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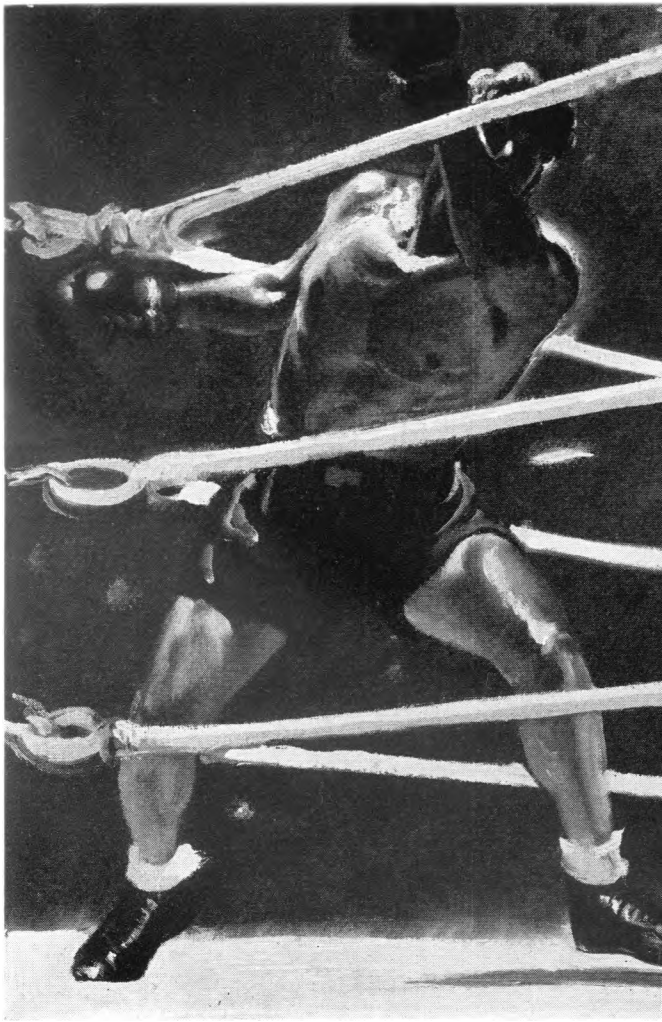
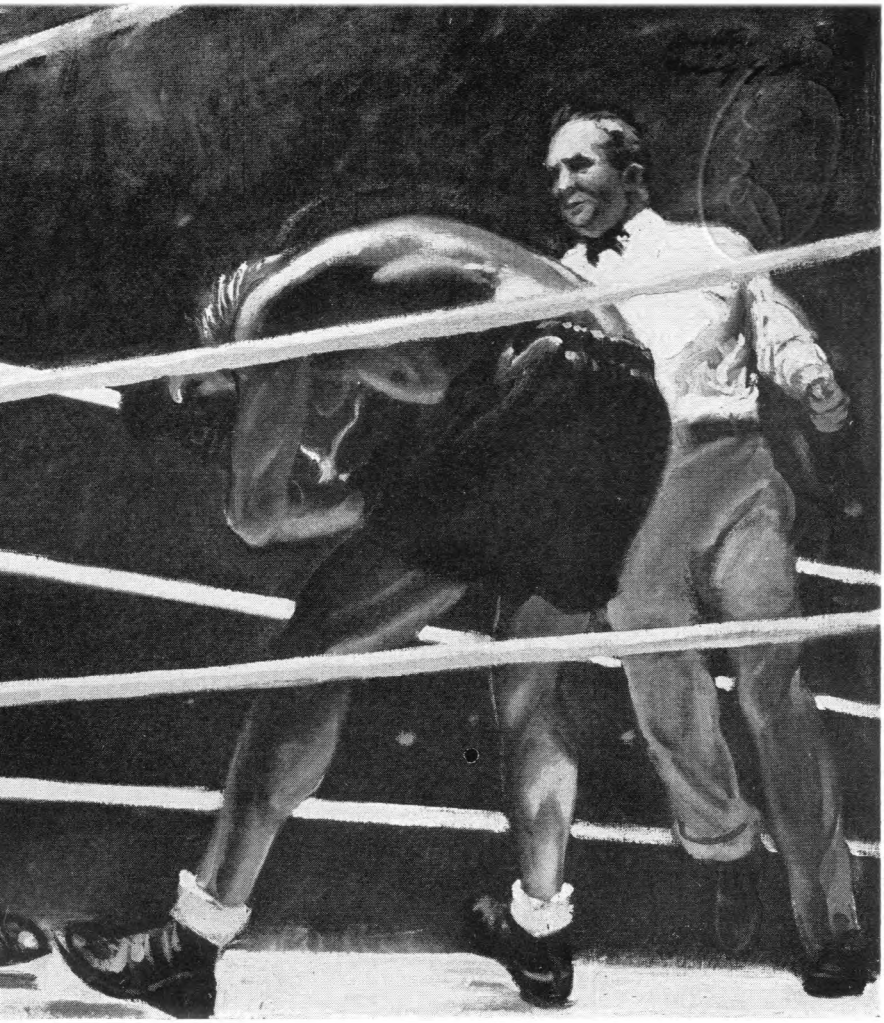
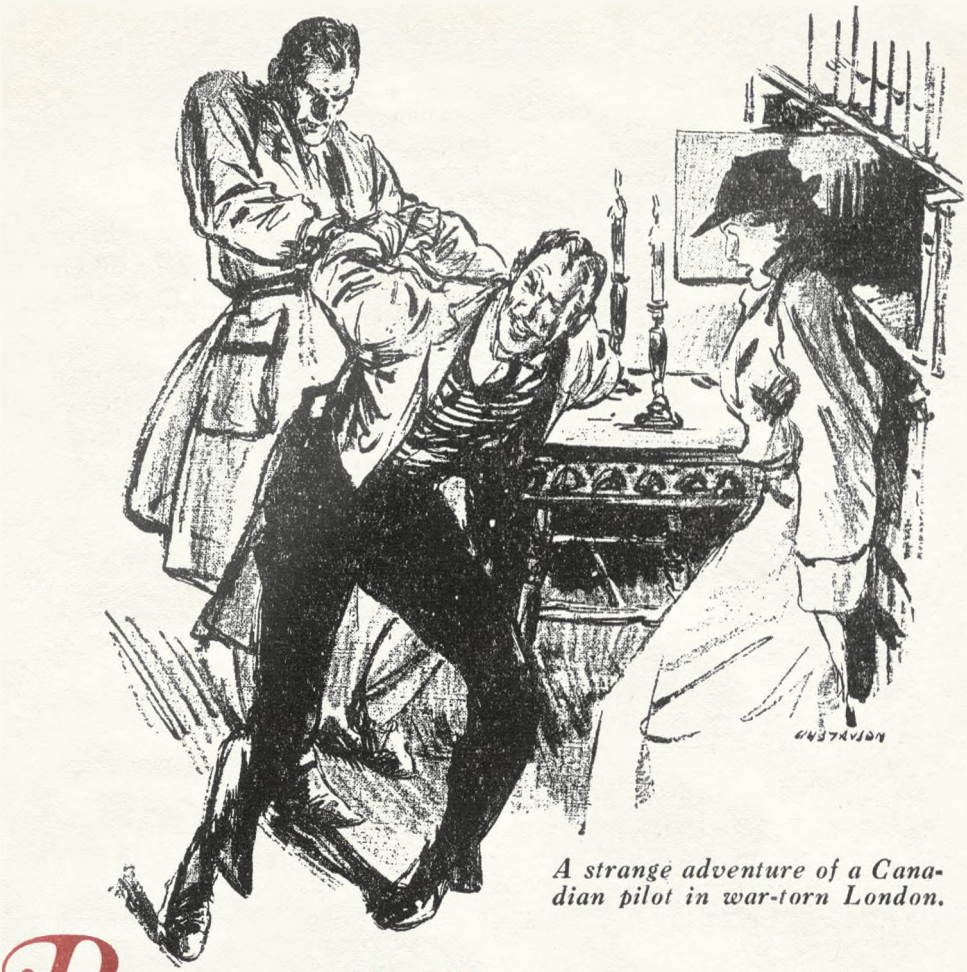
A Fantasy by NELSON BOND

Painted by Austin Briggs to illustrate "Thanks for the Glory," a novelette by Fulton Grant—beginning on page 12.







A strange adventure of a Canadian pilot in war-torn London.

Breakfast At the Savoy

By MICHAEL GALLISTER

ROGER BLANE was leaving the Savoy when the doorman stopped him, with the suggestion: "It's getting along to the hour, sir, and you'd be quite comfortable here—"

"Too much so, I fear," said Blane, buttoning his overcoat. "Your luxurious shelter isn't for a mug of a Canuck like me. I want to see things."

A Canuck from the windy plains, and he looked it—with the strapping, solid health of twenty-four, in London for the first time, with a week's leave to brighten his eyes. Ferrying bombers across from Newfoundland was a nerve-racking job, and he enjoyed being in mufti once more, free of all trammels. Air-raids or no, he had looked forward to London a long time, and he had nothing on his mind.

He was not in this enviable condition long, however.

Catching a bus with a laudable ambition of calling on some very distant rela-

(Continued on page 4)

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

JUNE 1941 VOL. 73, NO. 2

Seven Short Stories

A Novelette

A Complete Book-Length Novel

A Serial Novel

Special Features

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Cover Design—"The Gun Makers" Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

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

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Prize Offer for Real Experiences

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

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

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

(Continued from page 1)
tives who lived somewhere back of Kensington Mansions, he alighted at King's Gate and struck off afoot for his goal. It was a chill evening and the dimmed lights of a pub attracted him; he stopped in, had a whisky-and-soda, inquired his way, and started off again.

Just then the banshee wail came whirling across the sky, a demon full-throated.

Blane halted, irresolute. He had not a ghost of an idea where to look for shelter, was not even certain that he wanted shelter; he had come to see things. He soon changed his notions about that. Scurrying people streamed along the street and ducked out of sight. The anti-aircraft barrage began to boom and bark aloft; roar upon roar shook the air as bombs burst, the siren screamers maddened nerves and brain, and shrapnel fragments started to hail down, very slivers of death.

"TAKE cover, you fool!" said a voice. Blane was aware of a slim, dark-cloaked shape at his elbow.

"Thanks," he shouted. A shuddering, rocking roar reverberated. He stared up and around as another thin, infernal scream came blasting down the darkness.

"That's nowhere near. When the note goes down the scale, it's going farther away. Take cover, will you?"

A woman's voice, he now realized.

"Where?" he demanded.

"My Lord! With hotels everywhere around— Here, come along, silly!"

The woman pointed and started away. He followed obediently. A nice voice, he told himself, despite its impatience.

Apparently she knew her way around. Hotels, yes; not the swanky type, but huge old rambling structures of Victorian vintage, all blacked out, of course. He wondered what had happened to the cheerful pub and its crowd; probably it had a shelter of its own down below.

Blindly following his guide, Blane climbed steps, passed into a structure of some kind, and found himself amid hurrying people. Dim lights pierced the obscurity; more steps ahead, downward this time, and the infernal din of the skies and city waned to a faintly rocketing background, and then was gone.

More steps; electric bulbs appeared. This was a corridor filled with jostling shapes. Blinking at the lights, Blane turned to his companion and found her turning to look at him. He smiled and looked again. Gad! Aquiline features, a flash of wide gray eyes—why, she was no more than a girl, and a lovely one!

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "And I've some sandwiches in my pocket. Plenty of them."

"What's splendid?" she demanded.

"You. This. Everything!" His enthusiasm was unaffected.

She gave him another look.

"American, are you?" Her voice was scornful. "A show for your benefit!"

"Canadian," he corrected cheerfully. "On leave to see the sights. I'll be over to take a hand as soon as the R.A.F. passes on my application. Just now I'm a delivery-boy. We've ferried over a lot of bombers for you folks."

"Nice, safe work," said she, with open antagonism, and drew away from him.

They were passing into a large, low-ceiled but comfortably furnished room. About the walls stood folding cots, neatly racked. Chairs were everywhere; people were everywhere. The tables held magazines, newspapers; two servants were preparing tea at a side table. At first glance it was all matter-of-fact. Then, looking again, Blane realized that what struck the wrong note was the people themselves.

Many were frightened, some were in tears; all were stiff, and on high tension. While the majority were obviously hotel guests, others had come in from outside, as their coats and hats testified; an old man with women grouped around him was quietly sobbing. The crowd flowed in, filling the place like flooding water.

Blane found himself alone; his companion had left him, had gone across the room and was seating herself on one of the cushions ranged along the wall. He took an empty chair, removed hat and coat, and with a word of thanks accepted a cup of tea from one of the two menservants.

"Nice, safe work," she had said scornfully. He smiled to himself, unworried, and looked at her. She was all in dark blue, her cloak flung back, and her brown hair massed about her aquiline features. She was just lighting a cigarette.

He saw the change that came into her face, the startled fear and horror that filled it, her eyes staring, one hand going to her lips as though to repress a cry. He followed her gaze; two men and a woman were entering, bowed in by a member of the hotel staff who made obsequious efforts to find them a place in one corner. All were in evening attire; the woman was of a statuesque beauty,

He saw the startled fear in her face. . . . Two men and a woman were entering.

her features mobile and alive. Her presence was a living force. One could feel her in the place.

The two men were dark, powerful of build and feature, authority and command in their manner; high cheek-bones, strongly carved of nose and mouth and chin. Brothers, thought Blane, or possibly father and son; hard to say which, but they were obviously related, if one could judge by looks.

Blane turned his head and looked at the girl again. She was staring at the three but had composed herself; he thought her face had become white and drawn and tense. She put up a hand and jerked at her hat-brim, pulling it down as though to hide her eyes; she stooped

forward and sat with her hand to her mouth as she smoked. Evidently, she feared recognition. Fear, no doubt of it. Fear was in her face, and something more, something greater and more terrible, that shook her with emotion.

More people came flooding into the shelter now—a chef in his white cap and apron, waiters and housemaids. The hotel staff had been emptied underground, for there was no distinction of rank or class down here. Tongue-clackings filled the place: A bad raid; this part of town was catching it heavy, Blane understood.

A woman with a white-faced child came along. Blane rose, gave her his chair, took his coat and hat and went over to where the three in evening dress sat. He secured a cushion and made himself comfortable against the wall, directly beside them; he could not see them now, but he could look across and see the girl, and, better, he could hear them.

THE two men were discussing business. They had pleasantly modulated voices; that of the woman cut in, musical, rich, haunting. She spoke of their own shelter, destroyed two nights ago by a direct hit; luckily there had been no one in it at the time.

"Unless Sylvia was there," said one of the men.

She made an angry little sound.

"No such luck! I don't know what the world's coming to! . . . And to think we've not been able to learn anything—"

Her words ended abruptly, as though one of the men had warned her. Sylvia? That might be the girl across the room, thought Blane. Nice name, Sylvia.

"Oh, Perkins is all right," one of the men said lightly. "The house is safe with him."

"It had better be," said the other, ominously. "He knows what—"

Check, again. Looking across at the girl, Blane saw her moving, coming to her feet; she was holding a handkerchief to her face. He knew instinctively that she had reached the end of her rope; a terrific nerve-strain of some kind. A man brushed him, a waiter with a tray, bringing tea to the three beside him. The man spoke respectfully.

"We just had word from above that it's quieted down a bit, sir."

He passed on with his tray. The woman spoke.

"Well, we stay right here, George! I'll never spend another night like last one. We can have cots here."

"Right, Tressilis," said one of the two men. So, thought Blane, they were not related after all! "Better make a night of it in comfort."

His eye on the girl, Blane saw that she was on her feet, unsteadily. He rose and stood in front of the three here. At this moment one of the hotel staff appeared.

"The *All Clear* has just sounded!" he announced. "Those employed in the offices may resume their occupations. All guests are advised to remain here for the present, however; this has been too short to be true. The Jerries will certainly be along again."

Sylvia—if she *were* Sylvia—was joining in the rush of figures making for the exit. Blane stood quiet, knowing that he was blocking sight of her from the three. She passed. He fell in behind her, and saw her put out a hand to the wall for support.

"Steady, Sylvia!" he said quietly. "They didn't catch on."

She turned her head and flashed him one tumultuous glance from a white face —a look of startled amazement and agitation. Then she went on. They mounted, passed through the dim-lighted lobby, and came out upon the hotel steps. The sky was filled with distant clamor, a red glow hung upon the horizon above the chimney-pots; the *clang-clang* of fire-engine bells sounded almost sweetly upon the night.

They were alone here. She swung about.

"You were blocking their view of me." Her voice was composed but softened. "Thank you. What do you know?"

"Only what your face told me," he replied quietly. "And a few words they spoke. They're staying for the night. . . . The house is safe with Perkins, they said. Apparently the lady and 'George' would like to know where you are."

"Wouldn't they, though!" Sylvia exclaimed bitterly. "Damn the lot of them! She's my sister. George Tressilis is her husband. Garven's his cousin; Cornishmen both. . . . What was that you said?" She turned with abrupt words, eagerness flaming in her voice. "About the house?"

"That it's safe with Perkins," said Blane.

There was a moment of silence. A deep breath broke from her.

"Oh! If I were only a man now!" she said, under her breath, like a sigh.

Blane descended a step and turned. The glow in the sky was brightening. He could see her face as he gazed up at her;

she was looking off into the distance, above him. Flippant words came to his tongue, but they were not flippant as he spoke them.

"God made us what we are, and did a good job of it, Sylvia."

Her eyes dropped to him. "What a strange thing for you to say!"

"I'm a man; make use of me," he went on. "You have your wish. Can I help to keep that fear from coming into your heart again? Then permit me, do!"

"You don't understand—"

"Yes. All it's necessary to understand is your face—you, Sylvia." He moved, threw back his shoulders, laughed a little. "Oh, I'm not romantic! Really, I'm most prosaic. But you're not. You're a symbol of all beautiful things the world has lost. Let me help you if I can, if there's any help I can give."

She stood looking at him for a space, then suddenly shivered and flung a glance over her shoulder. She had remembered the three.

"We must get away from here!" she said abruptly, and put out her hand to him. "Thank you again, Canuck. It's a damned risky job; means jail if we're caught. And this Perkins—he's George's chauffeur—can handle any two men in a pinch."

"Oh! You only asked for one man," said Blane, laughing again. "But as long as you say 'we,' let's get to it, whatever it is. Maybe Perkins never tackled a Canuck."

"And no questions asked?"

"Thousands—when the time comes.... Where do we go from here?"

"Two streets over. It's not far."

SHE took his arm; they gained the sidewalk, and started out. The glow in the sky was from a big fire somewhere; the reflection lighted their way dimly.

"Damn the lot of them! She's my sister." The words recurred to Roger Blane with curious emphasis; here was a pretty family tangle of some kind, he reflected. He had not the faintest idea what it was all about, and did not care particularly; he was like that, sometimes. Well, to be honest about it, he did care too. He was banking with all he had, with every atom of faith and energy and enthusiasm in him, on this girl's face.

"I should have made for the City," she observed, "or for anywhere away from here. I've been on the loose three days now. These air-raids are wonderful—for anyone on the wrong side of the law."

"Quick! We're nearly there! Hurry!"

"I never did like the law particularly," said Blane cheerfully. He was careful not to ask questions. "Glad I got away from the Savoy. Regular underground hotel there; I wanted to see the rough side of things."

"Don't worry, you will. This is just a breather."

"What I'm driving at is that the Savoy's still there in case of need."

She pressed her hand, within his arm, in an intimate little gesture of comprehension.

"Sorry I called you a fool, Canuck."

"Don't be; it's a fact. You'll get used to it, I hope."

They swung around a corner. Dim shapes flitted along the street; voices echoed within the darkened houses. She spoke again.

"I've a door-key; we can get in, unless Perkins hears us. I'll need ten minutes to get into the safe."

"You'll have twenty."

So that was it: Robbing the family safe, eh? And she had skipped out three days ago.... It looked queer, all of it. However, if she was depending on him to keep Perkins quiet, well and good; Perkins would be quiet.

He laughed suddenly.

"You know, I always thought Perkins was the name of a housemaid or something of that sort. It usually is, in novels. Hello! They've got the fire."

The glow was dying away. Sylvia looked up and around, anxiously.

"Sharp work. One batch of Jerries comes over and starts a fire, the others come along to use it. . . . Oh!"

The thing shrieked and wailed across the heavens, the banshee cry of a lost soul.

"Quick! We're nearly there!" she went on, hurrying her pace. "Around this corner, down the block . . . fourth house. Hurry, hurry! My key's for the area-way; they don't know I have it. . . . I'll need a match. For a light."

"Can do," said Blane. Gad! What an infernal racket all of a sudden! "Takes thirty seconds for an archie shell to make twenty thousand feet, twenty for the fragments to fall. . . take your time, child."

They were going full blast, guns whose voice was like the fall of bombs; golden shell-bursts starred the far sky in evil mimicry. The noise was terrific.

"There's an underground close by," she was saying, her words almost lost. "We can make for it later."

Then she turned and was gone. He followed, down the steps of an invisible house. She was fumbling at a door; he struck a vesta, held it in cupped hands until she found the key-hole. The door swung, and they were inside; she closed it and shut out the worst of the pandemonium, and spoke at his ear.

"Take my hand; I'll lead. We must get upstairs."

Her fingers were cold as ice, vibrant with excitement; he folded his own around them, rubbed her hand between both of his, and struck out after her.

Everything was black as pitch. She stumbled over something, gained her balance anew, and they went on. Another door, then stairs going upward; these ended, and a door opened upon lights. Candles, one in a room.

"Quickly! The library!" she breathed, and freed her hand.

FURNITURE covered, pictures gone from the walls, broken windows shuttered—rooms readied against disaster. The house vibrated to rocking explosions; from above came a sound as of rifle-fire—shrapnel fragments piercing the slates. Earth and air alike shuddered to the siren screams of falling bombs. Blane thought longingly of the cool sweet silence of that shelter they had left. How on earth did these people stand it, night after night? How did this girl stand it?

The thought burst like a shell in his brain. Was it possible that she had gone to pieces under the strain, that he had lent himself to a raid-shocked woman's fancies? For an instant the thought paralyzed him; then he put it away, angrily.

She opened a door. He came after her into a charming little library, a small room walled with books, where two candles burned in high silver holders. On the table were the remains of a meal, with whisky and glasses; in the fireplace burned a few embers.

"Oh, the beast!" exclaimed Sylvia indignantly. "He's been making himself at home! . . . Well, no time to lose—"

She flew at the books. A section of the shelves opened back to her hand, away from the wall, revealing the door of a safe. She looked over her shoulder at Blane.

"If he caught us here, he'd have us. Hadn't you better wait outside?"

"Sound sense to that," said he. Going to the table, he poured himself a drink, downed it, poured another for her and handed it to her, and then stepped outside into the adjoining room. Here he sank into a covered chair and waited, trying to relax.

It was difficult, with the evil cacophony of reverberant din that filled the air. It was impossible, when he sighted a shadowy figure in the next room; he tensed on the edge of his chair and sat motionless, staring, every nerve taut.

That would be Perkins, coming now straight for the library entrance, unaware of the dark figure in the chair. A tall man, stooped a little, mustached features thin and hard; he passed within a yard of Blane and pulled open the door, and stood there, looking in. His voice came like a hollow mockery amid the unceasing tumult.

"You, miss! Out o' that!"

Blane sat unmoving. He faintly heard the girl's startled cry; then from Perkins broke a wildly exultant word, as he whipped something out of his pocket.

"Got you for fair! Now you'll go back into these, and no breaking away this time! You can go up before a magistrate for this!"

"Oh, Canuck, Canuck!" came the wail of Sylvia.

Perkins sprang forward; he was engaged in a struggle with the girl when Blane came into the doorway behind him. In the man's hand was a pair of handcuffs. He had Sylvia by the arm and was trying to click the bracelets on

her wrists. She struck him across the face; he lashed out at her.

Blane, unhurried, got the man's arm, twisted it behind him, got the other wrist, and held him. Perkins, twisting his head, uttered a squawking oath of amazement.

"Easy does it," said Blane, and his eye took in the papers and money and sheaves of letters spilled over the floor. "Get your stuff together, Sylvia, and—"

HE'D have sworn that no man could have broken the hold he had on Perkins; but, next instant, Perkins became a volcanic fury. The bomb helped. The scream of it was horrible; the concussion actually shook the house, shook plaster from the walls, and Blane rocked to the impact of air. It must have struck very close.

Perkins was free. Luckily, Blane still wore his overcoat; it saved him from the hammer-blows that tore into him. The man knew his business; he struck low and fast. Blane doubled up and went forward, took a facer that laid his cheek open, then gripped Perkins by one ankle and they came down together.

With this, Blane really went to work. After a moment he came up on one hand, fumbled around with the other, got the handcuffs, and nipped the wrists of the senseless Perkins together.

Sylvia was staring at him, her eyes wide, her face white as death, as he rose.

"Well, get organized!" he said, gasping a little. Those blows had hurt. "Have you found what you want? Then tidy up and let's go."

She swooped suddenly on the packets of banknotes and the papers; scooped them up, thrust them at him. He filled his pockets with what she gave him. No time now to ask questions or think about consequences. The safe door closed, the book-shelves slammed back into place. Blane caught up the whisky-bottle, just as she darted forward and knocked the candles from the table, plunging the room into darkness.

"Come, come!" lifted her voice in almost hysteric urgency.

Gulping a drink from the bottle, Blane trailed after her, caught up with her in the adjoining room, and voiced protest and inquiry. It was no time to be sauntering down the street, he pointed out; she stared at him in helpless perplexity.

"But we can't stay here, Canuck! It's only a block to the underground."

"Tell you what. Get back to the areaway, and wait for a lull."

She nodded and led the way to the lower level once more. Blane struck a match and lit a cigarette; they found the door, opened it, looked up into the street. The sky was a lurid glare, the guns and shells were at a terrific crescendo. She closed the door again.

"Here's a bench." She guided him, and they sat down. She took the cigarette he offered; the match-flame gave momentary relief from the intense darkness here. "I won't feel safe till I'm entirely away from this house."

"Sure; keep your chin up. —Oh, my sandwiches! Suppose we have a bite; they're a bit crushed, but no harm done." He got them out, opened them, and forced her to eat. "There must be somewhere you'll be safe?" he asked presently.

"Yes, of course; if I can only find Sir James Agnew, I'll be all right. He's my uncle; he'd stop all this terrible affair at once. But I can't find him! I've been trying for three days; you've no idea how frightfully everything is done up in the City!"

"Oh, we'll run him down," said Blane cheerfully. "What's his business?"

"I just told you! He's on the bench."

"Same as we are, eh? Oh, you mean he's a judge?"

"And nobody knows where anyone is, or anything," she said hopelessly. "That's why they could do this to me—because of the awful confusion. I'm twenty-one, you see, but if they could make me marry Garven then everything would be all right. It's on account of my sister being my guardian—trying to stave off an accounting for the lost funds—"

Her voice trailed away and was gone as the earth shook; the air sucked at them, the walls trembled, the rafters creaked as though in earthquake. Blane found himself holding her in his arms, found her clinging to him; fright had seized them both. He patted her shoulder and was thankful for the feel of reality.

So that was her story—that explained everything.

It was gone in a second roaring concussion, but this was not quite so bad; still, it kept them together with the frantic clutch of terror.

Blane ventured a shaky laugh.

"Regular Victorian dime novel, Sylvia —handcuffs, forced marriage and so on. Well, forget it now."

"I—I hope so," came her voice. "The money in the safe was mine, really. So were most of the other things. Are you cold?"

"Hell, no! I'm scared," said Blane, trying to stop the fit of shivering. "I should be the noble aviator of fiction, superior to all alarms; I'm not. This damned affair does something to you. I can't sit here any longer. Let's clear out and chance it!"

She sighed. "Yes. Now you know how I felt, Canuck. Come on."

They separated, rose, went to the door and pulled it open. The hideous din assailed them anew, but now it had retreated down the sky. They ventured forth to the street, holding hands like children.

Sanity came back, with the lull of noises. Blane eyed the lurid skies; his

"Where is she?" he broke out. "We heard it coming, and I shoved her into a basement. . . . Where is she, I say?"

cheerful humor returned. All over now, he told himself; she was safe enough, the villains were checkmated. Nothing to do except see the night out, get back to the Savoy, locate Sir James Agnew and then Sylvia—

They both heard it; the wailing scream rose and rose to an almost ultrasonic intensity. Thirty seconds of nerve-piercing hell, the realization that it was still rising in pitch, that it was for them. . . . Blane caught hold of the girl and dragged her down, aside, into another area-way below the street level—but it caught him before he could drop beside her.

The concussion was beyond human comprehension. It was, in fact, a hundred feet away and within a house to the right. The house dissolved. Blane saw the buildings across the street rising at him in the red flame-burst; he was off his feet, blown through the air—a crash, and it was over. . . . A soundless, silent crash that released him into an agelong darkness.

HE heard two women talking. Said one:

"That's what it does for you, my dear. Makes you just unutterably weary, as though it dragged all the vitality and energy right from you. That's air-raid nerves."

"Well, thumbs up!" said the other, laughing a little, but not in mirth. The laugh was weary and forced. "Hello! What's this stretcher-case doing here?"

"Arkwright brought him in. She said he didn't rate hospital. The doctor said

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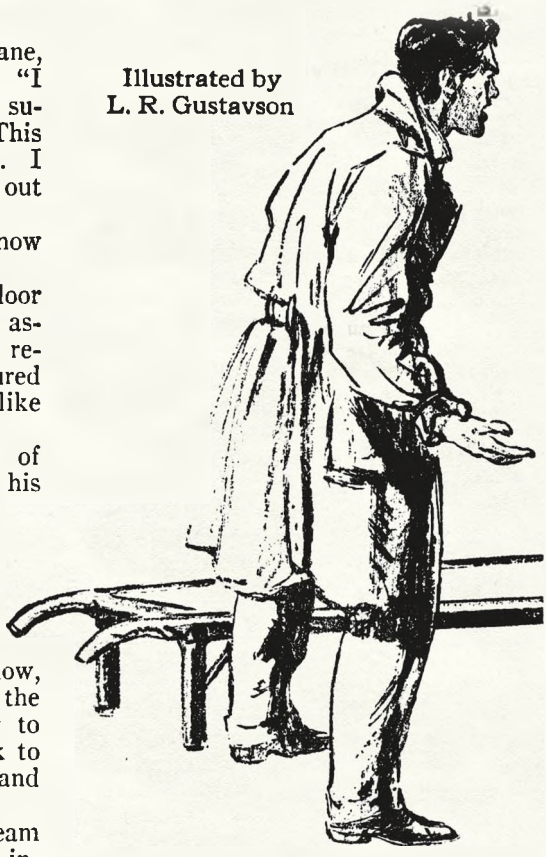
L. R. Gustavson



he was stunned from concussion. Canadian Air Force man, by his papers, on leave. I thought best to leave him here a bit; give him some tea and he'll come around presently."

"Right-o! Not hurt, eh? Nice face. Well, thank God it's over for the night!"

"Let's hope so. An hour now since the *All Clear*—four o'clock. . . . Ah! Tea's ready!"

Blane's eyes opened; he did not open them, they just opened. Bending above him, he saw two women in blue. One wore a helmet with a big black *A* on the front. Behind them were walls of sandbags. Other women were grouped near by.

He tried to move, to speak, and could not; his body just would not obey at all. One of the two knelt and held a cup to his lips.

"He's awake!" she said. "Here, drink this and you'll feel better."

He drank. Both women were looking down at him. Sudden recollection swept him.

"Where am I? Where is she?" Words bubbled from him. "She was across the street—"

One woman glanced at the other; their faces changed indefinably.

"Sorry, laddy," said one. "There was no one else. . . . Oh, I say! You weren't from that Parkway crowd, were you?"

"Parkway?" echoed Blane blankly.

"A bad business," went on the woman. "Direct hit on a shelter—worst thing we've had in weeks. I don't think a soul escaped alive." She turned to the other. "Brought the whole building down on top of them, you know. It was while you were gone."

Blane found himself coming round. He was on a stretcher. He sat up, gripped a hand above, and came to his feet. About him still hung his overcoat, more or less in shreds, but the bulging pockets seemed intact.

"What is this place?" he asked, looking around.

"Auxiliary Ambulance station," said one of the women. "You'd better rest a bit."

"Rest? Nonsense! Where is she?" he broke out, suddenly sweating and vehement. "We heard it coming. . . . I shoved her into a basement. . . . It blew me across the street. I remember that, all right. . . . Where is she, I say? Answer me!"

One of the women took hold of him, gently, but with firmness.

"Now, my son, buckle down," said she, a sad kindness in her face. "You were picked up; the driver reported all the houses across the street blown to bits—well, two or three of them anyway, and a fire going. That section caught it bad tonight. I'm mortal sorry, but if there was anyone else— Well, the luck fell your way, that's all."

"Luck!" said Blane, staring into her face. "Luck! My God!"

He went from sweat to ice; everything in him was frozen. So she was gone, in that hell; it had been his doing. He had been the one who wanted to go into the street. . . . He had tried to save her, and instead, had—

THEN his nerves went all to pieces. After a bit, the night air revived him. One of the drivers was giving him a lift toward the Savoy; dawn was stealing down from the sky; the woman beside him talked as she drove, quietly, steadying him. He had been begging her to take him back to the spot—he could not tell where it was, exactly.

"It was all searched hours ago, be sure of that," she was saying. "Nothing is passed up; the firemen do a grand job. Dear God, we know so well! Go around to the police later in the day; they'll have the names of any who were found, afterward. All we'd know would be the ambulance cases to the hospitals."

Dreadful certainty there, and it wrenched a groan from him. He did not know the girl's name, except for that one name, *Sylvia*. And she was dead, in that hell-blast. . . .

He walked the last mile or so through the dawn and the littered streets, a bareheaded spectral shape with bruised and cut cheek and hopeless agony in his eyes. He passed an underground station, disgorging its hundreds of sheltered people with their blankets and pillows and children. . . . A policeman stopped him, caught his arm, shook him, and stood back when he saw the wet eyes.

"Beg pardon, sir—just wanted to make sure you were all right."

He walked on, into what was left of Charing Cross and the Strand, and turned in at the Savoy drive. It was broad daylight now; as he stepped into the narrow hotel doorway, a deep groan welled up within him; he had wanted to bring her here! Why, just when that last scream had wrenched the heavens apart, he had been thinking that now everything was over, that nothing re-

mained but to reach the Savoy and clear up her troubles. . . .

The porter left his desk, caught Blane's arm, helped him to a lounge. He had begun suddenly to stagger.

"I'll 'ave you a drink in no time, sir. . . . Take it easy—do, now."

Blane slumped down, chin on chest. The drink came. He downed it, and looked up. The porter was speaking anxiously.

"Mr. Blane, isn't it? You're a Canadian, sir? Were you at the Parkway last night?"

"Parkway? Parkway?" The name had a vague familiarity. Oh, yes! That woman in the shelter had mentioned it. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"The Parkway, sir. That old hotel down Kensington Road way. The Jerries got it twice last night, direct hits; everyone there is gone, they say—"

"Never heard of it," said Blane. "What the hell are you gossiping about?"

"Why, sir, I've got a call here. It's for a Canadian gentleman from the Savoy who was in at the Parkway last night. . . . The lady doesn't know the name—a gentleman, she says, known as Canuck—"

BEFORE Blane's mind a vision grew, all in the fraction of an instant. The girl in blue leading him—an old hotel, the candle-lit lobby—the shelter down below. . . .

Then he was on his feet, bursting toward the desk, running, hurling himself at the telephone, shouting into it in wild incoherence. . . . Her voice, her voice! All the heartbreak of the world gone and forgotten.

"Hurry!" he cried. "Hurry—for God's sake, hurry, Sylvia!"

"But why?" came her question.

"Why? Good Lord—" He started to shout again, checked himself, dashed the tears from his eyes, and laughed; but tears were in his laugh too. "Breakfast, of course—our first breakfast together—breakfast at the Savoy! Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

"All right," she said, and the phone clicked.

Blane swung around. Porter, charwomen, clerks—they were all looking at him; they had all heard him and now they were all smiling. Why, the whole world was smiling—and the sun was coming up over London!

Michael Gallister will contribute another story of wartime London to an early issue.

A story of the Monster-Maker

By FULTON GRANT

Thanks

WHEN the Firmingham papers began to write about Billy Barston affectionately, calling him "the Champ," it was really the beginning of his trouble. It's a dangerous thing to read your own press.

Billy was a natural-born athlete when he came to Firmingham Free Academy, and Coach Blan saw that the first day. Of course the coach didn't know about Billy's father. All he saw was the nicely muscled body and the quick, bright mind and the real love of sports. It was no more than happenstance, too, that Coach Blan was building up a boxing team and that he sized Billy up for a natural, needing only a little coaching and experience.

It was only natural that Billy should take to boxing like a duck to water. Out in Pentonville where Billy lived there wasn't much boxing. There seldom is, in a country town. Besides, Billy's mother had always discouraged boxing. She had good reasons, too; and Billy, being a decent boy, and dutiful, had never wanted to displease his mother.

for the Glory

But when Coach Blan picked him for the squad the temptation was too much for him. Boxing was in his blood, and it had to come out. So Billy left-jabbed his way to the school title. Next year to the Junior State Amateur. And then it wasn't a far step to the local Silver Gloves and that publicity by the Firmingham sports-writers. And Billy read his press notices. He liked to be called "the Champ"—as who wouldn't? Also he read about other Silver Gloves winners who had gone into the prize-ring and made big money. What other profession in the world offers big money to a boy before he reaches twenty-five? And if you had lived in that rickety old Pentonville farmhouse where Billy lived; if you saw your mother working herself sick every day and getting old before her time; if you were impatient to be a man and do a man's work and earn a man's pay in order to make things better and easier for your mother—then you might have daydreamed the same picture that got Billy into trouble.

It is a matter of record that Billy's father, who had died when Billy was only two, had been a top-flight middleweight. If you look up the records you will find that Cyclone Jimmy Barst was one of the very few who ever took a decision over tough Billy Papke and that his twenty-round fight with the great Stanley Ketchel later on at Los Angeles is considered one of the bloodiest and most furious encounters in fistic history. Jimmy Barst was knocked out by Ketchel, which was not phenomenal, and the newspapers of the day claimed that he had fought the last five rounds unconscious. Also, if you investigate, you will see that the name of Barst vanished from the newspapers and from boxing. He was to be matched with Papke in 1912, but he suddenly withdrew from the ring, and thereby incurred the contempt of the sports writers. They called him a "quitter." They said he was afraid.

But the truth is, although the sports-writers could not know it, that on April 3, 1911, Mr. James J. Barston, alias Cy-

clone Jimmy Barst, was married to Miss Elda Woodin of Firmingham, and the new Mrs. Barston had influenced her pugilist husband to withdraw from the ring. He did just that. He bought a small store in Pentonville, which he operated until he died of a blood-clot eleven years later. The blood-clot was due to an old injury sustained in the ring, and from this one can imagine Mrs. Barston's natural opposition to her son's boxing.

Eighteen-year-old boys, however, are not celebrated for their foresight and good judgment.

That mock-grandiloquent invention of a harassed sports-writer, "the Champ," was too much for Billy. His dreams and his hopes merged with his ambitions. Why should not he claim his own heritage? Why should he not earn that "big money" which would bring comfort and peace to his mother's later years? She need not know until the thing was done.

BUT when Billy mentioned his dreams one day to Coach Blan, that wise gentleman answered him bluntly, brutally:

"Don't," he said, "be a sucker. You aren't *that* good. Amateur boxing is one thing, and professional fighting is very different, Billy. Better forget it."

But the day that Billy Barston won the Silver Gloves finals and gained the right to go to Chicago for the Western tournament, he visited the office of Mr. Hymie Sellers, Firmingham's boxing baron, and matchmaker for the Havens Street Arena. Sellers was a callous fellow, but he was no fool.

"So you want I should give you a preliminary spot, kid? I can do that any time, but I aint strong for it. This here aint no Silver Gloves, kid. These boys play for keeps. Brains you got it plenty, but it aint brains you need in this racket; it's instinct. Instinct and a lotta hard work. You'd be smart to wait a year and work in my gym with the boys till I see what you got."

But Billy was stubborn, and he was ambitious. . . .

A blow-by-blow description of that fight has no place in this history. Suffice it to say that Billy was billed to fight a somewhat punch-drunk trial horse named Silac, never championship material but a hardy ham-and-egger, and a tough obstacle for any fighter any day. Reasoned Sellers: if this kid could get by Silac, he might be worth spending time and money on. If not, he was only a punk and soon forgotten.

Billy left-jabbed Silac at will in the first round. In the second Silac slipped, or pretended to, and Billy stepped back in true sportsmanlike gallantry and waited for the professional to recover. The gallery-gods booed: "Sucker! Sucker! Take the collich boy, Lou! Take the panty-waist!" And Lou Silac proceeded to do just that. He rose from one knee with his whole body behind a right to the stomach. The blow nearly tore Billy's middle from his backbone. After that Billy never landed a blow; the end came before the second bell, and they carried Billy Barston, dripping blood and good intentions, from the ring to the dressing-room. There they dumped him on a bench and left him alone to recover.

And that was the end of Champion Billy Barston. Paradoxically, also, it was the beginning of this history.

Staggering out of the basement entrance from the Arena, still half dazed, and crying bitter tears tasting of salt and rosin and wintergreen liniment and the awful heartbreak of a kid, Billy made for the Canal. Did he have some dark idea of plunging his hurt body and shattered dreams into the muddy waters that sluice under the Adam Bede Street bridge? Of that we can only guess. But however and whatever, Billy did not reach the Canal.

He crossed the street near the bridge; and in the darkness, inner and outer, he did not see the heavy truck which was bearing down upon him from the Canal Street corner. There was a screaming of brakes, the whine of skidding tires, the shout of a scared driver. The truck's fender struck Billy a glancing blow and sent him reeling, to sprawl into the mud of the gutter.

A CROWD gathered. The truckman picked the boy up and started for a drugstore. Out of the crowd stepped a slight, bearded gentleman, who had the manner and the authority of a doctor. Examining the boy, he pronounced him in no real danger, saying that no bones were broken. He said that he rented a loft up over the drugstore, and that there was a small cot in the place where the boy could spend the night. Should there develop no symptom of concussion, he could, in the morning, go home.

And the truckman, who had the reek of strong drink upon him, was glad enough to avoid an interview with the police. Very willingly he carried the

limp body up those stairs. If this old man wanted to take over his responsibility, so much the better. . . .

"And so, my boy, you are the pugilist, no? I see at once there is the contusion and abrasion upon your face—"

"I guess you can't really call me a pugilist, sir. I guess I proved last night that I'm just a punk. I've been sort of kidding myself and having dreams. Well, they woke me up plenty last night."

It was a comforting thing to unburden himself and the old gentleman listened with some degree of attention, though he was actually concentrating on a handful of glass slides which he examined under a powerful microscope.

He was an odd little man, this kindly benefactor. His name, so he told Billy, was Emil Medlow, and by his speech he was of foreign origin. By his own admission he was not a doctor, although he did have the look of one. This little loft-room under the eaves of an ancient building was not Mr. Medlow's home but his laboratory. Everywhere were bottles and vials and a débris of empty pasteboard boxes out of which came the acrid odor of chemicals. At one end by the window was his microscope, which stood on a packing-box, in lieu of a proper table. At the other end were more packing-boxes covered with coarse wire screening, which served as a housing for several animals, including four rabbits, three guinea pigs and assorted white rats and mice.

"So you see, sir," Billy was explaining, "the worst part of it is Mom. Now I've turned professional, and lost my chance to go back to school, she'll be heart-broken. They all told me not to try it, sir. I was just too stubborn and conceited. Well, it's too late now. I guess I just don't have the right stuff. They said my dad didn't have real championship stuff when Ketchel beat him and he quit the ring. I never let myself believe it before, but maybe there is something in it. Maybe way back somewhere we both inherited—or we didn't inherit—something. I don't know much about things like that, but—"

Mr. Medlow suddenly turned from his microscope and looked frowningly at the boy, almost angrily. He snorted:

"Such things they make people think, the science and the doctors! What is it you inherit, and what you do not inherit? Of your father I do not know, but of you I know. You are big; you are strong; you are not stupid; but there is not in you the harmony absolute of the glands. Not

"Hey! That bunny's got hydrophobia!"

the harmony, not the speed. And I say you, also, boy, that I, Emil Medlow, if I like, can make you such a champion like they have not seen. I can do so, but I will not. I—"

This was a most extraordinary outburst, and its effect upon Billy Barston was just such an effect as it might have had upon any normal boy. It was a two-fold effect: on the one hand he decided then and there that this strange little man was a crank, a "nut," to be avoided. On the other hand—

But at that instant there came an incident which sent Billy out of the place with a feeling of violent repugnance.

That incident began with a scream—a queer squeaky scream—a wild little outcry of defiance, of savagery, of frustration, of animal anguish and rage. And it came from the other end of the room.

With an agility astonishing for a man of his age, this strange Mr. Medlow jumped from his seat at the microscope, broke off his amazing discourse, and fairly flew to the packing-box menagerie. Billy followed him with his eyes.

And what stunned him beyond verbal expression was this:

It was a rabbit screaming!

Now, conventionally rabbits do not scream. Rabbits are mild little beasts addicted to carrots and backyard hutches —terrified at their own shadows and notoriously silent in their habits. But this rabbit, a big brown thing, was screaming. It had somehow burst out of its cage, nearly demolishing the wire netting in its effort, and it stood or sat in the middle of the floor, squeakily screaming in an uncanny, impossible and completely frightful way. Moreover, it had almost ceased to look like a rabbit. Its eyes were red and inflamed as with fury. Its split lip was drawn back into a snarl. Not only that, but the creature seemed to be gathering its eight or ten pounds of weight as though meditating a spring upon the approaching person of Mr. Emil Medlow.

Billy yelled at him:

"Hey, that bunny's mad—he's got hydrophobia! My God, Mister, don't go near him!"

BUT Mr. Medlow did not slow his approach to the beast. Billy watched fascinated, speechless. He had heard of such things. Once near Pentonville a squirrel, bitten by a mad-dog, had attacked a child; and the child—it was a horrible story.

The rabbit screamed again, if screaming it could be called. No lynx, no panther, no lion of the jungle ever emitted a cry of greater defiance and menace and challenge. He screamed and crept forward toward the approaching little man, tensed and seemingly ready to hurl himself at Medlow's throat and sink his long rabbit-teeth in the man.

But he did not spring, for Medlow's hand came from his jacket pocket holding a small toy water-pistol. A quick stream shot from the pistol straight into the rabbit's face. The beast leaped high in the air, then dropped back to the floor and lay as though dead.

Billy ran to the old man as though freed from some paralysis. He was in no wise prepared for the next event in this incredible sequence. It shocked him. For Mr. Medlow had taken out a long knife and cut off the poor beast's head. And then as it dangled by the ears in Mr. Medlow's hand, that severed head gave vent to another little scream.

Billy waited for no more. He ran to the door and down the stairs.

The sequel to that weird scene came about one week later. Billy Barston did not, nor could he with an easy mind, go back to Pentonville. He could not face his mother.

While attending the Free Academy, Billy had boarded in a small house on Littiver Street not far from the school buildings. His board was paid in advance. He could live there, dine there for thirty days, before actual stringency would overtake him. Meanwhile he could look for work.

Billy did look for work, but no work appeared. It is not easy for an eighteen-year-old boy who has been dreaming in terms of vast thousands paid by eager boxing fans to content himself with a job at fifteen dollars a week. It is not easy for such a boy to become the carrier of bundles or the sweeper of dingy back rooms in a saloon. Such things he might have done even so, were it not for the dream which would not quite die in his heart—and the memory of the words:

"I, Emil Medlow, if I like, can make you such a champion like they have not seen—but I will not."

What did he mean? Could there be anything in it?

At the end of a week of job-seeking the boy was heartsick. This too was failure.

He couldn't go back to Hymie Sellers and be laughed at. He couldn't go home to Mom empty-handed. He couldn't go back to school and be told his scholarship was no longer valid. And he couldn't, or so it seemed, get any decent kind of work that would give a boy the ambition to work hard for something in the future.

"If I like, I can make you. . . . But I will not."

What a funny thing to say, even for a crank like that old Medlow. If he could, then why wouldn't he? Or was he bluffing? Or was he just *that* kind of a nut? But Billy Barston knew full well that old Medlow was not bluffing. He might be the victim of mad delusions; but it was a certain thing that he meant, at least, what he said.

"Such a champion—"

And all this thinking, all this daydreaming, was too much for the curiosity, for the wistful anxiety, of Billy Barston to do something, to be something, to be, in short, "the Champ."

"And so it is now you are wanting to be such champion I have said, no? You are wanting I should make already the miracles? It is true, boy; like I have

said, I can make you of such muscle, of such brain, of such skill like a phenomenon, that nobody can stand before you. Ah, yes; I, Emil Medlow, can do this thing. It is not any more the miracle. Already such thing and much more I have done. It is to accelerate the glands, boy, and I can do it. But I will not do it, boy. Already I tell you such thing I can but will not do. Why now do you come here asking me favors?"

There was, Billy knew, no good answer to that.

"Why—why, I sort of thought—well, I had an idea, sir, you might want to make an experiment. Like a guinea pig—like that rabbit. . . . And I—well, I guess that's all I'm good for. It would be sort of like a job—if you can do it, sir. If you aren't—well, if you aren't just kidding me."

He had no way of knowing it, of course, but it was the reference to the rabbit which did the trick. The little man started up and left his microscope.

"Ah, that rabbit! You talk of the failure, boy—you, at eighteen! What is it you can know of the failure, of the discouragement in life? Such a failure! Is it, then, a failure that with some leather gloves upon your hands you cannot bring hurt to some other boy who hurts you—to make happy a roomful of ignorant sadists? No, that is not failure, boy. There is not the consequence, not the importance. But that rabbit—ah, my boy, such a failure is that rabbit! Listen, boy, and I will tell you what it is a failure when from a lifetime you are getting all failure and no success."

And Billy listened to Medlow's incredible story.

WHEN, as a young man, Medlow won his doctorate at Leipzig, he had done much research in the realm of the then little-known endocrine glands. He had stumbled upon facts which convinced him that these misunderstood little vessels hidden under the brain or in other remote places of the body might be all-important to human life and behavior. He had come to America to pursue his work, believing that in this freer country he would find more open-mindedness among medical men than he had found in Europe. But in this last he had been deceived. The scientific men he talked to would have none of him. He was declared a quack, a charlatan, a pretender, a fake. His findings would undermine existing medical doctrine; he was dangerous.

In 1928, after having maintained a private practice among the poorer classes of Firmingham while pursuing his researches, he had endeavored to cure an infant doomed to a life of idiocy. He had operated. The infant had died. The local physicians with the help of the press had pounced upon the case. The mother, an ignorant servant-woman, had been urged to sue for indemnity. The case came to court. Medlow was tried for murder and convicted of manslaughter. He had spent some years in the St. Jude penitentiary—all because of his desire to work a miracle of science for the benefit of a helpless child.

Released from prison, he had continued his work. He had isolated a chemical agent which would cause a general speeding up of the glandular functions, with the result that the receivers of his treatment would cease to be a mere humans and become, by comparison, superhuman. The brain, the intelligence, the physical properties of humanity could, by this formula, so he claimed, be increased and enlivened and clarified so that civilization itself might accelerate, so that all humanity might gain entire centuries of mental and physical progress, so that a nation utilizing the benefits of his discovery might become a nation of supreme beings, nearly flawless, a race of wonder-men.

That had been his glorious ambition.

But failure came along with success. Two men who had allowed him to experiment using them as subjects had more than proved the value of his serum, had risen with dazzling rapidity to positions which demonstrated their mental, physical and even intellectual superiority over their fellow-men.

And then both men died. One withdrew from the experiment only just before he was murdered—by another subject.

"Is not that a failure, boy? Such a failure because the science itself it is failing, no? And why? Because there is something which I do not foresee. The functions, yes, I can control. The body, the glands, the brain, the intellect if you like—all that I am able to make perfect. But it is not enough. There is also in the human being something which you can call the essence, the instinct. There is under the life which we live here today, some other life which we are living inside. Such a word like *the soul*, I do not know what it is. But I do not have the name for this inside life which I cannot touch.

Out of the crowd stepped a man with the manner of a doctor.

And I say to you, my boy, that there is in every man and woman and child in this world something which is suppressed, which is pushed back, which is hidden. Such things are the instincts, the fundamental being which is man. Is it good? I do not know. Is it bad? I do not know that either. There is the greed, the desire, the cupidity, the lust, the hate, the savage instinct to kill. There is also the love, the hope, the kindness, the things you call the good nature.

"And when I am making to work fast the *life-essence* which is from the glands, *also* I am making to work fast and to be strong these inside things which I do not know how to name. Such things I cannot touch, I cannot control. Maybe I speed up that which is good, or maybe it is bad. I am the physician, the chemist, the scientist, yes. But I am not the metaphysician. The body, the mind, I can touch; but what you call the spirit, I do not know. There is, we say, God. There is, too, the Devil. I am failing because I cannot know which it is I am making strong in my work. Now that is failure, boy. I am telling you that is the failure of a lifetime."

To say that Billy Barston altogether understood this discourse would be to err. But it is certain that he did grasp the general meaning. This man was not mad —not in the accepted sense. If he were mad, then it was a noble madness which seeks to bring greatness to all humanity. A noble theme, surely, and by its very greatness, its very nobility, to fail when success seems at hand, must be, Billy reasoned, the very height of tragedy.

"Then—then you don't make any more experiments, sir? I mean, you—you gave up, and—"

"Not so. Upon the human beings I will not try my work. Me, I am not God; I also am human. I do not have the right to make such things. But upon the animals I go on—yes, I must always go on, until one day there is no more Emil Medlow. For this only I am alive now. To go on—"

"And then that rabbit—"

"Was one more failure. I am thinking to change my formula one little. I am thinking such failure I make are coming from what you call the subconscious which is inside. I am thinking if I can make dull, make asleep the subconscious, then I can with the conscious make what I am wanting to make. And so I am trying upon that poor rabbit my new formula. The rabbit, it does not have the subconscious, it does not have the soul, no? But tell me, boy, did you see what is coming to that rabbit? It is no more a rabbit; it is the savage beast which will if it can destroy me! If I do not kill him then quick, it can be that we both die in one minute. There is something from the past which I have wake up in that rabbit—something from the ages before history, when perhaps the rabbit is strong, is wild, is with the instinct to kill to defend himself. Of this I do not know. Only one thing I know, which is that this rabbit is changed and is now a lion. And that if I do not kill quick, I am setting loose in the world a savage beast which will kill and destroy. Ah, yes, boy—but it is again the failure."

"Then—you think there is no chance now? I mean, you can't ever make people better and stronger without—without making their inside life stronger, too, and maybe making them kill and do bad things? You think your work is all hopeless, sir?"

Medlow did not reply at once. He paced the floor thoughtfully. Then, shaking his head:

"Not so. While I am in the life, I am still hoping. From this rabbit too, I learn something. But the rabbit, it is not the human being. It is then possible that my formula can make the super-rabbits, but I do not know yet what it is with the human being. Such things no more I dare to do."

He seemed to deflate a little, to sigh.

"Ah, but it is hard, the failure. It is not so easy to be the philosopher—"

It was perhaps fascination as much as any other thing that forced the words to Billy's lips. He scarcely knew that he had spoken them before they were out.

"Well, sir," he said, "I wouldn't be afraid to—to help you experiment. I mean, I don't believe there is anything really bad in my inside life, as you call it. Why couldn't you take a chance on using me?"

AT eleven in the morning Mr. Hymie Sellers, noted sports-promoter of Firmingham, made a long-distance call to New York. At the other end of his wire was Mr. Piggie Wexton, also widely known in sporting circles as a trainer, manager and handler of champion pugilists. Said Hymie to Piggie:

"Listen, Wex: you catch a plane in half an hour, and you get down here before night, see? Now don't gimme no reasons why not, on account I got plenty reasons why, and mine is good and yours is rotten. Mine is million-dollar reasons. That is, if you are still in the game, and still interested in a million dollars. That's right; I said a million. And I got here what it takes to put a million together. I got here a boy which is a phenom—which is a wonder, and I don't mean no seven-day wonder, neither. I got here something which is class and speed and which can take your Champ Sulin on his best day in three rounds or less. All he needs now is build-up. All he needs is the papers and a couple fights in the Garden. Reason I call you, is already I want the champeenship fight here in my Arena, see? I give you the boy on contract, see? I give you Bat Nelson and Stan Ketchel and John L. Sullivan and maybe a chunk of Joe Louis all wrapped up in one boy weighing one hundred and sixty-five pounds wearing purple trunks. He's yours, Piggie; for a whole year he is yours. All I want is a contract which puts the champeenship fight right here in my house when it comes off. You build him; I book him. You make your dough your way and I make it mine. Now I got an option for twelve hours only, Piggie, so you catch that plane. Are you on your way?"

And the voice of Piggie Wexton said:

"Not only. Already I am on the landing-field, Hymie, but I am bringing with me a psych—a psych—a guy which will examine your head. Or is it maybe you are drunk, Hymie? Such a boy like you are telling me about he does not exist. But I am already arriving for a look. And I am thinking that if you lie only fifty per cent, Hymie, then still I am making good business. That speck you see in the air, it aint no fly. It's me, and my plane which is already there. Look out for me."

Mr. Piggie Wexton did arrive by plane, and while he did not make such speed as his promise foretold, he did land in the airport just out of Firmingham at three-thirty that afternoon. Riding to the city in Hymie Sellers' car, he listened to the Firmingham sports magnate's story with considerable interest and a due amount of skepticism.

SAID Hymie:

"Listen: a couple months back this boy was a punk, and what I mean is a punk, see? He is eighteen years old, this boy, and he is winning the Silver Gloves local. He comes to me and he wants I should get him a preliminary spot against some boy here which will show me if he is good enough to take over, see? So I tells him I don't like it. I tells him I don't go for Silver Gloves amateurs, see? But he damn' near cries on his face, and so I go soft and I get him a spot against Lou Silac. . . . You know little Lou."

"Yeah, so what? Silac is a dumb bunny. I got twenty boys can take Silac sittin' on one hand."

"Sure, I know. And this boy, he didn't take Silac. He takes such a shellacking from Silac like we aint seen around here since they fed Benny Carpenter to Louis."

"Yeah? Say, what the—"

"Wait. So the boy looks like a punk, and I tell him he's through—I don't want him if he's solid gold, see? And then one

day he comes at me with a gag. His gag is he was sick when he fights Silac, and he wants I should let him work out in the gym and spar with some of my boys until he can show me. He's a nice kid, this boy, so I get soft. I tell him sure. I send him down to my gym, and I tell Joe Milto he should give the kid maybe a couple, two minutes with some of the boys which aint too hot. Was I smart! That night Joe telephones me this boy is poison. Quick he takes a couple tough ham-and-eggers I got here working, and he looks like he's in there all alone. So Joe feeds him to Mickey Breen, which is not so bad. This kid he don't fool. He makes a monkey out of Mickey, and he kayoes him in two sessions. Then Joe hands him some of the heavies. This kid damn' near kills big Jumbo Hasp—what I mean! This kid is a middleweight and Hasp weighs damn' near two hundred pounds. This kid hits him with everything. He is terrific. So Joe tells me—"

MR. WEXTON interrupted:

"Say, you aint using reefers, Hymie? You sure?"

"Sure I'm sure! Listen: So I borrow this Lou Silac from Arty Meyer his manager, and I bring him down to the gymn. Silac, he is glad to make twenty bucks which I promise him. He has taken this kid before, and he will take him again. So he thinks. Listen! I tell you this Silac is a punk, but he's a tough punk. This kid makes him miss. This kid just aint there. Silac never can touch him. This kid has Silac so mixed up he stumbles over his own feet—all in one little round, Piggie. And then this kid he winks at me, and he lets go a one-two which puts Silac not only out but in the hospital. If you don't believe me, you go talk to Silac; he will tell you plenty about this boy."

"Do I see this boy?"

"You do. Tonight."

"Has he got a name?"

Hymie laughed.

"He's got a name, but it's a gag. He says he's Jimmy Barst, Jr. Can you tie that? You ever hear of Cyclone Jimmy Barst, which did twenty rounds with Ketchel when you was only a kid?"

"He quit. He went sour."

"So the papers used to say. But if you wanna make a crack like that around this here boy, which says he is Cyclone Jimmy Junior, then you better have the artillery. He would bust you on the nose, and you would feel bad."

"So he is mean, this boy? Well, that's all right. The mean ones can fight. I can handle the mean ones."

"No, my boy aint mean. He's a nice kid, see? But he won't let you make any cracks about Cyclone Jimmy Barst. Not while he is there. Because he says Cyclone Jimmy was his pop. Don't quote me; it is him that says it, not me. But that boy has what he needs to make it stick. Whaddya know—"

Piggie Wexton had earned his name not so much because of his nature as on account of his features, which were fat, porcine and unlovely. Also he had the mannerism of grunting or snorting when deeply moved. Right now he snorted.

"What I know?" *(Snort.)* "I know this, Hymie, that in case it aint a lie, which it could be and which smells bad, then it's what I call a wow!" *(Snort.)* "And such an angle for the papers! Cyclone Jimmy Junior. . . . Hymie, in case it is only half a lie, which I can tell when I see this boy, then you and me are already signing a contract. But I got to see this boy work. First I got to see this phenom—this boy which you got it in a pipe dream."

"You," said Hymie, "will see him work tonight in the Arena. You will have your contract ready. For one year and other valuable insinuations, my boy is your boy. Then I get a champeenship at the Arena."

THE curious thing which puzzled even Billy himself was the fact that he felt not the slightest elation. From the very first he had felt none. There was something inevitable about it, something calculated, something entirely without wonder.

There had been, of course, the tantalizing thrill of excitement when he had taken his first treatment. But even this thrill seemed to diminish and wane and become merely commonplace, as that day lengthened.

"There is only to remember, boy, that you must forget. You must forget that there is between you and me an understanding. You must forget that there exists the experiment. This is not like a medicine. It is not a medicine. It is the life—the very life itself which from the capillaries of your arm is entering into your body. For the complete success it is necessary that you do not encumber the mind with fears and with the consciousness of that which we are to do. Again I say to you, boy, this is not the medicine;

this is life itself. The effect will not make you *feel* different. Always you will be you. But you will be *you* with such intensity, with such completeness, with such confidence, boy, like never before you are knowing. To the body, to the brain, there is not danger, boy. Such danger which can be in this thing, it is— I do not know—"

"You mean that inner-life business, sir? I guess I'm not much scared about that. I don't believe I've been stowing away a lot of criminal instincts, sir—repressions, as you called them. That doesn't worry me so much, if that's what you mean."

BUT the old gentleman did not make a direct verbal answer to that. For the first time since Billy had known him, he revealed a shade of tenderness, of almost wistful softness. He laid his withered old hand upon the boy's shoulder, and the pressure of it spoke for him. It said very plainly:

"Indeed, boy, I pray that you may be right." It said, also, how terribly important this experiment was to Mr. Medlow in spite of his abstracted and stubbornly philosophical treatment of his many failures. He became in that instant almost human, almost like other men. Oddly, paradoxically, Billy was just a little sorry for him then.

Amazingly, the excitement of that first moment did fade. Billy had already planned—or dreamed—his course of action. He knew what he would say to Hymie Sellers. He knew that there was every chance of Mr. Sellers responding as he hoped. And he knew—or he made himself believe—that once in the gym he could prove or disprove in three short minutes the truth or the falsity of Mr. Medlow's claims. For Medlow had said:

"You will wait for three days, boy, and then you will do as you wish. In three days you are no longer such like you are now. You are already new, already more better. You will not know this thing nor feel any change, but you will already be new."

And so it struck Billy himself as odd that during those three days the thrill of anticipation waned instead of increasing.

There was, moreover, no great surprise for himself in the gym. There was, of course, this new sense of sureness, of self-confidence. His eye was clearer, more exacting, his judgement surer. He knew, for instance, although he did not quite know how he knew, that these ambitious young hopefuls against whom Mr. Milto made him box, were painfully slow, shockingly inaccurate. There was some keen new sense in him which enabled him to move his head or his body just that fraction which would let their futile attempts to hit him slip by or graze him harmlessly. He had the sense of a man fighting with a child. It was entirely without effort that he could send his right cleanly to the point of the jaw, and even before he struck the blow he had discounted the result. All the excitement around him, all the surprise, of the lookers-on, seemed a little silly. His was a nature divided. Part of him was entirely matter-of-fact about it, and methodical and cold. Another part of him felt a delicious sort of pleasure in the feel of supremacy.

What struck Billy, as he analyzed it later, was the satisfaction of it. Previously in all his amateur fights he had never cared much about winning by knockout. He had loved the sport of boxing for its own sake. It was fun, clean fun. Dancing out of reach of a man bent on annihilating him had been fun in the same sense as one has pleasure in solving a puzzle. Making the other boy miss while he tapped with his left had been Billy's game. But not now. Now it was a positive and not a negative thing. He wasted fewer motions. A mere shrinking of his body was enough; and then—the feel of his own fist landing in perfect coördination upon a point of his opponent's anatomy which he had carefully chosen—that and the immediate result, the yielding of the body, the sense of crushing, of annihilating. The pleasure of it was not intense, but it was there. It was just a trifle grim.

"Yes," he told himself, "there is a difference. The old boy really has something. I could take that Silac now and practically tear him apart."

AND then he had his chance at Silac, when Hymie Sellers brought the ham-and-egger down for that afternoon trial. And he was as good as his word. He did practically tear Silac apart.

That same sense of indifference, of coldness, persisted even when Mr. Sellers had urged him to appear in the Arena for the evening's night-cap bout. His opponent was to be a boxer of considerable reputation throughout the State, a contender for championship honors, and a man considered to be the logical obstacle to pass locally before any fighter should

have a chance in any of the big cities. His name was Bud O'Hara, and for reasons of value he was frequently referred to by the local press as "Dynamite" O'Hara.

To say that Billy felt any elation or eagerness would be untrue. In his amateur days he had seen O'Hara fight, and he had a visual idea of his style. He was a southpaw, and his style was considered unconventional and difficult to solve. And Billy felt a mild sort of impatience to test this style out against his own newfound sense of adequacy, just as you might be impatient to try out a new car on a difficult road or hill. It was just that, no more. The brimming eagerness of extreme youth had somehow gone from him.

"Cyclone," said Hymie Sellers in the dressing-room just before Billy's fight was called, "I want you should meet Mr. Wexton. You've heard o' Mr. Wexton, aint you? The papers like to call him Piggie Wexton, which aint very respectful, but which folks remember. Well, I got Mr. Wexton here to see you work on this boy O'Hara. If you take O'Hara, kid, Mr. Wexton is gonna point you up for the Champ. He'll handle you for a year while we ballyhoo a champeenship fight, see? And everybody knows Wex is the best manager in the country, kid. So you go in there and do your stuff."

Even then it struck Billy how different those words would have sounded to him only a few weeks ago. Piggie Wexton! The great Piggie Wexton, the champion-maker! In his wildest daydreams before the fatal fight with Lou Silac he had pictured himself managed and coached by the great Piggie Wexton, who dealt in champions only, and who seldom if ever guessed wrong. For a boxer to be admitted into Piggie Wexton's stable, was the final stamp of merit.

BUT now Billy could only hear his voice, calm and unruffled and not unduly impressed, saying:

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Sellers. Glad to know you, Mr. Wexton. I don't doubt that I can take this fellow."

And after they had gone from the dressing-room, Wexton said:

"Huh!" *(Snort.)* "This here aint no pug, Hymie. This here is a collich boy. Private, I make you a bet which says this Dynamite O'Hara will take him in three sessions."

"Yeah?" said Hymie. "Private, you bet how much says that?"

"Ten bucks I bet when it aint a sure thing."

"Without odds I take it," said Hymie. "But I gotta hunch it's a sure thing, Wex. This boy, he aint like he was the night Silac took him. This boy, he don't fool. I can use ten bucks. Why not?"

HYMIE'S was a neat way of putting it. Billy Barston, alias Cyclone Jimmy Barst Junior, did not fool. There had crept into him a sense of judgment which worked like a sensitive meter. O'Hara, he saw after the first two minutes of the first round had gone, depended upon speed and strength and his left-sided stance. But O'Hara did not have the accuracy to deceive this new metrical sense in Cyclone Jimmy, Jr.

And so Cyclone Jimmy did not fool. The thrill, the zest, the high and noble sporting sense which had been a part of his amateur career was all gone; this was business; this was a job. He was neither eager nor impatient nor yet grim, but merely methodical.

There was one instant during the first round when he perceived—almost as though his own intelligence were standing apart and considering the fight through a pair of binoculars—that this Dynamite O'Hara was dangerous—strong and dangerous, and tricky. He came in flatfooted and slow, and then changed his pace with a sudden burst. Billy was able to edge adroitly aside from two sizzling left hooks intended for his body, and to block a third hastily thrown at his jaw; but he had not counted on quite so much speed. O'Hara's right followed the left; Billy felt the other's great strength as it landed flush over his heart. Fortunately he had been moving back with the blow, and the force was broken. Himself, he had not yet struck a blow. He had been waiting. He had not even known why he waited, but some inner instinct made him wait.

And now that instinct prompted him to attack. He countered. His timing was perfect. He could take O'Hara's furious charges without blinking, and coolly let these powerful fists skim past his head while driving his own with easy precision.

He knew then that it was as good as over. The sense of competition left him altogether. He was no longer *competing;* he was probing, waiting, maneuvering. He felt superiority, assurance. He was contemplative, studious, cold.

And then came the moment when O'Hara performed one of those puzzling

changes of style which had given him some local fame—and Billy sensed in a split second that he was not in complete balance, so he feinted with the left and drew the southpaw even further away from his natural center of gravity—and with his right he struck.

It was not one of those grunting, all-out blows that boxers practice against a sand-bag, and wish they might deliver in actual combat. It was not at all effortful. It was merely a blow given with the feeling of entire control behind it.

And yet, as his fist jarred against the jaw of Dynamite O'Hara, Billy could feel the crunch of it, the demolishing effect of it. The feeling tingled along the nerve-ribbons of his arm and entered his brain, carrying with it sheer pleasure. Never before had he enjoyed such a feeling in a fight. It reminded him, grayly and remotely, of the church socials at home when he was a boy, and the booths they used to have, where for a dime you could hurl a hard ball into an array of white crockery for the sheer love of the smashing, breaking sound it made.

But young O'Hara made no actual sound. Merely he buckled. Merely he folded, accordion-fashion, upon himself. And that fight was finished. . . .

Mr. Wexton's eyes were fixed upon the lawyer whose name was Bosson, and whose conversation seemed incessantly concerned with "angles," giving a geometrical flavor to the mere business of signing a contract. But as Mr. Wexton talked, there was no doubt that his words were meant for this newcomer to the world of Fistiana, Cyclone Jimmy, Junior.

"I want," said Piggie, "this boy to know what I mean, see? Right now this boy aint nobody. It aint only you gotta be tough in this here fight game; you also gotta have you a manager which is smart. A manager which you can depend on to give you build-up. In the ring it is fights, but in the newspapers only it is champeenships, see?"

Here came a snortful punctuation and a pause.

"So I want this boy should know he's got Piggie Wexton to be his manager, see? With Piggie he rates; without Piggie he's a punk—which is why Piggie gets a third of his take for a year, see? And I want you should tell this boy what it is a manager. With a manager like Piggie, he is champeen. Without Piggie, he aint even human. I own him, see? He aint got nothin' I don't own a piece of. If he's got brains, it is Piggie's brains. If he's got a sister, then she is my sister too. If he's got heart, it is my heart. Without I say so, he can't even spit; that's what he can't do without I say so. From now on, this here contract says I am God and papa and mamma to this boy. I want he should understand that, see? Piggie aint no cheap manager. This here is Piggie Wexton. Outa punks he makes champeens."

"He's got a name, but it's a gag."

The lawyer nodded. Mr. Hymie Sellers also nodded. To them, this seemed entirely reasonable. Hymie Sellers completed the thought, also.

"That is right, Piggie. One third of this boy's take for one year you get it. And me, I get one third of his share. That is fair. That is even generous. Without us he is still a punk."

Up to now Cyclone Jimmy had not spoken. Now he said, very quietly:

"I won't sign." Merely that, nothing more. The three men stared in amazement.

"This boy he is nuts," commented Hymie.

"You will sign, boy, or you will wish you signed. Why, you small-time little punk, you—"

"I will not," said Cyclone Jimmy, "sign that contract. I don't like it. I don't need it. If I need a manager, I can get one. There are other managers, other places to go. . . . Well, if that's all you gentlemen have to say, I'll be on my way."

BUT it was not all those gentlemen had to say. They had, indeed, only just begun. There was, about this boy, something inhumanly calm, something grim and purposeful and entirely confident. He was walking casually to the door. He was opening the door. He was ignoring their outcries and their indignation. He was, in short, walking out of Hymie Sellers' private office and out of their lives. In their long experience with fighting-men they had never been confronted with such obstinacy, such poise, such cool and confident disregard of their self-admitted greatness. It was phenomenal. It was disconcerting. The lawyer, diplomatic and geometrical, had an approach to it, however.

"Perhaps Mr. Cyclone would tell us the kind of an agreement he thinks he would sign, then. Maybe we have overlooked an angle."

'Sure, kid, sure. We aint trying to jam you into nothing you don't want. Be good, now. You tell us. All we want is to make you champeen. There is in a champeenship, millions."

And thus the contract which was finally signed became, in the history of boxer-manager relations, a thing unique. The point of this scene, however, is that such a contract was signed.

It would serve no good purpose to describe the procession of fights which brought Cyclone Jimmy, Junior, out of obscurity and into the dazzling light of newsprint during that brief year of hard work, earnest activity and careful "build-up." Briefly, although Mr. Piggie Wexton did not succeed in obtaining a contract with this young pugilist which would give him a third of his ring earnings and a sort of fief-lord control over the body and soul and heart-beat of the youngster, Piggie did indeed live up to his promise. For he was a good manager—no more honest, perhaps, than most, but a great deal more sincere than some. As his own words put it, he "made champeens outa punks," and that was his credo and his plan. To Piggie, all unknowns were punks. Out of the plastic putty of punks he made chosen champions and multiple millions. A champion, to Piggie, was an investment. His time, his energy, his long ringwise years of experience he invested in champions; and the champions, in turn, had paid dividends. And now, so Piggie estimated and not without reason, he possessed material which could become a champion of all champions. For the records hung up by "his boy" Cyclone Jimmy over an eleven-month tour of the sticks was something to make such a hope inevitable.

Let the newspaper headlines tell the story:

FIRMINGHAM BOY
BEATS BUBBLES BURT
Nashville *Torch*, Sept. 3.

BARST WINNER OVER
HASLIP, ONE ROUND
Tuscaloosa *Blade*, Sept. 19.

McCOY, LOCAL MIDDLEWEIGHT, IN
HOSPITAL AFTER THREE ROUND
K.O. BY CYCLONE JIMMY
Little Rock *Free-Day*, October 20.

WEXTON'S BOY WONDER
WINS IN TWO SESSIONS
Tulsa *Moment*, November 4.

AIRHEART NO MATCH
FOR JIMMY BARST, JR.
Emporia *Crier*, November 21.

FANS SEE REMARKABLE
BOXING SHOW AS BARST
OVERWHELMS SOCK MARTINI
Las Vegas *Verb*, December 20.

CYCLONE JIMMY IN
TENTH STRAIGHT K.O.
The Denver *Prospector*, January 1.

SOUTHERN BOY TOO HOT
FOR PETE HALLOP
Nebraska City *Agrarian*, January 17.

BARST MASSACRES
DESPRIES, TWO ROUNDS
Des Moines *Searchlight*, February 3.

WEXTON'S BOY
COMING CHAMPION
Chicago *Opinion*, February 19.

7000 FANS SEE
CYCLONE BLAST POWERS
Pittsburgh *Industrial-Democrat*, Feb. 28.

MIDDLEWEIGHT BARST
ON CHAMPION'S TRAIL
Cincinnati *Merchant*, March 7.

PETE POOLE SKIRTS
DEATH AFTER BARST'S WIN
Paterson *Globe-Silkman,* March 12.
JUNIOR CYCLONE MAKES KNOCK-OUT RECORD WITH SEVEN ROUND DEFEAT OF TOM TALLO
Boston *Postscript,* April 4.
WEXTON'S WONDER WILL FIGHT CHALLENGER FOR RED CROSS PRE-CHAMPIONSHIP AFFAIR WITH 7-2 ODDS ON CYCLONE JIMMY JUNIOR
New York Morning *Index,* May 5.

THERE is a career in fifteen brief pictures. It tells a story; but, it must be said, it tells only an incomplete story. For while it pictures Cyclone Jimmy, Junior, new pugilistic sensation, on his meteoric rise toward the championship, it tells nothing whatever of Billy Barston, with whom and with whose problems we are chiefly concerned.

For there were indeed some problems. Largely these were neither financial nor physical; rather were they spiritual problems, which crisscrossed between the dual personalities of Billy and his *alter ego,* Cyclone Jimmy.

That fight in Little Rock, for instance, presented no physical problem at all. It was number seven on the progressive tour planned and outlined by the careful Piggie Wexton. He was confronted by a young pug named McCoy who had already set up a legend around his doughty fists in the local arenas, and was already being mentioned by a few sports-writers in the East who liked to fill their columns with gossip about provincial happenings. McCoy, moreover, was a bang-bang fighter who waded in from the opening bell, and battered down opposition by the windmill method, untiring, unflinching, taking what his opponents had to hand out in punishment, and merely handing out a bigger, tougher, more concentrated dish of his own. The late Harry Greb was that type and had rocked many a champion by the method.

But although Cyclone Jimmy, Junior, was able to outslug, outguess and outbox this battler in three terrific rounds, and to hand him such a beating that he required hospital care for a week after the bout, Billy Barston left that ring a puzzled, bewildered and faintly unhappy boy. What troubled him was his own soul. It would not leave him in peace.

"Gee, Mr. Wexton," he said to Piggie in the hotel, "I'm sorry I hurt that boy. It was too easy. He didn't have any defense. He just slugged and came in with his chin wide open, and—well, I could have killed him."

"Sure you could," said Piggie. "You can take 'em all, kid. Whadda you care if he got hurt? He woulda kilt you if he coulda. That's the chance he took, just like you. But it aint often that fighters get kilt in the ring, kid. They gotta have a bum ticker, or they gotta have bum luck, is all. The examiners nowadays is pretty sharp, see? They don't let a pug go into the ring unless he's okay. Whadda you care, kid? He aint dead, is he? Likely it's just a gag he's in the horsepital. But it helps your build-up."

Possibly this satisfied Cyclone Jimmy, but it did not pacify Billy Barston. Something had happened in that ring. That feeling of breaking crockery and liking it had happened. It had been stronger. He could, as he had said so simply, have killed McCoy. He had known it. He had had to restrain himself in order not literally to decapitate the other fighter.

And—this was the thing that troubled Billy. . . . Cyclone Jimmy had not liked this restraint.

"Barst," said the Des Moines *Searchlight*, "massacres Despries."

IT was a masterpiece of understatement. Cyclone Jimmy Barst, Jr., had found Philo Despries an excellent boxer, a young man with a real flair for keeping his rather handsome head out of harm's way and for piling up points by truly clever counter-fighting, dodging, weaving and bobbing. Despries was also a young man on the way up, and he was determined not to become another victim to this much-heralded lad from Firmingham. He fought Cyclone Jimmy on his own terms. It was the Southern boy's first fight which went a full limit.

But Philo Despries was, nevertheless, "massacred."

Billy Barston never quite knew how he did it. It was just as though the very cleverness of Despries had increased his own sense of timing and balance and self-assurance. Beginning with the third round, he began a campaign of infighting that nearly tore Despries away from his own midsection. He coolly let the Iowan love-tap him at will while he worked him into position for a body attack. Then he fought with the fury of a tiger. Only Despries' fine clean strength enabled him to stand for the limit of the fight. Only

This was no longer a battle for a chance at the title, for glory. This

the final bell saved him from a knockout. And he was carried out of the ring on the shoulders of his handlers—a beaten, almost misshapen object, so badly cut and scarred that he might not fight again for another twelve months.

And Billy Barston was unhappy about it. He had not meant to do that. It would have been quite enough to win. He had not needed to slaughter this nice young fellow. But it was as though his own hands had worked independently of his brain. It was as though some murderous devil were working in him. When he had solved Despries' style, and had organized his own campaign, he could not stop himself. For an instant he caught himself hating this handsome lad —hating and wanting to destroy him.

But it was only after the fight that the full impact of what he had done struck him.

"Now, why did I have to do that?" he wondered. "I didn't need to hurt that fellow, just to win. It didn't help me any. I wonder why I did it."

"NOW you listen, boy," Wexton said, after the Pittsburgh fight. "This is your first big-town show, and you done good. Listen, now, because I'm gonna tell you what nobody don't know about Piggie. Looka me, boy; I aint no fighter, huh? You wouldn't say I was built for the ring, hey? Since ten years I aint seen my own feet for the breadbasket I got. Fat Piggie Wexton, that's me." *(Snort, snort!)* "But justa same, fightin' is my business, boy. They all think it's the dough I want. Well, it aint only the dough. It's what I mean glory. Funny thing, aint it? I can't fight, but I want the glory. Vi-curious glory, maybe you call it. I made plenty champs. Already I made three champs, with Lou Petrillo and Chuck Szbyzski and Mike Donahan. But listen, kid; them boys aint nothing. They never did have what you got. You done swell. You got plenty. What's more, you aint no bum nor no roughneck. The fans like to see you work. The dames go for you. You don't talk like a mutt. You got it what I call it class. And with you, boy, we're gonna have the glory. Know what I mean?"

"I guess," admitted Billy Barston, "I do."

