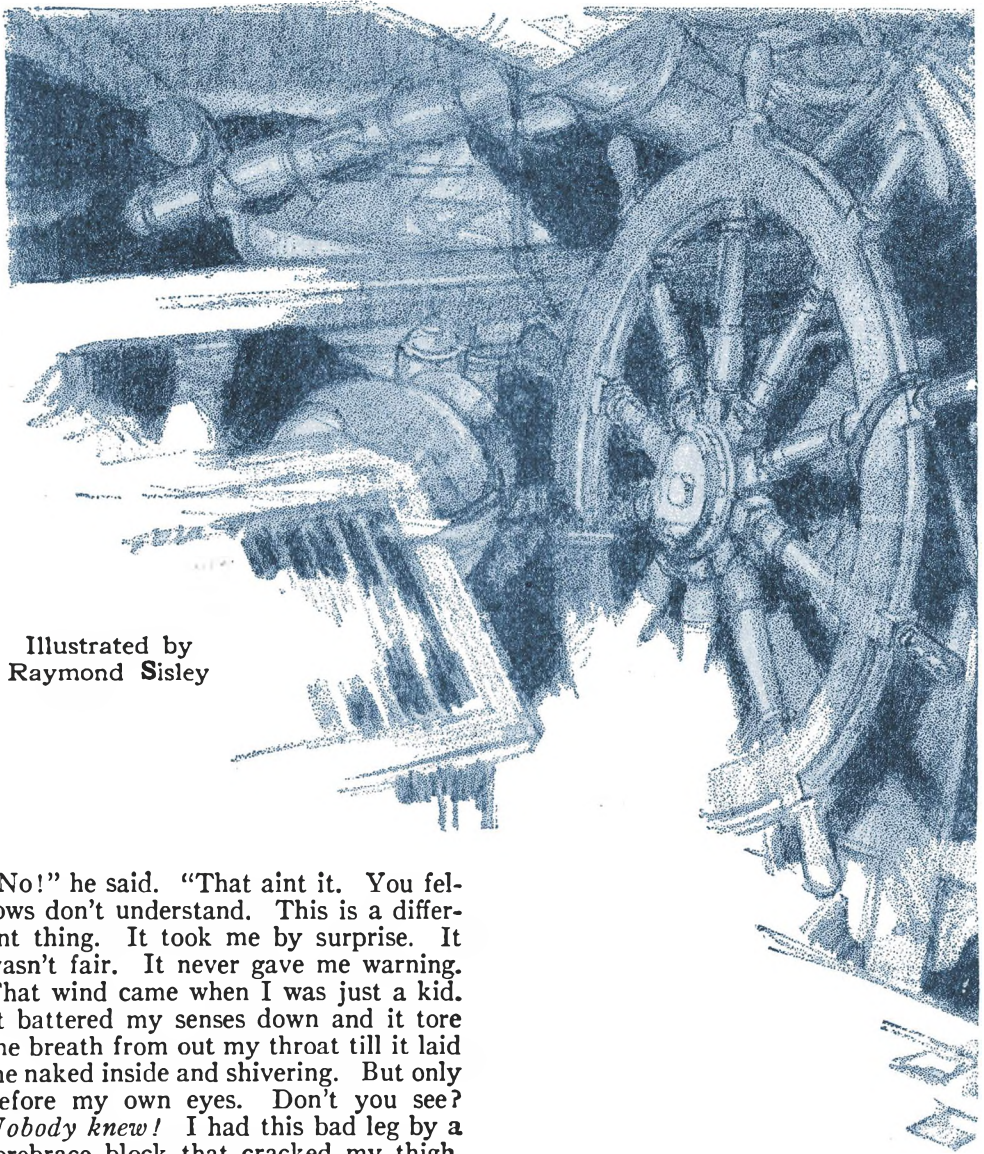
stay—till the last eight bells calls the end of your watch an' we send you down below through a well deck freeing-port, with a grate bar at your feet for company. That's for me. An' I know it. It's for you, too. Only you don't know it."

The bosun's voice sounded prophetic, the way a clear voice will toward the end of day when the weather is fine and the sea is smooth. But Typhoon Sammy didn't believe in any prophecy but his own. So he looked up, taking his pipe between his forefinger and his thumb. "That's not true," he said again.

A LOW ripple of laughter arose. "Sammy's still lookin' for the big wind that's gonna blow him clear."

The ripple gathered its weight at that, till someone broke it into a great guffaw. Because they knew all about this thing. "That's right, by jingo!" that fellow said. "Sammy was chief mate of a big flash sailin'-ship in the early days out here. Till a typhoon hit him square between the eyes an' scared him witless. So he's a fo'c'stle boomer now. But only for a little while." Sharp sarcasm came into that voice, remembering past days of its own. "Sure thing! Only for a little while. Only till—"

"No!" Sammy Yardabout came quickly to his feet, looking at them somberly.



Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

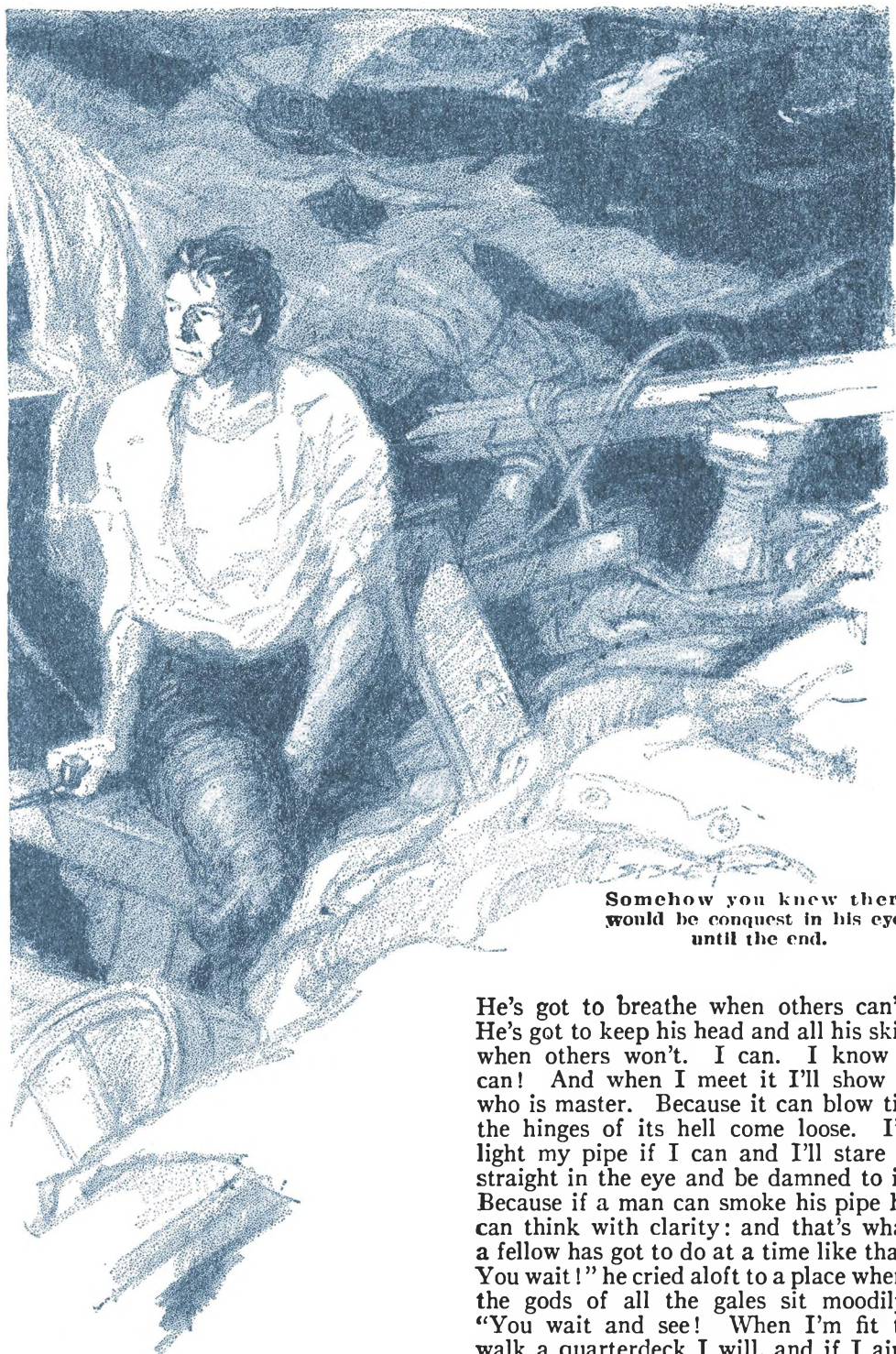
"No!" he said. "That aint it. You fellows don't understand. This is a different thing. It took me by surprise. It wasn't fair. It never gave me warning. That wind came when I was just a kid. It battered my senses down and it tore the breath from out my throat till it laid me naked inside and shivering. But only before my own eyes. Don't you see? *Nobody knew!* I had this bad leg by a forebrace block that cracked my thigh. When we sent that small boat across to that foundering schooner, I couldn't have gone if I wanted. The second mate took her. Who knew what I thought?" He looked about him with insistent appeal. "No one but me. It's myself. Alone! No one else."

"Then you should've kept your damn' trap shut," the bosun judged with finality. "Who the hell *aint* scared when that big slut begins to howl? What you see in men's eyes at a time like that, Sammy, you better not talk about afterward."

"No! No!" he cried again. "That's just it! I asked those fellows, I came right out and asked them. And they looked at me funny and walked away. That's when it dawned on me they were just as frightened as me. Maybe even

more. But that's not good. I was chief mate. I was ready to sit for master. I could have had a ship and gone the rest of my days with maybe never facing it again. Lots of men have. But I couldn't. Don't you see I couldn't? Because I tell you that's not good! How can a man be master with a thing like that at the back of his head? It just won't do. A man's got to be sure of himself inside. Deep inside. A sailor officer's skill and knowledge ought to be clean. Clean as his ticket. Clean as a hound's back tooth!"

He stopped talking for an instant. He stared out across the twilight sea where all the gold was draining from the ocean's face, leaving delicate half lights and purple shadows flicking along the easy swell.



Somehow you knew there would be conquest in his eyes until the end.

"I'll hunt it out." His voice fell still and quiet, wandering out into empty solitude. "I'll hunt that typhoon out. One day or another it's got to meet me. It's got to! Because I'll hunt it till it does. An honest shipmaster has got to face that thing.

He's got to breathe when others can't. He's got to keep his head and all his skill when others won't. I can. I know I can! And when I meet it I'll show it who is master. Because it can blow till the hinges of its hell come loose. I'll light my pipe if I can and I'll stare it straight in the eye and be damned to it. Because if a man can smoke his pipe he can think with clarity: and that's what a fellow has got to do at a time like that. You wait!" he cried aloft to a place where the gods of all the gales sit moodily. "You wait and see! When I'm fit to walk a quarterdeck I will, and if I aint I won't."

That's what he told them, not heeding a bosun's wisdom who counseled patient silence for all things as dark as that. But how could a man like Sammy Yard-about hold his peace? He was too lonely. So he had to speak. He had to

speak to the sea, to the sky: he had again to hurl his gauntlet at an invisible hurricane. And he had to speak to his fellows before he turned on his heel and started aft for the ladder that went aloft.

There was a moment of taut silence down there. Till someone grinned and another smiled, and then the laughter of self-defense exploded after him, pursuing him. He heard it, but he didn't stop. He just kept walking away from them, tall and heavy-set, limping a little because of that block that had smashed him on the thigh so long ago when he was mate in the ship that was called *Nirobe*. He relieved the wheel promptly when eight bells went and I thought if I looked at him in the binnacle light his face would be very old, almost as old as the sea. It wasn't. I couldn't tell you what age he had. His face was square and solid. His eyes, deep set and wide apart under crags of brows, were amazingly clear and bright, like the eyes of the young in heart. And he was an expert helmsman. He steered with care. . . .

So we made Manila Bay by way of the Palawan Passage and we sailed from there for the port of Hongkong in the middle of the month of September, with Typhoon Sammy still in the third mate's watch. He was like an excited hound-dog on a baffling scent. In the middle of the night you'd see him peering to windward, sniffing the weather and muttering to himself. "It's around here somewhere," the mate heard him growl one time. I wonder how he knew? Because as we worked up toward the Pratas Reef the barometer began to dance in tune to the wireless yarns about the life cycle of a typhoon whelped somewhere around the northern tip of Luzon.

ON the chart we watched its plot. It had started northwestward; then it dipped a little as if it meant to hurry south. But not for long. It must have known where Sammy was. We maneuvered to be clear of it, but it didn't act the way it should and we had no luck that trip. That was our idea. It wasn't what Sammy Yardabout thought. Because when the cirrus was thick overhead, when twilight came in the middle of the day with the sticky oppression upon the restlessly swollen ocean, he stood at the rail, motionless and very straight. He was peering off across an ominously heaving sea to where the black shadow of typhoon began its dark climb to the zenith. And in that unnatural stillness

you can never forget once you've known it, I heard him say with clarity, like a voice giving solemn utterance in a hollow, deserted place: "This is it!" . . . He was right. It was.

It came with a great clap of thunder and a livid flame of lightning that tongued clear across the entire sky. Typhoon Sammy lifted his face to welcome it. Why wouldn't he? Hadn't he waited long enough? I remember that face. It was quiet with patience and with long-gathered strength. He kept it raised aloft so that his enemy could plainly see it, and see that in it there was no despair. And the torrential rain fell down upon that face till the water streamed from it. And behind that rain there was wind.

WE took it on the starboard quarter, holding that course while it started shrieking destruction at us. There is no other gale on earth has the sound of true typhoon. Its wildness is persistent and intolerable: there is no crevice or fault in a man's spiritual armor it cannot find and penetrate. Typhoon Sammy would know that: he had heard it once before and had time enough to prepare before it came again. And you could plainly see what great good luck he thought he had when the mate sighted that dismayed sailing-ship wallowing in a black trough, forked lightning cruelly revealing her.

She was caught in a mesh between angry sky and raging sea. There was no space between at all. It was difficult to tell whether those rockets, spinning up with bubbles of light, exploded in the ocean or in the typhoon rack. But there she was. She'd been through her hell a little sooner than we, and there wasn't much left of her. Stumps of masts sticking up from a waterlogged hull awash in a clutter of her own wreckage. The seas that swept her were shining and black, till they broke clear across her in seething white to show the moving arm of one of her men on the poop, or the dark shape of another. Everyone forgot about Sammy. Who thinks of legends at a time like that? We were wondering what the devil we could do. Could we get a boat across? In that sea—and before the full trial of typhoon came? For this, we knew, was no more than the advance guard of hurricane. The whole fury of it wasn't far behind. Well, could we? The mate didn't know. It was Typhoon Sammy who told us. He was sure! He came bursting in where he had no right to be. Blazing!

THE IRON WHIRLWIND

"It can!" he cried, beside himself. "I know it, sir! This is the place! This is where it happened before!" I should have smashed him down at once, sending him out to the lookout's place where he belonged. Of course! Telling me stuff like that! But I couldn't. Not the way it poured out of him. Not the way his eyes burned. He wasn't insolent at all, though it might sound that way: he wasn't insubordinate. He couldn't be. Not Sammy. He was just pleading for his right. He thought that gale was his own opponent, personal and shrewd. It had put this thing in his way with crafty deliberation, hoping to confound him; in the same latitude where it happened before. He had to show it he didn't care.

"You'd be surprised, sir," he told me, "you'd be surprised what men can do!"

He was taut as he followed me into the dark and pitching wheelhouse. He was tense, and the wind was yammering at the ship when the chief mate said: "By God, we got to try while there's still a chance. I'm for it."

"Better start the oil-bags, then. Run up a signal burst and see if those fellows over there can do the same. It would help. Pick your own men, Mister, for the boat."

"I will pull the stroke," said Samuel Yardabout, just as if that matter had long ago been settled and he was stating no more than a fact.

SO he pulled the stroke, the way he said he would; and when I could I watched how the battle went, though the most of that was done by him in solitude. Which was proper, and eminently just. He said I'd be surprised what men could do when they must. I was. With our funnel smoke beating out stiff and flat on the sea, we got the ship around to windward, floating our oil-slick down. And in what we were pleased to call a lull our best boat took the water and started across.

How they managed it, no one will ever know, not even the men who did the job. The mate who had the steering-sweep in his fists told me later it had a lot to do with the way Sammy's eyes were on him. There was something in them, he said; something hard and tough as steel each time that fellow lay back with his weight upon the stroke. It could give an officer strength and sustenance. I don't wonder. I saw it myself from my place in the open wing, maneuvering. The small-boat went scending dizzily aloft with the

rearing flank of an oil-filmed sea and the next instant was out of sight in the monstrous cavern beyond. But when she came into view again, struggling, there he was. There he was with his shining face aloft. There was just enough of sick gray light to see it, spattered with brine, something between a smile and a challenge very clearly in his stare. His lips were a little parted. Maybe he was crying all heaven and earth to bear him witness in this trial. It had on it the look of ecstatic joy; it had about it the appearance and the quality of majesty. It wasn't easy to forget.

THAT way a tossing little cockleshell closed with a foundering wreck, while we gave what lee we could. It wasn't much. Not down where they were, hemmed in by the hurrying ocean walls with the mad skirl of the wind in their ears and the blinding sea in their eyes and the storm rack racing headlong overhead. Just the bare difference between survival and destruction. Not more than that. And barely that. We could see the line snake out when they tried to float it down: we could see dark shapes in the sinking hulk, with her bulwarks awash, struggling to retrieve it. Once—and again. No good. There was too much wreckage in between. Broken masts, splintered spars, a rubble of thrashing cordage and canvas from which the sea kept spouting heavenward. Then, with startling suddenness, a man went overside from our boat. He went abruptly, with a bowline about him. And that man was Sammy Yardabout.

The sea swallowed him at once. It rose up and engulfed him carelessly, and then went hurrying away with its upper lip curling in the clouds. But when the trough flattened out, he was there. Because there was tension on the line to let them know they had better slack off and be quick. And there was a battered deepwater hat floating alongside where he was. He let the ocean carry him. By God, it had carried him before! But he guided himself this time, until the stern of that hulk hid him and he disappeared from sight. Not for long, though. There was a clear space there. Sammy must have seen it, under the transom by the rudder chains. That's how he got aboard. That's how he hauled himself on to a vessel's poop again. By the strength of his own two fists. He came over a broken taffrail, up out of stormy seas, bringing a lifeline with him while the signs of

full typhoon grew blacker and more deadly in the sky. And that's how the rescue was made.

He sent them over the stern, one by one, to be hauled through the water to where a small boat plunged and reared to a small sea anchor not very far away. We were watching. We knew what was going on in the narrow, howling wilderness separating the tramp *Pandora* from Sammy Yardabout who was such a joke along the China coasts because he wanted to find a typhoon and single-handed do it battle. Well, he did! Do you think a man like that could ever be cheated of his just deserts? He sent them over one by one, with his big back bent while he heaved the line, but in between standing solid and erect. And do you suppose a man like that would listen to a shipmaster, telling him he ought to be the last to go? Not much. Sammy sent that last man over, too, and now he was all alone. I don't think it bothered him at all. You could tell that by the way he looked around him. He seemed so still in the midst of fury: he seemed so serene with confusion all around.

A monstrous roller came lifting out of darkness, roaring toward him, dwarfing him. The mate in the small boat waved wildly. No doubt he was screaming warning. So, unconsciously, were we. As if the feeble sound of a human voice could be heard! Maybe Sammy saw what was advancing on him: maybe he didn't. He was reaching slowly for the line; his hand was about to grasp it when that ninth sea toppled over. It swamped him. When it cleared he was down, a tumble of wreckage pinning him.

HE struggled—but not for long. Soon he stopped. His eyes went to windward to that place where his enemy was. The wind was higher now, lifting its voice. The seas beyond the dissipating oil-slick came leaping weirdly into vision, tall and confused and piling higher with the making gale. The thunderheads were rolling toward us, livid lightning flaming along the craggy clouds of storm. He knew what it meant. That shrill scream was crescendoing. There wasn't much time left to maneuver; to reclaim a boat; to put a ship in the wind and prepare for what the banshees really had in store.

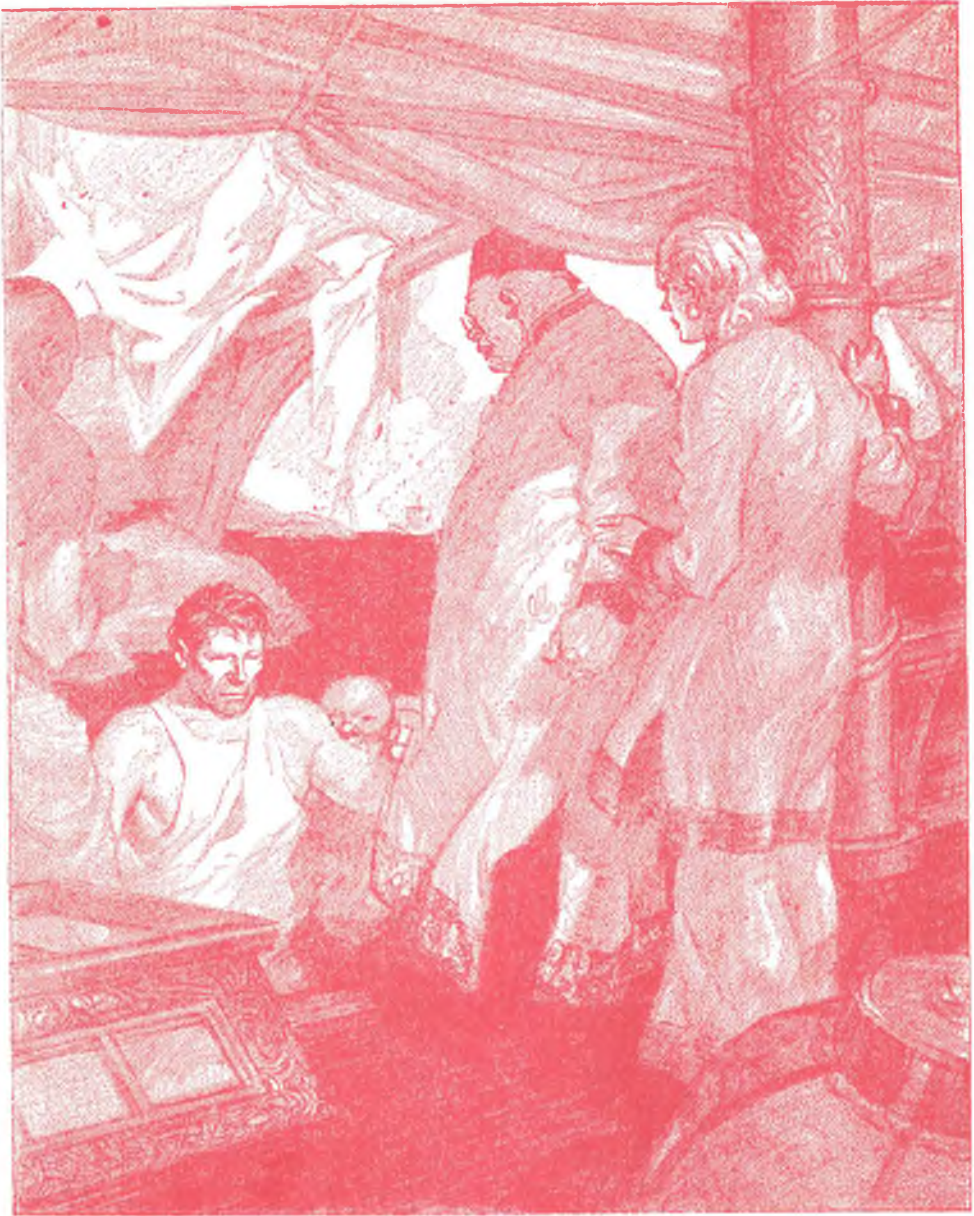
So Sammy Yardabout reached for his sheath-knife. Its blade glinted for an instant, catching all the light there was. From where he lay he could just reach the taffrail where the lifeline was made

fast. Without hesitation he cut it. And then—deliberately!—he made a waving gesture with his upflung arm to tell the mate to be on his way. Typhoon Sammy Yardabout could face what was left alone. He needed no help for that from any man. That was the way it had to be.

SO our boat came home without him. What else could the chief mate do? Somehow or another we hooked it on and lifted it aboard. Then we looked back, when there was time. All of us. To where he was. There was that compulsion on us, salute on the face of every silent man. Why not? I know to my eyes he was very plain—like a sight of something good, seen for an instant in a blinding light before utter darkness comes, and therefore forever after remembered. Just before the great squall struck we saw him with that clarity. A figure half prone on the deck of a sinking hulk with the seas leaping up all around and the heavens black and angry overhead.

He must have heard the first high whistling squeal of hurricane, because he turned his head as if to listen, or maybe just to smile at it with slow serenity. He meant to tell it he was ready; he had waited long enough. Just then that ship took a monstrous lurch. Suddenly she flung her counter free of foam. Her name leaped up. It leaped up into momentary vision like a living thing wanting to make itself known before oblivion came. *Nirobe!* No wonder Typhoon Sammy stayed! He was the same man. It was the same ship. Perhaps it was the selfsame gale, answering Sammy's insolent challenge on its own shrewd terms, in its own good time. Do you suppose he cared? Not Sammy Yardabout. He probably blessed great good fortune such as that. Because I tell you he had his pipe in his mouth. Somehow or another he had got it lit. And he meant to sit there till the hinges of the typhoon's hell blew loose—while he stared it straight in the eye with a clear brain and an unafraid heart. Because that, as he said himself, is what a fellow has got to do if his knowledge of himself is to be as clean as his ticket is. Clean as a hound's back tooth!

That's the way we saw him, that time Sammy Yardabout reached the end of his questing and found his hurricane at last. We saw him sitting calmly and with dignity, pinned down by wreckage he made no attempt to lift, quietly smoking his pipe while black typhoon spun



Quong Pu Li' and his foster-daughter found a man, all alone and half dead.

down to destroy him, while the rain came slashing down upon his uplifted face. I remember I reached for the whistle-rope, and I pulled it down three times. We barely heard that seaman's gesture of salute and farewell for the roar of the sea, the booming of the gale. And when I looked again the blackness was intense. There was a solid wall of water to hide his solitary contention from the eyes of his fellowman. He had disappeared completely. But somehow you knew there would be a smile of conquest in his eyes and a look of great glory on his face un-

til the very end. What more could Sammy ask? Blotted from sight, he was alone with his own typhoon. . . .

It is old Quong Pu Li', the Whampoa merchant prince, who ought to tell what is left to tell. But Quong doesn't talk very much. He only smiles blandly, in a mysteriously Oriental way. Maybe that's to hide what deep joy he feels when you speak of men and things he greatly admires. When Quong was middle-aged, long before demolition bombs were perfectly understood, he was the survivor of a Bias Bay pirate raid on a junk

he owned, together with a starry-eyed child whose white parents, all her kin on earth, were murdered before her eyes on a bloody deck. Quong adopted Helen Blaine, because he is that kind of man. He called her Precious Treasure; and she moved in his household afterward, slim with grace and beauty and sadness.

It was the palatial pleasure-junk of Quong Pu Li' and his foster-daughter that picked up the broken, battered hulk of a dismayed sailing-ship near Tailong Head after the typhoon passed and stillness returned to the sea.

It was the *Nirobe*. She had rice in her cargo holds. It swelled enormously, plugging her leaking seams till the ocean scornfully tossed her up against the land. They found a man who had lashed himself on her poop. He was all alone and half dead. But he had a pipe clutched fast in his fist and a strange still smile on his senseless face as if he had lately looked quite calmly on the face of every evil thing and had found he was unafraid and could easily stare it down. Helen Blaine nursed him back to health, through fever and delirium. He raved quite often in the still dark nights, not knowing where he was. He raved about typhoons mostly; about loneliness; about terror conquered and about a high wind that is senseless and knows neither ruth nor mercy and can find out every human fault if a man isn't careful and forewarned. She stroked his forehead and she calmed him, giving him comfort and renewed strength. And once when the moon was full, its light shining on the polished lacquer panels of the exotic room, she told him quietly: "I too have been through hurricane."

He looked deeply into her eyes and must have seen what he wanted there. He saw she wasn't laughing: he saw she understood. Because after that he was whole again, and he told Quong Pu Li' he was fit to be the master of a ship. Quong merely nodded. Being Chinese, he believed in tradition too. So he spent a fortune refitting the *Nirobe* while he waited till Sammy Yardabout went away and came back with a master's ticket in his fist. What questions could a Board of Examiners ask Sammy he wouldn't know about? Helen waited, too.

THAT barque was a lovely sight—in tow for the Lye Mun Pass out of the harbor of Hongkong, with the dread signal aloft on Blackhead Hill. She was standing straight for the massing cloud-

banks, sunset touching her spars where the men aloft were shaking loose the upper sails. But she was growing smaller, making steadily for the sea. I put my glasses on her, wishing to see her name again. *Nirobe*. I saw him, too, with clarity, under the bright cloud of his own peculiar greatness, peering steadfastly into the eye of the wind. That man on the poop was Captain Samuel Yardabout.

AT his side there was a woman. She, too, could look with confidence to that place where the great gales brew.

There are men on the China coast who will leer about Helen Yardabout. They will wink slyly when they tell you how Quong is a wise old bird with that tale about piracy. Ho! Like Moses in the bulrushes. What a likely yarn! They mean to imply she had Chinese blood. Well, I know it isn't true. But I know if she had, it would do her little harm. And then, as I looked, those two figures merged into one. The barque *Nirobe* was just a pale fine shadow; a thing of delicate beauty from the past, moving with confident, functional grace into a cloudy and unknown future.

I heard a junior third mate growling his complaint again.

"Is that fellow mad?" he wanted to know once more. "Can't he read a signal-flag at all?"

Oh, yes; Captain Yardabout could read the signs all right. He knew all about typhoons, and he judged what its track would be. He knew this one wasn't for him. He knew it with certainty. He was qualified. And sure enough, some hours later the black across came down and a red cone went aloft instead. Maybe that thing knew where Sammy was and it curved away to the north and west, knowing who its master was. . . .

So whenever you see that fine tall ship leaning along these ancient coasts with a solid man on her quarterdeck, pacing erectly with just a little of limp, you will know who it is. And you will know who the woman is at his side. That's Typhoon Sammy Yardabout, an old China hand who hunted a hurricane and found it and through the eye of it climbed back without fear to the solitary place of command. He did it himself. He did it alone. Because he believed in things, and to a man like that nothing else will do. He had to be sure. If you've had good fortune and have seen what there is to see on his face, and on her face too, you will know exactly what I mean.

COLD BLOOD

*A James Lee detective
story—*

By
**HUGH
WILEY**

Illustrated by
Hamilton Greene



ON Sunday afternoon, in his office in San Francisco, James Lee, of the Narcotic Bureau, turned away from a sheet of memoranda that lay on his desk. He summoned his secretary. A trace of impatience was in his voice. "Call Los Angeles and Reno, and ask Mr. Morgan and Mr. Blair to come in here at once," he directed. "Tell them to catch the first available planes."

When the secretary had gone, he left his office and headed for Chinatown. He walked along Grant Avenue until he came to the Double Blessing Bazaar. He entered this pungent emporium and smiled pleasantly at three somnolent clerks and at the proprietor, old Hing Moy. Out of respect for the elder Chinaman, Mr. Lee filled a moment with the appropriate phrases of formal salutation; and then, "I desire to speak with you in private," he said.

Old Hing Moy led the way to his low-ceilinged office under the balcony ranging across the rear of the store. When Lee was seated, Hing Moy asked:

"The subject of our conference?"

Abandoning all superfluous ceremony, "Why have you summoned the killers?" Lee asked with a directness that made old Hing Moy blink his eyes. "Can it be that my ears are liars? Six men, notoriously the messengers of death, who serve you and the various other elders of your League—summoned from New York and Chicago and Seattle! Shall I name them?"

Old Hing Moy smiled. "It is unnecessary," he said. "You are of clear perception."

"I have one thousand eyes," James Lee admitted blandly. "Have these killers been summoned to avenge Sin Yut's theft of Autumn Lotus?"

Hing Moy nodded. "Yes. The mantle of deception cannot hide the truth from you."

"You know that Sin Yut has married her—that she is his Number One wife?"

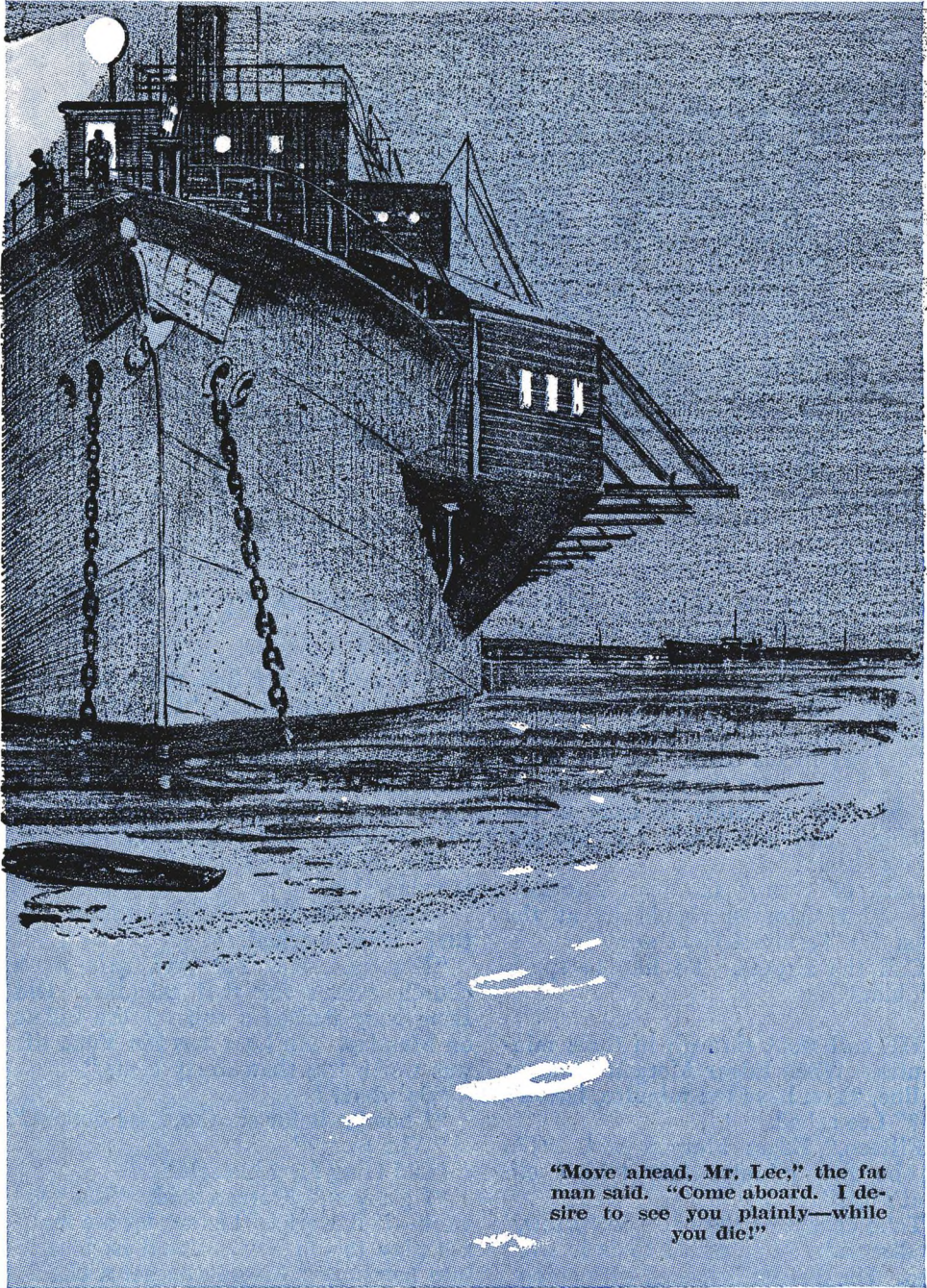


"A matter of small moment, whether she is his wife or one of his slaves. The theft of Autumn Lotus must be paid for in blood."

James Lee reached for his check-book and wrote a check payable to Hing Moy. "Here are six thousand slices of Sin Yut's flesh," he said. "Six thousand dollars. It is a generous price for the Autumn Lotus. Sin Yut has married her,

and he will be a gentle master. Give me your word that you will call off the killers, and this treasure is yours."

HING MOY devoted a brief three seconds to contemplation of the possibility of driving a better bargain; then, knowing Lee's methods, he said: "You may tell Sin Yut to enjoy tranquil sleep. The *boo how doy* will not molest him. A



"Move ahead, Mr. Lee," the fat man said. "Come aboard. I desire to see you plainly—while you die!"

cup of wine now, to celebrate this auspicious occasion—and to seal our lips."

James Lee lifted his eyebrows. Quick to observe this, Hing Moy said, "I beg your pardon."

"Thank you. The shadow will serve for the substance." Lee made a gesture toward Hing Moy: "Your health, long life, ten thousand blessings, and seven sons to mourn at your grave!"

Hing Moy removed his spectacles as a token of respect to a superior, stood up, bowed thrice to Lee and shook hands with himself. "May the waters of life be cool in thy throat, the fruits of heaven sweet upon thy tongue." Pointing up and down, then to Lee and to himself: "Between heaven and earth, only you and I share the knowledge of this moment."



THE BOO HOW DOY

Lee smiled at the absurdity of trying to keep a secret that would be known to Chinatown in the next hour. "Good-by," he said. "Good luck!"

At the door of the Double Blessing Bazaar, Lee turned left on Grant Avenue and walked to his office. To his secretary, "I'll be out for the rest of the day," he said. "I'll probably be back in the morning. Did you reach Mr. Morgan and Mr. Blair?"

"Both of them," the man informed him. "Mr. Morgan should be at the Union Air Terminal right now."

"Call the airport. I'd like to speak with him."

THE call went through in three minutes. When Edgar Morgan came on the line, "You have ten minutes, haven't you?" Lee asked.

"Fifteen," Edgar Morgan said. "We will be five minutes late taking off. What's up?"

"Take charge of the office tomorrow," Lee directed. "I've called Blair in from Reno. His district is loaded with opium. What did you get in the South?"

"Lots of it down here," Morgan answered. "Worse than it has been in the last five years."

"Where is it coming from?"

"I don't know. Some Pacific Coast port, probably."

"Check there. It's moving east. Chicago was clear of it Wednesday—a thousand pipes were smoking last night. It is a big one this time."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to try to discover the source."

"How?"

"I'm making my first move tonight," James Lee answered. "I'm calling on Sin Yut."

Shaken out of the calm that had characterized his conversation, "Holy old double-quick murder!" Morgan protested. "Listen! Are you crazy?"

"Steady down. Think fast. Sin Yut is vulnerable."

"You mean that dame Autumn Lotus?" Morgan asked.

"Exactly. Sin Yut was safe as a church except for that mistake. Old Hing Moy flashed a call for the killers on Monday. An hour ago Sin Yut's life was worth less than thirty cents."

"So what?"

"I bought it for six thousand dollars."

"Who from?"

"Old Hing Moy himself."

"I get you," Morgan said. "It's good work—if it works. Listen: let me make the play to Sin Yut. You'll be blasted into hamburger before you get a chance to start your first move."

"Thank you," James Lee said. "I'll take care of that. If my foot slips, you might—you might present him with a bill for the funeral expenses. There's not much risk."

"Risk? I still say you're crazy." Edgar Morgan began to talk fast: "What about your trouble with him last year? What about his Greek dope-runners that had you fouled in October? What about that mess of Chinamen you stopped at

the border three months ago? He's lost half a million bucks on you in the last two years. Go ahead with this program, and you'll be dead by morning. Wait until I get there. Let me take the rap."

"Little Autumn Lotus is worth more to him than I have cost him," James Lee said. "I'll play this hand myself. Don't rock the boat."

"If anything happens to you tonight," Edgar Morgan declared, "Sin Yut's next birthday will stay away from now on."

"Thanks," Lee said. "Good-by." He hung up the telephone and turned to his secretary. "You heard me?"

The secretary, his eyes wide with fear, nodded in silence. Then, "Listen, Mr. Lee, why not wait and let Mr. Morgan or Mr. Blair go up there?"

Lee smiled. "Because neither of them happens to know Sin Yut as I do," he answered. He rose. "I'll see you tomorrow morning," he said to his secretary.

He left the office. On the street, fifty feet from the entrance of the building, he found his car. "You may have the evening off," he said to his driver. "Report tomorrow morning at nine o'clock." He got into his car and swung into the traffic stream that flowed toward the approach to the Bay Bridge.

BY the time he reached the secondary highway paralleling the channels of the Delta, night had fallen. Fifteen miles to the north, he swung into the narrow road along the south shore of Elbow Island. He slowed the car to twenty miles. The thin light of a fading moon silvered the willows that fringed the shoreline. The road, rutted and broken with the harvest traffic, demanded careful driving. He looked at the clock on the instrument panel of the car.

"Seven-forty," he mused. "Another mile—and then the game begins."

Another mile along the way, where the road dived into the ghostly shade of a clump of sycamores, he parked the car. At the brink of the levee, near the water's edge, a spot of fire glowed red in the moonlight.

"What do you want?" a voice asked.

"Can you row me down to Sin Yut's boat?"

"That's my job," the voice answered. "Are you a Chink?"

James Lee blinked at the red glow of the boatman's fire. "No," he said. He got into the boat.

The boatman began rowing westward with the slow tidal current.

"Has Sin Yut shifted the Pavilion of Delight?" Lee asked.

"Sure. Things got too hot over near Dog Town. Too many white girls come aboard. How long since you been here last?"

"Six months," Lee said.

"I see. . . . It aint far now. She's laying against the far bank right around the next bend."

A HUNDRED yards from the Pavilion of Delight, a peremptory challenge rang across the shadowed water. The lookout's voice lifted loud above the medley of muffled music and the human voices in the cabins of the hulking craft. "I'll answer him," Lee said. He called to the vigilant lookout: "Tell your master, Sin Yut, that James Lee wants to see him."

At this, as if the mob on board the Pavilion of Delight had been engulfed by the moving waters of a tidal wave, the tumult of voices diminished to silence. There followed a sharp staccato dialogue in Cantonese. From the upper deck of the Pavilion of Delight a shaft of light launched downward through the darkness, searching the surface of the rippled water. A door of a cabin on the upper deck opened, and from the lighted rectangle of the doorway a fat man robed in flowing silk addressed Lee.

"Move ahead, Mr. Lee," the fat man said. "Come aboard. I desire to see you plainly—while you die!"

"I too have words to speak regarding death," James Lee replied. "Your death, not mine."

"You have put your head into the tiger's mouth. Come aboard before my guards rip you to pieces with their guns."

"Get alongside," Lee said to his boatman. To the fat Sin Yut: "A wise man understands a nod. I come without weapons, claiming a guest's immunity."

Dead silence for a moment; and then to his Chinese killers on the lower deck of the Pavilion of Delight, "Hold your fire," Sin Yut commanded. More loudly: "Come aboard, thou pilgrim of the night. For the moment have no fear." Then tempering his formal courtesy with a characteristic cruelty: "You may dismiss your boatman," he added. "Your craft on the return journey will be a funeral barge."

Landing beside the Pavilion of Delight, two Chinese men suddenly moved out of the darkness to stand beside James Lee: "The door—up front." The

door opened to reveal a colorful group whose revelry had been halted by a sudden sense of impending tragedy. Two long fan-tan tables flanked a central passageway that led aft. The air was thick with smoke. Under the vapors of stale tobacco lay the heavy scent of opium. A dance-floor beyond the tables held an assemblage of dancers that included a dozen white girls. Through this mob Lee walked directly toward a stairway that led upward to open balconies from which visitors might observe the scene below. Sin Yut waited for him at the head of the stairway. Bowing to the fat proprietor of the Pavilion of Delight, "Plenteous years," Lee said. "Seven decades of felicity."

"*Ch'uh liao si ti*," Sin Yut growled. "You have entered a place of death."

"Enough of fighting," James Lee answered. "Where can we converse in greater privacy?"

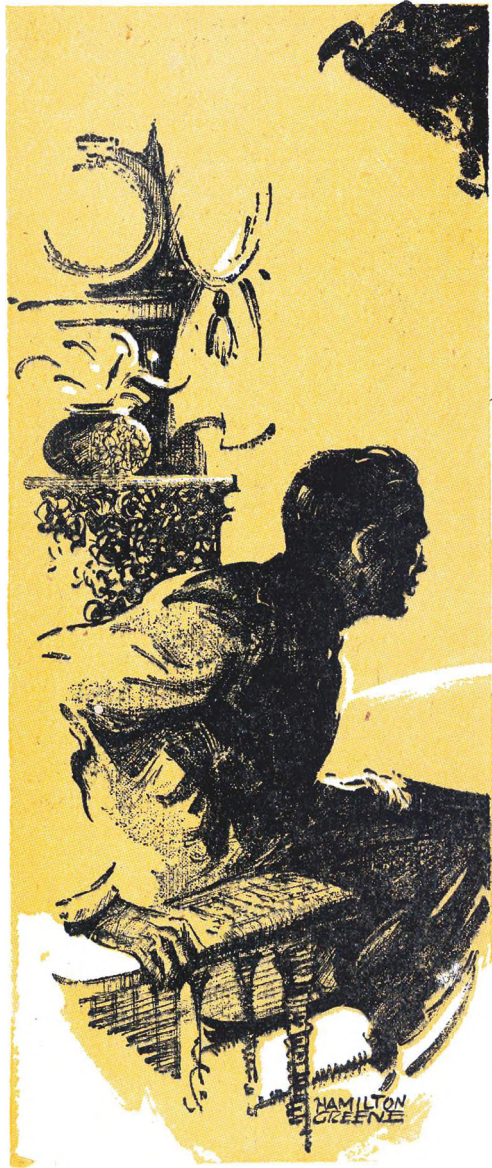
THE fat Sin Yut, a sardonic smile upon his face, bowed with some ceremony to Lee. "Please to enter my apartments," he said, opening a wide door that revealed a room whose luxurious furnishings were strangely in contrast with the shoddy scene below. In the vernacular of the street: "You're a wise guy, Mr. Lee, but there's a lot you don't know," Sin Yut said. "Sit down. . . . You got lots of life insurance?"

"Plenty," Lee suggested. "Enough to carry me through tonight."

Sin Yut sat down at a teakwood table. From a shallow drawer to his right he hauled out a blue .45 automatic. "Maybe this will make a lot of noise—but what of it? Does your insurance policy say anything in it about fish eating you?"

"I haven't read it very carefully. . . . Incidentally, read these." James Lee took three Service telegrams from his breast pocket and tossed them over to Sin Yut. The stolid master of the Pavilion of Delight picked up the messages. They were from agents of the Bureau in Seattle, Chicago and New York. Sin Yut glanced at the first one. His eyes widened in surprise, and his florid features turned gray with fear. His trembling hands made the reading of the third telegram difficult. He controlled himself with obvious effort and his face was livid. "The *boo how doy*—the killers! When will they be here?"

"The killers will not reach you," Lee assured him. "For the moment you may be at ease."



"What do you mean?" asked Sin Yut. "Let us say that I have saved your life."

"Saved my life," Sin Yut repeated. "At what price?"

James Lee leaned forward: "Sin Yut, you know that I have never lied to you. These men meant your death. I bought your life from Hing Moy."

"I have been blind. Ask what you will, and it is yours."

"You are careless with your promises. I desire to know the source of the opium that is spreading through the West."

Sin Yut cringed. "I do not know."

"What is the source of your supply? Who are the principals of the syndicate?"



"Does your insurance policy say anything about fish eating you?"

Where do I search? Where do I strike, this time, to destroy this latest enterprise?"

Sin Yut's features went gray again. "I do not know," he repeated. And then: "If I should tell you, I would be killed within the week."

Lee frowned. "Your words are shadows on the water?"

Sin Yut faltered: "I have no choice."

"I shall not force you to answer me."

"One thing I shall do for you," Sin Yut offered. "You are blessed with the perception of ten thousand scholars." Over his shoulder he called to an unseen servant: "Opium," he said. "Bring me a tin—unopened."

A moment later the heavy curtains of a doorway parted. A Chinese man came in. On a lacquered tray he carried a rectangular tin, lithographed in black and yellow. Sin Yut waved the servant away. He picked up the lithographed tin and handed it to James Lee. "This

will guide you," he said. "You are rich in wisdom."

Lee glanced at the rectangular tin container and slipped it into the right-hand pocket of his coat. "Thank you," he said to Sin Yut. "My compliments to the lady Autumn Lotus; and now will you repay what I spent for your life and arrange to have me put ashore?"

"What did—my life cost you?"

"Six thousand dollars."

To his unseen servant, "Get me six thousand dollars," Sin Yut directed.



When the blood-money had been returned to James Lee, "The honored guest is leaving," Sin Yut said. "Tears of regret make this moment bitter."

"The moment is sweetened with memories of pleasures enjoyed," Lee returned. "May the Middle Pathway lead you to happiness. Great wealth for you, in the favor of Milo Fo; tranquillity in the smile of Kwan Yin."

SIN YUT'S boatman set Lee ashore. At midnight he was back in his apartment in San Francisco.

"I am tired," he said to his servant. "A decanter of sherry—and that will be all tonight."

When his servant had left him, he drank two glasses of the warming wine. Thereafter, for an hour, he devoted himself to an intensive study of the rectangular, brightly lithographed tin of opium that Sin Yut had given him. The bottom of the tin was bright metal. The



For an hour Lee devoted himself to an intensive study of the tin of opium.

top of the tin and its sides were covered with inscriptions in four languages. "*Portuguese skinless and boneless sardines in pure olive oil,*" he read. "*Net contents seven ounces.*" At half-past one in the morning, possessed of a dozen significant facts concerning the opium and its container, he went to bed.

AT nine o'clock Monday, in his office, to Blair and Morgan: "I have a hot hunch about that stuff," Lee said, pointing to the tin of opium on his desk. "The tin can is authentic enough. The metal is 29-gauge, Birmingham. There is a trace of wolframite present in the tin—which probably means that the source was Cornwall. The opium was undoubtedly refined in Maçao and packed in sardine-tins in Portugal. Get some wires out, Blair, and check up on the imports

of Portuguese sardines along the Pacific Coast for the last thirty days." He turned to Edgar Morgan: "I want a list of all the Portuguese ships, or ships under Portuguese charter, that have come through the Canal to the Pacific Coast in the last month."

At half-past ten, "We can discard all ideas of Chinese or Japanese sources" Lee decided. "In the first place, either would have meant Malay tin. No wolframite in that stuff. In the second place, the opium is in an authentic sardine-can. The inks and the design of the inscription check exactly with the real thing. Of the Portuguese ships that you dug up, Morgan, I think that tramp *Tamega* is the hot spot. She came up the Pacific Coast ten days ago. It makes the timing perfect. She probably landed her cargo somewhere in Monterey Bay. Get

your hat, Blair. We're headed for Monterey." He turned to Edgar Morgan: "Blair and I will have lunch at the Del Monte Hotel. I'll telephone you when we get there."

Over the telephone, at one-forty-five, Edgar Morgan said to James Lee: "Go up and look over the Café Capitan at Brocado. It is a new night-spot, with a couple of hot numbers running it. Motta Barbossa is the boss. Another bad actor by the name of José Cabral is an undercover partner; thirty-five, face chopped up, five feet eight—has a dope record in Havana and New York. He has no business dabbling around in a penny-ante deal like the Café Capitan."

"Good work," Lee complimented. "Keep at it. I'll call you later."

Lee confided Morgan's information to Blair. "It sounds interesting," Blair commented. "What's the play?"

"I want you to mix around the Monterey waterfront with the men of the fishing-fleet. I'm going to the Café Capitan and have a quick look-see."

THE festivities in the Café Capitan had ended at three o'clock that morning. Lee found only a watchman on duty. He was a lanky Texan, fifty years old, and he had been overseas in the war. "Monday is a holiday for the cooks and waiters," he explained. "All the dealers and everybody."

"Do you open again Tuesday?"

The watchman nodded. "The chef, Dutch Miller, and his helper get here about one o'clock Tuesday afternoon. The waiters and bartenders blow in about six."

"How long has the place been running?"

"Three months now. . . . Say, boy, what's your name?"

"My name is James Lee. Do you mind if I have a look around inside?"

"You aint got no more chance to look around inside than a snowflake in hell!"

It became necessary for Lee to introduce himself. When this had been accomplished, the watchman held out his hand.

"Pardner, I'm sure proud to meet you," he said. "My name is Sam Webb. I heard about how you cleaned up that 'Frisco gang two years ago."

"All right if I have a look around inside?" Lee repeated.

"I'll say so! Look your head off. . . . What's going on?"

"I don't know—yet."

Webb opened a door to the kitchen of the Café Capitan. This room occupied the southeast corner of the building. In the kitchen, Sam Webb said: "The dining-room is out there."

"What's this door?"

"I don't pack a key to that door. It's the pastry-room and the meat-refrigerator. I guess old Mutt Barbossa figures I'll kill myself eating cake. Out this way to the dining-room."

FROM the dining-room the watchman led the way to the lobby of the club. "That's the bar there. The bosses' office is through that door there. The bookkeeper's joint is back of it."

James Lee looked at the door in the north wall of the lobby. "That's the gambling-room, I suppose?"

"That's it. I got a key to that one, if you want to get in."

"After while," Lee said. "Have you a key to the office?"

"Sure. . . got to answer the phone when it rings. The bookkeeper's room is right next to it."

Sam Webb selected a key from a collection of twenty. He unlocked the door of the office, clicked on a light and stood aside so that Lee might enter. "Step inside," he said.

Lee walked into the office. Over his shoulder he asked:

"Webb, how long since you have been in here?"

"I aint been in there since I come on duty. I got to vacuum the dining-room always, and the bar and the casino and everything, before I do much loafing."

"Have a look here," Lee directed. He pointed to the figure of a little old bearded man slouched across the office desk.

"Holy gee, it's old Mutt! I didn't know he was in here. I thought he left in Cabral's car."

"Motta Barbossa, the proprietor?" Lee asked.

"Sure. Listen, Mr. Lee, he looks sick to me."

James Lee unbuttoned Barbossa's coat and vest, and listened in vain for his heart-beats. "He is dead," he announced. Conscious of a quick annoyance at this added complication of his problem, he turned to Sam Webb: "I wish you would get your car and drive down to the Monterey waterfront, double quick," he said. "My associate, Joe Blair, is probably mixing around with the men of the fishing-fleet. Find him quick, and bring him back with you—and don't spill this to

the police. I'll call them presently, but right now I need some time to work on this job alone. Leave your keys with me."

When Webb had gone, Lee began a close inspection of the setting and of the dead man. A fresh stain of green ink on the lining of Barbossa's vest, the peculiar pallor of the man's skin and the unusual temperature of his body excited a quick suspicion that death had not been from natural causes. After ten minutes, confused by a jumble of new factors that had appeared in his complex problem, he said to himself: "Damn it, here's another jungle that I've got to explore."

HE searched the dead man's pockets, finding a check-book, a fountain pen, a wallet that held a miscellany of papers and some currency, a bunch of keys, a pocket comb, two handkerchiefs and a dollar watch. He laid these on the desk in front of Barbossa. He picked up the fountain pen, from which the ink had leaked out to stain the lining of Barbossa's vest. He examined this pen under a ten-power lens. He picked up the keys and looked at the door of the bookkeeper's room. Of the seven keys that Barbossa carried, the fourth fitted the lock of this door. At the far end of the bookkeeper's room, under an iron-barred window, there was a couch. A high desk stood against the east wall.

The steel door of a fireproof vault, framed into the west wall of the room, claimed his attention. The lock on the vault was fitted for a key, and the appropriate key was included on Barbossa's key-ring. James Lee clicked the lock and swung down on the short lever that operated the bolts. He opened the door of the vault. Stacked boxes filled it from the floor to the nine-foot ceiling. He stepped back, and reached for an electric-light switch on the wall near the door. He flashed on this light, and turned for a second look at the vault's contents. On each box was a larger legend, similar to the colorful inscriptions on the sardinetin that Sin Yut had given him: "*Portugese sardines*," he read, "*packed in pure olive oil*." He made a quick estimate of his find. "Too much fish! Six by eight by twenty—nearly a thousand cubic feet. Opium! . . . A thousand cubic feet. . . . Twenty-five tons!"

The crash of a pistol-shot interrupted his arithmetic. He felt the searing pain of a hot bullet burning through the muscles of his right shoulder. On the in-

stant, seeking the protection of the steel door, he swung behind it. He reached for a blue-barreled .38 in his right hip pocket, and fired twice at the figure of a man framed in the lighted doorway of Barbossa's office. The first shot missed its mark, but at the second a yelp of pain came as a tribute to his aim. He saw a pistol drop from the man's hand. He stepped from behind the steel door of the vault and swung his .38 up to the man's heart.

"Steady, or I'll kill you," he threatened. "Come in here."

The man obeyed.

"Who are you?" Lee demanded.

"Give a guess, you damn' burglar! Who are you?"

With his left hand, Lee reached for the thin steel handcuffs that he carried. He tossed them to his captive. "They're open," he said. "Link your right wrist and get over to that window. Come along. Snap that other cuff around one of those iron bars across the window. Quick!"

Obeying, since failure to obey obviously meant death, the prisoner turned from the window, snarling his rage at James Lee.

"I'll kill you mighty quick," he said. "I'll kill you like a rat when I get loose."

"You won't get loose—for a while. Who are you? Don't answer! You're José Cabral." Remembering Edgar Morgan's description of the man—thirty-five years old, five-feet-eight, face chopped up, and with a dope record in Havana and New York, he said: "Listen, Cabral, why did you kill Barbossa?"

The man cringed: "Don't say that. I didn't kill him." Then: "Give me a towel or something, will you? You want me to bleed to death?"

LEE felt his own blood wet and warm against his right shoulder. "You'll live through it," he predicted grimly. "Live through it—to be hanged!" He walked into the office and picked up the telephone from the desk in front of the dead man. "Get me the Chief of Police of Brocado," he said to the operator. To the Chief: "This is James Lee speaking—Narcotic Bureau. I've got two men for you, one dead and one alive. Come out to the Café Capitan as quickly as you can. Bring your coroner with you. Ask him to bring a surgical kit. Two of us need some first aid."

He hung up the telephone and gave a bit of advice to José Cabral.



"Holy gee, it's old Mutt! I didn't know he was in here. Listen, Mr. Lee, he looks sick, to me."

"Take it easy," he suggested. "Don't bruise my handcuffs."

He locked the door on Cabral and devoted the next five minutes to an examination of the kitchen, the pastry-room, and the refrigerator. He opened the door of the pantry with a key he found in Barbossa's collection. He returned to Barbossa's office. He opened the door of the bookkeeper's room; and again, for ten minutes, he engaged himself with a further investigation of Barbossa's corpse.

Presently, addressing Cabral: "Why did you kill Barbossa?" he repeated.

Cabral, his face gray with pain, scowled at Lee. "Get me a drink of water, will you? Listen, wise guy, you aint got me for murder yet—and the chances are I'll beat your hop rap before I'm through."

"Who killed Barbossa?" James Lee persisted.

"You're a hop dick, aint you? You're supposed to know everything. You don't know nothing. Wise guy, you're licked!"

Lee was silent for a moment; and then, reviewing a dozen bits of contradictory evidence that he had discovered in his latest search, "Maybe you're right," he admitted. Again he asked: "Who killed Barbossa?"



"Listen, wise guy, you aint got me for murder yet!"

"I should have killed him! The damned low-life!" Cabral raged. "That hop would have been spread out long before this, if he hadn't spent all his time playing around with dames."

The sound of men tramping through the kitchen interrupted Cabral's statement. Lee turned to see Blair coming through the doorway of the office.

"What you got?" Blair asked.

"Two men—and twenty-five tons of opium," James Lee answered. "That dead man at the desk is Barbossa. That's Cabral over there—linked to the window."

"Your friend Sam Webb is here with the Brocado police outfit," Blair said. "Chief of Police Joe Mason—and the coroner. Did you call them?"

"Yes. We need them."

"Here they are."

JOE MASON, Dr. Gale and three of Mason's men came into the narrow room.

"This is James Lee—my boss," Blair said to Joe Mason. Then, to Lee: "What the hell is the matter with your shoulder?"

Answering Blair's question with a statement to the police chief: "This shoulder—and Cabral's hand—that's why I asked

you to have your coroner bring his tools with him. Cabral shot me before I winged him."

"Meet Dr. Gale," the Chief said.

Lee shook hands with the coroner. "If you will stop a little blood for me, I will be grateful."

"WHAT'S been going on?" the Chief asked.

"Cabral and Barbossa are back of the biggest opium job that has been put over in the last ten years," Lee said. "I can take care of Cabral, but there's an angle to old Barbossa's death that'll interest you."

"Meaning what?" Chief Mason asked.

"Wait until Dr. Gale has a look at Barbossa."

When he had bandaged Cabral's hand, and after he had dressed the wound in Lee's shoulder, Dr. Gale fumbled around the dead Barbossa for five minutes, and then, brightly, to Chief Mason and the assemblage: "Probably a dyspnea, with a dilation of the coronary arteries and mitral regurgitation," he said. "In other words, his pump blew up—heart disease. Look at the color of his face."

"You can't see much of it for the whiskers," Chief Mason said.

"Look through his whiskers," James Lee suggested. "Not through them but under them."

The Chief of Police frowned.

"Meaning what?"

Lee turned the dead man's head to the left. Under the labyrinthian growth of beard on Barbossa's right jaw, there were three small abrasions that centered in the dark area of an oval bruise two inches long. "Somebody clipped him with a right to the jaw," Lee said, "—someone who probably wore a heavy ring set with three stones. A right-handed man five or six inches taller than Barbossa."

"It's a bruise, all right," Dr. Gale admitted. "It looks as if somebody socked him in the jaw."

"Before he died," James Lee added.

"That's right," Dr. Gale said. "Otherwise it wouldn't be black and blue."

"Are any of the cooks around the place addicted to a kitchen drink known as a 'Gentle Annie?'" James Lee asked.

"What kind of a drink is that?" Chief Mason exhibited quick interest in the question.

"It was named on the Mississippi River," James Lee said. "It is a blend of lemon and vanilla extract, fifty-fifty."

"The chef, Dutch Miller, is a nut for that stuff," Sam Webb volunteered. "Listen—he's got a ring like you spoke about."

"Go ahead, Mr. Lee," Chief Mason suggested. "What's the dope?"

"There's a goblet out on a table in the pastry-room half full of the stuff," Lee said. "Greasy fingerprints on it will spot your man without much trouble. If you will look at the rubber heels on Barbossa's shoes, you will see that they have been dragged across a floor that was covered with pine sawdust. They're scratched, and there is some sawdust between the rubber and the leather. You will find some wool fibers on them, red and green. Probably from the rug in the dining-room. You'll see where Barbossa's heels dragged across the rug. There is sawdust in the cuff of his pants, and if you will ruffle his hair, you will find some more, from the floor of the refrigerator-room."

"I don't get you," Chief Mason said.

"If you will look at the door of the refrigerator-room, you will get me," James Lee suggested.

"You mean Barbossa was penned up in the refrigerator-room?"

"I think so," James Lee said. "Clipped in the jaw for a knockout, penned up—and frozen to death." He turned to Dr. Gale. "The body was ten or fifteen degrees colder than room temperature when I got here half an hour ago."

"That's right," the Doctor said. "I wondered what made him so cold."

"If you will look at the temperature-control outside of the refrigerator-room, you will see that it has recently been turned to the low side of zero," Lee continued. "That's not done in these meat-coolers. Finally—Barbossa's fountain pen. It is one of the kind without a rubber ink-sac." He turned to Chief Mason. "You saw the big ink-stain on the lining of Barbossa's vest—still moist, fresh. The barrel of the pen is broken. The ink froze while Barbossa was in the refrigerator, expanded, split the barrel and leaked out."

"SWELL case," Chief Mason commented. "That's about all—except the motive and the killer."

At this finding an appropriate vent for his venomous rage, Cabral exploded. "You dumb police hick! There's a reason all over the place," he snarled. "Who was the last dame that lousy old chaser went for?"

"Nix on that stuff," Sam Webb objected. "Leave her out of this."

"Leave who out of it?" Chief Mason's tone suggested that he intended to blast the information out of someone if he could obtain it no other way.

"Dolly," José Cabral sneered, "Dolly—hottest number of our floor show. She happens to be the cook's daughter! If you want the guy that killed Mutt Barbossa, hunt up Dutch Miller. Mutt done her plenty wrong—and Dutch bumped him."

"I'd clip you if you was loose," Sam Webb threatened. "Dolly is a good girl. Dutch done right."

LEE turned to face the watchman. "Is that straight stuff?" he asked. "Does Cabral know what he's talking about?"

"Sure it's straight stuff," Sam Webb admitted. "Everybody knows that Barbossa jumped down to Hollywood on a plane last week for a three-day trip with Dolly."

To Chief Mason, "Dutch Miller's your man, I'd say," James Lee advised.

"Sure he's my man. I knew what was going on between old Mutt Barbossa and Dolly a month ago. I'll have Dutch rounded up in ten minutes—and I'll get him cleared for killing Barbossa. Let me get on the phone."

"Just a minute," Lee requested. "When you call your office, please have a couple of men come up here to guard the vault in the bookkeeper's room. There's a million dollars' worth of opium in that vault. I'll send for it tomorrow. I'm leaving now for San Francisco."

"Sure I will, Mr. Lee. Anything you want done is as good as done—with my compliments."

"Thank you." James Lee turned to Joe Blair. "Go in there and put another pair of links on Cabral's ankles, and bring him along," he directed. "We can make San Francisco by dinner-time, if we step on it."

"Beggars' Holiday," another story by Hugh Wiley, will be a feature of our next issue. With it will appear "Death on the Doorstep," a book-length detective mystery by Gordon Keyne, and the first big installment of a serial by Dornford Yates, who wrote "Stolen March," "Fire Below" and other well-remembered books.



DR. KAINO sat up and looked around. He knew immediately that his right leg was broken below the knee. A lucky escape, at that, he reflected.

The Russ plane was gone. It had swooped, spat its storm of death, and winged away. Of Kaino's party, half a dozen riddled corpses were clumped in the snow around the two sleds they had been pulling. The other four men, who had taken cover among the black blasted grove of trees, were half-heartedly emerging and calling to one another.

Suddenly Kaino was aware of a stranger sliding up behind him on skis—a tall, rangy, hard-eyed man. Kaino spoke sharply, but the other shook his head.

"Sorry. Don't know enough of your lingo to shake a stick at."

"Good Lord!" broke out Dr. Kaino. "An American?"

"Sure!" The other's face lit up. "But never mind gabbing, till I fix that leg."

An efficient man, thought Kaino. He rid himself of the skis, produced a first-

FOUR

Bill Jenkins takes sides in this war—and talks with that famous old soldier Gustavus Adolphus.

aid kit, examined the wound, and quickly covered it against frost.

"Leg broken; might be worse; we'll take care of it down in the dugout," he said. "Tried to signal you to take shelter, but that damned plane was too fast. I'm Parson Joe Hitchcock—used to be a college professor; hence the name. How come you talk American?"

"I *am* American, man—American of Finnish descent. A surgeon. I was making a round of these isolated defenses, aiming to reach No. 358. Should be close by."

"It is. Any relief on the way?"

"Afraid not."



There was a terrific concussion; must have been a direct hit, overhead.

opening. Yet the Finns battled doggedly on, hoping against hope.

Upon gaining the battery emplacement hidden among the trees, Dr. Kaino was really astonished when he was carried down into the subterranean quarters. Here were two big rooms, one containing the Bofors guns, the other for living-quarters; but here with Parson Joe were only three men, and none of them was Finnish; nor were these men soldiers.

"Where are the gun-crews?" demanded Dr. Kaino as Parson Joe laid bare the injured leg, with bandages and splints ready. "Where's the garrison?"

"Out in the snow, Doc—rather, under it. I think a gas shell got in here. We've been here two days already—came just before the attack started. Tell your men to go bring in your second sled, because we need all the grub you have. Then grit your teeth and hang on, while I set this leg."

Dr. Kaino gave the order. After this, the pain sent him into a merciful coma.

Yet his last memory was one of lingering astonishment. He knew this particular battery had been hard at work all day yesterday. A thrust from the Russians had been hammered back; the ice of the bay outside was even now heaped

MEN AT PEACE

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

The rangy Hitchcock looked at the pile of dead men, waved his arm at the four survivors, and Kaino translated his orders to them. With the wounded surgeon on a sled, Hitchcock led them all in among the trees.

March was already passing, but still everything was snow and ice, here on the shore and there along the seacoast, and the far islands where the Russians lay. For Viipuri had all but fallen; now the hammer and sickle were pounding and slashing at the outlying batteries which still defended the coast. These, under the unceasing swarms of planes, were falling one by one, and the way to Helsinki was

with corpses. How, then, when only four men had been here?

He learned the answer when he came to himself, after a slug of aquavit and a cup of hot tea. His own men were carrying up ammunition from a still deeper dugout. Around him were Parson Joe and the other three, and tobacco-smoke was blue in the air.

"Oh, we're just neutrals!" said Parson Joe cheerfully. "What's the name? Kaino? Well, Doc, meet the gang. We belonged to the third ambulance sector, the one that came up here from Paris last month. Here's Bill Jenkins, a Yank like me. This is Jan Philp, a Hollander. And

this is Oley—he's got some Norwegian name, but we call him Oley and let it go at that. He put up most of the money for the ambulances."

"And you put up the brains," grunted Jenkins solemnly. He was tall and thin and dark, with strange, bulging eyes. They all had the queer, hard, strained calmness that is unnatural, and tells of a past almost beyond endurance.

"And Philp the schnapps," spoke up Oley, young and bright of face. "I wish we had more of that good Hollands!"

"Well,"—Bill Jenkins rose, with his grave solemnity,—"I'd better go out and have a talk with those dead men of yours, Doc. They may need a steer to get 'em started right. It's always sort of a shock, they tell me, when it happens sudden."

He went out. The others exchanged a quick glance. Parson Joe spoke quietly.

"Doc, just don't be surprised at anything Bill says. You see, we were at the No. 3 Hospital a few days ago; we got here from there, somehow. I don't rightly know how. . . . Yes, we were stationed there when the Reds bombed it three days ago. Incendiary bombs, gas and machine-guns. That ended our unit for good, and Bill went clear off his nut. But he's harmless, so don't take him too seriously."

Dr. Kaino, who had seen horrors enough, felt a thrill of fresh horror. That No. 3 Hospital, clearly marked and isolated, had been deliberately destroyed.

"You Finns," said the Dutchman, a heavy, stalwart young man, "should exact payment for some of these brutalities. You should bomb those Russian cities."

"We're not barbarians," said Dr. Kaino. "They are. I will tell you about Colonel Peter Kalevala; then you will understand."

"Not now," cut in Parson Joe with decision. "You save your strength. There'll be another raid before dark, I expect. I'll want your four men to do scouting tonight; we're about done up. Worked like hell yesterday."

"Did you work these guns?" demanded Dr. Kaino.

Parson Joe grinned, hungrily. "We're neutrals, Doc. Benevolent neutrals. We work hard at it. Come on, Oley, let's get that soup fixed up."

