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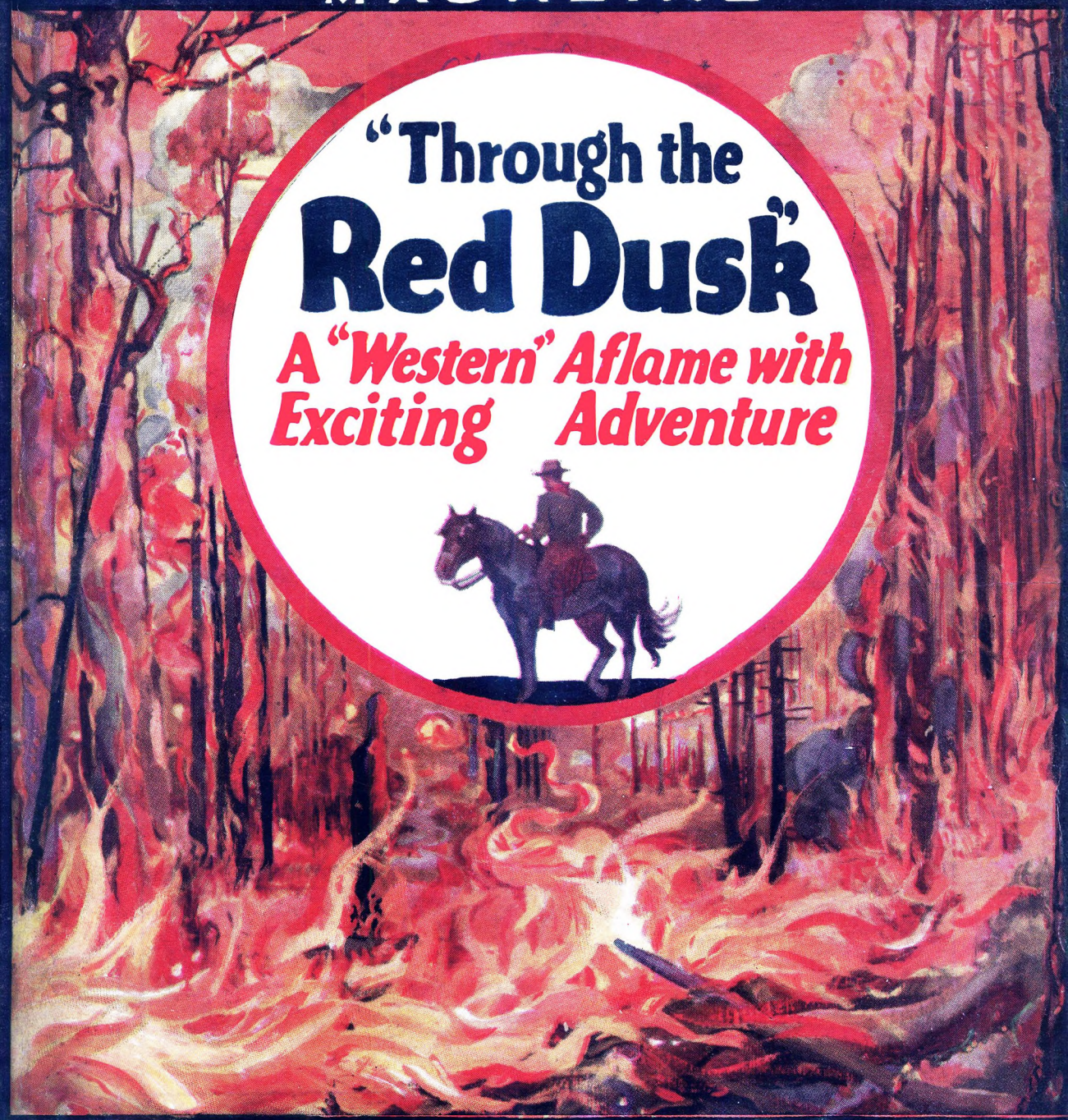
# THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE



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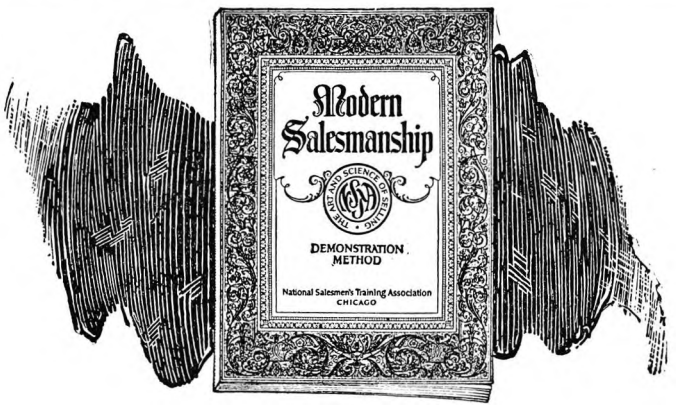


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# MAGAZINE

MARCH
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DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor





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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 42 MARCH 1926 No. 5

# We Want You to Know—

THE spice of life, and of fiction, is variety. Waking, sleeping; working, playing; far travel and home-coming—these save our all too civilized selves from the black plague of boredom.

So also with fiction, by grace of which we multiply the brief experience of our own circumscribed lives a thousandfold: its infinite variety of style, theme, background and mood affords the reader, especially the magazine reader, a grateful succession of differing pleasures.

In this belief the contents of The Blue Book Magazine are painstakingly chosen: in the eager endeavor to offer its readers the widest possible variety of stories, all of them, in their several spheres, of conspicuous attractiveness. How nearly we have achieved our aim in this present issue the succeeding pages will show. Next month we hope to come still nearer the goal.

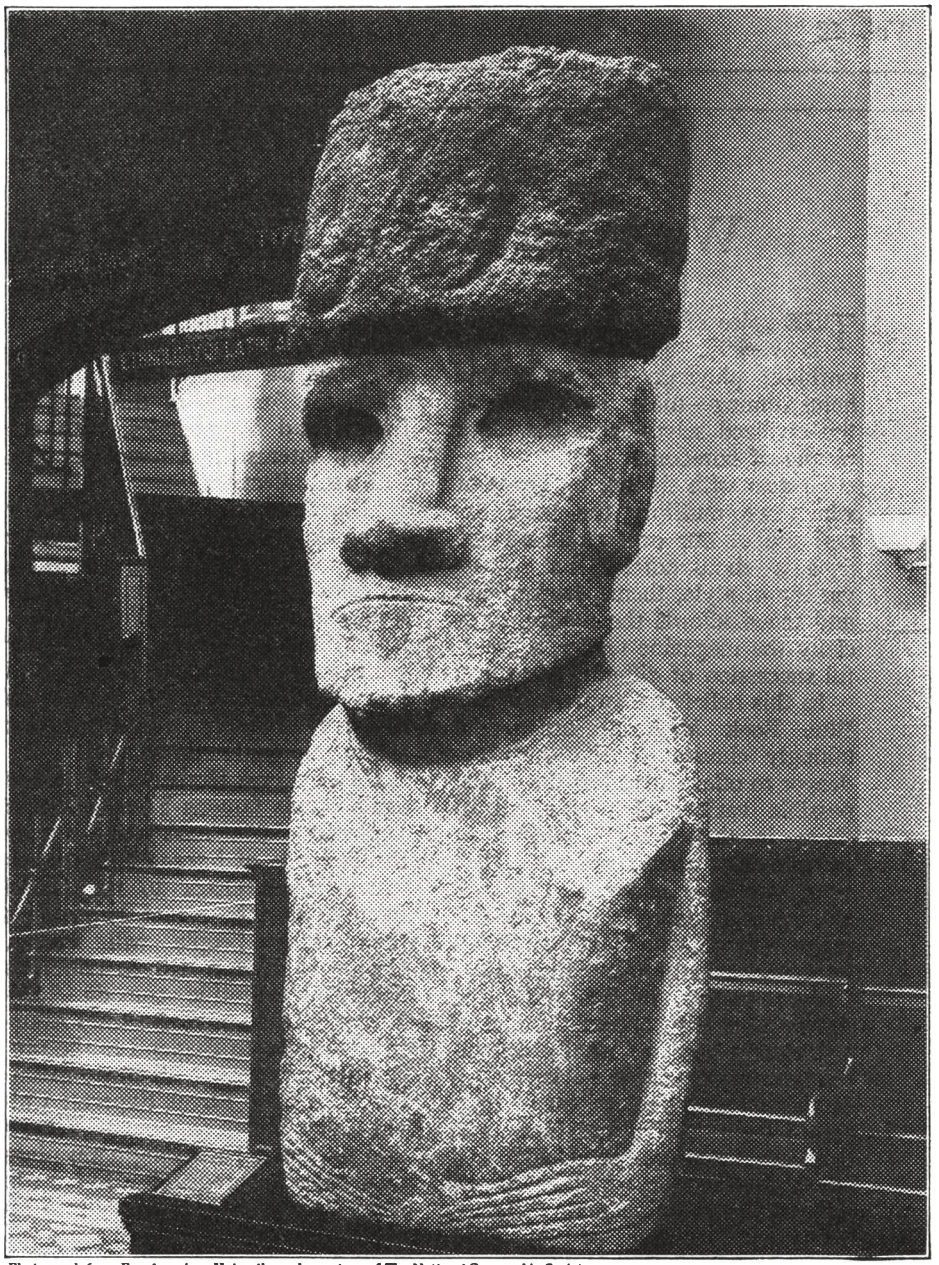
For example, in this next (the April) issue is to appear the first of a distinctly new and wholly delightful group of detective stories by one of the ablest living writers of mystery fiction—H. Bedford-Jones, who wrote "Madagascar Gold" and many another story which has roused our readers to enthusiasm. "Clancy, Detective," is one of the most intriguing characters in all current fiction. And present-day Paris, where *Clancy* functions so dramatically, (and where his author has been living the last two years), provides a setting picturesque indeed.

Another outstanding feature of this April issue will be Joe Mills' short novel "The Comeback." The central figure of this exceptional story is a dog—just a dog, if you will; but we predict that you will follow the fortunes of this dog, his friends and his enemies, with the deepest interest, and remember him with real affection.

"Chaulmoogra," a stirring story of adventure in a remote Asiatic wilderness in quest of the tree which provides the leprosy-cure, shifts the scene and mood again. Warren Hastings Miller, its author, makes yearly journeys to the Orient in search of fresh material, and his stories are not only notably interesting but thoroughly authentic as well.

Clarence Herbert New writes again of his famous Free Lances in Diplomacy in the next issue—a truly thrilling tale of international events which comes closer to the actual facts of certain recent happenings than many people will realize. George L. Knapp will contribute a delightful scientific comedy "McKeever's Dinosaur." Bertram Atkey will take you to England in the precarious company of his rare rapscallions the Easy Street Experts; Calvin Ball will shift you out to Kansas and to certain surprising happenings at a wayside garage. Jay Lucas will stage for you an exciting show in his native cattle-country. And there will be at least seven other stories of high individual excellence and carefully contrasted characters. Five of our readers, moreover, will contribute the true stories of the most remarkable things that ever happened to them. . . . . There's a magazine for you!

—*The Editors.*



Photograph from Pan American Union through courtesy of The National Geographic Society.

THE gigantic stone images found on Easter Island have been the subject of much speculation on the part of travelers and archeologists. Now for the first time, in the fascinating story "The Golden Crowns," by Beatrice Grimshaw, they figure prominently in a work of fiction. The photograph which we reproduce herewith was taken from one of these strange figures which now stands in the National Museum at Washington.

*Frontispiece to accompany "The Golden Crowns,", by Beatrice Grimshaw, page 53.*

# *Through the Red Dusk*

*A short novel of swift adventure in one of our National Forests—by the author of "Two-fisted Administration" and "The Race of Forest Men."*

## *By* ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

THE Santa Maria Cattleman's Association was in session.

"Now who in hell is going to prove I'm in trespass?" howled Tom Shanklin. "I've got a belly full of yappin' by you dry-land coyotes and the Forest Service. You've been talkin' about me bein' in trespass on my range for ten years and damned if I'm not goin' to start smokin' up the next pup that starts beefin' about it. Why, I've—"

"Everyone knows you trespass," cried Stub Cramm, stocky, tow-headed, blue-eyed, with a habitual sneer on his ruddy face. He was a leader of the disgruntled spokesman for the "dry-land" farmers who were protesting in this meeting against the chronic trespass which was reputed to be one of Shanklin's means of getting forage for his stock.

Shanklin, burly, medium in height, his deep-tanned visage shadowed by a dark beard which showed blue-black except for a livid scar on his left jaw where a horse had kicked him years before, turned on the homesteader viciously.

"Cramm, I've got a notion to make you eat that here and now. I'd like to know where your proof is."

"We don't need any proof," declared Cramm, his face flushing. "We know you trespass on the range."

"Say, I've stood about all of this I intend to put up with from you," cried Shanklin. "That's been my range since my daddy settled here forty-odd years ago. Now you come along with a lot of poppycock about protective limits and range regulations, and how this should be done, and how that must be done; and I'm sick of it. We got along all right before the homesteaders and the Forest Service began to butt in, and I'm doggoned if—"

"I'm getting about as full of it as you are," interrupted Cramm. "My stock hasn't been able to get half the forage they should on my allotment this year, because they've been crowded out by a bunch of T Bar K cattle. We've got a right here. The Government has given us this land, and we're goin' to see that we get our rights if we have to fight for—"

"Say, what do you think of my rights?" bellowed Shanklin. "Rights, rights! Why,

you damned prairie dog, I had grazing rights on the Ragcarpet range before you ever heard of Colorado. Rights, why—"

The chairman, long, slim Rasmusson, owner of the Circle X Ranch on the upper Huerfano, stood up and pounded the table emphatically.

"Now, this aint goin' to be no free-for-all," he announced. "This here's a meetin' of a cattleman's association, not an old ladies' scandal party. And if you two can't talk peaceable, then yuh can't talk. I'd like to hear what the Forest Supervisor, Mr. Chris Perrin, has to say about this." Rasmusson turned to the Forest officer.

"But I have the floor, Rasmusson," cried Shanklin. "I'm here to protect my rights in this matter. I've got the floor, and—"

"Yuh mean yuh did have the floor, Shanklin. Perrin's got it now. Go ahead, Perrin. Let's hear the Forest Service side of this ruckus and see if it can't be a little more sane than these two wildcats that have just had their say."

CHRIS PERRIN, supervisor of the Pagosa National Forest, got to his feet. He appeared young among the weather-ripened men of the cow ranges. But the healthy tan on his cheeks showed that his administration of the Forest was not done wholly from his office. He was clad in trim forest-green uniform, relieved in its plain color only by a dull bronze shield on his left shirt pocket. His clean-shaven, determined jaw, steady brown eye, and hair that tried to curl, were those of a clean-cut outdoor man.

He stood, hesitating, looking into the faces of the attentive men, all of whom showed the effects of the heated argument that had raged since the start of the meeting.

"You all know the Forest Service," he said. "We have no ax to grind. Our business is to get the best possible use of the forests.

"One job that we have is to regulate the grazing. There are certain rules that have been laid down for the entire service and others that have been established by the District Office which are designed to secure the best out of these ranges.

"You are all familiar with the rule which we call G-16. This provides that every man who owns a ranch in or near the Forest is entitled to forest range sufficient to carry through the summer the number of cattle that can use, during winter, the feed he can raise on his ranch. We call this the protective limit. This regulation allows for enough cattle to permit each rancher to make a living. And where there are ranchers who have many more cattle than the protective limit and have run them on the Forest for years, we have had gradually to reduce their permits toward the protective limit to make room for new settlers, so we might have our farm lands settled and more people living off the products of the range.

"That's the principle of this phase of grazing administration. Now as to this question that has been raised: If there is a trespass anywhere, and it can be proven, then proper action will be taken, regardless of who may be in trespass. As you know, I am new on this forest. I've been here only eight months. But I told you when I came that I would try to get just as square a deal for every man as possible. And I've got to stick by regulations.

"When I gave Mr. Shanklin his permit last spring, he signed a sworn statement that the stock he owned did not exceed—"

"Say, I can swear to such a thing as that too!" cried Cramm, rising to his feet. "Tom Shanklin's been running excess stock on that range for—"

"You're out of order," cried Rasmusson, rapping the table.

"I don't care a damn if I am," shouted Cramm. "Me and my friends are here to see that we get a square shake under these regulations. We mean to get it. All this high-falutin' talk sounds good, but what we want is action. We want results. These regulations have been established here for the past fifteen years or more, and still old man Shanklin runs stock on that range, and by the Lord Harry—"

"Can you prove that?" broke in Shanklin, jumping to his feet. "Any man that says that I'm in trespass on the Ragcarpet has got to—"

"You're both out of order," declared Rasmusson. "Mr. Perrin has the floor. He's told you that he is going to give everyone a fair shake, and if you're not satisfied with that—"

"Well, I'm not satisfied," interrupted Cramm. "Me and my bunch are here to get justice, and if we can't get it here—"

LUTE STRINGHAM, lanky, shambling, rose to his feet with a quick unbending that was as full of snap as the opening of a jackknife.

ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART, the author of this vivid story, used to be a Forest Service man himself; now he's a landscape architect and a writer on the great Outdoors which he knows and loves so well. The accompanying photograph was taken on a canoe journey somewhat removed from his usual Rocky Mountain haunts—in the Superior National Forest of Minnesota.

"I'm gettin' all-fired hot," he averred. "I'm with Cramm. I own a homestead next to his'n. I came out here from Ioway on the representations of the Gov'ment that I could have a homestead here and run stock on the Forest. I run stock on the Forest, and they starve because Shanklin and his men crowd on stock of their'n and run mine off into the plains where they aint no forage. And if we can't get justice here—"

"I've told you, Stringham, that I'd see that the regulations were enforced," protested Perrin. "Give me proof of what you say. I'll see that this thing is straightened out."

"Well, all right, if you mean it."

"Of course I mean it," said Perrin. "That's what I'm here for."

"Well, see to it that yuh do your job," Stringham growled. "But by Judas, if you don't, then look out! And if you know what you're doin', then get somethin' stirrin' right *pronto*."

The tall, lowering, hungry-looking dry-farmer subsided into the tiny schoolhouse seat that was built for a child a third his height.

Cramm still stood glowering at Shanklin. Perrin, his jaw set, his hands gripping, stood by the chairman's table that in more peaceable hours was the teacher's desk. Shanklin stood his ground, his stout bowed legs braced stubbornly.

"Well, gentlemen," said Rasmusson with cutting sarcasm, "we've come here to discuss peaceably some problems of grazin' on the Ragcarpet range. We've invited Mr. Perrin here to meet with us. If he aint been insulted, he has been mighty close to it, and we've made a show of ourselves. What is your pleasure? Shall we continue this free-for-all?"

"Move we adjourn," cried a voice.

"You've heard the motion. Do I hear a second?"

"Second it," came another voice.

"Here, I protest!" shouted Shanklin, angrily taking a step toward the chairman's table. "We've not settled a thing here today. Just went round and round! I'm not ready to stop this until somethin' definite is done."

"And I'm not either," declared Cramm, advancing. "I want some settlement."

"You've heard the motion," said Rasmusson. "All in favor say aye."

A deciding volume of "aye's" bellowed from the throats of the members of the association who were not directly involved in the squabble.

"Opposed, no," cried Rasmusson.

"No!" shouted Shanklin.

"No!" shouted the men who were grouped around Cramm.

"Motion carried. Meeting adjourned," pronounced the chairman, thumping the table with a heavy water glass.

"This is a *hell* of a meeting," exploded Shanklin. "I'm damned if I—"

THE end of his protest, however, was drowned in the noise of the crowd moving. Cramm and the seven men who had come with him moved out of the door, their faces grim, determined, talking to each other in low, threatening tones. They did not waste glances on the others, but went directly to their horses and rode away.

Shanklin approached Perrin.

"Well, what next?" he asked of the supervisor, curtness in his manner, anger in his voice. "What do you intend to do? I've had this trespass stuff shot at me for the last ten years by you Forest officers, but you've done nothing about it so far but talk. You intend to stick up for those dry-landers?"

"I'm going to stick to regulations," replied Perrin decisively. "It makes no difference to me whether they benefit you or Cramm. I'm going to administer this forest the best I can, and whoever doesn't like it can lump it."

"Mean to see that those men get feed on my range on the Ragcarpet Hills?"

"If they are entitled to it under the regulations and the permit issued."

"Humph!" Shanklin put a world of contempt into the expression. That anyone would give consideration to "dry-landers" was beyond his comprehension. To him they were human pests, coming in and fencing range, blocking off use of waterholes, using range that he had been entitled to use for years past.

He turned and strode angrily out of the door of the schoolhouse.

## CHAPTER II

ABSALOM JONES, tousle-headed forest ranger on the Santa Maria District, slammed the hot dish of flapjacks on the oilcloth table, whistled, blew on his fingers, grabbed the plate from where it

was sticking to the oilcloth table-cover, shoved a short length of board under the hot plate, dropped the plate and again emitted a low, soulful whistle.

"By Jacks, that plate's been right next to the fire, Chris," he said.

Chris Perrin laughed, for good-humored Ab Jones was comical except when he was dead serious. Then he was far from the fun-maker of the forest. But usually Ab was not serious.

"Here, Chris, have some Java," invited Ab. "Gosh, you'll starve around here if you don't reach. I'm so used to bein' alone at the station that I aint got manners at all. Just like a coyote. Eat what I can get, and that's usually everything in sight."

It was the morning after the meeting in the schoolhouse which had come so near ending in something more than words, and which foreshadowed something more serious ahead. Chris had elected to stay at the ranger station with Ab and talk over the whole situation. They had thrashed it all out the night before, but had reached no plan of action.

The meal now finished, silence fell. Ab's jovial face, with its merry blue eyes twinkling out from between full beard and tangled thatch, became somewhat serious.

"What you goin' to do, Chris, about this mix?" he asked at length. "I've known this bunch of homesteaders that were with Cramm yestidy, ever since they come here and settled. They've been gettin' more ugly every year since. Been gettin' more stock is the reason, of course. And it looks to me that they're mighty nigh the break-in'-point—about to do somethin' pretty rough. And I know Shanklin, too. Fat chance of his takin' stock off that range in the Ragcarpet Hills until he's forced to.

"What you goin' to do? He's in trespass as sure as little green apples, but not a Forest man has ever been able to catch him at it."

"Only thing is to catch him red-handed, and then hang it on him good and heavy—fine, threaten to not grant him a grazin' permit, and a few other things to boot."

"Well, the thing is to do that. He's foxy. Has the big T Bar K Ranch right up next to the range, no fences between his place and the Forest, runs his stock onto the Forest from his ranch, then if he thinks anyone is tryin' to check up on him, he gets some of his men to see that there are no more than his permit on the Forest by simply runnin' a bunch of his stock back on the ranch. But mostly his stock don't stay at his ranch at all; they're all on the Forest, and that's a lot in excess of what he's supposed to have. It's just too darned easy for him to run stock back and forth across the line, that's all."

"Well, we're going to hang it on him before summer is over. We'll plan to have a round-up of our own in about ten days."

"I wish you luck," replied Ab as he arose to clear the breakfast-table.

THE sun was bathing the Ragcarpet Hills in a fierce white light as Chris Perrin rode away from the Santa Maria ranger station. The cloudless sky was deepest blue, but with a metallic tint while the sunlight seemed to blend together, in one shimmering flood, the colors which gave these mountains their name. Streaks of red sandstone, buff sandstone, limestone that was creamy white, and the dark green of piñon and sage green of sagebrush, usually clean-cut as colors in some old tapestry, now swam in the quivering heat-rays.

For an hour Chris rode, letting his horse Snap pick his way along the twisting trail. The path swung around the shoulder of a little butte. Chris reined in Snap as he saw a figure on horseback coming toward him out of the miniature cañon along the shelf trail. He recognized Celia Shanklin, daughter of Tom Shanklin, owner of the T Bar K. She was twenty, curiously fair, as light in complexion as her father was dark. She was very much inclined to live in the moment at hand, joyous in the very process of being a part of the world in which she lived. In one thing she was very earnest—devotion to the ideals of the old West.

Chris felt his heart quicken its beat as she approached. She waved when she saw him. He answered the salutation and then admiringly watched the easy swing of her full-muscled body as it responded to the motion of her horse, Patchy. Dressed in wide-brimmed hat, light buff corduroy shirt, whipcord breeches and trim riding-boots, she might have been mistaken at first glance for a youth except for her graceful feminine figure.

She reined in as she came within a few feet of Chris.

"I found out you were coming up on this trail from the ranger station this morning, so I came out to meet you," she stated.

"Well, I'm glad you did," replied Chris. "Going to ride a ways with me?"

"No—want to talk with you just a minute; then I must hurry back."

A STRAINED seriousness in her voice immediately caused Chris to look searchingly at her lovely sun-tinted face. He recognized there new expressions—a hint of the unbending willful determination so characteristic of her father.

"All right, Celia, I'll listen to you whenever you want to orate, here or any other place," replied Chris, smiling.

"Well—" She hesitated a moment, looking off over the swelling tops of the Ragcarpet Hills toward Baldy Mountain, the high point of the range. Then with a quick turn of her head, her brown eyes caught the steady gaze of Chris.

"Dad told me of the meeting yesterday," she said. "You know he and I are pretty much partners. He told me he thought you were going to try to side in with Stub Cramm and his men. Are you?"

"Why, I'm not taking sides at all. Can't very well in the position I hold, you know."

"Well, maybe. But what are you going to do about what everyone calls trespass on the part of my father? Are you going to try to make him take part of his cattle off the Ragcarpet range?"

"If he has more there than he is entitled to on permit, and he is really in trespass, I'll have to take some action. I'll have to bring trespass proceedings against him."

"Then you side with Cramm?"

"No."

"Well, what do you call it, then?"

"Carrying out my job to the best of my ability."

She shrugged her shoulders, frowning.

"You know that my dad, Tom Shanklin, has had this range and used every bit of it long before Cramm ever came into the State. My grandfather before him came here and settled when there were still Indian raids. It was no easy homesteading then. They fought for what they got. Now you come with your Forest regulations and try to shove us off the range!

"Carrying out your job, indeed! Is it your job to encourage a bunch of half-starved hill-billies to come in here, settle and then take range we've had for years, won by our ability to hold it, and give it to them? That's some fine job, Chris Perrin!"

"That may be. But as long as I hold my position as supervisor of this Forest, I'm going to do my best to fill that place."

"You mean you're siding with Cramm and going to try to prove trespass on my father?"

"If I have to—if he is in trespass. I'll have to do my job or quit."

Suddenly the air of defiance dropped from her; she seemed to sway toward him, come closer. Her lips trembled; her eyes brimmed with tears that threatened to spill over.

"Please, Chris," she cried, a sob in her voice. "Please don't make it so hard for me. I came up here this morning—

"Oh, Chris, can't you see that if you go on this will come between us like a great insurmountable stone wall? We can't be friends, good pals, any longer! Can't you let these range problems work themselves out without you becoming involved? Cramm and his bunch can't last another five years here. But if you force enough of our cattle off the range we've used for so long, then they may stay here forever.

"And Chris, if you do this, can't you see that we can't any longer be friends?"

"Why not? Why can't we be even more than friends, whatever my duty may call for?"

She shook her head, biting her lip to keep back the sobs that threatened.

"No," she said tremulously, looking away over the valley. "It is one or the other. I'm a Shanklin. The T Bar K has been here since years before the Forest or Cramm. We have rights in the range. You'd take them from us. Do you think we can feel even friendly to anyone who does such a thing?"

"Why, Celia, you know there's nothing personal—"

"What is the reason for doing such a thing at all?" she flashed. "Why can't you keep going on as you have? Things will straighten out in a few years if you just keep your hands off. Dad knows how to handle Cramm and his bunch. He's dealt with that sort before. You stay out of it."

"I can't, so long as it involves the Forest range."

"Your mean—"

"That I'm going to enforce regulations, with all fairness to everyone."

"Even if it takes from us our old range that we have held so long? Maybe breaks up our friendship?"

He nodded.

Suddenly she sat erect, her pleading attitude vanishing.

"Very well, then," she said curtly. "Just remember that I've come to you and asked you, asked you as I have never asked any other man before, not to let any barrier come between us. If you do, by siding with Cramm, then it's your fault. I've done what I could to prevent our being enemies.

"But if you side with Cramm, Chris Perrin, then you're no friend of a Shanklin, and I'm a Shanklin! And I'll go through hell itself before I speak to you again!"

Before Chris could reply, before he could make a move to stop her, she had put spurs to Patchy viciously, forged by Chris and was flying away at breakneck speed, heading back toward the T Bar K.

## CHAPTER III

TENSE silence permeated the little office of the Pagosa National Forest. The click of the clerk's typewriter in the outer room only emphasized the sudden quiet. Chris Perrin, his face showing bloodless under its tan, stood rigidly staring at his superior officer, Hale Fremont, of the Denver District office. Fremont had been awaiting him upon his return from the Santa Maria Section.

Fremont spoke: "I tell you, Perrin, that just doing your best and not getting results is not going to get over. You've got to clean up."

"And I tell you, Fremont, that you fellows back there in the office can shout and pound the desk all you want—I've done my damndest to catch old man Shanklin at trespass with his cattle, and he's just too slick."

"Well, let me tell you something more. Everyone in this section knows you're in love with Celia Shanklin, his daughter. It's common talk. And Stub Cramm, leader of those dry-farmers, says—"

Chris reached out his hand in quick gesture.

"Now, look here, Fremont: you just tie into me personally, as much as you want—I'll take any official lambasting you think I merit. But lay off dragging that girl's name into this. If Stub Cramm and the rest of his riffraff neighbors come around me blathering about her, they better duck for cover. If any one of them ever says anything to me, I'll—"

"Keep your shirt on, Perrin! You've got to listen to me. You're supervisor of the Pagosa Forest. We put you down here nearly eight months ago. We told you when you came on the job that one of the first things to do was to clean up on the one big trespasser in the Ragcarpet country. You haven't delivered the goods.

"Shanklin is the worst offender in cattle-trespass in the District, perhaps practically the only one at the present time. That range down there is overcrowded. He has way over the protective limit for one ranch, and Stub Cramm and his bunch are on the warpath because they can't get cow-feed. They say that we give them allotments, but old man Shanklin takes every bit of the forage that can be found.

"And I'm telling you for your own good that Cramm and his gang have said openly that you are in collusion with Shanklin on this trespass, that everyone knows he is getting away with it because you are sweet on Celia Shanklin."

"They lie!"

"Well—"

"Fremont, if you keep on insinuating, I'll forget you're my superior Forest officer and— I'm doing my best here. That girl and my liking for her has nothing to do with Shanklin's trespass, and you know it!"

"There's one sure way to prove it. Clean up on that trespass that everyone knows is going on, and there'll never be a question about any job being put up between you and the old man." And Fremont regarded Chris Perrin steadily.

"I'm glad you gave me this information, Fremont," Perrin said, finally. Then he scowled. "But it makes me hot as all get-out, to have some of that bunch of dry-land homesteaders near the Ragcarpet country blather around about Celia Shanklin. Cramm and his gang are nothing but trouble-raisers. They have a few scrawny calves and some broken-down bulls, a raft of kids and lots of debts. And yet, under our policies, they have to have the same consideration on the Forest as big, businesslike stockmen like Shanklin, who could take lots more of our range if we would only allot it to them, and would produce more good beef per acre than these shanty farmers can in a thousand years.

"But I guess rules are rules, and I've tried hard enough to enforce them. I've tried to catch Shanklin at his trespass.

And don't forget it, that if I catch him in trespass, I'll soak him just as hard as anyone else. Now, have you any suggestion as to how I can get the goods on him?"

"How about a cattle count this fall at the round-up?"

"Tried it at the spring round-up—wont work. Shanklin pulls off a small private round-up at the ranch besides. There's no telling how many cattle he handles there."

"Round-up on the range?"

"Thought of that. My predecessor tried it. No go. Shanklin got wise, and shoved in cow-punchers to help. They drifted his cattle over the line before our men could find them on the Forest and count them. You know Shanklin's ranch is right up against the Forest, and he can run cattle on or off in an hour's time."

"You know the country, Perrin. I don't. And it's your problem. All the Service wants is results. We can't stand for chronic trespass like this. A month ago Cramm wrote the representative of this district in Congress, and we've just got a hot letter from the Washington office. If you don't get results pretty soon, there's going to be something doing in the way of an official investigation. It would be just like Cramm to file charges based on that gossip that I just gave you. So you've got to get action some way, and get results too, to protect the girl and yourself."

FOR a long time after the little accommodation train had carried Fremont away from town, Christopher Perrin sat at his desk with a forest map spread out before him. Part of the time he would see it, and at other times his eyes stared vacantly at it. His reflections often conjured up the face of Celia Shanklin. The whole colorful Ragcarpet country was associated in his mind with this brown-eyed girl, who rode the ranges as expertly as any cowpuncher in the district.

Chris wondered what she would say if he should resign—would they again be friends? He pitched the thought away as though unclean. To resign under fire, and with Cramm's gossip spread around, would be worse than fighting through. Celia Shanklin might dislike him, but she would have to recognize his steadfastness to duty and fair play before he was through.

To resign would mean disgrace. He'd never resign. He'd fight it out—bring old man Shanklin to account if it was the last thing he did!

Chris thumped the desk with his fist, unconsciously emphasizing this silent promise to himself.

THE outer door banged open, almost as an echo.

"Where's the boss?" bellowed a rough, cheerful voice. "Say, is he here?"

"Sure," answered McCleery, the clerk. "Bust right in to the other office, Ab."

Absalom Jones came stamping into the office where Chris Perrin was wrestling with his problem of catching Shanklin in trespass. Ab was in riding-boots, corduroy trousers, black-and-red checked shirt, and carried his battered hat in his hand. He scorned any such neatness as is found in the regulation uniform, reserving his one uniform for festive occasions and visits of men from the District office.

" 'Lo, boss," he cried, his big voice filling the little office. "Whatcha doin'? Goin' to move a mounting range or something? From the look on your face I might suspect that was what's up. Well, I'll bet we can do it—what say?"

Chris laughed. This stout rough-and-tumble ranger cheered him. Chris Perrin needed cheering at the moment.

"Well, it's near that bad, Ab," replied Chris. "Hale Fremont, from the District office, was just in here. He tried to put the fear into me, I guess. But he made me kinda hot instead. And it's all about this Shanklin trespass."

"What's eatin' on Hale?"

"Seems Cramm has already raised a row in Washington. And it's either get Shanklin or get our hides hung up to dry. Washington has demanded some one's scalp. And if we can't get Shanklin, they'll get us. But what makes me more sore than anything else, Ab, is that this weasel Cramm has been mouthing around about Celia Shanklin. He's got to stop that!"

"Wall, I don't know what he's said, but I'm with you. Cramm is a ragged, good-for-nothin' trouble-maker, and not fit to be talkin' about a gal like Celia. . . . . And say, it's Cramm and his bunch of coyote neighbors, two-legged coyotes, I mean, that I came up to see you 'bout. I made that Government flivver steam gettin' here! Cramm got together a bunch of homesteaders last night, and they're goin' to have another meetin' tonight. A friend of mine tipped me off. They aim to organize and go up on the Ragcarpet range, and if they find an excess of Shanklin's

allotment, they're goin' to do some cattle-killin'. They swear they're tired and sick of tryin' to get the Gov'ment to pertect them. And believe me, Chris, if they ever start anything like that, and old man Shanklin and his bunch of hard-boiled cowhands find out about it, they's goin' to be a nice little neighborly civil war in that section!"

AB sank into the chair opposite Chris, hauled out a brown leather pouch, fished in his shirt pocket for cigarette papers, dexterously rolled a cigarette, lit a match with a flick of his thumbnail and drew a deep puff of smoke into his lungs. He squinted his eyes speculatively at his superior, waiting for Chris to speak.

"Guess that means immediate action, Ab," said Chris slowly. "It's gettin' to be a fine mess—all because Shanklin thinks that range belongs to him because he was here first. And I guess maybe he has his side of the argument, too.

"But what we've got ahead of us now is to get in there, make our own independent range round-up—check up on stuff of Shanklin's found on the Forest. If it's in excess of his allotment, we'll bring trespass against him. If it isn't, then Cramm and his gang will have to quit their hollering."

"Well, when do you reckon this here round-up will start, boss?" asked Ab.

"Just as soon as we can get our men together," replied Chris. He turned to the telephone, twisted the little crank, ringing the operator. "Lone Pine Station," he directed as she answered.

"Hello," he called in the telephone a moment later. "This Harrison? . . . . Say, saddle up your cayuse and bring a light pack. Come over the ridge trail to Sweetwater Spring in the Ragcarpet country. I'll meet you and the other boys there tomorrow at sunup or before. . . . . All right, see you tomorrow."

Chris turned to Ab. "That's the first one. Harrison will have to ride all night to get there, but we'll get going at daybreak tomorrow. And we'll hit in there before Shanklin can run his cattle off. If we get the goods on him, all right. If he hasn't any cattle in trespass, then we can deal with Cramm when he comes on if he decides to start the cattle slaughter.

"Now I'll have to call the other boys. They've got less distance to ride than Harrison, but I'd better get them going."

## CHAPTER IV

SUNSET shot with reds, golds, blue-greens and yellows was dying back of the serrated crests of the Medano Mountains as Christopher Perrin and Absalom Jones rode into the Ragcarpet Hills. Immediate action was Chris' program. Hurried outfitting with several days' supplies, a ride in the light Government truck to the Santa Maria ranger station, hitching on of a light pack, throwing on of saddles, a hurried supper, and then they were on the trail headed for the Sweetwater spring.

"Ab, we're taking a chance in pulling all of our men out of their districts to stage this round-up," observed Chris. "It's been dry for about three weeks now, and things are getting so there's a real fire hazard. I hope nothing pops loose."

They rode in silence, watching the shadows deepen until only the soft, dark light of late afterglow covered the hills.

Ab started to sing, his rumbling voice echoing lightly and eerily from rock and tree, his song punctuated by the rattle of rocks and horse-hoofs on the trail. Then the pack-horse whinnied. The little cavalcade turned the shoulder of a low butte, and looking down, glimpsed the twinkle of a fire where one of the Forest men had preceded them to the Sweetwater spring and had already made camp for the night.

IT was daybreak when the last ranger reached the camp at Sweetwater. This was Harrison, from the Lone Pine Station. His horse was tired, and he had ridden since late afternoon the previous day, but declared he was ready for the day's work after a session with flapjacks and coffee, garnished with bacon done until it just crackled when crunched.

"All right, here's my plan," said Chris as the men gathered about their breakfast. "Back of the hills is that range of high mountains which runs to a peak in Baldy yonder. Not much chance that anything can be shoved out that way. The cliffs are too abrupt up there to get cattle out of this range and over the two trails across the mountains. If they tried it, we could catch them on the other side.

"We'll have to have two-man crews. Harrison and Rankin have ridden the farthest. They can start right here at the spring. Ab and I have ridden the shortest distance, so we'll take the section of the range farthest north. Jackson, you and

Haynes take the south end. You other four team up as you see fit, two and two.

"String out along the Forest line in twos. There's a total of fifteen miles along the front of this range that we have to cover. Ab and I'll take the north strip. We can all get to our stations by nine-thirty, and we'll all start moving over the Forest line at that time. Count the cattle as you go. Count all brands. We'll just check up on the whole kit while we're at it, and don't let one cow-critter get by if you can help it. Now, it's all clear?" he asked. "No slip-up this time, you know. We've got to get the goods. Any questions?"

"What if we run into any of Shanklin's men?" asked Jackson.

"Go right about your business. If they get nasty—well, use your own judgment. You're all armed, I guess, but I hope there will be no need of using any such arguments. But get this: we're out to count Shanklin's cattle on this range! It's official orders. And we're going to count them."

"All right, let's go," cried Ab as he swung into the saddle.

"Ab, I've got a feeling today is going to be filled with some sort of real excitement before we're finished," said Chris as they left the camp. "Just a hunch, I guess, without foundation. But this game of bringing Shanklin into court is not going to be an easy one, and we may run into a snag before we're done."

Ab nodded, hauled out a plug of villainous tobacco, inserted it in his whisker-rimmed mouth, worked it up and down, biting off a generous chew. "Well, with the whole Forest force on the job, unless we have to scrap both Cramm and Shanklin, I guess we maybe can have our way," he observed cheerfully.

For some time they rode. Then, turning a switchback in the trail, they were confronted by a man on horseback. It was Tom Shanklin. He reined in as they approached. "Howdy," he greeted gruffly.

"How are you, Tom!" replied Ab. Chris nodded in a friendly fashion.

"What's up?" demanded Shanklin. "I tried to find you last night at the ranger station. Heard that you were there late in the afternoon and pulled out just before sundown. What's in the air?"

"We're just doing a little scouting over the range," offered Chris. "Just checking up."

Shanklin looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean, checking up?"

"Why, just looking over the range in general," answered Chris evasively.

"Well, you don't need the whole Forest force to do that, do you?" demanded Shanklin.

"Whole Forest force?" cried Chris, surprised.

"Yes, all your rangers. No use to try to sidestep, Perrin. One of my riders came by your camp at the spring this morning just about daylight, and he reports you've got nearly a dozen men, all told. Now, what's the game?"

Chris thought quickly. He knew Shanklin would have not more than four of his hands at the ranch. The ranch was four miles away. If he told Shanklin the truth, it might be better than if he left him in ignorance. For if he evaded further, Shanklin would unquestionably sense that some such move as planned was on foot and would adopt measures to prevent the cattle-count. Besides, Chris had a belief that straight-from-the-shoulder man-to-man dealing was the best method in handling Forest users, that following it would eventually win Shanklin's friendship. Shanklin could never say that he had been brought to justice in a sneaking way.

"I'll tell you the game, Shanklin: We're out to count the stock on the Ragcarpet range. You yourself asked who was going to prove whether or not you were in trespass, and I'm going to answer that question. Before night we'll have the total count of all the cattle on the Forest in this section. Then we'll either shut up Cramm and his howling, or we'll make you meet regulations and put a trespass case against you if you're running more than your limit of stock here.

"That answers your question."

FOR a moment Shanklin was speechless. His face turned red, then white with anger, his lips moving, his hands clasping and unclasping. His hand instinctively strayed to the butt of a heavy pistol protruding from its holster. Ab Jones saw the motion and dropped his hand carelessly toward his own automatic. Chris sat motionless, his eye holding the gaze of the angry cowman.

Ever so slightly, Shanklin's fingers tightened on the gun.

"Better not try it, Tom," drawled Ab. "You may think you can get one or the other of us, but you know shootin' a U. S.

officer aint no holiday pastime. And what's more, I aim to beat you to it if you try. Better think more'n oncet."

For a moment the situation held, strained, taut, every nerve on edge. The horse fidgeted. Then Shanklin's hand came away empty.

"I'm warning you, Perrin, I'm warning you!" he blazed. "Call off your men. This is my range. I've had it before you damned officials of the Forest Service ever came in here, and I'm going to keep it, so help me God! You can try to put in all the homesteaders you want. You can play with Cramm, but you'll cross me when you do, and I'll not stand for it."

"But it's up to me to enforce regulations, Shanklin. I've no quarrel with you. I'd rather see a big, businesslike outfit like yours on here than a bunch of nesters."

"If you go ahead, I'll take means to protect myself," said Shanklin angrily. "You'll never find stock of mine in trespass, Perrin, ever. I'll use this range as I see fit. And if I have to, I'll—well, never mind. If you know what's good for you and your men, you'll pull them out of here and not get too bossy about this range that belongs to me by right of years' use."

Chris shook his head. "No, Shanklin, we're going to find out if you're in trespass here, and we're going to do it now, today. We've had enough talk. Now we're getting action."

Shanklin was silent a moment. Then he raised his finger, pointing at Chris. His tone was strained, his voice deadly level:

"Perrin, if you go ahead, you do it at your own risk. I'll never give up this range. It's mine; it will stay mine. And if you interfere, you do it at your own peril."

He paused. Again there was the strained silence; the sense of things being in a fine balance where one false move would precipitate a tragedy. Shanklin's face was pasty white; his hand trembled. He was restraining his consuming anger with difficulty. His eyes burned like points of fire. The two Forest officers sat without movement, alert, waiting for the next move.

Suddenly, without further words, Shanklin put spurs to his horse, whirled around on the narrow trail and headed toward the ranch, rocks flying, dust curling up from his horse's hoofs.

Ab looked at Chris. "Kinda narrow squeak for one of us," he observed cheerfully. "Old Tom was shootin' mad, and he aint over it by a long shot. Now what, Chris? Better go back and warn the boys he's on the warpath?"

Chris shook his head. "No," he said slowly. "They all know the seriousness of the situation. They know Shanklin and his bunch of cow-punchers—that they are a hard bunch; and they know we're out to get a trespass case on Shanklin if we can. We've got to trot along and start the count as soon as possible. We've got a full day's work ahead if we don't meet trouble. And if we meet trouble—well, I guess we'll meet it; that's all."

Chris spurred his horse, and they followed along the trail after Shanklin, taking the first trail which lay in the direction of the range they were to cover and away from the proximity of the T Bar K Ranch.

## CHAPTER V

EARLY afternoon found Chris and Ab on a high ridge which commanded a view to the country hanging far up under the cliffs of the range that climaxed in the tip of Baldy. They had just met the two rangers working this strip next to them and had checked counts. They had combed the country below and had found the range heavily grazed, but not so many cattle as they had expected. A few were homesteaders' stock, but most of the animals bore the brand of T Bar K.

"I wonder where Tom Shanklin has his stock hid out," questioned Ab as he eased himself in his saddle and reached for a pair of powerful binoculars that hung at the saddle-horn. "I'll swear I thought we'd find as many here as in any other part of the range. Only place left is this big meadow country right next to the cliffs."

Chris, his eyes narrowed to slits, gazed far up on the side of the slope where an open park was visible. Ab, not receiving a reply, glanced at his chief, followed his gaze, peered a moment in silence. Then he unlimbered the glasses, adjusted them and then handed them to Chris without a word.

For a full minute the Forest supervisor peered through the powerful lenses. Then he handed them back to Ab.

"What you make of it, Ab?" he asked.

"Chris," said Ab, "there's at least two hundred head in that one bunch and there's riders, four of them, hazin' them

out of that park. There's our meat, Chris. There's the hunch that will put him in trespass or put him in the clear if he can get off the Forest in time."

"We've got to block them and get that count, Ab."

"I reckon."

"Where will they bring them down?"

"Well, there's two trails. One of them is over that ridge to the left of the park. It's mostly in timber and will make slow going. It's away from his ranch, too. The other is mostly in open grass-land bordered by lodgepole until it gets to a little narrow, two-forked cañon that lies just yonder back of that thick pine-covered ridge.

"Now, if they bring them down there, we can head 'em. And I think we can count on their tryin' to use that way."

"Well, let's get over there. There are four to two, and the cattle may stampede if there is any kind of an argument, but we'll have a try at it, anyway. If we are ever going to get the goods on that bunch, it's now or never. They're mighty near the border of the Forest, and if he gets that bunch well out before we can block them, he's in the clear for sure."

"I think I've got a plan of campaign. Let's go," said Ab.

"Suppose they catch sight of us?" Chris asked.

"Not much chance," the ranger replied. "Most of this trail is in timber, and they'll be so darned busy jammin' those dogies down into that little cañon they'll not have much chance for gazin' around the country. No, I guess we'll be a surprise party for Tom and his gang."

AFTERNOON sun had climbed down until long shadows were falling eastward when the two Forest men reached the steep pine-covered pitch which finally landed them in the floor of the little cañon.

"Got about half an hour before they come," observed Ab, glancing up toward the sun. "Get our campaign planned in plenty of time."

"Well, let's get on," suggested Chris.

Ab shook his horse's reins and then moved up the cañon. On either side there were abrupt walls of granite. These walled in a grass-covered cañon floor that was surprisingly level in this stretch they were traveling. It was in effect a rock-walled strip of pasture, the underseep of the brawling little stream in the cañon feeding the roots of the forage. Here the cañon took a quick sweep toward the right, then twisted back. In this narrow place at which the angle came there were rocks in the stream-bed, but it was easily fordable between the boulders.

Above the angle there was an area which appeared almost level. The low cañon walls, not over fifty feet above the cañon floor, were abrupt at every side except the outlet and two others. To the right there was a rather broad passage between cliffs which seemed to open into an area beyond. To the left another opening wound upward toward the high country. Ab pointed to the cañon to the right.

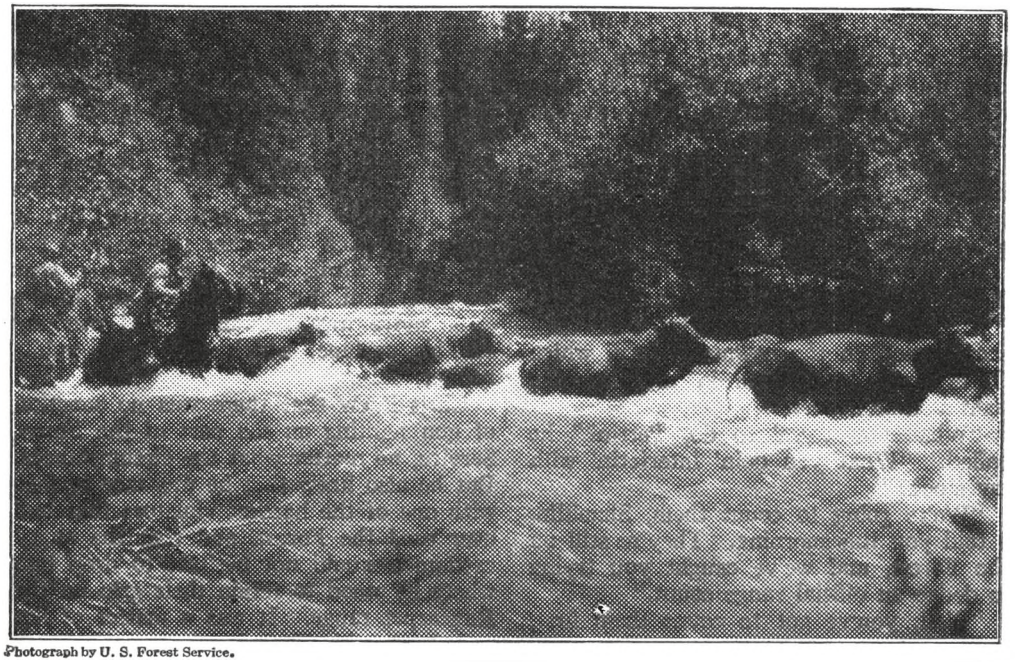
"Made to order," he declared. "That opening there will be large enough to run the whole herd through in a few minutes. See that little stack of rocks to the side of the entrance, about a hundred yards this way? Well, there's where one of us can stand guard while the other counts.

"When the herd comes down this left branch where they are bringin' 'em, you and me can get near the left cañon, start the front end of the herd toward that opening and shoo the whole caboodle in before Shanklin and his gang know what's happenin'. Normally the cows would go down the main cañon. With us here, we can drift them over there and I reckon one of us can stay here and argue with Shanklin while the other counts. We'll not have to hold 'em long, but they better be comin' along pretty soon or we'll not get a chance to see the brands by today's daylight."

Chris studied the situation. Ab's plan was ideal. With a little maneuvering the whole herd could be run into the side cañon; then Shanklin could be stopped and held in parley with a little display of arms if necessary. Meanwhile, the count would be made. After that, Shanklin could take his cattle out if he wished. He would be caught red-handed in the act of evading an official count, and if his cattle were in excess of his limit, this one act alone would convict him. But the count must be made so it could be sworn to along with the rest.

## CHAPTER VI

CHRIS and the ranger took their station by the cañon waiting for the oncoming cattle. The bawling of the cows became louder. Chris' horse Snap, and John Henry, the great rangy roan Ab was riding, both became restive.