"You aint done bad with the dough, neither, kid. Already you done good. You aint no millionaire yet, but you can

was grimmer, more deadly—a fight to the death. His tactics changed.

be one if you wanna. You got brains. You're smart. I was plenty sore at you when you wouldn't let me chisel into you with that contract, but I aint sore now. You was smart, is all. It's a long time I aint seen a fighter which can fight and also is smart. So I like you, see? I like you, and I want you should be the champ. For the glory. Your glory and my glory too, kid. Sure, the dough is nice, but the glory is better. You can't take the dough away with you when they pat your face with a shovel, but you never lose the glory. I wouldn't know if it's straight goods what you said about the old Jimmy Barston being your pop, but it wouldn't surprise me none. He was a good fighter, your pop. Only for this Ketchel, which in his class was the best, or maybe in any class, your pop mighta been champ. But he never did get no glory."

"No," said Cyclone Jimmy, Junior. "He retired."

"He was smart. He quit."

"That's a lie. He didn't quit. He retired because my mother wanted him to stop."

"Dames," said Wexton, shifting his ground deftly, "don't savvy glory. But listen, kid: you now got a chance to get that glory which your pop never did get. I got here a contract with Joe Getz, which is manager of this Tony Rapello. The Champ don't wanna fight Rapello, which is rat-poison in the ring. He is afraid of Rapello. But if I sign you to fight Rapello, I can get you a crack at the Champ. The Champ will sign to fight us if we win, see? On account he thinks this Rapello will fix your wagon, and so he don't have to fight you nor Rapello for another year."

"I CAN take Rapello," stated Jimmy Junior.

"But—oh, sure," said Mr. Wexton. "We can take Rapello. I was gonna keep you on ice another two-three months, but with this chance to go after the Champ, I was thinking I could sign."

"Sign it, Mr. Wexton. I can take Rapello."

Substantially the conversation ended there, for Cyclone Jimmy, Junior, put on his hat and left the hotel room. Mr. Piggie Wexton was not, as he might have been expected to be, happy. Not happy at all. There was something about the way this boy said, "I can take Rapello,"

which worried him. He said it too easily, too grimly, in a way. He was too sure. It sounded too simple. This Rapello was class. This Rapello was rat-poison. His boy Jimmy was good, but Rapello wasn't that simple. Besides, there wasn't any enthusiasm in Jimmy. He hadn't said that right. Something had come over him. He had changed since that first day in Firmingham. He acted—not worried, maybe, but—queer. "I can take Rapello," he said; but he acted like he didn't much give a damn.

THE Rapello fight was at the Garden. When a fighter from the provinces gets a chance to fight in the Garden, it is success; it is, as Piggie Wexton would say, the glory. In the world of pugilism, to be billed at the Garden is comparable to a singer being billed at the Metropolitan. Garden fans have sensitive palates. They pay high prices, and they expect high class.

It was evident to Billy Barston from the first minute of the first round that this Tony Rapello was a different fighter from all others he had met. He had, abundantly, what Hymie Sellers had once referred to as the "instink." He was automatic. He wasted neither strength nor movement. He possessed assurance. He came to this fight with a record of more than one hundred other battles, the last ninety-six of which he had won, forty-one by the K.O. route. He was rugged, lithe, supple, speedy and precise. His eyes were two small triangles under heavy brows, quick, alert, watchful. There was about his whole manner in the ring a quality which can best be described as workmanlike. This was his craft, his trade. He excelled at it, and he knew he excelled. He liked his work. He went to work in that ring with the methodical, craftsmanlike deftness of performance that a skilled mechanic might exhibit at a lathe. As the mechanic might organize his tools and gears to cut a parabolic taper or some delicate and difficult work, so Tony Rapello organized himself to meet this Cyclone Jimmy, Junior, quite plainly a boy of class.

It was a good show. Seldom if ever have Garden fans been treated to a better show. Iggie Hypoe, noted sports-writer, said of it:

"You can put that fight down with the Corbett-Fitzsimmons, or Nelson-Wolgast or Ketchel-O'Brien, as one of the great fights of all time, regardless of the fact that neither of these boys are champions. For my money, it was perfection in fistic exhibition. It was one of those instances where both fighters rise to abilities and class above and beyond their natural range. I doubt if either could give such an exhibition again. I doubt if either ever will. All honor, all glory to this Jimmy Barst, Junior, who won; but let us not hesitate to give equal glory and honor to Rapello, who, losing, will be remembered as long as there are fight fans."

That was the public's side of it. Billy's was a little different.

Rapello had a snakelike left that lashed out and burned like a brand of fire. Billy could counter this left, and did; but his own precision was scarcely more precise than Rapello's. The left stung him twice in the first two minutes. His own stung Rapello, too, but the challenger did not slow up. It would be more than sharp lefts which would win this fight.

Billy met the other's crouch with a crouch of his own. Rapello solved his rapid one-two, caught his follow-up right cross on his glove, and smashed his own right into Billy's face with a jarring effect such as Billy had not known since his first fight with Lou Silac, now nearly a year ago.

This was no hammer-and-tongs affair. Billy sensed that his experience with other, slower, less efficient fighting machines had not geared him to this darting, lashing, hard-hitting opponent. He did not doubt his own ability to win. He was merely aware that he must go all out in order not to lose. He must, for the first time, use caution. He must be sure. He must not waste motions. Methods used against other fighters were no good now.

It came to Billy, a little mistily due to the speed of action and the tension of the fight, that what he had gained from Mr. Medlow's accelerative injection, this Rapello possessed to a great degree through years of experience and natural, inborn instinct. He was cool, poised, wary. So was Rapello. His reflexes permitted a high degree of judgment. So did Rapello's. On the surface they were evenly matched. Billy alone knew that, more than skill, more than an artificially stimulated coördination and perfection of movement, he possessed a bodily strength which his moderate build and entirely normal weight and stature did not suggest. He knew that he had a wealth of stamina, not originally his own, but his to use when needed, that would outlast Rapello. Thanks, he knew, to a latter-

day miracle of science.... Thanks to Mr. Medlow.

And so while he became tense and more alert than ever before in his career, he did not worry, and he was not concerned. In the end, he knew, he would win, as long as he did not let his *normal* self become uppermost. As long as he could *use* the advantages which he had. And so he planned his fight.

The second, third, fourth and fifth rounds were Rapello's. The Italo-American swarmed over the smoothly boxing young Southerner by dint of his amazing speed, his extraordinary intelligence. He did not wait for openings; he made them. He could hit from any angle, and yet always appear to be in balance. His fist would dart and flicker and leave a red spot on the body of Jimmy, Junior, while the young Southerner was stinging him with his own smart jabs and crosses. His blows had power. Cyclone Jimmy was seen to be jolted by them more than once. In the fifth session Rapello slipped inside after the other boy had cleverly bobbed his way through one of the Italian's machine-gun flurries and was stepping back to recover his own poise, and drove four terrific body-blows to the solar-plexus which brought the house to its feet.

Barst was hurt, which was obvious from the expression of his face. He weathered the storm, but a grimness set over his lips. The schoolboy look left him. He grew a shade whiter—and he fairly exploded at Tony Rapello, driving the Italo-American back onto his heels with lefts and rights that were marvels of precision, and that whistled past the other's guard like needles past bars of iron.

But they gave that round to Rapello. It was his last round to win.

Billy Barston had actually felt pain then. The power of Rapello's punches had penetrated the muscular protection of his midsection, and he was hurt. But that was not what put that grimness on his face. What happened was an essential, a chemical change inside him. Suddenly Billy Barston felt the tingle of hate. This was no longer a fight in a ring before thousands of shouting fans. This was no longer a battle for a chance at the title, for glory, for a quarter of the generous gate, part of which he would turn over to the Red Cross. This was something grimmer, more deadly. This was a test of his inner self, a fight to the death.

His tactics changed from that instant. For two rounds he counter-punched with Rapello, defiantly taking the other's best when he had to, but making sure that his counters landed where they would hurt. And they did hurt. Before the seventh round was over, Rapello had slowed down. He had not weakened. He had not lost precision, but he no longer was that battery of fists which ceaselessly chopped at Cyclone Jimmy, like a constant spray or shower. He became more cautious, a little puzzled.

And then, the eighth: Billy shot from his stool as though catapulted. His whole body crashed into Rapello as he drove his right deep into the other's midsection, a short, jerky blow that came from some deep inner source of strength. The Italian grunted; his legs went rubbery; he tried to hold. Two short jolting lefts tilted his head back as he reached for Billy's body. He sagged. He slipped to one knee and then let himself slide to the floor, waiting for his head to clear. The Garden galleries were a bedlam. *One, two, three, four. . . .*

The referee's voice was lost in the din.

Six, seven, eight, nine—

Rapello was up and bobbing away. With a nervous strength that was almost a miracle, he tilted Cyclone Junior's head with a series of three quick lefts, and danced safely away again before the Southern boy could track him and pin him with another of those terrible chops.

But the gong broke the spell.

HIDEOUS and beautiful the ninth: The boys stood toe to toe. What astonished the fans was the extraordinary ability of this Cyclone Jimmy to drive his fist into the tiniest opening and to pack a power wholly unsuspected behind punches that seemed to be delivered without body or shoulder. What astonished them more was the slight bobbing of his head, the bare shrugging of a shoulder or the half turn of his body, to let Rapello's fury slip almost harmlessly past him, to shrink with each one of a perfect hail of blows as though his eye could separate them and void each one articulately, when to the spectators they were almost instantaneous.

Rapello's face and body began to show what punishment he was taking. There was a bad cut over his eye. Blood leaked from his tightly compressed lips; blood had streaked his body and made spots where imprint of Barst's gloves left their trace. But still he bored in. Still he

was instinctive, precise, a master. It was a savage, beautiful performance.

IN the tenth round there was still another change. Let it be given in the words of a famous sports-writer's morning column:

> It was in the tenth that Cyclone Jimmy Barst demonstrated that he is well named. People of today don't remember the original Cyclone Jimmy Barst whose name he is using but the old-timers will tell you that the other one couldn't hold a candle to the new one. The original Cyclone, they say, was a wonderful boxer but not a fighter. He didn't have the instinct to destroy, to kill which stamps the fighter, an instinct which this youngster has in a big way. He can box but also he can fight. A couple of times this writer thought he might climb up on Rapello and bite him, just from the look on his face.
>
> In that last round Cyclone really hurt Rapello in the clinch. His fist nearly tore through the Italian's body. And when he saw the other boy was weak and rattled he began stalking him like a lynx after a dicky bird. He was a killer ready to kill. And the rest of the fight was an exhibition of cool savagery of the kind that fans hope to see but seldom if ever do see. Jimmy Junior was a matador in a bull-ring. Personally I think bull-fighting is less savage than watching Cyclone Jimmy in the ring. I doubt if any fighter alive could have stood with him when he went all-out there.
>
> The end came just before the bell, which was lucky for Rapello. It was an heroic, epic ending. Groggy and punch-drunk, the Italian hung on the ropes by superhuman will and heart. He was finished. He was licked. He was helpless. And Barst merely stood there, coolly aiming and measuring him for the kill. The blows he hit Rapello hurt me right down to the bottom of my typewriter. Rapello was sausage. I don't know how a body can take such a beating. And every time Barst landed I thought I was dying. It was so bad that I prayed for the bell. The bell came too, and if it hadn't, I have an idea that this column might have been printed in a black border of inverted rules.
>
> I like this Cyclone Jimmy, but he has the instincts of a leopard-man. He is a man-eating tiger. *Brrr!*

The big news next day, however, was not the fight but the disappearance of Cyclone Jimmy Barst, Junior. Just that. He had gone. He had left a little note for his manager Piggie Wexton, had taken one suit of clothes in an old grip, had left his money and his bank-book and his check-book and all his account-books on top of his hotel night-table, and he had disappeared without a word. No reason, no explanation. Cyclone Jimmy had walked out on the championship.

During the investigation which, very naturally, was made, a taxicab driver testified that a young man answering Jimmy's description had chartered his car to Central Park sometime after midnight. But though the police combed the park and dragged the lakes, there was no trace of Cyclone Jimmy, dead or alive.

But if Cyclone Jimmy were lost, it is certain that Billy Barston was found, although he was such an insignificant figure that the newspapers would not eagerly know nor report the fact.

FOR that night, under a calm midnight moon on a rock in Central Park, Billy Barston sat alone for two terrible hours. Tight-lipped, low-voiced, he spoke only to himself—or perhaps he spoke with God.

"I might have killed him," he said. "I nearly did kill that boy. I *wanted* to. Only for the bell, I would have been a murderer."

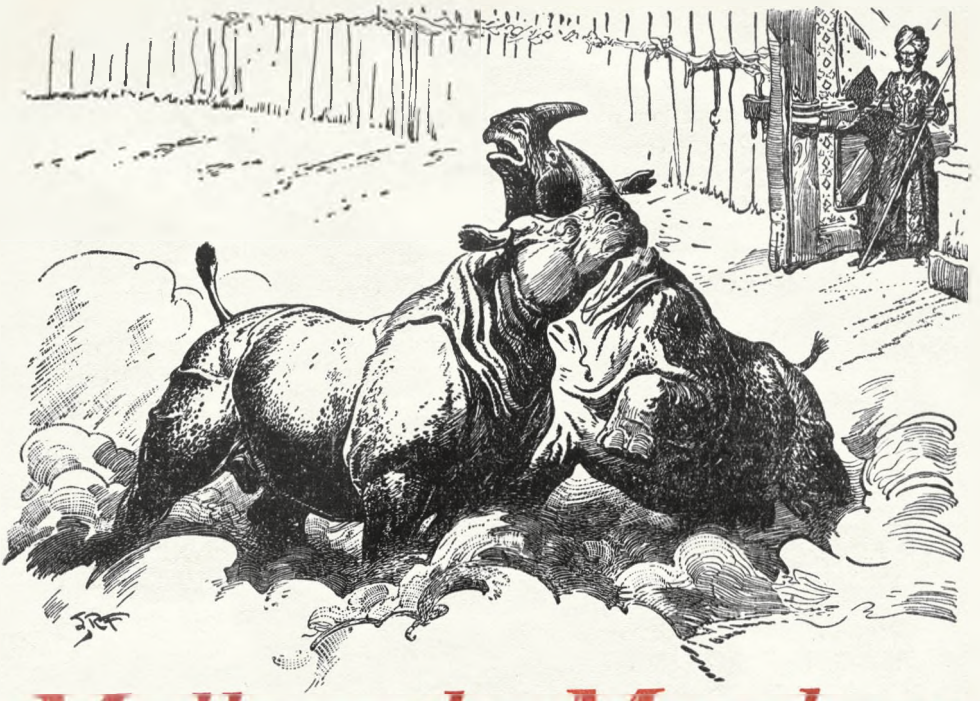
Secretly, silently on that rock there was another fight, noiseless but not painless. It was a struggle between Cyclone Jimmy and his almost forgotten counterpart. No body-blows, no left-hooks, no gloves. The weapons used were more subtle things. And when the waning moon crossed from behind a tree and looked down upon the rock, there was a boy kneeling on it, praying:

"Make me right, not wrong, O God. Make me *me* again. Give me the strength and the courage to quit now, before it is too late. Make me forget money and glory and all that. Make me go back and tell the old fellow I'm through. Make me, O God. Make me do it!"

But the search for Jimmy Barst, Junior, ended with the taxi-driver. All that remained of him was the note left for Mr. Piggie Wexton. Piggie didn't understand it, but something prompted him not to turn it over to the detectives. Because that hastily scrawled note read:

"Thanks, Mr. Wexton, for the glory."

Another story by Fulton Grant is scheduled for our next issue.



Malleer the Murderer

A colorful story of men and beasts, by the distinguished author of "Memoirs of a Bengal Lancer."

By F. YEATS-BROWN

IN the elephant stables of Nasr-ud-din, King of Oudh, there was one great tusker who was known for his exceptional ferocity. Malleer, as he was called, had disemboweled a wild rhinoceros, broken his tusk on the armor of another, and stamped the life out of several tigers. For more than half a century his fame as the invincible one-tusked fighting elephant of Lucknow had spread throughout the whole of Upper India.

But now, from the forests of Mysore, a huge black stranger had arrived, young and active (Malleer was eighty-seven) and in rut. Malleer was also rutting.

"Boppery bopp!" exclaimed the King of Oudh, draining his tumbler of mixed champagne and brandy. "We shall have the best fight ever seen in Lucknow. The occasion demands it!"

His courtiers agreed most heartily, as indeed they did with any project of His Majesty for spending money. The occasion in question was the arrival of the English Commander-in-chief from Calcutta, for whom a luncheon would be given, followed by wild-beast fights on the bank of the Gumpti River.

His Majesty's barber, and first favorite, was an Englishman who had taken the name of Sofraz Khan. That he was able to impart a wave to the King's naturally straight hair was only a minor cause of his influence: at this time nothing was done in Lucknow—and little in the provinces—without his knowledge and approval. When he retired to Brighton (a few years before the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857) he had a nest-egg of one-hundred and twenty thousand pounds invested in the Company's paper. All the animals which performed before His Majesty came under his supervision, from rare rhinoceroses to prize game-cocks, and it naturally fell to his lot to make the arrangements for the coming festival.

The barber was not a man to stint money, especially when it was not his own. To Malleer's mahout he promised a purse of twenty gold mohurs if he could win against the newcomer; but he found the old man in a despondent mood.

"Cherisher of the poor," said the latter, with hand on his heart, "my days are numbered, and fate beats his march upon the drum. Of what use will money be to me in the Day of Judgment?"

"You have a wife and child," said the barber.

"True, Your Exalted Highness; but while I live, with Malleer, my pay is enough to support us all. Soon my son will be a mahout in his turn. I want to live to see that day."

"How often have you won with Malleer?" asked the barber.

"More than ten times ten," answered the mahout, spreading his hands. "It is enough. We have earned our rest."

"Fiddlesticks! Here's a gold-piece to buy some opium—take it in warm milk before the fight, and give some to Malleer. If you win, you shall have fifty more gold-pieces."

A PLATFORM had been built out for the King and his guests over the Gumpti; and across the narrow stream a stoutly-fenced arena had been constructed. Lucknow was one of the great cities of the world in those days—a hundred years ago—with nearly three-quarters of a million inhabitants, and the Court of Oudh was famous for its lavish entertainments. A huge crowd had gathered for the display.

Two contests were to be decided before the chief event. First a leopard was matched against a famous black horse who had savaged several of the King's troopers. Shaitan was led into the ring with a nose-twitch. Directly he was loosed, he pawed the earth into a cloud of dust, seeking whom he might devour, then he went trotting round the arena, neighing, with head and tail held high. The betting was on the leopard, however; and the barber, who had seen Shaitan fight before, and knew that he was shod with sharp calkins, took fifty gold mohurs to ten against the latter.

When the leopard was released from his cage, he was at first disconcerted by the crowd, and crept round the edge of the arena, away from his adversary, seeking for some shelter. Shaitan stood still, with ears flat, following the leopard with bloodshot eyes.

The leopard seemed to be looking the other way; suddenly, however, with a speed that rendered his motion invisible, he sprang at the stallion's throat. Shaitan slashed at him with a sharp fore-hoof, which caught the leopard on the flank, streaking it with blood. He retreated, sat down, licked his wound. Men with pikes from the outside of the fence prodded him into action. He snarled at them, and seemed to have no stomach for fighting. Shaitan advanced a few paces. The leopard cowered, but cowered for a spring. Again he attacked with eye-defeating speed, and this time he pounced upon the horse's withers, and fastened his fangs in his neck.

But only for an instant. With a scream of rage, Shaitan bucked the leopard into the air, and as he fell, he turned and kicked him on the head and ribs. The leopard rolled clear of his adversary and lay sprawling and snarling, with a broken jaw. That was the end. Nothing would induce him to face Shaitan again, and he was eventually driven into a corner and captured. Shaitan, with gory back and crest, trotted round the ring as if he were treading on air.

Two rhinoceroses now appeared, but their performance was a tame affair. Neither would face the other, and it was only when one of them charged the fencing and scattered the crowd that His Majesty was at all diverted.

At last the two beasts attacked, their heavily armored heads meeting with a smashing blow. Each tried to lever up the other with his horn, for only the belly of the rhinoceros, and the skin between the hindlegs, is sufficiently soft to be vulnerable, and these places can only be reached if the animal turns tail, or is upset. There they stood, pushing, grunting, snorting. After a tedious lull, the King gave orders that they were to be separated. A squib was fired under their snouts. They looked up, backed away from each other, and allowed themselves to be coaxed back into their cages.

SHERBET and sweetmeats were served in the royal box. The King wore a magnificent turban of rubies and pearls, with a diamonded osprey-feather aslant and glittering. The Commander-in-chief and the British Resident in Oudh were both in full uniform, as were the officers of the garrison, all very smart, also very hot from a lunch of curry and snow-cooled claret. The Royal Lancers made a brave display, with their fluttering pen-

nons and whinnying Arab stallions. Farther downstream a guard of Abyssinian Amazons stood at ease on either side of an enclosure hung with muslin, where the ladies of the zenana chattered.

Malleer appeared first in the arena, trumpeting his arrival. He was tall and gaunt, with the light of battle in his little red eyes. Bahadur, from Mysore, was in better condition, and less nervous. He paced quietly into the ring, and salaamed to the Court of Oudh, and to the English Commander-in-chief.

Each elephant was ridden by his mahout, not in his customary place (for it would have been too dangerous to sit on the neck) but perched on the back of his mount. A rope, passed from neck to tail, gave the riders a hand-hold.

Elephants attack each other somewhat as rhinoceroses do, with a head-on charge, the object being to push the adversary off his balance and gore him in the belly. They walked round each other, maneuvering for position and uttering their fighting-cries—a succession of blasts between a roar and a grunt. The ground sloped slightly toward the river. Both tried for the advantage of the rise. Malleer, despite his age, was the quickest to see his chance. Turning, he charged his adversary, who had only just time to meet him with lowered tusks. Their foreheads met with a crash like the firing of a siege-gun. Gradually, in spite of his better position, Malleer was pushed back by the heavier Bahadur. The two spines curved under the terrific strain: a thunder of what might have been elephant curses came from the earth beneath their straining feet, while the mahouts upon them yelled encouragement and abuse.

WITH a twist of his great neck, Malleer broke away and tried to stab his adversary in the flank. Bahadur whipped round. Their tusks flashed and clashed. Then Malleer galloped off to recover his wind, and Bahadur was too exhausted to pursue. For a full minute the elephants shuffled round each other, like heavyweights in a prize-fight. The barber laid an even hundred mohurs on Malleer.

Both elephants now advanced again to the attack, with trunks raised out of harm's way. Malleer tried to pull off for his opponent's mahout; for an elephant, clever as he is, relies on his accustomed master in an emergency. It was a bold move, and nearly successful, but Bahadur dodged like a jinking boar. Malleer

Nasr-ud-din, King of Oudh.

turned too, and drove into Bahadur's flank. He stumbled, however, plowing the ground with his one good tusk. Bahadur was knocked sidewise, and his mahout, who had slithered to the far side of his back, was saved only by the rope catching his feet. For a moment he hung head-downward. Malleer tried to rise, but his tusk was deep in the earth. Before he could disengage it, Bahadur faced him again, and again they met in a head-to-head collision.

It was a struggle between strength and experience. Head to head, Bahadur was the stronger; but twice, thrice, four times Malleer was able to disengage himself and leave his adversary increasingly dismayed. Elephants are highly strung creatures and they have a well-developed psychic sense; Bahadur felt that his mahout was discouraged and that the fight would end badly. Suddenly he turned tail.

So far, Malleer's mahout had not once used his goad, but now in his excitement he smashed it down upon his mount's head. But Malleer was too exhausted to pursue. He swayed from one foot to the other, while he regained his breath, and watched Bahadur's retreat.

Both beasts were shaken: to induce them to attack, the mahouts had to use the ankus cruelly, driving the spikes into their animals' skulls so that they winced and ducked. At last, maddened by pain, and the tumult of the crowd, they charged down on each other once more. This was the death-grapple.

It was a struggle between strength and experience, to end in a death-grapple.

Presently the barber noticed that Bahadur's forefoot had begun to lift, like a dog doubtful of his next move. He tried to lay another hundred on Malleer, but the company was too excited to bet. Again that lifting foot, and for the first time it was Bahadur, not Malleer, who began to give way. Back and back he went, closer to the river, and suddenly slipped on the bank.

Malleer saw his opportunity and pounced on his adversary, plunging his tusk into his belly. He would have killed him then and there, but Bahadur fell into the Gumpti with a splash that wetted all the occupants of the royal box.

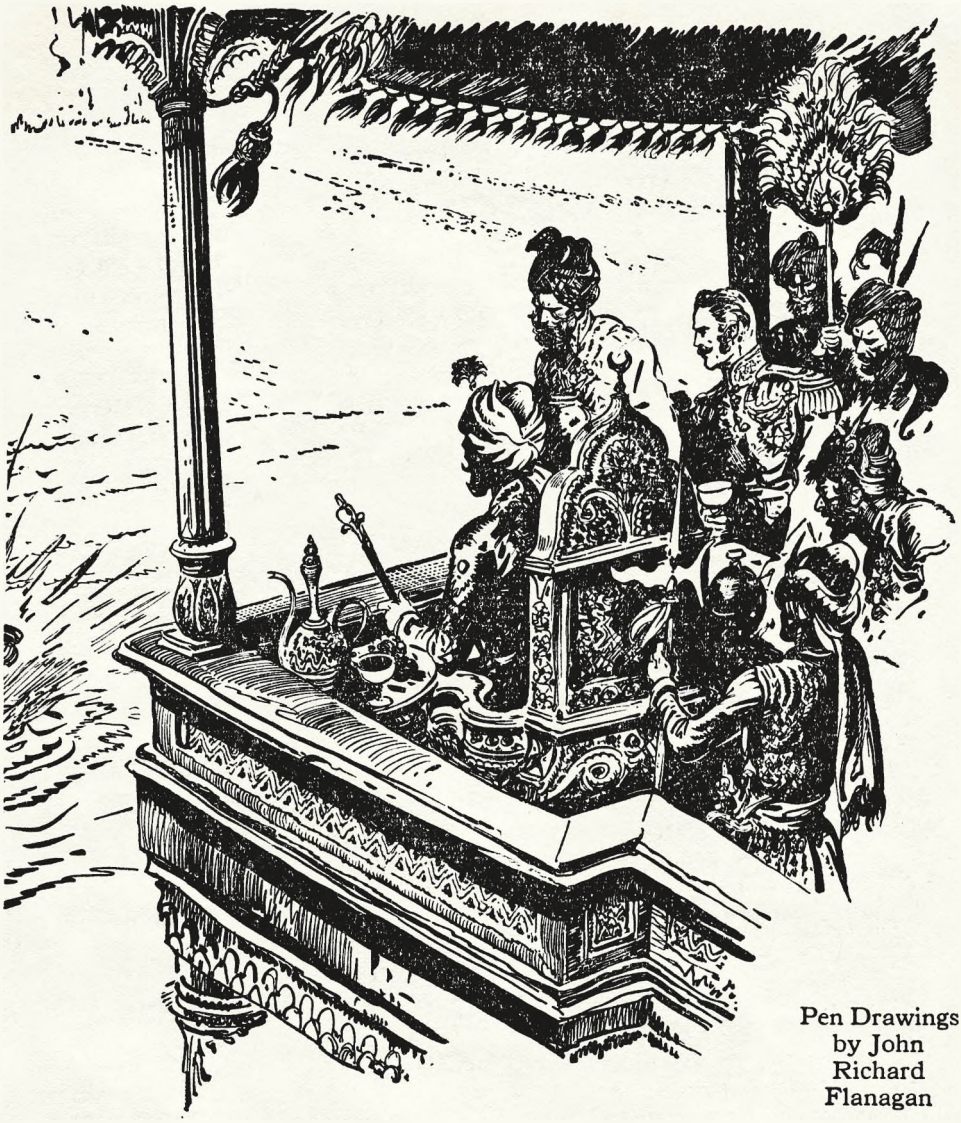
Silence. The crowd held its breath.

"Jai! Jai! Malleer!" The yell came from the victorious mahout, who had fallen to the ground in the struggle.

And now a strange thing happened: Seeing his adversary swimming away to safety, Malleer looked around for somebody to kill. His mahout was still on the ground, shouting. He rushed on the unfortunate man, and stood over him, trumpeting furiously. The mahout tried to roll away, but he was between Malleer's forefeet.

"Drive him off, you damned fools!" cried the Commander-in-chief. But it was too late. Malleer may have mistaken him for Bahadur's rider, or he may have been merely mad with rage; at any rate he stamped on the prostrate body. . . . Everyone heard the mahout's spine crack.

Lancers galloped into the arena, five on each side of Malleer. They were men trained to the task of managing elephants, and mounted on exceptionally fast and handy ponies. With their long spears they were generally able to drive the most intractable tusker in any desired



Pen Drawings by John Richard Flanagan

direction without coming within his reach. But not Malleer. One of the troopers tried to turn him by pricking him on the flank. Malleer turned like a tiger—literally with a tiger's speed—and knocked horse and rider into the dust. They were saved only because the elephant was still intent on destroying his first victim. He tore off the arms of his mahout, first one, then the other, flinging them high into the air over the terrified spectators.

BEHIND the lancers a woman came, carrying a child in her arms. She ran straight to the elephant. "Malleer," she cried, "oh, Malleer, what have you done?" She stood before him fearlessly, and her voice seemed to tear her throat. "You have killed my husband—now kill me and my child!"

Everyone expected her to be torn to pieces, but Malleer merely bowed his head. He had grown suddenly gentle. At a sign from the woman he knelt down before her, and took her and the child in his trunk, hoisting them upon his back.

He was walking away as quietly as a timber-elephant after a day's work, when the woman commanded him to return. She made him salaam to the King, then go back for the body of her husband, which he gave her in his trunk. . . .

His Majesty, who cried easily, steadied himself with a glass of wine, and gave orders that the mahout's wife was to receive a pension. The barber made a note of this—and collected his bets, which amounted to one hundred and fifty gold mohurs, or more than three hundred guineas.

High Lights

"DELILAH"

This novel about an American destroyer gained a place high among the best-sellers soon after its publication. We reprint this episode from the beginning of the book by special permission of the publishers, Farrar and Rinehart, N. Y.

By MARCUS GOODRICH

SHE was very slim and light. She was always tense, often atremble, and never failed to give the impression of being a mass of almost terrible power wrapped in a thin and fragile blue-grey skin. The materials that went into the making of her complete being were more curious and varied than those that went to compose her creator, Man—for Man, himself, formed part of her bowels, heart and nerve centers. She ate great quantities of hunked black food, and vented streams of grey débris. Through her coiled veins pumped vaporous, superheated blood at terrific pressure. She inhaled noisily and violently through four huge nostrils, sent her hot breath pouring out through four handsome mouths and sweated delicate, evanescent, white mist. Her function in existence was to carry blasting destruction at high speed to floating islands of men; and her intended destiny, at the opposite pole from that of the male bee, was to die in this act of impregnating her enemy with death. It was, perhaps, for this reason that she carried her distinctly feminine bow, which was high and very sharp, with graceful arrogance and some slight vindictiveness, after the manner of a perfectly controlled martyr selected for spectacular and aristocratic sacrifice. Her name was Delilah.

The suave, glistening Sulu Sea parted before Delilah's sharp bow and slid under her flat stern with great but smooth rapidity. It was only in her wake, where was left a white commotion, that there was betrayed the adequate evidence of the effort of her progress. A few feet above the cause of this foaming propulsion—two whirling typhoons of metal—an old Irish monk sat on the edge of a camp cot and gazed intently forward along the destroyer's narrow steel deck at what was taking place amidships....

The monk on the starboard side of the quarter-deck had been for thirty-five years in the multitudinous islands that stretch from the Malay Peninsula to the Kamchatka Peninsula, and he had been used, exploited or persecuted in so many of the crises that had splattered these brilliant archipelagoes with blood that his body and soul seemed to have assimilated certain aspects of them. People who encountered him even superficially were prone to imagine that "if he had lived in the Middle Ages he would have been a saint." Yet, as Lieutenant Fitzpatrick had observed to the Captain that morning after the monk had boarded Delilah alongside the Zamboanga dock, "The old boy seems to have too much of a sense of humour to make a good saint."

"I don't know," the Captain had answered, "he evidently hasn't enough of it to make him unimportant."

The monk's arrival had been preceded by urgent, emergency orders to get Delilah under way immediately he boarded her and proceed at the utmost speed possible to Isla-Sulu, one of a cluster of coral islands that lay at the southern limit of

the Sulu Sea. On this small island the Moros had risen. Some of the dozen or so white and Chinese traders on it were dead or wounded. Survivors were besieged. The order surprisingly further instructed the Captain to land the old holy man on the island, and under no circumstances to send ashore a landing party unless the monk called upon him to do so or failed to communicate with Delilah within an hour after landing. The Captain had been ruffled by this order.

"Well, if they want to kill off a priest or two, I suppose it's none of my business."

Even Lieutenant Fitzpatrick, who had an emotional leaning towards confidence in the monk, had . . . told himself "it was a very curious idea . . . paradoxical . . . this trying to pacify a bunch of Mohammedan fanatics by dumping a Catholic monk on them . . . as if he were a damn' barrel of oil on a rough sea. . . . And what the devil would happen to the people who were besieged during the hour the landing party held back . . . if the Father failed to straighten things out?"

IT is probable that the early torpedo-boat destroyer, which is practically all raw engine and boilers, was not designed with a view to Sulu Sea operations in the hot season. Even in cold weather, with fire under all four of Delilah's boilers and the engines running under maximum steam pressure, it was necessary to wear thick wooden sandals in order to tread the burning expanses of deck over the fire- and engine-rooms. This also was more economical, because it took longer to char away the wooden sandals than it did leather shoes, and the sandals could be sawed out of any thick board as fast as they were needed. Now, even though shod with the thick wood, the men waiting to relieve those below in the fire-rooms climbed off the scorching deck onto every shelf and corner that would hold them. A number even perched on the bronze cables of the railing, a thing normally not permitted because it stretched the cables.

An ordinary seaman, a young Texan named Warrington, with nothing on his body but a thin, sleeveless undershirt, dungaree trousers and a pair of wooden sandals, was crouching on the torpedo-tube base, two feet above the deck, waiting for his turn below. He, too, was staring at Poe's agonized face. Three men dragged the chief electrician off the after fire-room hatch rim, where he had collapsed, and hung him on the railing. Another, who was playing a vigorous stream of salt water on the deck in an attempt to keep the heat down, turned the nozzle on the fainting electrician to revive him. He screamed as the column of cold sea water broke against him. From Poe, the Texan's glance slid down the iron perspective of the deck and encountered the formidable figure of the monk. The association called up in his memory a story of Inquisitional torment . . . the men hung on the bronze wires like black, rotting victims of some ancient torture rack . . . soon he'd have to tackle it again . . . the hour wasn't nearly up, but the other gang seemed to be passing out for good . . . fifteen minutes up . . . fifteen minutes down . . . for an hour . . . then try to rest . . . for an hour . . . like this . . . on an incandescent deck . . . fifteen minutes up . . . fifteen minutes down. . . .

As a matter of fact, in this heat very few were able to stick out the full fifteen minutes below, and only the most rugged of the "black gang," the regular coal heavers, were expected to. When a man was on the verge of collapse, he crawled up the ladder and those above hauled him through the hatch onto the deck. Then the man whose turn it was next climbed down in his place. There was no question of anyone being a quitter: the crew knew instinctively and at once when a man was all in, and every one realized that they knew, so there was no shame about giving up and no thought of giving up while there was still strength enough to shovel. Some stuck it out eight minutes, some nine, some ten, some twelve and some thirteen minutes; even Rene, the bulky chief machinist's mate in charge of the resting gang to which Warrington belonged, had stayed the full fifteen minutes only twice.

"Stand by, you guys!" yelled Rene.

His gang had been seriously reduced by the necessary transfer of two mem-

bers to the other gang as replacements for four men who had suffered permanent collapse; and in the resulting rearrangement of pairs to work below, which now took place, Warrington, the ordinary seaman, found himself linked with the one thing in his hated surroundings that he hated most, a thing that infected his consciousness with an unrelaxing dread of terrific power coupled with devastating irresponsibility. This thing was O'Connel. Warrington and O'Connel, the water-tender, were the antitheses of each other in everything; even in the quality of their indubitable honesties: the boy's honesty was like that of an old steel blade, and the man's like that of the sea. One was seventeen, the other thirty-four. The Texan, who was born in a high, blue room pervaded by the scent of magnolia blossoms, fortified himself with poetry and hunted out his strength from the tunnels of his soul; while the Irishman, who was born in a canal barge, fortified himself with whiskey and sucked up his strength from the magnificent stretches of his great body. The one steered his aggressiveness against the universe and its enemy; the other shattered the faces of every one in the Squadron who was as big as he was. For the youth, this environment was a valley of repellent futility down which he had fled blindly from an intolerable situation in his home; for the man, it was a high place vivid with significant life.

The Texan was ever on the verge of annihilating the Irishman on the level of significance; and it always seemed as if O'Connel were about to rend Warrington bone from bone. Both looked life squarely in the face, but they saw there different things.

O'CONNEL was heavyweight champion of the Squadron, and too tough to serve on anything but the black boats. He had been in the Navy twelve years, and his service was a record of turbulence. For much of it, he had been deprived of advancement and pay and slammed in the brig; but for some of it he had gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor and a reputation for being a "hard egg" in the face of things that were likely to smash him as well as in situations where he was the one able to do the smashing. It was for this reason that people looked upon him as a wild man rather than as a bully. It is probable that the function of introspection was but primitively a part of his mental operations, and his test for human authenticity seemed to be a formula involving physical force, elemental simplicity and "guts."

In 1907, when he first went to destroyers, the thing had occurred that gained him the Congressional Medal. A cylinder head blew off at sea while O'Connel and three others were in an engine-room making emergency repairs on the engine. The splattering steel and steam killed one man outright and wounded the other two. The right side of O'Connel's head was crushed in. Nevertheless, he seized the engineer officer, who was one of those knocked out, and dragged him up out of the lethal cubicle onto the deck. Then realizing that the scalding steam was intimidating the rescue party that had gathered to extricate the men remaining below, he flung himself angrily into the midst of the fat, white death billowing out of the hatchway, and tumbled back down into the engine-room. Those on deck could hear his wild and private curses spouting up with the steam. A moment later, in rapid succession, the limp bodies of the other two men shot up through the steaming hatchway as if they had been hunks of lava flung skyward by the violence of an erupting crater.

When O'Connel had made his raging leap down the hatchway, his intention had been to make his way to the steam manifold and shut off all the steam making its way from the boilers to the engine. But in landing on the steel floor plates he had broken his left leg. It would have taken him so long a time, he had felt, to crawl first to the manifold, hoist himself up and turn off the steam, cracked up as he was, that the lungs of the men he was trying to save would surely have been burnt out by the steam. So he had heaved the men up first; and then afterwards, though the boiled flesh had been peeling from his hairy legs and arms, and his cracked head had assumed something like one of those grotesque shapes usually seen but in the distorting mirrors of a penny arcade, he had rolled and clawed his way to the manifold and shut off the steam. When the rescuers reached him, his slowly relaxing, blood-spattered body was doubled over his broken leg; but his big hands were fiercely gripping a polished engine stanchion after the manner of a wrestler holding to the limb of an opponent, and he was enunciating, more as if in realization than as if in supplication, "Peace, you son of . . . peace . . . peace . . . peace. . . ."

With his bronze medal on his breast and a silver plate in his skull, he had lain for a long time in hospital bunks and champed restlessly in places good for his lungs.

But he finally went back to the destroyers, seemingly cured of everything but a curious, elemental rage at something too far beyond the horizon of his consciousness to assume definite objectivity. When he raised hell, the men said: "You see, he's got a silver plate in his head."

THE Irishman hit the floor plates first and stood with his fists on his hips watching the Texan descend the ladder. Through his back the boy felt the wild, blue gaze plunging hostilely at him, and his heavy prescience that this was to be a significant encounter seemed to suffer instant confirmation. He helped the two worn-out men they were relieving up the ladder, slowly lit the taper of his bunker lamp, glanced a little helplessly from the great, iron visage of the boiler that formed the forward wall of the cave in which he found himself to that which formed the after wall, and then, almost shutting his eyes, crawled through the low door into the port coal bunker.

For some seconds O'Connel stared at the bunker hole, where the dim gleams from the Texan's paraffin torch flickered. Finally he stamped over and looked through into the bunker, which, like that on the starboard side of the ship, was a crevice only a little more than two feet wide, but extending the height and depth of the ship. It served the double purpose of carrying fuel and providing a protective belt of coal for the engines and boilers,—the only armour of any sort that stood between these and enemy's shells. In the depths of this narrow, towering frame, O'Connel saw the Texan leaning for a preparatory instant on the handle of his shovel as if it were a crutch. His eyes, across which there was a sweeping smear of coal dust, were gazing at the deep darkness just above the level of his head, and the squirming light glowed uncertainly amongst the curls of his dull blond hair.

The Irishman lunged back to one of the firebox doors under the after boiler, flung it open and shot in a shovelful of coal from the heap on the floor plates. As he was withdrawing the shovel from before the flaming door, some arresting pattern formed on the stream of consciousness rushing through his great, battered head. He grinned, and the red gush of brilliance from the firebox flashed and shone on the long row of his upper teeth, which were all gold. The sweat pouring down his face was curiously diverted into two deep channels that formed in the flesh on either side of his thick, flat nose as he grinned, and his hair, stiff with coal, seemed to bristle uncannily. His grin burst into a delighted, braying laugh. He banged the shovel on the floor-plates with fierce zest as a man might bang out his delight with a spoon on some cabaret table.

The mad banging and laughing penetrated into the bunker and startled the boy. Hanging the bunker lamp to a hook on the bulkhead, he crawled back to the low hole that served for door and peered out into the fire-room. For about as long as O'Connel had stared in at him, he was held by the lurid apparition before the flaming furnace; then he went back in where the coal began and commenced getting it down. After a few shovelfuls, he paused to readjust his grip. . . . He was holding the shovel too tight . . . but then if he held it looser the sweat made it slip . . . the heat seemed to be getting him already . . . he'd have to get the coal out fast . . . felt like the air pressure was bursting in his ears . . . blowers turning up too much . . . O'Connel used a lot of coal . . . too much coal, they said . . . but the officers weren't watching the smoke on this run . . . deadly hot. . . . He moved down to the door and shovelled through it onto the fire-room floor-plates the coal he had knocked down. The infranatural laughter bit at him again. His breath stopped for an instant.

The interior of the coal bunker was so narrow that he could maintain himself at any depth in it by the centrifugal pressure of his legs: But now he had shovelled his way to the bottom again, and somewhat farther away from the entrance into the fire-room. He'd fed O'Connel a lot of coal . . . this was about the end . . . as far as he was concerned . . . coal was as hard as rock . . . wasn't the coal, after all, but the steel side of the ship . . . this would never do . . . couldn't make the shovel go where he wanted it to. In a spurt of irritation he drove the shovel into the lumpy implacability before him. The force of the movement threw him forward into the coal, a section of which, jarred loose, caved in upon him. For a time he lay there in the hot, primordial smother, relaxed, at rest, losing consciousness, much as a snow-beaten man surrenders to the lethal peace of a deep drift.

The uninterrupted noises that in the first moments of his recumbency had seemed to have a soothing, lullaby effect upon him, slowly began to wear through their disguises: the malevolent, high-pitched purr of the sea as it slid viciously along the thin skin of the ship, and the pounding struggle of the propellers as they tore and twisted at its waters. . . . He began to think or dream or remember: "The sea . . . the sea . . . the unutterably horrible sea . . . an infinite, biological solution in which coiled and gasped monsters and living slime beside which the images of man's diseased obsessions and insane fears become delicate symmetries . . . a festering, amorphous mass pouring over the areas of the earth, licking and pounding in insentient fury at the few rocks up which man has fled . . . a distraught gesture of Creation." . . . Slowly he pulled himself up out of the coal and tried to stand erect. But he could not maintain himself in that position. On all fours he crawled over the hot bunker plates and coal towards the ruddy flicker of the fire-room entrance. His under lip curled out instinctively to catch the dark sweat that poured from about his head. He reached the door. Like a dying animal, covered with black mud, he glared through the hole at O'Connel.

With the heat and the air pressure assaulting the borders of his last province of strength, the Irishman, sweat-drenched and inflamed, was probing the conflagration before him with an enormous, iron slice bar. In proportion to the extent that his body succumbed to tiredness and weakness, he furiously revenged himself upon it by demanding of it heavier and grosser performances. He was left-handed and his right arm had been a little wasted by a series of injuries; but when he found that exhaustion was creeping into his good left arm, he flung it from him as if it had sentient personality; and, in no sense to get relief, but rather to defy his own strength and to humiliate his left arm, he swung angrily about to grip and handle the slice bar with his right hand alone. It was then that he saw Warrington staring at him from the hole.

This confrontation unloosed a considerable emotional and mental convulsion in each of them. The effort to reinstate the image and idea of the boy in his consciousness, which had been intensely monopolized by a quite different problem, and the sudden realization that "the little, white-necked louse was still at it" unpoised the Irishman. He emitted a raucous bleat, such as might come from a gargantuan calf.

"A-a-a! A-a-a! What the hell! Quittin'?" He sneered with both corners of his big mouth.

The instant the boy saw the great creature fighting with the fire, he had succumbed to the torturing obligation of maintaining the authenticity of his difference from him. He *couldn't* quit. The flaming power of his abhorrence of the Irishman and of the idea of admitting any sort of inferiority to him, openly or secretly, concentrated what little physical energy was left in him and strengthened the waning current of his blood. It began to pound unbearably within the sick regions about the back of his head. If his miserable body would only keep up with him . . . see him through . . . Were O'Connel a person like himself there would be no question of keeping on . . . he could say, "I am so tired, help me up the ladder" . . . even sink into the arms of an enemy . . . like himself . . . but this . . . this *thing!* When the Irishman shouted his question at him, the boy, still on all fours, turned about and faced back into the bunker; then he paused there as if endeavouring to marshal before him in the black path, in one convenient obstacle, all the ramifications of the dread necessity for going back.

This manoeuvre confounded O'Connel; so he went over to the hole and gripping Warrington by one of his slim arms dragged him out onto the floor plates of the fire-room. The boy jerked himself free and crawled back into the bunker. Until the thought of his fires called him back to the boilers, O'Connel stood in bewilderment staring at the hole and listening to the spasmodic coughing that began to come through it.

IN his excitement over being down with O'Connel and his fear of not getting out enough coal to meet shovel for shovel the Irishman's effort, Warrington had gotten down, and heaved out into the fire-room considerably more coal than the fires needed; so that the frantic, almost futile efforts that his exhausted body now engaged in, with his eyelids tightly pressed together as if to shut out the feverish dimness that enveloped him, held things back not at all for the moment. To load his shovel from the pile that he knocked down onto the floor of the bunker, hoist it to the level of his knees and then project its load through the

hole to O'Connel was demanding more intense mental concentration, attention to bodily balance and physical sacrifice than he ever had been called upon to suffer before. To get a load in the shovel, he felt with its blade for a clear space on the steel near the coal as a blind man searches the way before him with a stick. When he had found such a space, he laid the back of the shovel upon it and then lunged forward on the handle. Such coal as the edge of the shovel encountered slid into the shovel. At this point the terrible phase of his repetitious struggle was upon him. He balanced himself unnaturally on his heels, which he kept wide apart and opposite each other, and rested his back against the bulkhead. Then jamming the end of the shovel handle into his stomach just above the loins, he slid his hands halfway down the handle and slowly began to pull. The force of the lift was taken by his stomach, as a fulcrum, and each shovelful seemed on the verge of sending his straining intestines bursting through the pit of his abdomen. When the shovel hung poised at about the level of his knees, he opened his eyes with an effort, located the red bunker hole, closed his eyes again, and fell toward it. The shovel of coal proceeded through the hole until his body brought up sharply against the steel wall above it. This jerked the coal forward from the shovel. Often he missed the hole, and the coal and shovel clattered tauntingly against the bulkhead.

The Irishman could not get out of his head the idea of this "punk" actually trying to battle it out with him. Every time a shot of coal spat into the fire-room, he turned his head towards the hole. Eventually, the strange manner in which the coal jumped off when the shovel stuck through into the fire-room caught his attention. After watching for the rather long time required by three of these reappearances of the shovel, O'Connel could not resist the temptation to look into the hole. He leapt over, as the shovel was being withdrawn, and peered in. Slowly, as he watched the agony-drenched ritual develop in the reddish haze of the bunker, a crude, eerie revulsion proceeded within him. Some strong attitude, which particular one he had not the faculty to determine on the instant, began to disintegrate. Some handhold to his immediate situation seemed to be giving way. He slumped back uneasily into the center of the fire-room, where he slung his head from side to side lionesquely, as if seeking to sight something which he could rush upon and smash to reaffirm that all was right with his world. His eyes found the air-pressure gauge. It indicated an excessive pressure of air in the fire-room. His rage, blasting him along the channel provided by this, swept him up the ladder. With his sweating, tightly clenched fist, he crashed open the little, air-tight hatch-cover and, like a gleaming wet demon rending up through the earth, projected his coal-blackened upper bulk into the midst of the group clustered on the deck.

"You . . . ." he howled at the ship in general, "watch them blowers!"

The senior chief machinist's mate, Stengle, a small, coffee-coloured man, was jerking about between the two huge nostrils that sucked air down into the fire-room, trying to regulate their speed. The mechanism that controlled them from below had broken down early on the run.

"Keep your shirt on! Keep your shirt on!" he said, shaking a big Stillson wrench at the Irishman as if it had been a forefinger. "I'll have to let 'em run high, or shut 'em down . . . Can't do that."

WHEN O'Connel had dropped back down the hatch, leaving the abrupt banging of its cover as the period to his final, vituperative roar, the men awoke to the fact that the pair below already had survived for thirteen minutes. This was the record so far, for although several individuals had lasted the full quarter of an hour, one or the other of every pair that had gone down up to now had been relieved before the thirteen-minute mark. O'Connel always lasted it out; but no one expected or demanded of Warrington to stay down more than five minutes. As the fourteen-minute mark was approached, the situation took on the aspect of a prize fight in which some "dark horse" was putting up a totally unexpected and wonder arousing show. The men, including the resting gang from the forward fire-room, crowded a trifle excitedly around the hatch expecting every second to see it exude the sweat-soaked body of the boy; and the man whose duty it was to relieve him hovered preparatorily about as if made restless by a feeling that he should have been down long ago, but that it was no fault of his that he was not. A red-headed oiler, named Feenan, who was in the

habit of making clumsily sarcastic remarks about the boy's careful and rather over-elegant manner of speaking, stepped to the railing, his unpleasantly freckled face set with primitive primness, spat accurately into the sea, and said:

"He'll never stay down the fifteen minutes."

As if by sudden, unanimous consent, the sporting attitude of the crew gave way to a general feeling of uneasiness.

"Maybe the kid's passed out in the bunker and that wild guy has forgotten all about him."

"What time is it now?" Stengle was asked for the third time.

"Maybe the big harp got sore and smacked him."

Everybody laughed restlessly.

Stengle moved over to the hatch, pulled it open and stuck his dirty, little, grey head down into it. O'Connel feeling the pressure of the air jump suddenly from off his chest and ear drums, and perceiving the white fire he was feeding begin to turn red, raised his face questioningly to the hatch. It seemed to Stengle that the Irishman was more all in than he ever had seen him before.

"Time up?" shouted O'Connel.

"Minute to go," Stengle screamed back. His voice barely pierced the barricade of mechanical uproar between them. "How's the kid making out?"

At this question, the alien, about-facing disturbance within O'Connel burst into clear recognition. He flung his two great fists into the air as if they were gonfalons he was bearing into battle, and shouted triumphantly, half-incidentally up to Stengle:

"Going strong!"

Stengle popped his head back out of the hatch and permitted the cover to spring shut.

"Going strong," he repeated to the men around him.

A wave of surprised admiration swept up the deck, and even swirled for a moment about the bridge when "Unc" Blood, the chief quartermaster, was summoned there to relieve Ensign Woodbridge at the wheel for a moment.

Blood stationed himself upright behind the wheel, as motionless and set as a carbonized, baroque statue, and fixed his lecherous, little eyes steadily on the Captain in a suggestive fashion, a fashion that often caused the Captain to preface his wardroom stories about the Chief Quartermaster by saying, "Blood came up bursting with news . . ."

These two had "been together" going on six years, and the Captain never failed to assume what he felt was a discouraging attitude towards the man's propensity to gossip. He assumed this attitude now. For several minutes he would not look in Blood's direction: But when he finally—as he always did—shot a quick glance at the aging mariner to see if he still was "bursting," Blood's sanguinary glance nailed him. Before the Captain could escape, the point of Blood's blackened beard, which curved to one side in a satyrlike manner, dropped an inch and a half, the bright red cavity of his mouth twitched about his decayed teeth, and the two spikes of his mustachios, which at one moment resembled those of a Western sheriff and at another those of a Chinese gentleman, see-sawed slightly from one side to the other. When the Captain could bear this grin no longer, he said shortly:

"What's the matter?"

Then he stepped quickly over to the binnacle and glanced at the compass in the hope of catching Blood off the course; but, as always in these encounters, the Chief was dead on. In a twanging voice, as if he were saying something slightly vindictive, but really believing himself bathed in a fine, jesting manner, Blood said:

"You know, Cap'n, that new lemon from the Galveston they dumped on us last month at Cavite? . . . He's been down fourteen minutes and is still going strong! . . . Running neck and neck with O'Connel."

"You mean that new youngster?" said the Captain a trifle incredulously; then turning in good-natured and pleased surprise to Ensign Woodbridge (who, arriving back on the bridge in time to overhear Blood's news, already had exclaimed, "Well, I'll be damned") he said: "Woodbridge, that little ordinary seaman they gave us is down with O'Connel and sticking it out."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Ensign Woodbridge again, not so much with the feeling of surprise that had first engendered the remark, but with a sense of getting his exclamation in its proper rank and order.

O'CONNEL no longer was exiled in the depths of fire, coal and steel with a despicable alien. As his stark delight ascended flight after flight of sweet and fierce recognition, he pounded his shovel and shouted, "Guts! Guts!

Guts!" He thought: "He's probably Irish after all! . . . Shovel for shovel with me, O'Connel!" He rushed over to the bunker hole to roar in some greeting as if to a well-esteemed newcomer.

But the glimpse he got of the Texan down this new perspective brought him up sharply. A veritable incarnation of distress, the boy was struggling with the shovel as if it were some awkward, slippery burden. O'Connel gave a start that seemed to indicate that he was about to leap into the bunker to rescue his wounded comrade.

As he hesitated, Warrington jammed the handle of the shovel into his stomach for another try, and O'Connel realized the other's agony so intimately that his being began to function somewhat as if it were he, himself, fighting there in pain. He dove in to put an end to it.

The boy, sensing the great creature crowding the obscurity before him, glared toward it desperately and emitted a hawking, defiant sound, a sound electric with the sharp anomalous authority that often concentrates in even the meanest man in the throes of physical anguish. It arrested O'Connel and slowly pushed him back into the fire-room again, where he found himself, lost in a wilderness of uncertainty and pity, clumping along a network of unfamiliar mental and emotional trails. "I'm gonna stop this," he told himself truculently, "time must be up . . . them tight bums on the top side holding out till the last second . . . !" It entered his mind that the thing to do was to "tell the kid the time was up."

"Time up!" he shouted with the relief of having hit upon an actable line of conduct.

The next instant he was at the bunker hole, yelling again:

"Time up! Time up! Time up!"

When the boy finally heard him, he sat slowly down crosslegged about his shovel, drifting into the incomparable luxury of oblivion, slowly pulsing away from an acute crisis of high-pitched, kinetic agony.

For a second O'Connel's eyes lingered on the wet haft of the shovel, along which the light from the bunker lamp flickered. It projected upright from the dark mound of the small body like a limb stuck into the cairn marking some isolated and valorous death.

Seeing that his end was gained there, O'Connel swung back into the fire-room, kicked open the door of the coal bunker opposite to that in which Warrington was, and with furious surreptitiousness heaved out nine or ten shovelfuls of coal from that as yet untouched supply. After soundly reclosing this bunker hole door, he fed a shovelful to each of the fires, and then, steadying himself angrily on his slightly swaying legs, he rapidly transferred the remainder of the coal he had gotten out to the diminished pile in front of the Texan's bunker hole. It was a custom that the relieving watch should find a small supply of coal out to start with. As he heaved the last shovelful, he felt the air pressure rise from off of him. He dropped the shovel guiltily. A relieved, victorious feeling surged through him.

"What th' hell!" he yelled up at the open hatch.

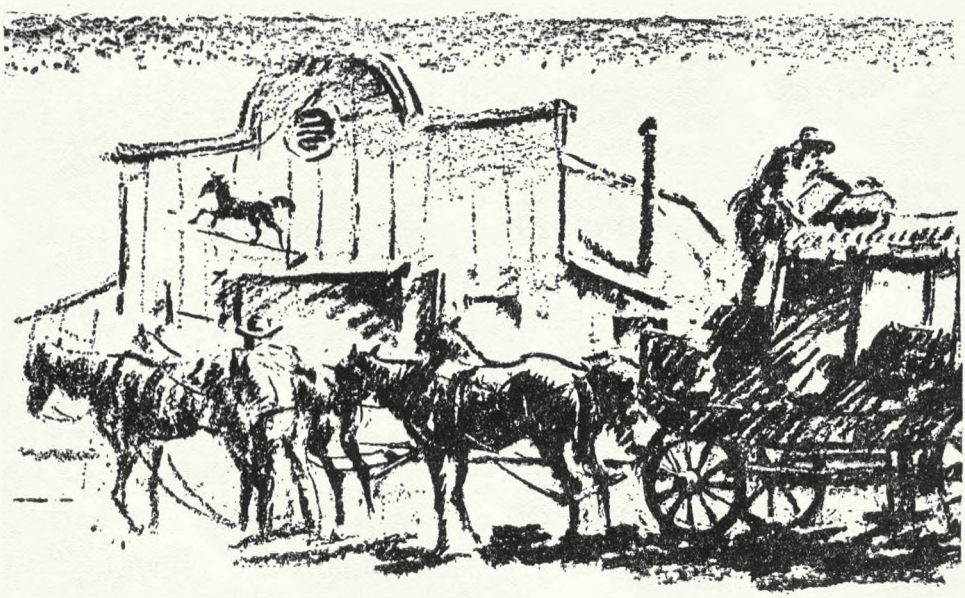
THE murky bodies of the relief followed one another quickly down the ladder.

The Irishman's figure, assuming a slight exaggeration of its usual arrogant, hard-boiled stance, shuffled over to the bunker hole. He stuck in his head and shouted:

"Hey! Lay off! Time's up!" Then, as he crawled through the hole, he added in loud, incompetent dissimulation: "Hold up, I'll give y' a hand."

Morrow, the relief coal heaver, knelt by the hole and pulled the boy's body through as O'Connel shoved its shoulders within his reach. Morrow and his watch-mate, Whorly, started to carry him towards the ladder; but O'Connel, arising from the bunker hole, snatched the small body from them and climbed up the ladder unassisted, maintaining the boy on his left shoulder and chest with the pressure of his right arm. As the two heads arose from the hatchway, the crowd of men surrounding it, comprising nearly the entire ship's company, let out a triumphal yell. The big bruiser, shaking off all the black hands that shot out to relieve him of his burden, climbed to the deck and stood for a moment glaring in a squinting manner at the slick sea, which the sun, burning the first suggestion of color for its setting, had raddled a greyish pink.

As he stood there swaying above the crowd of heads with the boy in his arms, he seemed to the monk on the quarter-deck like one of the bulky Pietas, absurd of color and strangely awkward of workmanship, that the Italian mountaineers bear down the trails to their devotions on feast days.



The Strange Affair

The author of "Blood on the Moon" gives us a moving drama of the old West.

WHEN Marshal Max Coker, from his chair in the deep shadow of the Hale House porch, saw the three men get off the upstage from Globe, he pulled a dog-eared envelope from his shirt pocket, found his stub of pencil, and put down three more marks on the envelope. Already there were nine marks there, all in a row, the first ones so faint as to be almost rubbed out. Coker, musing, said to himself: "Twelve, all told."

While hostlers from the feed-stable across the street unhitched the teams from the weather-bitten Barlow Sanderson coach and bawled for a way through the horse traffic of the street, Coker watched the three men, but especially the last one down. This man was standing beside the two lean Texans in puncher's dress, who wore no guns and who were now slapping the dust from their clothes with their wide hats; but he seemed to ignore them. Standing just beyond the stableman, who was unlacing the ropes of the rear express compartment, he was looking over the town of Seven Troughs, which was bathed now in its late afternoon fog of dust and sun and heat and the busy clatter of a boom town. He was a square man from the waist up, his burly shoulders filling out well the dust-grayed black coat; but it was a glimpse of his face that Coker was waiting for.

When he got it, as the man turned to mount the steps, as Coker noted the carved, sallow features, the weary gray eyes, he thought: "He's sick." But even as he thought it, he knew that wasn't right. He knew, too, that he should not have marked this man as one of the twelve, that he was not of their kind.

On the porch now, the stranger looked fleetingly at Coker's leg, thick in bandages and splints, which was stretched on a chair-seat before him, then looked at the Marshal's face and passed on through the door of the hotel into the lobby.

Coker shifted faintly in his chair, then settled back again. He crossed one mark out on the envelope, and put paper and pencil away. During the week since he had been out of bed, Coker had sat in this chair, meeting every stage, silently pegging every descending passenger. It was a kind of grim game, one that he did not enjoy, for every sixth passenger was a puncher, a Texan usually, from the east

at Seven Troughs

By LUKE SHORT

Illustrated by Paul C. Chapman

beyond the desert. There was a sameness about their looks, even their actions; they would climb down, dust themselves off, then ask the first passer-by a question, after which they would drift downstreet, usually to the same saloon. After that, they would not be seen around town.

Coker was wise enough to know that when punchers ride stages instead of ponies, somebody is paying them because somebody wants them, and in a hurry.

HE saw his deputy, Murdo McLeod, drawl a dry greeting to the stage messenger, and without pausing for the answer, ascend the steps. Murdo took the chair next him; and his young, hard face was not happy as he said: "He's no better, and no worse, Max."

"Anybody with him?"

Murdo nodded. "The old Mexican woman."

Coker stared moodily at the street. "How many days is it that the fever's run?"

"Six."

Coker said bitterly: "How tough are kids, anyway? That fever would leave a man looking like a piece of overdone bacon."

"He's tough, all right. Kids are."

"You better tell his mother you stopped in."

Murdo rose and started for the lobby door; then he wheeled and said in a low voice: "What did the stage bring?"

"Two," Coker answered dryly.

"That makes eleven, don't it?" Murdo drawled, looking at Coker, whose old seamed face was impassive. "What's Armbruster waiting for—an even dozen?" When Coker did not answer, Murdo turned to go, but Coker stopped him.

"Ask Hale who that passenger was—a thick man, with a thin white face, black coat, black hat. He looked sick."

"He one of the Texas imports?" Murdo asked.

"No. I don't think so."

Murdo went in. He returned in a few moments and stood beside Coker.

"Can't you get Beth off for a half-day, Max? She was up all night watching the kid, and she's asleep on her feet."

"She won't go."

Murdo swore with the gusto of youth, and Coker did not even listen as he fin-

ished bitterly: "Can't a woman be on hand when her own son dies?"

"Jobs are scarce," Coker said patiently. "If Hale fired her from this one, you know where she'd end."

He looked up at Murdo, and the deputy nodded somberly. Both were thinking of the second floor of the Palace saloon down the street.

"What about the sick man?" Coker said after a while.

"Hale didn't see him."

"Didn't he register?"

"No." Murdo rolled a cigarette.

PRESENTLY Coker said: "You don't reckon he could have been with those other two?"

"I might go ask Armbruster if he got all the hard cases he sent for," Murdo said dryly.

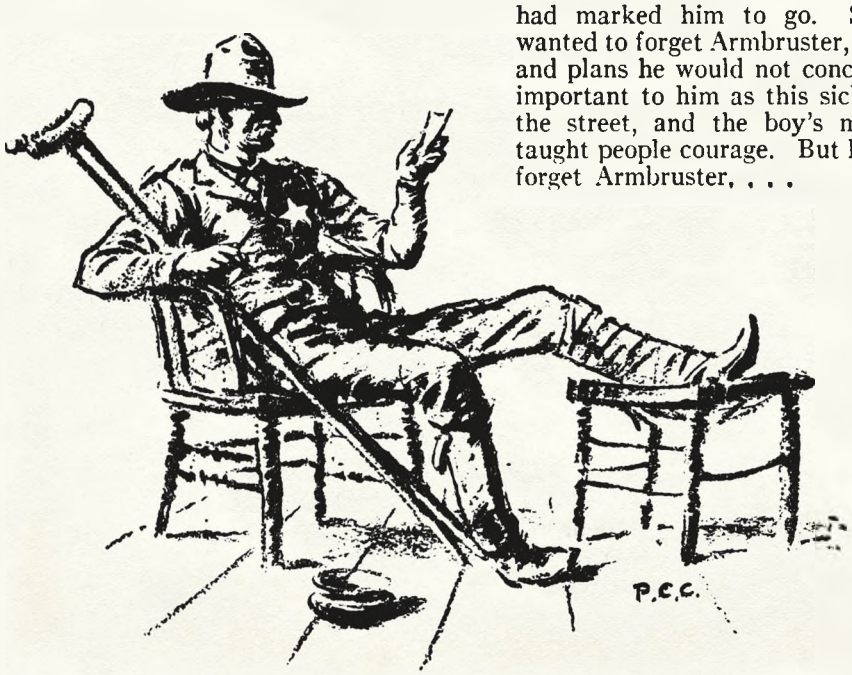
"You go down to the Melodian and see if he's there. See if he's with those other two." And he added: "I'd hate to lose count. Yes sir, I sure would. Because I think when he gets a dozen on hand, Armbruster will begin it."

Murdo rose and looked down at Coker. "Aint it time we bought into this, Max? If you give the word, I'll go down right now and choose those two imports before they can get horses and ride out to Armbruster. Before he even knows they're in town." His eyes were hard, inviting, reckless and eager.

Coker sighed and said: "You wear a badge, Murdo. Get on."

Murdo said, "Hell," and went down the steps; and Coker's face broke into a meager grin as he watched him go. Murdo had not yet learned that weariest of all philosophies—patience—Coker knew; but somehow he could not blame him. For a year they had both watched Armbruster ride this boom, watched him turn from an ordinary, humanly greedy and mildly prosperous rancher into a ruthless, shrewd and dogged sharper. Armbruster had salted test-pits with dust, and sold them to men who were drunk on hope and foredoomed by ignorance; he had bribed unnumbered men in the assay office so he could buy valuable claims from the men discouraged by low assays; he had jumped claims, diverted water, dynamited water-holes in his drive to freeze out other men.

All of it had been slick, smooth, done in a way that the law could not touch with witnesses or proof. And now, Coker knew, Armbruster was gathering these gunmen around him, preparing for his hard, quiet drive that would trample all law and at the same time defend what he had stolen while he stole more. If Coker doubted this, he had only to remember Armbruster's last warning, which had been served three weeks ago. Traveling one of the mountain trails to the north, Coker's horse had been shot beneath him, and had rolled on him, breaking his leg; and Coker knew then that Armbruster had marked him to go. Still, Coker wanted to forget Armbruster, whose ways and plans he would not concede were as important to him as this sick boy down the street, and the boy's mother, who taught people courage. But he could not forget Armbruster. . . .



It took Murdo until dusk to find out about this man. When he returned to Coker, the old man was asleep in his chair. Murdo sat down beside him, waiting, watching the night settle on this moiling town.

Coker stirred and presently said: "I'm an old man, Murdo."

Murdo ignored this. He said: "I found out your sick man's name. It's Mark McKinstrie. He didn't register. He just went up and took a room."

"Who is he?"

"Hale says—" Murdo began, and then his voice trailed off. A figure loomed in the square of the doorway, then paused and leaned against the jamb. Coker saw the burly shadow thrown on the porch, and understood the man was McKinstrie.

Murdo finished: "Hale says Beth got a little sleep this afternoon."

Coker didn't reply, and Murdo didn't speak further.

Presently, McKinstrie said to Coker from the doorway: "When can I get a north stage out of here?"

It didn't take Coker's sharp ear to catch the dead weariness in the man's voice, the polite, tired indifference. He said: "A north stage? Well, now that depends. If they've had—"

Coker ceased talking as four men rounded the corner of the porch and approached on the sidewalk. Coker said: "Careful now, Murdo."

AS they swung up on the steps, the lobby light fell on them. The man at the right, in front, the smallest among those tall men, was Morgan Armbruster. His face was too close-knit to be ascetic, and seemed driven by some restlessness that lighted up his pale hard eyes so they appeared to stab the darkness. His clothes were black, neat, sober for his years. Full on the porch, he stopped, and the men with him halted too. Two of them had acquired worn belts and guns since they stepped off the stage, Coker noticed abstractedly. Armbruster walked over toward Coker, whom he could not see in the shadow but understood was there.

He said: "Good evening, Max."

"Evening," Coker replied, without welcome, without distaste either.

"I've bought me a bodyguard, Coker," Armbruster continued, his voice pleasant, but his mouth and eyes jeering. "It seems a man isn't safe nowdays, inside town or out."

Coker said idly: "Certain kinds of men never have been."

"For instance?" Armbruster asked.

"Law men who cross lawless men."

"Who else?"

Coker answered immediately, quietly: "Lawless men who cross law men."

The three Texans scraped their feet nervously and watched Armbruster with still faces. They didn't like being in the light, with someone else in the dark. But Armbruster only laughed quietly.

Murdo said gravely out of the darkness beside Coker: "Do you run them in shifts now, Morg?"

Two of the Texans looked over at Murdo, their faces alert, receptive, shaped for trouble. The third one kept watching Armbruster for a sign. But Armbruster stepped into the shadow that the watching McKinstrie cast, and peered at Murdo, not seeing him.

"That's a big crowd to feed," Murdo continued. "And cotton-seed cake comes high out here."

The third Texan now swiveled his gaze to Murdo and started to walk toward him. Armbruster raised a hand, and the man stopped, breathing a little hard.

Armbruster said in the silence: "If some of the boys wanted to go hunting, I think I could spare them. I think I could even do it tonight."

"Do it now," Murdo murmured, and quickly.

McKinstrie in the doorway cleared his throat to hide the chuckle. Nobody heard him. The Texans were all three watching Armbruster now. He stood by Coker, his eyes still, speculative.

"No. Not now," he said softly. "Not now."

One of the Texans said to Murdo in a soft drawl: "I'd admire to see your face, son. I'll try to remember it."

Armbruster said, "Come off it, Wake," and turned and brushed past McKinstrie into the lobby. The Texans hesitated; then they too brushed past McKinstrie and entered the lobby. Murdo stood watching them, breathing hard.

McKinstrie lounged erect in the doorway, throwing his shadow across Murdo's face. "About that stage—" he said very politely, as if he had been willing to excuse an interruption, but now that it was over, there was business on hand.

Coker told him, "Tomorrow at ten." And McKinstrie, satisfied, turned and walked back through the lobby. Two of the Texans, seated in the deep lobby chairs, watched him narrowly as he went

past the desk and into the dining-room, where Armbruster and his companion had gone a minute before.

The dining-room was not large. It held perhaps ten small tables, flanking a long one in the center of the room at which a scattering of men now sat. It was informal, rough; unshaven, work-soiled men at the side table carried on loud conversations with other men across the room. The smell of cooked food mingled with that of tobacco smoke; an easy camaraderie was in the room, but McKinstrie did not feel it.

He glanced at Beth Workman, who was clearing off a small table in the corner and at the same time trying to catch his eye. He went over to the table beside which she was standing; just before he sat down, saying a quiet good evening, he recognized Armbruster at the next table, and he put his back to him.

HE did not look at Beth, but she watched him sit down, glancing at his tired face. Her own was more tired, and the heat had beaded her full upper lip with perspiration. Something like a flicker of sympathy came into her eyes as she noted his weariness, and then they settled back into that deep haunted violet that was miserable fear. She was wearing a full apron over her basque dress, and as she brushed back a wisp of straight chestnut hair into the knot that lay loose on her neck, her gesture was wooden, lifeless.

McKinstrie ran a hand over his face and took the napkin she offered him. She said: "There's beef or venison, with soup and vegetables."

McKinstrie looked up at her and said dryly: "I know. There always is. Anything else?"

Beth smiled slightly. "There's bear steak."

"And tomatoes?"

Beth wrinkled her forehead. "I—I think they're all stewed."

"They should be," McKinstrie said. "Bury the steak in them. And bring me lots of milk."

His gaze followed her as she crossed the room with a heavy tray of dishes. He stared moodily at the diners, and he remained that way, not even seeing Beth as she entered again and passed him, and stopped at Armbruster's table.

"How's the lad, Beth?" Armbruster asked her.

The girl's voice held no warmth as she answered: "No better, thanks."

Armbruster made a deprecatory sound and said with a kind of stiff and unctuous solicitousness: "He'll be right as rain in another week."

The girl said nothing, but the swift click of the dishes told McKinstrie she was busy.

"Maybe he'd pick up if you'd let me take him out to the place," Armbruster continued. "It's cooler there."

"Thank you," Beth replied noncommittally.

"You could send a woman out with him, of course—or come yourself."

"Thank you."

Armbruster said carefully: "I think his father would consent to that—since the boy's health is in question."

Beth said calmly: "His father is dead."

"Then there's no reason you should stay on here." Armbruster's voice was lower, more urgent. "I've a cook out there now, Beth. I need a housekeeper. Bring the boy and come out. I'd pay you twice what you're getting here. You can even name your own figure."

"More coffee?" Beth asked.

"Beth, today I sent to Globe for Doc Bain. He'll be here day after tomorrow."

Beth's voice was weary in protest. "But I can't afford it."

"I can. What's money for, if it can't buy that?" And then, as if he realized that his lack of tact had been too noticeable, he said quickly: "Of course, it's a thing I've always had in mind. We need a doctor here. Bain will move his practice up here. I simply put up the guarantee that would attract him."

"Yes."

"About moving the boy out—" Armbruster said quietly, stubbornly.

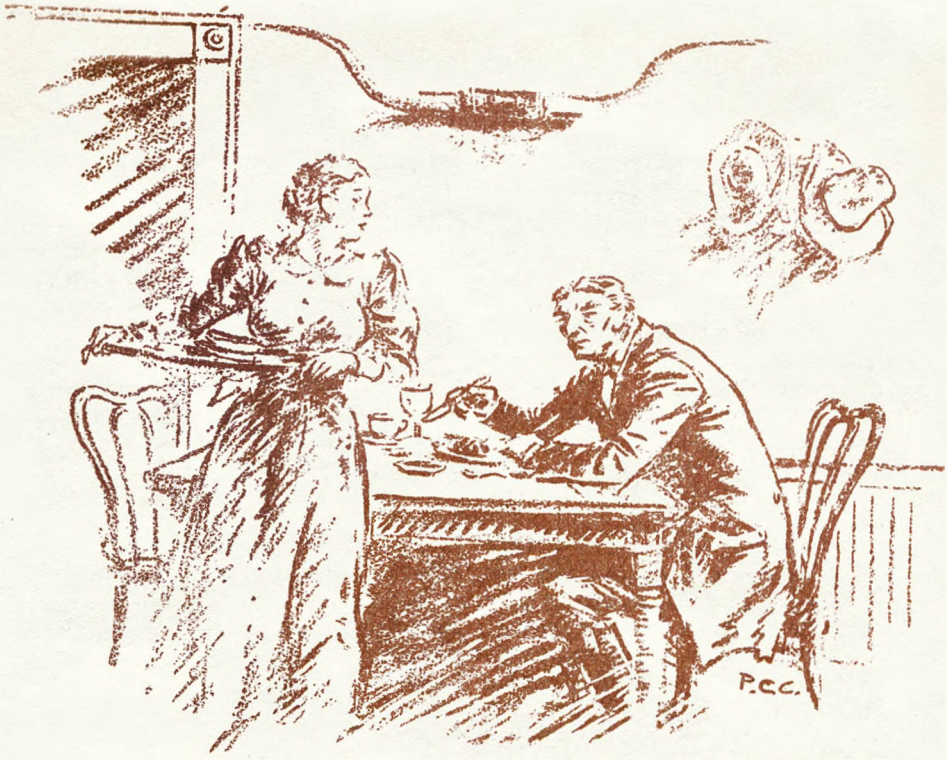
"You take cream, don't you?" Beth asked.

Then she walked past McKinstrie's table, her head high, her dress swishing in her haste.

McKinstrie shifted in his chair. He heard Armbruster rise, and half turned himself in time to see the third Texan at a table across the room rise quickly and join Armbruster at the door.

He was sitting there scowling when Coker hobbled up to his table and slid off his crutch into the chair opposite. McKinstrie looked annoyed, as Coker proceeded to roll a cigarette.

As he was about to light his smoke, Coker paused and looked up at him. "There's a nice pair of rooms you can rent over the assay office, Doc. You'll be out of the street dust there."



"There's no reason you should stay on here, Beth." Armbruster's voice was urgent.

McKinstrie waited a moment, then said sharply: "Who told you I was a doctor?"

"It's no secret, is it?"

"Yes," McKinstrie said flatly. . . . "I'm not."

Coker's reply was grave, mild. "That's funny. You're lugging around a trunk full of tools and stuff." Before McKinstrie could retort, Coker raised a hand. "Easy, son. When you come in here this noon, you didn't register, did you?"

"I was too tired. There was a crowd there at the desk. I went up and took the first empty room."

"All right. But nobody claimed your trunk down in the lobby, and Hale opened it, thinking it might have a name inside. It wasn't locked. He saw your instruments."

McKinstrie said irritably: "What if I do carry them? I used to be a doctor. I'm not any more."

"Through with it?"

"Yes. For good," McKinstrie said, again flatly, almost angrily.

BETH was approaching their table with McKinstrie's food. Coker smiled up at her and said: "Beth, this is Doc McKinstrie. Mrs. Workman, Doc."

McKinstrie rose to acknowledge the introduction, but he was looking at Coker, who said to Beth: "Doc says he'll go over and take a look at Tim tonight."

The look of gratitude that washed over the girl's face cut McKinstrie's reply short. He glared at Coker.

"I hope you will," Beth said simply. "He—he needs a doctor—terribly."

"You come over when you can," Coker told her. She set the dishes before McKinstrie and went on to Armbruster.

"Maybe you didn't understand," McKinstrie said slowly to Coker. "I said I was through."

"I heard you. But you aint yet." Coker accepted his level stare, returned one in kind. "You see, the boy is sick. There's no doctor here. It might take you ten minutes, and I'll see you're paid."

Beth returned now from Armbruster's table. She stood beside Coker and tendered him a sheaf of yellow-back banknotes; when Coker looked up inquiringly, he saw her face was tight with shame. She said: "Tell Mr. Hale to put those in an envelope to give Mr. Armbruster."

Coker half reared out of his seat, but Beth put a hand on his shoulder and gently forced him down. "Please, Max. I *must* take care of myself. I can!" she said passionately.

"You've been doing that too long," Coker growled, and rammed the banknotes in his vest.

"You'll only bring an open fight on quicker," Beth said in her low voice, watching Coker. "If it comes because of me, Max, I'll never know peace again. Will you promise?"

"Only as long as Murdo doesn't hear of it."

"Only you two know it." She looked quickly, imploringly, at McKinstrie, who only now was beginning to understand that what he had watched on the porch was at a simmer and soon ready to boil. He saw the fury in Coker's eyes, and he understood that while Coker had been the calmest head on the porch, he would not suffer this girl to be hurt.

McKinstrie told her: "It won't come from me."

"Then we'll go," Coker said. Beth glanced at McKinstrie again, and her eyes were moist, grateful, so that a pity melted his anger and he became uneasy, as he always did when beholding gratitude. He left a coin on the table for his uneaten supper and followed Coker.

At the dining-room door, Coker stopped and said: "Well?"

McKinstrie saw that Coker had withheld judgment until now, and a feeling of impotence made him want to be surly. But suddenly he smiled and shrugged. "I'll go. Lead off."

THE two Texans had taken chairs close to the stairs. Murdo lounged beside the door, watching them, his back to the wall, and they were watching him. Observant men crossing the lobby were avoiding the stairs. Hale sat silent behind his counter, reading a paper.

Murdo fell in beside McKinstrie, and did not speak until they were on the street.

"You're in this now, Doc. Maybe you don't want to be."

Coker said: "Don't make it worse than it is, Murdo."

"One of those *Tejanos* watched that parley in the dining-room and hunted Armbruster out. He was upstairs," Murdo said.

"All right. He's a doctor," Coker answered.

"The trouble was, Armbruster will know he saw that money and that you'll tell him about it," Murdo said quietly.

Coker said, "Damn," quietly.

McKinstrie said curiously, calmly: "A man can't just sit and watch in this country, then? He has to take a hand?"

It was Murdo who answered, and after a long moment's consideration: "When a man sees another man try to buy a decent woman, he usually doesn't mind sitting in the game."

McKINSTRIE looked swiftly at Murdo, but the deputy's face was blank, hard, with a be-damned-to-you cast to it that McKinstrie had seen before. He was looking straight ahead. McKinstrie smiled meagerly and said nothing. Coker was breathing hard from the exertion of having to pick his clumsy way on crutches through the street crowd. At the first side-street they turned right, and Murdo said: "Go ahead. I'll be on later."

He stationed himself at the corner beside another loafer, while they plunged into the dark well of the side-street. Past a blacksmith shop, where men worked, past a vacant lot that smelled like a corral, along several dark offices, they finally stopped at a harness shop, and Coker stepped off the walk beside it. A frail stairway climbed the side of the building to a platform even with the second story. Once in the corridor above, they heard the subdued clamor of men talking and drinking behind the several closed doors.

A woman stepped out into the hall, holding a half-open wrap around her.

She said: "Hello, boys." And then, when she saw Coker's crutch, she added: "Oh!"

Coker said: "Hello, Virgie. How is he?"

The girl pulled the wrap close now, and her easy invitational smile faded. She looked at McKinstrie, then at Coker. "I looked in a half-hour ago, Max. Not so good. Trix is in there now."