KAINO lay silent, wondering. His four men, elderly veterans refused for active service and put into hospital work, were jubilant; they were loading clips for the 40-mm. Bofors guns, four

shells to a clip. Oley made them comprehend that two of the four guns were jammed, but they grinned and said they could be repaired. This Oley was a blond, serious young giant, the youngest of the four; Parson Joe was the oldest.

PRESENTLY Bill Jenkins came in. "Hey, Parson!" he called. "I can hear 'em, but can't see 'em. Must be high. I was talking to King Gus. He says the Reds are fixin' to attack at sun-up, from the two islands to the north, and that a feller named Gizeri is with 'em."

Dr. Kaino swallowed hard at this name. Gizeri! There was no time to think, however. Parson Joe barked an order. Kaino was lifted and carried into the living-quarters; the massive doors were slid shut; a lamp was lit. Parson Joe came and sat beside the Doctor.

"We carried twenty-odd corpses out of here," he said casually. "I guess they forgot to close those doors and a gas-shell landed. Too bad. The place was deserted. Glad of your men to help—it was damned hard work feeding those guns yesterday."

"I thought you said you were neutrals?" said Dr. Kaino.

"Yeah. You should have seen those incendiary bombs hit No. 3 Hospital." Parson Joe glanced up as Jenkins drifted over to them. "What you want, Bill?"

Jenkins lit a cigarette and nodded in that queer spasmodic way of his.

"Gus says they're bombing heavy, all along the coast, and not to open up till he gives me the word. I got a date with him for later tonight; he says a guy named Richard Lionheart will be along. Ever hear of him?"

"Often," replied Parson Joe, in the soothing tone one uses to a child.

"Well, he says he has a message for us," said Jenkins with finality, then sat down and smoked, his eyes fixed on nothing.

"Good God!" murmured Dr. Kaino, looking up at the hard, thinly chiseled face of the American above him. "He seems perfectly normal—how the devil did he know about Gizeri?"

"Does it mean anything?" asked Parson Joe.

"Yes. It's what I want to tell you men about."

"Oh! Well, Bill's been crazy, as I say, since that hospital went up. He had a girl there, one of the nurses. She was about where one of the incendiary bombs hit. And we had just finished painting



There was no danger in getting out under the sky, now that day was done.

an enormous Red Cross on the flat roof, too! Cleaned the snow off to do it. They must have run the building up in a hurry, to put a flat roof on; that's no kind to have in snow country—"

"What did Jenkins mean, about Richard Lionheart?" intervened Dr. Kaino.

For a moment the hard blue eyes of Parson Joe searched his face.

"Bill isn't what you'd call educated," he rejoined slowly. "That makes it hard to understand, I suppose. Anyhow, he's been talking to somebody he calls King Gus—Gustavus Adolphus, presumably. Now, accept things as they are, Doc. Don't lose your grip. Bill may be stark insane, but all he wants to kill is Russians. He won't hurt us."

Dr. Kaino forced himself to acquiesce.

Soup had been heated. Everyone had some, with hard bread and sausage. Finding that the lot of them must remain here until the savage, persistent, searching air-raid up and down this sector of coast was over, Kaino relaxed.

"Call your friends," he told Hitchcock. "I'll tell you about Colonel Peter Kalevala and this Gizeri. It may be a needed warning to you, especially in your present guise as benevolent neutrals."

Hitchcock grinned, and his friends gathered around Dr. Kaino.

"This happened during the very first fighting, at Petsamo," he told them. "Colonel Peter had been trained in Germany, and had a full battery there at Petsamo. Now the Ancient Law says it is not murder to kill Russians, who are brute beasts,

but at that time none of our people wanted to kill. And Colonel Peter's battery did dreadful execution on those Reds, until it made men sick to see. So when the foremost ranks of Russians waved white flags, they stopped firing.

"Those ranks of Russians ran forward. They waved their empty rifles, showing that they had no more ammunition; they waved their empty belts. They wanted to surrender, and our people were very glad of this. So the Russians flooded over the lines in a mass, and foremost among them was Gizeri—he was a Finn who had joined the Reds. He had served the Reds as a spy, in Helsinki.

"The Russians had bayonets fixed to their rifles. Once in the lines, they attacked our people with the bayonet. Gizeri killed Colonel Peter. The battery was captured. This little trick, we have later learned, is among the arts of war taught in Moscow. And now our people do not cease firing while any Russians are in sight."

THAT was the story Dr. Kaino told them. As though to emphasize it, he had barely finished when the earth shuddered; then a second time.

"Those bombs came close," said Parson Joe, and looked at Jenkins. "How did you know anything about Gizeri?"

"I told you," said Bill simply. "Gus said he was there."

They glanced at one another, uncomfortably.

"Damn it!" exclaimed Jan Philp. "I suppose Bill will be talking to me, tomorrow or next day! And I don't want to die."

"You will, though." Bill Jenkins looked at him seriously. "I can see the queer kind of light around your face now that shows it."

Parson Joe stifled an oath. "And me, I suppose?"

"Sure," replied Jenkins soberly. "Sure. All of us, except the Doc, here. If we want to send out any word to anybody, better give it to him. I got a message all ready."

Dr. Kaino spoke, a little impatiently.

"I'm surprised at you fellows talking this way! Why don't you buck up and show some common sense, instead of yielding to superstitious fancies?"

The four men regarded him, he perceived, in surprise and even vexation.

"You don't have much common sense left, Doc," said Bill Jenkins reflectively, "when you see those Russian bombs



The whole frontal attack was suicidal;

spouting fire around wounded men and women, especially the woman who loves you."

"I've been bombed half a dozen times," said Dr. Kaino impatiently.

"Sure, but you're just a good doctor," retorted Parson Joe.

"What the devil do you mean by that?"

Parson Joe regarded him thoughtfully. "Y' know, Doc, man is retrogressing. Back home, we've seen the Japs bomb hell out of China; the same thing has happened in half a dozen countries, and we're used to it. Then Finland comes along and fights, and a lot of us have waked up. Take me, for instance.

"I was in Paris on my sabbatical year, working for an extra degree. And my wife skipped out with an Italian nobleman she met at the Opera. So what? My world went to pieces, and I met Oley, and here we are with an ambulance section—or were, until the Reds bombed it out of existence. It needed some inside



but the Russian strategy was to sacrifice masses of men in order to overwhelm.

trouble to wake me up and make me feel for the troubles and sorrows of others; that's what being civilized means. If the world remains callous to such things, we drift back into the decadence of Roman times."

"Gosh! You sure talk like a professor, Parson!" exclaimed Bill Jenkins.

The Hollander grunted impatiently. "Of course. After all, we're here; what matter? If we die tomorrow, then we're ended. I came along because I'm bored with life. The quicker we die and make room for someone else, the better."

"And no future life?" questioned Dr. Kaino.

Philp shrugged. "Of course not."

Bill Jenkins chuckled, but said nothing. The Norseman, blond Oley, gave a laugh and touched match to cigarette.

"I'd like to hear why Bill's here!" said he cheerfully. "As for me, it's simple enough. All my money went at Auteuil on a poor horse. I cabled home and found

that the firm was bankrupt. So I joined Parson Joe, sold off what I could, kissed my girl-friend good-by, and put the money into ambulances. And here we are! Or were. Now, Bill!"

Jenkins grinned at him. "Me? Oh, I just got an itchin' foot, I guess. I had a job in the American Bar, and met up with Marie. She was coming on this trip, nursing, so I signed up and came too." He glanced around with a puzzled expression. "Funny, I haven't seen her here yet, but Gus said I'd see her today sure."

"Better see that the air ventilator's open, Bill," Parson Joe said calmly.

Jenkins got up and left them. Dr. Kaino spoke quickly.

"That man's in a dangerous state. You'd better realize it."

"I guess so," Philp said carelessly. "Not dangerous to us, though. . . . Doc, is it true the Government is making peace with Moscow?"



The gun jumped under his hand; all those bullets went to one spot

"There are rumors." Kaino shrugged. "The end's inevitable, I fear. We've no more men; the artillery is nearly all useless—the guns are used up. Peace of any kind would save a remnant of Finland, at least."

"This whole Finnish war was started by Germany!" exclaimed Parson Joe. "It's no secret that the Nazis egged the Russians on. And they threatened to attack Sweden if any Allied troops were given passage to Finland. It's they who've destroyed this country—not the Soviets! The one to blame is the madman in Berlin."

He checked himself abruptly as Jenkins came back to them, and spoke up.

"That's right. Say, I forgot I had a message for you, Doc! Gus says never mind if peace is made, if Finland loses out, if everything does go wrong, even if the Nazis do come out on top."

"He says not to mind?" Dr. Kaino repeated.

Jenkins nodded solemnly. "He says greater forces than anyone realizes are fighting against the Nazis. And he says everything is going to end up right, if you just tell 'em what's needed."

"Very well," said the surgeon soothingly. "I'll tell them. Just what is needed?"

"Faith and courage," replied Bill Jenkins; and wandered away as though the subject were closed. Once again the earth shuddered; then twice more, close together. These bombs had been close.

Dr. Kaino glanced around at the unshaven faces, thought of what he had just heard, and blinked. It was real; yet he had an eerie sense of unreality about this place and these men.

He had heard about No. 3 Hospital being completely wiped out by a bombing fleet. These four men must have been through hell and worse; no wonder they were a bit queer in the head. It was a marvel that they had any sanity at all left.

"*Faith and courage!*" That was a queer prescription, thought Kaino. He knew, only too well, that Finland was doomed. He knew how the army was fighting on savagely, stubbornly, with no desire for peace; he also knew that peace alone could save what remained of the army, and how the huddled populace was being swept by disease and death.

"There's something to what Bill says." Parson Joe was speaking, gravely. "If the world has faith, collectively, in the outcome of things, if the people have faith in the right, then it'll pull through.

If the world has courage, it'll pull through."

"And if not?" asked Philp with a cynical glance.

"Then we'll all revert to barbarism, and perish. Not our civilization; that's not threatened. Nazi civilization is outwardly similar to ours. It's the ideals that differ! Past systems like Rome have died the same way—pulled down bit by bit, destroyed piecemeal by the hordes. Perhaps Bill does see clearer than the rest of us, Doc. . . . Where you from, back home?"

"Minnesota," said Dr. Kaino. "My wife and I came to take charge of a hospital at Viipuri; and did, until the Russ bombed us out. My wife's gone to Stockholm now, with a nervous breakdown."

"You're lucky," observed Philp, sagely wagging his head. "Mine gave *me* a breakdown."

Parson Joe winked. "Wife trouble. That's why Jan is here."

"Maybe, maybe not." The Hollander smiled thinly. "Anyhow, I don't want to die yet a while. I've got a lot to make up for before the end comes. That's really why I'm with this ambulance unit, or was. I wanted to sign up with the French, but they hadn't started the war yet; and I had to get away from my wife, so here I am."

Hard, thought Dr. Kaino, for the man to confess his real ambition—a *lot to make up for!* The thin and careworn features of the surgeon relaxed a trifle as he looked at the faces above.

"If we get out of here alive," he said, "you might throw in with me. My wife will be back with a couple of ambulances; we're going to work among the children in the civilian camps. Half of them are down with disease of one kind or another."

"Won't be any camps left when the Reds get through bombing," grunted Parson Joe.

Dr. Kaino's face twisted sharply. This statement was only too true.

HE dozed. Presently he woke, looked around; the four were tossing coins. A laugh broke from Oley, as he rose.

"All right. I am it—what is it you say in America? The sheep?"

"No, the goat," said Parson Joe. "Good luck. We'll all get on the door. Must be near dark outside."

"What are you doing?" Kaino asked.

"Going to see if there's any gas outside," said Oley carelessly, and went to

the massive doors of steel and concrete, with the others.

Dr. Kaino understood. One man chosen by lot; if there should be gas around, only one would perish.

The door slid back a little; Oley squeezed through, it was rolled shut behind him, and the silence of suspense fell upon the room. The four elderly men who had come with Dr. Kaino were asleep; they had marched long with those sleds.

Dr. Kaino never forgot this one moment of absolute silence, the air quivering with nervous tension, every thought following the blond young man who had just gone out. He was risking his life, with a laugh, for the sake of all. And these shelters, built without the fear of gas in mind, were traps at times.

TWO blows sounded on the door, and the tension broke.

"Everybody out!" cried Parson Joe. "Help me with the Doc, Bill!"

Out, of course, meant more than just a return to the gun-room; there was no danger in getting out under the sky, now that the day was done and the long night starting. And get out they did, even building fires in a hollow among the trees—a new hollow, where a bomb had landed. The sky was greening into deeper blue, and the stars were pricking out their faintly winking patterns upon it.

"Here's a fag, Doc." Parson Joe came over to Dr. Kaino and sat down. "Philp is doing the supper; nothing fancy, but it'll be grand. Wish you'd arrange with your men to keep watch tonight. The Russ might try a night attack."

"Wait," said the surgeon. "Now's your time to pull out of here."

"Why?"

"Why? You confounded idiot, four men can't work these guns against an assault!"

Parson Joe chuckled. "We made a damned good bluff at it, then; and what we did yesterday we can do tomorrow. Besides, we've got your four men to help now."

"But they'll bomb and machine-gun this place out of existence!"

"We figure so," said Parson Joe. "Know anything about working those guns?"

"No."

"They have a predictor mechanism for aiming, but I expect that's only against airplanes; we can't get the hang of it. Still, we can aim by hand, all right. I

think the rifling is about gone, they've been used so much; but if we can lay down a hundred shells per minute, out on the ice a mile to a mile and a half distant, we don't need to worry about being exact. The guns have a faster speed, but that's as fast as we can work 'em. Well, how about sending you away with your men? Nothing to stop you."

"To hell with you!" said Dr. Kaino. "I think you'd better send one man, however, to take news. Not that there's any help to spare, but—"

"Then we need the one man right here," said Parson Joe definitely.

Oley strolled up. "They came close this time! The snow's going out before long, Parson. In Norway, it's all gone now, but there's no Gulf Stream here to warm the land. More bombs tomorrow; they'll give us a good one. What are you frowning about?"

"Scared," said Parson Joe. "Scared as hell, if you must know."

Oley laughed at this; but Dr. Kaino, lying there under the stars, knew it was true. Hitchcock was afraid, yes; all the braver soul for that.

Supper came, with Jan Philp bragging and posing as a chef, and Dr. Kaino's precious liquor squandered in drinks. He did try desperately to reduce this madness into some semblance of sanity, but he had no luck. Even his four men were as roaring mad as the others. They were needed here; they could strike a blow against the Russ, and they meant to make the most of the occasion.

PARSON JOE came and sat with Dr. Kaino, and the two talked. Not of themselves, but of home, the world of men, books and hobbies. Dr. Kaino again perceived that this rangy man was actually afraid of the morrow, afraid of facing it, yet steeled himself to go ahead here and seize the offered chance to strike at the enemy.

"You wouldn't guess it from my lingo, Doc," he said, "but it was English that I used to teach in college. Seems like ten years ago, now! If you do pull out of this alive, as Bill Jenkins claims you will, you'll have a story of three men, Bill and Philp and Oley, and what they did here, and how they left."

"What about you?" asked Dr. Kaino.

Parson Joe gestured impatiently.

"I don't count; not important. Bill says you'll pull through, and maybe Bill does know. A crazy guy may sometimes have more on the ball than we realize.

Are you sure there's no help being sent to these coast-defense units?"

"None," said Dr. Kaino. "I was sent to give medical help where needed, and report back. The defenses are crumbling in the north; the whole country is being swept by swarms of planes, and no help is being sent us in any quantity. Our men are worn out, dropping where they stand; we've no replacements."

AFTERWARD, when the night chill was creeping upon them, and two of Dr. Kaino's men had gone out on the far ice to scout the Russian movements, Bill Jenkins showed up out of nowhere, and hugged the dying fire.

"Well, I met up with 'em," he announced in a most matter-of-fact way. "There was Gus, and this other feller Richard. Gus, by the way, says he was born somewhere around here, and Richard was kidding him because his folks were all German just the same. This Richard, he's English, but a swell guy in spite of it. He says there'll be a relief party here about four tomorrow afternoon, if we can hang on that long. He and Gus and a lot more are going over to work on the Russ commanders."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Dr. Kaino.

Jenkins shrugged heavily. "I don't know; something about trying to work on their minds and inspiring them to do the wrong thing," he answered vaguely. "And Parson! They said to tell you that all the hell you had back in Paris, about your wife and so forth, was just like what the Finns are having now. Like some folks getting more than their share of grief, and if they keep their chin up, it's just that much better for 'em later on. I don't savvy it very well, nor what Richard said to tell Philp."

"To tell me?" spoke up the Hollander, as though with frowning resentment.

"Yeah." Jenkins struggled to find the words. "He says to tell you that all death really means, is another life."

Philp scowled, and there was silence.

Later, back in the bombproof living quarters, Dr. Kaino wakened from fitful slumber to find Oley, the blond young Norseman, sitting by him and writing by candlelight.

"A letter for you to take out," Oley said, seeing that the surgeon was awake. "Bill told me I'd better get it done tonight."

"Surely you don't take any stock in his insane vagaries?" asked Dr. Kaino.

"I'd say no to that, except that they hold a streak of sense, queerly. Poor devil! When the nurses and wounded men all went up in flames, and his girl too, he was the most pitiful thing you ever saw! Bill's one of those men who seem mighty tough, but are not. Life's been a hard, hard scabble for him, until Marie came along and showed him what it might be. Then to have her end that way before his eyes—you know how those thermite bombs explode incredible heat? But after his brain snapped, he seemed to forget what had taken place, so far as any grief was concerned."

"This King Gus he talks about—could it be that he means Gustavus Adolphus?"

"Well, that's as near as we can figure it," Oley said apologetically.

"It's a strange thing, then," said Dr. Kaino. "Gustavus actually was a Finn by birth, and a German by family. Maybe Jenkins remembers it subconsciously."

Oley smiled slightly and made no response. Dr. Kaino, with a feeling of irritation, resolved to abandon any effort at beating sense into the heads of these men. Perhaps they were all mentally affected as the result of that No. 3 Hospital affair. By all accounts, it had been unusually horrible.

Not that such things were rare. Dr. Kaino had seen more than one hospital or civilian camp given its dose of destruction; he was hardened. And he, like many a greater soul, had come to fear lest the whole civilized world become hardened also.

"I suppose," he said, "we can expect some of Molotov's breadbaskets tomorrow. Not that they'll do much damage here; but they may roast us a bit."

Oley nodded and went on writing. Presently he finished. It was a letter, he said, to a girl in Oslo who had jilted him, sending him to Paris and a dissolute existence; but the life there had brought him no peace, he explained simply. To all four, life had been a struggle almost past bearing.

Dr. Kaino remembered having glimpsed this same thing in their faces, at first.

JUST before dawn everyone was astir, and Kaino awakened. He lay watching the men moving about in the lamplight, preparing food, getting shell-clips stacked ready near the guns. His old veterans had managed to repair a third gun, but the fourth was out of service. This left three of the Bofors, and two machine-guns for close work.

To the crippled watcher, the strange thing about this experience lay in these four men who, by Parson Joe's frightful sarcasm, were neutrals. They constituted a fair cross-section of the men whom Kaino had already met fighting for Finland; Swedes, Americans, Poles and Hungarians and others. But he had got under the shell of these four; he had looked into their hearts; he comprehended their private lives.

HERE was Bill Jenkins, in civilian life a bartender—who now talked with the ghosts of the dead. An alienist, thought Kaino, might understand the vagaries of this poor mental case, who was in such amazing contrast to Philp, the thoroughly materialistic Hollander who had no beliefs whatever, except that life ended with death.

Dr. Kaino was not sure about this himself; as he was wont to say, he had explored thousands of people, but had never come across a human soul.

And the young Norseman, a wastrel because of some love-affair; and Parson Joe, the rangy, sardonic, cheerful man who was so born to command, yet must continually fight the fear within! It was the latter who came now to Kaino's side and brought a tray for them both, with food and steaming tea.

"When the fun begins," he said, "you might like to be placed in the lower room? This upper one is bombproof, of course; twelve feet of protection overhead. But the openings for the guns, and the ventilators, make it bad for gas and heat and air-shock, not to mention bullets. Once they get our exact location, they'll gun us from the air."

"These are anti-aircraft guns," said Kaino.

Parson Joe shook his head. "Got to keep 'em trained on the Russ column. These are contact shells, and we can't bother to fight hornets when bears are advancing."

A word from Philp, who was watching. The old Finn last out on guard was coming in. The stars were paling; daylight was at hand.

The Finn arrived. Yes, he reported; one could hear things out there on the ice. At this, Bill Jenkins spoke up.

"No hurry. The planes will come first. They told me so."

Dr. Kaino suggested that his men, who were all veterans, might try their repaired gun on the planes; to this Parson Joe assented carelessly, and the four



“What’s that you say, Gus?
Made peace with the gods?”

elderly men went joyously to work elevating their weapon.

“All hands ready to take cover,” said Parson Joe, “by that east wall where the Doc is lying; that’s the safest place. Who’ll stand watch? We must keep an eye on the Russ, so they won’t work up under cover of the bombing.”

“I,” spoke up Oley. He went to one of the gun-openings where a periscope was installed, and leaned over its polished table. “Brightening up fast,” he said, as though no one else knew it. Then he fell silent, watching the table intently.

“What’s up?” asked Jenkins.

“Queer,” Oley replied. “Flashes of light, high up in the sky to the south!”

“Bombers, catching the sunlight long before we get it,” said Parson Joe calmly. “To the south, eh? Coming from their bases in Esthonia. Better take cover, everyone.”

THE four old Finns paid no attention, clustering around their gun. All the others except Oley moved over alongside Dr. Kaino. The gun-embrasures opened only on the shore and gave scant view of the sky; the two machine-guns were placed in forward bays of concrete, with wider scope. Oley, however, had the only means of getting a view all around.

Parson Joe explained to Dr. Kaino, as they smoked, that here the Russians could not come ashore to north and south, because of the high cliffs; they must land directly opposite the dugouts. This made it very nice for the Bofors guns, he observed with his sardonic smile.

“Looks like columns forming and tanks advancing,” said Oley.

“Let plenty of them come,” Philp spoke up. “We figured yesterday that the windrows of corpses and the two tanks we smashed were about a mile from shore. Better let ’em come that far, Parson.”

Parson Joe nodded. Oley’s voice came calmly, but with a vibrant stir in it.

“Tell your four ancients to get ready, Doc. Planes are dropping. . . . Lord, a regular river of them coming across the sky!”

His report was not needed. The air was a-quiver with the distant, slowly increasing drone. The lamp was put out; daylight filled the place now. Oley reported that four tanks were pushing shoreward across the ice, but not rapidly, and the main body of Russians had halted. The drone mounted by degrees to a roar, steadily and inexorably increasing

until nerves and flesh revolted against the unending vibration.

And then it came, without any warning; a terrific ear-splitting crash so close that the air-shock filled the entire place. Two of the old Finns were hurled to the floor; to Dr. Kaino, it seemed that the guns and the walls shook like cloth hanging in the wind. The two old men picked themselves up, bleeding at nose and ears.

"Well," said Parson Joe, "that was a close one. . . . Oh, hello! Give us a hand, Philp."

They picked up Oley, and then they laid him down again, by the opposite wall, and Parson Joe covered his face.

"I told him so last night," said Bill Jenkins, nodding. "What did it?"

"Shell-splinter, looked like," replied Parson Joe. "To the brain. A quick end."

Dr. Kaino stared, astonished at all this, hardly able to realize that Oley was really dead and beyond help; it seemed a matter of course to the others. Then he became aware of continuous shocks. Bombs must be falling everywhere; the roar of engines dinned out every other sound.

There was one terrific burst of heat. Kaino did not need to be told what had happened as he saw the others looking at the periscope table. One of Molotov's breadbaskets, as the Finns called the fiendish cluster of tiny thermite bombs, had sprayed its contents somewhere near. The columns of roaring flame were spouting with incredible heat that seared everything within a hundred feet.

"The trees are burning," said Parson Joe, watching. "That's bad. May make smoke to cloud our vision. . . . No, the wind's from the north! All's clearing. Hep! Look out, all!"

Everyone scattered. After a moment Kaino saw why; he heard the roar of diving planes, and then the bullets began to hit. Those Russians knew now where the dugout was. The old Finns were at work; Kaino saw their long gun-barrel jumping, saw them break into yelling glee, but heard nothing. After a moment, there was a terrific concussion; it must have been a direct hit overhead, but nothing happened here.

"ALL clear for the moment," came the voice of Parson Joe. "Better get to work, all hands!"

Dr. Kaino came to one elbow.

"Lift me!" he commanded. "Put me up by one of those machine-guns. I can work it if needed, and meanwhile can take care of anyone who gets hurt."

"Not much shelter in those embrasures from bullets," replied Parson Joe.

"Does it matter?"

At this, they grinned and lifted him. He could work the machine-gun, at least while the drum was in place; this would only be at a pinch.

HERE he had a view of what was happening. The trees, out around, were ablaze from thermite bombs. Something else was ablaze down the shore—two of them! His old Finns had actually brought down two planes! And there, out across the ice, were four tanks coming in, and behind them dark masses of men; and the sun rising, already high.

How much time had passed? Impossible to say; the senses stood still, and an hour seemed but a minute. Dr. Kaino found himself astonished that the sun should be so high. He wished for binoculars, but there were none.

The guns were jumping. The 40-mm. Bofors were not large guns at all; but those long and sharply conical shells, pumped out with incredible rapidity and precision, were terrible when they exploded. And they pierced tanks like paper, as Kaino knew. He strained his eyes against the sunlit east, watching.

One of the tanks turned and went scrambling back. The others did not. One smoked heavily, afire. One turned over on its side. The third just stopped, and its crew, tiny dots of men, appeared and ran back over the ice. While Dr. Kaino was still watching, he heard a yell and saw Philp at the periscope table; then he heard the planes, but did not see them at all, for a long time. They came from behind, from westward, and zoomed up so swiftly that they were hardly seen.

Bombs first; then the planes swung, flying low above the trees. They had the position exactly spotted, and emptied their guns at it as they flew past. The four old gunners had no chance to shoot or aim now.

Dr. Kaino crouched, desperately making himself small; so did the others. Bullets whined and shrieked in through the embrasures. Those planes must have formed an endless undulating circle. The roar was incessant; occasionally the earth shook as bombs came close, blowing the snow and the burning trees afar.

Kaino felt someone touch his foot. It was Philp, supporting one of the old Finns; they slumped down together, and Philp tried to talk but could not. That bullet must have found him as he stood

helping the Finn. It had gone clear through him. The Finn had a grisly head-wound. There was little to be done for either man; Kaino attended to them then dragged himself to one side, and looked around. The place was hazy, but only with fumes from the guns and a shell. The other three Finns were dead around their gun, which was knocked away. A small shell of some kind, perhaps from the Russian column, had entered the embrasure and exploded.

PARSON JOE was slaving at a gun with Bill Jenkins. Philp, to Kaino's amazement and protest, got to his feet and went to help them; but he did not last long. The wounded Finn died quietly while Kaino was pouring a drink between his lips.

It was unreal, lost under a roar of sound, like a dream. Kaino found himself staring, staring. He had seen death and horror enough, yet this was possessed of a frightful unreality.

There was some sort of interregnum; he was aware of silence that must have lasted for some time. He found Parson Joe beside him, propping him up, pouring some brandy into his mouth, lighting a cigarette for him.

"What happened?" he asked, blinking.

"I guess you forgot you had a bum leg, and tried to give me a hand." The rangy American grinned, but had a wild look in his eyes. "Take it easy, Doc. We broke 'em, and if they try again, Bill and I will have a gun each. I guess Bill's loading the clips now. And don't you ever say *guess*; never mind if I did! You're learning English, remember. That's a word from the American language—"

He broke off, laughed at himself, and took a drink of brandy. Kaino did not blame him for wanting a drink and more drinks, until mind and spirit reeled. Kaino himself felt impelled to queer utterances.

"Still afraid, are you?" he asked, looking Hitchcock in the eye.

"Hell, no! I've got all over that," said the other. "And for the first time in my life, I can understand something. Why all the great heroic legends and sagas of the world are concerned with the death of heroes, all of 'em! Sigurd, Roland, Grettir, Achilles—Christ! I used to think it was a mistake. Now I know better. How Benkei, the old Japanese hero, came to his death is a wonderful story; I can appreciate it now. What counts, Doc, is how you die—and why. Why! That's

it, Doc. I know how I'd teach those old stories if I ever went back to college. How and why—that's what counts!"

Bill Jenkins came over to them.

"Say, Parson!" he said seriously, wagging his head. "Gus was in just now. He says they're going to make one more try, but there won't be more planes. . . . We've only got one gun we can aim. The rifling is clear gone from the other one. Still, it can be used all right against a column. Gus says the relief party will be here by four, sure."

Strange, thought Kaino. The man spoke of impossible things, yet seemed calm and grave and quite sane. Looking at his watch, the surgeon was amazed to find that noon was upon them.

Conscious of the death around him, Dr. Kaino felt in his heart the truth that these men, all of them, had dared much for scant winnings; to them, more lay in the playing than in the victory. This was the essence of a man's teaching, he thought. Then he returned to normal as Parson Joe came to him with steaming bowls of soup.

"Bill hotted it, as the Britishers say," said Hitchcock cheerfully. "Y' know, Doc, we're—"

A shell screamed and struck somewhere just outside, bursting in the snow. The Russians had a battery of light artillery at work. Other shells began to hit all around the dugout. Talk was ended. Parson Joe and Jenkins, however, made no effort to use the two ready guns. They waited, keeping a sharp eye on the enemy.

The shelling continued for an hour. It did no particular damage.

Dr. Kaino was fighting the pain of his hurt leg. He roused out of this, abruptly, to find Parson Joe at one gun, Bill Jenkins at the other, exchanging a few words about the aiming. He twisted swiftly and looked out through his aperture.

THEY were coming: a dark swarm of figures advancing on the ice, already reaching those windrows of putrescent death that marked their former effort. They had spread far out, widely as the bay permitted where the ice was smooth. The sheen of steel flashed in the sunlight with rippling movement, steel of helms and bayonets. Kaino caught his breath as he squinted at the swarm. Against two men!

"All right, Bill," said Parson Joe calmly, after a moment.

The Bofors began their incredible barking; twice every second, until the two

men slowed their effort. No gun-crews here, to keep the clips fed.

The incessant rain of shells was bursting all along that far line a mile distant. White puffs everywhere. The line flowed on, but the ice remained black and motionless in its rear. And then, from far right and far left, two little groups of running men broke from the mass, spurring ahead, then two more groups. Four in all, running in loose open order. What it meant, Kaino could not tell.

"Get 'em, Bill!" shouted Parson Joe. "They're bringing up machine-guns!"

IT seemed suicidal, but the whole frontal attack was suicidal. All the Russian strategy in this war was to sacrifice masses of men in order to overwhelm.

One of the groups scattered and vanished. The column was coming steadily on behind them. Shells sprayed that column relentlessly; then the aim was switched again. Shells struck and exploded all around the three remaining groups; they kept coming on. They were getting in close to the shore-line, now.

One blew into a litter of bodies. The other two came racing on. One halted; Bill Jenkins yelled fiercely to Hitchcock. A machine-gun was being set up. Both the Bofors converged their fire on this gun, these men; the shells found their mark at last. Men and gun became mere black things on the ice.

Dr. Kaino looked for the remaining group, and blinked. It had disappeared. Apparently it had vanished into thin air.

Now the two guns directed a steadily hurtling stream of shells at the nearing column. The ice seemed to erupt flashing fire. The open ranks moved amidst this eruption, and their numbers lessened. Black specks littered the ice more thickly. The ranks of men melted; the tiny fire-flashes quickened along the ice.

"We got 'em, Bill!" A jubilant yell burst from Parson Joe. "Keep it up!"

The shells reached back to the supporting column, then returned to the front ranks. Small, a mere forty millimeters, it was not their size but their numbers that made them so frightful to men in the open. And the Russian ranks broke. They ebbed backward, hesitated, and fled in a crowding, panic-struck mob.

Kaino found himself yelling hoarsely—and then he ducked, ducked again as something whistled past his head. There on the ice, close in, was a spitting little burst of gunfire, nearly invisible in the sunlight.

He had found the fourth machine-gun group, sheltered amid a few ice-hummocks.

The bullets were everywhere. In that very instant of triumph, they came with appalling and incredible effect, like sheer wizardry, like the invisible touch from a dead hand of Russian vengeance. Everything happened in a minute now. They sprayed in at the gun-embrasures, an unceasing stream. Dr. Kaino heard and felt them striking all around him. They were striking everywhere in the chamber, slapping into the walls—

He looked, and his heart froze for one cold instant. Parson Joe was hanging over the rounded base of his gun-stand, a limp thing that dripped red. Bill Jenkins was on hands and knees, his head hanging and swaying. God!

Then Dr. Kaino remembered the machine-gun at his hand.

He twisted himself around; there was no more pain, now. He could see the flashes on the ice. He had a full drum of cartridges ready; the gun jumped under his hand. All those bullets went to the one spot. When the drum was empty, everything out there was silent. That final group had passed with the rest. There was only the streaming rout of men heading away in the distance.

Wiping sweat from his face, Kaino turned. He dragged himself across the floor. One sight of Parson Joe's dead face was enough, and he turned to Bill Jenkins.

Jenkins had, somehow, gained a sitting position, his back against the wall. Blood was pumping from under his shirt, and Kaino checked himself. Bill ignored him completely, and looking up at something unseen in the air, he grinned.

"Sure, Gus, sure!" he was saying, but in a faint voice. "Sure, I can see her! It's darned nice of you, Gus, to fetch her. . . . What's that you say? Made peace with the gods—for they have given men a just wage—and have justice on their side? I dunno about all that, Gus. . . . But we've all—all of us—found—"

WHAT it was they had found, Kaino never learned, for the faint voice died. But the relief column did come at four o'clock, and Dr. Kaino lived to tell his story. This is an amplification of his report. At the top of the report he, or someone else, had scrawled the little message Bill Jenkins had given Philp: "All that death really means—is another life."

Swamp Angel

The Story Thus Far:

WING DOBUSSY awoke from a nap on his cabin-boat—and found himself in a flooded forest instead of on the open Mississippi. A girl in a big green canoe was steering toward him.

"Hi-i, you!" she hailed. "Look aout! I reckon yo're a soft-paw! Or aint yo' jest naturally got no sense?"

"I don't blame you for thinking so!" he called back. "But I'm a stranger down thisaway. My first trip below the jump-off at the Ohio."

Dobussy and Isbelle Strake grew right friendly, and he decided to stay in this Dark Corner country, where a man could do well, hunting and trapping and such. . . . But a few days later he was hailed again—and in a sure different way.

"What's yo' business, strangeh?" demanded the older of two men in a fine pirogue who held him up at the point of their rifles.

"Wild-crafting," Dobussy answered. "Trapping, fishing, frogs—"

"Jes' loafing! Tha's all—jes' a vaga-bond! We don' 'low no tramps er sech trash down yeah, no suh! I 'rest yo', charge of no visible means of support, 'spicious character, loiterin'—all them things! Pick 'im up, Duck!"

And an hour later Dobussy found himself a shackled slave among a score of others, beaten with a mule-whip if he slackened in his labor at an illicit distillery concealed in the vast swamp—the property of old Dolomen Hatchie, who with his overseer Duck Wamber, had kidnaped the luckless wild-crafter.

Dobussy bided his time. And one stormy evening weeks later he heard a sudden rifle-shot, and the armed guard pitched into the water. At once Dobussy plunged into the undergrowth; there was no pursuit, and he finally came to his moored cabin-boat. And neither he nor anyone else saw the canoe of Isbelle Strake as it sped away into the shadows.

Dobussy went back to that peonage moonshine still—went back shooting. He shot up the guards. Then he freed the other slaves, set fire to the still—and went back to his boat. (*The story continues in detail:*)

LATE in the evening Dolomen Hatchie and Duck Wamber arrived in the landing-bayou. No one was around there, and they went on beyond the loading-skids so they could hide the pirogue where none of the help could find it. Then they cut across through the brake to the tramway, and found two of the push-cars on the rails. This was queer, as they were supposed to be chained back at the stockade, so they couldn't be sneaked away.

With old Hatchie on one end and Duck kicking at the back of one of the cars, they rolled over the hump, across the trestle and up the ridge, coasting down the slight grade to the stockade. The stillhouse was sure quiet. No pump was working; no boiler was blowing off, and no one was singing the way the darkies generally did late on the day-shift. They coasted into the stockade yard. Snapping back a wheel-lock, they stood looking through the big gallows-gate, which was swung partly open; they sniffed a dank strong smell in the air, while wondering, puzzled by the quiet.

Hatchie gripped his 38-55 and Duck held his 30-30 carbine ready, as they slowly approached the 'stillery. Old Dolomen turned to speak to Duck—when suddenly a sharp, quick-powder shot crackled from the dusk within the building. The old man cried out:

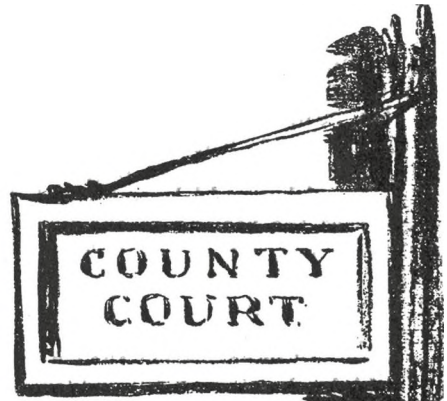
"Oh—a-ah!"

Wamber had heard too many shots, caught the sound of too many bullets thudding home, not to recognize the *thwack* by his side now. He saw the back of Grandpap's black coat jerk away from his body deep below the shoulder, a burst of flying dust following the fast slug coming through.

Grandpap, flung back, hit the gatepost where he stood fighting to remain erect, a tough old knot! But his eyes bulged, his mouth gaped open, showing yellow snags of teeth behind the mustache screen. Then slowly he buckled, knees and hips, slumping down. And Duck deserted him, bounding with yelps toward the standing timber a few yards distant, humping, dodging, twisting as bullets slapped at him through the fencepoles of the stockade.

*A stirring drama of the Dark
Corner region, by the able author
of "Mississippi Magic."*

By
**RAYMOND
S. SPEARS**



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

When anyone, even a woman, spoke to Wetz-el, he'd say: "Mind yo' own business, thank yo' kindly!"

Duck tripped and fell to his hands and knees, and he made three or four bounds like a heavy long-legged hound-dog. Hardly slacking his running and scrambling, getting to his hind-legs again, and protected by the screen of the high pole stockade, he at last reached the woods.

When Duck glanced back he caught a glimpse of somebody coming on the run to the gate so he could see to shoot better and not be whacking through the screen that glanced the bullets. And just as Duck rose bounding into the cover, a bullet hit his old 30-30 rifle square in the breech, breaking the weapon practically in two and knocking it out of his

hand. The splash of the lead and casing tore through his hand, stinging it like a hundred wasps.

Terror-stricken, Wamber hurdled over logs, crashed through brush, ran till he was breathless, his heart thumping in torture, till he dropped gasping. There darkness swiftly covered him.

"Dolomen Hatchie's daid!" Wamber whimpered, and moaned. "He's bush-whacked an' killed up! He's shot down in cold blood!"

When at last he sat up in the black, velvety dark, he could see a red glow off to his right through the trees. Hearing a thud, he thought it was somebody drop-

ping a chunk of firewood. He hoped it was a camp of innocent, honorable hunters. He headed staggering in that direction, but it was a long way. The red light slowly kept growing brighter and brighter, and he could hear through his ringing ears the roaring of the fire and the thudding bursts at intervals.

When he could see the flames shooting high above the trees, he realized that it was a building burning, lighting up the woods far and wide. Even then he just didn't think what it was, till suddenly he came right out into plain view of the scene. He had been circling, the way a man does if he isn't plumb watchful.

His jaw dropped, and his eyes bulged; the great Hatchie stillhouse was afire! The guardhouse was going up too, the fire licking out through the near side, bursting up out of the crumpling sheet-metal roof! The dormitory shed had already collapsed. The whole interior of the stillhouse was a mass of dense black smoke and spurting tongues of red flames thrusting up around the big stills and tanks. Duck knew the thick bulges of fumes were from the inpourings through the main feedpipes from the big tanks of fuel oil still standing on their burning platforms beside the big shed. Barrels and barrels of proof liquor were burning too, mixing with the oil—a lake of blue fire underneath among the spiling.

Wamber could hardly believe his eyes and ears. The works began to tip and squirm; the new galvanized iron roof curled up like paper as the growling became throbs and hisses. Explosions followed explosions, barrels bursting, stills blowing up, shooting out the smoke and throwing up the metal plates like leaves in a whirlwind—until the whole shebang crumpled down in sagging collapse.

The fall crashed into the condensers and boilers—neglected pressures hurling everything up again in fountains, debris and fragments of sheet copper flying like burning rags in all directions. Fumes of sour steam and alcoholic evaporation rolled out, boiling along the ground and fluffed around Duck, scalding him until he ran, frantically tearing off his blistering, heavy shirt.

RUNNING out on the tramway, he hardly slowed on the middle push-plank across the trestle. Then he cut across to where he and old Pap Hatchie had landed the pirogue in its hide-out. He rammed his hand into his trousers pocket for his key; trembling fingers

found it. But then, as he snatched his hand out, a branch, a twig or something switched the slip of metal from his powerless grasp, and he heard it tinkle, hitting something, before it flipped and fell with a quick, tiny splash into the bayou.

Frantically he seized the chain to tear it either from the hole through the pirogue bow or from the massive tree-root, but he couldn't budge it. He had always been right careful to have a boat tight-fastened so unauthorized scamps or fugitives from the works couldn't use it!

Back-tracking, he jumped wide into the tramway and headed along the rails toward the swamp trestle, across which spikes and glass were laid everywhere so the barefooted escapers couldn't cross without cutting their feet to pieces, unless they had a tramcar to transport them.

BACK at the stillhouse, if he had any kind of luck, he'd be able to find a skiff, dugout or something in which he could go out of the Skip and down the East Fork of the Albion. By this time, too, the scoundrel raiders and murderers would be gone.

For years, the establishment had been Duck's refuge, his home, his support and his big opportunity—everything a man could ask for, he had had there. So he returned to it as a fox or swamp wolf circles back to its den and follows its runway—like a rabbit hunting its hollow log or a 'coon its hollow tree. Of course, Duck kept thinking, it would never do to lose his head. If he did, he was gone!

Racing, twisting, turning through the country he knew, because he had hounded men all over those bottoms himself, Wamber began to see just what to do. Remembering the mistakes the fugitives he had chased had made, so they got lost, he tried to profit by them. He had the big advantage of having good boots and thick soles; that rascal Wing Dobussy had sure bought good leather ones!

He tore his hands on buckthorns and he tripped on greenbrier; he gashed his cheek on a sharp dry snag so that he felt it bleeding. Presently he heard the joyful yelping of dogs striking full cry into a fresh track. His heart gave a terrific thump—bloodhounds!

The baying rang and echoed through the brake, coming right along. To Duck Wamber, who had hunted men for life through those swamps, the trailing cries of the night were more dreadful than any sound he had ever heard before. He must get to water, swimming or wading to lose

his pursuers, or they'd tear him to pieces, if they were the ugly strain. They'd catch the smell of his blood—a posse must be after him. The Federals would hold against him his loyalty to Dolomen Hatchie!

Staggering along the tramway, weakened by weariness, hunger and terror of being headed off or coming to a bushwhacker's stand, probably to be cut down by buckshot or bullets—he had to risk it! He had nowhere else to go than circle back.

Ahead of him the red glow of the burning stillhouse increased. Though his life depended on it, he couldn't leave the tramway. He just couldn't crawl through the thickety brake nor climb a tree, he was so weary, stumbling and staggering.

Then behind him the bloodhounds came leaping and bounding, long ears flapping, yelping jubilantly.

Snatching at his scabbards, he found he had lost one of his revolvers, but he still had one of his old reliables. He drew it and let go into the shambling, eager animals pitching at him with their eyes glaring and their mouths wide open, showing their white teeth and wet red tongues. The bullets flung them back on their haunches as they broke into squeals of mortal agony. He dodged down and glared at bay back along the trail with his back to the fire, looking for the posse-drivers, but none came.

He thought of something. He searched for Grandpap's 38-55 repeater, but it was nowhere around the dead man. Someone had stolen it and carried away the old man's cartridge-belt full of ammunition.

A norther was beginning to blow, chill, raw, growling, bringing drizzling rain that saturated him as he crouched where he had stopped to make his desperate stand. He was so weak that he could hardly balance himself on his knees.

All at once Duck Wamber gave way, going to pieces. He had reached the dreadful limit of exhaustion, when mind and body can endure no more, and he pitched forward on his face just within the gateway of the stockade.

WHEN Wamber came to, he was soaking wet and as cold as the trampled blue earth where he lay. The fire had burned down to a smudge from beneath the blackened metal. The fuel-tanks were empty. The rain was pouring out of clouds that dragged through the tree-tops. The day was so gloomy, so gray, so thick, that he couldn't tell whether it

was coming morning or if night was at hand. The moaning of the gale filled the lonesome brake.

Rousing himself with the feeling that he had had a terrible nightmare, Wamber struggled to his feet. Every muscle was stiff, chilled and sore. He could move only with rheumatic cramps. Hatchie's body lay right where he fell; it wasn't a dream. The black-and-tan dogs he had shot were sprawled stark where they fell at his feet. And then he moaned as he recognized the stockade hounds. In his panic fear and weakness, he hadn't recognized them!

"That jes' shows how scoundrel-mean, despicable, hateful, that murderous feller is!" Wamber muttered through chattering teeth.

Rust was turning Grandpap Hatchie's revolver a dull red. His own .45 was staining. Eagerly he looked again for Grandpap's 38-55 rustless steel barrel, which had been the old man's pride, but that special made-to-order weapon was nowhere to be seen. Those unprincipled killing scoundrels had robbed the dead!

MUSTERING his will, Wamber shook himself together, sweat gathering with the cold rain on his face. He put on Hatchie's wide-brimmed hat, which was far too big for him till he drew the cottonmouth-skin ribbon band tight. All that Wamber had ever known, all that he knew and was or ever would be, had centered in that old man lying there dead. Whatever Duck Wamber felt of any faith, belief, joy or loyalty, was wrapped up in old Dolomen Hatchie—always in predicaments he had fallen back on the ideas and intentions of Grandpap! He couldn't do that now though!

"Grandpap always said if anything happened, to git Wetzel Hatchie the fustest thing!" Duck recalled dejectedly. "I don't reckon that boy's worth a damn. He's jest slick-haired, sniffy quality—edicated, book-learnt! Course, I gotta git word to him."

What had happened? That would be Wetzel's first question, and Duck had to have a story to tell him. Looking around, he wondered on his own account, too. In the dormitory's ruined entrance lay the night guard, shot dead. In the cold ruins of the living-quarters were two others, he couldn't tell which. He reckoned all the guards had been killed. Long guns and short guns were scattered in the ashes around the bodies.

"Hit warn't legal!" Duck choked. "They neveh had a fair chanc't! Hit

weren't Federals. Scatterin' Court possemen neveh raided us, course! Hit's jes' a lawless, murderin' Swamp Angel bad element come without warnin', shootin' men down! A man aint safe no mo' in this country! I betteh git to go!"

Scurrying in new alarm, Duck nevertheless swung Grandpap in his arms to the tram-car and then to the varnished pirogue, which he unlocked with Grandpap's key. Starting the outboard, with the body stretched in the bow, he pikepoled clear and headed through the landing-bayou for the Mississippi, going at full speed, bareheaded—he had covered the old man's face with his hat. Squinting, expecting any moment to be shot, Duck Wamber raced, now.

Murdered in cold blood! Low-lived, worthless killers who never drew an honest breath, never worked unless they had to, did that! They had destroyed that big business! The law didn't provide for that kind of scoundrel meanness. Such men weren't fit to live. He suspected Wing Dobussy, but couldn't swear to it.

This wasn't Duck's business, but Wetzel Hatchie's. The old man had had more faith in Wetzel than his overseer had.

"Now we'll see'f that boy amounts to shucks!" Duck sighed. "He needs lots of gumption to be half up to that dad of his'n, yas indeedy!"

CHAPTER VIII

KILLING EXCITEMENT QUIETS

THE killing of Grandpap Hatchie made a lot of talk. Still, no one seemed to know how or where it happened. Duck Wamber brought the body down old Mississip' in the famous varnished pirogue. According to Duck's tell at the coroner's inquest, he and Mr. Hatchie were running out old survey-lines by the blaze-marks up in the Dark Corner, and the first thing Duck knew, he heard a bullet hitting Mr. Hatchie in the chest. The next minute the old man pitched down on his face, dead. He was shot through the heart.

"I heard the shot!" Wamber testified. "It sure sounded spiteful."

The jury verdict was that Dolomen Hatchie had been shot down in cold blood by an unknown person. Proceedings were right short, the authorities conforming with the law. People around talked under their breaths.

As soon as Wamber brought the body, a telegram was sent to Wetzel, up at the

university where he was post-graduating, studying special-extra laws. He had just won his degree when the word came that his father had been shot down dead, in cold blood. Sheriff Harker telephoned the son exactly the circumstances as far as he knew. "Duck's holding back plenty," Harker said. "I reckon I better organize a posse and make him show me just the spot—"

"Just hold yo' horses, Sheriff, till I come," Wetzel said. "I'm starting immediately. When I arrive, we'll discuss whatever is necessary to talk about. I reckon Duck'll talk to me. He'd sure better!"

Scattering Court was excited about the murder. Old Dolomen Hatchie was the leadingest citizen in those parts. They expected prompt action.

WETZEL HATCHIE arrived home within thirty-six hours. He found Duck waiting for him at the old mansion which had belonged to Judge Stalcum till he was killed up, bushwhacked.

After Judge Stalcum's death, everyone had been surprised when Lotus Stalcum moved out and the Hatchies moved in. Lotus was just a little girl, and Minus Brooner, an attorney, had represented her interests. Apparently Dolomen Hatchie had papers, claims and agreements that gave him the Stalcum timber bottoms around the Court and the big mansion and estate—everything but just a small cottage with about an acre of ground and enough money to raise the orphan Lotus till she could take care of herself. She had been well educated and was a public and official stenographer—a typist, copyist and all those kinds of things. Real bright, she made a reasonable living, doing real well. Wetzel Hatchie had shined around her a bit, but she never said anything—just froze him out. . . .

No posses went back into the Dark Corner Scatterings looking for the murderer. Wetzel Hatchie said wait, and justice waited. If it had been old Grandpap finding out about a murder he would have reared and snorted, and there would have been posses manhunting all over the Dark Corner, looking for the killer; but Wetzel Hatchie was of a different kind. He was slim, catty-moving, quiet—the smoothest, stillest, least readable man in the Bottoms. Sheriff Harker did some confidential inquiring among the Swamp Angels, to kind of satisfy himself about the way things were. No one seemed to know a thing that had happened.



The great Hatchie stillhouse was afire! Explosions, barrels bursting, stills blowing up!

When the inquesting, autopsying and obituaring had run their course, old Dolomen Hatchie had the most popular funeral that was ever held in Scattering Court. Swamp Angels, town folks, poor

whites, qualities and officials, darkies and all turned out. The remains were exhibited in the mortuary and a steady stream of people went through, looking at that old white-whiskered countenance.

It had been said a million times he was too plaguey mean to die, that no bullet would ever get into his hide, it was so tough—lead would just crumple against him! But there he was, plumb dead!

No sooner was he buried than Dolomen Hatchie's being murdered flattened right down to the quietest killing anybody in the town remembered. When anyone spoke to Wetzel, he just looked at them, even at a woman, cold and sharp.

"Mind yo' own business, thank yo' kindly!" he'd say.

Many a nobody had made lots more fuss, getting killed up. Even the finding of a Swamp Angel along a trail after a dance or a mission-boat meeting had more echoes. Loud talking around the court was hushed down, officially. These were orders. People didn't talk to mere acquaintances about it. Wetzel Hatchie just let it be known this was nobody's affair but his own. He would attend to it.

This killing was peculiar and dubious. Not even a perfunctory reward was offered for the arrest and conviction of the killer. Perhaps Wetzel Hatchie didn't care to throw money away, just for vengeance; perhaps the authorities were playing foxy, lying low.

ONE odd thing: it just seemed as if a shadow had been lifted off Scattering Court and the Dark Corner. Men who didn't even know they were toting a weight of difficulty and dread, never knowing when the old man would bear down, enjoyed a strange relief. Wetzel Hatchie, quiet, gentlemanly, no threat in his eyes, was a right welcome change.

Duck Wamber, old Hatchie's right-hand man and constant companion, was the biggest surprise. First thing anyone knew, he didn't have his blacksnake whip. One day in the Courthouse Square, Wetzel Hatchie saw him starting to larrup one of the mute-boys, a poor white, just to hear him make funny noises.

"Cut that, Duck!" Wetzel snapped, sharp as clashing jaws. That was the last of Duck's plaguing small boys and helpless men. Grandpap used to chuckle, seeing Duck strutting, parading, bumping into people he met, showing off, but Wetzel Hatchie stopped all this, short.

Wetzel and Wamber went up the Albion every few days. They met Swamp Angel boats coming down, passed camps and shanties, flatboats tied in—rag-shack, rough-board and painted cabin craft. Wetzel always nodded, greeting courteously. Sometimes he stopped and

talked, always politely. He never asked leading questions. All he was doing, apparently, was finding landmark corners and running out timber-lot lines, finding the surveys according to his maps and other papers.

Always Duck carried his 30-30 rifle, but this might not mean anything because he shot a good deal of game. Moreover it would be foolish not to be ready for business, just in case somebody bore hard feelings about something or other.

Then all of a sudden news came that a Sheriff off down the river away below Mendova had caught two men who had whip-marks on their backs. They were brought to Scattering Court, very confidentially, and all one night in the Prosecuting Attorney's office a bright light shone. Men were heard crying out, begging. Deputy sheriffs circled the Courthouse Square; if anyone started along the sidewalk opposite the bright windows, he was headed off, told to go around.

The next day or two word shot through all the Dark Corner that two men who had been labor for old Dolomen Hatchie's industry back in the swamps of the Dark Corner had been questioned—sharp. Plenty of people shivered, hearing that—innocent and harmless Swamp Angels and respectable ridge plantation families, and homestead whites—wondering, worrying.

Just when everyone thought the Dark Corner and Scattering Court had settled down, with no hard feelings or mean expectations, Sheriff Harker took a sheet of paper over to the printing-office to have dodgers struck off. He ordered a thousand of them, and they were given out all day to Swamp Angels, farmers, all who came to town on trading Monday. Good readers read the notices out loud:

\$1000 REWARD!

The undersigned will pay the sum of One Thousand Dollars for the capture of the man who murdered my father DOLOMEN HATCHIE. This sum has been deposited in the Scattering Bank, payable to the order of Sheriff Harker, upon delivery to him of the said killer.

The sum of \$100 will be paid to anyone delivering to said Sheriff the person of John Doe, alias Wing Dobussy, at the Scattering Court, and upon his conviction of the assassination of my father, the \$1000, above offered, will be paid to whoever brings said Wing Dobussy, shanty-boater and river-rat, to Sheriff Harker, or enters him in our county jail.

(Signed) Wetzel Hatchie.

Autumn had come, the leaves beginning to turn, and acorns were pattering down on the dry leaves that had already fallen. People read or heard the news, naming Wing Dobussy. Swamp Angels had begun to speak and breathe freely; now they shut their mouths, stilled their tongues. The word was around that any of them would do anything for a thousand dollars. Even the Swamp Angels shook their heads, not trusting one another. They'd all seen Wing Dobussy flitting around. He had sold frogs, turtles, mussel-shells and fish to buyers up the Albion, and the other dwellers in the Dark Corner met him here and there as they were about their affairs.

"The ink on that reward-paper wa'n't hardly dry befo' he had a copy of it to read," the news reached Scattering Court. And thereafter Wing Dobussy was harder to see than a wild turkey hen going to her nest.

To close friends, Swamp Angels and poor whites from up the Albion admitted that one thousand dollars reward-money would be bad luck. They didn't want any of it. Most of them weren't as poor as some people thought; but poor or rich, they had no hard feelings against the man—"whoever he is"—who had killed Hatchie and quietened that Duck Wamber.

Far and wide the rumor of the killing had spread, whispering at all the landings on the lower Mississippi, how a man had been abused and whipped, put to work in a big moonshine still, stockaded in the swamp brakes—till one day he had fled in a cyclone. Instead of being satisfied, he had gone back and taken toll of all the guards, turning the helpless labor loose, and had shot old Dolomen Hatchie himself, ending his pitiless régime of meanness, cruelty and greed. No wonder the killing had been hushed up!

"All they want is to get their hooks on to Wing Dobussy!" the word was around. "They won't never bring him to trial, if they can on'y ketch him! They'll find ways of gettin' shut of him!"

THE talk carried a jeering undertone. A hundred people knew about Dobussy, and the only ones who would be glad to cash in the reward were around town, where old Dolomen had roistered with some and used others. Probably his big mistake had been feeling contempt and hate against all the Swamp Angels.

Wetzel Hatchie found it was too late to placate the wild-crafters back in the brakes. Not one would even pretend to

answer any questions about Wing Dobussy—nor about hide-outs.

In all Scattering Court, only Lotus Stalcum, probably, came anywhere near knowing just what was going on. Judge Stalcum had always been the Swamp Angels' friend. His daughter knew them all, and they came to her cottage every trade day. People knew it. Wetzel Hatchie tried to take advantage of her friendships.

"Lotus," he said to her, "we cain't let this murder of old Grandpap Dolomen go unpunished! You know how I feel, for your father was shot, same as mine—"

"No, Wetzel." She shook her head. "My father was resisting attempts to law landholders to death, taking their timber and property. Your father was running a peonage moonshine still. There's a difference."

"I've got five thousand dollars for you, personal, if you'll just find where this Wing Dobussy hangs out!" He kept his temper with an effort.

"No!" And her glance stung him.

YET he paid Lotus Stalcum more money than she had ever earned before; for she was the only one thoroughly familiar with the papers in the county clerk's office. Hatchie had to have copies of the land-records of the whole county.

She took the stained, mildewed and crackling papers and copied the Colonial Spanish, French, old English and pioneer documents and legal instruments—took them home to work on with reading- and magnifying-glasses. This was confidential work. She knew that. She made exact copies—kept true carbons of each one, but no one knew this. She certified to each and every paper she recovered from the old archives. She even went to Mendova and to the State capital to gather the data at Wetzel's expense. He knew of no one else who could do the work as well and as cheaply.

Wetzel Hatchie's law-coursing now stood him in good stead. He saved himself a lot of law fees and counsel money, handling his father's estate claims, the way he did. Come to find out, getting right down to it, there wasn't an acre of land up the Albion Basin that was clear in title. No one knew what to expect, even out around Scattering Court in old settled country.

Working through the old land-records, copied by Lotus Stalcum, checking through them according to old Dolomen Hatchie's papers, Wetzel admitted, himself, he was never so surprised in his life.



Racing, twisting, turning through country he knew, because he had hounded men all over those bottoms himself, he heard yelping of dogs, full cry. Bloodhounds!

"Course, there they are: If the land belongs to the estate, it does, and that's all there is about it. Just a matter of law!" Wetzel sighed, sympathetic and friendly and all that; but legislatures made the laws, and courts interpreted them. So what was a man to do if property belonged to him, by good rights?

A trembly, goose-pimpling chill ran through Scattering Court, and into the far places of the Dark Corner. No one knew who was going to be hit next—timber-owner, homestead-claimant, plantation ridger, settlement-dweller; ornery no-account whites, and proud, upstanding quality families, all waited, listening to horses coming thudding or splashing along the county pikes and byroads, a deputy bringing a subpoena or a summons, announcing actions of ouster, or to quiet title, or some such lawing business instituted by Wetzel Hatchie as executor of his father's estate.

Wetzel Hatchie told Lotus Stalcum he wanted and was going to get all the Dark Corner.

"What good will the swamp bottoms do you?" she asked.

"We'll see! We'll see!" he chortled.

Hatchie had an engineer make a map of the Dark Corner, all the Scatterings territory; and on this the Hatchie holdings were inked in red. Those with questionable claims against Hatchie's were cross-hatched with red lines. Claims of Hatchie against land-holdings of others were indicated by straight bar lines. Lotus Stalcum had to help Engineer Swone in the translations and reading of the survey notes and records.

"You can't get it all, Wetzel!" Lotus shook her head.

"Why not?" he demanded sharply.

"There are rights you can't touch." She refused to elucidate this speech.

Lotus did not quarrel with her bread and butter. She did her work so well that she was indispensable. She was quality, showing breeding of a type no son of Dolomen Hatchie and his wife—whoever she had been—could ever show. Wetzel had never shown special interest in girls or women. Hints of clandestine attachments had been bruited around, but no one questioned such things—it wasn't safe.

Friends of Judge Stalcum who knew law, had saved Lotus a pittance of her father's estate. Dolomen Hatchie had begrudged it; now Wetzel Hatchie sought her friendship, her kindness, gratitude for his giving her so much work with "good pay." The mystery of her father's killing never had been officially solved; Wetz-

el Hatchie, knew, however, that Lotus Stalcum held against him the same resentment she held unvoiced against his father.

To his cold heart came calculation and desire. In the university he had been himself just a Swamp Angel, fellow-students seeing little distinction between the uncouth youth and the other dwellers in the Dark Corner swamps. Lotus Stalcum had moved unquestioned where he never had any standing, for her father had been a great man in the State. Yet she was just a hired girl, if one got right down to it.

Once he dared to tell her her place. But—

"Are you white?" she asked. "You tell a *white* girl she is too proud? Just remember, Wetzel, you have your place, too."

Of all the things anyone had ever said to Wetzel Hatchie, that stayed with him, made him afraid. Among all his schemes, he included bringing Lotus Stalcum to her knees. His idea of power and place was to be able to order and drive important white men and women, office-holders and quality people, to do what he demanded. Hiring people, paying them half what they were worth—this was another triumph of which he took full advantage, and in which he took much satisfaction.

"Just remember, Lotus!" he told her. "I've hired you—as long as you do what I tell you, we'll get along."

"As long as you keep your place, I'll keep mine, of course," she said and all his fine build-up collapsed.

CHAPTER IX

THE SHOOTING OF WING DOBUSSY

DUCK WAMBER prowled restlessly around, listening, drinking with men to loosen their tongues, cunning, dangerous, collecting gossip. He brought word to Wetzel that a negro hand on a commission fish-boat had seen Wing Dobussy delivering a thirty-dollar crate of live jumbo-frogs, big bulls, on the east fork of the Albion.

"He done promised anotheh load er shipment," the darky had said. "Law, dat man sho do git to sacrifice plenty of dem bull-frogs!"

"Whereabouts on the East Fork?" Wetzel demanded.

"About the Cut-off ditch, suh," Wamber answered.

"So that scoundrel's hanging around!" Hatchie nodded with satisfaction, looking northward in the direction of the Dark Corner. "All right, Duck. We've business to 'tend to. Course, you understand, this is my own personal affair!"

"Shu-u, yas suh—yas, *suh!*" Wamber beamed. He had all along been fearful that Wetzel might be soft, liable to let things go. Now he knew old Dolomen's son was merely patient—a virtue old Grandpap had not always possessed.

"Are the Swamp Angels talking?"

"Not outside," Duck shook his head. "Those damned swamp-rats mind their own business. They're treacherous. You cain't get nothin' out of them."

"Reckon they favor Dobussy much?"

"They mought. They hang together. Course this Wing Dobussy's kind of an outsider. They's positively scairt of that reward-money." Duck grimaced. "They claim it's dirty money—blood-money."

"Money is never dirty, Duck!" Wetzel snapped. "They've contacted Dobussy out around, do you reckon?"

"Any of 'em, all of 'em!" Wamber snarled. "I found out the Barstows tote magazine an' price-list mail fo' him. I cain't get his alias. Then he gits commission envelopes in his own name, cash money fo' his fish, frogs, turtles, shells."

"We ought to catch him where and when he's working, Duck."

"We will!" Duck was sure. "Jes' when we find where-at it is."

"Yes, Duck, we'll get him!" Wetzel's face contorted like an angry cat's. "What's the best way to the stillhouse?"

"Taint safe up the Albion—lots of bresh along the banks," Duck shivered. "The bes' way's up old Mississipp' through Whisky Bayou to the loading dump. Don't nobody eveh git to go in thataway, fearin' ghosties, ha'nts an' witcheries."

"Scairt of the Albion, eh?" jeered Wetzel at his hapless servitor, his smile sly. "Not ghosts, but Wing Dobussy in the brush! That scoundrel was your big mistake, Duck. He had too much brains for you. Grandpap must've fair warned you to look out for him, didn't he?"

"Oh, yas—yas suh!" Wamber admitted. "But he neveh showed a sign—"

"He knew better!" Wetzel said. "He's impudent, mean and careless. We know he'll kill! He's just a rat off the Mississippi—a shantyboater, that's all. He's like a wolf—sly, sneaking. We'll have to go find him, though. He's our meat. By now he's relaxed his vigilance. All he's thinking is he's fooled us—got away



It had been said that old Hatchie was too plaguey mean to die—but there he was, plumb dead!

from us. All he's thinking is about making money—turtles, frogging in our swamps, root-digging. We'll just slip in some day and surprise him—right!"

Wamber's face twitched, and his eyes blinked.

"Come on, Duck!" Hatchie shrugged, his voice low. "You and I are going hunting, now. Or don't you want to go—yo' 'fraid, mebbey?"

A grin of delighted comprehension suffused the ridges and lines of Duck's red-cabbage-leaf countenance. Hunting—manhunting, that would be! In leash these many months, Wamber had possessed himself with patience. Now he was ready promptly, with guns cleaned, ammunition in hand and the boat motors with plug-points touched with emery. Wetzel indicated the fancy varnished pirogue as his choice for the pursuit, the best swamp water-craft and Duck had given the boat another coating of enamel varnish as clear as crystal.

Wetzel sat in the bow, with his rifle across his knees and that special 32-caliber blued-barrel gold-plated-cylinder, engraved-breech revolver in his snug, fast-draw holster—all ready for business! Wetzel was dressed, too, in an old golf

suit, with long-legged extra-soled moccasins and a faded woolen shirt—sure handsome, common and all according!

"Sit down!" Hatchie ordered as Wamber stood in the stern. "Get a-going! Stop that infernal racket."

Duck loved the uproar of the open cut-out of the motor, the staccato explosions and the quick echoes from the high earthen banks and the colonnaded forest brake walls. Old Grandpap, too, had liked the noise that way. Hearing only just the cutwater hiss and the power humming made Duck Wamber nervous.

Full speed ahead, shaving the current edges, taking advantage of the deadwaters and reverse eddies, hitting the shoals in the deep channels, gain-speeding, Duck never had had a chance to show Wetzel how good he was, piloting, guiding, "getting thar Eli," knowing the fine points in the Big Swamp, reading water, short-cutting, and figuring the right of things. Now he showed him.

Approaching Green Cane Ridge narrows, Hatchie began looking around. The plantations along Backbone were all his, now, and the ferry was no more. Here the Albion cut through, having high land on both sides.



"That eveh overflow, Duck?" Hatchie asked.

"No suh," Wamber answered. "Neveh! In the highest tide the Dark Corner eveh knowed, that east bank was more'n twenty inches above high water, Mist' Hatchie. Yo' jes' couldn't git on that hill fo' the deer, razorbacks, cattle—all of them refugitives, suh."

"We'll build a toll-gate there," Hatchie said. "Cabin, storehouse, and gambrel pole. How about house water?"

"Theh's a bubble-spring in the gap."

"Near 'nough to pipe it?"

"'Bout three hundred yards—"

"We'll put in a gasoline turbine and line," Hatchie said, adding: "We come purty near owning the Dark Corner now, Duck. We're taking possession. But we need income to hold it. We're going to buy fish, fur, shells, everything those Swamp Angels take off the Dark Corner. Money has got to come from somewhere! The stillhouse income kept us going."

Duck Wamber stood tense. Wetzel was talking to him like his father now. Hints had come to Duck, inquiries how Wetzel was keeping going. All that property took tax money. Lawing was expensive. The income out of the river night

had gone with the burning of the establishment. Grandpap had complained of expenses, and he had made a lawyer out of Wetzel to save attorney fees.

"Theh's all that surplus gallonage," Duck Wamber remarked.

"What's that, Duck—surplus gallonage?" Wetzel asked quickly. "What do you mean?"

Grandpap Dolomen Hatchie had never told Wetzel that? Nobody but Duck Wamber knew what lay on the bottom of the Skips in the white sand? Sure it looked like the old man had left Duck to help his boy!

"Why, Grandpap always kept the stills runnin' full blast," Duck answered, as if it was a commonplace. "What he didn't ship, he run aout into the Skips an' sunk. The day Wing Dobussy deserted, he was sinking barrels from the jackboat."

"He did?" Wetzel asked queerly. "Is there much of it, Duck?"

"Much of hit!" Duck grinned. "Why, Grandpap used to say all his profit went into buyin' barrels, kaigs, jugs off'n riveh junkers an' fillin' 'em with surplusage, suh. Ev'y yeah he'd sink barrels, sometimes one er two a week, sometimes a whole week's run. He claimed that was his savings."

"He neveh told me! Good God, Duck—those runaways 'll come back an' git it!" Wetzel exclaimed. "Why, there must be hundreds of barrels."

"Yas suh—more'n that!"

"We'll look into that!" Wetzel exclaimed, joyful with relief from the strain that had grown greater and greater as he had consolidated his vast land-holdings, so little of which was anything but worry and expense.

DESPITE the sun, a chill autumnal tang was in the air. At the Forks of the Albion, Prat Adkin the basket-maker was sitting on the bank weaving willow osiers—with a driftwood fire to help the sun warm him.

"Slow down, Duck," Hatchie ordered. "Make sure which way Dobussy went."

"Howdy, Prat!" Duck hailed.

"Howdy, ge'men! Come set an' warm?" Adkin invited. "Wife'll bring a cup o' coffee, I reckon."

"Land in," Hatchie said, and they landed, climbing the steep bank ten or twelve feet to the tent outfit level. Hatchie gazed at the five dozen or so baskets, measures and carriers, made from long willow switches which had grown on the river bars—his bars!

"I been working," Adkin grinned.

"You call this work?" Hatchie jeered, and Adkin cringed beneath that contempt. "Work an hour a day, sit around, run around all the rest of the time."

"Hyar's coffee, Mist' Hatchie—Duck!"

A tall, thin woman, flat-bosomed, scrawny-necked, her long, sallow face impassive, her eyes sparkling, clear and beautiful blue, brought a steaming smoky aluminum coffee-pot and cups on a battered pewter tray. The drink was black and good, strong enough to take off the chill. She knew how to brew it right.

"**W**HERE'S Wing Dobussy stay at?" Wamber asked.

"Why—um-m, I jes' don't know." Adkin shook his head. "In the Dark Corner, I expaict. I neveh did git that fur back. Bar willers grow longer through heah an' in the bayous above—"

"A difference in the osiers?" Hatchie asked quickly.

"Oh, yes indeed, suh!" Adkin assured him. "These run four-five foot. Some bars they's sprouts an' hard-barks inside of two foot—stunted. Bigges' dif'rence, if'n they's limber er crackle, too, suh."