Photograph by U. S. Forest Service.

**"Cattle were plunging across the stream . . . . the two horsemen keeping them moving."**

"These nags got an idea that somethin' is doin'," said Ab.

Then he said softly to John Henry: "Never you mind, old hoss; they's goin' to be a fine bit of a mix-up in a minute, and maybe yore goin' to be a part of it yourself."

A rock rattled; a white-faced two-year-old trotted into the arena at the junction of the cañons, caught sight of the two Forest men, stopped with feet all spraddled out, snorted.

Several others following directly behind him came piling into the open space from the flat-floored cañon above. They too snorted, stopped, uncertain as to what to do next.

"All right, Ab; time to gather them in," suggested Chris. He urged Snap forward. Ab moved forward on the big roan. The steers milled uneasily, started toward the main cañon below, then were turned abruptly by the quick driving plunge of the big roan and Ab.

Now other cattle came streaming in as though a torrent of livestock had suddenly collected above and was pouring down and plunging across the stream between cañon walls. The two horsemen took their stations, riding back and forth to keep the cattle moving into the side cañon at the right.

Chris realized that had it not been for their climbing the ridge, Shanklin easily would have run this band of stock out of the country without their ever sighting them. They might have seen tracks, but never would have known the number of stock nor been able to tell of the brands they carried.

A stubborn old cow, accustomed to running down this cañon to the T Bar K, insisted that she was not going into the side cañon.

But Chris with some quick maneuvering headed her along with the others. A little band of five or six broke away and ran to the other side of the arena where the cañon to the down country led out, then stopped and started to graze.

SUDDENLY Snap lifted his head and whinnied, looking up the cañon. Chris knew that the riders were coming. He had expected them before this, riding with the herd, but some refractory steers which refused to leave the better forage of the upper range had given trouble to the four riders in getting them into the stretch of cañon.

Now, however, they all came clattering after the last of the stock as it ran into the open space.

With a quick drive Chris headed the steers along toward Ab. The latter caught them up and sent them milling into the

opening of the side cañon. Chris looked back up the cañon. Shanklin and his three men had reined in at sight of a horseman in the cañon juncture.

"Get that count, Ab; I'll do the rest," called Chris.

Then he turned his horse toward the group of cowmen.

HE advanced a few steps and stopped. Shanklin recognized him. A dark scowl came on the cowman's face, which Chris could barely see in the dimming light at the distance.

"What you tryin' to do, Perrin?" he called. "What you doin' interferin' with my stock?"

"We're going to count them, Shanklin. I told you this morning. They're still on the Forest, and we've caught you trying to dodge an official range count."

"Well, you've got to count them first, and you don't expect us to let you get away with that, do you?"

Chris spurred Snap a little, making him restive and eager to move. The Forester realized that he might have to run for the cover of the little rock outcrop at the mouth of the box cañon, where he had planned to make a stand if necessary. Ab had already gone into the box cañon and had started to count. With an automatic counter in his hand, Chris knew that Ab would make comparatively short work of the tally.

"I don't see how you're going to stop our counting the stock," cried Chris. "Fact is we've got them partly counted right now, and are checking up brands while I'm talking to you."

For a moment Shanklin sat on his horse, the men at his side waiting for their chief to move. They had attacked ordinary homesteaders before. They would have needed no direction to charge settlers encroaching on their range. But to attack a Federal officer was something a little different.

Shanklin motioned to them to come close. They talked a moment in low tones. Chris knew that some plan of attack was being made. It was up to him to move first.

He whirled the restive Snap, and in a moment was running, head low, for the shelter of the rocky wall back of which he could make a stand.

A gun cracked, and a bullet whined. Chris jerked the plunging Snap to one side. Two other reports followed quickly, the bullets going wild. The fourth was but a split second later, and it kicked up the dust directly ahead.

Chris urged Snap forward. It was but a few hundred feet to the shelter of the rock in front of the side cañon, but it seemed leagues. Another shot ripped by. And then Chris, with a quick tug, sent Snap back of the rock shelter and in the same move was dismounted and reaching for his carbine, which was in a saddle holster.

Chris knew that there was no sanction of gun fighting on the part of the Forest Service, no matter what the circumstances. But he also knew that he was face to face with one of the hardest violators that had ever used the Forest, and that the angry cattlemen would not hesitate to drop him where he stood to retain their grip on the Ragcarpet range. It was a matter of life and death with Chris Perrin and Ab Jones from now on until the job was finished—and perhaps that would not end it. When one faces an enemy gun there is a grand disregard for printed rules and regulations, and a fine sense of adherence to the immutable law of self-preservation.

THE Forest man felt of the six-gun at his hip. He loosened it, working the lever of the carbine. He edged around the protecting dike and peered toward the mouth of the cañon where Shanklin and his men were sheltered. The sharp crack of a carbine and the angry whine of the bullet made Chris duck. They were not fooling about this matter; they were shooting to get him!

Suddenly there arose in Chris Perrin a fighting mood that he had never before experienced. He peered around the rock, took quick aim and fired. He saw one of the men tumble from his horse, rise, stumble and hurry to the shelter of the rock. Again he took aim and fired. He missed. All of his opponents scuttled for shelter. His fire was answered by a volley of shots from the men in the cañon mouth.

The reports of the guns seemed strangely muffled; the cañon walls seemed to deaden the sound. Chris supposed Ab could not hear the reports, they were so curiously softened by the arena walls.

It might cost him his job; he knew it was going to cost him the friendship of Tom Shanklin, make his love of Celia a hopeless passion; but he vowed that he

would count the cattle herded in the cañon if it was his last official act.

## CHAPTER VII

ACROSS the arena the small herd of strays that had broken from the main herd looked at the men curiously. They milled uneasily, grazed, then stopped to stare. They would have gone down the cañon but for the fact that the main herd was cut off from them. They wanted to get back with the herd. Chris recognized them as grade whitefaces of the T Bar K.

For the moment there was no activity in the mouth of the upper cañon. Chris looked back toward the half-dozen steers across the arena, near the outlet. He could barely see the cañon beyond them. It was starting to get dusk. He looked upward to the sloping walls where the thick, dark stands of dry lodgepole pine made the cañon seem even more dark. Only a few feet above the abrupt rock walls there was a sloping ledge covered with dry grass. Back of that, the thick timber began immediately.

Chris glanced back toward the lower cañon. Then his heart jumped, his hands clenched.

Up the lower cañon rode a band of eight men. They came slowly, spread out, and reaching the cañon mouth they stopped. They were plainly visible to Chris, but because of the angle in the cañon could not be seen from where Shanklin was stationed.

Chris peered vainly, trying to see who the newcomers were. He glanced toward Shanklin's men. Then he was startled by the sharp report of a gun. He looked quickly toward the lower cañon. There, kicking in death-struggle, he saw one of the T Bar K steers.

And striding across the turf, gun in hand, he recognized the squat, sinister figure of Cramm!

Cramm and his disgruntled homesteaders out shooting T Bar K stock! Shanklin and three of his men across the arena!

Chris' mind fairly raced, considering the trouble that was imminent!

With the herd of T Bar K steers and cows in the side cañon, with Cramm having the advantage of a greater number of guns, and with Shanklin certainly taking toll in human blood for every head of stock killed, Chris knew that only drastic action, or a miracle, could stop a clash which would cost lives! And in spite of every bit of his effort, in spite of his best intentions to clear up the whole situation, there was no way in which he could become detached on the instant from the drama which surged around him. He was the head officer of this Forest. He had tried to clear up the trespass, if it existed, before Cramm and his followers should start any move of violence. He had run Shanklin's cattle into the side cañon and had held Shanklin there while Ab counted. And now came Cramm, malignant, revengeful, unreasoning. Whatever the cause or whatever the result, much of the responsibility for what might follow would always fall to Chris Perrin, the Forest supervisor in charge of that range.

Chris looked toward the cañon where Shanklin and his men were hiding. There he saw them mounting their horses. To get Chris Perrin and prevent the count had become a secondary matter. They had seen Cramm as he had come into the open, and were not in position to see his band of associates back of the twist in the cañon wall. They were going to get Cramm.

Another shot cracked, and a second steer fell while the others milled away from Cramm.

Almost at the same moment, Shanklin and his men were spurring into the open. One man had his arm done in a sling, but was holding reins in his teeth and grasping a revolver in his uninjured hand. They came charging at Cramm across the open floor of the cañon arena. Cramm leaped for shelter behind the first steer. He recognized Shanklin, and carbines blazed. Cramm was shooting from cover; Shanklin charging.

THEN from around the turn in the cañon came the band of men with Cramm. Their guns swung into action instantly.

Shanklin reined in his horse until the animal almost fell in the quick effort to stop. A horse by Shanklin fell, shot, pinning the rider. It was the man with his arm in a sling. A man in the group back of Cramm threw his hand to his shoulder, dropped his gun, slumped forward.

Then Shanklin turned, spurred and started to whirl toward cover. In the motion he glimpsed the shelter back of which Chris still crouched, watching. It was nearer to the mouth of the sheltering box cañon, but he started toward the cañon upstream.

Lying low over his horse's neck, Shanklin led the race while the bullets from the guns in the hands of Cramm and his men spat and sent humming death whipping around them.

Cramm caught his horse as it ran by with his men, and leaping into the saddle, spurred forward.

Back in the center of the arena the man that had gone down when the horse had been killed lay quiet. Cramm's followers charged. They were coming full tilt at Shanklin's men. They were seven to three, and back of them were months of savage brooding, hate nursed against Shanklin and his men; they were aroused to kill. They were rapidly pushing around to where there stood a chance of cutting in on Shanklin. It was all happening in so many breaths—plunging, leaping, filled with unleashed motion. If Cramm and his men could get Shanklin crowded away from shelter in time, it would be a fight with their backs to the cliff, a battle to death.

Chris sensed this almost the instant Shanklin turned his horse away from the upper cañon. Shanklin had given up his desperate effort to reach his old shelter and now threw himself on the mercy of the Forest officer by heading for the rock dike at the mouth of the box cañon. But in the quick turn Shanklin lost ground again. Cramm lead his band in a plunging drive on the new course, which would push Shanklin into the rock walls before he could get around the end of the dike which sheltered Chris.

Once cornered against the cañon wall, Shanklin would be shot down and his men murdered pitilessly.

Chris watched tensely the change in tide of battle.

Cramm must be blocked. His band must be shunted away from the murder that would follow if they were able to come to close quarters with Shanklin, were able to head the three riders away from the ledge of rocks back of which Chris was hidden.

Chris jerked his carbine up. For the flick of an eye he sighted. Then the gun spat and jammed back at his shoulder.

The leading horse, ridden by tall Lute Stringham, stumbled, fell, rolled before the plunging horses behind, pitching his rider under the horses' hoofs.

The men following swerved, sharply, to avoid running down their comrade. It was the instant's respite that Shanklin needed. He swung hard, and plunging, leaping the horse, came into the shelter of the ledgy outcrop that had sheltered Chris.

"God, that was in time, Perrin," cried Shanklin.

The other two men leaped to the rock, took aim, fired. Another horse went down. Another rider slumped forward.

His mad rush blocked for the moment, Cramm hesitated. He was still a hundred and fifty feet from the rock wall of the outcrop in the cañon floor. The unexpected shot from behind surprised him. To go across that open space remaining might mean leaping into death from a score of guns. His other course was to cut and run for it, taking a chance on dodging bullets.

Cramm's horse whirled; his men followed; and leaving two on the field, they raced back to the shelter of the lower cañon.

Chris looked at Shanklin. The rancher's face was white; his hands trembled.

"It was sudden," he mumbled. "We ran into a hornet's nest. They nearly got us!"

SHANKLIN looked over the rock, Chris peering out beside him. Then Shanklin turned to his two men. One had drawn a fine bead on Stringham as he limped painfully back toward the outlet cañon. The other had covered the man farther back in the open place where he had fallen at the first exchange of shots.

"Don't, boys!" cried Shanklin. "That's murder. Let 'em go."

He turned suddenly to Perrin.

"You've come square, Perrin. I'm not going to forget that shot a moment ago. It saved us."

Chris nodded and looked out over the dusk-filled arena. The whole clash had happened so rapidly, flashed up and subsided, that only now were shadows becoming so thick and dark that the detail on the cañon walls was being blotted out. The figures in the open seemed to lurch around in the half-dark. Then, peering closely, Chris saw the great thin form of Stringham crumple and fall. He was quiet a moment, then struggled to his feet and on toward Cramm's band entrenched in the lower cañon.

"Stringham's hurt," Chris said to Shanklin. "Got a jar in the fall, or one of your men drilled him in the mix-up."

For some moments they watched breathlessly for some move by Cramm. Then

from the rear came the clatter of hoofs which stopped abruptly. All turned to gaze toward the cañon where the cattle were herded. From it came Ab Jones, leading John Henry.

He came slowly, gazing cautiously toward the opposite side of the arena, at the shelter where Chris had taken his station. He shaded his eyes as he peered, as though the faint brightness of the afterglow would not permit him to see objects near the walls of the cañon and the ledge that sheltered Chris.

An automatic rifle cracked across the arena. A bullet spatted against the rock near Ab, ricocheted and whined away.

Ab ducked, ran, dragging John Henry after him as he plunged toward the safety of the ledge. He halted in the shelter, breathless and cursing soulfully.

"Chris," he said as he came toward the thick shadow, "was that that damned Tom Shanklin, practicin' on me? Why in Sam Hill—

"Say, who in tophet—why, Shanklin, what in thunder you doin' here? How come you're back of this ledge? Who in the deuce whanged away at me?"

Ab looked, bewildered, from one to the other.

"Cramm's over there," said Chris shortly. "He started out on the warpath shooting Shanklin's cattle and bumped into Shanklin himself. He and the rest of the bunch would have murdered Shanklin and his men if they could have got them."

"For heaven's sake, look!" cried Shanklin, grasping Chris by the arm and pointing to the side of the cliff where the ledge, thickly blanketed with dried grasses, blended into the cover of thick, low young lodgepole.

Both Forest men gasped as they saw the cause of Shanklin's exclamation.

"Well, for the love of Saint Jimmy!" exploded Ab.

Whipped by a wind sucking up the cañon, and curling over the edge of the rock walls, a fire was burning brightly. As they watched, they could see a new spot set, and a dark figure momentarily pass between them and the fire, and then another point was caught by the flame and whipped into brightness.

"Why is Cramm doing that?" cried Shanklin, realizing that the enemy had made a new move in the clash that meant lives lost in the arena and might mean more deaths before the encounter was past.

"Several things," snapped Chris. "Lighting up the field first—firing the forest at the same time. He's crazy with the spirit of destruction, and from where he is setting the fire, he figures it'll soon be whipping over into this part of the cañon, and making us get out of here."

"Great guns!" cried Ab. "Them cattle is in that cañon above. The minute that fire gets into that lodgepole and starts a draft along with this wind, there be whole wagonloads of live brands carried into that upper cañon. The grass is dead as hay there, and she'll whiff up like powder. Good-by, cattle!"

"And good-by us, if that fire drives us into the open!" added one of the cowhands.

"But those cattle," said Shanklin, "they're some of my best stock. They're trapped! Perrin, you've done this—with your damned idea of a trespass!" He turned fiercely on the Forest supervisor. "You encouraged Cramm. If you hadn't sided with him, he'd never have dared fight me. I've a good notion to take care of you here and now."

Shanklin's hand dropped to the stock of his rifle. The muzzle rose.

"Shootin' him fer what?" drawled Ab. The ranger's hand was on his automatic pistol.

For a moment Shanklin looked bewildered at the two Forest men, then back across the arena to where Cramm was entrenched. He brushed his hand over his eyes. The slow, deliberate words of the ranger had cut through the fierce anger that had surged up. He realized the shot that had downed Stringham's horse had saved his own life.

"I don't know. Wonder if I'm wrong," mumbled Shanklin. "Maybe I am. I wonder."

FOR many seconds Shanklin stood staring out over the firelit arena. His hand slipped from the stock of his carbine. He seemed queerly limp and without force.

Then a great burden seemed to fall from his broad shoulders, and he turned to Chris:

"Perrin, I believe you've tried to play square. I haven't. And that's what has led to this. But we've got to get out, maybe fight through, and if we can, save that stock. Will you help?"

Chris stood a moment, looking at the dimly lighted face of Shanklin. The

rancher seemed old, broken. Then the Forester shot out his hand and Shanklin took it in a crushing grip.

"Tom, we're not far apart, at that, are we?" said Chris. Shanklin shook his head.

A sharp crack—a whining bullet sang viciously by the sheltering rock.

"We'll burn like rats here in another twenty minutes!" said Shanklin. Let's make a run for it."

He moved toward his horse, which was sheltered back of the rock. Chris grasped him by the arm.

"It's plain suicide to run into the open lighted by the fire," he gasped. "And there is the stock to save."

Shanklin stopped, looked up toward the fire that was now leaping many feet in the air as it licked at the dry lodgepole pines; then he turned to the Forest men.

"I guess we're licked," he said, his voice shaking. "I guess Cramm and his bunch are going to wipe us out. They may hang for it, but they've got us trapped. They're safe in the lower cañon. But we're here where the fire will get us, or they will sneak around and pot us before we can get away."

Shanklin hesitated; then his shoulders straightened, his hands gripped hard, he breathed deeply. His old stern spirit came back.

"Chris, I can't go like that. I've got to fight. By God, I'll get Cramm before they get me if I have to travel all the way across that open with a pound of lead in me!"

He turned resolutely, reached for the saddle-horn, and with a quick lift of his leg, straddled his cow-pony. The animal whirled and started across the short sheltered space.

Chris reached for the bridle—missed. Then Shanklin reined in sharply, dismounted and came to Chris putting his hand on the Forester's shoulder.

"Son," he said, his voice deep with emotion, "—son, it's the end of the trail for Tom Shanklin. I've stood by my guns all my life and I'm going down with them still in my hands. I can't ask either of the boys to go with me. You and Ab have no reason to go, either. Maybe I can run them back enough for you boys to get up the upper cañon and away; you can try anyway; and if you get out, Chris, tell the little girl that her old man went down fighting. Don't let any fool ideas keep you two apart, either."

Shanklin held out his hand. Chris grasped it, held him a moment.

"Tom, you can't go out there; we've got some chance to get clear here some way. You must not go!"

Shanklin shook his head.

"No, Chris. I'm going, and before they get me, I'll account for my share of those damned prairie rats!"

THEY stood hesitating. To be trapped was new to Shanklin. His fighting spirit revolted at the idea. Chris realized that the determination of the cowman to follow his own line of action, to drive into the band of Cramm's men, account for as many as he could and go down fighting, was due to this feeling of being cornered. Chris tried with all his might to think of some manner in which to turn Celia's father from the mad ride across the firelit cañon floor by offering some means of escape. Shanklin started to mount again.

With a loud flapping of leather chaps and clinking of spurs, Ab Jones came stumbling toward them.

"Chris, Tom!" he cried. "I've just got a humdinger. We can razz Cramm to a frazzle, save the stock, get out of here! It's a beaner of an idea, a corker.

"Listen," stuttered Ab, his enthusiasm almost getting the better of his powers of speech. "I take John Henry and the two boys with me into the box cañon back of us. We'll stampede the stock. They're probably millin' now from fright of the fire and no way to get out. We can run them through the wide mouth of the side box cañon in a jiffy. They'll head for the ranch down the country and jam right into Cramm. We'll follow.

"The first thing Cramm knows, he'll be covered with wild steers!

"Oh, gosh! Why didn't I think of this earlier!"

Chris turned to Shanklin.

"They'll shoot some of your steers, Tom," he said, "but it's the best chance."

SHANKLIN stood silent an instant. Stubborn, determined, a fighter who faced the enemy and shot it out, he still fleetingly held to his resolve to fly into the center of the enemy, gun in his hand. Then his head snapped erect.

"It's the best chance for all of us," he said. "Maybe I'll get a chance at Cramm in the run, anyway. Go to it, Ab. Chris and I'll keep these hyenas across the cañon

busy while you get started. We'll get back of the herd as it goes by."

Ab whirled and ran—awkwardly because of his riding-boots—to the two cow-punchers, who were lying back of the edge of the rock with rifles ready in case the enemy came in view. They had been shooting at the figure on the wall of the cañon, but had seemingly not been successful, for the fires still continued to spread, though no human now moved along the line of the flames.

Leading their horses, keeping the shelter of the ledge between them and Cramm's men, Ab and his two aids hurried to the place where for a few hundred feet they would be exposed to the fire of the enemy. They mounted.

"Better get ready to give those boys some help," growled Shanklin. He slipped back the safety catch on his carbine.

Chris, gun in hand, walked to the point where the whole arena could be seen. The fierce flame on the cañon wall, now raging in the draft its own heat created, lighted the arena with a curious lurid twilight in which objects stood out in grim clarity.

Ab led the way into the open, heading for the box cañon where the cattle were trapped. The rattle of hoofs on the pebbly stream-bed tinkled faintly above the roar of the sucking fire draft as it whirled through the grass on the cañon side.

A rifle snapped viciously above the turmoil. Shanklin drew a bead, pulled the trigger. Then he peered into the gloom.

"Believe I winged him," he said with dry satisfaction. "All right, damn you," he growled. "Try another shot."

Almost as if answering his challenge, two more reports rang out. Chris pulled his trigger just as Shanklin fired. Chris glanced back toward the cañon. In the flashing light he saw the last of three horsemen, bending low to escape bullets, disappear into the broad-mouthed cañon. The necessity for protecting Ab was past.

"Look!" cried Shanklin.

"What?" asked Chris, the intensity of Shanklin's exclamation at once gripping him.

There, struggling to free himself, was the cow-puncher who had been pinned and stunned by the fall of his horse. A rifle ripped faintly through the noise of the chortling flames.

The cowboy fell back, jerking.

"You— Of all the cowardly tricks!" cried Shanklin.

"They get him?" asked Chris.

"Can't tell—looks like it. They sure tried. One of my very best men out there, Fred Maitland, one-time champion of the State in bronco-busting."

Then a new thought made Chris tingle. In a moment the charging cattle, frenzied by the fire and whipped to new terror by Ab and his helpers, would be streaming over the arena plunging toward Cramm and his entrenched cohorts.

The stricken Maitland and the dark form of one of Cramm's men were in the path of the headlong stampede!

"Tom!" he cried. "We've got to run ahead of the herd! Maitland and that other fellow will be trampled to pulp if they're left there. They may be dead already, but we can't take the chance.

"No time to argue. We've got to do it. You follow me. I'll make a run for it on my horse as soon as we see the first cattle come through that gap. You go directly to Maitland. If he's dead, keep running. I'll run for Cramm's man. He isn't dead, that's pretty sure. I'll hoist him on the horse and run for you. By that time Cramm will see what's happening. He'll not shoot after the cattle start down-cañon. We'll pull to that side cañon above. Savvy?"

Shanklin nodded.

CHRIS hurried to his horse. He looked back at the mouth of the cañon. The first steers milled into the open, spraddled their forefeet, stopped, tried to turn back away from the nearer menace of the fire, were shoved by the mass of crazed stock back of them, and then came tumbling, bawling, into the opening.

Chris leaped to the back of Snap. He dug in the spurs. Snap plunged ahead at the unusual treatment.

Shanklin came thundering after him as they leaped clear of the shelter of the ledge. A bullet ripped by, followed by several. Chris bent low on Snap, guiding him for the dark form of Cramm's man.

Chris looked back. The cattle were pouring into the arena like some great enveloping dark stream. Dust raised from their front ranks as they raced forward, pushed into tumultuous running by the frenzied masses behind.

Then he reached Cramm's man. He sensed Shanklin driving by headed for the silent form of Maitland. He heard another shot, faint and clear amid the sounds

that blended from the racing feet of the cattle and the destroying fire.

In a moment Chris was at the homesteader's side. He stooped and picked him up. The wounded man groaned. With a supreme effort, Chris lifted the limp form into the saddle. Snap, in fear of fire, nervous from the onrushing cattle that now were but a few hundred feet distant, snorted, plunged, jerked away toward the side of the arena near the upper cañon. Chris ran after him. The homesteader's form swayed grotesquely in the light. Then the jolting, arousing some instinctive action, caused the wounded man to struggle, throw out his hand, grasp a flying rein, then tumble to the ground gripping the leather strap.

Instantly Snap halted and stood snorting. Chris approached, talking quietly. Horse and semiconscious rider had stopped not ten feet from the point where Shanklin stooped over the quiet form of Maitland. Chris ran forward, for the moment disregarding the homesteader and Snap, knowing the horse would stand for a moment, held by the gripping hand of the rancher.

"Dead?" asked Chris, shouting.

Shanklin shook his head. "No, not yet. But they've finished him. He hasn't a chance. One in the lung and one right through the stomach."

A band of racing cattle surged by, bawling, eyes and horns flashing in the firelight.

Stooping, Chris grasped the saddle of the dead horse. He lifted, mightily. Shanklin pulled at Maitland.

In a moment the bleeding, unconscious cow-puncher was clear of the horse, and lying over Shanklin's saddle. The homesteader was also loaded upon the nervous Snap. Then, at a jog trot, Shanklin and Chris led their horses out of the way of the plunging cattle into the safety of the upper cañon.

Here both wounded men were unloaded. For several hours they would be safe. The fire would have to cross the box cañon before it could get into the upper cañon, and that would take time. Help could be secured before it became necessary to move them.

CHRIS looked back at the arena. It was nearly filled with cattle, plunging, milling, trying to crowd into the lower cañon. Steers and cows were frantically struggling to get clear of the fire area, down the cañon, back to the home ranch. Nothing would stop them until they were well down the stream-bed nearer the T Bar K.

At the upper end of the open space Chris saw Ab and the two cow-punchers riding like madmen, waving their arms, shouting, urging the cattle into new fear and new efforts to drive into the cañon below.

That Cramm and his band had been routed by the first onrush of cattle and had to run for their lives was certain. In the lower cañon, with no trail out, or side cañon for at least a mile, it would be a race with milling death, over rock-strewn flats and through gorges, until safety was reached. Cramm would not bother the Forest men and Shanklin again for the moment.

Chris turned to Shanklin.

"That fire is going to play hell with the whole side of the mountain, Tom. Ab and I have to get our boys on it right away."

They both glanced to the side of the cañon where the red fiend of the forest had whipped over the grass and was sucking in the life of the young trees.

"How fast will that travel?" asked Shanklin anxiously.

"Without wind, maybe half a mile an hour. But if the wind blows more, there's no limit. It may sweep all the way to the big meadow," replied Chris.

For a moment Shanklin looked at the hissing flames.

"There are two of my men up there," he said. "And there is another eighty head of stock that they are planning on running out over the Forest boundary after dark tonight."

For a moment neither spoke. Both realized that with a light wind the fire might sweep over the little valley beyond the ridge where it was now leaping, and either trap the men and the stock or push them back into the big meadow where they would be burned without chance of escape.

"If you can help, Chris, do it. Do what you can," said Shanklin. The Forester nodded.

"Can you leave one of your men here to take care of these wounded men, Tom?"

Shanklin nodded. "The other will have to go for help," he suggested.

"I'm going after Cramm," declared the cowman. "And I'm going to get him."

The Forester looked quickly at Shanklin. Their glances held for a moment.

"No, you guessed wrong, Chris. I'll not shoot him unless I have to. He's going to face the jury if I have to trail him from here to there, and he'll rot in Cañon City's pen' the rest of his life if he don't hang. I'll only shoot if I must. I've had enough of this sort of thing in my life, and I'm ready to let up."

In a few moments the two Forest officers, Shanklin and one of his men were riding down the lower cañon to a point where the trail led out to the rolling ridge above. At the forking of the trails they parted, Shanklin heading down following the cañon trail of the stampeding cattle, while the other three climbed out of the cleft in the hills.

## CHAPTER VIII

TOM SHANKLIN urged his tired horse forward as he followed the path of the stampeded white-faces. The faint light of early night outlined the cañon rims, but it was now dark in the cañon floor. Looking back, he could see the fire as it swirled and swayed in its own draft. The wind which had been blowing had died down to a light breeze.

Night sounds of the forest were on every hand. A few startled birds, driven from their coverts by the fire, whirred by. Shanklin's every nerve was taut, for he knew that if he met Cramm, there might be forced a final settling of all old accounts.

The flame of a match leaped out of the night ahead. Shanklin reined in his horse. The flame died. Shanklin moved forward cautiously. Again a match burst into flame. Shanklin was startled by the nearness of it. He pulled his gun and advanced. In the faint flame of the match he beheld the face of Stringham.

"Up with your hands, Stringham!" he called. "Got you covered."

The match went out as the dry-lander put up his hands.

"Now, come here," ordered Shanklin.

"Can't."

"Why?"

"Shot through the leg. Can't walk without bleedin' like sin. Was just lookin' at the hole in my leg."

"Then throw your pistol over this way and light another match," ordered Shanklin. "If you don't, I'll have to take my chance on shootin' you if you start a queer move."

In a moment a dull thump on the ground not far distant was followed by the flaming of another match. Shanklin advanced, ready for any trick of the enemy.

"You alone, Stringham?" he asked.

"Yeh."

In a moment Shanklin was at the side of the wounded homesteader. The match still burned dimly.

"All right, light another match!" ordered Shanklin.

Stringham lit it. Shanklin grasped a small bunch of dry grass, and it burst into flame as it came in contact with the match. Stringham's haggard face looked up at him inquiringly. Shanklin gathered a few twigs and made a tiny fire by the light of which Stringham appeared more unkempt, more whipped than before.

"Where's the rest?" asked Shanklin.

"One's back there in the cañon, shot. I don't know where the five that started down cañon are. Cramm and I pulled into this side cañon here and let the stampede go by. We was both on his horse. Mine's dead. I'm bleedin' and need help. Cramm helped me a little, but the bullet-hole has opened again and I've got to stop it."

Tom Shanklin could hold a grudge as long as the other fellow could fight, but Stringham was whipped. Every line in the fellow showed he had surrendered. Shanklin knelt quickly, and dipping water out of the little side stream where it was running clear, he helped Stringham wash away the blood on his thigh.

"Now, where's Cramm?" asked Shanklin.

"He headed out of the cañon on the next trail below; then he'll go back toward the fire. I wanted him to stay here, but he said he had to run for it. He's the fellow that shot Maitland. He's afraid some of us will tell on him. And some of us will. He's led us into a hell of a jackpot in this cattle-killin'. And now he's left me here bleedin' to save his own hide. If I ever get back alive, I'll go to Ioway, and ten teams of mules can't get me out here in this God-forsaken—"

"Where's Cramm going?" interrupted Shanklin impatiently.

"He headed back by the lower trail, I said. He's got thirty-odd head of steers up there near the high meadow back of that fire. He figures on gettin' them out

about daybreak, down over the south trail across the ridge and into Talpa by noon tomorrow. He reckons you'll be busy with the fire and gettin' your stock out until tomorrow night. By that time he'll take what he can get for his stock and will beat it for Mexico. He's afraid of facin' a murder charge. Skairt white since that stampede. And he's ready to commit more murder to get free, 'cause he is so skairt."

Stringham, unnerved from the experience of the earlier evening, blurted out his information regarding Cramm and his plans. The sight of Shanklin's grim face in the light of the little fire, the suggestion that Shanklin would have this truth from him sooner or later if he had to force it at the point of his gun, made Stringham babble on with the story:

"I've got stock up there too, Shanklin. And I'm goin' to lose all I've got in that fire Cramm set. He thought it would smoke you out of the cañon. He didn't reckon on it goin' so fast, and now he's got that hangin' up ag'in' him, and the Forest men will stick him for that if they can't hang murder on him, and he knows it. . . . .

"Are you goin' to go? Then for God's sake give me back my gun and send help as soon as you can. I can't get far with this leg. Cramm wouldn't help me down to the ranch. He deserted me to save his own hide, damn him!"

A few minutes' search and Stringham's gun was located. Shanklin broke it, emptied the shells, handed the empty gun to Stringham, then the shells, and with Stringham covered by his own pistol, backed away. Shanklin was glad that he had found the lanky dry-lander, for it sent him off on a new trail, a trail that would lead him to Cramm. Beyond the light of the little fire, he mounted and turned the head of his horse back toward the rapidly spreading forest fire. Cramm, climbing out of the cañon on a trail a mile below, could not get back and around the fire and on the trail to the big meadow much before Shanklin if he used the upper trail. He stood a chance of stopping Cramm at the trail junction if he hurried.

## CHAPTER IX

CHRIS and Ab Jones reined in their horses as they stopped on a bare spot on the ridge where they could look back at the fire which was glowing over the lower part of the slope up from the cañon. Shanklin's man had gone on, riding toward the ranch for help to get the two wounded men from the arena where the tide of battle had whipped back and forth but a few moments before.

The fire was in thick, dry, young lodgepole pine. Little wind was stirring. As the two Forest men studied the plan of attack on the fire, new wind began to fan their cheeks. It blew so that it would quickly spread the fire over the ridge and into the valley down which ran the trail from the big meadow. The forefront of the blow touched the top of the ridge first, then began fanning the flames in the pines.

"Listen to that!" breathed Ab. "Chris, we're in for real trouble now. If Shanklin's men don't get that bunch of cattle down from the big meadow in the next sixty minutes, they'll never get down."

Perrin nodded, but continued to study the fire with relation to wind and the country he knew lay beyond the ridge on which they stood. Darkness and some smoke blanketed any view of the valley and the ridge beyond.

"Ab, this is a rather shallow valley the trail runs down, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, and only a few meadows in her. Then the land on the other side breaks up into a sort of a choppy ridge shot with porphyry dikes, and beyond that there is a gradual slope, rolling and covered with lodgepole—lodgepole thick as hair on a dog and dry as hay."

"Isn't this the valley where the Crawfish mine is located?"

"Yes, over on that far slope. Old tunnel and few shacks there."

"Well, I know it, then," replied Chris. "Know it pretty well. Been to the old mine on the short side trail."

For a moment he was silent again. Then he outlined his plan of action.

"Only way to hold the main fire is to backfire, Ab. It's too big a fire already to hold it, even with the help of our other Forest men that will be coming up as soon as they sight it. We'll have ten men, at the most. Maybe there'll be some of the ranchers up early tomorrow, but not tonight. We've got to fight it with the Forest force. And there's only one cache of tools in this section. The boys will pick up that bunch of equipment on the way. But we'll be short of tools, at that.

"I'm going in to try and see that Shank-

lin's men get out with that stock. I'll ride right up the main trail and probably run into them. You stay here, take charge of all the men that come up. For half an hour, try to flank this end of the fire and keep it away from the trail so we can sure get out. Then pull your men the other side of the valley. In exactly forty-five minutes (it's eight-thirty now), start back-fires on that ridge across. Keep the men there as long as necessary, then put on one as a patrol and bring the men back to the lower end of this valley. Throw down a fire-line.

"The fire that Cramm set will be down in the valley in about an hour and a half from now. The other fire has a shorter distance to go, but the lodgepole is smaller and thicker. It'll spread in a hurry. They'll probably meet well down in the valley, and if they do, we'll hold the fire right here, or at the worst, head it back into the ridge and the head of the valley, and it will burn only a strip. That plan all right?"

Ab was silent a moment, considering. "Best possible, but what if they don't get those cattle out in time?" he asked.

"I'm going to get them out, Ab, and you can bet those boys are shoving them as hard as they can; but if they don't, then I'll get those two boys out with me, and the cattle will have to go. That's all; it's a case of doing what we can, and then cut and run."

"Fire's goin' to be darned hot in the valley when those two, the old fire and the back-fire, come together," grumbled Ab. "Not healthy to be caught in there."

"I'll see that we get out in time, Ab," promised Chris. "See you later!" he called as he turned Snap into the trail and headed up the valley.

CHRIS urged Snap into a trot as soon as they were on the valley floor. Branches grabbed at him; darkness blanketed the pathway; thick stands of pine on every side sighed noisily as breezes rushed through their tops. A coyote howled on the ridge, and Snap snorted.

Chris' thoughts started to turn to considering the consequences of the fight in the canon. Then he was abruptly brought back to the present action by Snap stopping abruptly in the trail, tossing his head from side to side. For a moment horse and rider were silent, listening. Up the valley the lowing of the cattle sounded. On the ridge the fire-song could be heard as an undertone to the wind. Smoke was flooding the valley, making free breathing difficult.

The wild things running from the fire, which had stopped the horse, passed on. Chris urged Snap on, now at a walk, for the path was a bit steeper. Through the cover of lodgepole, the trail wound and then came into an open park. Star-shine faintly illumined the ridge on either side except where the smoke on the burning ridge was now floating up and curtaining the heavens and skyline. Across the little meadow Chris heard the sound of cattle milling in the trail. Rocks rattled; a cow bawled; and then he heard the men yelling at the stock and calling to each other. He waited. The restless herd streamed by. The white faces of the cow brutes looked like bobbing ghosts in the dim light. Snap whinnied. The riders for Shanklin stopped.

"Who is it?" cried a voice. "Tom?"

"No, Perrin," replied Chris. "Came up to help you get out before the fire gets into this valley and cuts off the trail."

Another brief pause, and then the voice replying:

"All right, but no funny business about that fire. We smell smoke all right, so I guess there is a fire. Thought we saw flames too. Well, let's go."

Without more talk they swung in behind the uneasy herd and gave all their attention to shoving it down the valley. The cattle resented being moved thus hurriedly. They clogged in the brush, stopped and headed back up trail, sniffed the smoke, milled in small groups, broke away from the main herd and thrashed into the trees, but the three men kept doggedly at the driving.

"How much time we got to get clear?" asked one of the riders when near to Chris. The Forest man glanced at the luminous dial of his watch. It showed that Ab was now ready to start the back-fire which, when it met the other fire, would make the forest along this trail a livid lake of flame.

"Just about twenty or thirty minutes if we keep shoving them hard. Then it will be too late, and we'll have to run for it."

"We can make it with twenty minutes to spare," said the rider.

LURID light, penetrating the thinner smoke, warned Chris that the fire was beginning to get hot enough to climb into the tree crowns. So long as it stayed

partly on the ground, it would not travel fast. But once in the tops, it would race, burning the twigs and needles in great sighing breaths of flame. Then it would leap for many feet. New fires, set by brands tossed in the air by the draft, would spring up all along the fire-line, and these in turn would set others. Its jumps would be prodigious.

With final yelling, pounding the cattle along, the men pushed them out of the valley, headed them across the bare ridge and into the cañon down which the other herd had raced. For several hundred yards Chris continued to help the cowhands with the herd, keeping it milling down toward the T Bar K Ranch. Then he stopped, at the bare spot on the ridge where he and Ab had outlined their campaign. Smoke clouded the valley so there was no clear view of the fire to be had. But glimpses between smoke-columns told the story. The fire was beginning to jump in the tops. The night wind was tossing the brands ahead as the fire draft shot them into the air. The fire was leaping ahead dozens of feet in a moment.

Dry weather, thick dry lodgepole pine, and wind, doomed the valley.

Across the valley the back-fire had begun to burn. Chris guessed that four of the men had arrived to help Ab. The others would come soon, but they would be tired at the start of the battle; and certainly it was to be a battle, for even with the back-fire there was the necessity for putting down a fire-line across the lower end of the valley and holding it.

After ten minutes' studying the fire, Chris turned Snap's head back toward the point where the trail coming out from the south also met in junction.

## CHAPTER X

AT the point where the trails crossed, Chris turned Snap toward the valley, for he knew if Ab had returned from directing the setting of the back-fire, he would be found a little way along this valley trail working with marking hatchet on the beginning of the fire-line that would bottle the conflagration in this one area.

Snap dog-trotted, walked, stopped at a ford, then splashed through. The rocks rolled from under his feet. Lurid twilight now filled the valley, dimming or flaring up as the fire leaped or as the smoke-curtain was swayed by the wind. It was a ghastly light—the dawn-light of an inferno.

Rounding a bend in the trail, Snap stopped abruptly, setting all four feet and almost pitching Chris into the trail ahead.

A figure, stumbling, running through the murk, pitched down the trail. It was Ab Jones.

"Ab!" called Chris.

The ranger leaped toward Chris' voice. Great whistling gasps came from his mouth. He coughed. For a moment he stood helpless, pointing inarticulately toward the valley.

"Take it a bit easy, Ab," suggested Chris. "Whatever it is, it'll wait a few seconds."

The ranger shook his head, gasped, coughed again and then huskily cried: "Celia!"

"Where?" shouted Chris, instantly tense with the mention of her name. "Hurry—speak, Ab! What's wrong?"

"Up the trail. I couldn't hold her. She came charging up to where I was working. Horse wringing wet. Looking fer you and her dad. Said Cramm had passed the ranch early this afternoon and had threatened to kill both of you. Said she must find you at once. I thought you were still up with that stock of Shanklin's helpin' out. I told her. Tried to explain, but she headed her pony up-trail; and before I could stop her, she was pounding into the night looking for you. I called bloody murder, but she went right in there.

"John Henry's tied back here. I'm goin' to get him and go after her."

"No, I'll go," cried Chris, his heart beginning to thump as he realized the danger of the girl. "You get the boys here just as quick as you can, Ab. Hold a way open on this trail until we get out, if it's the last thing you do."

Without waiting for reply, Chris spurred ahead. Snap leaped as he jabbed him viciously with the spurs.

Bending low, Chris pushed his horse into a faster gait. The smoke thickened. He could hear the *"Whoo—oo—oosh"* of a big tree as its body was swept with the flame. The wind in the trees was more audible.

Branches grasped at Chris, whipped across his face, but he did not slacken his horse's speed. He believed that Celia would stay in the trail. It was a race against the wind and fire to find her and get back to safety before the converging

flames coming from either ridge would reach the valley floor and the whole space would be brimming with fire.

Chris stopped Snap a moment, listened. He thought he could hear horse's hoof-beats. He listened again and was not sure. Then they came clear and loud. He held Snap tightly.

Around the corner of the trail, faintly outlined in the red dusk, came a horseman charging. Chris pulled Snap into the trail. The horseman reined hard. Both horses strained to avert a collision, but crashed.

Chris had his gun out before the two horses collided. He covered the newcomer.

It was Cramm—Cramm, trying to get through the fire, find his cattle and get to Talpa in the morning and then on to freedom. Cramm, desperate, ready for murder to maintain his freedom!

"I've got you, Cramm," shouted Chris. "Up with your hands, quick."

Cramm started to move in the saddle.

Chris knew that any second might be his last if Cramm reached his gun. Chris spurred Snap fiercely forward. Horses crashed again. Cramm fell into the trail, unseated by the suddenness of the move. His pistol cracked in the air, harmlessly.

In a moment Chris was on the ground. His pistol was pressed against the renegade dry-lander.

"Cramm, if you move, I'll pull the trigger. I've got no time to fool. Drop that gun!"

Slowly Cramm's fingers relaxed. The gun dropped at his side. Chris snatched it and threw it far into the brush.

"You're going along—and back, Cramm. Celia Shanklin is in here somewhere in the path of this fire you set. We're going to find her before we go out. Now up on your horse and get in the trail ahead of me, and if you can't keep out of my way, I'll shoot that horse under you and you can shift for yourself on foot—so make speed."

Cursing, Cramm scrambled to his feet and hurriedly mounted.

THIS picking up of Cramm had complicated Chris' task. To find Celia and get out of the valley unharmed, and at the same time keep Cramm from escaping could only be accomplished by taking the man along.

Through swirling smoke the horses plunged headlong. The wind was carrying brands high in the air now, and there was a new roar in the voice of the fire. Chris Perrin knew he was gambling with death. But for him his whole world was at stake. Celia Shanklin would be carried out of this hell alive, or Chris would never come out!

They entered a clearing. Just as the trail broke into the open, a horse charged by. Chris peered in the stinging smoke. It was Celia's horse Patchy—riderless.

With a curse that was half prayer, Chris drove his horse forward. Toward the other end of the clearing he saw a light spot in the dusk. It was Celia.

The next instant he was on the ground, reaching out to touch the girl he sought.

"Celia!" he cried. "You hurt?"

"Oh, Chris. Oh! Can we get out of here? I've hunted for you so long. Cramm was going to kill you. I couldn't stay at the ranch. I've ridden—"

She looked up at the form on the other horse.

"Who's that?" she cried.

"Cramm."

Instantly Chris felt her pull away from him. Cramm was the enemy she had tried to thwart all the afternoon. To find him in company with Chris, now that she had found her man, had an instant effect. The belief that Chris and Cramm were in league came rushing back.

"Cramm," she breathed. *"Cramm?"*

Her hand stole to her breast. She backed away from Chris.

"Celia, you must listen. Cramm is my prisoner."

"I can't believe it. He sits there free on his horse. He could ride away or shoot any instant he—"

"You must listen, I tell you," cried Chris desperately.

Anger, unreasoning rage, blotted all sense of justice and judgment from Celia's mind. Chris reached out his hand and grasped her arm. She jerked away, turned and started down the trail. That her terrific riding of the afternoon in her effort to warn Chris and her father had led her to Chris Perrin in company with the enemy Cramm—this strained Celia's overwrought nerves to the breaking point.

"Down off that horse," cried Chris desperately to Cramm. "Quick! Now into the trail in front, and no funny moves."

To keep Cramm from bolting, and to get hold of Celia, Cramm must be made to get on the trail ahead of her.

TOGETHER they stumbled down the trail following the hurrying girl. Cramm cursed.

"Get in front, there," cried Chris. "Hurry."

Cramm leaped around the girl. She stopped.

"You must listen to me!" cried Chris. "Cramm is my prisoner, I tell you! You've both got to obey orders. Come back. Snap can carry both of us. Cramm can ride ahead."

He grasped her, shook her a little to make her understand the seriousness of the situation. She turned, started to twist from his grasp.

Then down the trail, plunging and snorting, came Snap and Cramm's horse. Some animal of the forest, running in terror from the fire, stampeded the two horses, already nervous and excited by the fire.

Chris leaped as Snap went by, but the horse was thoroughly frightened and bounded past and on down the path.

Celia faced Chris in the red dusk.

"You're caught, trapped here," she breathed tremulously. Fear filled her voice. "Chris—oh, Chris, I can't stand it any longer. I do trust you! Please, please—"

She swayed, and fell into Perrin's arms.

"Get ahead, Cramm," cried Chris as he caught up the limp form of the girl he loved.

The dry-lander growled but obeyed. Hurrying, gasping because of the smoke that filtered through the trees, they started back in a desperate effort to make their way out of the valley. It would have been barely possible to get out to where the fire-line was being built if they had had their horses. On foot there was only the faintest chance of escape. But it was one possible chance. The lines of escape led into territory already laced with fire.

## CHAPTER XI

DESPERATELY they hurried forward. Celia stirred in his arms. Chris' grasp tightened a little, and he stumbled forward. Smoke was making going difficult, and through it all was the lurid red dusk that proclaimed that the fire was getting nearer.

Then with a twist she partly freed herself from Chris' arms. He stopped and eased her to the ground.

"Can you travel now?" he asked.

"Guess maybe, a ways," she answered, half sobbing. "I'll try."

Again they struggled forward. It seemed to Chris that they must certainly be nearing the place where Ab was working on the fire-line. Cramm trotted ahead doggedly, stumbling, but awed by the threat of the fire and the gun Chris carried.

A puff of wind brought a shower of sparks. Chris groaned as he realized that the fire had come so near the trail. It could start spot-fires on either side of their line of escape.

Then they came to a slight turn in the trail. All stopped, amazed.

The fire was over the trail!

It was a small fire. They might possibly tie clothing around their heads and dash through it. But what lay behind?

As they looked, they saw a figure crash through the woods between them and the fire—Tom Shanklin!

With an arm over his face he stumbled forward, black against the lurid curtain behind. He came staggering up, gasping and coughing.

*"Dad!"* cried Celia.

With a sob, Shanklin rushed forward. For an instant he crushed the girl to him, felt of her as though convincing himself she was real. Then, gasping, coughing, he spoke in jerky half-sentences:

"Trailed Cramm—bumped into Ab. He said you were in here. Had to come. Lost my horse, back. Just a chance to find Celia if Chris missed you. Had to come."

He stopped. They all turned to the fire.

"But maybe it's too late," he said, his breath whistling. "Streaks of the fire are across the trail below in a dozen places by this time. We're trapped!"

Cramm cursed. Celia sobbed, turned to Chris:

"Isn't there some way out, Chris? Isn't there even some way we can hide and let this flash by? Oh, Chris, dear—"

Her cry ended in a hysterical shudder.

The Forester shook his head dumbly. To know that the love of the girl had lured them both into this fiery maw, there to discover their love for each other, and then to know that it would be snuffed out in a few moments by the crisping flames—this numbed Chris. A spark fell on his shirt. It burned through.

Stung to action, he whipped it out. Another spark-shower followed, and then smoke. Suddenly a plan came to Chris, so

simple, so possible, that he fairly jumped.

"Here, take my hand, Celia. Tom, you take hers. And you hang onto Cramm. Now follow me!"

He almost shouted in joy at the thought that had rushed over him. If they could make the shelter he sought, they would be safe!

Back along the trail, through showers of sparks, through swirling smoke that made them gasp and cough, they plunged. Then Chris turned off on a little side-trail that led up the slope toward where the back-fire streamed across the ridge and was making its way down the slope to meet the older fire that had now crept so closely to the trail.

Dragging Celia, Chris battled forward. Tom Shanklin, his breath coming in great whistling sighs, toiled along keeping tight hold on Cramm. The dry-lander was strangely quiet, queerly nonresistant. The stupendous chortling of the fire dinning in his ears, broke his spirit, blotted out the bluff which was his bravery.

Smoke-clouds in the sky acted as reflectors. The red light of the fire was thrown back into the valley. Chris could feel Celia's hand tighten when the wind swept by, carrying hot gusts of the flame that was mowing down the thick little lodgepole pines. Time and again they covered their faces to keep hot stinging smoke from their lungs. It was plunge ahead, fighting on, in the red dusk, hoping, praying that safety might be found.

And then, with a cry of relief, Chris found the place he sought—the tunnel shed of the old Crawfish mine!

"Here we are!" he cried. "Up here, Tom—and you too, Cramm. This door is old, and we can crash it. Come on now, all hands shove."

The door to the tunnel held, creaked, cracked, held; and then with a quick ripping of old boards, it fell into the little shed that was the mouth of the Crawfish tunnel.

Through the door they stumbled, Celia holding tightly to Chris' arm. Then came Tom Shanklin, and finally the strangely subdued Cramm.

"By heaven, Chris, I think we're saved," cried Shanklin, coughing and catching his breath. "It's the one chance, the one big chance!"

Chris, looking back toward the door, saw a leaping tongue of flame tossed high in the air. It was filled with great glowing firebrands that would set myriads of fires in the young pines. They had made the sanctuary of the old mine tunnel barely in time.

Then Chris saw another picture against the red background of the door. A man was silhouetted against the redness of the night. He looked back in the tunnel and then stepped out.

"Stop him!" cried Chris, leaping forward with his gun drawn. "Tom, Cramm's leaving."

The two men jammed as they raced for the narrow entrance. At the door they stopped. They looked down into the dim sea of fire that filled the valley, the clashing currents of flames that were now licking up the trees in the center of the area from which they had just climbed. One moment they saw a dark figure against a flame-red burning thicket of lodgepole. Then it was gone. Cramm, rather than face the inevitable trial that rescue from this hell would bring, had chosen instead one desperate effort at finding a way out of the inferno and to freedom.

FOR several moments they stood and stared. Celia, shuddering, came and peered out at the swirling eddies of fire below, fire that in a moment would whip all over the outside structure of the wall.

"Not much chance," said Shanklin shortly.

"No, not much," said Chris.

Shanklin led the way back into the dim coolness of the old stout-timbered tunnel. A faint tang of smoke had reached there, but the air was good to breathe, cool and moist.