"This is the new doc, Virgie. Doc McKinstrie."

"Pleased to meet you, Doc," Virgie said, holding out her hand. McKinstrie took it, his face grave, listening to Virgie say: "Doc, if he don't come through, I'll quit going to church forever."

Coker grunted. They passed the girl and went on down the corridor past other doors, and stopped at the last one. Coker shifted his crutch and softly opened the door. It was a small, mean room, holding a bed and a cot, a warped dresser and wash-stand and two chairs. A blonde girl in a sleazy silk dress rose from the chair beside the bed, and a wave of cheap perfume rose with her.

"Trix, this is the new doc," Coker said, and Trix nodded pleasantly. Her face was white with powder, her lips too red, and she had a boldness in her eyes that accepted McKinstrie immediately.

She stepped aside now and said: "It's about time, Max."

"Run along," Coker told her. "And much obliged."

"Sure," Trix said. She looked at the bunched covers on the bed, then bade them good night and left.

McKinstrie looked at Coker, his face puzzled. "Is the boy old enough to know where he lives?"

"No, thank God," Coker said grimly. "But they're nice to him and nice to her. A boom camp makes money for women, but only for certain kinds of women. This is all his mother can afford—and she won't take help."

McKinstrie walked over to the bed and looked down. The boy lying there could have been seven or thereabouts; his small face was pinched, flushed, and the fine pale hair of his head plastered down with sweat. Even as McKinstrie watched, he tossed and moaned a little and kept turning his head, licking his lips, making small strange sounds. There was no need for a diagnosis here, McKinstrie knew. The boy had pneumonia. His breathing, his pulse, verified it.

"How long has he been delirious?" McKinstrie asked.

"This is the night of the sixth day," Coker told him. "What can you do?"

McKinstrie looked up at him, at his dogged, worried face.

"Make him comfortable," he said. "It's out of my hands. We might know tonight."

"If he'll pull through, you mean?"

"Yes." He took off his coat. "I'll need some things from my trunk."

"I'll send Murdo."

It took only a short time with the instruments for McKinstrie to verify his diagnosis. The boy's heart was good, the lungs no more than normally congested, the temperature not too dangerously high.

When he was finished, McKinstrie said: "I'll stay with him tonight. There's nothing you can do."

COKER left, and McKinstrie settled down to the wait. He took off his coat and sat down, preparing to sink his mind in the long and wearing sick vigil. But tonight he found he could not be calm; a restlessness took hold of him, of his mind as well as his body. It seemed then that this town was to be only a pause in his flight, and not the end; and he smiled wryly at the thought, knowing that no town, no place, would ever behold the end of it. As water sought its level, so his spirit sought change, and was only calm then.

He found himself by the bed, staring down at the boy, but not thinking of him. He was seeing that Oklahoma town he had left weeks before. He had not been there a week when he had been called to attend a gunshot wound. The man was a cattle-thief, but he did not know that. He learned it, though, and learned how people could hate him and shun him—and how they could starve him in the end. Before that, it was Montana; before that, Wyoming; and always it was the same. Was a doctor, then, to shun life, to live it by a petty book that had never been written, but which small people understood so well? More than once he had wanted to pitch his instruments and his books down the nearest well, and strike out for the high mountain trails and deserts, a free man. But always his profession called him, absorbed him; and then, by its very requirements of caution and patience and drudgery and impersonality, betrayed him.

IT would now. Since the moment he had stepped off the stage, weary with seventy-two hours of jolting and dust and heat, since he first felt Coker's searching curious gaze, he had been marked for trouble. It followed him and waited for him, inescapable. It was here now. Hadn't Coker and Murdo warned him, told him to expect it?

Thinking of the girl, his eyes focused on the child, and regarded the fever-weary face with curiosity. The hair was hers, perhaps the mouth, if the childish face were in repose. A fighting mouth, he reflected, and thought of the girl again. She had a proud, fine and haunted face that he tried to remember again, and remembering it, tried to fit it into what Coker had told him of her, and what he had overheard from Armbruster.

He was still trying, staring at the wall, when he heard the door open behind him and Beth stepped in. She had a cloth-covered tray in her arms, and she set it on the chair and walked over to the bed.

McKinstrie watched her as she looked down at the boy, watched the tension flow out of her face and sadness replace it.

"It's pneumonia, of course; but bad pneumonia?" she asked him.

"No worse than others," he told her. "Not as bad. The crisis may come tonight."

"What should I do when it comes?"

"I'll stay here with you, if you don't mind," he told her. "You get some sleep. I'll wake you if anything happens."

She nodded wearily and indicated the tray.

"Your supper," she told him. "It's still hot, I think. You'll need it."

While he wolfed it down, thankfully sitting on the cot, she smoothed the covers out and sat by the bed, watching him, smiling now and then when he looked at her.

"It's strange," she said finally, in a low voice, "how—how fortune never deserts you entirely, isn't it?"

"Doesn't it?" McKinstrie asked, his voice very quiet.

The look she gave him was puzzled. She went on: "No. I don't think so. There was no doctor here. Tim couldn't be moved. No doctor could come from Globe for what I could offer him. And then, when I needed someone desperately, you came here."

HE wanted to tell her that perhaps his coming couldn't change destiny, but something warned him not to discourage her. She had hope now; let her have a few hours of it, if things went bad. He only nodded.

"Why are you here?" As soon as she said it, she became confused. "I didn't mean that," she hastened to add. "I'm not curious. Only, it seems like an act of Providence. Are you just going through?"

McKinstrie smiled thinly. "Just going through, yes. Maybe I'll be here two days, two weeks, two months—a lifetime. But I hardly think so."

"Is it your health?" she asked shyly. "You seem so tired and worn."

"Seventy-two hours in that stage is apt to do that."

"No, I didn't mean that," she told him, and turned away.

He felt for his pipe, and was about to fill it, and then remembered that the air in this room, close and hot, was already no better than it should be. He put the napkin over the remaining food and stared at it a long moment, thinking of what she had just said. His gaze lifted, to find her watching him.

He said, "Yes, my health," and a trace of a smile creased his lean face. "When I was born, it was with something left out of me."

She did not answer. He went on: "You have it—more than you need. I often wonder why it can't be shared."

"What can't?"

"Courage."

She said, "I don't believe it."

"Not fighting courage," McKinstrie explained quietly. "Everyone has that. They're born with it, or develop it, or else they die. I mean the real thing, the courage to face years of hardship and hostility and annoyance and pettiness and dullness, and not run away."

"It is not easy to be a doctor," Beth said slowly. "You probably faced all those before you could be one."

He shrugged. "Maybe. But I was younger then, and it was worth fighting for. Now it's easier to run away."

"Not from yourself," she told him. "A man can't do that. A woman can't, either. I've tried."

"But you've won now."

"Yes," she said, looking at the boy.

McKinstrie thought she had forgotten him, she was silent so long, when suddenly she began to speak.

"I married very young, and my husband left me. He has since got a divorce. I had to face all the—" She cast about for a word.

"The talk?" he put in.

"Yes. Some people claimed I never was married, and—and that Tim wasn't my husband's child. It was a small town back in Kansas. I thought I couldn't stand it. I took Tim and left. It's taken me two years to find out that I couldn't run away from it. It's here now—around me. You saw tonight."

McKinstrie said quietly:

"Yes. I saw."

"But I'm through running away. I'm not afraid any more. If"—her voice almost broke—"I can keep Tim, and save a little money so I can give him things, it won't be hard." She looked at him steadily, her eyes dark and deep and urgent. "I don't expect any more."

McKINSTRIE said nothing, feeling a hot wave of shame rise within him. Presently, when her head began to nod in the stillness, he rose and set the tray of food on his chair and said:

"You lie down. I'll watch. I know more about it than you."

"But you'll wake me up if—"

"If the fever breaks, yes."

She went over to the cot, and lay down, and in a minute was asleep, her breathing deep and regular.

He sat in her chair by the bed, and put his face in his hands, and for a while was lost to this room, to time.

McKinstrie said: "These may be a little salty." They saw him pick up the bank-notes and cram them into Armbruster's mouth.

A gentle knock on the door aroused him. He tiptoed across the room and opened it.

Facing him was one of the still-faced Texans, who held out a heavy envelope.

"For her," the Texan said, and turned and walked away, but not before he had looked in the room and smiled significantly.

McKinstrie closed the door and stood looking at its panel.

"What is it?" Beth said to him.

He handed it to her without speaking. She sat up in bed and ripped the envelope, and from it cascaded a shower of yellow banknotes that spilled over her dress and the bed. She looked at him fleetingly, to see if he had noticed, and then she looked down at the note, and as she read it, the color began to mount to her face. She folded the note and put it beside her and smiled at him.

"Nothing," she said. She lay down again, and turned her face to the wall.

McKinstrie sat quietly in the chair, listening, until he heard her deep and regular breathing again. Then he rose and went to the bed and picked up the note. Unfolding it, he read:

Dear Beth:

If you'll spend the night with a stranger, there's no reason why you shouldn't come out with me. I will be good to you.

Morgan Armbruster

McKinstrie's hands were trembling so that he dropped the note. He let it lie on the floor perhaps a half minute. Twice he started across the room for his coat, and twice he paused and returned and looked down at Beth. Then, with a long shuddering sigh, he picked up the note, scooped up the yellow banknotes and put them all in the inside pocket of his coat. Then he returned to the chair by the bed and sat down again. This time he was patient, but it was the calm, cold motionless patience of finality.

IT was close to midnight when the fever broke, announced by an increased restlessness in the boy. McKinstrie watched it carefully, keeping the blankets close over Tim's neck and wiping the perspiration from his face with a towel. When finally the delirium died, it was not long before Tim opened his eyes, and now they were in true focus, and his face was puzzled when he saw McKinstrie.

"Hello, son," McKinstrie said.

Tim almost smiled and then did not. He accepted the drink of water McKinstrie gave him, and listened as he was told: "As soon as this is over, we'll call your mother."

He made his examination briefly, quickly, for the boy was already sleepy. Then he shifted him to a part of the bed where it was not wet with perspiration, washed his face gently, and then asked: "Tired, Tim?"

Tim nodded, watching him. He was waiting for something.

McKinstrie put his coat on, took up his hat, and wakened Beth. She roused quickly, like a cat.

"It's past," McKinstrie said quietly. "There's no reason why he shouldn't be all right. He wants to see you now. After that, let him sleep."

He did not stay to watch them, but let himself out of the room just as Beth knelt by the bedside, and Tim spoke faintly. He had one brief glance at her there by the bed, the light making a halo of her hair, before he closed the door.

He could hear other noises as he passed down the corridor, but they were lost to him. Outside, in the dark of the side-street, he could feel the slow cool wash of the wind that did not smell of hot dust now, but of pines and high streams. He paused and breathed it, looking over toward the close mountains whose presence he could feel only because the spangle of stars was blotted from part of the sky. It did not sober him. He sought the main street and turned toward the hotel, his face utterly grave. His pace might have been hurried. The crowds had thinned out somewhat, but the street was still thronged, as if night was only an inconvenience to be tolerated.

At the hotel porch, Murdo rose as he mounted the steps. Coker was there in his chair.

McKinstrie paused and said: "His fever broke. Barring complications, I don't see why he isn't safe. I can tell better in the morning."

"Ah," Coker said gently.

McKinstrie passed on into the lobby and got his key from the desk and mounted the stairs. In his room he struck a match and lighted the lamp, then knelt by his trunk. Lying on some folded clothes in the top tray was a gun. He picked it up, and still kneeling, hefted it almost fondly. Then he swung the loading gate and spun the cylinder, noting the five shells in it. He let the hammer down on the empty chamber, rose, rammed it under his waistband and blew out the light.

DOWN on the porch, Murdo was leaning against the post. He said as McKinstrie came out: "Anything we can do, Doc?"

McKinstrie did not pause in his stride. He said quietly: "I think not. Good night, gentlemen."

Murdo, watching him, slowly came erect, poised, like a hunting dog. As soon as McKinstrie's broad back was lost to sight, Murdo said gently:

"Now, maybe—"

He never finished it. He took the steps two at a time and was on the sidewalk.

"Murdo!" Coker called sharply. Murdo did not even hear it. Coker fumbled wildly for his crutch, cursing.

PERHAPS a thousand nights of knowing where to look for trouble took McKinstrie to the saloon, the Melodian. He shouldered through the bat-wing door into the noise and light and smoke and stench of alcohol, and he walked slowly past the bar, his eyes raking the line of backs there, and not changing.

A girl caught his arm in hers, and he removed it without looking at her, removed it slowly, but so that she winced and cursed him. He passed the faro-tables, where the crowd and noise was thickest, and then turned to the poker tables on the other side of the room.

And then he saw Armbruster, seated facing the front, cards in his thin hand, fingering delicately with the other a stack of chips that lay on the green felt-covered table cover before him. Two of the Texans were with him, and two other men McKinstrie had never seen.

It was the Texan with his back to the wall who first saw McKinstrie—who sat there motionless and watched McKinstrie lay a sheaf of yellow-back notes down on the green felt beside Armbruster and say in a quiet, thick voice: "These may be a little salty."

It was this Texan, and the other too, who watched McKinstrie's hand settle on the thin nape of Armbruster's neck, who watched Armbruster lifted out of his chair, his mouth open and his head back in agony. They saw McKinstrie pick up the bank-notes and cram them into Armbruster's mouth, and saw Armbruster claw at his face as he choked and gagged and fought.

It was this Texan who came to his feet, so that his chair crashed backward, his hand already downsweeping for his gun.

But it was Murdo, at the end of the bar, who shot first, loud and shattering; it slammed this Texan against the wall, already going down, as McKinstrie threw Armbruster against the table and upset it on the second Texan's lap.

Armbruster, jack-knifed on the table-edge as it up-ended, rolled off to the floor, and then completed the roll and paused on one knee, his gun swinging out wildly from its shoulder-holster, and exploding in hurried and frantic inaccuracy.

It was only then that McKinstrie thought of his gun. He drew it as quick-

ly as h could, later than Armbruster's second shot, and leveled it and emptied it. Somewhere in that swift chattering another shot from across the room—only one shot—joined in, and men yelled hoarsely.

Armbruster had tried to run, and now he lay on his face perhaps ten feet from the table, his head toward the door.

McKinstrie looked up to Murdo, who was watching the door. There was one shot out in the street. Murdo turned to McKinstrie, and grinning crookedly, he sank slowly, half turning, so he sat on the barrail, saying to the room: "I've got to sit down."

The man standing at the side of McKinstrie drawled: "You better get that gun, stranger." The massive table had settled up-ended on the second Texan, but he had contrived to get his gun out, only to have his wrist pinned to the floor by a spectator's foot.

Someone else got the gun, but left the table on the Texan. Coker beat through the door now, holding his crutch and his gun in the same hand.

He did not come as far as McKinstrie, but stopped beside Murdo and looked at this corner of the room thoughtfully.

Murdo, his arms wrapped around his middle, said: "I didn't see him, Max. He was across the room."

"Doc," Coker said, "take him along."

McKinstrie picked up Murdo in his arms and started for the door. Coker stayed until someone shoved the heavy table off the Texan. Coker told him, when he was on his feet: "There's one of your boys in the street. When you've got them buried, tell Armbruster's foreman to have the rest to light a shuck."

A girl laughed hysterically, setting off a roar of talk as Coker went out.

OVER in the hotel room, McKinstrie ripped Murdo's shirt off. Low, just above the belt and far on the left side, there was a hole that was just beginning to ooze blood.

Murdo, watching it, asked: "What's down there, Doc, that will stop the clock?"

"Nothing," McKinstrie said, smiling. "Nothing at all."

Murdo looked up at the ceiling and said softly: "Doc, that was pretty."

Later, when Murdo was bandaged and sleepy with drug, McKinstrie and Coker stepped out into the dark corridor. McKinstrie handed Coker Beth's note and said: "I suppose I had to have a reason for this."

Coker had to wait until he was in the lobby and in a good light before he read it. He rammed it in his pocket.

McKinstrie said: "Does that mean I can't leave tomorrow?"

"Not till the inquest," Coker said wearily. He wanted to say more; he had his mouth open to say more; but he only said, "Good night," and went out.

McKinstrie asked for another room. Mounting the stairs, he felt the old weariness. In his room, it enveloped him in quiet and bitter despair. Life had only one pattern, and a man could dig a thousand graves before he used one. . . . Montana, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Arizona. Next week it would be Nevada—

WHEN a soft knock came on his door, he did not hear it. When it came again, he raised his head and looked at the door, but did not answer.

Then the door opened, and Beth stood there. He rose beside the bed, silent, while she closed the door and came over to him.

"I'm not worth that," she said quietly. "Hadn't you done enough for us?"

"It was a debt," McKinstrie said. "Payment for a lesson you taught me—one that I can't seem to learn."

"Then you're leaving."

"Yes."

Beth studied his face a quiet moment, then held out her hand, and he took it.

"Thank you," she said simply.

He began a smile, began to say, "No, I'm the one to thank *you*," but he only got the first two words out when he ceased talking. He was watching her eyes. They turned dark with a kind of pain; and he did not know why he did it, but he folded her to him, and listened to her dry sobbing, smelling her hair and feeling her warm quivering body against him.

"I—I was a fool," she whispered into his shoulder. "I thought I could keep you."

He heard her, and in the few brief seconds that it took him to understand, all those endless tomorrows of flight vanished.

"I wanted that," he said quietly. "You have kept me."

The Luck

A fine novel of the sea by the author of "Trouble Trail," and "Dead or Alive."

By MAX BRAND

Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson

The Story Thus Far:

SAMUEL CULVER, an athletic bookworm, supported himself by a job with a San Francisco express company, and spent his other waking hours in study in search of a key to the lost Etruscan language.

But one day he lost his job—by taking another man's mistake on his own broad shoulders. And that night, tramping the foggy streets, he came upon a huge dog determinedly pursuing a car. Even as he watched, the dog leaped for its running-board, slipped, was knocked into the gutter by another car.

Culver took the big dog home, revived it, dressed its wound. And next day, thinking it might lead the way to its home, he took it out on a leash. For miles he followed the questing beast. Then it stopped at a rooming-house, led him upstairs to the room of a sailor, nosed under the edge of the rug and disclosed a little ebony cross. The sailor knew nothing of the dog or the cross; but as Culver led the beast away, it kept nosing at the cross in his pocket.

The next lead was a stocky man with red hair whom the dog tried to follow; the man took a cab and was lost; but while inquiring for him, Culver met pretty Sally Franklin, and that was all to the good. . . . And then—pursuing the dog and its quest to the waterfront, Culver was blackjacked and woke up to find himself shanghaied along with the dog aboard the sailing-ship *Spindrift*.

Next day, at sea, the mate Burke made a speech to the crew: They were going out to the South Seas to find one Walter Toth, who was dying and had a great store of pearls. "It's no easy job," he concluded, "because everybody that's up against Chinee Valdez is up against something hard."

Someone else appeared on the poop—a girl with golden-brown skin, her black hair done in a knot at the back of her neck. It was plain that this island girl Koba did not care what eyes looked at her. She was free as a boy; she had a boy's pride about her.

Burke passed into another theme. He said: "Chinee Valdez is on the sea now, or he'll soon be, and we're going to try to

of the Spindrift

be on his heels. And if we ever cross his wake, we've got his dog to follow 'im! I've seen to that!

"But we've got to cut corners and we've got to save time," he concluded. "Sails aint steam, but we're going to make them come damn' close. I'm going to crack on if I have to blow the damned tophamper out of her rotten keelson. The men that help, get double pay; but if you soldier, by God, I'll eat your hearts. . . . Lay forward, men!"

Burke kept his word, and drove the men hard, but gradually Culver got his sea-legs. And when the Finn named Birger Ukko was beaten by the superstitious bosun because he wouldn't go to the masthead and "whistle up a wind," Culver intervened, and fought the bosun and knocked him out. A treacherous blow from a marlinspike laid Culver low, however, and he was triced up and beaten severely with the cat-o'-nine-tails. Koba came to the forecastle to nurse him. Later he was able to repay her by saving her from going overboard in a storm. *(The story continues in detail):*

DAYS later, Culver leaned over the wireless with the earphones clasped over his head. He had the thing pretty well in hand now. He knew the whistle, like a squeaking mouse, that announced a station near in the air. He had listened to messages for some time, and his ear had quickened until he was able to take down all except the fastest; but never once did he get the *Livermore*.

It was the *Livermore*, according to Burke, that Valdez undoubtedly had taken for the South Seas, but whether the *Livermore* would go directly to Valdez' destination or stop at other ports on the way, and so be greatly delayed, Burke could not tell. The whole nature of the cruise might be altered by wireless orders after putting to sea. Burke had found that out before leaving San Francisco. To remain there and watch, would simply have been to drive Valdez to another port to take another ship. It was not even sure that Valdez' ultimate destination would be one of the ports of the *Livermore's* call list. If he could get close enough, he would hire a small craft and make the intervening step, of course. Where Walter Toth might be in the South Seas, in the meantime, they could only guess within a thousand miles. That was why Burke was so desperately eager to have the wireless at work in order to pick out of the air a message to or from the *Livermore*.

The day after the storm, he called Culver aft to the poop and said: "Culver, maybe I made a mistake. Maybe I got a little out of my head, day before yesterday. I was clean crazy because we'd lost our wind, and I could see Valdez sinking hull-down on us, and sliding over the

horizon and then downhill all the way home. Understand? I would of beat up my own father, I guess. And you shouldn't of hollered out to stop me from Birger Ukko. You shouldn't of done that! Am I right?"

Culver kept looking at the skipper and wondering at the poisonous bitterness he felt rise in him as he stared. He could not speak. The only conversation he could have been capable of would have been with his hands. As he listened, he found himself picking out points on the skipper's face where knuckles would have a good lodgment.

The skipper did not continue this semi-apology when he felt the eyes of Culver steadily on him. He merely said: "Go off there to the radio-room—and for God's sake, use your brains on that damned machine. Get the stuff out of the air. Get the *Livermore* out of the air!"

That was why Culver was leaning over the wireless with the head-phones at his ears. He knew the receiver and its dials. He knew the antenna wire, insulated from the wall with heavy porcelain knobs. The ground wire he knew, touching the iron frame of the composite old ship. The

third wire introduced his supply of power from the generator, passing through a transformer which stepped the current down to a hundred and ten volts, lighting the tubes.

The sending-set was on the table also; but he worked far less at that than he did at the receiving, since that was the skipper's desire. They were to listen in, not talk. Besides, reception was far harder than sending. He knew in the sending-set all the important parts of the heavy-duty tuning condensers, the large coil of big wire, the small coil, grid leaks, fixed condensers, the two power tubes. Anatomizing the power-transformers, resistors, toggle switch, and chokes, had taken him many days, for electrical theory was very dim in his brain; but he had a working knowledge at last, and that he should have arrived at one seemed miraculous to Burke. He used to stand in the doorway and listen while Culver spelled out, letter by letter, the communications that he picked up out of the air, from a freighter here, a passenger liner there; then the broadcasting continental stations would strike in from east and west and south.

BUT Culver was alone on this day, with big Napico in a corner, panting because of the heat and never turning his head or his eye toward his companion. All moves toward him still had to be made slowly, for at a sudden stir of hand or foot, the big fangs of Napico instantly prepared to strike. It was his snarl that warned Culver that someone else was standing in the open doorway. This time it was not the skipper, but Koba. He waved his hand nervously at her, and began to write rapidly on his reporting pad as though he were taking something out of the air. The words he wrote down meant little to him.

Koba came in. Napico greeted her with a tremendous snarl and rose to his haunches. She stood with her bare legs inches from his nose, disregarding him, and leaned on the back of Culver's chair. He grew more nervous. Since the storm, her attitude of possession had become more and more pronounced. She created in Culver a queer suspense—had become one of his major concerns, along with his quiet hatred of Burke, his fears for his library, his expectancy of a meeting, at last, with the master of the dog.

And here was Koba slipping her fingers through his hair.

"I'm busy here, Koba," he told her. "Run along, my dear. I'm very busy."

She could read, barely, only barely. Now she scanned his page on the pad and stumbled through the scribbling, saying aloud: "Sal-lee Frank-lin—Sal-lee Frank-lin—Sal-ly Frank-lin. . . . What is a sally franklin?"

He tore the page off with a jerk, tossed it on the floor, and ground it under his heel. He rubbed the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Run along, Koba," he repeated. "A Sally Franklin is a kind of a transformer for an alternating current."

"Alternating — transformer — sally," said Koba. "Much man!"

He was silent. He wrote again, this time in little twisting Chinese characters which really could only be hinted at with a pencil; they need a fine-hair brush for their proper execution.

"Say how much you love Koba?" she demanded.

"Koba, tell me where you think the *Spindrift* is going?" asked Culver.

"That skipper—that white pig!" answered Koba.

"Go ask him," said Culver.

She went to the door, looked back at him, received a casual wave of dismissal, and turned away. Glancing out the door, his eye ranged aft over the battered length of the *Spindrift*. They were still at work trying to repair the damage the storm had done to her; the scars would show but her injuries were only skin deep and the body of the bark was as sound as ever. She had showed her toughness in struggling against the sea. In Culver's mind she had become a passion. Even the brute nature of Burke realized how he loved the ship, and he was assigned to the helm for two half-shifts a day, stolen from his radio-listening. At those moments he lived with a purer enthusiasm than he ever had known, and a clearer delight than he had felt even when some half-discovered clue promised, for a little time, that the old Etruscan mystery was near solution.

"She likes you. She works for you. She is like that. She is a lover," said Peterson, the Negro cook.

Since the storm, when his impromptu orders had been the saving of them, the black man had a different place on the *Spindrift*. He still was the "doctor," but the crew treated him with a very definite respect. What he had gained, Burke in a measure had lost. The sailors could not look at the tall masts without remembering that Burke would have sacrificed them in the crisis and left the old

Spindrift without the wings which now flew her so swiftly over the blue sea. They could not see the shine of the canvas without remembering that difference between their skipper and their cook. Another man had dropped to the bottom of the list—big Jemmison. They despised him openly with their eyes, though still his bulk was too great to be insulted in words or open gestures. The bosun, however, seemed too simple to be aware of any change. He went on his way with his usual smile, his usual bellowing voice in passing on orders.

CULVER looked back from the long curve of the deck and stretched his hand back until it touched the neck of Napico. There was no warning growl, to be sure, but the neck was arched and the muscles hard. There seemed to be no relenting in Napico's attitude. It was true that he seemed to prefer a position near Culver, but there was never the slightest indication of friendliness.

The patience which Culver had learned from his years with books helped him now. Just as he had persisted in his literary problems year after year, so he persisted now day after day with the dog.

Koba returned, breathing deeply, with a rosy stain in her cheeks, and rubbing her mouth violently on the heel of her hand.

"Bah—pig, pig, pig!" said Koba.

She spat on the deck and rubbed her mouth again. Then she tossed a large square of pasteboard on Culver's table.

"There," she said. "I made him give him. Do you like, Culver?"

He could guess how she had paid for the loan of the cardboard. But he forgot her at once, he was so interested in the thing before him. For on the cardboard had been pasted a page of handwriting in ink on white paper that had been torn into a thousand small bits and then patiently assembled. It was a letter with the top strip of the page torn off, the address line being gone. The rest read:

March 11.

To Captain Valdez and my mates of the Spindrift.

Dear Friends:

Well, I've got it, and it has got me. I mean, I've got the stuff. It cost me hell to keep the money after you grubstaked me. There were times when I was broke and damned hungry, but I kept that stake buttoned up inside my belt and wouldn't touch it.

I saved it for the work of getting at the old Albatross. *I worked my way down and finally I hit port and used the cash to rent a boat and hire some divers. Then I sailed out and spent a couple of weeks before I spotted the wreck of the* Albatross.

She was on the reef, all right, but she's slipped down to a shoulder of it, and she was too deep for easy diving. I couldn't get my men to go down more than once or twice a day. So I made a fool of myself and did nearly the whole job.

I could feel the work getting me. I was spitting blood the fifth day, but I stuck at it. I got in through the bottom of the hull, because she was turned so far over that that was the easiest way. Finally I reached the cabin before I found the stuff. I cleaned out old Captain Mullaley's private stock of pearls, and believe me, it made a fine double handful, all big ones.

Mullaley, like I told, was a regular pirate, and he spent his life and a lot of gunpowder getting that collection together. And when you see it, you'll have to agree with me that he didn't waste his time or his bullets. I know pearls, and the way I figure it, there's around six hundred thousand dollars' worth even with the market low and the pearls not as good as I think. If the market is tops, there's maybe a million.

My half would make me rich enough and you fellows could have the rest, the ones of you that chipped in to grubstake me and the captain.

But my half will never come my way. I'm laid out, and the doctor says I'm cooked. Okay. It's been fun beating the ghost of Mullaley, anyway. He won the first trick when he cleaned me out of my little haul of shell; but I took the last trick and the pot.

There's nobody I would want to pass my share along to except maybe a niece that used to live in Baltimore ten years ago. By name of Sally (Elizabeth, really) Franklin. I heard that maybe her people have moved to San Francisco, and I wish you would look around to spot them. Sally could have my part.

I couldn't trust anybody to know about the pearls. I would have got me a cut throat. So I hid them out in the woods near here and I've got the place charted. I'll explain it to anybody that comes down. But come fast and come humping, because I'm fading out.

I hope to see you here from the Spindrift *before I pass out west. I heard I*

pretty near rubbed elbows with you a few months ago just before . . . sailed bound north.

Yours truly,
Walter Toth.

Culver, as he finished, looked out the open door and out to sea with a troubled mind. He could not say exactly what bothered him; but something, he felt, was wrong in the letter.

He began to read it again.

"Tell Koba how good she is," pleaded the girl.

"H-m-m!" murmured Culver.

"Aie-e-e! Aie-e-e!" shrilled Koba. *"You* are a white pig too!"

She went to the door and flung herself down on the deck in the full glare of the sun with her eyes closed. Presently she forgot her anger and was smiling, contented by the burning heat.

THE eye of Culver had returned to the bottom of the letter. It was there that the words had seemed to go wrong. He had searched too many literary documents, examining literary style, not to be aware when the language went off tune a little. He thought he found the change now, in the last paragraph.

"I hope to see you here from the Spindrift *before I pass out west. I heard I pretty near rubbed elbows with you a few months ago just before . . . sailed bound north."*

It was not quite as clearly coherent language as the rest of the letter, certainly, and now he took the cardboard into the sun to examine it bit by bit. Presently he made sure that the assembly of this portion had not been done accurately by Burke, or whoever had had the thing in hand. He could tell by the way the ink diminished. Apparently that paragraph had been written in the tiny, crowded hand, with one dip of the pen, the ink failing the nib a little toward the end. But the distribution of the dark and light ink did not correspond with the arrangement of the paragraph.

He began to reassemble the writing according to the ink, and according, also, to the frayed edges of the torn paper. They had been much handled and rubbed, which made this difficult, but at last he arrived at a new grouping which made different sense and seemed to follow the probable flow of the ink. He wrote out the new paragraph and went on deck to Burke. The wind having died down a bit, the Irishman was walking rapidly back and forth across the poop, giving himself a brisk swing-about at the end of each crossing of the deck, and always pausing a fraction of an instant to look into the eye of the wind and scowl because it would not blow more freshly. Jimmy Jones, wearing a clerical collar, sat behind the captain's walk in the shadow of a sail, his hands folded across his tidy paunch, and a sleepy contentment in his eyes.

Jimmy Jones was saying: "Perhaps you don't believe in prophecy, Captain Burke."

"I'm not the captain," said Burke, annoyedly. "Damn it, you know I'm not. Valdez is the captain of this ship."

"Ah, perhaps he is," answered Jimmy Jones, "unless the sharks have eaten him by this time. But when I see you walking up and down the poop of the old *Spindrift,* every inch a sailor, every inch a commander, I can't help calling you captain. You're worthy of being one, Captain Burke. But speaking of prophecy—"

"There aint any such thing," said Burke. " I stick my hand in my pocket, and who is gonna tell whether I have a nickel or a quarter in my fingers?"

"May I suggest that you have neither, sir?" said Culver.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Burke. "What makes you think that?"

"Because I can see that you have made a tight fist in your pocket; and a coin inside it would be painful, perhaps," explained Culver.

Burke stared at him.

"Mr. Burke is thoroughly surprised," commented Jimmy Jones. "He thought that you were one of the sheep, Culver; and now he suspects that you may be the sheep-dog, or even the wolf that frightens the flock. . . . We were speaking of prophecy, in which the Captain does not believe. And yet there is the direct testimony of the Good Book, Captain."

"Damn the Good Book!" said Burke. "I mean," he apologized, "the Bible is all right, but it kind of gags me, Jimmy, when I hear *you* talking about it."

"Well, it may be inappropriate in a certain sense," admitted Jimmy Jones with his smug little smile, "and yet it is my habit to gather wisdom where I may, even from the flowers in the field and the soil from which they grow, Captain Burke. But speaking of prophecy—"

"Birger Ukko was sour," answered Burke. "He promised us that the *Spindrift* was carrying a dead man on board

because the bell struck without a hand laid on it. That was only because the wave walloped us in a funny kind of a way. But along comes the storm, and no hands lost; and there you are."

"But that isn't the end of the story, is it?" asked Jimmy Jones in his soft, genial voice. "There is still time for someone to die on the *Spindrift*, isn't there? Personally, I'm waiting with a great deal of concern. I can't help wondering who it might be. All such good fellows. All! I even feel worried a little about you, Captain."

"About me? What the hell you talking about?" demanded Burke.

He was startled and a little frightened.

"Go ahead and try to make sense out of that!" he directed.

"Well," said Jimmy Jones, "our friend Culver, here, was able to tell what you had in your hand, and so perhaps he can tell me what I have in my mind."

"Could it be Captain Valdez?" asked Culver.

The shock of this jerked Jimmy Jones off his stool and spun the skipper around in the midst of a stride.

"Valdez!" said Burke, and then he was silent, though ugly unspoken words kept his lips twitching.

Culver explained his process of mind by quoting:

> *"Take heed! Take heed! For though the king's afar,*
> *His shadow still is stretched across the land."*

"Ah, Culver, you are a man of books," said Jimmy Jones. "I have been wondering what it was that gave you the air of abstraction, and now I understand—for a man of books must tag from his memory all the things that he sees with his eyes, and thought itself has no validity for the scholar unless he can wall his idea snugly in between quotation marks."

"So Koba brought that to you, did she?" said Burke, pointing to the card which Culver carried in his hand. "Give it to me!"

Culver proffered it. It was snatched away by an angry hand.

"Lemme tell you something about that Koba. You fool around with her, and you'll wake up some morning with an extra mouth carved under your chin. She'll cut your throat for you, Culver!"

Culver considered the remark in silence for an instant; then he said: "In regard to the letter, there: the final paragraph is put together wrong."

"Wrong? *Wrong?*" exclaimed Burke. He scowled at the card. "No, it makes good sense, all right, and I don't see anything wrong with it."

"I take it," said Culver, "that that paragraph is what gives you direction for this voyage. You touched at certain points in the South Seas, and you are returning to them to search the islands all around those ports."

"Maybe that's right," nodded Burke.

"It would be a long work," suggested Culver.

"Unless we have luck," admitted Burke. "And we're gonna have luck. I feel it in my bones we're gonna have luck. And I'll tell you something more, Culver: If you play the game with us and handle Napico on shore like a good fellow, we're gonna cut you in for a full share of the stuff."

Culver was silent again. It was hard to make himself talk to the skipper. But now he managed to say: "Re-group the words properly in that last paragraph, and it should read as follows: *'I hope to see you before I pass out. I pretty near rubbed elbows with you a few*

months ago, before I heard the Spindrift *sailed from just west (of) here, bound north.'* Those are the same words, you see, but they make better English. In the former version: *'I hope to see you here from the* Spindrift' is clumsy."

"Are the words all in?" demanded Burke. "They are! They're all in, and it *does* make better sense."

"The advantage," said Culver, "is that when you think over your last voyage, you perhaps can remember a port at which you touched with another island immediately to the east of it."

"Wait a minute," said Burke, rapping his forehead with his knuckles. "Wait—Salter's Island. . . . No, that's no good. That's too north of east. . . . Wait!"

"When we touched at Wago," suggested Jimmy Jones, "Tapua was immediately to the east."

"It was! It was!" shouted Burke. "By God, I knew that there was good luck on board the *Spindrift* somewhere, and you're it, Culver! You're dead right! Oh, God, now for a bellyful of wind! Tapua is the place! Tapua! Now, Valdez, watch yourself!"

He went rushing below to find a chart, and Culver turned away to return to the radio-house, for he had something else in mind that needed doing at once.

"We must have some time together, Culver," suggested Jimmy Jones.

"Yes sir," answered Culver, without enthusiasm.

"That was very neat about the coin in the hand; but much neater about the king and his shadow across the land," said Jimmy Jones. "Would you step down with me now and have a glass of port? A glass of Valdez' own port?"

Culver followed him down the companionway and into the captain's cabin, which Burke, strange to say, did not occupy. Napico, appearing noiselessly from the deck, slipped into the cabin behind them, and trotting into the small adjoining room, jumped up on the bed and lay there with his paws dangling over the edge and his tongue lolling out as though he were laughing at these two intruders, and yet keeping strict guard over the only place of real importance.

"So long as no one sleeps in the bed of Valdez," said Jimmy Jones, "Napico seems reasonably content. That is to say, he doesn't mind the afterguard, with whom he's familiar—the second, and Burke, and Koba and me. But if one of the sailors—other than your very exceptional self, Mr. Culver—were to step into this room, Napico would go for his throat as quickly, and as accurately as —well, as a knife out of Koba's hand. . . . Did you ever see Koba throw a knife, Mr. Culver?"

"No," said Culver.

"Extraordinary child," said Jimmy Jones, opening a cupboard which was set into the dark, carved paneling of the cabin. "Beautiful and interesting." He pointed to the wall. "There is one of her few misses," he said, indicating a deep scar in the panel. "Her knife missed the throat of Valdez by a fraction of an inch, and yet somehow her intention was entirely clear. . . . To your good health and our better acquaintance, Mr. Culver."

CULVER sipped the liquor. Jimmy Jones had poured down his glass and filled off another.

He said: "I like to get my tongue covered to the roots before I start trying to get the taste. A first glass for a drink; a second one for an opinion. And now that we know each other a little better, may I give you a word of advice which is for your honorable ear alone?"

"You are very kind," said Culver.

"You have observed Burke? You understand him?" suggested Jones.

Culver was silent.

"At least," said Jones, "I can say that he is a very honest fellow, since he honestly serves Burke and lets the rest of the world go hang. And no matter what you might do for him, in the end his promises to you would tie him down no more than the sheerest, the most intangible spider-thread. It is obviously his purpose, when he gets ashore with his men, to use your hand on the leash which controls Napico, and let Napico hunt for sign of Valdez. In this manner he expects to use the dog to betray the master. Interesting thought, isn't it? The heart of the dog swelling with love as he strains down the trail of his friend, his man of the whole world, his adored Valdez; and with every step he takes, drawing incalculable mischief upon the head of his captain! That is the picture which Burke has in mind. If you should refuse to take part, he would find means to persuade you. You already know that he is eloquent in acts of persuasion."

The flesh crawled upon the back of big Culver as he remembered.

"Therefore I advise you," said Jimmy Jones, "to find the first opportunity ashore to give them all the slip and become your own master. If the dog then

takes you to Valdez, you come as a herald giving warning that the enemy approach. And in that case, I imagine the Captain would find means to give himself adequate—er—protection."

"I understand," said Culver, watching the fat little man with curious attention.

"And as for reward," said Jimmy Jones, "you have in Captain Valdez a man as generous as the sea, as open as the wind. All that he has, belongs to the needs of his friends. You could trust him, Mr. Culver, to assist you to the last extreme."

Napico, in the next room, weary of lolling out his tongue as he panted, retracted it to lick his lips and gave an impatient whine.

"So, so, my beautiful Napico!" said Jimmy Jones. "You shall not be used to trail your master; you shall not be used like a knife to cut his throat. Mr. Culver will not permit it, so you may trust everything to him, Napico, my fine boy."

"You are a devoted friend of Captain Valdez, are you not?" asked Culver.

"In one word," said Jimmy Jones, "I know him; and to know Captain Valdez, —to know him to the heart and to the marrow of the bones,—is to love him."

"And yet," said Culver, "it seemed to me on deck, a moment ago, you were helping Burke locate the island where we are likely to find Valdez."

"Did you notice that?" asked Jimmy Jones, blinking a little. "The fact is that I know how the drama will end, but I am anxious to see the third act of the play. Here we have the honest Burke and all his men, that uncanny wizard Birger Ukko who calms the wind or makes it blow; our worthy Alec, who they say has eaten strange flesh in his time; Sibu, who has made a splendid collection of heads, and only needs a few long-haired blondes to complete the set; Francolini, who is another Borgia; Latour, who is as full of devices as Odysseus; and all the rest of them, to say nothing of melancholy George Green, who has killed more men than all the rest put together. I contemplate the engine of the opposition, a grand opposition, a beautiful opposition. And I see them striking for the heart of our hero, a single man, a single hand against them all. One Captain Valdez against that whole army. And yet, of course, he is sure to win!"

"Why are you so sure?" asked Culver, who was following somewhat from a distance the intricacies of this argument.

"Doesn't the hero of a proper play always win in the end?"

"But this, it seems to me, is not a play," said Culver. "It is not a contrived play, Mr. Jones."

"Valdez will contrive to make a play of it," answered Jimmy Jones, "and that's why I cannot wait for the moment. You understand, Mr. Culver? On the one hand I detest the thought of these forces of the opposition overtaking my dear Valdez; for that reason I take you aside and advise you how to act in order to keep mischief from the head of my good friend. On the other hand, I desire nothing so much as the climax of the piece and cannot help letting Burke have a glimpse of destiny, even though it be only through a crack in the wall. I hope it is all clear to you now?"

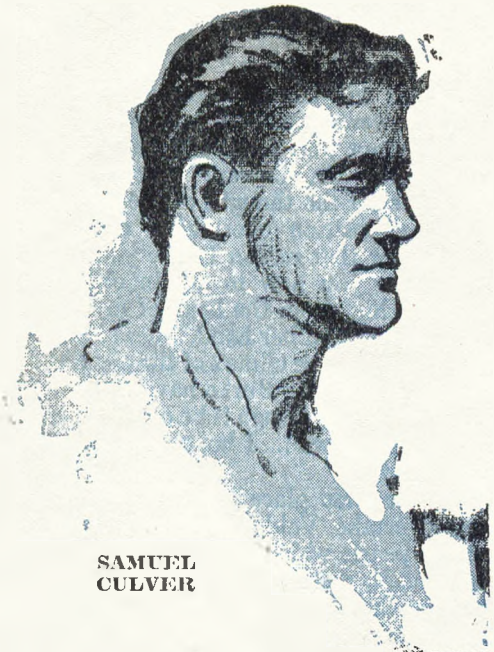
"In the first place," said Culver, "if they overtake Valdez, they are apt to get the pearls which he is trying to keep for himself, and I dare say that you detest the thought of Captain Valdez robbing them?"

"Ah, my dear Mr. Culver," said Jimmy Jones, "do not be ironical. Irony is the weapon of the weak and the tormented. . . . Will you have another glass?"

"I thank you, no," said Culver. And excusing himself, he went back to the radio-room.

Chapter Sixteen

IN the radio-room, he leaned over his table, threw the switch engaging the receiver, then the general switch connecting the receiver with the antenna. After that he threw the power supply and transmitter switches to give them a chance to warm up. He clasped the earphones over his head, and then manipulated the dials on the panel board for the station he wanted, the short-wave station of Tommy Wiley. He heard whistlings as he turned the dials; he heard a message clicking from a ship; he heard someone giving XVL, the call letters. Then he engaged the transmitter, and with the operating key sent out "C Q" half a dozen times. There was not much chance of getting a reply from the little sending-set of Tommy Wiley. He could only hope that the condenser and coil of his invention were truly as fine as he hoped. In that case, if Tommy were at his instrument, the message had a chance in a hundred of reaching its destination. He began at once to send his words: "ON BOARD THE SPINDRIFT SAILING FOR TAPUA WHERE WALTER TOTH



SAMUEL CULVER

IS DYING WITH LARGE FORTUNE WAITING FOR YOU. URGE YOU TAKE FASTEST POSSIBLE PASSAGE FOR TAPUA. KINDEST REGARDS. SAMUEL CULVER."

He waited, listening eagerly at the receiver. Then he repeated his message once, twice, and again.

He had just thrown the switch back to the receiver for the last time when the voice of Burke boomed through the doorway: "What are you sending, Culver? Who are you trying to reach?"

"I'm practicing," said Culver.

"You've got a buzzer for practice," commented Burke. "What the hell is the meaning of this?"

"A buzzer is excellent practice, but it's not exactly like an operating key, sir," said Culver.

"I'll have no more of this damned nonsense," stated Burke. "You send when I have a message for you to send. Otherwise, keep your finger off that key!"

He disappeared, and Culver leaned back in his chair. He could not help thinking of his message as traveling still through the air on urgent wings of sound; in reality he knew that already the swift impulses were girdling the world at the rate of half a dozen times a second. Either Thomas Wiley had heard, or the message never would reach its destination, for he would not dare to use the key again. He knew, as Jimmy Jones had suggested, the means of persuasion which Burke was capable of using.

That evening the crew was wondering why the *Spindrift*, with yards braced well around, was on a new tack, heading to the southwest instead of into the southeast. The trades caught her more favorably on this point of sailing. She could make steerageway, old Peterson used to say, with the flap of her sails; under the fresh, steady breeze she skimmed like a gull with all her wings stretched.

NOTHING altered; nothing changed. The days went by as steadily as the wind. Culver tried to keep his imagination from seeing and reseeing Sally Franklin and young Wiley packing their bags, hurrying aboard a steamer; he tried not to see them standing forward to feel the bow-wind, and watch the cutwater shearing off the bow-waves on some big liner that was sliding south with a shudder of creaming sea along her black sides. Tapua was not a port of call, he learned among the crew, for ships of any size. It was only, they said, a midget of an island, a tumble of mountains and jungle with a few white strips of beach fringing it, a bit of reef to shelter the harbor from certain winds, and a scattering of huts and houses to make a village. It could be reached by a small steamer that plied to Wago now and then, they believed. When he heard this, Culver gave up the slim hope of their coming. Perhaps there would not be time even for a fast steamer to make the voyage from San Francisco before the *Spindrift* reached her destination, though altering the course added nearly a thousand miles to the journey before she touched her first harbor.

When the fresh breeze lightened, when they lay for five days with not enough logging to count against drift, his heart was lightened and he could not help looking again and again along the northern horizon in hope that he would see the smoke of an approaching ship. And then they got a fine following wind and made Tapua the next day.

The smoke from the little volcano looked like that of a steamer, at first; but as they drew nearer the source, the smoke lifted into the sky, and finally they could make out the mountain. It seemed to stand by itself, rising steep-sided from the ocean like a whale that had come up to spout and would disappear into the deeps again the next moment.

Two hours before sunset of that same day, on his wireless he got the *Livermore*.

He had tuned the instrument very fine, and the *Livermore's* call came faintly but surely into his ears. He noted her

position. Apparently she had finished her southern voyage, loaded, and was far up north again toward Honolulu.

He took that message, written out neatly, to the skipper. Burke turned pale as he read. He could not actually grow white; the red of his skin was too intense for that, but he altered to a sort of gray purple.

"Then Valdez—he's had weeks on us. He's had weeks on us!" said Burke. "Weeks—weeks—and it's Valdez who's had them!"

Tapua was now revealing itself more clearly with every mile made toward it. The wind was light. They crept over the sea in the late afternoon without a sound from the rigging, without a whisper from the sea. The volcano showed now a group of lesser companions crowded about it. They were near enough to see the green of foliage, and see the white streak of water near the reef before the sunset confused everything in a colorful mist. Tapua disappeared. It was seen once more in the moonlight, a picture remade and created in close detail as the *Spindrift* stole upon the scene and made itself a part of the whole. Tapua now stretched far to the right, far to the left, and the soft booming of surf on the reef made a drum-note of music that struck regularly on the ear. A half-moon hung down low on the sky, suspended invisibly, and poured out silver along its path on the water, a bright silver hardly tarnished by the wrinklings of waves, the ground-swell was so even, so smooth of face except where it tripped its feet and tumbled on the reef. . . .

Culver was oiling a forecastle winch when Koba appeared beside him and sat down cross-legged, her back to the rail.

"You swim, Culver?" she asked.

"I used to swim well. But not for years and years, Koba," he told her.

"You swim good," stated Koba. "You have cold blood like a fish. You swim pretty good, I guess. Swim now, Culver."

"Why should I swim now?" he asked.

She flicked her thumb aft.

"Burke," she said. "He has irons to keep you till he needs Culver on shore. You swim now."

He could hardly believe what she said. He glanced over the bows toward the shore. They had seemed almost in on the harbor for a moment before, but the thought of swimming lengthened the distance as he measured it out in imaginary arm-strokes, until it seemed an endless journey. Off to the right, and ahead of them, lay the reef, making its rhythmical thunder in the surf as the ground-swells heaved and fell and whitened.

"Hi, Culver!" called George Green. "Lay aft to the skipper!"

Culver kicked off his shoes.

"Yeah. You swim," said the girl. "Take off his clothes and then swim better, Culver."

He did not pause to take off his clothes. He could see Burke waiting there aft, on the poop. He could see a different picture of that shore scene, now. There would be no chance to take the good advice of Jimmy Jones and give the shore party the slip, if he were taken onto the island to find the trail of Valdez. They probably would put hobbles on him and tie the leash of Napico to his wrist.

Culver said: "Koba, you've been a kind girl to me. Be careful of yourself, my dear. And good-by!"

She had her chin on her fist, and she made no answer whatever.

Culver stepped over the rail.

"Culver!" he heard George Green shout. "Lay aft!"

He sprang well out from the ship, forming his arms and hands into a prow above his head. The water stung his hands and bumped the back of his neck. It was not a graceful dive. He was aware of a big splash; then he was sliding down through the sea, swimming hard. He came to the surface opposite the waist of the ship. Francolini had run over to the starboard rail to watch him. Green was there. So was Birger Ukko and Sibu. They all laughed and chatted together and pointed him out. In fact, his strokes of swimming had not carried him far. The nearness of the *Spindrift* held him in a sort of charmed circle. He seemed to be making futile gestures with arms and legs to get away.

AFT, he saw Burke shaking a fist in the air, not toward the swimmer but at the world in general, and shouting orders to get a boat into the falls and lower away. Forward, there was quite another picture. Koba stood on the rail, at ease and secure as a circus performer, pulling off her dress and tossing it away behind her on the deck. The wind caught it, however, and hung it over the rail, like a bit of blue laundry. Except for the dress she had not been wearing much of anything. She bent her knees, gave her arms a swing, and then cut the air into the sea.

She disappeared. Presently a brown streak came up in the water beside him. He thought of sharks; then he saw it was Koba. She stood up out of the sea almost to the hips and gave the water a fling out of her hair.

"Culver is a slow pig in the water," she said.

Once he had read a romance in which the hero and the heroine swam ashore like this. They had come in from a life-raft, and there had been writing about the hero's strong body and the heroine's slender one, and the way the water buffeted his shoulders, and the smooth way she cut through the waves. There might be that sort of a picture now, but there was no romance in it for Culver. In the story the feature had been the couple treading water and giving one another a long embrace before the disaster was about to befall them. The disaster was a big wave, or something like that. Culver was irritated in remembering the thing. All he wanted right now was to get away from the *Spindrift*.

"This way!" said Koba, and cut out ahead of him. She seemed to take a stroke and sail, and wait, and look back at him. He seemed swimming in sticky liquid; she seemed floating in air. It was a queer difference.

He saw the ship was suddenly much smaller. And in a single eye-grasp he could take in all of her from the stem to the stern. He saw Napico's head and shoulders rearing above the after rail. The big dog was watching. Perhaps he would dive over and join the swimmers. Culver with his whole heart prayed that this might happen, because somehow he had had the feeling from the first that Napico was leading him somewhere.

He worked off his trousers. That left him freer for the swimming. The water seemed to slide past him more smoothly, but in the meantime he saw that the boat was swinging from the davits; it was dropping; then it was in the water.

Something roared in his ears, very close.

"Koba!" he called. "You're heading for the reef! We can't go that way."

She lifted her head and looked back at him, swimming on her side without effort. She reached out with the under arm and hauled herself far forward at every stroke. Her feet kicked just below his head. But she held on her course straight toward the reef. They were already in the larger heave of the waves as they gathered themselves for the run at the reef. Coming up to the top of a ground-swell, he saw clearly the lift and the crash of a comber on the coral, with weight enough to shatter a man's bones.

"Koba! Koba!" he called, but she kept straight on.

It might be that she had water in her ears and could not hear him. Or perhaps the roar from the reef, momentarily louder, drowned out his voice. He put on a strong spurt, swimming his fastest. But she, without specially increased effort, kept the same measured distance ahead of him. Already, it seemed to Culver, they were irretrievably in the swing of the waters, heading for trouble.

He reached out, at last, to catch her by the foot. His fingers touched her, but the foot kicked away and was gone like a frightened fish.

There was no taking her away from this dangerous course; and there was no leaving her, it seemed to Culver. When he looked back, he could see the boat coming off from the *Spindrift*, and in the sternsheets, standing up, laughing, was big Jemmison with a boathook in one hand, the other laid on the tiller. It would be a thought natural to Jemmison, to pull a human fish out of the sea with the steel hook which he carried! Culver, turning face down, swam on desperately behind the girl.

THERE is nothing like swimming to take it out of a man; the muscles of Culver, so well-trained for other work, began to grow numb with this unusual movement, and the wind went out of him as though he had fallen from a height. He tried one last time to call the girl; but when he lifted his head, he saw that it was too late. The swing of a sweeping ground-swell already was picking him up and driving him forward at such speed that it was enough to use his strength to keep his body straight without trying to make headway. He prepared to fend for himself with hands and feet when the reef rose under him; but he knew the thundering force of the water as the wave tumbled its crest over and dropped, with the lunging shoulder sliding behind it. Koba was lifting her head, looking forward, and then smiling back at him.

He looked back, and saw the boat with its prow not ten yards away; but it hung there, growing more distant, as the crew backed water hard. The pull of the ground-swell must have surprised them with the strength of its grip and the speed of its swinging motion.

Then he looked again toward Koba. The thunderous leaping of the water was right before him. Beyond it he saw the smooth water of the inner lagoon, sleeked out as though with oil, moving only in long, slow pulsations as the shattered waves reformed with the last impulse of their strength and rolled leisurely on toward the beach. The moon silvered a long path across those pleasant waves.

Beyond the lagoon there was the whole usual picture of a tropical island. There was the blanched sand of the beach rounding in a big arc at the lips of the sea; there were the tall palms with the dead skirts of a hundred years falling down around their shanks. There were the mountains with dim glimmers of fire in the open entrances. Off to the side appeared, on a highland, a house and some outbuildings which showed the presence, probably, of the usual trader.

Culver had time to smile a little as he looked at this sketch. Somehow his eyes remained set upon it, because they feared to look at that nearer picture. The roar of the breaking surf made thinking difficult now. And because his brain was befogged by the noise, he did not even try to find his own way but followed Koba blindly.

A larger wave than any of the preceding ones picked him up, lifted him high and flung him ahead. From that flying top he could see, at last, that there had been reason in Koba, after all. For the reef apparently did not run in an unbroken wall. Right ahead of the reaching arms of the girl the seas sluiced through a gap in the reef. It was not a wide opening, and the water came pouring in from either hand and intermingling in a twisting current which no swimmer could make head against. Still, there was that gap, like a hole in a rabbit-fence, and he understood at once that she had come in this direction because it was the only possible avenue of escape.

She was right on the lip of it now. He saw her go up on the crest of a wave. She turned. One arm flashed as she waved back at him. He saw her head turned also, and her voice cut through the thunder and reached him like the small cry of a child in the night.

Then the wave heaved on, blotting out the lagoon, the beach, the palms, the mountains, leaving only the smoking tip of the volcano in view above its upper ridge.

He, in the meantime, had fallen into the trough, but a moment later he was picked up as by a thousand urgent hands and tossed toward the stars. He lurched forward. The spinning crest shot him ahead. He looked down a steep bank and sharply descending hill of water which to the right and the left curled over and formed its visible thunder along the reef but just ahead of him the wave sloughed outward, suddenly, and poured through the gap in the coral.

He had a bewildered glance ahead, but he could not see Koba. Then the rushing current in the gap took hold of him, fingered him, and hurled him right on and down. He tried his best to keep his body straight. In spite of himself he was whirling around and round. The motion eased. But he was deep, dark fathoms beneath the surface, with pressure on his whole body. Gradually this relaxed. He swam strongly upward toward a glimmering light, and so with bursting lungs his head broke surface again.

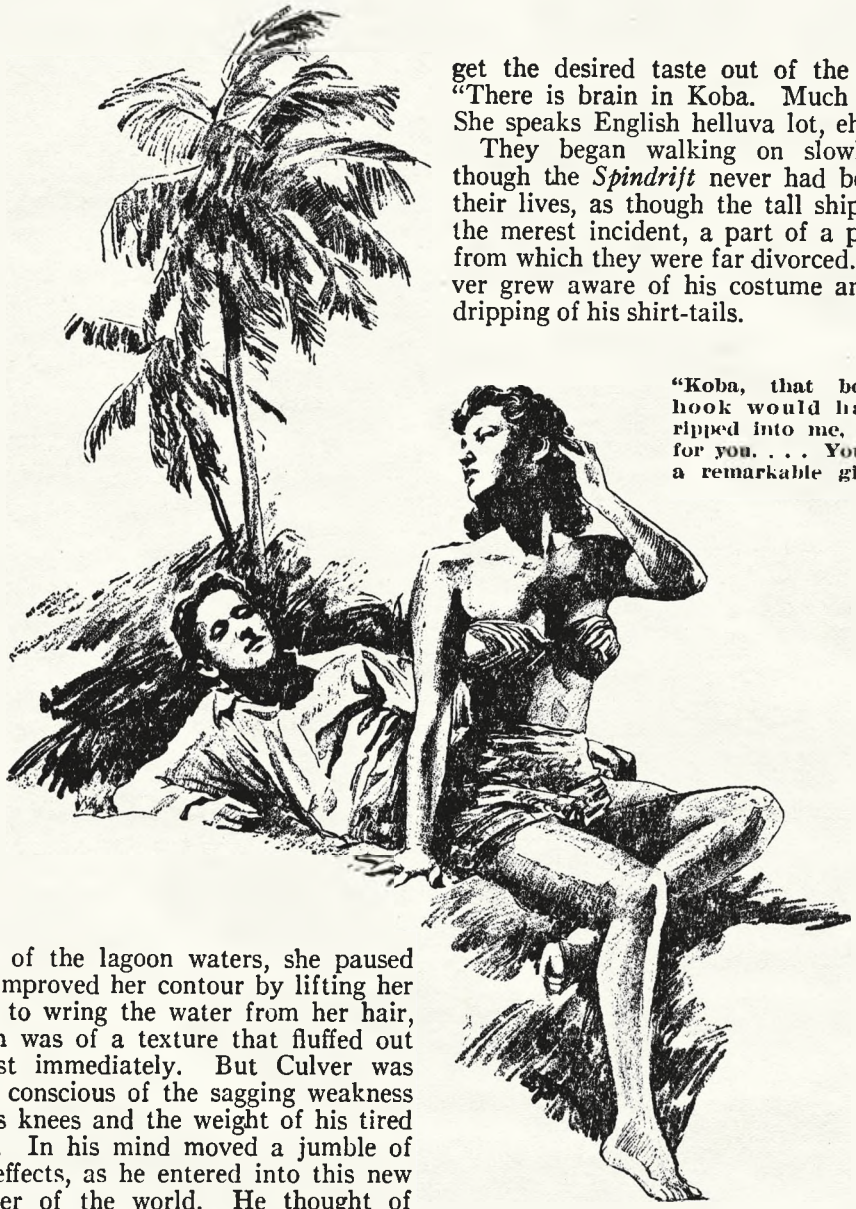
He was blind with coughing and gasping for the moment. But when at last he had winked his eyes clean, he saw Koba in the water beside him, laughing.

"Oh, if they only had come two oar-strokes closer—two strokes more—two strokes more!" she cried out. "They would have been tumbling here like wet white pigs. Tumbling and drowning!"

Culver floated on the smooth lagoon with casual swimming-strokes while he regained his wind. He could look back at the *Spindrift* beyond the white heads of the combers on the reef and see her with down-drooping sails, black and white in the moonlight. In the nearer distance, he saw the boat which had escaped the reef, oaring over the surface of the inner lagoon—moving in pulsations, like a water-bug that glides on the surface. Far off, he heard the plump of the anchor, the rattle and roar of the chain. Then he saw Koba stand up out of the water. They had come unexpectedly into the shallows of the lagoon, and the beach was immediately before them.

Chapter Seventeen

NO doubt Culver should have been watching the dark Venus who was rising from the sea beside him. Koba herself was expecting a great effect and moved slowly, elaborately, aware that a few dragglements of wet underclothes were all that pretended to hide what God had given to her in a large-hearted moment of creation. Knee-deep in the soft



"Koba, that boathook would have ripped into me, but for you. . . . You're a remarkable girl."

sway of the lagoon waters, she paused and improved her contour by lifting her arms to wring the water from her hair, which was of a texture that fluffed out almost immediately. But Culver was more conscious of the sagging weakness in his knees and the weight of his tired body. In his mind moved a jumble of odd effects, as he entered into this new quarter of the world. He thought of Mrs. Lindley and his books, of the light that had trembled in the red hair of Sally Franklin, of Napico, and again of Sally Franklin and the green in her eyes. A bit guiltily, he glanced at Koba.

"Koba, that boathook would have been ripped into me, but for you," he told her, and touched her shoulder in gratitude.

Koba instantly drew his arm around her.

"Now everything is all right," she said. "My uncle Takono is big man in Tapua. He takes one Valdez, one Burke, and bumps their heads. . . . You like Koba pretty good, Culver?"

"You're a remarkable girl," understated Culver.

"'Remarkable? Remarkable?'" echoed Koba, squinting her eyes as she tried to get the desired taste out of the word. "There is brain in Koba. Much brain. She speaks English helluva lot, eh?"

They began walking on slowly, as though the *Spindrift* never had been in their lives, as though the tall ship were the merest incident, a part of a picture from which they were far divorced. Culver grew aware of his costume and the dripping of his shirt-tails.

"You speak a great deal of English," answered Culver. "How did you come on board the *Spindrift,* my dear?"

"Everybody is damn' fool once," answered Koba, brushing the *Spindrift* out of the conversation with a very personable gesture. "Koba was damn' fool. There is Takono's house. Very fine, eh?"

The straggling buildings which he had seen from beyond the reef had turned into a fair-sized village with a hint of streets and some European structures grouped around the foot of a long pier. The palms and the trees had covered a great part of the picture when it was seen from a distance. Now they were heading up the slope of an easy hill with a big, round-sided hut on the flattened side of it.

He looked back through the palms, which were drawing together more thickly behind him; he still could see the shining sails of the *Spindrift*. But now everything connected with his immediate past seemed absurd and dreamlike. The present strangeness dimmed all thoughts of the ship, the shanghaiing in San Francisco, the dim figure of Valdez. If he had been asked what he would have with him out of his entire past at that moment, he would have answered that he wanted Napico to trot on ahead of him at the end of a leash, smelling out a way, for Napico was the unsolved problem which loomed out of his past; and to win the confidence and the love of the dog seemed, for mysterious reasons, almost as important as discovering a key to the Etruscan language.

WITH these thoughts Culver's mind was filled as he walked through the black-and-white strips of moonlight and shadow in the palm grove. The warm, humid air touched his body like tepid water, and the scent that it carried to him was utterly new, as though a different soil gave birth to different plants.

He found himself saying: "Where is it among the poets, Koba, that there is talk of a woman and the sea? Is it somewhere in Homer, or in the legend of Aphrodite, the foam-born, that we learn to think of women and the sea? Now my mind has been traveling very far from you, to tell the truth, but all at once the wind breathes something into me, and I can think of Koba only."

"Ha-ha?" murmured Koba, half questioning and half delighted.

"Where is it among the poets," went on Culver, thinking aloud in his gentle voice, "that they speak of the danger and the loveliness and the wildness and the song of the sea, and find it like the delightful peril and the beauty and the strangeness and the voice of woman?"

"Koba?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact, I seem to be thinking suddenly of you alone," said Culver. "But where is that thought among the poets? Theocritus? No, not there. He is too slight for that. Pindar? He has sweeping images like that; but would he use such images for a woman?"

Koba began to sing as softly as the rushing sound of the trade-wind through the palms. Culver was silent.

"Talk! Talk!" said Koba, and went on with her muted song.

It began to run into the mind and the thoughts of Culver like an accompaniment of the words which drifted from his lips almost unconsciously, now.

"Infinitely varied, varied most infinitely," said Culver. "Do you know how I see you, Koba?"

Instead of answering, she continued her singing, looking straight ahead, smiling to herself. An odd excitement entered Culver, but he suppressed this as well as he could.

"It is an image of a thousand parts," said Culver, continuing his thoughts aloud. "If there is pain, I remember Koba in the forecastle taking it away with the touch of her hands. That was the beginning. I think if I ever find pain again, the sort of pain that breaks the heart of a man in two, I shall remember your hands, Koba. Do you understand that?"

She continued her wordless song without an answer.

"But no matter what emotion might be in me," said Culver, exploring the idea with a growing wonder, "I think there would be a picture of you to match it. If I had an easy, slothful content in the warmth of the sun, when the heat of it like sleep relaxes the body and passes its fingers down to the deepest weariness and gives a perfect peace, I should think of Koba lying flat on her back on the deck with her arms thrown out, embracing the sun, smiling."

"Ah—ah—" murmured Koba, and continued her song again.

"And if I were ever tiptoe and alive with happiness, I would think of Koba swimming in the sea like a bird floating in the sky. Or if—or if—" He paused.

"Talk!" breathed Koba.

"This is hard to say, because it is quite new to me," said Culver, "but the truth is that if I ever again find a strange mournfulness in my heart, a sorrow with a happy core to it, a homesickness that persists when one is already home, and a desire to take what is already given, and a hunger in the midst of a food, a thirst in the midst of drinking, I shall think of Koba and this song of hers, like the wind, or the sound of the distant surf."

A SUDDEN rattle of cheerful voices broke upon them through the trees.

"Ah, my God, they will end it!" whispered Koba. "Come away! Quickly, quickly—"

She pulled at him to step aside behind a huge old palm trunk; but it was im-

possible to hide from the crowd of islanders who swept up around them, and caught at the girl with many hands.

Culver, surprised, listened to the babbling of their tongues with curious and happy ears, for it was a language richer in quick, soft vowels than any he ever had studied in all the years of his life. But over and over again he heard the name "Koba," and saw clearly that she had fallen among friends. Men and girls, these creatures moved in a way different from people who wear shoes; there was a languor even in their swiftest gestures. They had not about them the sweaty savor of civilization, but a queer pungency of odor that was half a fragrance, like the perfume of good cookery. Now they were urging both Koba and Culver forward, drawing them up the slope, laughing, shouting. And as they went, they cried out repeatedly: *"Kava! Kava!"*

He identified the word readily enough. An intoxicant curiously prepared in the South Seas by scraping and chewing the root of the kava. The expectorated mouthfuls—the saliva having separated the alkaline from the sugar content—ferment rapidly. The juice of coconuts is added liberally. Presently a mild intoxicant is in readiness.

NOW they emerged from the palms of the grove into the open before the big hut they had seen from a distance. It was apparent at once that a festival was going forward. Several fires burned in the open with big pots simmering over them, and the good odor of cooking meat and other edibles filled the air happily, for Culver. The moonlight and the light from the fires and the light from lanterns hung here and there filled the open space with a confusion of many shadows that angled out in all directions, making black, sprawling caricatures of every outline; Culver saw more bare humanity at a glance than he had dreamed of during the years of his life. It was far from a pleasant spectacle. He turned to rest his eyes on Koba, but she was gone, running to throw herself into the arms of the host.

Takono did not rise to greet her, because rising was difficult for him. He sat cross-legged on a mat in the center of things—a pyramidal edifice, squatting on his huge thighs. He was grotesque, yet there was a sort of magnificence and beauty about him. He embraced the girl and then held her for a moment like a baby in his arms, trundling her back and forth, laughing and talking to her. And around them a ring of girls danced, all with flowers adorning them. They made a lovely sight in motion; but when they were still, their beauty diminished suddenly. Even their faces seemed made more for laughter than for repose. They would have been trebly charming as a passing procession, not as a stationary show. In a closed room they would have been a burden to the eyes, perhaps, but in the outdoor they were helped by the tall lifting of the palms and the mountains which lifted like thunderheads in the background, with Tapua itself smoking highest of all.

Koba was on her feet again now, and running to Culver, she drew him across the open circle to the fat man. Takono put out an immense moist hand that fairly swallowed the grasp of Culver. He was hugely conscious of his damp shirt-tails, by this time, but his embarrassment was not shared. The chattering Tapuans gathered about and looked at him with the greatest friendliness and a sort of anatomical curiosity that paid heed to every detail. The big thigh muscle, divided above the knee and folding loosely down beside it, particularly took them. An old man actually got to his feet and came over to poke a forefinger into that muscle. The hardness of it made him laugh with pleasure.

Koba began to sell Culver like an ox at a fair. What her rapid voice said of him he could not tell, of course, but her gestures spoke for themselves with the utmost eloquence. It was presently apparent that an almost superhuman brain resided in the head with which she endowed him; and it appeared that no matter how the wind blew, he was at home in the rigging. In the air she sketched the monstrous figure of the bosun, reaching on tiptoe to draw in the outline of his towering head; and with a blow of her hero's hand she shattered the giant to dust and gravel underfoot, and kicked it for good measure. She made the *Spindrift* lie flat in the ocean once more and with her speaking hands she built up the great wave until it overwhelmed the ship once more; and she showed herself prostrate and senseless on the deck under the shadow of the wave, and indicated her hero swinging down like a bird from the sky to seize her and bear her up to safety. She even indicated the thundering reef, and her man of men sliding through the gap in the coral into the smooth safety of the lagoon.

When she had finished, there was a loud, hearty shouting, and the fat hand of Takono drew Culver down beside him. In that seat of honor he remained as the feasting began. It was a copious meal with everything served on great kava leaves—fish and roast pig as tender as butter, yams, and queer greens that tasted like nothing Culver ever had eaten before. And there were the draughts of strange drink which Koba continually fetched him in coconut shells.

It had a muddy look and a slimy texture and an odd vegetable taste, but the effect of it was to bring a mindless pleasure to Culver. For a time he was on the verge of song. And then came a period when all the voices sounded loudly and hollowly in his ears, as though he were listening to that roar of the sea which is always imprisoned in a shell. After that, the flames of the fire turned into a queer bright fuzz of obscurity, and finally sleep washed over Culver in delicious waves. A portion of his mind remained clear enough to realize that he was being taken up bodily by two young men and carried, with Koba supporting his head. He knew he was being put down in another place, and that Koba, sitting beside him, gave him a heavenly breeze from the waving of the fan which she held. Then he sank away into a senseless slumber.

Chapter Eighteen

CULVER wakened with a slightly jarred and vague feeling such as one has when taking another step down and finding the level ground too soon. He was on a shadowy platform outside the hut, sleeping on a mat with a hard roll under his head. He sat up and found Koba curled up beside him with a hand stretched out, almost touching his face. She smiled in her sleep. Some inward impulsion cleared the brain of Culver at once and got him to his feet. The forethought of the girl appeared here, also, for he found beside him a pair of old blue denim trousers and a pair of nondescript shoes which had plenty of room in them for his feet. He was dressed in two gestures and then looked uncertainly around him. The way lay open before him down the hill and he took it. He had a slight sense of guilt when he glanced down at Koba, but he had a greater sense still of liberation.

As he came down through the palms, a group of the islanders saw him and waved and shouted and laughed until he was out of view. He hoped that their voices would not waken Koba from her good sleep. As he neared the lower verge of the grove, he saw the *Spindrift* at anchor with her sails neatly furled and her image beside her in the still water. A small steamer was leaving the bay, trailing its wake back in a distinct line clear to the pier which it had just left. As he came out from the grove, he saw a jumble of boxes and bales on the pier, and native porters clearing them away by degrees. A little tug was tethered to the other side of the pier. Since the pier itself was the apparent center of all life, he went straight toward it.

A little general-merchandise shop near the waterfront tempted him to step inside with a few questions. A big smoky-eyed halfbreed, in charge, answered *no* to everything. He had never heard of a Walter Toth. He had heard of Captain Valdez of the *Spindrift,* but if the captain were not on board the ship which then was lying in harbor, he had no idea where the man might be.

Culver went gloomily out to the street —and found himself not three steps from Thomas Wiley and Sally Franklin!

The shock of that sight halted him speechless. They, however, were going straight past him, with an islander behind them, heaped with luggage; the astonishment in his eyes stopped them.

"It's Samuel Culver!" cried Sally. "How could we know you without glasses and brown as a native? Samuel Culver —keep hold of my hand. It's all I have to tell me that I wasn't a fool to jump halfway around the world."

"Miss Franklin—or Mrs. Wiley?" said Culver, shaking hands with them.

"Not quite; almost," answered Thomas Wiley. "But what happened to you, Culver? Tell us what it's all about!"

"How did you get on the *Spindrift?* And why?" demanded the girl. "And where is Walter Toth?"

He smiled as he segregated the question into its multiple parts. It was astonishingly pleasant to see them both, but above all to lay eyes on the girl.

"The dog—Napico turned out to be his name," said Culver, "took me at last to the *Spindrift,* at a San Francisco pier; and they wanted the dog on board to follow the trail of his master later on; so they shanghaied me; and I learned on board the ship that your uncle, Walter Toth, had found a large quantity of valuable pearls of which he felt a portion was

due to the crew of the *Spindrift* who had assisted him in the past; but the other half he wished to leave to his niece before he died, and death was close to him when he wrote the letter. So I wirelessed to you. It would have been very dangerous to use the sender of the ship again. I had only a few minutes and could not make a long explanation."

"I NEVER heard such a thing as this in my life!" cried the girl. "It's like walking through the mirror and finding the other side of everything."

Culver looked at Wiley, who was beaming broadly, and said: "There are pearls to the value of between six hundred thousand and a million dollars, in the estimation of Walter Toth. And he spoke in the manner of one who knows."

"Six hundred thousand!" said Wiley.

"Half of which would be the right of Miss Franklin," explained Culver. "So that I felt it necessary to send the wireless message."

"Good God, suppose you hadn't!" commented Wiley.

"In the meantime the captain of the *Spindrift*, Valdez, has apparently come ahead of his ship by steam to try to secure all the pearls for himself. But my hope is that for one reason or another he has not yet reached the island."

"Valdez — theft — pearls — the *Spindrift*—a dying man—" said Sally.

"It all would do very well as a fact," answered Culver, "except for the mention of the pearls, don't you agree? They remove the whole matter into the realm of fiction. I've often thought of that. The dog, the ship, Valdez, the dying man—we could believe all of that, but when we come to buried treasure, so to speak, the thing is at once incredible. Perhaps modern financiers have taught us to believe that money cannot be found except through compound interest? And who is the poet who says:

"In daylight all the midnight marvels die;
Wonders are for the ear, not for the eye."

"Poets to quote—even on Tapua—even in the middle of a melodrama," murmured the girl. "Didn't I tell you so, Tommy? But where did you pick up that red scar on your forehead, please?"

"As a matter of fact, that was how I was introduced to life on the *Spindrift*," explained Culver. "Sailors are a bit abrupt in their manners; particularly the crew of the *Spindrift*. Shall we go on to your lodgings?"

They went on, slowly, walking continually sidewise to continue questions and answers. Thomas Wiley by the grace of chance had been at his wireless when the message arrived; but it was hardly grace of chance that he had had it tuned so fine that he caught the vague whisper of the key across those thousands of miles

of ocean. It had been almost a perfect day for reception, he said, otherwise the thing could not have come through. He had gone at once with the wild news to Sally Franklin. They waited a day or two for a confirming message. Then they heard that the big liner *Norman Prince* was sailing at once for the South Seas and touched at Wago, near Tapua, with steamship connections between the two islands. That news had decided them to go. They almost had taken out a marriage license first.

"But she still hasn't quite made up her mind about me," said Thomas Wiley. "She doesn't know me well enough. Only ten years or so. Ten years more and I might be able to pull the thing off."

"But that, actually—that beautiful ship in the harbor—is that the *Spindrift* which you came on?"

"The very same. We arrived last night," explained Culver.

"And are *those* shore clothes for a sailor?"

"These are only accidents," he told her calmly. "I had to leave the ship in a hurry and swim ashore. And since it means we have met in this fashion—"

He broke off short because around the next corner of the "English" district of Tapua came the magnificence of Napico with his nose close to the ground, then again with head high in the air. Holding him were Alec and Jemmison, with Burke in person to the rear, still conning his craft from the poop-deck, as it were. They had not succeeded in putting the muzzle on the big dog. Instead, they handled him with a pair of strong lines which were rove into his collar. Walking well out from him and taking no chances with his teeth, the two strong men kept him at a distance while they escorted him through the town, plainly with the hope that he might pick up the trail of Valdez.

"Napico!" cried out big Culver.

It was a mere exclamation, not a call; for the dog never had answered to his name before, when Culver spoke it. This time there was a difference. Napico halted, looked quickly around him, spotted Culver, and went for him with a lunge. Perhaps Culver looked to the beast like a port in a storm. His heavy lunge was checked at once by the twin lines which controlled him. He flew into a snarling passion at once. First he

What her rapid voice said of Culver, he could not tell, of course, but her gestures spoke with utmost eloquence.

lurched toward the legs of Alec with a side-slash of his fangs, and missing that target, he took up the slack in the opposite direction by flinging himself at Jemmison.

Perhaps Alec would have held him safely enough. But Jemmison dropped his line with a shout; Napico whipped the other rope through the hands of Alec, and in a moment the big dog was at the feet of Culver. There he turned around and faced his enemies with a bristling hatred. Burke was enriching the air with an amazing flow of language, consigning Alec and Jemmison to various hells. Culver picked up the fallen ropes and held Napico on a short leash.

"Walk right on," he said to Wiley and the startled face of Sally. "It's all right. . . . Only give him plenty of headroom; don't let him come within reaching distance of you. But he's as much my dog as he is theirs. . . . Good morning, Alec!"

He went on slowly, still holding the dog short. He could not see either of the other faces but only that of Burke, who gave aside when Culver came closer. Probably it was not fear of Culver's hands but the teeth of the dog that backed him up. At any rate, he gave them a clear passage. His voice did not return to him until they were several steps past him and then he shouted: "I'll have it out of you, Culver! I'll have you back on board and I'll break you, Culver!"

That was all. The porter shambled ahead and showed them the way around the next corner.

"Who is that?" breathed Sally. "Who in the *world* is that?"

"That's Burke," said Culver. He looked at the girl strangely; there was a world, an entire world that he had passed around since he last saw her, and Burke had been the highest pinnacle in it. He had learned an entirely new lesson from Burke and that was how to hate. He despised himself for feeling that unworthy passion, but he could not help a sense that hatred was something like carbon in iron—it enabled the human metal to take a sharper edge and hold it longer. Hate, for instance, was what had led Burke so patiently on the long backtrail of Valdez. "Burke," added Culver, "who commands the *Spindrift* while the captain is away from her. Burke, who is following Valdez. And whether he or Valdez reach Toth first, you never will see your share of the pearls."

"But he is the man who stopped and asked me about Uncle Walter that day in San Francisco!" said the girl. "It's beginning to give me chills, Tommy. The wheel is turning around full circle, and I'm seeing some of the first spokes of it again!"

They got to a "hotel," which was a one-story shack patronized by sailors. There was no other public lodging-place in Tapua, and while Tommy Wiley went in to look at rooms, Culver remained outside with Napico. The big dog was too dangerous to take into an unknown place among unknown people without a muzzle. Sally remained outside with Culver.

There had been no wind to speak of but now the fronds of the palms began to shake and the soft, humid air stirred. The nose of Napico thrust out into it at once; he began to strain toward the inner side of the walk. When Culver let him move there, his nose instantly was on the ground. He began to whine, and to the astonishment of Culver, his shaggy tail started wagging.

"He's found something important to him," said Culver. "I'll see where this goes—"

Napico was trying to gallop on the trail. He swung his head about and snarled at the restraining ropes.

"Be careful!" the girl warned him. "How can you stay close to that green-eyed devil? He's a regular Chinese dragon, I think. *Watch* him, please!"

NAPICO towed Culver down the street at a good pace, turned a corner, and mounted the steps of a little bungalow which was set back behind an excuse for a garden. It was a dilapidated cottage with a great need of white paint to freshen its face. Napico raged until he got to the front door and stood up scratching at it with his forepaws until Culver pulled him back. His eagerness hurt Culver with a singular pain, but he found the hard grip of excitement on him at the same time. Valdez, he thought—only for Valdez would the dog show this tense desire to go on. And Valdez was the man whom Culver wished to face; but in that meeting Napico would pass out of his hands forever.

The girl felt the tension, also.

"Does it mean something now, this moment?" she asked. "Shall I run back for Tommy?"

"Let Tommy be," answered Culver shortly, for he was feeling that he was a mere weed in the grass, something to be

plucked up and thrown away. If he found Valdez, the dog left him; and now he served Sally in order that young Tommy should take her. He was rather amazed to find this thought in his mind, and hastily he told himself, as he knocked at the door, that she was young, very young, and he was old. He was thirty-five; he was in middle age; and more than years had aged him still more. What share had he in rewards? His reward, indeed, would probably be the scattering of the library which he had collected with such pain during years, perhaps even his cupboard stacked with the scholarly notations of his life would be thrown into the junkheap by Mrs. Lindley when she made the room ready for another guest! He was roused from this unhappy trance by the sudden tugging of Napico to get into the house.