"Then you do have to know *something!*" Hatchie commented, with a left-sided smile and the faintest of shrugs.

Having warmed for a moment by the fire and partaken of the hospitality of the shack, the visitors reentered their fancy pirogue and took their departure, not even looking back at the tent-man and his wife, who with expressionless features, watched them go. Who did Duck Wamber think he was, anyhow? The two were standing there when Hatchie and Duck glanced back from the bend up the East Fork, feeling gratified to have attracted such hurt and respectful attention.

Above Adkin's camp the river was much narrower, the banks lower and closer, the timber more of a snarl. Here the Dark Corner began, tangles of brush, cut-over, soft ground, water in spreading basins, winding bayous and creeks, natural ditches drained by the Forks of the Albion. They felt the difference. Duck told Wetzel when they passed the place where Lotus Stalcum's father had been found, in a trace that followed a mast-ridge toward the southeast. Just above, two men had been found dead, hit in the back by showering bullets—strangers in a cunner.

"Gove'ment," Wamber said, his voice crackling. "They heard tell a 'shine still was up yeah."

The two laughed softly. Nevertheless they swung their heads in ceaseless watchfulness and nervous attention to those brushy islands and shadowed banks—ominous even to them.

"Don't reckon yo' b'lieve in ghosties, er ha'n'ts, Mist' Wetzel?" Duck asked.

"Ghosts!" Hatchie looked back at the big-bodied, little-headed man, a smile beginning on his whippy lips, but becoming mirthless beneath a frown and retreating eyes. "I suppose you do, Duck?"

"I do!" Duck declared. "Grandpap had his idees too. One time we seen—well, sunthin'!"

"You would," Wetzel said. "Cain't you get that motor going faster? What'd you see, Duck? Some dark night yo' thought you saw something?"

"No suh—not at night," Duck shook his head. "A day like this'n. Hit was October, too; sunshiny, gobblers callin', bluejays laughin'. Yo' know, the Hell-diver Broad. Theh's a boat, plain as day. Feller polin' hit with a long double-ender paddle oveh deep water, crossin' ahead of us. Water slick—I swear to God I seen the ripples an' wake of his cunner. One of them trapper outfits—tent, hardware, grub-boxes, down to two inches of the gun'ales, loaded that deep.

"I seen his reflection on the water. So'd Grandpap. A strangeh, he was comin' out'n the purple shadder of the mornin' sunshine, an' hit flashed on his rifle-stock an' barrel. He kept a-goin'—kept a-goin'. An' then he thinned out. Not all at once, but peterin' away till we couldn't see a thing. The worst of hit was, the ripples of that cunner kept splittin', curlin', cuttin', an' we couldn't see a thing but hit!"

"Hallucination!" Wetzel chuckled uneasily. "Mass hallucination—I bet you and Grandpap were scairt to death!"

"Yo're damned well right we were!" Duck assented. "—Hark! Shootin'!"

THROUGH the heavy stillness they both had heard a "*ponk*" and then two "*ponks*," followed in a moment by a fourth, jarring the quiet. That was game-shooting, they figured by the sounds.

"That's a rifle, Duck?" Hatchie suggested inquiringly.

"Yas suh, a long ways off—fast powder—nitro!" Duck analyzed it aloud. "'Taint a shotgun; scatterguns open up, kinda roll. 'Taint a 30-30, neither. This crackles—the 30's got more of a bump."

"A 25-35, Duck?"



"A goose-rifle, I'd say, yassuh," Wamber nodded eagerly. "Dobussy's got a 25-35, they say."

"That so! Better hug into the points now—keep watch!"

They watched ahead, coming into view slowly to study the river ahead. The turns were sharp, the bends short, and then Duck said:

"Gravel Shoals is ahead—bigges' deer runway through yeah. That shootin' sounded like woundin' a deer an' follerin' up."

"Let's land, then!" Hatchie spoke quickly. "We'll go up the bank and look things over!"

"I reckon so!" Duck assented, grinning, steering toward the bank, where they landed in the bend just around the turn below Gravel Shoals crossing. The varnished pirogue was made fast, and Wetzl and Wamber crept up into the timber, cut through to look ahead. The water spread wide over rippling, sparkling rifts a few rods long. Around the turn on the top of the bank, Hatchie saw a man at work on the pale carcass of a buck deer.

The star-gauge bore suddenly dropped; there were three puffs of smoke, three sledge-hammer blows driving against the victim's waist.

"Yo' rifle?" Duck whispered.

"Not for this!" Hatchie answered, patting his revolver scabbard, adding: "Bring yo' carbine, but keep back!"

"Yassuh!" Duck breathed, his face widening in a yellow-fanged grin of appreciation. "I'll be right theh, suh!"

The dense forest grew to the river-bank, but among the trunks the ground was flat, bare and compact. Along the edge a rod or two within the timber stand was a path or runway where wild life skirted the deep water on the way to the shallow crossing three hundred yards or so upstream. This path the soft soles of Hatchie's striding feet followed in soundless speed. Presently he paused behind a big gum trunk, looked ahead and nodded with satisfaction.

Duck could see ahead too, where the skiff of Wing Dobussy with its bright out-board at the stern stood out in the afternoon sunlight. And at the top of the low



Vultures flew away, squawking loudly in alarm and disgust.

bank stooped the hunter who had killed a fine, long-legged swamp buck and was busily dressing it out where it had fallen.

Just as Hatchie, with Duck ten yards behind, stepped from behind a great hollow oak tree twenty feet away, Wing Dobussy sheathed his hunting-blade and stepped down to the water's edge to wash his hands. When he had shaken the water from them and from his clean forearms, he sprang back up the bank and stopped short, face to face with Wetzel Hatchie—and Duck Wamber, who was all clear, carbine ready, just beyond.

No need of Wetzel Hatchie hurrying in that wayback desolation. Duck Wamber squinted and grimaced with satisfaction, now understanding the why of Grandpap's boy being slow, careful and patient in every move, taking his own time.

A thin smile of grim complacency stretched the bright red line of Hatchie's lips as he filled his eyes with the spectacle of that surprised wild-crafter, caught helpless and hapless, his gaze fixed for a moment on the blued-barrel, plated-cylinder ornate revolver gripped in a long, dark-skinned hand with the deliberately conscious calm of a duelist's merciless intention.

Not a quiver shook that tapered six-inch barrel as with unhurrying delay it pointed up leg, body and centered on the victim's brow with every advantage behind its aim. When Dobussy's eyes narrowed, steady and serene, gazing with bold, untroubled courage into the slotted pits of Hatchie's eyes, Hatchie glanced away—unable to face such unflinching expectancy.

His own hesitation, as well as this acceptance without plea or fear, stirred fury in Hatchie, because it robbed him of unstinted vengeance. This poor white trash had preempted a gentleman's pre-

rogative of knowing how to die! Then let him die and know it—know what had hit him, suffer the full inescapable pangs!

The star-gauge bore suddenly dropped, aimed with skill and hatred at Dobussy's waist. There were three puffs of quickly dissolving smoke, three sledgehammer blows driving against the victim's waist, his eyes bulging out at each shot.

HATCHIE and Duck stood gazing into the face of the falling man, to see the assembling agony begin. Hatchie casually emptied the spent cylinders and flipped the shells, reloaded his revolver full, sheathed it in the scabbard and drew a package of cigarettes nonchalantly from his pocket, handing it to Duck, who took one as his eyes sparkled green in surprised admiration.

They lighted at Hatchie's gold lighter, studded with its precious stones which flashed in the bright sunshine. Hatchie's every move was studied, deliberate, posing, showing off with the swagger and pride of arrogance. Duck stared at him, admiring in open-mouthed excitement.

If in his time Duck Wamber had doubted whether Wetzel Hatchie was able to hold a candle to his sire, Grandpap Dolomen Hatchie, now that questioning was forever gone. In fact, if a man got right down to it, Wetzel did things up a mite more brown, handsome and technical than old Dolomen.

Duck's eyes squinted and popped by turns; his ears wriggled; his breath came deep. He could hardly smoke, he was so excited; but when Wetzel turned his back on the fallen Dobussy, Duck joined him, and they strolled with chins up back down the river, in and out among the thick tree trunks. Duck had to look back at the last step—he just had to gratify his curiosity. Sitting on his heels, arms braced, the victim was leaning down, arms bending, kind of giving way. Sometimes a man lives two or three days when he's taken a bullet in his stomach. Wetzel never turned an inch, but blew a

ring of smoke meditatively into the still brake air, and stuck his head into it, interested in another trifle—that's how deliberate and nervy he was!

OUT of sight of their mortal diversion, Wetzel looked thoughtfully over the green, rippling shoals, and smiled as a buzzard came swooping down out of the milky blue sky, casting a purple shadow on the water, a bolder bird than the others sweeping to sail to the bank to feast at the place where the deer-hunter had dragged his game after dressing it.

Wetzel Hatchie had plenty of heavy matters to think about. He had been amusing himself, finding vengeance. As they swung into the river channel, he turned to Duck with a decisive gesture.

"Listen, Duck: you always toted around with old Pap!" Hatchie's gaze was cold and hard. "He always had cash money—he hid out some. He told me so hisse'f. He must have had plenty laid by, out around, handy. Where is it?"

"Lawse—he wa'n't neveh no hand to tell anybody such private confidentials!" Wamber shook his head violently.

"Don't talk to me—you had your suspicions!" Hatchie spoke with angry vehemence. "Don't tell me—"

"If'n he wouldn't tell yo'—his own flesh an' blood—he'd neveh in Gawd's worl' tell a hired ovehseer!" Duck protested, stiff with alarm and doubt.

Wetzel Hatchie's face darkened. No one knew how hard he was being pressed, how close he had come to the ragged edge of being penniless—bent down by land-poverty. Glaring at Wamber, he wanted to curse him for not knowing what the old man would, of course, never let anyone know but himself. The accounts which Hatchie had pored over were never exact. Always there were incomes and outgoes—money shoved into land and expenses of keeping up the outlawed distillery. The nearest Hatchie could figure, scores of thousands of dollars had been turned into gold and cached in a hoard or hoards. No, old Dolomen would never let Duck Wamber know about that. The Scattering Bank and the Mendova trust company had changed paper from liquor shipments into gold—and that was gone.

"Well, I've got to have money—five thousand!" Hatchie impatiently indicated the Dark Corner. "Where'm I going to get it? How's anybody get money out of this damned swamp, anyhow? I've got to have cash money—"

"Why, course," Duck said unhappily, "Gran'pap always said them spare bar'ls at the stillhouse was worth a fortune. My lan', Mist' Wetzel, he sunk bar'ls in the lilies—I don' know how many—we neveh did keep track."

"Couldn't we fish up some of it—market it?"

"Oh, yes, suttin'ly. I bet you could sell a hundred bar'ls. Hit'll run forty gallons a bar'l—an' theh's kaigs, demi-johns—all kinds of containers. I neveh saw sech a feller fo' c'lecting up anything from big French an' Spanish wine-bar'ls, beer-kaigs, any an' all of them things—"

"A hundred barrels?" Wetzel squinted. "Why, the stuff's selling around a dollar a pint. . . . A hundred barrels'd be thirty thousand dollars! That's money!"

"Yas suh—Grandpap said if'n eve'y-thing else run dry on 'im, theh'd be the sunk cache, suh."

"Well, we'll go get it out—we'll do some shipping—just to tide me over!" Wetzel sighed, suddenly relieved. "You know how to handle it—to sell the stuff, Duck?"

"Well—course I neveh handled no money. But I've delivered—I c'n contact the runners—customers—I knowed 'em for yeahs!"

"All right, then. You go down to Mendova. That's where you deliver?"

"No suh—we d'livered at the whisky-landin'. Let them fellers run the risks! Grandpap'd ruther play safe—transport an' sellin's always risky, yo' know."

"Well, he never told me much about the business—"

"No suh. He always said a liquor business wa'n't honorable. Jes' his notion—an' he 'lowed yo'd grow up, quality, honorable—plenty money!"

"Well, I wish to God I knew where some of it is—cash money!" Wetzel grimaced. "Well, all right—we'll sell enough for pocket money!"

CHAPTER X

BULLETS STOP SHORT

WING DOBUSSY had left his 25-35 carbine in the stern of his skiff when he shot the deer. He had even slipped off his .22 automatic scabbard to rest it on the thwart, because it was awkward when he sat on the stern seat.

His big game-skinning knife was sheathed when he stopped short at the top of the low bank upon finding himself face to face with Wetzel Hatchie, his re-

volver already drawn, and Duck Wamber backing the play with his 30-30 carbine ready for business.

WHEN with numbing force the deferred agony of the impact of the slugs swelled along every nerve, through every vein and artery into all the extremities of Dobussy's being, it was as if the weapon made no sound at the muzzle, but crashed from within against his ears. Below his waist nothing seemed to be left, and he sank to his knees. The sky turned black, filled with crystalline darts of sparkling colors.

Dobussy knew that he sank to his knees and lurched forward on the ground. He felt the throb of the departing footsteps of the two men, the killer and his handy-man. Presently, down around the point, Dobussy heard an outboard popping and bustling away as the motor speeded up, the explosions growing more and more regular, rhythmic, going away farther and farther downstream. Then, drawing up in a spasm, Dobussy pitched over on his side, totally unconscious.

In and out of his senses, in and out of awareness of sunshine, of black night, of flickering buzzard shadows. . . How could a man bear those thrusting lances of agony?

Yet he had to bear them, and so he clenched his teeth against his groans, only to have his own moans awaken him. He heard his own shrieks, and stifled them. . . . So this was dying? The thought was for an instant greater than the pain. He had been left to die slowly, tortured in lingering agony. . . .

Wing Dobussy lay wishing in his anguish that he could die and have it over with. Then his eyes cleared, his mind calmed. The thrusting pangs settled into an enormous ache, with quick stabs if he stirred, along nerves as taut as fiddle-strings across his stomach. He was in and out of torture, nausea, stupor and utter unconsciousness. His senses, fading into black oblivion, were presently restored, and he remembered every detail, and saw with strange clarity.

"How-come I'm alive?" he wondered, hearing birds in morning talk, and feeling a gracious warmth in the slanting of early sunshine. "Wetzel Hatchie left me here to die slow and tortured. I've no right to be living."

He wasn't dead; yet the incredible idea that he wasn't going to die seemed plumb ridiculous. A man with three bullets in his stomach hasn't a chance in the world!

Without a surgeon, he couldn't even die comfortably. Then at a thought he caught his breath so sharply that it shook every muscle and twanged every nerve, and he heard his own moan like that of another. A possibility had come to his mind.

Of course, if the bullets didn't have penetration—but that just couldn't be, unless— Still, the revolver was a 32-caliber. With surging doubt, hardly hope and yet resembling it, he dragged his hands, clammy with cold sweat, to his shirt; and in spite of the cruel torture, he explored in search of the bullet-holes in the skin across his waist.

"Why, there's something wrong! All wrong!" he whispered, in dazed disbelief. "I can't find— Why, that can't be!"

He felt of his horsehide money-belt, with pockets all thick with the flat and once-folded currency which represented all his savings, his resources against periods or seasons when the returns of wilderness occupation were inadequate for his support, his supplies, his varied needs.

The belt was homemade, out of rawhide of a winter-killed horse. He had used the thinnest, toughest skin, and sewed it into pockets with flaps that hooked low into eyes near the bottom. Over the belt had been a light woolen union suit and a heavy woolen shirt.

IN gasping expectancy and curiosity, in spite of the hurt, he explored and found across the front of the belt the holes where three bullets had been aimed with malignant and expert accuracy, where they would cause the cruelest death possible—but also just where the result of Wing's thrift had served as an armor of paper money and coins of gold.

One bullet had gone through the inner layer of horsehide and maybe a half-inch into the flesh. He could feel the point stuck into him held in its hole through a wad of treasury certificates—a place now of excruciating soreness and throbbing hurt. Only this, apparently, accounted for his blood-soaked shirt. Another bullet had gone in at a slant, was held in the thick double-fold of five-dollar bills, and hadn't even broken the skin.

Having made sure, he burst into a laugh that like to have killed him; and the worse it hurt, the more he shook for joy. Letting go, he relaxed and sprawled on his back, chuckling and gasping at every spasm of relief and unmitigated physical anguish. Vultures flew away squawking loudly in alarm and disgust.

"I'm only bruised!" he kept whispering. "He just punched me—I'm sore as a boil—*ouch—oh—ah!* But I'm living! I'm not going to die! After all, it won't be a ghost comes back to haunt you, Wetzzel Hatchie! No, indeedy. And Duck Wamber! Wait'll I see you now! It won't be whip-cracking you'll hear—no sir! You've done declared war! I reckon now I'll finish it!"

When he tried to roll over, the darting hurts at first held him. But he must be up and on his way; and so amid darting thrusts like knife-blades of pain, he dragged himself into a sitting posture.

THERE lay his deer. Positively he couldn't leave and waste it! His boat was down the bank, out of sight from the two murderous scoundrels. Like an aged man, bent, doddering and weak, Wing worked and edged around, glad it wasn't a bigger venison as he inched and dragged himself down the bank, sliding over the bow into the craft.

He pulled the slipknot, tied to a root, and let the skiff float into the current. Down the shoals in the stillwater eddy he crept, and reached aft to the stern. Priming the outboard motor, he braced himself for the excruciating pangs of cranking the flywheel. Away it went!

Then the shaking of the boat by the throbbing motor hurt him till he gasped and had to slow it down to soften the sharp quivering of the hull.

On his way again, Wing Dobussy could hardly believe it. But for the stabbing soreness, perhaps he couldn't have been sure of his adventure. Never had he known how many different muscles he used in steering. Grinning with real joy, nevertheless, he bore it all the way up the current and through the Shortcut back into his own hidden harbor.

As he dropped a line over a cleat on the stern gun'ale of his shantyboat, he realized that he was near the limit of his endurance. Fighting off his weakness and agony, he managed to creep aboard, an inch at a time, getting onto the deck, trembling at the thought of losing his balance and falling overboard. On his knees he tried to unlock the door of the kitchen-galley. Sick, suffering, the world around him blackening out the afterglow of sunset, suddenly he pitched over on his face, unconscious. . . .

Confusion, half-lights, strange mingling of sensations, marked his return from oblivion. When presently his eyes opened, he saw daylight. He recognized his own

cabin. He ached, every heart-beat throbbing in his toes and fingers, fairly shaking his whole body. He smelled iodine and liniment. He felt as well as heard footsteps beyond the cabin partition.

Through the doorway appeared the figure of a woman, a girl; and then standing beside him was Isbelle Strake, stooping to look at him, her blue eyes narrow with watchful concern. His eyes turned to meet her gaze. Now he recollected what he had gone through.

She drew a chair to sit beside his narrow bed.

"What happened?" she asked. "Who shot you, Wing Dobussy?"

For a moment he hesitated. No man to talk about his personal affairs, he found it difficult now to speak out. But briefly he told her about the deer.

"I know 'bout hit!" she nodded. "A nice little buck. I hung him on yo' gambrel hook, Wing. But how come yo' was shot smack in the belt?"

"Duck Wamber and Wetzzel Hatchie cornered me!" he answered, and then told her the details of the river-bank, when they sneaked up on him at Gravel Shoals crossing. She listened with expressionless features, hard eyes, as he gave her the particulars, what was said and done.

"He reckons yo' killed his pap—ruined the still!" she suggested.

"I reckon he does," he nodded.

"Course he'd be provoked." She shrugged. "I found yo' on the deck. I seen the holes, but not much blood. Neveh saw such a bruise in my life! I didn't know if yo' was alive o' daid, till yo' groaned. Well, I've some venison broth. That's sure a fine-conditioned deer yo' killed up. I betteh feed yo'!"

"This is sure friendly of you!" he whispered.

"We Swamp Angels cain't be anything but friendly, now!" she said. "I betteh look afteh yo', Wing. Same time, my folks'll worry, so I'll go let 'em know, soon's I can. Jes yo' rest easy!"

"Take my skiff and the outboard!" he told her.

OF course he didn't dare eat much, but to stay his stomach he sipped the venison broth; and he had made a lot of sweet wild-grape juice. These at frequent intervals satisfied his hunger.

No smile crossed the countenance of Isbelle Strake. She hated his sufferings. She dreaded, feared the future. He heard her start the motor and drive away in the day. When she was away, Dobussy lay



"Yo' cain't fool yo'se'f, Wing," she said. "Yo'll be bushwhacked, if yo' stay." "Will you go away with me, Isbelle?" he asked, smiling.

Nex' time he'll use a rifle, shootin' yo' through an' through—in the haid, likely! Yo' cain't stay heah. Yo' got to leave the Dark Corner! Sho' as God, yo'll be bushwhacked—killed up—if you stay. He an' Wamber won't rest till yo're daid!"

"Will you go away with me, Isbelle?" he asked, smiling.

Her lips parted; her breath came in a quick gasp, and she turned her face away, her cheeks coloring and fading by turns.

"I cain't leave my folks jes' now, Wing!" She shook her head.

"Course I'd better go!" he spoke quietly. "If I got the Swamp Angels—all friends of mine—into the mess in the beginning, prob'ly it's none of my business, stayin' back to help 'em out of their grief an' troubles."

"Yo'—yo'd think of that!" She did not again suggest that he go away.

Gradually he recovered.

Isbelle would not stay with him, nor would she marry him—yet. When he could move about, she returned home.

helpless. The bruises were sure deep; he could feel them clear to his backbone.

He was flat on his back, since lying on either side was sheer torture; yet never had he felt quite so plumb contented in all his born days. Forehanded, and minding his own business, Wing Dobussy had plenty of time, plenty to eat on board, and the fortitude with which to endure the slow convalescence from his injuries.

Isbelle Strake returned sooner than he expected, but said nothing about her parents, as she set up a cot in the kitchen-galley to sleep on. The bullets interested her and Wing as they studied them together. Being soft-nose, one had mushroomed and bulged, stopping in the paper currency in his belt. The revolver rifling showed plain. One slug had crumpled against the cheek of a double-eagle lady, and Isbelle shuddered at seeing that.

Despite Wing's suffering, improvement of the terrible bruise began at once. He disobeyed the girl's remonstrances and injunctions, fighting the hurt and ache with increasing restlessness.

"Yo' cain't fool yo'se'f, Wing!" she said urgently. "That Hatchie hasn't any use fo' yo'! He'll neveh forgive himse'f fo' lettin' yo' git away. He'll hunt yo.' He'll sic Duck Wamber onto yo'.

RESUMING wild-crafting, no wolf or panther skulked with greater precaution than Dobussy through the brake. Never knowing at what moment bullets or buckshot would swarm at him from ambush, he neglected no resource of common sense, hunting skill, advantage of Dark Corner cover and trackless waters. Purposely he avoided swamp stream and trace thoroughfares. As long as Hatchie and Wamber believed him dead, the more desperate their surprise and excitement would be when they learned the truth.

Isbelle Strake was bright, thataway. She advised him to wait.

When he had quite recovered, though his bruises still showed under the skin, Wing cut through the byways of ditch and bayou to visit the Barstow boys over yonder. Approaching the homestead, Wing made sure from cover that only Barstow boats were at their landing and that there were no fresh tracks of strangers coming across from old Mississip' where passing craft of old-timers landed on occasion to visit the Barstows.

SMOKE curling from the fireplace and cookstove chimneys indicated the boys were at home. Yet to make sure, Dobussy hailed from the brush, and the two brothers came out to look around, answering cautiously.

"Reckon yo're alone?" Dobussy asked. "This is Wing Dobussy."

"Sho' nough, Wing!" Huck called reassuringly. "Aint nobody likely to come by us this early. Not unless off'n the riveh—and they'd be friendly. Come in an' set!"

The visitor climbed the fence blocks. Of course, the careful approach was significant and well understood; and when Wing was inside, his hosts kept watch through the windows and the little port-holes with shutters in the back of the building on both sides of the big brick-lined stick-and-mud fireplace chimney.

The brothers flaxed around preparing dinner. They were plumb glad to see Dobussy. It had been a right smart time since they met him out around. Nevertheless they politely refrained from asking any questions about what might be none of their business. They just passed the time of day in commonplaces.

"I had trouble," Wing volunteered at last. "I met two fellows in back. I'd just killed a deer and I was beefing it. I didn't even have a scabbard gun, and not suspecting anything, I didn't get to throw my belt-knife. Anyhow, they had me covered, a 30-30 carbine and a short .32-gun. One shot me three times with his revolver. Only luck I'm alive!"

"Revolver .32's aint got so much penetration," Buck said.

"Yes—probably short center-fires. I had on a heavy belt that stopped them." Dobussy hesitated. "I don't want to get yo' boys mixed up in anything. That's all there is to it. I aint showing myse'f anywhere except just to you."

"Yo' aint scoutin' from the law!" Clem declared. "Why, yo' got a case ag'in'

them fellers. They shot yo' unarmed, he'pless, mindin' yo' own business! Why, Wing, yo' don't have to run out, not on that account. Go right to Scatterin' Co't! Swear out warrants! Nobody has a right to shoot a man down thataway—not when they got the drop on him!"

"These men make the law!" Dobussy shook his head, choosing his words. "They make court law; they make politics law; and they choose the gun law. I'd never have a chancet at court or politics law, but by God, boys, I fear no man; I'll take my chance in fair play with a .22-caliber meat pistol against any cowardly scoundrel who'd shoot a man down an' leave him to die slow, thinking he had three bullets in his stomach!"

"Us Barstows know how that is," Huck said hoarsely. "We found ouh Pap daid, shot down without a chancet in Gawd's world, bushwhacked. We had ouh suspicions. Hit was a 38-55 bullet. At the same time, not being able to prove hit, we waited till we could know for certain. We neveh cut ouh timber. One feller tried to git hit, for nothin', practically. Pap Barstow wouldn't sell. They was talk of lawin', but I told old Grandpap Hatchie to his face hit was sho' lots of bresh along the Albion Forks an' bayous. He neveh said a word—jes' blinked—an' he neveh done nothin'. Duck Wamber twisted his neck ev'y time they met us, watchful. We always expected they were jes' bein' patient. Course, that's private, Wing. We don't talk when we're goin', where we're goin', or how we're goin'. Like a panther, we neveh go the same way twicet in succession. If we're friendly, we're damned good loyal neighbors. That means yo', Wing Dobussy. Theh's been talk around. I reckon yo'll want somebody to bring in supplies, sometimes; an' theh's always a spare bunk heah, 'gin' yo' need to come out the bresh to rest. We know how 'tis, scoutin' out account of bad friends—we neveh fussed the law, though."

"I'm legal, myse'f." Dobussy shook his head. "I wouldn't ask yo' to go risky on my account—"

"Risk nothin'!" Clem exclaimed. "If'n we like a feller, we'll go right plumb to hell with him. This is ouh fight too!"

THEY ate for an hour or so at squirrel dumplings, talking back and forth, planning and going over details. This was to be real campaigning. Mortal enemies must be met! Whether to kill or get to cover must be decided.

Of course, they were really peaceable. All they wanted was just to be left alone to mind their own business. They hated the desperate need. But men just didn't have to stand for some things, not from anybody. They had to feel, they liked to believe, they were the equal of any possible occasion that might arise.

Wing told his friends all there was to his difficulty. He told how he had been taken at rifle-muzzle and held with shotgun labor in old Grandpap Dolomen Hatchie's moonshine stillhouse stockade for months. He showed the whip-marks left by Duck's lash, laid on with a whip, no matter how faithfully he did his work.

He described how patient he had been, told of his increasing resentment till a mystery shot toppled down his guard and enabled him to escape in the thunderstorm downpour; he had risked his life to swim away in the screen of rain.

"Theh was no chancet of getting anything done by Sheriff, judge or the law about those po'r devils toiling in the swamp with Duck Wamber's whup-lash raising red an' blue welts on their backs." Dobussy spoke harshly. "Nobody'd believe those things. You know that as well or better'n I do, prob'ly."

"Yes, we know. Theh's talk around," the brothers agreed.

"Now old Grandpap's daid, shot down," Huck grinned without mirth. "Those works are all burned and wracked, junked. Looks like sunthin' sure must of happened even if'n law didn't speak up."

"Yas suh," Dobussy said quietly. "Something plenty happened, you're damned well right it did!"

The brothers exchanged glances and then gazed at Wing Dobussy, who sat staring at his plate. They did not disturb his grim revery till with a little start he shook himself out of his trance.

"It's a rough old world, boys!" he sighed, sagging a little. "Seems like a man isn't ever big enough for his job!"

The Barstows nodded. They knew how that was.

CHAPTER XI

WHERE'S THAT MOONSHINE?

WETZEL HATCHIE carried himself as if everything was going according to his ideas. Indeed, when he first took hold of his father's affairs, the estate seemed to be in splendid condition. Tens of thousands of acres were a solid basis

for any man's fortune. In the banks, two in Mendova and in the Scattering Court Bank, were thousands of dollars, expense money. Apparently all Wetzel had to do was hold his own, and keep on absorbing the lands to which his father had laid clandestine or open claims.

THE old families on the Backbone Ridge included the Holstons and the Clinches. A feud had begun between them before the Civil War, and it had waxed and waned all down through the years, difficulties coming every once in a while. Now both families were about wiped out. The women had scattered and children had grown up in ignorance, mostly leaving home to go west into the Great Plains, Texas and the cow-country.

County Clerk Quailen, claiming to be acting on behalf of the People, suddenly came down on the Clinch plantation in order to collect taxes that had been more or less delinquent for twenty or thirty years. The families which still remained, living out around in the houses, even in the quarter cabins, had expected trouble. Wetzel Hatchie circled around and took up quitclaims, paying fifty dollars here, twenty-five dollars there, a hundred dollars in another place.

Tom-Ed Clinch, though, refused to sell, settle or placate. A tall, mouthy and high-spirited man, what he lacked in education, he made up in shrewdness. Time had been when he was quality, but now only the pride remained. His wife was pretty, but dark complexioned; and two men were dead because they had questioned whether she was white.

When Wetzel Hatchie came smiling and explaining, showing by this and that paper, that the Clinches had about reached the end of their rope, Tom-Ed took it up plain and strong.

"I'll be teetotally damned if land-thieves, speculators, and second-generation scouter-moonshiners can run me off my property, that we Clinches've had a hundred and fifty yeahs!" Tom-Ed said.

Wetzel Hatchie never raised his voice, talking. He used only quiet words, which he took from law-books and polite vocabularies. He showed his dignity and magnanimity. Tom-Ed talked aloud and abusive right there in Scattering Court Square, listeners expecting every minute to see Wetzel Hatchie fly off the handle, and finish what Clinch started, but Hatchie slid from under, and let it be known that Tom-Ed was unreliable, ignorant and whisky-foolish.

However, Hatchie went into court the next county term, two weeks later. He presented his claims and put down his documents. He put on witnesses and brought in Bob Ranger, of Mendova, as counsel. Ranger knew lands, laws and human nature, as exemplified by an owned back-county judge and a hand-picked jury.

Tom-Ed Clinch and his relations couldn't see how anyone could actually have any real claim against their property. They'd lived on it all their lives, as had generations of ancestors before them. Just the right of adverse possession, they understood, would protect them. They had a whipper-snapper fellow, Budden Seck, representing them. Seck would take razor-back hog pork, eggs, a side of beef, five-gallon cans of wild honey and so on for his fees, splitting any money that might be in sight. Seck was pretty good at law, but his politics were away off; and as for the rest, he was honest, faithful, and managed to get along somehow. Hatchie hired him to search particularly difficult titles, once in a while—but his reports always told the truth instead of being according to the interests of his clients.

The jury and the court held with County Clerk Quailen's and Wetzel Hatchie's claims. Dolomen Hatchie had acquired quitclaims, papers some of the Clinches never heard of. The Hatchie estate owned more than half the outstanding titles, according to the findings. Then the taxes hadn't been paid—according to the books. The Clinches couldn't find receipts they claimed they'd received. They lost the whole plantation.

Tom-Ed and his relations were stunned. The other members of the family took the verdict honorably, peaceably. They knew it wasn't any use trying to hang on. They couldn't appeal, because they couldn't raise money for the lawyer's expenses going before the Land Court away off yonder, somewhere. If the Clinch case was carried clear up, it might land in the legislature, so what was the use?

BUT Tom-Ed, instead of being merely sick, got mad. He was cold sober when the case was tried. After the jury came in, he went out into the brush and bought a flat quart. This was genuine 30-70 honey and wild-grape distillings, and three dinks of it confirmed Tom-Ed's sober ideas. If a man thinks the same drunk as he does sober, or more so, he is just plumb sure right!

Wetzel Hatchie left the Court Square with Attorney Ranger on the way home where Hatchie was putting on a dinner for the Judge, the foreman of the jury, several professional and commercial men, with Mr. Ranger as the guest of honor.

Tom-Ed Clinch met the two under the yellowing horse-chestnut trees, and his flushed cheeks, his narrowed eyes, the drawing in of his lips, all showed he was sure feeling the verdict.

"Hold on, yo'!" he said. "Fo' once in yo' life, Wetzel Hatchie, yo' got to listen to a plain, clear, honest statement of what yo' are an' what yo' old Pap Dolomen was. I'm tellin' yo'!"

The last of the Clinch family plantation men, the last of the family that had owned land and planted big cotton, talked. His voice was like a lawyer's, and he knew the Hatchies, father and son, who they were in the Dark Corner, and what they did; his tone taunting and his bearing slighting, Tom-Ed let go the hatred, contempt and spite of generations, naming times, places and what's.

HATCHIE stood with one ear turned a little, listening to every word. He never stirred his head; but every once in a while his pale eyes would flicker and dart glances out around. He whitened, and he turned ivory pink—and Tom-Ed never in God's world had had a man he insulted and talked down that attentive, before. It just seemed as though Wetzel Hatchie was taking it. Attorney Ranger stood off at one side, his face expressionless. People all around the square, hearing that loud, snarling, rasping voice, came nearer to listen closer and see everything. They didn't get behind either one of the two men, though. Apparently Hatchie wasn't going to do anything.

Then suddenly he slipped off his waist-belt, a narrow, thick piece of muleskin, and whipped out with it. He had established, by this time, his forbearance, his patience, his peaceableness, his minding his own business. The flat of the strap smacked Tom-Ed, like a twisty snake, curled around the back of his head and sounded like a pistol on his left cheek. Tom-Ed jerked his mouth wide open, it stung so. Then he reached for his hip pocket, and Wetzel Hatchie had his plea of self-defence absolutely established in the eyes of a hundred witnesses—however reluctantly they would testify, considering Tom-Ed's provocation in the way the Court build-up had developed.



Wetzel Hatchie whipped back his coat and slapped the butt of a 32-caliber revolver in its snap-socket shoulder scabbard. He pulled the butt around close to his right shoulder, tightened his grip on the butt, lifted the muzzle and let go, *one-two-three*, the prettiest draw ever seen in Scattering Court Square, fast, graceful and sure! The three bullets hit Tom-Ed in the left breast. A silver dollar actually covered them, later; all three went through Clinch's heart and stopped just under his skin at the back. Lots of people who had thought Wetzel was just a smooth, lawing, show-off changed their minds right then and there!

Come to find out, Tom-Ed didn't have any gun on him. He'd begun to sweat across his brow, and when he went for his hip-pocket, it was to get a red bandanna. This was just Tom-Ed's foolishness, or thoughtlessness. If he'd had a gun, it wouldn't have made any difference. As far as Wetzel Hatchie was concerned, he'd stood right up to a mouthy scoundrel and been cool, collected and calculating. Tom-Ed was a dangerous character. He'd done meanness in his day. Now he got his.

The inquest was put over so as absolutely to conform with the legalities. More than twenty witnesses, the finest, most representative tale of witnesses ever seen in a Scattering Court case, testified to the reaching for the gun when insults had been passed. Tom-Ed's killings, as far as known, were recorded officially.

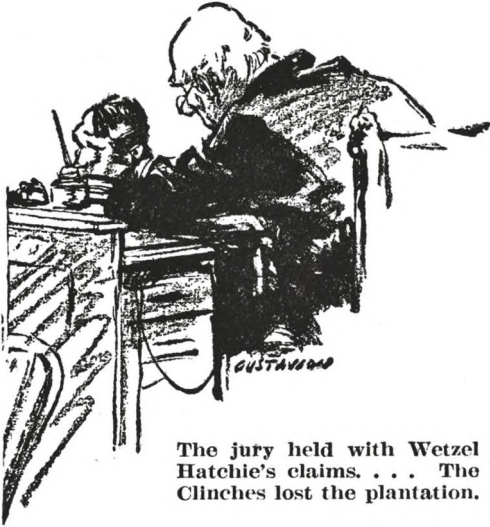
And then Wetzel Hatchie himself testified to his feelings, motives, actions, waiv-

ing the right of immunity; and he seemed shy, talked frankly and expressed regrets that the necessity had driven him to take the life of a fellow-man. "I felt I had to protect myse'f," he explained. He made a very good impression, all things considered.

The coroner's verdict was justifiable homicide, in self-protection without malice. Wetzel turned right around and paid every cent of Tom-Ed's funeral expenses, and though according to the land-verdict, he didn't owe the family a cent, he paid the widow one thousand dollars for her quitclaim, and so the last of the Clinches left Scattering County.

Another thousand dollars went to Attorney Ranger for using his acumen and knowledge in the matter of the lands.

BUSY as he was, lawing and researching, keeping his eyes open for potential disturbers and difficulties, Wetzel Hatchie was surprised, one day, to receive a note from the Mendova Swamp Bank stating that his account was overdrawn by three hundred dollars. The check he gave Attorney Ranger had done this. Hatchie hadn't posted up his check-books lately, having so much on his mind. He didn't have more than house-expenses left in the Scattering Court Bank. When he drew to cover the overdraft, the other bank didn't have money enough to pay the taxes he had underwritten on the Clinch plantation.



The jury held with Wetzel Hatchie's claims. . . . The Clinches lost the plantation.

Looking back through the bank-books of his father, Wetzel Hatchie checked up on the deposits. His father had handled a right smart of money. He had taken in hundreds and thousands of dollars, depositing "Cash." That meant stillhouse dividends. He had put the money back into the land—thousands, tens of thousands of acres.

"You buy land, and you got something to show for investment!" old Dolomen had said. "Keep plenty cash on hand, for emergencies and bargains, and have hit where yo' c'n git hit!"

Wetzel felt as if a coil of rope were tightening on him. Where was the cash old Dolomen Hatchie always kept on hand? Wetzel searched through the mansion that had belonged to Judge Stalcum, knowing there must be a hoard of ready cash hidden somewhere, the moonshine-still surplus! The three banks couldn't have accounted for more than a tithe of the money old Hatchie had taken in, keeping clear of income taxes and knowing what he was about, always having plenty of funds ready at hand.

Wetzel's face drew into hard, bony lines, his small mustache and goatee accentuating the full-blooded red of his lips, set in his tawny features, like old ivory with a flush of pink in his cheeks. His black, deep-sunk eyes stared around him; but whatever he looked at proved to be a mockery, and there was no trace of the lost money, except that Wetzel found here and there hints of thousands, tens of thousands of dollars. "*Gold traded,*" memoranda said. "Yes," they said at the banks, "old Pap was a great hand to bring in a few hundreds or thousands of dollars in paper money and exchange it for hard money—gold."

Pride, if nothing else, would prevent Wetzel Hatchie from letting it be known that he had already run through the cash his father carried around. His bankers knew that he was sure low in his bank reserves, but he had stock in those banks, and the higher-ups were not talkative. Wetzel sent a yellow boy for Wamber.

Wamber came into the library with swamp-bottom mud on his boots.

"We'll have to take up some of that liquor in the stillhouse harbor," Hatchie declared. "Twelve-fifteen barrels. How'll we run it out to market?"

"Why, uh-h—Mist' Hatchie, I neveh run much! I expaict we need a barge fo' that many. Theh's two-three round, mos'ly used fo' towin' shells."

"Well, rig the heavy-duty launch for business—towing—put in grub for a few days." Hatchie scowled. "We'll have to go up the Albion to get into the Skips."

"Yas suh! All right, suh—I dunno 'bout the barge!" Duck squinted. "This Isbelle Strake's got a good'n. Drifted hit, I hearn. Hit'd hold tons of shells—good fo' barrels, too. Hit's got a windlass."

"That's up the West Fork? We'll go up thataway to pick it up!"

THEY were off that late evening. They slept aboard the launch two miles below the Strake eddy soon after sunrise. They hailed, and Isbelle herself came out on the stern deck of her parents' boat.

"Mornin', Miss Isbelle!" Hatchie greeted politely. "You're losing weight. You're working too hard. You need a rest."

"No rest when I'm working." She shrugged. "What do you want?"

Hatchie's geniality slacked. "Is that barge for sale?" he asked.

"I reckon—for a fair price," she answered.

"How much you asking?"

"I'm using it—I don't care to sell it, far as that goes."

"What's it worth, Duck?" Hatchie asked.

"Duck Wamber cain't put a price on any of my things!" she declared. "I've had my experience with him. An' he with me, too!"

"Oh, you peppered him with No. 6's, didn't you!" Wetzel laughed; and Duck glared, remembering how she had run him through the brake, with more than a hundred pellets of lead sunk in him. "But really—set a price, won't you?"

She looked at the Georgia pine scow, thirty feet long, five wide and thirty inches deep, painted on planed lumber inside and out.

"I'll take one hundred and fifty dollars," she announced.

"Why, shucks! I could build it for fifty dollars!" Hatchie exclaimed.

"Well, build it, then!" She shrugged, chuckling, starting to leave the deck to go into the cabinboat.

Hatchie checked her with a "Wait!" and looked at Duck. Duck said it would take a week to get a scow built and painted, and Hatchie said, "We'll take it!" He turned to Duck. "Throw off the line!"

"Hold on, Mist' Hatchie. Yo' aint paid for hit, yet."

"Do you mean to say—" Hatchie was furious.

"Old Pap Dolomen took a thirty-dollar skift off'n us once an' he neveh would pay for it!" she said. "That scow stays tied. I got an outboard motor off'n old Dolomen—for the skift. Yo' pay cash, or keep yo' hands off my prop'ty, Mist' Hatchie!"

"Do you mean to say you don't trust me?" Wetzel Hatchie gasped.

"Not a minute! Not two foot goin'!"

"But—uh-h—I haven't the money with me!" he urged placatingly.

"I've hearn yo' aint got hit anywheres!" she jeered. "Yo're land po'r, they say!"

"I got hit!" Duck unbuckled the flap of his money-belt, and as he counted out one hundred and fifty dollars, Wetzel's face darkened.

WETZEL tossed the roll of currency on the stern deck. Isabelle counted it. Then she threw the mooring-line to Duck and shoved the scow clear with a pike-pole. The two made fast, bow and stern, alongside, and headed up into the Short-cut on their way over to the East Fork. When they glanced back, they saw her leaning against the cabin, with her elbow on the roof, watching.

"She's a good-shaped girl, Duck!" Wetzel grinned. "How come you neglected her, anyhow?"

Wamber grimaced angrily. Wetzel knew well enough what ailed Duck as regarded Isabelle Strake. They went on up the East Fork and into the stillhouse branch. Night had fallen, but Duck knew the channel, light or dark, and they struck through the narrow clear way between the spreads of broadwaters and

patches of lily pads and the pale flowers that glowed in the gloom.

Before them, when they struck the harbor of the Skips, loomed the collapsed ruin of the stillhouse that had given old Dolomen Hatchie his fortune. Now it was a lonely, desolate wreck in solitude. Most of the old stockade had fallen over.

An owl hooted; a swamp wolf called its curse; whispery hisses, sounds they could not identify, bothered them as they stretched the canvas hood over hoops and ate a cold snack by the light of an electric-battery bulb.

"We'll just run a small load for pocket money," Wetzel said.

Duck nodded, saying nothing. Personally, the stillhouse ruins brought him terrible memories. He never had been back since he brought out old Dolomen's body and then showed Wetzel how things were. The ruins didn't look natural. Not for an instant did he let on that he was bothered—Wetzel didn't believe in ghosts. No place in the world had ghostlier feelings than this!

THEY stretched their shock-bags on the bottom board and went to bed, though not to sleep. Duck had his uncomfortable reflections, Wetzel had his of a different nature. They had plenty ideas to figure. They were up before dawn, eating a cold snack breakfast, and by the time they had appeased their slack appetite, the day was dawning swiftly.

"Where's the best liquor sunk?" Wetzel asked.

"Why, I don' know, 'zactly," Duck answered. "First along, it was sunk 'thout no system, just right in the deep water, clost as they could. Them fool labor's piled hit up four-five bar'ls deep, but Gran'pap made 'm scatter hit, jes' one bar'l deep—an' in the pads, suh."

"Then all this close in is good!" Hatchie said. "Old!"

They poled out a few yards and began to prod the bottom. They found sand that the pike-hooks crunched in, the sound coming up the poles. They kept prodding in seven to ten feet or so of water. They found sand, and tangles of roots, and tree-roots over along the bluff reefs along the deep natural ditch.

"Why—why, where's them bar'ls?" Duck exploded, after holding his breath in expectancy that was not realized. "Why, this bottom was jes' paved with bar'ls an' kaigs! Oh—yar's one—"

But that was a sunk gum-log, by the looks of it. Shading their eyes, the two

men searched the bottom through the clear, utterly limpid water. At first they found no place where a barrel had been, even. Then they saw a barrel that had collapsed. They struck broken glass carboys. They looked at each other and then looked back at the stillhouse ruins.

They went to see what had happened to the place. They stood on an unburned timber end. The place had been ransacked. Not a piece of copper was in sight. Even the dump-heap of worn-out copper worms, stills, and special pumps was devastated.

"Why—why, Mist' Hatchie, hit's been junked!" Duck Wamber's voice rose in hollow astonishment and pain.

"And—and the liquor high-jacked?" Hatchie cried. "By God—I don't have to stand being robbed this way, Duck Wamber! You talk—*right!*"

Duck's red little cabbage of a face yellowed. He talked. Wetzel hadn't had Duck out of his sight more than an hour or two at any time, any more than old Dolomen had ever lost track of him. No, Duck hadn't personally robbed the sunken cache. Hatchie collapsed for a while, shaken and at loss. They went and looked over the bottom of the old stillhouse harbor, and they found five barrels, two kegs, several five-gallon glass carboys.

"It'll—it'll make pocket money!" Wetzel spoke weakly.

"But Mist' Hatchie, I watched bar'ls dumped into this year water fo' years an' years!" Duck protested. "Grandpap always said theh's a millyum dollars laid by in yeah!"

"Damned pirates! Dirty rat crooks! Steal anything they c'n lay their hands on!" Hatchie's voice was shrill and hollow, like a defeated bull's. "They robbed me—they stole my property! By God, I won't wait for the law to catch up with them. I'll—"

"Yo' cain't go to law, Mist' Hatchie! Hit's illegal!" Duck gasped.

HATCHIE stiffened, blinked, started to speak—swallowed instead.

"Don't I know!" he suddenly snarled, outraged. "I'm a lawyer. But these damned poor white Swamp Angels—bleeding me! My God, Duck—I've got to get that liquor-money. Why, I'll lose my land! I'm strapped—I can't pay taxes! Where'd that damned old fool Dolomen Hatchie hide his money? Where is it, Duck? You must know—some-

thing! You were always with him! Where'd he go? Why in hell didn't he tell me where 'tis? Where'd he cache it?"

"He never took me with him—I 'member he said he'd neveh tell till he was on his deathbed—an'—an' knowed hit!" Wamber shook his head.

"And he got himself killed up!" Hatchie gasped.

Just when he came into the Hatchie estate, everything going so good, there he was up against it!

"Yo' never told me the liquor was cached here!" he snarled at Wamber. "A million dollars cached—you covered up on me! By God, I b'lieve—"

"Now, now, Mist' Hatchie! I—I was too busy! If'n I'd thought—" Duck urged, in panic pleading. The glare of Wetzel Hatchie grew dull with helpless suspicion, but nothing could be proved.

EXHAUSTED, they dozed awhile, then headed down the Albion in the night, going to Mendova to sell what little liquor they had salvaged. They stopped over the day at Scattering Court. The next night they tripped down, and in the morning, which was dull and foggy, they steered into the rank Fox River, Duck heading for the confidential landing at the old brick warehouse long associated with night-time and foggy weather Mississippi River transporting business.

Duck started up the trail to the office, and a man came down to see about buying the stuff.

"Hatchie 'shine, eh?" he said. "Old barrels. Um-m. Market fo' old-line liquor's purty well stocked up. Lots been coming in lately. But I'll take hit. I'd know those old bar'ls an' kaigs Dolomen Hatchie used—"

He counted the price down to Wetzel. Wetzel felt a lot better. Men came down with a dray to load the liquor. And then suddenly dim figures swarmed into view in the gray mist.

"Up, you—all of you!" an order snapped. "Federal officers!"

The buyer and seller and hired help jumped—all obeyed.

"You're under arrest—liquor charges!" an exultant voice exclaimed. "I reckon we got yo' all daid to rights, sho' nuff!"

The raiding leader looked over the old-time containers.

"Hue-e!" he yelled. "Now, tha's sunthin' like! We s'picioned that old Hatchie liquor'd be gittin' down to market. Hi-i! Hyar 'tis!"

"Swamp Angel" comes to its climax in our forthcoming July issue.

GOLDBERGER

A spirited drama of men and their work, by the author of "Flame in the Forest."

By
**HAROLD
TITUS**

WHEN Art Ramsay went whooping across the city after ten o'clock that night, he didn't take chances with traffic cops just because he was a job-shop man on a "breakdown call." Not much! He wasn't even a job-shop man, really. Anyhow, he wouldn't be after eight in the morning, when the Trust Company was going to check the bank balance of Scolt Tool & Metal Works—where Art had gone from apprentice to manager—and take the keys and hand them over to some other dude.

He drove hellety-larrup, because the call had come from Hiram Winslow Hume, purchasing agent at Clyde-Barst Truck. The Trust Company was letting him out because of Hume's double-crossing. And this was his chance to tell it to Hume with all the trimmings.

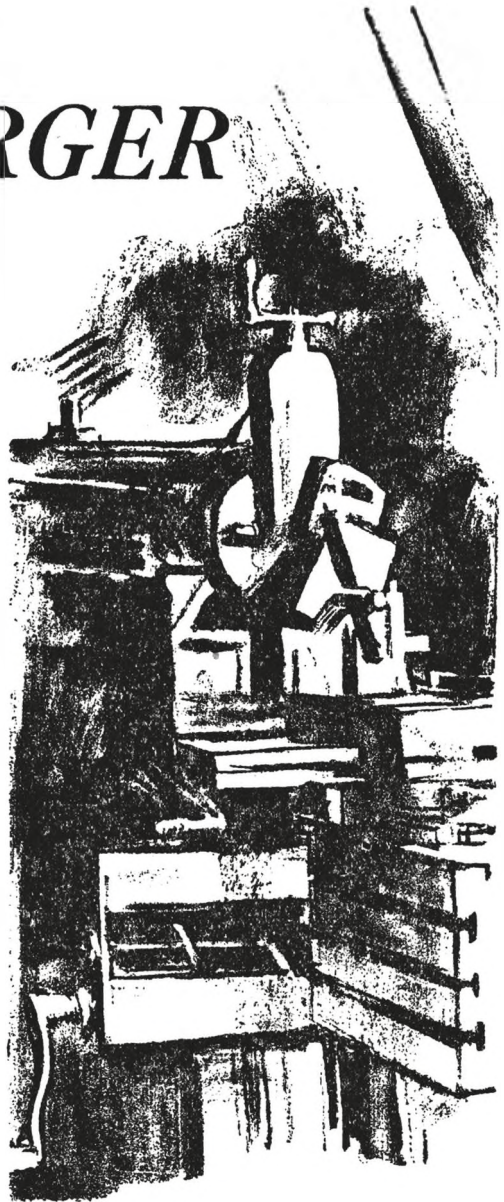
As he smashed speed limits and ran red lights, he rehearsed, sort of:

"Nuts to you, Hume!" he said through his teeth, trying to sound tough, when there wasn't a tough hair in his head. "I wouldn't lift a hand for you if you crawled on your belly!" he said, but that didn't sound so good.

"Go take a dive off the bridge, Hume," he said, trying again. "I hope your swell new plant rusts down before any job-shop in town comes through," he said. And that went flat, too.

For he wasn't so handy with words. He could handle lathes and shapers and milling-machines and presses like nobody's business—but with words he wasn't so hot.

But after he'd listened to Hume a few minutes, and put two and two together to make six or seven, he was glad he hadn't



known how to pin a man's ears back. Plenty glad, because he saw that if he held everything, this was maybe a chance to get an eye for an eye, or anyhow a job for a job, and what could be sweeter?

Sweat on Hume's hard, blue jaw had first given Art the hunch this might be something besides another breakdown. Hume sat at his desk wearing his tuxedo and the sweat popped out in little beads. He sat behind his three telephones and tried to be as tough and insulting as ever and didn't put it over. In a corner, understand? Scared stiff, see? Like a fighter with his guard dropping and his chin coming out.

And while Art pretended to listen to the trouble that had pulled Hume away from



They didn't think it could be done, but they were trying their best, anyhow.

some ritzy shindig, his mind went in high trying to figure out just why the bozo was that way.

"This damned bumper press has given us trouble from the start," Hume said. "Been a case of building up a bank and then tearing the whole press down ever since we got into production," he said, and his nails showed white as he twisted one of the phone cords.

"Had to get going again, and left the stripper off temporarily," he said. "So these fatheads on the bobtail shift tonight didn't notice that a formed bumper stuck to the punch, and rode it up. The whistle blew; they went to lunch, and thirty minutes later slipped in another blank," he said, and his hand trembled.

"Away she goes—die, gears, shaft and all!"

"I see," said Art, commencing to get a hazy idea.

"The die's gone," said Hume. "It's beyond any repair," he said, like anybody hard up against it will repeat the same thing over and over. "It'll take anyhow two weeks to get another, and we'll want our bumpers formed outside."

"I get it," said Art, trying to keep his face dead-pan, because Hume's eyes were hiding something, holding back something that was evidently a lot more important than a smashed die—and they were having a time of it.

"We'll have to get going," Hume said. "There's no time to lose."

Art shot a look at the blueprint on Hume's desk—of a big, heavy, channel-type bumper with a radius on the ends.

"How much time?" he said, trying not to show how excited he was by what he'd commenced to guess.

Hume didn't move, but when he answered, it was as if he strained forward.

"Deliveries'll have to start no later than eight," he said.

Art stopped the words at his teeth. "Eight o'clock?" he'd almost yelled, the way a man will when asked to do the impossible. But he didn't. He just cleared his throat instead.

"Well, that's a job of work," he managed to say, easy-like, and he pulled the blueprint around as if he was still running a job-shop and ready to get going.

And Hume kept giving him more to sift and add. He talked a streak, but after a minute or two Art wasn't fooled. After just a minute or two Art got down through that mess of words and understood what was eating on Hume. He talked about the job he wanted Art to do, but his mind was right on his *own* job and no place else. Everything he said about what had to be done for Clyde tied in with what had to be done for *him*.

Art breathed easier when that came clear. Clyde-Barst Truck, just into production, didn't have a bank of bumpers big enough to wad a gun. Oh, maybe they could start another shift; maybe run a few hours. But the end was in sight, and unless they got supplied, they'd be up a deep creek without a paddle. You don't store big trucks, and you don't deliver incomplete. Not in these days!

WHEN Art got that clear, the rest unraveled easy enough. These big plants get heavy-footed. Maybe Clyde-Barst had men in Maintenance and Tool Engineering who could make a fair stab at cutting this mustard. Just a fair stab, because they get used to gearing in with other men and departments. But in a big outfit they'd never have a chance. Too much paper work; too many studies and estimates and okays and carbon copies and requisitions in the way.

So everybody all down the line had an out, see, until they came to Hume, the purchasing agent. Top-side had hung the trouble right around Hume's neck and gone home to bed, and Hume must have bumpers in sight by morning—or else. That's what Art added up.

His mouth got a little dry. For weeks he'd been carrying a hunk of ice under his

heart, because his job was slipping. His job had slipped because of Hume's dirty billiards. Now it was his turn!

Mild little guy, Art. Light-haired, blue-eyed; voice low and gentle. But now, inside, he went native. He had Hume in his hands. He wanted to hold him there. Wanted to squeeze and make him suffer.

LOT of job-shops in the city, like in any other industrial town, see? Maybe a dozen that specialized, among other things, in pressed-metal operations. Maybe a half—maybe only a third—of these could make a fair to good try at turning around on a baby like this in time. But of them all, Scolt Tool & Metal was the one best bet.

That was why Hume had had the brass to call Art, after pouring it into him for months. Desperate, see? And if Art was going to get in a haymaker, he'd have to play his cards right. He couldn't let Hume suspect that by the time Clyde had to have those bumpers, he'd be walking out of the Scolt shop for the last time. That he was as good as washed up right now. If Hume guessed that, he'd be trying some other place and whoever he turned to, might scratch through and save his hide for him.

But if Art took all the time there was, if he stalled and kept Hume in his hands—why, then he could start looking up another job for himself with the satisfaction of knowing that the skids were nicely greased for Mr. Hume. . . .

"So it's a sweet piece of business for some Goldberger," Hume said, "if you've got what it takes."

That was more like the jeering, scornful Hume. He'd got hold of himself again. Art leaned closer to the blueprint to hide his flush. Being called a Goldberger by Hume stung him. He didn't want to show that, because of the way one thing leads to another. . . .

Now, *Goldberger's* a good word in its place. It means, in the job-shops, a way of doing things that's never been tried before. You have something to do and no tools or dies to do it with. You have, maybe, just a sample of the piece to be turned out and your experience and imagination; you start to town from there.

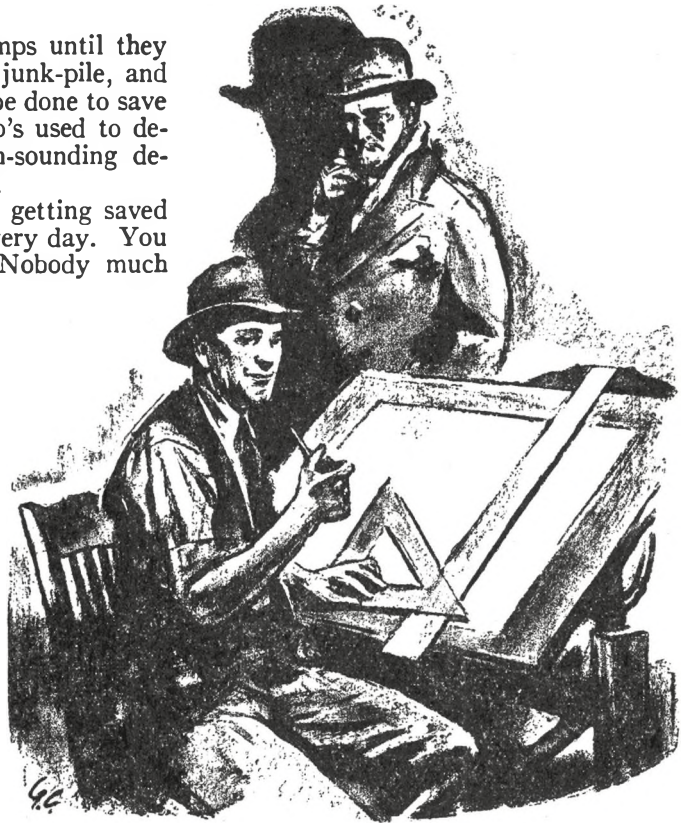
You rig up a contraption that may look like these cartoons of self-baiting mouse-traps and what-not that Rube Goldberg used to draw. You'll use blocks of cold rolled and chunks of wood and railroad iron and shimming material, and hold

them together with C-clamps until they look like a disaster to a junk-pile, and you get done what has to be done to save the goat of somebody who's used to depending on a lot of high-sounding departments and fancy help.

Why, some big plant is getting saved by a Goldberger almost every day. You never hear about that. Nobody much

While he roughed the layout, he was thinking how Hume would sweat blood when he found out.

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon



realizes that. But the little guys in alley shops make their living pulling chestnuts out of the fire for the ones who get pieces written about them.

Still, to hear Hume, you'd think when he gave a job-shop work he was tossing a dime to a panhandler. That was his way of getting the low figure: to make folks feel like scum or dirt. That's why he had three telephones: to make salesmen think he was Mussolini or something. That's why so many guys hated sight of him.

He hadn't bothered Art at first, because he'd never bothered old man Scolt. Scolt was an old-line mechanic, sure of himself, proud of his work, making a religion of resourcefulness, and he'd brought Art up that way, too.

"Most boys want the showy jobs these days," he'd told Art in the beginning. "They like limelight," he'd said, "and the limelight is on mass production. But I don't know," he'd said and twisted his head in that doubtful way. "I don't know what we'll come to, if we narrow too many of our folks down too far!

"I'm afraid," he said, "that we may get too dependent on blueprints for living as well as making a living," he'd said, and looked far off through the grimy shop window. "If we're going to stay strong,"

he'd said, "we need a supply of boys who don't have to have everything—jobs as well as lives—laid out for them. Maybe that won't make sense, son," he'd said. "And again, maybe you'll think it does when you're older."

MAYBE Art never got all the angles to old man Scolt's religion, but by the time Scolt was laid up, and Art, who'd got to be foreman, went in as manager, he was thinking and acting pretty much on that pattern.

Art had been getting along since Scolt died. No praise from the Trust Company, understand; but Trust Companies seem to be that way. If they just don't squawk, everything's jake. Each month he took the report down to Connolly, one of the vice presidents, and Connolly looked it over and didn't kick and gave Art what he asked for.

But one day Art called Clyde-Barst Truck to ask about some specifications that had come over, and Hume's secretary told Art to hang on because Hume was talking on another line. He was talking into another of those three telephones. He was talking to Kline, another job-shop man, and Art could hear every word.

Hume was peeling Kline's hide.

"When I want something done," he said, "I go to Scott Tool & Metal. They don't give excuses," he said, "they deliver the goods."

He said a lot more, and none of it meant anything to Art except that Hume was trying to make Kline eat out of his hand. Just his line, see? But when Hume finally picked up the other phone and said, "Hello," and Art said, "This is Ramsay," it was as if somebody had opened a door. He felt a cold draft, I mean.

He got his question answered and didn't think about that draft again until he tried to deliver the work he'd been asking about. It was a fixture job, and it represented a lot of material and labor, but Hume wouldn't accept.

"What's wrong?" Art asked him, plenty worried.

"Wrong?" yelled Hume. "There's so much wrong there's no place to start talking," he yelled. "You get your truck over here and cart this junk back to your alley or wherever it is you do your Goldberging, and don't try to deliver until it's *right!* Get me?"

Well, Art got the stuff back, and he and MacIver, his foreman, went over it and found everything up to the line. But Hume wouldn't listen to that, and the upshot was that he put a lot of mileage on his truck lugging those fixtures back and forth, and had the shop spend days working over them; and when Hume finally accepted, just as they'd been in the first place, Art's profits had run into a loss.

THE old sandpaper going on, see? Hume pouring it into Art just because Art had heard him telling somebody else he was good. Next, he turned back an experimental truck-frame and rejected other jobs, and then wouldn't even see Art.

It turned black to red. Connolly commenced to fuss. Things went even worse for the shop. You can't pick off new business every day when things are tough. Skip the agony, though. That afternoon Connolly had planned to meet Art for the last time, but he'd been delayed, and phoned Art to meet him first thing in the morning, and Art had said he would, trying to keep the heartbreak out of his voice, and that was that.

He lived over all this in just a second or two after Hume made his crack about Goldbergers. . . . Goldberger, was he? In that tone of voice, was he? Well, he'd never tried to Goldberg a brass hat out of



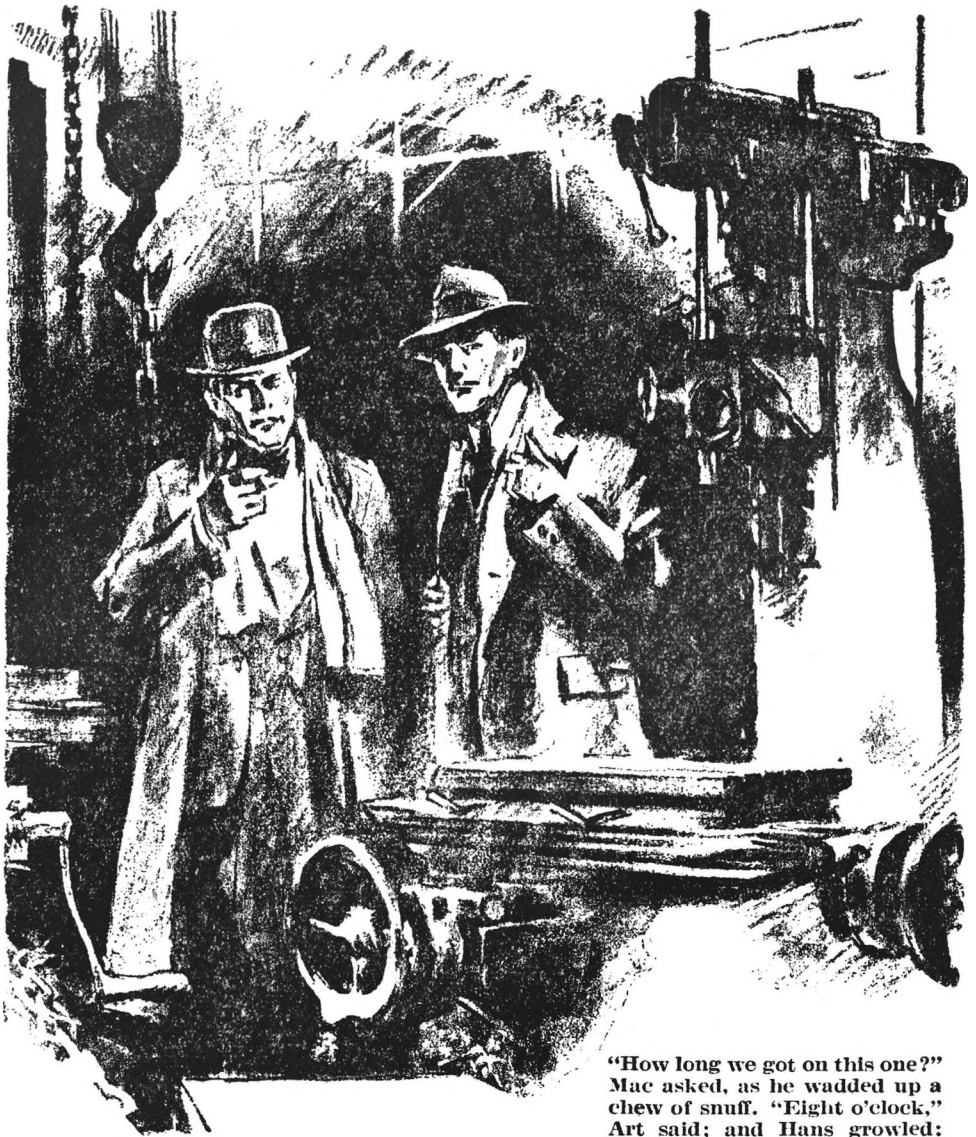
his job before—but he certainly could give it a try!

Nobody except the Trust Company and his wife knew he was out. Why, he hadn't even told his wife until that night—because, even if he was past thirty, a lump got in his throat when he tried to.

He commenced to feel good, like maybe an Indian did when he figured out a new scheme of torture.

"Okay," he said, trying to keep shakes out of his voice. "I'll need a drawing-board, first."

"Right down the hall!" Hume said and grinned. He grinned like a kid who's just over a scare. "We'll get going!" he said and Art had the hunch he hadn't been quite sure of himself until then. "And I'll go along and see how you get started," he said—and that was like a kick in the stomach for Art.



"How long we got on this one?" Mac asked, as he wadded up a chew of snuff. "Eight o'clock," Art said; and Hans growled: "Have a heart, boss!"

He had to patch up his Goldberging act in a hurry. If Hume was going to hang around it couldn't be only a stall. He'd have to make a start on the job. Well, he had the shop keys, didn't he? He'd never put on a show before, but maybe he could. He'd done a lot of things that nobody had ever tried. He'd start off as if he was going through with it.

"First, though, I'll have to phone," he said and fished out his book of telephone numbers any job-shop man carries with him because you never can tell when somebody's going to yell for help.

He got a steel salesman out of bed, ordering a bill of material with his eyes on the blueprint just as if he meant it.

"I'll be at your place in thirty minutes," he said. "Have your torch-cut-

ter there and be there yourself," he said and hung up and dialed MacIver's number.

"Mac, little break-down job for Clyde," he said. "I'll leave the blueprint at the shop and you can get at the templets. I'm having dummy dies torched out at LaSalle Steel. You'll need two shaper men to start and better have Ray bring the pick-up to LaSalle in an hour."

He talked fast. He didn't snap. But he talked fast and the way he talked made Hume relax a little more: Man jumping into a job!

Art got up, dragging the blueprint with him.

"Where's that drawing-board?" he said, his heart going good and hard because he'd never tried anything like this

before. "And you better get blanks ordered over to the shop while I make this lay-out," he said and got a lot of satisfaction at seeing the hope come up and up in Hume's eyes.

But it was something else when he got at the drawing-board. I mean, there sat something he'd have liked to try and no mistake. Walloping old bumper—eighth-inch steel, with an inch flange on each edge and that radius on each end. Clyde had formed it all in one operation, of course; shot the blank into the press, slapped the switch-buttons and before the operator could spit you had a bumper. . . . After three weeks of making and setting the die, understand?

A job-shop, though, wouldn't have any three weeks. It would have less than eight hours. It would have to turn one flange at a time in a power break; then it would take that channel section and form first one end radius and then the other on a die that was now only a block of steel in some dark warehouse.

One of those challenges Art ate up, if you get me. A job he'd have liked to wrestle with. But he wasn't going to try it. He was just going to make a bluff at starting and quit cold the minute Hume left and never know whether he could have delivered the goods or not.

"Hell with it!" he whispered and while he roughed the lay-out, he was thinking how Hume would burn up the telephones and sweat blood when he found out one of his pet worms had turned. Yes, and how Hume would look when top-side wanted to know how come he hadn't gotten bumpers.

Hume was walking up and down behind him by then. He had his overcoat and hat on and kept snapping his thumbs. He kept it up until Art was finished and they went out to Art's car together.

THEY didn't talk, going across town. Hume smoked cigarettes too fast. And Art's mind was full of dies. He kept thinking just how he'd plan that die if the job were for somebody else—if he intended to try to get away with it. Any monkey can form a flat piece of steel, understand, but putting an eight-inch radius in that channel section and not having it wrinkle was something else again. He thought back to a dozen other jobs he'd gotten away with, and picked out his mistakes and those he'd almost made—and by the time he pulled up at the shop he was seeing that dummy die in detail, in his mind's eye.

"Want to wait here?" he asked Hume. "Mac hasn't made it, but he'll be along pretty soon."

"No. I'll go to LaSalle with you," Hume said.

Art unlocked the office door. "All right," he growled. "You'll see something, my lad. Goldbergers, is it? Okay, then!"

JENSEN, the steel salesman, was waiting in his office when they got there. "Hi, Art," he said and gave Hume a look and then another quick one, as if he couldn't believe the first.

"Oh, hullo, Mr. Hume," he said and his voice was different. Almost like the words tasted bad. He'd had to do business with Hume, too.

"Boys've got the first piece on the table," he said. "Let's have a look."