"Chris," he said, his voice shaking, "—my boy, Cramm has proved one thing for me. You Forest men play square. I'm through fighting you. I'll go into any court you name and plead guilty to all the stock I have in trespass. I'll take my medicine. Hereafter I'm with you."

Their hands met in the dark in a firm clasp, and then another hand stole into Chris' grasp.

"Chris," breathed Celia, "Chris dear, can you forgive—"

In an instant she was in his arms, crushed fiercely, tenderly.

Outside, the flame-demon leaped and hissed over the doomed valley while Tom Shanklin, peace in his heart, carefully felt his way back into the old tunnel toward a point of greater safety.

# *The Stowaway*

*The gifted author of "Rats and Radios" and "In Self-Defense" here contributes a splendid tale of modern sea-faring. Don't overlook this eventful voyage of the Saigon Queen.*

## *By* JOHN MERSEREAU

THE sturdy steamer, *Saigon Queen,* outbound from the Golden Gate for Sydney, had dropped her pilot and was poking her blunt nose into the long, easy, sun-flecked swells beyond the Farallones before her single unpaying passenger was brought to light. Undersized, emaciated, but with a burning, unquenchable flame of hatred in his sunken blue eyes, he struggled impotently with the two burly seamen who dragged him from his hiding-place and into the presence of the saturnine smile of Captain Marvin McGaw.

Captain McGaw was that sort of man: impotence of any kind amused him. And it was obvious that the little gray-haired derelict before him was well within the restraint of the deck hands on his either side. So the fair-skinned, big-paunched skipper smiled. His calculating brain, however, quick to grasp any sort of opportunity for profit, had instantly decided upon the procedure to be followed. The stowaway could have his choice: either he could pay his passage or he could work it out. Any addition to the crew was acceptable to McGaw at the moment—any, at least, that called for no other wages than bunk and board—for the *Saigon Queen* was decidedly under-manned; although the Captain was equally agreeable to picking up a roundabout penny or so in the improbable event that the little man stood able and willing to pay his way.

Of course the *Queen,* being strictly a cargo vessel, had no passenger license. Therefore she could carry no passengers. And therefore she did not, for Captain Marvin McGaw was a law-abiding man. However, he could stretch the provisions of maritime law as far as the next man,—or a little farther, if it came right down to cases,—and he did.

To an alert eye it would have been evident that there were a number of loiterers sunning themselves along the rail who might have been more usefully employed in gathering up the gear disarranged in the recent business of leaving port. Moreover, these were duly listed on the crew roster in the various capacities of supercargo, steward and the like. And having made the acquaintance of the estimable master of the *Saigon Queen,* you may un-

derstand already that he was not one to tolerate loafing among his subordinates—at least, not without a good and sufficient reason.

There was a reason. There was a reason for almost everything McGaw did, and usually a very well-calculated and cold-blooded one. But in fairness it must be interpolated here that Gillis & Hoag, the vessel's owners, had no sure knowledge of and no share in the comfortable graft that their Captain McGaw was working to a fare-ye-well. The Gillis & Hoag line had come in for some pretty loose management in the third generation of its inception; but both of the present youthful partners in the firm, loose as were their business methods, were still as meticulous in their ideas of right and wrong as had been their Pilgrim forefathers. And that—risking again a Conradian touch—had been some meticulous!

IN a nutshell, Gillis & Hoag would have been the first, once they had proof positive of its continued practice, to abolish Captain McGaw's system of injecting into his allotted crew a certain number of "dummies," who toiled not during their passage, yet who earned a neat extra-legal dividend for the skipper by paying him (it was never spoken of as reduced fare) for this immunity. And Gillis & Hoag would have been the last, had they known it impended, to send the *Saigon Queen* across the great Pacific circle with a potentially insufficient crew in the beginning of the typhoon season.

Unfortunately, these otherwise meritorious young men had never had either inclination or necessity for versing themselves in things nautical. The bent of one leaned very decidedly toward the navigation of a small gutta-percha sphere in a direct line down a fairway; the other, with a Greenwich Village *Lorelei* for his lawfully wedded wife, was fully occupied in keeping his matrimonial bark from grounding on the shoals of scandal. And having inherited with their sizable patrimonies a trustworthy, if somewhat superannuated, business manager, Messrs. Gillis and Hoag rarely disturbed the dust in their private executive offices. They were not so much as acquainted with their Captain Marvin McGaw, in fact. Which was bound to react in one way and another—and surely did—upon the sensitive perceptions of the skipper of the *Saigon Queen*.

As for Captain McGaw, thus unappreciated, Opportunity had not been forced to knock twice at his cabin door to find him waiting with cocked ear. A sailorman not exactly unafraid, he was—but one willing to flip a coin with Dame Fortune whenever the profit loomed big enough. In the present instance, the improbable chance of detection seemed to him fair enough odds against the two thousand dollars he could obtain for landing a few "beats" in Sydney. And having that sum already in hand for the voyage, he wasted no further finesse on the unpromising person of the stowaway who, oddly enough, did not cower before his majesty.

"Got any money?" Captain McGaw queried, acidly.

"No."

"Then you'll have to work your way."

"I expect to," was the quiet-spoken response.

"You'll get what you expected, then," the Captain promised, grimly. But he experienced a pang of distress as he gauged the obvious physical limitations of the wisplike form. "You aint good for much, but I guess you can turn to and help out the cook without hurtin' your scrawny hide." He laughed raucously. "Go for'ard to the galley. Tell the nigger I sent him a apprentice."

The little stowaway's face remained a studied blank at the insult. But it was too frank of expression by nature to be entirely successful in masking the consuming hatred that had flashed into his sunken eyes at first sight of the Captain. It was a look of such intensity, of such basic and time-ripened purposefulness, that a person with any gift at all for character reading could scarcely have failed to note it. But McGaw, with weightier matters to consider, perhaps, entirely ignored it.

"Get moving!" he barked. But before the other could obey, he snapped a question: "Wait a minute. What's your name?"

THE stowaway hesitated, very evidently fabricating an alias.

"Jones."

"*Sir!*" amended the captain. "You're one of the crew now, remember, my bucko!"

"Jones, sir," the other repeated obediently, and turned away.

But Captain McGaw remained where he was for a moment, his small eyes narrowed

in thought. Some long-forgotten cell of his memory had reacted to that burring repetition of the word "sir." Somewhere, some time, in some unpleasant connection or other that could not be recalled at the moment, he had heard that selfsame voice before; or one identical with it. Probably the latter, he decided finally; for the man's face was unfamiliar.

Shrugging, McGaw turned about and nodded genially in passing to the tall, well-set-up young man, clad in baggy, comfortable tweeds, who hung over the nearby rail. The Captain was at some pains to treat his passengers with a broad camaraderie.

"Scum!" he said, jigging a stubby thumb back toward the retreating form of the "nigger's apprentice."

The young man—his name, coincidentally, was also Jones on the crew roster, where he was listed as stoker—nodded ready agreement. But his head, turning that his cynical eyes might better pursue the other Jones, his namesake, hid the enigmatical smile which just brushed his thin, firm lips.

"Yes—scum!" he repeated, with an inflection, however, that might have brought a questioning glance from a person of observation—or from one, possibly, less adept in concealing his thoughts than was Captain Marvin McGaw.

The *Saigon Queen* plowed on day after day at an average speed of about seven knots. The weather held miraculously fair for the time of year; and the vessel's crew, inadequate though it was to cope with any real emergency, had a moderately easy time of it. All but the stowaway, Jones, that is. For him there was little respite. The Captain seemed to have marked him out for the especial butt of his evil humor. At times there was a sardonic genius, no less, in the humiliating duties McGaw could invent for the little man to perform.

But Jones took everything, every insult, almost serenely. Some bright star of purpose—of single-track, unswerving purpose—must surely have been visible to his sight alone. Hope or certainty of some sort must have been acting as an all-powerful leaven within the tough fiber of his being, else mind and body would have broken under the first week of torture devised by Captain McGaw.

On the contrary, however, the stowaway seemed to thrive on abuse. His slight form began to fill. An embryonic muscle showed in a thin pad here and there on his tanning skin. And his haggard eyes—good, straightforward eyes they were, too—lost something of their harried look. But they continued to stare after Captain McGaw whenever he was about, as they had on that first day out, with a peculiarly intent expression.

IF the Captain noticed the glance which tagged after him with an infinite patience—and he could hardly have failed to note it one time or another—he never mentioned it directly. Which was peculiar in itself when one stops to consider, for McGaw was an outspoken man in cases where his was the right to command. However, he said nothing. He only increased Jones' labors—and smiled to himself in that saturnine way which was particularly his own.

But if the *Saigon Queen's* master kept his own counsel, the younger Jones—the stoker, so listed at least, who ate at the Captain's table—was less reserved. Perhaps it was only an innate sense of decency, a sympathy for the under dog, which first led him to seek fraternity with his older namesake. Or possibly he had an object of his own in view. At any rate, his overtures were met in a frank way that was neither servile nor presumptuous. And the friendship of Jones and Jones became a thing of latent possibilities no later than two weeks out of San Francisco.

The younger man at that time proffered an extra pipe and tobacco. The stowaway accepted the gift in the man-to-man spirit of its offering. And together, in those rare moments when the combined efforts of Captain McGaw and the black cook could find nothing more for the little man to do, Jones and Jones smoked up.

The International Date Line was astern, however, before the younger Jones dared to presume on a ripened friendship to put a question that had intrigued him for weeks. It was night—quite late, in fact. The old *Saigon Queen* was plugging along through a tropic sea. The stars hung low, like little winking lanterns in the sky. The sea was smooth—almost too smooth. There was no breeze. The soothing fumes of tobacco dissipated slowly sternward from the two men smoking outside the galley bulkhead. If ever, it was a moment particularly adapted for the exchange of confidences.

The younger Jones was staring out across

a dim expanse of sea, a sea which was weaving more and more of a potent spell about him of late. It was so big, so infinitely big and primeval—and yet so simple and restful in its manifestations—that it seemed to make small and commonplace the most exalting or harrowing of human experiences. It brought him the surcease of rest, mental rest, of a sort that had been foreign to him for a long, long time. And at such rare moments as this it even seemed to wash the wonted sadness from his eyes, the sense of tragic disillusionment; to soften the cynical curl of his thin, firm lips.

He broke a long silence.

"You've hated Captain McGaw for quite some time, haven't you?" he remarked, tentatively.

SECONDS ticked away. The older Jones drew in several sharp draughts on his pipe, silently. Then:

"I have reason to hate him," he said at last, gritting his teeth unconsciously on the amber pipe bit. As an afterthought, he added with simple directness: "I guess that's what kept me alive these last two-three years. Sometimes I wanted to die bad enough. And I was lonesome for all this, hungry for it—hungry!" With a gesture that, unsuspected, held the essence of drama, he waved a ragged sleeve out toward the dim, encompassing sea. "But I don't guess you can understand a feeling like that."

"And you couldn't come back to it?"

"I couldn't. I was in prison—in San Quentin." A shudder racked through the stowaway's slight frame. "Up there on San Quentin Point I could smell the salt water. I could see ships coming and ships going, while I had to stay put. At first I thought I'd go crazy. But I managed to keep hold of myself—waited and waited—remembering McGaw, *Captain* McGaw now, and what he'd done to me. . . . . I got out on parole last month—after two years. I'm—living for just one thing now."

The younger Jones believed that he knew what that "thing" was. He was genuinely moved.

"It must have been hell—or something a bit worse, even," he said. "But it's over now, old-timer. Most of us come a cropper, one time or another, through no fault of our own that we can see. It's hard to forgive, I know, but—well, retribution rights most wrongs by itself, I've come to believe, if you leave it alone—and give it time."

The older Jones faced him with eyes aflame. A stark and naked fury showed in them; and his dynamic little body was a-tremble with the surging of his emotion.

"Time! You can say that!" he cried. "You're young. Your future is ahead of you. Mine's behind me—gone. I'm broken. Every shipping firm on the West Coast has me blacklisted. I couldn't so much as get a berth as third officer on the dirtiest tramp in the Gillis & Hoag line—and God knows they're not particular any longer! Even McGaw doesn't know me now after two years of—" The fire suddenly left him. His voice lowered, half-apologetically. "But I shouldn't be annoying you like this. I don't usually—whine."

"But you're not annoying me. On the contrary. Wont you tell me the rest of it? Of course, if you don't want to—but I'm not asking simply out of idle curiosity." The younger Jones laid a heartening hand on the bowed shoulders of his companion. "We've both of us had a pretty rocky road to travel, old-timer. Mine's been a bit different than yours—easier or harder, according to the way one looks at it. But I have a feeling somehow that we—you and I—can help each other. And I'd like to have you tell me the rest—all of it—if it isn't too hard. Will you?"

THE stowaway smoked on for some time, making no response. Then, abruptly, with no other preamble than the instinctive squaring of his shoulders, he complied with the younger man's request.

"My true name is Dhu Campbell. I hold a captain's papers both for steam and sail," he began, in short, crisp sentences. "I commanded this vessel, the *Saigon Queen*, all during the war. I made a fortune for Gillis & Hoag in those years. I never lost a man from my crew in that time. And I never took a dollar on the side out of the thousands that might have fallen into my hand simply by holding it out. Gillis & Hoag—the old firm, that is—trusted me. That was enough. They were *men*."

Captain Dhu Campbell—freeing him now of his ill-fitting alias—did not note the odd look of distress that touched his listener's face at his stressing of the last word. He continued his story:

"Gillis and Hoag passed on soon after the Armistice, within a few days of each other, like stanch old partners would want to, I'd think. And that brought changes. I was given a new first officer—a friend of some office speak-easy—Marvin McGaw. And he fooled me from the start. He could be smooth enough, don't fear, when he wanted to be. I trusted him. And he was competent.

"We were routed to Japan and China at the time. And McGaw had been with me quite a while on the run when Congress passed that new narcotic law. A closer watch was kept on ships in the Orient trade after that. And it wasn't long until dope was found aboard the *Queen*—in my cabin! McGaw planted it there. I know that because his testimony at the trial was all a damnable lie. And he got my berth when I—when I went up for two years." The stowaway's voice took on an added bitterness. "I spent every last penny I owned trying to prove my innocence. I failed. Old Malachi Hoag and his partner would have moved heaven and hell to get me free. But their sons, sotting away the fortunes I'd risked my life time and again to help make for them, didn't lift a finger in my defense. No! They didn't even appear in person at the hearing. They didn't so much as answer the letters I sent—one after another—asking, begging them finally, to be character witnesses for me, to help me save my name—"

"Perhaps they didn't get them," Jones suggested. "Business letters are usually handled through secretaries or managers, you know."

"That didn't keep me out of prison for two years any the less!" Campbell responded grimly. "And they're going to pay through the nose—all of them—McGaw and Gillis and Hoag! That's what I've been living for. That's why I've been McGaw's doormat this trip without a whimper. I've got the evidence I need. I'm going to turn it over to the port authorities at Pagopago when we get there. And McGaw—Captain McGaw—will be taking his turn at wearing stripes before long, if I know anything about marine law."

"AND how about Gillis and Hoag?" asked Jones. Captain Dhu Campbell laughed mirthlessly.

"They'll pay, too! With their business going to the dogs, it'll hurt way down deep to pay a heavy penalty for carrying passengers without a license. The wireless operator is a beat, too. That'll count some more against them. It was their business to keep McGaw checked up. They can't wiggle out of the responsibility that way." A shadow of regret passed over his tense face. "I can't reach Hoag; not directly. He disappeared after that fly-by-night wife of his got her divorce. But he's already paid—paid with his pride and with his good name, the same as I had to pay. Did you see how the yellow papers took it up all over the country?" he gloated.

Jones nodded silently.

"He wont come back, either," Campbell prophesied. "The Hoags have pride. And after all the things she proved about him in court—tore his character to shreds—"

"But possibly those things were untrue," the younger man interposed quietly. "Perhaps Hoag trusted his wife as you trusted McGaw. Perhaps, likewise, he saw his fair-weather friends turn from him in scorn. Perhaps, too, after the exposé, he thought of revenge—was obsessed by it—until he ran away to save the one worthwhile thing remaining to him." His fingers pressed appealingly upon the stowaway's shoulder. He hurried on: "You're not a sea lawyer, old-timer. You're not a low snitcher. I know it. And you've still got safe your belief in yourself. For God's sake, keep it! For when that's gone—there's nothing—nothing left."

For a long moment the eyes of the two men clashed. And slowly, through some miraculous soul-alchemy that can turn gold to dross and back to gold again in the lives of men, the eyes of Captain Dhu Campbell—which had always before met squarely any glance—wavered and fell.

"You're right, I guess," he said, finally. "I can't forgive; but perhaps I—can try to be a man again." He turned his misted eyes to windward and shook his head dubiously.

The instinctive attitude of ship protection that every sea captain worthy of the name knows acutely, whatever his circumstance, reasserted itself in that moment. "I know these waters; there's a storm coming up. And we've only half a crew aboard, no wireless—and passengers. The *Saigon Queen* ought to be held up at Pagopago."

"It will be stopped. I promise you

that!" Jones said, his words tense and sharp.

Campbell, catching the tone of authority, looked up quickly.

"You're some sort of a marine inspector, then?" he hazarded. "Your name isn't really Jones?"

"No, it isn't Jones," the younger man replied, evenly, though he winced as from an agonizing blow. "My name"—he paused—"my name is Elias Hoag."

THE misted eyes of Captain Dhu Campbell widened, then narrowed—and hardened. With a sudden gesture of unutterable repugnance, he snatched the gift pipe from his teeth and flung it overboard into the darkening waters. It was one thing to be counseled by Jones, his friend and confidant. It was something vastly different to be preached to by Elias Hoag, the employer who had failed him so callously in his greatest need.

The younger man, sensing something of the new turmoil that had come surging into the stowaway's brain, remained silent, staring out over the stilled sea—harbinger of the storm Titans massing beyond the murky horizon.

Neither of these two sad figures—each immersed in his own tragic reflections—saw the thickset figure of Captain Marvin McGaw steal silently aft from the cover where he had been an eavesdropper—and a very interested one, indeed, upon the exchange of confidences just past.

NOW, contrary to popular conception in general, it is not the easiest thing in the world to explain satisfactorily a death by violence at sea. Lookouts are kept posted. And objectionable persons, sometimes, do not conveniently drop overboard without first putting up considerable of a struggle. Steel does not always fit neatly under the fifth rib at the initial stroke; and even that the heart is located exactly there—if, indeed, it is—remains an unknown physiological fact to numbers of otherwise well-qualified seamen. Nor do belaying pins fall like ripe apples from the rigging of tramp steamers.

Captain Marvin McGaw was in something of a quandary. As a matter of fact, he was too cowardly at heart to attempt any of the foregoing exploits, even had he been adept in their management—which he was not. Yet he realized the prime necessity of disposing of Jones and Jones, completely and for all time, before the *Saigon Queen* made Samoa. He knew that the stowaway had spoken the truth. He knew that Elias Hoag, regardless of the heavy fine that would apply to Gillis & Hoag thereby, intended to prefer criminal charges against him at the next port of call. There would be an inevitable sifting of his record, which would as surely bring to light other facts even more disastrous to his well-being. And well-being was a condition of body to which McGaw was an abject slave.

Something *had* to be done. Alone and unaided, the Captain would have to do it. An accomplice was out of the question. Accident would have to be the keynote, and plausible accident at that. Those facts were patent to McGaw. And tough facts they were, he found to his dismay when, in the seclusion of his cabin, he labored to fit them into the little jigsaw puzzle of life and death which, to save him from utter ruin, he must fit together flawlessly before his ship reached Samoa.

Unfortunately, McGaw had other considerations to infringe upon his meditations. As well as anyone else, he knew that a typhoon impended. The barometer had been dropping alarmingly since mid-afternoon. The Captain recognized the inadequacy of his crew to meet such an emergency. On the other hand, he realized that by crowding her the *Saigon Queen* might possibly make the safe haven of Pagopago harbor before the storm broke. But that would only advance the hour of reckoning, instead of delaying it. And Captain McGaw needed time—needed it desperately—to devote to the crucial problem before him.

McGAW made his first decision. The old *Saigon Queen* would attempt to ride out the hurricane on the open sea. If the storm was of sufficient intensity, the vessel might be blown hours—or days, even—off her course. The Captain hoped to high heaven that the latter might be the case. That would give him more time to perfect a plan.

With his protuberant eyes narrowed, Captain McGaw gave the mate on watch his instructions. Windsails were to be removed from about the engine-room ventilators. Hatches were to be battened down more securely. Lifeboats were to be overhauled. And most important, speed was to be reduced, so the Captain said, in

order to conserve fuel for the impending battle with the elements. And his orders were obeyed without question. McGaw was master of the *Saigon Queen.*

Returning to his cabin at midnight, he sprawled out on his berth—a gross and sinister figure. His fear approached panic—a condition in which cowards sometimes are said to conceive and execute acts that would appall a daredevil. McGaw was rapidly nearing that stage of desperation. His fear was not of the sea and its wrath; time had bred in him a certain fatalistic acceptance of the hazards of his profession. But he did fear the two men who, ignoring each other, still hung over the rail, staring with unseeing eyes out into the night.

McGaw cursed aloud. Damn them! Why couldn't they stand there like that—like damned mummies—until the typhoon swept over the vessel and blew or washed them overboard? Lost at sea! That would end their tattling. By their own responsibility, too. No tag ends of suspicion left dangling, either, to trip up anyone later. Lost at sea. . . . .

His flaccid features contracted into a repulsive grimace with the tension of his thought. But slowly those fatty ridges of muscle rolled back into place. The tensed body relaxed on the berth. Captain McGaw laughed softly, grimly. If his luck held—the phenomenal luck which had never failed him—he would win out yet. Yes! The plan that had come to him like a veritable inspiration offered a desperate gamble at best. But it offered, also, the only hope he could find that held the elements necessary for complete success.

That the scheme contained its quota of indubitable personal risk, Captain McGaw took as a mark of especial merit in himself. It made him out the sort of man he most admired; a man without pity or remorse, a man of resource and unflinching determination—a superman. And basking in the quasi-glory of this thought, Captain Marvin McGaw fell into a troubled sleep. According to his implicit instruction, he was not disturbed until the fury of the typhoon came roaring down upon the *Saigon Queen* from the bleak and menacing horizon.

FROM a post of comparative security in the eyes of the vessel, Elias Hoag, enthralled, watched the hurricane's advance. There was little wind at first. The seas, nevertheless, were billowing high and higher, and in a matter of minutes, they were mountainous. The lowering sky pressed down, constricting an uneasy world wherein the *Saigon Queen* was only a tiny pinpoint foreign to the primal elements of nature. Wind, sea and sky; these were the universe. And the wind was increasing now. Rigging whined and thrummed. Gusts of spray rattled high up on the laboring vessel. The black smoke, belching from her funnels, whisked away as if by magic. An atmosphere no less dark and dense swallowed it up.

Then, of a sudden, the typhoon unleashed its first fury. The ship heeled over to the impact of wind and water. A coil of rope, improperly secured, spun out like a burgee pennant. One after another the swirling waves toppled in over the ship's bow, boiling along the deck from end to end. In thunderous, shuddering impacts, the huge seas struck again and again. The ratlines and backstays, taut and vibrant as violin strings, shrieked in satanic discord. The wind was a screaming fury. It still increased—and increased.

All but suffocated in the welter of the hurricane that pressed about him, that clutched at him and pulled and all but dragged him free of his hold, Elias Hoag still clung to his point of vantage. He saw from there the hurtling masses of water sheet past, bow to rudder post, in a trice. He saw a lifeboat grind into splinters on its twisted davits. And powerless to give aid, he saw a luckless seaman, arms outflung and clutching, go bobbing out over the rail into the black maw of the tempest.

THE *Saigon Queen* drove on. Trembling, her aged timbers and plates groaning in protest, all but on her beam ends at times, she still fought a stubborn fight against the demons of the storm, while her screws, racing out of the water as often as in, threatened momentarily to strip or snap their shaftings. Twenty-four hours of this—the continued blackness of night throughout. No sun or star to take an observation by. The ceaseless pounding of the hurricane-lashed Pacific on a straining hull. And the face of the waters remained as starkly merciless of mien as were the cold eyes of Captain McGaw.

Before the storm attained its ultimate fury, the Captain gave over the bridge to his first officer and went down into the

Photograph by Wide World Photos.

**The wind was increasing. Gusts of spray rattled upon the laboring vessel.**

bowels of the ship—to see for himself that she was holding together, he said. He returned from his lone excursion with heartening word that all was well below. Moreover, he optimistically predicted that the *Queen* would live out the hurricane. She was stanch, for all her years; and there were those who could have borne witness that McGaw's voice trembled with prideful emotion when he made that statement. That this touching exhibition of feeling was genuine, none could doubt. No one but an idiot—or a Frankenstein—could be suspicioned of harboring disappointment at such a hopeful condition of affairs. And Captain McGaw was neither in the eyes of most men.

It was hours thereafter, too, when fire was first discovered in the cargo hold. And Captain McGaw was horrified with the rest when the report of this last blow of fate was brought to him. But he held himself courageously in hand. He did not forget the responsibility that was his as commander Everything that was humanly possible he did to preserve the morale of his crew. He swore roundly that he would make Pagopago in spite of fire, hurricane, hell and high water. And when, after a personal inspection, he was forced to agree with his officers that the flames were so far spread that the *Queen* would have to be abandoned within the hour, his same admirable efficiency and self-control persisted. He himself assigned positions in the lifeboats, arranging it with such skill that only one boat would have to chance the redoubled dangers of a launching to windward. And by chance it was, of course, that Jones and Jones—for McGaw still addressed them so, despite his contrary information—were designated to share this added peril.

Thus, with preparations to abandon ship completed with such dispatch, Captain McGaw had a last word with his three officers. It was a set speech.

"We've all done our best," he said, including himself in the general vindication. "If we've failed, it's from causes beyond our control. No one can be blamed for the loss of the *Queen*. It was an act of God." He held out his hand to each of the mates in turn, hurriedly. "Now, good luck and

—good-by, men. There are only the three boats; one for each of you to command. I'm not needed, and—well, I'm staying with my ship. You understand, of course. . . . ."

A tragic and heroic figure, not to be dissuaded, McGaw fought his way back to the bridge. The *Saigon Queen,* with boilers dying and headway gone, was already wallowing around into the trough of the sea. The wind had attained an unbelievable velocity. The seas were towering peaks, crashing their untold tons upon the ship wreathed in smoke and driving spray. The Captain was buffeted around cruelly. He could hardly stand. But from the eminence of the bridge, he was determined to watch the launching of the lifeboats. Inwardly, he doubted that any of the three would ever find a port. The single one to windward engaged his especial attention, none the less. He wanted to make sure of that.

McGaw saw the mate make his way safely back to the huddle of frightened men awaiting his coming. They were a subdued lot, the Captain saw—sheep-like in their attitude rather than in that panic of unreasoning fear one reads about. They even required some urging to take to the boat. McGaw could make them out only indistinctly, what with the thick, driving spray and the instability of his position. But finally the falls were manned at bow and stern. The little craft lowered away smartly.

McGaw held his breath for an instant, then expelled it in a whistling sigh of relief. The forward block had jammed. The lifeboat, keel tilted at a perilous angle, hung there suspended for a moment. Another sea swept the *Queen;* she rolled loggily, throwing McGaw back several paces. When he was able to resume his watch again, he merely grunted. Perhaps no more than five seconds had passed, but the little boat was gone—all but a shattered fragment which broke away from the forward fall as he looked.

McGaw smiled. That was that! He had disposed of his old shipmate, Captain Dhu Campbell, and his employer, Elias Hoag, in one neat stroke. He was safe. Should any of the occupants of the other boats escape—and that was doubtful indeed—there could be only praise for Captain Marvin McGaw and his courageous handling of a desperate situation. And under the circumstances, fire and typhoon combined, any hearing would be purely a matter of form. No knotty questions would be brought up.

Yes, Captain McGaw knew himself to be safe—as safe, that is, as any man could count himself at such a time. But he had planned the gamble with a full realization of the odds to be faced. And he was satisfied that, all things considered, he had haggled very shrewdly with chance. If he lost, notwithstanding, he would be no worse off than had he tamely waited for arrest at Pagopago.

THE master of the *Saigon Queen* shrugged composedly. Alone now on an otherwise deserted ship, he proceeded methodically to certain tasks he had in mind. From a secret place in his cabin, he removed a thin packet of currency—all in bills of surprisingly large denomination, moreover, for in common with most specialists in doubtful transactions he mistrusted banks. This money he stowed away in a waterproof belt next his skin. Lastly, he wrapped a number of signal rockets and some waxed hurricane matches carefully in a large square of oilskin, all made ready beforehand.

This secured to his body by a length of line, and with a powerful electric torch in hand, McGaw staggered to the door and turned the latch. As it opened, the door tore from his grasp and crashed back on its hinges. A wall of spray belched inside from the outer darkness. All but blinded by the stinging drops, the Captain hunched down his bull shoulders and lunged on aft. He could see nothing. He groped his way from hold to hold, like an Alpineer climbing a cloud-ridden crag. But the master knew every inch of his doomed vessel. The seas half buried him at times, threw him off his feet; the wind near suffocated him; and the driven spray spattered his raw face with the sting of fine shot. But McGaw kept on, with rare patience. Like one skilled wrestler grappling with another, he deserted a tenacious hold only when it could be exchanged for another more advantageous. All told it took him a good thirty minutes to fight his way aft to his goal near the stern. And by that time there was little more need for his electric torch. A lurid glow was rising above the inferno that had been the forward cargo hold.

An animal-like cry of relief welled from the Captain's numb lips as he saw dimly,

but close ahead now, the little pontoon life raft that was his ace in the hole, so to speak. Forgotten by all others in the turmoil of abandoning ship—or, perhaps, regarded by them as useless because of its lack of freeboard—it had played a major part in McGaw's calculations. He knew that it was provisioned and was capable of sustaining the weight of several men. And for all its frail appearance, its buoyant air chambers would ride it over the enormous seas like a duck.

Only an unskilled launching—or collision with floating wreckage—held any considerable chance of disaster. McGaw knew, moreover, that he could launch the squat little craft safely to leeward; he believed that he would be blown far away from the slower drifting *Queen* before that vessel began any major disintegration. And he had a plausible story all ready for the telling when rescue came—how, providentially, the raft had floated within reach of his exhausted hands as the *Saigon Queen* sunk beneath him.

WITH a glimmer of triumph in his eyes, McGaw worked his way closer. But, suddenly, he paused. An oath ripped from his sore lungs. He tossed the flashlight aside after focusing it an instant to make certain that his amazing discovery was no hallucination. Instinctively, he crouched. Fear gripped him, but he was desperate —and determined. The boats were gone; no witness would ever rise from the deep to point the finger of accusation at him. . . . .

With this sudden realization, his eyes became almost vacuous in their primitive hate. His jaw sagged as he snarled and snarled again. Anchoring himself to a stanchion with one long arm, his free hand groped within his protecting oilskins. It emerged, gripping a short, heavy revolver—the arm he would have used to cow his crew into submission had it proved necessary. And with this vicious weapon grasped in his stubby, powerful fingers, Captain Marvin McGaw resumed his slow, cautious progress toward the life raft, now only a matter of yards from him.

From the lee of the little craft two huddled figures detached themselves and, crouching likewise to hold themselves against the rip of the wind, awaited McGaw's coming. On the face of former Captain Dhu Campbell was mirrored an utter loathing. The features of Elias Hoag were drawn and stern, like those of a man who has seen murder and has assessed it with an unwavering judgment.

YES, the stowaway had fathomed the very depths of McGaw's strategy. From bitterest experience he had long since gained a panoramic view, as it were, of Captain McGaw's tricky character. And it had struck him immediately as being something rather more than a mere coincidence that both he and Elias Hoag had been assigned to the windward lifeboat. More than that, he had observed from a distance that brief but touching farewell between the three mates and the skipper.

To Campbell the little tableau had not rung true. He had every reason to suspect that McGaw was incapable of any such valorous martyrdom as going down with his vessel in a storm-swept sea. It was his immediate suspicion, therefore, that the Captain's seeming sacrifice must be the first step in some coldly-calculated scheme to improve his individual chance of escape.

With this for a basis of deduction, and with McGaw's plan—whatever it might be—obviously limited by such equipment as could be gathered aboard his vessel, Campbell speedily canvassed the situation. As well as McGaw, or better, he knew every foot of the old *Saigon Queen.* And before the mate returned to take command of the windward lifeboat, the stowaway's alert mind had visualized the ship, bow to stern, in every infinitesimal detail. And into his memory had flashed the significant picture of the little pontoon raft which had lain lashed into place unused for so long that it had been forgotten by all as a vital unit of life-saving equipment—overlooked by all but McGaw.

With this solution in hand, Captain Campbell found himself possessed of other and more sinister suspicions. Was it possible, he wondered, that the improvement in his physical appearance during the past weeks had made him again recognizable to his enemy? Had McGaw, suspecting impending exposure and ruin, deliberately set fire to the *Queen* on his long visit of inspection below? And the stowaway, horrified though he was by the thought, could only answer those questions in the affirmative. He knew McGaw.

CAMPBELL acted promptly. He drew Elias Hoag aside. He talked rapidly and to good purpose. And in those few

short minutes while Captain Marvin McGaw, a stricken figure, battled his way back to the bridge, Campbell and Hoag formed a retributive partnership. Campbell still maintained a stubborn hatred of his ex-employer. But above that was a duty, plainly manifest now, to bring McGaw to account for his last and most horrible crime. No less than a wholesale attempt at murder, this crime was; and as such the stowaway placed its requital before all personal considerations.

It had been Campbell's dearest hope that McGaw should be made to suffer as he had suffered—not through sudden death, which ends all finite pain but through a prolonged anguish of mind and body and soul. Prison bars; disgrace; the loss of fortune and of friends; a pariah existence beyond the pale of possible rehabilitation. And the stowaway had been terribly in earnest in that hope, for he had suffered innocently all those wrongs. But he gave over the chance of a kindred revenge, as he set aside his hatred of Elias Hoag, offering himself instead to the larger obligation that a sardonic fate had given into his hands to fulfill.

FOR Captain Marvin McGaw should and must repay his breach of trust—not to the one man or two he had wronged primarily, but to the account of the many he was offering in such callous sacrifice to his own love of life. It was a ship captain's heritage, his right—the first commandment in his code of the sea—that those in his keeping shall come all before him in the order and chance of rescue. McGaw, moreover, in the violation of this sacred covenant, was potentially a murderer. And the penalty for murder is death.

Campbell and Elias Hoag, in the poor shelter of the pontoon raft, saw the windward lifeboat and its helpless human freight crash into the ship's side—and disappear. Nor could they possibly have stayed the catastrophe. Sometime soon the boat must have lowered away from the burning *Queen;* and the tiny craft might easily have been a splintered wreck on its davits at any moment.

Again and again the seas rolled over the two who watched and waited. But they held to their vigil with a grim determination. Hoag was quietly patient. Campbell was keyed to the highest tension. He was not afraid of McGaw. Fear had not induced his partnership with Elias Hoag. His purpose in forming the alliance had been solely to make doubly certain that McGaw would not escape. His tension was a nervous reflex that instantly vanished as the Captain of the *Saigon Queen* drove his bulky form into view of the raft and its waiting occupants.

THE stowaway saw him first. His bleeding fingers clawing for any hold that would save him from being swept overboard, Campbell crawled forward on hands and knees. Elias Hoag, less effectually, followed behind him. And Captain McGaw waited, snarling, his revolver ready in his hand.

The *Saigon Queen* rolled up out of a smothering wave. For an instant her deck was all but clear. And in that instant Campbell threw himself forward at McGaw; and, simultaneously, McGaw pulled the trigger. The veins stood out on the back of his hairy hand, with the effort, but the trigger would not budge! Time and the corrosive action of salt air had locked the cylinder of the cheap weapon to its pin or frame with a weld of rust. It would not revolve.

But as Campbell collided with him, McGaw had overcome his first stupor of surprise. His left hand had closed over the weapon's hammer and, with his great strength bearing on this added leverage, the cylinder was slowly grinding around and the hammer was dropping back to a firing position. Elias Hoag was still several feet distant.

Another wave roared over the helpless *Queen.* With his revolver at last raised to fire, with Campbell straining to throw him to the reeling deck, McGaw was swept from his feet in a mad rush of water. Screaming in terror, he dropped his weapon and tried to retrieve a hold on the stanchion. He was too late. With the stowaway still clinging to him like a limpet, he slithered toward the stern.

HOAG saved them both from going over. With one hand he grasped desperately at Campbell's clothing and managed to keep firm his grip until the sea spent itself. And Campbell was still hanging to McGaw then.

McGaw, his face a pasty white, made good a safe hold on another stanchion and pulled himself erect. With his free hand he began a brutal beating of his small

antagonist. Every blow struck home. But Campbell did not flinch; nor did he attempt to retaliate. He merely hung on. He hung on and waited—and let McGaw beat him with that one free hand—while Elias Hoag passed a raft-lashing tight around McGaw's other wrist and made it fast to the stanchion just above the fingers that clung there so fearfully.

It was slow work. The *Saigon Queen* was now wallowing deeper and deeper into the seas. The wind hurtled like some solid mass against the straining, struggling bodies. Hands! Like a fear-crazed Laocoon, Captain Marvin McGaw writhed and fought to evade their implacable reaching for the one arm with which he was hammering Campbell into unconsciousness. But he could not shake loose the stowaway. He could not break free of the weakening grip that worked upward to his shoulder and, with bulldog tenacity, worked on down again to his elbow, his wrist. And Elias Hoag, as emotionless to all outward appearance as an executioner, finally drew tight the second lashing that handcuffed the Captain to the stanchion at his back.

Yes, Captain Marvin McGaw was to make good his promise. He was to go down with the *Saigon Queen,* in accordance with those immutable traditions of the sea which he had so long violated. Stripped of his money-belt and of his signal rocket case, he cowered there, a groveling craven, lacking to a degree even the outward semblance of a man. He whimpered. There remained to him not even that dim flame of courage which causes a trapped and helpless beast to snarl at encroaching death. He was broken—broken irretrievably by a prevision of the just but awful judgment about to be visited upon him.

But, oddly, the stowaway derived no satisfaction from this final collapse of the man who had been his enemy. On the contrary, it sickened him. It made him to see, and to see for all time, that vengeance is a pitiful attainment indeed in a universe where compensation is a natural force as certain and unvarying as the law of gravitation. A man dwells within himself a man. A coward, a thief, exists an alien to his own soul.

Perhaps there was an inkling of that discovery in the stowaway's eyes, in the straightforward glance of a man once lost who has found himself, with which he faced Elias Hoag. Perhaps the young shipowner, with his own tragic past to remember, had himself found a similar thought in those few seconds during which he had seen the forces of disintegration complete their work upon the spirit ruling Captain McGaw. Neither of them spoke. No agreement was reached in words. But it was a concerted movement between them that freed McGaw of his bonds. And between them they led the drooping, nerveless figure to the life raft.

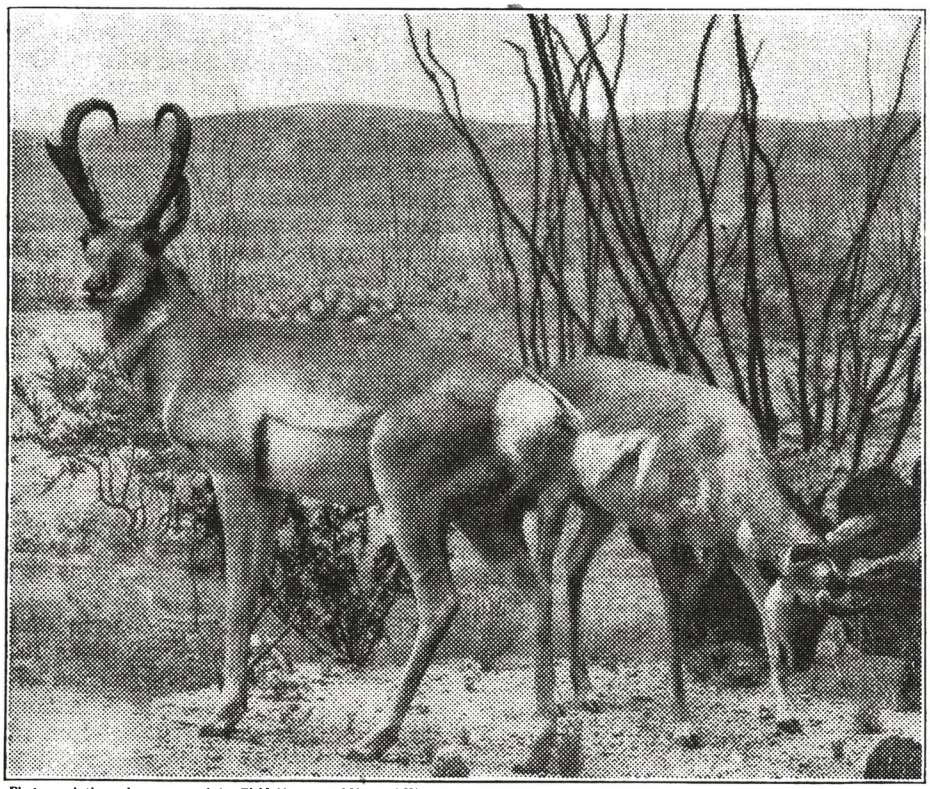
EXCEPT for the statement of a paradox —of which this is part—the story of Jones, the stowaway, is ended. His official record concludes with the loss of the *Saigon Queen's* log book and with the death of her Captain, who, it is generally believed, went down with his ship in accordance with the best traditions of the sea.

The death of Captain Marvin McGaw is set down in the archives of the British Admiralty, moreover, in transcript of the report forwarded by the commandant of the English patrol vessel, *Trafalgar,* which picked up the only survivors of the ill-fated *Queen.*

These three survivors were rescued from a small life raft, it seems. And the Admiralty record, which should be accurate, explicitly states the names and occupations of the fortunate trio. The first gave his name as Elias Hoag, co-partner in the Gillis & Hoag line of cargo steamers. The second designated himself Dhu Campbell, a sea captain in the employ of that shipping firm. The third—and here is an odd contradiction which seems to have remained quite unknown to the phlegmatic commandant of the *Trafalgar*—the third gave his name as Jones, a stowaway.

But we, who know there must be some error here, had best leave the record as it stands. Marvin McGaw is dead; a stowaway is of little consequence one way or another; and those most concerned in the matter, Elias Hoag and Captain Dhu Campbell—who, by the way, commands the new flagship of the rehabilitated Gillis & Hoag line—have seen fit to give no contrary testimony.

And so the Admiralty docket stands unchallenged, as it should, a brief and accurate enough summary of what befell the *Saigon Queen* on her last voyage—and all in accordance with the best traditions of the sea.



Photograph through courtesy of the Field Museum of Natural History. Julius Friesser, Taxidermist. Background by C. A. Corwin.

# *Blue Moonlight*

*The man who wrote "The Son of Wa Meru" here offers a most attractive story of the interesting but little-known American antelope.*

## *By* HAL BORLAND

THE herd had traveled far that day, for hunters had again appeared in their territory and this time had shot down five of the pronghorns before the herd could flash out of range. The canny old buck who led them had been persuaded by this latest display of invasion that safety for his followers lay elsewhere; so since the first snapping shots that morning old Prong had led his group steadily southward. Now the moon had risen, and the flight settled down to a slow movement in the general direction, with the herd feeding as they went, traveling leisurely, and sentinels always on the lookout.

The moon, first a brassy glow in the east, now became a deadened color, took on the cast of a blue bowl of clabbered milk, and slowly entered the rare blue stage. Its gleams became cool. The brazen luster died. Slowly the early warmth faded, and the moonlight became like the cold, hard, well-tempered glint of steel.

Almost as if prompted by the strange phosphorescent light, a young doe stalked to the edge of the herd. She found a deep-grassed valley, entered it, walked a dozen steps farther, and lay down. Half an hour later Flashtail was born.

Early next morning the herd moved on southward, but not far. The young doe whose fawn had been born in the moonlight went with them, but loitered even more than the others. A dozen times during the first few hours she hurried back

to the deep grass of the shallow valley, and at last, toward evening, her persistence brought the entire herd back there to feed and spend another night.

The pronghorns had come many miles from their former feeding-ground, now invaded by the hunters, and as the fawns had begun to appear almost every night, old Prong delayed in these new valleys a time. The youngsters must get their legs, must learn to follow the herd, before they could travel far.

GRASS was unusually good in the new country, and by the time Flashtail had learned the full power of his legs, thin as reeds, the antelope were fat enough to make many long, forced marches if need be. The fawns had all been born and were now beginning to nibble the crisp buffalo grass. They too had discovered their wonderful little legs, and with Flashtail most of them could outdistance even their elders, for short dashes.

This ability, Flashtail learned, meant safety for them—safety primarily from coyotes. As on that day when he was adventuring, feeding by himself in a shallow draw a hundred yards from the main herd, and a coyote attacked him! Flashtail had been dreaming, eyes half closed, and the coyote came up from one side through the tall grass. He was within a short leap of the fawn before Flashtail saw the danger. Then, just as the vandal rushed, the fawn spun about on his fine little legs and made off, the coyote almost nipping his tail.

But Flashtail, in his panic, had fled away from the herd. Now he circled back toward his elders, his legs spinning him along like the wind, and before the attacker knew it, he was in the very midst of a herd of intensely angry antelope. He forgot Flashtail, and in the immediate need of flight to save his own skin from the sharp hoofs, he completely lost all appetite. When the pronghorns returned from a short chase of the intruder, Flashtail strutted stiff-legged among his elders, proud of his speed, ignorant of his narrow escape.

Then, with the summer at its height, old Prong again took up the trail and led his herd farther southward. Instinctively he knew that those men many miles to the north of them would not remain far behind. And he knew of rough lands far toward the Arkansas River where his herd could feed in safety for at least another season.

Long, hot days they traveled across the rolling plains where not a tree broke the horizon. Alkali dust sifted up in the searing breezes. Enormous white clouds moved across the sky with a stately deliberation that made their shadows race like things alive across the broad plains far below them. Shallow brown water-holes reflected the rich blue of day and the star-pricked black of night.

Then the herd came to the first of the great breaks near the river. To the eyes of Flashtail they were a new world completely, a world of strange deep shadows that could not be walked on. He tried it once, and tumbled a dozen feet into a cut that fortunately was filled with loose dirt.

And for the first time he saw trees, strange, tall animals who had green hair and who waved incessantly with innumerable ears, but who never moved from their stands beside the great pools of water. They were strange beings, those trees, but to stand or lie beneath their wide arms at midday gave Flashtail a sense of the coolness of water without its wetness.

MANY suns passed in this new country, and the herd was fat and content. Hunters had not invaded here. Then came the great tragedy.

All day the herd had fed on the high hills to the north of the river, and at sunset they were eager to visit the pools for water. Old Prong, however, strangely demurred. The moon slowly rose, almost full this night, and began to shrink from its initial inflation on the east horizon. Then, just as the herd took the trail leading toward the pools, that clabber color came in a film over the face of the moon. The copper glow was blotted out. Even the silver softness fled. The gleams became keenly bright, like the hard, well-tempered glint of steel.

Slowly the herd wound its way toward the breaks. Old Prong was in the lead, and close behind him came Flashtail and his mother. The fawn, as always, hopped first to one side of the trail then to the other, never an instant either calm or serious, as his elders were. Gradually they all worked down from the uplands, in a path between two high, sharp hills. Below them, down where the blue moonlight could already be seen glinting on the surfaces, lay the water-holes, cool, inviting.

Suddenly the moonlight was blotted out for an instant in the eyes of Flashtail. A

body had been launched from the ledge just above the trail.

Old Prong leaped forward with a frightened snort, wheeling in the path. Flashtail's mother leaped back, snorting. All those behind drew up with a quick scuffle of hoofs. The fawn's eyes bulged as he saw a stranger in their midst, for on the path scarcely two paces ahead of his mother crouched a creature whose great eyes shone green, whose teeth were long and white, whose broad face leered ugly beneath his broad, low forehead and high, sharp ears. His feet were broad and his legs short; as he crouched there he snarled in a way that made the fawn's heart thump furiously.

A mere instant the pronghorns hesitated. Then with a snarl as he left the ground, the cougar leaped.

The young doe was at one side, fairly in the clear. The spring was at her fawn. But instead of wheeling and following the others back upward to the plain above,—and safety,—the doe sidestepped. She blocked the spring.

Flashtail never quite forgot that instant when so much happened—when the blue moonlight was blotted out in a flash, when the cat snarled its warning, when it leaped and Flashtail's mother seemed to twitch herself into the path. He always heard that crunch as she fell beneath the cat's leap, always when the moon shone blue after that.

Back up onto the plains the herd fled, far from the deep water-hole, all of them save two—the doe who had mothered Flashtail, and the old buck Prong, who had been cut off from his herd when the shadow dropped from the cliff into their midst. The doe never returned. Old Prong might as well never have, for when he did come, he found an ambitious young buck in his place at the head of the herd, and all the old buck's efforts to regain his place netted him were such a slashing at the horns of the vigorous young leader that he died alone in a dry watercourse before the moon had reached its last quarter.

VERY soon the herd again moved, this time back toward the north and the dangers from which old Prong had led them south. Flashtail, now entirely on his own, grew in sinew and sagacity throughout the season, and when the hunters scattered the herd in the first days of autumn, Flashtail and the half-dozen others who survived the encounter with repeating rifles struck back southward, seeking companionship and safety. That winter they spent on the wide plains at the foot of the Rocky Mountains where they peter out along the bad-lands of the Rio Grande.

Flashtail's second spring found him a nearly grown young buck, strong of limb and sound of wind, whose one weakness lay in a memory—a memory, however, which recurred with ever less frequency, until by his second autumn, when he again turned toward the southern plains, blue moons and accompanying phantom shadows of terror which sprang and clawed and killed, were but mere incidents in the dim past.

Then the band of antelope with which Flashtail had run ever since his mother's death began working westward, crossed the low mountains, and struck through the foothills toward the wide plains beyond. But one night, again in the blue moonlight, as they were threading their way down a shallow cañon toward a water-hole, a silent shadow once more dropped from a ledge above, and the herd fled in panic, leaving a doe to the hunger of a puma—a doe, and Flashtail's sense of security. And as the young buck and his companions dashed back into the safety of open plains again, Flashtail quivered like an aspen leaf, there in the moonlight which glimmered harsh and steel-blue.

Thereafter every ledge, every trail between sharp banks, every possible place for a shadow to lurk and drop on one's shoulders in the moonlight, was shunned by Flashtail. When he was thirsty he went to a water-hole or a stream whose approaches were broad and flat. When he quitted a high mesa, he went by a sharp declivity, if its lookout was wide, rather than by an easy descent between high banks. And on nights when the moon shone like clabber in a great blue bowl, Flashtail remained in the center of the widest plain he could find, quivering, nosing every breeze, nerves taut all night long for any strange vibration of the ground under his hard little hoofs.

Had he been a lone wanderer, this would have made little difference in his or any other pronghorn's life. It would, perhaps, have made him safe from the thousand-and-one deaths for his kind. It would have made his broad white rump fleeing in the distance a customary sight—if sight they ever got of him—to those antelope-

hunters who invaded his territory. It would have robbed many pumas and gray wolves of antelope venison meals many nights. But the others of his kind would have gone on as usual, wintering on the southern plateaus and summering where the grass was greener, more plentiful, dropping fawns in shallow valleys, battling even unto death for the leadership of the herds.

All that, had not Flashtail become a herd leader himself in his fourth autumn.

A BATTLE for leadership seldom arises from a single cause—that is, it is seldom the outcome of one disagreement. It is rather the result of a steady convergence of two conflicting bucks' natures until they meet in a battle whose immediate provocation may be as slight as a chance rubbing of shoulders.