The door was open, and a man in an undershirt, with wrinkled, bagging white trousers, and bare feet, stood in the hallway holding the door.

"What's the main idea?" he asked. "I don't keep dogs here. Back that brute outside. You need a stable for him, anyway. He's big enough to pass for a horse."

"He seems," said Culver politely, "to be following a trail. He seems to know someone who is in the place."

"That's me," said the stranger. "I'm the only man in the house."

"There might be a woman, perhaps?" asked Culver, with a dying hope.

"I'll be damned if there is or ever will be. I've had my fill of them, let me tell you."

He had the tattooed forearms of a sailor. A scrub of two days' beard gave a moldy look to his face, for the hair was spotted with gray. He was as round and heavy as a section sawed out of a big log.

"Do you know a Captain Valdez?" asked the girl suddenly.

The man in the hall moved until he could look past Culver.

"Sorry, ma'am," he said. "I didn't see you out there. What Valdez would you be meaning?"

"The one who used to be the captain of the *Spindrift*," she said.

"Oh, him?" repeated the sailor. "Sure I've heard of him, but I never laid eyes on his face. He keeps a hard ship, I'm told. There's the *Spindrift* out in the harbor now, they tell me. What about Valdez?"

"I thought," said Culver, "that this dog would never follow a trail as he's following this one, unless it were the trail of Valdez. He belongs to the Captain."

"Well, there's no captain here," answered the sailor. "None here, and aint been."

Culver looked calmly at him.

"Has someone come into your house from the street this morning?" he asked.

"Not a soul."

"Yesterday?"

"How the hell can I remember everything and everybody that might of come in here?" demanded the sailor. "And who are you? And what d'you want?"

"I don't look like the police, do I?" asked Culver, smiling.

The sailor almost jerked the door shut. He demanded through the narrowing crack of it: "What have I got to think about police for?"

"That," said Culver, "is your own concern, and not mine. I can't say what the police will think or do, of course. Who is it that says:

"Fear lays its ugly shadow on the floor,
Taps at the window, breathes beneath the door."

"Who talks about fear?" asked the sailor, jerking the door open again. "There wasn't anything phoney about this dying. God knows he was long enough at it and the whole town could of known, if it wanted to come here and take a look. If it wanted to ask questions, it could of asked them. I buried him right out in the open in the graveyard, didn't I?"

"My dear friend, I'm accusing you of nothing," said Culver.

"Are you a lawyer or something?" asked the sailor. "What've you come here for?"

"To ask for permission for my dog to get into your house," said Culver. "Do you definitely refuse me entrance?"

THIS question was a puzzler to the sailor. His brow gathered into a black scowl. He looked for a moment as though he might be about to use his foot on Napico or his fist on Culver; then he stepped back and said: "O.K. Come on in. But don't hang around about it. Get him in and get him out again, and it's all damned foolishness to me, I'm telling you."

Napico went straight in, scratching the floor loudly with his claws as he pulled heavily against the lead. He turned at once to the right, bumped open an almost closed door with his shoulder, and ex-

posed a neat little bedroom to view. It was done up with the tidiness of a sailor, a blanket folded across the end of the narrow cot, the matting clean, the woodwork obviously washed very recently.

"This is the place, is it?" asked Culver. "This *is* the place, I see."

"What of it?" asked the sailor. "Aint it good enough?"

"That depends, perhaps," said Culver, "on the purpose to which it is put."

"Why the hell don't you come right out and say what you're thinking about me?" asked the host. "Say: 'Parker, I think you're a thief'; or, 'Parker, I think you're a crook'; or, 'Parker, I think it's murder!' Why don't you come out and say what you think, man?"

THE man was breathing hard and he stood with his legs braced well apart and a fighting look on his face.

"I'd be foolish to accuse a man until there's a crime known," Culver said.

"You're one of these Government birds," stated Parker. "You're one of those damned slickers that come snooping around and making trouble wherever you go. You think you're disguised, don't you? Hell, yes, you're wearing old jeans and shoes that don't match and you think that makes a beachcomber out of you. But I'll tell you that the first word out of your mouth, I spotted you for somebody higher up. College. I knew it was somebody yapping college talk. With my eyes closed I could've told by your lingo."

"I'm sorry," said Culver. "I shouldn't be so apparent, it seems."

"Yeah, I aint so dumb," admitted Parker. "But go on and look. There's the bed that he died in. Here's the room that he lived in. Now go ahead and try to make something of it, will you?" And he broke out: "Murder! That's what you think! I can see it in your look. Murder! Go on and tell me that's what you think!"

Sally Franklin shrank back a bit toward the door. The dog, in the meantime, had been sniffing here and there about the floor, his tail slowly wagging, his ruff bristling with his excitement.

Now he took a sudden turn and pushed his head inside the door of an open, shallow closet. He reappeared again, carrying in his mouth a much-scuffed slipper which was down-trodden at the heel.

"How the devil—" began Parker, and then shut himself up by striking his right hand quickly against his mouth.

Culver said nothing. He watched Parker silently, while Napico sat down on the floor with the slipper between his paws and guarded it, whining with a happy contentment.

"Matter of fact—" began Parker, and then he paused again with color beginning to rise in his face.

"And did *that* belong to the dead man?" asked Culver.

"Damn the dog!" cried out Parker. He looked toward the window and then toward the door. At last he said: "Well, suppose it was the other one?"

"What other one?" asked Culver.

"You don't know, eh?" commented Parker, sneering. "No, not much you don't! You couldn't guess, could you?"

"I hoped that you'd help me out," answered Culver.

"All right. He acted like he wanted to keep it dark, but why should I wind up in the hoosegow on account of him? All right. There *was* somebody else here most of the time: there was Van Zandt!"

Having said this, he heaved up both arms and let them fall heavily to his side, as a sign that he had resisted as long as he could but had to surrender at last.

"Parker," said Culver, "let me take a weight off your mind. I'm not here to bring up your past before your eyes, I merely hope that you'll give me a reasonable assistance."

"Well?" growled Parker.

"After all, he did not give you enough money to make you rich?" suggested Culver.

Parker blinked. Then he exclaimed: "I wish I'd shoved the money down his throat! Now, what do you want out of me?"

"Your dead man is buried—but tell me how long his friend was at your house?" asked Culver.

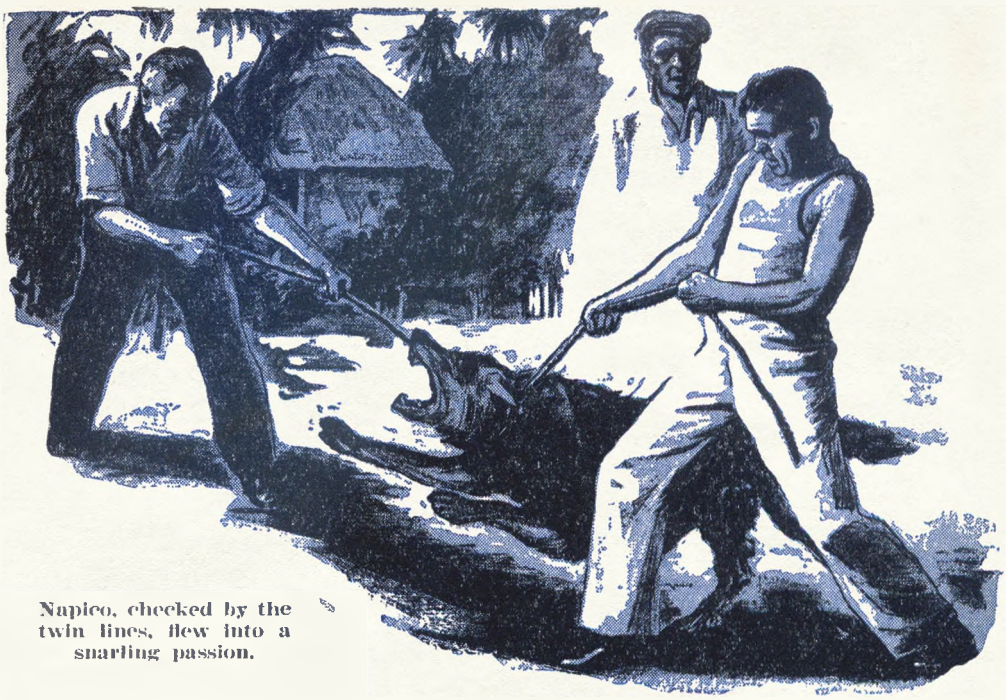
"Three, four weeks, maybe. There was a week before that when he just come to visit every day. I dunno what kind of a friend he was. My sick man told me to keep him out, after the first couple of times."

"But Van Zandt had money enough to buy his way in, of course?"

"Look here," answered Parker, black with his scowl again and sweating under the inquisition, "I gotta make a living, don't I? I aint here for my health."

"Suppose you describe Van Zandt for me?" Culver suggested.

"I guess you know what he looks like," replied Parker. "A beak and a chin like he wears aint seen every day; and you



Napico, checked by the twin lines, flew into a snarling passion.

don't get two hundred and fifty pounds of man wrapped up in one suit of clothes every day of your life, do you?"

"No," answered Culver. "That is rare, of course. . . . May we be alone in here for a short time?"

"As long as you want," said Parker, and went out of the room, leaving Culver at a stand, dreaming. For he was remembering the Roman, imperial profile and the huge bulk of the man in the automobile Napico had vainly pursued that night in San Francisco, which seemed two or three lifetimes in the buried past. Not Van Zandt, but Valdez must be the name, and he had come close to the end of the trail at last.

Chapter Nineteen

HE said to the girl: "Shouldn't you go back to Tommy and tell him where we are?"

"Go back? Leave this?" she asked. "I've never lived a step or a word or a thought before in my whole life! Leave this? I can't leave it! Tell me what you think. Van Zandt—who is Van Zandt?"

"Valdez, probably," replied Culver.

"And the dead man?"

"That has to be your uncle, I suppose."

Something took the place of the excitement in her eyes.

"He was a queer, jolly, happy man," she said. "And everyone always was afraid that he would come home drunk. But he's dead; and he was my uncle!"

"Interesting," said Culver. "Presently you will reason yourself into a state of grief because of a stranger."

"Please don't!" she said, angered a little.

"I beg your pardon," said Culver. "I merely was noticing the response which society labors to exact from us; we are forced into a conventional reaction. That was what interested me so much in your remark. I could see that you were proceeding through logic toward tears."

She laughed, briefly, and then watched him with curious, almost frightened eyes. "There's something rather terrible about you, you know," she said. "I'd hate to be cornered by you as poor Parker was."

"Terrible?" he repeated, amazed.

"I meet a very gentle man," she said. "who lives inside of great walls of books and peers out at the world through thick glasses. The same man goes down to the sea; I don't know how many storms and men beat on him, but he comes up from the sea again with his eyes young once more, and wearing a scar and a queer little smile of contentment as though everything had been simply another chapter out of a book." Her voice changed as she asked: "How were you so *sure* that Valdez had been here?"

"I was not sure at all. I was fumbling in the blindest darkness," explained Culver. "But Napico was very sure indeed."

"Might it not have been another trail than that of Valdez?"

"What trail but that of Valdez would make Napico whine and wag his tail?"

The dog, in fact, looked up with another whine from the slipper, when he heard the name of his master.

"But you knew that the sailor had a past that would make him afraid of the law; and you asked questions as though you were an officer of the law. *Are* you, Samuel Culver? Are you in the secret police?"

"No," he answered. "As for Parker's past, I saw that questions worried him. The poet says:

"Sin, once invited, dwells within our eyes
And views the future with a dark surmise."

"It was Parker's uneasy conscience that troubled him more than my questions."

"Ah, but you make everything easy with your quotations from the poets, as though they did all your thinking for you."

"There are a hundred generations of the poets," he said, "and what they say of the past must be true of the present, until human nature changes."

"What do you think has happened?"

"Valdez came and found Toth very ill. He pretended that he represented the entire crew of sailors who had helped Toth, but Toth doubted that. He even wished to keep Valdez out of his room, after two visits. But Valdez bribed Parker and kept coming. He wanted to learn the secret; he kept pressing to find out where the pearls of Mullaley had been hidden in the forest; and still week after week Toth doubted him and resisted. Until, I suppose, Toth felt that death was upon him, the other day. And then he talked rather than let the pearls disappear from the face of the world!"

"So Valdez has gone for them, now?" she asked. "What can we do?"

"Follow him, I suppose," said Culver.

"But where? Which way has he gone? There are a thousand trails leading back into the interior of Tapua, aren't there?"

"We'll have to find some indication here," answered Culver.

"There *isn't* an indication," she said. "There's nothing in the room except that slipper, and this silly magazine and the novel, there, and the calendar pad."

"There are only those three things," agreed Culver. "So we'll have to study them page by page. Will you take the calendar while I take the magazine?"

She was about to protest but there was a calm certainty about Culver that gave his words a certain force. She saw him pick up the magazine and start turning the pages. So, in her turn, she took the calendar and went rapidly through it.

"There's nothing in it. Every page is a blank," she said, looking up.

She discovered that Culver was only beginning the magazine and had hardly turned half a dozen sheets of it.

He said: "Will you tell Thomas Wiley where we are? He'll be worried."

"But Valdez!" she exclaimed. "Every moment he is getting farther and farther away from us. We'll never find him!"

"Every moment it grows more difficult," he admitted; "but we must study the page to find out the meaning. It is a time for quiet and thought, I dare say. But we have to have food for thought, you know, and that's what I'm trying to find. . . . Will you tell Wiley?"

SHE hurried from the place and fairly ran to the little lodging-house where Thomas Wiley was pacing impatiently up and down in front of the place.

She told him the news briefly.

"But he's found a book and now he's lost himself in print!" she said. "He'll be no use to us now. Tommy, start out through the town and ask questions everywhere. Ask if Valdez has been seen, and where he was going. A huge man of two hundred and fifty pounds with a great chin and a beak of a nose. I'll go back to Samuel Culver, but I'm afraid that he'll be no help now. . . . He's nibbling at printed words like a mouse at a granary, and he'll never be through!"

In fact, when she returned to the house and Parker had walked into the front room, Culver was sitting with the calendar open in front of him, absently shading a page with light strokes of a pencil-stub which he had picked up. Perhaps this was to assist the operations of his mind, by occupying his hands, she thought! She controlled her impatience, saying mildly: "Have you had any luck? Have you found anything?"

"About your uncle? A great deal," said Culver. "And if he were still above ground the facts might be useful!"

"Facts about him? I remembered him a little. Will you tell me what you've found out?" she wanted to know, still keeping her voice steady by force of great effort.

"He was an elderly fellow and women played no great part in his life," said Culver. "Adventure was what he loved. He was a chatty man, and loved to talk. Besides, he was careless and very nervous; an incessant smoker; and, toward the end at least, he was extremely unhappy. Despairing, I might say."

"Have you found a letter he wrote? How on earth do you know all this?"

"By studying the pages," said Culver. "Ashes between nearly all of them, the love stories hardly thumbed, the adventure yarns well finger-rubbed, and particularly the pages of dialogue. He had had this magazine as a companion for a long time. Sometimes he threw it aside, crumpling the corners. Sometimes he dropped it face down, even in the exciting middle of an adventure."

"It's all true, as I remember him," she said, staring. "But have you given up hope now? Are you sitting there trying to find a ghost of a clue for us to follow by *thinking* about it?"

"Well, it's a little more than a ghost of a clue," answered Culver. "You see?"

He tore out the page from the calendar and held it out to her. "He was dying, or almost dying, when he made it," pointed out Culver. "You see how the lines waver, and how they are clear in one place and dim in another and fade out altogether later on?"

The light pencil-strokes had covered the paper with a film of gray lead which brought out into relief a number of slight indentations, which formed lines and two or three arrows. All of one side was a blank except for a few faint indications. This was the tracery left by a drawing made on the page above.

"Those two upward strokes at the top," said Culver, "probably mean the volcano, Tapua itself. And the arrow points to the left, that is, to the northern side of the volcano. And this wavering line perhaps indicates a trail, spotted by the arrow."

"It's true!" exclaimed the girl. "But all this part is a blank!"

"His hand was growing weak and scrawling, by that time."

"Then we have only the vague beginning of the trail, and nothing to follow on toward the end?" asked Sally.

"If we can come to that vague beginning, perhaps Napico would help us the rest of the way," suggested Culver.

"Then let's hurry. Let's go now!"

"I was about to say the same thing," replied Culver, and stood up with the dog.

The moment he started for the door, Napico, as though he understood what sort of game was afoot, dropped the slipper and became bright-eyed with excitement.

"And Tommy?" asked Culver, as they walked up through the village, and into the tangled scrub beyond it, pointing just left of the north shoulder of Mount Tapua. "Should Tommy be with us?"

"If we find a trail, I'll run back for him —don't stop now!" pleaded Sally. "You *will* find it. I know you will. I'm almost sorry for Valdez, now. I suppose he was sure to be caught from the moment you turned your mind in his direction. Tell me, honestly—it isn't the first time you've done something like this, is it?"

"I've done nothing," answered Culver, "except work with books; but for a student there are a thousand hard trails to follow and dimmer indications than are on this map, a great deal. Suppose you are trying to follow a thought or a characteristic of a writer who is revealing himself only unconsciously in his words. How can a human being hide himself on the face of the earth as easily as thought can be hidden in the huge universe of the mind?"

The dog, as he spoke, pulled violently to the left as another trail joined the one they were walking on. The nose of Napico went down at once. His head wavered from side to side, following an exact scent; and he strained at the lead with trembling haunches. That faint whine which Culver had heard before, began to come from the throat of the big fellow.

"He has it!" said the girl. "He has it! He has it!"

She caught Culver's arm and fairly danced with excitement, looking up and laughing into his face in a full abandonment of happiness. Then the pale green growth beside the trail parted and Culver looked askance into the face of Koba.

KOBA made a fine statue against the background of green. For she was wearing a grass skirt and several chains of bright beads. Not even shoes encumbered her. She had her arms folded high, with an imperial demeanor. When she was most furiously bad-tempered, she was sure to smile a little, and she was smiling now in a way that chilled the blood of Culver. He was already walking past her with Sally when she appeared. Sally, rather startled, gasped a moment later: "What a beauty! But great heavens, does she *know* you?"

Koba, in her husky voice, was speaking rapidly, her eyes turning after Culver, but in her excitement she was using only her native tongue. Nevertheless her meaning was not altogether lost. Her language had the same fine terminal trill that is unmistakable in the cursing of an Irishman.

Culver said: "Koba, what's the matter?"

"Thief!" cried Koba, remembering her English. "Thief! Thief! Thief!"

And she pressed both hands over her heart, to make clear just what he had stolen. Culver retreated inch by inch before her passion, and Koba went into a queer, primitive dance. It consisted of kicking the ground rapidly with her heels and shaking her fists at the earth, the sky, and Culver.

"White pig! White pig! White pig!" screamed Koba. "May her children have hair on their faces—hair on their faces—hair on their faces!"

Culver rounded a sudden corner of the trail, pulled on by the lunging of Napico. Now that he was out of sight of Koba, he legged it swiftly to increase the distance.

"What a lovely girl—and what a warm manner she has!" said Sally. "Have you known her long?"

"Not very," said Culver.

"Not long, but well, I suppose," said Sally. "What a golden goddess! And yet not so little, either. Would you say."

"A hundred and thirty pounds, I dare say," said Culver, brooding.

To see Koba in such a transport of rage was something like seeing lightning at noonday. It was hard to remember, suddenly, how she had been the other night when they were walking up through the palm grove and in the whole world there had seemed only one lovely thing.

"A hundred and thirty pounds? You *do* know her well," commented Sally, with an odd lilt in her voice. "What was she saying at first in her own tongue?"

"I don't know," sighed Culver.

"I think you missed something," said Sally. "It had a very authentic sort of a sound. How lovely she is, the golden against the green. I didn't know you had such an eye for beauty."

"I can't tell why it is," said Culver, "but what you say makes me unhappy."

He looked suddenly askance at her and saw that she was smiling, and yet there something more than mirth in her face.

"Shall I tell you about Koba?" he asked.

"Please," said the girl.

She glanced over her shoulder. He had the same unhappy feeling that perhaps Koba might be following them, and knowing her as he did, he would rather have been followed by a snake.

"There was a time of trouble on the ship," said Culver, "and she helped me."

"I think she could be a very efficient helper," said Sally.

"My back was raw," he told her, "and Koba rubbed it with an unguent of some sort."

"How sweet of her," said Sally. "Was it a bad sunburn, or something?"

The memory came over him and turned him to stone. He stood still, and even the frantic lunges of Napico did not stir him any more than though they had been wireless tremors in the air.

"It was not sunburn," said Culver, in a new, hard voice. "But I was—" He stopped to get breath. He needed air.

"Never mind. Please don't!" said Sally, looking up at him alarmedly.

But he had started and the thing that was lodged in his throat had to come out. Perhaps if he spoke it, the throttling hate would leave him once for all.

"I had my wrists tied up in the rigging," he said, slowly. "And then, I was flogged, with a whip, as a mule or a dog is flogged—with a whip. Helpless!"

THE girl said nothing. She had moved back from him a little. He remained standing still.

"Afterward," he said, in the same hard, slow voice, "I walked the deck of that ship and obeyed orders. I saw the man who flogged me, and I did nothing about it. I saw him walking the poop and conning the ship, and I let him pass. Yet he had flogged me. Like a dog!"

He rubbed a hand across his forehead.

Then he said, controlling himself so that his voice was normal again: "Afterward, she came forward into the forecastle and rubbed my back with the ointment. She sang to me, and told me what the songs meant, and I went to sleep."

"I should think you'd *love* her!" cried Sally.

He thought for a moment.

"Almost," he said. "Almost."

"But really—with all your heart!"

"I think there was someone in my heart before her," said Culver in his simple way.

Sally said no more. Instead of asking him to explain, she walked on, her eyes thoughtfully on the toes of her shoes.

The concluding installment of this serial will appear in the forthcoming July issue.

A moving story of our peace-time army, by an officer in active service—the distinguished author of "Far Call the Bugles."

By CHARLES CLIFFORD

Line of Duty

FROM where Linda stood, by the gate of the little fenced-off back yard, she could see the old stone hospital where she had been born. She could see the window of the very room, though in the last year they had rearranged the upper floor of the hospital and that was the dentist's office now.

It seemed strange, she thought: only that and a few other small things like it had changed in those nineteen years; even this house—she squinted through the sunlight at the low stone building, with its white trim, the roses all over it, the patch of precious green lawn of which she could just see the edge, in front—was as she remembered it in her childhood. Old Sergeant Rembrich lived in it then—long since retired now—he and his little white-haired wife. Then a big green-and-red parrot hung by one foot on the tiny screened porch, and screamed and yelled insultingly at the boys who went by—or who, more often, gathered for the express purpose of urging it on. . . . Linda's father was only a corporal then, and they'd lived at the lowest ranking end of the back line.

She turned her head, and by bending back from the gate, she could just see the

roof and one corner of the house. Pop had come a long way since then. From the lowest ranking house to the top one; from corporal to master sergeant. To the nicest non-com's quarters on the post. But it had taken him twenty years.

LINDA'S mother came out onto the porch, half-smiling.

"Linda, you look like you were in a trance. What in the world you studying about?"

Linda smiled dreamily. "Most everything." She swung about the porch post, and with a bare arm about it, sat on the rail, her trim legs straight out before her. "I got to thinking how funny the army is," she said softly. "How I was born right in this post, and we've never moved the way you hear other people do. Just this same thing, the way I can remember its being, from a kid."

"Well, what of it?" Mrs. Duke asked. "You don't expect a regimental post on the border to *change,* do you? It's been here since long before the Civil War. Your grandfather served here against the Comanches, and that must have been in the Seventies; he said it was about the same except, when he was a corporal, they put up those new officers' quarters. He said an old sergeant told him the Rebels took the post during the war, and they didn't change it. Said they just used the old sick-records like they were their own, went right on with entries in them without any interruption. Changed the U.S.A. to C.S.A. Sergeant Holland says they're there now if you want to see them. Not only that," she went on, warmed now to the subject, "*before* the war, Robert E. Lee was in command here as a lieutenant-colonel. E Troop's storeroom is his old headquarters—just like it was."

"Except for the stuff inside it," Linda said. "No machine-guns or one-pounders then. Yes, I remember as a kid old Sergeant Kidder used to let us play in there. Hide in the blankets. I can still smell those mothballs." She looked toward the creek, her eyes dreamy. "Mom—"

The mother was watching her, her face screwed up, faintly impatient. "Mom, did you ever hear of an army girl, I mean like me, marrying—" She hesitated, and looked uncomfortably down at her cheap low-heeled shoes. "You know, some man out of the army?"

"A *civilian?*" her mother said, with a sharp edge to her voice. "I never heard of any good come of it, if that's what you mean. Why?" she said, with sudden, pointed interest. "Linda, you been thinking about some man in town?"

The girl met her eyes openly, and she smiled. "Of course not. Don't be such a fool, Mom. I was just daydreaming for fun. Like, suppose you *did* fall in love with some man, say from a big city. Like San Antone, or even New York. How it would be to go and live in a place like that all the time, the way people live here at Fort Mather. All the things they do and could happen to you. People that never even heard of the Army—never knew there was one."

"Hmph! They know it when a war comes. Mighty proud of it *then!* If it wasn't for people like us, they wouldn't *have* their cities and all those fancy things that go with them." She reached over and touched the girl's hand. "Now you shut your mind of such crazy thoughts. You're a soldier's daughter, and you can be right proud of your pop. And both your grandfathers were soldiers—even if your father's pa *was* in the infantry. And'f you get any marrying thoughts in your head, there's plenty of good young non-coms in the regiment."

"Plenty *who?*" the girl said swiftly. "Name me *one!*"

TAKEN by surprise at the attack, the mother stepped back and regarded her daughter, bewildered. "Who? Well.... I can't sit and just name them to you. But there's Sergeant Morill out of E Troop, and that big—that fighter, Brusk, out of A. And—"

The girl shrugged. "I can name them all. Then what have you got?"

"I notice you dance with all of them at the parties. And they're good enough to spend their money on you at the Noncoms' Club and the movies. And, long as I can remember, I never saw a better behaved, or younger bunch of non-coms in the post. Isn't one of them that wouldn't make a girl a good husband." She stared at the girl, and her eyes half closed, her mouth pursing thoughtfully. "What's wrong with Bill Harrel? Not a girl on the post isn't after him. And your father says if he doesn't end up warrant officer, it'll be because he leaves the service."

She waited for an answer. But Linda had turned her head. "You listening? What's wrong with Sergeant Harrel, I ask you?"

Linda turned her eyes back slowly to her mother's demanding gaze. "Not a

She huddled, staring; could she make it?

thing," she said slowly. "But Bill Harrel won't ever be a warrant officer."

And she got up from the rail, moved by her mother's frowning gaze and walked slowly into the house.

IT was Ladies' Night—a big night—at the Non-coms' Club. Master Sergeant Duke—Sergeant-Major of the Regiment—stood in the little sitting-room of his quarters and looked himself over in the narrow mirror with the lily-painted border that hung just inside the front door. He was a soldierly-looking figure, and he knew it. He trimmed his blouse down under his shining leather belt and then glanced over at his wife. For once she was ready on time, and he wondered what he would do for a little crabbing. "Where's Linda?"

Mrs. Duke had been waiting for that. She shrugged under her new velvet cape. "Going high-hat on us. This spring air, I guess. Started this morning, when I found her moping out back." She winked, indicating that they were probably being overheard. "Seems like none of the bachelors are good enough for her. Prefers to improve her mind with a book."

"You mean she's not going?"

"Seems that way."

Sergeant Duke scowled. "The Colonel and his wife are coming over. And some of the officers. They're presenting that plaque to the Club. He spoke to me about Linda today. His wife wants to see her about some job on the Army Relief committee. She'll want to talk to her there, maybe." He strode toward a bedroom door. "Linda!"

She was sitting in a chintz-covered cane chair under a reading-lamp, a gay-jacketed book in her hands. The light made a misty brightness about her fluffed blonde hair and gleamed on the long eyelashes. For an instant, in his first quick look, she seemed a stranger. More beautiful, in a way, than any movie actress he had seen—more naturally beautiful; and when she lifted her eyes from the book, the startling lightness of them, the quick, light blue, unnerved him.

"I heard what you said," she said quietly. "I just don't want to go, Father. I'll call the Colonel's wife in the morning."

He didn't know what to say. He looked at her a minute, thinking. Then he said: "It's a duty, Linda. You ought to be there, even if you don't want to. Things

don't work unless everybody pitches into them, in the army. And there aren't many girls to dance with in the post. . . . You were always the first one on deck, the last one to leave, seems to me," he said, puzzled. "What's wrong tonight?"

He caught her off-guard, and he saw it in the sudden color that burned in her face. "You can tell old Pop," he urged softly.

That sentence had been used between them since childhood. It had never failed. She saw the old understanding in his eyes. "I know," she said in a low voice. "I was going with Sergeant Harrel. He asked me a long time ago. But he can't take me." She broke off, and there was a pleading in her eyes for him not to ask more.

He frowned. "Harrel?" She knew his mind was racing over the duty roster, trying to place the non-coms on guard, or special assignments that would keep them from the party. She said wearily: "He's not on duty. It's just—" She saw her mother's face over her father's shoulder, and her voice broke. "Oh, please! Can't I call my soul my own just because my *father's in the army?*" She was close to tears, and her father backed away, raising his hand in a soothing gesture. Her mother said, sharply: "Your *father!* You talk as though you and the rest of us weren't. I declare, all this fuss!" She took her husband's arm firmly and gave him a meaning nudge. "Come on. This is going to be too good a party to be late for." She drew him out of the room, made a gay business of dancing through the front doorway and onto the moonlit porch; outside, she laughed as they went through the gate. "When she hears the music, wild horses won't hold her. She'll be along, don't worry."

"Sure, I guess so," Sergeant Duke said, and with that off his mind, he forgot his daughter.

LINDA laid down the book when the sound of their footsteps receded. The warm night air stirred the curtains behind her, and she turned her face, lifting it as in supplication to the night-scented desert air. Her fingers found the lamp chain, and she jerked it so that the close brightness of the lamp would go, and the soothing softness of the rich moonlight fill the room. She stared for a long time out across the low mesquite trees, down to where the little river showed in quick gleams among the bulking pecans. The deep, silent little river, she thought.

She felt as though she and the river were alone tonight; alone for some special purpose. She'd taken her troubles there before, but they had been childish troubles. Never like this. . . .

She reached into the bosom of her dress and took out the letter. The first three words hurt more than all the rest.

Dear Miss Duke:

I am sorry I cannot take you to the Non-coms' Club tonight as arranged, but something has come up which makes it impossible for me to go to the party. I hope it won't inconvenience you because of this short notice, and that maybe some other time we can make it.

Yours truly,
William Harrel.

"Miss Duke!" Times there had been when he called her "Linda." But now she saw that it was only because at those times all the others about them were calling her that. It was easier, but had no warm meaning.

And there had been only a few times altogether that she had ever been near him. Once or twice at the Club parties, or happening to meet him on the walk by the barracks, or going in or out of the movies, or a word or two at the post exchange. That was all. But she had *seen* him. Oh, many, many times. . . .

Mornings as the troops came in from drill she could see from the back yard the dusty road to the stables. She would watch, looking over the small hill for the approaching guidons of the troops. The little red-and-white flags on the long lances would come fluttering over the drab crest, and she'd mark them off in her mind, a little breathless as the different ones appeared—*M.G., H.Q., A, B, E, F.* And her heart would stop oddly, her breath die, as she saw it flip and twist, then lie out for a second flat, to show the big, brave *E.* Even before the whole of it was in sight, she could see him: imagine him, sitting big and careless on his horse, the heavy ash guidon lance in his big brown hand, his campaign hat cocked on his head, maybe that smile on his face.

She had been doing that long before the day—the wonderful day—the date for this night had been made. That day they were giving a shower for Lucy Perkins, in the afternoon, at the club-house. Most all the women on the enlisted line were there, and he'd come in to get some cigarettes, saw them all and started out, embarrassed. But some of them laughed,

called out to him and got him over and showed him the things. Linda herself didn't say a word. She hardly knew him. He never went to the Club dances.

This time one of them got at him—deviling him. "You can't duck the Regimental Day a week from Saturday," she said. "And none of those town girls, Bill Harrel. Not even that red-headed cashier at the Palace Theater—hear?"

They all laughed at that—very coy and meaningful.

"I had no such intentions," he said, laughing too. They couldn't get anywhere kidding him, she saw.

"Who, then?" Mrs. Morgan had persisted. "Now don't all speak at once, girls," she warned the crowd of women.

He stood there grinning, his eyes going over them as though picking a horse. "Who's the highest ranking gal? Rank must be served."

Big, good-natured Mrs. Harney laughed loudly, shaking with it. She was Warrant Officer Harney's wife, and the life of the party. "Sure, if Harney'd only break a leg now," she said, and laughed the way she always did at the comedies at the movies. Then she swung about, and her big fat hand dropped on Linda's shoulder like a sack of oats. "Here's the file below me, this sweet one! Linda darling, don't ever let them tell you rank don't have its privileges. To the dance you go, and the luck of him that your good father has the rank of the lot."

That had been the way of it. Begun in a joke—and ended in a joke. . . .

A deep, soundless sob shook her now, as she remembered. She pushed the chair from her and went blindly out of the house. She walked fast at first, wanting to get by the lighted club-house so that she would not see it, hear the music. She stumbled over the uneven, ledge-stabbed road that led from the drill-ground to the stables. She cut into the narrow, cactus-choked path that went toward the abandoned C.C.C. camp, her dress dragged and jerked by the sharp, reaching needles. Music was coming at her now, striking from the Club, driving her. She was almost running when she came to the rutty yellow back road that went from the post, across the little bridge, dipping and rising toward the distant State highway.

Almost to the bridge a trail dropped sharply into the bridle-path skirting the river. She breathed as though escaped from danger as she moved down it into the quiet sanctuary of the high, wide-spread pecans. Light from the moon came through in bars and mottled patches, brightening the hidden, silent river. Here alone amid the parched desert country was always green and cool shadow, regardless of the brazen southern sun. And here, peace for the soul, in spite of the turmoil of living.

HER feet led her unseeing to the natural place for her to go: to the General. Everybody called it that now, and it always made her a little proud, thinking that she'd been the one to name it. She must have been only about ten then. She remembered clearly the bright hot Texas summer day, and all of them, all the kids down there. Most of the boys with bathing-trunks or just their drawers, splashing in the cold dark water. And then the battle game: the Long Knives and the Comanches and the toy pistols flashing, and the scalping knives and the war-whoops. To improve the numerical situation, even trees had been called into action. These Indians, those soldiers; and tepees and horse-herd and buffaloes.

This great pecan, the giant of the narrow river forest, with its benign old roots, lying so that you could almost run up it to the huge laplike lower crotch, was the natural center of it all. A glorious command- and observation-post for the field of action. The General, she had said. The biggest, finest, bravest tree. It had come to her, of course, because just a few days before, the General had visited the post. Pershing! All the kids had been out to the parade and review when the regiment turned out for the famous old soldier. And right close to where they were all bunched, wide-eyed, staring, silent for once, the wonderful thing happened: Troops were dismissed, marching off under their non-coms. The officers had been directed to fall out and ride up to meet the General. But as the head of the regiment went by, her father riding stiffly, never looking to right or left, Pershing had seen him. Called to him by name! And before them all, shook his hand and talked, so they all could hear, about the old days when they had served together in the same troop!

Now she stood under the great tree and saw that the new crop of kids had left their mark on it. In her day they would have scorned to mark the General with cleats or handholds, but she saw now that some lazy or material mind had done just this. She sighed, looking upward, then slowly worked her way up to the deep

chairlike crotch, and stood, her back touching one great limb, staring over the scene below.

Turning her head, she could see the yellow of the dirt "back road" almost to where it ended in the padlocked gate of the county road and beside it, miles and miles of moon-silvered mesquite. In front she could see the low, dark deserted building of the once-C.C.C. camp. The boys had been moved to another State months ago and now the place lay silent, ghostly under the moonlight. To her right she saw the lights of the post, the closest ones those of the Club. Turning from those windows blurred by passing people, she looked off to where the wide flat drill-ground lay empty like a silver lake. Below her, some few yards between her and the C.C.C. camp was the only ugly sight: fatigue parties had gouged deeply into the yellow 'dobe deposit, driving bit by bit into the hillside. The big pit yawned at the moon, ochre against the dark of the trees.

But her eyes, against the fight within her, went back to that lighted Club building. Faintly now she could hear the music, and she gasped with sudden pain as she visioned herself, as she had for a hundred times before this night, dressed in her orchid party frock, with the drifting tulle, her eyes made up, in spite of her mother—those too light lashes and eyebrows. The way she had made them up the time they had the theatricals, and everybody had goggled. "Oh, Linda, you look like a regular glamour girl! . . . Why, I'd never've known you. You look *grown-up, beautiful!*"

If it had only happened! That sudden difference. She'd tried it out secretly, in front of the mirror, and they had all been right. The sudden shock of that change when she had swung about and taken it all in at once, in the mirror.

IT would have startled Bill Harrel too, she thought bitterly. Startled him out of the easy-going idea he was just taking the Sergeant-Major's little girl to a dance because he'd been kidded into it. Taken her because he had to take someone, and then when he got there, dancing with the married women: that Finance Sergeant's platinum-blonde wife, or Mrs. Marsh, who they said had been a dancer in San Antone. . . . Well, it hadn't happened. It never would, now!

Her teeth were dragging at her upper lip, and she felt the shaking inside of her again. She laid her head against the dear friendly bulk of the General, the coarse bark scratching gently against her hot cheek. Just once, she thought, I'll let myself go. Like this: *"I love him! I love him! I'll never love anyone else!"*

AS the agony of the words breathed from her, a sound shocked her to guilty, rigid silence.

"That you, Joe? *Joe?*"

She shrank against the tree bole. Below her, in the 'dobe pit, she heard a cautious movement, and then another voice, deep, harsh: "Okay—okay. . . . Sentry just rode by the bridge on the other side. He's got all the corrals to cover, and then down by the Q.M. buildings to the gate. We got twenty minutes, easy. All I hope is we got the lay right and don't get ourselves blowed to hell."

There was a scrambling sound; and fearfully peering from behind the big limb, she saw a man's head move and disappear into the brush by the pit. She forgot her own troubles in this new strange business. What were these men doing here? This back way into the post had been closed for months, the gate padlocked, opened only when the troops maneuvered to the south. And the rest of the reservation was surrounded with a high wire fence, plainly marked against entry. The only permissible way in was through the main gate; and there a sentry scrutinized each visitor. Things had changed since the days when the world was at peace and everything was open.

What was here for hidden, furtive men? There was nothing to steal. The storehouses were at the far end of the post, lighted and watched always by sentries. What was *here?*

Thinking, for the moment unfrightened, she closed her eyes and tried desperately to envision every foot of this part of the reservation. Then, with a shocking suddenness, she knew. She pictured the high, stiff wire guard-fence —inside of it the forbidden, squat frame building with the big white and red sign: "MAGAZINE. DANGER. AMMUNITION. EXPLOSIVES."

She stood, her hand gripped against the tree-trunk, her body shrunken close to it. Her muscles seemed stiffened to uselessness. And all the time her mind was running like an outlaw remount—wildly, crazily. The papers were full of things like this every day now. It had happened in the last war, and it could happen again. They'd even blown up great factories of explosives then: ships and carloads of it.

There was deadly fear in her now. . . . . "Give me the guardhouse! *Quick!*"

Maybe right now they had a fuse run up over the edge of that 'dobe pit, with one end under the wire and into that dingy, fatal building. Perhaps it was already lighted. But when it went off, they would be far away; right now they might be hurrying through the mesquite for that far gate, chuckling at the horror they had left brewing behind them.

What would happen if it did go off? She didn't know. But she did know what one little block of T.N.T. could do. She'd seen the demolition platoon practicing. Blowing up imaginary bridges and railroad tracks, and the big stumps back of the stables when the hurricane had taken some of the great trees down. Just one block would blow up a house, a soldier told her then. And here in this silent building were thousands of them. Boxes of dynamite. And maybe, too, the shells they used for the reveille gun, and the countless boxes of rifle and pistol and one-pounder shells.

All those, going off at once—it would blow the post to pieces, wouldn't it?

If she screamed, ran out there shouting, who would hear her in this distant place except *them?* They could catch her with ease, if she made a break for it.

If there were only a telephone! If she could get to one and call the guard. She

almost laughed hysterically at the folly of such an idea. She was in a *tree*, far from others, from normal people. Hidden away on a river-bank, pitying herself because she loved a man she hardly knew, who hadn't even a thought for her. And all the normal people, the ones she loved, liked, disliked, were off there where those lights were, in the neat green building with a band playing, all dancing. Gay with the beauty of the night, of the moonlight on the cabbage palms and wisteria, and on the fancy little fountain they'd put up just the other day. In there, and out in the patio they'd be talking and laughing and dancing and making love. Until—until the awful blast of light, the earth-rocking crash of the explosion that would still all laughter—all music—

"Oh, God help me!" she prayed desperately. "I'll die gladly if it will only stop this terrible thing!"

As though the frenzied prayer was instantly heard, a lightning flash of hope came to her: there must have been a telephone for the C.C.C. camp orderly-room. Wires crossed the road there, she remembered. And for some time after the young men had gone, the place had been used as an overflow camp for recruits, up till a few months ago. Would they have left the telephone? . . . And even if they had, the place would be certain to be locked up.

But it was a chance. To try to slip past them and run for the post would never work. It was open country there, and it would be ground they would be watching. But behind them, across the river and into the C.C.C. camp. . . .

As in the old days, as a child, she slid like an Indian down the scratchy trunk of the General. She held her breath, and could feel her heart, heavy, pounding, every scratch of the bark seeming like a sledgehammer blow in the still night. At the foot of the tree she huddled in the great roots, staring into the dark brush. She saw nothing. Could she make it?

She backed away from the tree and felt the heavy grass of the river-bank about her bare legs. It was deep here, she knew—deep and cold and steady-moving. It was like ice to her feeling, cautious feet. It rose, cold and frightening, along her legs, her knees, swept the thin dress from her thighs. She held to the bank, letting herself into the water as soundlessly as in the kid days, only here in this dark deep part they had never dared to swim. They'd been warned about the swirl of the hidden currents.

As the water closed about her stomach, it shocked her with its sudden, ugly cold—frightened her almost to the point of dragging herself back to that friendly bank while still there was time. She felt panicky and hung there, her lips pressed tight, her heart almost stopped. Then she let go, pushing herself backward. The water rose about her breasts, clutching, seeming to tear at her. And she thought: "I always loved the river. Like the tree, it won't hurt me. It *can't*." And she lay against it, her hands deep in it, her legs driving low and hard, but so as to muffle any splash.

It took her with it, drove her, holding possessively, but not hurting her. Her face was wet with it now; it slapped into her eyes and waved across her dry mouth, but at last it let her go, and she felt the other bank and stopped, her feet driven deep into the mud of it, listening. Here she was in shadow, and her fingers fumbled, caught the stout roots of lush grass, and she drew herself out. She lay for a moment, pressed to the cool moist earth, her head lifted a little, listening.

There was no sound except the high, light wind in the great pecans, the steady, even gurgle of the passing water.

Crawling, she made her way into the first low brush, groped through it carefully until she found the footpath that led to the camp; then she began to run.

THE path rose, the brush thinning as she went up. She could see the building nearest the road, that she knew to be the headquarters. Blankly the closed windows gave back the light of the moon; and near now, she saw the shine of it on a great brass padlock on the orderly-room door. She stopped, staring wildly about her. To her left, and below her, she could see the bridge and the gate road. She thought she heard the sound of a car. She drew into a shadowed haven of the building; then, by the obscuring mesquite trees, she saw the twinkle of moonlight on the glass of a lightless, slowly moving car. It had got in some way, and was sliding now from its place of concealment, moving toward those hidden men—their means for escape, probably.

She waited, breathless, until it had passed and disappeared into the thickness of trees across the bridge. She found a length of board, half concealed under the raised building, and with this she swiftly mounted the orderly-room steps. She thrust it with all her strength at a window close to the door, tearing the wooden

supports away with the breaking panes. She swept the ragged glass from the bottom of the sash, and drew herself up until she got a knee on the sill. Fortunately the building was low, and a border strip near the ground gave her a foothold. Inside the building, she saw at once by the built-in record slots and filing shelves that she was in the orderly-room. And in a shadowed corner she saw, with a gasp of relief, the oaken wall box of the signal-corps telephone. She tore at the handle, grinding it swiftly, the earpiece jammed close to her head. She could hear her heart pound in it. There was no response from the operator. It was probably a dead phone—disconnected against further need.

The floor under her seemed to move; she felt the tremor of it through her tense legs. She turned her head. . . .

From the receiver at her ear came a sound. A voice was there; an even, calm, stolid voice. "Operator!"

She was shaking now. She couldn't tell now whether it was the flimsy board floor or her own frightened body. But outside of her, of this voice that had just faded calmly in the receiver, she knew there was another sound. There was a faint, quick-dying sound of falling glass.

There was deadly fear in her now, such fear that there was horror in the thought of turning her head the little that would make her see that smashed window. She knew. Death was there. Seconds only separated her from that. . . .

"Give me the guardhouse! *Quick,* it's urgent!"

She stood there, the receiver in a hand that seemed chilled to stone. To her ear now came the safe, distant sound of the living wires. Faintly, blurred across that sound, she heard the murmur of a woman's voice, talking on some close wire, brought fleetingly across her hearing by some technical defect. An aberration of content, happiness, gossipy security, coming to her in this heartbreaking terror.

She was looking at the window now, her head turning in fascination. She saw the hands of a man, splayed, knotted fingers, knuckles; the rising thrust of a shapeless hat blocking the entire light.

She stared and waited, all life suddenly gone from her, and then, so loud that the sound seemed to fill the room, came through the receiver a hard, clear voice:

"Guardhouse!"

She never knew what she said: The scream tore all words, all memory of words from her. The place shook with her screams and with the vicious movement of the man, who seemed to thrust the window opening away from him as he leaped.

She fought like an animal. First with the telephone-receiver, then tearing and scratching, lashing out with her heavy walking shoes. At first the man tried to hold her, smash the screams from her mouth with his hard, vicious hand. With his greater weight he threw her hard against the thin wall of the room, and the building shook and dust fell in yellowed clouds about them.

AT the post guardhouse, Sergeant Brusk scowled at the ringing phone. Bad enough being on guard the night of a big party, just sitting here thinking of what he was missing: Free beer and fancy chow, lots of dancing; and late reveille Sunday morning. Then *that* thing had to sound off! Always meant trouble.

Sergeant Harrel grinned, pointed at the instrument. "Your baby, Socker. Maybe you'll get to go to the party yet. Perhaps there's a fight on up there. Maybe it's a riot over that Irene gal of yours."

Scowling deeper at this, but ignoring it, Sergeant Brusk spoke into the receiver. Watching his face, Sergeant Harrel got up from his chair and walked over to the phone. Screechy words shook into the quiet guard-room like knife-thrusts. Swiftly, but with precise, expert movements, Bill Harrel reached for his hanging belt, slipped it on and slid his hand down to the heavy, holstered pistol. "I'm moving while you handle the rest of it," he said, and he sprang like a cat into the main guard-room and called to the relief men sprawled about on their bunks. "What's the fastest horse out there?" He jerked a hand to indicate the stable shed behind the guardhouse.

"Mine. Shadow," a corporal said. "Remember he won the—"

"All right. Come on!"

He almost dragged the man from his bunk and pulled him alongside through the doorway and down the steps. At the shed he worked fast with the other man, and they had the horse saddled and led out before he had recovered from his outraged astonishment at this irregular duty.

Sergeant Harrel was on his back without touching a stirrup, and off at a gallop almost at the last tug of the corporal's fingers at the cinch-strap. He headed across the golf-links, straight for the ford, splashed through it in a shower of silver spray, and turned at a dead run in-

"Halt! Stop that car!" But the car came at him . . . . rushed past him.

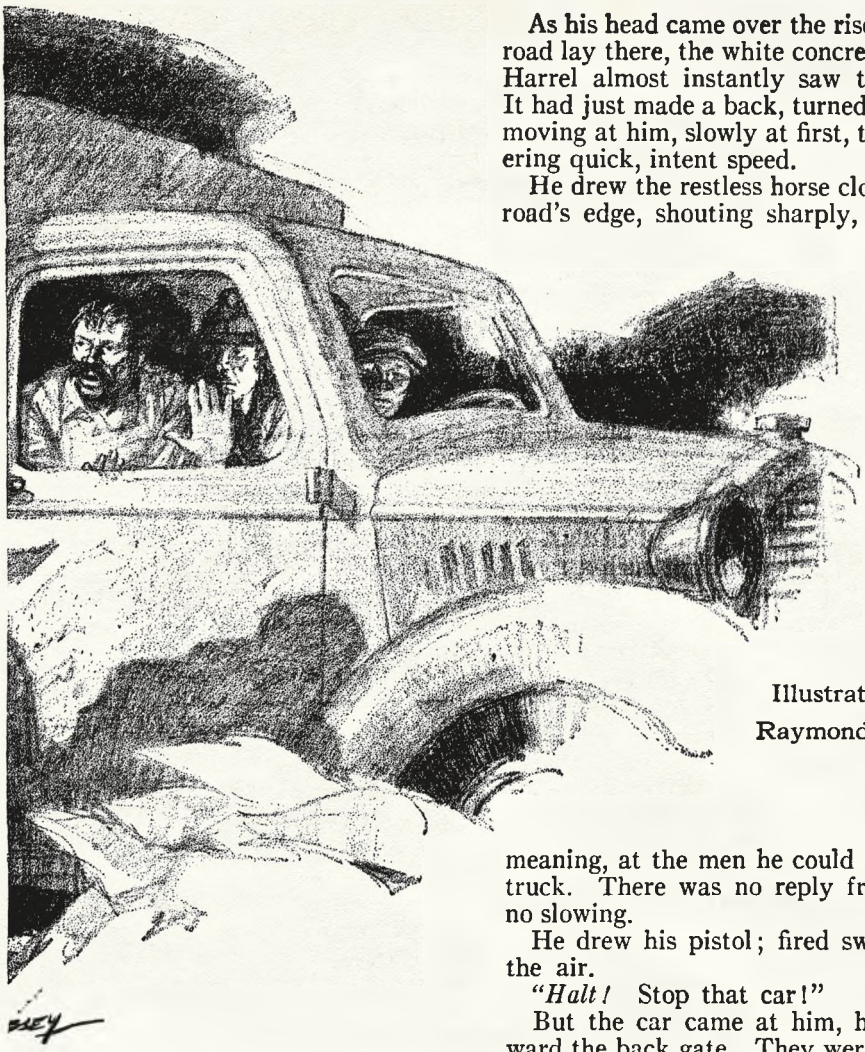
to the bridle path that skirted the river. The little roan could go, all right. Once over his astonishment, with the instinct of his quarter-horse heritage aflame in his blood, he flattened out for whatever goal might come.

The river flashed past, in glass-bright streaks, in sober, tree-darkened levels. The path turned, rose, dropped away, and the shortest manner of it led over jumps of logs, sharp, sliding drops and curving by placed ditches. But the little quarter-horse knew his way here. His feet were clever, quick, and the poor light was enough for his sharp, watching eyes.

Sergeant Harrel estimated grimly his speed and the distance to go. All of a mile on the straightaway, but on this winding, pleasure-planned trail, something else again. One thing to be riding a field day race and not giving a damn if you went tail over tin-cup: another thing to *have* to make it on top of your horse. A fall now, and he'd never make the grade on foot! And by the time that corporal of the guard and his patrol got saddled up and there on their slower horses. . . .

They had come to a level stretch, and he gave the little horse the spurs. Like a blur in the night they fled by the shadowing trees. Like the shadow he was named for, the squat roan slid over the soft, hoof-tracked loam of the trail, his neck extended, his small ears flat back.

The troop corrals across the stream raced by, one after the other. The .22 range, the green, fenced-in horse-show ring. Close now was the big bend in the river, the high reeds that were higher than a horse, then the steep lift of ground



Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

that led to the back road close by the bridge.

Only a little, now. . . .

Bill Harrel slid his hand down to the thumping pistol at his thigh. He slipped the flap, eased the heavy gun in its holster. It was loaded, ready with its seven ugly slugs. Thumb off the safety-catch, flick back the hammer, and it was ready to roar.

The roan slowed, gathering himself for the plunging scurry up the steep bank at the bridge end. Harrel's eyes were fixed on the line of road ahead. What lay there he could not guess. Maybe nothing. Just a foolish charge, a lot of useless trotting around, rewarded only with emptiness. . . . But that girl's voice—

The roan dug in, the dry yellow dust clouding up behind him into the mellow light of the night. Harrel lay forward, close down on the bobbing neck, wet now, the strong horse odor harsh in his nostrils.

As his head came over the rise, and the road lay there, the white concrete bridge, Harrel almost instantly saw the truck. It had just made a back, turned, and was moving at him, slowly at first, then gathering quick, intent speed.

He drew the restless horse close by the road's edge, shouting sharply, with full meaning, at the men he could see in the truck. There was no reply from them, no slowing.

He drew his pistol; fired swiftly into the air.

"*Halt!* Stop that car!"

But the car came at him, headed toward the back gate. They were going to run for it. They must know their mark. Coming in, they had cut the fence, without a doubt. Cut it close to the gate, and driven through almost at once onto the dirt road.

In the serene light, brighter, reddish stabs tinged with green light came at him. He heard the sound of guns above the sound of the racing car. They were shooting, at least two of them. He reined the horse back, part way down the slope. A fighting tightness had come to his lean jaw, a gleam into his eyes. Dust rose at him, choking, as the car rushed past him over the bridge and hit the heavy dirt of the farther road. He turned his body, the pistol moving into the dust, waiting its opening. He fired. But he saw that now, almost at once, this speeding truck would be out of the short range of accurate pistol-fire. He swung the horse into the road, and with the jab of the spurs, the quick closing of his legs,

the little quarter-horse once more leaped into the race.

He lay along the roan's neck, his arm straight, reaching, the pistol ripping flame through the blanketing dust. The car swayed and lurched over the rough, pitted road, the horse Shadow fighting after it as though it were a rival on a quarter track.

Harrel felt for his extra clip, finished the two shots left in the pistol and made the change with the precision and speed of long practice. He fired as fast as he could now, the range growing with every beat of his horse's hoofs.

Some of those shots had hit—all, he was certain, on the truck. He had a mounted expert qualification that insured that. A pistol silhouette target was many times smaller than the back of that car —but it wasn't shot at, at such a range, or it wasn't moving.

The dust was thicker now, the gate ahead close. The distance, because of the blurring dust, seemed increasing. Then, out ahead on the paved country road, he heard the loud sounding of a car horn, saw the car, crowded, the glint of guns in it. Brusk must have got to O.D. almost at once, jammed a guard detail in there with him, and they'd raced through the main gate and around by the highway—and just made it!

They were tumbling out now, and the men in the fleeing car saw that they were blocked. Dust engulfed the truck as it slewed off into the ditch, tilted, and came to a stop, one front wheel in the ditch.

Bill Harrel pulled up his mount and leaned in toward the cab of the truck before the others had it surrounded. His first quick glance noted that there were three men jammed in the driver's seat, and that they were holding their hands out to show that they were unarmed. The entire rear of the truck was piled with ammunition boxes.

Harrel jammed his hot pistol-barrel into the nearest man's face. "What did you do with that girl? Quick, now, or I'll blow your block off!"

The man shrank back, his eyes seemed bursting. "I never touched her. Don't, for God's sake!"

The man farthest from the pistol-muzzle said shakily: "Don't shoot, soldier. We aint hurt her. She's back in the building by the road there where the phone is."

Harrel heard the voice of the Officer of the Day, saw his face, the pistol in his hand as he jumped onto the running-board of the truck. "The call came from the C.C.C. camp," he told the officer. He explained swiftly, spun the roan about and galloped down the road, turned into the C.C.C. area and threw himself from the saddle, in through the smashed-out window.

He saw Linda Duke. She lay partly on her side, her hair wet, bedraggled, her clothes torn and water-soaked, darkening the dust-filmed floor around her. Her hands and feet had been hastily bound by lengths of old telephone wire, and an abandoned coil of it lay in a corner.

Harrel ripped the wire loose and lifted the girl. Her body was cold, wet, her face swollen with ugly bruises. "If they killed her, I'm going back there," he thought, and he felt himself shaking. "Nobody'll stop me. I'll finish the three of them."

He lifted her and carried her to a rough board table that stood against one wall of the room. Then he threw his big body at the orderly-room door and nearly tore it from its hinges. The warm moonlight flooded the room, and when he turned, he saw that her eyes were open. She moved her hands, trying to push herself up, and he went to her swiftly. He put an arm about her shoulder.

"Linda!"

The color was coming into her face. She drew her torn dress across her breast.

He smoothed her wet hair with his big hand and held her close against him. "They hurt you, kid?"

"I'm all right," she said weakly, and lifted her head, her eyes fixed on him. They widened suddenly with terror. "The *magazine!* Bill!"

"Everything okay," he said soothingly. "We got them. No harm done."

She sighed deeply. "Oh, thank God!"

"What all happened?" he asked gently, his hand still smoothing her hair.

SHE told him. Her voice came stronger, and she moved closer to him, gratefully, confidingly. He listened in silence, near the end a slow, tender smile coming onto his hard face. "Small-arms ammunition is what they were after," he said quietly. "Another one of these crackpot revolutions brewing along the border, I suppose. They get big dough for rifle and pistol cartridges."

She twisted upright, staring at him eagerly.

"They didn't get them, did they?"

He grinned. Sort of a shame to tell her now—tell her that the only thing in that

abandoned magazine for a long time now were ammunition boxes filled with sand, used only for dummy loading-tests and practice ammunition-supply.

"No, they didn't get them."

He had a sudden thought. He turned her so that he could look squarely into her eyes. "How come you were out here alone, and not at the dance?"

She looked away from him. "You didn't say you were on duty. Why did you lie, Bill? You didn't have to take me to the party if you didn't want to. Being here like this, you'd have to be on guard. I wouldn't have felt so badly if I'd known that."

"I took Sergeant Miller's place for the evening. The adjutant said it was okay. But you know how your father is. Old army precision. He doesn't like non-coms to swap guards. If he knew about it, he'd have all kinds of extras on special duty for me and Miller. So I didn't write it."

"You could have phoned."

"You might have questioned me."

"Why was it so important for Sergeant Miller to go to the dance and not you?"

He laughed wryly. "You know that wife of his. She just deviled the hell out of him. Would kill her to miss one, and she wouldn't go without him."

"But it wouldn't kill *me*, is that it?"

He stared at her. *"You!* You could go with any man in the post. Or in town. I never figured you'd miss it. Say," he looked at her sharply, "how come you did?"

She looked off through the open doorway toward the river. "Maybe I'm like Mrs. Miller," she said.

He found one of her cold hands and drew it between both of his. He said slowly: "I never cared for those dances. I got thinking, after that day I said how about going to it with me—you know?"

"I know."

"I got to thinking—"

She looked up at him, her face white and still. "Thinking what?"

His face was troubled, and she felt the uneasy movement of his big shoulders. At last he said roughly: "About you. How you were just a kid, and so pretty and all. In a place like this, you get so you forget everything on the outside. And I had it planned, like I told you once, when my time was up, to go out and see something of the world. Go falling for some girl, and you can't do that."

"You mean," she said in a low voice, "you were afraid of falling for me?"

"Dancing and all, that's the way it happens. To all these soldiers."

"Dancing—" she said, and she drew at the hand he had close between his own now.

The little roan, which had been standing head down before the door, swung his small head and lifted his ears. Listening, Sergeant Harrel said: "Patrol of the guard coming. They got a car down there. You better go back in it."

She stood up with him and drew away from his helping hand as they went down the steps. They could hear the distant thud of horses' hoofs, and the faint sound of voices from the direction of the road.

"YOU better get those wet clothes off and so on," Sergeant Harrel said awkwardly. "How do you feel now? Sure you're not hurt?"

She looked toward the road, down the trail from which the patrol would come.

"I'm all right," she said. "I really feel fine. Wonderful." She said the last words harshly, so sharply that Sergeant Harrel looked closely at her.

"That's fine," he said.

"Why?"

He too was staring down the trail. In a minute now, a horse would break through there, men with lots of words and questions would be upon them. He said, in a voice that sounded odd, even to himself: "I was just thinking. Time I check in and you get fixed up, Miller'll have his bellyful of dancing. He said only take his belt for a couple of hours, and then he'd relieve me. You figure you feel good enough for dancing if I stopped by for you later?"

She turned from staring at the trail, and looked up at him.

"Dancing? Didn't you just say that was the way it—it *happened?"*

Sergeant Harrel took a long, deep breath, knowing the next few words were to be the most important of his life. And then he said, manfully:

"Far as I'm concerned, I hope it does. I guess there's worse places than the army, quiet as it is."

"In that case," she said, her eyes bright in the moonlight, "you're taking a girl with a big black eye to the party."

Bill Harrel laughed deeply, and as the patrol of the guard burst through the bush, they stopped to a man, as no guns or word of command could have stopped them.

"For crying out loud!" the corporal breathed. "And we done all the work!"

The Abduction of

AT two-thirty sharp Abner Greer, pacing anxiously up and down before the window, saw the postman approaching. He went to the door, praying desperately that the envelope—if there were one—would be lean and checkful, instead of plump with one of his rejected manuscripts. He said, "Hello!" genially. And, "Have you got something for me today?" he asked.

The postman said: "Good afternoon, Mr. Greer." And he reached past Abner to press the bell-button. It rang loud and cheerfully in the hall beyond.

Abner fidgeted. "Have you anything for me?" he repeated.

The postman reached for the bell again. But Abner stopped him. "Look," he said, "not that it matters, but I'm already here!"

"I always," said the man in blue stiffly, "ring—"

"I know: Twice." Then Abner gulped; his heart did a somersault, ending near his wishbone. For the envelope the postman handed him petulantly was small and thin, and it bore the superscription of a New York publishing-house. Abner streaked for his own room.

He didn't open the letter at once. He couldn't. He had to stand there motionless for a moment until the riveters finished a welding job on his aorta, till his pulses stopped cutting a swing-time rug, till the room stopped going around in circles.

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

Abner Greer

Eventually he got it open. Then the lightning and the thunder did their stuff. For no welcome slip of green greeted his eyes. Inside he found a single sheet of correspondence paper that said, brutally: "Your manuscript, *'Worm Men of Space,'* is being held at this office pending the receipt of sixteen ($.16) cents return postage which was not enclosed."

Abner sighed. Visions of fame and of fortune fled. Less pleasant phantoms haunted him. The rent came due day after tomorrow. He owed a payment on his portable. That piece of cardboard wouldn't plug the Grand Cañon in his left shoe-sole much longer. It was a dreary, dreary day.

He stuffed the envelope into an inner pocket. He decided to go take a walk down by the deep river.

Another surprise from the author of "Dr. Fuddle's Fingers."

By **NELSON BOND**

He walked, and he walked. The afternoon sun sank lower and lower; so did Abner's spirits. And about that time—

It happened very suddenly and very strangely. One instant he was alone, slouching disconsolately along a deserted street; the next there was a vehicle at the curb beside him, and a voice was saying: "Wanna ride?"

"Go away!" said Abner miserably. "Do I look as if I could afford a cab?"

BUT the vehicle smooched evenly along beside him. The voice said: "Tizna cab. Sa lift. C'mon!"

Abner said, "Aw, go to—" Then he stopped. Well, why not? He'd looked at the river. Despite his despair, it had looked a great deal more like a mess of cold H_2O than the bourne of soft forgetfulness sad-eyed poets claimed. And he might as well go home—as long as he had a home to go to.

There was no sense in looking a gift-ride in the carburetor. A door opened before him. In the gathering dusk he received the impression that this was a very snorky car indeed—long, glittering. Then he was inside. And—

"Hey!" cried Abner.

"Samatta?" asked his picker-upper.

But Abner couldn't say. He didn't know what, or if anything, was the matter. All he knew was that there was an oversized dose of unusualness about this conveyance. The interior was hemispherical, domed with a lustrous metallic substance, carpeted with a sort of downy fur. There were no windows, but the walls were translucent. There was one wide seat running circularly about the interior. At the far end of the seat, diametrically opposite himself, before a dashboard gemmed with sparkling, inexplicable dials, sat a smiling little man dressed in a one-piece garment which—Abner thought—looked implausibly like a creation in plastic silk.

"Hey!" said Abner again, and made a pass at the handle of the door. "If you don't mind, pal, I just remembered I got a date with a guy about a million miles from here!"

But his companion seized his arm. "Kout!" he warned. "Doanopen it!"

"No?" said Abner. "Bop!"

He balled a fist, measuring the distance to the jaw of the other man. But the stranger grinned amiably.

"Sokay," he said. "Tripsova." He pressed a knob. The dashboard before him dulled. There was a slight, jarring concussion and the door swung open. And Abner's pupils dilated in the sunshine of a frighteningly foreign world!

The strange conveyance had stopped (or landed) in the center of a wide metal-paved courtyard. All about this square, towering skyward on every side, were gleaming glass-bricked structures of architecture so ultra-severe that Abner's eyes felt like the first step in an optical illusion. The sky above them was dotted with small, noiseless, barrel-shaped ships. Abner glimpsed people, dressed similarly to his companion, at the controls of these aircraft, and walking along the flying buttresses that connected upper sections of the walled court.

Abner fought for his breath, caught it, and gargled: "Wh-what's this?"

"Sokay, huh?" said his companion complacently. "Sawertha future."

"You," Abner told him pettishly, "talk as if you had a mouth full of mush. World of the future? Now I get it. A publicity gag, eh? You one of Grover Whalen's stooges?"

"Hoozat?" asked the little man, and grinned broadly. "Lemme splane: Sreally wertha future. Yoon me outa diffren senchries." He nodded at the machine they had just left. "Sa timasheen."

"Time machine!" Butterflies churned in Abner's gizzard. He shut his eyes and drew a deep breath. When he opened them again, things were still the same. And pinching didn't help any, either. It was incredible, but true. In a faint voice he asked: "How—how far future?"

"Nossa much," said his companion negligently. "Snow twenny-six senchry. Noany joaks?"

"I—I beg your pardon?"

"Joaks. Fomma's dawta, travlin saismun, Li'l' Audrey—Patten Mike."

Abner groped wildly for his cowlick.

"Are you crazy, man?" he howled. "You drag me from my own century into—into this strange world, and then ask if I know any jokes. What do I care about jokes? I've got to—"

He stopped. For from one of the nearer doorways a figure was hurrying toward them; a man of approximately the same age as Abner's present companion, grinning just as widely and with the same degree of anticipation, dressed in a vivid scarlet suit with ochre dots.

There was excitement in his greeting. "Lo, Jo! Seeya gottim. Werzy from? Zeea pro?"

"Dunno yet," answered Jo. To Abner he said: "Issis Tom. Hoor you?"

"My name," Abner told him, "is Greer. Abner Greer. And I want you to know that I protest these high-handed proceedings violently. I presume law and order still maintain in this era. Under the Lindbergh Law, originated in my day, kidnaping is a serious offense. I shall report you to—"

"Tawks cheezy," interrupted Tom. "Dony? Zeegorta sensa yuma?"

"Mustav," replied Jo. "Gottim outa the Twennyeth. All spozta be funny. You sure—" he asked Abner anxiously, "—yer name izzun Benny?"

"Of course not!" said Abner indignantly.

"Or Canner?"

"Or Bobbope?" Tom chimed in hopefully.

"My name," repeated Abner, "is Abner Greer. I—"

"Tellus a joak," demanded Jo. He said it so pleadingly that Abner's 'steenth objection writhed away in a shrug of the shoulders. It was a mad situation. Apparently these future folk were all off their buttons. But if he wanted to return to his own time, he might as well oblige them. So—

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "there was a man who raced breathlessly into a butcher's shop—"

THE two listeners hunched forward eagerly. Their eyes, dancing with excitement, hovered upon his every word. A chuckle was already pulling at the corners of Jo's mouth. Tom said delightedly: "Gwan! Gwan!"

"—and he shouted to the butcher: 'Quick—I want a half pound of calves' kidleys!'

"The butcher said, 'You mean "kidneys," don't you?' and the man answered, 'Well, I said "kidleys," diddle I?'"

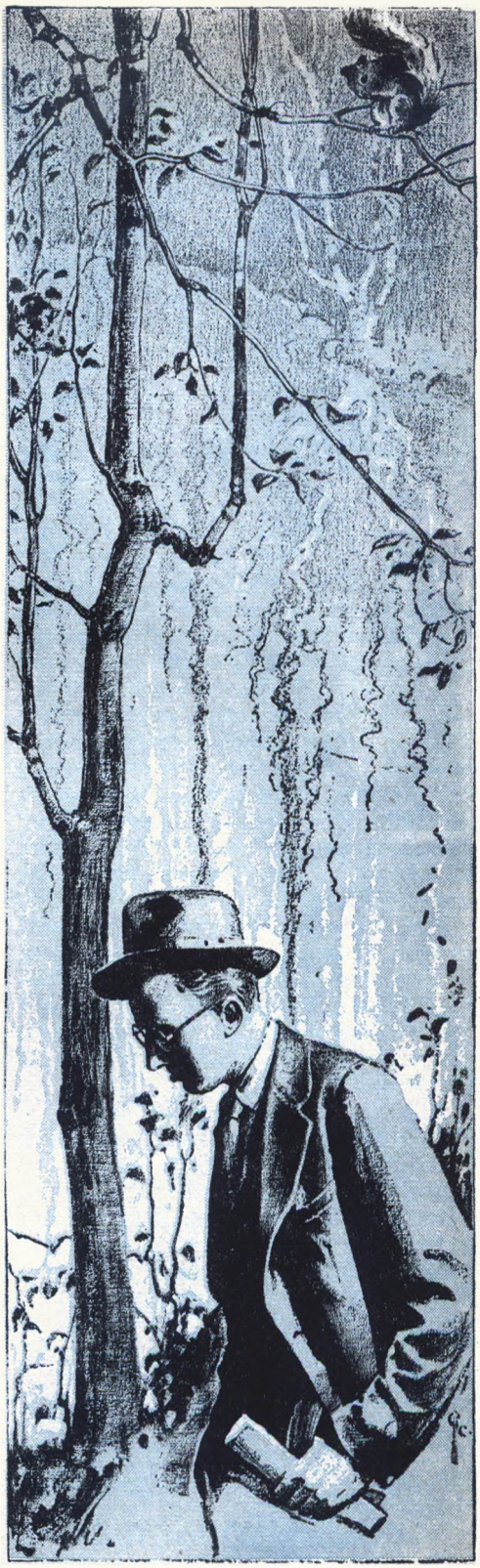
Abner chuckled. Then he realized he was chuckling all alone. The two little men were staring at him with expressions of woeful disappointment. Tom shook his head.

"Tizzun," he said, "funny!"

"Slouzy!" agreed Jo. "Noany more?"

"Plenty," said Abner grimly, "but I don't know if I ought to waste them on—Well, let's see how you like this one. A drunk was lying in the gutter. An elderly spinster walked by, looked down at him, sniffed and said, 'How *gauche!*' The drunk looked up and hiccuped, 'Fine, sis! How goesh by you?' There—how do you like that one?"

"Sawful!" said Jo promptly.



He walked and he walked. The sun sank; so did Abner's spirits.

"Srotten!" agreed Tom.

Abner, nettled, demanded: "Just what do you think is funny, anyway? If you're so clever, tell me one of your own jokes."

Jo looked at Tom and nodded. "Sfair nuff. Tellim bout the two spacers." Tom's grin broadened into a chuckle. Jo began to laugh, too. In two seconds the pair were rocking with mirth, holding their sides, gasping. Abner waited with some trepidation. If the jokes of the Twenty-sixth Century were *this* funny, he thought—

Tom, between spasms of mirthful choking, managed to get the story out.

"Two spacers," he said, "metna plantoid. Firstun says, 'Hoozat spaceship I seenyin lass week?' Notherun says, 'Wuzzuno spaceship; at wuzza comet!' *Whooooooo!*"

AND the two men again collapsed, shrieking their delight. Abner did the only thing possible under the circumstances—he held his nose. When, finally, there was a moment of comparative silence, he asked: "Well, now that you've had your fun, how about taking me back where I came from?"

For the first time, one of his remarks brought a noticeable response from the two future men. Jo's eyebrows lifted. Tom demanded: "Waffor?"

"You brought me here. Why, I don't know—unless it was to hear me tell old jokes—"

"Srite," said Jo. "Ya dint, tho. Louzy joaks!"

"That," said Abner stiffly, " is a matter of opinion. The point remains, I'd like to return to my own time. So if you're quite finished, now, with your humorous interlude, I'm ready to—"

"You," demanded Jo crisply, "gotny munny?"

Abner bridled.

"Fine courtesy! A hold-up, eh? Well, if that's the way it is, I'll have a look at this fine new world of yours before I pay my fare back." And without a backward glance he crossed the courtyard, passed through the adjacent building, and found himself on a busy thoroughfare of the city of time-to-be.

His first thought was that (barring the possibility he was drunk, dreaming or daffy, or all three) the world into which he had been conveyed was a Bedlam; one oversized asylum peopled by chaff-happy lunatics. His second thought, science-fiction-minded as he was, was that all this was wasted on him. He wished most heartily that Binder or Williamson or Campbell had been the ones selected for this time-traveling jaunt; it would have been an eye-opener.

The dreams of the Twentieth Century fictioneers had come true in one respect. Architecturally the city of the future was what their logic had predicted. Tall, overpowering in scope, plan and grandeur, metallic, paved with mobile sidewalks; the entire city air-conditioned. Air travel was a commonplace; space-travel in much more than its infancy.

But the character of the people!

Where were those grave-eyed scientific leaders whom science-fiction had promised? Where were those "upward and onward to the stars" future men? Surely these brilliantly-clad nincompoops with whom he brushed elbows were not they.

This city of the future had two gods:

The first was Laughter. And a mighty silly sort of laughter, at that. On every street corner stood great P. A. systems, from the horns of which blared a solid cacophony of idiotic nonsense. "Wuzza man hooz mothrinlaw came taliv with-im—" squawked one, raucously. And at the next block a horn guffawed: "Wyza rocket crossa void? Ta gettiny other planet!" With each gag-line, hurrying humanity would be temporarily convulsed into howling laughter; all movement and conversation would cease until the listeners screamed their approval—then the horn would bellow forth its next torpid bit of humor.

The other god was Greed. This was a paradox Abner could not at first com-

prehend, nor could he ever afterward reconcile the two credos. But on every side he saw evidence of cunning, cupidity, the desire for possession. Crimson ads in store-windows blazoned the news of *Bargains* and *Great Reductions*. Only thus, it seemed, could they tempt customers into their shops. Pedestrians craned their necks eagerly as they rode by on the mobile pavements, darted off ever and again to investigate a sign promising *Bankrupt Sale*—All Goods *Must* Be Sold!

And one commodity was in constant demand: A joke. At two-minute intervals someone would sidle up to Abner with the query, "Wanna getta laff?" Abner learned, from watching such by-play between others, that the telling of a new joke brought an exchange of currency. Prices ran arbitrarily from twenty-five cents (for a "travlin saismun" joke) to as much as five dollars for a brand-new belly-laugh.

Abner bought no amusement. He had upon his person exactly twelve dollars in currency of his era; this trifle represented his total capital. He had hoped it would help pay his rent; now he hoped it would pay his fare back to the saner world from which he had come.

IT was all very confusing. He had a dim theory to explain this mad civilization. Even in his own day the man in the street had shown initial tendencies toward joke-madness. Radio, with its constant bombardment of hoary gags and unfunny humor, had helped elevate the joke to a divine status. And the future had been predicated in such nation-sweeping fads as the "Knock, knock!" era, and the "Confucius say—" era.

As for cupidity—that had always been one of the traits of civilized man. Now, however, it was more open and above-board than ever before. The acquisitive strain, once frowned upon, was now accepted as natural. The streets of this future city were clean as picked bones because the desire to own something, to collect something, extended everywhere.

Well, thought Abner dismally, that was not too difficult a strain for the imagination. Even in his own day collectors had hovered like vultures over hundreds of silly, useless objects. There were string-savers, match-folder-cover collectors, cigar-band picker-uppers, antique-hounds, autograph-scrabblers. . . .

His head began to ache. That was the result of an unending stream of howls and shrieks from the P. A. system. There was much, Abner thought, he might do in this world. Hunt up the scientists, the research-men—surely there must be some!—and find out about rocket-travel. Learn of the history of the world for the next—or the past; which was it?—six hundred years.

But for this he needed a guide. And he knew only two souls in all this ridiculous city: Jo and Tom. He went back to the courtyard wherein he had left them.

They were still there. Jo was apparently renewing the storage-battery charge of his time-machine with an odd, portable charger which drew its juice from, thought Abner, some invisible source. Tom was inside the cabin, but came out when Jo called: "Herezat manna gen!"

Abner got right to the point.

"I need a guide. Someone to show me around this city. You chaps are the only ones I know. Since you're responsible for my being here, I think it's only fair that you take me on a little sight-seeing trip. How about it?"

Jo looked at Tom; Tom looked at Jo. Finally Tom said thoughtfully: "Zee trina be funny?"

"Souns likit," opined Jo.

Abner said: "I see nothing humorous in my suggestion. Don't you feel you have some obligation toward me? After having deliberately abducted me from my own time?"

"No!" said Tom.

"No!" said Jo.

"You mean," said Abner weakly, "no? Well, in that case—what am I going to do?"

Both men shrugged. Jo spoke for both. "Supta you."

Abner adopted a new, wheedling tone. "But surely you realize I'm all alone in a strange world. You wouldn't want me to be lonely, would you?"

"Winot?" asked Tom. But Jo said: "Doan be silly. Lotsa men outa your time here. Go lookem up."

"Men? Out of my time? Here?"

"Mmm. We brawtem. Issis *our* timasheen—" There was pride in Jo's voice. "Soney one inna werl. Coss munny ta run it. But we're trina fina good funnyman outa your time. Spozta be lotsovem." He added thoughtfully: "Notchoo, tho!"

Abner gasped: "But—but men out of my time—"

"Mmm. Judj, frinstance."

"George? George who?"

"Din say that. Said 'Judj.' Lass name's Cramer, Crater, sumpin like at."

Abner's hide rippled like a short skirt in a gust of wind. "Judge Crater! So that's what happened to him! And the *Cyclops* men. And hundreds, thousands, of others—this is the explanation for their mysterious disappearances. You've abducted them and refused to take them back. But—but why? Why didn't you take them back to their own time?"

Jo shrugged.

"Coss munny," he said, "to runna timachine."

IT was at that moment all desire to view the wonders of the future-world seeped out of Abner Greer. He had, now, but one thought. That was to get away from these callous little joke-mongers as quickly as possible.

He plunged a trembling hand into his pocket.

"How much?" he pleaded. "How much to take me back to 1940? I'm willing to—"

Jo said casually: "Two hunnerd?"

"I haven't got that much," cried Abner feverishly. "I only have twelve. But you can have my clothing. And I'll try to raise the rest for you—once I get back. You can get it the next time you—"

Jo glanced disdainfully at the crumpled bills Abner was thrusting at him.

"Snow good!" he sniffed. "Spaper!"

"But it's backed by gold and silver," pleaded Abner. "You can convert it yourself, the next time you visit my era—"

"Golen silver," sniffed Jo again. "Snow good. We gettum outa th'oshun. Dumm, aincha? Radium's our mediuma xchange. Gotny radium?"

"Radium!" Abner's face fell. He gulped. "N-no," he confessed, "I don't have any radium."

"Stuff," shrugged Jo. "Well—gbye!" He and Tom turned away. But Abner had one last hope.

"Wait! I'll tell you what I'll do: Take me back, and I'll buy you the biggest, finest joke-book in New York City! A thousand selected jokes—all by the famous Joe Miller. The man responsible for every humorous radio program ever written—"

For the first time a spark of interest lighted his listeners' eyes. Jo said: "Yaint foolin? Yuno wearta get Jo-miller's book?"

"I know—" Abner thought desperately, swiftly, for proof. "I know everything about books and publishing. I'm a writer, myself. See; here's a letter I got from an editor just this afternoon—I mean six hundred years ago—I—"

He dragged from his inner coat pocket the rejection letter, thrust it upon Jo. Jo studied it cautiously. He said, "Souns silly ta me. Ainno wormen in space. I dunno—"

But Tom's eyes had lighted strangely. With a swift intake of breath he grabbed the letter from Jo's hands, pointed at the envelope eagerly.

"Lookit! Sa nineteen-forty three-center! A Folly ishoo! Sawful rare! Rarzell! Wertha thousen bux!"

Abner started. It was inevitable that these futurelings should be stamp-collectors too. They collected everything else. Here he had something valuable enough to insure not only his safe return to his own era, but to buy the guided tour he wanted so badly! If he could dicker with these little men, now—

"Just a moment!" he said sternly. "That's *my* stamp! I'm perfectly willing to trade it, but—"

That was as far as he got. For something blunt and hard caressed the base of his skull; things went *boom;* other things went blank; he was pitching headlong to the ground—

He struggled out of the darkness to feel a hand on his shoulder, to hear a voice in his ear demanding: "What, if

I may ask, is the meaning of this? Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

His head ached, and his eyes refused to focus for a few moments. Finally they centered on one object, and Abner realized, with qualms of awe, that he was in the editorial offices of *Tomorrow Stories;* that the person shaking him to consciousness was none other than the editor of that science-fiction magazine.

He gasped: "My—my stamp! My letter!"

"What stamp? What letter?"