He unrolled the lay-out as he led them into the warehouse. A big, high and wide cavern, that. Row of lights down the middle throwing shadows back into the orderly piles of shapes on each side and up beyond the big bridge crane overhead. One light hung low over the table where the cutter was fussing with his torch.

Generally, Art got a kick out of a place like that at a time like that. Rest of the town asleep; three-four guys dragged out of bed going to bat for somebody in trouble; strutting their stuff so other dudes wouldn't be laid off, come morning. But tonight his nostrils stung—no telling when he'd be at it again. In earnest, that is; not just staging a show.

The cutter looked at Hume's dress shirt and bit down on his chew.

"When d'you think you're goin' to get a swing on this one?" he asked Art, smoothing the lay-out.

"Eight o'clock."

"Nuts!" said the cutter and Hume's hand, taking a cigarette up to his mouth stopped with a jerk. "Not even you, kid," he said and grinned at Art, lighting his torch.

The flame went from blue to orange and moved over to the steel and sparks fanned out. The block commenced to glow under it; turned cherry red below the torch. The flame bit down, sinking slowly into the metal at first, then going through the whole ten inches like a knife through cheese.

"Eight o'clock!" the cutter said as he commenced to send his flame creeping along. "Hot dickety!" he said.

Art tipped his head back for Jensen.

"Charge this to me—personal," he said.

Jensen scowled. "What's the idea?"

"Nev' mind. I'll add it up someday," Art said and Jensen shrugged.

"Have it your own way," he said and looked at Hume watching the cutter work and his lips moved. He'd said "Louse!" under his breath.

Art wasn't going to make the shop pay the shot, see? He'd pay his boys, too. It would be worth ten times any cost to take Hume out on the streets with him. Still, he wondered how long Hume would stick around. Not because it was going to cost him money, understand, but because he wasn't so sure how long he could keep a show like that going and fool everybody. . . .

It was twelve-thirty before the roughed-out die was off the table and the crane hook came swinging the piece that would get to be a punch in its place.

Ray, the pick-up driver, had reached there by then. He came in with his shoulders hunched and his hands in his pants pockets. His eyes were red and he yawned as he looked at the lay-out. The cutter said something to him and laughed and Ray looked at Art, sort of open-mouthed.

"Eight!" he said. "That'll be goin' some!"

Art didn't answer. He didn't let on he'd heard. He turned and walked away, all stirred up inside. Right up his street, understand. Tackling the things other dudes thought couldn't be done had always been his meat, see? And this time he didn't mean it. He wasn't boring in to a job of work; he was just playing a game. Made him a little sick.

They watched the punch burned out and started back to the shop. When they walked in Hume snapped out his wrist and looked at his watch and said:

"Ten after one!"

He said it like he expected Art to say something. But Art didn't. He was thinking this was the last time he'd ever come into that shop in the middle of the night. He was thinking it was like being evicted from the house you've grown up in. He was thinking it would take him years to get as hot about any other place as he'd been about this.

OLD Mac was just finishing with the nibbler on a templet. Hans and Harry, the shaper men he'd routed out, were watching him. They looked at Hume and gawped a little. You don't see a tuxedo very often in a job-shop.

"How long we got on this one?" Mac asked, as he wadded up a chew of snuff.

"Eight o'clock," Art said.

Old Mac's head kind of jerked forward.

"Which eight?" he said and his gray eyes crinkled.

"Holy old baldy!" Hans growled.

"Have a heart, boss!"

"Well, there's the doctor," Art said, tilting his head back to where Hume had stopped and it helped him a little to kind of feel Hume tightening up again; getting scared again. Everybody was certain what Hume had to have done couldn't be done and those doubts likely were like knives being stuck in and twisted.

SURE, he wanted Hume to suffer: that was the big idea. But he didn't get much satisfaction out of it right then because he was doing a little suffering of his own. Remembering things: about old man Scolt and how sort of tranquil he always was; about the lift he used to get when he got the hang of some machine or metal; about the other kids he'd taught things to and how they'd worked their heads off for him.

He walked down to the long bench under the windows where so many tough jobs had been licked. He stopped in the up-and-down shadows of belting by the shapers. Hans and Harry had the vises off and were ready to go. He laid a hand on a shaper almost like you might do, on somebody's shoulder. Something about the feel of a cold machine that warms a man—when he's grown up with tools, I mean, and got to liking them.

"Hell with it!" he said. He couldn't go soft when what he had to do called for being hard as cold-rolled. . . .

The back door swung open.

"Come and git 'em!" Ray yelled from out there, and Harry went loping back to the presses for a truck and they eased the roughed-out pieces down from the pick-up and rolled them to the shapers at a trot and all got around and lifted that three-hundred-pounds-and-better of die to the base.

The way they leaned into it got Art's goat a little. They didn't think what he'd told them had to be done could be done, but they were trying their best, anyhow. When they found out it was only a stall they'd say it was all right, of course; but at that it was kind of a dirty business for a mechanic's skill.

"Hell with it!" he said again and looked at Hume to get hold of himself.

A cigarette smoldered in Hume's hand. He stood, bent over a little and almost rigid, watching those boys. They had his job in their hands, remember.

Hans got going first, squaring up the die bottom. Generally, getting under way on a rush job, the slap of belts and the grunt of shapers sort of soothed Art. They didn't tonight. He was all churning inside and tight across the middle.

Nothing he could do if he wanted to, see? Boss in a production-plant can stand over his men and drive them. You can't do that in a job-shop. Your men are different or they wouldn't be there. Dependable, I mean, and more than that. Sort of an understanding that when you tell a man to do this or that you trust him to do it.

Art commenced to stew because Hume didn't leave. He commenced to sweat, wishing he would leave so he could come clean with the boys and stop this monkey business.

BUT Hume wasn't going to leave. He wasn't going to leave at all. Art found that out when the truck came over from Clyde with the bumper blanks.

"All right, then, you can sleep in the cab," Art heard Hume say to the driver. "But stay here. I'll be here all night," he said and that was something else for Art to get steamed up over.

He went out to his desk and tried to figure it out. Other nights, with things started, he'd gone to his desk and sat down and waited for something to go wrong; sat there sometimes for hours, expecting everything to go to hell in a heap.

He didn't want anything to go wrong tonight. He wanted Hume to know he'd been let down on purpose. He wanted Hume to know that he could have been pulled out of the jam he was in by this shop if he'd only acted like a white man in the past. He wanted—

He lit his pipe with a shaking hand and went on from there. Goldberged it through from there. He commenced to grin when he saw it opening up. Commenced to grin like maybe a redskin used to when he got ideas.

Those boys out there didn't think it could be done but, so help him, Art *did*. He had the die material and he'd have bet his shirt it would work; or could be made to work. And he knew those boys better than they knew themselves. Why, when Scolt was sick he'd gotten old Mac off the booze and let him be the me-

chanic he could be, sober. He'd taken Hans in on a wild shot; sloppy workman, Hans; a give-a-damn machinist. But Art had hyped him up, made him respect himself; made him a lead-off man anywhere. And he'd taught young Harry about all he knew. Yes, they had what a job like this took.

They'd turn it out, they would. They'd get the die smoothed up and barbered. They'd get it set. Making channel sections would be simple. He'd call men for the break before long, now. They'd get ready to try one out along about seven, if luck stayed with them. They'd shove the blank in. He'd give her a kick with the old press himself. They'd take it out and give it a look and Hume would be right in among them to see how it gauged.

Sure, Hume would be there! Art sat up straighter in his chair and tossed his pipe to the desk. Hume would be there and see that bumper formed right up to the line. Then it would be his turn.

"Whoa!" he'd say. "Hold it!" he'd say, and they'd all look up at him sort of surprised.

"This is as far as we go," he'd say to Hume. "This is the end of the line," he'd say, and Hume would gawp.

"Got a good memory, Hume?" he'd say. "Recall the day you crossed me up on that fixture job?" he'd say. "And do you remember the truck-frame you rejected just to rub it in?" he'd say.

Oh, that would be good! That would be fine! He rubbed his hands on his pants-legs so hard his chair squeaked.

"Well, I don't happen to work here any more," he'd say. "They threw me into the street on account of you," he'd say.

"The time these boys have put in tonight is on me," he'd say. "I paid for this steel and torching out these dummies myself," he'd say and maybe reach for a cold chisel. "I'm going to make junk of it now," he'd say, "and scrap your job," he'd say, "and from now—"

He broke off saying what he'd say and put in calls for the two more men he'd need. Then he sent Ray over on Mack for a pail of coffee from a quick-and-dirty and got out there where he'd always lived, if you get me.

THEY were just finishing squaring up the bottoms. Mac was checking the templets for the last time with his trams. Art gave a hand turning the die on the shaper base and watched like a coach must watch a football team while Mac



"Eight o'clock!" the cutter said as he sent the flame creeping along. "Hot dickety!"

scribed the steel around the templet and Hans got cutting again.

Steel shavings crunched under Art's shoes and he lifted one foot and pulled out a chip. His wife always raised the devil when he scratched the bathroom floor. Well, maybe she wouldn't have a chance to razz him about that for a while. She was taking it hard and—

He canned that. He was going to form metal, now. Sobbing was out. He called Mac over and showed him the side plates for the die and explained his idea of how that section would form and Mac nodded and said it ought to work.

"If we can figure the spring-back," Mac said.

"Which I'm taking up with Harry right now," Art said. "Going to put a little angle in that punch," he said, drawing with his pencil on a surface plate. "About so. See? Then we can shim the die if we have to and kick her up to line."

Mac chuckled.

"That's copperin' all bets!" he said—and Art felt proud.

He put Mac tearing a Goldberg out of the big hydraulic press. He went back to the break himself, carrying the blueprint to get ready for the boys coming on pretty soon. His last job, maybe, but he was going to drain it of all the kick it had.

IT was two o'clock before Harry got smoothing up the punch. It was two-thirty when the other men showed up. At three Art was satisfied the flanging was as simple and easy as he'd figured and he started a fire in the forge and set the coffee-pail there to warm.

Hume came back. It was a bet he wanted to say something but didn't know what to say. He drank coffee out of a paper cup and dribbled some on his shirt-front. He talked a little about nothing much, though.

"Well, how does it look to you?" he asked, finally. Hated to ask it, likely; hated to let on he wasn't sure himself.

"All right, so far," Art said. "You never can tell when something'll go wrong, though," he said and went over to the press, figuring that wouldn't make Hume feel any easier.

Hans' shaper commenced to hog it. He had to stop and make a change.

Four o'clock—and Harry sung out for Art.

"Look her over," he said and Art did and found a couple of high spots and got a grinder and barbered it a little himself and there was the punch, anyhow, ready to be drilled.

Quarter to five before they were drilling and tapping for the base- and side-plates on the die, though. Quarter to five, with Hume like an animal in a zoo cage. Walking, I mean. Up and down; up and back; turning on his heel, lighting one cigarette from another.

You could hear trucks going by outside by then. Town stirring in its sleep. Getting ready for another day. In two hours bumpers should be starting across town.

The punch was ready. They lugged it across to the old press and Art began to set it on the ram himself. His hands weren't any too steady. His wrench went *rat-tat-tat-tat* every now and then against metal. That wasn't from too much coffee. That wasn't from being tired, either. He wasn't tired at all. He was all hyped up. He was cutting this buck—if he'd been right about spring-back—and was going to swing on Hume before very long, now. Double satisfaction!

WHOLE night gone. Whole night up the spout, down a rat-hole. Why, Hume likely couldn't get bumpers in twenty-four hours any other place. Maybe not even then. Oh, it was going to be good. It was going to be—

"All right, lads!" Art said. "Let's all get on this die. She's a brute and we're all tired," he said.

He could see Hume shuffling along beside him as if he, too, helped lug a load. Well, he was lugging a load, all right, all right. More of a load than he knew. A load that was going to get him down now any minute. Any old minute!

Then ran extension-lights in for Art and he leaned in on the bed. Had a lot of stuff there to box that die in. To use for gauges, understand, to hold the blank

in place while it rode up to the punch. He'd planned that during the night, too, but it took time to set it up. You don't Goldberg in a hurry.

SOMETHING different about the place when he finally backed out and stood up and stretched his back. Corners were nearer, windows were different. That was daylight coming. Hume was looking at his watch.

"What time?" Art asked, and wanted to laugh.

"Five to seven," Hume said and sort of choked.

"All right. Let's go," Art said and his voice wasn't quite right, either. In a minute, now, he'd know how well he'd done one of his jobs.

Old Mac brought over a flanged blank and set one end against the gauges. Art spun the control-wheel and she started to talk.

Old, old press; bed a little loose; pump-shafts clattered plenty. Out at Clyde-Barst Truck or any production-shop they'd have hooted at it. But Art knew it the way a musician knows his fiddle.

Up she went, with seven hundred fifty tons of pressure in her guts. The section stirred in Mac's hands; sort of vibrated. Art flipped the wheel and escaping oil gurgled out and the bed fell away and there it was, with one end formed.

The boys came into a huddle over it. Not a wrinkle; smooth as satin; but before anybody could say anything old Mac clapped a templet on the radius.

"Oh-oh!" somebody said—and Hume made something like a whimper.

"Hell's bells!" somebody else growled and spit and you heard it spatter.

"Off five-sixteenths," growled Mac. "You'd figure—"

"It'll have to be to the line!" cut in Hume. His voice cracked and he drew in breath so you could hear it. "We've got a tolerance of a thirty-second!" he said. "Inspection won't pass it!" he said. "They'll reject— Why, you damned Gold—"

He sort of choked up, then. Everybody looked at him. Nobody spoke. Big shot going to pieces, see? Brass hat kind of hysterical.

"Hold it," said Art, looking hard at Hume, but that wasn't starting the speech he'd planned. "Hold it," he said. "You've only seen the first act.

"Hans! Some fiber shimming stuff!" he said. "We'll try a quarter-inch and see what a harder kick'll do."

You can't always tell what steel will do, understand? It won't always act the same way. Art had figured on that; given himself an out. Maybe. Remember: you never can tell.

They got the shimming material with Hume standing so close he got in the way. Mac did the cutting and his hands shook. Excited. He'd worked all night on a hard one and couldn't tell how they'd made out. You can't tell about steel.

They could hear traffic by then. Guys going to work. Guys heading for Clyde Truck, maybe: Art swallowed when he thought of that.

The shims went in on the die. Mac picked up another section. The press commenced to rattle. No die true to a thousandth as you'd find in a big shop; keep that in mind. Dummy die; made in the night. Dummy die shimmed up. And no man operating the press who had only to slap a button and watch her operate. Man there who knew the old baby, who knew the sound and the feel of her like you'll know your own kid.

Art's knees bent a little as she groaned. He held it. Held it longer than he had at first. When he let her go he let his breath go, too.

Nobody said anything. They squatted in a circle around the piece. All but Hume. He hung over them, one hand pulling at his coat.

"To the line," said Mac, and shoved back his cap as he got up.

ART looked at the gang. They all seemed pleased. Tired, but pleased. Dirty and red-eyed and a little gray around the mouths, but pleased.

Art looked at Hume. He took a long breath. Now was his time. This was the minute he'd waited for. He even had a cold chisel in his pocket.

He took a long breath—and then he thought, oh what the hell? Funny things went on inside him. He thought he was thinking that it was a dirty trick to drag those swell boys into spite work, but that wasn't it. Not all of it.

Away down deep, he was thinking something like this: there are heels on earth and always will be and you just get along with them, somehow; and that a good man can generally get another job; and that his specialty was getting folks out of trouble, something like a doctor, and it didn't matter who or what they were.

And he was good and happy over crack-
ing that tough one, too; and he figured

it was after all better to walk out for keeps with something like that fresh behind you than any other way.

So he didn't say what he'd intended. What he said was:

"Any minute, now, we'll have two-three fresh boys showing up who know this press as well as I do. Likely we can knock out eighteen-twenty an hour. We can run twenty-four hours. That okay, Hume?"

Hume didn't even answer. He just started to run for the phone. But from the way he ran you knew it was all okay.

Art turned back. He wanted to form a few more bumpers. He'd formed four when Hans touched his shoulder.

"Man to see you," Hans said.

IT was Connolly. It was Connolly, looking queer.

"Who's in the office?" he asked. "In dinner clothes. Phoning."

"That's Hume," said Art. "From Clyde-Barst Truck."

"Well!" said Connolly. "I *thought* I knew him," he said. "And he's— Well, he's ordering a lot of work sent here," he said. "And I don't know what's happened but it looks like a lot of good news. And of course," he said, "that is—if you haven't—if you want to—if you *will*, I mean—"

So Art said "okay" and blinked some and nodded to Mac to shove in another section—and that made five bumpers for Clyde.

He had eight behind him when the crew commenced to string in. He left the press and started over toward the forge and the coffee-pail. He wiped his neck off with a piece of waste, having commenced to sweat some. He looked around when Hume yelled at him.

Hume walked in long steps. He didn't seem to be tired or jittery any more. When he got up close he stuck out his hand but Art didn't take it. He just rolled the waste between his—so Hume put his hand on Art's shoulder.

"Old man," he said, "that certainly was pretty work!" he said and clapped Art's shoulder. "I've never seen better," he said and clapped it again. "I just want to tell you that I think you're a genius!"

Art's eyes got pretty cold for a minute. Then they warmed up and he grinned.

"Genius!" he said and shook his head. "No, Hume. You've got me wrong. No genius, Hume. Just another Goldberger. Just another Goldberger."


Ten Pieces

This novelette by a writer new to our pages offers you a detective-story with a South Seas background.

COLE DEXTON opened his eyes and saw, by the light of the lantern the guard carried in his left hand, that it was Gaston of the sad mustache who stood over him and prodded him in the ribs with a rifle butt.

"Wake up, my sweet one," Gaston said in his deep voice, which was richly flavored with a bouquet blended of Tahitian rum and a sour pipe. "*Monsieur le administrateur* commands you to present yourself at his office."

Chan Lee, who shared Dexton's mats, raised himself on his elbow and asked: "Wassa mallah?"



He walked ahead of Gaston from the shack where the prisoners slept.

"Probably I'm to be shot at sunrise," Dexton said. "I've no particular objection to that." He sat up and watched Gaston unlock his leg-shackle. "I'll crab, though, if they're turning me out at this time of night to dig my own grave."

He saw by the stars that it was not much after midnight when he walked ahead of Gaston from the shack where the prisoners slept. With soft coolness the night breeze caressed his body, bare to the waist—a breeze made fetid by its sweep across the foul mud of the mangrove swamp now uncovered by the ebb tide. The tide was low, he knew, a few minutes before eleven o'clock. Now it had begun to flow again. He could tell that by the low moaning sound the sea made against the outer reef.

The administrator's bungalow was a squat, square little building set up on a foundation of basalt slabs and roofed with steel. A wide, screened veranda faced it on all four sides. The front side

of Silver

By HERMAN
PETERSEN

Bautain used as his office. A light burned there now; and as Dexton went up the walk toward the steps, he saw the administrator seated at the table that served him for a desk.

A plump, short man, Antoine Bautain; round and pleasant of face, a bald spot at the crown of his head. He nodded, when Dexton opened the screened door and walked across the width of the veranda to stand before the table; and he tugged at a hair of his closely clipped mustache and said to Gaston:

"That is all, my thirsty one. You may go and look in the jug and see if there is a drop left."

Gaston took himself off with lantern and rifle to look for the drop in the jug.

The administrator gestured toward a chair which was drawn up close to the end of the table by the wall.

"Sit down, m'sieur," he directed, and he moved some papers about on the table, moved them into the bright circle of light reflected downward by the white glass shade of the kerosene lamp.

Dexton sat in the chair. There were straws blowing in the wind, but it was too dark for him to see which way they pointed.

Bautain was tousled, sleepy-eyed. Evidently the administrator, like himself, had been roused from sound slumber not very many minutes in the past. The papers on the table were newspaper clippings pinned together.

THE administrator sat back in his chair and cocked his head a bit on one side.

"Cole Dexton—that is your real name, m'sieur?"

Dexton nodded. He had given his real name the day he had landed on the island, without a passport, without a sou in his pockets. He had come to Heeva with the trading schooner *Tahitian Girl* from Papeete, and he had gone to sleep under some palms on the beach. The *Tahitian*



Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Girl had sailed away. Gaston of the sad mustache, from the drooping ends of which Gaston's tears sometimes dripped—Gaston had found him under the palms and had dragged him before Bautain. The island code had a tooth in it meant to discourage beachcombers. Bautain had let him feel the bite of that tooth by sentencing him to a year at hard labor. He had given Bautain his real name that day. He had had to. They had found some letters in one of his pockets, his name on the envelopes; but he had refused to give any information about himself.

"Cole Dexton is my real name," he said now to Bautain. "But it doesn't mean a thing."

"No?"

BAUTAIN picked up the pinned-together clippings and passed them across the table.

Dexton opened his eyes quite wide when he read the by-line of the first one. His own name! It was on the by-lines of all the clippings; his stories on the Welford murder case, clipped from the *Examiner*.

"It means," Bautain said, "that you were a police reporter. You are the man who, as you Americans say, broke the Welford case by discovering the clue that led to the much-wanted murderer."

Dexton shrugged a shoulder. He wondered how the administrator had come by the clippings.

"It means," the administrator continued, "that you are the man who disappeared shortly after that Welford case was broken. Just the other day I heard your name broadcast over the radio. One of those amazing columnists of the air you have in America said that a woman was the reason for your disappearance." He smiled. "Of course, a Frenchman can very easily believe that."

"Okay," Dexton admitted. He tossed the clippings to the table. "I'm the guy. I had a girl who turned out to be a tramp. I started traveling. So what?"

"So you are here."

Dexton helped himself to a cigarette from a package open on the table. He stood up to light it in the hot blast from the chimney of the lamp. Then he sat in the chair again.

"Did you wake me up in the middle of the night to tell me this?" he demanded.

"No. . . . Come with me."

Dexton followed the administrator from the veranda and then across the sand

toward the incoming tide. A number of outriggers were beached above the high water mark along the shore.

"Help me launch one," Bautain directed.

The two men dragged a canoe to the water and floated it.

"I'll paddle," Bautain said; and he paddled the little craft toward a yawl anchored in the moat inside the reef.

A light burned in the cabin of the yawl. Bautain bumped the outrigger alongside. He ordered Dexton to climb aboard with the painter and make fast.

The administrator went down the companionway into the cabin.

The ship lamp swung gently to and fro, sweeping the shadow of its base back and forth across the dead man who lay on the stained decking almost in the middle of the cramped space.

Cole Dexton had seen the man before. When with the other prisoners of the work-gang he had labored on the coral road in the broiling sun, the man several times had passed him—a tall, very thin, white-haired man with stooped shoulders, eyes squinted behind thick lenses set in white gold frames. He had always dressed in badly soiled whites, and he had worn a sun helmet. Once he had spoken to Dexton.

"Building roads in this sun must be tough, son," he had said.

Now he lay prone, sprawled out on the stained boards just beyond the foot of the companion ladder.

His head was turned to the left, the right side of his face pressed against the decking. He seemed not to have fallen into this position but to have settled down slowly, like a man sapped of his strength so that first his legs gave away and then his arms. His spectacles were still in place on his nose, the bows hooked behind his ears.

AFEW drops of blood had oozed from a wound in his neck, just enough to form a thin trickle which had run down across his throat. It was dark in color, the fresh brightness gone from it, but it was not dry. The neck area about the wound was puffed and somewhat discolored.

"Looks as if the jugular were punctured," Dexton said. "But it didn't bleed very much. . . . He hasn't been dead long."

He squatted on bare heels beside the body, took one of the dead man's arms by the wrist, lifted it and let it fall. It fell limply.

"Not more than a couple hours," he said. "Of course we're in the tropics here. That makes a lot of difference—but he hasn't been dead very long."

He looked up at Bautain.

"And he didn't die instantly. There were a number of minutes between the time he was wounded and the time death actually occurred. Not many minutes, perhaps—I think it worked quickly; but there was a lapse of time."

Bautain asked: "What was it, m'sieur? Do you know?"

Dexton rasped his hand against the blond bristles of his hair which had been clipped close a month before. He shook his head.

"I don't know. I can make a guess—poison. Some particular potent poison."

HE still squatted on bare heels by the body. All he had on was a pair of very dirty white cotton trousers. His skin, burned to the color of brown mahogany, wore the gleam of sweat. It was hot in the cabin.

"What about native poisons?" he asked Bautain, who stood beside him. "I mean, for poisoning darts or arrows? It's a thought that just popped into my head."

"The natives of these islands never were given to the use of poisons for such purposes," Bautain told him.

"I didn't know," Dexton said. "You see, I don't know very much about these islands. About all I know to date is that beachcombers are outlawed."

He looked at the body again, and he frowned slightly. The frown made three vertical lines between his eyebrows. He had a long face, the cheekbones prominent because his cheeks were hollow.

"It couldn't have been a beachcomber," he said as if he thought aloud. "There aren't any beachcombers. And it probably wasn't a native, because the natives here don't use poison like that."

"Who—" Bautain began. He broke off and shrugged. "*Ah, oui*—who? That is the question, is it not, m'sieur?"

"Yes," Dexton agreed. "Who? And why? Always those two questions. They are the tough ones. There are always plenty of other tough questions, but those two are always the worst."

He stood up.

"Who," he asked Bautain, "is he?"

"Doctor Henry Duane," the administrator named the dead man. "He comes from Chicago in the United States. He is a scientist, a biologist. His special interest is zoögeography. He has made several

previous visits to these islands in pursuit of his studies."

"He's made his last visit," Dexton said. "He's all caught up with his studies."

"He was—murdered? You think that?"

"I think so." Dexton nodded. He looked sharply at Bautain. "So do you. You thought so when you had me turned out in the middle of the night. You thought so when you sprung those newspaper clippings on me and let me know you were wise to my identity."

"*Oui*," Bautain admitted.

"Okay," Dexton said. "Let's have the rest of it. Where do I fit in?"

Bautain pointed at the dead man.

"Can you solve that riddle, m'sieur?"

The cramped cabin was low for a tall man and Cole Dexton was tall. He sat down on one of the steps of the companion ladder. He looked at Bautain.

"I don't know whether I can solve the riddle or not. . . . Suppose I said that I have no desire to try?"

"You have friends in the United States with whom you can arrange for the loan of five thousand francs when your sentence of a year at hard labor ends?"

"That's out," Dexton said. "I'm not borrowing."

"You must have five thousand francs when your present sentence terminates. Otherwise you will be arrested again, and sentenced again to the work-gang."

"Does it go on and on like that?"

"That is the law, m'sieur."

"I seem to be in a predicament with a nice future on my hands."

Bautain nodded.

"And I," he said, "am the administrator of these islands with a murdered man on my hands. That is not nice, m'sieur. It is also a predicament."

"Meaning about the record?"

"*Oui*."

"It must be kept clean or—"

"Or else," Bautain said.

DEXTON grinned at the administrator's slang. Evidently Bautain tuned his radio to many American broadcasts.

"Somebody gunning for your job? Or don't they play politics on this side of the line?"

"On the line and on both sides of it, m'sieur. It is a game played the world around, and this island of Heeva has not been forgotten."

"So it behooves you to solve this murder riddle or get a blot on the record. Isn't the record allowed one blot?"



"How long ago did you hear of his death?" Dexton asked the administrator.

"It already has a blot, m'sieur," Bautain told him. "About six months ago a murder was done here. The assassin is still at large." He lifted a shoulder in a shrug. "I am not a detective."

Dexton nodded. Bautain had given him enough light that he could see a straw or two and so make a reasonable guess as to which way the wind blew.

"You want me to front for you?"

"Front?"

"I solve the riddle, and you take the credit."

"Ah, oui!"

"Then I go back to building roads?"

"Non!" The administrator exploded his indignation that Dexton should suggest such a thing. "What kind of an ungrateful pig do you think I would be?"

"You tell me."

"Immediate termination of your sentence," Bautain told him. "Five thousand francs in cash, and a place to live

until a schooner comes, one on which you can arrange for passage to Papeete."

"Sold!" Dexton accepted the terms instantly. "I'm not saying that I can solve your riddle. But I'll take a stab at it."

Bautain smiled happily, and made a sweeping gesture with his hand.

"Stab away, m'sieur."

Dexton did not immediately move from his seat on the step of the companion ladder. He narrowed his eyes and made a slow survey of the cabin.

Forward of the port settle, a desk was built into the bulkhead, a desk with a lid opening downward to serve as a writing board. This lid was now open and on it

was a deep disorder of papers. A brief case lay open on the settle.

Bautain moved as if he intended to seat himself on that port side seat. Dexton stopped him with a word:

"Wait!" Then he said: "The Doctor was sitting there at that desk, writing or working with those papers. They're probably notes."

"*Oui*. He often did that. He didn't seem to mind the heat," Bautain said. "And he liked to be alone here where no one would disturb him."

"**S**OMEONE certainly disturbed him tonight! . . . How long ago did you hear of his death?"

"Just a few minutes—not more than five—before I sent Gaston to arouse you. Joseph brought me the word."

"Who is Joseph?"

"A native," Bautain said. "One of the older ones. Years ago he was a *tahuna*."

"A *tahuna*?"

"A native priest," the administrator explained. "Like a wizard or a witch-doctor—or a medicine-man of your Indians."

"I see. . . . You say he was a *tahuna* years ago. What did he do that he isn't one now? See the light?"

"He accepted Christianity and was baptized. He took the name Joseph."

"Okay. . . . How did Joseph discover the Doctor was dead?"

"He had been fishing," Bautain replied. "He was paddling toward shore when he observed the light in the cabin here. He came alongside, looked in through a port and saw the Doctor lying on the floor."

"He could have looked in through the port and seen the Doctor at his desk."

"*Oui*."

"And if he had any motive for doing it, he could have jabbed a spear through the same port and nicked the Doctor in the neck," Dexton added. "If once upon a time he practiced as a medicine man, he undoubtedly knew a few things about a poison or two. I'll bet his baptism didn't wash that knowledge away."

Bautain lifted both hands in protest.

"*Mon Dieu!* You must not suspect Joseph!"

"No? Listen," Dexton said. "At the beginning I'm eliminating myself and the other boys with me in the prison shack tonight. We were shackled to our beds, so we couldn't have done it. But everybody else on this island, including you, is a suspect."

"Me?" With both hands Bautain touched himself on the chest. Then he

shrugged, spread his hands apart, palms turned up. "I was in bed too."

"Okay," Dexton said.

He stood up, stepped to where the body of Doctor Duane lay. He rolled the body over on its back.

"Hello!" he exclaimed when he had done that. "Look what we've found!"

On the decking lay a shaft of wood eleven or twelve inches long, perhaps not quite a half inch in diameter. Near it lay a small cylinder of brass. Close by the brass cylinder was a sliver of bone three inches or so in length, which had been pushed through the center of a small wooden button.

"*Dieu!*" Bautain said softly. "The weapon?"

Squatted on his heels, Dexton picked up the shaft.

"That brass ferrule, or whatever it is, was fitted to one end of this." He took the brass piece in his fingers. "It's a forty-five caliber cartridge-case and the head has been cut off. One end has been crimped in a little."

He reached for the sliver of bone.

"Be careful!" Bautain warned him sharply.

Dexton did not touch the needle-sharp point.

"It's a hollow needle. The bone's been drilled out," he said. He studied it for some minutes. Then—"I get it. The button just fits into the cartridge-case. Like this." He shoved the needle through the cylinder, drew the button down into the tube toward the crimped end. "Now the whole business fits onto the end of the shaft—like this."

WITH the cylinder fitted to the end of the shaft, he could slide needle and button back and forth in the tube like a piston. As he did so a drop of fluid appeared on the end of the needle.

"There you are! A crude but nevertheless very effective hypodermic."

"*Diable!*" Bautain exclaimed softly. "The poison was in that cartridge-case!"

"Right!" Dexton nodded toward the port settle. "The Doctor was sitting there at the desk, working over his papers. Someone shot this thing through the port and popped him in the neck. There was enough force behind the throw to drive the needle into his jugular. At the same time, the momentum of the shaft caused the needle and button to operate like a plunger, with the result that the fluid in the hollow was forced out through the needle."

"And it killed him!"

"Yeah—but not right away. I don't know what the stuff was or just how it acted. It acted swiftly, but the Doctor had time enough to jump up and away from that side of the cabin. Of course that was a more or less natural reflex action. He had time, too, to jerk the shaft and needle away, pull it from his neck. It evidently came apart when he did that. Then he must have begun to weaken and sink down."

He crossed over to the desk, picked up a paper or two and scanned the writing on them.

"Notes. Just as I thought."

He began to put the papers together and arrange them in a pile. While he was doing that he uncovered an opened package of cigarettes. He took one, passed the package to Bautain.

"I hope there are some matches too."

There was a box of safety matches. There was also a small drawer which had been pulled from the desk. It lay upside down and empty under several papers.

DEXTON lighted his cigarette, held the flaming match toward Bautain. "These papers—I can't believe the Doctor left them in such disorder. . . . I think whoever pinked him waited for him to take the count, and then came aboard and down here."

"To search for something?"

"Apparently." Dexon nodded. "That would explain the mess these notes are in. Probably it explains why this drawer is out. It might have been in the drawer—whatever it was."

Dexon finished putting the papers into a pile.

"We'll take them along," he said, and he put them into the brief-case. With them he carefully packed the dart. "We might as well go ashore now. There doesn't seem to be any more we can do here. . . . It's a good bet that the killer came out in an outrigger or a boat of some kind. We'll have a look at those on the shore."

When they were ashore, Bautain went to the bungalow for a lantern. They began a tour of the beach when he returned with the light.

Within a minute or so they found the marks where an outrigger had been dragged across the wet sand uncovered by the ebb tide. The canoe had been pulled to the dry sand above the high water mark. The man who beached the tiny craft had been barefoot.

"That's Joseph's canoe," Bautain identified the outrigger.

"Joseph is number one on my list," Dexon declared. "He was on the spot and being an *ex-tahuna* he has, I'm sure, a working knowledge of some poisons."

"But what motive—"

"I don't know," Dexon admitted. "Motives are seldom easy to get at. I'm not doing motives right now. I'm looking for clues I can see with both eyes."

A score or more of outriggers were strung along the beach. Among them were two whaleboats.

"Those are mine," Bautain said.

Neither of the whaleboats had been launched.

"If you did it," Dexon remarked, "you used one of the canoes."

Several of the outriggers had been launched and beached again. Bautain was able to identify most of the canoes, and name the owners of them. The names he gave Dexon were those of natives.

"They were out fishing," he said. "Spearing by torchlight. There is nothing at all unusual about that."

One name, however, which Bautain gave Dexon, was that of a white man—Roger Putnam. His canoe, a small one with a single outrigger, had been used during the night.

"An American—from the States," Bautain informed Dexon. "He's been here about ten years. It is with Putnam that Doctor Duane always stays when he comes here. And it is Putnam's yawl on which the doctor now lies dead."

Abruptly Dexon halted.

"Putnam has elephantiasis of the feet and legs?"

"Why, no," Bautain replied. He seemed surprised. "Why do you ask that?"

"Look at his footprints. I suppose they are footprints. I never saw any quite like them."

THE marks in the sand, to which Dexon pointed, were oval in shape, all of a foot wide and eighteen inches long.

"If we were under the Big Dipper instead of the Southern Cross and if this were snow instead of wet sand, I'd say he wore small bear-paw snowshoes," Dexon said. "Do you know what snowshoes are?"

"Of course," Bautain declared, a shade of annoyance in his voice. "I've never seen them, but I've read about them and seen pictures of them. They are a frame with webwork woven between—"

"That's good enough," Dexter said. "The shoes that made these prints didn't have any webbing. They were made of canvas or something like that."

"*Dieu!* The mud-shoes of the Doctor perhaps!"

"What d'you mean—mud-shoes?"

"Like little canvas boats. He puts them on his feet when he goes out on the tide flats, where there is mud instead of sand. They support him so he doesn't sink down and become mired."

"Well, that's an idea!" Dexter lighted another cigarette from the package he had found on the yawl. "They'd hide footprints too."

They had a look at the other outriggers, but they found nothing more to interest them.

"We might as well go to the house," Dexter said.

AT the bungalow Dexter took over the table Bautain used for a desk. He moved the lamp to one end and on the cleared space of the table-top he deposited the contents of the brief-case. The dart with its needle-point of bone he very carefully put aside.

Then he drew up Bautain's chair; and when he had seated himself and lighted another cigarette, he began to look over the papers one by one.

"I'm going to dress," Bautain said; he went into the house, and soon Dexter heard him moving about in the cook-shack. When he returned to the veranda, garbed in fresh whites, he carried a smoke-blackened, steaming coffee-pot and two cups.

"Boy!" Dexter exclaimed, his eyebrows elevated when he had tipped back his chair and taken a sip of the black brew. "Did you float an egg on this?"

"*Non.* When it lifted the cover from the pot, I knew it had strength. Want some cognac in it?"

"No; that might lift my top. . . . I've found a letter in the Doctor's brief-case. It's from a sister, written to him just before he sailed from San Francisco."

Bautain made himself comfortable in the other chair and cocked his feet up on the table. He lighted a cigarette.

"What about it?" he wanted to know.

"Reading between the lines," Dexter told him, "I gather that the sister—her name is Lillian—has a son who has been away from home a long time. Something like ten years. Through the Doctor she sends the boy her love—and some money. The boy's name is Tom."

Bautain shrugged, and sipped coffee.

"There's a little more," Dexter went on. He put down his emptied cup. With his index finger he tapped a book with a black cover that lay among the papers. "The Doctor's diary." He opened it and turned several pages. "Two months ago the day before yesterday he made this entry." Dexter read: "Arrived at Heeva today. Found Tom looking well but older."

"Eh?" Bautain took his feet from the table. "But there is no Tom here."

"You should know. You keep the official *dossiers.*"

From the diary he took a newspaper clipping a column wide, half a column long.

"This is very interesting. I sha'n't read it to you. You must do that at your leisure. It is dated at Los Angeles three months ago."

"What is it about?"

"The death of a certain Mrs. Waring," Dexter said. "She apparently died quite a natural death. But ten years ago she was one of the principals involved in a death—of another person, of course—that was extremely violent. A shooting, in fact. Another principal in the affair was Thomas Salisbury. Thomas vanished."

Bautain flung his cigarette to the floor and stamped a foot on it with a violence that jarred the whole veranda.

"*Diable!* What goes on under my nose?"

"A little of this and a little of that. Take a scent and see what you can run down."

BAUTAIN poured another cup of the black coffee, lighted a fresh cigarette. His round, usually pleasant face wore a dark frown of perplexity.

"Take a scent—*oui!* But from where?" he demanded. "Where do I begin? With whom?"

"Why not try Roger Putnam?" Dexter suggested. "You said he had been here about ten years. You said, too, that Doctor Duane stayed with Putnam, used his yawl to get about among the islands, that he did the same thing on previous visits here."

"*Dieu!*" His dark eyes very round, Bautain stared at Dexter, and he poised his hands, a cup of coffee in one, a cigarette in the other. "You think Putnam might be Thomas Salisbury?"

"It's possible he is one and the same person," Dexter said. "It's been done before, you know—relatives hustle a man

out of the country and then pay him to stay away. Remittance-man stuff."

"If Putnam is Thomas Salisbury, then he is wanted in the United States for murder." Bautain gulped coffee, banged the emptied cup down on the table. He jumped up. "I shall arrest him at once."

"You haven't a warrant," Dexton reminded the administrator.

"*Pouf!*" Bautain made an impatient gesture. "I don't need one. This isn't America. This is Heeva. We have different laws here. That I suspect Putnam of being Doctor Duane's assassin is about all the reason I need to put him under restraint."

"Okay. You're the administrator." Dexton poured himself another cup of coffee. "It might be a good idea in more ways than one to lock him up. If he's innocent—well, maybe with him under lock and key, the guilty party will be thrown off guard. That would be a help."

WHEN Bautain acted officially, he acted swiftly. He shouted for Gaston; and with the guard and Dexton trailing him, he went directly to Roger Putnam's house. Gaston carried a lantern.

The night had yet two hours to live when the administrator with his two companions arrived at the house and climbed the steps to the veranda. The door of the screened enclosure was not locked. Bautain pushed it open and entered.

"Monsieur Putnam," he said loudly, "you are under arrest."

Putnam had been asleep in a hammock slung across the righthand end of the veranda. Now he put his feet to the floor and stood up, a man taller than Bautain but not so plumply built. He had on white pajamas, both coat and trousers, and he blinked in the light of the lantern which Gaston held high.

On a cot at the other end of the veranda a young man raised himself to a sitting position. He too blinked in the lantern light.

Bautain repeated: "Monsieur Putnam, you are under arrest."

"But—but—" Putnam looked from one to the other of the three men. "But what for?" His voice had a nervous jerkiness to it.

Bautain lifted a shoulder in a quick shrug.

"Doctor Duane was found dead on your yawl tonight—murdered. The murderer used your outrigger to paddle out to the yawl and commit the foul deed."

Putnam protested: "But I didn't—"

Bautain stopped him with a gesture.

"I am not examining you now, m'sieur. That will come later." He turned to Gaston. "Take him away. And see that you guard him well."

When Putnam had put on his shoes and picked up his clothing, Gaston marched him away.

Bautain turned to Dexton and questioned him with lifted eyebrows.

Gaston had taken the lantern with him, but there was a lamp on the table which was pushed against the wall near the end of the veranda where the cot stood. Dexton lighted the lamp, and then he stood with his hands in his trouser pockets and looked down at the young man who sat on the cot.

"Who are you?" Dexton asked.

"My name is Byron Baker." The young man's voice was husky, his smooth face very serious. "I am one of Doctor Duane's students. He brought me down here with him to do some field work."

Baker—he was about twenty—kept his eyes screwed together while he talked. A pair of spectacles lay on the end of the table, near the cot. Dexton handed them to the young man.

"Thank you," Baker said, and he put on the glasses.

"Don't mention it. . . . What were you up to tonight?"

"I spent the evening writing up notes."

"Did you work here?"

"Yes sir."

"I've been crowned a few times in my life, but never knighted," Dexton said. "My name is Cole Dexton. I'm from the U. S. myself." Then he asked: "You worked here at this table?"

"Yes."

THERE was a notebook near the lamp, and several neat piles of loose papers, each pile weighted with a stone. Two fountain pens and eight pencils of different lengths formed a precise row.

"Did you leave the house at all tonight?"

"No, I didn't."

"How about Putnam?"

"He went out about nine o'clock and came back around midnight. I was in bed. I had been asleep. He awakened me."

"Know where he went?"

"No."

"Own a gun?"

"I have a revolver. I brought it from home with me. The Doctor suggested it might be useful."

"Where is it?"

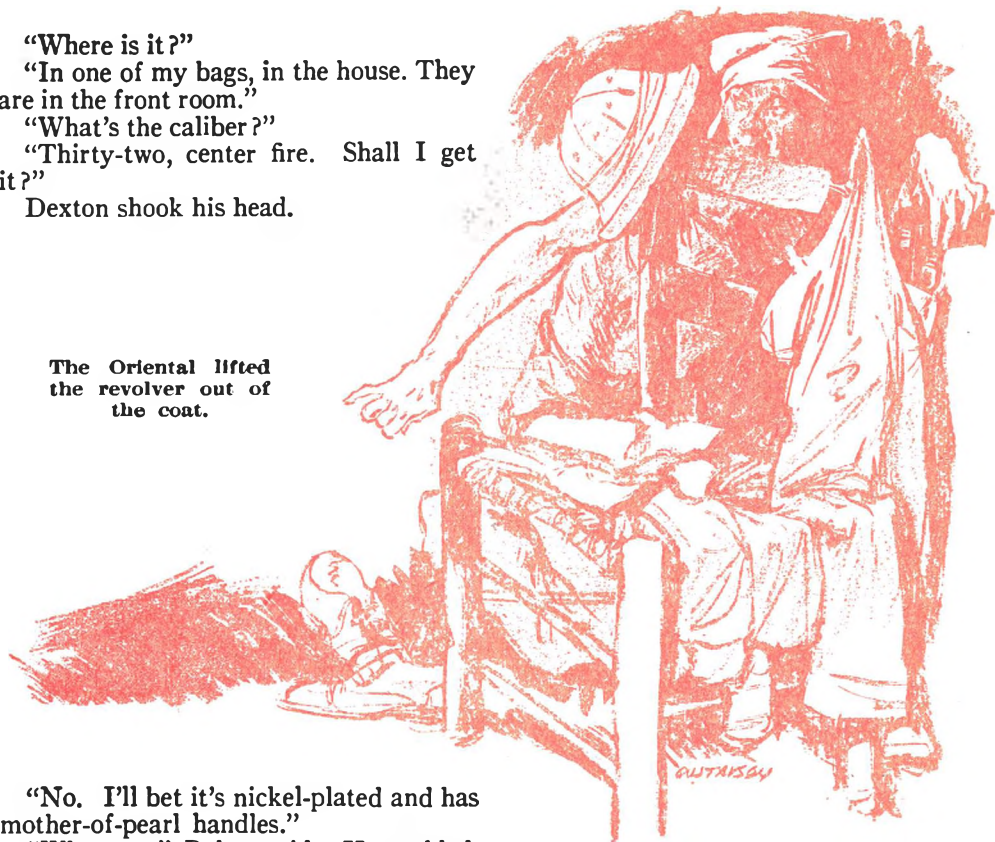
"In one of my bags, in the house. They are in the front room."

"What's the caliber?"

"Thirty-two, center fire. Shall I get it?"

Dexton shook his head.

The Oriental lifted the revolver out of the coat.



"No. I'll bet it's nickel-plated and has mother-of-pearl handles."

"Why, yes," Baker said. He nodded. "That describes it."

"I thought it would. . . . I understand Doc was in the habit of writing up his notes on the yawl. Is that why he went out tonight?"

"It was one reason," Baker said. "He wanted to see Joseph too."

"The *ex-tahuna*?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Joseph is an elderly native," Dexton explained.

Baker nodded. "That would be he, I am sure. The Doctor wanted to question him about *Pelamis bicolor*."

"Now you've got me," Dexton had to admit. "Is she blonde or brunette?"

Baker smiled.

"Both, really," he said. "It's a sea-snake. The upper part of the body is black, the lower part yellow. They occur in the waters here, but they are not exactly easy to find. The Doctor has managed to catch several since we have been here. He preserved two in alcohol and he secured the venom from the others."

"Venom? From sea-snakes?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" Baker exclaimed. "They are very venomous, perhaps as venomous as any poisonous snake known. Fortunately, they are shy creatures and seldom attack a swimmer or diver. When

caught, however, they strike very readily. They do not live very long when removed from the water."

"I'm glad to know that. . . . Why was Doc so interested in them?"

"He was collecting specimens and venom for Professor Hampden," Baker explained. "The Professor had hoped to accompany the Doctor this trip, but he was unable to do so."

"A colleague of the Doctor?"

"Yes."

"How does that sea-snake venom work? Know anything about it?"

"Very little. I've never gone very deep-ly into that subject."

"Suppose a shot of it was injected into a large vein, do you know what would happen?" Dexton asked.

"I believe it would cause coagulation of the blood very quickly," Baker said. "Clotting, you understand."

"And when the clot or clots reached the heart?"

"Death would occur, due to embolism."

"How long would that take? From the time the venom was injected, I mean?"

"I don't know," Baker said. "I think it wouldn't take very long."

"Did Doc keep the venom he had collected in the drawer of that desk on the

yawl?" Dexon then asked the young man.

"He kept money there," Baker replied. "Silver, mostly. He hired natives to help us quite often and he kept a supply of coins on hand with which to pay them. The venom is here, in the house."

"Let's have a look at it."

Baker rose, slipped his bare feet into shoes and took up the lamp from the table.

Dexon and Bautain followed him through the house to a rear room.

"Phew!" Dexon gasped. "Pickling alcohol! Why you fellows don't go in for at least a cheap grade of whisky—"

Benches were arranged about the room. On the benches were many glass jars and bottles, all sizes of them. Baker went to one of the benches, where he set the lamp down while he scanned the labels on a row of bottles.

"Why!" he exclaimed after a minute or so. "It isn't here! It was in a glass-stoppered bottle like these and it was very plainly labeled. . . . It's gone!"

BAUTAIN swore, and Dexon grinned. "Now, Administrator," he said soothingly. "Keep your shirt on. Things like this happen every now and then, especially when a murder has been done."

"You are not surprised that the bottle is gone?" Bautain demanded.

"I believe I would have been surprised if Baker with a flourish of the hand had produced the bottle and said, 'Here, my man, is the deadly dope!' Or words to that effect. . . . No. I'm not surprised."

"You think the venom was used to poison the Doctor?"

Dexon nodded. "I think so. It fits in."

He strolled about the room. One bench held a number of tools—a hammer, three files, a pair of pliers, a jackknife, a draw-shave, a small plane, two saws, a spool of fine copper wire, an assortment of nails in a tin can. In a tin cover now serving as a tray were a dozen or so of needlelike pieces of bone varying from two to four or five inches in length.

"What are these?" Dexon asked Baker.

"Spines cut from fish vertebræ," the young man said. "I have been trying to make a spear like those the natives use for small fish."

A small pile of wood-shavings had been swept under the bench. In the corner by the door stood the shaft from which they evidently had been shaved, a shaft a half inch in diameter and about eight feet

long. Dexon looked it over, examined both ends. Then he returned it to the corner.

He turned to Baker.

"Let's have a look at the rest of the house."

There were four rooms, all of them barely furnished.

"We live on the veranda most of the time," Baker said. "If it storms so that rain blows in on the veranda, then the Doctor and I sleep here in the front room. Mr. Putnam's room is over there." He nodded toward the left.

"Let's have a look."

It was a small room with one window. At one end was a cot, a chair beside it. At the other end of the room, near the door, was a bureau.

Dexon pulled open the top drawer of the bureau—it made a dry, squealing sound—and he pawed through the jumble of clothing it contained. He brought up a long, quite thick leather wallet and then a heavier object wrapped in cloth.

His interest was first in the cloth-wrapped object. He unwrapped it and disclosed a revolver, a blued steel weapon with black grips.

Dexon glanced at the muzzle end. "Thirty-eight," he said, and he wrapped the gun in the cloth again and tossed it back into the drawer.

"Poppuns!" he muttered. "The place is full of popguns!"

He gave his attention to the wallet. There were a few banknotes in it together with several traveler's checks.

"Look here," he said to Bautain. He placed the checks in a row on top of the bureau. "These total two thousand dollars—and every one of them is signed by Doctor Duane."

Bautain studied the display.

"**H**AVE we not perhaps uncovered a motive?" he asked after a little.

"You mean robbery?"

"On the yawl we found empty the drawer of the desk where the Doctor kept money," Bautain reminded him.

Dexon picked up the traveler's checks and returned them to the wallet. He handed the wallet to Bautain.

"You'd better take care of this." He looked at Baker and grinned. "You'd better get dressed, son, and then dig yourself up some breakfast. It looks as if you'll have to go on your own for a few days." He chuckled. "I'm a bit better off than you are. The administrator is taking care of me."

TEN PIECES OF SILVER

Back at the administrator's bungalow, Cole Dexton borrowed Bautain's soap and razor and shaved. In the cook-shack a buxom, barefoot native woman, Bautain's housekeeper, prepared breakfast. Bautain went on to the store to get Dexton a shirt, a pair of trousers and a pair of canvas shoes.

The two men ate their breakfast at the table on the veranda.

"I'll have to have the body brought ashore for burial," Bautain said when they were finished with the meal. "When that has been attended to, I shall examine Monsieur Putnam."

"You'd better gather up young Baker and keep him in tow," Dexton suggested. Bautain stared.

"Why?"

"The bone point on the dart used to kill the Doctor is a piece of fish-spine like those on the bench at Putnam's place. And I think the dart was a part of that spear shaft the boy is making. I'll match the pieces as soon as I get a chance. . . . Whoever killed the Doctor had access to the house. Keep those mud-shoes in mind. And that bottle of venom."

"*Bon Dieu!*" Bautain exploded. "Now you suspect the boy! Before the day is over, you will have the whole island under suspicion!"

"Such has been my intention from the very beginning. . . . Remember?"

"Bah!" With extreme impatience the administrator pushed his chair back from the table and got to his feet. "Why go on with the farce? The guilty man is locked up. I shall examine him today and enter a charge against him. The courts at Papeete can take care of the rest of the business."

He put on his hat and quit the veranda. Dexton grinned, lighted a cigarette and followed him to the beach.

"It looks," he remarked to Bautain's back, "as if it's a case of hail, hail, the gang's all here."

SEVERAL groups were gathered on the sand. Dexton had seen most of them before. One of them, a white man who wore a sun helmet and was dressed in white, saluted Bautain.

"Good morning, Administrator. I hear that you have had some unpleasantness here."

"*Oui, oui.* Doctor Duane was killed last night. We have apprehended the murderer. I am about to bring the body ashore for burial." He said to Dexton: "This is Monsieur Daley, from your

United States. Monsieur Daley is a pearl-buyer."

Daley was a compactly built man, a head shorter than Dexton; a square-faced man with a mouthful of short, strong, yellowish teeth.

He gave Dexton a quick, cold, gray-eyed survey.

"Haven't I seen you some place before?"

"On the road probably, in the work-gang," Dexton said carelessly. "I'm working my way up. There's nothing like starting at the bottom. . . . I've seen you before too, but never with pants on."

DALEY tipped back his head and laughed a booming laugh.

"From sunup to sundown I seldom wear more than a pair of swimming trunks and a hat. I'll get into my uniform presently. Going out to the yawl?"

Bautain had moved off to impress several natives into his service, and now they were launching canoes, making ready to go to the yawl and bring Doctor Duane's body ashore.

"I'll let Bautain handle that end of it," Dexton said. "He won't need me out there."

"He'll manage, all right. A good administrator, Bautain. . . . Care to step up to my shack and have a drink?"

"Delighted!"

They walked side by side.

"As one American to another," Daley said, "how are tricks?"

"They could be worse."

"And it goes without saying that they could be a lot better."

"Of course," Dexton admitted.

"You can tell me to go jump in the surf, and I'll understand," Daley said. "But is there a difficulty?"

"You mean, because I am a member of the labor-party here?"

"Yes."

"I landed full of the best of spirits but without funds," Dexton explained. "There seems to be a law covering such cases."

"If there is anything I can do—"

"Thanks, but I'm working it out." Dexton grinned. "The murder of Doctor Duane, while it was tough on him, is a break for me. Bautain discovered I used to do a little police reporting at home. For some unguessable reason, he seems to think that qualifies me to act as a detective. He has offered me a suspension of sentence in exchange for the name of Doctor Duane's murderer."

"And you have named Putnam?"

"The clues we have turned up seem to point toward Putnam," Dexton told the pearl-buyer. "Putnam's outrigger was used last night. Putnam was away from his house from nine o'clock until about midnight. The murder was committed during that time. There are a number of other clues. I feel that I am not at liberty to disclose them at the present time. Bautain has put Putnam under arrest, but he hasn't examined the man as yet."

HE pointed at a beached outrigger close to the path they followed.

"That's Putnam's canoe. Bautain identified it last night. Putnam took a great deal of pains to disguise his footprints. He wore a pair of Doctor Duane's mudshoes. I've never seen the things. Apparently they are made something like snowshoes. . . . Perhaps I can show you a print if one still exists."

He walked over to the beached outrigger, found one of the oval prints in the sand.

"Here's one," he said and pointed it out.

Daley bent over, hands on knees, and studied the mark. His position drew up snugly the seat of his white trousers, made his well-filled hip pockets bulge. Dexter observed that the pearl buyer carried a pipe and a tin of tobacco in one pocket.

"Interesting," Daley said, straightening up. "I've heard of mud-shoes, but I've never seen any, either."

Near Daley's house, a native shack with a thatched roof, a native lad, ten or eleven years old, was digging in the earth with a stick. When he saw Daley, he threw down the stick and trotted up to him to show two copper centimes he had in his hand.

Daley laughed. "So you found them, eh? All right. Off to the store with you now and spend them with Devereux."

He explained to Dexton when the boy ran off toward the store:

"It's a game I've been playing with the kid. I hide a few coins and he digs for them. A treasure-hunt, you know. He gets a kick out of it. And Devereux is all hot and bothered about where the boy is getting the money. He can't quite believe the lad is digging it up."

They went into the house. The pearl buyer produced a bottle of whisky and two glasses.

"Say when," he directed Dexton.



When Chan cast the bag over the head of the unsuspecting Gaston, Dexton tackled the guard about the legs.

TEN PIECES OF SILVER

"When," Dexton said when his glass was half full. "My first drink on Heeva. Here's looking at you."

"Good hunting," Daley said. "Another?"

Dexton shook his head.

"Not now. I've got to keep the wits together; I'm playing detective, remember."

Daley laughed.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you'd already played the game." He took the pipe and tobacco-tin from his hip pocket and filled and lighted his pipe. "I'm not throwing any mud at Putnam, understand, but I have had the feeling that there was something there, something I couldn't fathom."

"**B**ETWEEN Putnam and the Doctor, you mean?"

"Yes. You see, I am here, really, because Doctor Duane asked me to meet him here. I met him in Papeete a couple years ago. He wrote me several months back that he was planning another trip to the islands. He suggested if I met him here, he would show me something of interest."

"Pearls?"

"Yes," Daley said. "That's about all that does interest me."

"The Doctor had found some pearls?"

"I gathered that he had discovered a bed. He was forever poking about the islands. That idea did interest me, very much. This group of islands has never been any great shucks as a producer of pearls. I knew if the Doctor had found a bed, it was an unfished one, one no one else ever had discovered. Such a find usually means a rich harvest."

"When you came here and met the Doctor, didn't he give you some information?" Dexton asked.

"Not a thing. He was secretive. If he had any information, he kept it under his hat. And Putnam seemed to resent me being on the spot."

"So you have had your trip in vain?"

"I won't say that yet," Daley said. "Maybe you'll turn them up from among some of Putnam's possessions. If you do, I wish you'd put a flea in Bautain's ear to let me have a look at the things. . . . When did you say he was going to put Putnam on the grill?"

"I think he intends to do it sometime today. I'm going to talk him out of it if I can."

"Why?"

"The psychological touch," Dexton explained. "Putnam's locked up in that

sheet-iron shack beyond Bautain's bungalow. It's hotter than a Dutch oven in there. The man doesn't know what is going on. I figure that if he's left to stew in his own juices for a time, left very much alone and in the dark as to what is going on—well, he'll get jittery. A jittery man is likely to spill more than he means to when he is finally yanked on the carpet. The inner pressure is relieved by letting off a lot of talk. It's third-degree business I've seen worked very effectively at home."

Daley nodded. He took off his shirt.

"If he spills any information about where he hid the pearls, let me know, will you? . . . I'm going to get on the uniform now and take a dip."

Returning to Bautain's bungalow, Dexton found the administrator writing an official record of the case.

"That Chan Lee who slept next to me in the prison shack—he's doing time for burglary, isn't he?" he asked Bautain.

"*Oui*. Nothing is safe when that Chinaman is loose." He laughed a little. "He stole the false teeth from Gaston's mouth one night. When Gaston awakened he believed he had swallowed the plates. He became ill and was in much pain."

"Swell!" Dexton exclaimed his delight. "I want you to release that China boy to me."

"*Diable!* What do you want with him?"

"I have a little job for him to do. I'll be responsible for him," Dexton promised.

Bautain shrugged. "All right," he agreed. "But if he steals anything, you'll serve sentence as an accomplice."

"I'll take a chance. I'm in a gambling mood today."

"We have a law against gambling here too."

"You have altogether too many laws. You've got yourself all gummed up with them. Thank goodness I'm not in your shoes. . . . Send for Chan Lee."

THE Oriental soon came to the bungalow; a slightly built, bland-faced yellow man who wore dirty pajama trousers, straw sandals on his feet, a green rag twisted turbanlike about his head.

While Bautain watched after them, a disapproving frown on his round face, Dexton took the Chinese to the shade of a clump of coco-palms a short distance from the house. There he gave Chan a cigarette and talked with him for a time.

"*Sacré!*" Bautain fairly hissed when Dexton returned alone to the veranda. "I

don't know what devilment you have been hatching, but if it—"

"If it misses fire, blame me and not Chan," Dexon said calmly. "Write in your books, old thing, and don't worry about us." He stretched out comfortably in the hammock. "When Chan comes back, let me know."

He closed his eyes. Almost instantly he slept. He slept for an hour before Bautain booted the hammock where it sagged the most and said:

"The slant-eyed devil is back."

Chan Lee was squatting on the floor near the door.

Dexon sat up in the hammock.

"Get it?" he asked Chan.

Chan handed him a revolver, a very short-barreled, nickeled revolver with black rubber grips; a vicious-looking gun.

"A forty-five bulldog," Dexon said; "a very nasty weapon at close quarters."

HE broke open the gun and ejected the cartridges into the palm of his left hand.

"Have you a pair of pliers?" he asked Bautain. "And a pen-knife?"

"What now?"

"I'm going to unload these cartridges—just in case."

Bautain swore under his breath, but he went into the house where he found a pair of pliers and a knife. He brought them to the veranda and threw them down on the table.

With the tools, Dexon pulled the bullets from the cartridges, and he removed the powder. Then he replaced the bullets in the unloaded cases and inserted the cartridges in the cylinder of the revolver.

He handed the gun to Chan Lee.

"Put it back where you got it. Don't get caught. Come back here when you've done the job."

Chan Lee shuffled away.

"Don't," Bautain said when the Oriental was gone, "tell me whose gun that was."

He picked up the pliers Dexon had used and flung them the length of the veranda. They struck against the screening and bounced back.

"If you and that slant-eyed heathen live long enough, you'll probably build a road clear around this island."

Dexon chuckled and stretched out again in the hammock.

"I told you I was gambling today," he reminded the administrator. "It's all in a good cause—to erase the blot on the record, your record." He lighted a ciga-

rette. "You'll have to play along with me a little. Part of your play is to leave Putnam alone today. Let him stew. Put over your examination until tomorrow."

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!*" Bautain growled. "Must I—"

"Exactly," Dexon said. "Thunder in your beard, if you like. But don't make too much noise about it. I've got to catch up on a little sleep."

He slept until late in the afternoon. When he awakened, he discovered Chan Lee squatted on the veranda and smoking a cigarette to which he had helped himself from a package on the table. Bautain was nowhere in sight.

"Do the job all right?" Dexon asked Chan.

"Do him all lightee. Nobody see."

"Where is he?"

"Gone boatee."

"Okay. . . . You stick around where I can find you after it gets dark. We've got another little job to do. . . . Haven't seen Joseph about, have you?"

"No see."

"Okay. I'll have a look around. I want to see what that Baker boy is up to."

He found Byron Baker on the veranda of Putnam's house. The young man was working on his notebook.

"Been at that all day?" Dexter asked.

"Yes," Baker said. "There didn't seem to be anything else for me to do."

He closed the notebook, put down his fountain pen in the precise row with the other pen and the pencils.

"You know, Mr. Dexon," he said then huskily, "I'm somewhat concerned."

"About what?"

"About myself. I haven't any money and I am quite a distance from home. The Doctor brought me here, paid all my expenses. I—I don't know what to do."

"Just eat, sleep and don't worry about it for the time being," Dexon advised.

"I CAN'T help worrying," the young man confessed. "Probably I sha'n't sleep too well because of that. As for eating—there isn't any food in the house."

"There's the store."

"I know. But I haven't any money. And I am getting quite hungry. We didn't bother to get much of a meal last night."

"Last night?" Dexon's jaw dropped a little. "Haven't you eaten since?"

"No, sir."

"Kid, I'm sorry—and ashamed of myself," Dexon said and meant it. "I had my own belly full and never gave you a thought, not in that way."

TEN PIECES OF SILVER

He put his hand in his trouser pocket and jingled a few coins.

"Bautain's advanced me a few francs. Come on down to the store and I'll stake you to some crackers and cheese and a drink. That'll hold you until Bautain's housekeeper puts on the hash tonight. You'll stay there with us."

They went to the store where Dex-ton bought the materials for a substantial lunch. Then he sent Baker on to Bautain's house.

"Tell them I sent you," he directed the boy.

He bought himself a bottle of beer and sat down at a veranda table to drink it. He had just finished the bottle when Daley came in. The man wore tan swimming shorts and a white sun helmet. He ordered more beer and sat at the table with Dex-ton.

"How's the big case going?"

"I've a feeling it's about to break," Dex-ton replied. "The psychological treatment is working. Putnam is quivering to talk. About tomorrow morning he'll be ready to spill all he knows."

"He'll confess, you think?"

"He'll either confess or give us something that will incriminate someone else. He isn't the only suspect, you know."

"I didn't know," Daley said.

"There's Joseph, the *ex-takuna*," Dex-ton told the pearl-buyer. "And then there's that Baker, the lad Doctor Duane brought here with him. Neither one is exactly in the clear. Joseph apparently has made himself scarce. The boy is here and worried. . . . If Putnam isn't the man we want, I'll bet the rest of my sentence against the finest pearl you can scare up in these parts that he knows who the killer is. I'm going to get that information if I have to sweat him dry to get it out of him."

He finished his beer.

"I'm playing everything I've got to break this case. I'm putting all my stakes on one throw of the dice, so to speak. I win or go back to the work-gang. And I think I'll know by tomorrow. Perhaps by tonight."

DINNER was served after sundown at Bautain's house, served at the table on the veranda; but this night Cole Dex-ton was not one of the diners. Bautain and Baker ate without his company.

Dex-ton crouched in a clump of pandanus near the sheet-iron shack in which Roger Putnam was confined. Chan Lee squatted beside him. They did not talk,

neither did they smoke. They listened and watched—and waited.

Chan Lee expelled a short breath in a soft hiss. Through the screen of leaves Dex-ton sighted the light of a swinging lantern. Gaston came along the path from the house, his rifle slung across his back. In one hand he carried a bucket—Putnam's dinner.

By the door of the shack, Gaston put lantern and bucket on the ground while he fumbled with the key to the padlock which secured the door.

"Now," Dex-ton whispered.

He and Chan Lee moved swiftly and silently forward. In his hands Chan carried a burlap sack. He ran slightly ahead of Dex-ton.

When Chan cast the bag over the head of the unsuspecting Gaston and jerked it about his shoulders, Dex-ton tackled the guard about the legs and brought him to the ground with a thud that produced from Gaston a grunt and then a curse.

"Get your hand over his mouth," Dex-ton snapped.

WITH cords ready, he bound Gas-ton's arms together at the wrists, his legs at the ankles.

"Into the shack with him! . . . Gag him now! Throttle him if you have to, but don't let him yell."

With Gaston's keys Dex-ton unlocked Putnam's leg-shackle. Putnam was sitting on his cot. So far, he had not uttered a word.

"You're passing up dinner tonight, fellow," Dex-ton told him. "We're springing you. Bautain is going to put on the screws tomorrow. You've got to get away."

Though he was now free of the leg-shackle, Putnam made no move to leave his cot.

"But—" he began in his nervously jerky voice. "But I didn't—"

"Maybe you didn't. But where were you last night? You were away from the house between nine and midnight."

"I went to call on a—a woman."

"Care to name her?"

"No."

"Okay. It's on your head. You've got to make yourself scarce to these parts for a few days. Bautain is convinced you killed the Doctor. You know what that means under French law."

"That I'm guilty," Putnam said, "and I'll have to prove myself innocent."

"Right. And a swell time you're going to have proving that. The cards are

stacked against you, fellow. You've got to lam."

"But where—"

"The yawl is your best bet. Get to it and put to sea. If there is anything you want from the house, go grab it in a hurry. We'll meet you on the beach."

He shoved Putnam through the doorway of the shack.

"Run!" he commanded. "There's no one at the house. The kid's with Bautain tonight. Run!"

Putnam ran.

DEXTON waited until he was out of sight. Then he said to Chan:

"All right. We go after him. If it's pearls he's after, we'll have him cold."

They trotted along on Putnam's trail.

Putnam ran to his house and went in. A minute or so later a light came on in a rear room. He had lighted a lamp or a lantern and he moved about with it.

Then with the light—it was a lantern—he came out of the house by way of the rear door. In his right hand he carried a bar, and he trotted toward the base of an immense old breadfruit tree.

At the foot of the tree, Putnam set the lantern on the ground. He gave a furtive look about and then with the bar he began to pry at a large, thick slab of basalt. It was a heavy stone and Putnam had trouble moving it. He used small stones as fulcrums and he shifted them a number of times. Finally he did lift the slab a little. He kicked a small stone under it to hold it while he shifted bar and fulcrum again.

For more than ten minutes the man worked feverishly before he succeeded in lifting the slab clear of its bed in the earth. Then with the bar he worked the big stone to one side until under it the lantern-light disclosed a cavity.

Putnam got down on his hands and knees then and reached his right hand into the hole. He tried to drag some object out; but evidently he had not moved the stone far enough to the side, for again he went to work with the bar and moved the slab a few inches more.

Then he dragged from the hole a metal box.

Tucking the box under his left arm, Putnam snatched up the lantern and trotted toward the bungalow. He went in through the rear doorway. Inside, he went to his own room.

"He's pulling out the top drawer of the bureau," Dexon whispered to Chan Lee. He recognized the dry squealing sound

that drawer made. "He's after his wallet, I'll bet. Maybe his gun too."

In the house Putnam pushed the bureau drawer in, pulled out others.

"No good," Chan Lee said.

"No good," Dexon agreed. "Bautain has it."

The light moved from the room.

"Watch yourself now! He's coming out."

Putnam came out by the front door. Still carrying the lantern, he trotted down the veranda steps and toward the beach. He had the metal box under his left arm.

He trotted forward a dozen steps—and a shot crumpled him.

He went sprawling forward, the metal box falling to bounce end over end on the ground. The lantern, oddly enough, struck on its bottom and stood upright.

Dexon made a headlong dash toward the spot from where the shot had come. He had seen the flash.

"Grab that lantern!" he yelled at Chan. "Get that lantern!"

Chan ran up with the lantern. Near the base of a young palm lay a rifle. A few feet from it was a small green tin.

"Gaston's rifle!"

Dexon grabbed it up. He snatched up the green tin too. That he shoved in his trouser pocket.

"Come on!"

Chan Lee racing at his side, he ran to the shack.

Gaston lay bound and gagged as they had left him.

NEW day had come. The sun was an hour high. In the cook shack the buxom, barefoot cook was rattling pans.

On the veranda the short, plump administrator was pacing his agitation back and forth, his hands gesticulating.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Bautain said. "I should sentence you to at least ten years."

"How about twenty?" Cole Dexon asked.

He sat at the table. A dispatch box stood open by the lamp. The table top was covered with newspaper-clippings.

"We didn't slip entirely. We have proved that Roger Putnam and Thomas Salisbury were both aliases for one and the same person, wanted in the U. S. on a ten-year-old murder charge. These clippings tell the whole story. . . . That's one feather in your cap."

"Bah! A dead feather! And you shall wear it. It shall be on your head. You released him. You assaulted a prison guard, broke open the prison—"

Baker swung his fist into Daley's face, tripped him, and flung him down. Daley ripped the gun from his pocket.



"Gaston had already unlocked and opened the door," Dex-ton insisted upon the correction. "So you can cross out the breaking and entering charge. I did release Putnam. I'll admit I slipped up when I left the rifle with Gaston. I forgot about it."

"Twenty years would be just punishment."

"Okay. Twenty years, then. Make up your mind and calm down. Doesn't Gaston know who took the rifle from him? He had it slung over his back."