So it was with this one.

Throughout the summer Flashtail had been experiencing a vague dislike for the old leader whose dark cheeks stood out in any gathering of antelope. Blackie was a veteran, with many scars on his thick old hide, and his sagacity amounted almost to intuition. Yet even the wisest of bucks fall, when their legs weaken, or their horns grow dull, or their eyes dim the slightest. In the herd were half a dozen young bucks who looked on the old leader as a sworn enemy, and not until they had fought it out with Blackie did Flashtail come to actual blows with the veteran. One by one the others were driven off or subjugated, some with fatal wounds, others with broken horns, all with aspirations shattered. Then came the day when Flashtail's encounter was inevitable. His presence with the herd had become daily more and more distasteful to Black-cheeks. Flashtail's manner of trotting stiff-legged about the does and showing off his fine head and beautiful horns aroused ever more and more resentment. The challenge to battle came of such an offense.

In the midst of such a parade Flashtail heard a snort of anger and turned to catch a glimpse of the old leader charging him. One leap carried Flashtail into the clear, but when he turned, he found Blackie still at his heels. Twice more he tried to escape. It was futile. Then he turned and met the attack head on. The battle was brief. When he had retreated before three successive charges by the red-eyed old buck, Flashtail saw an opening, drove home his horns, and the black-cheeked one was on the defensive. Never again did he lunge forward. Every movement was to guard against Flashtail's incessant charge. And in less time than it takes to drive off a coyote, the young buck had the leader of a few minutes before on the run. Blackie was deeply gored in half a dozen places, and his aging legs were weakening under this last attack of youth. He forgot his pride as well as his does, and fled. Flashtail pursued for half a mile, then turned about and danced high-headed and stiff-legged back to his herd. And at once he changed the course of movement, to suit his own ideas and to exercise his power.

FOR many days the antelope fed westward across the sage flats. The deposed Blackie never again so much as came to the top of a near-by hill to look at his erstwhile followers, and the usual group of young bucks who felt moved to challenge the new leader at his accession were downed or driven off without undue stir. But one of them caused any real trouble, Hop, who even in the face of gravest danger persisted in maintaining his high-headed, stiff-legged gait of showing off, instead of settling down to the gait of a fleeing jack rabbit, head carried low and legs spurning the ground in leaps so fast the eyes could hardly follow them.

Hop became insolent immediately Flashtail assumed the leadership, snorted contemptuously, and tried to lead a group of the does off in the very face of the new leader. Flashtail pursued and punished the upstart, but the next day the same thing happened. And not until Flashtail a week later attacked Hop so savagely that he broke one of the rebel's horn-tips, did he succeed in maintaining discipline. Then, though his spirit still remained at odds with his leader's, savage jabs in his ribs from prong-hilted horns he could not fend off persuaded him of Flashtail's rightness of thinking.

The season passed, and the herd had wandered west until shut off from further movement in that direction by that cleft in the desert slashed out by the Rio Colorado in its riotous chase toward the mudflats at the head of the Gulf of Lower California. Here Flashtail and his does and ambitious young bucks spent the winter, and with the spring, newly coated and horned, returned to their summer feeding grounds.

But this fall there were blue horizons far to the south that beckoned the leader, hills at the edge of the sky that must be green with rich pasture, valleys there whose waters must be cool and sweet. And, half undecided, he led the herd toward that distant skyline. Then one night another of those black shadows dropped among Flashtail's herd, downed a doe, and once more the moon rose blue on the east horizon. And Hop, last year's rebel, now with full, strong horns again, began to cause trouble in the herd.

Hop was not of a mind to pit his whole fortunes against the strength and sagacity of Flashtail; but whenever the leader left the herd, to stand alone on a high tableland and quiver in the blue moonlight, Hop would assume the leadership and take the does by devious routes into distant bad-lands, sometimes miles away from the spot where their true leader had left them. And upon Flashtail's appearance, when the blue scum had passed from the moon, Hop usually had the good judgment to retire to the background. He had not yet forgotten the previous season.

THEN came a night when the moon rose blue, and Flashtail drew gradually away from the herd, through the stunted cedars and up to the top of a small tableland. Soon Hop was urging the does in the other direction, and before Flashtail turned to look, his herd had vanished in the maze of cañons. For an hour, two hours, the buck stood there, eying every shadow with suspicion, quivering at the strange gleams. Midnight came, and he still remained entranced. But gradually the spell passed, and just before the first plumes of dawn the buck turned to seek his herd.

Mile after mile he followed the trail, through deep cañons, over sharp hills, until he topped a ridge and looked down on the herd at the bottom of a rocky cañon. As he poked his proud head into sight, the sentinels stamped and snorted their warning, and in an instant every prong-horn was all attention. Flashtail walked and slid to the bottom of the cañon and approached the herd. Hop, however, this time refused to retire. Almost at the moment the leader stood on the cañon floor, Hop charged him. Horns cracked together, and the heavy breathing of the bucks echoed back from the sharp cañon walls. Surprised though he was at the suddenness of the attack, Flashtail soon drew blood. Then he assumed the offensive, drove the usurper across the narrow floor in one charge, sent him fairly spinning on his small hoofs and drove him up the steep path to the plateau above and far out on that before he returned to the herd.

ALL that day the luckless Hop sulked at a distance, watching the herd and grazing fitfully. When Flashtail led them to water at a pool far out among the alkali flats, Hop tagged along well in the rear, circled wide for them to pass as they returned, and drank from the opposite side of the brackish puddle before he too went back.

Toward evening Flashtail seemed to sense a need for getting away from the defeated Hop, and led his does southward. Still the disgruntled buck trailed them, always at the same distance. The sun set behind the mountains in the west, and Flashtail was even more nervous. Dusk crept across the wide flats, and the old buck circled his little herd in impatience. Then the moon peered over the eastern horizon, at first a mere slit of fiery light on the hilltop. It grew, became a blazing heap, and Flashtail watched it, fascinated. Up it slid, until it rested there above the junipers, crimson and round.

With its red light still in his eyes, Flashtail again circled his little band. This time he saw Hop less than a hundred paces away, staring steadily at the herd. On around stalked the leader, and now he noted the moon shrinking, as it lifted farther above the dim skyline. Now he found himself facing Hop at fifty yards. And when he had hurried to the east and once more gazed at the new-risen globe, it had shrunk even more, had begun to lose that fiery richness. A scum of gray, almost silvery, mist was hiding that beauty.

Flashtail struck a nervous trot. Round he went, while the does stared at him, fascinated at the queer antics. Now Hop stood less than forty paces away.

Almost at a lope Flashtail hurried to the side facing the ball of Fate in the east. Surely it faded, grew hard and gleaming in its light. A moment he watched it, his eyes reddening in fear; then he hurried again to the side from which he knew Hop to be approaching.

The renegade was snorting this time, stalking closer, stiff-legged, the white bristles on his rump high in anger. An instant

the two bucks stood there glaring at each other. Every hair on Flashtail's back, from withers to tail-tuft, stood erect. With a wheeze of anger, he shook his horns warningly at the other.

Then Hop charged.

THE ground here was hard and smooth. Flashtail sidestepped and met the lunge with his own head lowered, plowed into the oncomer fiercely, staggered at a counter blow. Again he found his feet firmly planted on the hard soil, and lunged ahead at the gray ribs before his eyes. Bones crunched and distended lungs emptied themselves in prodigious grunts. Flashtail went to his knees in a mighty effort, met an oncoming charge in that position, struggled back to his feet.

Then he caught Hop full in the side with both prongs, and as he had this morning, he now drove him backward steadily. Old Flashtail was still master of such situations.

But Hop unknowingly swung his rump toward the east as he backed away from the punishing horns in front of him. And Flashtail, as he followed, pressing his advantage, caught a gleam from the moon as he turned. His red-rimmed eyes blinked at the moonlight, and his charge was relaxed midway. With a snort he raised his head to the steely disk above the junipers.

Suddenly his haunches quivered, and his nostrils sniffed hungrily for strength in air that seemed to choke his lungs. Inside his head black shadows were flitting, each clawing, biting, killing.

The moon had become a dish of clabber in a blue bowl.

Disconcerted a moment by the sudden change of tactics, Hop hesitated, caught strength from the air that choked Flashtail, and charged. Unprepared, the leader sprawled half over, scrambled to his feet amid a persistent attack, and without a thought of defense, fled.

BUT the path that Flashtail took was merely one away from that steel-gray disk in the east. And it led, not to the plains where Flashtail wanted to stand in silent awe and trembling until the gray scarf passed, but down a sharp gully and up on the opposite side between two cliffs whose walls rose high and straight. Into this place he fled, Hop two jumps behind. Suddenly the path fell away beneath his feet, and he almost sprawled in the bottom, so steep was the descent. Up the other side he dashed.

Then a black shadow crossed the dully glowing sky, sped downward. Flashtail's hoofs dug up the soil as he caught himself. He threw back his head, nearly stepped on his hind feet with his fore, and found himself in the very edge of the moonlight facing a broad, grinning mouth armed with gleaming teeth, and topped by two eyes green as water. The wildcat had missed his quarry, and now crouched for a second spring.

Behind Flashtail rose the blue moon,—Hop had seen the shadow drop from the ledge and had fled,—and in front of him crouched one of those shadows from his dreams. He stood now quivering between two evils, bounded side by side by the high cliffs. His red-rimmed eyes bulged in fear, but as on that night ages ago when the shadow had dropped onto the path ahead of his mother, Flashtail stood stupefied, almost hypnotized.

Angered at missing his quarry, the cat snarled. Still Flashtail was stupefied. Then, in the same instant, the cat unleashed his taut sinews, sprang toward the buck who faced him. The leap would have caught Flashtail full on the chest, with the cat's teeth burying themselves deep in his throat. Had Flashtail wheeled in flight, the cat would have landed on his broad white rump. But in the fraction of an instant, instinct overcame obsession. Down went the buck's head, and his legs braced themselves for a shock.

The cat had hardly anticipated such action. His double leap had been made so within a single wink of time that it seemed no such defense could be thrown up. Furthermore, this particular cat had never tackled a pronghorn buck; all his prey had been does and fawns. So he struck squarely on Flashtail's prongs.

Instantly the evil magic of blue moonlight was gone. Here was a spitting, clawing beast at Flashtail's head, reaching for his lifeblood. This was no shadow that dropped silently from a ledge above, dispatched one with a noiseless blow in the blue moonlight!

The buck lunged quickly ahead, cat perched on his horns. One pass the cat made at his neck, and with a jerk, down went Flashtail's head. The cat was crushed to the ground before his broad, splaying hind feet had even slashed the buck's face, and the sharp horns were

driven home, crunching ribs as they went. Then the buck jerked back an instant. The cat crouched for another leap, half left the ground. But this time he met sharp hoofs, for Flashtail sat back suddenly and brought his forefeet into play. A quick thud of two hoofs meeting a furry body, and the buck sprang into the air. Down he came stiff-legged, four sharp hoofs bunched. Another crunch, and a high-pitched cry of pain and anger. Still another leap, and another crunching of ribs.

Until the fangs ceased to snap futilely, the broad paws to strike, Flashtail pranced there in the narrow pathway. Such treatment had those four hoofs often given a rattlesnake. Now they dealt death not only to a wildcat who had sprung from his ledge too soon, but to a shadow who had crouched on a shelf in a memory haunted by the gleam of the moon.

THE buck ceased his frenzied stamping. His eyes lost their glint of anger. Even his bristly hair from withers to tail-tuft became less fully erect. And as he slowly turned there in the pathway and faced that east from which he had fled so recently, a pleasant moon, copper soft in its glow, lighted the plains. Its soothing beams penetrated now to the deep cut where the slashed and beaten body of a wildcat lay in the deep dust, eyes glazed in their greenish phosphorescence.

Calmly Flashtail returned toward the east, up the path down which he had nearly fallen, out onto the plain beyond. There he paused while his nervous tension relaxed, great brown eyes searching the rolling hills. Then a whiff of breeze from the northeast came to his quivering nostrils. At once he set off at a swift trot.

The herd were in a broad swale, some of them grazing quietly, others bedded down for the night. As Flashtail topped the rise, the sentinels stamped excitedly and snorted, loping back toward their companions. Those lying down were on their feet in an instant, and the entire herd stood facing Flashtail as he trotted toward them. From one side came Hop, at his stiff-legged, high-headed gait, eyes blazing, rump hair up in anger. But this time display failed. He met no moon-cowed buck whose fight had fled with the sunlight. Now he met an antelope who had vanquished every fear his mind or memory ever knew.

With a crunch of sturdy horns against strong-sprung ribs the two met, Flashtail's horns, Hop's ribs. The younger buck grunted, half in surprise, half in anger. He turned, only to meet a new attack so quick his eyes could not follow it. He flung his horns sidewise in an effort to block, and with a high-pitched crackling—Hop lost one!

As the older buck charged through, his horns had locked with the usurper's, but Flashtail was in mid-flight; Hop was standing. And almost as though a heavy bar had been thrust between his two horns and suddenly snapped sidewise, Flashtail's prongs caught those of Hop. One horn gave way; the younger buck's head was twisted until his neck was all but broken; and his whole body was snapped to the ground off its four agile feet. In a flash the old buck, now furiosity incarnate, was back at his fallen enemy, just rising to his knees. The jolt brought deep blood and bowled Hop over once more. But as Flashtail leaped to clear himself of the flying legs, he himself was tripped and stumbled. By the time he recovered and returned to the battle, Hop was gone. He knew when his time had come, and now he was dodging among the cedars fifty yards away, headed somewhere—anywhere but here.

HALF a mile Flashtail followed, but the chase was half-hearted after a hundred paces, and he soon returned. And as he pranced back to his does, head proudly in the air, legs mincing along stiffly, he realized that southern horizon. Surely there must be something more than a line of blue hills there.

Quickly he loped around his herd, that each one might see him. Then, settling down to a nervous trot, he led the way, at first coaxingly, then imperiously, straight away from the Pole Star. His eyes were set on that southern horizon, on the broad plains—though he did not realize them as such—where the Rio Colorado meanders through flats of silt carried down from those wintering grounds of the pronghorns at the foot of the Rockies.

And as he led the way, Flashtail only once caught a glimpse of blue film in the moonlight setting out the cedars like black beings in a purple world. Only once, and that from a corner of an eye. And with a snort of impatience at that eye's vision, he blinked—and the autumn moonlight was soft, copper-glowing.

# *The Golden Crowns*

*Wherein a strange treasure-quest among far Pacific islands comes to its unexpected and dramatic denouement: a story in a thousand.*

## *By* BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

THERE was Captain Clarity, little, gray, and full of scorn for treasure and treasure-seekers; there was Rutland Stewart-Ellis, big and fattish, restless as a dog that noses meat somewhere near; there was Jerry Dawson, spruce in his clean suit, and cool as the ice that was thousands of miles away from us, looking as if he didn't know, or care, that his reputation as a discoverer of hidden things hung that day in the balance. There was Ysabel, the Captain's daughter, with her black bobbed curls blowing in the sea-wind that swept from south, with her long Spanish eyes fixed, as the eyes of some of her explorer-ancestors may have been fixed, in Balboa's day, upon the huge Pacific, looking, looking. . . . .

There was myself, too. And I was looking where Ysabel looked; where Jerry Dawson, and Clarity—despite his scorn—and Ellis all were looking: eastward, to a point of blue that in the last ten minutes had begun to prick up from the deep. For that point of blue was Bosun Island; and Dawson, breaking at last the long reserve he had kept inviolate throughout our wanderings, had told us that here, or nowhere, were the gold crowns of our seeking to be found.

We were east and north of Ducie, veering into that enormous three-thousand-mile gap that is broken only by Easter Island, and a few small unmarked islets, reefs and atolls. Easter itself lay about four hundred miles away. We did not purpose to call there, Jerry, who was leader in all but name, having informed us that Easter was outside our plans. Personally I should have thought—but it didn't matter what I might choose to think. Everyone on board the schooner would have told you that; and so I suppose it must have been true.

I cannot describe the tenseness, the feeling of things about to be fulfilled, that held the ship and its adventurers that windy-blue South Sea morning. Gone was the indolence that for months had hung about the schooner like a magic mist through which we saw all things pleasantly, dreamily. It was as if a breeze had blown down from the far North, bringing with it a hint of the cold, the fierceness, the hard industry, born of iron skies, that was more or

less in the blood of all of us. Dawson tramped the deck as if he had been on watch; Ellis had stopped smoking, for about the first time in three months, and was busy casting up accounts of the trip. I felt—also for the first time in three months—that it was absolutely wrong to lie in a deck-chair and read novels at nine in the morning; a newly-awakened Puritan conscience drove me to open "Norrie on Navigation" (which I had always intended to study) and glance at its tiresome diagrams, in the intervals of watching Bosun Island.

ONLY Captain Clarity, detached as usual from the spirit of the trip, seemed to have the South Sea feeling about him that morning. He was rather conspicuously laid out in a deck-chair, with a Niué hat over his eyes, and he was to all appearance doing nothing, and doing it very hard. I don't know whether anyone else caught—as I did—a keen glance or two from the small gray eyes beneath the hat-brim, that boded ill for any Kanaka of the crew who should venture to presume upon that apparent quiet. Anyhow, the work of the ship was being done, and the black quartermaster, hands on the wheel, shifted a spoke or two, once or twice, in obedience to a barely perceptible nod.

I was not much surprised, therefore,—though I think the others were,—when Clarity suddenly burst out:

"I thought you was chaps had some sense somewhere in your skulls. I did."

"Oh?" was Dawson's comment.

"Well, and last night you tell me that I'm to believe a pack of sailors came and left God knows what of gold on that island, instead of taking it with them when they sailed away. It's not in reason, man. It's plain blank foolery."

"All the same, Captain," said Jerry, pausing in his eternal walk, "If anything's true about the treasure, that's true."

"What, sailors of two hundred years ago, who wasn't responsible to God or man or Board of Trade—left a fortune behind them, and went without it to South America, where all the fun must 'a' been, in those days, same as it is now?"

"That's so."

The Captain rose, spat once, forcefully, over the side of the ship, and returned to his deck-chair.

"I wouldn't have done it," he said, "if I was drunk—if I was dead—if the Day of Judgment was comin' up out of the sea in front of us, and the last trump was beginnin' to tootle. What kind of men was they, since you know all about it?"

"I wish I did know. I have a guess that they were Dutch, and that they visited these parts some time before Roggeveen did, two hundred years ago."

"Dutch!" said the Captain. "I never had any use for Dutch, but I'll think even less of them after that."

"Well, Roggeveen was a great man, Captain, and left his mark over a good deal of this side of the world. And I'm inclined to think his contemporaries knew what they were about, when they left their treasure behind them. I'm inclined to think they couldn't well do anything else."

"Why?"

"I hope to tell you that before very long."

"I don't believe a word of it, anyhow. Treasure cruises and treasure cruises—there's just two sorts: what the knowing ones gets up to skin the fools of their money with, and what the fools gets up to skin themselves with. Meaning nothing uncomplimentary to you, Mr. Dawson!" He put his pipe back in the corner of his mouth, drew his hat over his eyes, and seemed to doze again. But nevertheless that unsleeping glance from time to time raked the ship and the horizon, regularly as a beam from an intermitting lighthouse. The island was drawing near.

WHAT one saw, first of all, was an immense plaque of brilliant milky-green set down in the blue sea like a meadow fallen from fairyland. The island in the middle hardly caught your eye at first; it was dull and insignificant, compared with that arresting shout of color. When one did look at it, one saw it to be tallish, perhaps ninety feet, steeple-shaped, and covered with brush and trees. Inevitably, from its dusky outline, the eye fled back to the nameless, marvelous green of the surrounding lagoon, and the crumbling foam-wreath that surrounded it in a perfect circle.

"Marooner's Ring!" I exclaimed.

"If it is not," said Jerry, his eyes fixed on it as the eyes of Moses may have been fixed on the Promised Land, "there is no such place."

"Your limit," I ventured, "seems to have been a circle drawn round a point not very far from here." Jerry had told me much,

but not everything; he had seized on my vague ideas and given them substance, and then—with his irritating, inevitable reserve—kept the heart of the matter from me.

It seemed that the reserve was not broken yet. He did not answer me, but by and by turned to Ysabel, who was standing on the poop beside him—always, unconsciously, those two seemed to gravitate together as needles floating in water, or ships in a calm at sea, will slowly, surely find one another.

"What has the Señorita to say?" he asked her. I had noticed that for some time now he had avoided using her own name. Ellis fidgeted like a restive horse if Jerry called the girl "Ysabel," and with "Miss Clarity" he would have nothing to do.

Ysabel surprised me by her reply—or would have, if I had not known how the two read each other's minds:

"The other expeditions," she said, "looked only at plain atolls, just as you did in the beginning. After we'd been to Wicked Island, you knew there was an island in the middle. Of course, Eighteenth Century people, who knew very little about coral islands, thought this reef and the lagoon most awfully remarkable, and they called the place 'Marooner's Ring' when it ought to have been 'Marooner's Island.' Do I get a mark, Teacher?"

"You get all the marks," said Jerry, looking not at her but at the growing bulk of the island. "All the marks there are or ever will be."

"How many million marks for sixpence?" japed Ellis; he was the sort of man who can never resist the chance of any childish play on words. Nobody answered him. The island was growing near; we could see a narrow beach, backed by bare cliffs; birds flying over sunstruck starveling woods. Not a house, not a human being.

Clarity, with consummate skill, picked out the one opening in the reef, and sent his ship spinning through it, on the sweep of the high tide. The passage sucked us in as a man sucks in an oyster, and immediately we were gliding on the still, malachite surface of the lagoon.

"It's uninhabited," said Ysabel delightedly. "Do you think that 'we are the first who ever burst' into it?"

SHE looked more than ever like a gallant mischievous lad this morning, dressed as she was for landing, in one of the cotton suits with patrol collar that are worn all over the tropics. Clarity answered her, a little acidly:

"Not the first by about fifty fools, I dare reckon. All these islands and atolls have been raked over with a small-tooth comb by people with the treasure-hunting bug. And if your mother," he continued without a break, "could 'a' seen you in that rig, she'd 'a' died. She was one with a figure," he went on. "You girls nowadays is like a fathom of pump-water; I don't know how you do it, nor where you put your dinners. As slick as weasels, you all are. I suppose the young chaps like it, or you wouldn't *be* it. In my time we liked girls with some shape to 'em, and they supplied the market according. I reckon your boys"—he suddenly attacked Jerry, as if the latter were responsible,—"will fancy 'em three-cornered, and her girls will *have* three corners exact to specification. It's a wonderful world we live in."

Ysabel, quite unconcerned by these terrific prophecies, was examining the land through a glass. When the roar of the anchor-chains had died away, she remarked:

"There's a round white thing lying on the beach. It couldn't be a life-buoy of course; but it—"

Clarity's eye was trained to his own glass before she had done speaking.

"It is a life-buoy," he remarked, and began humming to hide his dismay.

*"Whisky for my Johnny—"*

he sang, under his breath, as if some one on the distant island might hear him, and come forth.

"Mr. Dawson, I reckon some one's been here before you."

Dead silence followed his remark. The two glasses were handed round; I looked, and Jerry looked, and Rutland Stewart-Ellis looked, and each of us saw what Clarity had seen—a life-buoy, new and clean, lying on the narrow beach of the island. A raging tiger would have been, to most of us, a pleasanter sight.

Jerry was the first to speak. He was smiling; men of his kind do smile when hurt or hit, so I took small comfort from that.

"It may have drifted in from outside," he said. "There's no use worrying before one must."

"Of course it's drifted in," said Clarity. "But it has drifted off of something that

was pretty near the island, I reckon, to make the passage the way it done. It's about a million times as likely that a ship has been close in here, and dropped it, as that the buoy has drifted in on its own from somewhere thousands of miles off, and just got into that current of the passage by sheer luck."

WE could all see this, and it did not cheer us up. Interest in the island itself had suddenly flagged. What everyone wanted to know was the name on the buoy, and the condition it was in. On those circumstances might depend the success of our quest.

Clarity did not keep us long waiting. He came with the boat himself, and leaped off the bow before she had touched ground. Jerry and he raced up the beach together, and made a dead heat to the buoy.

"*Anaconda,*" shouted Jerry to us. "Quite new and clean. Can't have been here more than a day or so."

"What's the *Anaconda?*" shouted Ellis.

"Chilean gunboat." They were walking back to us. "What do you think of your treasure-trip now?" demanded Clarity, scorn in his voice. I took it that he was anxious to cover up his recent uncalculated display of interest.

"I'll have to take a look round before I can answer that," replied Jerry. He looked so cheerful that my heart sank to my "sneaker" shoes. "There's something I haven't seen, and Clarity hasn't seen, and he has," I thought to myself. "And it's something perfectly rotten." Because when Jerry was succeeding, and things going well, he always carried a face as long as your arm.

"Where are you going to look round?" asked Ellis sneeringly. He seemed to have swelled up like a toad; his face was bloated with anger and disappointment. "I don't see any dashed thing on the dashed island but a lump of rock."

He had spoken truly; the whole of Bosun Island, except the little beach, was comprehended in the steeple of stone, thinly feathered with trees, that stood out above our heads. It was on this that Jerry's attention seemed to be focused. Not that there was any place upon it where treasure could be concealed—as well try to hide it on Nelson's Column or Cleopatra's Needle. No, something else seemed to attract him, and not slightly.

"I wish," he said to me, still with that pleasant smile on his face, "that you'd try to get Ysabel and her father between the pinnacle and the beach, and keep them there."

"Why?"

"Of all the why-birds! Because, since you must have it, I don't like the look of the splintered rocks on top there."

I could not say "Why?" again quite so soon, though I wanted to. I could only collect Ysabel and her father—nobody seemed troubling about Ellis—and keep them in the area indicated, by wild guesses as to the best places for digging operations. The Captain was obviously interested, as obviously determined not to show it. Ysabel, however, drank my words like honey; for about the second or third time on our long voyage, she seemed to know that I was really there, an existent human being. . . . . I fancy now—though I did not then—that my supposed possession of Jerry's confidence was the true magnet.

JERRY, meanwhile, had gone up to the top of the high rocks, and was standing there, looking far off through a glass, as if he expected to see the crowns of Marooner's Ring floating about in the Pacific Ocean. I heard him whistling, a thin, gay whistle that I didn't like.

He came down again, and said we ought to get together and hold a council. I noticed that he collected the party on the sunny side of the pinnacle, where we had landed, instead of going round to the shadier part. Also that he tactfully shepherded in anyone who wandered off to the wide plateau of sand, where you could see all round you.

"Is there something he doesn't want us to see—and what on earth did he mean about splintered rocks?" I asked myself. I was puzzled. Jerry was secretive enough in his way, as are most men of his type, but it was not his way to keep any of the facts of his investigations back. On the contrary, he flung them in your face, and laughed to see how little you could make of them. No, I never said he was a prize-book hero; he had as much conceit as you have, any day.

There was nothing for it but to sit down on the beach with my suspicions and my sun-umbrella, and wait to see what might be going to happen. I didn't like the way things had been happening, so far. I had never thought to land on the veritable island of our dreams, in an atmosphere of

fears and warnings; I had thought to leap on shore pick in hand, and start madly digging, cheering and singing the while—or something similar.

Jerry lit a cigarette,—I think to gain time,—and presently said: "Well, we're on the island, all right, and no one has been before us."

It was as if an electric shock had run through the party—missing myself; I was insulated by that gnawing little doubt. Up went their heads as if moved by a string; two eyes of sunlit black, two of staring blue, and two of hard gray (Clarity's pretense of unbelief was wearing very thin by now) fixed themselves on Jerry's.

"How do you know?"

"What are you going to—"

"Where are the crowns?"

The exclamations burst out all together, from Clarity, Ysabel and Ellis.

"I know," said Jerry, nursing his cigarette, which seemed to be damp, "because the descriptions all fit, and everything matches. The *Beulah* must have been wrecked hereabouts—"

"Ay," broke in Clarity. "It was always reckoned so, but nobody knew till that paper turned up."

"And the man on the Ghost Island—you remember, Joe."

I said I remembered.

"He told me he had found the gold bowl he wanted to pay us with, under the white rock. There's the rock."

All of us knew about the rock; three heads were turned to look at it. It was a small subsidiary pinnacle, white with the droppings of seabirds.

"This place is not a pure atoll," went on Jerry, indicating with the point of one sea-browned finger the circular sweep of lagoon that surrounded, like a shield of malachite, the central boss of the dark-green islet and narrow ivory beach. "But it would have passed for one, with people who weren't particular over names—and the very doubtfulness of it would cause confusion about which and where. An atoll, of course, is just a plain ring-shaped reef or island, with nothing in the middle. Well, as you know, about half the atolls in the Eastern Pacific have been marked down as Marooner's, one time and another."

"If we have found the place," cut in Ellis, "I don't see that you have much to be proud of; you got two jolly good hints. I wonder where you'd have been without them?"

"Just where I am, only a bit later," retorted Jerry. "Because I had something to guide me that the others hadn't. It was only a question of time. Time's money, I grant, in a job like this, and the hints, as you call 'em, helped. But—"

WE were all craning and staring now; even I had forgotten the uncomfortable presentiments that assailed me earlier; even Clarity had laid aside his pose of skepticism. I think we all had our mouths open like frogs, literally gaping to hear the rest. For it was plain, from Jerry's tone, that the great secret, the golden secret, kept from us so long, was about to be revealed.

Surprisingly, just there, he stopped, and seemed to listen.

"I say," he said, "do you hear anything?"

I did not, and said so. I was wild to get at the rest of the tale. More than all the others, I knew that Jerry had a big card up his sleeve.

But he would not go on for a minute. He asked Ellis if he had heard anything, and made him listen. Ellis listened, and shook his head, and the Captain said he thought we'd have some weather by and by; and there was a silence, during which we all listened hard, for we knew not what. I heard the Captain breathing through his nose, and a faint tinkle of corals afloat on the outgoing tide, and up above, the thin whistling and mewing of gulls. Nothing more.

Jerry appeared to put some preoccupation or other definitely aside. He rose to his feet, and said:

"If we don't get it here, it's nowhere in the world. This is by far the likeliest place within a thousand miles of—Easter Island."

I jumped to my feet with a yell. I knew now.

"Say it again!" I cried. "The crowns of the giant stone images—they were gold!"

"You have it," said Jerry.

"And the men who got there before Roggeveen—of course they did! And of course no boat—smallish boat—could make a long voyage with—that—on board. Jerry—Jerry! Oh, Lord!"

"What're you all talkin' about?" demanded Stewart-Ellis. "What's the tosh about Roggeveen and Easter? Where's our treasure?"

"I know about Easter Island," burst in Ysabel, her eyes two dark moons of wonder.

"It was in 'General Information' at school. Easter Island has stone images fifty feet high, with enormous red tufa crowns on them, and nobody knows who made them or when. Some people suppose they had something to do with the Aztecs—Incas and all that. The people who filled a room with gold to rescue the Inca. And they didn't rescue him, because Pizarro cheated," she added for our information.

"Fifty feet high!" repeated Ellis, his face lighting up with sudden greed. "I saw—by Jove, what size would their crowns be?"

"The size of a big sponge bath."

"Gold?"

"A sort of gold sheeting. Like the Tutankhamen things. You know there's been some connection suggested between Central America and Egypt. I figure the tufa crowns were sheeted with gold, in some cases at any rate, and that the sheeting was easily detachable. I was pretty near certain of it even before I saw the bob from the top of one of them on Ghost Island."

"Was that what the bowl was?" I cried.

"Yes. I'd gamble my life on it."

NOW why, I wondered, should pretty Ysabel turn suddenly pale, at that word, and turn her face away? I was to know before long—to remember also. For the moment I could not keep my attention on anything but the vision of the gold. Clear before my eyes rose pictures, such as almost everyone has seen, of the mysterious, stately images of Easter—the giants sitting through a thousand years with faces turned to sea—crowns, cap-shaped, of red tufa, on their enormous heads.

Incas and conquistadores and rooms filled with gold—Tutankhamen and his chairs and chests and coffin, gold-sheeted—the immemorial pagoda of Burma, with its golden casing from earth to four hundred feet up in the air: things like this chased themselves through my brain. It was possible—with Jerry as sponsor, it was more than possible; it was true.

Some of the links in the chain of evidence were missing—have always been missing, since. Jerry has never been able to tell me whence and why the idea came to him of the Easter Island images. All that I had guessed at was Inca gold of some sort, Inca crowns and jewelry, perhaps, concealed on an unidentified atoll that must lie within a couple of weeks' sail of South America. Jerry Dawson, who had a sense (I always suspect) that other people do not possess, jumped the vacant places, and arrived at the certainty of the richer, infinitely more wonderful treasure. But even Jerry could not tell me how.

In that moment, nobody asked questions. We wanted to get our hands on the gold, instantly. We had brought picks and spades with us, and a cartridge or two of dynamite, also fuse. But nobody knew, even on that tiny islet, where to begin the search.

"Let's have your view of the matter," Jerry asked Ysabel. I was sure that his own mind was already made up; still, it was clear he took pleasure in drawing out her opinions.

Ysabel, standing in the sun and the wind beside us, made a strangely charming picture in her male attire, and one that suited well with the place. There was always something of the sea-breeze about Ysabel; the tossing of her dark silky curls, the sway of her light body upward from the ankles seemed to surround her with an aura of gay winds, wherever she went. If you have ever been in love with a Spanish, or half-Spanish girl, you will know more of what I mean than books could tell you.

Her eyes had to pass Rutland Stewart-Ellis and myself, on the way to meet with Jerry's. As homing birds speed over an empty landscape, the light of her glance swept us, went by, and rested.

Ellis never saw it; his eyes were dimmed with the shine of those gold crowns; what I saw, and felt, matters to none.

I was sure then, and am sure now, that her reply was drawn from Jerry's mind, as the sky takes dew from the sea. Still, it startled me a little, it was so sure.

"I am to imagine," she said, "that I'm a sailor of two hundred years ago. And I've landed with other sailors. And we've carried off the gold crowns of some of the images. And we've probably mutinied to get a chance to do it, and maybe killed people. It's been hard going; the ship we stole was probably very, very small, and there's been bad weather, and the gold weighs her down. So we must land anywhere, get rid of the gold, and sail again to South America for a larger boat."

She paused a minute, still looking at Jerry. I don't know to this day whether she was hypnotized by him. I think not. I think it was something simpler, much older—something that has been told over

and over again in trampled, handled verses like:

*Two souls with but a single thought*
*Two hearts that beat as one.*

Just while one wave had time to burst in creaming foam on the shore of the lagoon, she stood silent. Nobody interrupted. Then she went on:

"We wanted a big hole, and something to mark it by. And not too near low tide, for fear of storms. But we weren't careful enough after all, because you see the top of one of the crowns got washed out!"

"I say, did the rest?" asked Ellis eagerly.

"Ysabel's talkin' nonsense, and you oughtn't to be upholding her," commented the little skipper, severely. "What she ought to be doin' this minute is to be gettin' the tea ready out of them thermal bottles, and layin' the cloth, not yarnin' away there in trousers like an old shellback passin' the dogwatches."

Ysabel had been in the habit of serving us, prettily and simply, with our afternoon tea, more to please her father than anyone else. But this was no time for thermoses and tablecloths.

"Let her be, Cap," said Ellis sulkily. "We want to hear."

"Oh, if you want to," said Clarity, and sat himself down again, humming, with an air of detachment, the old, old chantey that we had not heard for long:

*Farewell and adieu to you, fair Spanish ladies!*

Not at all disturbed, she continued, through the windy sounding of Clarity's tune:

"We saw where the ground under the hill had been split a little; by an earthquake maybe, and we thought that would do. We were very tired. We rolled away all the rocks we could, and then we rigged a block and tackle—"

"Ysabel, how do you—"

"Stop!" I said sharply, to Ellis.

"And we hauled the crowns up one by one, pushing as well. It was dreadful work. We lay down on our backs, and some of us cried, and said we should never see Holland again. We got the crowns in, and we couldn't cover them that day, but next day we were better, and we threw rocks and rocks, and then we cut down a sort of cliff, of sand, on the top of it, and we sailed away."

She stopped again.

"That's all," she added suddenly, lifting up her head, and staring about her.

"Plain 'istirricks," said Clarity. "You'd ought to have a jug of water thrown over you. I always did it to your mother."

But Jerry Dawson looked at her, and in his eyes I saw the light that never was on sea or land. . . . . Long after, he told me that she had read, almost word for word, what was in his mind—what he had gathered, and guessed, and caught with his own invisible aërials; what, I think now, was in all probability the true story of the place.

In the same minute (he told me) he had known for certain that even if Ysabel held to her strange obstinacy about Ellis, it would not separate her and himself—in the end.

"When you've got a woman's soul as fast as that," he said, "the rest is bound to follow; the greater will bring the less along after it."

"What if she had been married?" I asked out of curiosity.

"She couldn't have been," was his answer. "All nations know it's only a girl's white soul that can show the invisible writing."

I don't know that I understood him. I never understood Jerry altogether. As I've said, he belongs to the next generation; his own children and grandchildren will be more his contemporaries than I.

But to return.

THE significant moment passed; some of us had not even noticed it. Once more the treasure was in the foreground.

Now that Ysabel had said so, we could all see that the filled-in crevasse must be the spot, if any. It is impossible for anyone who has not hunted gold, to know the lust, the hunger that possessed us, once we had realized that almost under our feet, in all probability, lay treasure beyond reckoning. We almost fought each other for the picks—Jerry, Ellis, myself and the skeptical Clarity. We had a couple of native sailors with us, but we wouldn't even allow them a chance; we wanted under that sun, in the breathless heat of the brazen rocks—to do the work ourselves. I still remember how the pick-handle blistered my useless palms almost immediately; how it grew slippery with sweat and twisted; how soon, very soon, I found myself panting like a man who has run a long race, and felt the iron turn to ponderous lead.

When I dropped the pick, some one else

seized it; in a moment Ysabel was swinging away with the best. And if you have never seen a beautiful girl, dressed as she was dressed, working with a common long-handle pick, you do not know what the poetry of motion can be.

Pick-work is graceful enough in itself; the commonest rock-chopper becomes a model for statuaries, once he begins that fine backward swing from the hips. But when Hebe herself takes the pick—

I have a little drawing of it; I am not much of an artist as a rule, but just then, for five minutes, while I stood back and watched, my hand was inspired. That bit of an envelope, sketched on with red pencil, is the most precious thing I have.

NEVER, as long as life remains in this body of mine, shall I forget the moment that came soon after—when the picks had been changed for the shovels, and the shovels, in their turn, laid aside for picks again. You would have thought the opening crevasse held some dangerous monster, so fast and hard were the blows rained down into it. I would have taken a pick now if I could have got one—I was rested enough to begin again; but you might as well have asked for the eye out of anyone's head, as the tool he—or she—was swinging.

I don't know how long it was—it may have been half an hour, or twice that time—before I heard an unforgettable sound: the glorious ring of iron upon gold. Take a gold cup from some one's race trophies, if he will let you, hit it with a hammer, and you will hear the live, splendid note that we heard. But you will hear it in miniature only. I think no one now living, save the little band who stood on the atoll that day, has listened to the ringing boom of an iron pick-head on a hollow mass of gold as big as a barrel.

I am not quite sure what I did after that, or what anyone did, for a few minutes. I remember kicking Ellis' shins, as if I had been ten, and getting my head punched, as if he had been fifteen, because I had got in the way, and wanted to get in the way some more. I recall, too, that there was a great deal of scrabbling with hands, and gravel and sand flying, till somebody shouted for the shovels, and everyone began digging again—inside the incredible gold cap that had been unearthed. I remember, too, that I was just a little disappointed; I had somehow pictured the crowns on the lines of those worn by chess kings, splendidly battlemented—and this colossal thing was a sheer tub. Thin, too—it looked like dented paper. . . . .

But when the sand and gravel and loose stones were out of it, and the whole party began to heave, then we saw what we had got. One might just as well have heaved at the foundations of St. Paul's. Not a stir came out of the battered, blackened mass; not the smallest response to the fully exerted strength of four whites and two native boys. It did not need the sparkles that showed where picks had struck, to tell us that this was indeed none but the royal, the glorious metal.

"Avast heaving," ordered Clarity by and by. "Boys, get me that length of chain from the locker, and be sharp about it!"

I dare say they were sharp—being Clarity's crew; but it seemed a very long time before they came back from the ship with the chain. A long time, too, before they had it slung under the mass of gold, and secured above. Time, in such moments, is reckoned by feeling and thought; and we were living a year a minute. The thoughts that chased through my head in that half-hour or so would have filled volumes: dreams of my share, and what I was going to do with it; calculations, badly mauled for want of a bit of paper, about ounces, pounds, pounds Troy, and values taken at four guineas or so the ounce; strange shots of fear, like toothache pains of the mind, when I recalled Jerry's earlier uneasiness; over all, a dim cloud that dulled the splendor of our victory, as years and rains had dimmed the shine of the gold, because—because I had no one who might share it.

Well, they got the chain underneath at last; and then, Clarity directing, everybody, myself included, tailed on and began to haul. For the first and last time, I learned the true use of those eternal chanties. I don't think we should ever have got the mass out of the hole, but for Clarity and his

*"Haul the bowline—the vessel she's a-rollin',*
*Haul the bowline, the bowline haul!"*

"Heave, bullies—heave and wake the dead! Put your back into it, you Ellis."

*"Haul the bowline—the skipper he's a-growlin',*
*Haul the bowline, the bowline haul!"*

And more verses that I like to remember, years after the ache has left my knees and shoulders.

Out she came at last, with a bumping ring that drowned the chantey. Clarity stopped, and wiped his forehead; he had been sweating almost as much as the rest of us. There was an immense silence; in the midst of it the small, careless waves of the lagoon sounded on the beach, and yellow-footed gulls took wing from the rocks above, crying.

I had got back strength, and was standing upright once more, opening my mouth to say I do not know what, when the words were stopped by an extraordinary sensation of impending disaster. So strong was it that breath stopped too, for a moment, as it stops in the teeth of a furious blast. Before I had time to catch my wind again, the terror was upon us.

THERE came from far away behind the rocky pyramid, a dull rending boom. As if it had been a signal, the top of the island almost immediately, bowed itself over and fell into the sea, with a terrific splash. The whole place seemed to rock; the landscape dissolved. Spires of stone toppled; fountains burst up in the lagoon. There was a terrible screaming in the air, mingled with crash on crash from the impending peak of the island.

Over and over, the rending boom burst out, shaking the heart with that dread sound that so many of us knew in the red years 'fourteen to 'eighteen—the sound of great guns firing.

Nobody needed explanations. We all—I suppose—guessed that the *Anaconda* had chosen this supposed solitary, unvisited island for gun-practice, after visiting it to see that everything was safe, and that, over the horizon, she was busy blowing it to bits.

Whether any one of us lived for another five minutes was a matter of the extremest chance.

Many brave things were done in the war by Jerry Dawson, but I think his bravest act was done on that afternoon. As coolly as if it had been raining merely drops of water and hailstones, he walked round the shelter of the rock, looked to sea, and came back, dodging two or three fragments of flying rock that might have smashed up a cottage. I saw that he was white as the foam on the far verge of the reef, but I knew that it was not fear that paled him—remorse, rather, for having taken the chance that turned out so disastrously.

He had guessed from the first (if guess is the word) that the place was being used for gun-practice by the Chilean navy. There was, however, nothing to tell that the practice was not for the present finished, and there was every chance of our being too late to secure the treasure, if a crowd of man-of-war's men were to get into the habit of overrunning the narrow little island. Therefore he kept his discovery to himself—knowing that the facts would not have had the slightest influence on any of our party—and decided to make one swift attempt to secure the gold.

I suppose I guessed this, but at the time I was not conscious of guessing or thinking, or of anything at all but trying to get Ysabel out of the range of falling fragments. I remember that she shouted things I could not hear, and seemed to struggle; but it was a minute or so before I realized that the struggles were not hers. Absurdly, we had all rushed upon her, like a football team rushing on the ball, and were all fighting against each other to drag her out of range. Nothing more dangerous or futile could have been imagined. Clarity was the first to find that out; he loosed his daughter, and shouted down her ear.

JERRY had let go, seeing he was merely making a tug-of-war rope of the girl; I was hanging on, and so was Ellis. When I loosed hold, Ellis went backward, stumbled over himself, and fell. I don't know how Ysabel had managed to keep her head, but she did; she twisted out of the mess, eel-wise, flung her hand into Jerry's waiting palm, and ran with him to the big rock where Clarity was beckoning. Half under it she crouched, and the Captain, arching himself over her like a cat with its kitten, placed his body between her and harm. "But it isn't any good," I heard myself saying. "Bodies are no use; they're only bits of soft meat."

The thunder of the big guns had stopped; the island had ceased dissolving around us. Everything might begin again tomorrow, in two minutes, or never. There was no knowing. The *Anaconda* was far out of sight. Doubtless she would steam up and check the hits when she had done; but that was small consolation, considering that we, by that time, might be done also. And if we were not, the gold was as good as lost, once anyone saw it. For what right, after all, could we put up to a treas-

ure taken from Easter Island natives by Dutch sailors, and left on an islet that geographically belonged—in all probability—to the very nation that owned the *Anaconda?*

IN the calm that followed the storm, there was a chance to think these things. I make no doubt we all thought much on the same lines. But—naturally enough—no one wanted, much, to go out into the open and begin hauling the gold down to the whaleboat. The native sailors, crouched beneath a neighboring rock, were shedding tears of dismay. Ellis, rolling a cigarette with unsteady fingers, shouted: "Who's game to go?" and made no move to leave his own bit of shelter.

Jerry turned and walked to the dirty, glittering mass of the great crown. On the way he kicked the Raratongan boys out of their funk-hole, and they came with him, not stopping to ask questions. He said something to Ellis—something I didn't hear, for I was down beside the crown myself—that jerked Ysabel's future husband out of his retirement as quickly as Jerry's boot had brought out the boys. Clarity started to come out, but Jerry called to him: "Stay where you are, man; she must have some one." And the Captain, nodding, seemed to agree. "It's all down-beach to the boat now," he shouted.

It might have been down, but it felt extremely like "up," as we tailed on and hauled the frightful thing. I do not know whether we should ever have succeeded in getting the crown to the whaleboat or not. As things turned out, there was no need. We had not been straining and tugging with our teeth set and our heels dug into the sand, for half a minute, before the horrible thunder began again, and another pinnacle flew off the top of the island, and smashed down into the lagoon. I let go and ran as hard as I could, back to shelter. So did the Raratongans. I expected to be overtaken by Jerry, but when I flung myself down under a ledge of the pinnacle, wondering, while I licked my dry sandy lips, how long it would be before the whole place crashed round us, I saw that neither Jerry nor Ellis was with me.

The thunder came again, and I flung my head down, and saw nothing for a moment or two, fully expecting to die, for this time I had heard the scream of a shell. When the rending explosion passed, and I dared to look up, I saw three things:

Half the summit of the island gone.

Jerry, standing by the crown, hacking it up with an ax, which bit into the soft pure gold as into cheese.

Rutland Stewart-Ellis, lying in a lake of blood, dead.

It was a minute or so before I thought—so dazed was I—of looking for Ysabel. She was still where I had seen her last. Clarity had left her, and was coasting cautiously along under the rocks.

"The ship's all right," he bawled when he reached me. There was no noise at the moment, but I bawled loudly too, when I replied:

"Sooner we get to her the better."

"What about the gold?" he shouted. "Can't leave it, but can't take it."

I saw that. We should have to make a run for our lives, as if we were playing a ghastly sort of prisoner's base—and maybe lose the game, into the bargain.

"Must be mad," said Clarity, pointing to Jerry, who was still hacking away at the crown. He had bitten deep into it now. An immense thin hollow segment of it was almost detached; you could see the yellow glitter of untarnished metal about the raw edges. In the strange blank silence that followed the thunder of the guns, the live ring of steel on gold sounded bell-like, marvelous. We stood under our poor shelter of rock, that might at any time be blown away, and watched him, wondering.

Jerry shouted, without stopping work:

"Make a run for the boat. I'll come at the last minute."

Clarity slapped his thigh.

"By Jings," he cried, "I see it." And I saw, too. Jerry was calmly risking—more than risking—his poor chance, by staying out there under possible fire, cutting up the one crown we had secured into portable fragments, which we were to transport if opportunity allowed us.

"I'll go and help," I cried. But Clarity, with his usual cold common sense, held me back.

"Not till it's time," he said.

TIME! Would there be any time for any of us, in half an hour? Or should we have gone where Ellis had gone, over eternity's edge? I thought this, even as I wondered how it was that none of us seemed shocked or moved at that barely perceived tragedy.

Left to myself, I don't know what I should have done. But when you were

with Clarity, you usually had to do what he did. I waited, therefore, an interminable fifteen minutes or so. And the guns kept off. And Jerry hacked, and the glittering fragments flew.

Suddenly he stood up, shouting:

"They'll begin again soon."

To this day, I don't know upon what intervals or observations—when all observation seemed impossible—his calculations were based. But I knew Jerry. I followed the Captain at a run down the beach, and the boys came too. And Ysabel started from her refuge, as if to join us, until a shout from her father drove her back:

"You dare, and I'll skelp ye!"

After that, it was a madness of work, lifting bits of dirty, bright-bordered metal that felt incredibly huger than they looked, panting down to the whaleboat with them, casting them in, and laboring back for more. And above us the sky was delicate blue, and the wind hummed over the reef, and the bosun birds and the red-legged gulls wheeled, crying, wondering at the strange ways of men. And still the guns held off.

A strong man, hard driven, can carry two hundred pounds at once. A weak man can raise fifty or so. Among us, we had transported much more than a thousand pounds weight to the big double-ender boat, before Jerry cried to us to stop, to bring Ysabel and go.

We were blindly obeying him now—among the blind, the one-eyed is king; and Jerry's unnamed sense, that had sometimes helped him and sometimes failed him, through those long wanderings of ours, was our only hope. You cannot imagine, till you have tried, how hard it is to stop in the harvesting of gold; leave off, with desire unsated, while you might yet gather more and more. But we did leave off; we let the lumps we held drop from our scarred fingers to the sand, and ran to take our seats in the boat—long since shoved down—while Clarity called Ysabel, and went to meet her. Jerry went too, there was no keeping him back from that.

They had to pass the ghastly figure of Ellis. Jerry tried to kick the sand over it as he passed, and in so doing moved the body. Something rolled out from under—a couple of tiny, black-and-white objects. I don't think Jerry knew what they were at first; he picked them up mechanically and carried them in his hand. Ysabel saw them, and her mouth parted in a sort of choked cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry, looking at the things. "They're dice—I'll throw them away."

"No, no," said Ysabel, trembling as I had not seen her tremble before the bombardment itself. "Give them to me."

She turned them in her fingers,—all as we hurried down to the beach,—shook them up and down inside her palms, and then, with an exclamation, cast them far into the green still waters of the lagoon.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jerry.

"Get on *board!*" ordered Clarity. I really think those two might have stopped to discuss matters, if the Captain had not hustled them, sharply ordering, into the whaleboat, and set them, with myself, and the boys, to row. No sailing was possible now; the wind had died, and oars were our only chance. What that boat felt like, with over half a ton of gold, and six passengers under a tropic sun, I cannot tell you, any more than the galley slave of past ages—for whom I have ever since cherished a deep sympathy—could, probably, have told of similar experiences.

The one thing wanting to make our passage a hell was supplied when that damnable *Anaconda* opened out again, and began to smash the reef up with bad shots. Still, the farther we got from her target the safer we were, and it began to look before long, as if we should reach the schooner alive. By great luck she had been anchored far enough away from the island to escape destruction, though there was no knowing how long such luck might last.