Abner said: "The men of the future. Jo and Tom—they stole it! The greedy, cunning little crooks! I might have suspected they'd do that. Anyone with a sense of humor like theirs—"

"Look," said the editor nervously. "Maybe you've been reading a little too much science-fiction? Why don't you try detective stories for a change? Or sports stories? Besides, all the characters in our stories are purely coincidental—"

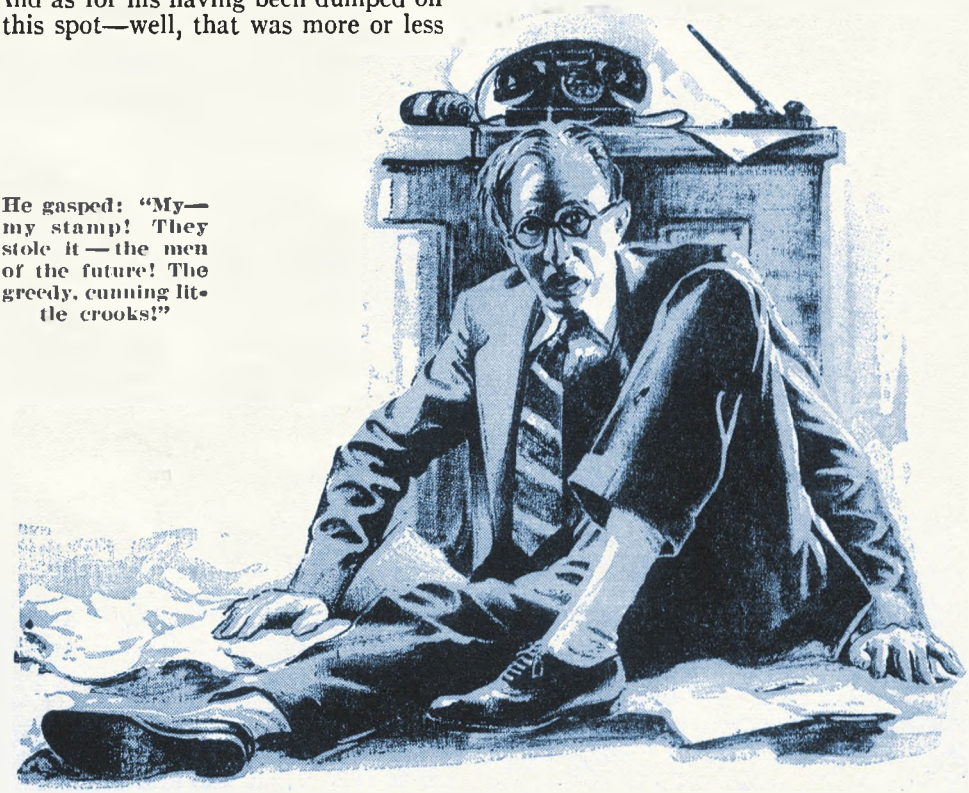
Abner saw the whole thing then. He had been robbed of his only precious possession—but he had lost nothing by the robbery. For the stamp Jo and Tom had taken was valueless now; would be worth nothing for at least two or three centuries.

And as for his having been dumped off in this spot—well, that was more or less natural. For the future-men had a definite, if lopsided, sense of humor. . . .

So he told the editor his story, just as it had happened from beginning to end. And when he had finished, the editor said: "Greer, that's terrific! Something new and different in science-fiction. I'd like you to go home and write that just as you've told me. I think,"—he clapped Abner on the shoulder,—"I think you can become one of our regular contributors, my boy!"

ABNER went home and started the story. . . . He changed it, though, as he went along. The more he thought it over, the more he changed it. It was funny about that story. It finally ended up with the scene of action on Venus. There was a young space navigator as the hero, a renegade Martian as the villain. It turned out that a horde of silicon-men from Pluto were menacing Earth. The name of the finished story was, "Flame Men of Io."

It came back three days later. The envelope was stamped *Perishable,* and the editor's sole comment was an ecclesiastical, "Migod!" And shortly after that, Abner Greer decided he didn't like the writing profession, anyway. Which just goes to show you. Or does it?



He gasped: "My—my stamp! They stole it—the men of the future! The greedy, cunning little crooks!"

Not Upon the

COLD was the night; and the beleaguered town lay hungering. Powder lacked not, but fuel was scant, and food priced high. Howard Smith shook the snow from his coat and shivered, and tightened the muffler about his throat.

"You're a fool," said his companion roughly. "Still time to turn back; we'll get another man for the job. I never thought you'd be the one to show up."

"Turning back is bad luck," said Howard Smith in his quiet insistent way.

The other man caught his arm, with a stifled groan.

"Will ye not listen, Howard? If no one else knows you, she will; and I tell you, she's lost her head over this Captain Blount, with his noble family and all! You'll get no mercy. It's the noose or a firing-squad, of a certainty."

"If caught," amended Smith. "Yes, no struggle is so savage, so bitter, so terrible, as a civil war. And that's what this is, at bottom. But why worry, old friend? I'm safe."

"Oh, you're a fool, I say!" exclaimed the other man. . . . "We part here, then. Once past that door, you're on your own. Blount's the man you deal with—Burgoyne's aid and secretary. To think he's the man, of all men, with whom she's in love! A young fop, I understand."

Howard Smith looked at the lantern-lighted door beyond them, the wide, heavy door of a tavern whose frosted windows glowed with ruddy light. To the door was affixed a large printed notice.

"You know, it's not a little thing I have to do," he said reflectively. "No other can serve as I can serve, or play the part I can play. I must do it, because that Virginia gentleman out yonder on the heights depends upon me. I didn't know Peggy was in Boston, of course, but it's too late now to back out even if I so desired. I've been passed through the lines; there'll be reports about me and so forth. Well, go your ways! You know where to reach me, each Monday and Friday; I know where to reach you at need. Good luck."

"And the same to you." The other man pressed his hand warmly and went crunching away down the crisp-footed street.

Howard Smith turned to the door. As he inspected the placard posted there, a slight smile twisted his thin, wide lips. The lantern outlined his face: a handsome, thinly carven profile, the face of a scholar with deep, strong eyes.

The printed notice, in huge type, announced that the comedy of "The Busybody," followed by the farce "The Blockade of Boston" for the first time on any

A dramatic episode of America's early days—played offstage.

Sleeve

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

stage, would be presented at Faneuil Hall on January 8, 1776; that is to say, four days hence.

Smith opened the door and entered; he walked with a decided limp, and this limp naturally made him a marked man.

The tavern rang with voices and scraps of song. It was crowded with officers, whose scarlet coats, pipe-clayed belts and gilt epaulets made brave show. The smell of hot grog and mulled wine was in the air, countering the blue haze of tobacco from long clay pipes. A silence fell as Smith entered, and all eyes went to him as he opened his coat and removed the heavy muffler, to reveal snowy linen, excellently cut garments of the latest fashion, the gold fob and seals of a dandy. He smiled at the men about the nearest table.

"Your pardon, gentlemen," he said with calm assurance. "I am in search of Captain Horatio Blount, of General Burgoyne's staff. I understand he is here?"

His Majesty's commission meant rank, birth, pride of caste, influence; rarely did it entail snobbery or gaucherie. Several officers were on their feet at once, voices cried out for Blount, and Smith was led into the adjacent room, where a group sat at a table. Blount rose. He was a young man, dark, slender, with a forceful air oddly unnatural.

Howard Smith, quietly at ease, bowed slightly, and gave his name.

"My business with you, sir, is of a private nature," he went on. "If you will have the goodness to grant me five minutes? I am the bearer of a letter from Major André, who is now in New York."

"Oh, by all means!" exclaimed Blount. "And how's André, the gay dog? Damme, sir, he should have been an artist, not a soldier.... But come along, come along. You're a stranger here? I knew of no ship arriving."

"I came through the American lines," said Smith.

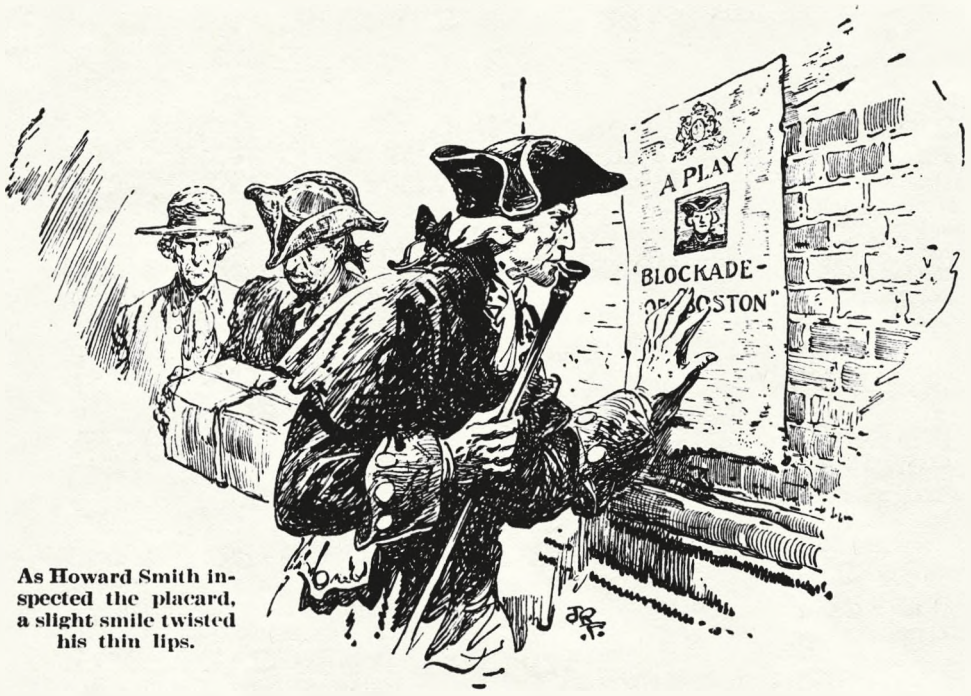
The other halted. "Eh? You mean they allowed you to come through?"

Smith smiled. "Certainly. Why not? I made no secret of being from New York."

"Egad!" exclaimed Blount, upon the silence. "Then the Yankee peasants are getting wondrous lax of a sudden!"

"On the contrary, sir. They did not consider it worth while making war upon a crippled man. My foot was crushed in a carriage accident in Pall Mall, last year."

These words in conjunction with Smith's limp, produced an instant, awkward apology; Blount, in confusion, led the way to a private room.



As Howard Smith inspected the placard, a slight smile twisted his thin lips.

Smith's letter was produced and read. Blount warmed up immediately, cordially.

"Why, you're the very man for us!" he exclaimed, shaking hands. "Stage experience; you know the theater; you've written for it. . . . Gad, you must meet Burgoyne at once!"

"I had the honor of knowing him two years ago in London," said Smith. "In fact, I gave him some slight assistance with the first play he wrote, one for the marriage of his brother-in-law, Lord Stanley. Garrick afterward put it on at Drury Lane, you know."

"Better and better! Have you dined?"

"Not yet. I've secured lodgings with Madam Draper."

"An excellent woman, devoted to the cause," broke in Blount, and took his arm. "Come, join us at table; famine may be upon Boston, but we still eat. I'm to join the General in an hour. You shall accompany me."

Back to the company, with a general introduction and a more particular one to the table Blount had left. Room was made, and Howard Smith found cordiality on all sides. "Wine with you, sir—an honor!" The gentlemen, both officers and volunteers with the force, were still awkwardly conscious of that crippled foot.

Smith lost no time in establishing himself; his background was simple. Born in New York, he had gone to England three years ago. A year at Oxford, and he had abandoned college for Fleet Street; with the officers around, he soon found many mutual friends. The carriage accident had left him unable to move for long months, until at last he took ship for New York. There, after meeting André and others, he had come on to Boston.

He did not say that he had spent nearly a week in the camp of General Washington, whose half-organized army was holding the city in siege.

THE name of André was an open-sesame, for the young major was the most popular man in the army. Was he promoting theatricals in New York? Zounds, sir! He had put the theater upon its feet here—most delivish talent imaginable! He and Burgoyne together had done it. . . . And what were these rebels like? One heard there were actually some gentlemen in their rabble.

"Oh, that reminds me!" exclaimed Blount. "We must get to the General. He'll be glad of whatever information you can give about the rebel forces."

Leaving was not so easy, for the amateur theatricals held a stout place in all hearts. Many of these officers had rôles in the forthcoming production on January the 8th, with female rôles being taken by belles of the town—that is to say, of loyalist families. Boston in general considered this very improper and shocking.

"These New Englanders have demmed amusing prejudices," drawled someone. "Did ye hear about the ranting preacher

last Sunday, who proclaimed that the theater was the anteroom to hell? A fact, 'pon my honor!"

"He may be the one whose meeting-house Howe has just pulled down to make fuel for the troops," spoke up another, and a roar of laughter and profane comments ensued.

Howard Smith, looking on and listening, gathered that Puritan Boston had sundry laws against theatrical performances, and that these officers gleefully went out of their way to offend such New England prejudices. Indeed, their playbills were ironically sent to Washington and other leaders of the rebel troops.

And this, oddly enough, had caused Howard Smith to be in Boston; those playbills had opened the way, had inspired his presence. Only a crippled man could serve in this spot; only an habitué of Fleet Street and of London theaters could have fitted into his present rôle. . . .

The two men got away at last, bundled to the ears. Arm in arm with Captain Blount, Smith had now no fears of sentries or night-watch.

He had, further, come to a shrewd estimate of his companion. Blount, who admittedly was on his first campaign and had his commission by dint of family influence, was no soldier at heart. His forceful manner was an assumption that concealed a gentle, sensitive nature; he had arrived from England in the fall, and had scarcely heard a shot fired. He was, as he confided boyishly, a bit of a poet at times.

So they arrived at the house where Burgoyne was billeted; the sentry passed them smartly; they were with the General.

A pleasant, kindly, handsome man, Burgoyne; young and talented, he was more at home with a pen than with a sword. When the two men entered the room where he sat writing before the fire, he dropped his quill and came to his feet, hand outstretched.

"Howard Smith, upon my soul! An apparition, bred of cold New England stars? Nay, solid flesh! Welcome, man; what miracle has brought you? Did you drop from the skies?"

"No. Through the rebel lines. Any friend of General Burgoyne, said they, might pass and welcome."

"The deuce you say!" Burgoyne caught Smith's whimsical twinkle, and broke into a laugh. Then, noticing the limp, he stiffened. "Hello, what's this? Hurt? A chair, man, a chair! Blount, get that decanter of Madeira. This demands a toast!"

Explanations, greetings, messages from André, news from London. . . . Then Blount broke in with eager word.

"He's just through the lines, General Burgoyne! He can tell all we want to know!"

"A miracle, sure as my name's John Burgoyne!" The General lifted his glass. "Your health, Smith! Now for the word. What sort of army have these rebels?"

SMITH lied judiciously.

"Poorly trained troops, if at all, but plenty of them. They seem well armed, to amend their lack of training. Their numbers astonished me. A good ten thousand men, I'd say."

"A rabble," said Burgoyne; "but they can fight."

"They've been completely reorganized, I understand," went on Smith.

"We observed some sort of celebration on the second," said Burgoyne; "no doubt in honor of His Majesty's most gracious proclamation."

"On the contrary," Smith rejoined, "I believe it was in celebration of the reorganization of their rabble army, and because of a Union Flag received from their Congress, as they call it."

"Oh, that reminds me!" broke in the General. "I must ask you about that flag; we're devilish anxious to make use of it in the theatricals. Blount, write down what Smith has to say, like a good chap, and get the word to General Howe. Then we can settle down and be at our ease."

Blount obeyed, and Smith spoke freely if not truthfully. He liked Blount; the young officer had solid worth and he was briskly competent. When the task was done, Blount himself took the report to headquarters.

Left alone, Burgoyne relaxed.

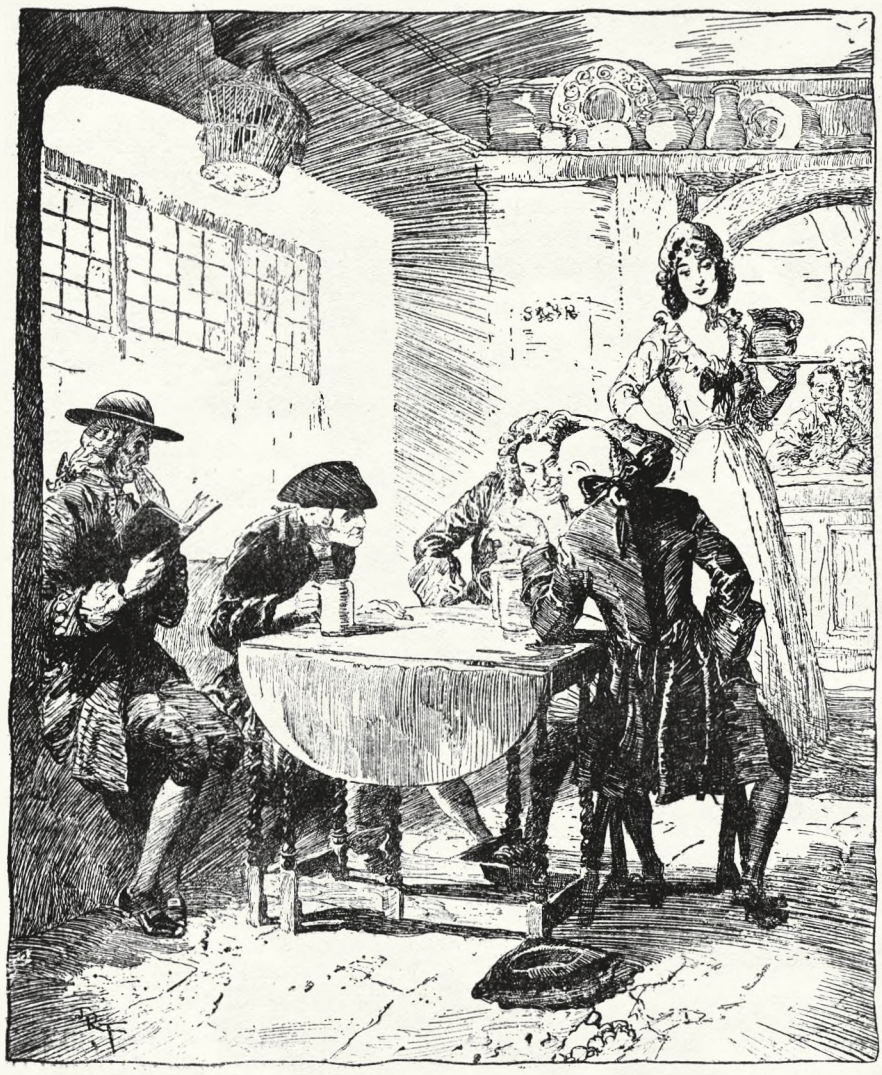
"Gad, Smith! The age of miracles is not passed, eh? I've had Blount scraping the town for someone to help us, and here you turn up like an angel!"

"In disguise," said Howard Smith. "How can I be of any help to you?"

"Our theater here. We've put on performances since early in the fall."

"Oh, I see! Well, General, London knows you for an amateur actor of ability. And your play?"

Burgoyne leaned forward. "Look, man! This is something more. We're showing these scurvy provincials a bit of culture, I admit; but we're hard put



"These New Englanders have demmed amusing prejudices, 'pon my honor!"

to it on certain technical points, in acting, in stage managing, in stage business and so forth. Your appearance is providential. I hereby appoint you manager of His Majesty's amateur playhouse. Yes or no?"

"Why, yes, if I can be of any service!"

"Good. Then that's settled. Tomorrow night's rehearsal will see you in charge." The General leaned back. "Now, have ye seen the playbills?"

"Yes."

"Then lend me your ear. I've writ a farce, 'The Blockade of Boston,' which badly needs some help from you. It's not generally known that I writ it, of course; Howe says it might be ill taken if 'twere known that an officer of general rank produced a farce; but all the same, it's mine." Burgoyne winked. "And I must not forget about the flag. I want to use it, when my *Washington* makes his entrance. What sort of flag is it? Can we get one?"

"Easily made," said Smith. "They told me it's the first flag that's been adopted for their forces. It has thirteen stripes, red and white, to signify the colonies, and in the upper left square, the English Union."

"Damned rebel effrontery!" declared the other with swift choler.

"Oh, they don't call themselves rebels," Smith put in. "There seems to be no intention of resigning allegiance to His Majesty, although there's a good deal of talk about it."

"Well, the rascals will soon have another sort of talk to busy 'em. Pity that any gentleman like this man Washington should demean himself to lead such a riffraff."

Smith shrugged. "So they said about Cromwell, a hundred and thirty years ago."

"Eh?" Burgoyne's large and intelligent eyes drove at him. "Surely you've no sympathy with these peasants in arms? You've too much sound common sense."

"Naturally. Who spoke of sympathy? He's an able man, however. By the way, I met your friend Major André, as you know; he seems an extraordinarily brilliant chap."

Burgoyne waxed ardent on the new subject, and the danger was avoided.

FURNISHED with a pass that safeguarded against any peril, Howard Smith went to his lodgings, later, highly satisfied with all things—except his own business here. Except from one direction, he anticipated no risk whatever. It was the rôle he played that irked him, and plagued him sorely. The business of a spy is never a pleasant one to any man of honor; it must be undertaken, as Smith had undertaken it, of necessity.

Lying awake in the cold dark night, he thought of how his old friends in New York had pleaded with him to do this work; of how he had been sent on to Washington in the camp before Boston town; of how the bleak Virginian had waxed vehement over their hot punch and persuaded him to the errand, with a fiery energy that brooked no protests.

"Think you I'm a rebel in arms against my King and brother officers, to pleasure an idle hour? Think you I take pride in being called traitor, by those whom I've honored? Think you, Mr. Smith, that I enjoy dishonor? No, but by God, my own heart and intellect tell me otherwise! I do what I can; that's the motto for a man, these days. We have the damnedest, direst need of you. If Howe attacks, we're lost; give him false information to keep him from it. He's starving; so are we. Take this position in Boston, and keep us informed; play your part. . . . I'd do it myself if I could—my hand on it, my word on it! All religious cant aside, I believe, sir, that the Creator has given honest men one sure guide; my appeal is made solely to your sense of duty. Integrity lies in the heart, not upon the sleeve."

True, perhaps; none the less, it irked him until he fell asleep. . . .

Burgoyne took him next day to headquarters. He met Howe, the hard-driving, capable general in command. "Give him information to keep him from it!" Smith gave the information, quietly confident; somehow, one never mistrusts a crippled man. These Britishers knew nothing of his earlier history, of his hot-headed outbursts in New York against injustice and tyranny, of how he had been pitched neck and crop back into the heart of England by his scandalized family. Now his family themselves had become patriots, swept out of New York, gone somewhere and scattered—he knew not whither. And he was here.

He walked about town that afternoon. He visited Madam Draper's establishment, where her fiery loyalist news-sheet was printed; he dropped into a shop or two; he turned with dusk into the bookstall kept by his friend from New York. Here he leaned over the brown calf volumes to speak a low word to the one man who knew him.

"Send the sure report that Howe will not attack for the present."

"Thank God!" breathed the other man. "How goes it?"

"All well."

"It's important that there be no postponement of the theatricals on the 8th. We must have word of any change; something's planned for that night."

"Very well. Unless you hear from me, all goes well. Better not get in touch with me as planned; it will be safer for me to reach you."

A nod. He walked out into the street, a book under his arm, and went his way. Six o'clock was close. Six, at Faneuil Hall, for a dress-rehearsal.

THE assemblage was prompt. Burgoyne was here, and Captain Blount, who had a small rôle in the farce; a dozen officers besides, and half as many ladies. The flickering footlights were lit, and two huge whale-oil lamps illumined the stage, but the body of the house was gloomily dark.

Howard Smith was presented to the company, most of whom remained seated in the pit for the present, as the new stage manager; there was no chance for individual introductions, as a hot discussion instantly arose. With the performance three days away, rehearsals had been most lamentable, and Burgoyne was of the opinion that it might be well to postpone the affair for a week.

"Suppose, gentlemen," suggested Smith, "that we settle the question after this rehearsal? Postponement would be a bad thing for the morale of all concerned. Boston is very largely in sympathy with

Illustrated by
James Richard Flanagan

"Pardon me, Blount," he broke in. "—you're losing all the effect there."

the rebel cause, I find, and we should give these good folk no handle for jeers and scoffing. Perhaps, with your coöperation, we can smooth away all difficulties and carry on."

Amid eager applause, rehearsal was called.

At once, Smith saw where the trouble lay; the lines were ill-learned, and the amateur prompter was slack, while much of the "business" was poorly done. The act finished, he tore into the players, showed them where the faults lay and how to correct them, and assumed the prompter's job himself. They went through the act again, and Burgoyne was delighted.

"Zounds! Now we have something!" he exclaimed. "On with the game, lads! No need of postponement, if the remainder goes like this!"

It went better, indeed, and with two more rehearsals "The Busybody" would be in good shape for presentation. The players stood back, removing wigs and costumes, and the members of the "Blockade of Boston" company came on the stage. And Howard Smith found himself looking into the mocking eyes of Peggy Williams.

He bowed over her fingers, touched his lips to them, heard her low words.

"So you've changed sentiments, my dear Howard, since we last met? I

wonder! Change of pace has brought change of mind, perhaps?"

They were cruel words; they stung.

"Quite true, Mistress Peggy," he said. "Men change, but women do not, it seems."

This drove deep; she bit her lip, blood rose in her cheeks, and in her eyes Smith perceived that he had made a mortal enemy. He was too angry to care.

AT their last meeting, before he went to England, they had quarreled bitterly. She had no sympathy with the colonies, she was of a Tory family; more, something had come up to utterly disillusion Howard Smith. He had gone overseas heartbroken. Looking back, he could see clearly, in the focus of distance, the coldly cruel workings of her heart. No, she had not changed.

Yet she was beautiful, with an icy but stately beauty that enthralled men. He watched her now, doing a scene in the farce opposite Captain Blount, and saw again how magnificent was her loveliness and charm. Then he wakened.

"Here, here!" he broke in. "Pardon me, Blount—you're losing all the effect there. Let me show you the way of it, if you don't mind."

"Gladly," said Blount, stepping aside.

Smith had a fair copy of the farce in his hand. He took up the scene with Peggy, who played an American shepherdess. (No doubt Burgoyne took for granted that there were such creatures in New England.)

"One moment, Mistress Williams," he cut in. "As I conceive the author's meaning, those lines should be delivered with a crass and stupid air, to offset their violence. You are the tender, unsophisticated, silly little *Amaryllis*, prating of liberty; let it waken laughter in the audience."

"Hear, hear!" came from Burgoyne. "Capital, my lad, capital!"

Peggy's eyes flashed; but she curtsied and went through the lines again, to applause. Smith yielded place to Blount, and the rehearsal went on. Afterward, Smith was speaking with Blount when Peggy came up to him, smiling.

"My aunt is here, Howard; I'm stopping with her. You must come and pay your respects. She'll be delighted to see you again, especially with your present political views."

"Eh?" Captain Blount spoke up, surprised. "Then you two know each other?"

"We're old and very dear friends," said Peggy sweetly, "from New York before the war. We shall expect you, Howard! And now may I ask your escort, Captain Blount? I promised Aunt Kate I'd be back early, and you know how she worries."

Burgoyne approached, with an imperative gesture to Blount. He bowed over Peggy's hand, then turned to his aide with a low word.

"Howe has agreed to a reconnaissance in force day after tomorrow; the morning of the 7th, sunrise. See to it that orders are sent the commanders whom we've discussed. Colonel Halkett in charge. If the Yankees weaken, he's to push on through."

Peggy and her escort departed. Burgoyne took Smith's arm with warm commendations of his work, and war was again forgotten in the stage. The other ladies departed with their escorts; the lights were extinguished; Howard Smith was dragged off by enthusiastic officers to the nearest tavern, there to talk late into the night over a bowl of rum punch.

Later, Smith again lay awake, staring into the darkness. Now he had a message of vital import to send, and he revolted against the doing. Back into his mind came the speech of the grave, hot-tempered Virginian. "My hand on it, my word on it; integrity lies in the heart, not upon the sleeve!" He fell asleep at last, comforted.

WITH morning, he visited the bookshop and delivered his message.

"Get it through at all costs!" he concluded. "If the reconnaissance breaks through, a general attack will follow. Washington must learn that it's a test of his lines!"

"It will get through," was the earnest response.

Afternoon brought Captain Blont.

"Smith, I must have at you; information has reached me," said Blount, plunging at it doggedly. "It's told that—gad, man, I blush to repeat it!—that you're here as a spy for the rebels. There it is," he hurried on. "I can't believe it. I know it's not true, that it's some mistake. Give me your word it's not so, and the matter's closed."

"I think much of my honor, Blount," replied Howard Smith gravely.

"Damme, man! Anyone can see you're a gentleman!" burst out the other. "Therefore give me your word, accept my apologies, and the matter's ended."

"That I'm no spy?" Howard Smith smiled suddenly. "No. I'll not involve my honor in any such question."

Blount eyed him hard, puzzled and miserable and dogged.

"Look ye: I'm told that you're known in New York for a rebel. That you were prisoned there for sedition and treason; that you near killed a King's officer—"

"True, quite true," said Smith coolly. "Before the war, in hot youth; errors, for which I was punished. Then I went to England. I was no spy there, I can assure you! And now I'm back here, drinking the King's health with right good will and doing my bit to encourage the morale and stage presence of His Majesty's officers. And," he added with a humorous twinkle, "a spy needs two good feet to run with. I've but one."

Blount's face cleared. He joined in Smith's laughter, but uneasily.

"Forgive me," he said with contrition. "I knew there was a mistake, but—"

"There was no mistake," said Howard Smith gently.

"Deuce take me if I can understand you!" exclaimed the other.

Smith took his arm.

"Don't try; I'm easily understood. Look elsewhere, my dear chap. I know the source of this ridiculous story. Shall we discuss it?"

Blount drew back. "Zounds, no!"

"Right. You and I alike would go far to defend the good name of a woman. Here no such thing is at issue. I loved Peggy Williams, Blount, with all a boy's devotion; why, when we quarreled I came near to throwing myself into the river! When I took ship for England, my sleeve was wet with tears, the first night out."

Thawed, discomfited and disarmed by these confessions, Blount remained irresolute. Howard Smith went on with a quiet poise that made his words doubly impressive. And he said the one thing that could win this man's confidence and belief.

"In view of what's happened, Blount, I must tell you that I greatly wronged Peggy Blount. One of those things that can never be recalled. Jumping at conclusions, I thought her heartless, cruel, utterly selfish and inhuman. Yes, I confess it. I even charged her with it. When, in reality—"

"She's the finest and noblest of women!" Blount exclaimed fervently. Smith assented.

"Yes. Therefore, quite naturally, in view of my asinine conduct, she bears a grudge. Who wouldn't, under such circumstances? Poor woman, to be the victim of a boy's petulance and fiery misapprehension! What she said about my conduct in New York is more than true; when we parted, I was a reckless, silly, drunken fellow—"

"Say no more, I beg of you!" Honest Blount caught his hand and wrung it. "My dear old chap, I understand perfectly; I've been a bit of a fool myself, you know. I cherish your friendship for this confidence—'pon my word, I do! And I shall respect it, believe me. I would that you and Peggy might be friends again."

"No, no! I've injured her too deeply for that," said Smith, shaking his head. "Let matters rest. The fault is and was my own, quite entirely. If you attempt to patch matters up, 'twill only hurt your own standing with her. So let be."

"With all my heart," replied Blount, quickly. "We shall see you tonight?"

Smith smiled. "Why not?"

"And, I implore you, forgive me for even suspecting you of such base actions."

Smith winced. "Tut, tut!" he broke in. "A great man once said to me words which bear upon all the events of life: Integrity lies in the heart, not upon the sleeve. Worth remembering."

Captain Blount departed, much moved.

Smith lit his pipe, thoughtfully, not too happily. So, he had weathered that storm! He felt sorry for Blount, once more; a fine young fellow, blind to the truth, honest as daylight. Somewhere in the future, poor Blount had a sad disillusionment awaiting him.

The evening's rehearsal passed off without incident. Mistress Peggy, bound later to dinner and an assembly, was a marvelous creature in shimmering gown, shimmering jewels, shimmering furs; as Burgoyne commented, she was enough to turn the head of any man alive, but Howard Smith viewed her with indifferent gaze. That she had eyes only for Captain Blount, and he for her, was obvious enough. Smith wondered if she were really in love. It was quite possible, he thought cynically; Blount was heir to a title and a fortune, across the water.

BOSTON wakened next morning to the sound of gunfire. The rattling volleys rose and died, the cannon fell into silence; back to quarters came the troops and the wagons with the wounded, and cursing officers, amid ironic cheers of patriot city folk. The reconnaissance had

failed, and the snow upon the far heights lay reddened.

Smith did not stir abroad that morning. A thin snow was drifting down and the streets did not tempt him. Thus, he heard no details until he came to table at noon. Madam Draper, breathing fire and fury against the rebels, had several officers among her lodgers, and she had full knowledge of the morning's repulse —though she would scarcely publish it in her Tory sheet.

"A disgrace!" she fulminated. "Who ever heard of such dishonor? That rabble actually turned cannon upon His Majesty's troops! They are blind to all sense of decency and virtue! They were planted behind barricades, instead of fighting in the open like brave men! What's the world coming to, that such dishonorable tactics are permitted?"

"To war, madam," said one of the officers, and Smith suppressed his smile.

"However," added the good lady, "a sloop-of-war arrived in harbor an hour ago from New York, with dispatches. Perhaps we shall have some better news from that quarter. I hear that two of the staff officers engaged in a brawl this morning, too; a duel may come of it."

"Did you hear their names, madam?" inquired somebody with interest.

"A captain on Burgoyne's staff—I think Blount was the name," she replied. "The other was an officer on General Howe's staff; I have not yet learned the details."

Howard Smith, warmly muffled, limped through the streets to Burgoyne's billet. He got no news here. Burgoyne was at headquarters and Blount with him; dispatches had arrived from New York with the sloop, and others from England, and headquarters was in ferment. The orderly on duty knew nothing about any duel but "hoped to Gawd new orders would jerk the cooped-up bloody army out of this 'ere bloody rebel town. Repulsed by them ragged peasants. . . . Gawd bli'me—who ever 'eard of such goings-on?"

Rehearsal at six; the final dress-rehearsal. Smith turned up early at Faneuil Hall; thus far, he had learned nothing further, but here came news thick and fast, as members of the cast drifted in. Smith listened with dull incredulity.

A brawl? Worse, far worse; during the ghastly affair of the morning, Blount had actually drawn sword on Colonel Michaelson of Howe's staff, attached to the party. Why? A mystery. Gad, what a fool! To do such a thing, in face of the enemy! After all, superior officers were superior officers. Rumor went that Blount was under arrest.

"No, he's not," spoke up someone. "'Ware, gentlemen! Here he is now."

Here he was, escorting Peggy. Before the footlights, she dropped his arm and turned from him. Her voice struck out in cold hauteur.

"You need not trouble, Captain Blount. I shall arrange otherwise for an escort home. Our acquaintance, sir, is at an end. Whether you are cashiered or resign, 'tis all one to me."

Openly said, cruelly said. . . . Blount bowed to her, very white. The other officers surrounded him eagerly; he shook his head. Howard Smith met his gaze, saw he was hurt to the very quick, saw the proud, bitter anguish in his eyes, and came to the rescue.

"Places, gentlemen! Captain Blount, will you have the kindness to act as prompter for the comedy and allow me to give more attention to the stage? Thank you. Orchestra, ready?"

In response, the fiddles struck up, and the comedy began.

AT the back of his mind, Smith remained aware of Captain Blount. He was puzzled. It was worse than a mere hurt; the man seemed mortally stricken, almost in a daze. Burgoyne was not coming tonight, someone murmured significantly, was settling some affair with General Howe. Smith caught the aside. She had spoken the word *cashiered* —did it mean that Blount was done for, his career ended? And what had occasioned his mad action?

The comedy was finished. The actors dispersed; those for the farce took the stage. An orderly from Burgoyne arrived with a package. It was the rebel flag, just finished, to be used in the General's farce. Smith shook it out—thirteen stripes, red and white, the British Union in the corner. He tossed it to the actor who represented General Washington, uncouthly uniformed, with trailing rusty saber and comic wig, and went to where Blount stood at one side.

"Join me for supper, afterward," said Smith.

"Eh? Oh, thanks very much! Afraid I can't." Blount's frozen demeanor broke. "Sorry, old chap. I must back to the General at once."

"Well, cheer up. Don't take it so hard. After all, it's just her way."

"Her way? Oh, you mean Peggy!" Blount broke into a harsh laugh. "Upon my word, Smith, I wasn't thinking of her."

"You'll not let us down tomorrow night?"

"Trust me, old chap! I say! Shall we dine together, after the performance?" Blount spoke impulsively. "I'll be free then, you know."

"Delighted! I'll speak to Madam Draper, and we'll have a bite in my room. Now go into your part, and keep your chin up, and if you need a friend, count on me."

Blount warmed. When he stepped on the stage and bowed to Peggy Williams, his color had returned; he smiled, he was himself again, he had a new bearing.

Afterward, he quickly disappeared. A group of others departed with Peggy.

Next day, Boston buzzed with rumors. Word had come ordering evacuation, they said, but this was impossible until more ships arrived. Evacuation! Tory citizens quailed at the thought; rebel sympathizers could be recognized by their broad grins.

In the afternoon, Smith went to the bookshop, for the last time.

"I'm leaving," he said abruptly. "I can't go on with this."

"Howard, you've done magnificent work for the cause!" came the response. "Go, if you like. We'll replace you. When?"

"Tomorrow."

"Agreed, then. Nothing will interfere with that performance tonight, I trust?"

"Nothing."

EVENING, and a clear night in prospect, as six of the clock approached. Smith, limping along to Faneuil Hall, breathed with a new freedom; he had done his work, he had served, he was through with it all. A weight was lifted from his heart.

"I'm leaving," Smith said abruptly. "I can't go on with this."

The hall blazed with lights and flared with color. Everywhere were uniforms; Howe was here, and his staff, the good Tory ladies of the town had turned out in their best, officers of the fleet and of the army were crowded into the hall. On either side of the stage, as was the custom, they were six deep.

Howard Smith, in the rear, saw to the costumes, put stage-fright to flight with a word and a smile, and went to the prompter's place. He greeted Blount with a hearty clap on the shoulder, but was shocked by the young man's haggard air. No time to talk now; he went ahead, the signal was given, the fiddles struck up, the buzzing tongues in the house fell silent.

The comedy ran through its course, and ended to a thunderous burst of applause from the jam-packed house. The players took their bows, and joined the throngs beside the stage. Smith, in the wings upstage, sent word to the orchestra. The fiddles struck up the prelude to the farce.

The imitation *Washington*, in full comic regalia, trailing the flag behind him, was on stage, awaiting the curtain's rise, when Smith was aware of a commotion. One officer halted another, almost beside him, with excited words.

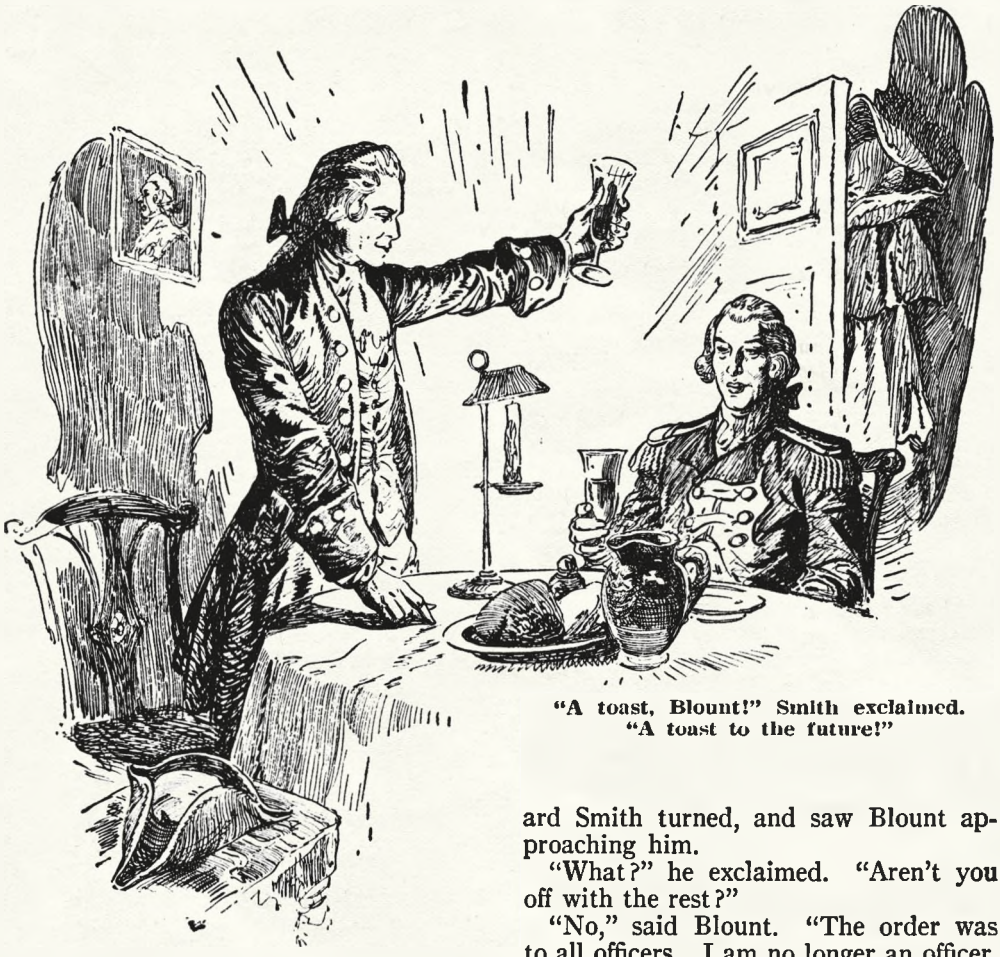
"Have ye heard? They say the rebels are attacking in force—Charlestown—"

The curtain lifted.

Offstage, Howard Smith was aware of stamping feet, of new commotion, of startled voices; a tall figure brushed him aside and strode out on the stage—a sergeant of grenadiers.

STOPPING short, the sergeant flung up his arm and shouted:

"The Yankees are attacking our works on Bunker's Hill! They've crossed the Neck and are inside our lines!"



"A toast, Blount!" Smith exclaimed. "A toast to the future!"

Scattered applause broke forth; to most of the audience, this was part of the farce.

But the figure of General Howe came erect instantly. His voice burst out in a stentorian-alarm shout:

"Officers! To your posts, all officers!"

ONE startled, incredulous instant—then the entire house was in frantic pandemonium.

Behind the resplendent figure of Howe, officers were bursting from all sides for the doors. Those on the stage went leaping through and over the orchestra, overturning fiddlers and drummers; actors were frenziedly getting rid of costumes and wigs. Shriek upon shriek went up. Women, taken by stark panic, screamed and fell, fainting. They were unregarded. Shouts of men drowned their cries. There was a mad crush for every exit. Scenery toppled and crashed. Seats and benches were splintered. From the streets outside came the clatter and bang of gun-carriages, horses at mad gallop.

The stage was cleared. A single figure remained, unhurried, unexcited. Howard Smith turned, and saw Blount approaching him.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Aren't you off with the rest?"

"No," said Blount. "The order was to all officers. I am no longer an officer. My resignation was handed in today and accepted."

Smith looked at him for a moment; the man was ten years older overnight.

"Good," he said cheerfully. "Come along; slip out the back way."

They passed in silence through the reverberant streets, hearing the distant rattle of volleys and boom of cannon.

Neither spoke until they were in Smith's room, where a fire burned and a cold meal was set on the table.

They threw off their cloaks and hats; then Smith filled the wine-glasses and picked up his own.

"A toast, Blount!" he exclaimed. "A toast to the future!"

The Englishman smiled mirthlessly, lifted his glass, and drained it.

"You toast what does not exist; no matter," he said.

"Sit down. Tell me about it. What's all this about a duel? Did you really fly out at Howe's staff officer?"

Blount stretched out in a chair and sighed in weary relaxation.

"Yes. The thing struck me to the heart; I lost my head, went all to pieces.

I've no doubt I'd have killed Michaelson on the spot without regret, had I not been restrained. It's haunted me ever since. I dream of it."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

Blount lifted his head in surprise. "Mean to say you don't know?"

"I haven't been able to get any explanation."

"It was a rebel, wounded. He was alongside the road—a poor devil, bleeding, in rags," said Blount. "He staggered to his feet and shook a sword at us, and shouted something. 'To hell with the King!' I think it was.... Well, Michaelson rode at him and cut him down." Blount paused, then broke into a passionate cry: "Needless, useless, cold-hearted cruelty! The poor devil could have done us no hurt. He was a man, wounded. Michaelson split his head with his saber.... Oh, God! Well, there it is. War, of course; I was a fool. Yet I'd do it again."

HOWARD SMITH was silent for a moment.

"Why, Blount, I honor you!" he said then softly.

"I resigned, perforce," said Blount. "They would allow no duel."

"I see. Here, more wine; you need it. You've done the right thing. No regrets! And so this is why she threw you over so publicly, eh?"

"Lord, no!" Again Blount looked up. "She said she'd give me my answer when we reached the hall; she did so. Publicly. But not because of that. And, Smith: I've come to understand what you said the other day. You generous rascal! It was not you who did her a wrong. You lied to me. You discovered what was in her, you feared to tell me the truth."

Howard Smith's lips curved in a slow smile.

"Why, what's this? You really do understand, do you? Yes, I admit it, Blount; you were in no shape to comprehend the truth. Apparently you are now. What's happened to make the difference?"

"I'll tell you," said Blount, and broke off. Then: "Gad, to think of it! This morning I had everything in the world, everything! Tonight, nothing. In one day!"

"One day is a mere speck to the gods; it can be an eternity to us," said Howard Smith. "No man may consider himself except as one point in a line that is itself in time a mere point.... Well?"

"You know there were dispatches from England this morning?" rejoined Blount. "Among them was news for me. Everything's gone crash at home. The pater died suddenly; every penny's been lost in speculation. My mother died a couple of years ago. I've nothing left—nothing! Nothing there, nothing here; everything swept away in one day! And Peggy—well, I told her about it. You heard her answer. She dropped me like a hot cake, and did it in public, so everyone would think it was on account of the other matter. Calculating, what?"

Smith whistled softly.

"So your eyes are opened to her reality! One blow upon another, each to counter-balance the one before.... Curious!"

Blount gulped down his wine. "I'm damned glad to be able to talk it out to you. What's ahead? I don't know. I must get away from everything and everyone who knows me. I must start afresh, from the bottom."

"No harm in that; may do you good." Smith leaned forward. "See here! Go with me. I'm leaving town tomorrow. There's a new horizon waiting for us—for a crippled man and a man without a future. All America's waiting, Blount! Chances, opportunities, everything. You weren't made to be a soldier. I'm unable to be one. Very well, accept the fact and let's find our own future together. Chuck the past and forget it; face forward! What d'ye say?"

BLOUNT listened with eyes kindling, alight, then suddenly ablaze. Color leaped into his cheeks. He sprang to his feet, sending his chair back with a crash, and thrust out his hand to grip that of Smith.

"Done!" he said. "Done! And it fits. It fits you, it fits me, it even fits her.... Zounds, man, it fits!"

"What does?" asked Smith, smiling at the younger man's reawakening of eager interest.

"Something you uttered the other day. 'Integrity lies in the heart, not upon the sleeve!' I've remembered that speech. Great words, noble words!"

"They were said to me by a great and noble man," answered Howard Smith. And as he spoke, the roar of distant cannon shook the icy windows.

Another story by Mr. Bedford-Jones will appear in our next issue.

The Salted Well

A brief but dramatic story of the oil-fields.

By C. W. WRIGHT, JR.

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

WEARILY Tom Garson unlatched the heavy buckle of his safety-belt and swung down the steel rungs of the ladder from crown to derrick floor of the latticework over Western Flat Drilling Company's No. 1 Mullins. A hundred feet below him, steam whistled from the big drilling engines and wandered off into rustling mesquite.

Every muscle in his rugged frame spoke protestingly as he descended beside the glistening vertical rows of four thousand feet of drill-pipe—steel that he had helped manhandle into eighty-foot "fourbles" as it was drawn from the well. Once on the derrick floor, he grinned wryly at the driller, Bat Henderson, pushed his battered hat back on his head, and fell to with the floor crew at cleaning up the litter of tools and muddy bits.

Henderson fed steam and water into the washing hose that Garson swept over the rack of worn fishtail bits. The fireman and two helpers were at the far end of the floor when the stream of steam-forced water chewed the mud off the last bit in the row, then swung hissing to the floor just above the steps that led to the ground—just in time to blast full into the figure of Daniel Burroughs, the Western Flat Company's superintendent, as he mounted to the floor.

Garson cut the hose aside as Henderson spun valves suddenly and uselessly—the Super was a sorry mess of mud and water. Burroughs' face flared until the thin mustache cut a black line beneath his aquiline nose. To Garson's awkward, "Mighty sorry, Burroughs!" he snapped: "Ten-day lay-off, for carelessness, Garson! See me in my office at eight tonight, and I'll give you your time."

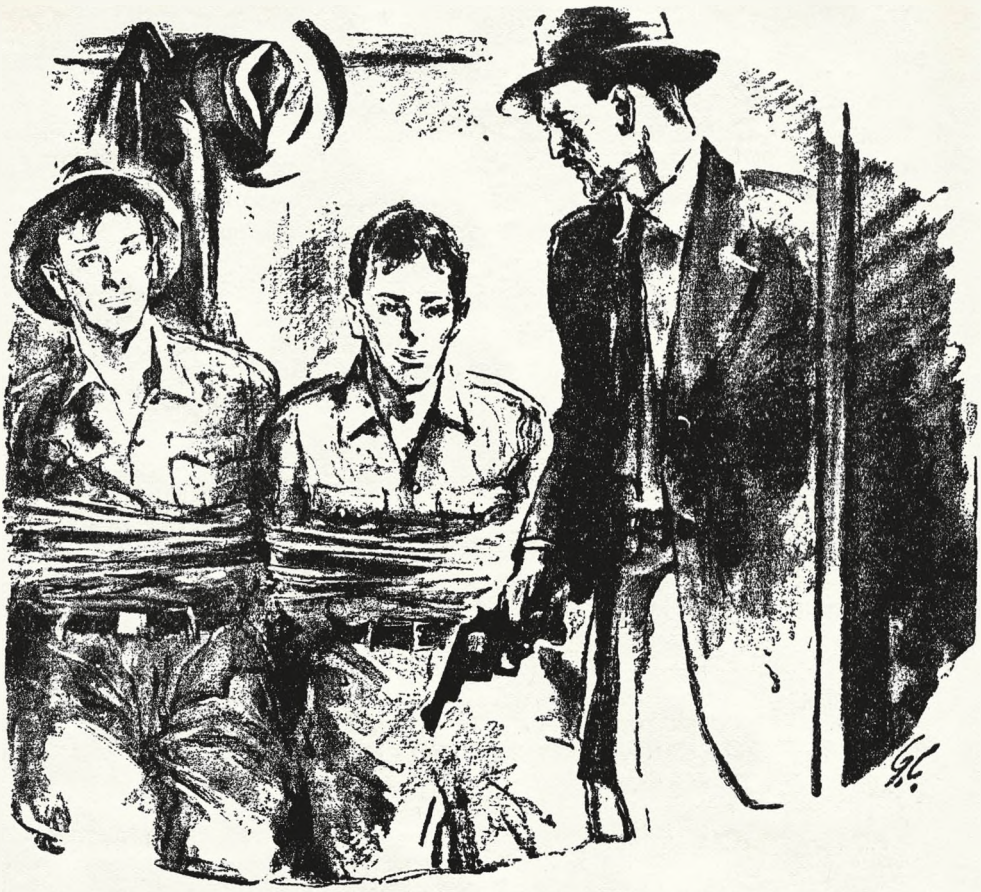
The superintendent whipped around, stalked to his car, and rammed its black length into motion, the gears whining angrily. Garson peeled off his wet gloves, flung them into the corner of the tool-house, then changed his muddy khakis for clean dry ones, waved a silent leave to Henderson, and walked to his own battered roadster.

Behind its wheel, rattling down the well-worn ruts that led between ranks of mesquite, five meandering miles to Rancho Mojado, he sat like a block of solid stone, his heavy shoulders sagging a little under the weight of heavier thoughts. The weight of his shoulders came from the honest labor of pipe-line and tank battery, from roustabouting and rough-necking, drilling his own wells—and missing—with just such a rig as that on the Mullins. Some of the bronze on his face came from long hours with a seismograph crew, some of the weight on his mind from the memory of knowledge gained on the last trip with that crew over the mesa land where he had spent his youth.

Now he was back on a rig, working for nine dollars a day as a derrickman, his mind whirling with the effort to find another foothold. A sudden jar of deep ruts turning aside from the more familiar pair shook him from the past, and he trod the accelerator again.

ONCE in a wind-burned, sand-blistered little railroad siding, he beat his cloud of dust into the frame shack that was the office of the Western Flat, asked for Burroughs, and faced him silently.

The superintendent motioned him to shut the door, looked at him sharply, then waved him to a chair before his desk.



"You'll stay in the tool-house here, until I'm ready to go."

"Garson, I wanted to see you—and you made a good excuse with that mud-hose. Never mind that—do you want to make a thousand dollars?"

The Texan held his face rigid with an effort. A foothold!

"You know I can't do that, working derricks, Burroughs—what do you want done?"

"I'll put my cards on the table, Garson. I had a man coming out from the coast, but he was killed in an automobile accident. You're the only man I can get that knows enough to do this job. I'll have to trust you to keep your mouth shut. I'll give you five hundred now—tonight—and five hundred more the day you take the portable core rig I have in the brush, a quarter-mile by airline from the Mullins, but on the far side of the mesa—and drill a horizontal hole to the Mullins casing and cut that casing with a milling tool. No questions asked, of course. How about it?"

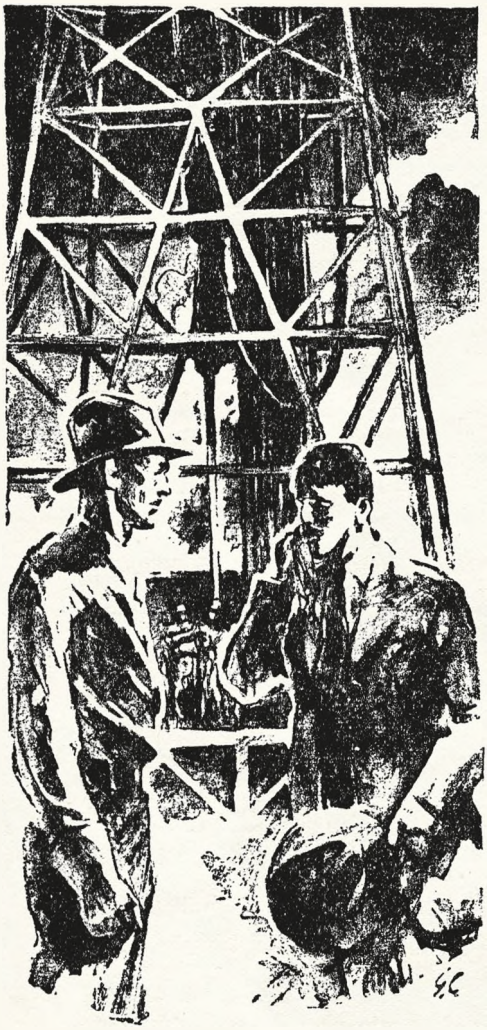
Garson thought for a full minute before he answered. In his voice was resignation, no curiosity.

"I'll do it," he said at last. "I'll need one man of my own on the rig, and a good directional drilling-control. It'll take three days, if your rig is set up, and water and fuel-oil on hand."

Burroughs nodded, reached into his desk, and pushed eight fifty-dollar bills and five twenties across to the Texan. "Get your man—I'll take you out there now. Be in my car, out in back, in an hour."

Garson left the office silently, the money burning in his hip pocket. To him the scheme was crystal-clear. A little pump, fifty barrels of oil in a tank at the core rig, an underground line to the Mullins—and another great oil-discovery.

Burroughs would lease and sublease, build up the price while apparently waiting for tank space—then he would sell out and leave.



The Super, a sorry mess of mud and water, snapped: "Ten-day lay-off, for carelessness, Garson!"

Garson shrugged again, then swung off down the dusty street in search of the man he needed. . . .

Four nights later, Garson clicked off the switch of a delicate magnetic directional drilling control and recorder, and closed its dials.

"We're on the Mullins casing, Doug. Let's run in that milling tool, make our cut and tie in."

The Diesels of the core rig hummed through four sets of mufflers as joints of slender pipe slid from the hole at the base of a portable derrick that lay canted almost on its side. The steel jaws of a milling tool replaced the soft bit, and the pipe disappeared steadily into the hole again. . . .

As the morning sun reddened the gray of the dusty mesquite, Garson watched Burroughs spin a valve that fed good sweet crude from his little storage tank into the line to the Mullins casing, two hundred feet below the surface. Minutes later, the morning-tour fireman on the Mullins shouted as he saw a live oil slick blossom on the waste from the pumps.

At the same time, Garson's face reddened slightly as he pocketed five hundred dollars—and looked into a gun-muzzle in Burroughs' solid fist. "Sorry, but I'm taking no chances, Garson. I want to be sure that you're *here* while I do a little promoting. I'll not tie you and your man too tightly—but you'll stay in the tool-house here, until I'm ready to go. Be back tonight with some food. Keep your mind on that thousand, and it won't be so bad!"

THREE uncomfortable days later Burroughs released a grimy, cramped pair of oil men. Taking no chance of reprisal, he kept them at a respectable distance as he climbed into the black car. His voice was only faintly jeering as he met Garson's calm gaze.

"Did a pretty good job, Tom. I sold ninety per cent of the Western stock—my own company, by the way. I sold royalty rights and core tests and drilling rights—even sold this core rig. I've a plane a few miles down the road, and I'll be in Mexico in a couple of hours, with about a hundred thousand dollars."

Garson smiled grimly. "Mullins bought your Western stock, your royalties, and all your original drilling rights, didn't he, Burroughs?"

The promoter was surprised. "Yes, he did. How did you know?"

"Well, it's like this, Burroughs: The Mullins ranch used to be the Lazy G—my father's. When I was doing better, a few years ago, he sold the ranch to Mullins and moved to town. Later I shot the whole ranch with a seismograph crew—and there's oil at forty-two hundred on three-fourths of the property.

"I couldn't sell Mullins on geophysical dope then—he's a cattleman. But last week, with the well nearly drilled, for five hundred in cash and my ten-day note for five hundred more, I bought an option on about three hundred acres of the old ranch. He took my tip, I guess, and bought you out. You didn't exactly salt the Mullins well—it'll flow about twenty thousand barrels a day. And if you'd left the core rig tied in, it would have kicked back!"

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

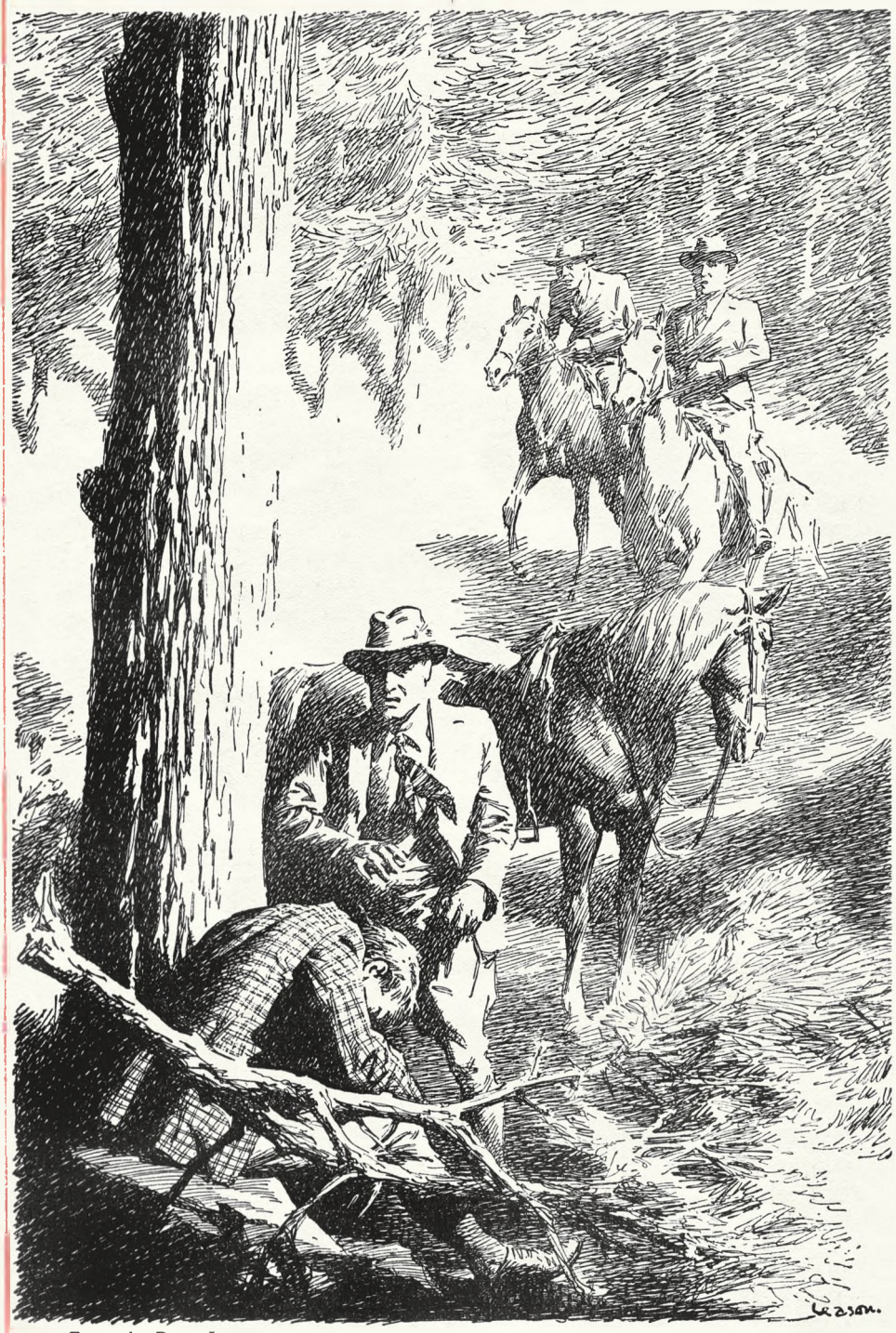
THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS

By GORDON KEYNE

Who wrote "They Lived by the Sword" and "Gunpowder Gold."

ON A CALIFORNIA MAGNATE'S HUGE ESTATE, DEATH COMES TO LIFE AMONG THE GUESTS—AND MR. FATE MAKES A MOCKERY OF MURDER.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



Drawn by Percy Leason

We came into a little clearing, and saw him seated on a rock. Letting out a hail, I dismounted. Then, realizing he had made no response, I started toward him—and halted in sickened amazement. . . . He was dead.

THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS

By GORDON KEYNE

Who wrote "Gunpowder Gold" and "Death on the Doorstep."

MARY and I were off early, to arrive early. It was a hundred-mile drive from our home on the desert floor to the cloud-veiled estate of Alta Serafina, adjoining the Serafina Forest Preserve, high in the California Sierras.

To be a guest of Daniel Parker Herron presupposes importance in one of the three empires of which he is overlord. The remarkable record in Europe and China of the Herron Fighters made him one of the world's magnates in airplane construction; his genius at things electrical, and his business acumen, had led to his famous tooth-and-nail struggle with the powers of radio, which left him victor, and a prominent figure of the air-waves. His unexpected plunge into the maelstrom of Hollywood and his emergence in blazing triumph as the master movie magnate of them all, is still so recent as to be in every mind.

Herron is today, undoubtedly, one of the world's wealthiest men, just as Alta Serafina is one of the world's show places. This fabulous paradise is probably unique, and has no rival except the vast Hearst estate farther north. Thus, as I say, to be a guest there would presuppose importance.

So I must be honest. We are not important people. In the past couple of years I had sold a few detective scripts to Herron's producers, and had twice met Herron himself. It was Mary who had really brought us this invitation, which came both from Herron and from Mona Vindon, who was usually billed as "the beauty of the world."

Mary had become acquainted with the famous screen star during the winter festivities at Palm Springs. The two women had taken an instant liking to each other. Mona Vindon shared the quiet simplicity which was so charming a quality in Herron himself. She wanted Mary to come. Herron wrote that he had personal business to discuss with me, which argued well for our finances. So, naturally, we packed up and went to Alta Serafina.

The average altitude on that ten-mile-square estate is seven thousand feet; it is no place for weak hearts or lungs. The morning was still young when we halted the car before the entrance gates at the southeast corner. There I had my first sight of that singularly unhappy man whose past and future were bound up with the lives—and the frightful deaths—of persons even then at Alta Serafina.

That barrier would have halted a runaway truck. Leaving the little house beside it, and coming through a small screened gate, was a uniformed guard, who asked for our admission card; he checked it carefully with a typed list, initialed it, and handed it back.

"Follow on to the forks, Mr. Keyne, and take the right turn," he said, and made his way back to the gate-house; a moment later the solid barrier swung open with a whir of machinery.

During this little while I had noted a second man, also in the gray-green uniform and Sam Browne belt of a guard. He was standing in the doorway of the gate-house, his gaze fastened upon us, and his face drew my whole attention. He was a compact, muscular young man. His cheeks and head were in flat planes, and his wide-winged nostrils flared like those of an Indian. I recalled few men with so straight a gaze, and instinctively knew his movements would be direct and methodical. Both physically and mental-

ly he was bitter-clean, and stringy as sun-dried pemmican.

He saluted us briefly, unsmilingly, as we passed through the gate. Mary caught her breath and turned, her eyes lingering upon him. Then the gate fell out of our sight.

"Gordon!" she exclaimed quickly. "Did you see that man?"

I did not pretend to mistake her. "Yes. He had the shoulder-bars of a captain, I noticed; Herron's force of guards must be on a military basis."

"I don't mean that," she said breathlessly. "I know him, I know him! I remember him from Paris!"

I chuckled. "It's over a year since we were there, Mary. You think some gigolo you danced with is now in Herron's employ? A striking face, I grant you, but—"

"No," she cut in. "No. Not a gigolo. Do you remember the terrible murder-case that was in all the papers then? An American tourist who brutally killed an American girl—somebody's wife? It's mixed up in my mind, but I remember the tourist's name was Currey."

I thought back. "Yes, I recall something about it. Hot stuff—Currey!"

"Don't joke about it," she snapped. "That man we passed—he was Currey. I couldn't mistake. The pictures of him were everywhere. That murderer is here, Gordon!"

"Maybe," I rejoined. "And here are the forks in the road."

WE swung into the right turn as ordered. Two minutes later, under a great stand of sugar pines, we came to a pair of uniformed guards awaiting us; beside them was a flat platform on three wheels, with two seats and a luggage hamper.

To this we transferred, and our bags were packed in. One of the guards departed with our car. In a clearing to the left appeared a concrete slab about an acre in extent, with a ramp leading down into it; this, we gathered, was the garage.

The little electric shuttle-car zoomed us up a narrow shaded road and emerged on a rocky eminence where the driver halted, smiling, to let us gaze our fill. The panorama was stupendous.

Far to the north, nearly two hundred miles, hung the frosted top of Mt. Whitney like a blown bubble in the cloudless sky. Eastward burned the hazy, shimmering chromatics of the desert hills. South towered the bulks of the San Bernardino range, with San Jacinto and San Gorgonio astride the pass to Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley. Los Angeles and the other cities of the plain were hidden beneath a writhing gray blanket; eighty miles distant, Catalina Island floated like a phantom in the sea.

"We've attained this view in a few minutes, and without effort," murmured Mary. "Our grandfathers would have traveled weeks to gain it, and would have talked of it all their lives!"

Our driver, who had the sense to say nothing, took this as a signal, and we were under way again for the cluster of buildings locally termed the Lodge. We had a confused glimpse of tennis-courts and a golf-course dotted with players, a miraculously blue lake, and dozens of little toy cottages tucked away among gigantic rocks and pines. What with domestics and workmen, this tremendous establishment that housed just one man, alone in the world, was larger than many a village.

Off to the right sprawled the Main House, of chalet type. The upper part stepped back to a full three stories; the ground floor was of giant redwood logs with the bark on. We swept around to the north entrance and before we knew it, we were in an elevator, being taken to the third floor. Here we walked down endless pine corridors rich with amber skylights, around corners and down half-flights and up again, to reach a three-room suite in the southeast corner. The place was a labyrinth. The doors were all alike, and all unmarked or numbered; a decorative metal container held a card with the name of the occupant.

While we were gazing from our windows into the incredible depths below—this corner of the house overlooked one end of the famous Sweetwood Chasm—a maid and valet arrived, unpacked our luggage with deft dispatch, and vanished again. I dropped into a priceless Sheraton chair, lit a cigarette, and eyed Mary.

"I'll make a bet with you, Mary. They'll never come back for us. It'll be like a dream. Days will pass, and weeks. We'll just sit here unrecollected and forgotten—"

"Like some famous novelist in a Hollywood studio," struck in Mary brightly.

"Correct. Finally they'll send a search-party to locate us. Something may remind Herron of our existence; by that time it'll be too late."

"I'll take your bet!" Mary cocked her head, listening. "Here's someone now. And, Gordon! You must tell Mr. Herron about that man we saw—the man Currey. Not that I believe in hounding anyone through life because of a mistake made, but this was a brutal murder, a horrible affair. Herron ought to be told."

"All right," I said. Steps had sounded, a knock rang at the door.

I admitted a crisp man of fifty who introduced himself as Lennihan, Herron's secretary. He inquired whether I wanted to see Mr. Herron now or during the afternoon.

"Now!" I rejoined, and departed. . . .

Endless corridors, stairways, vistas; Lennihan explained that at the moment Alta Serafina housed less than a dozen guests in all, the greater part of the Main House being closed off. Several of the cottages outside were in use. One of these was a permanent home occupied by the Pascal Herrons, an elderly couple. I would, said Lennihan rather sadly, see quite a bit of Herron's Uncle Pascal. Lennihan was one of those automatons with a terrific capacity for work, and a scant sense of humor. He managed to convey the idea that Uncle Pascal was not all that might be desired; and he was right.

PASSING through a wide doorway, we entered a different world. Here was the business portion of Alta Serafina, with soundproofed walls and air-conditioned offices. From here, whether in summer or winter, Daniel Parker Herron ruled his entire empire in solitary grandeur. He ignored the citied world of business just as he ignored politics, with a lofty disdain he might have borrowed from the snowy peaks he so loved.

Glancing through an open door in passing, I glimpsed a communications-room literally packed to overflowing with telephone switchboards and teletype apparatus. Still another door opened into a little post office, complete with boxes and registry window. Then, crossing the antechamber, we were in the simple, spacious, unadorned sanctum whose single wide plate glass window looked out upon nature's magnificence, and I was shaking hands with Herron.

Immediately the world was happier; he had that effect, for he was simple and honest as the scrubbed white-pine floor underfoot. Herron might rule his dominion like a king, but there was no regal pose about him; there was no pose whatever.

In his late thirties, Herron's rugged tanned features were stronger than they were handsome; that thin-lipped mouth of his was expressive, swift to smile, purse up quizzically, or burst open in explosive laughter. The word *hearty* would well describe the man. His sun-bleached hair was a hempen thatch, yet the brows above his deep blue eyes were jet black. Just now those blue eyes were twinkling and radiant; he was glad to see me, and said so.

"You're looking fit, Gordon! You'll need to be. We're going to run you ragged up here. And you can kiss that charming wife of yours good-by for a time; Mona has plans for her. . . . Well, sit down and don't be so damned formal. Here, smoke up."

One was instantly on a footing of familiarity with Dan Herron—if he liked you. He tore open a pack of cigarettes, lit his own and mine and returned to his desk. Like the room, the desk was bare and simple. Herron, in sweat-shirt and slacks, slid himself into a squeaky old swivel chair and grinned at me as he rocked it back and forth.

"My dad's old chair; he would never have it oiled. Said a man behind a desk had too much tendency to sleep anyhow—needed a good healthy squeak. Gordon, we're establishing a new production unit at the lot." Thus he always referred to the enormous Herron Pictures establishment in Hollywood. "For mystery and detective pictures exclusively. I want you to do us a dozen stories. Here's a contract; see if it suits you."

This was Dan Herron's way of doing business; he simply took what he wanted, pleasantly. He was so genuine and so open that trouble avoided him.

The contract was to my taste; it was overgenerous, and I said so. He grinned and waved his hand.

"Swell! You'll earn every cent of it. But this isn't the only reason I wanted to get you here, Gordon; something has come up where you should be able to give some help. As I've told you before this, I regard you as an old friend, I've read so many of your stories. I've been a fan of yours so long, that now I've called you in to join a board of strategy, as it were. Do you want to take on some problems this afternoon?"

"Well, Dan, I'm gaited to run from trouble," I rejoined lightly. "But I'll take on anything you throw at me. . . .

Oh, by the way: Mary insisted that I tell you something."

I hesitated. It looked rather absurd, but at his prompting, I went on:

"At the gate as we entered your grounds, a man was standing. He was in your gray-green uniform and had silver shoulder-bars, like a captain. Do you place him?"

"Of course," Dan Herron exclaimed. "That's Captain Brett—he's actually captain of my guards." He broke into a laugh. "Captain of the Guards—the title rather appeals to him. He's a queer chap in many ways, but sterling. We were in college together."

"All right," I said, and drew a deep breath. "Then Mary was mistaken; that settles it, of course. She insisted that he was a chap we'd heard a good deal about when we were in Paris, a bit over a year ago. She thought you should be warned. You know how a woman is."

Herron's face had changed as I spoke. Its gay humor waned and died; his eyes sharpened on me. He nodded slightly.

"I suppose she took him to be that murderer Hamilton Currey, eh?"

"Yes," I replied uneasily. "I'm sorry, Dan, honest! I hope it didn't jar you."

"Oh, not a bit," he said, and his face cleared in a smile. "Other people have thought they recognized him, Gordon. I've shrugged it off as mistaken identity, but with you, it's different. I don't mind telling you the truth: Brett actually is the man Currey."

"Oh!" I said, very awkwardly.

He chuckled at my expression. "I'll tell you about it one of these days—Brett may tell you himself. Put it out of your mind that he's a murderer; he's not. I give you my word, Keyne, Brett's a genius! Mad, they'd have called him a couple of centuries ago; prating of unseen things—but damned sensible too!"

A QUEER chilly something seized upon me. Herron was in earnest; I did not understand his words, and did not like them. They affected me strangely. The people who would have been called mad a couple of centuries ago usually have a tincture of madness today that is not to my taste.

"You know Lafe Newberry, of course?" Herron said abruptly.

"Slightly. Not intimately."

"He came up yesterday and is spending some time here, I hope. I've got him on leave from the *Chronicle;* we're working together on something big for radio. Meantime, he's on a thing that should appeal to your dramatic instincts. He'll join us any minute now; before he barges in, let me find you the evidence."

He rummaged through his desk.

Newberry? There was a real genius, and none of your mad hatters! He had been a foreign correspondent during some years for the *News* people and had been expelled from most European capitals because he got too much news. Just before the war broke, he had returned to this country, specializing in a syndicated crime column; I did not know him well. He was, admittedly, one of the nation's great reporters. The startling mystery solutions which his column credited to the police were actually his own. He roved from paper to paper of his syndicate as the crime-drift might indicate; at present he was nominally a member of the *Chronicle* staff in Los Angeles. His presence here at Alta Serafina indicated something of unusual import afoot.

"Lafe's not a happy man," said Herron, getting out a small folder at last. "Had a domestic tragedy in Europe, but he's risen above it. . . . Ah, here he is!"

The door opened, and Newberry came in with a cheery greeting.

"Hello, Dan! Heard Keyne was here, so in I came. H'are you, Keyne?"

The stocky man who weaved into the room as though he were shadow-boxing and pumped my hand, did not lack in self-assurance, but he was really a quiet, thoughtful chap, very soft-spoken.

Lafe Newberry was getting on in years for a reporter; he was, I should venture, about forty-five, soberly but carefully attired, and had a perfectly round head covered with thinning drab hair. His lower lip thrust out slightly in permanent truculence, from a square chin—exactly like the earlier pictures of Mussolini. He had a bony, spatulate nose. What he lacked in good looks, he made up in forceful personality.

"I'm just showing Gordon the letter that came here the other day," Herron said, shoving the manila folder across the desk at me. "I think you have the first one, Lafe? Let's introduce Gordon to the mystic writer: then you can take him in hand—and nothing's to be held back. What d'you think of it, Gordon?"

Clipped to the folder was a piece of newsprint, and pasted across this, which was letter size, were whole words that had been cut from a newspaper. They read:

DEATH IS MAN'S END AT LAND'S END. YOU CAN'T GAMBLE WITH DEATH; I ALWAYS WIN. WHEN AN UNINVITED GUEST LIES DEAD, LOOK BELOW HIM. AND WHEN YOU ARE IN MOST FEAR I WILL COME TO THE RESCUE. DEATH IS A FRIEND.

MR. FATE.

I shook my head, smiling.

"Such crackpot messages aren't usually signed. Your friend Death, or Mr. Fate, seems to be a mental case with a sense of humor. What do you do with such nonsense as this?"

"Oh, we have a nut file," replied Herron. "Some is interesting; most is harmless; but this is to be taken seriously. Our friend, as you call him, has rung the bell, has delivered the goods, has come through!"

I WAS startled. "Good Lord, Dan! You don't mean there's been a killing here?"

"I don't think we need to worry up here. You saw for yourself that we're pretty well guarded," Herron rejoined gravely. "However, the guy has certainly paid off on another message. Did you read about the Boguslav case recently?"

"Yes, of course; day before yesterday, wasn't it?"

Poor old Boguslav, a White Russian general, had come into the United States years ago without a passport, living harmlessly and quietly. Some investigation into illegal entries, or a tip from some communist, had dredged up the old chap. Despite every sympathetic effort made on his behalf, he was ordered deported.

"And he took a soldier's way out," I said.

Lafe Newberry snorted. "He did, like hell! That's merely what the sob-sister said, Keyne. Here! We got this at the *Chronicle* office, investigated right away, found the old duffer stiff and cold—and had a swell scoop. Read it."

He shoved another message at me, made up like the first of clipped and pasted words; it had been sent to the city editor of the *Chronicle*.

GENERAL BOGUSLAV HAS LOST HIS GAMBLE. DEATH TAKES HIS SALUTE HERE RATHER THAN IN THE LUBIANKA CELLARS. SO MAY I SOONER VISIT THE HEIGHTS OF ALTA SERAFINA.

MR. FATE.

Herron was watching me with his bleak stare as I laid down the message. I divined an uneasy worry in his manner. Now Newberry spoke quickly:

"Keyne, would an old soldier shoot himself so clumsily as to deface his prized Cross of St. George? Would he do this just before a testimonial dinner given by his old friends? He trimmed his hair and beard. He pressed his old uniform tunic, snipping off the frayed threads, darkening the worn places with ink. He put on all his decorations and polished his boots. Then—he shot himself! He did, like hell!"

The scorn in his voice was like acid. I shook my head.

"And there were other reasons," spoke up Herron. "Never mind all that now; it's past and over. The main thing was that Mr. Fate predicted it aright. The presumptive threat concerning Alta Serafina worried Lafe, who phoned me about it. We dug the other message out of our files. I got Lafe here to handle it and called you in; and we're going to keep our fences tight. We just don't want any murder-mystery around here."

Again his undercurrent of anxiety surprised me. Daniel Parker Herron had never been known to pull any punches, and was bitterly hated in a dozen quarters because of his passion for abstract justice. Threats of death and revenge have never bothered him in the least. Yet now he was certainly bothered. He had called Newberry here, and had even summoned me to lend a hand. This worry of his might well spring from an uneasy conscience, since Herron was all he-man and no angel.

"Well, have you any uninvited guests here?" I asked. "If not, you should worry about the prediction!"

"Nary a one," he said, "and we intend to have none, either! Now, boys, the meeting stands adjourned until two o'clock—right after lunch. Lafe, take care of Gordon. He's one of the family; there's nothing to hide from him. The morning's still early. See that he gets shaken down. Trails, horses, tennis, anything you like."

Newberry and I came into the outer office, where Lennihan gave the newspaperman a sheaf of telegrams and letters. Newberry turned to me:

"Look here," he said frankly, "do you mind giving me fifteen minutes to answer some of these wires? Then I'll be with you, and my mind free. Come along to my quarters, if you like."

"No, I'll just wander about the labyrinth," I said, "and get an eyeful of the

place. Where's the famous collection of firearms?"

"Scattered all over—a room here, another there," said Newberry. "All right, make yourself at home. I'll find you, wherever you are."

We separated. I was just as glad to have a few moments to myself; and finding a side doorway at hand and the open air beyond, I struck out for the wine-clear atmosphere and the huge trees. This took me out on one side of the Main House, and I strolled aimlessly along the path, making for the trees.

TWO men were approaching. One was a swarthy, handsome man whom I took for an Oriental of some sort. The other was a gnomelike little fellow with sideburns and snapping bright eyes and an expression of cheerful idiocy. He caught my eye, abruptly abandoned his companion, and pursued me with outstretched hand and glad words.

"Hello, you're a new arrival, eh? Glad to welcome you. I'm Pascal Herron—sort of unofficial greeter, you know. Have you seen Dan yet?"

"Yes, thanks," I said, and gave my name. He had never heard of me and said so.

"Just as well to be frank about it, eh? Good sign, too. Can't always put your finger on these guys who are famous for something; apt to be lop-sided. Take that chap I was with just now. Charming fellow, but up in the air. He's that Raja Naga you must have read about; mystic from somewhere upcountry in India. . . . Well, what can I do for you?"

When Uncle Pascal discovered he could do nothing for me, he went his way and I went mine, striking off among the trees and losing myself happily—now following one of the graveled walks, or again crossing a slippery, yielding mattress of pine needles.