"Could he see?" Bautain demanded. "You left that *sacré* bag over his head.

... Who killed Doctor Duane? That's what I want to know."

"Well, you know Putnam didn't do it. And you know he didn't have any pearls."

"Pearls! *Pouf!* That much for the pearls! There weren't any."

"Baker says there were."

"Yes, indeed," Baker said, from the hammock. "The Doctor told me that the last time he was here he discovered a bed. He took up one or two pearls. When we went back—it was about two weeks ago—we found the bed had been raided. At first the Doctor thought Mr. Putnam had done it. But Mr. Putnam most strenuously denied it."

"Did they have an argument?"

"Yes; a very heated one," Baker said. "Finally the Doctor put on a helmet and went down. He was down over an hour. When he came up, he apologized to Mr. Putnam for his suspicion. He said he had found something under the water, something that identified to him the person who had raided the bed."

"What did he find?"

"A knife."

"Whose was it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Dexter."

"Fiction!" Bautain swore. "Pure fiction! You're telling a story now to cover your own tracks! Where were you last night when Putnam was shot and killed?"

Baker's face drained of color.

"I? I—I was walking along the beach."

"Ah, oui! Walking along the beach! A most convenient place to walk at that particular time! But why were you walking?"

"You'll burst a blood-vessel," Dexter warned Bautain. "Besides, where did you go after dinner? And where was Joseph? Where has he been ever since the Doctor was knocked over? There's something I'd like to know."

THE housekeeper came out to lay the table for breakfast. Dexter swept the clippings into the dispatch box and tossed the box under the table.

"Let's skip it until after breakfast."

They had no more than concluded the meal when Devereux, the storekeeper, came to the bungalow. With him he had the native boy Dexter had seen digging for centimes near Daley's shack. The lad was crying.

The French of Devereux and Bautain was much too fast for Dexter to follow, but he gathered that the boy had committed some misdemeanor. Devereux put a handful of silver coins on the table, coins to which clung flakes and crumbs of earth. Dexter counted them—ten five-franc pieces.

"What goes on?" he asked Bautain.

The administrator shrugged.

"The boy just tried to buy out the store. He offered this money in payment. The question is, where did he steal it?"

"From the looks of it, I'd say he dug it up."

"That's what he says. A likely story!"

"I saw him dig up a couple centimes yesterday near Daley's shack," Dexter said. "Daley's been playing a game with the kid. He buried the money. Send for Daley and have him confirm that, Monsieur Missouri."

Daley confirmed the story when he came to the bungalow. The pearl-buyer had on a shirt and a pair of trousers.

"But this money?" Bautain gestured toward the table. "Surely you didn't bury that. *Mon Dieu!* That is more than a few centimes. That is fifty francs."

Daley shook his head.

"I didn't plant that. I don't know anything about that pile. But I do know this—if the kid says he dug it up, then he dug it up."

"Have him take us to the spot," Dexter insisted. "Tell him we want to see the hole."

The boy led the men to the beach and then northward until he came to a palm that had been snapped off ten feet or so from the ground.

At the foot of the palm bole was a freshly dug hole, earth heaped up about it.

"Ask the lad," Dexter suggested, "how he happened to dig here."

"I guess I've made him treasure-conscious," Daley said.

Bautain questioned the boy.

"He says," the administrator translated when the boy replied, "that he was hunting for treasure this morning. He saw that the earth by the palm here had been disturbed. He finds the money Monsieur Daley buries by looking for disturbed earth."

"The observing little devil!" Daley chuckled. "I'll fool him the next time."

Bautain went on: "He dug with his hands. When he found the money, he ran to the store with it."

DEXTON squatted by the hole, about eight inches deep, which the boy had clawed into the ground. With his fingers Dexter began to dig.

"This ground," he said, "has been disturbed deeper than the boy dug."

He dug with both hands. He dug up a coffee-tin and a glass-stoppered bottle.

"That's it!" Baker cried excitedly when he saw the bottle. "That's it—the venom!"

"And here," Dexter said, pulling the cover from the coffee-can and making the contents of the tin rattle, "are the pearls."

"By George!" Daley exclaimed, bending forward to peer into the can. "They are pearls. And nice ones too."

He looked at Bautain.

"I'd like a chance at buying the lot. I mean, of course, if it is possible for you to sell them to me. I'd like to be permitted to look them over and appraise them."

TEN PIECES OF SILVER

"Good heavens!" Dexon exclaimed, handing the tin of pearls to Bautain. "Haven't you done that yet?"

"What d'ye mean?" Daley demanded.

"I should think that by this time you would have a name for each pearl."

For a moment the little group stood in stunned silence. Then Daley cursed and stepped back. His right hand swept toward his hip pocket.

Baker, who stood beside the man, pivoted on his toes and swung his fist into Daley's face, striking him squarely between the eyes. Then he lunged against Daley, tripped him and flung him down.

Daley ripped his gun from his trouser pocket. Baker kicked it from his hand. Then he dropped on Daley, put his knee against Daley's Adam's-apple, put his weight upon the knee. He had the bottle of snake venom in his hands.

"You be good," he advised Daley, "or I shall pour some of this into your eyes. . . . You were fooling around down here last night! I know, because I saw you.

LA TE that day Baker and Dexon were on their knees on the veranda of Bautain's house rolling a pair of dice. Baker had a couple of the ten five-franc pieces in a hand. Dexter had the others on the floor in front of him.

Bautain climbed the steps, opened the door, then stopped and stood looking at the two.

"Now what?" he demanded.

Dexon palmed the dice.

"Did Daley confess?" he asked.

"*Oui*. He met the Doctor a couple years ago at Papeete. He bought two pearls from the Doctor, who told him he had found a bed here. When the Doctor came back this year, Daley followed him to Heeva. He tried to get the Doctor to fish the bed, but the Doctor, knowing it would be illegal, refused. So Daley did some scouting. He talked with natives here and on other islands who had helped the Doctor at various times. Finally Daley located the bed and raided it. He did lose a knife under the water, the one the Doctor found and recognized. The Doctor threatened to expose Daley as a pearl pirate if Daley did not turn over the pearls. So Daley killed him to silence him. You had that all figured out. He killed Putnam because he feared Putnam knew a thing or two."

Then he said accusingly:

"You knew all the time and you said nothing to me about it."

Dexon shrugged.

"I couldn't prove a thing. I was looking for a forty-five-caliber gun, because that brass end on the dart was made from a forty-five case. The morning after the killing I was showing Daley a print of that mud-shoe in the sand. When he bent over to look at it, I saw the bulge of the gun in his pocket. I got Chan Lee to pinch it. It's a forty-five, as you know."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Bautain demanded.

"You'd have slapped him in the brig—and you couldn't prove a thing against him. I couldn't, not even after I found a tin of his tobacco beside Gaston's rifle where he dropped it when he shot Putnam. I knew it was his tobacco. Devereux doesn't sell that kind."

"*Dieu!* Wasn't that proof?"

"No. Not the kind I wanted. What I wanted him to do was go after Putnam. I tried to arrange that. That's why I unloaded Daley's gun. I didn't want another killing done—and then I never gave Gaston's rifle a thought."

He shook his head.

"It's queer the way things work out sometimes," he said. "There I was, figuring hard on a scheme to make Daley expose himself. And actually he himself put that machinery under motion before he killed the Doctor. Teaching that kid to hunt treasure did it. The ten pieces of silver the kid dug was the business."

"*Oui*," Bautain agreed. He sat in the hammock. "And I keep my promise to you, *mon ami*. Also I shall see to it that Monsieur Baker is returned to the United States. He can live with you until a schooner comes. You will occupy Putnam's bungalow."

"**W**E'LL need a houseboy," Dexon said. "How about Chan Lee?"

"It's all right with me so long as you all keep within the law. . . . Where did you get those dice?"

"We found them in Daley's things. We are just warming them up."

"Gambling!" Bautain said severely then: "That is against the law here."

"But we're not gambling. Gambling is a game of chance."

"*Bleu!* Isn't rolling dice a game of chance?"

"No."

"Why isn't it? You make a bet on the roll and there is a chance to win."

"Oh, yeah?" Dexon grinned. He tossed out a five-franc piece. "Cover that, big boy, and I'll show you how utterly wrong you are."



TAXUS the hair badger was hungry, and he craved excitement. So he hoisted his muscular bulk out of the slanting burrow and prepared to sally forth again on what for weeks had been a fruitless quest—the search for fresh food where there was none.

A doglike shiver began at his leathery snout and ran the length of his bristly body, effectually shaking the den-dust out of his wiry coat. Then his usually dreamy eyes roved critically over the immediate surroundings to make sure there were no lurking dangers in near-by weed patches.

He grunted and puffed peevishly, as he began the hopeless search. He must have something to eat soon, or the coming of winter would number him among the unfit. Not an ounce of fat did he carry now; unusually early hot weather had driven him into æstivation weeks ahead of time. But the first flat rock he overturned exposed not one snail, grub, nor beetle; not even a moist spot, where insects ordinarily hovered. And it was the same with a dozen other rocks and favorite insect retreats which he scrutinized patiently and deliberately. Even the customary dust-colored grasshoppers were absent now.

He swung his black orbs farther afield to find that prospect just as uninviting. Apparently there was nothing edible in the whole region, except perhaps a few elusive sandswifts—bony lizards with snaky flickering tongues and fireproof toes, who were of the few ground-runners able to turn a square corner and come to a full stop at top speed without skidding or upsetting. These swift little reptiles could run without apparent discomfort over sand hot enough to scorch the tough soles of a badger; and they deposited

their eggs, about the size of peas and shaped like hen eggs, in the same burning sand. But Taxus had little liking for eating lizards.

He came now to a place from which he could view a world of sunken prairie. Miles of dry grass, in tall spires with white waving pennants, in huge bouquets of dead trailing streamers, in scattered huddles of shorter salt grass with parched stems and dead foliage. A far-stretching solitude of drouth-cursed slopes fell away to flats as arid as the uplands.

From the edge of a small jutting table rock Taxus gazed intently out across the waste, a stiff breeze pasting his coarse hair flat to his wide chest and pointed face. For several minutes he stood motionless. He was reluctant to leave the district where he was born and had lived for nearly twenty years; he knew every foot of it and like most other creatures he preferred to stay in familiar surroundings. Perhaps drouths were for the purpose of causing wild life to change environments and thus prevent stagnation. However that may be, the badger must move out if no rain came soon.

Forty days and forty nights, huge thunder-heads had hung listlessly in a sky of faded blue, steadily presaging a rain which just as stubbornly refused to materialize. And that vast basin which is Cheyenne Bottoms rapidly became a caldron of spinning whirlwinds and shimmering heat mirages. All the prairie vegetation was succumbing to the aridity; even that hardy native the sandhill lily rattled dry swords like the bleached ribs of a buffalo skeleton.

On the basin's rim, braced against the breeze, Taxus resembled an incongruous idol of some pagan cult, and somehow the blacker bands around his eyes gave him



Cheyenne Bottoms

*A vivid drama of the
wilderness war at our
doorstep.*

By DAVID BAXTER

more the aspect of a meek old clown than of the bold brigand he really was. . . .

Gazing down the long slopes, he was surprised to see another badger hurrying along a narrow path that wound through the grass thicket—not a stringy specimen like himself, but a vividly banded animal in full fur of a definitely blackish cast—looking neither right nor left and in a moment passing around a hummock, out of sight. Then in a few moments a lanky beast hove in sight—a much larger brute with long flopping ears touching the ground as he loped along the same trail the fugitive badger had taken. Taxus crouched instinctively, sensing the need though not the reason for caution. When the stranger passed abreast of him a long-drawn howl echoed over the hillsides. The hair badger bared his teeth in a soundless snarl and drew farther back from the edge.

Of course he could not know that this was the worst of all enemies of wild life on the ground, a lone trail-hound, who hunted just for the sake of the kill. But the mere fact that the other badger had fled so precipitately was sufficient. Taxus squatted, low and taut.

AGAIN the deep bawl sounded, below and to the right. And Taxus saw the hound plunge forward and clamp his fangs over the neck of that other badger as the latter tried ineffectually to dig into a rocky slope where he had been overtaken. In less than a minute came the soft crushing sound of severed vertebrae, and almost directly the hapless fugitive was stone dead.

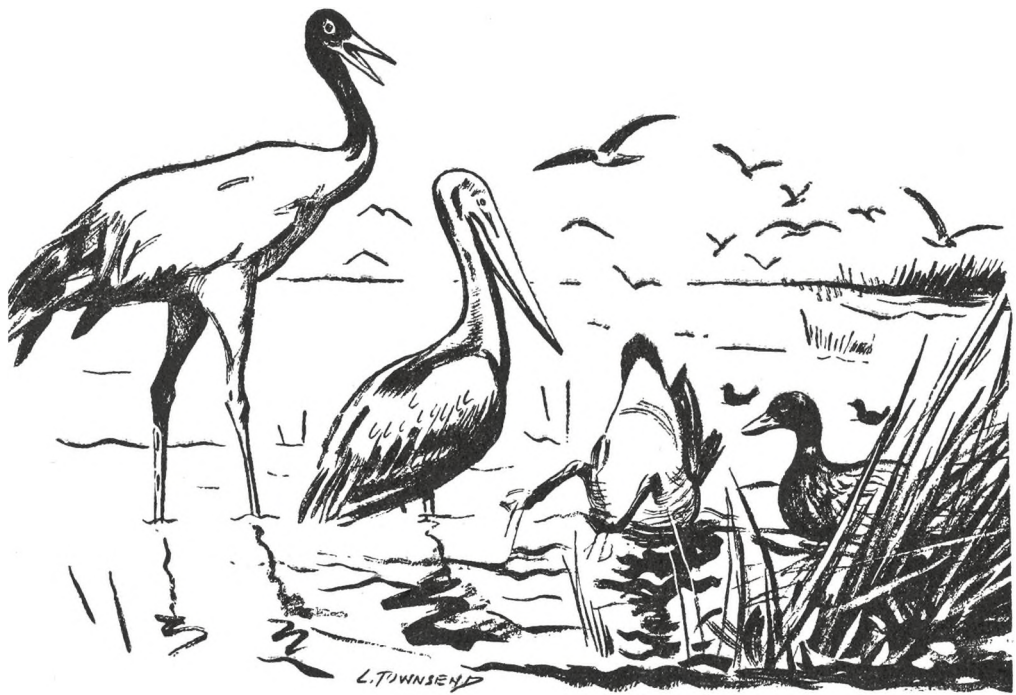
As flat as a door-mat Taxus sprawled upon the ledge, seeking to escape atten-

tion through absolute immobility, while the dog worried the lifeless carcass. Nor did the watcher move until the hound had slouched off across the bottoms with the peculiar slinking stride of a panther.

As day advanced, and there seemed no further danger from the trail-hound, Taxus arose to survey again the terrain. He took no more than a dozen rolling steps when with startling abruptness a shrill buzzing, long and vehement, yet carrying an undertone of plaintive terror, came down from high overhead. Taxus gazed quickly aloft.

So swiftly the eye could scarcely follow, dodging hither and yon a singing locust hurtled through the air! And right behind, dodging when the locust dodged, circling when the locust circled, in and out, up, down, as though the two were joined by an invisible thread, a giant blue wasp pressed in close pursuit. Inch by inch the wasp drew up, and in an amazing spurt of speed struck the fear-crazed fugitive squarely in the middle of the back, tumbling both of them to the earth at the badger's feet. They were quivering in death, as Taxus raked them gingerly around with one long forenail before turning to his own affairs.

Trundling down the slope, he now resembled a towheaded urchin who could not keep his unruly hair combed and parted. He lived the identical life-cycle of all Western badgers, but some trappers would claim that his kind was a separate species. For he had no soft underfur—no underclothes, so to speak. Indeed, the hair badger derives his trade name from the fact that he has only one coat of sparse bristles; therefore his pelt is virtually worthless on the hide market.



His thirty pounds of mature bone and sinew, swung low on wide-set legs, gave to the hair badger an appearance of uncouth awkwardness quite deceptive—for he could be as active as a bobcat upon occasion, also as vicious and as wise. Long-legged killers, such as coyotes, found him difficult. None of these treacherous assassins had ever been able to corner him where he could not scoop out a shallow depression in which to curl his haunches while he brought all four cutters into action.

The last rays of the sun were tinting the white thunder-heads with golden cream while the sky deepened to the purple of approaching night. And still the hair badger's food-search was unrewarded. An ominous quiet, creeping slowly over the bottoms, had rendered the atmosphere responsive to the slightest sounds. Through it came the distinct cawing of that black pirate the carrion crow, flapping wearily and warily more than a mile away. His raucous voice held a note of jeering derision.

The hair badger listened a few seconds as with measured, laborious strokes the ebony murderer of young birds winged up that rightfully named Deception Creek, which joined Blood Creek, to end waterless in the basin. Then *Taxus* shuffled on toward the high country.

Scrambling to the highest ridge, he saw what had not been visible from below: a prodigious black cloud on the far horizon. As he eyed it, it enlarged fearfully; with awe-inspiring rapidity it seeped over the whole northern segment

of the heavens. Like an immense ink-blot, it spread wider and higher until the very earth was overshadowed. Then without further warning a long wriggling chain of blue-tinted lightning split the black from its uppermost edge to the dusky hills beyond.

The hair badger cringed painfully before the cannonade of thunder which instantly followed the terrifying thrust of lightning. In common with all prairie denizens he had never become accustomed to the blinding interplay, nor had he overcome the deadly fear of it. Instead of taking to the open countryside, he galloped madly back down the slopes. His long claws hampered him sadly; once they caught in a loop of peppergrass, throwing him headlong, and once he collided with a projecting lump of earth, and was thrown out of his course.

THEN came the rain. . . . A preliminary scattering of huge drops made duck-tracks in the alkali dust. Other drops jarred the withered pads of a prickly pear, while straight crystal spears were soon stabbing the scarlet sumac berries and piercing sporadic growths of dead bunchgrass as tall as a man. The pelting sting of the drops drove the distracted badger to greater speed.

A rising wind mingled and added a sullen roar to the thunder. The slashing lightning became an almost incessant glare. The very landscape faded into the fury of the storm; the air was a veritable lake turned upside down. Pools formed instantly, to run over and slither

down every plane around the bottoms. Rivulets raced down every erosion furrow. Every slough and draw fed a swirling mass into the flood. Deception Creek reversed its reputation, to become indeed a master of deceit, and Blood Creek ran overfull of muddy water. In the end, the cloudburst changed the gigantic dry bowl into an inland sea of twenty-five thousand acres of clay-gray water—an unheard-of occurrence in the annals of man.

Taxus wallowed through the deluge like a small bark crossing the bar in a hurricane. Only blind instinct enabled him to locate his den, and had it not been situated on a side hill where the drainage was good he would have been forced to spend the night outside. Possibly he would have drowned, although he could swim as well as a beaver.

SOMETIME afterward, when he once more hoisted himself out of the hole, a silver cycle-moon lay flat on its back on the eastern rim of the bottoms; old-timers called it a new moon with the old moon in its lap; Indians said the two up-pointing horns denoted wet weather: the red man might as well hang bows and arrows on the horns because it was going to rain and there could be no hunting.

The hair badger spat down toward the new-born lake where a shore breeze told of food that was plentiful. For news of the new watering-place had carried far. Those who had deserted during the protracted dry spell were returning in force, bringing with them many strangers, who had always lived outside. Crawlers, runners, flyers, hoppers had all responded to the call, as man responds to the urge of a gold-rush.

Uttering a tiny squeak of fear, something shot from under the very feet of the badger, bounding away over the rejuvenated ragweeds, clearing ten feet at every jump. Its long hindlegs and slender tufted tail indicated a kangaroo rat, a complex little fellow who possessed the twittering voice of a bird and the reckless leaping proclivities of a frog.

Taxus scorned pursuit; no need of chasing rats that tried to fly, when there were plenty of ground-squirrels.

He scented a fresh squirrel-hole and was soon regaling his ravenous appetite upon its stripe-coated, stub-tailed owner. It was his first meal for days and before he was appeased he had unholed a total of six squirrels. Small wonder early farmers in Kansas asserted that a badger

bored thousands of post-holes, of which none could be fitted into a fence line!

The hair badger hunted to the brink of the lake, consuming *en route* several beetles and katydids, a sand mouse and a trapdoor spider. It was while he was busy digging, that a faint but clear and deep baying sounded from the crestline. So much noise did he make ripping through the tough sod that he was totally unaware that the deadly menace of the night trails was again abroad. In blissful ignorance, he moved on around the lake, surprising a prairie-dog owl, that lonely night-flyer who consorts so freely with rattlesnakes and who is the sole member of the owl family content to reside on the treeless plains.

The double-horned moon mounted steadily in a star-sprinkled sky, casting pale radiance farther out across the lake, whitening the water until it appeared to stand above the shore in snowy prominence. A heavy roll on the surface failed to detract from the peace and quiet of the sleeping seagulls who had discovered the transformed bottoms and drifted in for a night's rest after a strenuous day of chasing grasshoppers. Now nearly a thousand were riding the swells as lightly as bits of thistle floss, apparently moving with the breeze but in reality remaining as stationary as an anchored boat—for gulls can swim automatically while asleep.

A scattering of slaty mudhens mingled with the throng, seeking companionship; they would fraternize just as readily with Canadian geese or whooping cranes.

WHERE the waters slapped and hissed on a flat beach, the badger paused to sample the air currents. Some mystic warning endeavored to penetrate his food-gorged senses. For a full minute he stood as rigid as a mounted specimen. High overhead a wide "V" of sandhill cranes circled slowly for a safe landing in the moonlight; the liquid queries of their aged leader fell like bugle notes, to be broken suddenly by a weird cry that quavered over the waves in agonized, ironical laughter—a loon had found the new lake and was already enjoying it in his queer fashion. A ring-neck killdeer, who seemed never to sleep, ducked his round head and ran in a flash along the brink, uttering a succession of shrill intolerant complaints.

Taxus resisted an impulse to pursue as the queer little bird cut loose another cackle of piercing defiance and flickered

out of sight in the gloom. A rod or two from the water were a number of odd chimney-like structures, each walled meticulously with mudballs about the size of marbles and each standing approximately six inches above the ground with a one-inch hole down the center—the mud towers of a crawfish village which is often found in swampy places where there is no surface water. A deft sweep of one forefoot brought one crumbling down, and *Taxus* soon unearthed its angry inhabitant; and each of several more holes furnished another of the furiously resisting creatures, which the hair badger consumed ere he resumed his wanderings across the flats.

ABOVE the incessant drone of billions of insects there was that stupendous hush of illimitable spaces; a gigantic quiet composed of innumerable tiny noises: grass blades rubbing and weed stems tapping; leaves fluttering; growing plants upthrusting and unfolding; water gurgling and wavelets hissing; singly almost inaudible, but combined to a volume of deafening quantity, once the ear separated it from the rest.

The hair badger had much hunting to do. He waddled along the beach sniffing the wind suspiciously; the trail-hound had apparently left the neighborhood but there seemed an admixture of smells sifting down the slopes. And when he arrived at the foot of a bare swale spreading out fanlike to the water, he stopped to listen intently a moment. Then a childlike cry of anguish and hopeless terror rang out. Again and again it sounded, rapidly drawing nearer. As the hair badger faced in that direction a jackrabbit galloped out of the hedge of weeds and passed within a few yards of his wondering eyes, staggering as it ran, its voice thinning pitifully. *Taxus* could plainly see the cause of its distress—a dark shape resembling the shadow of a flying squirrel clinging to the runner's flank, much as a Cheyenne Indian rode his war pony during an attack on an early-day wagon train.

With all four feet outstretched, the sinister shadow gouged deep in the rabbit's neck. And *Taxus* knew that the villain in velvet, the prairie weasel, had also arrived. It must have covered many a weary mile to be present so soon, and so soon living up to its reputation as conscienceless cutthroat! A vindictive blood-sucking vampire, it was literally riding the jackrabbit to death. . . .

The hair badger plodded on around the lake, investigating Indian sage, tickle-grass, broom sedge and Russian thistle jungles. Just before sun-up he came to a black opening in a low embankment. Here he decided to camp for the rest of the night, and here he eventually stayed for several nights. As usual he entered backward, and was soon sleeping on his well-filled stomach, long claws folded lattice-wise over his face.

After several foggy days, the sun boiled red and large over the eastern side of the basin, lending a hazy smoky effect to the bottoms, as of the recent presence of a thousand Pawnee council fires. It was the beginning of "Indian summer," and the badger toddled forth for a last hunt before cold weather closed the doors of too many larders. An overgrown yellow grasshopper was the first to catch his attention, then four or five sable hearth-cricket who had thought themselves securely hidden under the roots of a wild rosebush, and next a clan of praying mantis, who cocked their triangular heads in futile bravery. Following this, he hoed out a tapering bread-root, munching it with great relish as his dreamy eyes wandered around in search of another appetizer—a pint of seeds shaken down from a tall gumweed.

On account of their ventriloquial quality he could not locate exactly the yelping signals of a coyote, but when another of the gray sneakers answered from the crest of Cheyenne hill he knew they were merely exchanging greetings, with no intention of trying to corner him. He accepted fully of the bounty provided by the season. Indeed, he became an inveterate vegetarian, an eater of roots, fruits, and seeds. Clusters of wild grape lured him, as did hippaws, prickly pears, ground-apples, grass-nuts, buffalo peas, mushrooms and sheep sorrel. Literally walking in fat, he was, as was every creature upon which he later preyed; they were easy prey when so fat as to be careless.

The young of prairie chickens, quails, meadowlarks, snakes, moles and other ground dwellers all furnished acceptable fare after the days of eating vegetables. Thus was the badger assured of a warm bed for winter in one of his deepest hibernaculums.

ONE thing marred the serenity: the trail-hound began hunting along the lake every night; he found the trails hot on the frosty air. Sometimes his eager

CHEYENNE BOTTOMS

bawling sounded so close that the badger would crouch in the tensest anticipation. Many a rabbit, opossum, and ground bird gave its life to this heartless killer. Man-trained in the art of murder, he was no doubt the only one in the whole region whom *Taxus* had to fear.

One chilly night when the badger was hurrying back to a den he had arranged for winter, he ran afoul of an alien raccoon, the like of whom he had never seen in the bottoms. Pure black, a shadow of the ordinary coon, he sat obstinately in front of the door, his pink eyes glowing with the unwinking stare of live embers. He snarled truculently when *Taxus* tried to detour, and again when he tried the other side. But if he thought the badger would retire he was in error. Self-locking jaws open wide, black lips curled, *Taxus* muscled forward. The coon snarled his ill humor; and the badger emitted a defiant hiss, which arose quickly to a thin high treble like the whistle of a pop-corn wagon, the coarse hair on his back springing erect.

THEY came together cursing and vilifying as savagely as a pair of wildcats. And for a minute there was little to choose between them; one big ball of fur and claws, they rolled and squirmed, the badger growling dog-fashion, the coon spitting like a tomcat. While the hairy one clinched and wrestled, the ring-tail bounced and held on with monkey claws. However, it was more a battle of spite—neither really tried to kill the other; neither had any intention of eating the other. Nor was this latter ever the case, except when adult ate young.

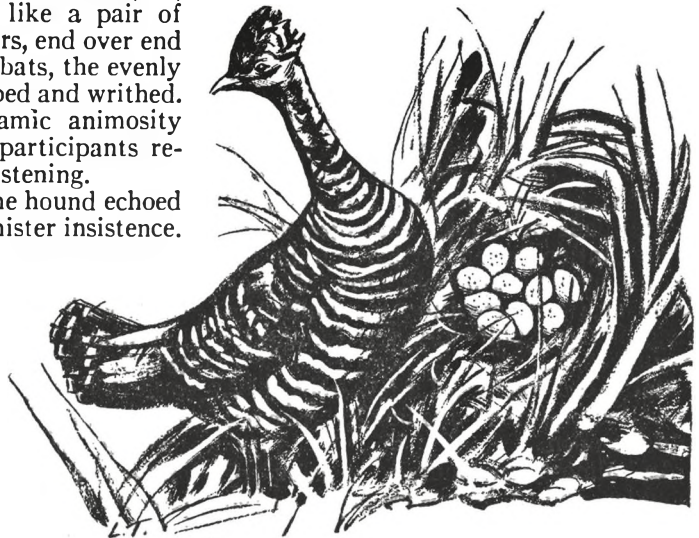
The din of the battle was terrific, as, over and over, sidewise like a pair of rough-and-tumble wrestlers, end over end like a pair of trained acrobats, the evenly matched combatants flopped and writhed. Then abruptly the dynamic animosity ceased altogether—both participants relaxed, to lie embraced, listening.

The long low howl of the hound echoed through the night with sinister insistence.

Not unmusical it was, in spite of its fear-inspiring tones. The deep baritone of the trail-hound tolled again, closer, and the listeners immediately disengaged, hatred for each other entirely forgotten. The black coon trotted nonchalantly off into the thickets; the hair badger backed into the disputed den without even looking to see if he would hit the door squarely. Here he sighed in relief as he heard the hound's call sounding fainter and farther up on the ridge.

Down along the waterfront the voices of the lake were a babel of confused articulations, somehow strangely detached. The thousand of seagulls was now ten thousand. A great gathering of teals and butterballs chorused a weird scale, while the sonorous quacking of mallards, canvasbacks and other ducks of weightier species blared at untimed intervals. Hell-divers there were too, in numbers, diving for what they could not yet hope to find on the new bed of the lake. A few pelicans, a small flock of sandhill cranes and another of green herons stilted in deeper water. Even the curlews came—another almost extinct species; seven of them sailed in, exactly a yard apart, one behind the other, wings stroking in the perfect unison of well-trained boatmen.

An overland immigration of astonishing proportions was also arriving. And as every Eden has its evils, many types of turtles blundered into the district, the diamondbacks, striped shells, leatherbacks and even the humbler stinkers, a miniature tank corps of armored destroyers from the Walnut and Arkansas rivers as far as twelve miles from the new lake. The ruthless brown mink were also there;



Illustrated by
Lee Townsend

they came in a small mob, as they often traveled, for safety and better hunting facilities. And a few days later Taxus met yet another immigrant train, a mother skunk and her brood of nine half-grown youngsters, mincing along daintily, tails at half-mast, fur slicked back in shining elegance.

It began to look as if the bottoms would eventually be overpopulated. Taxus saw opossums of many shades: pure black, brown, cream, cinnamon, white and gray. The ancient bottoms were indeed becoming a paradise for all manner of wild life. Cattails were pointing stubby brown fingers skyward; bulrushes, polished and symmetrical, waved their beaded tassels to and fro; three-cornered slough grasses thrust their bodkins up through the shallows. Never since the day nearly a century before when Satank, the cruelest, most relentless of Cheyenne chieftains, had established a village in the basin, had there been such a change in any region. When day waned, the far-flung sheet of water became a scene of intense activity. When day broke, the winged regiments formed one after another to rise and be whisked into the south with a sturdy norther pounding them on the back.

As Taxus trudged one night over a flat, still sodden from the wind tides, there was no note of foreboding in the chill atmosphere, yet he cast about furtively from time to time. The icy-crisp muck underfoot was not to his liking, but there was an occasional helgramite, lucky bug or other compensation to be found in the little pools along the way. So he worked methodically across to a long incline tipping gently up to the skyline, whereon grew a mixed garden of wild mustard, muletail, sunflowers, burdocks and other rough dryland plants.

NEAR the edge of this jungle he stopped to shake the cold mud from his feet. A chill cross-wind brought a scent to his dilated nostrils; strange and new it was, yet wet and fishy as the smell of crawdads or clams. And directly an odd agitation began farther out in the weeds, moving gradually toward him. Some awkward creature, too bulky for the winding rabbit-runs, was forcing its way through.

Retreating backward a few steps, Taxus waited until the thing finally broke out into the open.

An almost involuntary tensing of shoulder- and neck-muscles prepared the badger for battle. The things he did not

know, he did not fear. Then he stared in astonishment at the black apparition that blundered out of the thicket. Never before had he viewed such a repulsive monster, such an embodiment of malice! He recognized that it was a turtle—but the size of it was beyond his experience, while the demoniacal glare in its snaky eyes was appalling, and its outthrust snout was disgustingly ugly.

WITH masterful oarlike tread it tore loose from the entangling weeds and marched toward him. But the hair badger stubbornly held his place, clutching the muck, returning evil glare for evil glare. The long scaly neck shot aggressively forward, snapping horribly with beaked jaws. Taxus answered its malevolent hissing savagely.

The lumbering turtle was as large as an inverted dishpan, and had rows of horny protuberances all over its armored back. Although it advanced in a manner brooking no interference, Taxus stood his ground, baring his teeth, only hissing the louder.

This loggerhead alligator was an unknown quantity; it would have been no disgrace to run away. For the "logger" was one of the most dastardly fish- and bird-murderers to be found in the lower kingdom. Nothing a hair badger could do would ever equal the destructive propensities of a loggerhead. Even when the logger was no larger than a quarter of a dollar he was a fierce and fearless little killer who made life miserable for small fish and other aquatic life.

Tapering horn-clad tail lashing sideways, hard eyes glittering, the alligator turtle charged, as though to crush Taxus underfoot. For a mere badger to intercept this powerful creature was the depth of folly. In truth, a man may well feel a qualm of fear when a loggerhead is determined to attain a given objective. At such times they seem to go insane—and woe unto any who has the temerity to stand in the path!

Unwittingly Taxus faced the greatest danger of his life. Here was an enemy in an impenetrable coat of mail, who could rend and tear with fearful power, but who was invulnerable to teeth and talons.

Luckily the turtle's first stroke, swift and vicious, barely grazed the badger's sneering muzzle. The hooked beak cut and seared, drew a jet of blood, but failed to secure an anchorage. The hair badger leaped sidewise, grunting his surprise,

not yet convinced. Like a wary boxer he circled his mountainous foe, seeking an opening for one of his straight-in bites. But his teeth struck and grated on something hard as rock. This enraged him beyond control, beyond better judgment. Leaping over the massive pile, as the turtle pivoted with swiftness unbelievable in one so cumbersome, he fastened one of his lockjaw holds on a horny hind foot, striving furiously to sever that jerking member. But he found it the same as trying to bite a dried hedge limb. And the strength of that pistoning leg was irresistible; it snatched him back and forth with relentless force.

Suddenly a bell-toned voice sounded along the upper slopes, twice, thrice, drawing perceptibly nearer, placing the badger between two burnings. The hunting hound-dog was approaching with steady strides, sniffing carefully for a fresh trail, weaving noiselessly through the weed patch. And so intent was he upon smelling out the many converging runways that he came to the scene quite unaware of its dreadful import. Even then his big solemn eyes told him it was only a silly badger wallowing around a black earthy hummock! Badgers were easy for him to kill; he knew how to do it! He crouched, edged stealthily ahead, hoping to creep close enough for one short leap. Evidently this badger was more of a fool than were the rest of his kind.

Meanwhile the ugly beak had swung back to fasten upon one of the badger's hind feet, like a pair of wire nippers, snipping into the tendons, rendering the old mammal helpless for a moment. Then he flew into a veritable hurricane of clawing, slashing and useless in-fighting. He might as well have been fighting a tree stump, for all it gained him. The loggerhead had walked twelve miles across country from the Arkansas River and did not propose to be turned back now. In fact, he would rather head into death than turn aside.

SLOWLY and relentlessly he began to drag his frantic victim toward the water; once under the surface, it would be an easy matter to drown him and end the affair. He had often drowned full-grown geese and ducks. Step by step he heaved and hauled, until the slime began to rise around him, while Taxus centered his efforts on trying to prevent being dragged to a watery grave. He hooked his claws into the slough-grass



roots and held on, but he succeeded only in plowing miniature furrows in the mud behind him. In spite of all he could do, inch by inch the animated tractor was pulling him into the shallows.

It had become a weird, silent trial of endurance—yet every living creature in a radius of a hundred yards knew that some awful tragedy was happening. Many were the terrified eyes staring from the fringe of vegetation. The boggy flats became a zone of silent fear. A bullbat wheeled drunkenly. A great horned owl, that cruel shark of the night airways, skimmed low on hushed wings, but did not dare to stoop.

THEN the hound took a hand. He knew no more of alligator turtles than did Taxus, but he sensed that he had no time to spare. Three bounds and his slaving jaws closed upon the elongated neck of the saurian; closed and relaxed again.

Like a flash the turtle released his own grip and sank his beak deep in the hound's shoulder. So rapid and savage was the stroke the dog could not anticipate it. He yowled aloud in pain, seeking only to free himself. But the tenacious nightmare clung and bit until the horny hook found the shoulder-bone. The whole lakeside fairly rang with piteous howls. The hound-dog was getting a touch of his own cruelty; did he but escape it is practically certain he would be cured of lone hunting.

Taxus dragged his maimed foot up the incline to a safe den, where he spent the winter sleeping and healing his wounds. His enemy the trail-hound had unintentionally proved to be a friend in need, and indeed.

Who Loses It?

PROPOSITION PETE MCGILL sat on the bed staring at his hat with a sour look on his face; for sooner or later he was going to put it on and then go out and ride down four floors in the elevator, walk three blocks, climb the stairs to the second floor of Murlay's Billiard and Recreation Club; and there, probably hanging around the snooker game, find Fish-eye Yager, and inform Fish-eye that he did not have any fifteen hundred dollars.

That would vex Fish-eye, which was unfortunate; for Fish-eye was large and very hard, both inside and out. He wasn't tricky or underhanded at all; in fact, he was strictly on the up-and-up, but he was awfully firm about money-matters, and

He made his book out at Reeve City's Parkside, when they were running there; for they don't have pari-mutuels yet at Parkside; and when they weren't, he made it on other tracks, down at Murlay's B. & R. C. Though most of his bets were small, four-bits to ten bucks, in general he did all right, keeping his book carefully in balance, and never trying to handicap races himself.

But today when Fish-eye wanted a hundred on Flatside to win, he just couldn't turn it down, even though at fifteen-to-one the bet threw his book top-heavy out of balance. For horses were not only Prop's livelihood—they were his inner being; and he knew Flatside could not even run fourth except by a fluke.



"What an idea!"
breathed Cuc-ball.

could nearly always be counted on to collect his debts. The few instances in which he had failed were commemorated by split lips, cauliflowered ears and oddly shaped noses, which could be seen around town any time you cared to look.

Never again, Prop vowed solemnly, would he let his book get out of balance.

Thereupon Mice Twice got left flat-footed at the post, Gigger-do and Count March tangled badly at the stretch turn; and Captain Percy, running easily and a cinch to win, broke stride just after he made his bid and finished poorly, apparently a touch lame. Flatside won; and a bad day otherwise, including three cus-

By FRANCIS
COCKRELL

*THE kidnaping (snatch-
ing, perhaps, to you) of
the bookmaker known as
Proposition Pete; his soul-
shaking sojourn in the cus-
tody of Cue-ball and Creep;
his hazardous encounters
with Fish-eye, Squire Hin-
kle and that sardonic assas-
sin Lips Livermore.*



Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

bankroll gone, he could have got a stake somewhere—from Squire Hinkle, if no one else. Among other things the Squire ran a few horses himself, including Captain Percy; and while he was strictly an individual to leave alone when possible, he was ever eager where there was a prospect of thirty per cent a month, and would have been a sure touch ordinarily. But even the Squire wouldn't stake a bookie who in one afternoon had lost fifteen hundred he didn't have.

STILL, sitting there being sad about things was not going to change them any, so finally Prop sighed and started for the dresser to get his hat. As he did so, there was a knock on the door.

"All right, then, Fish-eye," he said resignedly. "Come on in; but *honest*, I was just on my way out to—"

It was not Fish-eye. It was Cue-ball Cohen, Gorge Lundborg and Creep Weaver. They entered silently with their hands in their coat pockets; and Cue-ball said: "Take it easy and keep quiet, Prop.—Clean him, Gorge."

"You know I don't carry nothing," Prop said offensively, as Gorge patted him for firearms.

tomers who hit parlays, wiped out his bank-roll and left him with exactly seven bucks to give Fish-eye on account—a sum which Fish-eye would consider inadequate.

And not only had his greed made him an appointment with mayhem, but it had blighted his future. With merely his



"You leave my twenty-five hundred at the desk for Scotty Berg," Prop said.

Creep had the door open a crack, and was peering into the hall.

"Say," Prop inquired, "what is this, anyhow?"

"A snatch," Cue-ball stated briefly; "and we don't want no trouble, un'erstan'?"

Prop looked puzzled. "No fooling?"

"No fooling," Cue-ball assured him.

"Boys," Prop stated, "I don't get it, but you've come to the right man! Let's go." Even Fish-eye couldn't expect him to show up if he was busy being snatched. Of course, this was only postponing things, but that was better than nothing. Anything, even Fish-eye tomorrow, was better than Fish-eye today.

"Hall's okay," Creep announced.

Prop locked the door behind him and went along the hall with Creep and Gorge on either side of him, and Cue-ball leading. They passed five doors, and Cue-ball opened the sixth one and they all went in.

"That was quick, wasn't it?" Prop said.

"Pretty nice," Cue-ball admitted. "Nobody to see or nothin'."

"I got to hand it to you," Prop said.

"I kinda liked it," Cue-ball said modestly. "I read about it some place one time. I'm always readin' somethin'," he added. "Course y'un'erstan' they's nothin' personal in this, Prop. Strictly business, an' we'll try to make you comf'table while you're with us."

"Sure, sure," Prop said. "You guys are okay. I know that."

"Just set down over there," Cue-ball said, indicating the desk by the window, "an' we'll get the note wrote up." He produced a pencil and paper from his pocket. "Jus' tell him how it is, an' it'll be twen'y-fi' gran', an' to put a ad in the *Journal* to Daisy—"

"Who?" Prop asked. "My Uncle Adelbert?"

"Sure," Cue-ball replied. "Who else?"

"Well," Prop said, "nobody. Only—well, Uncle Adelbert just don't seem to like me very much. And he's mighty tight, you know. I'm afraid he aint liable to go for this, fellas."

"He's your own flesh and blood, aint he?" Cue-ball asked.

"Yeah, but you see—"

"That's good enough for me," Cue-ball said. "You just write the note."

"Okay," Prop said. "I just thought you oughta know."

There was a chance they might get sore when they found out they couldn't show a profit on him; and Creep and Gorge particularly were sort of unpredictable when they got sore; but at least now they couldn't say he hadn't played fair.

PROP finished the note, telling Uncle Adelbert to acknowledge its receipt by a personal in the *Journal*, addressed to "Daisy," and that further instructions would then follow, and not to go to the police or anything, else it might cost his devoted nephew his life.

Cue-ball approved the note, and Creep left to slip it under the door of Uncle Adelbert's office. They weren't using the mails, Cue-ball explained to Prop. "We aint gettin' no Feds in, you bet," he said.

There was no danger of anyone else getting the note, because Uncle Adelbert had no employees, his business being what he called "trading." He bought things and sold them—anything from a fruitstand to a business block, and his profit was generally in proportion to the size of the deal. Most of his deals were big.

Creep would go on home after delivering the note, and the other three now went to bed. They had a two-room suite, with two beds in the bedroom; Cue-ball and Prop slept in one, Gorge in the other. Cue-ball handcuffed Prop to himself.

"Not that I don't trust you," he explained, "—only, when you got a important deal, like this, you got to watch them details."

Prop said sure, he understood.

WHEN there was no answer to the note next day, Prop said his Uncle Adelbert was probably out of town; and when Creep called his house from a pay-phone, the housekeeper confirmed this guess.

Just waiting, with nothing to do, was pretty dull. Gorge did better than the rest of them. Gorge, short for *Gorgeous*, was seven feet high, and though during his brief ring career he had never been knocked down, his really singular characteristic was that he is probably the only man in fistic history who leads exclusively with his ears, which were now of an unusual shape and hue, and not much good to listen with. Gorge got himself a potted plant from the dime store, and set it in the window and watered it a good deal, and watched it interestedly the rest of the time, and seemed pretty well satisfied; but it didn't grow fast enough to suit the others.

Creep was the silent type, and always moved wearily except when there was shooting. He was different then. But most of the time he was sitting, or lying down, or leaning against something. He drew things once in a while—pictures, and sort of designs, and some of them weren't bad, either.

Cue-ball was, relatively speaking, the brains of the trio; and though, true to his word, he did read some, it was evident he wasn't cut out for a real bookworm.

Creep and Gorge ate out, and brought sandwiches and things for the other two.

Prop asked Creep to bring him a *Racing Form* when he went out that first evening, and of course when he got back, they all got to talking about horses and picking them.

It turned out the next day that both Creep and Cue-ball had picked three winners, and Cue-ball said if they just had some dough, they could kill some time with the ponies, Prop making book, of course.

"In fac'," he said, "I mean look, Prop—I mean, it aint as if we didn't have no prospects, when we'll be plenty fat soon as your uncle gets back. If you wanted to make book, an' take our markers—"

"Tell you the truth," Prop said, "I'm short myself right now, but I'll make you a proposition: I know you're all right, an' you know me. We'll just make it whoever loses pays off out o' the first cash he gets hold of. Course," he added, "I don't care, only it would kinda pass the time, wouldn't it?"

Prop wasn't much worried about going in the red, for if he couldn't out-handicap these three he would go on an oat diet and start running in claiming races himself. As it turned out, at the end of three days, he was into them for about eight hundred. After that, though the betting continued, with the trio increasing their bets, it didn't get their full attention.

For on the morning of the fourth day the *Journal* carried a message for Daisy:

DAISY—Knew you were worthless but not that you were stupid enough to think I'd fall for anything so obvious. A. McG.

"What's the matter with him?" Cue-ball asked angrily.

"I guess he thinks it's just a gag I'm tryin' to fleece him with," Prop said. "He's got a kind of suspicious nature," he added sadly.

"Well," Cue-ball said grimly, "we'll fix *that*. We just got to write him a better note. That's all."

AFTER some revision, another note was drafted which Cue-ball was positive would convince Uncle Adelbert his nephew was a goner if twenty-five thousand was not swiftly forthcoming. Prop was as interested as anyone now, for if they did collect, he would be into them on the races far enough by that time to pay off Fish-eye, and his own troubles would be over; but he wasn't nearly as optimistic.

The last time he had tried to dig any cash out of his uncle was to buy a pure



"Well," Lips said, "the easiest thing is to conk him here, an' then take him down to his room an' finish him up wit' a blade."

sweetheart of a three-year-old filly which, as he explained to Uncle Adelbert, had been handled wrong and could be turned into something really fancy. Uncle Adelbert had read him a lecture on the evils of horse-racing, tried to sell him a greenhouse and flower-shop worth twice the money, finally even offered to let him run it rent-free, just pay the taxes, if he would quit his worthless ways—and two days later bought the horse himself. On the basis of what Prop had told him about her handling, he had won two purses with her and then sold her for twice what he had paid, and had at the same time gone slightly horse-nutty.

So Prop was disappointed but not surprised when this appeared two days later:

DAISY—Am I laughing!

That really seared them. "Why," Cue-ball said indignantly, "that old buzzard aint got the heart of a louse! And him your own blood-uncle."

This time they all worked, fired to a white heat of creation, and everybody gave all he had.

"Don't forget about does he want you to endure inhuman Oriental torture and hideous suffering and wind up a gory, mewchilated corpse," Cue-ball cautioned, culling a bit of useful data from his hours with the masters.

Prop put in those angles and some more of his own, and in the end it was a powerful, eloquent epistle which they all knew they could never equal again. It drew, two mornings later, this reply:

DAISY—Tsk, tsk. How harrowing!

By noon things were at a standstill. Clearly Uncle Adelbert simply was not open to conviction by letter; and to see him personally, if it did convince him Prop was kidnaped, would also betray the identity of at least one of his captors, and that wouldn't do.

Gorge, having thought hard all morning, now suggested they might cut an ear off Prop, and send that to Uncle Adelbert; but Prop said all ears looked alike to Uncle A., and Gorge went back to looking at his plant, discouraged. Cue-ball, however, inspired by that and momentarily heartened by what seemed the first practical idea yet, said they *could* cut off a finger, though, and send it—for Uncle Adelbert wouldn't think Prop would cut off his own finger, and *that* would identify him.

But when Prop pointed out that it wouldn't—because his fingerprints had never been taken, they all lapsed into gloom again, except Gorge, who looked up at Prop admiringly.

"Gee," Gorge said, "not *ever*?"

"It just don't seem fair," Cue-ball said bitterly. "Not makin' nothin' on a perfect snatch is bad enough, but to *lose* dough on the deal—" He ran a hand over his thinning hair, and let it drop dejectedly. "Sometimes it just looks like they aint no use *tryin'* to get ahead."

"It's sure tough," Prop agreed somberly, because this spoiled his own chance to pay Fish-eye too. "But don't let it get you down," he consoled Cue-ball. "It aint your fault. Different guys is good at different things, is all, an' you all just aint cut out for this kind o' business."

"What about Goat De Griff?" Cue-ball said. "He started out here, nothin' but

a cheap gun, an' a little snatchin' on the side, in a small way, and *he's* went on up, aint he? First Chi, an' now he's in New York with just about the Number One guy in the country, that's all."

"That's what I mean," Prop said, "Goat, he *was* cut out for it, see? He was prompt an' efficient an' his prices was right, an' he was on the job all the time.

"Jus' take this job, f'rinstance," Prop elaborated. "Goat woulda found out *first* it wasn't no good, an' never bothered with it, see? He just, well, he just had a talent that way, you might say. You guys oughta be in somethin' where you could use your talents, see what I mean? Like Cue-ball oughta be in some kind o' game where he could use his head on keepin' books and cuttin' costs an' stuff like that. An' Creep, he oughta be in somethin' where he could use his art, see, an' Gorge oughta be raisin' somethin'—like vegetables or flowers—that's what I mean."

"O KAY, okay," Cue-ball said, "but all that don't make no differ'nce now. What we gotta figure now is what're we gonna *do*?"

"I think we oughta knock him off," Gorge said. "It's his fault. He aint got no business havin' a uncle like that."

"Anyhow," Creep put in, "suppose he was to turn us in?"

"Now, boys," Prop said hastily—for when Creep had ideas like that they might come to something, you couldn't tell about Creep—"you know I wouldn't do a thing like that. Anyhow, if I did it wouldn't matter; couldn't anybody *prove* anything. Besides," he hurried on, "it wouldn't be honest to knock a guy off when you owe him dough. Gorge, you know that."

"I guess not," Gorge admitted gloomily. After a little he muttered: "Sometimes I get *tired* bein' honest."

Cue-ball sighed again. "I sure hate to have it all come to—"

"Wait a minute!" Prop said suddenly, with a light in his eye. "Wait a minute!"

He looked around at the three slowly. "Men," he announced impressively, "I got a proposition is absolutely the prettiest thing you ever see. All you need is five G's. 'Cause you don't owe me but two and a half, an' I know where you can get a greenhouse an' flower-shop for not more'n fi'teen hunnerd, an' that'd give you a G capital, an' you'd be a cinch, with Gorge to raise the stuff, an' Cue-ball to han'le the business, an' Creep to make the floral designs an' stuff like that."

"Gee, it sounds pretty nice at that," Cue-ball admitted. "Only—"

"My uncle has the joint," Prop went on, "an' I know I can get it for you for fi'teen hunnerd. It's worth twice that, only it's down on Third Street, an' the guys he's had in there don't do any good in that neighborhood. An' the taxes are too high, an' he can't get 'em cut down; but Cue-ball, your brother-in-law in the assessor's office could get that fixed for



you, an' you guys know all the boys down that way, and they'd be tickled to give you their business. An' you know how the boys are when they's a funeral, an' all the funerals they have, an' weddin's an' parties an' stuff. It'd be a gold mine."

"But that don't do no good," Cue-ball wailed as the beauty of the idea grew on him, "when we aint *got* no five G's, an' can't *get* it."

"But you can," Prop said. "It's a cinch." He paused a moment for effect, and then said succinctly: "Peddle me."

Cue-ball blinked and sat up. Gorge frowned, trying to think.

"How?" Cue-ball said. "Who to?"

"Nothin' to it," Prop said. "You go to somebody likely, like say Itchy Iboze or Clutch Kelso or Horrid Albert, an' act dumb, see? You snatched me, only now you got cold feet and don't know how to go on with it; but I got a uncle that'll pay plenty; all it needs is the right kind o' man to handle the details, an' you'll sell me for five G's. It can't miss."

"Cheeses!" Cue-Ball breathed. "What a idea!" Then he sobered. "Only, how about you, Prop? Will you be okay?"

"Don't worry about me," Prop said. "Them guys is all friends of mine, an'

when it turns out they can't do nothing, they'll just take it for a joke and it'll be okay. See? 'Cause they all got plenty of cash at the moment, and they'll never miss it."

"Creep," Cue-ball said, "let's go! You stay with Prop, Gorge. Don't let that pansy grow too fast," he added cheerily, "an' we'll sell it when we open up."

"It aint no pansy!" Gorge said. "It's a *lilium martagon*." But they were gone. "That means Turk's-cap lily," he explained to Prop.

But Prop didn't hear him, for he was lost in happy contemplation of the amazing resource of the McGill brain. If this worked, and he was confident it would, the boys would have a great set-up,—that greenhouse was made to order for them,—and he himself would not only be able to pay off Fish-eye but would have a stake besides. And all from a situation that had looked worse than hopeless. In fact, it was such an absolutely terrific idea that he didn't see how even he had thought of it. Just sheer inspiration, he guessed.

IT was about six o'clock when Cue-ball and Creep got back. They just came in and sat down.

"How'd you make out?" Prop asked eagerly. "Okay?"

"Well," Cue-ball said, "we peddled you."

"Which one?" Prop said, when Cue-ball didn't go on. "Itchy? I figgered he was the best bet."

"No," Cue-ball said uncomfortably. "It wasn't Itchy."

"Well," Prop said cheerfully, "it don't matter. Any of them three is okay. They all got a sense of humor."

"Tell you the truth, Prop," Cue-ball said reluctantly, "for one reason another, didn't none of them want to monkey with it. But you see it was such a fine idea, we shopped aroun' a little more, an' finally we find a guy goes for it, all right. An'—an'—" He stopped and passed a hand over his head again.

"Who?" Prop said uneasily. "Who is he?"

"Well, Prop," Cue-ball said, "it's Squire Hinkle."

There was a silence, broken only by a low whistle of sympathy from Gorge; for slow as he was on the uptake, even Gorge got the grim implications of that announcement.

Prop just swallowed and turned pale.

For the fact that Rufus Fenimore Hinkle—usually known as Squire—had a

paunch with a gold watch-chain across it, a tiny goatee and smooth ways, could by no means hide from anyone who knew him at all well that he was a distinctly grisly gent, any way you took him. He was ever on the alert, for instance, for an effective dope for horses which the stewards could not detect; and his connection with racing expressed only his more jolly and sportsmanlike side, was merely a hobby, really. He would just as happy put you away as not, if it might be profitable; and even if it wouldn't, if he was irritated. He had in fact been the man who gave Goat DeGriff most of his sterner business before the Goat made good and went up to the big time; and he had a lad working for him now named Lips Livermore whom a lot of the boys predicted would go even farther than Goat had.

The others were silent too, avoiding each other's eyes; and it was a long time before Prop found his voice; for he was recalling his earlier predicament, and thinking of it longingly. Sweet, gentle Fish-eye! Thoughtful, considerate Fish-eye!

"Cue-ball," he said finally, "gee, Cue-ball, that was a awful kind of unfriendly thing to do, looks like."

Cue-ball squirmed. "Well, I know," he said guiltily. "I guess it was, Prop. Cheese, I— But you see," he explained weakly, "it was jus' so pretty, we hated to let it go to waste, an' I guess we jus' didn't stop to think, an' now—well, you see how it is. We didn't mean no harm, only—well—" His voice trailed off lamely.

"For not meanin' any harm," Prop said, "you sure turned in a pretty card." He ran a hand distractedly through his hair. "I guess they can't nothin' be done about it now, though," he said hollowly; for the only thing wrong with that statement was that it was so awfully true.

HE would have tried gladly, eagerly, anything that offered a chance of release from this situation, no matter how risky; but there wasn't anything. An attempt at escape would be merely fruitless and painful, for both Gorge and Creep were sitting watchfully close to him now, and even Gorge realized that not delivering to the Squire merchandise you had agreed to deliver to him was a very silly thing to do. For the same reason it would be useless to try to get them to call it off, particularly when that would also involve a loss of five grand. They were sympathetic, all right, but not *that* sympathetic.

"Maybe it'll be all right," Cue-ball offered encouragingly. "You can't tell," he said; "it may not be so bad." But he didn't sound very convinced.

"Yeah," Prop said sourly. "*Maybe!*" Then he sighed. "Look, do me a favor, anyhow. I'll give you a envelope for Scotty Berg, an' you put my twen'y-five hunnerd in it, an' leave it at the desk for him. No use me havin' it here, with Squire knowin' about it."

They consented eagerly, as though glad of a chance to do Prop a last service, and Prop wrote his note to Scotty Berg, who was house dick there at the hotel and could be trusted. He told Scotty if he didn't show up sooner or later, to give fifteen hundred to Fish-eye and keep the rest for his trouble, he guessed. There was no use trying to put in a plea for help or anything, for Cue-ball was reading over his shoulder.

After that there was nothing to do but wait.

THE Squire arrived at seven-thirty, all gracious and gushing, the way he was. Lips was with him. The Squire shook hands all around and brought out a bottle, and wouldn't talk business until everyone had had a drink. He always did things that way, genial and expansive.

Prop, being the merchandise, had no reason to hurry, but the vendors got their drinks down in record time, and the Squire then took the key to the room, gave Cue-ball five thousand in medium-sized bills, and wished them a courteous good-night. Giving Prop a last fond and apologetic look, the trio faded out.

"Remember, you leave my twenty-five hundred at the desk for Scotty Berg," Prop said to Cue-ball, on the q.t.

The Squire sipped his drink contentedly. "Well, Proposition, my boy," he said heartily, "it's good to see you looking so hale. I trust nothing will happen to upset you. No reason it should. Just a few days for negotiations, to come to terms—we'll have you out of here in no time, I expect.—Lips, my lad," he directed politely, "just hand Mr. McGill some of that paper you have, and a pencil, will you? He wants to write a note."

Prop had said little up till now, and for a moment longer he just sat there looking at the half-finished drink in his hand. The idea of being in the Squire's or Lips' custody while they went through all this again gave him the creeps; and anyhow, it wasn't going to help things to prolong it; whereas, if he came out with the situa-

tion right now, the Squire might get mad, but not *too* mad; if Prop was lucky, he would still be in circulation next week.

He finished off his drink at a gulp and set it down.

"They's no use writin' any notes," he said. "Them guys have had me up here ten days, an' couldn't even get carfare out o' Uncle Adelbert."

The Squire raised his eyebrows. "What was that?" he asked softly. "Perhaps you'd better elaborate, my boy."

So Prop told him the history of the thing, quoting the notes as well as he could remember them, and showing him the personals with which Uncle Adelbert had replied. "I'm afraid they kind o' tricked you," he ended sympathetically. "It's too bad."

"Yes," the Squire agreed, "it is rather too bad." He had listened quietly and calmly, and his voice was still soft and smooth as he spoke now; but that didn't make it sound any better to Prop, when he heard what he said.

"*They* tricked me, Prop?" he asked gently. "You aren't trying to suggest, surely, that one of those dolts, or all three together, could have conceived this scheme of salvage? It's so obvious, my boy, that yours is the brain behind it, that any other conclusion is ludicrous. And so—" He paused, spreading the fingers of his right hand and gazing thoughtfully at their superb manicure.

"I—I think I'll have another drink," Prop said unsteadily. As he stood at the dresser and poured it, he saw sweat standing up on the back of his hands, and he could feel it cool and clammy on his brow.

"Lips," the Squire now said blandly, "I'd be glad to have your suggestions about the best way to handle this. We'll want it quiet and unobtrusive, naturally."

"Squire—" Prop began, but he found he couldn't go on; and besides, the Squire was paying no attention to him. He got back to his chair and wilted into it, feeling mighty empty. It wasn't that this was anything he hadn't expected, but it just came up so prompt and abrupt.

LIPS, emaciated and pasty-yellow, did not reply until he was coming up to stand beside Prop with an automatic in his hand, just in case.

"Well," he said then, the loose, flabby features from which he took his name flopping a few times before sound came from between them, as they always did, "I guess the easiest thing is conk him a time or so here, light, an' then take him

down to his room an' finish him up wit' a blade."

The Squire nodded pensively. "As a matter of fact, Lips," he said generously, "that isn't bad at all. No one saw us enter; no one need see us leave. It's quite good, Lips. Really."

Prop found his voice. It croaked a bit, but he found it. "Squire," he said, "they aint no use in that. Honest, they aint. You know I'm not chump enough to talk, an' even if I did, they couldn't anything be proved. Pu-pu-putting me away," he finished, "won't make you nothing."

"Financially, no," the Squire admitted reasonably. "But I believe in indulging one's emotions, you see. That's why I'm always equable. I don't thwart myself. And I do hate to be bilked. Why, I expect I'll get at least four thousand dollars' worth of satisfaction out of it, Prop. That leaves only a trifling loss, you see. No, I think—"

"I got a little dough myself," Prop said. "Twen'y-five hunnerd. If that—"

"No," the Squire said regretfully, "I don't like to take a *business* loss. I'm afraid that—"

Later Prop didn't know why he said it; he had no plan. Maybe the urgency of the situation simply popped it out of him. Anyhow, he said it:

"How would you like to unload Captain Percy?"

The Squire regarded him carefully for a full minute. "Why," he asked, "should you think I might want to dispose of the Captain?"

"Well," Prop fumbled desperately, "I don't know. I just thought—way he finished last time, an'—I don't know—I just thought he might've pulled a tendon and not be no good any more. I heard some talk that way."

"He's quite sound," the Squire said. "Quite. That was a shoe. Merely a shoe. Still—if the price were right— Have you anything in mind?"

Prop was still stalling, still in the dark. "What would you call right?" he asked.

"Oh, say fifteen thousand."

NEVER did Prop ever know where the idea came from, when it did. It just seemed to kind of keep one jump ahead of him, while they talked.

"I guess you wouldn't take maybe—fifteen hunnerd?" he asked.

The Squire considered. Then: "Do you know where I could get it? Cash?"

"Squire," Prop said, "I got a proposition: You're out five G's 'cause you can't

cash me for a dime. Your horse is worth maybe a G an' a half. That's six an' a half. Did I get *seven* an' a half for him, you'd be in a grand. Right? Course," he admitted, "terminatin' me might be more fun, but wouldn't the other be more—well, lastin', you might say?"

The Squire, when you got down to business, did not fiddle away time with idle chatter.

"Can you do it?" was all he said.

"Uncle Adelbert," Prop said, "has went sort o' horse-nutty here of late; I think I can do it. I'd have to use the phone, but if it don't work, he won't know where I was callin' from, or that you had any connection with it, if I turn up missin'. So it can't hurt anything to try. Lips can stan' right beside me while I talk, jus' to be sure I don't make no slips."

The Squire gazed at the tip of his shiny shoe, which he tapped with the point of his gold-headed cane. He looked up.

"Call him," he said.

PROP dialed the number. The housekeeper answered, and said Mr. McGill was at home. Prop put the mouthpiece of the desk phone to his chest and listened closely at the receiver. When he heard footsteps sounding, he began talking softly.

"All right, all right, that doesn't matter. I tell you—"

In the receiver he heard Uncle Adelbert's voice say, "Hello." He didn't reply, but raised his voice and kept the mouthpiece against his chest.

"Okay, I *know* the nag is worth fifteen thousand, but if you gotta have cash, you gotta have it, an' I don't know what the old buzzard'll come up to. I take whatever I can get over seventy-five hunnerd or I'm hanging up, an' that's final. . . . All right, then pipe down. He's comin'."

Prop fell silent, giving the Squire a meaning look, and listening. After a little he heard feet stamp the floor a time or so, and then Uncle Adelbert's voice again:

"Hello."

"Uncle Adelbert? . . . This is Peter, Uncle Adelbert. . . . No, forget about that other. . . . Well, it didn't cost anything to try. . . . No. . . . No, I just heard about something pretty nice, only I can't handle it, an' I thought you . . . Well, it's a horse. . . . He's worth anyhow fifteen thousand, only the guy owns him thinks maybe he's pulled a tendon, an' he's gotta have cash right away—he's just *gotta*, an' he's gonna sell him tonight; an' it jus' looked like you might pick up a bargain



"Did you know the Squire'd 'a' sold you that horse for fifteen hundred?" Prop asked.

Squire caught it and lightly called his attention to it, and then the Squire and Lips went on out.

Uncle Adelbert looked at Prop smugly. "Huh!" he said. "Thought you'd flim-flam me, eh? Even beat you at your own game. I know a thing or two, nephew."

"Did you know the Squire'd 'a' sold you that horse for fifteen hundred?" Prop asked maliciously.

"Uh—wha—wha—*what!*" Uncle Adelbert yelped. Then he laughed. "You're just trying to fret me. That horse has pulled no tendon."

"No," Prop said, "but the Squire thinks he has, an' he'd of sold him for fifteen hunderd; an' he might just as well *have* a pulled tendon far as you're concerned, too, 'less you got the right man trainin' him."

Uncle Adelbert licked his lips as if they had vinegar on them. "What's—wrong with him?" he asked.

"He's stric'ly a two-miler," Prop said. "Trained right. Try to make him run at 'em early, like in a mile, or mile an' a eighth, like las' time, an' he's stiff yet an' don't like it, an' acts lame. He's a phony. But give him two miles, an' he can make a bid in the backstretch second time, and outrun anything in the country, an' *love* it. He'd be a cinch, better'n Malibar. Actually he *is* worth ten grand, easy. —Trained right," he added.

'cause I know you always got cash handy an'— Well, maybe low as 'leven thousand if you hold out. . . . No, but I'll have him up in my room to meet you, if you wanta come down. . . . No, you better take a cab, Uncle Adelbert. . . . All right, we'll be waiting."

Prop hung up and looked at the Squire. "Know what he was gonna do?" he asked. "He was gonna come on the *street-car*."

UNCLE ADELBERT asked a lot of questions, and wanted to know what Prop was getting out of it; Prop said, "Nothing," very innocently, and the Squire came down to eleven thousand; but Uncle Adelbert still seemed mighty dubious, and finally said well, all the cash he could get together on such short notice was seventy-five hundred, and if they wanted to deal for that all right, but he wasn't very anxious, one way or the other.

So the Squire hemmed and hawed about the right amount, and then finally took it and made out the bill-of-sale, and Uncle Adelbert counted him out the money, trying to short-change him fifty, but the

"How—how do you know?" Uncle Adelbert asked.

"Only way you ever know anything like that," Prop said briefly. "I seen it before. Horse name of Loose Lucy, at Arlington, six years ago."

Uncle Adelbert was obviously thinking hard.

"I don't suppose you would—uh—be interested in training him?" he suggested presently.

"No," Prop said. "I don't like you much, to start with, if you wanta know; an' I wouldn't wanta bother with jus' one horse, anyhow."

"Well, Peter," Uncle Adelbert said, "you've rather surprised me this evening. You're cannier than I! I'm planning on building up a stable, Peter. Say ten or fifteen horses. If you'd be interested in managing—for a percentage of the profits, naturally," he added hastily. "Say ten per cent."

Prop snorted. "Make it a choice of three hunderd a month or fifty per cent," he said, "an' we might trade."

"Well, all right, then," said Uncle Adelbert sadly, having been prepared to go as high as sixty-five.

"By the way," Prop said then, "you know that greenhouse you tried to foist off on me?"

"Yes?" said Uncle Adelbert warily.

THE lights looked cheerful, and the noise of traffic sounded friendly, and it was nice to see people just walking around on the street, free and easy. The click of the balls sounded friendly too, as he neared the top of the steps at Murlay's B. & R. C.; and even Fish-eye, over by the snooker game, looked benign to Prop.

"Fish-eye," Prop said, "here is that fifteen C's I owe you. I'm sorry it took so long, only I been busy bein' kind of snatched the last week or so, an' I couldn't get aroun'. You know how it is."

"Oh," Fish-eye said understandingly, his face softening to the texture of granite. "Well, of course that's differ'nt." Then he added politely: "Ever'thing come out all right?"

"I guess I can't complain," Prop said. "Only—" He paused a moment, and a faintly worried look crossed his face. "Fish-eye," he said, "I'd be glad to buy a drink if you aint busy. You see," he explained, "I'm pretty good at figgers; or anyhow, I always *was*—" Again the faintly worried look. "Only, maybe this is differ'nt. Or something. I—I'd sort o' like to go over it with somebody." Fish-

eye never went about repeating things which had been told him in confidence.

They repaired to the basement bar, down by the bowling-alleys.

"SO you see," Prop said, during the third highball, indicating the figures on the envelope they had finally resorted to, "the Squire puts in five G's, an' his horse is worth a G and a half to him; but he gets seven and a half out of it, so that's a G profit there. Then Cue-ball, Creep an' Gorge get the five G's from him, an' besides that, a set-up worth anyhow three G's for one and a half, so that's six and a half profit, or seven an' a half altogether, so far. Then Uncle Adelbert, he gets a horse for seven and a half that's worth anyhow ten G's, with me trainin' him, so that makes ten altogether, an' then he sells this greenhouse for one and a half, which he woulda took five C's for, I bet; so that makes eleven G's; an' then I come out okay an' pay you a G an' a half that I'm clear on; so you wind up, there's twelve and a half G's been made all around—and what I don't get, Fish-eye, is this: *Who loses it?*"

"That's a cinch," Fish-eye said after a moment. "You say the horse is worth a G and a half one time and ten G's the next time. Well, there's eight and a half. Then the greenhouse you call three G's one time and half a G the next time, so that makes eleven G's. See? Then the G and a half you pay me—well, you owe me that before it all ever starts, so you can't count that in for profit, so that makes the other G and a half. They didn't anybody really lose nothin', 'cause they all got good value for their dough, even the Squire, account of he wouldn't ever of knew how to handle Captain Percy; but you givin' things differ'nt values differ'nt times is how it comes out to look uneven, see—when really it aint. Do you get it?"

Prop was frowning pretty hard, but finally he nodded.

"Well," he said, "I guess so. I guess that's it, all right. Only wait a minute, Fish-eye," he said suddenly: "Maybe that takes care of the twelve and a half G's all right; but,"—he reached into his pocket,—"*where did that come from?*"

And he laid on the table the cool thousand in cash which he had left after paying off Fish-eye.

Fish-eye gazed at the money nervously for a minute, and then looked up for a waiter. "We better get some more drinks," he said. "We're gonna need 'em."

THE SUBMARINE'S TREASURE

By S. ANDREW WOOD

Who wrote "Red Terror" and "Comrades of Chaos"

Illustrated by Percy Leason



WAR WINGS BY, OUTSIDE THE WINDOWS OF SINNERS' CASTLE ON THE IRISH COAST, WHILE STRANGE ADVENTURERS GATHER TO RETRIEVE LOOT BURIED BY A SUBMARINE'S CREW IN 1918. AND THEN A 1940 U-BOAT LANDS ITS MEN.

A COMPLETE NOVEL



"I have the dishonor to be Lieutenant Schumann's son," the younger man said.

THE SUBMARINE'S TREASURE

By S. ANDREW WOOD

Who wrote those well-remembered BLUE BOOK novels "Comrades of Chaos" and "Red Terror."

THE back of Erich Schumann's car, where it stood coyly half-hidden among the bushes of the common, was just visible to Janet Feversham, and she hesitated now whether to go toward it or to walk on.