IF you ask me what happened after we got on board, I cannot tell you at first hand. I found my berth, and lay three-quarters dead all afternoon. I heard the guns stop, felt the schooner get under way and glide forth again—saw, dimly, by and by, green palm trees pass the port, blue empty seas take their place, dusk come with a burning of red fires against the west.

It was late when I stumbled out and lay upon the hatch. And the first thing I saw was a lady in a flowered, lace and silken gown, with ribbons in her hair, sitting unashamed and happy on the knee of Jerry Dawson.

I said the first thing that came into my head, and that was, idiotically:

"Where's your other clothes?"

"Kept for special occasions," answered Jerry. "We're going to lay in glad rags by the million in Callao."

I sat down and did not think at all for a minute or two.

Then I looked up and asked:

"Oh—what about the dice?"

The answer to that was long. But I daresay you will want to know.

Ysabel had gambled herself upon a throw of the dice, led on to it by Ellis, who saw her foolish, schoolgirl fancy for the toys, and made the most of it. And she had lost. But a certain fierce pride in playing the game had held her to her word. How far it would have held her in the very end, I do not know. For Ellis had been clever enough to include, in the throw, a promise not to marry anyone save himself.

But the dice we found on the beach under Ellis' body, the dice he had used, were not his own. They were a trick pair of Ysabel's, which she had made at school, for a wager, in keeping with her pose of being "the wickedest girl in the school." They had never been used except for innocent jests; even her dicing against herself had been carried out with the ordinary pair she also possessed. Ellis had seen the trick pair, and stolen them, days before he made his proposal; and he had substituted the false dice for the true ones at the moment when she had agreed to his crafty plan—taken as in a net by the snare of her own solitary fault.

Well, if it was a fault, he had cured her, for she never touched card or dice again.

You will not find Marooner's Ring if you look for it, on the map or on the seas. It was never rightly charted on the first, and as to the latter, the *Anaconda* started trying new explosives at short range, a few days later, with results entirely pleasing to the Republic of Chile.

As for us—half a ton of gold, we found, was as good for all practical purposes as twenty times the amount. Do your own summing, and see.

Captain Clarity's only comment, so far as report goes, was: "Now, I suppose, I shall be allowed, at last, to wear my own trousers."

But for days after we left, he sang almost continuously:

*"What shall we do with a drunken sailor?"*

Which, being a sober man, was always his song of joy.

# *TO LET*

*There's real and rapid action in this story of blood and gold and romance. Don't fail to read it.*

## *By* C. FRANCIS

THEY called him a boob when he first came to Glory and broke all the glasses in the Mountain Home restaurant by pouring boiling water on them; they dubbed him "the Sap" when he got a job on a farm and pulled up the wilted cabbage plants that had just been set out, leaving more thrifty weeds in their places; they styled him "the Young Gorilla" when he went to the Duke's place and mopped up the floor with two bad-men, minions of the Duke, when they threw in his face the pop which he brought when they asked for a drink; now they address him as Mr. Herm Nebaw.

Herm's father had dragged him over the hills and desert trails since he was a mere boy. Old Nebaw struck it at last on the edge of the burning sands, by a spring at the base of a mountain, just before he died. Herm cleaned up the gold in the old rocker and headed straight for town.

Herm had everything to learn, and his education came high in laughs, jeers and an occasional kick, which he resented. The whole outlook changed when Pansy Lane came to work at the Desert Rat, where Herm took part of his meals. Young Sid Willis was leaning over the counter talking to Pansy when Herm went in at twelve. A look of disgust was on her face. Young Willis caught her hand when she set down his order on the counter and, still talking, drew her closer. Herm saw fear on Pansy's face as she struggled to get

# BURTON

away. He caught Sid by the collar, shook him until his hands and mouth flew open, releasing Pansy and also an exclamation of pain. Then Herm set him down on his stool so hard that his teeth rattled like bones in an empty garret.

HERM sat at a table in the rear so that Pansy would not have to walk so far to serve him. She stopped by his table.

"Why do men think that because a girl has to work, she'll—"

"I'll go back and flatten out his face if you say," said Herm.

"Oh, no. I'd be fired. Dinty wants a girl who can draw customers."

"I see," said Herm. "This is your first day, eh? Well, I'll take a meal-ticket. I've been dividing up my trade, but it's handier here." He left the meal-ticket with her to punch.

She smiled when she brought his order and stood by his table a moment. "How about a show tonight?" said Herm. "Will you go?"

The encounter with Sid made her a little cautious. "I don't even know your name," she said.

"Oh, I'm Herm Nebaw. You've heard of 'Gold' Nebaw. Father was always looking for gold. When they saw him coming, people would say, 'Here comes Gold.' "

"You were never in town much?" And when Herm was about to leave, she said: "I don't think I better."

Herm said no more about it, but let his meal-ticket stand for the week. He came in again that night but did not speak to Pansy. He did not notice that she lingered at his table as if expecting him to say something more. When he was ready to go and she was punching his meal-ticket, she said: "I guess I will go with you to the show after all, if you still want to take me."

"Sure I do."

"You broke the cowboy's jaw when he tried to make you dance, didn't you?" she asked on the way to the show.

Herm laughed.

"Don't you like to dance?"

"I want to smell violets instead of gunpowder when I do," said Herm.

"Where you working?" asked Pansy, looking up at him.

"At the Duke's."

She drew a little away from him. "Do you like it there?"

"No. But I got to live, same as you do —and have men take hold of your hand."

"Don't you know that they've been trying to close up the Duke's place but can't get anything on him? Everyone suspects that Lem and Dick Sands are his tools, and that they robbed the mail-car that was held up a month ago."

"I know Lem and Dick. I piled them both on the floor the first day. Gave them pop for whisky," said Herm, laughing but troubled nevertheless.

After they had walked a block, "I wish you didn't work there," she said.

"Does that make a difference?"

Herm quit the next day, and Pansy got him a place on a ranch just outside of Glory. Herm thought watching things grow was a wonderful life. His vocation decided upon, he asked Pansy to marry him, then concluded to see her dad.

"Eh, what you mean, you boob? Stay away from Pansy, understand!"

Herm had other things to say. "Get out and stay out," said the indignant father, and he lifted his toe toward Herm in no friendly manner. Herm caught the offending foot, twisted it and sent the angry father spinning like a top.

Herm thought that ended it. "I'll be twenty-one in three years," said Pansy in the restaurant the next day. Herm thought that was a long time, but perhaps it was not too long.

Herm found that he could buy a nice eighty acres of land for six thousand dol-

lars, but his wages were small, and at his present rate of saving it would take him thirty-nine years to pay for it. He didn't fancy running in debt, and Pansy wouldn't wait that long.

Herm thought the thing over for several days. It would be three years before Pansy could marry him. He decided to go back into the mountains and operate the old rocker his father had set up on the edge of the desert. It was a lonely life, but he could save six thousand out there and buy Pansy a home. He knew of no other way.

"Will you wait for me, Pansy?" he asked, that evening, walking with her down by the river.

"Sure I'll wait," she assured him.

"I guess you wouldn't be worth having if you wouldn't," he said. Pansy wanted to be worth having, so she worked on in the Desert Rat.

FOR three years Herm shoveled sand into the old rocker, kept his muscles fit. He took his meat from the wilderness, and was always alert. At night he read books until dark, then he dreamed and planned the future. Every six months he went to Glory, to see if Pansy was still waiting, taking enough dust to buy a grubstake. Donovan was still holding the land at the original price.

"What do you do, way out there?" asked Pansy.

Herm was as full of romance as a serenader, and she listened to his tales of the desert, of sandstorms, the hunting of game, and of work at the old rocker, her eyes as dreamy as a midnight sky.

At the end of three years Herm put his gold into a buckskin sack—six thousand dollars, well earned, sixteen dollars to the ounce, almost twenty-five pounds of it, tied securely with a buckskin thong made from one of the many deer he had killed. He would reach Glory on Pansy's birthday. He was happy. Loading his pack-horse with bedding, camp outfit and gold, he turned toward civilization, Pansy and the ranch he was going to buy. It took him two days to cross the desert of drifting sands, where he camped by a stream in the mountains. Another day, and he would lay his treasure at Pansy's feet.

For three years he had dreamed; now came wakefulness and the dream gone, pushed out by realities. He was ten miles out of Glory in a deep and narrow cañon filled with boulders when two men sprang up out of the rocks, covered him with their guns and commanded him to hold up his hands. He had heard of highwaymen, but had never thought this could happen to him. His rifle was in the pack, and his six-shooter was in his saddle-bag. Perhaps it was just as well, for one was on each side of him, and quick as he was, he could not get them both. They tied his hands and marched him off to face a boulder while they went through his pack, scattering it on the trail. Taking his gold, they led his horses down the cañon two miles and vanished up a defile.

He tried to track them when he had recovered his horses, but it was useless. They had handkerchiefs tied over their faces, and he would not know them if he saw them again. He sat down on a rock, and for an hour brooded over his misfortune. Three more years! Would Pansy wait? He was a boob, all right, for letting this happen.

He rode into Glory late, found Pansy and told her, while a cloud gathered on her face. "Will you wait three years longer?" he asked her.

She hesitated a long time before answering. Herm knew what that meant. Likely Donovan would not keep the land; there was other land, but only one Pansy.

Finally she answered: "Yes, I'll wait for you, Herm." But the voice was weak, afar off, lost to him. It was a warning. He must think of some other plan. He couldn't take her out there on the desert. "Maybe it was those Sands brothers, Lem and Dick," she said. "People have always said they were robbers."

"Little good that does me now," said Herm. "They'll keep my gold a month or two and then cash it over at Needles, maybe. To cash it right away would cause suspicion." He thought a moment. "I'd like to see under the Duke's place. I'll bet a feller would find bones there, and other things."

"Three years is going to be a long time to work in that hash joint," said Pansy with a heavy sigh. "Besides, what assurance is there that you will get here with the next six thousand?" She looked up to Herm.

"You haven't seen some one else, have you, Pansy?"

She looked down now. "No, not yet; but when you let loose one prop, you're almost bound to grab another to keep from falling. Seems to me, Herm, you're rap-

ping my fingers to make me let go," she said doubtfully.

"You think I made up that story about losing my gold to put you off?"

"It might be, Herm."

THE next night Herm went over to the Duke's place instead of taking Pansy to the show. The place was pretty well filled by seven o'clock, and getting noisy. He had drawn a hundred dollars out of the bank. Lem and Dick Sands were sitting by the stove asleep, as if they had lost a couple of nights' rest. Herm told of the hold-up, and men began to offer sympathy.

"Drat the sympathy!" said Herm. "I'm treating the house." He turned to the crowd. "All you loungers come up and gurgle to the clink of my coin," said Herm; but most of them stood back.

"Can you afford it, Herm, after losing all that gold?"

"That's only one star in my crown of gold," said Herm. "Aint I been away three years? Think I'd quit with a few thousand? I'm going back in a couple days and bring in the rest of it before them fellows get back from Needles. They went that way."

Men looked at each other. "The kid's gone crazy like his dad."

"Plumb bugs! Can't stand prosperity."

"Don't he know better than to talk around here?"

Lem and Dick Sands had now awakened and had cocked their ears to listen. The crowd surged up to get action on Herm's money, all except Lem and Dick. "Can't you hear?" said Herm turning to them. "Going back to bring in a cargo. You coming up, or you want me to drag you out of them chairs? Remember how I piled you the first day I come in here. You wanted whisky then—lost your thirst?"

The news of Herm's celebration scattered quickly. In less than half an hour everyone in Glory knew that he was making a fool of himself. Herm was inviting the crowd up on a second call for refreshments when the sheriff put his hand on Herm's shoulder.

"Come along with me, Herm," said Sheriff Kinney, and he led Herm out.

"WHAT'S the big notion in bringing me out here, Officer?" asked Herm.

"Don't you know you are making a fool of yourself in there telling them about your going out to get that gold? There's men in there right now who would kill you for a small fraction of fifty thousand."

"Why don't you arrest them, instead of bringing me out here?" asked Herm, giving the officer a hard look.

"You got to catch a man with the goods before you can hang him," said Sheriff Kinney patiently.

"So you pick on me because I'm easy, eh?" said Herm. "You haven't caught me with any goods."

"I'm doing it for your own good, Herm. You are young and don't know the ways of bad men. They hang around such places as the Duke's waiting for a tip, the kind you are handing to them."

"The men who took my gold went toward Needles. I know that," said Herm.

"But all the crooks don't live in Needles. When are you going out after this gold, Herm?" asked the sheriff.

"Day after tomorrow," said Herm frankly.

"Better let me go along as guard, if you insist on going now that you have told everyone. I'll take a couple of deputies and escort you through the mountains."

"Thanks, Kinney, but I don't need any protection. I've got a man to go along with me. One's enough."

"Who?" asked the sheriff.

"Dad Walker."

"What, are you plumb crazy, Herm? You might as well take a dead man. Look here, Herm, if you insist on bringing this gold into Glory alone, you better wait awhile and sneak in when no one knows you are coming. I don't want to be compelled to go out and look for your bones. It isn't fair to Pansy, your being so reckless."

"Thanks, Kinney, but I'll be all right."

HERM found Pansy wiping tears from her eyes. "I've heard all about it, Herm," she said petulantly. "Your making a fool of yourself in the Duke's place, spilling the fact that you got all that money when you told me you lost it all, and had to go back to stay three years more! I understand—you were just trying to put me off, when you asked me to wait three years more. But—but I guess I can get along," she sobbed, evading him.

"Look here, Pansy. I just told you that to see if you would wait. I saw you wouldn't, so I got an option on that eighty acres for ten days. We'll get married as

soon as I get back. Gee, and we'll watch things grow!"

"And pull up the cabbage plants!" she hurled at him.

"Why, Pansy, I can tell a cabbage better than a worm that lives on them, and I can tell the flowers better than the bees, and I know more about girls—"

"Keep still. You don't know what I am going to do—yet. Besides, you'll never get back with that money, now that you spilled what you intend to do over at the Duke's."

"Yes, I will," he assured her.

"YOU see, Dad," said Herm to old Walker, later, "we sneak out at night. You take the gold in, while they are waiting for me. They will never suspect you have it."

Herm left Dad Walker on the edge of the desert. "I got to cross to those mountains, Dad. It's thirty miles; no use your going, for it's a hard trip through the sand. No danger of them out there. They'll wait until we're closer to town, like they did before."

Dad Walker watched the drifting sands for three days before he saw an approaching speck grow into a human form. It was Herm. They rode ten miles into the mountains and camped in the cañon. "Just take it from here, Dad. I'll ride the ridge, and they'll never see me."

From the elevation Herm saw Dad Walker pack and start toward Glory. He had not gone far when four horsemen rode up the cañon to meet him, handkerchiefs over their faces.

"Where's Herm?" asked one of the men.

"How should I know?" And he started down the trail.

The bandits looked at each other. "Just a minute, Dad. We will take a look into your pack." He stopped. In a moment they had scattered the pack over the trail, looked into one of the ten buckskin sacks, retied it, packed them on their own horses, and rode away, taking Dad Walker's horses two miles down the cañon. Herm watched the whole thing from the hillside, but was undisturbed. He rode down the ridge to the first draw cutting the cañon. Soon the four men went up this draw a little way from him, and cut straight across country. Herm knew the mountains like a book, and when they were out of sight, he took an old trail and beat them to an isolated cabin ten miles away. Here he again waited, tying his horse's head so it couldn't whinny. The four men came about an hour later. They were in no hurry now, but loitered about the cabin until dark. Herm watched with a glass. Two of the men were Lem and Dick Sands. The others he had never before seen. They had doubtless expected trouble this time, and got the two extra men.

About dark the four men saddled their horses, repacked the buckskin sacks and rode away toward Needles. Herm knew that the trail was cut by another that went to Glory. Lem and Dick would turn there and go direct to Glory, taking the pack with them. Herm went down to the cabin when they were gone, but found no trace of his gold. He expected this; in fact it was what he wished.

Herm took a shortcut through the mountains direct to Glory and reached it at eleven o'clock. Dad Walker had already come in, and the news of the second robbery was being discussed. Herm left his horse outside of town and hid in an old shed back of the Duke's place.

LEM and Dick rode up behind the Duke's about two o'clock after the town had quieted down. Taking a couple of heavy gunnysacks from their mounts, they threw them into the cellar, which was opened from the inside the moment they stopped. Some one had been waiting.

Herm had worked around the Duke's long enough to know about how the building was planned both above- and below-ground. On one side was a window with iron bars opening into the basement, made to keep thieves out instead of in. Herm got a pair of bolt clips at the blacksmith shop and cut these bars. Crawling through into the basement, he found himself in a small room with boxes filled with bottles, and a few barrels of liquor. For ten minutes he explored the room, feeling about the walls until he knew where every box and barrel was located. He found a door with a latch made for strength rather than for convenience. Putting his ear to the door, he heard voices, and saw a thin ray of light. This room was built more like a fort than a simple basement.

Herm lifted the latch noiselessly and still heard the buzz of voices, muffled by the thick wall. If he could surprise them, he would have them cornered like rats. He figured that Lem and Dick were here waiting for daylight. He pushed gently on

the door, but it stuck. He lowered the latch again. The voices were now silent, and waiting a few minutes he heard a click as the light was switched off, then the steps of two men on the stairs. They were leaving.

WAITING a moment, Herm lifted the latch, put his weight against the door—and fell into the room. That was all that saved his life, for a steel bar came down that would have brained him. It glanced off his back, taking a little skin as it descended. The men had heard or seen the latch and had set a trap for him. Now there was nothing to do but to fight to the death; but as long as it was dark, they would not dare to shoot. Herm groped out, caught a hand, wrenched the arm and with a terrific effort broke it with a snap. He heard the man cry out and sink down. He was now fumbling for his gun with the other hand. He had no time to lose; as long as it was dark, the advantage was with him, for these men were as putty in his strong grip. He groped around the blackness like an infuriated gorilla—he would break them in two.

One of them was now trying to find the light-switch and Herm collided with him. There was a deafening roar close to Herm's head, but the shot missed; and in that instant Herm grabbed him, threw him so quickly and with such force that he was for the moment stunned.

Herm tied his hands and threw him against the wall. The one with the broken arm had now got up and was groping about to find him. Something pointed hit Herm's arm and there was another blinding flash. The bullet went through the flesh only. In an instant Herm had knocked the gun from the hand and grappled with him. He now heard some one coming down the stairs, warned by the two shots. Herm quickly tied a hand and a foot and lighted a match. Finding the electric switch, he turned it, flooding the room with light. Picking up the iron bar the first man had used in his attempt to brain him, he waited beside the door.

Soon a pistol was thrust through the opening. As soon as the hand followed, Herm struck such a blow that the pistol went whirling and the hand that held it was useless.

The Duke, for it was he, growled like an infuriated beast, dropped to the floor and scrambled for the gun with his other hand. Herm kicked it across the room against Lem Sands. The Duke whined like a baby while Herm secured those fat bloated arms.

A shot rang out. Herm saw that Lem had taken the gun and was shooting at him by holding the gun in his hands behind his back looking over his shoulder to direct his aim. Herm dropped to the floor, threw a bottle that caught Lem on the side of the head. The next shot skimmed the floor and took off the sole of Herm's shoe. Lem now sank back, limp.

Herm now picked up the artillery and to prevent his enemies from getting away hung them against the walls on spikes driven against the wall. Upstairs Steve, the bartender, who slept in the building, was just coming out of his room. "Stop right there, Steve," said Herm, leveling his gun.

He obeyed, and Herm pushed him back into the room and tied him to the bedpost with a sheet. He now went out and rang the town fire-bell. Sheriff Kinney was the first to arrive on the scene, and Herm took him into the basement. They found an old Government mail sack with a few opened registered letters which had been overlooked in the destruction of evidence.

HERM found his gold piled in the corner. He quickly picked out one of the buckskin sacks and started out.

"Aint you going to take the rest of it, Herm?" asked the sheriff.

"Hell, no! It's only copper. I got it over at Needles, so they would lead me to this one I got here. This is gold, pure gold, enough to take up the option on that eighty acres."

"Just a minute, Herm, before you go. There'll be a thousand coming to you as soon as the rewards can be straightened out for the robbery of that mail-car. And another thing, Herm: the people of the county have been offering a thousand to any man who could hang a 'To Let' sign on the door of this shebang. I think you ought to be the man to do it."

When they went out to look for Pansy a half-hour later, a man stepped out of the crowd that had gathered and asked: "Who hung that sign on the door, Sheriff Kinney?"

"Why, Mr. Herm Nebaw," said the sheriff, turning to present that gentleman; but Herm was walking away with Pansy hanging to his arm.

# *Easy Street Experts*

*"The Fight for Peace" describes one of the most daring of all the coups put over by two bland and blase practitioners of that ancient profession: theft.*

## *By* BERTRAM ATKEY

IT was during the dreamy cigar-scented hour following dinner one evening that the Honorable John Brass, his mind hovering with affectionate reminiscence upon the rather choice lunch they had enjoyed that day at the Astoritz Hotel, recalled the lady with the bright bay hair—none other than their old friend Mrs. Fay-Lacy—who had been lunching at the next table with a gentleman who might have passed anywhere for an old uncle of Sing, the Honorable John's valet.

He removed his cigar for a moment.

"How did that Chink who was lunching at the Astoritz with Esme Fay-Lacy strike you, Squire?" he asked.

Colonel Clumber looked up rather quickly.

"I took him for a crook, but Henri, the head waiter, told me as we came out that, as a matter of fact, he was prince—prince or mandarin, or both, if there's any difference. His name's Chi Hi or words to that effect. What about him? He hasn't got money."

Mr. Brass pondered. "How do you know?"

The Colonel smiled.

"Well, considering Esme is the society tout for Money-lender Lazenger, it doesn't look rich. When you see a man lunching with Mrs. Fay-Lacy you see a man who wouldn't much mind hanging a sandwich board on himself with 'Broke' printed on it—if he had the price of a board."

The Honorable John nodded.

"Well, there hasn't been much of a boom in the prince business in China lately. I suppose Chi is over here for what he can get and doesn't much care who knows it," he mused. "Republic over there, aint it?"

"So-called," agreed the Colonel tersely.

Sing entered with the whisky and soda with which the partners were in the habit of dispelling the cloying taste of their liqueurs, and Mr. Brass questioned him.

"Sing, my son, who is Prince Chi Hi when he's at home—if he's got a home?"

Sing's beady eyes gleamed a little.

"Velly noble plince, master, velly rich powerful before Lepublic come."

"Lost his job now, I take it, hey?"

"He lost job now allee samee loyal family."

"Moneyed man?"

"Not got now—Lepublic takee. He tlying bollow money for gettee Lepublic pullee down, cuttee up, killee Plesident. Bollow hundled thousan's evelywhere—millions p'laps, bollow all Melican cities, bollow all over Eulope. Now bollow money in London."

THE partners looked at each other, like a pair of old artillerymen that, seated outside some village inn, suddenly hear afar off an unexpected thudding of big guns.

"Pour out the whisky, Sing, carefully, mind—and give us the facts about this champion loan shark," instructed Mr. Brass.

Sing did so, not without a certain eagerness. He was, in his simple Chinese way, a thrifty man, and it rather depressed him to think of all the money which he knew Chi Hi would shortly be carting back to China. The interest his employers were suddenly exhibiting in the matter cheered him up considerably, for he knew them quite sufficiently well to be aware of the fact that they rarely if ever extended their interests to a man and his money without ultimately taking a tolerably large fistful of that man's principal as a sort of *quid pro quo*.

But Sing knew very little more than the plain fact that Chi Hi was on the point of winding up a borrowing tour, the object of which he believed, was the financing of an attempt to re-establish the monarchy in China.

The result of the inquiry was that the ever-ready Chink was abruptly fired down into the Chinese quarter with strict instructions to "get abreast" of the movements of Chi Hi without unnecessary and foolish delay.

For themselves the partners proposed to turn their kind attention to the bay-haired Mrs. Fay-Lacy, in the morning. . . . .

From a casual and cursory survey—more especially cursory—of the announcements of the more prominent money-lenders one would be wholly justified in surmising that they are as plentiful as pebbles upon the seashore; indeed, one might very easily come to the conclusion that it is a matter of some little difficulty to wend one's weary way through life to the impartial grave without succumbing, sooner or later, to the philanthropic blandishments of one or more of the swarming multitude of would-be helpers of financial lame dogs over the stile—into the field where the bull, temporarily concealed from view, is carefully sharpening his horns to gore the last golden bezant out of the aforesaid lame dog.

But though they be many in name our money-lenders be few in person—few but effective.

The father of the chapel, as one might say, or to put it in good plain old-fashioned French, the *doyen* of the many-aliased tribe of money-lenders, undoubtedly was, just then, Mr. Craik Lazenger, that sharp-set old he-wolf whose domestic den consisted of a small, ordinary, raw-looking detached villa in funereally-shrubbed grounds, outside Woking. Few borrowers ever had the privilege of meeting Mr. Lazenger personally, for few possessed, or were willing to part with, sufficient security to merit the personal attention of the elderly blood-sucker. It was usually one or more of his deputies with whom the average loan-seeker dealt, while Mr. Lazenger occupied what leisure he could spare from his bigger investments in superintending the daily wool-harvest from afar off.

He was one of those steely-eyed elders, with short, stiff, gray-mixed whiskers and beard grown mainly for the purpose of ambushing a "beware" mouth and chin. His income was probably as much as a hundred thousand a year, and his personal expenses might have amounted to six pounds a week. He was not a person of extravagant personal tastes, and it was a curious fact that he lived in constant terror of poverty. Occasionally, however, a borrower would come within reach whom Mr. Lazenger considered worthy of his special attention.

SUCH a borrower was Prince Chi Hi—introduced by the most able of Mr. Lazenger's staff of agents or (as Colonel Clumber put it) touts, Mrs. Fay-Lacy.

For Chi Hi had behind him as security practically as much of China as he could pawn—providing always that lenders were willing to pay out cold cash on the chance of Chi Hi and Company uprooting the Republic.

It was a chance upon which Mr. Craik Lazenger did not propose, at first, to spread himself very recklessly, but nevertheless, he was willing to discuss matters —*via* Mrs. Fay-Lacy to begin with.

These facts represented the patiently

acquired sum total of the Brass-Clumber combine's knowledge of affairs two days after they first glanced into the matter.

Most of it had been gleaned by Sing from certain obscure friends and compatriots of his, who appeared to reside in, or at any rate frequented, a weird old rat-ridden, many-roomed and mysterious Chinese lodging-house, club or what-not, near the docks.

Encouraged by this moderately fruitful preliminary canter of their saffron-hued satellite, Messrs. Brass and Clumber proceeded to invite Mrs. Fay-Lacy to an elaborate dinner at the Astoritz.

It is quite possible, nevertheless, that it would have been money wasted had not a curious incident occurred just at the liqueur stage of the meal.

A red-mustached, gaunt gentleman with extremely glittering eyes, and wearing a dress suit that obviously had not been built for him, suddenly came up to their table, and, without the least preliminary, remarked, staring hungrily at Mrs. Fay-Lacy:

"Esme, old girl, I'm up against it."

And promptly proceeded to prove his words by pitching, in a dead faint, face forward across the Honorable John's lap.

"Why—oh, Gerald!" gasped Mrs. Fay-Lacy, and sat where she was, utterly unable to stand, shocked into a bad trembling fit.

"Gerald, is it?" said Mr. Brass blankly, and, with the aid of the Colonel and a herd of startled waiters, got the red-mustached gentleman into a more natural position just as he opened his eyes.

A minute later he had disposed of nearly half a tumbler of costly cognac urged upon him by the partners, and was stiffening up somewhat. Mrs. Fay-Lacy, still white-lipped, introduced him to the partners.

The newcomer, it appeared, was Mr. Gerald Lazenger, son of Craik Lazenger, and it took the partners precisely thirty seconds to perceive that their presence was no longer in very urgent request. It was quite obvious that both Mr. Lazenger and Mrs. Fay-Lacy were keenly desirous of a private conversation.

And so Messrs. Brass and Clumber gracefully paid the bill, said farewell, and went.

THEY waited in the lounge to light their cigars, and as they waited saw Mrs. Fay-Lacy and Lazenger pass out, take a taxi, and depart to an address which, when they overheard it given to the driver, caused them to glance at each other a trifle uneasily.

For the address was that of Mrs. Fay-Lacy's flat—where at that moment the partners knew Sing should be actively employed in looking through her papers with a view to seeing how matters stood between Lazenger senior and Prince Chi Hi.

In the ordinary way the combine would never have taken an interest in the deal at all, but among the information that the invaluable Sing—in some way known only to himself—had corkscrewed from his Celestial friends in the house near the docks, was the point that one of Prince Chi Hi's gentle Chinese idiosyncrasies was to collect all loans in cash or its equivalent in bar gold. Soldiers understand gold—not checks. And a person who plans shortly to embark upon the enterprise of abolishing even the most rickety of Republics, above all things should carry gold in preference to paper or promises, wherewith to pay his men their salaries.

At any rate that was Chi Hi's plan—and as he purposed doing by his future warriors, so he purposed being done by, when drawing from the money-lenders he patronized.

But gold in bulk is heavy stuff, not too easily handled, and much can happen to it in transit—a fact appreciated at its full value by Messrs. Brass and Clumber. Hence their anxiety to know as much as possible of the time when Chi Hi would be taking his cash boxes, safes, money bags and so forth to the residence of Mr. Craik Lazenger.

"The Chink'll be all right," said the Honorable John as they strolled away from the Astoritz. "The man or woman who can surprise him hasn't been born yet. He's got ears like a dog and the first click of the Fay-Lacy's key in her lock will send Sing under the bed or out of the window and down the ash-lift like a lamplighter. But at the same time, we might do worse than slip down to Victoria Street and have a look round about the flat, in case we can lend him a hand."

The Colonel agreed, and they took a taxi to the end of Victoria Street. Mrs. Fay-Lacy's flat was in a huge warren described as "residential mansions" in that neighborhood.

It was half-past ten when they arrived and they "looked round" until half-past

eleven—concluding their look around with a look through the keyhole of Mrs. Fay-Lacy's door.

But, beyond the meager knowledge that somebody in the flat was talking busily, they learned nothing, and, becoming rather uncomfortably aware of the fact that they had not enjoyed their customary period of repose after a well-thought-out dinner, they took a taxi home, leaving it to Sing to adapt himself to circumstances in any way that seemed to him most suitable and called for.

"Sing'll be all right," they said, comfortably, took a nightcap or two, and went to bed without waiting for the arrival of the Chink—who, it may be said, was at that moment lying flat on his stomach under the luxurious Chesterfield in Mrs. Fay-Lacy's small drawing-room, listening attentively to the conversation of the red-mustached Gerald and his hostess.

IN justice to the Honorable John and his partner it should be explained that worry on behalf of their Chinaman would have been worry wasted. Sing had very little idea of how he was going to get out of the flat, and, at the moment, was giving the point very little consideration. Sufficient for the hour was the Chesterfield thereof, might have been the carefree Chink's motto. And anyway he was there because his idol, Mr. Brass, had instructed him to be there—and that was ample for Sing. He had a passion for doing his duty (when told to), and he was perfectly willing to risk the six months or two years or whatever the award of merit would be in the case of capture. As Mr. Brass would have said: "Sing always was a bit of a fatalist."

He was quite happy and tolerably comfortable where he was. It was improbable that the bay-haired lady or Lazenger junior would look under the Chesterfield, unless he sneezed inadvertently—and he would have been in Dartmoor prison long before, had *that* been a failing of his.

He merely lay there, listening, his ears spread, as it were, like the nets of the fowler.

At one o'clock Mr. Lazenger departed. Mrs. Fay-Lacy, friendly enough, went with him down to the main door. The flat was on the first floor and her two maids were long since in bed.

She met Sing coming down the stairs as she returned. He was smoking a cigarette from the open box on her table—but she did not know that. He stood aside, most politely, for her to pass. She caught a glimpse of his face and paused. The light was dim at that hour.

"Prince Chi Hi?" she said, doubtfully.

Sing grinned.

"Excuse, madam—not Plince Chi Hi. Another gentleman," he explained. "Chinamen allee samee look alike to English ladies."

"Oh, pardon," said Mrs. Fay-Lacy vaguely, and continued up the stairs.

It did not disturb the lady to find the door of her flat slightly ajar—she had left it so herself. Nor did she miss the cigarette—for, as Sing had so reasonably reflected, what was one cigarette among so many?

Nor did it occur to the Chink that he had effected his exit with rather considerable judgment and dexterity. Indeed, he thought no more of it as he slid swiftly homeward. He was too busy thinking out the details of the breakfast of his employers next morning. The knowledge he had gleaned concerning the Chi Hi affair was quietly tucked away in the back of his head to be left until called for by his master on the following day.

WHEN, after their morning repast had been soundly defeated, Messrs. Brass and Clumber cheerily faced their daily tasks, they began by receiving the report of Sing.

Despite the lengthy duration of the period of his retirement under the Fay-Lacy Chesterfield, Sing had all the salient points boiled down to the degree of concentration which he knew the partners looked for.

He spoke, and a few minutes later Mr. Brass summed up as follows:

"Let's get it right, now," he said, in extremely businesslike tones. "As far as we can judge from this yellow image's report, old Lazenger is going to lend Chi Hi twenty thousand bones—all in gold—and Chi is going down to his place to sign the deeds and fetch away the gold at six o'clock in the evening the day after tomorrow. Mrs. Fay-Lacy told Gerald Lazenger about it, and she and Gerald (who has just come out of jail, where he went for forging his father's name to a check) mean to have a dash at the gold for themselves—old Tooth-and-Claw Lazenger having treated her pretty harshly, too—

and set up housekeeping on it. Well, now, where do we come in, Squire? We can't *all* have the stuff—somebody's got to stand aside!"

"That gold is for us," said the Colonel bluntly. "We must live."

The Honorable John nodded.

"We'll cross Chi Hi out, for a start," he said. "He only wants the money to start more bloodshed and war and foolery in China. I suppose they wanted a Republic over there or they wouldn't have had it. Live and let live—somebody over there put the ace on the king, and I don't see why we should be called upon to contribute twenty thousand toward the cost of a joker for Chi Hi to whang down on the ace. Cross Chi off. As for Gerald, and his red-headed Esme, cross them off too. It's only a blackguard who'll rob his father, anyway."

"True," nodded the Colonel. "But who do we get the stuff from, the old Lazenger, or Chi Hi, or young Lazenger after he's got it from Chi?"

"Well, we sha'n't get it off the old man—people have been trying that for years and never managed it. We might delay Chi an hour and let Sing impersonate him, but it's risky. And I doubt if the Chink could give what you might call a classy impersonation of a prince, in spite of their faces growing the same shape. Could you come the Prince well enough, Sing?"

Sing, admirably aware of his limitations, thought not.

His employers agreed with unflattering conviction.

"You're right," said the Honorable John. "Just pour me out another cognac, my son, and then get on with your work while we go into things."

And in accordance with their quaint custom of liqueuring after every meal, the two smooth old tigers took their cognacs to the big bay window which a late afternoon sun was considerately lighting up for them, and settled down seriously to discuss their plans for preventing China from being silly.

That night a forty h.p. khaki-colored touring car, driven by the able Sing and occupied by the partners, slid quietly up the drive of the comfortable house at Purdston.

Mr. Ferdinand Bloom, apprised by telephone, appeared at the door to receive them.

It was something past ten o'clock and Mr. Bloom was rather tired and a trifle overwrought, having undergone the unpleasant experience of subduing and recovering from a mild intoxication, which really required from six to eight hours of tranquil slumber for effective dispersal. His face, too, was slightly swollen on one side.

He silently took the heavy coats and sundries of his employers and, in reply to the Honorable John's friendly comment that he did not look very "flourishing," mentioned that he had neuralgia.

"That's all right, Bloom, my lad," Mr. Brass assured him kindly. "Don't you worry about us. You do your best for us and you'll be looked after. You stick to your work and force yourself to overlook the neuralgia. Don't think about it. It's a very painful thing, is neuralgia, and we understand. You just slip out and get the whisky and soda, like a good lad, and look alive. You want to hustle round a bit, Bloomy, and it's astonishing how you'll forget the neuralgia."

He held his hands out to the cheery glow of the fire that Mr. Bloom had lighted in readiness for them and turned to Colonel Clumber.

"Not the man Sing is," he said, referring to the unhappy Ferdinand. "Too gloomy, and fat, and self-conscious, not to say selfish. The man's always thinking about himself. He never laughs—and a fat, neuralgic man that never laughs gives me the creeps."

"Who? Bloom? He's got as much neuralgia as a motor tire and no more. May have a touch of toothache," grunted the Colonel. "He ought to shout 'Hurray' because it aint gout."

They lighted cigars, and, pensively staring into the fire, waited for Mr. Bloom's return with the refreshment.

Duly this arrived and was dealt with. Bloom, looking as happy as a captured missionary cutting firewood for cannibals, was bidden to remain in the room.

A moment later Sing came in from the motor-house, and Mr. Brass began to announce the plan of campaign.

TWO evenings later, at seven o'clock precisely, Mr. Craik Lazenger, with well-concealed reluctance, duly separated himself from the two and three quarters hundred-weight or so of bar gold for which Prince Chi Hi stipulated—a mode of payment which, though cumbersome, suited the

money-lender admirably in that he had netted a moderate profit on the gold. It was not the sort of transaction that Mr. Lazenger cared for, as a general rule. It savored too much of the speculative. True, Chi Hi had been able to put up some nineteen thousand pounds' worth of fairly good French securities, but the remainder of the securities were worthless unless the *coup d'état* of the aspiring monarch served by Chi Hi was successful; in which case the modest Mr. Lazenger had something like two million pounds' worth of concessions in lands, docks, railways, mining, and a dozen other hefty things of that kind to keep for his very own—all duly approved, by cable, by an agent of the money-lender in Shanghai.

Blandly smiling, Prince Chi Hi supervised the carrying out of the gold—which had been weighed and packed—to the car he had brought. The work was done by two impassive Chinamen who accompanied the Prince, and the gold was checked off by Mrs. Fay-Lacy, who was in attendance upon Craik Lazenger. The metal being stowed away, Chi Hi bade Lazenger an affable farewell and proceeded to stow himself away with it.

Old Lazenger watched the car disappear.

"That's the first Chinese Prince I ever did business with," he said, adding musingly: "I wonder if he will get all that gold safely to China."

Mrs. Fay-Lacy could have told him, but she said nothing. She fondly hoped that within a few minutes there would be a Chinese Prince on the London Road twenty thousand short in his accounts, and a red-mustached gentleman named Gerald speeding it homewards right merrily in a fast car that carried about two and three-quarters hundredweight more cargo than it had left town with.

For, somewhere out there in the night, Lazenger junior, the disinherited son of Craik Lazenger, was waiting with a friend, to receive the Prince.

And—although she did not know this—not far from Lazenger junior there waited also a quartet of peace-seekers who were determined at all costs to prevent precisely twenty thousand pounds' worth of bloodshed in China.

The house of Lazenger senior was situated in a well-wooded lane which ran off from the main road, and it was when Chi Hi's big hired limousine had traveled about halfway along this lane that the glaring headlights discovered to the driver a yellow touring car half blocking the road. The limousine pulled up.

"Can't you get past?" called a man, who appeared to be working over the engine of the touring car. "Sorry. Lend me a hand with this valve-spring half a second, and I'll get out of the way."

The limousine driver got down, explaining briefly to Chi Hi, and went over to the touring car, going round to the far side of it, out of the zone of light from his own lamps. As he did so a sudden whistling hiss from the back of the limousine announced the fact that either a valve had gone wrong or a puncture had happened—two valves, in fact, for the hiss of escaping air was suddenly redoubled.

Chi Hi felt the big car settle down on the deflating tires and peered out. It was very dark in the lane and the man who had so swiftly unscrewed the valve-caps was not visible.

Then from the off side of the yellow car came a curious, dull little noise, as of a blow, and a sort of choked groan. The two Chinese servants of the Prince were out of the limousine like cats as Chi Hi, his eyes suddenly alive with suspicion, gave an order.

They were biggish, muscular men, but muscle availed one of them little against the spanner of Gerald Lazenger who, having finished with the tires, was awaiting whoever came out of the body of the big car.

THE Chinaman dropped heavily. His fellow, who had slid from the seat next to the driver's, leaped like a wolf for the dark figure of Lazenger. He went head down like a man butting, and Lazenger, more by luck than correct judgment, met him with that artifice which, in certain circles, is described as "giving the knee." And he gave it as though he meant it. The unfortunate Chink reeled back into the ditch unconscious.

Then Prince Chi Hi became abruptly aware of a man at the door of the limousine, a man with eyes that gleamed coldly through the slits of a mask, who pressed a magazine pistol hard against the Prince's head and growled: "Get out quick!" At the same instant another man appeared at the other door, searching for the boxes under Chi Hi's feet.

The Prince was a strategist rather than a physical fighter. He could plan war on

a large scale wonderfully well—but he was no practical exponent of the arts of attack or defense. He knew that these men wanted the gold and meant to have it, and he decided to let them have it. His life was more valuable than the money, which was a small amount in comparison with some of the sums he had borrowed. He got out nimbly, and swiftly amalgamated himself with the darkness further down the lane, a second or so before the military arrived. The military!

A long, low, powerfully-engined, khaki-colored car, with blinding headlights, shot silently up from the main road, stopped with a shudder two yards from the other cars, and four men in khaki—soldiers—jumped down. The dark steel barrels of their short rifles gave back a sullen reflection of the car lights as they moved. Three carried rifles—the fourth, an officer, had a big Browning pistol.

"Steady, men! Fire if they resist arrest!" barked the officer, in a voice which one would never have recognized as that of the Honorable John Brass.

BUT neither Mr. Lazenger nor his accomplice was in the least desirous of resisting arrest. All they desired to do was to quit that place. It is much easier to knock an unprepared Chinaman on the head with a spanner than it is to outface an officer, a sergeant, and two burly privates, all heavily armed.

There was something very cooling to the ardor of the two thugs in the fierce white light of the huge lamps on the military car, and in the sight of the business-like uniforms, brown belts, and drab puttees of the soldiers. A crook may have nerve and to spare to tackle an elderly Chinese prince, but when the quarry is suddenly transformed into a quartet of big and beefy gentlemen of the Army, that same crook requires to make out a fresh mental balance-sheet of his nerve resources.

At any rate that is what Mr. Gerald Lazenger and his friend did, and their figures worked out right first shot. The balance-sheet showed that "nerve in hand" was not enough by seventy-five per cent to balance with "nerve required." The whole sum took about one-eighteenth of a second to work out, and so, even as the "Tommies" began to rush them, Lazenger junior and partner gave up the gold and bolted with speed and precision beyond all praise or blame.

"Why the blazes didn't Esme drop a hint that the Chinese blackguard might have an escort arriving to see him home?" groaned Gerald, letting out another notch of speed as he fancied he heard footsteps behind him.

At the scene of the conflict the "escort" were working like demons. Sing had already turned the car, tearing down half a ton of bank to do it. The other "soldiers" were lugging the neat but heavy boxes from the limousine to their car.

The sergeant—Colonel Clumber, no less—ran round with an electric torch examining the stunned.

"None dead—they'll be all right," he panted.

"Where's the Prince?" asked Captain Brass.

"Climbed a tree, or something—he aint here," returned the sergeant, and got into the car. "Get in, Bloom—lively now!" Mr. Bloom scrambled in, and the car shot away down the lane, the "soldiers" hastily slipping on tweed caps and loud checked overcoats as they got out of range of the glaring lights behind.

"Wide open, Sing!" muttered the Honorable John, jamming a cap on the head of Sing, who was driving.

The Chink opened the throttle and the car leaped forward. In two minutes she was clear of the lane and was booming home to Purdston, her false number flickering whitely, like a rabbit's tail, for all who cared about such things to see and make a note of. They were in and out of Woking by the time Mr. Lazenger and partner, tearing down the lane, saw ahead of them the lights of the taxi in which Mrs. Fay-Lacy was returning to Woking station.

"Over the hedge," grunted Gerald, remembering the taxi-driver, and they left the highway for the woods, circled in the dark, and presently worked round to the main road, masks removed and cigars lighted, fondly hoping that they looked like two gentlemen who had merely been for a country stroll.

Without waiting for Mrs. Fay-Lacy they took the next train up to town.

"How about the car?" asked Lazenger's fellow thug anxiously. They were alone in the carriage, and Lazenger took full advantage of the fact.

"Car! What car?" he bawled, his eyes bloodshot. "What do I care about the car? Let the man we hired it from look

after his own car. All I'm worrying about is whether those damned military guys could identify us!"

WHEN Mrs. Fay-Lacy arrived at the battlefield she found Prince Chi Hi, who had screwed up nerve enough to return, rather feebly trying to resuscitate the driver of the limousine—sandbagged—and his two Chinese servants, spannered and knee-ed respectively.

The lady was surprised—more surprised than she cared to admit. The gold was gone, obviously, but it looked as though the thieves had forgotten their motor in their hurry. She couldn't understand it at all. But she did what she could because she had to, and when her taxi-driver had fetched the police, and the victims had more or less regained their senses, she kindly accompanied the still acutely confused Chi Hi to town in the limousine—leaving him at his hotel possessed mainly of a vague idea that if she had not been what she was, and if he had not been what he was, he could have loved her for her kindly aid, and positively determined that when the monarchy was re-established in China he would see that she received the greatly envied Chinese decoration of Three Brass Balls, the Plume of Feathers, or some other souvenir of that kind.

Then Mrs. Fay-Lacy went hurriedly to her flat.

Gerald was there—and his friend. She did not understand the sudden appearance of the military—and Gerald was unable to enlighten her.

"Something went wrong, that's all I know," growled Mr. Lazenger.

LATE that night, down at Purdston, the Honorable John handed Sing and Mr. Bloom their share of the plunder.

"There you are, my lads, there's a quid apiece for you to go on with. You've been good lads tonight and if we sell the gold, well, I don't say but what you might get another quid—later on. We'll see how you go on."

He lay back in the armchair with a sigh of content.

"I think I can *promise* it to you. I'm very pleased with the way you two and Mrs. Bloom knocked up that quick dinner after we got home—very pleased indeed. Now pour me out another drop of brandy, Sing. That's it. Put the uniforms away carefully, mind, and clean the rifles. Lord knows I hope we shall never use 'em—I'm anti-bloodshed myself—but cleanliness is next to godliness, so always keep your firearms clean, my lads. Now slip it."

They "slipped it" just as the Colonel came in—he had been locking up the specially constructed secret safe which they had had put in at Purdston.

"All right, Sergeant?" asked the Honorable John playfully.

The Colonel nodded.

"That's good." Then Mr. Brass pondered a while.

"Well," he said at last, "it was as neat a job as we ever pulled off. We did everybody a bit of good, too—the loss of that twenty thousand will save a lot of lives in China."

"Yes," the Colonel grinned. "We've done a bit of good to everybody except Mrs. Fay-Lacy and her Gerald."

"Them! Oh, they're a couple of thieves—deserve all they get," said the Honorable John. "And if the truth was known this was quite likely a little private swindle on Chi Hi's part. I guess we can count this a side-shot of Chi's. In which case he's a crook and deserves to lose the money, don't he?"

"Sure, sure!" crooned the Colonel, complacently.

"That's logic, aint it?" chuckled the Honorable John.

"Certainly," agreed his partner. "Certainly it is."

"Very well, then, Squire. Pass the brandy!"

# *Roberta Kills a Seledang*

*Here we have a tremendously exciting story of an American girl's adventure in the very Oriental Malay state already described by Mr. Miller in "The Coming of Siti" and "The Sungei Tin Mine."*

## *By* WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

"SHE has but to smile and it is done. Lo, they follow her about like tame cats!"

Thus Itam Nabi in extolling the perfections of Siti Ishtar, queen of Kota Sembilan. Roberta Severance tossed her head and bit her lip petulantly. She had met neither Siti Ishtar nor Raynor, the British Resident, as yet, for the captain of her Bangkok steamer had put in directly at Kwala Laut, where her brother George Severance had met her with a sampan. But all the natives, and particularly Itam Nabi, were becoming wearisome in their ravings over Siti Ishtar, and Roberta was jealous.

She was finding life on George's rubber estate in Kota Sembilan a tremendous yet fascinating contrast to the artificial pursuit of abstract beauty that had been all her career as an artist in Singapore. Life, in Malaya, was primitive; it dealt with the roots of human existence, birth, living, death, uncomplicated by any other and wholly vain externals. The plantation avenues of George's young rubber trees, like rows and rows of tall broom-handles with featherings of heavy green leaves on them, did not interest Roberta much. But his native village, with its leisurely and placid life, simple as a cradle of the human race—*that* had aroused an intense enthusiasm in her artist's soul by its very contrast with the hectic existence one lived in Singapore.

"The sword of beauty! She has it, even as thou, Mem Si-gigit," went on the Black Prophet, squatting beside the bungalow tiger-skin rug and chewing betel hideously. "Fie upon women who cannot enchant their men!" he added with relish. "A child of Shaitan and utterly devoid of fear is Siti Ishtar!"

"Enough!" Roberta shut him off. "Thou growest tedious over her, O Black Prophet. Tell me—why do thy people call me Mem Si-gigit?" she asked him saucily.

Roberta bit her lip even as she asked it, an unconscious trick of hers which the natives had been quick to note. She had met that nickname, "Lady-who-bites-her-lip" before she had been three days in

Kota Sembilan. Installed as George's housekeeper in the plantation main bungalow, she had taken over his Number One and all his servants with the capable hands of the girl used to the ways of the East, and had then explored with eager interest the life of the native village that belonged on the estate. But the nickname puzzled her. It was obvious, of course, but the Malays were very subtle and invariably named their white Tuan or Mem from some mental rather than physical characteristic.

ROBERTA sat with her silken stockings doubled under her on George's great tiger rug, her blue eyes questioning Itam Nabi burningly, her small figure in its Chinese linens leaning back negligently and propped up by bare, sturdily muscled arms. Itam Nabi grinned upon her like some benign black gorilla, as he squatted on his hams for an idle chat with the Mem, his brown eyes shrewd and observant.

"Hoo! Why do they call thee Mem Sigigit? Without doubt thou art beautiful as Siti Ishtar herself, O Moon of the World," he assured her placatingly as he eyed admiringly Roberta's curly and bobbed blonde hair. "But, by the sign of the lip-biting, thou showest that there is fear in thy heart."

Roberta flushed vexedly. Rough, was Itam Nabi, boorish and primitive; but if you wanted the truth you got it from him!

"*Ya Allah,* before danger one does not do thus," went on Itam Nabi, folding a thick under-lip under one yellow fang. "One meets him *so!*" His face suddenly set in a frown appalling in its ferocity. "It is thy weakness, O Charmer of Hearts; but, by the Smiting, it can be mended!"

Roberta laughed merrily and even then just halted in time that unconscious fold of her lower lip under white teeth. She knew nothing of the psychology of it, that that trick of hers was the mark of a repressed inborn decision overlaid by doubts due to the general inertia and inexperience of civilized life. Itam Nabi had never even heard of psychology, but he had not lived at least a hundred and fifty years—judging from that seamed and scarred mastiff face of his—not to be strong on observation. There was not a sign nor an ear-mark of traits, human or animal, that the Black Prophet had not observed and studied in that queer brain of his, and Roberta knew that he was right.

"What wouldst thou have me do for a cure, Itam Nabi?" she laughed indulgently. "Go out and kill a tiger, as George did?"

Itam Nabi threw up his hands in horror and spat vigorously. "*Thu!* Up a tree, and with a fire-stick as do the white Tuans (save only the Tuan Besar, on whom be peace)?" he ejaculated scornfully and scowled upon her like an offended ape. "May Allah not have mercy on their graves and may the pelted devil possess them!"