The truth had grown upon me, and I found it filled with new surprises as I considered it. I was not here because Mona Vindon and Mary had taken a liking for one another. I was not here because Herron wanted to make me a movie writer. I was here because he was worried, and he wanted to focus my imagination and the hard, practical brain of Newberry upon some problem that frightened him. He, Daniel Parker Herron, who could command immense resources—frightened! It was hard to visualize. He was an upstanding personality himself, and by no means in the habit of leaning on others. Because I had a flair for the writing of detective novels, he thought I was a detective.

"A sad mistake it was to make!" I murmured to myself. "To be in Wonderland for such a reason—it's like some country locksmith waking up to find himself in heaven because St. Peter has lost his keys and needs help!"

Laughing softly, I came out on a sunny slope between two giant russet trunks —a sharp slope, too. Ten feet below me was a narrow trail that wound along the cliff-edge, where ran a waist-high parapet of cut and fitted stones. Beyond this little wall was three thousand feet of nothing. I was at the verge of that dizzy gorge known as Sweetwood Chasm, a spot famed as a scenic wonder.

At the moment I had no inclination to view this stupendous gulf. I sank down among the ferns that strewed the pine-sweet slope, and let my nerves relax to the vast loneliness of the place. The Lodge, the entire outer world, were out of sight—gone—for only sky and distance remained here.

I could see across five miles of space to Toro Peak, pine-fringed above the six-thousand-foot line, and below it carpeted with manzanita and juniper jungle, matted into a smooth bottle green flecked by maroon shadows. Above me, a squirrel scampered along one of the huge trees, carefully keeping on the side away from me, and peering down now and again with watchful, curious gaze.

Closing my eyes against the sky-glare, I lay lulled by the hypnotic drumming of a woodpecker somewhere above, while my thoughts drifted upon my situation. The thought of working over some puzzle sent by a crank letter-writer was amusing and vaguely attractive. The drumming of the questing bug-hunter stopped abruptly. After a moment it recommenced, closer at hand but slower, with a dull reiteration as though the bird were working on a more solid log, with a different tempo. Then I realized that it was no bird at all, but the sound of hasty feet thudding the earth.

I sat up and looked around. Drumming, frenzied haste—the very thought of any such thing jarred strangely upon this blissful solitude. A fleck of scarlet broke through the shadows of the trail to my left. There, from a fringe of young cedars, a woman suddenly burst into sight, running along the trail like a startled animal in panic urge.

Her arms were outstretched before her, hands clutching and thrusting as though reaching to push away something unseen. I could hear her labored breathing; her face was a contorted mask of emotion. And then, suddenly as she had appeared, she stopped dead.

Not because of me. My presence among the ferns above remained unsuspected. Why did she halt? She was staring at something; she was making a terrific effort to banish all her emotion—and she was doing it. For her, perhaps, it was no hard matter.

I gazed at her with a curious sense of unreality. She had ever seemed more actual on the screen than she did in life; and now, in the quivering, terrified flesh, she did not seem actual at all. She was Mona Vindon the incomparable, the exquisite, for whose brilliant triumph in "Cynthia" a full-throated chorus was demanding the next Academy award.

Frightened—in panic! Nothing stirred along the trail behind her. Now, however, a figure came into sight, approaching her. It was this figure she had seen; it was for him she now broke into a quick smile, though she was still ashen to the lips. In her gay slacks, in her scarlet scarf, in the sunlit masses of her hair, she was abruptly carefree and eager.

"Good morning!" she cried cordially. "Just the man I wanted to see!"

The other stopped, and I saw that it was Captain Brett.

"Anything wrong, Miss Vindon?" he asked, eying her frowningly. "You look rather startled."

"I slipped and nearly fell over the parapet there at Land's End," she said, and broke into a laugh. "Have you a cigarette? And then I'll ask your company back to my cottage. I want to get my car out, as soon as I can dress."

She wanted to keep him away—from whatever had frightened her. Then something plucked at me. Land's End! The message from "Mr. Fate!"

"I suppose,"—Brett was speaking and looking at her in his unsmiling, bleak way,—"you were warned by the stars of your near-tumble?"

"You needn't be sarcastic," she said, lighting the cigarette from his match.

"On the contrary, it's needed," he rejoined. "You know very well Dan doesn't approve of your belief in astrology. The stars—bosh! You struggle through life, and for what? Do you know?"

She exhaled thinly, smiling a little. It was easy to see that they were friends and intimate ones. I remembered that Herron had mentioned Brett as an old college friend.

"For success, my dear man," she rejoined. "Success and fame!"

"And do you know just what success and fame are?" he questioned harshly. "No, you don't. Men live long lives, seek furiously and painfully, rise early and bed late, forgo friends and let love fly unmourned, and still struggling come to death's narrow door—too intent on their prize to realize that they never knew what it was!"

She was quite herself now. With a delicious trill of laughter, she caught his arm and swung him around.

"You sha'n't lecture me—I'll not have it!" she cried gayly. "Life is nonsense, all nonsense! It's not real! I refuse to think it real at all, so come along."

They passed from my sight, going along the path to the right. But those last words of Mona Vindon's were transparent. Something had happened, that she was fighting desperately to deny all realities and to forget. I wondered if it was what the unknown Mr. Fate had predicted. And I wondered if this undeniably odd man Brett were perhaps the murderer—a murderer once more.

MONA VINDON had not called for help, perhaps had wanted none. I had a chilly distaste for backtracking her steps. With these Hollywood people, an intruder usually got it in the neck; and, even though I knew Mona slightly, I did not intend to stick my neck out.

It was the buzzard that decided me. I noticed him in his downward carrion spiral; the target of his drop seemed close to me. The gust of some transverse air-current swept him out of his orbit, dead opposite me. He tilted his wings, turned himself like an ice-skater, and magically was catapulted back, without obvious movement, to his former position, dropping lower and out of my sight.

There was now no doubt what to expect. I rose and slid down the slope to the trail. This led me through the deep woods, then widened, dipped, and emerged upon a broad flagged pavement

that completely covered a triangular spur of rock thrusting out above the gorge. The cliff rose steeply at the back; it was bisected by two stone pillars and a broad flight of steps which must lead to the Lodge, as a portion of the building was visible among the trees above. Several benches formed part of the parapet edging the great chasm. Here was Land's End, as a neatly lettered sign informed all and sundry, giving a view of the dizzy gulf below and of the mountains beyond, unrivaled in nature.

It was the view closer to hand that caught my attention.

HERE was the reason for Mona Vindon's terror; a man, outstretched on that stone bench—a pool under and around his head, congealed and black.

I took a step closer, and another. The man was dead. Sight of him was what had sent Mona Vindon darting away in panic. This seemed odd; one thinks of an actress as better poised. And why had she so obviously tried to keep Brett from coming here and finding the body?

Well, no matter; I must let Herron know immediately. And I must, as I had so often and glibly written, "leave everything untouched until the police arrive." I turned to the broad stone steps and the flanking pillars; in one of those pillars I had glimpsed a tiny open door. As I thought, it proved to be a telephone container. The entire estate was honeycombed with a telephone system.

Handkerchief covering my hand, I lifted off the receiver; if there were any fingerprints in this murder case, far be it from Gordon Keyne to spoil them!

"Main House switchboard; good morning," said a cool voice. I gave my name and asked for Herron, and presently heard his voice.

"Hello, Dan!" I said. "I'm down at your Land's End place."

"Oh, you are!" he made polite reply, evidently wondering at my call. "Fine view, eh?"

"Not so fine as it was once."

"Eh?" Naturally, he was puzzled. "Fog coming up?"

"More than that." I caught at the cue. "Remember the storm warning from Mr. Fate? Well, it's come true."

I could almost feel his startled silence.

"The devil you say!" he broke out. "Stick around; I'll be right along."

I went back to survey the dead man more carefully. Now I was in for it, since I must make good with my detective lore or else lose face with Dan Herron. The thought of Lafe Newberry cheered me, however. He knew all the answers.

The corpse was youngish; in his early thirties, at a guess. His open mouth, lips drawn back in a smiling grimace, showed white and regular teeth. Blond hair. Careful grooming, shirt and collar immaculate, cravat unrumpled, shoes new and polished. Yet the suit, of excellent material, was wrinkled and heavily spotted, as with grease.

He had been shot. There was a bluish hole between his eyes, and nothing much left of the back of his head. Seeking a more pleasant prospect, I turned away from the bench, which was on the very edge of the gulf. If the corpse had fallen outward, he would have gone hurtling down into Sweetwood Chasm.

What a damnably banal name, I thought, for so magnificent a drop! The cliff fell away sheer for a couple of hundred feet, then was broken by the feathery blue-green tips of young trees; from there the rock bulged out and ran on down to the brush line, a mile below.

"When an uninvited guest is killed, look below him." So ran the message. Was this a guest? Was he uninvited? No matter; the grisly jest had the same savor. Look below him—and below him was the overhang of the rock face, empty space!

A few cigarette-butts littered the paving. There was no sign of any weapon; the face, powder-stained, was not relaxed as faces ordinarily relax in death. Sometimes, in the surprise and horror of murder realized, the dead face never loses its emotion; sometimes *rigor mortis* seizes upon the whole body instantly.

If suicide, a weapon would be here. There was no suicide; it must be murder. But why had Mona Vindon been in such fearful agitation, and why had she wheedled Captain Brett away?

Voices sounded; coming down the stone steps were Herron and Newberry, followed by two others. One was a stout, middle-aged man whose physician's case revealed his profession; the other was Brett, impassive, unsmiling as ever. The doctor went directly to the body on the bench. Herron came to me, with a nod and a troubled look.

"I don't know whether the name of our friend is Fate or Death," he said, "but he certainly calls his shots."

"That depends," I said. "According to him, remember, an uninvited guest—"

"This man's a total stranger," Herron broke in, and that settled it.

Presently the doctor straightened up and came to us with brisk words.

"Nothing to be done, Mr. Herron. It happened from ten to twelve hours ago, to judge by the state of *rigor*. The bullet entered at the forehead and went out at the back—rather obvious. Unless you want me for something else, I'll get back to the surgery. One of the guests had just come in with a badly strained tendon when you called."

"Go ahead," said Herron. "And not a word about this to a soul, White."

Doctor White bobbed his head and then crossed to the stairs and bolted up; he was always hasty in everything, always rushed, but a good man.

The four of us drew together. Herron introduced me to Captain William Brett. I gathered that the other three were on a basis of intimacy; it was Lafe and Dan and Bill, though Newberry usually referred to Herron as "the Chief."

"If he's not a guest, how did he get here?" I asked.

"They break into banks, why not into Alta Serafina?" Newberry countered.

"I suppose nobody here knows him?" spoke out Herron.

"Sure," said Newberry promptly.

"Eh? You do?" Herron jerked around. "Then who is he? What is he?"

"Allan Wilson by name, Chief. He's the one I've been dealing with all the while, in the Silver Syndicate."

The name, the words, meant nothing to me; but the face of Herron changed. It hardened, became cold and angry; he said nothing, however.

I WAS watching Brett, though not overtly. I surprised startled surmise in his eyes, a glance along the trail, a swift scrutiny of the ground. He knew now why Mona Vindon had seemed so strange, why she had got him away from here. Or did he? At all events, he had recalled the meeting.

He said nothing. As a matter of fact, Brett seldom or never opened his mouth in presence of Newberry. Among these three men, as I was shortly to learn, existed a singular intimacy, a relationship strange and terrible or beautiful, according to the viewpoint.

Herron gestured to me, walked across to the next bench, and sat down. He bit at a cigar and extended another to me. Newberry and Brett were examining the corpse.

"What d'you think of this murder, Gordon?" asked Herron.

"Ask Lafe," I said. "He's your man for details, and they're fairly obvious. Cigarette-stubs under the bench; fresh clothes, good clothes on the corpse, but his suit is badly spotted. By the way, if he's not a guest, how did he come here?"

"That's the question. What d'ye mean by turning up your nose at details and clues?"

"I'm not sure, to be frank." I lit the cigar. "To me, it vaguely seems that larger things will loom more important, Dan. Causes, personalities—what shall I say? As though forces were at work. You'll probably think I'm crazy."

"I think you're dead right!" he broke out. "I can't take this in hand as I should. I'm working day and night in two directions. First, with three of our lawyers who are here, effecting a complete reorganization of my affairs; that's the big thing. Second, on a tremendous story with Lafe, he and I together. I suppose his mention of the Silver Syndicate meant nothing to you?"

"Nothing at all."

"It's our private designation for the most secret and powerful gambling group on this continent. I'm not against gambling on moral grounds. But the men at the top of this ring are beyond the law. I'm down on men like that. You may remember that my radio interests exposed and blew up the Big Ten in the psychic racket. . . . You may remember how Murder, Incorporated, was blown up. That's what we're going to do with these gambling big-shots: Blow hell out of them, not by newspaper publicity, but by radio and movies."

He paused, champing at his cigar, then went on:

"Lafe has ferreted out their secrets, their plans, everything; now he's working on the men higher up. They'll be men not a soul suspects of such activity, Gordon; men highly placed, able, respectable, who think in millions and get their profit in millions."

A wry smile twisted his strong lips as he stared out at the gulf. I surprised a quick weariness in his rugged fighting features.

"Gambling, one of the great sources of wealth in the world today—handbooks, lotteries, numbers, little and big games. A source of power for men who already have wealth. Release from the monotony of fat desires! It offers power to those cowards who want to fight while

risking nothing, and to keep themselves hidden!"

Disdain and scorn flamed within him. Human, prodigal of mistakes, spendthrift of money and energy—Dan Herron was all this, but he was no weakling and no hypocrite.

"So this man was one of Lafe's stool pigeons," I said. "Is that why he's dead?"

"I doubt it," Herron replied. "We're not crusading against gambling, remember. Our sole objective is to expose the men at the top; only Lafe and I know this. I have the feeling that there's more behind this murder; the hidden forces you mentioned, perhaps."

Abruptly he dismissed this subject, and spoke confidentially.

"For the next few days I'm absolutely tied up with lawyers; this reorganization of the airplane industry and other interests have me sewed up. So let me explain here and now about Brett. We were in college together; he's younger than I am. About that murder mess in Paris: I pulled him out of it. Rather, Lafe did, with my backing. Got him acquitted. None the less, his whole life was wrecked, so I gave him shelter here. Great things in Brett, great things!"

He puffed anew, squinting out at the opposite peaks.

"Lafe pulled the finest thing a man ever did," he mused. "He fixed up an alibi that overbore all the evidence; and Brett did look damnably guilty. You see, it was Lafe's wife he was accused of murdering."

What bombs can be loosed in a word or two! Here was sketched human drama and anguish unequaled. Glancing at Newberry, I tried to match this with my appraisal of him, and failed.

"Did Newberry believe him guilty?" I asked.

Herron shook his head. "No. Brett convinced him that he was innocent; I knew such a barbaric crime was quite impossible to him, also. So Lafe went to work, and managed it. And here are the two of them, pulling a dead man's pocket to pieces!"

I got a new line on this man Brett, as he was now named, while I watched him carefully sorting the various objects from Wilson's pockets. His impassive, inhuman fixity took on color. The reason slipped into my mind—not clearly, but enough to register. He was not a resentful hermit savagely hating the world; rather, he was progressing, keeping in motion, moving forward to some deep inner goal that he alone knew. I began to want to know this man.

"By the way, Dan, I met your Uncle Pascal this morning," I said, smiling.

"Oh!" Herron wakened and turned to me, his abstraction gone in a swift laugh. "You ought to get really acquainted; the old boy is a human wonder, and a character such as never was before! His wife, Aunt Martha, is pretty much an invalid. They stay here the year around, and Pascal potters around with books and such. Well, I'm due back at the office. Two this afternoon, remember."

HE rose abruptly. As he did so, the other two men separated. Newberry came toward us, while Brett strode rapidly off by the eastern trail.

"Going to get the guy out of sight," said Newberry, in his flat, level way. "Dan, you and Keyne come and look over this stuff. Never can tell."

I am not sure to this day whether he already knew what we would find. Probably he guessed it, at all events.

We stood looking down at the odds and ends taken from Wilson. Keys, wallet, handkerchiefs, a lighter and such things. Lying with the wallet was a little sheaf of papers and envelopes. Newberry picked them up and spread them apart. All three of us saw it at once—a white envelope addressed to Daniel Parker Herron. Without a word, Newberry shoved it aside from the others. Herron reached forward and took it.

He tore it open and pulled out the sole contents: a check. He glanced at this, and his jaw fell. We crowded close. The check was certified. It was made out to Herron. It was issued by and on the Trinity Trust & Savings Bank and it was for two hundred thousand dollars.

"Small potatoes!" Upon the silence broke Newberry's jeering voice.

"What d'you mean?" snapped Herron. "Why would the Trinity Trust send me this?"

"Oh, merely as a bribe; it's perhaps one per cent of the Silver Syndicate's annual take," said the reporter calmly. "They hope you'll take the cash and let the story go."

"Bribe?" Herron exploded suddenly. "How d'you know that? Where'd they get the idea I could be bribed? Why would they dare try such a thing on me?"

"I guess I'm responsible, Chief," said Newberry.

"You? Explain."

"Well, I needed some motion in the back row. Y' see, Chief, when you begin poking into the Silver Syndicate, you're reminded of a nest of snakes. All the little reptiles down in front, rolled into a ball, while the big ones lie flat and sluggish, hard to pick out in the mess. So I dropped a word that you had a walloping big note coming due soon and couldn't meet it."

At this, Herron really did explode.

"I don't owe anyone a thin dime, blast your impudence!" he concluded more coherently. "To have such a rumor get around, just now when our reorganization is pending—"

"Cheer up, Chief, it won't," Newberry broke in coolly. "You agreed with me, a couple of weeks ago, that it was imperative to learn whether our source of information was reliable and close to the top. I slipped Wilson the word; he went to headquarters with the news, and headquarters acted. Therefore Wilson was considered entirely responsible; he was also close to the top."

"So this man was the one you were working with!"

"Yes. Now we can go ahead and break the story. If the syndicate can trust his judgment for this much money, I can trust what he told me."

"That doesn't follow, Lafe." Herron was in action now, alert and positive. "He could have transmitted your blasted financial tip through a dozen hands!"

"Sure. But would they have passed this certified piece of larceny back through those twelve hands? Not likely. Wilson was close to the top of the grapevine."

"And he's the fellow you've been so damned mysterious about, eh? See here—d'you think they may be on to us—that he was killed because he talked to you?"

"Not with a certified check for two hundred grand in his pocket," said Newberry. "They'd not hand you a bribe with one hand and a bunch of trouble with the other. If they had killed him, he would simply have disappeared. They're not gangsters, to advertise their killings. Not much! They're too clever."

Herron nodded his acceptance of this theory.

"How did you make him loosen up at all, Lafe?"

Newberry grinned. "Remember the card that used to stand on your desk in the New York office, Chief? It said: *'The best oil to use on a crook's jawbone is fear.'* Well, I just knew enough at first to make Wilson think I really knew a lot; and I did know something about his past. I got him believing that the syndicate aimed to throw him to the wolves if things got hot. To make sure they wouldn't throw him without taking a slide themselves, Wilson gave me chapter, book and verse. I promised, in return, to deal him out completely in any gambling story that might break. Well, he's been dealt out now—poor fellow!"

Newberry's words were sympathetic, but his eyes remained hard and bright as two polished steel-blue gunsights.

Herron glanced at his watch.

"The devil! I must be on my way. Lafe, see you this afternoon; we'll have to make some decision about this business. You and Keyne get somewhere on it, if you can."

"And you'd better tuck that check out of sight and sit tight," said Newberry. "Or do you need my advice?"

"I do not. So long!"

Herron turned, took the steps that led to the Lodge two at a time, and was gone. He had the gait of an athlete.

NEWBERRY, who had worn no hat, was palming his round head, his eyes flitting about uncertainly. He observed: "Hm! It's a wonder to me that Wilson could lie there undiscovered all morning until you happened along—what with guards, guests and caretakers, the estate fairly swarms with life."

"You mentioned his past," I said, gesturing toward the corpse.

"A bad one, a dirty one," he nodded.

"I suppose it'll mean no end of a scandal when the authorities go into it."

"What authorities, Keyne?" he asked.

"Sheriff's office, I suppose."

He shook his head. "They'll not mix in it until we find the killer. And that, if I'm any judge, means Mr. Fate."

"Hold on," I exclaimed. "You don't mean you'd conceal this murder?"

"Why not?" His gaze was hard.

"That's a felony."

"Not unless it's found out. When it is, we'll have the killer. No sheriff will worry about trifles when he gets a murderer handed him on a silver platter."

"That's fantastic," I exclaimed. "Not even Daniel Parker Herron can get away with that sort of thing!"

Newberry stared at me.

"Now look," he said. "I deal with facts; you deal with fiction. That's a swell combination, if we play ball. You

know a lot I'd like to know. The Chief said to spill everything; we'd better get on the job. For me, the job is double; find Mr. Fate and solve this damned puzzle—and protect the Chief. Get it?"

"Yes," I said. There was something about him which kept me from blurting out that I had not been the first to discover this dead man.

"You can help me protect him," Newberry went on, "by keeping your trap shut about due process of law and so forth. I'll spill the reason now, before Brett returns. Then we'll go to work on the case."

"But why not bring in the law?" I objected. "Herron would be the first to say so; he has nothing to hide and nothing to fear—"

"He has plenty!" snapped the reporter. "Even if he doesn't know it! Don't tell me you haven't heard the rumors about the Chief and Mona Vindon?"

The ground began to feel shaky. It was no secret that they were in love, were engaged, and had been for a long time past, but that they remained unmarried. Some of the rumors were ugly, naturally.

"They were almost married last year," he went on, not pausing for a reply. "Everything stopped dead. Why? I didn't know myself, then. I know now. When two and two make four, I can see it; when they make twenty-two, I'm puzzled. You're aware that she had a husband?"

I assented. Every movie fan knew of the heart-wrenching romance of Mona Vindon. She had been married years ago, as a mere child, to some aviator who later crashed and died. It was the old *Lady Blessington* story of a girl sold into marriage to a brute. All the world had rejoiced with Mona when her husband died; they had been separated but not divorced.

Newberry nodded as I sketched what I knew.

"Correct. All true, too, except that her husband crashed and died," he said placidly. "Let me give you the straight of it. His name was Underwood."

He told it simply. Back in the days of short commons and no luck and utter desperation, before the movies brought her fame, Mona's husband flew for money. He became a dope-smuggler; the F.B.I. got on his trail, and that finished him. When he crashed and burned to death south of the border, his passing was a public and private benefit.

"When I got into touch with Wilson on this Silver Syndicate story," went on Newberry, with that sardonic glint deepening in his pale eyes, "I sensed something familiar about him, but was slow to place it. About three weeks ago I placed it. Underwood didn't die in that plane crash. It was a blind to make the Federal men check him off as dead. He was smart enough to know that if you want to fool the dicks, you must fool the entire world. So even Mona thought him dead. I did too, until I placed this guy Wilson for what he really was."

The truth burst upon me:

"Good Lord! So that's it! And that's why the marriage was halted—the man got in touch with Herron, perhaps blackmailed him!"

"Sure. But Herron never dreamed he was this fellow—didn't recognize him this morning, naturally." Newberry paused. "I don't have the usual stock notions about murder, Keyne. I don't believe it's always a crime. This Wilson was a louse. But now you see why it can't be passed on to the authorities—why the Chief must be made to abandon any such notion. I don't want to tell him, of course. But he'd be in the soup, Mona would be in the soup—her first husband murdered, here on the Chief's estate! Boy, what a yellow-sheet holiday it would be! Now d'you get it?"

I nodded dumbly. This dead man on the bench was actually Underwood, and Herron did not suspect it.

But I knew now why Mona Vindon had been in such panic terror when she saw him lying there.

CHAPTER THREE

OUR conversation was abruptly ended when Brett came into sight, trundling a hand truck on which was an enormous wicker laundry basket. He pulled the thing close to the bench, opened the basket, and produced a camera and tripod. Wordless, efficient, he began to photograph the corpse and the scene from various angles.

"Our Mr. Fate must be a grisly sort of joker," I said. "Remember his advice—when an uninvited guest was killed, to look below him?"

Newberry ignored my remark.

"I'm going to cast about while the ground's untrodden," he said. "Back in five minutes. Wait for me, and then we'll join the cocktail crowd up above."

He circled about the flagstones, eying the ground, and I joined Brett. He gave me a nod and a quick look; he was putting away his camera.

"Got to have the pictures when the sheriff asks questions," he said. "And the coroner."

The man radiated a calm strength; he attracted me. It was not mere curiosity, but a swift interest.

Newberry had passed out of sight and hearing along the western trail. So, as Brett began to wrap up the stuff taken from the dead man's pockets, penciling each neat little packet, I obeyed the impulse.

"So the man's a stranger, an uninvited guest!" I said.

He nodded. "Apparently Newberry knew him, but no one else."

"Don't you?" I asked. His head jerked up, and he looked at me.

"I? Heavens, no! Never saw him before in my life, Mr. Keyne."

"I wonder,"—I meditated audibly,—"whether he knew what he was after? Or was he too so savagely intent upon his prize that he died without ever realizing just what it was?"

Brett caught his breath slightly. His eyes widened on me. No doubt he had been puzzling over why Mona Vindon should have been so anxious to cover up her agitation and to steer him away from here, earlier that morning.

"So what?" he breathed, a challenge in his gaze.

I smiled. "That remains to be seen, Captain Brett. Apparently our views on astrology coincide, and—"

I was cut short. Newberry's voice drove at us, thinly urgent; he was out of sight up the path, but his words were meant for us.

"Cover up, quick! Uncle Pascal's coming."

Brett moved like a flash. From the basket he jerked out a blanket and flung it over the corpse. I was astonished by sight of his face; it was suddenly alive with emotion, with feeling, as though a mask had been lifted. And it was a fine, chiseled face as I saw it now.

"For God's sake, get the old man away from here!" he said softly. "I'll look you up later. I understand."

I swung around. A clatter of heels sounded from the stone steps, and there was Pascal Herron tripping down—a gnome with side-whiskers and a cheerful grin. As I advanced to meet him, he spoke sharply.

"Hello, hello! What's going on here? Ah, it's you, Mr. Keyne. Where's Lafe Newberry? Come out from hiding, you rascal! I heard your voice. What's going on here?"

Newberry appeared on the trail, but hung off. I caught Pascal's arm, thankful for the few words Herron had given me about the man.

"Hush!" I said gravely. "You might think that some repairs were being made to that bench, and that Captain Brett was taking a photograph of the view opposite; far from it, Mr. Herron! In reality, a corpse lies beneath that blanket, a hideously murdered corpse, and another one in that laundry-basket!"

He broke into a laugh. "You're the fiction-writer, eh? I found out about you."

"Right. And Dan was telling me that you're fond of books. If there's time before lunch, do you suppose—"

INSTANTLY he turned me to the stairs and plunged into a torrent of speech as he urged me upward. I was a little slow to get the connection, for his remarks apparently had to do with some archæological discovery on the site of Troy. As we gained the upper flight of stone steps, however, and he guided me away from the looming Main House toward the cottages at the right, I began to get the man ticketed.

Pascal Herron was an ardent passer-on of superficial information. He had a weekly half-hour "column," as he called it—actually a talk over one of the Herron broadcasting stations, filled with queer scraps of information, supposedly cultural. His "column" had attained great popularity, too.

"Have you read Kaempfer's scholarly monograph? It recasts all our ideas of the Siege of Troy, which really lasted nine months instead of ten years!" he was chattering volubly. "The Iliad is merely a collection of soldier-legends. There was no Wooden Horse; that was a tunnel under the walls, with wooden beams or supports. Troy was not burned, either, being built of stone. Aeneas—"

So he rambled along till we reached his cottage. He ushered me into a study lined to the ceiling with books.

I murmured something about luncheon. He said it was still an hour off, and

shoved me into a chair. As by magic he had an *aperitif* before me, plumped himself into another chair—and with a word had me sitting upright, startled.

"How queer that those two men should be so amicable! I refer to Brett and the reporter Newberry. You know the hideous story."

THE relish he put into the word *hideous* showed what a gossip he was.

"Dan mentioned the matter," I replied. "But it's none of my business, so—"

"I'll tell you the whole truth," he broke in: "Newberry's wife was murdered, brutally stabbed. And bloody fingerprints of the killer were found. They were Brett's prints! He was not known then as Brett—handier to keep the name. He was an old college friend of my nephew Dan. It has the horror of a Greek tragedy, the fascination of a plot by Euripides! Well, I've learned that you're a writer of detective stories. Look at the opportunity given you here!"

His impish manner is beyond description. And he was right. The story he was unfolding to me did have a certain horrible fascination, especially in view of what Herron had said about Newberry's splendid action. I threw off my scruples.

"The stories," I said, "are conflicting. Dan, for example, vows that Brett was not the murderer."

"Bosh!" broke in my host. "He's under Brett's thumb! Afraid of him, that's what I am; afraid of him! You'd better be afraid of Brett too. He'd murder us all if he had the chance. He's everywhere about here—now as a guard, now as a guest."

"He struck me as a fine sort of man," I said, reflecting that Pascal Herron must be a trifle flighty.

"Just the same, he fights with everybody. Well, now—Newberry's wife wasn't a bit wild, but she played around the way some young women do. She was at some night-spot and came home, and Newberry found her dead next morning—he had been in London and came back to find that!"

"Then Brett and the Newberrys were friends?" I inquired.

"Didn't know each other," he chirped. "But they got the fingerprints, and Brett had been at the night-spot that night, earlier. Just running everyone down, they found the prints fitted him, and they jugged him, and it was a hell of a scandal. Then Newberry finally got him out of it. Fixed up an alibi for him, see? And put money where it'd do the most good. Oh, you can get away with anything in these Latin countries if you know what palms to grease! Dan should have left the man alone. I tell you, he's a false friend!"

I saw clearly that he had a down on Brett. He was flighty and had no doubt talked a lot, and either Herron or Brett had shut him up hard. Just to prove it, I tested this out.

"Well, I'll tell Dan what you've just said—"

"Don't you breathe a word of it!" he cried at me. "This is confidential, so you can use it in a story. I'll tell you things about Dan, too, that you might use. I know some fine secrets!" He winked solemnly at me. "Historical things, too. D'you know why Hannibal did not take Rome when he had the chance?"

"No," I said. The leprechaun had become a child, to be humored.

"Because he had a dream, showing him that Carthage would fall under the weight of conquered Rome. And Genghis Khan turned back from India for the same reason; he had a dream that he'd die if he set foot in Tibet. Oh, I like to root out queer things!"

"Then tell me where Sir Francis Bacon is buried," I said wickedly, thinking to settle his hash for good and all. To my amazement, he shook his head.

"No. I know, but I can't tell yet. In a certain place in Durham Cathedral; and it's down in the records as Francis Paston. Can't tell more till it's been authenticated. I'll talk about it in my column some Sunday. Next week is to be about Friar Bacon and how he got the secret of gunpowder from an Egyptian merchant who died in London in 1374. The Egyptian, whose name was Hadad, got it from Arabian seamen who were attacked by Chinese pirates. And—"

I tore myself away, but he followed me outside despite my protests.

"You know the man you saw this morning?" he rattled on. "Raja Naga. A great man, Mr. Keyne, a wonderful man! He reads the stars as we read a written page. You must make his acquaintance. He has rendered Miss Vindon great services. He has saved her from many errors and has helped her to fame."

I got rid of him at last, sighting Newberry heading for the cottage, and meeting him near the sunken gardens. The

entire south side of the Main House and cottages was taken up by these gardens; they were marvels of nature suited to the altitude.

"Well, I see he's been blatting away as usual," said Newberry, with his slightly mocking grin. "You look damned glad to be rid of him. Suppose we sit here and get down to brass tacks, then separate and meet later on?"

"Suits me," I rejoined, accompanying him to one of the benches.

"We've just time before lunch to cover the field," he said, shifting some folded papers from his pocket. "I've typed out a list for you—names, if you need 'em. Besides you folks and me, eleven guests. Three are Dan's lawyers—check 'em off. Leaves eight."

"Why all the rigmarole?" I demanded.

He grimaced. "What the hell! Don't you do it in every whodunit you hammer out? Seriously, Keyne, Wilson was killed on that bench, by someone here; 'Mr. Fate' predicted it. Therefore Mr. Fate is somebody here."

I nodded. Oddly enough, since a mere word with Captain Brett, I had ceased to think of him as either a murderer or an ex-murderer.

Among the caretakers and other employees, who ran to a staggering number, it was of course possible to seek our man; but not probable. All were steady help, well known, and the only exceptions were the chauffeurs of several guests.

NEWBERRY, in his emotionless way, astonished me by proposing that I inform Herron of the dead man's identity, when I saw him after lunch. The reporter said frankly that he shrank from doing so, and that it would come better from me.

"Besides, I've got other things to look into—that check, for one," he said. "And at two-thirty the Chief has one hell of an important conference with those lawyers. If you spill the news, it'll buck him up. Nothing to stop the marriage now, see? You and I are the only ones to know who Wilson is. Besides, he'll appreciate the necessity of hushing this thing up."

I took the matter under advisement, promising nothing; and we went back to routine exposition of the situation; none the less, my mind played with the possibilities of giving Herron this startling information. . . .

A good half of the Main House was out of use. The guests here, aside from the three legal lights, were on hand for a party that was to be given two nights hence; Newberry confided to me that it was a birthday party for Mona Vindon—a surprise to everyone concerned. No one else had thus far been informed of it.

All the other eight guests were in the Main House. The three lawyers were in one of the cottages. Mona herself, with her secretary, occupied another cottage. Herron's quarters were in the main building.

However, Newberry had no interest in the list of guests. Our business, he said, was not so much to find the murderer as to hush up the murder; and he was right.

"Let's wait till morning; then we'll meet with Herron and settle things—say at eleven o'clock," he concluded. "You can give him this information about Wilson, and keep your eye peeled for anything else. I'll check on some leads of my own."

I agreed. I said nothing about my glimpse of Mona Vindon; it was not important, and was something of a secret between me and Brett, for the moment. Noon was approaching. We rose and started away, and Newberry said thoughtfully:

"You know, the bitterest congressional election in years is coming up here in California in a few months. And one of Dan Herron's tangled radio affairs is his control of a whole string of small stations, up and down the State. The local politicians would give their eye-teeth to get his political support!"

"There's a Federal law about—"

"And there are tricks in all trades." Newberry winked, sagely. "Look here; suppose we meet in the bar at five for a cocktail? I might have some news about that whopping big check to impart."

I agreed. We were nearing our destination. Before us was opening the magnificent loggia with its gay sun-umbrellas, guests grouped everywhere and waiters passing about. Beyond was the central living-room, where a buffet luncheon was set—no formality, just do as you prefer. Newberry showed me where the washrooms were, and I left him.

After a quick clean-up, I came back upon the luncheon scene. Seeking Mary, I surprised what struck me at the moment as a slightly ludicrous brawl of words between two men who disliked each other. But after the first moment, I realized that it merely continued a scene of which I had witnessed the first passages earlier this morning.

Remembering the status of Brett in this place, and all Pascal Herron had said, I was not astonished when I came upon Captain Brett, no longer in his uniform, but now in white flannels.

They were all in one corner of the big room. Brett, his face like a thundercloud, stood facing the swarthy, handsome Raja Naga; Mona Vindon sat looking at them uneasily, beside a table that was being set by two waiters; and just beyond her sat Mary, who caught my eye and made a slight gesture that halted me. None of the others noticed me.

"You are wrong," Raja Naga was saying, with a superbly suave manner that did not quite hide his sneer. "The stars are immutable sentinels of eternity, watchers knowing and serene. Students and seers may say yes or no, but they care nothing, nor will they bend one moment toward another, no matter how you beseech them. But though they are inflexible, do not believe them to have no connection with your destiny."

"Tripe!" said Brett. "I'm not polite about it, either. The stars didn't tell you that death was close at hand, did they?" At this, Mona Vindon tried to check him, but he went on harshly: "They didn't warn you that someone was dying last night, did they?"

"All that death means, is another life," said the Hindu, for such he was. "Shall I tell to you a little parable of India, about death?"

IF Brett did not want to hear it, Mary and Mona did, and said so. Raja Naga's voice was flexible as an actor's.

"The gods had whispered to the prince that there was a jewel in the sunset," he said. "He sent his captain of guards to bring it. The captain bestrode his horse and went, but he came not back. The prince dispatched another and another, until a score of his best warriors had gone; but none returned. At last he, old and failing, went himself, and found the jewel—which was death. None may send for that which is in the sunset."

Raja Naga bowed and saluted the ladies.

Suddenly Brett smiled, and that acid smile of his was poised and calm again. "Look, Raja! I'll give you a better one: I'll match your inspired bit of nonsense with the story of an old woman from a Chinatown alley. I'll tell you of blue lagoons and pagodas against a twilight sky like ideographs of finest brush-strokes. I'll tell you of a brazen bell whose throat held a sound so human and so divine that a tale was told of it: the bones of a god were burned beneath it in the making, and its heat was quenched in the tears of a thousand wives bewailing their dead! I'll tell of a mountain so serene and high that its crest is a blowing veil in the face of eternal light; a sword so keen that tigers who behold it are like kittens forever after; a river so broad that on one side they pray at moonrise, and on the other bank the sun looks back at night!

"Here in this land of enchanted surprises are maidens more fair than the robes of an emperor on a throne of milky jade! Here trees are rooted deep in honeyed wells, and birds sing endless praise to the goddess of mercy. And where is this land? It is not to be found on the globes of scholars; nor may it be told of by returning travelers. Come—where is it, Raja Naga?"

The Hindu, disdainfully aloof, held his peace. Brett smiled, and his smile was no longer bitter, but very tender.

"Why, it's in the heart of my youngest child!" he said. "Or so, at least, spoke Ng Li, so long ago that the hills he lived beneath are now in sandy beaches on the eastern shore."

"I think the gods have spoken through your lips," Raja Naga said simply, and turning, he strode away.

Brett glanced after him with thinly narrowed eyes; that unexpected praise had been unpleasant. He swung around, spoke to the two women briefly, and also strode away.

I came forward, shook hands with Mona, and took the chair between the two.

"Well, this is about the rummiest go that I ever ran into!" I said. "What was it—a contest in parlor stories?"

Mona Vindon tried to smile, but her eyes were wide and dark.

"I'm afraid it was deeper than that," she said.

"Well, let me in on the secret," I said. "Let me in on it, Miss Vindon, and I'll let you in on one of mine that will banish all your most secret fears. I'm a magician too; I'll put to flight all the trouble in your heart. It's a promise."

Mona Vindon stared at me. "You mean that, Mr. Keyne? But you can't know my trouble!"

"Try me," I said, smiling. Mary gave me a puzzled look and stepped hard on my toe, but I ignored her. "Try me.

First, let me in on this byplay between the Seer and the Dark Angel."

"Oh!" The words struck a spark in Mona's eyes. "You're really a mystic?"

"Try me," I said.

She drew a deep breath. "Well—it's nothing new. Raja Naga and Mr. Brett were in Paris at the same time, and Brett doesn't believe in astrology or psychic powers, or at least in Raja Naga's kind, and they just aren't friends. And now they got into an argument, and you heard how it ended—and that's all. Why did you call Brett a dark angel?"

I looked at her for a moment. That some intimacy lay between them, I knew from what I had seen this very morning. How deep did it go? How innocent was it? Well—all that was none of my business. Between this Hindu seer and Brett there existed a bitter hatred, which was enough for me.

Taking out a card and a pencil, I scribbled on it:

"What threatened you this morning is gone forever. Forget it."

I was about to sign it, quizzically, with the name of Mr. Fate—and checked myself. I could barely repress an exclamation, and stared down at the table with a startled pulse-leap coursing through me.

"Your promise, please!" exclaimed Mona Vindon.

I looked up, met her eyes, and held out the card. "Show it to no one—not even to Mary here! Agreed?"

She nodded. She took the card, read the words, lifted frightened eyes to me again—and across her lovely, delicate features swept a rose-pink color.

But I was still thinking of the card and the pencil in my hand, and the signature I had not jotted down; for I believed that I had suddenly comprehended who, or what, Mr. Fate was.

"DAN," I said gravely, "I'm afraid you'll have to let me stick my nose into your private affairs, so pin your ears back meekly. I've a thing or two that I must tell you. A peculiar set of circumstances has given me, in the few hours I've been here, more information about you, possibly, than I'll obtain all the rest of my life."

Herron laughed and extended cigars.

"Smoke up, and go as far as you like, Gordon!" he exclaimed. "I'm free until two-thirty. And after tomorrow, thank God, I'll not be tied up with lawyers and shall be free as a bird day and night!"

"Perhaps freer than you think," I said. That caught him, and banished his mirth.

Two o'clock had come and gone, and I sat in Herron's sanctum—the two of us alone. Luncheon had afforded me no opportunity of private speech with Mona Vindon, or to be honest, I had evaded any such opportunity. So far as Mary was concerned, she was the one female in ten thousand who could hold curiosity in check.

"I suppose," Herron observed, lighting a cigar with his usual care, "Uncle Pascal has been telling you my life's history?"

"He hasn't opened his mouth about you, Dan. He's an interesting old chap; his mental angle is pitiful and needs correcting; it's not good for him to be stuck away here, out of the world."

"I know it; but you can't do anything with Uncle Pascal; God himself can't!" Herron grimaced wryly. Then he broke into a smile. "Listen, Gordon; don't hesitate to go to bat with anything that's on your mind. What's this all about?"

I took him at his word. "Miss Vindon's husband."

He drew at his cigar for a moment, then laid it down. A curious change took place in him; he leaned back in his creaking desk chair, and became utterly relaxed—which warned me of his intense concentration. It is only in Hollywood that concentration requires knotted brow and tense attitude.

"So you know he's alive, do you?" he said quietly. Then, not giving me a chance to speak, he went on rapidly:

"It's been a terrible ordeal, Gordon; I'm thankful you do know, thankful that I can lighten the burden by confiding in you. Yes, he's alive; I haven't dared breathe it to a soul, not even to Lafe. Alive, and blackmailing me! And I have preached that there should be no compromise with blackmailers!"

He uttered a harsh, bitter laugh. "And I'm helpless. Not for my own sake; if that hophead dared to show himself, dared to come alive, I'd have him clapped into a Federal prison in five minutes—if I were alone in the matter! But it's Mona. She doesn't dream he isn't dead. And if this fellow came to life publicly, think what it'd mean to

her! We're both prominent; rumor has been at work already because we're not married. This rascal could bring down the vultures of publicity—another *Eugene Aram* case! And it'd wreck her."

"Did you ever see this man?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No. He's worked by telephone and by letter. If he ever revealed to Mona that he was alive—I don't know what she'd do!"

"I know what she'd do," I said, and smiled. "She'd probably be scared to death lest you discover the matter. You'd better go find her, Dan, and get the thing all cleared up!"

He stared at me. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"She discovered that corpse this morning, before I did, and recognized him. And your Lafe Newberry knew him; Wilson was really Underwood. Newberry asked me to break it to you—he shrank from doing it, he said. I rather doubt that he'd shrink from anything, but none the less—"

The jolt took Herron off his feet for a moment. He tried to speak and could not. It was a revelation of all the pent depths of his emotion, of his soul-harried worry. He was still trying to assimilate all that my words implied, when the buzzer sounded; he threw the interphone switch and replied.

"Captain Brett is here, sir," said Lennihan's voice.

"Oh! Yes, all right; send him in." He swung around to me, and his face was radiant. "By glory, you've given me the best day's news I've had in years! If I knew who killed that scoundrel, I'd give him ten thousand dollars and help him make his get-away!"

"Better ask Mr. Fate who did it," I said. "Oh, that reminds me! I wanted to tell you—"

THE door opened and Brett came in. His entrance cut me short. It was no moment to reveal what I had discovered about Mr. Fate.

Herron leaped up. Years had fallen away from him, and he was like a boy.

He exclaimed: "Well, Brett? Anything special?"

"Might be." Brett regarded him in some astonishment. "Why, you look as though you'd just won the Sweepstakes!"

Herron laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. "Better than that; Keyne just brought me some grand news. I must hurry away with it. He'll tell you! No secrets from Brett, Gordon."

"Well, I've found how Wilson got into the estate," said Brett.

Herron stopped short. "As a corpse or a live man?"

"Oh, he was killed on that bench—the blood's proof enough. But he was driven in, curled up in the luggage-compartment of some guest's car. The dirt and grease spotting his clothes gave the clue."

"Whose car?"

"No telling, as yet. He may have stolen a ride in."

"Good! Keyne will tell you more about him—"

"Hold on!" I broke in. "If you don't mind, I'd like to get Brett's help in a little job."

"Sure!" said Herron, from the door. "Brett, do whatever he wants, like a good chap."

With that, he was gone. I looked at Brett, and suddenly he laughed.

"I've been hoping for a word with you," he said. "The remark you made to me, there at Land's End, was an amazing thing, but I suppose it's all right."

"Yes," I said. "Miss Vindon had discovered the corpse, when you met her this morning. What's more, she had recognized it. I was just telling Herron who it was: Underwood—her husband. He wasn't dead, as had been supposed."

"Oh!" said Brett, and there were volumes in the word.

He got out a cigarette and lit it. In his white flannels, he looked trim and fit, but not the soldierly figure he cut when in uniform. His features were curiously softened, now. He was thinking back to that meeting with Mona Vindon, probably trying to figure out how I knew of it. I helped him.

"No mystery, Brett. I was sitting directly above you among the ferns; neither of you noticed me."

He flashed me a glance, broke into a quick laugh, and his face cleared. Moment by moment, he was a totally different person from the Brett whom I had seen this morning, in the presence of Newberry.

"I owe you one for that, Keyne," he said. "You popped in on my bout with Raja Naga; no doubt you thought we were both crazy?"

"More or less," I rejoined.

"The fellow's a blasted fake—no picayune stuff, but plays for big money in high circles. I don't like Miss Vindon to be a dupe, that's all. Now, what did you want me to do?"

I accepted his explanation without comment, though I did not believe it.

"First, change into your uniform," I told him. "Then get six or eight pounds of flour, about three hundred feet of stout manila rope to let you down a precipice, several small paper sacks, and two strong men to handle the rope and you. Meet me at Land's End in twenty minutes."

"Okay," he said. Turning, he departed without a single question.

I LOOKED up Mary, found that she and Mona Vindon were still as inseparable as ham and eggs, and went my way to Land's End. There I saw only a stain to speak of the tragedy that had marked the spot—a stain on the bench. I sat down and waited. When Brett at length appeared, in uniform, announcing that the two men and the things I wanted would be along in a moment, I told him why.

He knew nothing about Mr. Fate, so I did not go into this phase of the matter, although it was that message which lingered in my mind, with its "look below him." Instead, I drew his attention to the narrow stone bench, dangerously close on the brink of that dizzy gulf; in fact, it would never have been allowed there in any public place. If Wilson had been murdered, he could easily have been knocked over the edge—or first shot and then knocked over. However, suppose he had shot himself? The powder stains on his dead face allowed for such a theory.

"If he did shoot himself," I concluded, "the gun might have fallen from his hand and gone over the verge—and the gun can be found."

Brett heard my scheme, shrugged, and agreed as his men came on the scene.

The average revolver weighs between one and two pounds; so we made the flour into two-pound lots, wrapping each little paper sack well with twine. One by one we dropped them off, at the end of the stone bench where Wilson's head had lain. One by one we watched them drip flour at every contact with the cliff, as they fell. One by one they burst and became white spots, down below where the first trees grew and the rock face bulged outward.

Then Brett went down, with the two men tailing on to the rope. I would have liked to go myself, but I had regretfully abandoned the thrill of discovery along with my youthful waistline some years ago. I hoped that the trail of those flour-sacks would approximate that of the pistol—if there were a pistol. . . .

After half an hour Brett came up; he had a bundle stuffed under his shirt, and did not disclose its contents until he had sent the two men away with the rope. Then he sat down on the bench with me, took out the objects wrapped in his handkerchief, and carefully bared them to sight.

"Don't touch 'em," he cautioned me.

Here was a handsome .38 automatic pistol, unusual in that it had an ornamental silver plate in the butt; nothing was engraved on this plate, however. To the weapon was tied a four-foot length of cord; and the cord led to a piece of lead pipe pounded into a chunk as big as one's fist.

"It's what the French would call an engine—not meaning what we'd mean, however," Brett said gravely. "Get the idea? Wilson simply hung the weight over the end of the bench and shot himself. The pull of the weight dragged down the gun."

"Even better than I thought," I commented. "Plain suicide, eh?"

"That," said Brett, "is obvious."

"And now what? To Herron with the whole thing?"

He shook his head thoughtfully, rolling up the bundle again.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not. I want to go over this carefully for fingerprints."

"Are you a criminologist?"

He lifted his head and looked me full in the face, a way he had.

"No. But I'm particularly interested in prints—I'm pretty good there. I'm not through with the body and so forth. I've a lot to do tonight. Suppose we let this ride and say nothing of it till morning, then take it up with Herron."

"Right," I assented. Newberry and I were to meet with Herron at eleven. I must regretfully admit to a sneaking desire to put something over on the famous Lafe Newberry, and to achieve something independently of him. Still, it occurred to me that this might not be cricket.

"Do you," I asked, "want to get Newberry in on this? He's working on it, you know."

Brett looked at me anew, looked at me for a full half minute, and I read queer things in his face.

"I'd rather not," he said slowly, as though feeling out my attitude.

"Okay, then," I replied. "Suits me. Nine in the morning with Herron."

"And I'll leave word with Lennihan," Brett added, "so we'll be sure to see him at nine. If you need to get word with me meantime, phone my room."

On this, we separated.

As I made my way back to the upper level, I recalled that I had a five o'clock date in the bar with Newberry; he had anticipated unearthing something about the two-hundred-thousand-dollar check.

REACHING the Main House, I ran slap into Mary, who promptly collared me and took me into a corner.

"All right, now come through," she said, and she meant business. "Have I any right to inquire into my husband's rather eccentric silences and actions?"

"No," I said, smiling. After some years, we had attained a pretty good understanding. "Not yet, my dear. By a rare chance given to few whodunit-writers, I have the luck to be on the spot while mystery brews and bubbles, and to breathe the same air with Death; and I don't like it by half, but I can't talk about it."

"All right, then I'll ask no more. The note you gave Mona, whatever it was, made her deliriously happy. She's a different woman; look out she doesn't kiss you. Come along, now, and join us. That Hindu astrology faker is good at tennis; we'll play doubles. Can do?"

We played doubles, for which my waistline fits me better than singles. Luckily, all of us were pretty terrible. Mona—well, I had never imagined her as she now was, a living flame of laughing energy, all her delicate beauty touched with fire. Raja Naga was the best one among us; and before we had played two sets, I was seeing this Hindu in a new light.

Faker he might be, probably was, but he had personality. He had been around a lot; had lived abroad, spoke superb French and German, knew England well. I was anxious to get Mary's angle on him, for she has infernal skill at sizing up people.

The third set finished, we took a table under a sun-umbrella and ordered a drink all around, before going in to bathe and change. As we chatted here, I got a line on some of the other guests, for Mona was discussing them with Mary, and Raja Naga made laughing comments. With him out, there were seven—Mona's secretary did not count.

Princess Gantimiroff, the green-eyed Russian beauty whose title, vitriolic pen and adventuress background had lifted her to cinema fame, came in for some savage digs. Then there was Frederick Lammengeyer, the banker; he was well treated, for he had been Mona's backer in Hollywood; he and his wife were her old friends. Cregar, the socialite from Santa Barbara, poloist and sportsman, whose wife had inherited the soap millions. Last came Norton, European manager of the Herron interests, and his French wife.

A distinguished company, certainly; an odd assemblage, because drawn together by the central figure of Mona Vindon. I recalled that the reason of this assemblage was a surprise of some sort for Mona Vindon; what it was, I neither knew nor cared at the moment. She, however, gave me her hand across the table, as we rose—she was the type of woman who did nothing secretly.

"I want to thank you for that card you gave me at luncheon," she said, and turned to Mary. "My dear, may I steal your husband for—oh, say ten minutes?"

"Well," said Mary critically, "he's rather perspiry and bedraggled and could do with a shave—"

She and Mona broke into laughter together. "Five o'clock, then," said Mona to me, her eyes radiant. "In the cocktail lounge. And Mary shall come too—if she won't listen!"

"Don't be silly," said Mary. "Five o'clock will find me soaking in a hot tub, my dear!"

We broke up, with Raja Naga beaming upon us. As we went to our rooms, I asked Mary what she thought of the Hindu.

"I don't want to think of him," she said simply. "He's far too suave, Gordon; he's dangerous, if you ask me. How long are we going to be here?"

I figured. Today was Wednesday: the party for Mona was Friday night.

"Probably till the end of the week, maybe longer," I said. "Things are happening, Mary. A lot of things are coming to a head here; we've dropped into a hot spot, believe me! You met Brett this noon—learn anything about him?"

She nodded. Mona had told her Brett's story.

"She likes him a lot too," she added. "So do I. I don't know where Herron comes in, though! If she became as radiant over you as she does over Brett

—well, you wouldn't be keeping cocktail dates with her, I can tell you!"

We let it go at that....

I came into the bar a moment or two before five, somewhat hesitantly. I had two engagements for the same time, and could only hope for the best; however, I need not have worried. The bar, or rather lounge, was gorgeous in its simplicity. Every inch of the walls was covered by deep-sea charts fitted together, and the sole decorations were heads of game fish breaking through these charts —deep-sea fishing was Herron's pastime. He had fished all over the world, and these mounted heads came through the charts at the approximate places where each had been caught. A neat idea, neatly put into effect.

Before I knew it, I was stumbling over Newberry. He was in one of the bays, and had a companion, whom he introduced me to—Princess Gantimiroff; both urged me to join them in a drink, and it was hard to refuse. When the Princess turned on what she had, the heat was terrific. I could see that Newberry, despite his blasé soul, was a lost man; but oddly enough the Princess appeared to be really captivated by him.

HOWEVER, catching a glimpse of Mona Vindon coming into the lounge, I refused.

"No, Lafe; I've a date," I said. "Just came to see if you'd done anything about that check. You said to turn up at five."

"Oh, that!" He waved his cigarette grandly. "Let it wait till we see Herron at eleven in the morning, Keyne. Until then, I'll keep the valuable information locked in my own bosom; can't trust you with it."

"Very well," I said rather tartly. "In that case, I'll even the score by keeping what I've learned to myself. Anyhow, there are more important things than work. Let me congratulate you on the discovery!"

The Princess accepted this as tribute to herself, and we parted with a smile and a handshake. I hurried off to join Mona Vindon, who greeted me with lifted brows.

"What, Gordon? Didn't you see that she expected you to kiss her hand?"

"I wasn't raised to that," I said. "Neither was she. Raja Naga had her down pat, if you remember, when he said she was the daughter of some Russian cook, and had worked her way to America *via* the primrose path. Further, I happen to know she's no princess. The last Prince Gantimiroff was Viceroy of Mongolia—he and his entire family were wiped out when the Reds took Russia years ago. She picked a poor monicker."

"Well, she has a good line and gets away with it," said Mona. "That's success as it's usually reckoned. And she certainly has a place in Hollywood any actress might envy, if not too particular. Dan had his own reasons for asking her to come here."

I gathered that the delicate and lovely Mona Vindon had not picked all the guests herself, or for reasons of affection.

We settled down in one of the cushioned bays and gave our order.

"I'm really in love with your Mary," she said, her eyes on me, "and it seems that I'm getting terribly in your debt as well. First for what you told Dan today, and second for the message you gave me at noon. Are you just a good angel who goes about distributing hand-outs of cheer and courage?"

"The wings aren't visible by daylight," I said, smiling. Something warned me that all was not as it should be.

"Well," she stirred her cocktail, still watching me with a curious air, "I don't know what information you gave Dan; he merely said that you had helped him remove all the trouble in the way of our marriage—he would never tell me just what it was, you know. I'll not ask anything about it, either. I never trouble trouble. But I can't imagine how on earth you could know anything about the other! Unless, of course, you're psychic."

The other? I felt as though my brain needed clearing. She had not known about Underwood's being alive—yet she had understood my message.

"Let's get it straight," I evaded. "You were at Land's End this morning."

"No, I wasn't," she said, and smiled. "I started for there, yes."

"But," I blurted, "I caught a glimpse of you running away!"

A startled expression shot through her eyes. She leaned forward earnestly.

"You know, Gordon, I do believe in the occult! Not entirely, perhaps, but a little bit. And last night I was looking at the stars with Raja Naga. Oh, he's wonderful, truly! He told me that something threatened me, that I was about to make a false step; he said that horrible evil was close to me, and would not be gone until the gods sent word by a chosen messenger that it was past."

She paused, to sip her drink. I had the insane impulse to kick the table over and beat the air with my hands. It was almost impossible to credit a fine, intelligent person with believing this psychic rot, as she obviously did. Informing the sucker of a frightful impending evil, and thereby winning gratitude for lifting the curse, is the first trick in the bag, more ancient than history itself.

"Then, this morning," she went on, "I took a walk and started for Land's End. Just before I got there, I had a terrible experience. My heel turned; my foot slipped, and I almost went over the stone parapet—I actually hung over it, looking down at nothing! I was simply too frightened to scream. The thought of plunging down into that chasm seemed to paralyze my brain. I must have run back along the path—the first thing I knew, I saw Captain Brett, ahead. I was ashamed of my panic and got myself in hand, and that's all. You see, Raja Naga was right. Then came your note at luncheon. It was wonderful that Raja Naga should have the ability to protect me—but how did you know anything threatened me?"

I seized my drink and gulped it frantically.

She was not lying, not trying to ease off the matter of her dead husband. No, she was sincere, earnest, telling the truth. Then she had never seen the corpse at all! It was quite possible that she had passed along the path below, while I lay with my eyes closed, then had come back, running, wakening me.

What the devil should I tell her now—what could I tell her? That blasted Hindu was trying to get her under his thumb, somehow. I had stepped into his game by sheer coincidence; and one must admit coincidence in real life, though I have consistently refused to admit it in fiction.

"Well, Mona," I said desperately, "I'll have to be honest about it. Why I wrote that note, I haven't the least idea! It just came into my head to do it. Of course, there are times when I'm psychic, but—"

She came close to fulfilling Mary's prediction and kissing me. She was radiant, so filled with delight and happiness and belief in my occult powers that I felt downright ashamed of myself. So I thought it as well to get in a blow while the iron was hot.

"You'd better lay off this astrology stuff," I said gravely. "Raja Naga may be the white-haired boy in Hollywood and all that—but lay off him! Whatever you do, tell him nothing. You're going to marry Dan, aren't you?"

"Well," she said, "I—yes, I suppose so."

Queer—no eagerness, no gladness, just a far-away look in her eye and a grudging assent that was eloquent of regret.

"Then tell your Raja Naga nothing!" I said. "Why, look! I could pull all kinds of occult stuff, if it would swing you away from that faker. I could predict death, surprises, anything! But I wouldn't go in for it. And if you marry anyone, then you're one with him, and have no business dragging in the stars."

CHAPTER FIVE

I TOLD Brett about the singular mistake I had made, and recounted the facts in Mona's meeting with him. This was toward nine the following morning, as we sat in the office outside Herron's sanctum, awaiting his arrival. No one else was around, and Lennihan was rattling a typewriter with loud abandon.

"Well, don't get Mona wrong, Gordon," observed Brett, his face saturnine. "She's the finest of women. Anybody can fall for that psychic gabble; Napoleon was a sucker for it, remember! With people like Mona, it's a passing phase; she'll come out of it in no time."

"You think Raja Naga's a faker?"

Brett smiled thinly. "I say so, but I don't think so entirely. He really has something on the ball. The trouble is, that he digs in his hooks; you've no idea how many people hate and fear him and don't dare let go of him! Any man who makes it his business to know secrets, is dangerous. I'm not going to let him go too far with Mona."

I wanted to ask why, but checked myself. If Mona were none too anxious to marry Daniel Parker Herron, this amazing fact must have a reason. She had wanted to marry Herron badly enough some months ago; why not now? Brett might well be the reason.

"What does Herron think of the Hindu?" I asked. "Does he fall for his line?"

"Of course not," Brett replied. "Dan pays him no mind, as they say down South. And he doesn't have Naga here

now because he likes him, or because Mona likes him. He's got the fellow here for use; making a deal with him on information for the Dies Committee. Dan's given that committee a lot of stuff, you know, and Raja Naga can spill no end of material on the Reds in Hollywood."

"Queer, about Mona's stumbling," I observed.

Brett's voice deepened. "Stumbled and nearly went over the parapet, eh? Keyne, that just can't be done. It's doubly impossible for Mona; she's a real athlete, in perfect condition. At that spot in the trail, too, it couldn't be done unless she stumbled over a bench."

"I'm sure she was telling the truth, Brett!"

"Oh, of course! It's clear enough." A glowing light swept into his face. "If necessary, I can play hell's game too! Perhaps not so well as he can, but I can play it. If I thought he had used suggestion or hypnotism on her—"

He paused, cutting off his words.

"Just what is his game? What's he after?" I demanded.

"Oh, power, intrigue, money! He makes fools of the women, who are fools to start with; men too. Joe Carey, the producer, never makes a move without asking Raja Naga's occult advice first. The man has his finger in half Hollywood's pies."

"Since we seem to be growing intimate, you and I," said I, to divert his thoughts, "will you tell me why Newberry should act as—"

"No!" He jerked around with the vibrant word, then shrugged and softened. "Keyne, I owe all that I am to Lafe Newberry and to Dan Herron. I'd rather not discuss them with anyone; at least, just now. Learn my story, and you'll know why. Didn't that old fool Pascal Herron bellyache everything he knew and guessed, about me? I remember you were with him, yesterday."

"Yes," I said, impelled to honesty.

"Then make the most of it." He came to his feet. "Here's Dan. Morning!"

Dan Herron swept in upon us breezily; he was like a clean wind of vitality rushing through the place. In his bare sanctum, he was a focal point of blazing energy, and Brett was once more changed in his presence—a new man again, laughing, exuberant.

But I, dreading what I foresaw must be said, kept quiet.

Brett opened up his package, showing the automatic and the cord and the weight; and I saw Herron's eyes jerk incredulously at sight of the pistol. Brett told how we had found the things, and explained how the weight had made sure the pistol would vanish into the gulf below. Herron swore softly under his breath, still staring at the weapon.

"Then—the blasted scoundrel wanted it to look like murder!" he exclaimed. "Any fingerprints on that gun?"

"Plenty," said Brett. "All those of the dead man—Wilson, as he was called. Keyne told me who he was."

"Glad you know everything," Herron rejoined. Relief had come into his face. "Then it's clearly a suicide case, eh?"

"Absolutely," agreed Brett.

Herron looked at me, and his laughter died. "What the hell are you so sour about, Gordon?" he shot out.

"Trouble, Dan," I said regretfully. "Shall we face it down?"

"Go the limit, here and now."

"Wilson," I said, voicing the reflections that had come to me overnight, "had to smuggle himself here, or be smuggled. It must have pained him to soil and stain his clothes, for he was a careful dresser. He wouldn't have rigged up this suicide contraption, with that check in his pocket! He was murdered; the act was made to look like murder, but this gun was planted so that if desired, the suicide theory would stand. And there's a conclusive reason, which I just now learned, that knocks out the suicide theory."

"Well, what's the conclusive knockout?" demanded Herron.

"Your recognition of this pistol."

THIS caught him off guard. Brett was staring at us in alarmed conjecture. Herron's face changed, and he tried to bluff.

"Gordon, what on earth are you driving at? I never saw the gun in my life!"

I shook my head, smiling. "Dan, don't try to fool your lawyer. Brett and I are your only friends, right now. So give down, give down!"

"Be damned if you're not worse than a Dutch conscience!" he said ruefully. "Yes, I did recognize it."

"Yours?"

"Certainly."

He lied. We both knew, in this instant of silence, that he lied. I caught the answer from his mind, could read it in his eye as he frowned at me.

"Well? Don't you believe me?"

"No," I said. "It belonged to Miss Vindon, eh?"

Brett exclaimed in sharp surprise. Herron flung up his hands.

"All right, blast you! Yes, I gave it to her last summer and taught her to use it. Haven't seen it since then. Has the gun been fired?"

"Once." Brett spoke in a low voice.

"If the killer had really wanted to lose that gun," I said, "he'd have tossed it far out into the gorge. Had he wanted the death to look like suicide, the gun would have been lying beside the bench. The obvious conclusion—"

"By the Lord Harry, I get it!" burst out Brett.

Herron checked him, answered the interphone, and next moment Lennihan came in with a yellow envelope.

"Sorry, Mr. Herron. One of those urgent and personal things."

Herron tore at the envelope, glanced at the message, and his eyes lit up with a sudden blaze. He reached for the phone.

"All right, Lennihan; no answer! Hello! Give me the communications-room. Yes. This you, Hilda? Where did this message come from? Who filed it, and when?"

He listened, hung up, and turned to us.

"Boys, here's a honey!" he said. "Urgent and personal message. Filed here at Serafina last night—probably in a coin booth; we have a couple around the place—for delivery this morning. Now read it."

I took the message from him; Brett came to my shoulder, reading it with me:

> Daniel Parker Herron
> Alta Serafina
>
> Announce before three this afternoon your complete and unconditional support of Andrew Millinger for Congress. Otherwise will give to press the full story of Underwood's death, presumably murder. If you make announcement as requested I will undertake to prove that death was suicide.
>
> Mr. Fate.

From Brett broke a hasty yelp.

"Keyne put his finger on it, Dan! The gun was planted! The killer stole it from Mona and made this job look like murder. . . . But agree to his terms, and he'll make it look like suicide! Therefore Mr. Fate is the killer! And we've beat him to it by finding the gun!"

Herron, despite the blaze in his eyes, was white and shaken by the threat.

"But he's got me," he said with forced calm. "Imagine the newspaper stories: Mona's husband resurrected, only to be found murdered on my estate, at my very door! Why, it'd be the sensation of the century! He figures I'll agree; then he'll tell us where to find the gun. He knows I'd recognize that gun: it'd keep me from double-crossing him. Why, the damned scoundrel is clever as ten devils!" He leaned forward and threw the interphone switch. "Get hold of Lafe Newberry at once. . . . What? Oh, the devil! I forgot." He leaned back wearily. "Lafe took a car and left, a couple hours ago. Just when we need him most!"

"But you don't need him," I said.

They swung around at me. I went on:

"You've got a great chance to pull every one of the killer's teeth, Dan! He doesn't know we've found the pistol. Phone the sheriff now, instantly; send a plane, get him here on the jump! Get the coroner, hold the inquest; have the thing settled for good and all as suicide—have the dead man recognized as Underwood! Then break the story."

"The story?" Herron gaped at me.

"Yes! On all your radio stations. Give it to the press, to make the noon or early afternoon editions. Give an interview, get one with Mona. Spread everything; don't leave one solitary detail for Mr. Fate to break in any newspapers! Why, you'll knock this murderer silly!"

Herron blazed up, then checked himself.

"Wait! You forget about the rigging on that gun. The coroner might not be so ready to grab at the suicide theory."

I laughed. "Throw the damned cord and weight away—forget 'em! The gun bears the dead man's prints and was found under his body."

"Sure! I found it myself, under his body!" cried Brett in wild delight. "Dan, it's a natural, it's a beauty!"

HERRON chewed at his cigar; then suddenly he went into action. And to watch the Herron machine going into high gear was something to see. He had several planes at his landing-field; inside of five minutes he had one warming up, was talking to Sheriff Kemp of Serafina County on the phone, and had a dozen people at work, including me.

I was doing a spread story. Herron dictated the main story and alleged interviews with himself and Mona Vindon; these were all for release *via* teletype transcription to his radio stations, who

would coöperate with the press by holding back until the newspapers appeared. A wise move. Of course, nothing could go out until the coroner's verdict was secured. The sheriff agreed instantly to all that was desired; before he was off the phone, the plane was on the way to get him. Every detail moved with almost incredible speed and precision.

Inside half an hour the plane was back. Sheriff and coroner went to work, more than pleased to have everything handed them on a silver platter. The evidence was clear. A jury was impaneled on the spot. The verdict of suicide was obtained.

The story was broken. Herron, Brett and I were of course the only persons who had all the threads of the affair complete. So swiftly did everything move, that it was barely eleven o'clock when we stood out on the landing-field and watched Herron's big transport drop down the sky, bearing the officials and the corpse. All was over.

"And all I want," said Herron, "is to get my hands on that fellow. And—"

A shout broke from one of the field men. We swung around, and sighted another plane sweeping in from the north, banking slightly, evidently intending to land.

The field was a half-mile from the Main House. It was a rather misty morning, with clouds drifting along the peaks, and the radio reports had said that the lower country was gripped by fog and inclement weather.

"Looks like a private plane," said Herron, watching alertly. "Might be putting in here—we're listed as an emergency field, of course—to avoid a bad landing below. Ah! Here's the radio operator."

From the instrument-house the operator came at a run for us.

"It's a chartered plane, Mr. Herron!" he reported. "It has Millinger aboard —you know, Andrew Millinger, the congressional candidate! They say it's pretty stormy below and they're landing here."

Brett gave me a wink and a grin. It was not an opportune moment, to say the least, for Mr. Millinger to be landing on Mr. Herron's estate.

Herron's face was a thundercloud as he strode out to the halted plane. From it descended the pilot, followed by two other men. The face and sturdy figure of Millinger, radiating brotherly love and puritanical shrewdness, were well known. Those qualities had won him wealth and nation-wide publicity; he was a rugged son of the Western soil, caricatured, respected, even feared for his downright honesty. The man with him was small, cadaverous, shrunken in appearance; I heard Millinger introduce him as R. G. Raymond.

Millinger shook hands with Herron; the two had met previously, it seemed.

"Grand to find this emergency field, Herron!" boomed Millinger. "Everything around Los Angeles is blanketed in fog. If we hadn't received your urgent invitation, we'd have had to come down somewhere in the desert."

"My invitation?" Herron echoed. Raymond came up, laughing delightedly.

"An inspiration, Mr. Herron, to mention that Norton and Cregar were here! Norton and I are old pals, you know, and Cregar is one of Andy's stanchest supporters."

"Yes?" Herron eyed him. "Seems to be a mistake somewhere. Millinger, what do you know about an attempt made to blackmail me in your name?"

GOOD strategy; for Millinger was one of those men physically and mentally incapable of a lie. His breezy Western character was real, and like that of Gladstone, was rooted in a firm religious conviction.

Millinger stiffened and lost his smile.

"This is a queer greeting, Herron! Do you actually charge me with blackmail?"

"No," said Herron. "I ask if you know anything about an attempt that was made this very morning to force me into supporting you. A straight question."

Millinger reddened with anger. "I'd give a good deal to win your support, but I'm not jeopardizing my immortal soul to win anything! I know nothing about any such attempt, and repudiate it absolutely."

"Your word's good." Smiling, Herron extended his hand. "Forgive the question. I'll explain later. Now, what's all this about an invitation?"

"Why, you sent us one last night!" Looking bewildered, Millinger turned. "You have it, Raymond. Let's see it."

Raymond produced a telegram. Herron glanced at it, a startled flash in his deep blue eyes. He pocketed it and looked up, with a hearty laugh.

"Someone was playing a joke; never mind! I'm delighted to have you with us, gentlemen! We've a few guests, an

intimate party. If you find other friends here, that's good luck all around. Come along. Your pilot and luggage will be taken care of. —Oh, Brett! —Keyne!"

We were introduced, then followed the others toward the Lodge, trailing well behind.

Brett nudged me. "Invitation, eh? I'll bet Raymond pulled the trick himself!"

"Who is he?" I asked. "The name's vaguely familiar."

"It's vaguely familiar to a lot of people." Brett's face darkened. "One magazine branded him, in oblique fashion, as 'the shadow to end all shadows.' He's suave, silent, immensely rich, has brains like a rattlesnake, and is trying to shove Andy Millinger into Congress. Why? I don't know. His only human failing is mountain-climbing; he's nuts about it!"

"You don't seem to like the little gent," I observed.

"Like him? I hate him. He's not overtly connected with anything. . . . The spark just leaps the gap, if you get me. But his financial operations have left suckers broke and hungry all over the country. My father died of a broken heart on a deal where Raymond waxed fat and a thousand stockholders were ruined. Like him? I'd kill him in a minute if—"

He broke off abruptly. "Sorry. Forgot myself, Keyne. Forget it."

He strode off and left me. Herron had swept his two new guests into the Main House. I looked for Mary and glimpsed her amid half a dozen riders, heading away by the trail. Having no yen for boots and saddles, I turned into the cocktail lounge, perched on a bar stool and absorbed a bottle of beer to make up for my morning's labors.

A TOUCH on the shoulder; I turned to look into the green eyes of Princess Gantimiroff. She slid her long thighs onto the stool next me, smiled in her intimate way and ordered a champagne cup, then spoke softly to me.

"So, my friend of the charming wife! Do you know you're famous because that bundle of animated beauty wears your name? We're all mad about her. She is the frankest, freest, gayest piece of honesty I've met in ages!"

"Yes? What's the catch?" I asked.

She gave a trill of laughter and placed her hand on my arm.

"You think there is a catch if one woman speaks good of another? Nonsense! You must know that your wife is no woman, but angel!"

"Impossible, Princess!" I said. "Angels are all of the other sex. That's why the superiority of the male animal is always so obvious."

Her eyes laughed into mine; her white teeth glistened. "You think so, eh? Like all writers, all good actors, you're an egoist! Tell me something. This Raja Naga is an old friend of yours?"

"Never saw him before I came up here yesterday. Why?"

"He said a terrible thing; it was last night." She shivered a little. "No, no, I cannot repeat it! I wondered if you knew him. I have heard of him often, but do not like him."

I frowned. "You mean that he said something about me?"

"Yes: about you and Mr. Newberry. That you reminded him of the tiger and the babu; it is some Indian story. And that Mr. Newberry had the soul of a devil, plainly visible to informed eyes."

I broke into a laugh.

"Don't worry, little cousin of the Czar," I said. "Newberry's all right; not pretty, but worth a dozen of this Raja Naga. And if his eyes or any other can locate any devils around here, I'd like to see 'em!"

We were interrupted by my name being called. The barman leaned apologetically toward me.

"Mr. Keyne, sir? Beg pardon, but a general call's just come in for you. Mr. Herron is in his office with Mr. Newberry, and wants you there, sir."

I excused myself to the alleged Princess, and got away. But as I went, it suddenly came clear why she had thus plastered herself on me. That fool remark I had made last evening to Newberry—he had not missed it, after all, but had carried it to her. And she had seized the chance to curl herself around me and purr, and investigate what Raja Naga had said about her. She probably knew already. The call had interfered; but I had the vivid impression of an enmity here that startled me.

These thoughts were still in my head when I stumbled into Herron's sanctum —and remembered that eleven o'clock appointment. It was long past eleven now. Herron was at his desk. Newberry scowled. Trouble was in the air.

"Brett will be along any minute," said Herron. "Gordon, Lafe doesn't like the way we've washed up the Wilson affair. I've assumed full responsibility—"

"But," Newberry broke in, "Keyne found the gun, kept quiet about it, and persuaded you to act without letting me know. Brett had a hand in it. Of course, that's your privilege and I've no squawk coming," he went on in his flat, tired voice, "but it was my understanding, Dan, that I was in charge of the case."

"No," said Herron directly. "I'm in charge, Lafe. Always."

Newberry did not take up the challenge. He turned to me, instead. Brett came into the room while he was speaking, but Newberry ignored him.

"I see now what you meant last night, Keyne; and I guess I had it coming. All the same, you've gummed things up. You've smeared the prettiest case I've seen in a long time. You're a crackpot to have let the Chief drag in the sheriff!"

"Just why?" I demanded. "If you know the whole story, you know we were justified."

"No," he dissented flatly. "The sheriff has the gun now. It should never have been turned over to him. If that gun should be traced to the Chief or to Miss Vindon, all the trouble will break that you hoped to avoid. Another gun should have been substituted; you and Brett could have done that without harming your consciences."

I SAID nothing; his criticism was justified. We should have done exactly as he said. Herron was looking from one to another of us, saying nothing. Now Brett spoke up:

"Dead right," he said quietly. "We should have done it. Didn't occur to us."

"No." Newberry shifted his head and his eyes, looking full at Brett. "No. You wanted to chisel me out and act independently. Well, that's all right with me."

"Careful, Lafe," said Herron warningly. "They didn't want anything of the sort."

"I think they did." And Newberry shrugged. "What of it, Chief? Doesn't make me sore. I urged you to get Keyne here, in the first place; I suggested it. That was my mistake. Now, so far as working with him goes, I'm out. Either the case is mine or his. Let him go his fictional way with Captain Brett, and I'll go mine."

"Suits me," I said.

"Hold on." Brett's eyes fixed on Newberry. "I owe you a lot—"

"You owe me nothing!" For the first time Newberry showed a trace of heat. "Nothing, understand? I never did like you, anyhow; I helped you because I was confident you didn't do the job in Paris. And because the Chief cabled to help you. Well, I did. It was my duty. That's all."

"I knew you were no friend," Brett said in a low voice. "I felt it all the time."

"And by God," spoke up Herron warmly, "that's another mark to your credit, Lafe! You didn't care much for Brett, eh? But you pulled him out of the mess regardless—duty and conviction. Good for you! And you never told me this before."

"Never needed to," said Newberry. "Now, Chief, I've some news for you. It's agreed that I go my own way, is it?"

"As you like," Herron responded calmly. "Only an Arab can make a camel and an ox pull evenly at the yoke. I've no Arab blood."

"Okay, then." Newberry rubbed his hands and beamed. "I've got the whole story about the two-hundred-grand check and who's behind the Silver Syndicate. Do you want it?"

Herron's voice exploded. "Glory be! Of course we want it! Where'd you get the story?"

"Out of my head," said Newberry. "I'll have the evidence by tomorrow night."

"Oh!" Herron's exultation died. "Just theory, eh? Want to tell it privately?"

"Lord, Chief, I've no hard feelings!" Newberry grinned at me and Brett. "Now that I'm in single harness again, I love the whole wide world! And I have some evidence; remember the letters and papers in the pocket of the Wilson-Underwood corpse? I kept 'em. They helped. And the man at the top of the Silver Syndicate, the one who sent you that check, is your honorable house-guest Fred Lammengeyer."

To me, the revelation sounded fantastic. I knew Lammengeyer slightly, knew more of him by repute, and had seen him several times about the place. To Herron, the name was like a bomb.

"Why, Lafe, he's the very last man on earth to be suspected—"

"Yeah; and that's the guy we've been trying to put the finger on," broke in Newberry. "And I can tell you what you've never suspected until now: the political affiliations of the Silver Syndicate—and why. Want it or not?"

"Talk," said Herron curtly.

Newberry talked, beginning with Millinger and his present manager, R. G. Raymond, who controlled great industrial and financial influence; the rugged Millinger was like a child in his hands.

"Or in anyone's hands," Newberry went on in his sardonic way. "He looks up to Pat Cregar's social position and the Bristol soap millions. Therefore Cregar could handle him. Anyone could. I could step into Raymond's boots and carry on, myself!"

"One minute, Lafe," intruded Herron. "The telegram of invitation Millinger received was sent from here, all right. It was phoned, probably from a booth, and was accepted as from Lennihan; but he had nothing to do with it. Someone else sent it."

Newberry nodded. "Maybe Lammengeyer; he's behind a lot of skulduggery, I find. Now, he and Raymond are old friends. He's giving Raymond financial and other support. Why? Because, if elected, Andy Millinger will do precisely what the gamblers want done."

"Easy, Lafe!" warned Herron. "That sounds fantastic."

"Lammengeyer is president of the Trinity Bank, that sent you the check. Ask him about it, and he'll deny all knowledge of it."

"I have," Herron said curtly. "He did."

"And you believe any bank could issue a check for two hundred grand, and the president know nothing of it?" Newberry was exultant. "Wilson was sent here with the check, and killed. You might fall for the check, they thought; if not, you'd fall for the blackmail. And they would be rid of Wilson. They didn't like him any more; knew too much."

"Lammengeyer would never do such a thing."

"Of course not; he'd just shut his eyes and cross his fingers. But now you've blocked their game. That wasn't wise, Dan. You should have played 'em along and let me steal their thunder by finding the gun and substituting another for it."

"But," I asked, "how would you have found it?"

Newberry cocked an eye at me and grinned. "Same way you did! Now, Dan, let's get down to cases. If you supported Millinger, his election would be certain. Granted?"

"More or less," Herron admitted cautiously.

"This State is broke,—or worse,—like some others. Nevada, next door, has grown rich on gambling. Well, on the day before election, what happens? Millinger springs the grand little surprise: a State Lottery to reduce the debt, reduce taxes, keep at home the money that now goes elsewhere! We used to have lotteries, you know; some of our most swanky colleges were founded on lottery earnings. And with this, or in place of it, a big Sweepstakes scheme. And, boy, it will sweep Andy Millinger right into office! Especially if you're supporting him."

"He would never come out for such a thing."

"Sure. He'll be honestly sold on it, though. It's a tremendous stake, remember! And it's not the underworld that's at work, but the upper crust—men like Patrick Cregar. The big men, the visionary millionaires, the powers of this world. Men like Raymond."

Herron, chewing at a cigar, nodded slowly.

"Might be. But Lammengeyer's a banker, a philanthropist."

"I'll have some dope on Lammengeyer tomorrow, Chief, that will open your eyes!"

"Then I'll be sold on it," said Herron. "It would fit in with everything, Lafe. It would fit with the Wilson affair and the check. What d'you want?"

We were, I think, all sold on it. The story and inferences rang true.

"I'll grab my car right now and beat it for Los Angeles," said Newberry. "I'll be back tomorrow with sufficient evidence to let us go ahead and break the radio story. We'll play it all up as a plot against Millinger, and show the old boy for the honest simp he is!"

Herron frowned. "That would be almost supporting him, wouldn't it?"

"Not the way we'll handle the story, Chief."

"Okay, then. Go to it."

NEWBERRY swung around, waved a hand to us, and strode out the door with his cynical grin.

Herron looked after him admiringly.

"There goes the most brilliant journalistic brain in America!"

"With the thought-processes of a rascal," I said.

Herron whirled. "I can't let you say that."