"Nosey Parker!" Jan murmured to herself, with a touch of distaste. "It's no business of yours who he has with him. Unless—" And the thought brought her up short on the soft turf with her heart quickening. "—Unless it chances to be Kate. If it is, I'll wring his neck!"

Tall and lissome, she stood a moment, her hands thrust deep in the pockets of her blue slacks, frowning. She looked a firm, strong and personable young woman. The sun streaked a long shadow from her feet; and there was no sound in the warm silence, save the murmur of the sea at the foot of the cliffs, and the drone of naval planes far out at sea. In those hot August evenings in the last week of peace, the world itself seemed to the imaginative listener to be holding its breath.

Slowly Jan approached the car. She had no premonition of tragedy whatever, even when the faint throb of the running engine reached her ears. All she knew was that if her young sister Kate was in that car with Erich Schumann, she intended to step inside without a word and drive them both home to Twelvetrees Farm—though Erich, no doubt, would only give his nervous, impudent grin. . . . She tapped on the closed window before opening the door. Something acrid and choking caught at her throat and made her gasp, as she did so,

wiping across her nostrils and her consciousness like a whiplash. Gasoline fumes!

"Kate! Kate, darling!"

Time, Jan had been told, stood still at such moments. If so, she was tuned-in differently—for time flashed past on wild wings. . . . They were there, in the back seat; Kate's soft dead-weight toppled into Jan's arms as she flung open the other door—and she lifted the girl out onto the grass. The heart was beating; the breath came in fluttering gasps. Kate whimpered, and became very sick, her golden curls awry. Kate, at any rate, was not badly hurt.

JAN ran back and switched off the engine at the dashboard. "Erich!" she called—huskily, because the fumes made her own brain spin round. He sat slumped, his blond head hanging, wedged somehow. Too heavy to move. Jan Feversham stared at him, felt the wrist that hung so limply, and then moved slowly away from the open door. There was nothing to be done there.

"Jan! Oh, Jan, hold me!"

Kneeling there, Jan put her arms about her sister and held her while her brain tried to stay cool. The plane squadron had long ago droned away. Far out at sea, the siren of a destroyer whooped faintly. A late bee hummed.

"What happened, Kate?"

The small mouth shook, still artificially red in a dreary white face. Kate was eighteen, but at that moment, looked a haggard thirty. Mechanically, she was already fumbling with her compact.

"Erich and I decided to die together. Oh, don't laugh, Jan! It was all crazy, I know, but—well, we'd nearly emptied a big flask of brandy, between us, and everything was so hopeless. We loved each other, and there was Erich's wife—"

Jan caught her breath. "So you remembered her?"

"Yes. One can't forget Camilla. I wasn't—wasn't keen on all this. But Erich—he kind of hypnotized me. He's German; neurotic, you know. Scotland Yard was watching him, ready to intern him, and he couldn't stand it. He might have killed me, if I'd refused. I meant to stop the engine as soon as he lost his senses, but I hadn't the strength—"

Jan came to her feet. Her look traveled toward the car, then over the flaming gorse bushes to the deserted road in the distance.

"He's dead," she said, with all the clear brutality she could muster; because that way, through Kate's keen sense of self-preservation, she could steady her sister. . . . "No, sit down. It's pretty terrible. But we've got to think things over."

She did not watch the effect on Kate. Night was creeping in from the sea. It seemed to Jan that night was creeping over the whole world. But she could think coolly. She could still hate dead Erich Schumann, who, within a month of taking the Old Manor House, had haunted Twelvetrees Farm, where the two daughters of the late Tom Feversham lived and worked the land, and just managed to keep out of the bankruptcy court. "*I'm glad I hit him over the face with that stick,*" thought Jan. "*Though he only glowered like an insulted Prussian officer. First me, and then Kate. But I didn't guess it was anything like this.*"

The survivor of a suicide-pact could be charged with murder. Fantastic, but true. She could see Kate drooping in the dock, carried out half-fainting to prison. She could see the newspapers.

"SOMEbody saw you leave with him in the car, of course," Jan hazarded.

"No. He picked me up. Camilla's in London, getting ready to go a sea-cruise on some yacht. Anyhow, she never suspected. She thought—I think she thought it was you who attracted him. Erich gave her that impression. You see, though she's ghastly jealous, she knew you would only laugh at him. Oh, I'm a swine, Jan! What shall I do?"

But the stiffness of terror was dying away from Kate. She kept her back to the car and watched her sister. Jan smiled at her reassuringly. It was a queer time to think of deathbed-promises—or perhaps it wasn't. She had promised to look after heedless, headstrong Kate. . . . And this was the way she had done it!

"Listen: You must walk home. I know it's a good four miles, but that doesn't matter. It'll be dark in half an hour. Take the bridle-path by Nightingale Wood. Oh, you poor little brandy-swimming idiot, Kate! But I'll see to it all, and follow on. Don't say a word to anybody. Now, get going!"

More than anything, she wanted Kate to fling herself into her arms. Much later, Jan Feversham thought it was some intuition that they would never see each other again which came like one of those nightmares that are half-horrible, half-comic, in the growing dusk. But Kate was already running, steadying her pace to a walk, vanishing.

WITH her jaw set, Jan went to the car. Odd to think how certain sure she was that Erich Schumann was dead. Why had he done it? Was there a streak of insanity in all Germans, as some people said? He was young and good-looking; and his wife, Camilla, was beautiful and very well off. Though not naturalized, he had been in England for many years.

"Get going!" muttered Jan, this time to herself.

Her plan had the simplicity of melodrama. It was to drive the car across the common to the cliff-edge, where a grass-road ran and cars often picnicked, held on the slope by their brakes. The fall was some three hundred feet, and the tide was in. She was agile enough to jump out, after releasing the brake, without being taken over herself. It was just a case of steady nerves, and waiting a few minutes till the evening mist began to thicken.

There might be something belonging to Kate still in the car. When the tide went down, a scarf or some article could easily be found among the wreckage. Erich might have left a message for his wife. He hated her, and he was full of malice.

Jan's calmness was entirely artificial. If she let it go for one moment, she would find herself running away as Kate had done, she knew. Instead, she found

herself inside the car, detaching something that was pinned firmly to the leather padding of one of the front seats, and averting her glance from Erich's body. It was a closed envelope, superscribed, "To be opened by my wife, please."

Jan ripped it open. She was not afraid of the dead man as she did so, because she could only picture him as one who had wantonly used his power upon Kate in order to hurt his wife; he was a part of a strange neurotic brutality which seemed to have overtaken the world in general, and one race of people in particular.

I thought I would forestall you, Camilla. I forgive you for trying to poison me. You never thought I guessed, did you? If the police chance to open this first, it will be nasty for you. Otherwise you will be in time to smash that phial of aconitine in your dressing-table drawer. I don't care which. As you know, I was always a gambler. It is Kate I love; I am taking her with me. I always hated you, Camilla. Goodby.

A shudder ran through Jan. All Erich's lies, of course, to injure his wife after he was dead. She was glad to save Camilla that much pain. She felt slightly sick as she tore the note into pieces. Headachy, too; and the mist that was creeping round the car had a red tinge, to her sight. There were no gasoline fumes, now. But she recollected dimly that the carbon-monoxide part was odorless. It still lay about the car. With a movement of alarm, she tried to lever herself from the seat. Her limbs seemed useless, her brain swimming with sleepiness. She slipped out as far as the running-board, but could get no farther.

FROM one of the saloon windows of the Diesel-engined yacht *Brantane*, where she rode gracefully in the harbor, Craig Allenby watched the squadron of naval planes fly jarringly overhead and disappear down the sea-horizon. He helped himself to a drink from the silver tantalus, glanced at the clock in the bulkhead, and shrugged. The line of his jaw was strong enough, but his smile was rather more cynical and tired than a young man's had any right to be.

"Don't worry, Allenby. The guests will all be here when we weigh anchor at midnight," a voice said by his side.

Jethro Cobb always entered anywhere like a quiet child who wandered in. Small, chiseled and suave, he stood hard-



ly any higher than his secretary's broad shoulders, and moved with a limp. And yet he dominated the saloon, as he dominated any room he entered, with that lean, eagle-like face stamped with dead passions, and worn like a mask—whether with a good or an evil aura, it was impossible to say.

"If they aren't, they'll never start on their pleasure trip. They're putting a boom across the harbor tomorrow," said Allenby. "I've a hunch there's going to be war."

"Possibly," agreed Jethro Cobb, pouring out a thimbleful of sherry and choosing a cigar. "You'll miss it, Allenby. A shame."

Allenby kept his face wooden. He had learned how to do that when he stood in the dock at the Old Bailey for three gruelling days a month or so before, as the accused man in the Middleton murder trial. He was not quite used to being alive and free, yet. Not many men came so near the hangman as he had done, only to be given the benefit of the doubt and acquitted at the end of it. Life had become a numb thing for him. But he had not yet ceased to wonder why, when the crowds hustled round him as he left the courts, Jethro Cobb's car had appeared from nowhere, and why Jethro Cobb—whose name he had never heard before—the next day made him a kind of secretary-bodyguard for the pleasure-cruise on his yacht *Brantane* he was planning.

"You're still curious about me, Allenby. I'm the Man from Nowhere. Likewise, the Man who Pleases Himself. Don't worry."

"I don't," said Allenby curtly.

"Thanks. You're no humbug, at any rate. Those people who are coming on my cruise are." He chuckled gravely. "That was a sweet advertisement, eh? *Wealthy man, undoubtedly eccentric, even possibly mad in the opinion of conventional people, wishes to take about half-a-dozen guests aboard his small private yacht for a cruise to the Caribbean, to escape awhile from this tired and war-threatened civilization. He strictly reserves his right to pick and choose, and his decision in everything is final.*

Something like that. The real Agony Column touch. Well, we've picked our guests. At least, I have."

"Is it to be the Caribbean?" asked Allenby indifferently.

"Possibly," answered Jethro Cobb. "Possibly not."

He turned in the doorway. Against the smooth teak paneling, his face, startlingly young, startlingly old, was etched like a fresco. There was a contemptuous compassion in it that caused the young man to flinch a little, because he had forgotten that Jethro Cobb, like everybody else, must think him guilty of the Middleton murder.

"Go ashore and take a last look at peace-time England, Allenby, if you wish. None of the guests will arrive till after dark. And by the way, come back. Don't leave me in the lurch at the last moment. I need you. You ask so few questions."

Allenby flushed, perhaps because he had more than once thought of going back to the world and facing it.

"I'm not likely to slip you. Send one of your watchdogs after me, if you doubt it."

"Don't be a fool, boy," Jethro Cobb said gently. "You're the only watchdog I have."

There was little else to do. Not that Craig Allenby cared a hoot about peace-time England. . . . His loose-limbed figure stepped ashore from the launch ten minutes later, and swung up from the harbor to the Downs behind. Nobody up there would recognize the man who had been given the benefit of the doubt. He wondered whether any of the guests of the *Brantane* would know him, and he laughed.

IT was good to be up there. The scent of the broom was like honey, the sunset gorgeous. He could even grin at the thought that, for all he knew, he had thrown in his lot with a madman who might mean to scuttle his yacht and take his guests to the bottom as a punishment for running away from their country when war threatened. The Man from Nowhere! It suited Jethro Cobb. He had no background, and though Allenby had been with him a month, he had discovered nothing about him, save that he was very rich, and utterly unexpected in everything he did. What did the man resemble? One of Cromwell's Ironsides, built on a small scale. Or a sort of crazy Bunyan without a Bible. That was it.

Quite suddenly, Craig Allenby caught sight of the black car among the bushes, with the girl leaning against the running-board. He stopped and stared; and then, as she came unsteadily to her feet, went forward. She saw him, and her eyes widened.

"Hold up!" he adjured her.

FOR a moment Jan Feversham leaned against him; then she was steadying herself against the car, trying to smile and not succeeding overmuch.

"I'm all right," she said breathlessly. "I think the exhaust-pipe leaks a bit—"

Allenby bent down to a piece of tubing that curved away from the exhaust outlet and under the floorboards. It caused him to direct his glance past the open door, as the girl made an involuntary movement to prevent him. He pressed by her. She saw his eyes grow cold and alert, like those of a man who had grown used to watching out for unexpected traps.

"You've had a narrow escape," he said slowly. "He wasn't so lucky,—or unlucky, as the case might be,—was he?"

"No," answered Jan.

They inspected each other. A blue dusk was descending about them, cutting them off, it seemed, from the rest of the world. In it, the man looked unnaturally big, unnaturally indifferent to what he had stumbled upon, though pity was in his face. To Jan, it was a strong, rather reckless face, and its owner was either tough, or else life had hit him very hard of late.

"I understand, I think. Did he suggest it, or was it a genuine agreement, may I ask?"

"What has it to do with you?"

"Nothing. Only I believe you could be charged with murder, or manslaughter, or something. He was married, I suppose, or else you are. No, you aren't wearing any ring. —You're feeling all right?"

"All right, thanks. You've got an unpleasant mind. But he *was* married. His name was Erich Schumann, and he was German. Mine is Jan Feversham. He was afraid of being interned. And I,"—she managed to lift a defiant face which was pale enough in all conscience, because she was still affected by the dregs of the fumes,—"I was pretty miserable. And now you know."

Jan knew that she must keep all her wits. He thought she had intended to die out of love for Erich Schumann.

There was a laugh in that, if she could only find it. There was a grim laugh in the whole business. But at least it covered up Kate's tracks, which was what mostly mattered. Kate would be almost at Twelvetrees, by now. Twelvetrees! Jan had a feeling from nowhere that she was finished with that impoverished little farm. She had run into something fantastic, where anything could happen. But she must let this man keep on with his mistake.

Allenby spoke again. He was perplexed.

"You're darned cool. And you don't look that sort of little idiot at all. You're in a jam, all the same. I don't want to pry into your affairs. But I'd like to help you. I'm not exactly keen on the letter of the law myself. . . . You were what's called in love with him, I presume."

"What do you think?" said Jan wearily.

"But glad to be here still. I know the feeling. Someone knew you were with him, I suppose?"

Jan held her breath. The very same question she had asked Kate! She shook her head.

"Nobody."

Craig Allenby cursed himself for a quixotic fool, but he said:

"Better get away from here, then, as quickly as possible. Leave it to me. I'll do my best."

It was nearly dark now. Searchlights flickered uneasily out at sea, probing for some treacherous swoop of planes before war started. Jan involuntarily searched Allenby's face; and he saw that her hair was dark and soft, and her throat white and strong. He believed he had blundered into the sort of commonplace and not-too-nice drama one read of sometimes in the newspapers. But he would have liked the girl concerned in it to look more commonplace.

NEAR the gorse bush behind them something seemed to stir just then, causing them both to turn involuntarily. The glow of a cigar became visible, and then a small figure leisurely appeared. It was Jethro Cobb.

He spoke in the silence.

"I followed you, Allenby, I'm afraid, if you'll forgive me. I've taken a liking to you, you know. . . . This is a very tragic affair, Miss Feversham."

Jan Feversham became conscious of a pair of magnetic eyes fixed upon her

which she had seen once before, and only once, at the Old Manor House, the home of Erich and Camilla Schumann. Their expression was speculative and quite detached, and she felt that she was being observed as a specimen of weak and erring human nature, or a bird caught in a net, rather than anything else. Involuntarily, she wanted to avoid that piercing clairvoyance.

"Erich Schumann?" said Jethro Cobb. "Of course, I knew him. Once, I saw you at his house, I think, Miss Feversham. I don't think the world is much worse off. The wages of sin is death, we're told, though they are not always paid in that way. And now that you're not sorry to find yourself alive, what do you propose to do, young lady?"

A SENSE of weariness began to rise in Jan. It seemed an eternity since Kate had hurried away to safety. Her thoughts slipped. She remembered an old gypsy woman who had recently come to Twelvetrees and prophesied strange adventures for her. If they included a charge of murder at the local police court, and a first-class scandal, then it couldn't be helped. There was a streak of obstinacy in her. She would keep as silent as—well, as Kate herself probably would. But she wished she didn't have an overwhelming desire to escape and hide herself somewhere, perhaps with the help of this big young man by her side—or the feeling that it was impossible to hide from this other little man she had seen only once in her life before.

"She's going home, and I'm going to make the police think it's a solo business," said Craig Allenby.

"Chivalry? Or just a natural fellow-feeling? Lord, what fools these mortals be!" Jethro Cobb smiled dryly, but his glance was luminous. It rested on Jan.

"Young lady, I don't know whether you've heard my name. It's the quaint one of Jethro Cobb. I'm an eccentric. A man who works on the spur of the moment. I start on a yachting-cruise in a few hours with a number of guests. One of them has canceled her acceptance. I should like you to take her place. The trip will last a month or so—perhaps less. We're all escaping from this dangerous world for a time. Will you come?"

"No," answered Jan. For the first time she felt really frightened. There was something compelling about this strange, steely little man.

"I think you will," said Jethro Cobb briskly. "It will do you good. A terrific emotional storm such as this"—he smiled, and it was impossible to say whether there was irony in it—"needs convalescing from. It will make you a different woman. The yacht is called the *Brantane*, and her launch will be at the harbor pier between eleven o'clock and midnight. I shall expect you. Now go, and leave Allenby to report to the police and settle everything."

By some volition that seemed to be beyond herself, Jan found that she was moving slowly away into the semi-darkness. She would never go down to Jethro Cobb's yacht, of course. For one thing, Kate would need her badly; without her, Kate would go to pieces and say something that would betray herself. She stumbled along the path feeling that it was somebody else and not Jan Feversham who walked the long way back to Twelvetrees Farm.

Twelvetrees looked dark and dismal among its dozen poplars when she reached it. The signboard which had said "FOR SALE OR TO LET" for a year or more, made it look derelict. There was no light visible in any of the windows. That made her quicken her footsteps.

Jan lit the lamp in the farm-kitchen and then stood looking at the message from Kate which she picked up from the table. It was scribbled and short and faintly-scented, on Kate's best notepaper:

I've packed a few things and gone up to London, Jan. I couldn't stand Twelvetrees now. I have some money, and shall get work. You didn't mind my opening the little safe, I hope. I have only taken my share. As soon as I'm settled, I'll let you know my address. But if it isn't for quite a time, don't worry. —K.

Chapter Two

A POOL of bright sunlight swung rhythmically across the floor of Craig Allenby's cabin as the yacht *Brantane* trod her way leisurely through the Atlantic swell, nearly twenty hours out of port. As yet, Jethro Cobb's guests remained in their cabins, either from inclination or necessity. He had seen none of them, and it was unlikely they had seen each other. Jethro Cobb himself was conspicuous by his absence.

Allenby glanced at the sheet of paper which a steward had brought in.

List of guests who will all meet at dinner, when we shall be in smooth water.

The Rev. James Catchpole.

Mr. Wackett.

Mrs. Camilla Schumann.

Miss Janet Feversham.

His eyes lingered frowningly on the last two names etched there in Jethro Cobb's small writing. The police had not suspected any second person in the tragedy on the common. A German, fearing internment, had ended his life in a not unusual way. But "*Mrs. Camilla Schumann*" could be no other than the man Erich Schumann's wife.

"Weird customer! Wonder what his game is, and what the deuce does he mean by smooth water? They think they're bound for the Caribbean. And I guess that Agony Column advertisement of his meant nothing at all."

The green rollers slopped past the cabin port; in the distance a couple of destroyers raced past, two grim little sisters of the war that was coming. Allenby went up to the bridge and stood by McVenn, the taciturn Scotch skipper, in order to watch them—Craig Allenby, runaway!

"I thought we'd be well out of sight of land, by now. Those are mountains over yonder, aren't they, Captain McVenn?" he said, suddenly, pointing to starboard bow.

"Ireland," replied McVenn. "North-west coast. Donegal, to be exact. A wild part."

"Then we're off our course."

McVenn inquired dryly: "Did ye come up to my bridge to insult me, Mr. Allenby? Or would ye like to take over the navigation yourself? I understood we were both in the service of Mr. Jethro Cobb. Well, each to his own job—that's what I say. The compass is still working, and we're on our course."

Allenby opened his mouth to speak, then stayed silent. McVenn was like a clam, a dour Puritan whose only indulgence was a doglike loyalty to Jethro Cobb. He smiled. Tory Island or Timbuctoo, either suited him, he told himself as he went down presently to dress for dinner. But despite his armor of indifference, there was a beat of excitement in his pulse. He dressed leisurely, and lit a cigarette, after the dinner-bugle sounded, deliberately waiting till the guests had gathered. In the smoke



of it, he seemed to see dark soft hair and a pale throat. It made him throw his cigarette aside impatiently and step out into the corridor—to pull up clumsily at the sight of Janet Feversham, emerging from the next cabin.

She smiled with a touch of challenge and excitement.

"We're late, aren't we? I slept like a log, after breakfast, for some reason."

"They all did, I think," answered Allenby with an odd suspicion as to the possible reason shooting through him. "Come along. And—better brace yourself for a shock or two. It may be a queer dinner-party."

"Thanks for what you did for me," she said under her breath. "It was terribly kind. I won't forget it."

THE dining-saloon of the *Brantane* was a glow of warm lamplight which illuminated the table where Jethro Cobb sat with three people. The Rev. James Catchpole was a large, florid man with benevolent but fishy eyes that twinkled watchfully behind spectacles. Mr. Wackett, a small, jockeylike individual with sharp and comic features, toyed with his full wineglass. But it was the woman who riveted attention. With dark green eyes, creamy skin and a mouth curved in lazy amusement as though at the company she found herself in, Erich Schumann's widow made an unusual picture. She glanced up carelessly, then half-rose from her chair under the shock as she saw and recognized Janet Feversham.

"Pray sit down, Mrs. Schumann," came Jethro Cobb's precise voice. "Now the company is complete, we will all drink a health to each other."

At the head of the table he sat with the excited flush of a pleased child on each of his cheeks. The hum of the *Brantane's* engines was the only sound audible, as she slipped through perfectly smooth water.

"The toast will be in the nature of an introduction, ladies and gentlemen. We are, for the time being, making a little world of our own. Therefore we ought to know each other more or less intimately. I begin with my secretary, Mr. Craig Allenby: A month ago, in an old house in Chelsea, Mr. Allenby was discovered by the police beside the murdered body of his uncle, Mr. John Middleton, whose sole heir he was. I will not go into the details. He was charged with murder, and the evidence was black against him. He had been leading a rather gay life in London, and he needed money. In any case, he was a sinner." Jethro Cobb paused. "But there was some flaw in the evidence. A matter of identification by a servant who was on the premises, I think. He was also defended by a very clever counsel. He was given the benefit of the doubt, and acquitted."

Somebody murmured, "Gawd!" and then swiveled his fascinated glance from Jethro Cobb to look at Allenby. It was Mr. Wackett. But—as under a spell, the others remained still. If Jethro Cobb had wished to provide his guests with a dramatic entertainment at their first meeting, he had succeeded.

COBB'S gentle voice went on: "A lady, now: Mrs. Camilla Schumann, the very charming woman by your side, Mr. Wackett. The details in her case are not so clean-cut. Hers was an ancient crime which women have often excelled in. She tried to poison her husband, who, luckily for himself—for the time being—discovered the plan and checkmated it. The motive seems to have been jealousy, but there may have been some deeper reason. Ladies and gentlemen, I pass no judgment." The small, eagle-like face leaned forward earnestly. "Allenby may be completely innocent. Mrs. Schumann may have given way to sudden temptation

and repented immediately. Her husband was no saint. But she was also a sinner."

"Can't you see that he's stark mad?" whispered Camilla Schumann huskily. "Are you all going to sit here and listen to this nonsense?"

"Mrs. Schumann's husband is now out of reach of poison," said Jethro Cobb. "That may be news to Mrs. Schumann, who, I understand, came direct to the *Brantane* from London. He killed himself; and this unhappy young lady, Miss Janet Feversham, elected to die with him, I understand, but she escaped alive. One might feel sorry for Miss Feversham; one might hesitate to cast the first stone. But nevertheless she was a sinner."

JAN FEVERSHAM turned away from the hard face of the woman who stared at her across the table, telling herself that this was only some sort of queer dream. Wine, spilled by Camilla Schumann, made a stain on the cloth. Mr. Wackett fingered his cigarette-case nervously, and the Rev. James Catchpole cleared his throat. A hiatus seemed to have occurred in the drama, of which he, as a clergyman, felt bound to take advantage, to soothe and gently rebuke their extraordinary host. Catchpole had glanced stealthily at everybody, so far, save Craig Allenby, as Allenby himself had subconsciously noted. Now he said suavely:

"Mr. Cobb, this is all most disturbing, though we all expected something unusual, no doubt. The facts you present may be true or otherwise. But surely on a restful trip like this, all mankind's concern is charity, as the poet says, and we shall find each other out as we go along?"

"So far," said Jethro Cobb, with a glance of icy mirth that seemed to strip Mr. Catchpole of his dog-collar and clerical mien at one and the same moment, "I have dealt with the sinners—the mere weaklings, one might say. Take your hand out of your coat pocket, Mr. Wackett; for if you use the automatic pistol you have there, you'll hang as sure as your name isn't Wackett. Allenby, keep an eye on Mr. Wackett. . . . Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Catchpole and Mr. Wackett, I believe, are not strictly sinners, save against society. They are simple professional criminals; and yet, since there is so much good in the worst of us, as another poet says, Mr. Catchpole—"

He paused. "Perhaps not entirely criminal. They will afford us light relief. By profession, they specialize in blackmail. Each has made but a poor living at it. They had an idea that there was something shady about this cruise, and having discovered that I was a wealthy man, they answered my advertisement in their present guise, much to my pleasure. Do I bore any of you?"

"Monstrous!" murmured Catchpole. "Monstrous!"

But both he and Mr. Wackett, who looked like a wicked little weasel cornered for a moment, sat without moving, the wind completely taken out of their sails. Jethro Cobb's eyelids fell, and then he smiled all round the table.

"You will perceive, my friends," he said, "that none of the company here are hardened criminals. Not even Messrs. Catchpole and Wackett, whom I take to be merely two lazy and cruel men who make a living by their wits. Mr. Catchpole, I believe, has a young wife he is very fond of. Otherwise I don't know a lot about Mr. Catchpole. . . . Even Mr. Wackett is not without virtue, though he does carry a firearm which he will presently hand over to Allenby. . . . Mind you, I'm not sure what the days will bring forth for us, the evil or the good, the cowardice or the courage, so to speak. It is my purpose to discover one of them."

A SOFT laugh came abruptly from Camilla Schumann. She had completely recovered her poise. Her eyes danced across at Craig Allenby for an instant, but went immediately to the little figure at the head of the table.

"I think I'm going to like this, speaking personally, Mr. Cobb," she said. "To be made the subject of a social experiment! It's heaps better than any war. But where are you taking us to? Honest, now!"

Jethro Cobb stepped from his chair to the long windows and pulled aside the curtains. Though the saloon was brightly lighted, it was still daylight outside; a daylight of smooth, shot-silk water and wild purple mountains that rose on every side. He pointed to a gray castellated pile on the shore of the quiet lough the *Brantane* crept into. It stood there as though carved out of the rock that supported it.

"Sinners' Castle," said Jethro Cobb, almost shyly. "A ridiculous name. But I like it."

"Sinners' Castle!" murmured Camilla Schumann. "How perfectly marvelous! Is it to be a kind of concentration-camp for us all, Mr. Cobb?"

BUT Cobb drew close the curtains of the cabin windows again and went back to his place at the head of the table as though he had not heard her. The *Brantane* throbbed at half-speed, and the electric fans hummed quietly. After a moment's interval, Cobb raised his glass.

"I drink to you all, ladies and gentlemen. If any should prefer to go back to England with the yacht when she leaves, they are, of course, at liberty to do so. There is no compulsion. But I hope you will all decide to accept my hospitality."

A moment later he had left them, almost before they knew it, his little figure, with its slight limp, disappearing through a doorway behind him. He made a small, old-fashioned bow of apology before he went.

Jan Feversham found herself glancing with rather surprising calmness at the four other people left around the table. Craig Allenby, by her side, had a faint hard smile of amusement; and Camilla Schumann's dark green eyes rested on him, thoughtfully, not for the first time. Mr. Wackett had refilled his glass to the brim, and sat with his lips pursed in a noiseless whistle. It was the Reverend James Catchpole, the pseudo-clergyman, who at length broke the silence. His voice was shaken but brave.

"Hallucinations," he said. "I would even go so far as to call it delusional insanity. I remember a very devoted member of my own congregation—"

"Do stop it, please!" said Camilla, with gentle impatience.

She leaned white elbows on the table. The lamplight made her creamy skin glow faintly. She said:

"He's weird, isn't he? He knows everything, or thinks he does. . . . Let's all be sensible. We're discovered, more or less. I knew you and Erich were fond of each other, Jan—though I never thought you'd be such a couple of fools. I didn't worry much, so we'll let bygones be bygones, now we're all in one family, so to speak. . . . Would it shock you very much to learn that I did think of poisoning my husband, Mr. Allenby?"

"Not particularly," answered Craig Allenby laconically. Long ago he had decided that nothing brought about by

Jethro Cobb should surprise him. He smiled at Camilla Schumann, fully conscious of her attraction, but more interested in the woman herself.

"After he tried to poison me because I found out by accident that he was acting as a Nazi agent! Perhaps I'll tell you the details later. It was a rather awful duel of wits, and I was glad to come on this little holiday for a rest," finished Camilla.

"*Liar,*" thought Jan. "*She wants to impress him with her innocence, and there's a lot more to it than that. She wants to convey to him what cheap stuff I am, too. Not that it matters. He's very likely a murderer. We can't possibly all be innocent, or even half-innocent.*"

"Well, that's briefly me," said Camilla. Her thick dark lashes flickered. "I suspect you never killed that uncle of yours, either, Mr. Allenby. Though we can all be broad-minded at a place with such a delightful name as Sinners' Castle! I'm thrilling all over. Aren't you, Jan?"

"A bit," answered Jan, slowly. She was wondering why, all at once, she began to hate and fear Camilla Schumann. "But I think we'd better all be careful. Of each other, I mean. Do you remember what he said about bringing forth the evil or the good in us?"

CAMILLA'S eyebrows went up, and a snicker came from Mr. Wackett, whose sharp nose was now bent over a plate of *hors d'oeuvres*. Both he and Catchpole had a masked look, like two cats who found themselves in a loft of plump pigeons, and tried not to show it. Yet there was something deeper and more disturbed than that, about both of them. Jan wondered: "*Who are they, really?*"

"Poppycock!" said Mr. Wackett. "He's no magician. Though what with poison and murder, we make a swell bunch. I never heard anything like it. Not," Mr. Wackett ended smoothly, "that there aren't extenuating circumstances in everything. We're the last to judge, aren't we, Mr. Catchpole?"

"Sure you are." Craig Allenby reached a hand across the table. "That gun, if you please, Mr. Wackett."

For a moment Mr. Wackett hesitated then with a sheepish grin and a remark about tough spots in Santa Cruz or somewhere now being wiped out, he handed it over gracefully.

Camilla Schumann observed gravely: "Well, then, we'll all make a vow to live



in love and friendship together while we're at Sinners' Castle, and not try to kill each other or anything like that, in spite of Mr. Cobb's kind remarks. So it's settled. And now, I wonder when we shall have something to eat? I'm ravenous."

THE yacht whispered through the water while dinner was being served ten minutes later. Jethro Cobb joined them again for the luxurious meal. He had obviously left them alone purposely, though probably he had listened to their conversation. There was something gnomelike though perfectly dignified about him; and when he at length led the way to the deck, he seemed to belong to the wild Donegal landscape that met their eyes, as though he had come limping out of one of the hollows of the hills. The *Brantane* floated close inshore on a mauve mirror of water into which the image of the mountains dipped darkly. A few seabirds wailed. In the squat-turreted mass of Sinners' Castle, now lying black and mysterious by the shore, lights gleamed. It looked as old as the hills themselves, and as remote from human life.

"What is its real name?" asked Jan.

Cobb glanced at her. "Cashel Murtag is its real name," he answered. "Murtag was a chieftain of these parts, and in the old Irish tongue he was nicknamed the Sinner. So I'm not so fanciful, Miss Feversham. Things don't change in this country much, not even the names. Murtag began as a saint and ended as a sinner. I believe there was a woman or two in it."

Jan stood with the others on the boat platform and dreamily watched the silky water flow past in the half-dark. There was something sleepy and druglike in the evening, with its smell of sea-salt and pines; something unreal about everything. Lightly leaning against the rope rail, she tried to wonder what had happened to Kate, but failed. Kate had

only been an instrument in all this, because there was a sort of destiny in it. She was conscious of Mr. Wackett sniffing enjoyably at a cigar, of Craig Allenby behind her, and the scent of a cigarette that Camilla Schumann smoked. The motor-launch was being lowered, but the *Brantane* still moved with a lazily-turning screw. . . .

"Take care, Jan, or you'll be in!" came Camilla's warning voice.

Jan half-turned, and with horrible suddenness the white rope she leaned upon gave way. There was no chance to keep her balance, though Mr. Wackett shouted and made a snatch at her. The water closed over her head, and she went down with her lungs full of salty water. It was nearly warm, and Jan could swim, but a vague terror gripped her. "*Somebody loosened that rope, and it was Camilla Schumann!*" flashed through her mind. Fighting hard, she strove to rise to the surface, only to find that some strong current pulled her down. Then she came up to the light again, the white sides of the yacht sliding above her as she gasped for air, the slowly-threshing screw not a dozen yards away, gleaming bronze blades drawing nearer to cut her to pieces, sidling sideways toward her. . . . Camilla had worked things out well, in that first murder attempted at Sinners' Castle.

It all passed across Jan as though it were somebody else who fought there. With it was a cool wonderment as to why Camilla should have taken the trouble unless she was a homicidal maniac, mad with jealousy and grief, after all. Then she saw Craig Allenby's face in the green water by her side.

"Take a long breath," he snapped. "You're going under again if you don't want to be sliced in two."

He dived deep, taking her with him, and holding her fast, while the dull thunder of the propeller passed over them, then left them floating behind in the creamy wake of it, the danger past.

Already the motor-launch was shooting toward them. Allenby still held her.

"Thanks—I'm all right," she said; then she spluttered and laughed unsteadily. "You don't think I did it on purpose to give you a—a sort of regular job? The rope must have slipped, or broken, or something."

She felt tired, yet exhilarated, as the launch took them to the boat platform. She must not betray to anybody her certainty that it was not an accident. She saw Camilla, looking as startled and concerned as anybody, and thought: "*Can she possibly have meant to get me out of the way because she's fallen in love with him? Is she that kind of a primitive woman?*"

"ALL right, Miss Feversham?" asked Jethro Cobb, standing close to her, his small bright eyes intent. "That was a narrow escape. I'll get the skipper to speak to the man who looped that rope so carelessly."

Jan laughed shakily. Not much presence was required to do that.

"The skipper ought to speak to me, good and well. It was my own fault, leaning against it like that. But I'll be more careful in future."

Jethro Cobb's glance raked all over her, as though he saw her clearly, and was interested in her for the first time. It was like that of some very intelligent child who missed nothing, and wistfully longed to understand. There was no hiding it from him. He knew. And he knew that she knew.

"You're not vindictive?" The question was barely audible. She was compelled to answer, equally low:

"No, but—"

He spoke before he moved away.

"Don't be. But take care."

The launch purred toward Sinners' Castle with its passengers, leaving a phosphorescent trail behind it. Somewhere in the dark pile, a dog barked; and far away to seaward, there was an uneasy, metallic hum in the sky. Was it airplanes, Jan wondered? Perhaps the war had already broken, and out there, where the Atlantic roared, the U-boats were lurking on their bed of death. It didn't seem to matter, at Sinners' Castle, especially to somebody who had just had an attempt made on her life. . . .

Camilla Schumann sat by her side. Jan was not afraid of Camilla now. On the other hand, she felt that she had started a long duel with her.

Camilla's hand touched Jan's.

"You're wet. Lucky it's a warm night. We seem to have started well, I must say, with a near-drowning and a gallant rescue. Jan, you don't think I'm jealous?"

"Of—"

She nearly said, "Of Craig." It startled her tremendously that she should think of him by his Christian name so suddenly. Though she was shivering a little, her cheek burned under cover of the darkness.

Camilla's voice went on:

"Of Erich—or his memory. He was a perfect swine, really, you know, like all people of his race. He was a Prussian. I had an idea once that it wasn't you, but your young sister Kate." . . . A pause. Camilla's green eyes were invisible now above her beautifully modeled cheekbones; but they watched her, Jan was sure. "Anyway, we're both better off, and you'll forget him soon enough. . . . Isn't he strong and silent?"

"Who?"

"Well, not Mr. Wackett. Craig Allenby."

"I suppose he is. I haven't noticed."

Camilla laughed, and glanced at the stern, where Craig Allenby sat beside Jethro Cobb, with his big shoulders against the dying afterglow.

"That's funny. Both you and Craig are strait-laced. He thinks you're—well a bit soiled. Married lover, and all that. And you think it's a hundred to one he was guilty of that murder. Personally, I don't give a damn; I'm no little white hen myself. . . . It's most fascinating. I wouldn't be anywhere else for worlds."

"I don't care much what he thinks of me," said Jan indifferently. "Though I'm grateful for what he did just now, of course."

She wondered if it got over.

Chapter Three

ON the old terrace of the castle in the late afternoon, Craig Allenby stood looking out at the panorama of mountain and glen that stretched as far as he could see. The highlands of Donegal lifted to the horizon on one side, on the other the empty lough—for the *Brantane* had gone—ran out to the Atlantic, across which the nearest land was Newfoundland. Tier upon tier, the mountains rose. He liked them. They seemed clean and honest, and strong. On Castle Mur-

tag itself Jethro Cobb must have spent a small fortune to redeem it from the decay of a century. Corridors and banqueting-hall, as well as its ten habitable bedrooms, were furnished with astonishing comfort—though so far the only servants visible were a man and his wife, a silent Irish couple. Jethro Cobb had discoursed cheerfully about the salmon streams, the grouse on the moors—and the ghost of Murtag the Sinner, that one could take a pot-shot at with a silver bullet after dark. Mr. Wackett, in a canary waistcoat, was full of breezy wisecracks. Mr. Catchpole, no longer in clergyman's attire, was quiet and greasily dignified, but very watchful. Both men, Allenby felt, were spurious. Camilla Schumann set some hot nerve pleasantly throbbing within him. She was pagan. As for Jan Feversham—no, he must avoid her. In some vague way, she hurt him.

He turned and saw Camilla Schumann by his side, very fresh, and vital enough to stir the pulse of any man.

"It's a lovely scene, isn't it?" she said softly. "A long way from war. . . . Do you know it's started? I happened to find a radio-set, and switched it on. But what does it matter to us?"

SHE was breathing quickly, as though in excitement, and she turned and looked out at the mouth of the lough for an instant, brushing him with her shoulder as she did so.

"I only hope one of the U-boats doesn't come and shell Sinners' Castle," she laughed.

"They did something of the sort in the last war," Allenby returned. "At least, they were supposed to come in and make themselves quite at home here. They lay at the mouth of the lough, according to local rumor, and the officers came ashore to the castle. It was empty, then."

"Who told you that?" she asked curiously. It seemed to him that she looked startled.

"Cobb. But he couldn't know. He only bought the place a year or two ago."

"He's mad, of course, but quite amiably so. Do you see the flag flying on the top of the tower? It's his own design. He ran it up the moment he heard war was declared. It must be visible miles out at sea."

Allenby let himself become conscious of Camilla's magnetism. She intrigued him. Perhaps there was something dan-

gerous about her, but he was in a mood for danger. Inwardly he gibed at himself. Danger! War had happened. And he was in hiding, at the service of an eccentric lunatic.

"You're bitter about that trial of yours, Craig, aren't you? Jan's sure you were guilty. I'm certain you weren't."

"Does it matter?"

"No. Nothing matters here. Don't you feel that, already? After all, this is like a pleasure cruise, where things happen quickly. . . . But I'd rather we didn't look on each other as a couple of out-and-out bad people. We're just human. That's why I'm not grieving for my husband. . . . Poor Jan! And I'm going to like you a lot, Craig Allenby."

HER lips touched his as lightly as a butterfly's wing, closed and dewy. Then she laughed, and looked at him inscrutably.

"You're innocent of that murder, all right, Craig," she said. "And you're not likely to carry out any of Jethro Cobb's hopes and fears at Sinners' Castle. Well, listen: I said I'd perhaps tell you my story, didn't I? It's a strange one. To start with, Erich had a secret radio, and the Old Manor House was only a mile from the sea. All the men of his family are in the German Navy—the submarine service. Even in the last war, they were. I shouldn't wonder if some of them came here, at one time." Camilla paused. "They might even come again, this war. Their sons, their nephews, you know. At Kiel they called the Schumanns the *Unterseekinder*, and they certainly are submarine babies. Their U-boats have been hanging out in the Atlantic for months, and Erich kept them in touch with shipping movements. I found that out all in one horrible hour. I thought he never suspected, and that when war began, I'd be able to hand him over to Scotland Yard red-handed. But he suspected, all right."

Her shudder turned into a shrug.

"He tried to poison me first. Aconitine. It leaves no trace. I took a leaf out of his book," she said laconically. "Only once. Then I got frightened, because I'm no Lucrezia Borgia. How Jethro Cobb found out, I don't know. He only came to the house once or twice. He's not human. I believe he'll crumble to dust when he dies, or else go back into a bottle."

Camilla leaned against the parapet, and finished:

"So you see, it wasn't jealousy at all. It was a mixture of patriotism and self-preservation. I didn't worry about his affair with Jan Feversham, though it was open enough. She knew about the radio-station too, because I once saw them both go into the summerhouse where it was hidden. Such things don't matter much when you are infatuated. I suppose he meant to use her in some way."



FROM among the red Virginia Creeper just beneath the wall of the terrace, Jan heard every word before she sidled noiselessly away with her hand on the leash of the wolfhound puppy she held. The puppy, in search of an imaginary rat, had pulled her into the undergrowth, and without any real twinge of conscience she had stayed and listened. Sinners' Castle, with its corridors and buttresses, was well provided with eaves-dropping posts.

She wondered soberly what had made Camilla Schumann choose that particular fiction about herself. The woman was far too subtle to keep on blackening her to Craig Allenby like a jealous servant-girl; therefore it followed that the whole of her story might be deliberately invented for some reason. But why? To test him—to use him in some way?

"Don't be a fool, you'll be saying she's a German spy who intends to poison us all and turn the Castle into a U-boat base, next! And she had no more idea than the rest of us that we weren't going to the Caribbean or somewhere."

A voice sounded by her side as she stood looking at the dark woods across the water. It was Mr. Wackett, now in a vividly green deerstalker hat, and plus-fours. He said, humorously:

"Nobody been doing a spot of doing-in yet that one could notice, eh, Miss Feversham? Well, there's a war on at last, and there'll be plenty of doing-in soon, I guess. Funny thing, how you go all patriotic when it comes. Holidays like this seem a sin. If it is a holiday," ended Wackett dubiously. "But them mountains get me. Look at 'em. Not that I wouldn't mind a long tramp over 'em if I had a map. Always a great walker, I was."

"Mr. Cobb's sure to have one in the library," said Jan.

"Thanks—good idea. Gawd, this is a good funk-hole! I'd recommend it to some of the ol' dears who've gone as far into Cornwall as they can, I would. Ireland, eh? Can't help looking round for

the Paddys and the pigs, and old Mother O'Reilly sitting at the cabin door with her clay pipe. But there aint any such."

He coughed.

"Rum business this, aint it? Not good enough for respectable crooks like Catchpole and me." Wackett grinned, but his impudence had a touch of wickedness behind it. "Love-interest starting, too. A hot affair it'll be, with that green-eyed blonde in it. Bit dangerous, considering her hobby, too. But better than being buried in quicklime as that bloke might have been by now, except for a bit of luck."

Jan felt herself flinch. The man was looking at her with cold curiosity. She obviously intrigued him. Of course, he knew the story of Erich Schumann and herself. Jethro Cobb had spared nobody. Forlornly, she cursed Kate, who had probably already half-forgotten Erich Schumann and her elder sister and all the rest of her life at Twelvetrees Farm.

Wackett said, with his habitual grin:

"She's rich, isn't she—that Mrs. Schumann? She brought a nice bit of jewelry ashore with her."

Jan answered, calmly:

"I dare say her room would be worth breaking into if you thought of doing it, and then finding your way back to civilization over the hills and far away out of the reach of Jethro Cobb, Mr. Wackett. But I warn you there are miles of mountain to cross—Old Man, and Saddleback Pat, and the Seven Bens. I got them all from Mr. Cobb. And there are acres on acres of bog."

A LAUGH came from Wackett. He lifted his deerstalker.

"See my old shako, Miss Feversham? I take it off. There's something about you. It's an idea, sure. I guess Cobb wouldn't interfere. Sinners' Castle, where there aint no Ten Commandments and a man can raise a thirst—and satisfy it handsomely, I will say. That's his notion. Well, if Catchpole and me get a bit tired, we'll take your hint, Miss Feversham. And I'd like to see that blonde lay police information. Or anybody else, for that matter."

Jan looked after the little man as he lounged jauntily downward to the rocks where Mr. Catchpole sat in a boat with some fishing-tackle he didn't appear to know what to do with. Wackett turned with a wave of his hand that expressed his irony. She wished for a moment that she hadn't been so quick with her tongue, and suddenly felt that she stood a lonely figure on the edge of unknown abysses that scared her. She knew no more real truth about Wackett and Catchpole than she did about Camilla and Craig Allenby and Jethro Cobb himself. If she told Craig the truth about her sister Kate and Erich Schumann, and enlisted his help—her face went obstinately up to the sea-wind that blew the waters of the lough into dark purple. She wasn't going to do that. If he wanted to fall for Camilla, he could have her. With a slight start she perceived Jethro Cobb's little face at one of the deep-sunk windows in the gray wall behind her before he vanished without haste.

Presently, Camilla and Craig Allenby came down from the terrace together.

"We're taking a couple of guns out on the moor, Jan," called Camilla. "Coming?"

But Jan hugged the wolfhound puppy with a smile. "I've made a pal. And I feel lazy."

ALREADY, the thought had started: Morally, there was a good excuse for breaking into the room and searching the belongings of a woman who had tried to kill her. If she left any trace and Camilla made a fuss, then she would calmly pass on the credit of it to Messrs. Catchpole and Wackett. Jan laughed grimly at herself. She was growing clever! Quietly she slipped through the great oak doorway and up the dark staircase where two old galleon lamps already shed a soft light, only to find the door of Camilla's room firmly locked. But from her own window a coping, with plenty of ivy to cling to, ran to Camilla's. After dark, there might be a chance, that way. The streak of obstinacy in Jan was working now at full pressure. . . .

She lay on the bed, and pretended a headache, at dinnertime—and Fortune seemed to favor her, for Camilla and Craig Allenby were not back for dinner. Watching a big yellow moon rise, she felt a bit sick at the thought of those two people together under it. With her chin on her hand, she wondered soberly

whether she could stop herself falling in love with Craig, if it wasn't too late. Once, she thought she heard distant gunfire far out at sea, but it died away.

IT was late when, in dark trousers and shirt, Jan began to climb along the coping. Cashel Murtag slumbered in black and silver without any sound within it, as she scrambled noiselessly along its old ivy. The window, when she reached it, was slightly open, and with one last look at the moonlit moors where Camilla, like the she-cat she was, kept abroad the man she pursued, Jan entered. As she did so, the clock in the tower chimed, with disconcerting suddenness, eleven rusty strokes. . . .

A hide trunk, empty; a wardrobe full of clothes, and the elusive, hated scent of Camilla over everything. A dressing-table drawer, unlocked; within it, three jewel-cases. Though her heart tripped quickly, Jan searched methodically. The jewelry looked good—an excellent haul for Messrs. Catchpole and Wackett. No letters. But deep within a small leather writing-case, one single linen-mounted sheet of an Ordnance Survey map, old and stained as though with sea-water. Jan took it into the moonlight, and stared at it. There were the names: *Old Man* and *Saddleback Pat*, *Derry-veigh* and *Blackadder's Bog*, with, at the bottom, plainly marked, "*Cashel Murtag*."

All the time, then, Camilla had either known or guessed that the *Brantane* was coming to Sinners' Castle!

There was a monogram on the writing-case, Jan noticed, now. "E.S." It had belonged to Camilla's husband, to the man who had sought to make Kate die with him. Not long before, perhaps, it had held other things besides the map; but now something slipped from behind the blotting-pad and fluttered to the floor. It was an old newspaper-clipping, dated November, 1918, yellow and faded, but clear to read in the pencil light of her small flashlight.

Despite the mutiny at Kiel and the end of the German Navy, it is assumed that a number of *Unterseebooten* are still at sea, and fear is expressed that some of their demoralized crews may turn privateers on their own, after peace is signed. The sinking of the American ship *Kermesse* two hundred miles from the Irish coast, by a U boat whose men boarded the vessel, transferred a quanti-

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ty of gold bullion she was carrying, and made away with it, lends colour to this. It would not be difficult for these modern pirates, before returning to their base, to deposit their booty in some lonely spot on the coast until a more favourable time for retrieving it.

That was all. Jan carefully replaced map and clipping. She felt excited in a cool and steadfast way that surprised herself. No use trying to conjecture anything. At Sinners' Castle, no doubt, one waited for things to happen, and they did without fail. If Camilla came back while she was there, something drastic might easily happen to *her!* She turned to the window. As she did so, there was an unexpected sound.

It was the click of a key being fitted into the lock of the door. In the few seconds it fumbled, Jan found herself backing, not in the direction of the window, but toward the big Sheraton wardrobe which made an angle with the wall. As she went, she picked up a heavy candlestick from the table which she had mentally noted before that. With a pleasurable thrill she told herself that this time Camilla should receive as good as she gave if she asked for it. Then her arm fell to her side.

It was not Camilla at all. The foremost figure which came softly along the thick carpet was that of Mr. Wackett, and in his footsteps padded the late Rev. Mr. Catchpole. They were clothed as though for a sudden and urgent journey.

Mr. Wackett hummed softly to himself as he sprayed a flashlight leisurely round the room, but Catchpole's voice held nervousness when he spoke.

"For Mike's sake, don't croon like that! Let's get on with it, and clear out."

WACKETT opened the dressing-table drawer.

"We're here," he said softly, "to help ourselves. If the blonde comes back from the moonlight—though she won't, because blondes like moonlight—she's welcome to watch us. As good as kidnaped, weren't we? And put into bad company. Poisoners, murderers and all that. This is just compensation."

"I'd rather find what the game is here. Might be worth a hundred thousand, if he's made it a submarine base or anything like that. All right, laugh at the ideal!"

"I'm not. Only at you. You're scared of old Jethro. Me too. A bird in the

hand is worth two in the bush. . . . See the pretty birds. Little robin red-breasts!" Wackett scooped a pendant of rubies from its case, pocketing them expertly, humming again. Camilla had evidently brought all her jewelry on the trip. Jan crushed herself into the shadow as Catchpole snooped close. Both men were afraid, though they showed it differently—both glad to be shaking the dust of Sinners' Castle from their feet.

"Clean-up!" murmured Mr. Wackett. "We'll exit by the window, as pre-arranged. Over the hills and far away, as the little suicide-dame put it, bless her."

No reply left Catchpole, because he was staring through the shadows at the door, which had opened with a minimum of sound. Craig Allenby, standing there, seemed to fill the doorway. He looked at both of them.

"**S**ORRY, gentlemen," he said. "Will you come down and see Mr. Cobb and Mrs. Schumann?"

"Why should we?" asked Catchpole, huskily finding voice.

"It's only polite. Cobb's the host, and Mrs. Schumann's the owner. No, don't go for the window, Wackett. I've got your pistol, yet—though I don't promise to use it. I can manage easily without."

"Came back and dogged us, didn't you, young Mr. Slip-the-drop? You and the blonde," said Wackett. He tried to grin, but looked like a malevolent little ferret, badly done by.

"We did."

Craig with one hand propelled Wackett out into the corridor, and his companion followed with more dignity but scarcely less speed. In her corner, Jan heard the door close. A long breath came from her. She did not hesitate, but crossed to the dressing-table; from the still-open drawer she took Erich Schumann's small leather writing-case and thrust it into her shirt. It was all done on impulse; and whether it was stupid or clever, she didn't stop to consider. . . .

The ivy felt cold and slippery on her return journey. Low out at sea, the searchlights were criss-crossing; there were half a dozen soft sullen booms that made her pause on the coping, thinking of depth-charges and U-boats. But once in her own room, she did not pause, save to change into a more convincing sleeping-suit and dressing-gown. . . . Her mind was made up. If all the clan at

Sinners' Castle was gathering below, including Camilla, she certainly didn't mean to be left out of it.

Quietly, she opened the door.

"Hullo, Jan!"

She tried not to jump back, though it was Camilla who stood there in the corridor. In the dim light, Camilla was insubstantial, save for her almond eyes, which, with lazy laughter, were full upon Jan. She looked like the ghost of some woman who might once at Cashel Murtag have driven Murtag the Sinner to the devil, and wandered the place ever since.

"I heard a noise, and it startled me, so I came out to see."

Jan wondered if her tone sounded too defiant, but Camilla merely nodded.

"Catchpole and Wackett, Limited—very limited—after my jewels," she said. "Craig and I laid a trap for them. Came back quietly, in spite of the delicious moonlight, and Craig ran them in. . . . Come down to the judgment-seat, Jan, if you're not too sleepy. Judge Jethro is in full session."

AS they went down the staircase, the spell of Sinners' Castle stirred Jan's fancies into riot. She actually kept a stair behind Camilla, just as a precaution, for she felt that a fall downstairs resulting in a broken neck might be engineered more successfully than an accidental plunge into the *Brantane's* propeller. At the same time, she could not quell a sharp zest for adventure, and a cool wonder whether she might not get in the trick herself before Camilla did, if she really tried.

Jan decided to wait. . . .

When they reached the circular room which was the small library of Sinners' Castle, Jethro Cobb sat huddled in an armchair beside a peat-fire which glowed redly in the hearth, despite the mildness of the night. He looked up as Jan and Camilla entered, and his blue eyes, in their deep sockets, rested on both women, as though comparing them. He smiled faintly.

"What is to be done with these two most miserable sinners, Mrs. Schumann?" he asked. "There's an old iron gallows down by the rocks, dating from the days when robbery was punished that way. And a dungeon or two, I believe. You wouldn't like to be hangman or jailer, Allenby?"

Wackett's hand brushed across his sharp nose. "Laughter in court!" he ob-

served ironically. But a bead of sweat stood on Catchpole's upper-lip, in spite of the sickly smile which tried to assure the company that it was all a feeble joke. For the first time, his eyes hung, like those of a sick dog, upon Allenby.

"You vulgar imbeciles!" said Jethro Cobb softly. "I'm disappointed. I bring you here as my guests; I try a modest psychological experiment on you; and this is what happens. What clumsy craftsmen! I was sorry to have to warn Mrs. Schumann and instruct Allenby to keep a watch. You will perceive that you're now in what is called a cleft stick."

There was hatred in Wackett's face. Looking narrowly, Jethro Cobb saw it. He chuckled all at once.

"So! You feel humiliation? I believe you'd kill me, if you could. And Allenby too, of course. That's better. I've a contempt for the small passions. Catchpole, can't I stir some bile in you also?"

"Please don't!" said Jan quickly.

Cobb sent her that wistful, searching glance. It was gone in an instant, but he was silent. Camilla laughed, and said carelessly:

"Let's forget it all. There's nothing missing—nothing valuable, anyway." The pause she made sent a queer tingle through Jan. "There's something peculiar about this place, I suppose. Let's absolutely forget it. But don't do it again, will you? Didn't Mr. Cobb tell us your wife was young, Mr. Catchpole?"

Her smile was charming, mischievous.

"Young," said Catchpole huskily, "and beautiful."

"Well, I suppose they were meant for her. Everybody says that this war is only part of a social revolution that means the leveling up of possessions all round. Please say nothing more about it. But don't hate Mr. Cobb, however much he asks you to. Nor you either, Mr. Wackett. And don't leave Sinners' Castle and break up the party."

"No," said Wackett, his slit of a mouth white at the corners.

WHEN they had gone, Jethro Cobb sighed. He sat with his head down, gazing at the blue peat-flames as if in a reverie. That way, he looked timelessly old, though he was hardly more than middle-aged. Presently he stood out of the chair, and gave a little ceremonious bow directed at Camilla Schumann.

"All that fresh air and exercise must have made you tired, Mrs. Schumann. Did you bring anything down?"

"A few grouse. Nothing else."

Camilla was on her feet too, smiling, but stiffly holding the little man's glance as she took her dismissal. Jan thought, like lightning: "*He means, did she bring Craig down, and she knows it. He's trying to make her hate him too, and succeeding very well.*"

"Sleep well." Jethro Cobb watched Camilla leave the room, then rubbed his hands together with a crisp sound. "A striking woman, Allenby, both in looks and character! A man who was reckless enough, and liked tigers for their lovely skins, would be very much attracted to her. Or"—Cobb finished almost musingly—"a man who didn't give a care about anything. A weakling who'd thrown up the fight, and run away. He'd fall for her, though he might despise himself all the time."

"He doesn't mince his words, does he, Miss Feversham?" said Craig Allenby.

LOOKING at him, Jan knew that it was much too late to stop herself falling in love with him. There was no thrill in it. It was more like a feeling of catastrophe, than anything else. He stood lightly against the back of a chair, lean-faced and smiling, armored within himself. He cared nothing for Cobb. And certainly he cared nothing for Jan Feversham.

"Mr. Cobb's trying to make you hate him," said Jan.

Craig laughed. "No go. He's set his heart on a murder happening here, even if it has to be himself. I refuse to do his dirty work. Any further instructions, Mr. Cobb?"

"Not tonight," said Jethro Cobb, gravely putting out a thin hand; then: "You stay, please, Miss Feversham."

She felt Allenby's glance linger on her as he left the room, but it was only curiosity. The red peat fell in with a small crash as an uneasy wind blew from the mountains about the chimneys of Sinners' Castle and set the waters outside lapping. The effect of loneliness, of isolation, was intense.

"I want to tell you my story, Miss Feversham," said Jethro Cobb, suddenly breaking the silence.

Jan leaned forward. Long ago, any sense of fantasy had gone. Whatever Jethro Cobb said or did, must be accepted. But she had to speak.

"First I want to tell you mine," she said. "At least, I want to say that I never joined Erich Schumann in any sui-

cide-pact. It was my younger sister, and it was only foolishness on her part. Craig Allenby—and you—found me after I'd sent her home and was trying to rub out her tracks. I hated him."

Jethro Cobb showed no emotion at her words.

"I thought something of the kind. So there's one of us at least who is completely innocent—you. I imagine the other is Allenby. Never mind." He cuddled his eagle-face and white hair deeper into his chair, and smiled.

"Now listen to me: I came out of prison two years ago, after serving five years for manslaughter! I don't look it, do I? My sister was very young, like yours. The man wouldn't leave her alone. I was a puritan—I am still. But hot-blooded. I wrote him violent letters, and I gloated on the hiding I meant to give. I meant to cripple him so that he would never show himself on the stage again—he was a well-known actor. I got a terrific kick out of it. There was a good Honest John of a man who wanted to marry my sister, you understand.

"One day, like a thunderclap, I realized the evil pleasure I was giving myself. It wasn't for my sister I meant to half-kill him. It was for my own delight. I was a pathological case, if I didn't pull myself together. I was gradually planning to destroy the man. Well, I prayed; I believe in prayer. The evil spirit left me. But a little later the man was found dead in a country lane badly battered, with my heavy-handed horsewhip beside him. Weak heart. Honest John had done my beating-up for me, but killed the man. Honest John and my sister were already secretly married, and—I went to prison. Not from any self-sacrifice. For the Lord's sake, don't think that, Miss Feversham! Honest John and I never really liked each other. But what else could I do, when I was guilty?"

THE man seemed animated for a moment. Then he stared mildly at Jan—an unwinking stare.

"Hence this eccentric experiment of mine," he ended. "Camilla Schumann, guilty yet innocent, Allenby probably likewise, but certainly nicely balanced between good and evil. Catchpole and Wackett, poor devils, not exactly sure what they are. Yourself—" His voice dropped oddly. "No, you're the only really white sheep. That's your natural color. It's all a psychological experiment. So don't think there's anything



else to it—a German submarine base, or hidden treasure, or anything like that.”

So completely unexpected were Jethro Cobb's last words that Jan stared back at him in turn. He contradicted himself in everything he said, as though he took a gentle pleasure in confusing her. Inwardly, she cried out in protest at everything. She only had one insignificant clipping from an old newspaper, and a contour map, not of the currents and soundings and bearings of the lough, but of the hills and bogs inland. But he appeared to know she had them.

“You've brave,” he said. “After what she tried to do to you! There's no mystery about how I know. This place is full of holes and corners, and I'm small and active. I know you went into her room. I admired you for it.”

“You're very frightening, Mr. Cobb,” said Jan in a low voice.

“Slightly mad, you mean? Everybody is, my dear. I'll keep on with it. Look at this.”

AFTER ascertaining that the door was closed, he limped briskly to the high mantel and thrust at one of the smoke-stained panels. When he turned, there was a circular disk of dull metal resting in his palm. Gesturing Jan to the standard lamp, he gave it to her; and she found herself looking at a miniature but perfectly engraved copy of the contour map which lay hidden in her own room at that instant. It differed in one respect: Where the hump of Saddleback Pat rose from Blackadder's Bog, a tiny speck of mica, embedded in the metal, glinted, marked mysteriously, “*Finn Maccool.*”

“A clever bit of craftsmanship,” said Jethro Cobb, watching her. “Nearly twenty years old. The metal was cut by oxy-acetylene from a torpedo-fin and the etching done with an engineer's needle by a man who had little else to do, just then, at the end of the last war. As much as anything, he did it for amusement, I believe, while his submarine lay in the lough here before going back to Germany to be surrendered. A mere reconstruction on my part. I know nothing definite.”

Jan asked, raising her eyes to the keen but almost childish face:

“What does the piece of mica stand for? ‘Finn Maccool,’ I know, was one of the old Irish giants who was supposed to have buried a crock of gold among the hills.”

“Was he? That was a nice fancy of the man who etched the map, even if he was a German. Perhaps he did hide something there. If he did, he must have fetched it long ago—unless, of course, he died.”

“Was it Erich Schumann?”

“Schumann was nine years old when that was made. But he knew about it. So does Camilla.”

“She wants it, of course. It's a kind of clue, I suppose.”

“She's more or less prepared to kill for it, poor creature. She has hopes that she'll get Allenby to help her. . . . Now we'll put the thing back.”

“But the gold, or whatever it is, can't be there yet!”

“Gold?” Turning from the mantel, Jethro Cobb rubbed his cheek. “Why do you— Oh, I see: that newspaper-clipping in Schumann's writing-case! Better burn the whole thing. No, it's unlikely that the pirate's hoard is there now, if it ever was. But Camilla means to make sure.”

“Why don't you get it yourself?”

“There's an obstinate streak in you. You'll be asking next how I know all these things. . . . I'm a rich man. My hobby is human behaviorism. I spent five years buried away from my fellow-creatures, and I'm making up for it now. Besides, I'm sure your Finn Maccool's crock of gold must have been lifted long ago.” He looked at the clock. “It's getting late. I've kept you here too long in that pretty dressing-gown, Miss Ferversham.”

“You want me to keep all this secret?”

“I know you will.” He took her hand and bent over it, as perhaps that Irish gentleman and great sinner Murtag of Cashel Murtag would have done. “We'll study the other four people now, you and I. But watch Camilla.”

FOR nearly three days a drizzle of rain had enveloped Cashel Murtag, an Atlantic rain that beat in with soft persistence and kept Jethro Cobb's guests indoors. Messrs. Catchpole and Wackett fed well and drank well, cheated each other at cards, and entirely recovered from their discomfiture, during that

time. Jan found herself playing billiards with Camilla, and felt as glad as a school-girl that she could play rings round her when Craig Allenby watched them. The radio spoke of sinkings and the war at sea. The world shook. But it all seemed far away from Sinners' Castle.

On the third night, when Jan went to bed, the sky had cleared to a field of stars that stippled the water outside. The air was very clear when she sat at her window and looked down the lough. With a pair of small but good binoculars, it was almost possible to see the breakers outside the mouth. But presently she tired and went to bed. Camilla had come upstairs before her; but an hour later, to her sleepy surprise, Jan heard a step on the loose board outside the door as she went to her room.

"Darn Camilla!" she thought.

But all the same, her door was carefully locked.

THE morning was bright with sunshine. Saddleback Pat, rising out of Blackadder's Bog, had a ring of white cloud round his forehead, when she looked out. Jan trained her glasses on his scarred sides for some trace of a possible cave where a fortune in gold bars might be hidden under the mildew of twenty-one years, then laughed at herself. She changed direction and found something much more interesting. A slim, tweed-clad figure moved leisurely along the distant shore of the lough, dwindling slowly. It was Camilla.

"Camilla had an early breakfast, and went out to look for submarines, she said," Craig Allenby told her when she went down.

"It's a great morning," said Jan, trying not to let her look linger on him. "I think I'll take the little sailing curragh out. I'll cry '*Kamerad!*' if any U-boat rises."

When she reached the little boathouse, half an hour later, he was already there sitting at the tiller under the brown lug of the curragh. "*Camilla's left him behind, so I'll do,*" thought Jan, forlornly. Yet had Camilla been beating at a stone wall, after all? She had taken the tiller from him, and he was watching her firm, strong hand on it as the curragh heeled over.

"I misjudged you," he said all at once. "There was something queer about that suicide business—to refer to another existence. It wasn't what it seemed. You'd never do a thing like that."

"Thanks," she answered laconically. She never meant to tell him. He must find out for himself. Then: "I never even tried to judge *you*. It wasn't my business. I wonder why Camilla didn't take you with her just now?"

"I didn't want to go. . . . What were you doing by that car that evening?"

"Mr. Cobb will tell you, if he thinks fit."

"Cobb?" He looked at her for a long time, while the curragh danced over the green waves. "He's several years under fifty, that's true. . . . Look at those mackerel! We'll trail a line."

Jan nearly laughed as he consigned her to Jethro Cobb, and threw out a line astern. But she said:

"You ought to have stayed in London and proved that somebody else killed that uncle of yours, instead of just becoming one of Jethro Cobb's 'specimens,' if it comes to candid speaking. Though I suppose it might be difficult, at the beginning of a war. And now having both broken the ice, so to speak, we'd better go on with the fishing."

But she let Craig pull in the silvery fish, which he did in silence. Now and then Jan put the small binoculars to her eyes, and thought she saw a brown speck moving against the green woods and purple heather of the shore. The lough began to widen there, to a lonely space of blue water. They trawled to and fro for two hours and more, in that ocean inlet of Ireland which was so remote from human life even now, when the seas outside it held lurking death, and the eye of a periscope might be watching them.

Then Craig Allenby's eyes crinkled in a way Jan had noticed long before.

"You shall taste fresh mackerel grilled on a wood fire," he promised her. "They're good."

ON a pebbly beach under a low brown cliff, they ran the curragh, and went ashore. Looking back, they could see the fluttering speck of Jethro Cobb's flag, and hear the faint chime of the clock at Sinners' Castle, though it was fully half a dozen miles away. When the fire of branches and driftwood was crackling, Jan said:

"I don't want to see you operate on the poor things. I'll take a look around."

Somewhere, not far away, was Camilla. Jan had seen her, with those precious little binoculars; seen her look at the distant curragh and then slip inland, either

by chance or design. Camilla seemed to be gypsying all alone. With the salt wind blowing about her, Jan reached the brow of the low cliff. She took out her compact and repaired her complexion, an operation that would appeal to Camilla if she were anywhere near and suspicious of being watched. Half a mile away, a flock of wood-pigeons flew suddenly out of the trees.

Jan began to crawl through the thicket on all fours. After a time, when all her joints began to ache, the stub of a cigarette, still smoking, gave her hope. It seemed an hour before she was in the depth of the wood proper, her trousers torn and muddy, and her skin scratched. The glasses jumped before her eyes, but she could see Camilla there in the green twilight, approaching a tall, bearded man wrapped in a stained blue Navy coat and sweater—a man who was hatless and wet, and sagged a little as though from exhaustion, as he came forward to meet her.

A magpie flew chattering from Jan where she crawled yard by yard, on her stomach now, close to where the two people had seated themselves on a tree-trunk. It was uncomfortable, because it made her heart thump against the ground; but at last she could hear them talking, lying within a few yards of them. The man spoke in careful and correct English, as he huddled in his wet clothes.

"We came in the night before last, when it was as black as pitch, after sinking a big boat a hundred miles out. Ah, yes." His white teeth gleamed momentarily through his beard. "I had that much of this war. We lay on the surface, charging the batteries. It was weird to hear the clock striking, and to know there was someone at the castle. In the darkness I stepped off. It was an accident, you understand. Karl, my son and Erich's cousin—yes, I had the honor to serve under my own son, a better Nazi than myself—looked for me in the boat for an hour, poor lad. I watched him from the shore. He is a first-class navigator, however, and he will carry on. Naturally, one of the *Untersseekinder* Schumanns would not leave his boat in the lurch altogether."

CAMILLA said quickly: "I saw the flare you lit, last night, though it was a bit risky. We can't stay here long, Conrad. There's a small boat on the lough, with a man and a girl from the castle. I'll tell you about them later."

The man laughed, though he seemed surprised.

"A man and a girl? I expected only Erich. Not even you, Camilla. Naturally, I shall be glad to have a warm fire and a good meal after hiding in this barbarous wood. I am not so young. Two wars! It is one at least too many, in the sea-coffin service. But I volunteered as soon as it seemed inevitable. Naturally, Erich is with you?"

"No. . . . Conrad, he died. He feared internment."

HE stiffened. But he had lived with death too long for it to be anything more than an incident in a man's life. He had about him the same mixture of brute and child which Jan had always noticed in Erich Schumann. His eyes, red-rimmed, pierced Camilla; then the torpedo beard went up almost gayly.

"So! Poor Erich! I will ask no questions, Camilla. I am too thankful to find a friend at the old Irish castle."

"You were a fool not to come and take away the stuff in peace-time, Conrad. That's what surprises me."

He pondered it, shivering, for he was soaked. "Perhaps so. But it would have meant living in exile. In Germany, the State would have taken it—even in the early days. It would have been impossible to hide it. When the Führer rose, the Schumanns would have made me give the gold to him with both hands. They are all very good Nazis, very great patriots. So am I, when I remember. And then, again, I lost the clue—the metal map I made. I lost it one time I came to visit you and Erich. *Herr Gott*, I cast up nothing. Never did I trust Erich. No doubt you have it here with you. You were always cleverer than he."

"It isn't necessary. You could walk to the place."

"And fall into the bog, or over a precipice! Or search for days and days without ever finding it, always falling into that damned bog that frightened me more than any depth-charge ever did; for we got lost the whole night on our way back, and lay not daring to stay, for fear of being sucked in. I swear the banshees were thrusting at us with invisible fingers. Never shall I forget it. No, we need the metal map and the bearings. The grass will have grown on it; the stones will have fallen on the cave. In these savage mountains, the landscape changes. That was why we took a note of the bearing by the sun, of the exact spot, and

screwed it inside the metal map. It was childish," Conrad ended musingly. "But it was half a joke. We were certain we would never get home. The British fleet were beating us up. We lay on the bottom of the sea crazy and weak with foul air, and I copied that map with the engineer's needle, to pass the time. Nor did we get home—except me. I had the Schumann luck when we were bombed into scrap-iron by one of our own destroyers outside Heligoland. How long ago it seems! And now I am here again."