Scandalized was Itam Nabi, evidently, and Roberta's laugh pealed out joyously. She loved all the raw and the primitive as represented by this engaging old malefactor, and she was simply craving to know what he would suggest next.

"How else, then, am I to cast out this fear and become like unto Siti Ishtar?" she demanded. "She seems to have you all bewitched!"

"Verily, a swayer of hearts incarnate!" agreed Itam Nabi. "*Aiwa!* Love is a fever in the young, and even the aged are not exempt. But thou, O Honey of Delight, would be like unto her as two pearls, hadst thou not this base fear."

HE considered awhile, Roberta waiting jealously. Just then she would have cheerfully given all her talent in art for one jot of that admiration which the natives lavished on their peerless queen.

"*Ptu!*" spat Itam Nabi. "The tiger is but rotten bones except thou come upon him with a spear. But lo, Favored of my Soul, consider the seledang. Like unto the Hammer of Hanuman is he! A beast of mighty wraths and, verily, outrageous. No bullet from the white man's fire-stick can stop *him!* With us, one slashes his throat with the keen parang, and then dodges nimbly until the life is gone out of him."

Roberta gasped over that glimpse of native daring. Tackling the pugnacious wild buffalo with a mere parang! Where were men with rifles? Simply nowhere! And then she sat eying Itam Nabi burningly, her teeth gripping hard on her lower lip. It was exactly that inborn decision, the impulse to do and dare but repressed by doubts of the unknown, that her unconscious action now was showing as a trait of weakness.

"Even so," Itam Nabi nodded wisely. "Thou wouldst, and thou wouldst not, Mem. Yet does one not anoint a rat's head with oil of jasmine!"

*That* hurt! Roberta flushed furiously. Itam Nabi was positively brutal, he was so direct! And his imagery cut her to the soul. The coronation of a queen, in men's hearts! It could never be hers in Malaya so long as that trait of unconscious fear remained. She had not even known that she *had* the fear, so protected and guarded and hedged about with barriers are all our lives in civilization. But Itam Nabi and the natives had descried unerringly her weakness. "Mem Si-gigit," indeed! Never would they give her the unreserved adoration that they yielded to Siti Ishtar so long as she bore that nickname! Roberta was half inclined to take Itam Nabi up, reckless of what might happen to her if she went hunting with a jungle animal like him. She knew what he had done in making a man of George with his tiger-cage, but—

A certain reluctance in her character held her back. "I'm no butcher, to go killing poor animals, Itam Nabi!" she retorted pettishly. "Even if I *do* bite my lip! You'll have to try some other way with *this* white Mem. And you'll find I'm not so flabby as you think, if it comes to the point!" she flared at him.

Itam Nabi cackled delightedly. "Hoo! So ruffled its feathers that game-cock thy brother, O Delight of my Countenance!" he chortled. "Nay, I spoke harshly, but—"

He might have told her that her very life here depended upon acquiring, as soon as possible, an unshakable courage and a capacity for instant decision. But Itam Nabi was too subtle for that. Instead he pursued his original line of attack, the jealousy of one woman over the perfections of another.

*"Ya Siti Ishtar!"* he apostrophized the young queen whose personality had captivated all Kota Sembilan. "Heart-shaped is her face, and the beauty of her mouth is like the flower of the rose! And, as the Sword of the Faith is the soul of Siti Ishtar! Did she not slay Shaitan Sadud with her own hand?"

ROBERTA arose in a huff. Itam Nabi could be more than tedious sometimes! She had heard that story of the insurrection of Shaitan Sadud at least a thousand times. The villages had even set it to music and verse. Itam Nabi squatted, still watching her with a curious grin on his ugly countenance as Mem Si-gigit vanished uncompromisingly into the living quarters of the Severance bungalow. He spat a generous streak of red betel juice; then arose and went out toward the jungle, probably to curl up somewhere under a bush and sleep, for he did nothing in the daytime.

Roberta gathered up her sketch box, her folding easel, and a pair of canvases clipped in a patent holder. The native life of Malaya fascinated her. One saw little of it in Singapore and was concerned principally with abstract beauty, Oriental still-lifes. But here was Life, in its simplest terms, and it had a significant message for the artist. The Malay was a simple soul, loving with fervor his family, his little thatch hut, his proa, his rice patch, his fruit trees. He rarely sought the Mohammedan complement of four wives but was content with one. And he prized above all things his independence, that freedom for the leisures of living so bountifully given him by Nature. Out of her jungle she supplied him with literally everything for his simple needs. He loved to fish, to hunt, to gather wild produce in the jungle, to till the soil and sail a boat. And all he asked of Life, as represented by the white man, was to be let alone.

As Roberta saw it, he was getting a good deal more out of existence than most other peoples on the globe. There was none of that fierce struggle to make money (and pay it all out again for mere living) that characterized civilized peoples. There was also none of that terror and insecurity of feudal war that afflicted all barbarous races. Law, too, was free in Malaya, free for rich man and poor man alike. If another man's buffalo invaded his rice patch, he had but to bring the offense before Itam Nabi as headman of the village and the matter would be adjusted. If a more serious crime injured him, he had but to hale the offender before Ibn Yaïd, the vizier, in Kwala Djelan, and justice would be done, and it would cost him nothing. A poor man got justice here—which could not be said of any civilized country with which Roberta was acquainted!

She had therefore pitched in enthusiastically with her brush to record on canvas the various aspects of village life in Malaya, and today she started out for her daily painting soon after Itam Nabi was gone. She unchained Sufi, the larger of George's two apes, and snapped a leash on his collar. He was better than a dog for protection, for he would attack with fury

any creature, animal or human, that molested Roberta. Sunni, the little ape, was of no use for that, but they were both most amusing. Roberta would never forget her first dinner in George's bungalow, when both apes were led in solemnly and seated themselves in chairs at either hand of the Tuan Besar. Sunni did not stay there long but hopped up on the table, examining minutely every morsel that George ate, helping himself with tiny black paw to anything on his or Roberta's plate that attracted his fancy. Sufi sat like a lord in his chair and was quite lawless. He had distinguished himself that first night by snatching a banana off a tray and hurling it at Number One! Itam Nabi had named both apes—after the two great sects of Islam whose mental outlooks on the Faith each represented with ludicrous fidelity.

OUT along a river path from town tripped Roberta, Sufi legging it on all fours along the trail ahead of her, now and then racing up trees in chase of the agile gecko lizards. The house of Mat Tembing was the one she sought. A little witch of a daughter lived there, a beauty of a child, and Tembing's people had at last been prevailed upon *not* to bedeck her with all the wedding finery kept in every Malay house, but to let her be painted unspoiled, just as she was in native life.

About a mile out of town a footpath led off to the right from the main river trail and down this Roberta turned. The Sunggei River gleamed ahead in the morning sun, the tall peaked thatch gable of Tembing's hut centering a grove of coco palms planted around his house. She passed Tembing himself, plowing with a pair of buffalo in his rice patch. *"Tabek, Ya Mat Tembing! Apa khabar?"* she called out cheerily.

*"Tabek, Ya Mem!"* returned Tembing gravely. "May Allah salute you!"

Roberta went on to the house. Like all Malay establishments, it was built on piles out over the river. A cool interior vista showed through its veranda door. Roberta reached the ladder and looked through the dark living-room to the waterside porch beyond, blazing in the sun, where another ladder went down to sampans moored below. An old crone sat fishing out there beside a post. Roberta sent Sufi up a coco palm to twist off a fresh nut and then gayly climbed the veranda ladder.

*"Salamaat!"* she greeted Aïssa Tembing, who was making curry sambals beside the stone fireplace. Minah, the daughter, engaged in shredding coconut over an iron implement like a military spur, looked up and smiled as shyly as some delicate Asiatic elf.

*"Tabek, Mem!"* they called out in shrill chorus. "Welcome art thou as the roses in summer!"

It was a gay little house, even though bare of furniture save mats and cushions. Its walls were of plaited rattan in a red and yellow zigzag pattern, all the joists of bamboo. A cradle hung from the rafters by thongs, its dusky little occupant fast asleep. Children clad in nothing but a bib and a string of beads peeped shyly around the waterfront door. Roberta set up her easel and indicated domestic utensils to be gathered for a composition. It was a cool, airy, and clean place to work, this house of Tembing's. Save an iron pan used for cooking rice, there was nothing in it that did not come from the jungle; and even the iron bowl had a dipper made of half a coconut shell with a stick thrust through holes below its rim. The lamps they used at night were mere cymba shells—the abundant native clam—with a palm pith wick in it and filled with coconut oil.

"YOU'LL do, Minah, just as you are," said Roberta to the elf at her coconut grating, clad in a delightful sarong of lavender and orange plaid.

"But just one so-little jewel, Mem!" begged Aïssa, hastening to the sandalwood chest in which the family finery was kept. She produced a huge ruby brooch of cunningly worked red Malay gold. It made a barbaric note in the twisted kerchief of embroidered blue and silver that wound up to an overpowering turban on Minah's head. Roberta set to work limning the round elfish face with its great brown eyes, its rosebud lips, the delicate wide-nostriled nose.

She went on studying their simple life as she worked. The jungle and the sea gave them literally everything. There was a stack of water buckets in a corner—and what were they but long joints of blue bamboo? There was a pile of fresh green dinner plates—squares of banana leaf, to be cast into the river when done with. There were bins for unhusked padi rice, made of bark and bamboo. Hanks of coir rope and twine hung festooned for use

in net-making and fishing tackle, and the spindle for making the twine of coco husk fibre was there, too. A rattan cage of dried sago bread hung safe from ants near the fire. Roberta had passed the oven that had made that bread in coming down the path —the simplest oven in the world, merely an ant hill set on fire, when it would go on burning with a dull red heat for days. Life was leisurely and peaceful here. Our own, with its strenuous struggle from the cradle to the grave to just keep alive and pay one's bills, seemed but a cruel kind of barbarity to Roberta as she painted on placidly. The jungle and the sea were life's main elements in Malaya, she ruminated. Above all the sea; it was Tembing's whole outlook on life. It sparkled in the wide brackish reaches of the Sunggei before his front door; and on it, poised like birds, moved the sailing sampans and the great proas that nurtured this race of seamen. The salty breeze of it was blowing strongly landward now and it kept Tembing's house cool and pleasant. And a huge slat-sailed Chinese junk bowling up from the bar was hinting eloquently of Kota Sembilan's foreign commerce. It was bringing them porcelain and gunpowder and lead in exchange for edible birds' nests and tin and rubber.

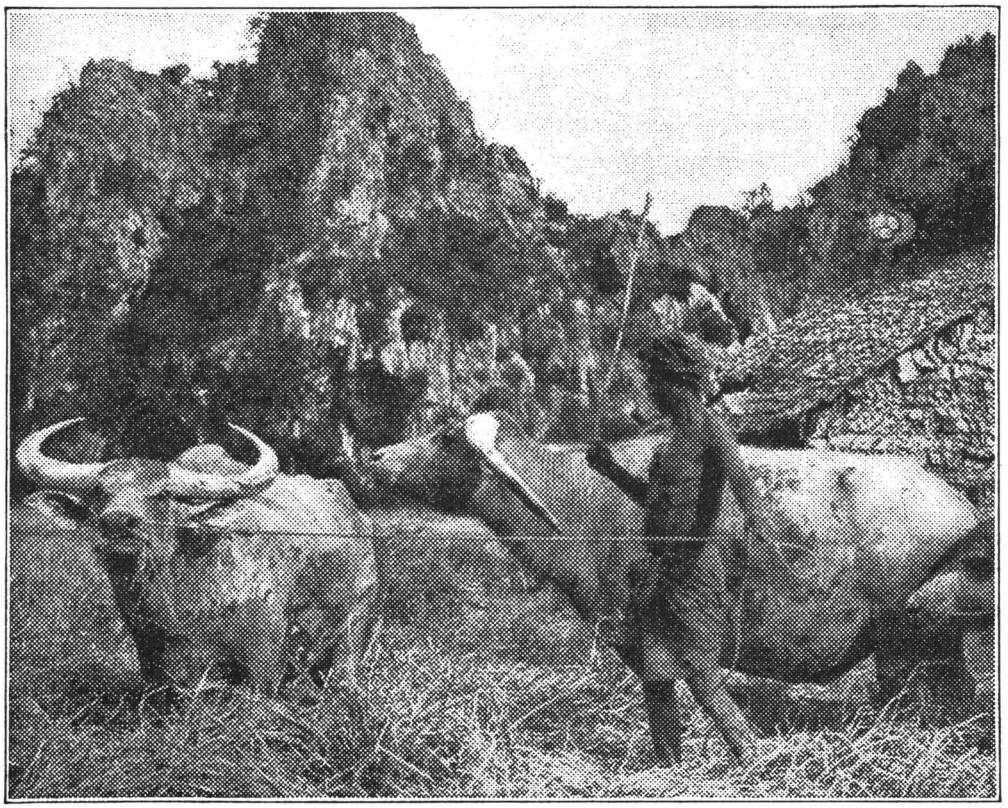
Roberta noted an old Singapore musket standing in a corner and pointedly left it out of her composition. It was Tembing's sole weapon of civilized manufacture. She wished vaguely that it could have been left out of his life, too. She hated guns, for men went to war with them and war was the curse of mankind. The spear and the kriss she accepted. They were picturesque, and they kept the people courteous and peaceful. It was remarkable how little bloodshed there was in Malaya, where every man carried a keen kriss in his girdle. She recalled that in Singapore it was not allowed—with the result that the police there had their hands full with petty quarrels and stabbings from concealed knives. Like the gentleman's sword of our own elder days, the Malay's kriss was a safeguard against thoughtless and unnecessary rudeness, with ensuing brawls.

THE painting was coming on famously. Minah stood out delicately on the canvas, a sylph of beauty. Her bare shoulders sloped to a graceful brown arm with a single broad bracelet of silver on it. Her gorgeous sarong was tucked in tightly above her tiny breasts, and enveloped her in folds that were planes of light and color. Roberta felt more satisfied with it than with anything she had done in Singapore. She was doing an artist's true work here, recording Life, putting the message of its significance and beauty into her canvas.

A huge windy snort startled the whole room. Roberta saw Minah's eyes dilate with horror, her little body shrink back, and her hand leap to her bosom. She heard the one gasp—*"Matjan!"*—from Aïssa as the mother crouched in a stealthy movement toward the Singapore musket in the corner. And Roberta turned—to face a Bengal tiger whose enormous white and black striped round face was blinking at her over the top step of the landward veranda ladder!

Roberta did *not* bite her lip! Instead, the corners of her mouth went down sternly as her blue eyes glared angrily at him. For an instant, an icy chill had paralyzed all thought in one overpowering wave of terror. And then inward things, mental traits and habits deep encrusted through long usage, seemed being torn up and ripped out of her as that inborn resolution, that keen Yankee decision that was a heritage from her father, Judge Severance of Vermont, crashed its way swiftly to the surface through all those layers and layers of suppressions, fears, inhibitions. She faced that tiger with cold courage, felt the Singapore musket being thrust into her hand from behind; but made no sudden motion with it, stood still as death, watching him narrowly.

STRIPES was evidently at some disadvantage here, in coming upon all these people in broad daylight. He had without doubt been following Sufi's scent, only to have it end in this roomful of humans. He was puzzled about it, Roberta could see, and undecided whether to attack or to run away. She kept her head. The tiger blinked twice, his great yellow eyes looking at her uncertainly. Roberta recalled that tiger who had entered suddenly a schoolroom in Singapore in broad daylight —to take a whimsical fright and vanish before all those startled human faces. The Malay women were acting just like those Singapore school children now, not a sound nor a whimper out of them, nor any movement. There was not even a breath, save that hoarse windy sigh snuffing through the tiger's nostrils.





**Seledang are too wild to photograph, but this, his cousin, the water buffalo, will suggest him.**

Roberta advanced the muzzle of the Singapore musket slowly, imperceptibly. She had no idea where to aim her bullet, but was going to fire the instant he made a hostile move. It seemed to her that that was the longest moment she had ever lived! There was nothing to do but stand fast and wait; and then shoot and trust to God if he leaped up on the veranda.

But he did nothing; only turned slowly his magnificent head to look fixedly over shoulder toward the jungle, his white forepaws still on the top rung of the ladder, the ten long curved claws a shining warrant of his cruel power. Some distant sound in the bush had attracted his attention. He continued to look; then snorted in a deep animal grunt that was abysmal in its suggestion of untamable ferocity. The hair about his neck rose erect; his face seemed to flatten and grow broader, due to a peculiar action in the fur-muscles of his chops.

Even Roberta's dull human senses were now aware of that disturbance in the jungle. A challenging roar of rage, very like the bawl of a buffalo but infinitely more ferocious, penetrated across the ragged clearings of Tembing's homestead. It was followed by a crackle of snapping twigs; and then a huge black beast, with down-curving horns four feet across, broke through and stood pawing on the dike of the rice-pond. Roberta saw Tembing and his bullocks flee with bawls of fright—not toward his house but across the wind, blowing strongly landward from the sea. She heard the terrified groan—*"Seledang!"* —from Aïssa behind her; then: "O Day of Misfortune! O Merciful!—Surely He raises and abases, and who shall question!"

THERE was the wail of utter despair in it, of fatalism, of unquestioning acceptance of whatever acts of God one's Kismet sent. It impressed Roberta far more than her own senses did, for a feeling of intense relief had come over her as she saw the tiger loose his hold on the rung and leap in one long spring, to crouch again facing this new adversary. His tail was now twitching unceasingly, a muttering, rumbling growl, infinitely savage, reverberating in his throat.

Roberta knew in a vague way that the seledang had winded their unwelcome visitor, his own worst enemy, and had come out of his swamps filled with fury. But

she had simply no conception of the menace to them all, to this house and every one in it, that that big black beast over there foreboded! Aïssa's groan of despair gave her a first hint of it. Not before even the dreaded *matjan* had she uttered any such wail!

The seledang advanced across the rice field, tail erect, horns thrown forward, body curved into an arch. Snorts of the most intense ferocity came from him; his thick strong neck seemed to have swelled out until it was twice its natural size. Straight for him crawled the tiger, close over the ground. They stopped a moment, while the fascinated women watched, the wild buffalo pawing with glistening sharp hoofs like spades, the tiger alert, crouched tensely for his spring.

THEN with a nerve-shattering roar he launched it. In a low, flat arc his striped body soared in a long pounce, that pounce that few living creatures in the world can withstand. It was met by the sturdy lunge of a battering-ram head and a sudden twist of the long horns that sent the tiger whirling over and over roaring his baffled rage. That terrific paw-stroke intended to break the seledang's neck had missed its mark, spent its force on a granitic bony frontal that itself weighed two hundredweight. Directly he had touched the earth, the tiger rebounded to the attack. He swept in a lithe, curving leap, slashing for the seledang's flanks. They saw him strike and cling fast, and for an instant there were sharp ejaculations of pity from the watching women as his long white fangs glistened in wide-gaping red jaws before sinking in fatally. And then they all gasped, as with equal rapidity the seledang twisted in a complicated doubling-up that snapped out viciously and again hurled the tiger by a horn-toss that had wrenched him violently from his claw-hold.

*"Aiee!"* whispered Aïssa. "Not yet!"

Roberta did not know whether she meant the buffalo or the tiger, but she felt that one thrust of either of those long horns would finish it for the tiger. This could not go on long! It was a terrific battle to watch; the tiger some four hundred pounds of active and leaping ferocity, the seledang all of twelve hundred, tough, strong, and as pugnacious as his cousin the African buffalo, than which there is no more dangerous big game.

He was forcing the fighting, now, and both of them roaring so that Roberta's ears were appalled by the unmitigated fury of the mere sound. The seledang was rushing him in short goring charges, the tiger leaping from side to side, striking viciously with blows that flashed like lightning, giving back and back always as his determined antagonist lunged and lunged with yet more murderous purpose.

And then he leaped for the seledang's neck again—and was caught and impaled by a thrust of those long horns! Stripes screeched his agony, was thrown with a vicious fling to the rice, and instantly the seledang was upon him, goring again and again, driving him back and back through the mud, the tiger striking futilely, raking and smashing at that invulnerable bony forehead.

Roberta's breast heaved and her breath came in great sobs as she watched, fascinated, her knuckles white with the intensity of her grip on the old musket. He was dying gallantly, that tiger; but dying, being gored and prodded to death by that ferocious engine of power out there! Life was passing out of the world, quitting its hold on a body, even if only a tiger's. And it was arousing sensations in her that amazed Roberta. The flood gates of her womanhood seemed being all unlocked by this terrific scene of the passing of life. The tiger was moaning and coughing out his last under those shattering blows. Roberta wept passionately; she would have fired the musket in a forlorn hope to save him, were it not her only shot. She was a giver, not a taker of life; that was her destiny in this world. She was experiencing the poignant wonder of it now. . . . .

And then she was aware of Aïssa pawing at her frantically. "Hasten, Mem! To the sampans! Wait not a moment!—*Aiee!*—Soon he comes for *us!*"

SHE had her baby in her arms and had sent all the others in haste out on the waterfront porch. Roberta shivered. She was so absorbed in her own emotions that she could not as yet grasp the fact that the seledang would attack *them* the instant his fury upon the tiger was sated and the wind told him there were yet more enemies in front of him.

*"Come!* Oh haste! What canst thou do with that popgun against *him?"* urged Aïssa, shaking the white Mem in her eagerness.

*"Baik!"* said Roberta, and would have gone—had not at that moment there come before her eyes the most pathetically superb sight in the whole world, the heroism of mere man in the defense of his womankind, no matter what the odds. It was only old Itam Nabi, but to Roberta he seemed some kind of god and she could have worshiped him! Laboring stertorously down the footpath he was coming, winded, breathing hoarsely, brandishing a bright steel parang; but to her he represented all the chivalry, the unselfish devotion, the sacrificial courage of all the men she had ever known or dreamed of. And she had no thought of deserting him now for any sampan or safety whatever.

The seledang saw him too, left off jabbing the tiger's carcass, snorted belligerently, and lowered his immense horns for the charge.

"GET thee to the boat, Ya Mem!—Hasten! Hasten!" Itam Nabi found breath to wheeze, and then crouched, awaiting the seledang. Roberta stood her ground. How just like a man! she thought tenderly. Sublime in their devotion, dauntless in their courage,—they were divinely worshipful, even *if* egregious in their notion that women didn't count and were to be protected in matters like this! She measured his chances in the very few seconds that were left. For her he proposed to duel with that seledang who had just vanquished a tiger, depending solely on his nimble legs and his keen parang! And he hadn't a chance. He might win in thick jungle,—but he had but one poor mimosa tree to dodge around here. Not that it seemed to matter at all to Itam Nabi, but it mattered a great deal to Roberta. She raised the musket swiftly and aimed it. A great bony head and enormous down-sweeping horns covered everything vulnerable before her sights. She hadn't a hope to do any damage either, Roberta realized sickeningly. And in one second more he would go for Itam Nabi and nothing that she could do would stop him. This old Singapore musket. . . . .

The seledang swung up his head and bellowed forth a challenging squeal. Roberta saw his great thick dewlap exposed to her sights for one instant, recalled Itam Nabi's saying that here he struck with his parang, and, with a steadying of the sights and the decision that this was her one chance, she pulled the trigger.

THERE was a deafening report and a violent shock that kicked her backward clear off her feet. The thing must have had half a dozen tin slugs in it and two handfuls of powder! That was Roberta's one definite thought as she went down bewilderedly in the cloud of smoke. Her head struck bamboo and she saw a million stars. And then she knew nothing at all for quite some time. . . . .

When she came to, she was reclining in a strong, greasy-smelling black arm. Over her face bent the concerned one of Itam Nabi, and, as she opened her eyes, it cracked in a joyful grin.

*"El hamdu Illahi!"* he shouted. "Lo, it is the Power of God!"

Roberta smiled wanly. Her shoulder seemed on fire and it ached as if hit with a mace. She saw Aïssa fluttering about and the girl Minah hastening with a bowl of coconut juice. She drank and her head felt better. Apparently the danger from the seledang was over.

*"Aiwa!* Dead as the pelted devil he lies!" said Itam Nabi, reading the question in her eyes. "Never *was* such a Smiting! And thou didst *not* bite thy lip, but met him with the face of wrath! These eyes saw it! Praised be Allah! Wondrous are his blessings!"

Roberta smiled up at him fondly. He seemed so happy; even more pleased that she had cast out that trick of fear than that she had shot the seledang.

"Itam Nabi—you are simply priceless!" she told him, smiling feebly.

The Black Prophet looked down his nose, puzzled. Then he bent over her, observing her intently, his gaze keen and observant as an ape's.

*"Ohé!"* he exclaimed delightedly, *"Ohé!* —There is love for man awake in thine eyes, O Honey of Delight!" he accused. "Extolled be the perfections of Allah, in Whom is no change!" he boomed out his favorite text from the Koran.

"But where find we now a prince meet for thy perfections, O Rani, brighter than the moon in glory?" he added, scratching perplexedly the regrettable mop of gray hair on his head.

Roberta tossed her head and thrilled as she heard that new title, "Rani"—*Empress* —given but rarely to any woman in Malaya. It would be hers, if Itam Nabi as headman of the village had anything to say about it! And as for the prince—well, perhaps, some day—

# *Politics in Mountsburg*

*A characteristic exploit of Grigsby the engineer—and a typically absorbing story by that able engineer of fiction who writes the "Free Lances in Diplomacy" stories.*

## *By* CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

ONE of the many reasons for Jason Ordway's success in life was his readiness to make use of any scientific development which made for time-saving and efficiency. The airplane, for example: he ordered two built for his own especial needs—and as radio-telephony saved valuable time also, he ordered the planes big enough to carry a high-powered installation together with capacity for three extra passengers when there was reason for taking them along.

Ordway left the great steel and machinery plant which bore his name in Mountsburg at two o'clock one afternoon, with only his private secretary and his radio-expert—bound for New York. When about halfway, he told his radio-man to get in communication with WEAF and ask them to switch on a telephone connection with the Engineers Club. This took but a few moments, the steward of the club answering. In reply to an inquiry for Mr. John Grigsby, construction engineer, he gave that gentleman's telephone number in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. WEAF obligingly made that connection—and Grigsby himself answered the phone.

"Grigsby talking. Who is it, please?"

"Jason Ordway, of Mountsburg—"

"Ordway Steel Construction Company?"

"Yep. Want to see you this evening—possibly two or three hours. Business proposition, I think—if you're at liberty."

"H-m-m—where are you now?"

"Wait a minute 'til I ask the pilot! . . . . He says we're somewhere over western Pennsylvania—about four thousand feet up."

"You'll come down at Mineola or near there, I suppose? About how soon?"

"Two hours—or a little over."

"I'll get a car and meet you out there at the flying-field. Look around for a wig-wag as you come down—two white flags. Who's with you?"

"My secretary, Miss Sherrod—the crew remain with the plane."

"All right—you'll be in time to dine with us at home. I suggest that as the

best place for a business talk because I have a rather complete outfit of maps—including the territory around Mountsburg, if the proposition has anything to do with that locality. If not, I probably have topographics covering 'most any place you're likely to mention."

The roar of the exhaust and the screws, of course, made conversation on the plane difficult, if not impossible—but inside of each leather flying-helmet a telephone receiver covered one ear, and a hand-transmitter hung from a metal hook under the arm of each leather jacket. So that one had but to plug into the proper hole on the side of the fuselage to communicate with anyone on board.

While Miss Sherrod had some hazy idea as to what the steel magnate's business might be with the engineer, when the car drew up before one of the older apartment-buildings on Ocean Avenue, she thought Mr. Grigsby could scarcely know much about Ordway's position in the financial world. While the building was exceptionally decent and respectable,—on one of the finest residence streets in the city,—it was hardly in the same class with the magnate's various palatial houses or even the clubs of which he was a member.

MRS. GRIGSBY she thought charming —and the apartment itself unlike any she had seen before. Evidently, the pair had decorated it to suit their own taste rather than that of the owner's decorator, and the place certainly had atmosphere. It was both restful and interesting, many souvenirs of their years in the far corners of the world being used effectively in the decorative scheme, and each bit of color so placed that it harmonized perfectly with the others surrounding it. There was an impression of spaciousness not accounted for by the regulation size of the six rooms in the suite—partly an effect of the general color-scheme and partly from an unusual arrangement of furniture. Ordway was charmed with the place, as was his secretary, when they came in—so the two were shown all over the apartment, with its many electric and other conveniences, Mrs. Grigsby explaining:

"You see, this was our first home when we were married. After one lovely year, we had to leave for Indo-China—stayed there five years altogether. When we finally came back, this same old apartment was vacant. There was a new and very nice owner—and we could afford to keep it no matter where we had to go, temporarily. So we studied out the decorations to suit ourselves and have made it our real home."

After dinner Grigsby took from one of the closets a tarpaulin-covered bale from which he extracted Government sheets for the neighborhood within a twenty-mile radius of Mountsburg—spreading them out upon a large black-oak table in the "den."

"You've said nothing as yet, Mr. Ordway, as to the nature of the proposition or its location—but the bulk of your interests center in or about Mountsburg, so I got these sheets out upon the chance of striking what was in your mind—"

ORDWAY carefully scrutinized some of the topographic sheets. "How long have you had these, Grigsby?"

The engineer chuckled. "I expected that question—if you happened to know anything about the survey in your section. These are all plate-proofs—struck off for final correction before the sale-copies are printed. None of these sheets is yet on sale—not likely to be for a year or two, when the appropriation permits. But I know the people down at the 'Coast and Geodetic' rather well, and every time they pull a new set of proofs, I get one. The corrections are marked in red ink, but you'll notice there weren't many needed. Well—what's on your mind?"

"Water-supply for Mountsburg—a growing city of three hundred thousand—largely mechanics and laborers employed in the various big plants. The chrome and iron-mines in the hills right back of us decided the location of a good-sized town at the start. Competing railway systems, the building of big plants, and the influx of labor all helped to boost us. We started with the old cisterns and wells—cesspools, of course. Then driven wells. Tried artesian—but the deeper we went, the dryer it got. Drainage has been, recently, into the Manaskattie River below the city. More or less crude system for drinking-water from upriver a ways—using surface pipes. But with the growth of the city, the river has become polluted for several miles above us. We've had a few epidemics and are in danger of more. Public opinion has become strong enough to make the city council finally vote a bond-issue to pay for water from Lake Missecaumee, necessitating a fifteen- or twenty-mile aque-

duct. But we'd never have got the project voted through if the council hadn't seen an opportunity for big-league graft in it. On a bond-issue of forty-five millions, I expect those birds in the City Hall figure on getting at least twenty-five, one way or another."

THE frown between Grigsby's eyes deepened as he concentrated upon these disjointed scraps of information and lined them up to see how they affected the whole proposition.

"Now, Mr. Ordway, just what is the situation at this moment? Where are you at on the proposition?" he asked briskly.

"A commission has been appointed to make surveys, receive various propositions for a water-system, complete, report to the council upon the best or most practical one —and then handle the construction. Approval by the council is only a matter of form, because the commission is authorized to go ahead and accept bids for different contracts on the work. So much for the preliminary end of it and the authority to begin construction when ready. Then a bond-issue of forty-five millions has been authorized and must be offered for subscription as soon as the complete plans have been adopted by the commission. Payments to be made by the comptroller, upon presentation of vouchers endorsed by the commission, from funds in the city treasury. We were rather surprised when it appeared that the council had not appointed politicians to every place on the commission—choosing, instead, a majority made up of leading business men at the head of local industries, myself among the number. In fact, it was quite a little while before we figured it out—then it became a little clearer. With men of our standing responsible for the acts of the commission, it was certain that the plans finally adopted would be the best obtainable and the chief engineer the best we could get. This, of course, insured public confidence in the work and willingness upon the part of the citizens to support the expenditure of a large sum upon it. The public will get so used to newspaper items that the comptroller has paid out so many millions in one month, so many in another, that it becomes an old story—nobody paying any attention to it. Of course there will be a rake-off for the city hall crowd in every contract—or else they'll start balling up things."

"Is the sum realized from the bond-issue to be set aside as a water-system fund and not dipped into for anything else?"

"That was the intention. We tried to have the authorization worded that way, but it was pointed out that such an arrangement would be a direct incentive for everybody identified with the work—engineers, contractors, even the commission itself—to figure upon spending the entire amount upon the water-system when the work might be done for considerably under the forty-five millions. On the other hand, it was quite possible that the work might eventually cost more than that sum, making future appropriations or bond-issues necessary. And, anyhow, it was against all precedent to go outside of the customary procedure of simply turning the bond-receipts into the treasury for city use in any way needed."

"Are you considerably within your debt-limit—up there in Mountsburg?"

"We were—up to this year. After this bond-issue, another for the same amount would put us over the line, temporarily."

"Then if the comptroller happened to say there were no funds immediately available when a lot of vouchers were presented to him for payment, that would cut off money for running expenses until he was again in funds, eh?"

"Well, it wouldn't be *quite* as simple as that for him. He'd have to do a lot of explaining which would present more or less difficulty. But—looking that far ahead—you've put your finger upon the weak spot—the feature which necessitates our employing an engineer who is something more than merely a technician."

"JUST how good is a claim against the city? Good enough to be collected through the courts?" asked Grigsby.

"Not much question as to that—if a man had the patience to carry the suit on up through two or three of them. It's never been done for a large amount, but in several minor cases it has been established that such a judgment is a collectible lien upon any money in the city treasury, which must be settled before any other payments are made by the comptroller."

"Hmph! Just one more question—then I think I'll have the situation pretty well in mind. Will those vouchers endorsed by the commission be established as duly authorized orders for payment by the comptroller—same as bank-drafts?"

"Yes. I think the council overlooked a bet when the authorization was written that way—or so plainly that no other construction can be put upon the intention expressed. But they appeared to feel quite sure of getting whatever they wanted in some way known to themselves only."

"Then if you've enough big men up there who really want this water-system put through, I see no reason why they should be disappointed."

ORDWAY smiled. "That's the sort of talk I hoped to hear from you, Grigsby—though I couldn't be sure until we got together."

"How did you happen to pick on me, anyhow?"

"Called up Colonel Myers at the Club. I believe he's the oldest living member—known him since I was a boy—thought he could tell me, offhand, the record of every prominent engineer in the country. I got the impression from him that you'd probably come high—but were worth it. The Feng Hsu Dam in Indo-China was mentioned as a case in point—where the politics were a far more serious proposition than the engineering."

"So you know the Colonel, do you? We all love that man! A hundred per cent efficient—at ninety-one! Well, let's get down to cases on this proposition. You're figuring on getting your water from Lake Missecaumee, are you? Why?"

"Best obtainable, as far as we know. Six miles long and two wide—all the water we'll need for the next half-century."

"Your city will never grow big enough to exhaust it. But I notice several permanent camps marked on the map, around its shores. Bound to be more of them, also summer-resorts and villages there in a few years, with more or less pollution. Eighteen-mile aqueduct to build and maintain. The lake-level is but seventy feet higher than Mountsburg—which means a big pumping-station and constant expense for maintenance. How about this smaller lake in the mountains back of the city—Lukewaumas? Four miles long—three-quarters wide. What do you know about that one?"

"Never heard of it! If it's the one we call 'Turner Pond,' I bought it a few years ago to keep the pulp companies from getting in there and cutting the trees—had some idea of a fishing-club. The timber and underbrush around it have never been cut—only a few trails through them. Nobody ever goes there except a few picnickers who are out for a stiff climb with adventure thrown in, or some of the fishing-nuts who sometimes go up there for the bass—lake's full of 'em, if you think they're worth the trouble. I suppose, in an air-line, that pond can't be more'n three or four miles from Mountsburg—but if you start to climb it, you'd swear it was twenty. You've got to go over the shoulder of Pendleton Hill—that's a good eighteen hundred feet of elevation. Then through a notch between Twin Peaks and around back of 'em—perhaps another five hundred feet up—"

"That's the longest way around, by more than three miles. If you went straight over the top of Pendleton at the highest point, you'd see that lake just below you—it twists around the corner of a notch almost at right angles. And here's something you may never have heard. Soundings along the middle of that little lake show a depth of fifteen hundred feet,—evidently a chasm between the two peaks,—probably twice as much water as there is in all Lake Missecaumee, which is shallow. *Pure* water, too, because there's little chance of pollution in the next century and every rainfall drains down into it through primeval woods."

"But—dammit all, Grigsby!—you're not suggesting that as the source of our water-supply, are you? First place, I don't know how in thunder you'd get at it—and if you did, the expense would be 'way beyond our reach!"

"The expense would be several millions less than your aqueduct and pumping-station from Missecaumee! Here's where these Government sheets are pretty good medicine when you know how to use them—just follow my pencil! See this ravine on the city side of Pendleton Hill? At the point where my pencil rests, you're only two hundred feet higher than the city, but you're a good two miles from the outer streets—within seven thousand feet of the deepest part of Lukewaumas, air-line. Probably trap rock and conglomerate in that mountain—can't be much granite with the sort of mines you've got in the neighborhood. Now you can bore seven thousand feet of hydraulic tunnel through that mountain for a darned sight less money than you can build eighteen miles of permanent aqueduct, can't you? And the pressure will be so

great that you'll have to be mighty careful about the strength of your piping. No trouble about fire-hydrants on the top floors of your fifteen-story buildings along Mount Street."

The steel magnate was absorbedly poring over the topographic sheet—studying contour-levels and air-line distances. "My gosh! To think of our living right there all these years—half our lives—and never knowing what there really is in the neighborhood! I guess this settles the water-system, Grigsby! Nobody else is going to make a suggestion within miles of this! From what you tell me, nobody else has any surveys or maps to base it on! The commission will vote you in as chief engineer without a question when you show this to 'em—if you'll take it. How much would you want?"

"Well—considering the politics and all—I'd say about forty thousand a year. I suppose I could take the job—but from what I understand of the situation, it's likely to be a fight from the start. And your voters may kick at my salary."

"I'll personally guarantee it until the work is finished, if they do! In fact, I'll guarantee it anyhow—cash or checks when due—no waiting for the comptroller!"

"Suppose we put you both up for the night? Then, if you're going back tomorrow, I'll go with you. Circling over those mountains a few times in that plane of yours will give me about all I need to know as to the practicability of my suggestion—give us an air-line sight from Lake Lukewaumas to the city. The outcrop will indicate what the rock is likely to be under Mount Pendleton. If I'm satisfied, I suggest that we immediately take up as many of the commission as your boat will carry and show them exactly what the proposition is. Take the rest of them on a second trip. That settles all doubt and argument in the matter. From this topographic sheet, we get just about what you'll see from the plane, only with more detail. Even a fairly thick-witted man can't help seeing that it's the only rational scheme in your neighborhood."

TWO weeks later, at a meeting of the Mountsburg city council in the City Hall, one of the members exploded a small bomb by presenting a carefully worked-out plan for the new water-system from the Water Supply Commission. So far as anything they had heard of the matter, the commission, as yet, had been inactive. There had been no newspaper comment as to their even looking for an engineer or making any arrangement for preliminary surveys—and, though the council knew that every man on the commission was of the type which gets things done quickly and efficiently, none of the members supposed that definite action would be taken for several months at least. The first impression was that some half-baked plan had been tentatively offered by a scant majority of the commissioners—but upon examining the accompanying blue-prints and map-tracings, it was evident that the scheme had been worked out to the smallest detail and had been unanimously adopted by the entire commission. Presently it dawned upon the comptroller that the Lake Missecaumee plan had been abandoned in favor of a much nearer lake which none of them had ever heard of but which they decided must be "Turner Pond." He went right up in the air over this and the others were joining him when Fogarty—the politician who held the office of city engineer—put in a word or two of doubt:

"Wait a bit, will yez? W-a-i-t a minute! It do be sayin' here in the specifications that the intintion is to burrow a hole plumb through ould Pendleton, yon, to let the wather through from Turner Pond. Ye can't make nothin' else o' what it do be sayin'! Well—I'm thinkin' that'll not be so bad f'r anny one of us, d'ye see? Most of the contractin'll be rock-blastin', which is ixpinsive—anny ould price might get by—an' the aqueduct, from where the hole cooms out on this side'll be just what we bin figgerin' on from Missecaumee—"

"How long will it take f'r that hole through the mountain, Fogarty—if it can be done at all?"

"Mebbe five years—mebbe tin—dipindin' on the rock, *an' how fast we want it done!* Sure, the more I look into it, the more illigant schayme it looks to be! It has the other wan beat six ways!"

"What do they want us to do—formally approve their recommendation, I suppose? An'—if we don't?"

"They've the power to go ahid with it annyhow—'cordin' to the authorization given the commission. The comptroller might rayfuse paymint of their vouchers if we hadn't approved—but they'd just go ahid an' git a coort order compellin' him to pay—so there'd be no sinse in rayfusin'.

If ye'll listen to me, gintlemin, ye'll approve these plans in proper order, now—at this meetin'—an' I'ave thim go ahid as fast as they loike f'r a bit. If ye don't, they might be submittin' some other schayme not so good f'r us or our conthractors!"

"They got to advertise f'r bids on the contracts, aint they?"

"Sure! But what outsiders is loikely to bate us at *thot* game?"

BEFORE the end of the month, advertisements were out for bids on the various contracts—and some features in them caused another serious consultation in the council. The bids were to be so worded that the understanding was perfectly clear upon two points at least. A deposit of twenty thousand dollars must accompany each bid as an evidence of good faith—to be returned with interest at six per cent when the contract was fulfilled—or returned in three months to the unsuccessful bidders. A final clause stipulated that in the event that either of the contracting parties failed at any time to live up to his side of the agreement in every respect, the contract immediately became null and void. Again, Engineer Fogarty pointed out that such a hard and fast stipulation was far more likely to prevent any drastic action upon the part of the commission than in the case of any contractor—but the comptroller raised a very pertinent objection on the other side by stating that a strike among the men employed by any contractor would terminate his contract just as quickly as any ill-considered action upon the part of the contractor. Just here, the Commissioner of Public Works showed them an explanatory letter from the Water Supply Commission which covered this very point—holding that the water-supply was too urgent a necessity for the city to risk any chance of being held up indefinitely by strikes among the contractors. If such an occurrence wiped out one man's contract, it was regrettable, of course, but it gave the commissioners opportunity at once to get other labor and carry on the work—it being understood that if a low bidder had figured on non-union wages, that fact barred the acceptance of his bid, so that all of them were starting on an equal basis as far as labor costs were concerned.

Each one of these points had been a suggestion of John Grigsby's—who was quite well aware of the sort of animal he was up against and determined to leave out no reasonable precaution that he could think of. Beyond all this, he foresaw much more serious attempts to stop or damage his work after it had progressed considerably faster and farther than the council had any idea of letting it progress. He made a point of conferring with each member of the commission until he was satisfied that every man of them was big enough—successful enough in his business and general influence—to recognize the immediate necessity for the very best water-system obtainable, and forceful enough to overcome all obstacles in putting through such work in the same way they would their own private enterprises. As Blakeman, of the Eagle Mining & Construction Co. put it, in talking to John Grigsby:

"A city of over three hundred thousand people easily can become a very serious proposition if an epidemic gets a fair hold in it—or if a fire spreads so that the ordinary water-pressure which you find in most of the smaller places can't make any impression upon it. We've got to have hose-pressure that'll throw a two-hundred-foot stream from the top floors of the Ordway Building, if we need it. Both of these points are serious enough in the case of a city made up of average folks with a fair percentage of education. But when it comes to a town which is eighty per cent labor—skilled and unskilled—the proposition is a darned sight more serious! Ignorance always fights proper sanitation in the living-quarters. Disease which should be reported at once is allowed to spread from one tenement to another before a doctor is called in or knows what he's up against. And, of course, the question of politics in a city of this type is a pretty hard nut to crack. With the more educated element outvoted ten-to-one, it is practically impossible to get constructive or conservative city government—there are altogether too many soft-snap berths to be handed out by those in power to feed on the city pay-roll. There is just one thing which holds such a government in check—and one only. If they let politics get *too* rotten—soak the employers with too many impossible restrictions, or taxes which knock every cent of profit out of their businesses—there's nothing to hinder their pulling up the plants by the roots and moving them somewhere else. Of course

the near-by mines would be hard to replace—but there are mining-sections to be found and developed in other parts of the country, if necessary. In fact, that is about the only element of safety we've got here. Now—on a proposition like this water-system—the council don't see it as we employers do, and there's no way of making them see it! They're helping us, so far, simply for the graft they expect to find in it. If you told them that, with the present water-system and an eighty-mile gale, any fire with a good start would wipe out two-thirds of the city—or that an epidemic from polluted water could easily kill fifty thousand people before it was stamped out—they'd laugh at you! They should worry! Plenty of doctors—an expensive fire department with the latest type of motor-engines! How can you make that sort of a brain understand that a thousand people can drink dippersful of polluted water while ten doctors in the tenements are fighting the first few cases of typhoid? Or that the best fire-engine every built isn't worth a damn without plenty of water, in any really big fire?"

"I know exactly what you're up against, Blakeman," replied Grigsby gravely. "I've seen more than one situation like it before—but I'm glad to know just where you and the other commissioners stand in this matter, because, unless I've sized up that City Hall gang all wrong, we're going to have a game to play that'll be plumb interesting before we get through and turn the water on. The first thing I'm going to spend money on is a police-force of our own—say, a hundred men—ex-cowpunchers, ex-army or state-constabulary men. May need three hundred before the wind-up—but I think a hundred will give us all the protection we'll want for the first year anyhow. We're likely to get sabotage of all sorts—and—worse, perhaps!"

"Telegraph for your men at once, Grigsby, if you know where to get them, and know each one is reliable! What next?"

"Going to run a narrow-gauge cog-railway straight over the top of Pendleton Hill at the highest point, and down on the other side as far as that rock-cliff which drops six hundred feet sheer into the lake. Big elevator with a wooden-truss frame anchored into the face of that cliff. Big steel float at the base of the rock—on the water, but anchored tight against the cliff. Cut a working-chamber into the face, sixty feet deep, forty wide, twenty high. That's the nearest deep water directly in line with the city through the mountain. From that working-chamber, we'll sink two shafts down to the level at which we come out on this side of the mountain in that little ravine. Then we'll start boring our tunnel from there."

"Oh-h-h—you're not going to work from this side at the start?"

"Purposely not. Working over on the lake side—our labor camping there in shacks—none of the city gang can form any clear idea as to how far we're getting along. The aqueduct, of course, will be started from the city—and I expect the bids from city contractors are likely to be the lowest, so that part of the construction will be a local affair. On the tunneling, I think I can get bids from Maine quarrymen which'll be 'way under anything we're likely to be offered from anyone in this neighborhood—they know a lot about hard rock, up there in Maine."

PARTLY because she was herself a first-class field-engineer, Joan Grigsby was as fascinated with big work as any man on the job—but one noticed in connection with the Grigsbys that, wherever you found one of them, the other was likely to be somewhere around. So, as soon as a comfortable bungalow had been run up for them on the bank of the lake, she moved in with a serviceable housekeeping outfit—though, until the everlastingly pushed cog-railway began hauling material over the top of the mountain, all of their supplies had to be "packed in" on the backs of mules and the only means of transportation down to the city was on their own ponies over the longer five-mile trail.

Now Mountsburg, like other cities, has its various social strata—only, being the labor-community it is, the upper crust differs somewhat from that in metropolitan centers, though there is some attempt at copying New York and Chicago on a small scale. Children of boss-mechanics, foremen, superintendents and contractors are going through high-schools a good deal like the average in larger places—rather better on the technical side, perhaps, and considerably worse on history and literature. There is also more college attendance among both sexes than one might think from the make-up of the town—with many of the unsatisfactory results one sees also in the larger places.

And with all these mixed results, there is considerable aping of social mannerisms which the youngsters have seen in the larger cities. Take for example the two riding-clubs—with their bob-tailed mounts, their Prussian cavalrymen as riding-masters, their flat saddles, the ridiculous posture taught with the knees on a level with the pommel. A party of five rode out through Mount Street to the hills, one afternoon; the girls in shiny beaver hats and the last word in metropolitan riding-togs, the men in smart cutaway-coats and derby hats—all with flat saddles and iron stirrups with which they could not have ridden down the steep "Pendleton Trail" without serious risk of sliding over their horses' heads to nasty falls. But they had no intention of attempting any such ride, so their chances were fair enough for getting home in the saddle—if their mounts didn't shy or "sunfish."

At the foot of the trail, where they were turning about to go back, Joan Grigsby came riding down on her sure-footed cow-pony—in a "Mex," with long covered stirrups, olive-drab breeches, puttees and a brown felt hat which matched her breeches—stiff-legged—feet well out in front of the pony's shoulders. If he had stumbled to his knees, she would have kept her seat and gentled him up again.

Having not the slightest idea who she was, the city party watched her with tittering disapproval of her get-up but some grudging respect for her riding, even though it was rotten bad form according to their standards. As her pony approached in an army fox-trot which covered ground more rapidly than it seemed to, she smiled at them in a friendly way. One of the girls asked, sotto voce:

"Who is she, Louise? Nobody I know! Is there a Wild West show in town? Looks as if she belonged to something like that! Why, I believe the creature is going to speak to us! Did you ever hear of such impertinence!"

"Good afternoon, folks! Lovely weather for riding, isn't it?" They looked at her in stony silence. "What's the matter?"—stopping her pony with a touch. "You've no reason to be sore at me for anything, because I never laid eyes on you before! I spoke to you civilly, didn't I?"

One of the girls took it upon herself to answer pertly: "Er—I'm quite sure that none of us know you—we have never been introduced!"

"Oh, *that's* it? Now I wonder if your bad manners are your parents' fault, or just something you've taken on in spite of them? All right. You're young yet—all of you." And with a slight touch of the spur, "Sam-u-el" humped away in an easy canter.

One of the girls, with flaming cheeks, said explosively: "Did you ever hear of such insolence! Come on—I'm not going to take her dust! Let's ride past her and get where we can forget the creature's existence!"

THIS wasn't altogether the simple proposition it seemed. "Sam-u-el" had been loafing down the trails, was full of oats, and quite inclined to argue the question of speed with any old equine. With one ear cocked back for a possible word of reproof from his mistress, he stretched out a little—until, though well within his own limit, it took some traveling to overhaul him. Joan let him go for a couple of minutes, sitting her saddle as if glued to his back. The thoroughly angry girl who was slightly in advance of the others foolishly whacked her thoroughbred with a crop until he took the bit in his teeth and bolted. Her tile hat came off and she was being tossed a good six inches above her flat saddle at each leap of the now maddened horse. Then a buckle-hole in her girth-strap ripped a little—tore into the next hole—and the saddle began to slip just as she was passing Joan, who instinctively had reined in when she saw what was the matter and then gently spurred "Sam-u-el" up abreast on the left side, so that her right arm was free.

"Lean this way a little!" she cried. "That's it! Kick your feet out of those stirrups before they get caught around your instep!"

Slipping an arm around the girl's waist, Joan pulled her across onto "Sam-u-el's" rump—then gradually reined him in and let the girl slide down until she stood on her feet in the road, pale, crying—unable to say anything.

"Never mind, dear! You're not hurt—only scared a little. Here come the rest of your party, now—so I'll be going on. I'm Mrs. Grigsby of the new water-system. Get a decent saddle, some day, and come see us up at the lake. It's less than nine miles from the City Hall, out and back—just a nice morning's ride. I'll give you lunch when you come."

The rest of the party, of course, had seen every detail of the occurrence and reached the girl in another moment. When they heard her story, one of the men remembered a bit of rumor he'd picked up in New York the week before.

"If that was really Mrs. Grigsby, I think there's an apology due from all of us! We've been pretty severely criticizing the commission for paying an engineer any such whacking salary as forty thousand a year—but down in New York, they say he's actually worth more than that. He and his wife have done big things in various parts of the world. Seems to me the sporting thing to do is hunt her up before she rides back to the lake and express some sort of regret for our bad manners. You see, people of that class don't need introductions from anybody."