"Hold on, Dan! I didn't call him a rascal. It's his manner of thought that

makes him a great reporter, a great investigator. He pierces instinctively through all pretense and sham. What I said was actually a compliment."

Herron eyed me dubiously. "I suppose you resent Newberry's attitude toward you?"

"Yes; but I don't regret it," I said frankly. "We'll work better separately."

"And you?" Herron flung a glance at Brett, who shrugged lightly.

"Lafe and I are now aware of each other's real feelings. It's a relief, Dan. It doesn't mean that we're enemies or anything like that."

Herron's face cleared, and he came to his feet, with a glance at his watch.

"That's fine all around. I'm late for lunch, blast it! Sewed up with those lawyers all afternoon—and I must crowd in half an hour for Millinger. . . . See here, you chaps: Tomorrow is Mona's birthday, and the servants' frolic. But on Saturday—how about a ride to Arch Lake on Saturday morning? No women along. A stag ride and trout-fry. Sound good?"

It did; and so we left him and went our ways. As Brett and I were separating, he paused.

"If you're free tonight after dinner, Gordon, I'd like to have a chat with you. Say, in my cottage. Eh?"

"It's a date!" I rejoined. "I'd like nothing better."

Mary and I got upstairs after cocktails that afternoon and set about dressing for dinner. I am not a great hand at unpacking; when away from home, I usually stay half packed. Thus, being at the shaving-point, I unzipped my toilet kit to get at my things.

On top of them was lying a folded telegram. I had put none there. I opened it, and found that it was merely typing on a telegraph-blank:

GORDON KEYNE,
ALTA SERAFINA
SMART GUY, AREN'T YOU? IT ISN'T EVERYONE WHO CAN OUTSMART DEATH. EVEN IN ALTA SERAFINA DEATH COMES TO LIFE, SO SEE IF YOU CAN DO IT AGAIN. DEATH COMES TO LIFE . . . . A GOOD TITLE FOR ONE OF YOUR STORIES, IF YOU LIVE TO WRITE IT.

MR. FATE

So the killer knew my share in blocking his blackmail scheme! And if we needed any proof that he was among us, was under this very roof, was in fact one of us—here it was.

CHAPTER SIX

I SAID nothing to Mary of my discovery. While I waited for her to dress, however, I made a second discovery.

My portable typewriter is old and faithful, and has several letters out of alignment. Taking another look-see at the Mr. Fate message, I noticed that some of the letters here were a bit off. No microscope or enlargements were required to prove that the message had been typed here in our rooms, on my own machine! During the day, therefore, Mr. Fate had been in our suite.

I was not pleased by this. It rather spoiled my dinner, in fact—a magnificent dinner in the lordly hall, around the noble oaken board that had served Queen Elizabeth.

Herron was in rare fettle this evening, with his reorganization concluded and his three attorneys speeding away later by plane. Andrew Millinger looked weary and troubled. Raymond, who never looked anything except his dry, cadaverous self, ate sparingly and talked all through dinner with Mrs. Lammengeyer, whom he took in. Princess Gantimiroff, I noticed, kept Norton thoroughly absorbed. He was a typical Herron executive, suave, heavy-set, capable, with a crisp air of knowing just what he was about. His French wife was having a grand time with Raja Naga, who was at the other end of the table from Mona Vindon and therefore innocuous.

Somewhere at this table, in all probability was Mr. Fate.

Herron, who had a harmless admiration for old-fashioned customs, sometimes chose to let the ladies leave, and to keep the men about a bottle of port. He so elected this evening, protracting the dinner more than usual, and let Millinger draw him into a political discussion which interested all of us—and particularly Millinger. For once, Andy was getting a lot of horse-sense handed him, and several times I detected a frown of annoyance on Raymond's face. It was not likely, I reflected, that Raymond had planned this stopover at Alta Serafina.

When we went to join the ladies, it was past eight; Brett and I quietly slipped away together, left the Main

House, and crossed to his cottage. There we lit cigars and relaxed, while I waited for some inkling of his purpose in wanting this talk.

"Do you realize," he said, as we chatted of nothing, "that the unexpected arrival of Raymond here is rather startling? You spoke of strange forces at work; perhaps that's truer than you know, truer than most of us would admit. I feel the same thing; a gathering, as it were, a focal assemblage of influences, of results from old causes—a concentration here of converging forces—"

"Maybe this will help reduce them," I said, and showed him the message from Mr. Fate. He read it thoughtfully. "Think we'd better bother Herron with it tonight?"

"No. Suppose we let it wait. Herron's not the man to be bothered just now—a hundred things on his mind, from Mona's birthday to his own lawyers. I'd bother him myself, if I could. Instead, I'm bothering you," he added with a slight smile.

"Suits me. But Newberry should have this as soon as he gets back. It was written on my own typewriter, by the way; must have been done in my room today."

He whistled softly. "Well, who knows! You may be Mr. Fate—I may be; Herron may be! Or Raja Naga. This isn't the first time I've run up against the Hindu. Last year in Paris, when I had my trouble there, he was mixed in it. Newberry's wife was the woman. . . . She was a simple little thing."

Simple, yes, but as he went on to sketch that old trouble, he made it clear that she had been no angel. She was flighty; she was amoral; and she was even promiscuous; Lafe Newberry had been well rid of her, and knew it. All this did not excuse her murder, of course. But Brett had been with her that evening, earlier—had picked her up in the American Bar and taken her home and left her, merely as a charitable action. And when she was found murdered in the morning, his bloody fingerprints were also found in the apartment.

"Newberry was a prince. I've tried hard to like him; it's impossible. But he was a prince," went on Brett. "It never came out about Raja Naga—he had been making a dupe of the girl. Newberry thought it all rather amusing and didn't object; he had a cruel streak and even was cynical enough to make a story or two about it. Raja Naga was going big in Hollywood just then, and some movie people had brought him to Paris on a visit."

"How on earth did Newberry get away from the evidence of those fingerprints?" I asked.

Brett smiled wryly.

"I had a vague memory of returning to the apartment, later in the night, to make sure she was all right—one of those crazy things champagne breeds in the brain," he said. "Probably I had done so, had walked in, found a bloody mess, and wandered out. I'm not excusing myself—just being honest about it. I couldn't account for myself, and those prints were damning."

He was bitter, and I could scarcely blame him.

"Newberry came to bat, provided me with a cast-iron alibi, and somehow threw suspicion on those prints. How? Damned if I know. He had Dan Herron's money behind him, and money can buy anything in Europe except honor, which long ago died of old age there."

He had been cleared, but his life was wrecked; everyone considered him guilty. He went to pieces. Herron got him here and kept him here, building him up into what he now was. Daniel Parker Herron did things like that all the time.

"Was Newberry badly crushed over his wife's death?" I asked curiously.

"Lord, no! He hated her like poison; she feared him and despised him. I don't think he cared about her smirching his honor, for that means little to him. He did care because she was cheap, and because he had somehow been tricked into marriage, I believe. Queer thing—she had been stabbed through the jugular. Blood everywhere."

WHAT did this have to do with our situation at Alta Serafina? Plenty, if one did not demand clear-cut and definite reasons.

"When you spoke of unseen forces," Brett told me gravely, "you hit upon the very thing I fear and hope and dread—a convergence of lives and destinies which may carry out here what was begun in Paris a year and more ago, before the outbreak of war. Mutual hatreds may come to a head here, because these people are drawn together."

This might seem fantastic, but as he pointed out, there was much beneath the smooth appearance of things here. The arrival of Millinger and Raymond had

precipitated trouble. There was something shadowy—from the past—between Raymond and Princess Gantimiroff.

"She's running with Newberry now, and has been for a long time past," Brett stated. "No more morals than a wildcat!

"But that's only a small part of the dynamite stacked up here," Brett went on moodily. "Take Raja Naga. We had trouble in Paris; we may have trouble here. Uncle Pascal admires the beggar. Mona is still too much under his spell for my notion. He and our fake Russian Princess are somewhat at daggers' points, perhaps literally. Why, you and Mary are almost the only persons here who have no jealousies, no concealed hatreds, no ax to grind!"

I sipped the liqueur he had placed before me.

"See here, old man, I like you," I said quietly. "Suppose both of us come clean; come through all the way. Now let me pass all the known bounds of propriety, simply because as you say I've no ax to grind. The woman loves you; and you're both too sensitive, too finely drawn, to face it."

Our minds met; he comprehended, without my saying it, that I did understand his position. In brief, he loved the fiancée of his friend and benefactor, and could not help himself. And Mona Vindon—

"No, no!" he exclaimed, but with a steady poise that I liked. "Don't get the wrong slant. I want to save her from that damned Naga; I won't let him tamper with her brain. If I love her, that's no crime. I've said so to Herron himself; he knows everything. But what I'm afraid of is more things coming up like this Wilson murder. Explosions can come out of the pot brewing here—"

"Bosh! People don't bump each other off, in these circles, because of a disagreement," I broke in.

He shook his head. "I mean chance—the damned bad luck of it all—"

"Chance? There's no such thing," I intervened. "You're acquainted with the principles of the karmic law; Emerson set them forth in one of his greatest essays. What you did yesterday, has to do with what you did today."

Unfortunate words; I could have bitten off my tongue-tip, but too late.

"That's the very thing!" exclaimed Brett, his eyes wide on me. "What I did yesterday—that murder in Paris! I've waited patiently to learn the truth; what is the truth? Was I guilty? How did my fingerprints come there, unless I was guilty? Don't you see—there's the torture of a lifetime, Keyne! It stands between me and any future at all! I might be suspected of having murdered this man Wilson—probably I am so suspected, by those who know about me!"

I got him argued out of his dark mood; and after another drink or two he became more cheerful. So we parted, on a note of friendship and mutual liking.

IN the morning I saw Uncle Pascal in the Main House for the first time. I was down early for breakfast—a hit-or-miss affair in the English fashion; and as I stepped out for a lungful of the brisk air, I ran into him. He caught at my arm excitedly.

"Here! I'll show you something—come on, quickly!"

He led me toward the gardens and came to a halt behind a leafy hedge.

"Now look!" he said, pulling the greenery aside. "Look!"

I obeyed. Below us, in a niche of the sunken gardens, were Andrew Millinger and Raymond. Millinger was furious about something; Raymond, thinly cynical, apparently was goading him into greater anger.

I drew back, and walked away with Uncle Pascal. He was grinning delightedly.

"Fighting!" he said. "Having a grand row off to themselves in secret! There's something to make a newspaper man gloat, eh? Millinger, the pompous pillar of forensic rectitude, having a rowdy fight with the man who set him up! What a wow of a story if it got out!"

"And what Dan would do to you for betraying his hospitality!" I said.

"Oh, I'm no newspaper man; I'm just a radio columnist," he rejoined. "Do you know the Cregars?"

"I've met them. Why?"

"Don't talk to me about Dan's rectitude! He got 'em here for Mona's party—she knows them well. His real reason was to work on 'em. Soap millions, you know; they advertise by radio exclusively. Dan wants some of those millions for the Herron stations."

"You must like to bite anyone near you, Uncle Pascal," I said. "Herron's not that kind. Anyhow, advertising is handled by regular firms, not by Cregar and his heiress bride; so forget it."

Leaving him somewhat abruptly, I went back inside and came unexpectedly

upon Lafe Newberry and Lammengeyer, standing before the buffet in animated talk while they ate. The reporter hailed me eagerly, apparently with no animus whatever. I was surprised to see him back so early, and still more surprised to find him intimate with the very man he had been investigating and accusing.

"Didn't know you were back," I said. "How's everything in the lower world?"

"Fine," he observed. "Stick around; come along with me and see the Chief, as soon as I fill up. Just got in half an hour ago. Now, Lammengeyer, let's have that schedule of the State obligations once more, will you? I'm not a political writer. I didn't know your boob State was floundering in near-bankruptcy. Is it true that all the rich people are being driven out by the whopping income tax? Give me the whole picture."

He winked at me as he spoke. He was merely drawing out his man for some purpose of his own.

As always, I felt attracted and yet repelled by Newberry, and lingered. He was brilliant in his questions, and Lammengeyer talked freely, only too anxious to hold a lodge of sorrow with anyone who was disposed to mourn the State and national insolvency with him. He was full of remedies, too, all on the conservative side.

While we were talking, Mrs. Cregar showed up. She, poor thing, gave no outward indication of the soap millions except a rather dowdy taste in jewels. She sought beauty by an early ride every morning, and had just returned from it with a ravenous appetite. Newberry and I left Lammengeyer to her tender mercies and went our ways.

"You seem to have got over your dislike for fictionists," I commented dryly. "Or is it just that your disposition is better in the morning?"

NEWBERRY hooked his arm in mine with a laugh.

"Forget it, Keyne, forget it! I do like to work alone; I did feel envious because you had found that gun; and altitude puts my nerves on edge. Those are my excuses, and I'm sorry for the whole thing. Let's not hold a grudge."

"Far be it from me to cherish vengeance!" I rejoined. "Just to prove it, here's what I'm about to show Dan Herron."

Newberry whistled softly as he read the typed message from Mr. Fate. When we walked into Herron's office, Dan was ruddily delighted to see us friends again. And somewhat to my surprise, the message with its assurance that Mr. Fate was among us, worried him little.

"I'm more interested, Lafe," he said, "in whether you've succeeded in linking Lammengeyer with your pet theory."

"It's all buttoned up under my vest, Chief," replied Newberry. "I'll get my notes typed out and hand them in. What's more, we've got that guy cinched for good and all. You know what a skeet expert and crack shot he is? Well, twenty years ago he shot a man—killed him. It was all hushed up, and there's where we've got him nailed. Hushing doesn't pay. . . . Duck-shooting; a cold wet day, a stumble and a loaded gun goes off—and the previous night, Lammengeyer had enjoyed a fight with the man, after a drunken poker game. How's that for a story, if we ever want to break it? I've got every fact nailed tight."

"No one would ever believe Lammengeyer ever played a game of poker in his life," I said.

"That's what makes it good; I've got the proof. It was accidental, mind."

"I'm playing no dirty cards over my air-waves," struck in Herron crisply. "Keep the story for your newspaper column, if you like. Have you really got the goods on Fred as the head of the Silver Syndicate?"

"I have."

"Then get to work on the radio scripts; when you've got the series in shape, I'll go over it with you."

"And the Mr. Fate guy? If he's really here, it's bad for somebody."

"Keep after him till you trip him, sure."

Newberry took his leave, casual and calm as ever. I was following, when Herron checked me; his secretary Lennihan had just announced Millinger.

"Hold on, Gordon! I'd like you to stick around. May need a witness. Hello, Andy! You've met Keyne, I think? You don't mind if he sits in, as a friend? It's a rule, of course, that whatever goes on at Alta Serafina is off the record."

Millinger stalked in, shook hands, assented heartily to my presence, and planted himself in a chair. He accepted a cigar, bit at it, and spoke his mind.

"Herron, I'm an honest man, or try to be one. No matter what's said about you, no one denies that you're genuine. That's why I want your advice."

"Advice? My advice?" Herron's brows lifted in unfeigned surprise. "Why?"

"Just as one honest neighbor to another, Dan. I'm in a pickle. The more I see of this politics game, the less I know whom to trust." Millinger's rugged features were hard-set. "Now I'm in the notion that the man who's been running things for me is a rascal."

"Raymond?"

"Yep." Millinger was opinionated, more or less rustic, but earnest. "We had a row, and he let slip a few things. What do you think of him?"

"Off the record," said Herron quietly, "I know nothing definite against him; but I'd take him for a smooth one. However, I suppose you're indebted to him."

"I'm indebted to nobody. If you were in my boots, what'd you do?"

"Send him packing."

"I've tried that; he refuses. He just laughs at me and says—" Millinger paused, reddened, then continued: "Says he built me up as a figurehead, and he can slap me down. Now tell me what to do."

There was something pathetic in this appeal to an admittedly keener brain.

"Are you in any rush to leave here?" Herron asked abruptly.

"No. Right now, I aim to settle this matter first. I couldn't really trust Cregar or Lammengeyer or anyone else, except a man who has no ax to grind and isn't a friend of my party."

"Thanks for the compliment." Herron resumed his usual brisk air. "Suppose you wait till tomorrow. I've just been through a reorganization hell. This afternoon we're having a frolic for the servants. Tonight, a birthday party for Mona. I'll wake up tomorrow with a clear, untroubled mind. We'll go for a ride or a hike. After lunch, I'll be better able to talk with you honestly and clearly. I'll give you the best advice I know how, and you can take it or leave it."

Millinger came to his feet and shoved his big paw across the desk.

"Shake!" he said. Just the one word. He shook hands with Herron and went striding out. When the door slammed, Herron gave me a quizzical glance.

"Gordon, be honest in your turn. What d'you make of that man and his errand?"

"He and Raymond were having a hot row in the gardens, an hour ago," I said. "I think Andy Millinger's on the level. Raymond has let slip a few things, as he said. And he trusts neither Cregar nor Lammengeyer. Yes, I think the man's straight—and it looks as though Lafe's theory were right."

Herron nodded slowly, thoughtfully.

This was excitement enough for one day, and a Friday at that. As though to make amends, destiny played no more tricks. All afternoon, and all that evening, there was not a breath, not a hint, of unpleasantness in any quarter. Friendliness descended upon the whole party. During the games and races in which the servants and workmen participated, and on into the formal dinner, and on through the festivities in the ballroom later, the atmosphere of happiness and of high spirits was unmarred by any discordant voice or act.

"FOR your birthday, Mona, we've done our best," said Herron, later that evening as we stood about a punch-bowl in old-fashioned style. "Is it fun?"

"It's been perfect, perfect!" Mona was radiant. She looked around, her delicate beauty touched with a glorious happiness. "I don't know when I've had so thoroughly delightful a day—just perfect!"

Uncle Pascal, looking rather ridiculous in evening attire, shoved forward.

"And do you know why, my dear?" he said. "Listen, now. It's a fact, an honest fact, that beginning this blessed morning, the Little People cast a spell on this house and all in it!" He wrinkled up his face, and again I thought of a leprechaun. "A spell that would last till midnight or after—a spell of good fortune and pleasant hearts and kindly spirits among all here, to give you pleasure and delight!"

He scraped her a bow. She caught him and kissed him impulsively, amid applause from all directions. I took it all at face value, too, until Mary and I were in our rooms, and she turned to me with startled eyes.

"Gordon—did you hear about it? About what Raja Naga said?"

"No, my darling, and I don't give a continental what the Hindu said!"

"But it's rather terrible, really! I didn't hear it myself, and I don't know just who did, but there seems to be no doubt that he and Cregar had a quarrel, and that before they separated, Raja Naga lost his head and said that inside another forty-eight hours Cregar would be lying in his coffin!"

"He didn't say that!" I protested, staring at her. "No mystic would predict

such a thing to a person, even if he believed it! Who told you?"

"Princess Gantimiroff. She had it straight from Cregar himself."

"Then it's been exaggerated, depend on it. Forget the whole silly story, my dear!"

We forgot it—until next day.

NEXT morning I left Mary asleep and stole down in the dawn, to find a gay crowd breakfasting.

All the plans to make a stag ride or hike of it, had gone agley. Mrs. Lammengeyer, Mrs. Cregar, Princess Gantimiroff and Mrs. Norton had demanded admission on hearing of the outing; and the demure little mouse who acted as secretary for Mona was also in the group. So, for a wonder, was Pascal Herron.

Raymond, a great walker, had infected Lammengeyer and Millinger with his hiking fever; Cregar, who had planned to hike, was forced to stick to the saddle because of a wrenched knee. This left the three to keep company, and Millinger was trying to drum up another in the person of Newberry, when I joined them at one end of the buffet. Uncle Pascal edged in with me, listening to Millinger pontificate anent geology. It was his one great hobby.

When we trooped outside to the horses, Raja Naga was magnificent in turban and jodhpurs and scarlet jacket. He had a superb seat; I heard Cregar saying something to him about polo, just as Mrs. Lammengeyer created a diversion. In mounting, she caught her foot in the reins and startled the horse. She swayed half out of the saddle with a frightened scream, and the alarmed beast began to rear and paw, and finally went into a stiff-legged plunging.

Before anyone else could intervene, Raja Naga brought his mount alongside and laid his hand on the neck of her horse. Instantly the beast stopped dead in his tracks. He voiced a shrill protest as though in terror, and stood shivering.

Mrs. Lammengeyer, a pleasant laughing woman, was helped into her saddle, none the worse for her alarm, but the horse refused to budge a step and remained in a shiver of fright. Another mount was brought, and we all set off. I found Uncle Pascal beside me, prating mysteriously about what he called "the night side of nature," and as we drew up the trail he explained himself.

"Do you know what he did, Mr. Keyne? I've heard of it and read of it, but never saw it in real life! It's what they call giving a horse the cobra hiss!"

I thought he was joking, but he proved to be in deep earnest.

"It's known among gypsy folk," he averred gravely. "Gypsy John, or Parry Hearne, a famous Seventeenth Century gypsy, described it in his memoirs. And something else! The name—"

"Wait a minute," I broke in. "What the devil are you talking about? Did Raja Naga hiss like a cobra?"

"That's the way it's described," replied Uncle Pascal. "That's the name for it. And in his book Hearne also says that the gypsies, who came as you know from India in the Twelfth Century, belonged originally to the Naga tribe, expelled by the Mongols. And *Naga* means *snake*—they were the ancient serpent people, legendary all over the far East, even to Siam and Angkor. I'm going to do a radio column on the subject next month. You see the obvious connection: Raja Naga, the serpent people, the gypsies, and this horse trick?"

"I see no connection whatever," I said. "Raja Naga is a name assumed for the benefit of suckers; if he called himself that in India, he'd be lynched."

This wounded Uncle Pascal, who straightway deserted me.

We passed the four hiking enthusiasts, who had started ahead of us. They were waiting, it seemed, for a geologist's hammer to be brought for Millinger. He and Lammengeyer were in ordinary garments. Newberry was oddly resplendent in khaki breeches and an emerald green jacket, and had a camera slung over his shoulder. Raymond wore shorts and sweater, with a feathered Alpine hat; he carried an alpenstock and had a musette bag at his hip. With an exchange of somewhat rude jokes, we rode past, and Newberry vowed loudly that they would yet get to Arch Lake ahead of us.

This was possible, as Herron explained when I fell in beside him. Our trail hugged the little stream, while the foot-trail climbed immediately and made a short-cut to the lake. But ours, as Herron said with a shrug, was safer for a parade with females!

Arch Lake, when at last we reached it, proved to be a tiny crystal-clear body of snow-water. On its shore stood a miniature of the Main House at Alta Serafina, which was used chiefly for fishing parties. The cooks and camp-crew were on hand; boats were brought out, and a meal was being readied in a screened pavilion beside the water.

Since the hikers would be along in an hour at most, and it was a trifle early for luncheon, Herron suggested that we wet a fly. Most of us fell in with the idea. The water had not been fished this year; the fish were ravenous, and we had caught enough for all hands before the shrieks of the famishing women fetched us ashore. Millinger and his companions had not yet shown up, but the fish were put on the fire regardless.

I turned over my fish to the cleaners, heard Pascal hail me, and joined him without paying any heed to the others at his table. I would not have chosen Raja Naga and the Princess for my company, but could not draw back without giving offense.

"Nine cooks!" Princess Gantimiroff was drawling, with a gesture toward our helpers. "And a forest ranger, and others. Apparently we're well served."

The Hindu flashed her a look and a smile that held no mirth.

"Belief in the brotherhood of man, I presume, doesn't forbid one to have domestics?"

Her brows lifted. "How should I know?" She gave him a wide, earnest look, and overdid the innocent one sufficiently to make the mockery apparent. "I've no beliefs whatever!"

"Oh, my mistake! Pray pardon me," Raja Naga rejoined. "I was under the impression—something General Boguslav said to me before his tragic death, or perhaps something else entirely! Forgive my error."

AT the name of *Boguslav,* she caught her breath, and I wondered where I had heard the name before. It gave her a jolt, certainly; then she smiled sweetly on the Hindu.

"Dear Raja Naga!" she murmured. "I didn't know that a magician could make mistakes! Is it possible that he doesn't foresee everything? That he could even do very dangerous things, like talking, without being aware of their peril?"

It was all suavely, beautifully said, but the sense of restraint startled me.

"Oh, I'm no magician!" Raja Naga laughed lightly. "I'm merely a humble slave of the karmic forces, Princess. We believe, you know, that there's no such thing as accident; that whatever was done, say a year ago in Paris, might have its repercussion today in California. Some very interesting things—but you say that you have no beliefs."

Something hit her again in those words; what it was, I could not tell. With a laugh, the Gantimiroff rose and flounced away, catching Herron's eye and rejoining him. Raja Naga's gaze drove after her. Then, ignoring us, the Hindu came to his feet and strode off.

"Well, that's a queer business!" I observed. "They weren't kidding, either."

"Devil a bit," agreed Uncle Pascal. Suddenly it came to me where I had heard the name of Boguslav. Why, of course! That was the old White Russian whose death had been foretold by the first "Mr. Fate" message!

"No, they weren't kidding," rambled on Uncle Pascal. "I'll bet he's got a lot on her. I've heard rumors that she's an agent in Hollywood for the Communists. But what a fine woman she is, Keyne! A barbaric cat, a tigress—"

Before he could say more, the stentorian lunch-call went out, and with the odors of fish-fry in the air, we fairly leaped for the board.

That was a meal for the gods, and we made the most of it. We were nearly finished when Millinger and Lammengeyer came into sight. I noticed that Lammengeyer was carrying Raymond's alpenstock.

As the two wolfed some food, they told us that Raymond had kept dropping back; all his boasted walking ability had evaporated—no doubt due to the altitude. He ordered them at last to go on without him, and they complied. Uneasy at his non-arrival, Lammengeyer had gone back to meet him. As he did not return, Newberry went to find the pair of them.

"I couldn't find hide nor hair of Raymond," recounted Lammengeyer wearily. "When Newberry came along, he said to come on in, and he'd go back till he found Raymond. Now the two of them are in the soup."

Herron exchanged a glance with the forest ranger who had shown up to lunch with us. "What d'you think, Woodruff?"

"I think we'd better get after 'em, Mr. Herron," the ranger replied. "You know, there are old trails branching off

the High Trail they followed. They may have struck off on one, or they may have struck down to the horse-trail you took. Or they may have turned back."

"All right," said Herron. "We'll take along a couple of horses for them; you phone the Main House to send up a couple more for the party here. Brett, you and Keyne, Woodruff and I. How about it, Gordon?"

"You bet," I assented. "And the others?"

"The party stays here," said Herron, and his tone permitted of no argument.

We were off in ten minutes with the two led horses. As the ranger and Herron both knew the trails intimately, we struck away from the lake at a good pace. And we were scarcely out of sight of the lake when we saw Newberry ahead, and alone. His hat was gone, and he was dead beat.

"Raymond? Search me," he said to our questions. "I went clear back to where we left him; no sign of him anywhere. He may have turned back, of course. He had said something about feeling the altitude."

"Hop into the saddle," said Herron.

Woodruff and Newberry, finally, rode off along the High Trail. Herron, Brett and I took the lower trail. It so happened that I was in the lead, when we came into a little clearing and saw a single blasted pine in the center; and seated on a rock at the base of the tree was Raymond, holding his Alpine hat between his knees.

Letting out a hail, I spurred on and dismounted. Then, realizing that he had made no response, I started toward him —and halted in sickened amazement.

Two furrows of blood ran down his face. From his skull protruded a splinter of wood; beside him lay a branch, apparently fallen from the tree above. I went to him, caught his wrist to feel his pulse. He was dead.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FIVE-THIRTY that afternoon found the main party of riders not yet returned to the Main House. In Herron's bare pine sanctum sat Brett, Newberry, Herron, Dr. White and I, and a silence of horror hung upon the room.

"Good God, White! Say that again!" breathed Herron, openly incredulous. "You must be mistaken. It was quite obviously an accident!"

The puffy little physician, nervously eying us in challenge, drew a long breath and repeated his amazing statement.

"Mr. Raymond simply did not meet his death through being struck by that falling bough, as you thought. The splinter which was embedded in his skull did not make the wound. In fact," he added, "I withdrew it quite easily."

"But, Doc, they found him that way!" protested Newberry. "He was brought in just as he was found. Brett took pictures of him. Keyne, you discovered him—the splinter was in his head then?"

"Yes, and ghastly it was," I replied.

"Here." Brett, who had a wad of blotters in his hand, parted them and produced a number of photographic prints, not yet quite dry. "I wanted to let these dry, but take 'em now. That's exactly the way we found him, Doctor."

Doctor White examined the prints, spreading them on the desk, and grisly things they were, showing the seated corpse from various angles.

"I can't help it," said White, with a stubborn air. "Pictures or no pictures, the wound was not made by this piece of wood. He met his death in some other fashion."

"You mean that it was no accident?" Herron asked sharply. "Is that it?"

"Really, Mr. Herron, I can't assign causes," protested the Doctor uneasily. "I can't go that far."

"Then for heaven's sake go as far as you can! Explain yourself."

"Well sir, from what you say and from these pictures, the assumption is that the man was seated there, and was killed by a dead branch falling. The point went through his head and broke off, the branch falling beside him. Right?"

He was right, we all agreed. He went on:

"Have you any idea how far that dead branch fell?"

"No," rejoined Herron. "But the tree had no branches at all within about sixty feet of the ground, I estimated. So it fell that far, at least."

"From those photographs, I should say the branch was about two inches thick."

We agreed that it was—a long, weathered, dead limb.

"Consider," said White gravely, "the impact of that weight falling such a distance."

"The devil!" Herron said abruptly. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"Such a blow would have shattered the bones and caused a terrific internal hemorrhage. The wound that killed Mr. Raymond was knifelike. There was a trace of contusion, but no parietal fracture. The wound is regular, and quite circular; a bit over an inch and a quarter in diameter but very, very deep."

"The splinter in the wound—"

"Could not possibly have caused it," asserted the physician firmly.

"Any chance of some other interpretation, Doctor?" asked Brett.

"None, unless we assume that either the laws of anatomy or those of gravity were suspended," replied the physician with a certain dry humor.

"Then," said Herron abruptly, "we have to face it, that's all. The sheriff and coroner will have a technical holiday when they get here. They're on the way now. Lafe! You see what this means?" The crisp, kinetic energy of him struck across the room suddenly. "A hell of a thing all around! You handle it for the newspapers; play it up as an accident. First, let's have your yarn. What happened during the hike that was significant?"

Newberry pondered. "Nothing," he said at length. "We bunched up on the trail until Raymond began to tire; he felt the altitude. He loitered so far behind that I went back for him a couple of times. He held us all back. We figured a way to get on faster; one of us would stay with Raymond for a bit, then hike out and overtake the others, another dropping back to keep prodding him along. We were afraid of some accident. He refused to turn and make for home. That's about all there was to it."

"Any quarrels?"

"No, and I kept my ears open. I was disappointed because I had gone along in hope of getting an earful. You know how I hate to walk, anyhow."

"Who was the one to think up your shuttle system?" demanded Herron.

"Lammengeyer, I believe."

"Which of you last saw Raymond alive?"

Newberry reflected. "Must have been Millinger. He was puffing and steaming when he caught up with us. I went on with him, and Lammengeyer sat down to wait for Raymond to come along. About twenty minutes later Lammengeyer overtook us, alone; said he had waited, and even had gone back a ways, but had seen nothing of Raymond. It was by the little waterfall that he overtook us."

"And then you went back to look?"

"Correct, Chief. Had no luck. Met you. So it must have been Honest Old Andy who saw the guy last."

"That is," added Herron, "provided Lammengeyer was telling the truth about not having seen him."

NEWBERRY rose, with an elaborately casual air which did not conceal his wolfish eagerness.

"Well, I'll get on the story, Chief. . . . Mind if I borrow Brett for a while?"

And the puzzled Brett departed with him.

Dr. White, who had no mind for mysteries and wanted to be about his business elsewhere, took his leave also. He had barely gone, when the phone rang. Herron answered.

One startled oath was ripped from him. A minute later he slammed down the instrument, snapped open the interphone, and roared at Lennihan to find where the call had come from.

"Damned impudent rat!" he burst out at me. "That was our Mr. Fate himself! He said this was one murder in which he was not concerned; he laughed and rang off. How the devil could he have known about it? He must be one of us, in this very house, just as you said!"

His agitation was pardonable, for we had kept Raymond's demise a close secret among ourselves. Herron's fist crashed down on the desk.

"Gordon, there's the murderer! He denies having had anything to do with it, in order to divert suspicion. What's Lafe done about tracking him down?"

"Ask Lafe, not me," I said. "And for God's sake, don't breathe the name of Mr. Fate to the Sheriff! Every newspaper in the country would grab at it with a whoop!"

"Of course." He looked up, as Lennihan entered. "Well? Where did the call come from?"

"It came from here—from Alta Serafina."

"From what room?"

"It didn't come from any room, sir. It was a long-distance call, from Alta Serafina 676. That's the coin booth for special use—it has an outside wire."

Herron dismissed him, with an oath of irritation.

"Gordon, there are damned queer things here!" he said to me. "For ex-

ample, that telegram inviting Millinger here—who sent it? I swear none of us did! But—"

He broke off to answer the interphone. The riders had come home. Herron had left word that he wanted to see Millinger and Lammengeyer the instant they returned, and this was an intimation that they were on the way here now. I rose to leave, but he waved me down.

"You keep your nose to the grindstone, blast you!" He fairly glared at me across the desk. "I mean it. I need help here. God knows what may break any minute! We're dealing with a political pinnacle of professional virtue," he added, "and a banker who's an absolute rascal at heart. You sit right in, Gordon, and be here in case I need a witness to what's said."

Practical man, Daniel Parker Herron!

"All right," I said, rising. "I'll sit in. But first, your old friend Gordon Keyne is going to step into your outer office on important business."

As I stepped into the lavatory, which opened off Lennihan's office, I almost ran into Newberry coming out.

He caught my arm. "Keyne! The rest of the crowd are back!"

"I know it," I said. "Millinger and Lammengeyer are on their way now, and Dan wants me to sit in as a witness."

"Don't you let 'em go before I get there," he exclaimed quickly. "Boy, I've got the whole thing by the tail! Brett's digging up some stuff; I'll get this damned story sent in—then we'll be along. You hold 'em. Mind, now! Don't let 'em go before I show up! You can send for me, if you must."

I CAME back to the sanctum just in time to follow Millinger and Lammengeyer in. The former, walking stiffly, lumbered over to a chair and sank down with a deep grunt of relief. Lammengeyer, floridly sunburned, was limping, and his well-groomed, hearty radiance was absent. Neither of them knew of Raymond's death, naturally.

"Glad to hear, by your phone-call before we left the lake, that Raymond was found," said Millinger cheerfully. "What happened to the old buzzard? Wasn't like him to quit, I thought. *Do or die* is his motto."

"Evidently he did, today," Herron said grimly. "Was he well when you saw him last?"

"Fagged out a bit with the altitude. I remember he took off that fool knapsack he had packed along, and hung it on a tree. What d'you mean? He isn't ill?"

Lammengeyer, perhaps sensing something amiss, regarded us with an uneasy frown.

"We should have had better sense than to go hiking at this altitude, all of us. What's the matter with Raymond, Dan?"

"The same old thing that comes to all of us sooner or later," said Herron.

Millinger, holding a match to his cigar and puffing, got the import of the words and stared at Herron, his mouth open, while he slowly lowered the cigar.

"You can't mean—no, no! You said you found him—found him—"

"Sitting under a tree, yes. Dead. It seems that our friend Raja Naga last night predicted a death, but picked the wrong man as the victim."

"My Lord," exclaimed Lammengeyer under his breath.

Herron turned to him. "You saw him last, I think? How was he looking then?"

The banker met Herron's scrutiny with a steady, almost challenging, gaze. "He was tired; the altitude, of course. But I didn't see him last. Andy, didn't you see him after I did?"

"Of course I did," said Millinger, his face troubled and dismayed. "This is terrible, Herron—terrible! Yes, I must have been the last to see him in life. I walked with him till he got short of breath again. Then he sat down beside the trail, and I steamed ahead, to catch up with the others."

"Excuse me for asking the question, Andrew," Herron said gently, "but did you have any altercation with Raymond today? Any quarrel over the political situation?"

"No, not a word," Millinger made frank reply. "You see, I've been waiting until you and I have that talk this afternoon—at least, we were to have had it. Now everything's both simplified, and in a mess. The plane, you know, was chartered by Raymond. I'll have to make other arrangements regarding my speaking tour, and in other directions as well."

Herron waved this aside. "Hold on, Andy. You gentlemen don't fully understand. Raymond is not dead as the result of an accident, as we first thought; we've discovered that he was killed—murdered."

Millinger gaped, shocked into silence. Lammengeyer stiffened and sat staring.

"We don't know who killed him," Herron went on. "It'll have to be run down. The county officials are on the way here;

I'll try to make the newspapers think it was accidental—"

"So that's it!" cut in Lammengeyer. "Are you intimating, Herron, that either Andy or I are in any way connected with his death?"

"As far as we know," said Herron quietly, "you two and Newberry were the only people within miles of Raymond when he was murdered. What Sheriff Kemp will think, what anyone would think, is rather obvious. However, some other person may have been in that vicinity. I'm hoping to check on all such matters with you two, before the Sheriff comes."

"Yes, yes, I can see all that," Millinger murmured unhappily. "You're right, Herron. We were the last to see him, or I was. Unfortunate, most unfortunate! Let's get the matter cleared up, by all means." He relapsed into silence, brooding heavily, chin sunk on chest.

"I'd like a word with you in private," shot out Lammengeyer abruptly.

"Eh?" Herron regarded him sharply. "Certainly not, sir. Mr. Keyne is fully in my confidence; so is Mr. Millinger. Under the circumstances, it would be most unusual."

"I fail to see that," said the banker, an edge to his voice. "However, as you like. If Raymond's death seemed accidental at first, why not leave it that way?"

Herron smiled a little, but his nostrils began to flare; I saw that he was furious. His voice, however, remained calm.

"The very suggestion throws a most unfortunate suspicion on you, Lammengeyer. There'll be no hushing up. I can't afford to have skeletons in my cupboard."

I began to appreciate why Herron had wanted a witness present.

"I think you mistake," Lammengeyer said softly. "We can't let this thing get out of hand until it involves us all—me and you and Millinger—and, shall I say, Mrs. Underwood."

Herron froze. Then, surprisingly, Millinger spoke up.

"Lammengeyer, don't make a fool of yourself! We have nothing to fear."

"Shut up!" snapped the banker viciously. "Your brain died this afternoon. Until you get another, keep quiet! You'll be the chief sufferer here. I know that I had nothing to do with Raymond's death, and I don't propose to be put on the block. You'll be ruined if a breath of suspicion touches you; it'll shrivel your campaign, your whole future!"

"Just a minute," said Herron, and his eyes were dangerous now. "You mentioned a Mrs. Underwood?"

"Precisely. The wife of a man who came here recently on business."

"Then you admit you sent him! Fine!" Herron's face lit up. "But you don't know where he is now. You don't know what happened to him."

"I'm talking about Raymond," countered the banker. "I know that I didn't kill him."

Millinger heaved himself up in his chair. "Are you pointing a finger at me?" he boomed.

"Not necessarily. After all, Newberry was on the trip too."

"But I was the last to see him." Millinger's face was grim. "That is, unless you lied about not having found him!"

Lammengeyer spread out his hands. "You see? If this sort of thing goes on when the authorities take hold, what will happen to all of us? Far better to decide that it was an accident. Raymond's no loss to the world. Who's to gain by newspaper publicity? Not you, Herron. And certainly not Millinger."

"I haven't heard one good reason why I should conspire to defeat justice," Herron replied coldly.

"No? I've given you plenty of reasons; two hundred thousand of them!"

HERRON jerked slightly.

"So you admit that you sent the check by Wilson, eh? Or Underwood?"

"I know, naturally, that you received a check," Lammengeyer said warily, "since it was drawn on my bank."

"Sent by your bank, you mean." Herron leaned forward and touched a switch. Lights sprang on in the room, which was darkening rapidly. He opened a drawer and produced the check found in Wilson's pocket. "Trinity Trust, yes. So you've tied yourself in with Wilson, with this check!"

"Not at all," denied the banker.

"A check for two hundred thousand dollars," went on Herron. "Bribe—blackmail! And you think you can swing me with your filthy money! When I've got you tied up with the syndicate of gamblers—when this very check ties you up! Here's the check; here's what I think of it, and I'll keep it for evidence."

He swiftly tore it across.

Then Millinger spoke ponderously.

"Better keep it, Herron. Don't lose it, if that's your attitude. If you want a motive as to Raymond's killing—"

Lammengeyer, suddenly white and ablaze with anger, leaped up.

"Andy! You fool, I've warned you to keep out of this!" His voice shrilled. "Keep out, or I'll crack you wide open!"

Herron nodded to Millinger.

"Go on, Andy," he said quietly. "Now we're getting somewhere. How did you learn about this check? Did you know what they were using it for?"

Millinger quite ignored the furious banker.

"No, but I learned of the check yesterday," he said. "The money was put up by Raymond. He supposed it was being handled as cash; he found a check had been sent, and was angry, very angry. He claimed it was a dead give-away. Lammengeyer was confident that it was not. Raymond said if evil came of it, he would expose Lammengeyer as head of the gambling syndicate. This is how I learned of his connections, of his unholy alliance. He was so angry he kept nothing back."

Lammengeyer, who had become very calm, came forward to the desk, leaned both hands on it, and stared down into Herron's face.

"Now it's my turn," he said. "I tried to save Millinger, but the old fool lets his tongue run on regardless. Do you want to know how Raymond was killed?"

"Yes, if you know," said Herron.

"I saw it done."

The words hit upon the tension like a funeral bell. All of us froze intently upon the man standing there before the desk.

"You—you saw it done!" gasped Millinger, staring at him.

"Yes." Lammengeyer turned slightly, face to face with the candidate. "Yes, Andrew. I tried to save you. Now I'll have to tell the truth—that I saw you hit him with that hammer you carried. You didn't know I saw it, eh? You came up behind him as he sat on that rock—"

A roar escaped Millinger. He came out of his chair as though on springs, and would have leaped at the banker had not Herron acted swiftly, darting from behind the desk and catching Millinger by the wrists.

"Quiet!" His words, his eyes, silenced the stalwart old candidate. "Quiet, Andy! Let Lammengeyer talk; your turn will come."

Newberry opened the door and stepped into the room.

"Sheriff Kemp's just been announced from the lower entrance, Chief. I had to have a word with you before he got here."

"Not much to talk about now," said Herron. "Lammengeyer saw Millinger commit the crime."

"Oh!" Newberry started. "The devil he did!"

"There's still time," spoke up Lammengeyer, "to show some sense and keep this an accident, Herron. I don't want to see Millinger ruined by this thing!"

"You won't," shot out Newberry. He turned to Millinger, his pale eyes alight. "I'll take care of you, Andy; sit tight and say nothing. I know who actually did murder Raymond."

Herron barked at him. "Careful, Lafe! Lammengeyer saw the thing done, I tell you!"

"Of course," said Lammengeyer coldly. "With the sharp end of that hammer. After killing him, Millinger threw the hammer away and—"

"You lie!" broke out Millinger furiously. "You lie! You heard me say I'd dropped that hammer somewhere on the trail!"

Herron made another appeal to the reporter.

"Be sensible, Lafe, be sensible! Lammengeyer couldn't have known all this unless he had seen the murder committed, as he says—"

"Or," struck in Newberry in his sardonic way, "unless he had committed it himself, which he did. . . . Quiet, Andy, quiet!"

He looked down, saw the torn check on the desk, and broke into a laugh.

"So we're coming right out into the open, eh? Lammengeyer, philanthropist, banker, and big shot of the gambling syndicate! Chief, this is going to be the biggest story of the decade!"

CHAPTER NINE

NOBODY down at the county-seat was missing a chance to hit Alta Serafina on business. Truro, the district attorney, showed up with Dr. Burton the coroner, and Sheriff Kemp with his sandy hair and bristles brought a technician and several deputies. Newberry was the white-haired boy and no mistake. Before breaking in upon us to recount his triumphant version of the killing, it seemed that he

had spoken with Sheriff Kemp by phone at the lower entrance. Consequently, everything now went off like clockwork.

The furious and protesting Lammengeyer was sent to his rooms under guard. So was Millinger, after a few words with Newberry. Then we all went straight to the hospital, where the coroner had been conferring with Dr. White. They were in thorough agreement, and little White puffed with pride as the coroner confirmed his finding.

"I've signed the disposal order, Sheriff," Burton concluded, "and you may have the body whenever you wish. I shall want it later for the P.M., of course."

"And," said Brett, at a nod from Newberry, "if you'll all step down to my office, we'll go into what actual evidence has turned up. I have a binocular microscope there, and if you—"

"I have my own instrument along," spoke up the technician. "Let's go."

So we went. That Brett and Newberry had been working together ever since they had left Herron's office, was now evident.

In Brett's office we found, lying in the folds of a white felt cloth, the geologist's hammer carried that day by Millinger. Woodruff, the ranger, had discovered it lying in the upper trail, nowhere near the body of Raymond.

"Take my microscope, Dr. Burton," Brett said. "I think you'll find the hammer as clean as a whistle."

Burton examined the metal carefully.

"Apparently you're right," he said. "And superficially, I should say this was not the instrument that caused the man's death. The measurements of the wound do not coincide."

"And it was found half a mile from the body," Newberry put in.

"But now look at this alpenstock," said Brett. He brought the thing, wrapped in a curl of brown paper. "I've examined it; you may do so and satisfy yourselves. You'll notice that the steel head is not unlike the sharp end of the hammer in shape and size, but a trifle larger at the base. If Dr. Burton will examine it and determine just what are the fibers caught in the roughened metal and around the jointure with the wood, I think the matter will be clear."

In some excitement we watched while Burton and the technicians examined the alpenstock head. They figured, conferred and agreed.

"This did the job, all right," said the coroner. "Just to be on the safe side, I'll prepare a slide and use the other microscope."

"Apparently," said Brett, "the steel head has been cleansed with sand or dirt."

"And it looks clean to the naked eye," the coroner assented.

The technician opened up his big leather case. Burton took a slide, and with a knife and a low-powe lens scraped indefinable particles from the alpenstock head to the slide. He touched a drop of liquid to the glass, and with a teaser poked at the result. He then placed the slide in the big German binocular microscope and went to work.

"Nerve corpuscles are unmistakable, both multipolar and pyramidal," he muttered. "Shred of the dura, too. . . . Cortical brain tissue, mingled with grit."

BRETT now took up the story, as we had already heard it from Newberry.

"The dead man, upon leaving the Main House this morning, carried this alpenstock. Tiring on the trail, he gave it to Lammengeyer, who later brought it to the Arch Lake lodge with him. He stacked it there with the impedimenta of the party. He came home on horseback, and the alpenstock was brought in with the other stuff."

Kemp was busily taking notes, while the happenings of the day were reconstructed. When the photographs were mentioned, Truro demanded them; they had been left in Herron's sanctum, and Brett posted off to get them. Newberry, meantime, carried on the story.

"Could Millinger have had access to the alpenstock before the murder?" Truro asked.

"Not unless he borrowed it from Lammengeyer, who was carrying it," said Newberry.

"Who, aside from Lammengeyer, has handled this alpenstock?"

"The crew, in packing it back here. I, when I got it from the equipment-room, to show Brett. No one else. Lammengeyer had it most of the day."

"Can either you or anyone else," snapped Truro, "swear it was the one taken out this morning by Raymond?"

"The men who brought it back told me it—"

"No hearsay evidence, Mr. Newberry. Can you swear it was the same one?"

"Certainly," said the reporter angrily.

"How can you be positive?"

"Because no other was taken. There are a dozen in the equipment-room. No

other was gone all day. No other is gone now."

"Were you here all day, watching the equipment-room?"

"Of course not! But I—"

"You should know that you can't hang any man on that sort of evidence," Truro said. "But I don't want to minimize the real importance of the help you gentlemen are giving us. What's this about Lammengeyer claiming to have seen the murder committed and describing it? How did he happen to know so much about it?"

"Wait!" I exclaimed hastily, remembering. "Herron, do you recall how he stood over your desk? The photographs lay there, telling him the whole story! And I noticed that he glanced at them. He felt himself slipping in deeper and deeper, and I think he just let fly with the accusation, desperately."

"And you're all convinced," Truro said slowly, "that this atrocious murder was committed by a gentle old man known as a philanthropist, a banker—"

"And the man at the top of the gambling racket," put in Herron quietly. "Lafe, you may break the Silver Syndicate story in all our radio stations tomorrow, and arrange with the news services to follow each broadcast with their releases. Lammengeyer said enough to tie himself fast to the Wilson deal."

He told the amazed county officials about Lammengeyer's behind-the-scenes activities. In the midst of this, Brett returned with the photographs, which were examined with keen interest. The sliver found in the wound, and other bits of physical evidence were produced, and the district attorney's temper began to improve. Truro at length pointed to the photos, with a question:

"I understand that this clearing is on the lower trail. Why would Raymond or Lammengeyer have gone there? Did they know these trails well?"

"No, not at all," said Brett. "But there's a sign on the upper trail, an arrow and a marking '*To water,*' pointing anyone along the connecting trail. I assume that they went to get a drink."

A few more questions, and the officials were satisfied.

"I think we've enough here to justify Lammengeyer's arrest on suspicion of murder," said Truro. "To inflict that wound, the killer had to grasp the alpenstock just above the point; also, the wound was inflicted from behind. Thus we have premeditation fairly well proven. If we find Lammengeyer's fingerprints on the damned thing—"

"They'd be there anyway," I put in, "since he carried it a good part of the day. And there's one curious thing: Why did Raymond fall behind?"

They all stared at me. Raymond was tired. Raymond had felt the altitude. The thick shoes and alpenstock and knapsack had been too much for him. Voices dinned at me from all sides, but I stuck to the question. Why should Raymond have grown so quickly weary, when his passion was hiking and climbing?

"Probably he was an armchair mountaineer," suggested Truro.

"No: he was a real climber. If you look at his boots as he lies on that table, you'll see that the nails are worn down and the leather scuffed by many a hard climb; also, he's the president of some climbing society. Now, a professional climber, or one who makes a hobby of it, doesn't bog down so suddenly under a few miles, or a little altitude."

Truro regarded me thoughtfully. "What do you think the reason was?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," I said frankly. "Did someone suggest that he lag behind? If so, with what purpose? Was it so that he and Lammengeyer might discuss something privately? When you're proving premeditation, it might be important to bring out that Raymond didn't lag because of exhaustion, but for some other reason."

"I'll remember it. Good idea," said Truro. "Well, suppose we go and get statements from those two; and if we turn up nothing new, Lammengeyer it is."

Lammengeyer it was; and except for ourselves and Mrs. Lammengeyer, not a soul knew of the day's happenings. That poor woman was tremendously broken up, but rose to the occasion like a good one, and insisted on leaving with her husband. Herron provided them with a car, and two deputies set off with them for Serafina.

I WAS standing outside, at the front steps, when the cars got off. Brett was with me. When the banker and his guards passed us, I saw Brett's face twist and wince in the lamplight. It came to me that he must now be living again those horrible moments when he, in Paris, had been led away for a murder he had not committed. As the cars departed, I took him by the arm.

"Come to the bar, and forget it. A cocktail before dinner."

"No; I want to keep a clear head," he said in a low voice. "You must understand; I helped fasten those handcuffs on him. And now I'm wondering— Well, see you at dinner!"

He swung off and away. Wondering—what? Whether he had helped to corral the wrong man? That struck me as nonsense, so I went into the bar and ran afoul of Millinger and Newberry, who were in a corner nook by themselves.

"This young man has displayed positive genius today!" boomed the candidate, real affection in his rugged countenance. "I can never be too grateful for what he's done this day!"

Newberry grinned. "Your enthusiasm may kindle the Chief into giving me a raise, Andy! Talk it up to him, like a good scout."

Millinger was in earnest, however.

"Better than that: Our talks have given me an idea, Newberry. At the present moment I'm like a marooned mariner; my party heads are back East; I'm cut adrift from everything, and I'm scarcely equipped to handle the political niceties of the campaign. I left such matters to Raymond. Of late years, however, newspaper men have come heavily to the fore—in a word, my boy, I need a campaign manager. Can you step into Raymond's shoes if I get Herron's permission?"

The swift gratification in Newberry's face was answer enough. Before he could reply, Millinger continued gravely:

"A few hours ago, the end of the world was in sight for me. You walked in, showed intuition, intelligence, capability; I still shudder to think of the outcome, if the wild charge of Lammengeyer had reached the newspapers of the nation. You changed all that, and I'm grateful!"

"All I did was use the tools I'm trained to use," said Newberry, and added frankly: "I do think I made a good job of it, however!"

Guests were drifting into the bar for a preprandial cocktail. Dan Herron had come in with them; he drifted over to us.

"Glad things turned out right for you, Andy," he said. "Hello! You and Lafe look like two plotters!"

"Dead right," said Millinger, and plunged straight at it. He wanted Newberry and said so. "Lend him to me, Dan," he concluded, "and I'll give him a really wide path to travel! Especially if I'm elected."

Herron looked at the reporter with twinkling eyes. "How about it, Lafe?"

"Well," drawled Newberry, "I've got the Raymond story covered; the follow-up goes in after dinner. The Silver Syndicate stuff is written and ready for release, except for the final scripts. The answer's up to you."

"The best story of all hasn't been written yet," Herron said. "If you want a real one for your first press release in your new job, I'll give it to you."

Newberry's grin vanished.

"What is it, Chief? What's up?" he demanded tensely.

"The Herron interests, after thorough investigation," said Herron slowly, "have decided to break their long-standing rule and support a candidate for public office. I'll tell you his name, Lafe, if you'll promise to run down that Mr. Fate rat before you leave me."

"Chief, that guy is a goner right now! I'll do it if it takes a leg!" burst out Newberry. "Who's the candidate? What party are you backing?"

"Andrew Millinger for Congress," said Herron.

The rest was pandemonium.

CHAPTER TEN

MORNING found Alta Serafina subdued and somber, for there had been no point in keeping the tragedy a secret. What hurt far more than the death of Raymond, who had few friends, was the arrest of Lammengeyer.

Cregar, an intimate friend of the banker, was hard hit. So was Mona Vindon, for the accused man had been her first backer. And it was here that cause and effect began to get in its deadly work. Mary, later in the morning, told me about it. She was at Mona Vindon's cottage when Herron came, and Mona made her remain; perhaps Mona knew she had Herron at a disadvantage, with Mary present.

"Yes, I sent for you, Dan," she replied to Herron's greeting. "Now the time has come for me to claim your many promises! I want you to do something for me."

Herron laughed. "Well, nothing hard about that, my dear! Name it, and if it's in the world, it's yours!"

"Oh, this isn't a thing," she said smiling, and kissed him. "You've probably done it anyway. I mean, get behind Fred

Lammengeyer. We must do it. With all your influence and backing, we should be able to prove this charge absurd."

"Look, my dear—let me tell you the truth about this," began Herron. "You must face the fact that Fred's come to the end of the road. I've been working for months, getting the dope on him; the stories are being broken now. He's back of the organized gambling—"

Before he got far with his revelation, Mona was in mounting anger.

"You can't talk that way about him! I won't have it, Dan!" she cried. "I owe my first recognition to him, and it's a debt I sha'n't forget. That you, of all people, should have been working in secret to wreck him—I can't believe it!"

"Confound it, Mona, anyone would think the old hypocrite was your long-lost brother!" exclaimed Dan, which did not help matters a bit. "Now let me tell you something more: Lafe Newberry has built up the gambling story, and it can't be shaken; and in this instance he's built up Lammengeyer's guilt beyond all possibility of doubt, Mona. I can't turn on him now. I can't deny what I believe to be the facts, what is obviously a crime—you wouldn't have me do that. I just can't do it!"

"Why can't you?" She looked him in the eyes, and it was a look that went deep. "Why can't you, Dan? I'm afraid that there's only one answer: you really mean you won't do it?"

Herron could have done it, of course. But he was stubborn and grew more so.

At length Mona put her hand on his arm and smiled, and spoke.

"All right, Dan; suppose you think it over, and we'll take it up again after lunch. I must get at my mail with Miss Hartley. Say, two o'clock? —No, Mary, don't you go! After the mail's done, we might take a ride."

Dan Herron went his way, nicely and completely dismissed; and Mary, telling me about it, was most admiring.

"And after all, Gordon, why shouldn't Herron do a little thing like that?"

"Little thing?" I repeated. "Woman, get wise to yourself! This is murder! Besides, it's a tremendous story he has worked up; for a whim, she's asking him to go against facts, against all he believes, against all his business instincts and—"

"Bosh!" said Mary. "He'd do it in a minute, if he really loved her with all his heart and soul!"

"If she loved him that way," I retorted, "she wouldn't ask it!"

Mary looked at me, I looked at her; the same idea had hit us.

"So that's it!" I observed. "After all the talk about them, have they discovered they're not in love? Would she pass up the richest catch in America?"

"Perhaps she has just that much sense," said Mary.

THIS was Sunday, and for some of us here, Monday meant business. The Nortons were getting off after luncheon, and Millinger was leaving an hour later; he was not taking Newberry, however, for the latter had many loose ends to take care of. Herron promised to send Newberry in one of his own planes, to join Millinger, within a few days. The Cregars were staying over, as were the others.

Luncheon past, I discovered Brett filling his pipe in a corner of the veranda, and joined him.

"When will we get any papers with the story?" I demanded.

He shrugged. "Dan probably has them now, for a couple of planes came in this morning. When he'll hand 'em out to everybody, is another matter. They may be in the reading-room, though. Say, tell me something! Why did you put so much importance on Raymond's having lagged behind?"

"Just a hunch, Brett; no actual reason. I still think it may be important."

"It is," he said. "Want to come over to my shack?"

I assented, and we crossed to his cottage. When we got comfortable in his place, he jerked his thumb toward a couch under the windows.

"Ever see that before?"

I frowned. The object on the couch was, apparently, a musette-bag.

"No."

"Think back. Somebody—Millinger, I think—said that Raymond had been so tired he hung his musette-bag on a tree; that was when Millinger last saw him. Our sheriff paid no attention. I went out and brought the thing in."

"So that's the one!" I exclaimed. "Anything of interest about or in it?"

"Apparently not. Cigars, gum, chocolate and a small thermos half full of coffee. And yet—well, it's a queer thing." Brett paused, cocking an eye at the couch. "I have a hunch, a feeling, that if Raymond's murder is ever solved, that musette-bag will have something to do with it. And your query as to why he was so tired."

"The murder has been solved, Brett," I said gently.

He swung around and gave me a look. "You really think so?" he demanded in skeptic mockery.

"No."

He relaxed and smiled. "I thought so, Keyne," he said. "First, let me ask why you aren't satisfied with the outcome of the mystery?"

"Simply because it doesn't satisfy," I said. "It answers all the requirements, and yet fails to convince me. My reason says Lammengeyer is guilty; yet I can't believe it."

He nodded. "Right, right! That brings me back. . . . Let me talk of myself, will you, before we go into the Lammengeyer thing? I've crowded a lot into the past year; now it's crowding me, apparently. Look at the people here, all of a sudden, who were in Paris then! Gantimiroff; Raja Naga; Raymond—"

"Whom you hated," I said impulsively. "Remember what you said about him?"

"Yes," he said. "That I'd like to kill him. And with my story, the murder might well have been laid at my door. But others here also hated him. Let's not get off the track; think of Paris. Is it by accident that those people whom I knew then are here now? Certainly it's not by human design."

"There are no accidents," I said, "from the psychic viewpoint."

"Quite true. Then it's by design of the fates. And think what that means to me!" His voice shook slightly. "I've prayed and hoped that forces were at work to establish my innocence; surely there is a just Deity! This thought has upheld me. And I've suffered, Keyne. I lost the woman I loved, because of that affair. Yes, Mona Vindon. I had gone to Paris; she was coming later. Then—well, she turned to Herron; but we've become good friends again, under his ægis. It could be nothing more. I couldn't betray his friendship."

He paused, puffed his pipe alight, and went on:

"As I say, I waited, in a secure confidence that things would ultimately come around to remove the shadow from my life. Now these people are here—doesn't it mean something? And these people aren't friends. You know the antipathy between me and Newberry—"

I probed. "Be frank, Brett. Take one more step. You've evaded on the cause of your feeling toward Newberry; it's not vague. Let's have it!"

He nodded. "True. I've no basis, mind you, for thinking so; but I'm convinced that he helped me, that he got me clear, because he knew I was innocent of that murder. And he knew I was innocent because he knew who did commit the crime."

"You've no idea yourself who did it?"

"None whatever. But I believe with all my heart and soul," he said, with an earnest tensity that was impressive, "in the approach of justice, whether you call these invisible forces God or Karma or Retribution. The truth will out, Keyne, and the singular way in which these people are gathered here, makes me believe the truth is close upon us."

He laid down his pipe, broke into a smile, and waved his hand toward the couch.

"So that's that, and we may return to the musette-bag yonder—and to Lammengeyer."

"If you remember," I said slowly, "Lammengeyer denied all knowledge of that check to Herron; and later, when accused of murder, wound himself all up in acknowledgment. So he lied, which is a presumption of guilt. And Newberry was convinced of his guilt in regard to the Wilson affair—which has not, remember, been solved. We must regard Lammengeyer, not as the actual murderer but the man behind that crime. With Raymond, he was himself the killer."

"And that brings us back to the query whether the mysterious Mr. Fate were not really Lammengeyer."

"But Mr. Fate called Herron this afternoon!" I exclaimed. "While Lammengeyer was still out on the trail!"

This effectually answered *that.*

The telephone rang. Brett answered.

"Oh! You've got it! Good! Let me have it, yes. I'll jot it down."

HE scribbled rapidly, spoke again, and rang off. He leaped to his feet and came to me, excitement in his face.

"I knew it, Keyne! Let's get back to your first query, now—the one about Raymond!"

"Eh? Oh, you mean as to why he lagged behind and felt so tired?"

"Right." Brett jabbed his pipe toward the couch. "After I got that musette-bag, and found what was in it, I sent off a sample of the coffee, sent it down to Serafina to get it analyzed. That was the report on the phone: The coffee was heavily drugged with one of the barbiturates, frequently used as a pre-opera-

tive sedative. That's why Raymond lagged! He was meant to lag! Didn't I tell you that Mr. Fate was a genius? And I say again, there are no accidents!"

Scarcely was I out of Brett's cottage when Uncle Pascal bobbed up out of nowhere and nabbed me. He insisted on walking me over toward his cottage, and pointing out a green for bowling, freshly rolled and seeded, and surrounded by a gravel path on all four sides.

"Just been rolled," he said, gazing at it lovingly. "I should state, Keyne, that this has been done for my benefit. I love the ancient game. When you can put in three or four hours of an afternoon—"

"Unfortunately, I can't," I said, and broke away, leaving him lovingly eying the new-seeded patch that was to be his bowling-green.

Cregar met me and dragged me into a tennis match, for which I was not sorry, since Raja Naga and Herron made up the four. After two sets, we broke up, and I beckoned the Hindu into a quiet nook and went at him deliberately.

"If you please, information! I'm a curious person, and you've roused my curiosity; since you've spoken openly before me, I can ask you to explain your words to Gantimiroff. Twice you've said you know something about her, about Paris. Will you give me a hint as to what your knowledge comprises?"

He regarded me steadily for a moment. "Tell Mr. Brett that since my knowledge concerns him, it is at his disposal. Shall we say, nine tomorrow morning? Good. And thanks for a very pleasant game."

He had certainly guessed the truth, or had some means of knowing it; I made no effort to deny that I spoke on behalf of Brett.

When I met Brett, late in the afternoon in the cocktail lounge, I told him exactly what had been said. He grimaced slightly and shook his head.

"This is the second time that man has overcome me with courtesy! Nine in the morning, eh?" He laid down an early afternoon edition of a Los Angeles paper. "Seen the *Chronicle*? It arrived by plane half an hour ago. It has the full Raymond story written by Newberry. The ones yesterday and this morning were rather sketchy, but this is good. Some pictures, too. Look it over."

I did not miss the insistence in his manner; I skimmed through the story and looked over the pictures of Raymond without catching anything amiss. He only smiled when I so observed.

"Take a good look at the picture of Raymond taken by Newberry."

I did so. It was captioned as the last picture of Raymond alive, having been snapped on the trail during his fatal hike. And I grew more puzzled. It was a fairish picture, with the background out of focus and the figure beautifully precise.

"I've never won a prize at puzzle pictures," I said. "I'll bite. What else?"

"The musette-bag. Millinger stated, you recall, that Raymond was tired and hung it on a tree or bush—where I found it this morning."

I stared at him. "Yes. But what's the point, Brett? This picture was taken after he had hung it up, of course."

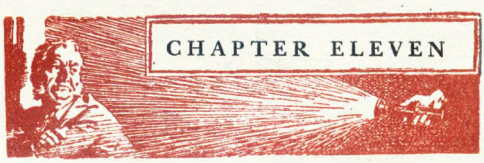
"That's the whole blazing point, man!" he rejoined tensely. "Millinger was the last to see him alive, when he got rid of his musette-bag. Well, this picture was taken later—taken by Newberry."

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed, waking to it at last. "Then Newberry lied about not having found Raymond when he dropped back the last time!"

"Right. He found him. He talked with him. He took this picture. He never missed the musette-bag. He had no way of knowing that the very absence of that bag would positively identify this picture as having been taken at a certain time. And as you've so often said in your fictional outpourings—"

He paused, and I concluded:

"Those are the things that killers overlook; precisely. And the answer is that Newberry is Mr. Fate! It fits, man, it fits! Everything fits!"



FROM the newspapers at which I glanced that evening, I appreciated what an island of peace this estate in the Sierras really was. Herron's announced support of Millinger had created a sensation. The murder of Raymond had created another. The arrest of Lammengeyer had sent all of southern California into a regular tailspin. All in all, it was a Monday long to be remembered in newspaper annals, as one Monday when there was news and to spare. The flood of wires, letters, and phone-calls beating in upon Herron beggared the imagina-

tion; Lennihan had to whip a special corps of assistants together to handle it all.

"What news from the domestic front?" I asked Mary, when she showed up. I was in bed and reading comfortably. "Good or bad?"

"Depends on the point of view," she replied. "I like Herron, of course; at the same time, he's a man who has absolutely everything, and one can't feel much sympathy for him if he loses in love; while Mr. Brett—well, he's a man who has lost everything, Gordon. . . . If Mona really loves him, he deserves it."

That was a woman's argument for you.

"Which puts Brett in a hell of a position, considering what he owes Herron," I said. "Hm! Well, I've had enough arguments for one day. Want to pull out of here and go home?"

"Certainly not," said Mary with decision. "Mona depends on me to stand by her."

That settled it; and I went to sleep. . . .

A subdued hammering wakened me; and I located the sound as coming from the door of our suite. I stumbled into the other room, switched on a light, and opened the door to admit Brett. He was half dressed. His face was expressionless but strangely drawn; his eyes pulled to pin-points against the light.

"Sorry to waken you at this ungodly hour, but hell's broken loose. Get your pants on and come along, like a good fellow."

I gaped at him. "What the devil's up?"

"Another dead man."

"Who?"

"Damn it, I don't know!" he broke out. "Flack, one of the guards, found him and reported to me; didn't know him. I called Dan. He said to get you and meet him there. Now, if you're fully satisfied, will you climb into some clothes? It's chilly outside."

His ill humor was quite justified. I must have appeared stupid; and so I was. It was three-thirty in the morning, I discovered. . . . I fumbled into some clothes, slipped into my tennis shoes, and joined Brett. He had a flashlight with a powerful beam, and in no time we were out of the house. In reply to my questions, he shot the beam ahead.

"Over yonder. By the new bowling-green, Flack said. He's probably there now with Dan."

Leaving the tennis-courts behind, we headed for the bowling-green; it lay between Pascal Herron's cottage and the tiny lake which served Alta Serafina as a swimming-pool; and I recalled the new-seeded ground as we approached in the darkness. A haze was over the stars and the night was pitch-black.

Ahead showed the tiny red glow of a cigarette. We caught Herron's voice; he was there with the guard, Flack. Then everything was silent except the scrape of our feet. We were on the graveled path that bordered the green. The flashlight leaped and struck upon the body ahead, lying across the gravel.

HE was long dead, apparently. Blood had poured into the path from a wound in his neck, and had welled across his clothes. His hands had evidently pawed at the wound, for they were crusted. It was a revolting sight.

"Cregar!" I exclaimed. "Pat Cregar!"

"Yes," grunted Herron. He drew a quick, deep breath, and I sensed that his nerves were at the breaking-point. Nor did I blame him. Relief seized me when the flashlight ceased. The death, the stillness, and the circling loom of black night, combined to raise a panic touch within the heart.

"I'll get some clothes on and rouse up White," said Herron, who was in pajamas. The dawn here was bitter chill. "This is a hell of a thing. Wonder why Mrs. Cregar hasn't missed him?"

"Probably they have separate rooms," said Brett. "Flack, go over to my cottage, will you, and get my camera and bulbs out of the bedroom closet."

He described what he wanted. Flack departed, and Herron also left. The two of us were alone, yet not alone.

"By the way," I asked, "have you tried to find who primed Raymond's coffee?"

"Of course. Impossible. The flask came from the kitchen with others. Raymond took one at random and put it in his bag. As the coffee was half gone, someone might have got a drink from him, and slipped the stuff in. Millinger's gone, so we can't ask him."

"Try Newberry," I suggested, and he grunted. "At any rate, Mr. Fate hasn't left any record of this visitation, apparently. Why the devil would he kill Cregar?"

"Why would anyone kill Cregar?" said Brett. "You think that Mr. Fate did this?"

"Naturally. And if you want to reopen our discussion of yesterday, and attempt to identify the gentleman—"

Brett moved restlessly, and broke in upon me.

"Listen, Keyne. We can settle that matter instantly, for good and all. Newberry is not Mr. Fate—at least, Lafe didn't have anything to do with this murder."

"You seem damned positive of it," I remarked in some surprise.

"I am. Last night I was—well, I was almost convinced," he said in a low voice. "I'm ashamed to confess it, Keyne, but I had one of the guards do nothing except shadow Lafe Newberry last night. I know precisely what he did. I hate to say it, and you'll regard it as strictly confidential, of course."

He hesitated, at my assent. "Must seem like a low-down trick," he went on. "Damn it! Well, Newberry worked in the communications-room until one-fifteen. Then he went to his room and was there ten minutes; then he went to another room, and is still there."

"Another room?" I echoed, quite missing the point. Brett swore softly.

"Yes. Gantimiroff's room."

I WHISTLED in surprise. Now I comprehended Brett's reluctance to speak.

"Well, cheer up," I said. "That gal hasn't any reputation to lose, by all accounts. And I don't blame Newberry."

Brett chuckled at this. He was still chuckling when Herron rejoined us, with a brisk word.

"White will be along. Well, boys, what d'ye know about this? One thing I've remembered: this death was predicted by Raja Naga. Newberry jeered about that prediction, only last evening."

Then we all jumped, as a voice came at us out of the gloom; a thin, piping, jeering voice:

"What sinful conclave takes place here upon this lonely upland heath? What ho, first, second and third murderers!"

An oath from Herron and the beam of his flashlight fled out across the darkness. It picked up a figure squatted under the broad branches of a blue cedar—the figure of Uncle Pascal, who sprang nimbly to his feet as the light revealed him.

"You! What are you doing here?" snapped Herron. "Go on back to bed! You'll catch your death of cold here."

"Rats!" retorted Pascal. "I'm dressed warmer than any of you, except Keyne. He had sense enough to put on a leather jacket."

How the devil could he have known this? I was enshrouded in darkness, and no beam of light had touched me. Before I could speak the query, however, another light jabbed at us, and here came the guard Flack, with Brett's camera and equipment.

"You'd better take that corpse away from here," went on Pascal. "It's nothing to leave lying around, so close to my house."

"How do you know there's a corpse here?" snapped Herron.

His uncle laughed wildly. "There's something tangible in the light of the night sky, Daniel! My young friend Dr. Kaplan at the university has made remarkable discoveries about it. He's captured the veritable afterglow of deep space in a quartz bottle. He and I differ on—"

"Stop your nonsense!" barked Herron angrily. "What brought you out here?"

"Now, boys, turn off your lights and keep 'em off," rejoined Uncle Pascal, "and I'll show you a trick. Also, I'll tell you something important you don't know. Keep your temper down, Dan, and you'll all learn a thing or two."

"Some of your night-seeing tricks?" Herron demanded scornfully, and turned to us, muttering: "The old goat has the gift of nocturnal vision; his cat's eyes can see in the dark. I suppose he's talking about that."

The flashlights had been snapped off.

"All right," said Pascal, chuckling. "Leave the lights off. Now where am I? In what direction?"

Fuming though he was, Herron probably guessed there was something under all this foolery, and kept himself in hand. We tried to locate Uncle Pascal, but he had skipped into the darkness somewhere, and none of us could find him by the sound of his voice.

"All right!" he said at last. "Shoot on your light."

A beam picked him up. He was coming toward us, dusting off his knees.

"An old Injun trick, my lads," he chirped in his cheerfully idiotic way. "The savages knew that the dispersion of sound increases with the—but you're not interested in primal acoustics, I fear. Somebody give me a cigarette, and I'll impart some real information."

I complied with the request, and held a match. The flare lit up his wildly whimsical features, and unbrushed hair.

"Do you know who did this thing?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No; but it shouldn't be a very hard job for you,

Keyne, with your fictionist's brain, to find who did kill them. Even for me it would be simple."

"Them? There's only one dead man, Uncle Pascal," snapped Herron.

"Oh, is that so?" rejoined Pascal gleefully. "Smart lad, Dan! Then what's wrong with the other fellow? Maybe he's merely fainted?"

"What other fellow?" Herron demanded sharply.

"The corpse who walked out into the middle of my new bowling-green!"

The others turned from us; the pencils of light swept out across the newly seeded green, and picked up what seemed an inanimate heap of clothes. Horrified ejaculations broke from everyone—and small wonder! If the appearance of Cregar had been horrible, the other man before us was worse; when the jugular is cut, the results are not pretty.

"Listen!" Uncle Pascal leaned close to my ear. "Keep your eye on Brett. I always said it was tempting fate to have a murderer around loose! You'll find that he did it!" Freeing me, he turned away, and his voice crackled out abruptly. "Stay on the gravel, all of you! Keep off the fresh ground!"

I joined the others; we stared along the converging light-pencils at the object beyond. A man, yes, but it was impossible to tell who he was.

"Looks like Newberry's dark suit," I said, with a chill feeling. "Didn't he have an argument with Cregar?"

"Newberry's not here," Brett reminded me.

"Doesn't matter a jiffy who it is—the big thing is those footprints in the ground!" chirped Uncle Pascal. "Dan, use your eyes! Throw your light along the ground—level, not downward! Realize what those tracks mean?"

The urgency in his voice was compelling; and obeying, we saw that he was right. In the level flashlight rays, the indentations in the freshly rolled earth were quite plain: The dead man had walked half across that seeded space, and died. To him came tracks from the far side; to him, then they left him and came straight to the body of Cregar. It was Cregar who had walked out there, as though to meet him—then had walked back here and dropped.

"Gad!" exclaimed Dan Herron. "Can a man walk that far with his throat cut?"

"Anything can be done—once," I observed grimly. "Nothing's impossible. See what it means? They met there—"

"Met—and killed each other!" added Brett. "Yet it's damned queer. Cregar has been stabbed, not shot. Pascal, did they wake you while they were fighting?"

"No," said Uncle Pascal. "I saw your guard's flashlight flitting around. I was awake and reading. I came out to see what was up."

"Well, for the Lord's sake, let's find out who it is yonder!" exclaimed Herron. "You go, Gordon; we'll hold the lights. Keep away from those tracks and be careful not to muss up the ground."

Two flashlights lit the ground admirably. Keeping well clear of the three lines of footprints, I started toward the body; but even on closer approach, could not see whose figure it was.

The freshly rolled and pulverized earth took a perfect impression of anything that touched it, and there was not a mark of any kind except the tracks of the dead men walking out and ending, the prints of Cregar coming out and then going away at a sharp angle. I halted six feet away from the huddled figure, which lay face down, the face twisted away from me and from the lights.

Whipping off my leather jacket, spreading it on the earth ahead of me, I stepped on it, reached forward, and touched the extended hand of the dead man. It was icy cold; he had been dead for hours. I struck a match and got a gleam of light on the dead face.

It was the face of Raja Naga.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WE were still stunned, all of us, by the finding of this second body. It had a ghastly unreality, like something out of a dream that could not be true. I called out the name; and Brett, lifting his voice, said that Uncle Pascal had just told them as much, claiming he could recognize the figure.

Herron called to examine the ground attentively, and I did so. There could be no error about those footprints. Naga had walked out here and dropped; he had walked straight out, and heavily. Those of Cregar had not come straight out, but went off at tangents, then came to the body of the Hindu, then went heavily to where Cregar's body now lay, as though with plunging steps.

About the head and shoulders of Raja Naga were confused prints, as though one or both of the men had fallen; an expert might make something of them, but I could not. So, walking in my own tracks, I backed off and rejoined the others.

"Apparently he was stabbed to death also," I said, concluding my report. "I didn't turn him over to see, but the blood indicated as much."

It was, on the face of it, clear that both men had started across the seeded ground, had met, had fought; Naga had fallen, and Cregar started away, getting as far as the edging gravel path before he keeled over. Yet as Herron pointed out, Cregar was hardly the man to be using a knife.

"Unless the Hindu used it first, and Cregar took it away from him," said Brett.

"Then where is it now?" demanded Uncle Pascal.

The white coruscation of flashlight bulbs split the night, as Brett got his photographs of Cregar's body. He went on to operate on the tracks and on Raja Naga likewise, while Herron and I undertook to answer Pascal's inquiry. It was soon answered. We lifted Cregar, glimpsed the weapon lying beneath him; and Herron, handkerchief around hand, drew it forth and stared at it.

"Recognize it?" I asked.

"Of course! A kitchen knife, and from our own kitchens. I brought over a complete set from the factory in Sweden, just before the war. Good Lord!" He drew a deep breath. "All this just doesn't make sense, Gordon! Do you realize that the knife was lying under him, not in the wound? Of course, he may have jerked it loose in a dying spasm."

He had just begun to react to the horror of it all, but Uncle Pascal seemed entirely oblivious to any such angle of the affair.

Brett, his pictures made, was working away at something; it proved that he was trying to brush out his own tracks as he backed away. This was absolutely impossible. That fresh-seeded ground had been perfectly rolled. He rejoined us, breathing hard.

"Well, that settles it," he said. "No one else could have been out there. They killed each other—why, we'll probably never know. They'd had a quarrel, remember; and there was Raja Naga's prophecy. Well, now what?"

Herron turned to Flack, ordering the guard to go after a hand-truck.

"We'll get the bodies out of sight before daylight, and leave Flack on guard to make sure this ground is not disturbed. It's getting on to morning now. I'd say, get a bit of sleep, if you can, and we'll get together early, say seven o'clock, to decide on what's to be done. Meet in my office, breakfast there, and face the issue. This is going to be one hell of a thing all around."

"I'm off to bed, then," I said, and moved away. Uncle Pascal joined me and walked with me toward the lights of the Main House.

"So," he observed softly, "you all think it's so easy as that, do you!"

"As what?" I rejoined.

"Oh, the solution! Murdered each other, says you—as if that were likely!"

"Can you improve on the idea?"

"Certainly I can," he replied. "Ten to one, mark my words, we'll find that Brett is the murderer!"

"And while you find it so, I'll make up some lost sleep," I rejoined, and entered the house while he turned back again to his own cottage.

WITH morning, I was up and off without waking Mary. When Herron, Brett and I forgathered in Herron's sanctum, I expected to see Uncle Pascal and Newberry, but they were not in evidence. Nor was there any sign of the promised breakfast.

"Isn't Newberry in on this?" I asked.

Herron grimaced, and made curt reply. "No, he's not. Look here, will you two help me out? I'm in a hell of a jam in several directions, and I want two or three hours before I have to talk to sheriffs or anyone else." Herron's appeal gathered incoherency; I had never imagined he could so lose his self control. "Take charge of this whole damned thing, Brett! You help him, Gordon. Notify Sheriff Kemp, close the gates and let no one leave, do anything you damned please—but give me until nine o'clock or so absolutely undisturbed."

"Okay. Leave it to us, Dan," Brett said briefly. "Come on, Keyne."

Outside, I gave him a look. "Here, what's struck him?"

"Search me. Come on and get breakfast. I expect he's found out where Newberry spent the night—probably was trying to get in touch with Lafe about these murders. Not that Dan gives a hang about anybody's morals, but when

a man falls down and fails to show up when news breaks, then Dan goes wild. You go along to the breakfast-room; I'll stop and phone Sheriff Kemp—might as well do it now and save trouble—and then join you."

So I went to the big empty room and conjured up breakfast. Looking out at the drive and the entrance, I saw a car standing there, loaded with baggage. Mona Vindon and her colorless little secretary were getting into it. The car got off as I watched. When Brett showed up, I shot a quick question at him.

"Did you close the gates to prevent anyone leaving?"

"Tighter than a drum, till the sheriff gets here and takes charge. Why?"

"No particular reason. Here, try these sausages; they're really prime. By the way, I suppose it didn't occur to you to look over the rooms of the defunct gentlemen?"

"Didn't want to disturb Mrs. Cregar." He lifted his head and gave me that bleak, level look of his; then his eyes melted in friendly warmth. "About the other—yes. And I was surprised. I never dreamed Raja Naga knew so much; for example, he must have known Fate. Here—this was lying on his writing-table. No accident that it was torn, eh?"

He passed me a folded sheet of the Alta Serafina notepaper. Upon it were a few lines of writing in a neat script:

General Boguslav was murdered by the Red Group in Los Angeles; all Communists hated him bitterly. Mr. Fate, who is in constant intimate touch with the Reds, was tipped off ahead of time. Mr. Fate is our very good—

I looked up in dismay. Obviously no accident that it had been torn off there, left as a mocking challenge by the killer, no doubt Mr. Fate himself!