Camilla spoke urgently:

"I'm better than Erich, Conrad. I read that code radiogram you sent to him, saying you would come to Cashel Murtagh the first few days if war broke out. Oh, I know, your nerve isn't what it was; you're well over forty; you're fed up with Nazi Germany and the submarine service in spite of being a Schumann; and you don't see why you shouldn't enjoy a bit of life after this war's over, Nazi or not."

"Charming Camilla!" He bit his lip, and bowed in ironical Prussian fashion. "It is a pity you are my niece. There is some man at the castle?"

"Four of them. And a girl. Guests of a man called Jethro Cobb, who bought the castle and furnished it. He's not quite human. I don't know how he got hold of your metal map, but I know he has it. That's why I came here as one of his guests."

"We must get it from him. It is a long way to come for nothing. Even yet, it seems a dream."

"It isn't—it's real, Now I must go."

His bloodshot eyes narrowed a little. "And I follow, and give myself up as a prisoner of war to this Mr. Jethro Cobb. Is that it?"

"He won't make you a prisoner. Ireland isn't at war. He'll treat you as a guest. You're Lieutenant Conrad of the German Navy. Your U-boat lay in the lough last night, and you were very glad to swim ashore and be out of the war."

"Again, charming! You make me feel so big. As big as when, almost for a joke, we carried the gold bricks up the mountain in 1918, so very drunk with brandy and defeat that we scarcely remembered it next day. But—very good, I will come and play my part."

JAN, lying as close as a red Indian to the ground, tensed to spring up and shout for Craig Allenby's help, because it seemed as though Camilla would stumble over her as she left the wood; but a

moment later Camilla's brogues flipped past her, and were gone without touching her. Meanwhile Conrad on the tree-trunk was draining what remained of a small brandy flask. It was easy to guess that this *Unterseekind* Schumann, long past the age for his grim and nerve-racking job, had only been able to sustain it from the bottle. He was probably the weak brother of the family now, whatever he had once been. His glance went nervously through the trees and beyond the headland to the glittering Atlantic, as though a periscope might break the water and reveal the coward and deserter sitting there. . . . Jan, crawling away cautiously, was haunted by the picture he made.

STILL, she was determined about one thing: She meant not to breathe a word of what she had seen and heard, to Craig Allenby. He kept everything from her; he told her nothing about his own affairs; very likely he was still fascinated by Camilla. Her flesh tingled at that thought more than at what had happened in the last quarter of an hour. But she laughed lightly when she scrambled down to the beach, where he sat over the blue smoke of the fire.

"It's thrilling," she said. "Like a cannibal island. Except there aren't any cannibals. I got badly bushed. Look at my trousers!"

"Didn't see Camilla anywhere with those glasses of yours, I expect."

"Talking about cannibals? No."

"You don't like her." Smiling slightly, he took the savory fish from the white ash of the fire, and handed it to her on a flat stone.

"And you do."

"Heavens, you're nearly as big a puritan as Cobb!" he said cynically. "Don't be. This is only a short if hectic chapter in all our lives. Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die—one or more of us, according to Cobb's private theory. Fish good?"

"Delicious," said Jan, swallowing the big lump in her throat.

Later, as the curragh rippled its way down the lough, Jan closed her eyes, to shut out Craig as much as anything, but also to picture a big black submarine, and a man stepping into the water under cover of night, leaving his steely, fanatical companions behind. When she unclosed her lashes, Craig was watching her. He was friendly, and he liked her well enough; but Camilla was stronger meat, if only because she was a dangerous woman.

an; and danger held a rather fearful fascination at Sinners' Castle. Jan herself felt its influence like the edge of a knife that slid across her skin without breaking it—yet. She could not deny that she got some exhilaration out of it.

Chapter Four

THE exhilaration was there two days afterward when Lieutenant Conrad, of the German U-boat service leaned easily in a deck-chair on the terrace of Cashel Murtagh with a cigar tilted between his bearded lips, and put a long finger through the rings he blew while he shrugged an answer to a question from Wackett—who this morning wore a red tie with polka dots, and smoked a large curved pipe. Catchpole, in another seat, listened with his hands clasped. Good feeding and a sun-reddened nose imparted a contented, piglike look to the erstwhile clergyman.

"It was a terrible blow. To think we were at war with Englishmen like yourself, Mr. Wackett! Quiet, capable men, who never let go. Boys of the bulldog breed, as your song says. Yes, I am glad to be out of it."

"You were gutsy, though," conceded Wackett. "Lying in a sardine-can at the bottom of the sea, breathing your own breath with Jack Johnsons dropping around you! . . . I couldn't have done it! Wouldn't be surprised if it was you sunk the *Athenia*."

"I wouldn't be surprised. But let us not talk of it."

"Too terrible," murmured Catchpole somnolently. But his small eyes roved over the German.

Conrad rose and clicked his heels as Jethro Cobb appeared. He was very grateful and charming to everybody, like a bearded boy—but a boy who would stone a cat or tie an old woman down in bed, if it amused him, Jan thought. He and Camilla talked like strangers getting to know each other. To Jethro Cobb, he was one gentleman to another. Only when he had half-finished the decanter, did a tiny mocking gleam come into his eyes.

"I don't want the decanter to precipitate matters," Cobb had told Jan. "I want everything to happen cold sober here."

He had listened without visible emotion when she told him what she had seen and heard in the wood by the head-

land. His wistful look seemed to take her in, rather than her sensational story. Nothing surprised him, visibly. . . . She watched him, now, talking with his eager, boyish smile to Conrad, and wondered with a queer kind of anger, whether he had merely roped the man in as another psychological specimen, and had forgotten the deadly combination he made with Camilla Schumann.

"Somebody with a name like O'Brien O'Flaherty O'Flynn walled up his wife in one of the old towers, I've just read in a book in the library," Camilla was saying. "The bloodstains where she beat herself to death are supposed to be still there. They wouldn't wipe out. I want to find the grisly spot. Coming, Craig?"

"Sure."

Jan watched Camilla walk away with Craig. The sun had made her silky skin like a peach, while Jan, according to her mirror, had merely grown olive and brown-eyed and freckled. She was more like a strong, slim boy from the Donegal mountains that rose against the blue sky across the lough than anything else. All the same, she was a woman and not a panther.

"Miss Feversham,"—Conrad broke in on her thoughts,—"will you show me this place where the Irishman so perfectly solved his domestic problems?"

The old Celtic ruins were scattered by the lough shore. There was the gray skeleton of a tower and a few crumbled walls with ivy that ruffled in the wind when the gales blew. Today a stiff breeze blew through the soft Irish sunshine. Camilla leaned close against Craig Allenby within the dimness of the tower. Her fingers were linked in his. They looked like two people who had come to a romantic understanding—if a thing like that could be called romantic, Jan told herself, between her closed teeth.

CAMILLA released herself with a mischievous glance.

"All right, Jan, I'll be guide and take Lieutenant Conrad up the steps. There's only room for two at a time. I'll take you up, after."

"*You won't!*" thought Jan, looking up to the crumbled steps, where a false step would have meant a broken neck. She took a cigarette from the case Craig Allenby handed her, and lit it.

"I don't believe you like Lieutenant Conrad, much," she said. "Of course he's an enemy subject, and a Nazi. But he must be a brave man."

THE SUBMARINE'S TREASURE



He frowned at her suddenly, ignoring the statement.

"Jan, why don't you go away from here? Is it because Cobb's fond of you? Because he is."

She found herself answering, "I know that," though the idea startled her. It seemed ludicrous to picture Jethro Cobb fond of any woman.

"He's obsessed by this psychological idea. You ought to get him to shut up this shop."

"What would become of you and Camilla?"

"Hello, puritan!" he said, lightly. "I can feel you fingering my soul. Leave it alone, will you?"

"So you admit she's bad for the soul."

He looked at her inscrutably. The light from the blue sky which came down from the roofless summit of the tower cut his features strongly.

"She's a beautiful devil. But men like 'em sometimes. It's a fairly good pairing-off, if the little men who do that sort of thing are working on this bit of Irish soil. Camilla and me. Cobb and you. But Cobb would want to marry you. Camilla's not particular. That suits me."

He turned away, having spoken with a certain brutal frankness which he seemed to make deliberate. What happened then came very quickly. Allenby looked up at some sound—and shoved Jan aside as a mass of heavy stone came falling down, thudding on the spot where they had both been standing a second before. Leaning against the rough wall, Jan's thought snapped for a lightning instant: "*This is a development. She tried to get him, that time, as well as me!*" The débris still went on falling from above; Allenby caught her up with an oath, but there was warm blood on her forehead from a fragment that had struck her, and she realized with a light-headed clearness that her senses were leaving her. . . .

When she recovered a few minutes later, she was lying on a deep couch, in the

cool blue shadows of the small library, with Jethro Cobb, in a low Wexford chair, watching her.

"All right? It was a rather narrow escape. You got a glancing scalp blow—but from a fairly small stone."

Jan sipped the cup of tea he handed to her. It was laced with something that stopped her hand from trembling after a minute or two, and made her feel calm and almost matter-of-fact.

"I WAS behind you and Allenby," Cobb said. "I thought it advisable to come along. Conrad slipped, and dislodged a bit of the masonry. And he nearly came down himself, in a pains-taking attempt to make it look accidental. . . . Oh, no, Allenby wasn't hurt. He carried you here. I got rather a crack on the hand myself."

"You! They meant to get all three of us, then."

"Well, perhaps. But it was a tall order, even if they'd loosened things up there beforehand. I'm not sure they saw me, though. They want that precious metal map out of me before they do anything drastic, I imagine."

Jan passed her hand across her forehead.

"I just don't understand why Camilla should want to kill Craig Allenby. I thought—"

Cobb nodded understandingly.

"Yes, so she was, until Lieutenant Conrad appeared on the scene. Not that she's transferred her affections. But Conrad is an accomplice ready-made. I think she believed at first that Allenby really murdered his uncle, and so might be good material to work on. She'll manage to persuade him that it was an accident, I expect. Is he very infatuated?"

Jan nodded, because she flinched from answering aloud, remembering Allenby's words: "*She's a beautiful devil. But men like 'em sometimes.*" And she must leave his soul alone, Craig had told her. Well, it was his own. She sat up, her

head feeling no more than a little swimmy. Jethro Cobb was standing by the big fireplace, his white head and clean-cut face etched against the black paneling, his hands rubbing a little nervously together.

"I wonder you don't give them that metal map," Jan said, "if you don't want it yourself. This is all horribly dangerous for you. They'll drag Catchpole and Wackett in, if they haven't already done so. Remember, you've made those two hate you. . . . Wouldn't they have a task to get the gold away if it's still there?"

"They'd bring it down here and put it into ordinary packing-cases, and a little coasting-steamer could call in for them. Don't forget there are a number of unbalanced I.R.A. people who would be pleased to help. A foreign tramp or two still looks in at Galway. Camilla would make a brilliant figure in Mentone or somewhere, with half a million in gold. That was Erich Schumann's plan for himself, at any rate."

He spoke almost absently, his intense blue eyes still upon her. The gold among the hills, Finn Maccool's crock of gold, seemed to be part of his experiment, to him; but he was not thinking of that at the moment. He was thinking of herself, Jan knew.

"While we're here, they can't do it unless I help them. Conrad won't go without the map and his bearings. He's scared stiff of getting lost. The man's neurotic with drink and nerve-strain. Not that they haven't had a good game of hunt-the-slipper for the map already. If I gave it to them, we might get short shrift. . . . Now, I want to talk about something else. I have some news about your sister Kate."

JAN jumped involuntarily, and gasped: "About—"

"About Kate," Jethro Cobb repeated mildly. "It's absurd, but I have a telephone here. It was costly, because it goes under the lough and across the hills to the telegraph-station twenty miles distant; and the deer break the wires every now and again. However, there isn't a trace of it about the house. Well, I got in touch with a private-inquiry man I know. Kate is singing in a cabaret, quite a respectable one. She's also very friendly with a young fellow of good family and not too much brain. A Mr. Bert Twistleton."

"He owns the shooting round Twelvetrees." Jan laughed a bit unsteadily.

"Kate called him the Blue Spaniel. It was something about his nose. He's harmless. It was very, very good of you, Mr. Cobb."

So that was Kate. Kate, as usual, had made a good landing. Jan felt very glad, and a bit envious of Kate's unflinching luck.

"I want to be good to you," Cobb said. "I wonder if you'd do me the honor to marry me? It's sudden, I know. But I wish you'd think it over."

HE stood outside the bar of sunshine that streamed through the window as though he were afraid of her seeing him. He had spoken in his normal voice, which was always a little wistfully eager. Jan knew quite well that she had heard aright, though perhaps she ought to have doubted it. She stood up, beginning to shake her head. Quite touchingly, he began to plead, but still kept in the shadow.

"I'm neither so old nor so cracked as I seem," he said. "I'm a lonely man, and women have always gone on the other side of my street. I was glad of it—but you're different. I'm dull, but I'd make a good comrade."

"I wouldn't call you dull," Jan said slowly. "It hasn't been a dull time here."

"Just your promise, that's all. If you ever went back on it, I wouldn't try to hold you against your will."

("I'm not a chicken myself," thought Jan. "Twenty-seven next birthday. Craig Allenby's weak, contemptible. He'll hate me if I try to save him from Camilla any more. No more struggling at Twelvetrees, if I ever get back there. Besides, I like him. And I'm beginning to hate Craig Allenby.")

"It is rather unexpected," she said. She smiled. He was so like a shy boy, quiet and slightly crippled, but brilliant of intellect.

"But you'll give me your promise." He took her hand, with a sharp intake of breath. "Thank you, my dear."

"I want to make a condition," Jan said. "I want us to go away from Sinners' Castle. The game's too dangerous."

He lifted his small, finely sculptured head.

"For me, you mean. Leaving the crock of gold for Camilla and Conrad and Messrs. Wackett and Catchpole to squabble over?"

"And Craig Allenby—though I don't believe there's any crock of gold. It's all too wild. But if the *Brantane* came and

you shut up Sinners' Castle, they'd have to come."

"True," he said thoughtfully; then: "You're excited."

There was color in her face. Why shouldn't Camilla and Craig Allenby know?

"Perhaps we might have a sort of little celebration-party," he said, as though he read her thoughts. She began, in order to hide her confusion:

"Camilla might—"

"Try to make it a poison-party? No, that attempt on her husband really frightened her, I think. She's bad to the core, and quite reckless. If she was Latin, she might have used the idea again. But I think she was probably glad to leave her poison behind."

When he opened the door for her, she remembered that he hadn't agreed to leave Sinners' Castle. He was like some leprechaun who meant to heap kindness upon her, but could not part with his iron will. When the sea-air in the big hall blew upon her, she felt as though she came up from a magic underground where he had persuaded her just as he pleased, and left her changed, belonging to him. The five other guests of Sinners' Castle were all waiting there.

"Miss Feversham was only slightly hurt," said Jethro Cobb. "I hope you will congratulate me. She has promised to be my wife."

"Congratulations and best wishes!" said Craig Allenby.

His eyes met Jan's searchingly, making her feel weak for a moment; and then with a warm laugh Camilla came forward. An astonishing impulse to strike her in the face with all the force of which Jan was capable, needed a lot of beating down. It proved to Jan that perhaps her nerve was a trifle broken.

"Thanks, everybody!" For Mr. Wackett, with his mouth pulled in a grin; Catchpole, like the shabby vicar of some parish where sin still flourished, in spite of his efforts; Lieutenant Conrad, his heels together and his eyes bright—all were gathered about her. "But I think I'll lie down a bit."

THE staircase seemed long and tiring. Her room was very quiet, as if the rather sinister peace of the mountains about Sinners' Castle came down into it. A faint haze lay over the lough.

Well, she could be mistress of Cashel Murtagh whenever she liked, if she and Jethro Cobb were not murdered, before.

It was strange how little she could envision that cache on Saddleback Pat, how unreal it seemed. So was the war unreal, at Sinners' Castle, though out at sea it was going on in grim earnest.

She ought to lie down, and forget Craig Allenby. But didn't he understand that both Camilla and Conrad had tried to kill him? No, he was too infatuated. . . .

"Mrs. Jethro Cobb!"

No, that wouldn't come real, either. The clock in the tower chimed and made her start, as it always did. A flock of sheldrake scuttered across the distant water. More than once, of late, she had watched the wild life of the lough through her small binoculars, because that seemed real and eternal. It anchored her to earth. Dipping into the smooth surface, the birds faded away into the haze. Nothing stirred. It was like a dull mirror.

AND then, just as Jan was putting down the glasses before taking off her shoes, for she really was shaken, something broke the surface. It moved quietly, leaving a rippling V behind it; then without hurry disappeared.

It was the periscope of a submarine.

Jan lowered the glasses as the field of vision went empty and remained so. She put them quietly away. Her sense of unreality had all gone now. The far-away war had come to Sinners' Castle, and out in the deep waters of the lough, within two miles, a submarine lay lurking. It could only be a U-boat—the same craft from which Conrad Schumann, of the *Unterseekinder* Schumanns, had deserted from his son's command and come ashore. Out of her hidden pirate-beat in the Atlantic, where, hunting and hunted, she played ball with death, she had come back into that lonely inlet. For what?

That steely instrument of destruction, slumbering a hundred feet below water, perhaps, gave Jan no sense of real peril, though with its guns it could easily blow Sinners' Castle from the rock which held it. Nobody was likely to have glimpsed the periscope, besides herself. It was like knowing the secret of some sea-monster that basked out there.

She bathed her temples and felt fresher. Her wealthy fiancé, Mr. Jethro Cobb, would like her to take care of her looks, no doubt. A shadow of a dimple came into her cheek, then went away. . . . As she finished at the mirror five minutes later, a knock sounded on the door.

"It's I, Jan," said Camilla's voice.

She opened the door, feeling all at once much more powerful than Camilla, with all the secrets she held. The woman stepped in quickly, closing the door behind her. She walked to a chair and sat down.

"You're pretty plucky, Jan, I must say," she said, without any preface. "You frighten me, just a wee bit. How do I affect you?"

"I'm not sure," replied Jan, looking into the limpid green eyes. "But I think you can't be very clever, missing twice, if that's what you're referring to."

"Not as clever as you. Your quaint fiancé must be worth half a million. I sha'n't try again now, I don't think. Thanks for cutting the cackle. . . . I've come to lay my cards on the table, now you are somebody here. First, I'm penniless. Catchpole and Wackett would have got about twenty pounds for my jewels—they're paste. So I'm rather desperate. Add to that, I'm a pagan. I'd rather die than be poor. I mean that, quite literally."

Jan sat down. It was almost the first time she had believed any word of Camilla Schumann's. She was completely reckless, rather than subtle or clever.

"Erich got no nearer to that crock of gold, as Conrad calls it, than the original contour map you took from my room. Conrad's family name is Schumann, as you've either guessed or known all the time. He copied the map on part of a torpedo-fin. I'm—"

"I know about that too."

"It was stolen from Conrad. Conrad's run to seed, you know. Well, Erich believed that Jethro Cobb had it, and knew about the gold, and he arranged with Conrad to come to Sinners' Castle, if war happened. It's true I tried to poison Erich, because I wanted to be free of him and come here myself. It was—a sort of adventure. And you'll never know the kind of man Erich was. . . . There wasn't any need for it, because Scotland Yard was on his track."

"I WONDER why you're telling me this." Jan's voice was hard.

"I'm coming to that. I got Jethro Cobb to invite me on his yachting trip, because I knew he'd bought Sinners' Castle. He's a kind of miser." Camilla's voice took on a slow hatred. "He won't touch it. He gloats over it, where it is, because he's rich enough. That's one reason why I hate him so. You ought to get him to make a will in your favor, Jan."

"Because Conrad wants to kill him? Is that it?"

"I tell you I don't dare!" said Camilla fiercely. "Neither does Conrad. We're both of us desperate people. We've reached a philosophy you wouldn't understand. Conrad's chiefly afraid of one thing, and that's getting lost on Saddle-back Pat. He's superstitious, like a lot of Nazis. Hitler has an astrologer, hasn't he? Get that metal map for us, Jan."

Jan lit a cigarette. Camilla watched her like a snake, a snake which hesitated to strike. She felt a moment of triumph. Outside on the lough, the haze was thickening, the water heavy and still, like mercury, above the skulking thing it held.

"In return, I'll give up Craig Allenby," said Camilla. "Give us the map, and take them both away with you."

THIS time, Jan struck. She could not help it. The blow she gave with her clenched fist sent Camilla Schumann reeling back a step, and left a red patch on her white cheek. The green eyes flared, but were frightened. Camilla stood against the wall staring, while Jan opened the door, and gestured her to it. "That was my answer," she said. "Don't try any woman-to-woman talk again!"

It was good to feel her knuckles tingling for fully a quarter of an hour after, and to find, even when dusk came, that a tiny scratch remained on them where they had touched Camilla's teeth. The night promised to be black and heavy; and when Jan stood with Jethro Cobb in the garden by the water-edge before dinner, she forgot Camilla and felt a thrill of foreboding run through her. Had the sight of the periscope been an illusion on her part after all, she wondered? For all the excitement Jethro Cobb showed when she told him about it, it might have been. And yet his eyes glanced over the water with a grave luminance. Jan did not want to stay out for long. Somehow, she did not wish to think of that inhuman thing with its young, ultimately doomed human cargo hiding there till it should go out and prey again.

"Conrad's been tanking-up all day, poor devil," said Cobb. "I don't envy Camilla her partner. I wonder what that young submarine-commander son of his would say if he could see him? Something may happen at dinner. You're not nervous?" He touched her hand momentarily. "Allenby's got his eyes open."

THE SUBMARINE'S TREASURE

Craig Allenby smiled formally at her as she sat with Cobb at the head of the table in the small banqueting-hall when early darkness had dropped like a mantle over Sinners' Castle. The Irish couple and whatever mysterious menials they had in the kitchen provided an excellent dinner. It was Camilla, who, with eyes like stars, toasted the happy couple. It was Mr. Wackett who joined in eloquently. (*"It isn't real,"* thought Jan. *"Nobody believes in it. Neither do I. Perhaps Craig does. If he does, that's all that matters."*)

"It is like one of our farewell parties at Kiel," said Conrad Schumann. "There is always a betrothal, or more often a wedding. Sometimes several. It makes for a lot of widows, unfortunately. My son Karl was betrothed before he left. A very charming girl."

There was a red spot on each of Conrad's cheekbones. In one of Allenby's dress-suits he looked more like a dissolute yet attractive artist than a U-boat officer. His eyes were gay but haunted, and he drank deeply. It suddenly struck Jan that both Catchpole and Wackett were watching him intently, as though expectant of something, and willing to be either spectators or sharers in the game. Outside, the wind was rising a little, and the full tide slapped on the rocks.

"Up on Saddleback Pat," said Conrad Schumann abruptly, "it will be a dirty night."

Camilla's fingers curled over and clenched.

"You're drinking too much tonight, Lieutenant," she said in a low voice.

BUT the two pairs of eyes, Conrad's and Jethro Cobb's, were fixed upon each other across the table. In the silence, Cobb said:

"The banshees will be crying up there. . . . It'll be a dirty night out at sea too, Lieutenant."

Camilla whispered, "You fool!" and made a restraining movement to Conrad Schumann—but too late. Into the German's hand sprang a small Luger pistol; he balanced it in his palm.

"I would avenge the insult you mean for me, if I had any right to, Herr Cobb," he said. "And if there was not more important business on hand! Please sit still, everybody. I give you, my friend Cobb, two minutes in which to produce a certain map, engraved on metal, of this part of Ireland. As God in heaven is my judge, I shall shoot you, if you refuse."

"So you admit to that Judge," said Jethro Cobb. "Why, your hand's shaking, man!"

"The map!" said Conrad. "Be silent, Camilla!"

"I'm only trying to say," said Camilla, deadly white but smiling, "that since you've precipitated matters, you'd better hold Miss Feversham as hostage, and draw a bead on her while he fetches it."

FROM the blue glint of the gun in Conrad's hand, after what seemed a long interval during which Cobb did not seem to move, Jan's glance passed to Catchpole and Wackett. They sat quite still also, both grinning faintly, which meant that they were in this, to however limited a degree. It was perhaps not true that she had known something like it would happen, but it was not entirely unexpected. Jethro Cobb began cracking a walnut with his fingers. She thought: *"He's quite likely to have the cartridges out of the pistol."*

There was a crash, as Craig Allenby acted. The movements he made were beautifully coordinated, and swift as lightning. His right hand pinned the Luger to the table; his left smashed into Conrad's clipped beard and lifted him from the chair to the floor. With the pistol in his pocket, he turned.

"Shall we stop all this fooling?" he asked, and it was Jan he addressed.

He went close to her and Jethro Cobb. She began to feel her heart thrumming, as he spoke exclusively to her again.

"I'd like you to come away from here with me as soon as it's daylight," he said. "I'd like to ask you when we're alone. But Cobb ought to hear. He does most of his own performances in public. Whether he releases you or not, I want you to leave this place with me, before this woman kills you, and gives him some notes for his psychological experiment."

"I can't," murmured Jan. Her eyes were wide as she saw him turn to Camilla. She grew light-headed, because his smile was one of genuine amusement mingled with contempt.

"My apologies, Camilla," he said.

"Why?" Camilla asked huskily. Her glance glided to Conrad, where he leaned dazedly on the back of a chair, but it came back to Craig.

"I hardly know how to put it. Taking you in—basely deceiving a beautiful and charming woman! There's something about you, you know. And yet there isn't. You're unlucky with men, even Con-



rad, here. It'll lead you to a quarter I know something about myself. But you may not be as fortunate as I was. Jan, can't you see it was because I suspected her from the beginning, because I wanted to keep a watch on the woman?"

Through Jan, who was only human, passed a delicious joy. "The woman!" As though blonde Camilla were some wretched creature caught in shoplifting. Yet it was all too late, as she well knew.

Cobb's clenched hand lay on the table.

"This isn't playing the game, Allenby," he said.

"Jan, will you come?"

"No," she answered. "I won't come. Please sit down, Craig."

AFTER a few seconds, he obeyed, his eyes still smoldering at her and at Jethro Cobb. It was a strange dinner-table now, that the softened lamps of Sinners' Castle shone upon, closed in by the darkness of mountain and sea beyond the curtains. Conrad Schumann sprawled with a hand on the decanter, his bearded chin on his chest. Camilla sat with a wide, fixed smile that took in Craig Allenby and ignored the other man. Mr. Wackett made a move to rise delicately from the table, but was pulled down again by a pasty-faced Catchpole, whose glance was fixed on Craig Allenby's pocket.

Presently Jethro Cobb rose to his feet, helped Jan to hers. He smiled gravely.

"I would apologize for this scene," he said, "if I knew whom to apologize to. But the dinner itself was enjoyable, Mr. Wackett?"

"Lush," admitted Mr. Wackett somewhat hoarsely. "But look here—"

"Say no more, Mr. Wackett. Lieutenant Conrad was obviously drunk, and harking back to his student days at Heidelberg. He's a man with a load of trouble, too."

Cobb's fine face held a faint strain. When the group went into the room

he called the library, he glanced at the clock, and listened to the wind behind the curtains; and Jan heard him make a sound that was like a cut-off sigh. He looked at neither Conrad nor Camilla, but drew one of the heavy curtains and stood looking out. Both he and Jan had heard a low but peremptory knock at the door.

"I fear the night's excitements are not all over," Cobb said. "I think we have visitors." He spoke in a louder voice that suddenly held a touch of compassion. "We have visitors, Lieutenant Conrad!"

It sent through Jan a thrill of complete sickness, because she guessed who was there. Conrad raised his head as Cobb addressed him; and then the door of the room opened to admit the Irish butler, pale and startled. Behind him were three men. They were unshaven and hollow-eyed, and the odor of oil clung to them; but the full German naval uniform each wore was spick and span, as though specially donned for an occasion of ceremony. The foremost, a boy hardly out of his teens, it seemed, wore a sword. His epaulettes creaked faintly as he saluted, after one glance round the room which took in Conrad and rested on him.

"There is no occasion to be alarmed," he said. "You are all quite safe and will not be hurt. We come only for a deserter. —Lieutenant Schumann, attention!"

Slowly, Conrad Schumann levered himself up and stood upright. The boy made a gesture to the other two officers, and they stepped to his side. The boy bowed slightly to Jethro Cobb, his lean face set like a mask.

"I thank you for your hospitality to Lieutenant Schumann, sir," he said. "I thank you on behalf of myself and of the German Navy, though we are now enemies. It is not to be thought that we have intruded for a trifle, that we should

not be glad to be rid of a coward, instead of taking the trouble to find him and execute sentence. But Lieutenant Schumann belongs to a very famous family of German Navy people, whose discipline is very strict. I have the honor to belong to that family. I have the dishonor to be Lieutenant Schumann's son."

Jethro Cobb said: "Will you partake of my hospitality too, while you're here, Commander Schumann, if the business is not too urgent? You're very welcome."

The boy's glance went longingly round the warmly-lit room. One saw the craving for brief comfort and safety that lay in his eyes. He was very like Conrad, and not unlike Erich Schumann, save for the iron and inhuman strength, forged from some fanatic furnace and stamped by his upbringing, which carved every feature.

"I am sorry. I would like to. But no, we must get aboard and leave these dangerous waters. It is so necessary not to swerve from one's purpose, also. —Are you ready, Lieutenant Schumann?"

Conrad, with a twisted smile, broke the silence for the first time, speaking in German.

"A revolver in the hand, Karl, or a firing-party?"

"There will be a court, Lieutenant Schumann," the boy said, speaking precisely in English, out of his metallic courtesy: "Lieutenant Bohm-Karnfeld, Under-lieutenant Brautsch and myself. It is not to be discussed before enemy civilians." Again he bowed, and said earnestly: "Believe me, there are not many such cowards and soft men in our submarine service. Nor in yours. It is a hard life. Men break under it. But this one did not. He was broken to begin with."

"It's strange that you found your way into this lough, Herr Commander," said Jethro Cobb. It was almost as though he wished to detain the little party of stiff and pitiless young men a bit longer.

KARL SCHUMANN smiled back at him bleakly.

"That also is not to be discussed, sir. It was charted by Lieutenant Schumann. It will form the subject of the inquiry. Rest assured, sir, that justice is always done in the German Navy."

"Then give me the revolver now, Karl," said Conrad Schumann. "And get out of this. —Have no fear, Cobb; I promise to make a clean job of it on the terrace, and drop into the water."

"I do not trust you, Lieutenant Schumann," said Commander Schumann icily.

There was something terrible about the two men, father and son, as they looked at each other, and Conrad, cold sober now, braced his shoulders with the twitch of a smile. He was a big man, bigger than the younger of the *Unterseekinder* Schumanns, who made a last bow and marched toward the door. But there the boy turned. The steely calm fled from him, for one instant.

"It is not that I have no emotions, sir," he said. "But I do not belong to myself. It is the discipline. Always, since I was a child, I was trained in it. Lieutenant Schumann is of another generation. It is to be regretted. But he was a good sailor." His voice fell. "Yes, he was once a good sailor. And now we will go, thanking you. Will you all please not move from here for a quarter of an hour? It will be dangerous to do otherwise."

THE business was ended; a draft of air came into the room, and the front door closed. The footsteps of the four men died away as they crunched audibly down the garden. The clink of the decanter against a glass, as Wackett mechanically helped himself, sounded sharp. Camilla was twisting a handkerchief in her hand; and she looked, for the first time, cornered and at a loss.

"Poor young brutes!" Cobb said softly.

He seemed to be listening for something. He looked old and stern, and as his hand rested on Jan's, something seemed to tell her that his thoughts were not in that room, not at Sinners' Castle at all, but out in the windy night. The drama was not finished. She whispered, because it seemed impossible to use normal tones in the electric strain:

"It was ghastly. That boy—"

Jethro Cobb, speaking as low, said: "Listen, my dear. I sent a phone message to the telegraph-station, an hour ago. The radio of every destroyer within a hundred miles will have it. They're trapped. It's war. We shall get a letter of thanks from the Admiralty. But I feel like a murderer."

"It's war," said Jan, with shaking lips. "Nobody can run away from it, wherever they go."

She felt it to be an eternity since that dinner to celebrate the engagement of Jethro Cobb and herself had started. The time-factor at Sinners' Castle did not seem to function as it did anywhere

else; and though it was only a minute or two by the clock since the U-boat officers had taken away their prisoner, and they could hardly have yet reached their launch at the landing, it seemed to be much longer. Cobb's finger on her hand tightened. There came three mellow klaxon hoots from the lough, and the throb of powerful engines tuning up. In it was urgency and warning; and the drumming of a launch, that followed a minute later, showed that it had been understood.

And now the curtains of the room, thick as they were, glowed calcium white under the direct rays of a searchlight. Jan never forgot the sight as Craig Allenby drew back one of the curtains: the blinding white eyes of half a dozen destroyers six miles down the hill-girt water, the ghostly conning-tower and whaleback of the U-boat, the launch that slicked frenziedly toward it.

It sank a minute later, leaving the launch afloat and empty on the surface. One moment it was there, and then there was nothing save an uneasy swirl of water. Instantly the destroyer searchlights went away, and the only thing left in the window-glass was the reflection of the lamps of the room on the dark shield of the night. But there came the deep soft boom of a depth-charge that set the pictures on the wall shaking, and then another and another, glinting a faint rose-red in the depths of the lough, and the light thrum of speeding engines that came inshore planting their deadly bombs as they sped and circled.

Allenby dropped the window-curtain. "Thanks. It's like a public execution. It shouldn't be watched," Jan said, with a deep shudder. She stood by his side, and his arm passed round her for an instant, to hold her.

ALL was quiet now. The thrum of the destroyers died away, and a stag roared distantly on the lough shore. As though an enervating wind had passed through the room, everybody felt exhausted with the fierce excitement. Involuntarily, Jan kept away from Jethro Cobb, though she knew there was no logic in it, that he had saved, perhaps, hundred of other lives, among them children and women. The lean implacable face of Karl Schumann, whose boyhood had been iron discipline that was stronger than blood, and whose youth had trysted with and found death, was hard to banish.

Jethro Cobb came out of a reverie. He said:

"Mr. Wackett, Mr. Catchpole, you're both shaken, and no wonder. This is all beyond your capacities. Perhaps you yearn for London again. If so, I can manage a conveyance to Donegal, where you will get a train to Belfast."

Wackett grinned with an effort. His glance slid to Camilla.

"Nope," he said. "We stay. We like it. Everything aint happened yet."

"Very good. Camilla—"

She looked at him with a smile that hid mingled hatred and fear. Not once did she glance again at Craig Allenby.

"WE come back to the old business, don't we, Mr. Cobb?" she said. "It's like passing through a thunderstorm, and then seeing the same old landscape again. Poor Conrad! He muffed everything. I wish he'd been more like that terrible son of his!" Her voice thickened ever so slightly. "I shall go up after that Finn Maccool's crock of gold without your precious map. That was Conrad's voodoo, not mine."

"With Messrs. Catchpole and Wackett? Poor partners! Don't, Camilla. Or ought I to give the same advice to Mr. Catchpole and Mr. Wackett?"

She bent forward tigerishly. For the moment, her control was gone.

"Have you taken it and hidden it, somewhere?"

"The subject tires me," said Jethro Cobb. "We're all tired, I think."

Camilla raised heavy lids.

"Your experiment's about finished," she jeered. "Jan and Craig have come down on the side of the angels—except that they're in love with each other. You knew *me* all the time. Catchpole and Wackett—well, I leave you to judge."

"I do. You've set them on fire about hidden treasure."

"Shucks!" said Mr. Wackett, glancing at his fingers, which shook a little. "We don't believe in it. But it's a bit of fun—" He broke off to ask: "Gawd—will there be bodies floating about, do you think? Funny if the Dutcher came back that way. That is, if they got him on board their launch before the hooter blew. Maybe they didn't, and he'll be back any minute."

"I'm very much afraid that unhappy man is still alive," said Jethro Cobb, after what seemed a long pause. They all waited, because there was a note of quiet certainty in his voice.

A flaw of rain pattered on the window-glass as he spoke, and they heard Molloy, the butler, answer the door. He must have had a stout heart to do it. When Conrad Schumann entered the room a minute later, he looked round with an unnatural calm, though he was the hue of clay. In deep silence he sat down, and then spoke.

"Karl was correct about me. I was not to be trusted," he said. "But it was only when the warning went, that I slipped them. Till then, I was ready to take my physic, you understand. But I knew they were trapped, and I dared not go aboard. I dared not. They did not even fire at me when I broke away. They were too intent on getting back to their posts, though they too knew it was all finished."

He sat there like a lost man, then suddenly broke into a loud laugh.

"You thought Karl was a fine boy, Herr Cobb, I am sure. He would not get drunk and make a fool of himself, as I did. . . . I am an ill-mannered guest, and had better hand myself over as a prisoner of war."

CRAIG ALLENBY touched his shoulder. "You've had enough of everything for one night, Conrad," he said. "Get to bed."

"Presently." He swayed to his feet. "But I would like to explain: It was not fear of Karl and the Court of Inquiry. That would have been strictly just. I can see that hellish white tunnel we should all have crouched in." A shudder passed through him. "And I can hear Karl passing sentence. He would, of course, not have executed it himself. We should have come to the surface, and half a dozen of his men would have shot me, blindfold on deck. I was prepared for all that. It was a relief. It is just possible that Karl would have kissed me farewell, for father and son do that in Germany, you understand. All that, I was prepared for, till the alarm went. Then I dared not go aboard."

"Go to bed, Conrad," Craig reiterated.

Obediently, Schumann went, though he seemed to remember Camilla, and paused to give her a long look that somehow held no meaning, but only expressed his numbed brain. Whatever Conrad Schumann might be next day, and as long as he should live, he was a man haunted by phantoms, that night. Presently Camilla, who had recovered her poise, said: "Those men would die

very quickly, I suppose. I'm going to forget them, with the aid of a sleeping-draft. After all, it's war, and I've no reason to like Germans. . . . It's marvelous, to all know each other as well as we do now, isn't it? Good night, Craig. Pleasant dreams, if possible, Jan."

"Tough," said Mr. Wackett, following her with his eyes. He seemed alarmed at the idea of being left unsupported in the vicinity of Jethro Cobb, save by his partner. "Bit of snooker before beddy-byes, Catch? And a sleeping-draft or two likewise for me. I don't like war when it knocks at the front door and makes a man nuts like that."

THEY left; and when they had gone, it was Craig Allenby who first spoke. Cobb seemed to wait for him to do so, and Jan listened in silence.

"I'm your paid man, Cobb," he said. "And I need the pay, too, at least until I can touch my uncle's money, if ever. I owe you a pile of thanks, but I'm not going to let Miss Feversham stay here. Man, can't you see that all those four people are riper for mischief than they ever were? They're in one bunch, now, and they've degenerated."

"There's one thing about you up to now, Allenby," Jethro said. "You've minded your own business, and you've never asked many questions."

"I'll ask one now," Craig said. "If Conrad hid some bullion among the mountains, as he seems to have done, why don't you give him that map he asked for, and let them find it? They'd never get it out of the country. It belongs to the nation, I suppose. It would be a criminal offence to handle it. Unless"—he paused—"you want it for yourself."

"They think I do," murmured Jethro Cobb. "I don't. I told you that, Jan. It's true. —I hope you don't mind my calling her by her Christian name, Allenby?"

It was faintly ironical. He seemed deadly tired, and frail-looking. Some gray ash fell from his cigar to his coat lapel as he sat between them, and he brushed it away carefully.

"They'll want to get it away from Sinners' Castle if they find the stuff," he said. "That's the difficulty. We should be in the way."

JAN stirred. She did not look at Craig Allenby. But her eyes met Jethro Cobb's in perplexity.



"I don't understand you," she said.

"Nobody ever did," he answered. "But some day, when you're my wife,—if you decide to marry me,—you'll know more than anybody else. I'm a puritan, but not a simple one. I believe one makes one's own hell. Listen to me! I'll do what you want me to. I'm prepared to leave here, if you'll come with me, Jan. You and Allenby."

"Craig?"

"Craig. He's still in my employ. We all go away for a few days. Don't you see?" His blue eyes began to glisten. He was like some boy with a new idea, and it was impossible to tell whether it was an inspiration or part of his plans. "We leave those four people at Sinners' Castle, to do as they wish: Camilla and Conrad—Catchpole and Wackett. Camilla has no use for anybody but Camilla. Conrad has made his own hell. Wackett is a beast of limited intellect. Catchpole—he's a dark horse. Mr. Catchpole is always in the background. Consider Mr. Catchpole, Allenby. What do you think of him?"

"I'm not the psychologist you are," replied Allenby dryly. "And he always manages to avoid me. Perhaps I'm too big and rough for him."

"We'll leave 'em here," said Jethro Cobb. "Molloy will look after their creature comforts. They can either pull the place down to find Conrad's metal map, or they can go up to Saddleback Pat without it. We'll come back in a few days and see what they've done. Tomorrow morning, then."

He had decided. Jan thought: "*I wonder if he really is quite normal. But everything he's done, so far, has had a reason.*" She would have liked to go out of the room with him when he went; but touching her hand very lightly, he limped away. Craig Allenby hardly waited until the door closed.

"Jan!"

"It's no use," she said. "I know what you're going to say. We're made for each other, and you knew it from the beginning, and you thought I'd understand about Camilla. But I'm going to stick to him if he wants me. I couldn't let him down."

"I know," Craig said bitterly. "You adore him. It's a lightning love-affair."

"Just the same flash of lightning all round," she half-smiled, though her heart felt small. "Let's forget it."

Looking at him, she knew that he never intended to forget it. She knew not the slightest bit about his character; he might really have killed somebody in the heat of the moment, but what he wanted he clung to. His mouth was hard and obstinate. The manner in which he had deceived Camilla proved that he knew something about women, in the way some absolutely clean men did. They were born with it.

"Old man's darling!" he sneered.

"That's cheap, Craig. I'm not a schoolgirl myself, and he's not an old man. Isn't this disloyal on the part of two people who owe him a lot?"

"I owe him nothing very much. . . . It'll be like being married to a senior wrangler with the heart of a child, Jan."

"It sounds not too bad. . . . You don't see why you shouldn't take anything you want, do you, Craig?"

"Not particularly. I seldom thought about it. For one thing, I never met a woman like you before."

"I'm just middlingly straight, that's all. And a lot of women can stick danger as well as men. They'll have to, now war has come. You mustn't mention this again, Craig."

"I won't. I'll take you, some day, without mentioning it, Jan," he said. "I'll stay by Cobb and I'll stay by you. But once away from here, I'll try to make sure he won't bring you back."

Chapter Five

THE plane, one of three belonging to a black young Irishman who had flown in the Spanish War, and now ran Irish Skyways (Dublin) Limited, arrived promptly at noon next day. Camilla, Conrad, Wackett and Catchpole all gathered to watch them climb into the fuselage—Catchpole, as usual, slightly behind. Jan, from her seat, glanced curiously at his low brow and bushy eyebrows, remembering the recent emphasis Jethro Cobb had laid on Mr. Catchpole, thus seeming to bring the man into the foreground for the first time. He was fat and piglike, yet since they had landed at Sinners' Castle, in his clergyman's guise and out of it, he had never left his shifty alertness for a moment.

THE SUBMARINE'S TREASURE

Wackett cried "*Auf wiederseh'n!*" and clapped Conrad Schumann on the back, to call attention to his German. It was understood that Jethro Cobb, his fiancée and his secretary were going to London for a few days before returning to Cashel Murtag. It seemed to Jan that there was something mocking in the slim tautness of Camilla as she waved farewell when the plane took off, and a tension about all four of them which they tried to hide.

"Back to a world at war," Jethro Cobb said. "You'll find, though, that life goes on. Life's a bigger thing than the biggest war that ever happened. So is death," he added in an undertone; and Jan knew he was thinking of young Karl Schumann.

DUBLIN and the slinking cross-channel boat. London—mantled in darkness. They drove to a house in Kensington, with a big portico and soft lights behind the drawn blinds, and London muted and dark outside but cheerful, with the pulse of its eternal life moving under the blackout. A plump, bustling housekeeper came forward to greet them. Half-shyly he introduced Jan and Craig Allenby, for as he entered the house, Cobb seemed to change into a harmless and lovable bachelor who had been away for some time, and was now glad to be by his own fireside again.

"Not that I shall ask you to stay in London always, Jan, when we've finished with Sinners' Castle," he said next morning. "There's a fairly big house in Hertfordshire. Full of youngsters at the moment, of course. I had it fitted up about a month ago to take one of the East End children's hospitals—though children don't interest me, except as human beings. They bore me, till they grow up."

And yet, in his study, there were signs of all sorts of activities: radio clinics, and a derelict town in Durham which he seemed to run completely, subscriptions to hospitals and charities that staggered Jan with their size when she saw them.

"It's a secret," he said. "I use another name. Have you ever heard of John Goodfellow?"

She had, because during the last year all the newspapers had been hunting after the real identity of a man who used the obviously assumed name of "John Goodfellow" for his generous gifts.

"It's really a company I formed," he said. "I left everything to them. I couldn't be bothered. You won't mind?

I've plenty of money left. . . . I wonder what those four are doing at Sinners' Castle. There are going to be exciting happenings there, yet."

Jan was beginning to feel the strain a little. She could almost think that he purposely threw Craig Allenby and herself together, and wondered if it was a streak of subtle cruelty that ran in him. Craig was quiet, almost sullen. His dark eyes smoldered at both of them. Once he went out for a few hours, and came back tight-mouthed and silent. Jethro Cobb smiled at him faintly.

"Old friends not so genial?" he asked. "Too soon for them to forget, you know.

You were better at Sinners' Castle, Allenby, unless you've got the courage to take the bull by the horns and face things through. Jan might help you. You used to dine at the San Sisto in your wild days, didn't you? Take her there this evening."

So it was that—though it was folly on the part of the three of them—Craig Allenby and Jan, in a dark red frock that suited her dark hair and the sunburned olive of her skin, passed through the blacked-out doorway of the San Sisto Club, to the pearl-and-ebony brightness within.

"This was my hang-out once," Craig said, with her deep in his arms among the dancers. "A lot of the old gang are still here. They're broad-minded, but they draw the line at murderers. Watch 'em do the Ishmael act. And do I care when I can hold you like this, Mrs. Jethro Cobb-to-be?"

IT was dangerous. When he held her still closer, laughing with his cheek against hers as men and women began to turn in startled recognition, she felt part of him, and as reckless and amused as he was. A young man in captain's uniform drawled something in his ear, and she all but swung round like a spitfire at the puppy. An almost perceptible lane was left for them as they quitted the dance-floor and walked to their table in an alcove. Somebody laughed cynically, and a slim, fox-faced young man gave Allenby a stiff, reticent bow, before turning away.

"That's Mackness, junior counsel to the eminent K.C. who got me off," Craig said as they sat down. "Like to hear the story?"

"It would put in a background," said Jan, her heart in her eyes as she looked at him, though she didn't know it. "So

far, it's only been Sinners' Castle, and neither of us thought it strange."

"I kept it between my teeth. Though I told the gentle Camilla a lot of damn' lies. . . . My uncle, old John Middleton, was a retired steel man: Middleton's Metals. He allowed me a couple of thousand a year, but I wasn't a lily of the field altogether, Jan. I took my degree in metallurgy, and part of the time I worked pretty hard at the steelworks in Coventry. But Uncle John liked me in London. He'd begun life himself making tin-tacks in a cellar in Birmingham; and for the last of the Middleton clan—me—there was to be nothing like that. He spoiled me pretty well, the dear old chap. You see the result."

"Yes. . . . Go on."

"He wanted me to marry a girl—an incredible creature from the counties, who looked and talked like a horse. She did, Jan. Uncle thought her smoke-room stories were typical of the English aristocracy. I didn't, and we quarreled. He cut off my allowance, but I carried on with the spending of it all the same. I went to see him several times, and we had a slanging match. I went up once too often, and found him dead—murdered. The police arrested me. There was some highly circumstantial evidence. I'm not going to tell you about it now. It's all over." Allenby ended: "What does it matter? Cobb salvaged me for his own reasons, and took me to Sinners' Castle, where I met you. That's good enough."

He swung her to the dance-floor again. He was about the biggest man there, and the hysteria of a new war was popping the corks at the San Sisto. If she hadn't been with him, he would very likely have made a rough-house out of sheer devilry, and the pain and rage which was in his soul. Somebody started an ironical clapping when, toward midnight, they made their exit across the floor.

"You see?" he laughed bitterly.

"The empty-headed beasts! I didn't know people could be so childish. But you stuck it well. Some day they'll be sorry, Craig!"

THE Embankment was all moonlight that touched Jan's lips, making them look as dewy as she felt in all her being as they walked along. The spell of Sinners' Castle, out in the Atlantic darkness, seemed to have drifted over to London, a thing that followed them and could not be shaken off. They watched the

black velvet of the river flow past, and the searchlights playing down the estuary, and Jan Feversham knew she was lost. She lifted her face, and suddenly felt Craig Allenby's mouth on hers, and his arms holding her.

"You can't go on with it. You won't!"

She stayed close to him.

"I don't think I can. You oughtn't to have come back with us, Craig. I owe him a lot, even if you don't. And to break faith with him, like this—it makes us no more honest than Camilla, Conrad, all of them. I can't face him!"

"We'll not face him. He's a gnome, and he'd do something. You'd be back at Sinners' Castle before you knew. Jan, I can't take the Middleton Estate or show myself in London till I find out who killed the old man. But I can get a job in the laboratory up there. They'll need me now. Let's go!"

"No." She shook her head. "No more running away. We'll tell him together."

She knew he winced, but he never meant to let her go; and to him, Jethro Cobb was less than nothing, now. Allenby hailed a taxi, and in silence, they sat in it; while Jan was telling herself, thinking of Jethro Cobb: "*He said he wouldn't hold me against my will. It's probably all part of his experiments. He knew Craig and I were in love, and he threw us together.*"

A small parcel addressed to her lay on the table in the big hall when they reached the house at Kensington. Opening it with foreboding, she stood staring at the sapphire-and-diamond ring which fell from the little case it contained. A note was folded with it.

Will you wear it, if it's the right size, as I think it is? If you don't like it, we can change it tomorrow when I come back. I've gone into the country for the night.

A sharp breath came from Craig Allenby.

"He's a cunning devil with his Sinners' Castle tricks. What made him do that? Leave it, Jan."

Then he bit his lip, for the maid who had admitted them still stood there, admirably trained and demure, though she must have heard him.

"A gentleman has been here about an hour waiting to see you, sir. Mr. Jessup, the name was. He specially asked for both you and Miss Feversham, sir."

Mr. Jessup was already standing when

they entered the room. He was a thick-set man with a houndlike furrow in each cheek, and close-cropped hair that carried an unexpected quiff over the forehead. Though he looked like a prosperous bookmaker, he was dressed in perfect taste; and his hat, gloves and walking-stick lay neatly deposited on the couch. He handed Allenby a card which read, simply:

"Ex-Inspector Tom Jessup, late C.I.D."

HE made no preamble, but took some notes from his pocket. Then he put them aside to address Jan.

"About your sister, Miss Kate, Miss Feversham. You'll maybe be interested to hear that she was married to Mr. Hubert Twistleton yesterday morning. At St. George's, Hanover Square, too, though it was quiet on account of the war. They had no honeymoon, Mr. Twistleton going into the army, and Miss Kate getting their country-house ready for convalescent officers.

"Mr. Allenby—" Mr. Jessup permitted himself a glance of dry curiosity at Craig. *"In re* the Middleton case, this is the situation, so far as we establish it. About two months ago, a young woman who was an artist's model took refuge in Mr. John Middleton's house in Chelsea. Her story was that an artist she'd become infatuated with, was beating her up and making her life a misery, and she'd run away. Well, Mr. Middleton was kind to her. Kind, I said. Nothing else. He was a simple old man and a—well, a knight chivalrous, so to speak.

"But she was the wife of a wrong 'un, and there was no cruel artist. It was the old blackmail story. Connery—that was his name, and we have him on our books—went up one night after his wife to gather the dibs. That was the night of the 13th of July; an unlucky day, you'll remember. The old man put up a fight, went to the phone and got as far as a police call, when Connery killed him—not actually meaning to, I don't suppose. Mrs. Connery hadn't bargained for murder, and showed a clean pair of heels. So did Connery, no doubt, because when you got there, there was only your uncle. And three or four minutes later, the police. Correct, Mr. Allenby?"

Mechanically, Craig nodded.

"Bad luck," said Mr. Jessup. "But go through the Old Bailey records, and you'll be surprised how many hangings and a few gettings-off depend on a chance like that."

Jan caught at her breath, telling herself that, for the moment, it mattered nothing who this mysterious individual was.

"Have you come to tell us you've got this Connery?"

Mr. Jessup looked at her. "No, Miss Feversham. But we've got his young and beautiful wife. For she is that, though Connery's middle-aged. She finished with him when he left her and beat it somewhere. We had a score of men and women on the job. But it was young Mrs. Connery who walked into the office and gave us the whole low-down. For the sake of the thousand pounds' reward we had on offer," ended Mr. Jessup significantly.

He opened a neat wallet and took out a photograph wrapped in tissue-paper.

"Never saw him that night, I don't suppose," he said. "Maybe he was disguised a bit. Mrs. Connery says he fancied himself, at that. In a modest way. Clergymen and such. This is him."

A PULSE at Jan's throat started to beat, and she was afraid Mr. Jessup would see it. Craig's own hand was quite steady as he took the picture, and she looked at it over his shoulder. Even before her glance focused, she knew that the clean-shaven, rather oily man in the photograph, and the retiring Mr. Catchpole of the yacht *Brantane*, and of Sinners' Castle, were the same.

"No," answered Craig, "I didn't see him."

Carefully, ex-Inspector Jessup put the photograph away in its wrappings. Watching him, Jan's thoughts danced within her brain. *"Yes, it's Catchpole. Craig gave that answer because he means to go back to Sinners' Castle to get the man himself. He would. And Jethro Cobb is behind every bit of this, of course."* Aloud, she said:

"It's all terribly thrilling. Won't you have a drink, Mr. Jessup?"

"No, thanks." Mr. Jessup glanced solemnly at the clock. "I never drink before five in the morning. War-time vow. Well, once we get Connery and let him know it's U.P., you're all clear, Mr. Allenby. You'll hold your head up in society again, as they say. The young woman won't get a smell of Mr. Cobb's thousand pounds till he's convicted, so she'll be glad to do her bit. I was glad to come along and report to you when Mr. Cobb asked me to, tonight. If I may say so, sir, you're lucky to have a



man like him kindly disposed toward you."

"Thanks—I know that," answered Craig. His laugh was a little brittle. "He's quite a good fairy. Like *Rumpelstiltskin*."

"Old German fairy-tale, eh? Not the new kind." Mr. Jessup picked up hat, gloves and stick, with an answering laugh. "We'll have Connery soon, never fear."

Jan went back with slow steps into the room after she had let him out. Craig stood back against the table and watched her enter.

"He must have had an idea who Catchpole was when he brought him on that trip. That was part of his bag of tricks, too. He'd put Jessup on the job as soon as my trial was over. And while Jessup was playing Mrs. Connery, he'd see her himself and get a bead from her on Wackett. Wackett was Catchpole's pal, and might have been hiding him. Cobb landed them both together for the trip, through his newspaper advertisement for guests."

"Perhaps. We shall never know till he tells us. You owe him something now, Craig."

"Yes. Better put on that ring, Jan."

"I'd better."

They both smiled with some whiteness at each other, and after a few seconds, Craig looked at the clock, which showed nearly an hour after midnight. His intention was to change and get the first Irish train that left Euston. Catchpole was his own personal meat, and if he had to swim home with the man, he would get him into that dock where he had stood himself. He felt a bleak kind of eagerness possess him.

"Good-by, Jan. Perhaps you'll thank Cobb for me."

There was no need to explain. She knew his purpose. Another woman would have wanted him to take Jessup and one or two Scotland Yard men. But

the sorcery of Sinners' Castle still lay on them both, and Jessup and Scotland Yard would have obtruded too much from the outside world.

So she merely said:

"Good-by. You'll have to thank him yourself. I've an idea you may see us at Cashel Murtag."

Chapter Six

IN the wan dawn, five hours later, Craig Allenby caught the Irish mail at Euston. He slept that night before the turf fire of a whitewashed cabin within distant sight of Saddleback Pat, and the little family of Donegal peasants watched the mad stranger out of sight as he made for the sea through a soft Atlantic rain early next morning. It was a long tramp across a rough and rugged wilderness. Allenby didn't find it hard to believe in a cache of mildewed gold hidden in the gullies of Saddleback Pat, with pixies among the peat pools of Blackadder's Bog guarding it. When, after hours, Cashel Murtag and the lough and the misty Atlantic, with no sign of war on it, came into view, he had decided to try to take Sinners' Castle in the flank and arrive there unseen—a reconnaissance before the raid on Mr. Catchpole.

In the thin drizzle, there was a chance of success. His plan was to come unaware upon Catchpole, and trust to luck and the sailing curragh to get his quarry away, conscious or unconscious, trussed or free. Molloy, the butler, might help him.

"Steady!" he told himself.

He was relishing the idea of violence too much, and had almost forgotten, in a way he had, the other people at Sinners' Castle. It seemed long now, since he had danced with Jan at the San Sisto, under the war-time blackness of London; and the war itself seemed to have receded again, until—as he crept over the

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rocks—a gray armed merchant cruiser appeared and vanished, out at sea, and a seaplane droned invisibly.

The wolfhound puppy came lolloping out to him, and he sent it away, outraged and grieved, by the casting of a stone. What instinct held him from walking boldly up to the castle-door, or even presenting himself to Molloy in the kitchen, he didn't know. But it was there.

HE saw Conrad Schumann as he slid, half-bent, over the broken seawall. The man stood on the grass, looking out to sea, quite motionless, as though on some vigil which had lasted long and would never end. Allenby spoke quietly behind him.

"See anything, Conrad?"

The German turned slowly. If he felt any surprise, he gave no sign. But something in his eyes gave Craig a disagreeable jar.

"So, it is you, Allenby? No, I see nothing, now. There are still patches of oil in the backwaters; but a submarine leaves little wreckage. Yesterday I buried Bohm-Karnfeld. He came to the surface, you understand. The only one. He was a very strong Nazi. . . . So was Karl. Karl stood on the conning-tower with his arms folded. You, of course, think that inhuman?"

Schumann asked the question with a touch of anxiety. He seemed to think it important to get Allenby's reactions. Craig answered with involuntary irony: "It wasn't chivalrous, to say the least."

"Chivalry? Yes, they consider themselves knights. But they cannot help but jeer at a fallen enemy; it is something that was born in them out of the humiliation of the last war, I think, something that their leaders have bred in them. . . . Karl never came up. I look for him all the time. They grow wild at me, Camilla and those two men. They say I am a fool. But until Karl comes up, I shall not go to Saddleback Pat, with or without the metal map."

With an effort, Craig asked: "Why not?"

Conrad lit a cigarette. The grass at his feet was littered with stubs.

"That is easily answered. This *verfluchte* lough is but a valley belonging to Saddleback Pat and the other hills which the sea has flowed over and covered centuries ago. Till I am sure that Karl is not up there waiting for me when I go, till I have given him decent burial, I do not move."

Conrad Schumann was quietly mad. Only his eyes and the way he spoke gave him away. He presented quite a normal picture, except for that, and in his fixed idea alone his sanity had gone. The brute and the child still remained there, unreliable and dangerous. He looked almost gay, though he was dead sober. He seemed glad of Allenby's appearance, as a bored sentry might be. His bearded mouth smiled as he said:

"Herr Cobb and his charming fiancée are with you, no doubt?"

"I came ahead," Craig answered, and Schumann laughed lightly.

"That Camilla! You are brave to scorn her as you did, and then come back to face her. Hell has no fury like it, as our Shakespeare says. Do you see anything floating out yonder?"

His hand turned Craig's shoulder to direct his gaze, and he pointed. Uncomfortably, Allenby pretended to search the gray water, and uncomfortably he felt Schumann's hold tighten. He narrowed his glance and was shaking his head when he became aware of something that pressed into his back, and a suave and precise voice behind him spoke.

"Turn about and walk straight into the vestry, Mr. Allenby, if it isn't inconvenient, sir. . . . Thank you very much, Conrad. —Don't make any violent movement, Mr. Allenby, I beg you. It will be so much nicer for all of us, if you do as you are told. Please start going, my dear friend." The speaker ended with a hollow cough. "Unaccustomed as I am to public shooting, I have reason for doing my best, Mr. Allenby."

THE wintry humor in the voice of Mr. Catchpole would have sent a chill through anybody who had observed his hitherto retiring manner. Conrad Schumann's slanting eyebrows went up, and he shrugged humorously before turning to survey the water again. Obviously, he had seen Catchpole approaching, and taken his part to keep Allenby's attention. That done, he lost interest.

Craig began to move. There was nothing else for it.

The distance to the big front door of Sinners' Castle was short, but it seemed to last a long time when a pistol held by a man one intended to bring to the hangman was pressed against the backbone.

"Your old room, Mr. Allenby. It was very comfortable, I believe."

He stumbled up the wide stairs in a helpless rage that he knew to be unwise,

because he needed all his wits. If he could have turned and borne Catchpole down with a wholesale breaking of limbs of both of them, he would have been glad to do so. There was a humorous side to the picture, and it had the effect of cooling him. When he saw who sat on the bed in his room, chewing an unlighted cigar, he was able to smile a greeting.

"Hullo, Wackett! Tell me, is this man behind me our Reverend Mr. Catchpole?"

"It's 'im," said Mr. Wackett, running a finger round a particularly violent checked soft collar, as though it was too tight. "Better do as he tells you, Mr. Allenby. Don't think the butler can help you. He and his missus are in the cellar—and Catchpole did it. —What do you want, Catch?"

"Tie him up, Wackett. He's as strong as the bull of Bashan."

"Bible again!" muttered Wackett distastefully. "All right, Catch. I'll do it."

WHEN Mr. Wackett had finished the job, by the use of a strong rope, it was well enough done. If Catchpole had any suspicion that Craig knew his real identity, he showed no sign of it, but surveyed the result with wicked, lazy eyes that seemed to have grown rounder in their pupils, like a cat's at night. On the other hand, Wackett sweated slightly with discomfort. He was obviously glad to leave the scene of violence when Catchpole led the way. Left alone, Allenby tried to think. It seemed clear there was discord and some demoralization at Sinners' Castle. That helped him not at all at the moment; far from being forcibly brought to justice, Catchpole was more likely to kill him on slight provocation, if not actually in cold blood; already he had committed one murder. Nor, if Jan and Jethro Cobb came, would he hesitate about them, if the gold-bug had also got into his brain.

It gave Craig a cold feeling that lasted a long time. The opening of the door and the entry of Mr. Wackett with a well-spread tray roused him. A lot of Mr. Wackett's jauntiness had gone. His cheeks were mottled, and his sharp nose sharper. The picture of his gentle partner with a pistol in his hand seemed to have unstrung him. But when Craig spoke, he shook his head.

"Shut your trap, Mr. Allenby. An' when Catch's by, keep it shut. That's

all. Here, I'll loosen up your hands. But no lammin' out. It aint no use."

The tray was set for two people, and he guessed instinctively who his lunch partner was to be before Camilla appeared. He crushed his violent hatred of her as she came in, a faint flush on her cheeks, and her teeth biting on her lip as she saw him.

"How perfectly absurd!" she murmured.

With a movement that had something animal about it, she unfastened Mr. Wackett's rope and threw it away. To his surprise, her voice trembled.

"I'll not lunch with a bound man," she said. "Even if he happens to detest me. All right, Craig, I won't mention that again. Everything's gone to bits here. I suppose we're none of us clever enough. I wanted that gold like hell, but I'm beginning to believe there isn't any, and that I've lost the bit of stuff I called my soul, for nothing. Not that I ever had much of it. Touching, isn't it?"

She laughed. Though she might be a good actress, she was genuinely pale, and her green eyes were dark and tired. There was a touch of despair at herself in them as she looked at Allenby. He didn't see it, though it concerned him. But he noticed that she was almost plain, and her allure had gone.

"The wages of sin, Camilla, as Cobb might say," he returned lightly. "Though we're none of us flawless, as he might say, again. What's the next move in the melodrama?"

AGAIN she laughed, though the laugh died away.

"You've seen how Conrad is. There's something at Sinners' Castle, and you know it yourself, Craig. All the things that seem mad anywhere else become natural here. He won't move till he's sure that Karl isn't sitting in the cave up on Saddleback Pat. Not that we haven't searched everywhere for his metal map, but without finding it. Catchpole and Wackett made a journey on their own. They only got as far as the bog, and stuck there—nearly for good! Why did you come alone, like this?"

Something made him answer:

"I came for Catchpole. He's the man who murdered my uncle. Cobb brought him along as part of the experiment. I think he guesses that I know, too."

Camilla started, and a pulse stirred at her throat.

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"I could help you! Listen, Craig: He has coffee with me in the evenings. He—well, he rather fancies his chances. You wouldn't think it, but he's a ladies' man. I've got some sleeping-tablets with me. It wouldn't be hard to send him to sleep."

She stopped with a wry smile.

"Oh, I don't mean aconitine, though I've got some of that left over from the Erich affair, just in case. For myself, I mean. It's clean and painless. Here's the tablets, if you don't believe me."

CRAIG looked at the small container, which she rolled off her palm beside his plate. He let it lie.

"You're a dangerous person, Camilla."

Almost imperceptibly her breath caught. "I was. I'm not—now. I'm beat. I don't believe Conrad's crock of gold is there; and if it was, we'd never be able to get it away. It all seemed so real—till we got here. Then it became fairy gold at the rainbow's end, which is as it should be in Ireland, but not so good for a woman like me. Let me help you, Craig. I can—and I'd do anything for you."

She poured out coffee with a hand that hung unsteadily over the two cups. It was not the ash-blonde and vital Camilla who had landed from the *Brantane*, but a woman left stranded by her own emotions, for perhaps the only time in her life.

Craig sat utterly silent.

Camilla spoke again:

"Sorry, Craig. Sorry if I tried to make you think anything. I'd help you, just the same."

"Thanks," he said with an effort.

She pushed his coffee across, knowing her offer refused. It was a moment of queer tension in which Craig Allenby tried to understand a woman and completely failed. To break it, he walked to the window, stretched his cramped muscles, and looked out. The rain had stopped, and the sky was breaking into ragged patches of blue above the lough. At first, the picture of a yellow funnel and white hull approaching in the distance seemed no more than a hallucination. But it was clear enough and growing clearer each second. War and mines and submarines and all, the *Brantane* was coming once more to Sinners' Castle. He watched her again for a few moments, and then became aware that he could also watch something else from there. In a small, circular mirror that

hung on the wall, the table, the coffee-cups and Camilla's hands were reflected. If Camilla's hands hadn't moved, his attention would never have been caught. One of them dropped something lightly into his cup. It hovered above her own uncertainly, then was withdrawn. It was all like some small close-up on a television screen.

"Dope," Craig thought, turning without any hurry. "I'm to be put to sleep instead of Catchpole, for some reason." His glance sought the tube of tablets by his plate. They were still there. Camilla had not touched them, had forgotten them. It was some other and far more potent stuff she had used. She was a little whiter than before, but not much. If she had dared, she would have put something in her own cup, but her resolution had failed.

"I never asked you how you left Jan," she said jerkily.

"If I'm not mistaken, you'll see for yourself before long," Craig answered. "Go and look out of the window."

She rose precipitately, all her self-possession gone, and obeyed. Craig hesitated, oddly. A few days before, he could have grinned at the situation, but there was nothing humorous about this other Camilla—who, in the mood she was in, would have liked to bring about a double tragedy, but was as afraid to die as she was afraid to live. Unlike her husband!

"They've come back, so you're safe. Drink your coffee, and we'll get down to them, Craig. Catchpole daren't do anything now."

She drank hers hastily, and set down her cup. There were three five-grain sleeping-tablets dissolved in it.

"I'll not drink mine, I think," Craig said evenly.

SHE stared; then, with one hand holding the table, brushed the back of her other across her forehead. On the polished floor, her chair grated back. She stood with her head hanging.

"You're clever, Craig. I don't believe I'd have let you drink it. I meant to go myself, too, but I daren't. I was all washed up. I couldn't leave you behind, I thought, and then I couldn't go myself. I must have caught it all from Erich." She laughed chokily. "Ask Jethro Cobb for the explanation—"

"All right. No ill-feeling," said Craig, and caught her gently as she drooped into the chair.

Chapter Seven

ON the old stone landing-quay of Cashel Murtag, Jethro Cobb and Jan Feversham watched the motor-launch which had disembarked them being hauled up into the davits of the *Brantane*, while the yacht herself, with smooth engines, turned her slim bows and gathered way seaward. It had taken two hours from Sligo Bay, where she lay waiting for her gray paint and her guns and her wind-bitten R.N.R. crew. Now she hurried back like a *débutante* eager for her new uniform. No sign of life came from Sinners' Castle.

"They're not very subtle," said Jethro Cobb. "They might have made some pretence of a welcome. Or even sent Molloy out. That is, if he's at liberty, which I doubt."

"They were waiting till they were sure the yacht wasn't staying, perhaps," said Jan. "Hadn't we better go in?"

The big oak door swung open to Cobb's hand. He looked bright and active, in spite of his limp, and more like a leprechaun than usual, Jan thought. She herself was prepared for anything now. Though, if anything had happened to Craig, she meant, if she had to spend all Jethro Cobb's money on it, to exact full payment all round. . . .

"Anybody here?" called Cobb, entering the library.

The door closed with a snap behind them. Catchpole stood before the fireplace, with Wackett by his side and his pistol covering the two of them. From the door Conrad Schumann walked to the hearthrug and joined them. Catchpole spoke, in a voice from which all the oil had seeped away.

"We're after that metal map, Mr. Cobb, and we're going to have it. You're going to take us to the place where you've hidden it, without wasting one minute, if you don't want to be a dead man. Is that clear?"

JETHRO COBB gestured Jan to a chair, and sat down himself.

"Clear enough, Catchpole," he said. "Things seemed to have happened here. Mr. Catchpole in command, eh? That's interesting. Have you looked in the panel of the library mantelpiece?"

"Bashed the 'ole room to bits!" Wackett spoke, his Adam's apple moving as he swallowed. "For Gawd's sake, no monkey tricks, Mr. Cobb! It aint any use. Catch's off the handle."

"You wouldn't have found it there," said Jethro Cobb. "If only because Camilla went there first. She watched me place it there one evening when I was with Miss Feversham. Where is Camilla? She ought to be here. . . . Here it is. I took it away and brought it back. By rights, I believe, it's yours, Conrad."

Conrad's fingers all but snatched the disk of dull metal. For an instant Catchpole's weapon swung uncertainly to him and then was lowered. With his face thin and exultant, Conrad began to unscrew the back of the disk and took out a flat sheet of notepaper, stained and crinkled but still holding the figures and rough compass-sketch which his fountain-pen had drawn twenty-one years before. The three faces made a strange picture of avarice and excitement, and Jan thought she heard Jethro Cobb give a little sigh.

"Correct, Conrad?" he asked.