THE girl who had been so nearly thrown thought very well of herself, but she had been pretty badly scared—and convinced that she might easily have been killed but for Mrs. Grigsby's timely rescue. So they located "Sam-u-el," standing before the post office, and made very decent apologies when his mistress came out; apologies which were accepted gracefully.

That was that. The girl in the affair proved to be the only daughter of Craddock, president of the city council—and she had the innate decency to give her father and mother a perfectly straight account of the affair at dinner, that evening.

In a couple of weeks, the bond-issue had been offered—and over-subscribed. When he knew that most of the money had been deposited to the city's account by the comptroller, Grigsby appeared at a meeting of the commission in the Ordway Building, suggesting that they immediately present a voucher for eighteen million dollars—draw the money from the city treasury—and open water-system accounts for current disbursements in three different banks. Such a proceeding hadn't occurred to them as possible, but the engineer pointed out that there was no clause in the commission's franchise which prohibited it—in fact, there was no question whatever as to their legal right to make such a demand if they chose to. Each commissioner thought, however, that the comptroller would refuse.

"That will be his first impulse, undoubtedly—but the more he thinks it over the sooner he'll see that you could get a court order forcing him to comply. I think you'll get the money within a few days—and then have the utmost difficulty in getting another cent for two or three years, if they can get away with a refusal. But the point is this eighteen millions will, in my estimation, enable us to complete from a third to a half of the work, depending upon what we strike inside that mountain. Whatever delays of other sorts happen along, we can't be held up for lack of funds to meet our pay-rolls, as they fully intended we should be. At this particular moment, the comptroller can't bluff us off with a statement that he hasn't the money available. A few months from now, he can—and will."

There was a stormy session of the council in the City Hall next day—every member being unalterably opposed to granting any such demand. After the language finally subsided to something more parliamentary, Craddock—who had more intelligence than any of the rest—began to think acquiescence on their part might work out very much to their advantage in the long run.

"First place—we might as well face the fact that the commission will force us to comply, through the courts, if we refuse. And that puts us in the light of obstructing a very necessary improvement. On the other hand—say we give them the eighteen millions—that leaves over twenty-seven millions in our hands and gives us all the excuse we want for demanding a strict accounting before we pay another cent. Meanwhile, our friends among the contractors are getting their money regularly—we'll raise a howl if they don't. The whole proposition leaves the council in the best possible light. We have openly and promptly rendered every assistance to the water commission. If anything should go wrong with the work, it's right up to them! And—er—it wouldn't surprise me much if a number of things *do* go wrong in the next couple of years."

Covert glances of comprehension—and suggestive grins—traveled around the circle of faces at the table. The payment was voted, and the commission banked the eighteen millions as carefully and with as many safeguards as if it were capital invested in their own businesses. Before Mountsburg woke up to the fact that any real start was being made on the work, a spur of track had been run from the city

switchyards to the ravine in the side of Pendleton Hill; the cog-narrow-gauge had been run over the top of the mountain; the big construction-float was anchored to the cliff, on the lake; the working-chamber blasted out of the rock, and trainload after trainload of material was going over the mountain in a steady stream.

When bids were opened for the various contracts, it was found that local concerns had obtained the aqueduct sections from the city—sand, bricks and broken stone to build them. But the rock-tunneling and all of the cement had gone to outsiders whose figures were considerably under those of the contractors in the neighborhood—Maine quarrymen getting the rock-work at an average price per cubic yard—concerns in New York, Pittsburgh and Chicago supplying the cement. The Maine contractors had also put in bids for drills, barrows, steam-shovels and the whole working outfit at prices much below the open market. All the bids were published in the city newspapers, so there could be no question of unfairness in the awards.

After a month, the council began to get curious about what was being done at the lake. Newspaper men had been up there—very much "personally conducted"—and they hadn't seen so very much. Quantities of material were coming down the narrow-gauge to the top of the rough elevator down the cliff, and stored there in good weather-proof shacks. There was a faint sound of drilling which echoed across the lake and back again. There were two power-launches and a number of Rangely boats where there had been no boat of any sort before. And the engineers gave the reporters some exciting bass-fishing before they went back. Only two general pictures of the lake were permitted to be taken—with one of the working-floats and rock-chamber. To Fogarty, the city engineer—when he saw these in the newspapers—they meant a good deal more than to any others in the council, and he somewhat grudgingly admitted that a surprising amount of work appeared to be in progress. Three months before, he had been assuring them that if work were commenced at the lake end, at all, they wouldn't be able to get enough material over there to make a start until late in the fall—supposing, as all of them did, that Grigsby would pack it over the trails on mules. Before the meeting broke up, it was decided that the council make an official visit of inspection the following Saturday. This, of course, it was in the power of the commission to refuse—inasmuch as it was in sole charge of the work. But Grigsby foresaw advantage to them in letting the council take in everything they could, Fogarty having little more ability than a "chain-and-transit" man, himself, in spite of his high-sounding office—and he suggested that they bring some of their womenfolk with them for an afternoon on the lake in the launches.

It seemed to the women like a pretty strenuous day with little that might be worth while to pay for it, but the councilmen had talked so much of the new water-system that most of them had become curious, also, and there were thirty in the party which came down the narrow-gauge to the top of the cliff. Anticipating some nervousness from both men and women, the big platform of the elevator had been fenced around, chest-high, with one-inch planking—which made it look safer, though it made them dizzy to look down the six hundred feet to the float at the bottom, and to the surface of the lake. Great depths generally appear far more dangerous than shallow ones, regardless of the fact that the buoyancy of the water is the same.

AMONG the party, was a restless boy of twelve, the only son of the comptroller and sufficiently spoiled to be a general nuisance.

As the first load began to descend, and when the car was eighty feet above the water, Grigsby stopped it so that, with the sun at exactly the right angle, they could make out projections of rock a good hundred feet under the surface, or the denser shadows which indicated them—and see that there were far greater depths below. He was explaining the advantage of starting the tunnel under the mountain at that deepest spot, when the boy climbed up and straddled the guard-rail behind him to look over. Several exclamations made the engineer whirl about and reach for him just as the boy lost his balance and fell.

At that height, there was danger of his striking the edge of the big steel float—but, fortunately, his last grab at the rail shoved him out far enough to hit the water, in a partly sitting position, ten feet beyond the float. With that slant of the sun, they could see his body distinctly as

it curved under water out toward the middle of the lake—and Grigsby, standing upon the guard-rail, took a few seconds to note his exact location before diving after him.

It was a perfect swan-dive, calculated to a nicety—but one goes much deeper in fresh water and comes up more slowly than in salt because of the difference in buoyancy, and the strain upon Grigsby's lungs was becoming almost intolerable when he came to the surface with the boy in his arms and was hauled into one of the boats which a hard-rock man hastily shoved off from the float. The boy was unconscious and had swallowed considerable water—but Joan, who had been waiting for their guests in one of the power-launches, promptly started first-aid treatment and had the youngster very much alive in a few moments, apparently none the worse for his plunge; then with his father and mother, and her husband, she ran the launch across to their bungalow on the opposite shore for dry clothes and hot coffee. The Murdocks hadn't much to say, but the picture of the boy's fall and Grigsby's dive from that dizzy height (eighty feet into sea-water is no great risk, but in lake-water, it is) was burning itself into their brains to remain there as long as they lived.

Joan glanced at her husband once or twice a little anxiously, but he smilingly said he was all right and they went back to join the party on the float. A rough stair was being hung upon the sides of both shafts in the rock-chamber as they were drilled down, leaving clearance for a miner's-cage to be lowered in the center. Fogarty was starting down the deepest of these, which he was told had reached a depth of five hundred feet, when one of the assistant engineers stopped him with the statement that no visitors were allowed below. When the city engineer asked an explanation of this from Grigsby a few minutes later, he was told that the thickness of the wall between shafts and lake-water was something they couldn't exactly determine because fissures in the rock, under water, which couldn't be seen from the surface, might run in much closer than they figured—and that under the greater pressure lower down, the rock wall might give way unexpectedly.

"Of course we're continually sounding the rock, Fogarty, and watching every trickle of moisture—but while it's all in the day's work for us, we don't feel like submitting anyone else to the risk. When we finally 'hole-through,' we'll take a party of you the whole length to the other side of the mountain before we let the water in—but until then, you're safer outside."

The tour of the lake in the launches, the bass-fishing, and the luncheon prepared by the Chinese camp-cooks, made the day a much more interesting experience for the city party than they had anticipated. Some of the fishing councilmen ran their boats up on the lake shore at one or two points with the intention of getting some idea as to what the woods were like in back of it. But they found the undergrowth practically impassable except at two places where the trails ran in—evidently made, originally, by wild animals coming down for a drink—and when a couple of them penetrated one of these a few rods, they were met by one of the uniformed lake constabulary who told them that the lake was now barred to all picnickers or outsiders of any sort except those who were guests of the commission or the engineers.

"That may seem a little hard upon the picnickers, gentlemen, but not more than half a dozen ever come up here in one season, and you can readily see that this water must now be guarded against pollution of any description. It's Mr. Ordway's property, anyhow—his 'no-trespass' signs all through these woods are legally effective in themselves."

THE next day they discussed this with a couple of others, in one of the more disreputable saloons which flourished openly in the tenement district—and were inclined to think it might serve their purpose very well at some later time. That afternoon, a code radio-message was brought to Grigsby—in bed, at his bungalow. When the party had gone home, late in the previous afternoon, he had felt so tired that it was an effort to move. Joan had seen that a light dinner was prepared for him and then, sitting on the edge of the bed, insisted upon knowing exactly what was wrong with him.

"Well, I reckon there isn't much doubt that I wrenched the muscles of my back in that dive from the elevator-car. I've done it before, you know, one way or another—sometimes by nasty falls. And unless we get busy, it'll put me out of business for a week or more—I wont be

able to move without howling, tomorrow."

Laying him upon his face, she had Sam Wong fetch a cauldron of steaming hot water and began fomenting his back with flannels as hot as he could stand, then soaked them with arnica-solution, covered the poultices with oiled silk and trussed him up in them for the night. For an hour or two, every move hurt him—then he dropped off to sleep. In the morning, the soreness was almost gone, but Joan had managed to keep him in bed until the radio-message came.

"If that irrepressible Murdock kid had been the cause of any serious injury to you, John, I always would have regretted that I didn't chuck him back into the lake and make a finished job of him! But you're nearly all right again, and I suppose his mother thinks he was worth saving! Who sent the radio?"

"Cotterthwaite, of the constabulary. Says it's important that I get the seven-forty-five to Hortonville and see him there at the Gales House by nine o'clock. Of course it wont do for anybody to see us together in Mountsburg, or for him to come out here." Grigsby kept five of his constabulary in the city as plain-clothes men, posing as labor-agitators, on the chance of picking up rumors which indicated some move against the water commission.

Joan pondered a moment. Then she said: "Well, there isn't much risk of your getting more cold in those back-muscles, and if you do, I can foment them again. It's something we ought to know, or Cotterthwaite wouldn't have sent the message."

At a few minutes past nine, a man who presented a much different appearance from the labor-agitator of the Mountsburg slums pulled up a chair near that of the engineer in an isolated corner of the hotel veranda and lighted a good cigar.

"It's like this, sir: I struck something over there which looks kinda smelly and yet may not amount to anything. Do you know anything about a nephew of Councilman Brady who graduated from medical college a while back and has started a laboratory for biological work here in Hortonville? This isn't a big town, but it's only a short ride from three or four good-sized cities—from which he expects the doctors to send him a lot of lab' work. He's said to be a fairly good biologist, and I heard him telling his uncle in one of the Mountsburg saloons, last week, of an interesting experiment he was making on a superannuated horse which he was killing by inoculating with typhoid germs. Then they switched to a discussion as to whether the editor of the *Mountsburg Journal* (in which three of the council have an interest) would display something, but what, I didn't catch, in his big window on Mount Street, with explanatory bulletins. Brady said the *Journal* would do anything he said—once it got the goods. Later on, in another saloon, Dr. O'Shea had a confab with a tough bird known as 'Petey Slavin,' a billiard-marker—undoubtedly a gangster. Petey was to come over here this evening and get something in a carpet-bag. He came in on the same train with you. Suppose we go around to a little stable in the rear of O'Shea's laboratory, and see if we can turn up anything?"

IN ten minutes, they were skulking in the shadow behind the aforesaid stable—peering in through a little window above one of the stalls. The doctor evidently was performing an operation on a dead horse—having ripped open the swollen belly and extracted the viscera, which Petey Slavin, after wrapping in oilskins, was stuffing into a carpet-bag. O'Shea then stuffed the dead horse's belly with excelsior and sewed up the skin so deftly that the crease would be taken for some veterinary's work if noticed at all. Just before "Petey" left, O'Shea rehearsed him in something he was to do.

"Oh, I getcha, Doc'! I goes out ridin' a mule tomorrow night when it's dark—with this gripsack strapped on behind. I goes up over the old trail around t'other end of the lake, sneaks down the trail marked on the map an' dumps this stuff into the water—sloshin' it 'round plenty. Then I fills the big spring-water bottle at that same spot an' brings it back to youse. You lets it soak a while—then takes it down to the *Joinal* office—an' they puts it in the big windy wit' the analyzin' o' the kinda bugs youse finds in it. Nix on the new water-supply!"

The two men behind the barn looked at each other with the impulse to go around and smash the scoundrels before arresting them.

But it seemed better, after reflection, to cinch the thing with other witnesses, so they went back to Mountsburg and arranged to shadow "Petey" and each of the council at every step. After which, Grigs-

by gave his constabulary strict orders at the lake.

IN due time, Petey climbed the trail on his mule and cautiously picked his way to what he supposed one of the two unguarded points on the lake shore. Within a thousand feet of the water, however, two five-hundred-watt lamps suddenly blazed enough light for a couple of movie cameras to get a hundred feet of film before he finally climbed down from his mule. Then he was led away to a corrugated-iron shack in the woods where he remained under guard.

Upon the next day, at a safe distance from the lake, the contents of the carpet-sack were taken out, unwrapped and photographed—the viscera being subsequently sent to one of the great New York laboratories for analysis. At the next meeting of the city council, Grigsby, with Ordway and Blakeman of the commission, unexpectedly presented themselves with a courteous enough request for a conference behind locked doors. There was some disposition to refuse—but finally the doors were locked and President Craddock said they would listen to what the engineer had to say.

"Gentlemen," began Grigsby, "we may as well assume that neither this council nor the commission have fooled each other for one moment. Up to this time, you've aided us in every way—giving us so much rope that you could wipe us out in one neat jab when the proper time came, and have a large sum left in the city treasury for—well—other necessary disbursements, let us say. We're quite well aware that when we've spent the eighteen millions now in hand, further vouchers, though perfectly good, will be refused payment on the ground of 'no available funds.' Word will be passed to the local contractors—their men will quit work until the city again has money to pay them. If that were all of it, we wouldn't bother to take your time at this meeting. I'd simply cancel all those contracts and re-let them to outside concerns—having made arrangements from the start to borrow all the money needed, on our vouchers, and have the lenders sue the city on them. I could get fifty millions on Mountsburg's credit that way if I had to. But when it comes to deliberately polluting our lake—your own water-supply, which is desperately needed—the matter has got to come to a show-down! We have Petey Slavin under guard where he'll be shot if he tries to break out. We have a lot of film of him on his mule with a carpet-bag full of typhoid viscera strapped on behind; of that viscera, spread out; an analysis from a leading New York laboratory of just what it contains; and witnesses who overheard the whole plot to exhibit a supposed jar of our lake water in the *Journal's* window, with enough typhoid germs to kill half the city if they started breeding in the lake. The object being, of course, to discredit the commission and cancel the whole project—when two-thirds of its money is in the city treasury! Now how about it? Will you help us to complete the system as soon as possible on condition that we keep our mouths shut? Or will you compel us to take this into the courts and send most of you to State's prison?"

Comptroller Murdock and President Craddock slowly got upon their feet, with glances of withering contempt at their less intelligent colleagues.

Craddock made a brief statement: "Mr. Grigsby, I'll admit, frankly, that I was against your water-supply scheme at the start. It seemed difficult if not impossible—but when I saw how thoroughly you knew your business and the amazing progress you've already made, I changed my mind. Afterward, your wife placed me under great personal obligations. I shall honestly and heartily help the commission in every way I can. As for this typhoid pollution I knew absolutely nothing about it—would never have sanctioned so foul an outrage!"

The comptroller's statement was briefer, but emphatic:

"President Craddock's statement covers about everything I would say for myself. Mr. Grigsby can hardly suppose that I would sanction anything like this typhoid conspiracy—nor do anything at all to hamper him, after the personal obligations he so unhesitatingly placed me under! And in all justice, I must express disbelief that a majority of this council had anything to do with it."

In Ordway's office, an hour later, the magnate said: "It looks now—thanks to the Grigsbys—as if we'll have no more obstruction or treachery from those birds. But—it may be just as well to 'keep our powder dry,' all the same!"

**A new story of the "Free Lances in Diplomacy" will appear in our next issue.**

# *The Mechanic's Home Run*

*The author of "Efficiency Oscar" and "A Jailbird in Hand" is in excellent form in this joyous new story of our old friend the garage wizard.*

## *By* CALVIN BALL

WHILE I stands in the garage using the emery on a set of leaky valves, I could hear the crowds in the field where the county races was going at full sway. The field was a quarter-mile from the highway garage where I works, and echoes of hoofs came clear.

I always keep away from this race business, though, because my trade is a expert auto mechanic, and I have heard about you better stick to your last. Also it is more profit that way.

I strolled over to the front door to take a squint up the road, and it was then I saw something which it was enough to make me mad. I don't object to having a flashy-looking jockey wander over from the fair-grounds and spend his time hanging on the fence, but this jockey was of a slick variety, and I certainly had a good suspicion why he was there.

The owner of the garage lives upstairs above it, I living with him; and when I say that the owner has got a daughter named Caroline who she is a knockout for good looks, and also a classy dresser, you will then have a good idea why I am holding to this kind of job in a rural section, and you would also see why a red-coat jockey comes loafing around the gatepost.

I could see in two winks what kind of a game this was, because yesterday Caroline came home from the fair-grounds with herself hooked on the arm of a jockey, and this one now draped on the fence was the same gay bird or I made a mistake.

Parking myself at one side of the door where he couldn't see me, I kept quiet for a few minutes watching for developments. One of his hands was hanging on the fence, and with the other he was killing time dusting himself with his cap. His hair was slicked back in a first-class sheik manner, and with his jockey uniform, the colors of which squealed out loud, he sure was a smooth-looking article. His eyes was stuck out toward somebody, but I didn't know did he have a date to meet her, or was he only hoping he might see her by accident.

AS it is always a good policy to nip a affair like this in the bud, I eased out into the yard and over to the fence to

where the cuckoo was still dusting himself with a green cap.

"It's a hot one, aint it?" he says, mopping his brow and giving me a close once-over.

"It sure is," I agreed, sizing up his rainbow garb; "but I have seen worse at a minstrel. Are you a jockey?"

"Now, brother," he says in a slow tone, "if you look close at the way I am dressed, what would you take me for?"

"I might take you for a fire-alarm," I says, "only there aint enough motion. Are you looking for somebody special?"

"Nothing special," he tells me. "I am just killing the time."

"Do you find this a good place to kill it?"

"It is a excellent place," he states, taking another swipe at himself with his cap.

For a minute I stands there without speaking. I pulled out a pack of cigarettes, because in a situation like this you can think better if you smoke.

"Thanks," he says, reaching out and pinching a cigarette before I could get my own fingers into them. "Have you got a match?"

I slipped the package of matches out of my pocket, saying nothing, but looking at him hard. He put the cigarette between his teeth and stuck out his face for a light.

"Strike a light," he says.

"Are you sure you could puff it yourself?" I asked. "What is your name?"

He blew out a cloud of smoke thick enough to hide me. I was by this time getting badly roiled up, as you know what small sizes jockeys come in. I am not a heavyweight myself, but if my judgment was sound, this shrimp now before me was one who I could easily shake the daylight out of him.

"My name is Muller," he states. "What is yours?"

"Look here, Muller," I says, shifting my weight to the other foot, "I might as well tell you frank that you spoil the view when I have to look out the door and see you decorating this fence-post. As you claim you are killing time here, then wouldn't it be a extra good plan for you to kill a little of it somewhere else?"

If he was not dumb, this hint was plain enough for him to understand; and from the hard tone of voice I used, anyone could see I meant business.

It is easy for a man to make a mistake of judgment, though, and by the time I finished speaking, I saw maybe I was the man who had made it. With a slow motion he tossed his cigarette on the ground, grinding it in with his heel; and closing his eyes halfway into a couple of mean slits, he got a look on his face that was tough.

"So that is the way the game is?" he says, sticking out his chin and moving a step closer to me. "Let me tell you, fellow, I got your number. I am passing the time on this fence, aint I, fellow! And you come butting in, didn't you, fellow! Now, are you going to drop this subject right here, or am I got to get my hands black on them overalls?"

I am not the kind who backs down on a bluff, but at the same time I have heard about patience is a virtue, and you never can tell what brand of dynamite comes tied up in a small package. The ugly glare he had got into his eye was one I didn't like.

While we stands there, him eying me and me eying him, I heard a slam at the front door, and twisting my neck around, saw that it was Caroline coming out.

"It is a big surprise to see you," she calls out to him in a welcome voice, and also flashing him a smile that certainly looked genuine. "I was going out for a walk, and I suppose you are taking a walk also."

MULLER drops his ugly look, and turning around to Caroline, stretched his face into a movie smile.

"This is good luck," he answers, "because I was passing by the door when you walked out."

While I stood at one side, Caroline noticing me like she noticed the posts in the fence, she hops over and begins shaking hands with Mr. Muller.

"Is this a friend of yours?" Muller asked finally, jabbing a thumb over his shoulder in my direction.

Caroline turned around like she hadn't seen me before.

"This is Ed," she says, "who is the mechanic around this place."

"Glad to meet him," Muller says, without looking in my direction; "and if you are going on a walk, then I could go with you. Aint that right?"

"Well, if you insist," Caroline answered, "and maybe Ed would come along."

"I don't play any three-handed euchre," I says to her; "and besides, you might get

a cramp in your neck trying to look at two of us at one time."

Caroline hands me a North Pole stare.

"So that's the way you feel about it!" she says, independent.

While I stands there like a article of furniture, the two of them rambles off toward the fair-grounds. I am not the kind of a gentleman which practices profane words, but what I said about jockeys when I went back at them valves would certainly make your hair stand up.

It's no use to blame Caroline for such a situation, because some women is pretty fickle, and when you compare a professional jockey to a mechanic like me, I could see my chances getting slim.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Caroline come strolling in.

"Well," I says, looking up from where I was, "did that portion of Roquefort go home?"

She looks me up and down in a iceberg manner.

"I been at the fair-grounds with Mr. Muller viewing the races," she says; "and it's lucky somebody calls around to take me out, because if I waited for some mechanics to do so, I would never go anywhere."

"Caroline," I says to her, "I don't like to hear such hints about I don't take you out, and also I don't approve of you walking around with any fancy-dressed rooster who makes his living riding horses. Keep away from this racing business, Caroline. That is a game which you never know where you are at."

She opened her eyes in a surprised way.

"So you are jealous, are you?" she comes back at me, which is about what you could expect from a woman.

"Don't accuse me I am jealous, Caroline, because I am not. But I certainly would not let my brain get excited about somebody because he wears jockey clothes, and rides a nag in a race."

Caroline elevates her chin.

"You needn't mention about your brains," she says, "as I know all about that. And the horse which Mr. Muller is going to ride in the county sweepstakes Friday is not any nag, but a race-horse of best breeding by the name of Good Luck."

"If he could win any race with a jockey like Muller," I says, "he certainly would need good luck. Did you forget about I am alive?"

"And also you needn't be sarcastic about Mr. Muller," she cuts in, "because if you could see him finishing out a race, with the crowd cheering his name, you would realize that he is of the profession which is not so common as mechanics."

Without waiting for me to answer, she hands me another look, and then whirling around, high-hats it up the stairs.

THE way I ground on them valves was something awful, my teeth grinding in a similar way. The trouble with me was that I was not a jockey, and I would be dumb if I couldn't see that! The way a woman's brain works certainly is a mystery, and I will say the mystery of this one was gone far enough.

Sliding over to the door for another look at the fresh air, I peeks down the pike toward Pine View City. At the bend, where the road turns out of town, I could see a cloud of dust rolling up, and thinking it looked like out of the ordinary, I walked out to the road.

I have seen cars breaking the speed-laws many times, but the machine now headed in this direction from Pine View City was coming at a rate I wasn't used to. I strained my eyes to see what kind of a outfit it was, but for a few minutes couldn't see anything but dust. After another minute or two I could make out the outlines, and I swear if it didn't look like a horse and buggy. By another two seconds I was sure of it.

I never figured out how long it took the horse to make the trip between Pine View City and the farm, but if there is any vehicle has made it in faster time, it must have been run by gasoline. It went by like a streak of lightning, the horse's ears sticking out straight ahead and his tail flying behind. A empty old-fashioned buckboard was bouncing along after him, jumping over the bumps twenty feet at a clip. Before I could wink the dust out of my eyes, the whole outfit had streaked out of sight around the crossroad back of the woods.

They have got some fast stock at the fair-grounds, but if there is anything on a race-track which could outrun this whirl of dust, then it must be a miracle. While I stood with my eyes bulging out, gaping toward the spot where the runaway disappeared, a car rattled up and stopped.

Hank Sneider, which owns the forty-acre piece down on the flats, piles out of the

car, and with his hat in his hand hustles up to me.

"You see that blasted mare?" he yells.

"I wouldn't guarantee what it was I saw," I told him, "but something on wheels shot by here at a hundred-mile gait. Was that your horse?"

Hank yanked out a handkerchief and wiped off the dust.

"It was mine, Edward. This is the second time she has done the trick."

"It's a good trick the way she does it," I says, "and it certainly didn't take her long. With a horse who has speed like that, why haven't you got her in the fair-ground races?"

"Ha! This horse comes from racing stock, but she is a stubborn one and runs home for oats. It took three hours to drive five miles into Pine View City, she knowing she was headed away from the barn. The minute I finished business in town and gets her turned around with her nose pointed home, she bolts down the road like a bullet. That's the cussedest horse that ever lived, and when I get home, I'll find her standing at the barn door waiting to get in for oats."

As I got a good head on me, it didn't take me more than a couple of seconds to see that this was a opportunity I wouldn't meet it every day. We have not got a regular race-track at the fair, but the county races was being run over a old road across lots, and when I thought of the layout of such a course, it took my wind.

Any horse racing down this road would have her nose pointed straight at Hank's barn all the way. As Hank has not got a quick head on him for such things, this coincidence must have missed his attention.

I thought about Caroline, and also about Muller, who he was already popping off how he is going to win Friday's county sweepstakes. The way my brain worked certainly was some action. Keeping a poker face on me, I began picking my teeth kind of casual.

"As this horse aint much good," I says, "you must want to sell her pretty bad."

Hank give me a sharp look.

"You figuring on buying her?"

"It would have to be a very low price," I said cautious, "because she certainly is almost worthless."

"It's a pretty good horse," he says, quick.

"She's a runaway, Hank. You claim it's the second time she's broke loose; and you heard about three times and out. I'll give you forty dollars."

"Ha! You joking?"

"You think it's too much?"

"For a horse like that? She's worth more."

"How much more?"

"What you going to do with her?" he asked, eying me closer. "Maybe you will pay fifty dollars."

"It is a bargain," I says, quick. "Now, if that horse is safe at the barn door as you claim, then you keep her until Friday, when I will call for her. And don't feed her any oats."

I walks away from Hank, and the way he stares after me was something to see.

"WELL," I says to Caroline when I saw her the next morning at breakfast-time, "I suppose you will be walking again today beside some fair-grounds crocodile with a green hat."

"Who you mean?" she asked, still a little snappy.

"I mean somebody prominent," I says, "like jockeys."

"Are you hinting about Mr. Muller?"

"You are a shrewd one to guess it," I tells her. "Did Mr. Muller say any more about he is going to win the sweepstakes tomorrow?"

"Maybe you would like to see him lose, Ed, as I now see what kind of a nature you got. You needn't worry about is he going to win, because when it's a jockey like Mr. Muller, and a horse like Good Luck, it is a combination that will always win. Mr. Muller said so."

"If Mr. Muller said he was king of Siam, then you would believe it," I said, sarcastic. "And furthermore, don't be too confident about who will win the sweepstakes, as I am also running a horse in that race which I will ride her myself."

While Caroline stood blinking at me, eyebrow lifted up in surprise, I pulls on my cap and without giving her a chance to come back at me, left the room.

When I got over to the Fair-grounds Committee with the information that I have got a entry for tomorrow's sweepstakes, I could see why it was that every jockey gets a large head so his hat wont fit. The crowd stood around eying me and asking questions like I am beginning to be a celebrity.

"Where'd you get a horse?" one says. "And do you think he could run?"

"It will be a big surprise," I answered, "the way this horse will run."

"Ha!"

I twists my neck around to see who the last speaker is, and like I thought, it's Muller. Standing back of Muller, with his eyes bulged out and his ears lopped forward so he would not miss a thing, was a tall, skinny fellow who he had been pointed out to me before. His name, they claimed, was Beagle, him being the owner and backer of Good Luck, the horse which Muller rides. Now that I got a close view of Beagle, I will sure say he was the slickest customer I have had a chance to look at. He had a nose on him like a handle, and from the way he kept blinking a couple of small eyes, he certainly looked like a fox, and a tricky one, at that. While I looked at him, he began twisting on one of his ears, and moved up a step closer.

"Where'd you say you got this horse?" he asked.

"I didn't say where I got him," I says, "except that I now have got him in a certain barn, and he will be on deck tomorrow."

"Is this one which belongs to some farmer near here?" he insists, stepping in still closer.

"He belongs to me," I told him, "and I am not giving any advance tips."

I LEFT Beagle still twisting at his ear and his nose jumping up and down, he was so interested about getting more information. As I have had experience before with crookers like Beagle, I knew that the only safe way is to always keep any plans under your hat—especially in the racing business, because in this game you never know where you are at.

About a hour before the sweepstakes race Friday afternoon, I pulled out a five-ton truck which we have got, this being a up-to-date farm; and tossing into it a new pair of overalls, I buzzed down the road to Hank's barn.

Hank stood outside the barn door waiting for me.

"Going to haul her away in a truck?" he asked, surprised, running his eyes over the machine like he was curious.

"I am going to transport her to the fairgrounds in a motortruck," I explained, "because that is the way race-horses are handled."

Hank certainly opened his eyes.

"You going to run this horse in the race?"

"That's what I intend doing, Hank; "and with the speed this one has, I have already got a string on first prize."

"Well, I swear," says Hank, "I thought you would know better!"

Without paying attention to Hank, I hustled into the barn and saddles up, Hank hollering to me that I could get along better if I called her by her name, which he said it was Home Run. The way Home Run jumped around the stall was something awful, but as I have had experience with jumpy ones, I clinched down the saddle and pulled her outside.

"You been giving her oats?" I asked.

"Not even a oat. Only hay. That is what makes her so skittish. See her eyes sticking out toward the feed-box."

Not being scientific, I don't know if any horse could understand the English language, but from the way this horse's ears perked up when we mentioned about oats, it showed she must be on to a few words.

"She kicked hard this morning," Hank says, "when she found out I was again cheating her on oats. She was mad and no mistake."

While Home Run sniffed around the feed-box, licking up a kernel here and there off the ground, Hank give me a hand lugging around a barn door which we slanted up to the back end of the truck for a gangplank.

Grabbing up a pan with a little oats in the bottom of it, I turned Home Run around till her back was to the plank, and began feeding her the oats, at the same time crowding in so close to her that she had to keep backing up. Her mind being busy on licking up oats, she didn't notice where she was backing, and in a minute I had her backed up in the truck. With quick work Hank stretched the chains across, hooking them solid so she couldn't jump out; and when I pulled the pan of oats away, her neck stretched out after it like rubber. She saw she was trapped and began pawing and neighing, also handing Hank and me hard looks.

I propped the barn door wide open, and from the view she had, Home Run looked direct into the stall at the feed-box. While she wiggled her eyes at me to see what I was doing, I lugged over a full sack of oats, and turning it upside-down, filled the feed-box to the top, also dumping

the rest of it on the floor in front of the manger. Her ears stuck straight out at me, and from the way she begun bouncing around, I was worried she might break the chains.

Leaving the doors open so Home Run could keep her eyes on the oats, Hank and me jumped into the machine and stepped on the gas for the fair-grounds. While we made a straight line down the road, I could hear Home Run switching her tail, and when Hank turns around for a squint, he tells me that she has still got her eyes bulged out and her ears pointed like a arrow back at the barn.

"I forgot to tell you," Hank speaks up, "that there was a man out here last night, and he was asking about you."

"What's that?" I says, sharp.

"A skinny, extra tall fellow, he was—with little eyes and a big nose. He wanted to know did you buy a horse from me and how fast could it run."

This information made me jump. When you get mixed up with race-track affairs, you can't be sure about what is going on. It is a game which you never know where you are at.

"Did his nose look like a handle?" I asked. "And did he have a habit of twisting his ear when he talked?"

"That's the same one." I sure was mad.

"What'd you tell him?" I asked.

"Well, I mentioned the horse could run some, and also she liked her oats."

"That is a hot one," I says.

DEALING with a couple of race-track slickers like Beagle and Muller, you have got to figure that there will be crooked work somewhere; but as Hank was positive about Beagle didn't go near the barn, it looked like maybe he didn't get the information he was snooping for.

When we got to the grounds where the crowd was, I got a couple of cheers, and a couple of cheers certainly braces you up. Some of these spectators run alongside for a look at what we got in the truck.

Standing in the crowd, I spotted Caroline, which she still had a surprised look on her face, and the way she stretched her neck to see me was a point of interest. When she saw I had my eye on her, she waved, but kind of feeble.

Taking a squint at my watch, I see there was no time to lose, and pushing in high I kept straight on down the road one mile to the starting spot.

Muller was already there hanging onto a horse, which from the way it pranced around, I guessed it must be Good Luck. A couple other nags was also being led around, none of them looking any faster than Home Run, and not half as hungry.

While I parks the car to one side, with the back end still facing in the direction of the barn, I could hear the constable blowing a whistle and shouting to get ready for the start.

"You going to ride in them overalls?" Hank inquires.

"I am not so dumb as to think fancy clothes would help any in the kind of sketch this is going to be," I says. "I am out for business; so get ready to unfasten the chain, Hank, because we don't want to be late."

Hank rubs his chin and looked at the horse kind of doubtful. She was still facing in the direction of the barn with her ears stretched; and her eyes was by this time popping out, she was so anxious to get started.

"Edward," Hank says finally, "I have had that mare a long time and know her tricks. If you drop that chain now, she is going to make one bound for home, and twenty men couldn't hold her. I can tell from her eye what she is thinking about, and she is thinking about them oats."

"Starter," I says, hustling over to where the constable was standing with his whistle, "as my horse is a bit skittish, I am going to mount her where she is in the machine, and when you blow the whistle my assistant will drop that back-end chain."

"It aint customary to start out of a truck this way," the constable says, "but if you start even with the rest, I have got no objection."

I scrambled into the truck and onto Home Run, buckling my knees under her like a leech. While I am a expert mechanic, I have also had plenty experience on horse-riding, and I don't take a back seat for any splashy customer like Muller. Hank was already tugging on the end chain.

The constable toots twice for the first signal, then blows a long one to go; and while the other nags stuck out their tails and ran for it, Hank drops the chain.

I already heard tell about the fellow which got shot out of a cannon; and the kind of a bound Home Run made, this start was the next thing to it. It was as even a start as this judge could look at,

and I drops the reins, figuring I would have my hands full hanging on, which I did.

Ten seconds showed me what way the straws blowed in this race, and if anybody in that crowd down at the end of the track had got a previous idea Home Run didn't have speed, then I will say they made a bad mistake. Before I was a quarter way down the line, Muller was so far behind I couldn't hear his hoofs.

When we got to a quarter of a mile from the finish, I could hear the crowd hollering like hoodlums. Taking a squint over my shoulder, I saw Muller puffing along, which by this time he was lagging so far behind that he must seen it's hopeless. He was standing up in the stirrups with his elbows out like his main idea now was to beat the other nags out of second place. But you can't figure ahead on horses.

With two hundred yards still to go, I spotted a lanky-looking individual waiting down at the end with the rest of the crowd, but standing up close to the track. When I got close enough to recognize that it's Beagle, my nerves jumped. In front of him he was holding something which looked like a sack. And when I thought about the kind of character Beagle was, my eyes opened for trouble.

By this time I could see the streak of whitewash across the road which marked the line where the race ended. I kept my eyes on Beagle, who was now edging closer to the track and dragging the sack of something with him.

It wasn't till I was almost opposite Beagle that it flashed on me what kind of a shyster scheme he was up to. The bag which he held in front of him was a bag of oats, and it didn't take me long to see why he was standing there fifteen feet from the finish line with the bag wide open in a appetizing way.

At the same second that I saw through the game, Home Run got her eyes on the sack. We was abreast of Beagle and a scant fifteen feet from the line, when Home Run comes to a dead stop with her ears pointed at the sack. I heard a howl from the crowd, and grabbing her by the mane I dug my heels into her ribs.

She made the sack in one bound, knocking Beagle over as she buries her nose into the oats. Still jabbing at her ribs and hollering for her to go ahead a few feet more to the limit, I screwed my neck for a look back toward Muller. He had a grin on his face and was coming fast. What I thought about this pair of sneaks was something terrific, because from the determination of Home Run to keep her nose in them oats, I saw the game must be up.

Before I could get my eyes off Muller, Home Run suddenly gives another jump, and when I looked to see what has happened I got a surprise that was a jolt. Beagle was sprawled out on the ground; and Caroline, which she must have leaped up out of the crowd, had snatched away the bag of oats and was dragging it on a run across the line.

With a lively wiggle, Home Run followed her, pushing her nose across the finish line after the oats about a split second before Muller comes streaking by.

By the time I crawled down off the horse, the judge was pinning a blue ribbon on me, and some one else was shaking my hand. When I saw who it was pumping my hand I was ready to drop flat.

"Beagle, you underhand crook," I says, jerking my hand away.

"Didn't know a thing about he liked oats," Beagle asserts. "This was some I has for my own horse. Ask Muller if it aint so."

BY this time Muller got off his nag and was edging up through the crowd.

"Well, well!" he says to the judge. "So you claim he won by ten inches."

"A easy ten inches," the judge answers, putting another pin in the ribbon.

"It looked to me like their noses crossed the line even," Muller complains.

"Their noses was even," the judge says, "but you forget about this horse has got a ten-inch tongue which she had it stretched to the limit for oats. A good ten inches is what I say."

"And I also will say," says Caroline, "that for a mechanic, Ed is a knockout jockey, because he is the only one on record which could win a race and besides feed his horse on the way."

I am bright about some things, and when you get a cue like this, it is certainly time for some action. I slides over and takes Caroline by the arm. "Now we are going to take a walk," I suggests.

"No, we wouldn't," she says quick, pulling her arm away, "because I already promised Mr. Muller."

And that's the trouble with this racing business; you never know where you are at!

# *To Hold the Herd*

*This vivid story of the cattle country is by a cowboy and hunter who knows it well—the author of "Trouble on the Range" and "Fang of the Wolf."*

## *By* JAY LUCAS

THE sun blazed down with an intensity unusual in the pine forests of northern Arizona. The torrid sky was cloudless but for the black bank of clouds that hung low in the north. For several evenings this bank had appeared, only to sink back again. Sometimes it came so close that its threatening growl might be heard, but always it sank back slowly. Before long it would sweep across the sky, making the day dark as night, the night dark as hell. Then the heavens would pour down torrents sufficient to sweep strong pines from their roots. The terrible bolts of blue-white flame would shiver tall trees, the earth would tremble at the roar of the unceasing thunder. Streaming pine forests would glisten and glitter in the ghastly light. A sickly, decomposed smell would hang in the air. Here and there would be the red blaze of a dead pine, set on fire instantly from top to root by a small finger of that fierce flame.

But now the cloud was motionless, low in the north; the hot air was still; the sun blazed down. A tiny dust-devil whirled across the flat, scattering and swirling the dry leaves. It swept toward a patch of flowering weeds, sending a pair of brilliant humming-birds flitting away in alarm. Then on it went, toward the farther edge of the flat, and was lost in the pines, pines which crooned softly where they hid it.

From near where it had disappeared came a moaning sound, rising and falling, swelling and dying away. Nearer it came, louder, and now one could sometimes hear a shrill yell. Then, on the edge of the pines, something flashed in the sun—the silver conchas of a cowboy's chaps. A wild, long-horned cow darted into the opening, to be headed back by a racing cowboy who playfully swung low in the saddle to seize her tail as she whirled back into the forest, to the company of her kind. Then came the leaders of the herd, the wilder ones among the cattle, lean, long-horned, swinging along with a quick, graceful stride, horns swaying easily. After them came the others, cattle of better blood and

gentler nature than the leaders, but without their free, wild grace.

Last of all came the "drag"—the weak, the sick, the young calves, the "dogies"—slowly dragging their tired feet, heads hanging down, kept going only by constant urging. And there at the drag rode old Tom Loren, oldest cowboy of them all!

HE swung his rope across the flank of a dogie, and swore softly in his cracked voice—no longer could his old throat frame the shrill yells such as rang from other parts of the herd. Not that he was overly given to profanity, but— "Whipping dogies"—so he had come down to that! Just half an hour before, the new foreman, Clay Simms, had ridden to him where he worked at the point.

"Tom," he had asked softly, "how about whippin' the dogies a while? Pointin' is pretty hard work for a man of your age."

Soft words, kindly spoken—kindly but inexorably, and with a sheepish, apologetic air. Tom wondered if the foreman already had a check in his pocket marked "Wages to date," a check that would mean that he, Tom, had lost his job, the last riding job he could ever have—for what outfit would hire a new cowboy of sixty-four? And the foreman had said last night, when he took over the place of old Dan Groome, under whom Tom Loren had worked for ten years, that the outfit had to be speeded up. And sixty-four can no more speed up than it can ride a bucking horse.

So old Tom Loren "whipped the dogies," and swore softly because he could not yell. Tomorrow he would be just sixty-four. On his fourteenth birthday, just fifty years tomorrow, he had first sat in a cowboy's saddle. In no other manner had he ever earned a penny. And tomorrow, he knew, his half-century of labor complete, he would be cast aside, broken, to make room for a younger man. And—his sister, the only woman he had ever loved in his solitary life, his old sister Maria! Tomorrow she would be cast from her miserable shack in town, for which he could no longer pay rent. She would be left to starve on the streets. That he would starve with her never occurred to him; he thought only of old Maria. And so his hands clenched over the saddle-horn, and he stared blindly ahead, heedless of the fact that part of the drag was dropping behind him, and returning toward the shade of the trees. But the new foreman was not heedless; compassion and anger struggled for supremacy in his mind as he glared toward the old man whom next day he must tell to roll his bed and go—where?

Clay Simms started to give an order to one of his men, but paused, and himself rode back to the drag to whip up the laggards. He could not meet old Loren's eye. Yes, Clay Simms was merciful, and tenderhearted; but he was now foreman of the Circle T. A man who could not earn his board, much less his wages, could not be kept—not if the foreman wished to keep his own well-paying job. So the foreman drove the laggards back into the herd, and quietly signed to the nearest man to keep an eye to old Tom's work. Then he rode ahead to count the cattle as they entered the water-lot.

SOON all the herd was corralled, and the cowboys sought the shade of the rude shed that did duty as a blacksmith shop. It was little past mid-afternoon, but too late to start another drive that day. The foreman started to open the gate of the water-lot, that the cattle might enter the pasture to graze for the night, but was stopped by a hail from Carter Grant, who had just ridden up. Carter Grant, general manager and chief stockholder of the Circle T, had lived an easy life in town for several years but the bronze and seams of the ranges had scarcely begun to fade from his face, stamped in as they were by a lifetime of riding the deserts and mountains. As he swung from his horse, the foreman met him, and together they sought the shade of the blacksmith shop. The general manager dropped on his heels among his cowboys, and borrowed a cigarette from old Tom Loren, who happened to be next to him. Then he turned to the foreman.

"Clay, things are looking pretty bad: I had an understanding with the buyer that the cattle didn't have to be delivered until day after tomorrow, but now he insists that we have them in town by tomorrow night, according to the written contract, or he wont accept them—beef has gone down since he bought, and he could make a cheaper contract with some one else now. If he doesn't accept delivery, we'll have to turn the herd loose, and wait till we find another buyer."

The foreman rolled a cigarette meditatively, and puffed in silence a moment. Evidently he was weighing his words.

"Well," he grunted at last, "it's a two-day drive to town, but we can start before daylight in the morning and make it in one. It'll sure be hard on the cattle, but we can make it if we have to. We'll have just enough to fill the contract, according to the count I just got, if we don't lose more than a few head on the way. I suppose if we're any short he'll refuse to accept them, if he wants to get out of taking them anyway."

"Yes, any loophole will do for him."

Carter Grant puffed his cigarette in silence for some time, then turned impulsively to the cowboys:

"Boys, we've *got* to get them there by tomorrow night! We must have the money for them! This outfit is mortgaged, like every other one in Arizona, almost. We've the last payment to make on our notes before midnight tomorrow, and if we can't make it we'll lose the outfit, and—well, we'll all be out of a job."

His voice sounded tired, very tired, as he glanced from one to another of his men. If the mortgage were foreclosed could he, fifty-eight years old, earn a living riding the ranges, the only trade he knew? Hardly, he thought. The foreman placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"Heck, old-timer, we can get them to town easy before sundown tomorrow!"

"But what if you should lose too many of them in the brush? You must figure on losing some."

The foreman laughed.

"Nothing to worry about—we'll get them there, with plenty left over. Just leave that to me and the boys."

Reassured, old Carter Grant stood up and reached his hat from the horn of the anvil.

"Good for you, boys, I know you will. And when you get to town tomorrow night I'll have a dinner at the restaurant for you that'll make the best Christmas dinner you ever ate seem like a meal for a canary-bird. I have to be going back now; I just came out to tell you they had to be there. I'll have to hurry back to see that the cars are ready to ship them in, and that the brand inspector is on the job. See you all tomorrow about sundown, then, boys!"

"Darned tootin'!" called the seated cowboys in a reassuring chorus, as he rode away.

The herd was to be left in the water-lot all night, that no time might be wasted rounding up the pasture next morning, the foreman decided. And then came Johnny, the devil-may-care young cook:

"Say, you waddies, why don't you come an' attack the grub-pile an' let me get the dishes washed? I'm in a hurry to get away. Don't you know there's a dance over the mountain at Garvin's big barn?"

Dance! No, certainly they had not known, or they would not thus have idled in the shade of the blacksmith shop. Their chaps flapped busily as they hurried toward the cook-shack. Came the rattle of tin plates and cups. Later there came the swishing of razors on strops, and soon back they trooped toward the corral where the horses were. Gay were their shirts, and gayer still their neck-kerchiefs; loudly tinkled their spurs, as they all swept over the hill, hoofs going clickety-click, to cross the mountain to Garvin's dance. What if they did get no sleep that night? They would be ready all the earlier to throw open the water-lot gate and start the herd.

BUT there was one who did not go, one who had not been noticed in the joyous hurry. On the top log of the water-lot sat old Tom Loren, his head sunk in his hands. Far, far distant were the days when he had always led the boys of his outfit in the race to dance or barbecue. So now he sat alone on the top log of the water-lot, his head sunk in his hands, his once powerful shoulders shaking, as he thought of Maria, his old sister.

Long he sat there, two hours or more, staring at the herd-trodden dust of the water-lot, but seeing it not. All he saw was Maria, his old sister, walking gaunt and hungry by his side along the dusty road—homeless. . . . . Sixty-four years old! And only twenty-three dollars ahead—the wages he had coming up to now, to be handed to him when the herd arrived in town next day, he knew. How often had he thus arrived in town with a herd, to be handed several months' back pay? And then the glorious holiday, when money flowed like water and his spurs tinkled merrily across the dance-hall floor. Afterward, his money gone, back he would ride, laughing and whistling, back to the range to earn more. But now he was not coming back, he would never ride again. And nothing else could he do; fifty years in the saddle had made him as helpless afoot as a baby.

He could remember when Texas was open range, as Arizona here was now, when a Texan was respected all over the open range country. Now the name "Texan" caused a grin to spring to the lips of a true cowboy—now a Texan was a booted, spurred, painfully cowboy-like, studiously picturesque young fellow who could neither ride nor rope, but talked much of his prowess at both.

FIFTY years! Why had he not saved? He had meant to the last few years, of course—but then he had had Maria to keep, and her board was high in town. Once he and Maria had had thoughts of a little outfit of their own, or dreams, rather—bright, beautiful, impossible dreams. If he had only been able to—

Was it night already? It had grown suddenly dark. Slowly he raised his head. The whole northern half of the sky was purplish-black, the cloud extending fully to the east and west. Now that the setting sun was hidden, the blaze of the lightning could be seen in the distance. Then the roaring rumble came to his ears—had his ears been keener and his mind less troubled, he would have heard it long before. The storm had come, the terrible storm of the northern Arizona mountains! Tom Loren climbed stiffly from his seat, and shuffled hastily to the house, his tattered, shiny chaps flapping quickly in the cold wind that suddenly moaned through the pines, the brim of his old Stetson pressed tightly by the wind against the crown.

Hastily he closed the door, and rushed over to the south window, to close it too. Then back to the north window, to make it also secure against the storm. For an instant he stood there, his face pressed against the glass, watching the milling herd in the water-lot. Very restless the herd was—for what living creature is not, when the storm descends upon the Arizona mountains!

Then, without an instant's warning, it happened. A terrible blue sheet of flame; a roar that made the mountains tremble, and almost burst the ear-drums. An instant of comparative darkness, then a huge red blaze low to the ground at the north side of the water-lot, where the tall dead pine had stood, a cloud of dust sweeping forward on the wind from where the bolt had struck. A dull pounding of thousands of hoofs, fleeing to the south side of the corral. One muffled bellow, as the herd pressed in terror against the logs. And then again the heavens blazed with evil-smelling blue fire—again the deafening roar. Again a tall pine shivered in fragments to the earth, and the dry earth rose from its foot as though from a great explosion; again the instant of darkness. And then—the break in the corral, the herd pouring forth, silent with mortal terror! Stampede!

The torrent came, sheets of water dancing green in the fires of hell, the sky roaring in agony, tall pines dying in instant flame. But old Tom Loren heeded not as he rushed toward the corral where his horse was. The wind threw him against the gate, and he fell. He arose with difficulty, for his clothes were heavy with the icy water. But he got his rope, and started toward his horse. He was a cowboy, and the herd must be held, *must be held*—for that is the creed of the cowboy.

It was now black as the tomb. Then again the weird blue-green flame came, quivering and trembling, searing the eyeballs, lingering long. As it died away the thin rope of rawhide snapped unerringly on the neck of Raven, the big, powerful black. What if Raven was the foreman's horse? What if riding another cowboy's horse without his leave is the crowning crime of the ranges? He was the best horse on the ranges of the northern mountains, and now the best was needed. And does not the storm destroy all precedents? In it the long-fanged gray wolf and the timid jackrabbit crouch together beneath a log, and huddle close for sympathy.

AS old Tom swung stiffly to the saddle, the lightning struck again. Terrified, the big black sprang sidewise beneath a young pine, the limbs of which almost tore his would-be rider from his side. Then the pine was left behind, and the old man pulled himself into the saddle. His shirt had been torn to shreds, and his hat was gone, but that did not matter, for he was now seated solidly, and could ride to stop the herd.