"He did know, then! And he was going to tell us everything this morning! About your Paris affair as well."

Brett nodded. "Too bad.... Each of those men, last night, was stabbed in the same spot; downward, through the jugular."

"You mean that it was impossible, then, for them to have killed each other?"

"I mean that, and more, Keyne. Newberry's wife, in Paris a year ago, was stabbed in precisely the same place and manner."

I stared at him.

"They were killed by the same person who killed her?"

"There are no accidents," said Brett. A flash leaped through his eyes, a terrible flash. "Did I not tell you that the karmic forces were at work here—that somehow, somewhere, retribution was at hand? I believe it. I know it!"

"But it doesn't fit!" I exclaimed. "Raja Naga might have been killed by Mr. Fate, for fear he'd tell too much. Why, then, the murder of Cregar? And if it's all as you say, then suppose we revert to my theory that Newberry is Mr. Fate. Perhaps *Newberry* killed his wife in Paris!"

Brett shook his head, peering at me through a cloud of smoke.

"No. Lafe was well accounted for that night; he was at work. His whereabouts were known. Believe me, that supposition is entirely out of the question. Well, suppose we get busy. We've a couple of hours, or more, before the sheriff arrives; which means that Dan will have the time he craved."

IN the morning sunlight there was no longer any sense of mystery. The bowling-green was now a pitifully circumscribed plot of ground flanked by its graveled walks. By daylight it was even more obvious that Naga and Cregar had walked across the seeded patch to meet each other. Only one weapon had been found. Cregar, then, must have used it, himself getting his death-wound in the struggle.

"Yet he held the knife, carried it off with him—that doesn't make sense, Brett!" I exclaimed. "And it was lying beneath him."

"Can't always tell what'll happen in a struggle. Look at the direction Cregar took when he left the Hindu!" He pointed. "Straight toward Pascal Herron's cottage. It was Cregar's first visit here. He didn't know the place well. He saw a light burning at Pascal's house and started for it, as the nearest place of help."

"Sounds logical," I assented. "Did Dr. White fix the time of the murders?"

"If it was a fight, it wasn't murder," said Brett dryly. "Yes. Approximately before eleven last evening. Suppose we go see what Pascal can tell us about all this. You know, I've got a hell of a job to face—telling Mrs. Cregar! I think I'll pass it on to White. Yes, I'll call him from Pascal's."

We walked over to the big cottage, and found Uncle Pascal sitting on the front steps, smoking an elaborately decorated

corncob pipe with an amber stem. He greeted us with a twinkle in his eye, and assented cordially to Brett's request, much to my relief. He took Brett inside to telephone, then hurried out and came to me.

"I was wrong, Keyne!" he said breathlessly. "All wrong. About Brett, I mean."

"Glad to hear it," I exclaimed. "Does your wife know about the happenings?"

"Yes—here she is now."

The frail, gentle old woman came out, greeted me, and took a rocker in the sunlight, knitting in hand. Presently Brett reappeared, with a curt nod to me; evidently White had assumed the dreaded task. We sat down on the steps, and Pascal tittered.

"I was watching you boys over there. Find anything new?"

"No," replied Brett. "Did either of you folks hear anything out of the ordinary last night, before you turned in?"

"I didn't turn in," said Uncle Pascal. "I read late. Martha, you said something about voices. What was it?"

She nodded. "Yes. It was after the symphony ended and I turned off the radio. That would be nine-sixteen, wouldn't it, Pascal?"

The old leprechaun winked elaborately at me. "Nine-seventeen, I'd say."

"Well, I heard voices. It sounded like a woman calling and a man answering. I couldn't hear any words, of course. At first I thought they were on the water, for sounds carry from the lake; but they might have been on that—that bowling-green."

Brett looked at Uncle Pascal. "Did you hear them?"

"I can't have the eyes of a cat and the ears of a dog both," came the retort. "In fact, I've quite rusted away except for my brain. Martha's the ears and looks of the family, I'm the eyes and brains—and that leaves Dan with nothing but money." He chuckled and mouthed his pipestem.

"You're sure about the two voices, Mrs. Herron?" asked Brett.

She nodded. "Yes; it was only an impression, of course. I didn't pay it much mind."

We dropped the subject. Presently she went in, and Brett turned to Pascal.

"You know something more than you've said, don't you?" he asked directly.

"You're damned right I do! I know everything," said Uncle Pascal delightedly. "When you two boys get brain-fever and quit, just come to me and I'll help you out."

"Brag's a good horse, eh?" Brett rose. "Come on, Keyne. Let's look over the ground once more. Thanks for use of the phone, Pascal. See you later."

WE strolled away. At least we had learned something, provided those voices had been at the time of the killing. As Brett pointed out, the suavely modulated tenor voice of Raja Naga might easily have passed for that of a woman.

"I've checked up on the two of 'em, last night," he went on thoughtfully. "Both men left the house before nine o'clock."

"Together?" I asked.

"Apparently not; can't be sure. Raja Naga had been playing chess with Newberry, who remained in the game-room until he went to do his story, about eleven. Cregar had been drinking quite a bit. The waiter at the buffet table remembers when they left."

"How so?"

"Because,"—and Brett smiled,—"he had a date with his girl, one of the housemaids, and wanted to get off, and couldn't." We had come to the damned square of bloody ground and were circling it. "Cregar demanded one of those kidneys nested in a mushroom top; the waiter got what he wanted, and he went out eating it."

"Obviously," I observed, "Cregar and Naga did not leave together."

"Obviously, Keyne?" said Brett, surprised.

I pointed to the tracks. "Yes. You see, they reached here from different directions; one arrived here on this side, the other over there. As though they had a rendezvous here. For a duel?"

"Duel, my eye!" said Brett, and laughed excitedly. "You've hit something, Keyne! Here's what it was—by George, all the puzzle pieces fit together! They had a date here, say. Raja Naga got here first and called Cregar to him—perhaps assumed a woman's voice. Now look at Cregar's uneven line of footsteps going out to the center."

"Looks like the lurching stagger of a drunken man."

"Cregar was a tank; he was seldom so drunk as that! But the outgoing line of footprints is straight. If he staggered in, he walked out straight." He broke off, staring at the tracks in the ground, his eyes alight. "Hold on, now! Let me get

it right," he muttered. "Yes, it fits—it fits!"

We were standing at the spot where the tracks of Raja Naga led out across the seeded ground. I looked down at the path; something curious about the gravel had caught my eye. All this plot had been most carefully tended by expert hands. Yet here, for a little space of some feet, gravel had been scraped from the path into two small piles. I drew Brett's attention to it, and he nodded abstractedly.

"Looks as though some kid had been playing here."

"Right here, where Raja Naga turned off," I said, frowning. "Why?"

"I can't believe those two men met by chance," Brett said abruptly. "Things just don't happen that way, Keyne. There's no chance—there are no accidents! Here, come around to the other side of the green. I've got the whole thing now—ah, it's beautiful; it fits!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm.

We passed over to where Cregar had made his entrance on the seeded ground. Careful to keep away from his prints, Brett pointed to them, interpreted them to me like an Indian tracker.

"Here's the first of his zigzags, Gordon! Both feet together; there's no throw of dirt from the toes. He stood here, listening; the impressions of his feet are comparatively deeper. He was listening, trying to place the sound of Naga's voice. It seemed to come from the right; he took four steps in that direction—see them? Then he halted again, as the voice seemed to come from the left. He steers left; twice more he changes direction before he comes to the center of the green! Do you get the idea now?"

"No. I'm a dumb cluck," I said, "and it's over my head. No matter how dark it was, I could make up my mind as to the direction of a voice."

He grinned. "Didn't you learn anything from Uncle Pascal's little demonstration last night, and his mention of acoustics? He had been fooling us, scattering his voice by a method old as man! He got down on his knees—he was brushing the dirt from them when he showed himself—and put his mouth against the ground. We couldn't tell where he was. And that's precisely what Naga did. And Uncle Pascal caught on, the smart old devil!"

He began to explain the laws of acoustics, and how the earth could act as a reflector instead of a conductor, scattering sound—until I broke in upon him.

"All right, Brett. Let's grant your whole argument; and you tell me just one little thing! Why did Naga go through all this hocus-pocus? Why tempt Cregar out into the middle of the seeded space? Why not knife him more conveniently?"

Brett compressed his lips for a moment.

"I guess you've got me," he said at last, reluctantly. "There must have been a reason. Want to go into the house and look at the knife? I've got the physical evidence all together there."

"Yes, suppose we do," I replied. "And I want to get a copy of the *Chronicle*—the one that carries Newberry's story about Raymond. I haven't read it. We got off on the subject of that musette-bag, if you remember."

We turned back toward the Main House.

"I have several copies—I'll give you one, of course," said Brett, frowning. "Have you thought over your suspicions of Newberry?"

"They're absolutely barred," I returned, "by the fact that he did not have the alpenstock on the trail; that is, if the murder was committed by the alpenstock."

"It was," he said. "They took a cast of the wound and proved it; phoned up about it last evening, because in their excitement they left the alpenstock here. I've kept it locked up. Said they'd send up for it today. Now, however, they'll be up on a larger errand as well. You can't very well suspect Newberry of this double killing, anyhow!"

"No," I said, as we approached the building. "As long as you know where he was at the time Mrs. Herron heard those voices."

"And for some time later," he agreed, and led the way to the basement.

Here, besides the saddle- and ski-rooms, were the workshops and a small laboratory, for Alta Serafina was largely self-sufficient. Equipment of all sorts was kept here, from tennis racks to alpenstocks, from ski-wax to parts for automobiles and snowplows.

BRETT introduced the genius of this place, an angular old Scot named McWhirter, who shook my hand warmly and said he had read my stories. Then we went on, and Brett unlocked the door of his own sanctum. Since the discovery of the two bodies, he had not been back to bed, but had remained at work here.

His binoculars, microscope, violet-ray and other instruments were flanked by much homemade apparatus. The walls were covered with camera studies and all kinds of enlargements. He pointed to the mess surrounding his microscope.

"I wanted to learn," he said, "which of the two men was first stabbed, but both proved to be of the same blood group. Otherwise, by finding which blood underlay the other on the seeded ground, we might have determined it. Here's the knife. No prints were on it except their own."

The gruesome object was cradled in a wire frame within a wooden box eighteen inches long, over which a piece of glass had been sealed with adhesive tape. Pinned to the wall was an enlargement made by stripping together small enlarged photos; Brett had been working, and no mistake. On the table were blow-ups of the predominant prints from the knife. With them was a pile of other prints, which I perceived had come from the alpenstock. This tool itself lay along two nails driven into the wall; below it was the steel head, which Brett had removed. He shoved rubber gloves at me.

"Use these if you touch anything. The knife—"

"Wait a minute," I said. "Why did you take the head from the alpenstock?"

"A hunch," he replied, and shrugged. "Nothing developed. I'll have to put it together again before the sheriff gets here. As for the knife, I tried for some story of the order in which it was handled. Apparently the Cregar prints overlie those of Naga—these enlargements show it. It seems obvious that Cregar was lured out, stabbed, then pulled out the knife and stabbed Naga, and stumbled away. Probably he didn't realize that he had killed Naga with the one frantic blow."

I fell to picturing the scene mentally, with his words. Remembering the dark, controlled Naga, it was hard to credit any murderous frenzy in him. Cregar would have fitted better as the aggressor, though it was difficult to see him as a knife-wielder.

"The whole conflict of the ages is passing between your eyebrows and your mouth," Brett said dryly, as he watched me. "What's the big idea?"

"I just can't believe they did it, Brett. It just aint so!"

"The evidence points to it clearly."

"No doubt. Let's go back to my idea that Mr. Fate is really Newberry. You spoke of his wife having been killed in Paris, precisely as these two men were killed. That may be coincidence. But suppose it's not? Suppose he killed his wife, there, himself; suppose he wasn't pegged down, as you think, last night—and slipped out to do this?"

"Why would he do it?"

"I don't know; that doesn't make sense either," I admitted. "If he were Mr. Fate, and had killed Raymond, there'd be a motive—he'd have the job he was after."

"Weak," said Brett. "Besides, the alpenstock proves conclusively that he didn't do it, and Lammengeyer did."

HE glanced at his watch, and whistled softly.

"Holy smoke! Time has fled! I'll have to take that knife up, and the photos, and put 'em with the bodies and other stuff, before Sheriff Kemp gets here. Then I'll have to put that alpenstock together."

"I'll do that while you're gone," I said, seeing the two stout screws that had held the steel head to the staff, lying with the head.

"Right. Mind the gloves, then," said Brett. "I'll bring you one of those papers with the Raymond story. Give the devil his due; Lafe did a marvelous piece of writing on that story."

He began to get his scattered prints together and moved the knife and box, just as it was. I donned the rubber gloves and started to refasten the steel alpenstock head to its staff. The door slammed behind Brett. As it did so, I suddenly froze, staring down at the alpenstock head; I laid down the screwdriver, looked at the screws, and took both of them over to the microscope—though I scarcely needed more than an ordinary glass to verify my curious discovery.

It was not strange that I had chanced upon something that Brett had missed. His whole attention had been given to the staff and the head. Mine had lighted upon the two screws.

I examined them minutely. Under the heads, and also upon the threads, was a dark stain. Scraping at this with an old scalpel that lay to hand, I obtained numerous particles of it on a glass slide. If it was rust, my whole discovery would mean nothing. But if it was not rust—

Brett returned when I had just finished putting the screws in place, and had the alpenstock together again. I took off my gloves, as he laid down a newspaper.

"Here's the Raymond story again. I'm still puzzled by that blasted picture! Oh, the thing's ready, eh? Fine. Just got a phone-call from the gate—the sheriff's party is on the way. They made damned good time. I'll take that alpenstock—"

"Wait a minute," I said, showing him the slide. "I'm not sure whether I discovered what you missed, or whether I didn't. Is there any way of determining whether this brown stuff is dried blood, or whether it's rust?"

"Nothing easier," he replied. "But the alpenstock—"

"Tell me where to take it, while you make the test for me," I said, quivering. "By golly, Brett, I may have struck oil here!"

"All right. There's a box for the alpenstock; take it up to Lennihan, like a good chap. I'll meet you there."

He routed out a long cardboard box stuffed with cotton, laid the alpenstock in it, and I went off with it.

When I had given it to Lennihan, and learned that Herron was not around, I went out on the wide front terrace, and settled down to read the Raymond story. Looking off across the greensward, I saw a car in front of Mona Vindon's cottage, and made out a group there—Herron, I thought, and a figure that looked like Mary, among them. So she had been turned back, eh?

The story caught my eye. It was good. His lead was magnificent:

> Hat in hand, R. G. Raymond, shadowy Wall Street giant, sat down to rest at Alta Serafina, mountain estate of Daniel Parker Herron, and Death found him there, far from the click of the tape.
>
> Hat in hand, resting beneath a tall pine on a mountain trail, as though doffing the Alpine headgear in greeting to the approaching Presence—

Something clicked twice in my brain. I went back and read that lead once more; and my eyes bulged. Holy smoke! And Newberry had written it—had written it that same evening of Raymond's death!

I checked back over the whole afternoon and evening, and satisfied myself that this strange, incredible error was no figment of my imagination. I reviewed everything I had said, everything that had been said among us, before Newberry went to get his story off. Then I crammed the paper into my pocket, rose, and was heading indoors when two cars came sweeping up to the entrance, disgorging a crowd of men. Sheriff Kemp and his satellites had arrived—probably the district attorney as well, though I did not wait to see.

I was suddenly on fire. The photograph showing Raymond without his musette-bag—that had been the starter. This story was the clincher; another slip on the part of Mr. Fate! The whole thing was taking shape before me. Thanks to Newberry, who must be entirely unaware of it, the mystery of Raymond's murder was no longer a mystery! The proof, the conclusive proof, the key to the whole affair, must lie in the stain on those two little screws.

I made all haste to the basement and so to the laboratory, but Brett was not there. The laboratory door was locked. As I turned from it, the old caretaker McWhirter came into sight, calling my name.

"Where's Captain Brett?" I demanded.

"He just went to Mr. Herron's office, sir," said McWhirter. "That's why I was calling you—they want you there too."

"All right," I said. "Tell me one thing: where do you keep your alpenstocks?"

"Over here, sir, in this rack."

He led me to a rack in one corner, switched on a light, and showed me a row of alpenstocks and other aids to climbing—ropes, grapnels, everything that one could desire. The case was not locked. I pulled it open. Beneath the alpenstocks were several extra heads to fit the shafts, and my heart leaped.

Eureka! I had it now, had every last detail of it at my fingers' ends! Seizing one of the extra heads, I slipped it into my hip pocket and turned.

"Thanks, Mac. I'll return this sometime."

Then I made haste to reach Herron's office.

Lennihan passed me on into the inner sanctum. Sheriff Kemp and the district attorney, Truro, were there, and most unpleasant they were about it. Herron was there, with Lafe Newberry. Brett had just come in, and was moving up a chair. He flung me a significant nod, as though to tell me that the stain on the screws had been blood; but I no longer needed his assurance.

MY arrival evidently interrupted a heated discussion: Herron was looking red and angry, and the sheriff, who had broken off, resumed his speech before I could get in a word.

"If you were anyone but a man of your size, Herron, I'd pull the whole damn' lot on suspicion! Do you realize that within twenty-four hours the country will be smoking with rumors about you and every guest you got here? That Truro and I will be lucky if we don't get slapped in the face with a recall petition? They're already saying that you've paid us to cover up your private cemetery! And now two more men killed!"

"Careful, Kemp, careful," struck in the smooth voice of Truro. "Mr. Herron, I'm sure, will cooperate with us. You see, Mr. Herron, we had to book Lammengeyer in the face of all that evidence, but it didn't smell right to us then, and it smells worse now. And now, two more men killed last night! Don't tell me you have two killers running around loose up here."

"Cregar and Raja Naga obviously killed one another—" began Herron.

"Nonsense!" Sheriff Kemp broke in. Newberry rose and left the room quietly; no one paid any attention to him. I watched him leave, with swift relief; so much the better for what I had to say! And I could no longer keep back my excitement.

"Well, gentlemen, I can settle all this," I exclaimed, leaping up. "I know who killed Raymond—"

Kemp turned on me with an absolute snarl.

"Shut up! When I need some half-cooked fictioneer to tell me who's doing the killing around here, I'll give you a badge!"

"But, Sheriff!" I broke out in dismay. "You've got to listen to me! I can show you every step—"

"Yes, and what's wrong here is too much amateur detective test-tubing," roared the sheriff, bringing down his fist on the desk with a bang as he glared at me. "That's got to stop. From now on, I'm taking over, and I mean completely over! I'm going to tear this place apart, if necessary. That goes for you too, Mr. Brett! You and your damned pictures and fancy treatment of evidence—*arrgh!* Captain Brett, are you? Well, around me you're just another tourist, so bear it in mind."

"If you'd show more sense and less anger," I snapped, "I could tell you precisely who did the killing."

An oath burst from the sheriff. "Then bring him in here with a confession signed, like in your blasted books! Now keep out of it." He turned to Brett. "While we're about it, there's a few things I'd like to check up on you, yourself. So let's go to bat and get 'em settled."

I went out and closed the door, and nodded to Lennihan.

"Where'd Mr. Newberry go?"

"Communications-room, he said."

When I went down the hall, I found Newberry not there; he had ducked in and out again, and someone said I would find him in the gun-room. This was a small but interesting room on the main corridor just outside the business offices. I hurried there at once, and walked in to see Newberry by the window, at the bench.

The shotguns, rifles and hand arms here were all racked in locked cases on the wall. A workbench and a very complete library on guns completed the little place. Newberry had brought one of the books to the bench, and looked up as I approached.

"Hello! Are you after information too?"

"No," I replied. "I have information."

He grinned. "Quite a scene back yonder, eh? The Sheriff's putting on a tough line to impress Truro, who's the real political power in Serafina County. What's your information about?"

"Well, I have a hunch on the killings," I said. "They refused to listen to me, in Dan's office, so I thought I'd try it out on you. In fact," I added, with an unashamed lie, "Brett helped me on it, and he's getting it all typed out now."

"Swell!" Newberry exclaimed cordially, laying aside his book. He picked up a small iron machinist's hammer from the bench, and played idly with it. "Swell, Keyne! Try it out on me, by all means! Theory, eh? Spill it, and I'll spoil it!"

"Yes, you would if you could," I said quietly, holding his gaze.

"Oh! Who's the killer, then?"

"You are."

HE evinced no surprise, no emotion of any kind.

"Why on earth do you say that, Keyne?" he asked in a flat voice.

"You're Mr. Fate yourself. You got tipped off on the Boguslav murder by some of your Red friends. Probably Gantimiroff, since you've been swapping information with her. Raja Naga knew as much and said as much."

He produced a cigarette and lit it, with his sardonic grimace.

"Quite true. That Hindu had something on the ball."

"You admit it, then?" I demanded, surprised.

"Of course, of course. No harm in writing notes, is there? You say I've done these killings here? How many do you blame me with?"

"All of them, naturally."

He shook his head, chuckled, and puffed at his cigarette.

"Keyne, you're priceless! But sadly mistaken."

"They need only one killing to pull the gas jets in this State. You brought Wilson up here. Before passing the gates, you loaded him into your luggage compartment; after passing the gates, you let him out. You probably told him you'd bring Herron down to Land's End to meet him. Instead, you bumped him off there."

"And why, in the name of goodness?" drawled Newberry.

"You were hoping to turn Herron to Millinger's support. It might have worked, too, only we discovered the suicide and stole your thunder and blocked your game."

He exhaled thinly, his pale eyes narrowing slightly on me. "Not bad, Keyne. Do you blame me for Raymond's unfortunate demise also?"

"That's the one you'll take the rap for, when Brett and the others get here," I said. I was watching him sharply. For being entirely sure of myself now, I was not sure that I had done a wise thing in facing him with the matter. "You had your eye on Millinger, if you could earn his gratitude and make a place for yourself. You played the hand superbly, I will say."

Newberry shook his head. "Keyne, I'm disappointed in you. Guys who don't like me could read that in the teacups too. Haven't you any real downright convincing stuff?"

"Plenty of it," I said, keeping my same casual tone. "You hit Raymond over the head and knocked him cold; then, having along the trail fitted a stick into the spare alpenstock part you had brought along, you drove it down into his skull. You removed the weapon, forced the stick out of the alpenstock head and threw it away, then wrapped the steel point in your handkerchief. You made pretense to cleanse it, first, with dirt, and packed it safely in your hip pocket."

He laughed at me, as I reached into my own hip pocket and brought out the long steel alpenstock head. I tossed it down the length of the workbench.

"You're terrific, Keyne!" he observed amusedly. "I suppose you found the stick out on the trail?"

"It's probably there for the finding; I haven't needed it," I rejoined. "You propped Raymond up on the stone against the tree, you stuck a piece of dead branch into the wound—you like to draw red herrings over the trail, don't you?—and you put his hat in his hands, on his knees. Only you and I, Newberry, knew the hat was there. Nobody else knew I had found it there. I didn't mention it. But you wrote about it in your story—get the point, do you? You slipped up there, Lafe. The way you did in using the photo you took of Raymond, just before you killed him. That was dated, but you didn't know it."

He took the cigarette from his lips, held it forgotten in his fingers, and his eyes dilated on me as I spoke. Those pale eyes held an infernal light now; he made no further pretense of being amused.

"SO that's what gave it away!" he said in a low, tense voice.

I nodded. "Precisely. You came back here and replaced the head on the alpenstock Lammengeyer brought in, with the smeared one in your pocket. Then you went ahead with your program, casting the blame on Millinger, only to prove him innocent and thus gain his eternal gratitude, then putting Lammengeyer in clink for the crime. I suppose you'd have left him there, too, if Brett hadn't thought to take the head off that alpenstock. Then we found that blood had been inside that steel head or shank when it was put on. Inside, Lafe, so it was under the heads of the two screws that you put in!"

"Brett!" he ejaculated sharply. "Brett, eh?"

"Yes, Brett," I said. "You saved his neck in Paris, true; it was because you knew who had killed your wife there!"

"Damn it, of course I knew!" he broke out.

"Naturally, since you did it yourself."

His jaw fell. He stared at me in such genuine amazement that I fell silent.

"What a fool you are, after all!" he exclaimed abruptly. "I suppose you blame me for that double killing last night!"

"Certainly," I told him. "To clean up the other matter first, how the devil did you induce Raymond to hide, the last

time Lammengeyer went back to look for him? Of course you had doped his coffee, so his brain wasn't working right."

"A trifle like that shouldn't bother you," he broke in with a sneer. "However, I had nothing to do with last night's work. I don't know who did. Why, it threatened to spoil everything, just when I was ready to cash in on what I had accomplished! If you're such a fool as to think I murdered my wife, then you'd believe anything. So you think you and Brett have pinned all this on me, eh?"

"Don't you?"

"I'm afraid so." He sighed a little. "Well, it can't be helped now. And yet, Keyne, remember one thing: Wilson was an utter scoundrel! And Raymond, behind his mask, was no better. Killing them was good riddance."

"What about Cregar and Naga?" I demanded.

"Oh, don't be absurd!" he said petulantly. "I slipped up, yes; you've done a superb job of work here, so don't spoil it. As for Brett—well, at least I'm not the sort of heel that he is! Do you know what's been happening in the past half-hour or so? Mona and that wife of yours and poor Herron—well, Mona gave him his come-uppance, that's what. Brett, sheltered here by Dan, has wormed his way into Mona's good graces. Now it's all over. Herron made mistakes, as I did; his dream's gone too."

"But why in heaven's name did you pull that crazy Mr. Fate stuff—the messages to Herron, and so forth?" I demanded curiously.

He gave me a scornful, weary look. "First as a trick, a joke, to build up my crime column; then as a means of wakening Herron's interest. Don't you see, you fool, that I had no future, no nothing? A reporter has no future, unless he makes it. However, the poor but honest wench of journalism must still triumph over your painted Jezebel of fiction, old man! There's one thing you seem to have given me no credit for."

"Yes?" I rejoined, wondering what he was driving at. He took the cigarette from his lips, exhaled a thin cloud of smoke, and nodded.

"Yes. If I'd been as clever as you think, wouldn't I have made my preparations in case I lost the gamble? Wouldn't I have a get-away all planned and ready?"

"Well, I hadn't thought of that."

"You're damned right I would!" he exclaimed, and flicked his burning cigarette straight into my face. Instinctively, I flinched aside.

With one tiger-leap he was in and under my guard, landing a terrific jolt beneath the belt that left me dazed, staggering, sick. He followed me closely, and I saw the little iron hammer glint in his hand.

"Be damned if I'll burn for killing you!" he was gasping. "But I'll give you something to remember."

The hammer crashed home, and all the world went black and starry.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IT is a terrifying thing to waken and find oneself on the floor, head vibrating with pain and face sticky with blood. The frantic impulse is to scramble erect, at all costs.

I did so, and the pain in my head redoubled; that iron hammer had caught me a nasty crack over the temple. When I staggered out into the hall, not a soul was in sight, nor did I meet anyone until I came into Herron's outer office and saw Lennihan gaping at me with eyes a-bulge. He leaped from his chair and jerked open the door of the sanctum, with an incoherent babble to Herron.

They all came running at me. Herron put an arm around me and drew me into the inner office; someone held a tumbler of whisky to my lips; Dr. Burton, the coroner, began to swab and bandage my head; voices were yammering; everything was unreal.

"What happened to you?" Sheriff Kemp was standing over me, barking away. I put up a hand and touched my head, as Burton bandaged it.

"You said to get a confession—this is the signed statement," I said, and broke into hysterical laughter. "Newberry! It was Newberry who killed them all."

"What the devil are you talking about?" roared Herron. "Lafe? Nonsense! Explain!"

"Stop him. Don't let him get—get away—"

This was all I could say. Reaction had set in, and I could not coördinate my thoughts, could not pull myself together.

"Don't worry about anyone getting away," growled Kemp. "I left a man at the gates. Here, gimme that phone!"

He called for the gate-house, got the deputy he had left there, and learned that no one had departed.

"Good," he said. "Nobody's to leave —nobody! Especially the reporter, Newberry. If you get any argument, keep your gun handy. Okay." He slammed down the receiver and glared at me. "Did you say Newberry killed 'em all and tried to do you in?"

I tried to assent, but Uncle Pascal broke in ahead of me.

"No, no! He had nothing to do with the murders of last night! Perhaps he did kill Raymond; that was a crude business. But the deaths on the bowling-green—ah, there's a classic! A beautifully planned crime!"

"My God! Have we got another amateur *Sherlock* here?" burst out Kemp.

Truro intervened. "One minute, Kemp. Mr. Herron, do you know who killed those men last night?"

"Yes!" bleated Uncle Pascal. The district attorney gestured to him.

"You have the floor, but be brief about it. Tell us what you know, while we're waiting for Mr. Keyne to recover. I suppose you'll say those two men killed each other?"

"Of course not!" rejoined Pascal loftily. "No man's hand was responsible for their death. That's where I made my own mistake at first."

"Now look," broke in the sheriff, who was purpling in the face, "if you pull any of this occult stuff on us, so help me I'll pinch you for obstructing justice! No man's hand, huh? I suppose you'll say they were killed by a falling star?"

"No," said Uncle Pascal cheerfully. "By a woman."

The tension snapped abruptly; somebody uttered a harsh laugh. Kemp bit his lip and subsided, at a gesture from Truro. Uncle Pascal, flinging a grin at me, proceeded.

"The facts were plain, gentlemen. It was impossible to cover any traces of footprints; no third person had walked over that ground; yet without a third person, there could have been no murder. To accept the theory that Cregar and Raja Naga killed one another would not flatter the intelligence. So I had to discover how the killer had worked. I was like the astronomer Leverrier, who through sheer deductive brilliance postulated the existence and position of the planet Neptune, years before Galle located it—within one degree of Leverrier's announced position."

He smiled upon us all, the picture of gratification, then shot a query at me.

"Surely you don't believe Newberry killed those men?"

"He denied it," I summoned up the words. "He did kill Raymond. Admitted it."

"Ah! Perfect, perfect!" said Uncle Pascal blandly. "Well, gentlemen, since I've given you all these hints, undoubtedly you are now aware how the woman crossed that seeded ground without leaving a footprint?"

A growl escaped Kemp. "With water-wings, I suppose! Get to the point, will you?"

Uncle Pascal chuckled. "In my own good time, Sheriff. Well, this woman was carried, that's all. Carried."

And now he received no further interruptions. The attention of every man there was riveted upon his words. Carried! So simple, so obvious, that it had occurred to no one.

"This woman," he went on happily, "had made an appointment with both Naga and Cregar. How or why is of no interest to me; though since both men were probably hot-blooded, the answer might be found in a deep primal urge." He gestured dismissal. "She met Naga on the east path; I should say she was smoking, to guide him, since it was very dark. At a certain point on the gravel path, she collapsed, no doubt complaining of a heart attack."

"A certain point?" Truro asked calmly, curiously. "Did it have to be a certain point?"

"Oh, definitely!" said Pascal. "Her entire scheme depended upon great exactitude, even precision, of timing and spacing."

"Then how, if she was walking with Naga, did she know when she reached this certain place, in the pitch darkness?"

BUT if Truro thought he had his man there, he was mistaken. Uncle Pascal tugged at his whiskers and fairly beamed.

"I'm glad you reminded me! You'll find that certain place marked by the gravel having been scraped aside, making two slight mounds. She had done this previously, of course. When her footsteps encountered one of those little gravel ridges in the darkness, she knew that she was at the exact spot."

Truro sat back, with a nod. "Continue, by all means," he said dryly.

"Naga had her in his arms; the lights of my house were visible, it was close by.

If he did not start there for help, she suggested it. He picked her up—something of an athlete, remember—and started across the green straight for my cottage. She was counting the steps. At the desired spot, she stabbed him. He fell; she fell across him, on top of his body; but she did not move, that clever woman, until she heard the sound of Cregar's footsteps on the gravel of the west path, as he strolled along, awaiting the expected meeting with her."

"She called Cregar," pursued the little man. "Her face was against the ground; he could not at once locate her. She probably said that she had had to defend herself from Raja Naga. At any rate, he picked her up, and he too started for my house as being the nearest spot to get aid. When he reached the solid ground, the gravel path, she stabbed him. You'll observe that she knew precisely where to stab, too. And there's the amazing simple and beautiful way those men were killed, gentlemen."

"WHERE'S your proof?" spoke out Truro.

"Proof?" Uncle Pascal waved a scornful hand. "Isn't the whole thing inevitable? Why, it resolves itself like the octave in music!"

"Like hell it does," Sheriff Kemp spoke up harshly. "You know how anyone knifed in the jugular spouts blood? If she did what you say, this dame had to lie still while one man bled all over her, then stab another guy in the same way!"

"Oh, absolutely!" Pascal was radiant. "This woman had superb courage, enormous energy! She was really a tigress, Sheriff!"

"Hm! You seem to admire her," said the practical sheriff. "Then she was bloody as hell, dusty, disheveled. She couldn't show up anywhere like that."

"Brains, Sheriff! Splendid! Quite true!" Uncle Pascal grinned. "I thought of that, too. She went down to the lake, removed all her clothes, tied them to a weight that was ready, swam out with them, and let them go to the bottom. Then she swam back—"

"And walked in here all pink and naked?" sneered Kemp.

"Oh, no! There was no one about the locker-house at that hour, you know. From the water to the lockers was only a few feet; she had clothes in one of the lockers. She merely dressed and came back here. Really, it was beautifully planned."

"Rats!" broke out the sheriff. "I think the lot of you are a bunch of screwballs—you and your women murderers that sound like a movie! Now it's my turn to talk. I'm taking this man Brett in on suspicion." And he shot a glare at Brett, who was sitting at one side, very white and shaken. They must have had a set-to about it before I appeared.

"Wait, Kemp," said Herron gravely. He too was looking badly, ten years older than I had last seen him. The affair of Mona Vindon must have hit him hard. "I'd like to know why you suspect Brett."

"We know all about him, for one thing," retorted Kemp challengingly. "His name isn't Brett at all, but Currey. He wriggled out of a knife-killing in Paris—yeah, we've got the whole story! That killing was identical with these; jugular vein sliced by a down-stroke. It looks to me like—"

"Just a moment, Sheriff." Truro spoke with quiet authority, and turned to Uncle Pascal. "Mr. Herron, you've given us a nice little fairy-tale; have you any proof of it?"

"Best in the world," chirped Pascal complacently. "Want to hear how I tracked her down?"

"An excellent idea," said Truro. "Where do we start?"

"With the footprints. When Cregar walked off the seeded ground, his prints were far deeper than when he walked on; this caught my eye and I experimented. It would take about a hundred pounds extra to account for the difference. Then I examined the bodies. If you gentlemen will apply your scientific and technical ability," he went on with jubilant sarcasm, "you'll find traces of little feathery strips on their sleeves and coats, smeared in the blood. You'll find traces of the same material on the soil, where it's disturbed at the point occupied by Raja Naga's torso. She fell there, you see."

"Horse feathers!" snorted the sheriff.

Uncle Pascal beamed at him. "No; stuff off a woman's dress. Marabou, I think."

A momentary silence was tribute, mute but eloquent. For the third time, he had reduced the fantastic to abrupt commonsense. Then he went on, blithely:

"I think you mentioned the murder of Newberry's wife in Paris? Well, the same person who killed that woman a year or more ago, killed these two men last night."

At this, Truro lost his calm entirely.

"Who's the woman? Where's your proof? Where's this dress?"

"In the lake, I told you," said Pascal blandly. Brett was staring at him, open-mouthed, eyes bulging. Truro emitted a roar.

"In the lake! Are you making fun of us?"

"Heavens, no!" Pascal's eyes widened. "She admitted it. I talked to her about it a little while ago. She admitted everything; her poise was admirable, in fact. Oh, she's a most superior woman, although I fear in the sense that Nietzsche—"

"My God!" gasped the sheriff. "You—you braced her with it?"

"Certainly, certainly." Pascal produced an old silver turnip of a watch, hung on a massive gold chain, and consulted it. An expression of gratification came into his face. "Look, gentlemen! Really an extraordinary thing! I'm barely one minute and thirty seconds out in my calculations."

"What in God's name are you blatting about?" cried the sheriff.

"My prediction! I made an estimate of the precise time required in order to convince you gentlemen."

I intervened, with memory spurring me. Pulling myself together, I sat up and frantically shouted Pascal down.

"Listen, listen! Newberry boasted—said he had his get-away all planned if things went wrong! Stop your gabbing, or he'll trick you yet! Get after him!"

"Quite right," agreed Uncle Pascal blandly. "No doubt she's going with him. She murdered his wife in Paris because she was in love with him. Oh, she's a superb tigress, I tell you! She had to kill Raja Naga, because he knew about the Paris murder and meant to spill it. She had no compunction whatever. She brought Cregar into it—why? Merely because her plan required two killings, to look as though each man had killed the other.... What a tigress!"

"Gantimiroff!" The yell broke from Brett. "It was Gantimiroff! She's the one!"

"Of course!" assented Pascal, beaming. "You should have guessed long ago."

A DULL roar grew into closer sound: the drumming crepitation of an airplane motor. The plane itself flashed into sight. We all turned to the enormous window in one wall of the sanctum: there was the plane, mounting, circling up above the farther trees. A choked cry of recognition burst from Herron.

"My old ship! The old Herron Special! And Lafe's a pilot, a good pilot."

The room was in pandemonium. Then Sheriff Kemp flung himself at the desk and scooped up the phone.

"Operator! Get me the sheriff's office in Los Angeles—quick!" Breathing hard, he glared at us. "We'll get out their patrol ship and stop this damned rat in his tracks.... Making for Mexico, eh? Not much!"

There was an instant of silence. Newberry had made good his boast. He had taken one of Herron's ships, from the Alta Serafina field; the sheriff had never thought to stop that hole of escape! And now it was too late. The plane was lessening upon the sky and was lost to our field of vision.

"You damned monkey!" The sheriff flung a snarl at Pascal. "If they get away, it's your fault—and I'll have you behind the bars for it!"

"My fault? Oh, not at all, not at all!" Pascal was blandly innocent. "I had nothing to do with it, upon my word! I did my best to persuade you. Why, Sheriff, you mocked at me! Yes, you mocked at me!" He was enjoying himself, as the twinkle in his eye showed. Then he sobered. "But you can kill that call," he added. "Won't do you any good."

"What d'you mean by that?" demanded the district attorney.

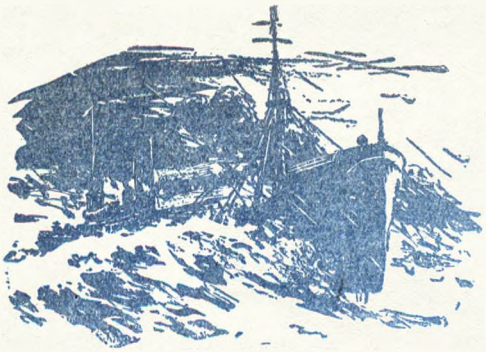
"That old Herron Special of Dan's." Pascal shook his head sadly. "Only yesterday I was talking with your mechanic, Dan. You've probably ignored the report he sent you last week, in the press of more important matters. Just goes to show the real importance of little things.... Well, the ship's quite useless. She's been stored here all winter, you know, and developed a split in the prop. It seems that she uses the old wooden propellers—"

"What d'ye mean, useless?" barked the sheriff scornfully. "There she goes—or rather, she's gone by now!"

"Yes, I'm afraid she has," assented Uncle Pascal. "The vibration, you know. The mechanic said she wouldn't last more than a few minutes in the air. We'll probably get the report of the crash before we leave this room."

And he was right. Death had indeed come to life—with a vengeance!

"Cheesebox on a Raft," and "The Coroner's Tale," two short complete novels, by Richard Matthews Hallet and by Thomas Duncan, will appear in this department next month.



From

For details concerning these Real Experience stories see page 3.

H.M.S. "———"
Somewhere at Sea

DEAR MOTHER:

Just a line to thank you for the muffler you knitted for me. There was a piece of paper pinned on it and you'd wrote on it: "To help you win the war." Well, it did, and you'll laugh when I tell you.

The morning it arrived we put to sea in charge of a convoy of merchant ships, and coming out to sea in the dawn with the ice on the decks and a freezing fog blowing up the slack of your pants—well, I tell you, Mother, it was cold, believe me. We chased around a bit, getting the convoy together and that wasn't easy in the fog, what with not seeing them till you were on top of them, and some being foreigners, they didn't understand "Get a move on" and "Shake a leg," and plain English like that. One collier was still anchored and there was a chap fishing over the stern said his captain wouldn't weigh anchor till he'd caught him a haddock for his breakfast, convoy or no convoy, or what was the use of democracy, might as well all be Nazis, whatever. I think he was a Welshman. Well, Mother, next minute he caught a fish and hauled it up, so the collier weighed and off we went.

Well, Mother, I'm the loader of our foremost anti-aircraft twin gun—the starboard gun, that is. Lorry Palmer is loader of the port gun, him that was courting the Siggers girl that lived in the second house from the corner—only he won't now because of the balloon barrage in the Memorial Park. Those balloon chaps are fair terrors. I said to Lorry, "Don't trouble—out of sight, out of mind," meaning to cheer him up a bit. Lorry said he didn't know about that, but when he gets a bit of leave he's going to put it across that fellow if he has to climb up the wire of his blinking balloon to get at him.

Well, Mother, this letter isn't about the Siggers girl, not but what I don't know a thing or two about her more than Lorry thinks he does, but what I started to tell you was about this convoy trip. It was the second day out and we had them all nicely in line; I must say they kept station very well, not being used to maneuvers and all that. Ships of all sizes and shapes, British and French and a Greek there was, and the collier whose captain had to have fresh fish for his breakfast, bringing up the rear. I was down below helping to scrub out my mess deck and I will say it was snug below with the chaps singing. The smell of hot soapsuds put me in mind of the kitchen at home Monday mornings when we were kids. All of a sudden the alarm gongs rang and we snatched up our coats and shrapnel helmets and I hung your scarf round my neck and tumbled on deck to our guns. Of course they are part-manned all the time, and when I got forward onto the forecastle the guns were loaded and elevated and trained.

"Enemy aircraft sighted," Lorry said. "They're shadowing us."

He had a blue wool balaclava helmet over his head, and a tin hat on top of that and a tartan scarf round his neck a Scotch girl gave him to help him forget the balloon barrage, and looked a fair treat.

Then one of the other escort ships a long way astern loosed off. She had bigger guns than us. We could see the shells bursting miles away up in the clouds. Every time one burst Lorry shouted: "Hold that, you Nosey Parkers!" He's a scream.

Well, all the morning they shadowed us, and in the afternoon the foremost lookout yelled out all of a sudden: "Enemy aircraft ahead! They're diving for us."

I couldn't see them because next second we fired, and what with the flashes and me shoving those projectiles into the gun as fast as I could load, I hadn't time for rubber-necking. But out of the corner of my eye I could see them swooping

Somewhere at Sea

Censorship requires that these significant letters, collected for us by a British correspondent we believe trustworthy, be anonymous.

down and bank and turn in the smoke, and next minute it was over. Not a scratch on the convoy and the attack beaten off by the Navy's anti-aircraft gunners, and a destroyer going off full split to pick up the bits of one of the German planes we'd shot down.

Lorry said it was his gun done it. But I knew it was mine, because the muffler you sent me was hanging loose around my neck, and one end got caught in the nose of the projectile, me being the loader, and it went into the gun. Well, I just rammed the rest into the gun with the projectile because there wasn't time to clear it, and slammed the breech to, and the gun fired, and up went the shell and the muffler with it, bit of paper and all. So no more now.

Your loving son,
BILL.

P.S. I'd like another muffler.

H.M.S. "———"
Somewhere at Sea

DEAR ELSE:

Thank you for your letter. You say this is a funny war. Well, I don't know about it being funny, but when I was called up I spun a coin. "Heads the Navy, tails the Army," I said. I didn't have a coin to spin. I borrowed one from Bob Martin, who was bootboy at the "Red Lion" pub. Remember him?

It came up heads. I said, "That's the Navy for me, Bob," and I handed him back the shilling. "You was quite safe," he said, and turned the shilling over. It was heads on both sides. I used to wonder how he always came to win at pitch and toss. He joined the Army, Bob did.

Well, Else, you know all about that training camp. I got through quick from being in the Boy Scouts. Signalman I am now. Ordinary signalman on board one of His Majesty's destroyers, and it's fine.

We was on patrol the other day when we got an S.O.S. from a steamer a long way off. It stopped suddenly like a sheep stops bleating when its throat's cut. She hadn't time to give her position—just "S.O.S." and the word "*submarine.*" And then we heard one of our aircraft calling. We've got surface patrols out on their beats, and aircraft flying backwards and forwards everywhere. They put me in mind of a pack of hounds hidden in the bracken casting about for a scent. Every now and again one gives tongue.

"Greek steamer torpedoed by enemy submarine. Have attacked and bombed submarine. Position so and so."

Well, off we went full speed for the position she'd given, and I wish you could have seen us, for there isn't a finer sight on the sea than a British destroyer going full speed to the rescue with the wake boiling astern and the waves carved in two by the sharp bows, and falling away on each side, all foam and spray: the wind rushing past, and the engines making a deep hum like a swarm of bees.

Well, we sighted the ship after a couple of hours, and the aircraft was still circling round. The ship was sinking, and the crew were in the boats. But there was something else there too—a submarine with her conning tower awash. And the aircraft started to tell us by flashing lamp, how she'd dropped a bomb near the submarine just as she was going to submerge and the bomb damaged the conning tower so the submarine couldn't dive. Every time the crew came up to man the gun, the aircraft gave them a burst of machine-gun fire and drove them below. Her periscopes were smashed, but we thought she could see well enough to loose off a torpedo at us—and sure enough, she did. The look-out saw it and sang out, but it passed ahead of us. She was game, all right. Well, after that there was only one thing for it. The first round from our foremast gun nearly knocked the conning tower off her. The second went into the hull and burst inside. That knocked the fight out of them. Up came

a white flag on a broomstick through the hole, and our captain ceased fire.

"Keep that flying a bit, my lad," he said. So we kept our guns trained on her, and we went and picked up the crew of the steamer first and then went alongside the submarine and gave them a hail, and up they came with their hands up.

The Greek skipper was on the bridge with our captain. Fine big fellow he was, and pretty mad. "Captain," he said, "one thing I ask—that Nazi U-boat captain, it is permitted to me to give him one kick in the pants? Only one—yes?"

Our Captain shook his head, very solemn. "Not aboard my ship."

"Why not?" says the Greek. "Only one little kick in the pants?"

Our Captain shakes his head again. He's all for King's Regulations and that lot, and he couldn't see a joke if you explained it to him for a week.

"Un-neutral conduct," he said. . . .

Your loving brother,
BERT.

S.S. "———"
Somewhere at Sea

MY DEAR SON:

I daresay you looked at the address on this, and wondered what your old father is doing. Well, son, I'm the cook on board this hooker, because they said I was too old to sign on as deckhand, but the crew reckon I'm a bit of Santa Claus, the Children's Hour, Walt Disney, and Boulestin all rolled into one. What I mean is, they come to rely on me. When I'm not cooking, I keep them amused, and soothe the youngsters when they get rattled. And I cut their hair and tattoo their girls' names on their arms and tell their fortunes out of teacups. An old clipper seaman, I reckon, ought to be able to turn his hand to most things.

The Old Man looks like a Methodist parson till you hear him talking about German submarines. A little fellow with a fringe of whisker on his chops and a starched collar, and what he doesn't know about handling that ship of his you could sit on a bee's knee. Him and the Chief Officer were forever working out tactics of what they'd do if a submarine attacked us. But I'd only been torpedoed three times last war, so they didn't ask me to join them.

Well, yesterday afternoon the look-out saw the track of a torpedo cross our bows, so there was no need for me to look in a teacup to find out if we was going to be attacked. I was in my galley giving it a lick of paint, and within thirty seconds the gun's crew was closed up, gun loaded. The Skipper altered course along the track of the torpedo to bring the gun to bear if the submarine broke surface, and started to zigzag. He had a prearranged signal with the Chief Engineer, and from the way smoke began to come out of the funnel I knew they was doing their bit down below. I went along to the gun to help passing ammunition to it.

Well, sure enough, the submarine broke surface after a bit, and we opened fire. The shell burst short, and I could see the Jerries tumbling out of the conning tower to man the gun. The next burst somewhere forward. The gun was still there, but I couldn't see the crew. I reckon it blew the lot into the water. The next shot was a miss, because we fired on the swing of the zigzag. Before we could get off another round, the submarine had submerged.

Well, she had her torpedoes left, and there was still a couple of hours of daylight. The Chief Engineer was knocking hell out of the old ship, but I reckoned we could hardly draw out of torpedo range before dark. Sparks was sending out wireless messages for all he was worth but there wasn't a patrol within reach anyway. I was scratching my head wondering what the Old Man would do, when another torpedo passed along our side, missing us by twenty yards. That wasn't so funny, but it made me think harder than ever.

Then it came to me that once when you were kids, I watched you and Phil playing redskins, and Cis was a lonely settler. It was on that bit of waste ground where they built the council houses later. You were stalking her through the grass, and all of a sudden she started waving her arms, shouting:

"Hurray, here come the Life Guards!"

You thought it was the Logan boys, and you sneaked off because you'd no use for them, but there wasn't anybody there after all. Cis did it so well she deceived me as well as you.

Well, I don't know how that came into my mind after all those years, standing by the gun staring at our wake and waiting for the next torpedo. Maybe I was thinking of Phil, killed in the last war. The Chief Officer was standing beside me.

"How if we hoisted some flags," I said, "strings of 'em? Keep on hoisting of 'em and hauling 'em down again."

He stared at me. "What for?" he said.

"Why," I said, "the U-boat will see the flags through her periscope and think half the British Navy is coming to our rescue, and us signaling to them."

"Trust an old clipper-jack!" he said, and ran forward as fast as his legs would carry him.

I don't know when the U-boat cleared out. We never saw her again, and we are due to reach port tomorrow. Maybe I'll go and hear Gracie Fields at a cinema.

Your loving,
DAD.

H.M.S. Minesweeping Trawler,
Laughing Water

MY DEAR GODMOTHER:

I take up my pen though it's not a very handy one, to write and thank you from the crew and myself for the parcels. They all came safely to hand, the cakes and the cigarettes and the long stockings are just fine and the wee mittens and the woollen helmets are fine too and the sweets. I haven't sucked a lollipop this forty year and they taste fine. I haven't had a godmother this forty year either, till you wrote from London to say you had adopted us. I was never in London. Well, you'll be about the age of my daughter, no doubt, but I'm proud to have you for a godmother for there's not many men of my age have such a thing.

You write and ask me to tell you what we are doing all day. I'll tell you. Just sweeping for mines. And the way we do it is this. We have a float on a wire and a kite that keeps the float out on our quarter, and a weight on the wire to keep it well down near the bottom. We steam along then till the wire catches in the mooring of a mine and it cuts it. Then up comes the mine to the surface and we have a bit of fun sinking it with the Lewis gun and rifles. I'm not so handy with the rifle myself, but my gunner, he's an old Navy man. Retired, of course, but a right proper Deadshot Dick with that gun of his. Did you ever read a book called "Deadshot Dick," missie? I mind I read it when I was a lad. That and the "Pilgrim's Progress," another fine book.

Whiles it's cold, of course. But I've fished these waters and off Iceland and the Faroes for thirty years; times you couldn't touch a bit of iron or the flesh stuck to it with the cold. And no lassie sent us lollipops in those days. Salt-water sores we got, but no lollipops.

But I was telling you about the mines. There's two kinds, the moored and the magnetic, and they sit on the bottom till you pass over them and then up they go. So we tow a magnet between two trawlers and hope that will pass over the mine instead of the *Laughing Water*. The other kind, the ones that come to the surface when the sweep-wire cuts their mooring, have horns. And if you bump one of these horns, up you go. So when we are shooting at them to sink them, we don't go too near in case the bullet strikes a horn and the mine explodes. I've known it to happen, and we got a nice lot of fish stunned by the explosion.

One day we were astern of another trawler sweeping ahead of us and her sweep-wire cut a mine mooring very near through but not quite. There was maybe one strand that didn't part for a few seconds. And then it parted and up she came like the horned beast that you'll have read about in the Scriptures, right in our path. It was so close I dare not alter the helm, for it would have swung us round into her. I just did nothing and I said to myself, "Angus, lad, this is the end," and I heard her bump along against the bows, but by the mercy of Providence we didn't touch a horn, and I gave the ship a wee bit of helm to swing the stern away, and we cleared it and we breathed deep.

I had all hands up with the rifles and I said: "Now, lads, for a bit of fancy shooting." I was mad with that mine. It was bobbing about on top of the waves and we settled down to sink it. The sun was setting and I had to sink it before dark.

Well, the devil himself was in that mine, missie, excuse me for mentioning it. But even Deadshot Dick couldn't sink it, and the cook put a bullet through the gunwale of the dinghy. So I clouted his head and sent him back to the galley and I said to Dick the gunner, "Let me have that Lewis gun." It was getting dusk and I wanted to get back to the base. Well, I was filled with righteous anger against that mine and I sent half a tray of bullets into it while it was on top of a wave. I've never hit a haystack before or since. We watched it sink and disappear, and I said the sword of the Lord and of Gideon; and told Dick to take the gun away and clean it.

I'll be turning in now, miss.

Your obedient servant
ANGUS ———.
Skipper, R.N.R.

The Tree

WE had just settled ourselves into a new camp. Three days of hard, back-breaking work in a steady drizzle had given place, after a night in a steam-bath, to one of those vivid, tropical mornings. We began to have a better opinion of the forests of British Honduras.

This unusual intensity of light after three days of almost excessive gloom, even for the jungle, appears to have had the same effect upon both the male members of our party. The sole representative of the fairer sex was already busy with compact and other technical appliances. I got out my shaving things and had the job well started, when a double howl came ringing through the tree-boles.

We have special howls in our household. A single high-pitched yell means "Where are you?" or, conversely, "Where am I?" Two howls mean "Come quickly and bring a gun," which is synonymous with saying: "I have seen some valuable animal specimen and need help."

Compact and razor were traded for nets and guns; the native staff streamed—if two people can stream—from their quarters, and we charged off toward the other tent. I wore a very diminutive well-lathered goatee; the feminine contingent had one beautifully penciled and one almost natural eyebrow.

We came upon my colleague clothed only in a pair of pajama trousers, his face covered in glistening white lather, staring fixedly above him at the first forks of a giant tree which was clothed in a suit of tangled parasitic ferns, orchids and creepers.

"What is it? Where is it?" we eagerly inquired, likewise peering aloft.

"It went into that hole," said my colleague, pointing aloft with a soapy razor.

"Yes, but what was it?" I inquired.

"I don't know," he answered. "I saw its tail disappearing, was all."

We got to work with a will, and soon the low growth was cleared away from the base of the great tree. Sure enough, there was a large hole in its trunk, but a hole of a very awkward shape, turning almost at right angles into the hollow interior between two of the thin, buttress roots that radiate from the bases of the trees in this forest. After peering into this, we came to the conclusion that we might smoke the animal out by means of burning sulphur.

After half an hour's strenuous work, however, we were reluctantly forced to give up the attempt, because no smoke appeared at the higher hole, whereas it poured out of the hole at the bottom. We came to the conclusion that the cavity did not extend up the inside of the trunk, or that it was blocked by a mass of fallen blocks and chips of rotten wood, as sometimes happens.

Then I noticed that the creepers were numerous and large, and extended right to the summit of the tree. I suggested that I should go aloft.

In due course, I began the long climb, clothed in a thick shirt with sleeves to prevent arm-abrasions, trousers tucked into my stockings, and thin rubber shoes to aid foot gripping. In my pockets were cigarettes, matches and a long coil of strong string.

Now husky people and athletes might shin up ninety-foot trees as they would a rope in a gymnasium, but I find it judicious to take the whole process rather seriously, very slowly and with the ut-

Volcano

Our naturalist Tarzan gets into big trouble when he climbs after kinkajous.

By IVAN SANDERSON

most caution. If a creeper gives way at a crucial moment, one requires every ounce of one's strength—and I have little —to prevent a great going-down.

After some difficulty I gained the first great fork. Up there was a space bigger than the average balcony, with a more or less level floor composed of a bed of dead leaves, creepers, fern-roots, orchids, rubbish and even some clumps of grass. Between the two great branches which rose steeply on either side was a natural latticework of entwined creepers forming the whole into a giant basket. In this I lay down for a rest after ascertaining that it did not house snakes or scorpions, and calling down to the others below that I was safe.

I then tied one end of the string to a creeper, the other to a piece of dead wood. Thrown out, this carried the string down to the ground, where my companions were ready with the lighted blow-torch, the sulphur candle and a bottle of water. These I hauled up, and after festooning them about my person by means of short strings from my belt, I launched out over space once more.

The animal hole was on the outer-under side of one of the great bifurcating limbs, about ten feet above the floor of the natural balcony. To reach it, meant swarming up some creepers, swinging beneath them and finally anchoring myself opposite the hole by twisting my legs round two separate creepers. The resultant position, though a strain, was rendered more comfortable and less strenuous by the presence of a strong though thin liana that happened to encircle the branch at this point, and upon which I could partially sit.

Just inside the hole a small ledge presented itself. It was perfectly suited to hold the sulphur pan, and it was not long before I had the blow-torch arranged so that it heated but did not light the sulphur. This we find to be the best method, for the burning sulphur releases so much gas that sleeping animals may become suffocated before they awake, and then roll off their ledges and tumble down into the great chimney formed by the trunk, where they cannot be reached. The heating process is slower but surer.

I was surprised, therefore, when not more than a minute after the torch was fixed, a small, clawed hand gently and cautiously appeared from the gloom above. I was doubly astonished, because I imagined the animal to be below me.

Then I witnessed one of the most fascinating sights that has ever fallen to my lot.

Not two feet from my face appeared two round, soft keen little faces with great lustrous yellow eyes, rounded ears and a general air of ineffable gentleness. They came down quietly and softly from above, head-first down the farther surface of the hollow interior. They were puzzled by the smell of the smoke, but apparently little annoyed by it, for they did not sniff or even blink. I at once resolved upon a scheme: these animals must be taken alive!

Shooing them back with the sulphur pan, I made haste getting a noose fixed with the strong string. This I suspended from above the hole over a creeper so that the loop encircled the entrance. I then removed the blow-torch, leaned far back to one side and grasped the free end of the string. Within a few seconds a head appeared. It peered at me but did not pause. I got ready to strike, but before I could do so the head of the second animal came out. What to do? If I waited a second longer, the first animal would be through; if I pulled, I could not have the noose for the second. And I wanted the pair. After a moment's hesitation, I pulled.

THE string flew together. It caught the second animal, the female, round the neck, and squeezed its head tight against the flanks of its mate, which in turn was thus encircled round the middle. With one heave and a quick jerk, both animals were yanked out of the hole before they knew what had happened, and because the hole was partially on the under surface of the branch, it only required a few feet of slack in the string before they were dangling in mid-air far out from the tree. With a rip I let the string slide through my fingers so that they whizzed groundward before their struggling freed them from the sim-

ple noose. Actually they were but a dozen feet from the ground when the female fell clear, but that is no tumble at all for this particular animal.

I looked down upon a wild scramble below as my friends fell upon the beautiful little pets. The chance of capturing a pair of full-grown live kinkajous before breakfast is not a common occurrence even to a zoölogist's household. These little woolly animals, related to the raccoon and built upon lines that resemble a lemur, a kitten and an animated teddy-bear rolled into one, make the most lovable of pets—sometimes! They can be extremely savage, and although vegetarians for the most part, are armed with the cutting, tearing teeth of a dog. To us, however, they were more than pets. They would form the basis for a considerable amount of interesting study.

Naturally we were overjoyed. It was some time before they were ready below to receive the blow-torch and pan and the bottle, the water from which had been poured into the hole to make sure that none of the excessively dry tinder formed by the rotten interior was alight.

I then began to retrace my steps, and on arriving at the balcony once more, I wormed through the creepers, and reached out with my right foot to find a solid stand among the rubbish. I imagined I had found one, and began to move my weight forward on to it.

THERE was one ominous crack, sudden and sharp as a revolver-shot. I gripped the creepers convulsively, while before my eyes the whole mass of rubbish lodged between the forked branches slowly subsided as if being sucked in from below. In a second there was a gaping void where I was about to step. With a roar that rose into a thundering crescendo, the whole mass crashed down the great chimney; and as if in answer, there came up in its place with a full-throated hiss a great column of almost transparent flame. A jet of nearly liquid heat preceded by an arc of golden sparks rocketed up into the foliage.

In a flash I realized that we had not damped the tree after we had tried to smoke it from the bottom. I had been aloft half an hour. Now beneath me was an inferno—a jungle volcano in a quite advanced stage of eruption: tons of powdery, finely divided, superdried tinder packed into a fifty-foot chimney five feet wide, and supplied with a natural forced draft.

My first mad scramble took me far up one of the great branches. Then amid the roaring of the flames, the rain of sparks, billowing smoke and crashing of heat-agitated branches above, and the yells of those below, I did things that I could never later be persuaded to believe. It appears that I fairly skimmed up the underside of the branch to the next fork. Having gained this point, which was out of immediate danger and the range of the sparks, I regained my common-sense. Around me were the branches of neighboring trees; below me—eighty feet below me—were the blanched faces of my companions. How far away, how tiny and helpless they seemed, and how very slender the remaining branches of the tree that I was on! I began a painfully slow but not unmethodical advance upward and outward, after selecting a road that seemed at least possible.

SPACES and gaps, however, appeared greater as one approached them, whereas the branches got proportionately slimmer and less stable. At last the one I was on began to bend. The Africans have a word, "belly-fear," and I believe I learned then what it meant.

After carefully retracing my steps—or rather, crawling tracks—and trying two other routes, I came face to face with the realization that I was trapped in mid-air just as surely as I would have been in the depths of the tree-trunk. I yelled this to those below, expecting sympathy. Instead I got wild gesticulations.

Now the noise was terrific. Only those who have seen a full-sized hollow tropical forest tree on fire will know just how loud the roaring can be. Up in my lofty vantage-point, moreover, the crashing of the branches waving in the convection-currents added to the uproar so that I could not hear what my companions were shouting. They kept pointing to a spot below me near the fork whence the flames were coming; and at last I spotted the object of their excitement: a single great creeper that hung from beneath my branch and that did not immediately join the trunk of the tree but instead hung in a great loop and only joined it some twenty feet from the ground. As soon as I had spotted this, I saw what they expected of me and set out to do it. Those below, as soon as they saw I was on my way, sent one of their number to begin the ascent.

By the time I had reached the top of the creeper, they had reached the bottom

and were hewing it adrift from the tree trunk with a machete. Soon it was free below and dangling some six feet away from the smoking trunk. In the haze of smoke, I found its hard, dry surface, and in a second was over the branch and slowly descending. I passed three small holes belching pink flames like so many blow-torches. The heat almost scorched me, and inside I could see only shimmering white light. At last I reached the free end of the creeper, and grabbed the machete-handle held out to me. I was pulled in to the trunk, and seizing the other creepers there, we both fell rather than climbed to earth.

Nor were we too quick; for within seconds, it seemed, the branch below the one I had just left gave two cracks, and then sang its way to earth in one piece, landing with a thud that shook the whole forest. A column of sparks flew up, and we ran.

Luck was certainly with us that memorable day. Not only was I safe, but our camp was safe. I suddenly sat down—I couldn't help it; I felt cold despite the fire.

While breakfast was brought, I resumed my shaving. My face was pure black and pure white in patches; in one of the white patches was a small perky goatee. I looked at my wife. Her disproportionate eyebrows made her expression so funny that I began to laugh and I found it very difficult to stop.

The Theater of War

Three stories of Real Experience from a noted British naval officer and correspondent who has been accorded a front seat in several theaters of the war.

By BARTIMEUS

WITHIN a few weeks of being on board one of our largest battleships I found myself at sea in a motor torpedo-boat, which is the smallest of our men-of-war. She was seventy feet long, carried two torpedo tubes, some depth-charges and an anti-aircraft armament. The complement consisted of two officers and eight ratings. The battleship carried sixteen hundred; and it was interesting to reflect that by a combination of circumstances it might be possible for one of these seventy-foot hornets to disable and even sink a thirty-five-thousand-ton battleship.

In outline these boats resemble a flat-iron; and economy in space, which is of course a feature of all ships, is carried to a fine art in a motor torpedo-boat. The living-spaces, for both officers and men, are in the forepart of the boat; the crew occupy one compartment out of which opens the tiny galley, while the captain and his navigator, usually a lieutenant and a sub-lieutenant, R.N.V.R., occupy another.

As in the case of submarines, motor torpedo-boats are manned by picked men. These ratings receive special equipment and certain tinned rations which, as in the case of submarines, are officially called "comforts."

There are times when they must need a good deal of comforting. When the boat is running on her main engines, the roar of the exhaust makes conversation impossible. In any seaway the water drives over her in a continuous sheet as she bounces from one wave-top to the next. Life on board under these conditions is one long shower-bath. The captain and coxswain stand on a thick soft rubber pad which absorbs some of the shock as the boat strikes each successive sea. The rest of the crew, wherever they happen to be, just keep their knees bent and hold to whatever is handy: there must be moments when they wonder whether the next jolt won't knock their backbones through the tops of their heads.

I found myself on board one of these craft late one afternoon, one of several moored alongside a jetty, their crews sitting about the decks, basking in the sun. Some lay outstretched with their gas-masks for pillows, asleep; but even in this hour of relaxation one or two of the

gunners were fiddling with the mechanism of their guns with a brush and a tin of oil. One man was putting a touch of paint on one of the torpedo tubes where a wire had chafed it. While he worked, he sang softly to himself. Somebody else put his head and shoulders out of the forward hatch and began handing round cups of tea. As the sun was setting, the lieutenants in command came down the pier and climbed on board. They had been to a council of war ashore.

"Ten o'clock," said our captain briefly. "Get your suppers early and turn in for a few hours. It'll be an all-night show."

Some hours later the stillness of the harbor was broken by the roar of high-powered engines as they began warming through. There were a few brief orders: one by one the boats glided seaward, the noise increasing as they gathered speed, and presently there was nothing round us but the roaring darkness and the furrow of our wake, pale in the starlight.

After some hours the sound of the engines dropped abruptly to a soft purring note. The night was very calm. A while later the navigator emerged from the conning-tower door. He glanced at the dimly lit binnacle, murmured something and pointed through the darkness. The boat reduced speed until she barely carried steerage way. The reflections of the stars swayed and danced in the broad wave that curved back from our bows.

I could see it then, a dark object, fine on the port bow. "That's it," said the captain. The outline of a buoy loomed up and slid past us. "That's two miles from the enemy coast," said the navigator. In the comparative stillness the sound of aircraft passing overhead was plainly audible.

AN instant later the darkness ahead suddenly became a lattice of searchlight beams. They wheeled and concentrated, spread fanwise and joined their points in clusters that swayed uneasily and revealed specks of tinsel that eluded them. White flashes of gunfire spouted into fountains of tracer shells. The dull mutter of the German guns reached us across the water and then the *"Woomp!"* of exploding bombs.

"Good old R.A.F.!" said the coxswain at the wheel. "Knocking seven bells out of the Boche."

"Woomp!" said the British bombs. For two hours they continued to say the same thing with splendid monotony. *"Woomp! . . . Woomp! . . . Woomp!"* The searchlights swayed like the fiery girders of some titanic structure about to crash into ruin. Flaming onions hung like dying suns amid the lesser constellations of star-shells and sank slowly to extinction. Then the R.A.F. went home, and darkness fell upon the coast except where fires glowed dully....

Dawn found us back in harbor. A dockhand caught the heaving line flung by our gunner. "Where've you been, mate?" he asked.

The gunner replied: "Sitting in the front row of stalls, chum."

*

VESSELS OF WRATH

THE captain of the little gunboat placed the long earthenware bottle on the wardroom table. It bore the inscription *"Bols."*

"It is the last bottle," he said. "I brought it out of Holland." He filled the glasses, and we drank, not as sailors usually do, with toasts and conviviality, but in silence, like men partaking of some sad sacrament.

There were half a dozen of us round the little table. I was the only English Naval officer. The others were Dutch, captains and officers of little ships who had endured all things to the end and had escaped with their honor and their ships to Britain. "I was with the Queen," said one thoughtfully. "I was on board the British destroyer when Her Majesty came on board. Her Majesty had but one thought in her mind—how best to serve us all. It was not in her mind to leave Holland even then. It was Her Majesty's hope that some small village could be found on the coast where she could stay and still be an inspiration to the nation. But the impossibility of that was made clear to Her Majesty. Treachery everywhere, the treachery of the Germans whom we had accepted as friends and neighbors in our midst, and the ceaseless bombing attacks on the coast, would make Her Majesty's safety impossible in Holland any longer. That was pointed out to the Queen. Then she said: 'Can I go to England?'

"The captain of the English destroyer said he was at the Queen's disposal to take Her Majesty wherever she wished to go.

" 'Then take me, please, to England.' So he took her."

Another raised his glass, drank, and put it down.

"Ja," he said, "it is good to hold command of the seas."

We talked a little while about the days when the Dutch held the seas, and I told them that in the smoking-room of the naval barracks at Chatham hang the portraits of the Dutch Admirals who sailed up the Medway, to remind us of these things.

"And the Queen," asked another, "she was not afraid?"

The narrator gave a short contemptuous laugh at the suggestion. "She was the Queen of Holland. She had but one thought—Holland."

"But I was afraid," persisted the first speaker. The other eyes all turned toward him. "The treachery," he explained. "No country has ever been defeated by treachery on such a scale before as Holland was."

The others nodded. One leaned forward and tapped the table with his forefinger. "Listen! We gave refuge to Germans who had fled from persecution in their own country. In nearly every house there was one. There were German business men everywhere, our friends, our neighbors. We trusted them. Listen," he repeated insistently: "Every one was a Fifth Columnist, a traitor to Holland. And they had been organized—not just on the spur of the moment, but for years, so that when the time came they knew what to do; and they worked with the parachutists, with the German army, with the enemy posts, to a degree of efficiency and coördination that has never been seen before. It was against that we had to fight."

Another took up the tale: "For example, we blew up a bridge—it does not matter where. A small bridge, but strategically important. Within an hour parachutists were descending with spare parts to rebuild that bridge."

"Talking of bridges," said one who had not yet spoken. "There was a bridge we were preparing to blow up. I sent some of my men with demolition charges to help the military. Suddenly three motor omnibuses arrived full of officers and men in Dutch uniforms. They were shouting greetings to us in Dutch and cheering. Our men ran forward to meet them.

"'How are things going?' they cried.

"'Fine!' was the answer.

"They jumped from the buses, and every man pulled out a pistol. They shot our men at point-blank range—our men with their hands stretched out in welcome, and laughing faces.... They were Germans."

The host refilled the glasses in the silence after that. It was a terrible silence, more terrible than shouted curses.

And then slowly threads of talk filtered back into it. Short tales of incredible gallantry by men who had not seen a shot fired in war before; of little ships that stuck to their posts for days under merciless bombing day and night, long after their own air force had been exterminated. They told of a German division that tried to cross the Zuider Zee in fishing craft and flat-bottomed boats and was exterminated by two mine-sweepers and a torpedo-boat. One mine-sweeper was sunk; the other and a torpedo-boat were sunk by their own officers in the locks of the dam. But while the war lasted—"our war," they called it—not a German crossed the shallow Zuider Zee, which held fifteen thousand enemy dead.

They were not boasters, the Dutch. They recounted these things in somber matter-of-fact tones. Much more they told me that I have withheld, for Holland and their kin are under the heel of the Nazi conqueror and there is no pity in that defilement.

Later, ashore, under the quiet English skies, I saw some of the men walking about the streets, shopping. A fine breed of seamen, tall and burly, and they held their heads high, these men who have lost their country but kept their souls, their courage and their honour.

Tradition is a strange thing; it survives with more potency in a seaman's walk and the set of his shoulders than it does in history books. These Dutch naval officers and men were descendants of seamen who had also held command of the narrow seas, and perhaps because of that it was plain they shared something imperishable, against which no treachery or brutal force of arms, no vileness, can ultimately prevail.

*

A LET-UP

I REALIZED quite suddenly the other day that there comes a time when noise wins. I felt I really wanted to get away from the wail of sirens and the roar of the barrage at nights. I don't count bombs, because unless one hits you, they aren't particularly noticeable in the general racket. But what ultimately decided me to take a few days' leave out of London was the personal sort of way

London people talked about their bombs. I kept meeting a man who boasted that his grandmother had calmly extinguished an incendiary bomb with wet tea-leaves, and incidents of that kind; and because I had nothing in my family history to compare with these stories, they began to get me down. So, as I had five days' leave due me, I took it.

There is an aspect of wearing plain clothes—or what soldiers call mufti—that I had overlooked. It was pretty good to dig out an old suit of plus-fours, even though it smelt of moth-balls, and put it on instead of uniform; but it was better still when I boarded the train, and a soldier burdened with full equipment, a suitcase and a large paper parcel, climbed in with me and said: "Here, chum, where can we get a cup of tea?" He mightn't even have spoken to me if I'd been in uniform. As it was, we went in search of tea together, and he poured out, because I'm clumsy with a teapot.

It was dark when I got out of the train, and in the darkness outside the station the hooded lights of cars were the only illumination. There are a number of moments during a short leave which might be described as peak moments. This was one of them: To arrive at a journey's end pretty tired and stale, and hear the voice of a friend hail you out of the darkness; to climb into a little car and be driven through deserted roads that are almost invisible except for the white dotted line down the centre; suddenly to relax and be aware of the peace around you, and to smell the wet earth and dying leaves, the most bitter-sweet scent of the autumn night.

These good moments form a sort of procession through the memory. There was lying in bed the first night, trying to fight an overwhelming sleepiness, because once you were asleep, you would be no longer conscious of the luxurious warmth of the hot-water bottle and the sound of the wind fretting the trees outside, the stillness of the old house inside, and the peace of it all.

THE truth is that I had slipped back into something rather like childhood. Next morning the sounds and the scents coming in through the open windows were the same as I knew in childhood: a cock crowing somewhere, the gurgle of freshets in the valley, and a church clock measuring the new day with a soft chime. The world before fear was, as I see it now: a lovely, unreal, unchanging world.

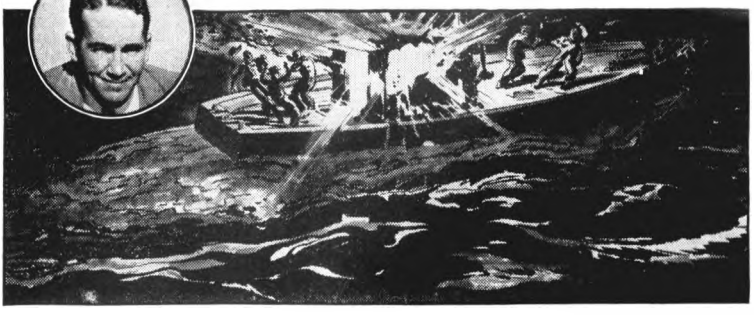
When you are in this sort of mood, the things you can do are comparatively limited, if you wish to preserve the illusion. It seemed good to me that morning to clear a drain that had become choked. It involved splashing about in gum boots and getting covered with mud to the eyebrows. I started operations single-handed, but was presently joined by five fellow-guests and my hostess' daughter. Four of the former were evacuées, and the other a dachshund. At last my junior hostess poured a bucket of water down one end, and the rest of us crowded at the other end to see the result. The water gushed out, and the youngest evacuée lifted up his voice in triumph. "Magic!" he shouted. Well, I suppose it was all magic, of a sort.

Across the lawn there was a copper beech, and behind it a gray tower, and ruins—Norman, Tudor, Stuart. King Stephen's brother, Bishop of Winchester, built it for his palace in 1129. A hundred years before that, the Danes had sacked and burned the village which gave it a name. Since then the current of English history has eddied and flowed through those buildings. Henry II sat there in conference before starting for the Third Crusade; Richard Cœur de Leon feasted there after his ransom and return to England; Henry V sat him down there the day before he embarked for France and Agincourt, and wrote a letter; William of Wykeham died there; the Emperor Charles V was the guest of Henry VIII, and between them they made a treaty there against the King of France. A roving band of Commonwealth irregulars laid siege to it with a gun, and there its story ended until the other day when a Heinkel dropped two bombs alongside of Bishop Blois' fishpond. The craters have already been filled in, and the incident forgotten. The jackdaws roost in the shot-holes made by Cromwell's artillery. Chestnut trees grow where English kings feasted and made history; and one night for a treat we roasted the chestnuts in front of a log fire.

Throughout the hours of daylight, rooks were cawing where the Roman road climbed out of the valley. The sound was like a tumult of hoarse battle cries coming out of the past of England. It was wild, harsh music, and it seemed to repeat the same thing endlessly: how that England was very old; and unless we chose to destroy it ourselves, it was quite indestructible.

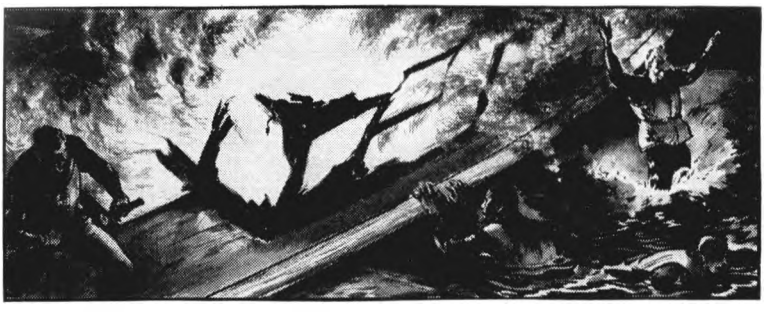
"FLAMES DROVE US INTO THE INKY SEA!"

A true experience of WILLIAM H. CRANE, *West Columbia, Texas*



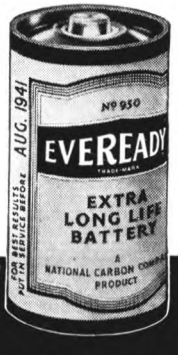
"A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION rocked the boat on which we were riding out to an oil drilling rig in Galveston Bay," writes Mr. Crane. "Instantly, the six of us—a drilling crew and the skipper of our craft—were surrounded by flames.

"FIGHTING THE FIRE was hopeless. As tongues of flame seared us, we strapped on lifebelts. Our driller grabbed a flashlight. Then we hurled ourselves overboard into the black water.



"AFTER HOURS OF SIGNALLING, the piercing white beam of the flashlight guided a searching party to us. Without the flashlight and its dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries it could have been 'curtains' for us.

(Signed) William H. Crane"



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Our Readers* Write Us—

He Bursts into Song

I like the month of February
Better than March or January.
Its weather's rough, but look,
Its days, most years, are twenty-eight;
So I have three days less to wait
To read my monthly BLUE BOOK.

Michael Gallister rates with me;
And so does Dornford Yates, for he
And Fullerton are fine.
That Banshee yarn was surely great,
I've read few funnier things to date,
I'd like some more for mine.

I don't like murder tales a lot—
Though "Mooney's in a Jam" was hot—
I think fantastics smell.
But Draco, Mill, and Chidsey too,
Are just my style. I'm telling you,
Their yarns are simply swell.

So every month I blow two bits
To buy BLUE BOOK. *'Tis crammed with hits,*
Till I ask: "Where, on earth,
Could any reader hope to find
In any place known to man's mind
A bigger quarter's worth?"

Dickson Wood (Austin, Texas)

One Thing They Don't Fight About

My husband's name is William; I call him Billiam. I have stood by Billiam for fifty-five belligerent years. Fifty-five years is a long time for any woman to stand her first husband, especially if he is a natural-born fighter, like Billiam.

The only thing we agree about is the BLUE BOOK, *and we even fight about that, to see which one shall get it first.*

Billiam says your love yarns are "swelligant!" Your heroes are not all "he angels," and your females have more sense than hen turkeys. Billiam thinks your Western stories are just right. He doesn't like the "blood-and-thunder" kind, that kill, and kill, and kill, and never bury their dead. . . .

The pictures on your BLUE BOOK *covers are refreshing, Mr. Editor. More power to you!*

Serena La Plante (Anoka, Minn.)

He's Been Stung—and Likes It!

I've been stung!

All of twelve or fifteen years ago, I used to read magazines with a prolific kind of enthusiasm. Those were the days when good stories were the general rule, it seemed. Gradually, then, something became lacking—the taste went away; and I came to the conclusion that perhaps I was growing away from "juvenile" adventure. Either that or modern American writing was falling to a low that bade fair to turn the stomach of the reader-world.

I have never read BLUE BOOK *before because the price of twenty-five cents is a lot of money to me—too much to toss away on a conglomeration of junk that must pass for writing. That is what I* thought. *Just yesterday, a friend passed on to me the April issue of* BLUE BOOK. *And so I scream I have been stung! Yes, stung with the flavor of writing that is* writing; *stung with the thrill of stories that are* stories. *Max Brand's "The Luck of the Spindrift" has started the march of quarters that, we may well hope, will not end. So come on and sting me again! I love it!*

Manly M. Banister (Kansas City, Kan.)

Hawaii Says—

For the most part Nawiliwili goes to bed at nine-thirty, and I am not used to such hours. (They get up early here, too.) I have always been a magazine snob, sticking closely to the slick-paper brands. So somewhat hesitantly I picked up a BLUE BOOK, *and although I suppose I've sinned too long to be entitled to a voice at this late date, I'd like to say it's a valuable discovery for me, and to offer some comment for what it may be worth:*

I've always thought that a serial in a monthly is nothing but a trick to sell the next month's issue. It's bound to weaken a good story to be so broken up. And I think a good magazine sells as well without it. Novelettes, okay—but novels don't belong. It's the only criticism I'd make. A monthly collection of good entertainment, varied and plentiful, is a real find.

Keep up the good work, and put me down as having learned a lesson.

Rawson Moore (Nawiliwili, Kauai, T. H.)

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*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the ones which we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.

We specially desire for our Real Experience department true stories from the fighting men in training and overseas.