"To think that sometimes I thought it all a dream!" murmured Conrad. "It was so mixed up with death and damnation at the bottom of the sea. It was very difficult to empty the explosive from the torpedo I cut it from, I remember. We laughed. We were so drunk with brandy and defeat. Somebody said: 'Don't worry about the tri-nitro-toluol, Conrad. It will solve all our problems.' Karl would have never gone to pieces like that."

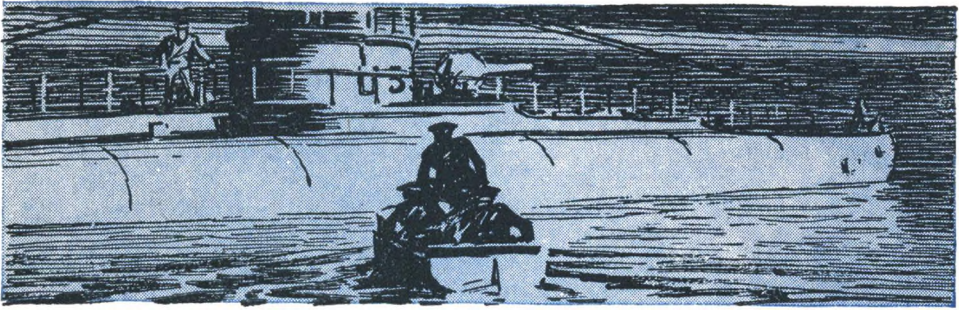
If he remembered his vigil for the body of his son, he had forgotten it now. The sight of the map had driven another kind of madness into him which was shared by his companions. Overhead, the clock of Sinners' Castle chimed, and there might have been a sardonic note in it.

Conrad placed the metal map in his pocket, and though the other two watched his movements, they said nothing. But presently Wackett's light eyes rested on Jethro Cobb with a dawning flicker of uncertainty and suspicion. Mr. Wackett, between a low cunning and a natural shrewdness, was on the horns of a dilemma.

"Wait a minute," he said. "This aint natural. Not even for a queer guy like you. Why didn't you go after the stuff yourself, Cobb?"

"The question has been asked before, Mr. Wackett," Cobb said. "The answer is always the same. I am already a rich man. I might get into trouble with the authorities, who, besides confiscating it and using it to pay for an hour or two of

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the war, may imprison me. I've been in prison once, Mr. Wackett. Lastly, I don't believe the gold is there. I think it is a figment of Lieutenant Schumann's imagination."

CONRAD gave his deadly smile and glanced questioningly at Catchpole's pistol, then shrugged as Wackett said, sharply: "Hell, none of that!" The German looked out of the window at the daylight, of which some nine hours were still left. The fever that lay all over him communicated itself to the other two. They had forgotten Camilla, forgotten everything in their sudden dream of riches. Jan thought: "*They've been too long at Sinners' Castle. It's got into their blood. Perhaps it was always in Conrad's. . . . I wonder where Craig is?*"

Wackett said, licking his lips: "How'll we get the stuff down here? It must be darned heavy."

Conrad lifted opaque eyes from the paper in his hand.

"Five of the men carried it like pack-mules. We shall do likewise. But first we will locate it. I shall find the place, now. The three of us will go." His bearded mouth slipped into a grin. "It is not business for a woman, after all. . . . These two—"

"There's the cellar," said Catchpole.

"There is also the lough," said Conrad, grinning at Jan. It held the same adolescent cruelty she had seen more than once on Erich Schumann.

"Where your son Karl is, Conrad," Jethro Cobb reminded him quietly.

The man came savagely across to him, but dropped his hand before the little tranquil face. Jan hardly noticed the incident, because she had noticed something more important. It was a movement among the myrtles outside the big window which Catchpole's fattish figure half obscured. It was, in fact, Craig Allenby, with a deer-stalking rifle from the gun-room under his arm. She only saw

him for one instant. And then, almost the next, it seemed, he was standing in the doorway of the room with the glinting double-barrel lifted to his shoulder

"Hand that pistol to Mr. Cobb, Connery. Don't hesitate a second about it," he ordered quietly.

The only sound came from Mr. Wackett. He wore dentures, and they snapped together audibly in the shock of the moment. But slowly the erstwhile Catchpole, after one long look at Craig's trigger-finger, carried out the instruction. In some way he seemed to sink back into his clergyman's guise, much as a hedgehog rolls into a ball, though he must have heard the name "Connery."

"I want this man, Cobb," said Craig. "I came here for him."

"You seem to have got him." Jethro Cobb gingerly handled the pistol that lay in his palm. "Where is Camilla, Allenby? I'd like her here to complete the cast."

"You can't have her, I'm afraid. Camilla's fast asleep. Drugged."

"REALLY?" Cobb's surprise was scarcely noticeable. "Rather an anticlimax for her. You'll have to tell us about it later. Mr. Wackett, will you do what is called 'frisk' Lieutenant Conrad, just in case? This cumbersome weapon of Allenby's will cover you while you're doing it. And now"—as Wackett, after springing nervously to his task, finished and shook his head in negative—"I want to say that this incipient violence was all unnecessary. If Conrad's story is true, he cached the bullion, took the bearings, made the map—everything. He is at liberty to search for it, and take with him whoever he thinks fit."

"Thank you, Herr Cobb," said Conrad. His eyes were mad and bright again. A dry cough came from Connery; he looked like one who had been misjudged. There was something incorrigible about the way the man slipped

back into his greasy dignity again. "*It's Jethro Cobb he thinks is a bit crazy, not Conrad at all, though Mr. Wackett isn't so sure, now,*" Jan told herself. She noticed that Craig's glance fell to Jethro Cobb's ring, which she wore on her finger, but he was keeping close to Connery until Cobb said in a low voice:

"Will you please sit down, Allenby, and leave it all to me? Let him go, now."

THE three men had gone, leaving the room and, indeed, all of Sinners' Castle very quiet, save for the lap of the water outside. The wind had blown an iridescent scum of oil along the surface, and it slimed against the low sea-wall, lifting and falling with the swell.

"That bullion isn't there," said Craig Allenby. "You took it yourself, long ago."

"Nearly two years ago," said Jethro Cobb. He leaned forward to hand over the pistol, which was Conrad's Luger, to Craig.

"I got on the trail of it quite by accident. I was fishing in Donegal with Erich Schumann, whom I knew slightly, and we sheltered the night at Cashel Murtagh—it was empty, then. There was something rotten about the man; I didn't like him. He had that metal map with him. He'd taken it from his cousin Conrad once. He hadn't the remotest notion what it was about. But I had, because I happened to be a junior partner in a firm of bullion merchants in Mincing Lane at the end of the last war. I heard one or two stories of piracy by submarine crews and hiding-places on the Irish coast. Tommyrot, most of them. But Erich boasted a lot about the *Unterseekinder* Schumanns, of Kiel. I bought Cashel Murtagh for an old song, because I liked it, and I went exploring Saddleback Pat for the fun of the thing, without any precious map, taking a whole month over the job. . . . Hadn't you better go and release the Molloy, Allenby?"

"They'll wait. Go on."

"The stuff was there in a place that was marked on the old maps as Finn Maccool's Chimney. An unromantic mass of mildewed bags and boxes. But bullion *is* unromantic, you know. I didn't believe in it a bit till I came on it. Queer, that. I didn't believe in it, yet found it! Those three believe in it, and won't find it. That's a bit like life. . . . I hired a man to burgle Schumann's house and bring me the metal map, after

that, because he'd begun to tumble to the truth, when it was too late, and he'd got mixed up with the Gestapo foreign branch. Which meant of course that our own secret service had him taped and was watching him. So he couldn't move. It pleased me. Something impish about me, I suppose."

He gave Jan his wistful smile. She said:

"That's how you got all your money, I suppose."

"No." He shook his head. "I really am rich, my dear. I always was rich. It went"—he gestured vaguely—"well, on a lot of different charities and things. Most of it. Famine funds, starving people in different parts of this unhappy world. I got it across to Holland and realized on it pretty well, there. I got my own kick out of it on this last occasion, when I found that I could hoodwink Camilla, who was neither guilty nor innocent; and help Allenby, who was inclined to be a coward, and deceive Wackett and Catchpole—who as you know is the Connery who killed John Middleton. That unhappy Conrad, of course, came back and walked into the drama; and you, Jan—well, that was chance, too. But not altogether, perhaps."

He passed his hand through his white hair.

"We left Jessup in Sligo, and he's bringing a few of the Civil Guard over to make sure of Connery, this evening. They'll intern Conrad Schumann too, I suppose. That is, unless—" Cobb interrupted himself and looked across. "You two might like to follow those rainbow-gold seekers on Saddleback Pat. I'm sure you'll easily pick them up with those glasses of yours, Jan. Keep to the green part of the bog when you cross it, and beware of loose boulders. I'm too tired to come. I'll release poor Molloy and his wife, and perhaps take a look at Camilla. She'll hate to be out of this. But it's a suitable punishment."

JAN and Craig Allenby found themselves out in the salty air soon after, moving over the marsh which ran up from Sinners' Castle to the moorland and the scarred hump of Saddleback Pat and its brother hills that crowded the sky.

"Do you notice we always do what he tells us, whatever it is?" asked Jan in a low voice.

Craig nodded; after a moment he said:

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"He thinks something's going to happen to them."

"Yes, to Conrad. Haven't you got that feeling too?"

The binoculars Jan had snatched up showed Conrad, Connery and Wackett, where they picked their way swiftly yet gingerly across Blackadder's Bog. Craig left her behind with his long strides with Conrad's Luger in his pocket for safety, while she gazed.

HALF an hour, and they themselves were on the bog, with its black, peaty pools. A great loneliness seemed to wrap about them all at once. A pale mist came creeping down from Saddleback Pat, drifted over them and passed out to sea, where a convoy of tramps, shepherded by lean destroyers and restless planes, moved into the North Channel, and a gun boomed. The faint echo floated through the desolation. . . .

"Craig, it looks as though we might be just wanting to laugh at them."

He made no answer. Nor did he tell her yet, what had happened between Camilla and himself. They were now in a warlock country of dwarfed and twisted trees, with Saddleback Pat brown and broken above them, its sides a tumult of crevices and gullies. The three ahead were scrambling quickly across the black buttresses of rock. Conrad, in front, seemed to have found his bearings. He moved like a cat.

Wet vapor curled about Jan and Allenby's panting breath. They were halfway up Saddleback Pat, not far away now, but still unseen among the boulders and the wisps of mist, the trio too absorbed to notice them. The guns boomed, out at sea again, on their eternal hunting. Conrad turned unsteadily at the sound. He made a gesture of defiance.

"Stop them, Craig. They'll kill themselves!"

"No. They're all right. They've got a rope."

Jan felt that Saddleback Pat looked down on it all with a touch of cold mirth. The three men had stopped, and craned over a deep tunnel-like cleft that fell all but sheer down the side of the mountain. If it was Finn Maccool's Chimney, it was well-named. It went down thirty feet of almost circular shaft to a rocky ledge which jutted out into mist and empty space. Six feet down, as though cut by the hand of man, was a square opening in the side. Allenby,

crawling up to the three of them, saw it clearly—saw, too, the deadly peril of any attempt to climb down. To do it alone, as he certainly once had done, Jethro Cobb must have had nerves of steel. So too must Conrad Schumann. But that was twenty-one years before. . . .

"I give you my word there's nothing there," Craig spoke out, appearing abruptly. "Cobb has taken it away."

Wackett swiveled his head sharply, but Connery barely noticed him, nor did Schumann. They were too passionately absorbed. The German was tying a belay of the rope round a piece of rock and testing it, then knotting it about his body. Connery watched him closely. There was a mere foothold in the chimney that a practiced rock-climber, and few others, might have used. Schumann stepped over with the loop on his arm; and his face, with its uplifted beard, began to go down.

But as the dimness closed about him he hesitated. Some claustrophobia from his submarine days haunted him with memories. He looked round wildly, at the walls of rock and moss that shut him in, as the steel walls of a U-boat had shut him in under the sea long before when he etched a map to pass the time. Some trick of the atmosphere brought the sullen explosions from the hunting destroyers plainly to the heights of Saddleback Pat.

And then, all at once, a large bird, kite or falcon, flapped up past Schumann's cringing face from the cranny where it had been disturbed. Like a ghost it slipped past him. No cry left him. His nerveless hand let go the rope, and he went crashing down. The rope ran out, tightened and snapped with the sound of a broken cello-string. They saw his body hit the ledge below, and bounce out into the empty space beyond, where the bird he had disturbed hovered high in air, before shooting away.

IT was over in a matter of seconds, like something long foredoomed. Connery still stared into the empty chimney, though Wackett staggered back from the edge, a shaking hand pressed against his mouth. If there was ever a man who had decided not to seek hidden treasure again, it was Mr. Wackett.

"Keep back, Jan dear," Allenby bade. With a feeling of thankfulness, he saw she had not been close enough to see the tragedy.

"Connery!" he called.

Connery turned hastily. He wiped his mouth.

"He must have thought that bird was his boy," he said. "I had nothing to do with the rope breaking, Mr. Allenby. A terrible tragedy. Of course he was *non compos mentis*. But there is still enough rope left for one of us to climb down and make sure if the poor man died for nothing."

He actually picked up the broken length of rope, then let it fall with a sigh and a shake of the head. Even then, he clung to the guise of Catchpole, as though loath to leave go of the character. Only his eyes were small and fiery with wickedness.

"Step out here, Connery," commanded Craig.

"That's 'is name," said Wackett huskily. "And mine's Sucker. Always was, even when I looked after him after the Middleton murder. Wanted to double-cross poor Conrad, he did, the slimy snail. 'Im and me traipsin' through the bogs with a load of gold apiece, and 'im shoving me in one of those pools as soon as he could. That was his idea. Always the quiet ones that are the worst, it is. Look at 'im! Good job he hasn't a gun."

"I have. I'm tired of them," said Craig. "Better lead the way with him down to Sinners' Castle, Wackett."

MR. WACKETT had gone, next morning, when dawn crept from behind Saddleback Pat, flowed over Sinners' Castle and the lough, and spread out to the little black ships that felt their way into safety by the fading light of Rathlin O'Birne's lighthouse. Mr. Wackett, his partner having been taken away the night before by Mr. Jessup and five genial Irish policemen, had chanced the wilderness and would, no doubt, be heard of in London again, but not in the neighborhood of Jethro Cobb. . . .

"And you, Camilla?" Cobb asked. It was about midday, though the old clock of Cashel Murtag had not struck, because it had run down. Cobb sat with his hands clasped thoughtfully, a little harmless-looking man, who had received the news of Conrad Schumann's end as though it was more or less all predestined, and for the best. Camilla didn't look at Craig Allenby. He had told nobody

of those uncertain hands of hers in the mirror, and it was a secret between them. He was a man who could keep a secret like that until it faded from his memory. Which would be very soon because she was so unimportant to him.

"I'd like to have gone away luxuriously, on the *Brantane*," she said. "Go down with my colors flying, so to speak—though even then they'd be your colors, wouldn't they? I expect I shall do a lot of harm in the world, yet—once clear of Sinners' Castle, which seems to cramp my style." She paused. "When do you intend to finish your last bit of the psychological experiment, Mr. Cobb? I mean, to break off Jan's engagement to you and hand her gracefully to Craig?"

SHE moved away from them, not waiting for a reply. She was dressed for walking. On the nearest road, six miles away, a jaunting car was to take her back to civilization. On her way to it, she would have to pass close to the precipice at the foot of which the body of Conrad Schumann had lain with the falcons circling above him. The periscope of a British submarine was just visible at the mouth of the lough, where it lay hopefully in wait for any other *Unterseekinder* in. But there would be none, Jan knew. . . .

"I wanted to see what Allenby would do," said Jethro Cobb, lifting Jan's hand and taking the ring from her finger. "He nearly took you from under my nose in spite of what he owed me. He'd still do it, some day, if I kept you. That's one of the things you can't play tricks with. . . . That Irish Skyways plane will be here in time for you to get the night boat. I shall stay here for a while. I like the old place."

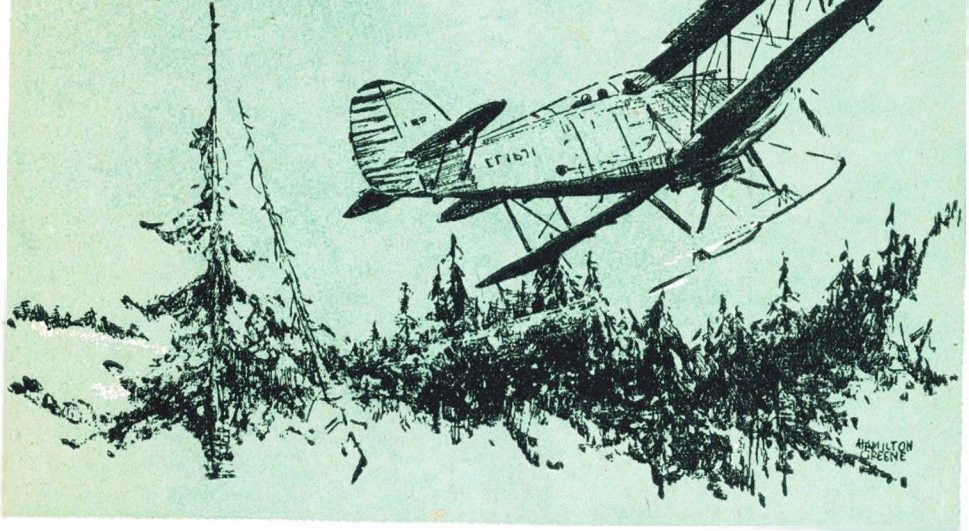
He nodded, left them and went into the doorway of Cashel Murtag. Like one of the local pixies, Jan thought, returning to the underground again, modestly satisfied with its experiences, but finished with them now. Craig Allenby pulled her out of her chair. A squadron of seaplanes wheeled over the lough, returning to their carrier and their tiny part in the grim game the world had embarked upon. Sinners' Castle seemed to ignore them with the kindly wisdom of age, which had seen many things pass.

THE END

"Death on the Doorstep," a mystery drama of America today, by Gordon Keyne, will be our complete novel next month.

Tiny David and the State Police deal with an international problem in this fine story—

By **ROBERT MILL**



Over the Border

TRANQUIL LAKE, normally a quiet little town in northern New York near the Canadian border, broke into the headlines with a bang.

A late spring morning dawned with cloudless sunny skies. Three hours later this preview of delights to come underwent a sudden and dramatic change. A storm came howling out of the northwest, with winds of almost unbelievable velocity. There were intermittent snowsqualls, during which the landscape was virtually blotted out.

During the height of the storm the residents of Tranquil Lake heard, but could not see, an airplane that was circling perilously close to the rooftops. Then came a providential lull in the snowfall. The pilot sighted a field, which had been marked as an emergency landing-place for mail-planes on the New York-Montreal run, and he brought his ship in to a workmanlike landing.

Soon a goodly portion of the male population of Tranquil Lake was gathered about the airplane, which was a small bomber of rather ancient design. It was

equipped with skis for landing on snow, and it bore the insignia of the Canadian air-force. Beside the plane stood two youths, wearing the uniform of the R.A.F. of England, who were in Canada to receive advanced training at the air schools established for the entire empire.

The younger of the air-men, who obviously was the pilot, faced the assembled crowd with a boyish smile of embarrassment.

"I say, you chaps, what town is this?"

"Tranquil Lake," came the chorus.

A hand reached inside the cabin of the plane and produced a map. Soon a worried frown appeared.

"My word! That's in the United States, isn't it?"

The assembled villagers assured him that it was. Whereupon the pilot turned to his companion.

"Sorry, Ronnie. Rather fancy I've missed the wicket." He shrugged. "But for three hours, the ground just wasn't there, you know, and there was enough wind-drift to take us to China." He addressed the nearest native. "Could you tell me where I can place a trunk call?"



"If you interfere with us, somebody is going to get hurt. Just keep that in mind."

There was a hesitant silence. Then a youth in the crowd came to the rescue:

"He means that he wants to make a long-distance telephone-call."

"Quite so," the pilot agreed.

There were willing volunteers, and the pilot turned to his companion.

"Stand by the crate, will you, Ronnie? I'll be back in a jiffy."

A grunt of assent was the only answer from the other air-man.

IN due time, the pilot, accompanied by a throng of admirers, returned. He lowered his voice as he said to his fellow airman: "Ceiling zero, almost everywhere. Quite aside from that, we have orders to stay right here and notify the authorities. Avoid international complications, and all that sort of rot." He turned to the crowd. "Is there any officer about?"

Several men chuckled.

"Only a constable," a man volunteered, "and he's sick in bed with the

grippe. Mostly, when we want anything like that, we call the troopers."

A second voice came from the crowd:

"You don't have to bother about that. That louse Hans Schmidt hot-footed it for a telephone as soon as he saw this was a Canadian plane. He was muttering something about getting you guys interned."

An angry murmur arose from the crowd. A middle-aged man whose face bore a scar reminiscent of former battlefields acted as spokesman:

"Nothing doing. You fellows stay here until the storm lets up. Then you beat it back to Canada." His manner became belligerent. "I'd like to see anybody stop you."

A roar of approval arose.

The boyish smile returned to the face of the pilot.

"That's frightfully decent of you chaps. However, we have orders to face the music."



Illustrated by
Hamilton Greene

Meanwhile one Hans Schmidt was having a not altogether satisfactory session with the telephone. He first called Captain Charles Field, commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, and stated his case. Captain Field, a man of pronounced likes and dislikes, found nothing in Mr. Schmidt's name, his accent, or his request that caused him any pleasure. He made this very evident as he gruffly informed the Tranquil Lake man that the Canadian airplane was a Federal problem, and out of his jurisdiction. Captain Field then volunteered the information that, quite aside from all that, he would be double-blanked if he would intern any Canadian airplane. On the contrary, he would send the air-men on their way with his triple-blanked blessing, and a personal message for them to deliver to a certain multiple-blanked gentleman in Europe who wore a misplaced eyebrow, mistakenly called a mustache.

The next person called was a Federal official. Here Mr. Schmidt fared better. The Federal man shared Captain Field's sentiments, but he also had a deep and abiding respect for international law. Therefore he assured his caller that the matter would receive prompt attention.

TEN minutes later Captain Field, still in good voice, was arguing the matter out with the Federal man.*

"It isn't how we feel about the thing," the Federal official concluded. "We have to stick to the law. This thing will get in the papers, and there may be trouble. I haven't anybody to send, and I'm asking you to cooperate. This is official, Captain. Neither one of us can afford to have Washington down on his neck."

Captain Field surrendered to the inevitable, and hung up the telephone. After voicing his thoughts in a tone that flooded the barracks, and carried to the nearby stables and garage, he bawled for Lieutenant Edward David.

Mr. David, who was big enough to deserve the nickname of Tiny, appeared almost at once. Captain Field studied his face as he outlined the case to him. Mr. David, the commanding officer noted with satisfaction, looked even dumber than usual, which Captain Field regarded as a hopeful sign.

"There are no if's, and's or but's about it," the Captain wound up. "You get down there and grab that plane and its crew. The best minds will decide what happens after that. . . . That isn't our party."

"Yes sir," was Mr. David's only contribution. He saluted smartly, and left the office.

Captain Field gazed after him hopefully. "Never knew him to do what he was told," he muttered. An inspiration came to him. "Take Crosby with you," he bawled. He resumed his paper-work, growling: "Put those two together, and they're bound to make a botch of it!"

Lieutenant James Crosby accepted the assignment without enthusiasm. He did enliven the trip to Tranquil Lake with conversation, and his conversation demonstrated that Mr. Crosby had not taken President Roosevelt's admonition regarding neutrality too seriously. While he lacked Captain Field's volume, and somewhat racy vocabulary, he had a

*Again fact follows fiction! As we go to press the newspapers report an actual forced landing of Canadian flyers—at Alexandria Bay, New York.

more vivid imagination, and he devoted it whole-heartedly to devising unpleasant situations for the same mustached gentleman Captain Field had mentioned.

BY the time they arrived at Tranquil Lake the crowd had gained in size. They pushed their way through, and confronted the two British air-men. There was an interruption as a native addressed the troopers:

"The barracks have been calling you guys. They want you to get in touch with them right away."

Mr. David turned to his companion.

"Go see what they're beefing about, will you, Jim? I'll settle the war."

Mr. Crosby departed in search of a telephone, while Mr. David spoke to the pilot:

"I'm Lieutenant David, of the State police."

The youthful air-man extended his hand. "Leftenant Geoffrey Hardwich, R.A.F." He indicated his companion. "Leftenant Ronald Howard. We've been waiting for you. I rather fancy we've put our foot into it, but it wasn't intentional, you know. The storm blinded us. Just what lies ahead, Leftenant?"

Tiny David shook his head dubiously.

"I wouldn't know that, Lieutenant. Our orders are to hold you and the plane until what we jokingly call our best minds announce the verdict. It's no tonic to us. All our sympathies are right on your side of the fence." He attempted a gruff bit of cheer. "Even at worst, there are worse places than the United States for the duration of the war."

The pilot's face sobered.

"Quite. But you see, I had a brother. They shot him down the first week—turned the machine-gun on him when he was using his 'chute. That makes a chap anxious to get back and do his bit."

Tiny David's face was grave.

"It sure must make you feel that way," he agreed.

There was an awkward silence. Then the British air-man shrugged.

"Fortunes of war, Leftenant."

The man with the scar on his face, who had been listening attentively, confronted the trooper.

"What's the dope?" he demanded rather truculently.

"There isn't any dope," Tiny David retorted. "We feel the same way you do, but we're doing a job of work. If you interfere with us, somebody is going to get hurt. Just keep that in mind."

The British pilot took part in the discussion:

"Thanks a lot, but the Leftenant and I understand each other."

The angry murmur from the crowd subsided.

Soon Crosby returned, struggling with only partially suppressed excitement.

"There's hell to pay at Riverford," he began. "The ice is breaking up in the river. There is a jam about half a mile below the town, and the water is backing up toward the village. Some of the houses are flooded now. The people are trapped, because the one dirt road that leads out has been impassable for a week. They want dynamite to break the jam, but God knows how we're going to get it in to them."

Tiny David frowned thoughtfully.

"They have sick and old people there," Crosby continued, "and no way to get them out. Hell, Tiny, we can't stand here and let them drown."

Tiny David turned to the crowd.

"Any dynamite in town?" he asked.

A PROSPEROUS-appearing middle-aged man spoke up:

"We carry quite a stock, and you're welcome to what you need." He shook his head dubiously. "But I can't see how it's going to help you any. The going is all right on the main road, and you have about thirty-five miles of that. Then you have twenty-two miles on the dirt road, and that is impassable."

Tiny David again turned to the crowd.

"Anybody got a pair of snowshoes they'll let me have?"

Crosby cut in: "You won't make it, Tiny. It's a question of time. The water is backing up toward the town fast."

The youthful British pilot looked up from the map he had been studying.

"Are any of you chaps familiar with the countryside near Riverford?"

"Reckon I am." The answer came from a man wearing the garb of a woodsman. "Been livin' there for fifteen years. My wife and two kids are there right now."

The pilot looked at him with sympathy, as he asked:

"Are there any open fields where a plane might land?"

The woodsman's face was troubled.

"Nary a one that I know of, Mister. There's thick timber all around the town. You might have been able to set her down on the river, but now the ice is going out."

The pilot frowned.

"If it was anything but dynamite," he mused, "we could drop it off with a 'chute."

The silent observer made his first contribution:

"Bombs." He pointed to the underbelly of the airplane, which was almost buried in the snow. "Three of them."

The pilot's face brightened.

"By Jove! Trust good old Ronnie to come through." His question was addressed to the crowd. "Any chance of getting some high-octane petrol?"

The middle-aged man again was equal to the occasion.

"We stock aviation gas for the field here. We can fill up your tanks." He spied an employee in the crowd. "Hey, Pete."

The pilot was studying the snowy field.

"How about you chaps turning to with shovels and giving us a bit better runway?"

There was a rush for shovels. The pilot indicated a path he wished cleared, which ran diagonally from one far corner of the field to the other. The residents fell to work with a will.

"I was afraid some of those drifts were a bit too deep for our skis," the pilot explained to Tiny David. "Bit of luck, this. Our problem today was a three-hundred-mile cross-country flight. Then we were supposed to spot a camouflaged target and bomb it. Long before we reached there, our minds were on other things. I'd forgotten all about the blooming bombs until good old Ronnie spoke up."

Tiny David turned from an inspection of the leaden sky.

"This is darned decent of you fellows."

The pilot waved his hand airily.

"Rot. Couldn't do anything else. Consider Ronnie and me on parole to return here. Word of honor as officers and gentlemen, and that sort of thing."

Tiny David grinned. Then his face became serious.

"I'M afraid that won't do, Lieutenant. We have to keep this on an official basis. You've been detained. Now I have commandeered your plane. Naturally, I wouldn't send you on any errand that I wouldn't do myself. That's why I'm going with you."

The pilot's boyish smile, which had vanished as Tiny David started to speak, reappeared.

"I think I understand, Leftenant. Everything strictly official." A twinkle ap-



"He was muttering something about getting you guys interned."

peared in his eyes. "At the end of the quarter you probably will receive a statement from His Majesty for ammunition expended, and that sort of thing." He turned to the observer. "Think we can find room for him, Ronnie?"

A grunt was the answer. Then Ronnie reached inside the cabin and commenced to remove superfluous gear.

"Bloody wireless-kit comes out," he growled; "confounded thing failed just when we needed it most!"

Jim Crosby pressed close to Tiny David.

"How about me?" he demanded.

"Sorry, Jim," came the answer. "We can't risk carrying any more dead weight. Anyway, there is a job for you here. After we get safely in the air, you get Riverford on the telephone. Tell them to keep everybody away from the river."

Mr. Crosby yielded reluctantly.

Soon the preparations were completed, and the airplane stood poised at the end of the improvised runway, its propellers spinning as the pilot warmed up the motor for the take-off.

A ripple of interest went up from the crowd as Mr. Schmidt returned to the field to observe at first hand the results of his telephone activities. One sight of the airplane, with its motor running, sent him hurrying to Mr. Crosby's side.

"Vere dey go?" he demanded.

Mr. Crosby hooked his thumbs in his gun-belt as he surveyed his questioner.

"My Aunt Sophronia is being buried today," the trooper explained, "and they're going to drop dandelions on the funeral procession. But don't wiggle out of your undies. They'll be back."

Mr. Schmidt's face was a vivid red.
 "They be back! Yah! Yah! You make chokes. Not good chokes, eider. Better chokes than dat I can make!"
 "Mebbe so," Mr. Crosby admitted. "But they have one dummy on the air now, and his sponsors cut his time in half, so I can't see much future for you."

Inside the cabin of the plane, the pilot turned to his passengers.

"All hands ready? Right-o."

He gunned the motor. The ship quivered. He released the brakes. The plane roared down the runway.

Tiny David glanced at the pilot. The British youth's face grew tense as the end of the runway neared and the ship showed no inclination to leave the ground. The end of the runway was almost at hand. The pilot pulled back on the wheel. The plane took a false hop, and then entered the air.

The usually silent Ronnie glanced down at the tree-tops.

"Two feet to spare," was his verdict.

The ship slowly gained altitude, nosing upward into a dull, leaden sky. Then the snow-squalls began anew. The pilot checked his instruments against his map. There was a smile on his face, as he said: "A bit dusty, what?"

Tiny David was growing accustomed to the roar of the motor. Soon he realized that the taciturn Ronnie was singing. He caught a fragment of the song: "*Jolly boating weather—*"

The pilot grinned.

"Ronnie always sings," he explained. "Mum as a clam on the ground, but a regular chatterbox soon as we get upstairs."

They caught only fleeting glimpses of the earth as the flight continued. The pilot's eyes were glued on the instrument-board. Ronnie, Tiny David noted, now was engaged in vocally, "Hanging His Washing on the Siegfried Line."

Visibility cleared momentarily. Tiny David, peering downward, caught a fleeting glimpse of Riverford, and pointed excitedly.

"Right-o," came the calm reply from the pilot. "All set, Ronnie?"

"Very good," said Ronnie.

The plane began to circle, steadily losing altitude. Now the streets of the vil-



OVER THE BORDER

lage were visible, and they could distinguish men and women, all looking aloft. The river came into view. It was comparatively easy to spot the ice-jam.

Nature, using turbulent waters and huge cakes of ice, had done a job that would have done credit to almost any engineer. The great cakes of ice had formed a perfect dam. Behind that barrier was an immense, and steadily widening, sea of water, one side of which now had advanced well into the town.

The pilot banked sharply, and pulled the plane into a series of spirals above the ice-jam. Ronnie was busy over his bombing-sights. He made hasty calculations. Then he spoke into his phones:

"North by east. One thousand feet. Air speed, one hundred."

"Right-o."

The plane turned, and retraced its path. Then came another dizzy turn. Tiny David caught only fleeting glimpses of the ice barrier through the swirling snow-flakes.

The ship seemed to Tiny David to be some distance from the dam when Ronnie tugged at a control. The trooper, peering downward, saw a geyser of water and ice fragments a short distance to the right, and away from the Riverford side of the dam.

"Sorry," murmured the pilot. "My fault, Ronnie."

The ship headed back for the second try.

"North by east," came Ronnie's directions. "Eight hundred feet. Air speed, eighty-five."

"Good old Ronnie," the pilot approved. "Shading it a bit close. Only two left. Can't waste them." He shouted into

Tiny David's ear: "Hold tight! This may toss us about a bit."

Again the ship approached the dam. The nose of the plane went down. Once more Ronnie pulled the control.

"Ah-h-h-h!"

Directly above the center of the ice dam there was a cloud of water and flying debris. The ship rocked violently from side to side. It shivered furiously. The roar of the motor had increased as the pilot, fighting the controls, sought to get out of the concussion caused by the explosion.

The ship regained an even keel. The pilot smiled. "There's life in the old girl yet!" he said.

They circled about, watching the black and white torrent pour through the opening caused by the bomb. Huge cakes of ice, caught up by the current, dashed into the gap and thundered against the barriers that remained on both sides.

"Once more," said the pilot. "Take out what's left on the village side."

"Right-o," came the reply from Ronnie. Again he repeated his instructions. A third time the plane approached the dam. Ronnie had found the range. The bomb sped straight to its target. The river was open. It was only a question of time until the flood would subside.

RONNIE leaned forward. "I *would* land two out of three when no instructor was around!"

The pilot chuckled. Then his face sobered as he turned to Tiny David. "Back we go, what?"

They flew low over the town. Grateful residents waved coats and cloths at the passing plane. The pilot dipped one wing in salute. Then they mounted into the winter sky.

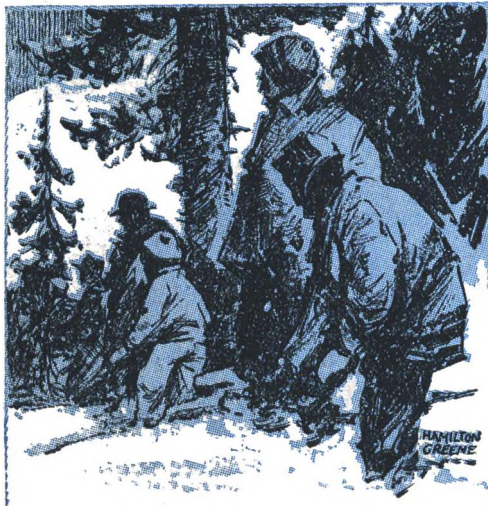
Tiny David had the map in his hands. "No use to take a chance on that field at Tranquil Lake again," he shouted. His finger indicated a spot on the map. "Head for Lineville. They have a real airport there."

The pilot leaned over to study the map. An expression of surprise crossed his face. The surprise was replaced by puzzlement. "Sure you want us to land there?" he demanded.

Tiny David's face was guileless. "Very sure. Good town, Lineville. We have a patrol there. They will fix us up in fine style."

The pilot shrugged. . . .

The plane made short distance of the miles, and soon they were circling above



OVER THE BORDER

Lineville. Tiny David's finger indicated the airport, which was some distance from the village, and in a northerly direction.

The ship lost altitude slowly, and came in to a professional landing. Airport employees gathered about them. Among the group was a man wearing the uniform of the Canadian Customs. A uniformed Immigration Inspector of the same country joined him.

The pilot snapped off the motor, and turned to Tiny David.

"I can't feel too badly about this, Lieutenant. The map showed that Lineville's airport was on our side of the line. You ordered me to land here. All's fair in love and war, you know."

Tiny David's expression of bewilderment almost qualified him for the stage.

"That's right," he muttered. "The airport is in Canada. Funny that I didn't remember that."

The British youth eyed him keenly.

"I think I understand. What Ronnie and I feel is a bit difficult to put into words. But we want you to know—"

Tiny David cut him short.

"Just a bonehead play of a dumb State cop," he declared. "Much better that way. No international complications. Your plane was commandeered, and you obeyed orders." He extended his hand. "When you get across, I hope you do the same sort of work on the ice-jams over there!"

He turned away, made a brief explanation to the Canadian officials, and entered a waiting taxicab.

THE next morning Tiny David sat across the desk from Captain Field, who looked unusually glum.

"Albany," said the commanding officer, "has been heard from. Major Harner is on record officially to the effect that he is ashamed that one of his men didn't know the difference between the United States and Canada. Still in his official capacity, he has ordered me to discharge that man. I always obey orders. Just before you came in here, I had the clerk send this message to the Major on the teletype: 'Trooper Joseph Zilch is no longer a member of the Black Horse Troop.' The Major is perfectly satisfied."

Captain Field's eyes twinkled.

"Unofficially, Major Harner gave me a message for you. It's just three words: 'Well done, Tiny!'"

Another story of Tiny David will appear in an early issue.



A British correspondent sends a graphic story of war-time flying.

BECAUSE I am a sailor, I am more concerned with the Fleet Air Arm than the Royal Air Force. The Fleet Air Arm was originally a branch of the R.A.F., but eventually it became a part of the Navy. It lives chiefly in aircraft carriers, but there are also squadrons that have been landed on parts of the British coast, where they work in conjunction with the Air Force patrolling sections of the North Sea. It was to one of these squadrons that I recently paid a visit to gain first-hand experience of the life of a fighting pilot in war.

The plane that carried me to the far north flew low along the coast, because visibility was bad. But it was clear enough to see the wild Highlands spread out in contours of russet and green.

At length we came to a headland with rain-squalls drifting in from the sea, and the plane in which I was a passenger circled and came down, taxiing across a level field.

Through the rain, hangars and rows of huts showed up against the sky. We pulled on gum-boots and splashed toward them through seas of mud churned up by lorries and all the traffic of the camp. The R.A.F. bombing machines and the Fleet Air Arm fighters were drawn up in rows across the aërodrome, looking like gigantic browsing insects.

In a bare room warmed by an oil-stove half a dozen pilots sat awaiting the summons to go up, if visibility should suddenly clear. One played patience on an ammunition-box; another frowned over a crossword puzzle. Two talked, straddling their chairs; another paced thoughtfully up and down the muddy board floor. The observers were in flying kit, their helmets and parachute harness hanging from the walls. They were all young men, two of them very young—midshipmen, in fact. We sat and talked.

I seem to remember in the last war that there was a good deal of rather macabre gayety among the fighting pilots in touch

For details of our prize offer for stories of Real Experience, see Page 3.

North Sea Patrol

By "BARTIMEUS"

with the enemy. "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" stuff. They made ceaseless jokes about death.

None of that was in this hut smelling of paraffin and tea and tobacco, with the rain beating against the window-frames. The young faces looked soberly cheerful. Much the same expression as you would see in a changing-room on a school playing-field before a rather important football match. Jokes there were in plenty, but they weren't about death.

They talked fighting tactics, and one of the midshipmen revealed that he had recently shot down a German bomber after a grim game of touch-last in a range of cloud mountains out over the North Sea. The homing raider dived and banked and dodged from one cloud-valley to another, trying to shake off the pursuit.

"He kept going from one cloud to another for cover till I got to know his trick," said the boy. "Everybody has one trick. I got ahead and gave him a burst at two hundred yards as he came out of a cloud." His face sobered. "The hunt is grand fun. But when you see the poor devils spinning down in a nose-dive, on fire—not so funny!" he ended gravely.

"They're really awfully young, some of them," said another stripling. "I got a day's leave and flew over to see a couple in the hospital at—"

"Why?" I asked.

The speaker looked embarrassed. "Oh, just to take them some cigarettes and chocolates and that kind of thing."

"Were you responsible for their being in hospital?"

He nodded. "I think actually my gunner shot them down. Nice kids. They asked me to go and stay with them in Germany after the war."

AS it turned out, there was no flying that day. But in the dawn next morning the aërodrome sounded as if the bulls of Bashan were roaring together, as the fighters were warmed through. In the

pilots' hut the observers of the flight going up were pulling on their flying-kits. The pilot's cockpit is warmed; a pilot rarely bothers about more than helmet and parachute harness, but the observer in the rear has nothing to warm him but the kit he wears.

I was taking the place of an observer in this flight and had borrowed his kit. First I struggled into a combination suit like the skin of a teddy bear. On top of that goes a wind-proof combination suit with a high collar lined with fleece. Then comes a life-saving waistcoat. This can be inflated in a few moments by the wearer, and for some obscure reason is known technically as a "Mae West." The parachute harness buckles on over this. It is a cumbersome arrangement to walk about in, but I can imagine moments when it gives considerable moral support. Lastly there is a flying-helmet with telephone mouthpiece and earphone attachments, gauntlet gloves and fleece-lined flying boots.

One by one, burdened by our harness, we went squelching through the mud to the landing-ground where the fighters were drawn up. Each pilot and observer walked to their allotted machine. Two of them stopped to exchange a remark in the deafening roar of the slip-stream, where normal speech is of course an impossibility. The speaker reached out for the tube of the other's headphone and spoke into it. The observer did the same, and they both laughed. They were finishing a conversation that started in the hut. We climbed up into our cockpits.

One of the maintenance personnel climbed up after me and tested the switches of the wireless telephone and the release-gear of the gun. He was a cheerful person with a red face, and drops of moisture on his eyebrows. He wished me a happy landing, and disappeared over the edge of the cockpit.

A bank of gray low-lying cloud hung overhead. Beyond the edge of the cliffs

REAL EXPERIENCES

the sea was visible, with a silvery brightness to the eastward. A cold wind came from the hills, carrying a scent of heather and wisps of rain. The roaring of the engines grew a little louder: the ground flowed bumpily away beneath us, turned in a wide circle and receded.

By the time I had finished fiddling about with my straps and switches and trays of ammunition, and looked over the side, the ground was far beneath us; and it was doing queer things: tilting on edge a bit, so that a mare and her foal in a field seemed to be grazing at a most impossible angle. Then I saw the surf beneath us, and there was an icy rushing wind that sang in the wires, and a queer feeling of lightness in my stomach.

The other fighters were flying in a V-formation on either side of us, rising and dipping slightly as if riding on the surface of an invisible sea. The real sea, far beneath us, was visible for a while, and then faded as we began climbing above the clouds. They stretched beneath us for all the world like an Arctic panorama. The sea showed through them, thousands of feet below in little dark streaks, rifts in a white floor resembling pack-ice. Cloud-mountains in the far distance were catching the first rays of the rising sun.

The altitude produced a curious feeling of detachment. It seemed impossible to recapture any emotion: neither love or hate lived in that cold clear nothingness—only peace, and the rushing wind of our passage: blue sky above, and white light gleaming on the cloud-floor beneath.

The voice of the pilot buzzed in my earphone: "Keep a good look-out."

It recalled our mission to me. Somewhere out of the cloud-mountains to the southeast, or out of the blue of space, a speck might appear, or a cluster of specks—and death would be abroad in that sunny emptiness. It seemed queer to think of death up in that Nirvana.

WE climbed on; the sense of peace was succeeded by a rather nauseating faintness as we neared the oxygen limits. The thermometer showed eight degrees below zero. I glanced at the altitude indicator; to take my mind off the swaying faintness, I tried to calculate how many miles we were above the sea. I sighted the gun at imaginary assailants, searched the sky and clouds through glasses, wondered what sort of shooting I'd do, when my sensations were those of

a man bleeding to death: decided death would be rather a pleasant release.

"Hold your nose," warned the pilot, and down we dived with red-hot needles stabbing our cracking eardrums, down through space into blessed oxygen and the comparative warmth of mere freezing-point. We met our reliefs coming out to take over the patrol. "*Nothing to report*," flashed an observer, and they went past us, climbing to the ceaseless aerial beat over the North Sea.

THAT afternoon I found myself alone with one of the fighting pilots. It was the midshipman who had shot down a bomber after chasing it through the clouds. He told me that his father had been in Cody's "circus," and how he himself had wanted to fly since he was about five. He had gone straight from school to flying instruction, and thence to the Fleet Air Arm. He was twenty.

I made some mention of the lights on the cloud-floor that morning, and he told me of a sunset he had once seen. He was on detached patrol above the clouds, and he found himself flying on and on through unearthly radiance and colors that were never on land or sea. Coming back was like waking from sleep and some lovely incommunicable dream. He said:

"It was worth having lived, to see it!"

Not long previously he had experienced engine-trouble when on patrol over the North Sea and came planing down from ten thousand feet in the direction of a trawler he remembered seeing earlier. He hit the water at ninety-mile speed, slap into a fifteen-foot swell, about three miles from the trawler. Another fighter in his patrol saw him dive and followed him through the clouds. To attract the attention of the trawler's crew to the damaged plane, her consort fired a burst of machine-gun fire. The trawler's crew decided that they were being attacked by a German machine, and stayed below.

In the meantime the machine still floated. The pilot's hand was jammed in a bit of mechanism, anchoring him by the wrist to a plane that might cock up its tail and dive to the bottom. The observer, having failed to free him, set off to swim to the trawler for help, supported by his "Mae West," and they were both picked up by the trawler, none the worse.

I heard last week that this boy, the youngest fighting pilot in the Fleet Air Arm, had been killed on active service, I am glad he saw that sunset it was so worth living to have seen!

The Touareg Tomb



*A battle-adventure with the strange veiled people
of the Sahara.*

By JOHN PAAR-CABRERA

IT was late in the afternoon. The irregular meharistes of the *goum*—all high-caste veiled Touareg of the Kel Rhea and Imeman tribes,—loomed like faceless and floating ghosts through the flurries of whirling sand, which hid their shuffling camels.

"How far is the oasis where Inarti is waiting for us?" I shouted to the scout, who had just returned to the squadron.

"We are getting near to it. But Inarti, may Allah preserve him, has much pain—here!" the scout shouted back, pounding his breast. "You prize Inarti's advice, don't you, Sidi?"

"Nobody knows the Sahara better than he," I replied.

"True," the scout confirmed. "But, Inshallah! He's past fifty—has been in numberless combats . . . For more than thirty years he sat in the *thala* saddle."

"And for thirty years," I mused, "he swallowed the impalpable sand that is in the air of the desert; I hope the sand has not finally eaten his lungs away."

For I had seen a few middle-aged Touareg warriors and Chaamba Arabs, all straight, leathery fellows, suddenly topple, vomiting blood, and die in a few minutes, victims of the sudden hemorrhage which tears the worn-out lungs of the veteran desert riders.

The storm subsided, and loud bleats of our camels, which were smelling the water of the wells, warned us that we were about to reach the oasis.

It was a green patch of a few score palm trees, surrounded by the usual wall of sun-hardened mud. A square building with a round roof, unmistakably a marabout's tomb, was in the very middle.

"Why did Inarti pick such a place for a camp?" I shouted angrily.

"The tomb is empty," the scout replied. "The pious hermit for whom it was built was carried away by a party of Reguibat marauders, who wanted to profit from the neighborhood of his blessed person, and died in far-away Mauritania. Inarti was in this same oasis many years ago, and knows that no evil spirits hover at night around the corpseless tomb."

In the oasis I had just got out of the saddle of my squatting camel, when Inarti came to greet me. Straight as a rod, clad in a glistening black *takarbast* tunic, and with a black cloth wrapped tightly around head and face, he was an awesome figure.

"*Bismillaten!* Seven blessings on you, Sidi."

"Peace be with you. Why did you not tell me this morning that your chest was bothering you? All the hard riding as leader of the scouts should have been done by Chekkou."

"Why, Sidi? Allah is the only life-giver, and dispenser of happiness to the souls of the faithful. But in this world destiny rules everything."

The beams of the setting sun covered with a golden haze the sandy ridges; the shallow valleys between the dunes were purplish and restful to look at, and the fierce heat of the day was subsiding.

"Sidi," Inarti unexpectedly said, "I rode out of our post with you, to defeat the raiders of Tegama, the Air chief; and I swear that until your task is done, I shall stand by you and help you."

But he had hardly finished speaking when he jerked his head back and slapped

both hands on the black cloth covering his mouth.

Shunning the helping hands of the meharistes who hastened to support him, Inarti squatted on the damp ground and bowed his head while the blood seeped thickly through his black face-veil and dripped between his open knees into an ever-widening pool.

"Honor the brave! Get his *takouba* and rifle," Chekkou shouted.

Inarti's eyes—the disconcerting eyes of a high-caste Targui, with large yellow pupils ringed by blue rims—opened wide when his weapons were placed before him. There were deep marks, filled in with brass slivers, on the flat butt of the spear, on the stock of the carbine and on the heavy pommel of the sword; and each of these marks symbolized an enemy slain in single combat.

It was only when Inarti began swaying from side to side—to interfere before then would have been misinterpreted as the kind of courtesy due to a woman in trouble, and therefore as an insult—that I knelt at his side and helped him to lie down. But when his awesome eyes glazed over, his head lay on my cupped hands.

All the meharistes of the squadron volunteered to prepare Inarti's body for burial. I selected four of them, who had been his close friends for years.

THEN I went to inspect the oasis. Near the tomb I found a tent and four Chaamba Arabs: three wiry young fellows and a patriarch, who stroked endlessly his matted beard.

"As you can see, we are peaceful shepherds," the patriarch wheezed after the customary greetings, pointing to a herd of goats ruminating in a makeshift pen.

One of the young Chaamba had been preparing the ceremonial minted tea. He took the pot containing the brew off the fire, and filling two tall lead cups, offered one of them to me and the other to the old man, who took a long gulp of the hot liquid, smacked his lips, and looked expectantly at me.

I quickly reflected that had there been anything wrong with the tea, he would not have touched it. I drained my cup.

I felt unusually spent and listless when I went to look at the camp the meharistes were pitching among the groves. With my shoulders propped against the scaly trunk of a palm, I wondered if I was being overcome by a sudden attack of fever.

It was almost dark when Chekkou came to squat beside me.

"Sidi,"—his voice sounded faint, as if coming from a distance—"I sent out the usual cordon of far-flung lookouts. The sentries have been duly posted. And yet, everything is wrong."

"Why?" I stammered weakly.

"The oasis is here," Chekkou explained, sticking a finger into the soft damp ground. Then he traced a ring around the mark symbolizing the oasis. "And here is the outlying wall, watched by the inner cordon of sentries."

"And these," he continued after a pause, digging a series of dots all around the drawing, "are the lookouts, watching the approaches to the oasis and to our camp."

"What are you getting at, with all this mummary?" I snapped peevishly.

With a sweeping motion of his hands, Chekkou effaced all the marks.

"During the night," he growled, "the scouts and the sentries will slink back to the pitched tents, and the *goum* will be at the mercy of a surprise attack. And all because, while you were drinking tea, two Chaamba were telling our men that, although the tomb is empty, a swarm of Bori, the lowest and most cruel of evil spirits, congregate in the oasis at night."

"Rot!" I muttered thickly. "The simple fact that the four Chaamba settled in this oasis proves they don't believe that it is infested by any kind of ghosts."

"Sidi, the Chaamba say they are protected by some bags containing Koranic verses, which were once dipped into an oil blessed by one of the four thousand Saints of Allah who roam the earth in disguise."

"Our men are fools, to believe that," I growled. "And you are a halfwit because you didn't tell me all this ghastly rigmorale before sending out the lookouts and pitching the tents."

"Sidi, I thought that the old man had warned you. . . . I believed you knew of some way of conjuring off the devils."

Spent and befuddled I was, but my knowledge of Saharan mentality still stood me in good stead. Thus I realized that I was up against the stone wall of tribal superstition, and that it was no use arguing; several things had to be done, and quickly: the scouts had to be recalled, and the mehara saddled. The camp, finally, had to be pitched several miles away from the oasis.

But it wasn't. Before I could open my mouth to give the necessary orders, all became dark; then there was a deep roar in my ears, and I lost consciousness.

I shall never know when my fainting spell gave way to deep sleep. But it must have been nearly dawn when I began to dream of Inarti.

In the nightmare, the body of the dead Targui headman had wasted, and of it, only a gigantic skeleton remained. A face veil was wrapped around his skull and jaws. A pale glow shone in his empty eye-sockets, and under the litham veil, his fleshless mouth was uttering an unintelligible message. I stammered:

"My friend, I don't understand what you're saying. Can't you give me some sign of what you mean?"

At that, one of Inarti's arms slowly raised. Inch by inch, his skeleton claw slid toward my shoulder, which became numb and cold.

I WOKE with a jerk, and instantly found out that no superhuman agency had benumbed my muscles. Whoever had carried me under a tent had made a pillow out of my folded burnous, and placed my automatic under it. But the gun had slipped out, and lay under my shoulder.

I arose cursing—and in that very moment, hell broke loose in the oasis. Volleys crashed deafeningly; and there came hair-raising screams of: "*Ul-ul Allah Akbar!*" and "*Jihad! Jihad!*"

When I stepped out of the tent, a swishing huge sword almost decapitated me. I hastily leaped back, bringing my sword-blade up. In the next split second I saw a veiled head and an enormous pair of shoulders covered by a white *takarbast*—the white tunic of an Air raider—framed in the opening of the tent. I lunged, and at the same time pressed the trigger of the automatic in my left hand. The tribesman fell face down into the tent.

When I went out, a full moon and the angry stars of the African sky threw so much light on the oasis that all details of the combat were as clearly visible as if it had been daytime. The raiders had come in two waves. The first had reached unnoticed the wall surrounding the oasis and had swarmed within. The sentries, who had been driven practically on top of the tents by fear of ghosts, had made a stand, but had been slaughtered to a man.

My meharistes, however, were Ahaggar Touareg, of a breed which is as brave as the Air, but quicker of wits. As soon as they had been awakened by the noise of the fight they had grasped their weapons and leaped out of the tents. Their rush had driven back the first swarm of tribesmen. But the second squadron of

the half-breed warriors of Tegama were leaping pell-mell over the wall and joining the mêlée.

Guns roared; sword-blades flashed dully in the moonlight. Blue-clad Ahaggar Touareg, recognizable as meharistes by their bandoliers, charged, and were counterattacked ferociously by the black-limbed, white-clad Air Touareg.

Under the trunks of the palm trees they tore at each other in confused masses of battering arms, kicking legs and bobbing veiled heads. The irrigation ditches were jammed with wrestling, rolling and stabbing tribesmen. To make matters worse, several of the camels of the *goum* had broken loose and now were running at random, indiscriminately biting friends and foes; and everywhere—out in the open, partially concealed in holes in the ground, sprawled under the deep shadow of the branches, the strewn bodies of the dead lay like shapeless heaps of cloth.

I brought my whistle to my mouth and I blew a sharp blast. The nearest meharistes and Air tribesmen instantly converged on me. It was a good fight, fast and furious, and I still carry a memory of it in the form of two scars on the left side of my head. Then the moment came when I had a small band of a dozen meharistes with me, and a clear path to the heap of saddles and bags in whose midst our two machine-guns were located.

I retrieved these weapons, but I had only four meharistes with me when I succeeded in reaching a neutral corner close to the eastern wall of the oasis.

A party of raiders suddenly turned, let loose a volley and charged. One of their bullets hit and upset the machine-gun placed before Immakitane, who was the tallest man of the *goum*, a veritable giant. But I pressed the trigger of the machine-gun of which I had taken personal charge.

A few minutes later, it was all over. I stopped firing. The Air closest to the eastern section of the wall I allowed to get away. The others asked loudly the *aman*, the permission to surrender with guarantee of life.

However, half of the raiding party were already dead in the oasis. Foremost among them was a corpse bedecked with heavy golden bracelets: the body of Tegama, the chieftain who had led a horde of warriors of the Air highlands across some four hundred miles of untracked wilderness, for the sake of pillaging in the stamping-grounds of the Ahaggar Touareg, who are the age-old enemies of the Touareg of the Air.

THE TOUAREG TOMB

As the prisoners readily confessed, the Chaamba were the allies of Tegama. They had taken me in by the crudest of ruses—by placing a soporific powder in the bottom of the cup, which was after filled by tea and given to me. That was the reason the graybeard had drunk so freely—inwardly gloating, no doubt, at the thought that soon I would be seized by Tegama, who had sworn to tear the heart out of the breast of a live Roumi officer with his own hands.

Instead, death overtook him and the three younger Chaamba at the very beginning of the combat, when they were caught in the cross-fire of the Air and the meharistes.

Forty meharistes had been wounded. But luck assisting, only twelve had been killed. Their bodies, and Inarti's, were buried in individual graves, in Touareg style, their knees drawn under their breasts. Their weapons, tied in bundles, and large boulders bearing their names carved in the Punic characters of the written Touareg language, were placed on their graves, in the middle of horse-shoes of stones open toward the east.

But as a special mark of deference, it was over Inarti's grave that a few stanzas of the first Fatah and the prayers of the dead were recited by a high-caste mehariste, who had been tutored by one of the rare philosophers and Koranic students of the Ahaggar. Then I personally commanded the squad that fired the ritual volleys over the graves.

With this final military salute, topping a Touareg burial, Inarti ag Belhad, Imeman headman and acting-sergeant of meharistes, became but one of the memories of the desert.

LIKE all other men with a realistic turn of mind, I don't believe in ghosts. I know that science recognizes telepathy, the transference of thought—but only on condition that the transmitting and the receiving brain are both alive.

Thus, while I have no doubt that, without the disconcerting dream in which Inarti's vision played the leading rôle, I would have probably been caught half-asleep and either murdered in my tent or captured, I must perforce attribute my very close escape to sheer luck.

However, I shall never forget that a few moments before his death Inarti solemnly swore to help me and stand by me until Tegama and his fierce raiders were routed, and that, in some uncanny way, fate made good his promise.



IHAD always thought war would be grand. And I was always sad that I was too young to train for it before it came. But ten days after the Germans had marched into my village near Poznan, I received a uniform and a gun, and orders to proceed to a certain wood, where I would receive instructions.

It was sometimes difficult to get along fast enough. A train would start and stop—stop for so long it seemed as though it might never start again, and so it might be quicker to go on foot. Then in the long nights peasants would let one sleep on their carts, filled with turnips or potatoes. One could lie full length, and it was not too cold in those early days. We had no rations, so that we had to depend on the peasants to feed us.

When I reached the village near the wood, I found it blackened. Incendiary bombs had started three fires, and there was not a house left or hut left. I had hoped for a real meal here, as the four days since I left home had produced only scrappy food, but there was a well, and so at least I had a long drink.

All the fields immediately around the village were burnt too, but in the end I found a family sleeping in a distant field. They said it was not bombing that had set the village alight at all—that a man had dropped out of a plane with a parachute. He had been armed and asked for information about troop movements, obviously suspecting that this was near a recruiting station. When no one would tell him anything, he got very angry and said they would all be sorry. The next morning they were badly bombed, and in the night the fires broke out. Cows and hens were burned, and ten of the wounded from the air-raid could not be moved out in time to be saved.

There was a big house five kilometers away, so I went there and found only two women servants and the lady of the house. She was packing a few things and was glad to see me and to hear that I was a real Polish soldier. (These men from airplanes wear Polish uniforms and

Soldier of Poland

A story of the German invasion, as told to an English visitor—

By CASIMIR WIERTZ

they speak our tongue so well that people start being suspicious of anyone they do not know.) The reason she was particularly glad to see me was that there was a big statue that her son had brought from an Eastern country which she wanted to save. She said it was a wonderful god. She wanted to throw it into the pond, and it was too heavy for her to lift. So I carried it out, and waded deep into the water and pushed it out of my arms. It was not at all a Polish face, but it seemed to smile contentedly as it disappeared under the water. The mud is deep in that pond. However long the war lasts, that is a treasure the Germans will never find.

Then the lady asked me if I could drive a cart for her and her women, as they must leave at once, and I said I would, of course. Her young son was waiting for her in the forest on his horse, she said, and would take over from me when we reached him.

We started out, and had gone some little way when I heard a strange clanking sound behind the trees on the right. Being in uniform, I jumped at once into a ditch to take cover, and I had just got down when round the corner across the forest came a great engine that I knew must be a tank. It waddled out onto the road and then stopped. Then the whole top seemed to be lifting itself open, and I crouched as hard as I could under the thin little bush in the ditch.

Then I heard a gun go *pop—pop—pop—pop—pop—pop*—and two screams. Then more clanking, and the engine made straight across the ditch in which I lay, but no one saw me; and after a few minutes I got out and found the cart across the road at right angles, the horse lying in the shafts dead, two of the women quite dead and the lady sitting exactly as I had left her, looking straight in front of her, but with blood pouring from her forearm and leg.

I did not know what to do, so ran back to the last village we had passed. Two peasant women came back with me, and

an old man. When we got back to the cart, the lady was also dead. So I went back with these people, who said I must have food; but this only made me very sick, so I lay down till the evening, when a band of Polish soldiers marched through and took me with them. And so in the end came to Cracow.

WE were in a lot of battles after we joined up with the army, but I was always lucky not getting wounded, and then we started fighting a retreat, as our general said he would never surrender one man alive. And one day I found myself in a steep wooded country quite alone, not knowing quite how I had got there. I threw myself down and fell asleep, and when I woke up, the sun was quite high and there was not a sound of a voice or a footstep. I had got used to living in a crowd, and this silence was a very frightening thing. I got up, thinking if I followed my nose to the top of the hill I would be able to see the lie of the land. Then I thought it would be better to try and get to the bottom of the valley, where I might find a river to guide me. At least I would have something to drink, and I might even catch small fish by tickling them under the water as I had loved to do as a small boy.

I spent two nights and days wandering like this, and it really was a relief to be captured by a troop of Russian soldiers, though at first I could not understand what this was all about, as we had never heard a word of our having any except German armies to fight. I spoke a little Russian and understood quite a good bit more, as I had relations living in the east of Poland where I spent my summer holidays every year; but I did not tell them I understood at all.

I was so tired and dirty it was not difficult to pretend to understand nothing at all when they said the war was over, and that they had won, and that as I was not an officer, it would not be at all bad for me. All this time they were walking me toward a village; when we reached

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it, I realized that I had got to within an hour of the Carpathian frontier.

They took my gun from me. I had no ammunition, so this was not much loss; and they looked through all my pockets. They gave me bread and cheese and a jug of water, and all sat around and watched me as I ate and drank ravenously. They were arguing what to do with me, and finally decided to keep me in a room which they could watch sitting outside this café until someone turned up in the village with a better idea. The room was dirty and vermin were literally swarming everywhere.

That night two drunks were shut up with me so that I was glad when a clatter on the road proved to be a platoon of soldiers whose officer ordered that I should be taken off after dinner and entrained for Stanislawow.

THE prison in Stanislawow was full of Poles; it was wonderful to be with friends again. There were a thousand rumors, and much bitterness at the way the Marshal had deserted his Polish army. But everyone said that the fighting of the Poles was magnificent whenever they were given anyone to fight, and everyone's main idea was to escape into Rumania or Hungary, and so to France or somewhere where a Polish army was being formed. Every man in that prison had an astonishing story to tell of things which he had seen or suffered. There were two women in the prison whom the Russians had not suspected in their uniform.

The room I slept in had a high window, but not inaccessible; and as soon as I saw the warders did not bother to close it, I felt I must try to escape that way. The others told me there were so many soldiers with fixed bayonets all around the building that such an effort was sui-

cide. But I did not like the prison fare of dry bread and water, and felt I must make a try before I lost strength.

So that the second night two friends gave me a leg-up. I squeezed my body out, took one look out and saw water under me. How deep I did not know. The window was about eight meters from the surface. I let go of the window-edge, and my body scabbled down into water, with a splash which I felt must surely be heard for kilometers around. I was waist-deep when at last I found my footing, and moved cautiously downstream.

I had no idea where the prison building lay in relation to the down. Would downstream take me in or out of the inhabited district? After fifty yards of wading close under cover of the bank, I ventured to crawl out, and found that luck was with me. I was leaving the town. But the water seemed the safest place for my bank was in shadow.

I worked two to three hours down the waterway before venturing out into the meadows again. Twice, passing close to hamlets on the bank, my heart stopped at the barking of dogs, who heard my steps even under cover of the gurgling water.

I felt sure this stream must lead down to the frontier river eventually—the lovely Dniester. For five days and nights I followed the stream, lying hidden by day, venturing twice to peasant huts to ask food and guidance and finally a change of clothes. Dressed in dirty white old linen trousers and a coarse shirt, I risked longer treks, and even at two larger villages I slouched lazily through without any challenge, right across the marketplace.

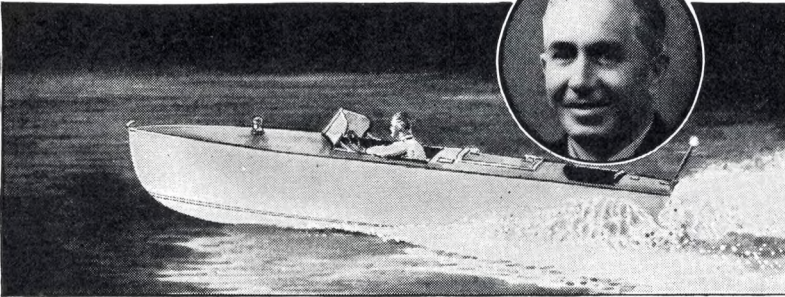
It was Sunday when I reached the frontier. There was a wooden church within one hundred meters of the river. I would have liked to go to mass, but I was afraid that the Russians were already persecuting the devout, so for this day I waited for darkness to visit the shrine just outside.

The hot dry summer had narrowed the river-bed, and at no place did it come much over my waist. The crossing was a simple matter. Within twenty-four hours I was arrested by Rumanian officials, who were quite kindly and sent me to an internment camp about a hundred kilometers outside of Bucharest.

After two months there I was sent for, given tickets and visas, and now am in a training-camp somewhere in France.

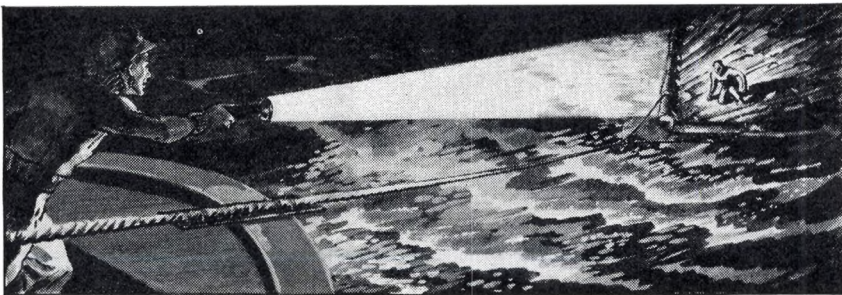
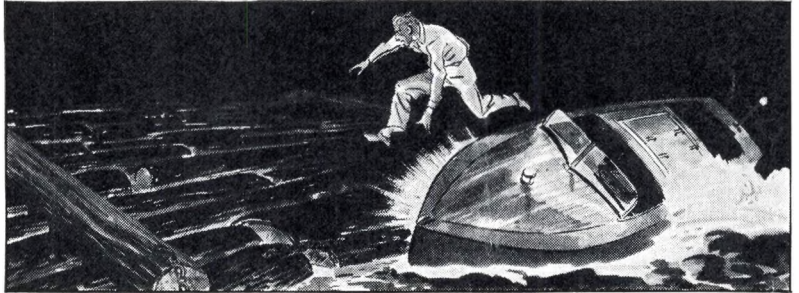
TERROR STRICKEN, I LEAPT TOWARD THE SINISTER SHAPE!

A true experience of J. H. WILLIAMS, Victoria, B. C.



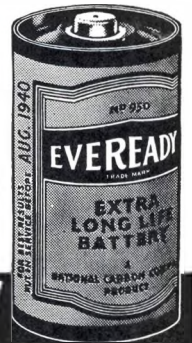
"ONE BLACK NIGHT I was returning to Vancouver, in my 15-foot inboard motorboat," writes Mr. Williams. "Suddenly, a dark and sinister shape loomed up directly ahead. There was no time to avoid it."

"I LEAPT as the boat crashed into the object—and found myself sitting on a crossbeam of a huge log boom that was being towed by a distant tug. My boat was gone. Shivering with cold, I shouted in vain—the tug was too far away for my voice to reach it."



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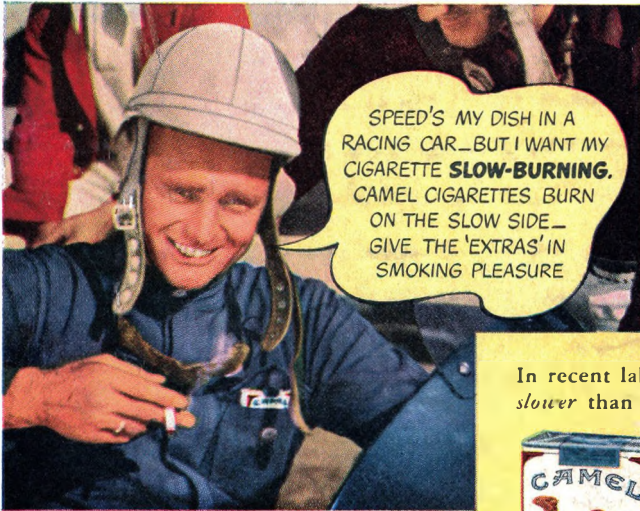
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HERE THEY COME in a hurricane of dirt and oil. You can almost hear the whine of motors and shriek of brakes as they streak into the sharp unbanked curves. They may call 'em "midget racers," but there's *speed to burn* underneath those hoods. Leading the pack in the picture above is Bob Swanson, Pacific Coast

champ. In a split second these racers may be somersaulting, flying through fences. Bob Swanson likes a slower pace in his off-time. Smokes Camels a lot. He explains: "I don't like overheating in my cigarette any more than in a racing motor. I stick to Camels. I know they're slower-burning . . . milder and cooler."

Slower-burning Camels give the extras



SPEED'S MY DISH IN A RACING CAR...BUT I WANT MY CIGARETTE **SLOW-BURNING**. CAMEL CIGARETTES BURN ON THE SLOW SIDE... GIVE THE 'EXTRAS' IN SMOKING PLEASURE

WITH BOB SWANSON, it's always a slow-burning Camel. "That slower burning makes a big difference," says Bob. "Camels are milder — easier on my throat. They don't bother my nerves. They never tire my taste. And they give an extra amount of smoking, too." Millions have learned that in cigarettes the coveted extras of coolness, mildness (which includes freedom from irritation), and full, rich flavor go with *slow-burning* Camels.

MORE PLEASURE PER PUFF
... MORE PUFFS PER PACK!

In recent laboratory tests, CAMELS burned 25% slower than the average of the 15 other of the largest-selling brands tested — slower than *any* of them. That means, on the average, a smoking *plus* equal to



**5 EXTRA SMOKES
PER PACK!**

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Camels

— the cigarette of
Costlier Tobaccos