Around the edge of the pond, toward the break in the corral, swept the black, with powerful strides that brought a faint glow to his chilled rider. If any horse could stop the herd, it was Raven. Then again the heavens roared, the earth trembled, and eyelids closed over tortured eyes. Just once the old man glanced back as he raced. The big pine that had stood over the

house was gone, and a dull red glow was rapidly devouring the house itself. So that was the end. His bed and few poor possessions were to go—and he out of work. He must save what he could of them! For an instant his hand tightened on the reins, as though to whirl the horse. But the herd must be held! His hand loosened, and his spurs touched the flank of the black. And out through the break in the corral he shot—to stop the herd.

Under the roaring pines he raced, toward the ridge. It had taken him but a short time indeed to fly from the house to the corral, rope and saddle his horse, and swing to its back, but to him it seemed hours, almost. Far ahead, it seemed, the herd now must be. But well he knew cattle: even in their terror, the wild leaders of the herd would take the well-beaten trails up the ridge, and down the little gulch at the other side. Then along the narrow little valley to its head, and over the next ridge. And there they would scatter wildly, running before the storm. Once scattered in the many heads of Devil's Cañon, a score of men could not throw them back into a herd while the storm raged. Even after it broke, many days would be spent in rounding them up again. Could he reach them before they scattered? And having reached them, could he hold them?

HE struck the steep trail at the foot of the ridge. Here the pines were few, but there were oaks,—dragging, tearing, bruising oaks,—that stretched to the top of the trail, where again they gave way to the forest of pines. It was a place to ride slowly, to pick one's way among the close-growing oaks and their low-hanging limbs. But he touched his spurs to Raven, and loosened his rein. How Raven took the climb! Was there ever such a horse before?

And ever the storm, sweeping around him, howling across the mountains like some devouring monster from the bowels of the earth, belching greenish-blue fire, fetid of breath, shaking the earth with the thunder of his hoofs, chilling the blood with his deep-throated roar; ever those winding-sheets of rain!

Beside the trail stood a pillar of fire, a dead pine blazing from root to lofty tip. Horse and rider glowed red as they plunged through the hissing fire at its base. And just behind them fell the upper half of the tree, shooting down through the storm like a bolt, great coals of fire flying upward to sweep away before the wind. Upon man and horse this fire rained, but streaming hair and clothing joined with streaming sky to snuff it out instantly. Then the glow of the pine was left behind, and blackness was unbroken. Again the sky gleamed greenish-yellow, and rivers of fire raced across it, splitting and spreading, the roar of thunder making head rock upon shoulders. Raven plunged high in the air, and crashed to the ground upon his belly. Was the horse alive or dead? A shower of pine needles and torn bark descended before the wind, beating like whips. Was the horse dead? No! Once he quivered—then, with the old man still in the saddle, staggered half-stunned to his feet. The spurs sank cruelly home, and Raven plunged madly upward, driven now by mortal terror. And again the spurs sank into his flanks. *The herd must be held!*

At last! The top of the ridge had been reached. Tom Loren tightened the rein, slowed his mount until the lightning might show if the herd lay below, or had passed over the other ridge, to scatter. It was only a second's wait, but it seemed ages to the old man, until suddenly the sodden little valley reflected the weirdly dancing flames. But all was well; thousands of high-held white horns had glistened in the light, their owners plunging blindly ahead not far from the foot of the ridge where old Tom Loren sat in the saddle.

Down the ridge Raven raced, with mighty strides, the saddle rising and falling as gently as a boat in a mild breeze. Old Tom Loren's head came more erect, and his bony shoulders squared a trifle. Not for years had he ridden such a horse! He had never before quite realized that year by year the horses cut out for his string had been growing older and stiffer—the horses the younger men would not ride. How sure-footed Raven was! At the end of each long bound, his feet slipped in the mud, but not once did he stumble; he swayed and swung to a perfect balance.

Again the lightning blazed, and in the momentary flash Tom saw why Raven had slacked his gait; he was following the herd. A touch of the rein on his neck, and he swung to one side and lengthened his stride understandingly. So that was it—his rider wanted him to pass the herd! Now the lightning came fast, almost a continuous blaze. Pair by pair the gleaming white horns and flaming eyes dropped be-

hind on the left, until the middle of the herd had been reached.

Ahead of the fleeing herd stood a giant spruce. The leaders swirled around it. And then the spruce was hidden in a sheet of flame, while forward on the wind came the biting odor of burned flesh and hair. The next flash showed that the spruce had been split from top to bottom. Half of it had crashed in fragments to the ground; the other half stood erect, the white, splintered side facing Tom Loren. And beneath lay one of the wild leaders. But what was that? Around the blasted spruce the herd swirled as before, but on the other side they did not come together again. The herd had split!

RAVEN did not need the spurs; he was a cow-horse, and well he knew what he had to do. The thunder of his hoofs could be heard even above the roar of the storm as he tore forward with mighty bounds. Even through the wet saddle, his rider seemed to feel the great smooth muscles drawing taut and relaxing with each powerful stride. Now, already, he was abreast of the leaders, and pressing close to their sides. Tom Loren tore his slicker from the back of his saddle, and waved it wildly. It glistened ghostly-yellow, wet as it was, in the continual lightning-flare. Some of the cattle swung slightly to the left, but one forged ahead, regardless of the slicker flapping before her horns, and took the lead. A wild thing she was, of the old stock. Tall and gaunt, with immense spread of black-tipped horns; black, dancing eyes protruding fiercely; yellow, with black muzzle. Old Tom stuffed his slicker into the saddle before him, to leave his right hand free. Then his .45 spat a little stream of fire. The yellow cow sagged to the wet ground, and lay still. Over her stumbled the others, to hesitate an instant. Before they could again reach their full stride, Raven was upon them; the terrible shiny yellow thing was beating upon their horns and eyes, and they were crowded to the left, back to the main herd.

Now the top of the little ridge at the head of the valley had been reached, and ahead, on the left, lay the many heads of Devil's Cañon. What was to be done to keep them from the broken country where they must inevitably scatter? Just one thing; the herd must be swung to the right. There was no time to go back around the racing cattle—that would give the leaders time to reach Wolf Gulch. No, he must cross in front of the herd, as it poured through the gap. What if his horse should slip in the stony mud? Over man and horse would pound thousands of trampling hoofs, and when the herd had passed, there, beaten into the mud, would lie what was left of old Tom Loren, a mangled, unrecognizable thing.

Across the front of the herd dashed Raven, his rider's eyes fixed to the left and behind, where the torrent of tossing horns and blazing eyes poured through the gap, close-packed. A hidden root! The horse crashed to his belly, and struggled to rise. The white horns, like the foam of breakers in a storm, swept upon him. A black tip raked his thigh. Another tore his rider's chap-leg. With a wild scream of terror, the horse threw himself upward and forward. Now the cattle were not only ahead, but during a lull in the thunder the soggy roar of their hoofs sounded on either side. In a darkness like that of the grave, a minute passed, two, three—then again the lightning blazed up. The leaders were again behind; Raven again swinging across the front. Good pony, Raven!

AND now the horse was at the right of the herd, and running straight beside the leaders, the wild, yellow, long-horned leaders. They must be swung over toward Pleasant Valley. They must be held!

But they refused to turn. The slicker had been lost in the fall. Again the old wooden-handled revolver spat fire in little streams, and yellow masses crumpled to the wet earth. Another wild yellow cow, with black-tipped horns, had taken the lead. Close to her pressed Raven, while his rider reloaded his gun, took aim, and pulled the trigger. But Raven stumbled slightly, and the bullet missed its mark. No, not quite missed—it plowed a red furrow in the nose of the cow. With a stifled bellow, and high-swung head, the cow whirled far to the right. And after her swung the rest. The herd was turned!

Down the ridge they thundered, toward the head of Pleasant Valley. The worst of the storm had passed; the wind and rain were abating fast, the lightning and thunder rapidly growing more distant. The darkness was absolute, but old Tom trusted wisely to Raven, the best cow-horse of the Arizona mountains. Then the clattering of stones beneath hoofs ceased, as they raced out onto the level valley.

## To Hold the Herd

Suddenly the moon shone out in full force, for the storm of the northern Arizona mountains passes as quickly as it comes. Old Tom Loren forged again to the front of the herd. He had removed his chaps while he rode, and now swung them around his head, to strike and beat across the slowing horns. The worst of the panic had passed. Slowly, at first, the leaders turned to the right, then faster, until they were going again toward the north. Then back to the east, until they reached the slower of the herd. And then around and around they milled, a giant whirlpool of heaving, breathing flesh, rapidly at first, then slower and slower. At last they paused, and began to voice their wild terror that until now had been inarticulate. And then came the note of a cow calling to her calf, and the high-pitched bawl of a calf seeking its mother. And one by one the others took up the cry. Their terror had passed. The herd had been held! . . . .

That was two years ago. Now old Tom Loren sits placidly in the evening on the porch of his Pleasant Valley ranch, the Flying R, and contentedly puffs his cigarette as he watches his cattle stream away from the water-hole in front of the house. His chaps are no longer tattered and shiny, but of new brown cowhide, and new, too, is his big Stetson. With easy living he has put on a little weight, and his gaunt face has filled out.

For Tom Loren is now a cowman! He had no money to invest, but Carter Grant and the others of the Circle T cheerfully indorsed his notes when he bought the ranch—indeed, it was at their suggestion that he bought it. And these notes he has already begun to pay off. But why should he not? The cowboys of the Circle T do not need the orders of Clay Simms to brand every Flying R calf as carefully as they do those of their own outfit. And what cowboy of the country does not count it a red-letter day when he brands a calf for Tom Loren, the old man who stopped the great Circle T herd in Pleasant Valley the night of the big storm?

As Tom Loren sits puffing his cigarette in the twilight, a big black horse comes up to him—Raven, his top horse, the gift of his old foreman Clay Simms. And as Raven gently nuzzles him, Tom smiles happily, for he hears Maria, his old sister Maria, singing softly while she prepares his supper.

# *Love Raises The Deuce*

*This stirring story of two great games is by the world's champion tennis-player.*

*By* WILLIAM

MARY HARWOOD had run a long way. Every muscle in her legs reminded her forcibly of the fact. She regretted several of the runs because they had been quite useless—she arrived at her destination too late. The little white ball was well on its way past her before she arrived. It had been an afternoon of rising hopes and blasted visions; hopes and visions shared by the ten thousand spectators in the great concrete stadium that circled the championship tennis court at Westside Tennis Club, Forest Hills, L. I. Mary Harwood was the popular choice for the national tennis champion; unfortunately more popular than logical, for the defending champion, Mrs. Frank Mosier, was once more proving herself invincible in the crucial test. Mary had won her way to the final round of the National Championship by tennis of a superlative brand. She had toppled several favorites from their thrones during her march to the final and in so doing had caught the public fancy. Mary was a husky, hard-hitting young maid from California who during her existence of seventeen years had made tennis her one great love. She had lived for the National Championship and now her goal was at hand, yet unattainable. Mrs. Mosier was a veteran of a decade of championship tennis, six times a title-holder,—a woman twice Mary's age and incalculably older than that in experience. In addition

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to these assets, she possessed a machine-like game that even youth must wear down before. Mary was a concrete proof of this fact. For two long hours the ten thousand people that thronged the stadium, drawn by the magic of Mary's rise and their keen desire to see her dethrone the queen, had watched the gradual but certain disintegration of Mary's game under the forcing tactics of the champion. The end was at hand. Mrs. Mosier led at 5-2 and 40-15 in the final set. Mary's legs would not carry her to the other's shots.

A crashing drive down the side line and Mary, footsore and weary, came to the net, hand extended to congratulate the champion.

"Game! Set! Match! Championship! Mrs. Mosier wins 4-6, 8-6, 6-2," the voice of Clifford Black pronounced the death sentence on Mary's hopes for that season.

Mrs. Mosier threw an arm around Mary's shoulders.

"My dear, you played beautifully. I was most fortunate to win. If you could have lasted better, you would have done so."

"No!" Mary gulped a breath that refused to reach her lungs. "You were too good."

Arm in arm, the two players left the court together.

Mary found her shower and rubdown relieved the ache of her body, but had little relief for her mind. Over and over she asked herself why she could not put over the winning punch in that second set; or if not, then why she could not outlast a woman twice her age,—"an old woman," as she bitterly told herself,—when it came to the vital third set. She had no answer and no excuse. She just couldn't do it, and that was that! . . . .

"Mary!"

The girl turned from the bag she was packing to find Mrs. Mosier, dressed ready for the street, standing behind her. Mary pulled the bag from the chair, slightly flustered at her recent thoughts.

"Wont you sit down?" she murmured.

"No, thank you." Mrs. Mosier's flashing smile warmed the girl's spirits. "I'm just leaving—but, Mary, at the risk of seeming very rude, I am going to tell you something. Do you mind?"

The girl managed to force a smile as she faced the champion. She felt that one more word to her about that match today and she would scream—but after all this was the champion and she was a good old scout, so let her go ahead with it!

"Why, no, Mrs. Mosier, I'd appreciate any advice you will give me."

"I wonder if you know why you lost to me today?" Mrs. Mosier seemed almost thinking aloud. "No, I suppose not! Do you?" Suddenly she shot the question at the girl.

It caught Mary unprepared. She answered thoughtlessly, hurriedly: "No! I don't! I should have won!" Then a red flush rose to her cheek and she impulsively grabbed Mrs. Mosier's hand.

"I'm sorry! I shouldn't have said that —but it's out and I can't help it. I don't mean it as sour grapes!"

Mrs. Mosier's flashing smile persisted.

"My dear, you are quite right. You should have won. You lost because your footwork is poor and through that fact, I was able to tire you out. You have a great game, a fine temperament and everything that goes to make a great champion except"—she paused, and then rushed on—"except footwork. Without it you can never reach the top. Learn footwork, learn to dance, learn weight balance and control, and you will be National Champion." She laughed, a queer self-conscious little sound, and turned away. "Don't think me very rude in saying this, please! Now I must hurry. Good-by!" She was gone.

"Good-by," Mary murmured automati-

cally. Her mind was running on the other's words: "Learn to dance, learn weight balance and control and you'll be National Champion."

All right, she would learn to dance. She would study. She would master footwork. She would be National Champion!

SHE was caught at a most inconvenient moment to follow the dancing instructor's order to "Hold your pose." One toe was pointed skyward while she balanced precariously on the other, for Mary was engaged in following Mrs. Mosier's instruction to learn dancing. She had now been studying for three months, and the spirit and glamour of the art had caught her, just as much as her desire to improve her tennis. She had started to study solely to aid her footwork—now she worked because she loved to dance, and her progress had been phenomenal. Mary's toe came to earth, or rather to the smooth floor, and she waited the teacher's remarks. Something seemed weighing on the mind of the energetic, somewhat faded little woman, who revealed to her pupils the mysteries of the dance.

"Girls, I have a wonderful, glorious surprise for you. My friend, Mme. Alla Rominova, is coming this morning to visit us. In fact, she is due any time. I want to put on a special program for her. You must do your best—" Her voice went on and on as she grew more and more worked up over her great surprise, but Mary had ceased to listen. Mme. Alla Rominova! Rominova, the greatest dancer the world had ever known, coming here! It couldn't be—yet it might be! Rominova was in the city on what she had announced would be her farewell American tour. Her days had been glorious, but many, on the stage; her fortune was assured and she wanted rest. Rominova was to retire and a gap would be left that only some one of her teaching could hope to fill.

The door of the big room opened, cutting short the teacher's remarks. A slim figure in black came forward. It was Rominova. No one who had ever seen that incomparable walk, that strange sinuous grace, could mistake it. The instructor flew to her with outstretched hands. There were a few words of greeting, too low to be caught by the class and the teacher turned to them.

"Girls, it gives me great pleasure to present Mme. Rominova, who has honored us with this visit. She wants to see how we are progressing. We will dance for her."

Mme. Rominova seated herself in a large chair at the end of the room while the teacher, all flustered at being caught unawares, hastily arranged an impromptu program.

Solos, groups, duets, valses, bacchantes—everything that had been studied—were mixed together in chaotic confusion, but at least Mme. Rominova had a chance to see every student in action. Mary never knew how she struggled through the opening measures of her solo. She felt the teacher had played her a mean trick, for she was told to dance the arrangement of "The Swan" by Saint-Saens. The Swan! Arranged and made famous as a dance by Mme. Rominova, who now sat there to watch its slaughter! Mary was so confused and annoyed that she almost stumbled as she started. But that slight slip, perfectly covered, cleared her mind. All right, if she must dance "The Swan" she would dance it. Gradually the haunting, languorous melody gripped her imagination and carried her out of her surroundings. Certain themes did this to her, against her will. The Swan was one of them. She forgot the class, the teacher, even Mme. Rominova—and, dancing for the joy of living and the love of music and movement, the end came all too soon. She paused on the floor, hardly knowing where she was. A little burst of hand-clapping and a low "Marvelous!" murmured in a soft foreign voice, recalled her to the immediate present. Mme. Rominova was applauding her! She flushed, bowed and retreated precipitately to the ranks of the class.

The program finally wore to an end, and the girls were dismissed to dress. Mary, tired and hungry, was just ready for the street when the teacher appeared.

"Mary Harwood!"

"Yes?" The girl turned wearily.

"Mme. Rominova desires to meet you. Come with me."

"MARY!" The girl turned eagerly at the voice behind her. "Oh, John! Good evening!"

"I wondered where you were, Mary. I looked all over the boat before I thought of the stern. Why are you hiding away?"

"Thinking, John, and dreaming wonderful dreams."

The man laughed and drew closer. "Am I included in those dreams, Mary?"

Photograph © by Underwood and Underwood.

## WILLIAM T. TILDEN, II

THE remarkable career of William T. Tilden, II, as a tennis champion has been widely celebrated in the newspapers. And his ability as a sports-writer has also come in for a good deal of comment. The fact that he is also a talented writer of fiction is less well known; and the charming story which we publish herewith will reveal him to many readers in a new light.

The girl turned from the glory of the moon and looked up in his face. It was a fine, strong, reserved young face, softened, now, by his love for her. She had known since the first day they met in London, a week before sailing, that he was attracted to her. Now she knew he loved her. She glowed in the knowledge, yet felt no answer in herself. She liked and admired John—the Honorable John Ayers, he was really—but it was no more than a warm friendship for a kindred spirit. He was a gentleman and a sportsman.

She smiled mistily into his eyes. "Well, John, my dreams were of myself, I am afraid!"

He bent over her and took her hand. "Is there no place in them at all for me? I love you, Mary—you know that."

"Yes, I know," she replied gently.

He drew her to him.

"I love you," he said again simply. She drew back, withdrawing her hand, and leaned against the rail. The moon encircled them with its brilliance and shut out the world.

"Listen, John, and be sensible. Have you ever heard of Marie Harminoff?"

"You mean the young dancer, Mme. Rominova's protégée who is to succeed Mme. Rominova—the girl everyone says will be the greatest dancer in the world? Why, yes, she is supposed to be on this ship with Rominova on her way to the States to make her début—but her name isn't on the passenger list and I haven't seen anyone who has seen her. Why?"

"I am Marie Harminoff!"

"You? Oh, you're spoofing!"

"No, John. Mary Harwood of the U. S. A. is Marie Harminoff, the mysterious Russian dancer discovered and developed by Mme. Rominova. Two years ago I was just an everyday little American girl who played tennis."

"Oh," he broke in, "that's where I heard your name! You are the tennis star!"

"Not are, John, *was*. Now I am Marie Harminoff the Russian dancer, except to my best friends,"—she smiled at him—"like you. No, please wait until I finish! Two years ago I met Mme. Rominova,—how or why does not matter,—and she gave me my chance. She offered me two years' study with her at her home in Russia and the chance to go on the stage as a star, with her presenting me as her protégée. What would any girl do under those circumstances? What I did is answered by the fact that here I am, Marie Harminoff, on my way to the United States to make my début!"

John seized her hands passionately.

"What difference does all that make in the question of love? I love you—I don't care what you call yourself, or if you are American or Russian. I love you and want you!"

HE swept her into his arms and kissed her passionately, overwhelmingly.

"Marie!" A smooth, cool voice cut through the consciousness of the man and the girl, bringing them to a sharp realization of their surroundings. Mary withdrew from John's arms. A few feet away, stood Rominova, slim, beautiful, and apparently calm.

"Marie, may I see you in my cabin at once?"

The great dancer turned and walked swiftly away without waiting for a reply. Mary started after her, but John impulsively stopped her.

"You must answer my question! Will you marry me?"

Mary turned to him, a strange, half-whimsical light in her eyes.

"You are a very difficult person, so is Rominova. Please, John, let me go! Rominova is angry and I must make my peace with her."

He started to speak, to protest, but with a last tender smile, Mary went.

"You are very good to me." Her voice floated back to him as he stood motionless in the moonlight. "Good night."

Mary was left in no uncertainty as to Rominova's views. Her entrance to the cabin was greeted by a burst of the famous Rominova temper, that was politely called "temperament" on its public exhibitions. Mary let the storm partially spend itself before she offered any explanation. Finally Rominova came to her ultimatum:

"Either you give up this young man forever or you give up my friendship and support! You are an artiste and marriage has no place in your life. Love, yes, but you are not the kind who can tell the difference between love and marriage. Take your choice, Marie—give up this young man or give up your career!"

Mary's temper had worn thin under the tirade.

"Madame, you ask the impossible!"

"It is not impossible! It is the only way. Take your choice!"

"Madame, I am quite sensible of your goodness to me, all you have done for me. My public life is yours to direct—but my private life is my own." Mary was having difficulty in holding her tongue to dignified speech.

Rominova looked incredulous.

"Do you mean you will not give up this young man?"

Suddenly something snapped in Mary's control.

"This young man! No! I wont give up this or any other young man because an old fool, jealous of her pet toy,—that's all I am, your pet toy, something to please your vanity when you are too old to dance yourself,—tries to tell me what I can or can't do. I'm American, you idiot, not Russian, and I'll live my own life and make my own career!"

Mary turned, tears of rage burning her eyelids, and stormed out of the room.

The boat docked next morning. Mary left the steamer alone.

THE months that followed Mary's return to the United States were weary ones of bitter disappointment, lightened only by John Ayers' unswerving loyalty and devotion. Rominova was as good an enemy as she had been a friend—and just as thorough. Her influence in the theatrical world was so strong that Mary had no chance to find employment. The story of the break was common gossip on Broadway, and from the time of her return in January until May crept by the answer to Mary's question was one long "No." Fortunately the stage was not a matter of her bread and butter. She had plenty of money to live on but her pride would not let her go back to California yet. Gradually, as spring came and she could find no work, the lure of the tennis courts once more seized her. It was two whole years since she had fought her memorable losing struggle against Mrs. Mosier, who quite unintentionally was responsible for Mary's embarking on her ill-starred career.

Mrs. Mosier still reigned supreme in the tennis world—better, if anything, with each passing year. The first tournament Mary entered, she entered in fear and trembling. Her defeat in three close sets by Marion Jessop in the semi-finals brought her far more encouragement than it did fear. She was better than she had dared hope she would be after her long lay-off; in fact, she thought she would be better than she ever had been if she practiced. Certainly she was much faster on her feet. Mrs. Mosier was right. Well, she had learned to dance! Now if she couldn't dance, at least she could play tennis.

The old ideal, the goal of her childhood, the National Championship, once more grew into a crowning ambition. On through the months of June and July, Mary played tennis, growing better and better until with the month of August she was conceded to be the logical favorite for the National crown. Three times already Mary had defeated Mrs. Mosier, the national champion. The first match had been a bitter struggle, won by Mary in the last set. The other two matches had been more easy, however.

John Ayers lingered on in the United States, though knowing he should return to England. His father was in ill health and John would soon be called upon to take up the reins of the big business. John could not tear himself away from Mary. True, she had never said she loved him, nor given him any definite assurance of hope, but all through the months that followed her return to the United States, she had turned more and more to him for companionship and encouragement. He was her regular escort to all tournaments, and her confidant for her hopes of the championship. Even though the news from his father grew steadily worse during the summer, John lingered on. Finally, he made up his mind to go home immediately following the completion of the Woman's National Championship.

The draw for the championship placed Mary Harwood on the opposite side from Mrs. Mosier, and press and public alike conceded these two their meeting in the final round.

MARY'S romantic and stormy career—now public property—had made her the most popular figure in the tennis world, and every day capacity crowds thronged the stadium to watch her. Form ran true throughout the week. Friday saw Mrs. Mosier crush Eleanor Goss in sequence sets to reach her position in the final round. Mary was forced to a close battle by the visiting English star, Kathleen McKane, but emerged victor, amid the cheers of her loyal public.

She came out of the enclosure to find John waiting for her.

"I wont be long dressing," she called as she hurried by. She did not notice the strained expression on his face. He said nothing of importance until they were seated at dinner at the Biltmore. Once the order was given, he drew from his pocket a cable and handed it across to her. Her eyes scanned it rapidly.

Father dying. Come at once.

MOTHER.

Sudden tears sprang to her eyes. "Poor John, I'm more sorry than I can say," she murmured.

"I am, too," he said quietly. "Sorry for Dad and Mother, and also for myself that I must leave without seeing you win tomorrow."

"Oh," she gasped, "do you sail so soon? Wont you be there tomorrow? Can you catch a ship so quickly?"

"The *Olympic* sails at noon tomorrow and I have secured passage."

"When will you come back?"

"I can't tell. Maybe never."

"Never? Oh, John, you must!"

He shook his head.

"Dad leaves a big business when he goes and he has given me my play-time while he lived. Now I must take hold. I may not be able to come back for years."

THE room seemed to swim before Mary's eyes. It seemed to her that, with his last words, John had drawn out of her life something that was part of her. She never realized before quite what he meant to her very existence.

"What will I do?" she murmured softly.

He leaned toward her. "Come with me, dearest!"

She straightened sharply. "What?"

"Come with me—we can be married tonight. You are my life, my existence and I can't leave you behind! You have made it impossible for me to live away from you. Come with me!"

Mary closed her eyes a moment. The long years ahead seemed opening before her. Nothing, nothing, nothing of real value. What did tennis, or dancing either, for that matter, count in the scheme of things? Just an endless chain of travel, crowds of gaping people watching one jump around like a monkey on a stick, whether that stick was a tennis court or a stage! No rest, no peace, no real home, no children, nothing but the ceaseless travel, change, hurry, hustle and bustle! It would not be so hard if she could see John by her side, but he was going away tomorrow at noon and might not be back for years—if ever!

She opened her eyes and smiled. "I'll go," she said, quietly.

His eyes looked the kiss he could not give. "My darling!"

Out from the long pause that spoke volumes he suddenly became articulate: "But the finals are tomorrow! Dearest, what will you do?"

Happily she leaned across the table to tell him. . . . .

WHEN the champion, Mrs. Mosier, hurried into the clubhouse at Forest Hills, the stadium was crowded to capacity. She still had fifteen minutes in which to dress and be on the court. Doubtless Mary Harwood was already in the marquee.

"Telegram, Mrs. Mosier!" The girl at the office handed over the slip of paper.

Mrs. Mosier opened it on her way to the dressing-room. She could see the brightly colored dresses of the women who were pouring into the stadium. The day was perfect, the court excellent, the whole setting ripe for her greatest match. She realized that Mary would beat her but she was determined to go down fighting. . . . .

She glanced down at the telegram in her hand. It wasn't a telegram, but a wireless. Doubtless a good-luck wish from an admirer who could not be there.

Then with a second glance, she grasped the full import of the message.

To Mrs. Frank Mosier,
Westside Tennis Club,
Forest Hills, L. I.

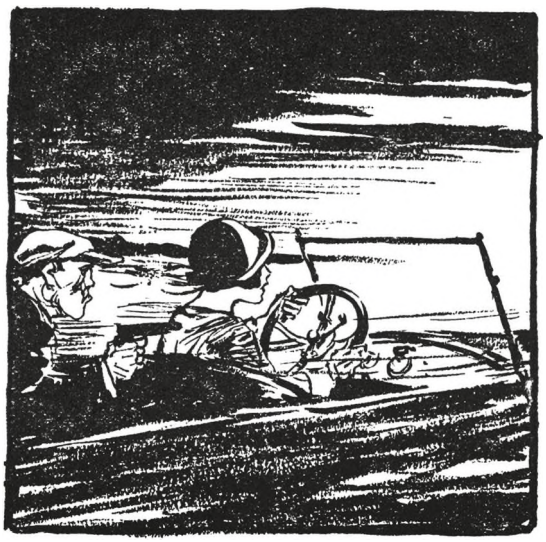
Regret necessity default finals today. Unexpectedly sailing to Europe, owing serious illness in family. I hope we may meet at Wimbledon in future years. My husband joins me in congratulations.

MARY HARWOOD AYERS.

Mrs. Mosier looked up from the wireless. She was once more National Champion.

"Oh, damn!" she said. "That girl is the real world's champion! Well, I guess I'll go to Wimbledon next year."

**Be sure to read "The Comeback," a fine short novel of outdoor life which Joe Mills has sent to us from his mountain home out in Colorado, and which will be published in the next, the April, issue.**



# *Chubby Drives It Out*

*A lively story of Mojave Desert adventure in 1925, with the motorcar replacing the mustang and things happening pretty fast just the same.*

## *By* WHITMAN CHAMBERS

THE Mojave Desert was no place for a fat man. Chubby Gerard had arrived at this conclusion not after years of research and investigation, but after merely a single brief hour in one of California's great but un-press-agented open spaces.

And what was more, the Mojave Desert was certainly no place for a fat man in a flivver coupé. In a club car on a fast train, it might not have been so bad. A comfortable plush seat in which to recline, a few cooling beverages to drink, and it could be endured. Not comfortable, to be sure, not even desirable—but endurable. In a tiny coupé it was—well, terrible.

Chubby regarded his companion at the wheel with undisguised disdain. Sheldon Tremont was a regular fellow, all right. Handsome, too—enviably handsome. But there was no denying the fact that his idea of a good time was downright queer. Of course, there was a woman mixed up in it. A woman was enough to warp any man's mentality, particularly when she happened to be young and very beautiful and very self-willed.

Chubby sighed. and shook his head sadly. He wondered if there were anybody in the world as uncomfortable as he. His round, red face was already peeling from the blistering sun. Small beads of perspiration dotted his forehead and trickled at regular intervals from his chin. He was attired in duck trousers and a silk shirt. The trousers had once been white, and the shirt had once been pink. But the alkali of the desert had changed them both to the indeterminate shade of Tremont's khaki shirt and riding-breeches.

Chubby fidgeted nervously in his seat and gazed anxiously across the panorama of mesquite and cactus and rolling sand-dunes which stretched before them.

"Terrible, aint it?" he choked.

Tremont smiled disarmingly.

"I think it's quite picturesque."

THE sand was rapidly growing deeper, and Tremont had difficulty in keeping the light car in the two ruts which formed the road. He did not speak for a moment as he wrestled with the wheel. A slight skid would land them in the drifted sand

at the side of the highway. That would mean shoveling and hard work—distasteful prospects even to the philosophical Tremont.

The ruts curved sharply and then led off ahead in two straight lines. Tremont remarked sadly:

"It's a crime, though, Chubby."

"What's a crime?"

"That we've lived within a hundred miles of the Mojave Desert all our lives and have never before come out to look it over. It's really a crime, Chubby."

"Huh! If that's a crime, you'd better pick me out a nice room in San Quentin."

"But isn't it picturesque? After all we've read about the desert, a man's education wouldn't be complete without giving it the once-over. The lure of the desert, Chubby! I can feel it creeping over me already."

"More likely the sand sifting down your neck!" the fat youth put in morosely.

"But joking aside, Chubby, aren't you interested in the desert? Look at that tall cactus over there. It must be thirty feet high."

The car lurched slightly and slipped out of the ruts. Chubby's form stiffened. His red face paled beneath its sunburn. Tremont jerked the wheel and opened the throttle as the coupé lost momentum in the deep sand. By dint of good driving and better luck he got the car back into the road.

"Shel, if you want me to have heart failure, just look at a few more of those cactuses," Chubby groaned. "'Course, I may be wrong, but it has always been my idea that the man at the wheel ought to keep his eyes on the road. Just let me do the looking at the scenery. I'll tell you about it after we get across this blamed desert—if and whenever we do."

"I stand corrected." Tremont grinned sheepishly. "After this, I'll stop the car when I want to look at the scenery."

"You do and I'll brain you!" Chubby threatened. "Right now, I'm a man with but a single thought. That's to get off this desert as fast as possible. Step on the gas, Shel, step on the gas."

AS noon approached, the interior of the coupé grew steadily warmer. A blistering wind, searingly hot from the sun-baked expanses of the desert, blew in the open windshield. It parched the two men like a tongue of flame. On all sides of them stretched the burning waste-lands, shimmering and dancing grotesquely in the heat-waves. There was no sound save the purr of the motor, the high-pitched hiss of the boiling radiator and, from time to time, a series of inarticulate mouthings from Chubby.

After a time Tremont brought the little car to a halt and relaxed momentarily in his seat.

"Well, what did I tell you about stopping to admire the view?" said Gerard threateningly.

"My dear Chubby," Tremont remonstrated gently. "Don't you know that a flivver has no resemblance to a camel? It would be suicide to try to make the old girl go nine days without giving her a drink. Chubby, suppose you do it?"

Gerard got out of the car. Groaning a bit but still moving with a certain alacrity, born of his desire to leave the desert behind them as fast as possible, he untied the water-bag from the spare tire and hurried around to the radiator.

"Careful!" Tremont cautioned.

HIS warning was too late. The removal of the radiator cap precipitated a geyser of steam and boiling water. Descending, it thoroughly drenched the fat man. Chubby essayed a scowl, despite the pain it caused his blistering features.

"Burn you?" Tremont grinned.

"Naw! It was cool beside this blamed wind." Chubby filled the radiator hurriedly and climbed back into the car. "Let her out, Shel. Give her the gun. If we aren't off this desert pretty soon, I'll melt. I'm telling you, Shel, I'll melt sure. I wasn't built for this kind of work. Give her the gun!"

Tremont gave her the gun. The car lurched forward through the sand. Chubby relaxed in his seat, his eyes half closed, his breath coming in gasps. Thus for several miles. Then he heard a shout from Tremont. The fat man sat up suddenly and looked about.

"Well?" he grunted.

"Coming to a dry lake-bed," the other announced.

Chubby peered ahead through the dazzling sunlight. Stretching before them for miles was a flat, level expanse of desert, incredibly smooth, devoid of vegetation.

"Boy! You're right!" he enthused. "I've heard of these lake-beds but this is the first one I ever saw. Say! Talk about

a race course. Beverley Hills! Indianapolis! Blah! This has got the whole bunch of 'em screaming for help. Now we show some speed. Come on, Barney Oldfield, give her the gas."

The car dropped down a sandy pitch and swept out on the smooth floor of the lake-bed. Tremont pulled the throttle down to the last notch. The coupé shot forward. The ground was packed hard. No boulevard could have been harder. It was as smooth as a table-top, as level as the surface of a millpond. The speedometer mounted steadily—thirty-five, forty, forty-five, forty-eight. Vibration was utterly lacking. The car did not appear to be moving, save for the trembling speedometer needle and the increased rush of air through the windshield.

Chubby sat back in his seat and lit a cigarette. He was happier than at any moment since he had left home.

"Ah," he breathed joyously. "This is the real McCoy, eh, Shel? Boy, if we only had a few more lake-beds, a trip to the Grand Canon wouldn't be so bad. I was beginning to feel sorry we started out. In fact, I was thinking very unkind thoughts of one Miss Jane Evarts."

Tremont glanced at him quickly.

"Why pick on Jane?" he queried.

Chubby grunted.

"Aw, act your age, Shel! That innocence stuff doesn't get over. What do you think I am? A moron? If you have the idea you took me down the line with that blah of yours about 'see America first,' you're crazy with the heat."

"Quite possible," Tremont admitted mildly. "It is very warm."

"Aw, never mind tryin' to change the subject from Jane Evarts to the weather. I know it's warm as well as you do. I also know about the little scene you had night before last with Jane. She insisted on calling you 'brother' and you wanted her to call you 'daddy.' You couldn't agree, so you disagreed. Quite simple. Puzzle: who's the goat?"

"I am," Tremont admitted without rancor.

"*You* are? You don't hate yourself much, do you? If *you're* the goat of this particular triangle, I'm the king of Siam. As a matter of fact, you're the wise guy and I'm the sucker. You shove off on this trip to heal your wounded heart and you drag me along to keep you company. I'm the innocent victim of your blighted romance. Look me over. Don't I look like a victim?"

TREMONT opened his mouth to protest, but Chubby silenced him with a wave of his pudgy hand.

"Never mind the excuses and apologies, old man. You know your stuff, all right. You're the original Nat Goodwin when it comes to knocking the women dead. You sure know how to treat 'em. When you come back after a month or so, our friend Jane will be ready to eat out of your hand. She'll marry you inside of twenty-four hours. And it'll serve her right, too. She's too blamed up-stage. She's too self-willed. Always wants her own way. Don't give a darn whose toes she steps on. If I was old man Evarts, I'd take her over my knee—"

The brakes screamed suddenly. Gerard's head snapped. Directly in front of the car he saw a narrow arroyo which cut the lake-bed at right angles to the road. It was not deep. It would not be a menace to a car traveling at a moderate speed. But to a flivver rolling along at nearly fifty miles an hour—

Chubby held his breath as he felt the coupé skid. His hands grasped the window frame in the door. His feet braced against the floorboards. The brakes seemed to have little effect. The arroyo raced toward them with incredible swiftness. Came a terrific bump. Chubby swung around on the seat and landed ultimately in a jammed heap between the dash and the edge of the cushion.

The coupé stopped. Chubby groaned.

Tremont gazed at his portly companion and laughed.

"You're too fat for gymnastics, Chubby," he admonished. "Besides, you'd better save your strength. You'll need it."

Gerard silently extricated himself and resumed his seat.

"The motor's still going," he remarked, pointedly, at last. "What are we waiting for?"

Tremont, his obvious optimism and good nature unabated, announced:

"We're waiting for a new axle. And we can wait till kingdom come and it will never be delivered to us f.o.b. Let's get out."

Chubby's eyes opened wide.

"You're—you're kidding me, Shel!" he gasped.

Tremont shook his head and got out of the car.

"I wish I were, Chub, old-timer," he said. "But I've busted them before and I know the symptoms. It snapped when we hit that chuck-hole. We can't go on until one of us goes back to Mojave and gets a new one."

"*Walks* back to Mojave?" Gerard asked incredulously.

"No. There's quite a bit of traffic along here. One of us ought to be able to get a ride into town and back again. Want to go?"

"Who? Me?" the fat man wailed. "The trip'd kill me, Shel. Honest it would. You go and I'll stay here and take out the busted axle."

"Do you know how?"

"I hope to tell you I do. I'm the best little axle-taker-out this side of Chicago."

Tremont regarded him dubiously.

"All right," he acquiesced at last. "I'll take your word for it. I'll bring back something for supper and some water. If you'll work while I'm gone, we ought to be able to get under way again before dark."

"Yes, yes! That's great!" Chubby agreed enthusiastically. He got out of the car and scanned the heat-baked wastes to the eastward. "Somebody's coming now!" he said, sighting a dust cloud far out on the desert.

Tremont followed his gaze.

"Campers who stayed overnight in Barstow," he hazarded. "Just about time for them to be getting through. Ought to be quite a few machines coming along now. Guess you wont die of lonesomeness."

"Don't worry. If anything kills me, it'll be the heat."

Tremont unstrapped a canteen from the running-board and slung it over his shoulder.

"You've got the water-bag," he said. "It's almost half full and ought to last you. I'll be back as soon as possible. Maybe in the middle of the afternoon some time."

Tremont flagged the approaching car. There were only two persons in it. He told them his tale of woe and was allowed to ensconce himself on the luggage in the tonneau.

It was with an odd feeling of lonesomeness that Chubby watched the car speed out on the lake-bed. He kept his eyes on it until it crossed the dry lake and disappeared among the sand-dunes to the north. Then he dropped disconsolately onto the running-board, buried his head in his hands. The Mojave Desert was certainly no place for a fat man—particularly when the only means of locomotion was a flivver with a broken axle!

IT was after three o'clock that afternoon when Tremont returned to the stalled car, via the running-board of a tourist's flivver. He dropped to the ground, retrieved the axle, the canteen, and an armful of packages from the tonneau and thanked the traveler for the lift. The machine moved off. Tremont turned to the coupé. There appeared to be no one about.

"Chubby!" he called. "Where the dickens are you?"

There was no answer for a moment. Then a red face emerged from under the car. It dripped perspiration and was surmounted by a mop of tousled hair. Two bloodshot eyes blinked sleepily at Tremont.

"What—what time is it?" Chubby asked uncertainly.

"After three," the other returned coldly.

The fat man pulled himself with great difficulty from beneath the car and got to his feet unsteadily. He stood rubbing his eyes.

"I—I guess I slept too long, Shel. I—I'm sorry I didn't get that blamed axle out."

Tremont sighed resignedly.

"So am I, Chubby. We could have been under way in no time if you hadn't gone to sleep."

"But I'll make up for it, Shel," Gerard promised fervently. "I'll work like blazes—see if I don't!"

He threw open the door and delved under the front seat. The jack appeared in his hand. He raced to the rear of the car. "This is me working. Here, behind this jack. Watch me. I'm good, what I mean!" Puffing, perspiring, groaning, he began to jack up the rear wheel.

It was just sundown when the task of installing the new axle was completed. The sands were beginning to cool. The fiery heat of the afternoon was subsiding rapidly.

Chubby removed the jack from the car, tossed it into the compartment under the seat and relaxed on the running-board, his burning head in his hands. His clothes were covered with grease and alkali dust. His face was streaked with grime.

"Tired, Chub?" Tremont grinned.

Gerard nodded woefully.

"The heat!" he mumbled. "It's got me. Oh, Lord, just to think that at this time

yesterday I was getting ready for a cool plunge in the 'Y' tank back home. Think of it! How long have we been on the road, Shel?"

"Almost a whole day. We left at six this morning."

"Almost a whole day! It seems like fourteen years!" Chubby wailed. "Shel, I apologize. I *am* a moron. Sixth class. Or maybe I'm a low imbecile. I dunno. But nobody but a moron would let himself be dragged away from home and mother for this. Look at it! And right now the boys back home are jumping off the spring-board in the 'Y.' The water is clear and cool. It's splashing around the edges of the tank." A moan escaped his cracked lips. "And we haven't even got enough water to wash in! See America first! Blah!"

The other laughed.

"Cheer up. It wont be so bad from now on. It'll cool off fast. The nights are always cold down here. We'll get some dinner and shove off about dark. You'll feel better after you eat. I bought a big porterhouse in Mojave, and some fruit and stuff. You'll be a new man after you get outside of half of it."

Chubby raised his head interestedly.

"Food," he mused. "Porterhouse! Fruit! H-m! Those who want food may do so. That takes in me. Let's get it cooked!"

IT was just dusk. Dinner was arrayed temptingly on the folding camp table. The travelers were about to sit down when they heard the roar of an open exhaust, from the direction of Mojave.

"It's not coming *very* fast!" Tremont grinned, walking around the coupé.

Chubby followed precipitately. In the gathering gloom they made out a large touring car speeding across the lake-bed.

"Doing seventy," Tremont muttered.

"And then some," Chubby agreed. "My God!" he exclaimed suddenly. "That arroyo! It'll be a wreck, sure!"

For once, in a lifetime of slow thinking and slower moving, Chubby Gerard thought quickly.

"I'll flag it!" he shouted.

He dashed toward the road, his arms waving wildly, his mouth opened in a mighty bellow of warning. But the big machine did not slow down. Chubby redoubled his efforts, gesticulating, shouting, jumping about. The car came toward him swiftly, looming out of the dusk at a terrific speed. It headed straight for the arroyo, its exhaust roaring like a machine-gun.

Chubby jumped from the path of the racing car with alacrity. It was too late for it to stop now. Already he had visions of pulling the injured from the wreck, of speeding into Mojave to the hospital.

Then, with the car but fifty feet away, he saw a slim arm slip from behind the windshield. He caught the dull gleam of a pistol. An instant later came a slender spurt of reddish-yellow flame. Chubby dropped to the ground like a sack of grain. The car raced on. Then its brakes shrieked. It skidded half around, swung back like a pendulum, and hit the arroyo with a crash. Slithering wildly for a hundred feet or more, it at last limped to a stop like a wounded deer.

Tremont, galvanized suddenly into action, pulled his own revolver from a pocket in the coupé and advanced warily toward the big car. He saw the door open. A slender form dropped to the ground and turned toward him. Although the person wore trousers, there was something unmistakably feminine about the walk. Tremont grunted disdainfully. A woman! He glanced over his shoulder at Chubby. Through the gloom he saw that the fat man was on all fours now and was gazing angrily at the big car.

"Hurt?" Tremont called.

"Naw. But somebody else is goin' to be," Gerard answered vindictively.

Tremont faced the driver of the car.

"Shooting rather promiscuously, aren't you?" he called across a distance of fifty feet or more.

"Oh, stop preaching, Shel," came the answer in a familiar, petulant voice. "Come here, and give me a hand. I've blown a tire."

TREMONT started. So that's who it was! Just like her, too, to shoot first and make explanations afterward! Chubby was right. She *was* too high-spirited. A wild whoop from the fat man brought Tremont back to earth.

"Hey, you, Jane Evarts! What do you mean, shootin' at me that way? Want me to take you over my knee?"

"Oh, dry up, Chubby Gerard," the girl called, not without humor. "I didn't recognize you in that trick outfit. Thought you were the bank robber, of course.

There was a hold-up, you know. First National of Mojave. Lone bandit." Then, as Chubby continued to stare: "Don't stand there gawking at me. Come here and help me fix this tire. And where did you get those outlandish clothes?"

"None of your business," Chubby came back politely.

The two men hurried over to the big car, Tremont in silence, the fat youth grumbling loudly about a fool woman who didn't have sense enough to look before she shot. The slim girl who came to meet them was dressed in a mannish riding-habit. She was pretty in a petite way, with her bobbed brown hair and her flashing eyes and delicately curved lips. Her chin was very strong and firm. Jane Evarts obviously had a will of her own.

"Where are you going, Jane?" Tremont asked.

"Albuquerque," the girl answered calmly, as though motoring alone across a couple of States meant no more to her than dancing a fox-trot.

Chubby grunted:

"Bet your ma don't know you're out."

"You're wrong, Chubby," Jane smiled. "I left a note when I departed this afternoon, telling her where I was going. I have a cousin who lives in Albuquerque, and I'm going to spend a few months with her. The old home town bored me. I got the wanderlust. And here I am. Just like that."

"You took the car and left, without so much as asking your parents or anything else?" Tremont contributed.

"You may go to the head of the class, Sheldon. However, I'm twenty-one, you know. And I'm sure *you* have no objections to my taking a little trip."

Tremont smiled and shook his head hopelessly.

"I have lots of them, Jane. But I know you're not interested in hearing them, so I'll keep quiet. Had your dinner?"

"No. I was going to eat dinner in Barstow."

"Better stop and eat with us. It's all ready. Then we'll help you change your tire. All right?"

Jane nodded readily, with an eagerness that was almost patent.

"I'd be glad to join you." Then, as an afterthought: "Of course, if you're in a hurry, I can change the tire myself."

Tremont took her arm and started back to the folding camp table.

"We've been here since eleven o'clock this morning. Broke an axle and just got it fixed. So a few minutes more or less wont make much difference to us. And we've got plenty to eat. I know Chubby will be overjoyed to give you his share of the porterhouse. He doesn't care for steak. It disagrees with him. Besides, he's been sleeping all afternoon and isn't hungry."

Chubby's groan signified his resignation to the inevitable.

DINNER was finished. The tire was changed in a silence broken only by Chubby's muttered imprecations as he labored with the rim lugs. Jane was ready to resume her journey.

"It's a long way from here to New Mexico," Tremont began. "I don't suppose I can talk you out of attempting the trip."

Jane shook her head determinedly.

"Don't try, Sheldon. It would be a waste of time. I've made up my mind. And you know what that means." She laughed unsteadily. "Besides, it's perfectly safe."

"I don't agree with you there," Tremont answered hopelessly. "But we wont argue about it. Suppose you drive slowly and let Chubby and me keep behind you. At least, we could give you a hand if you had any more tire trouble. And if anything serious happened—"

The girl interrupted him with a laugh. It was a shaky laugh, for all her bravado.

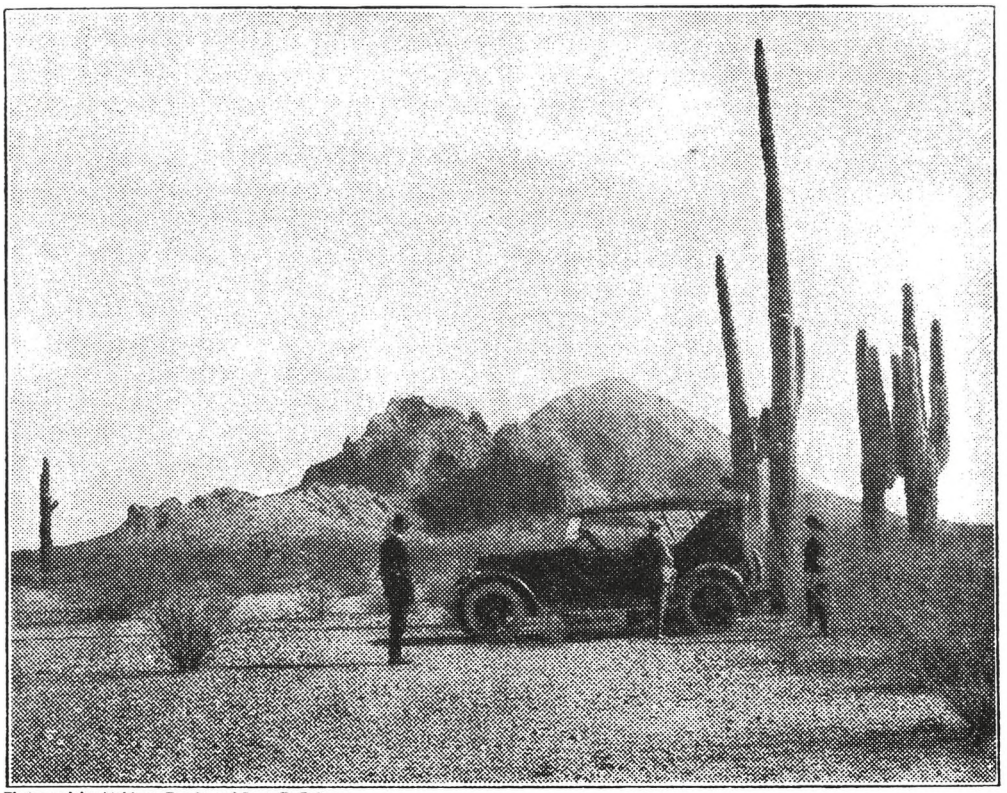
"Your little old lizzie is too slow for me, Shel. I'm sorry to disagree with you about the danger and I might really enjoy your company on the trip. But I think I shall go on alone. Good-by."

She held out a slim hand. Tremont clasped it.

"Jane! Please!"

"Aw, let her go," the fat man put in morosely. "It's her funeral, aint it? It'll serve her right to get stranded out in the desert some place and have to hoof it forty or fifty miles. Maybe it'll bring her down off her high horse."

Chubby would probably have said more had his attention not been attracted by the sound of an approaching automobile. The three turned as they saw a pair of headlights bearing slowly down upon them. A battered machine, missing on at least one cylinder and with two flat tires, drew up beside them and came to a groaning halt.



Photograph by Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway.

**Here's the sort of country through which Chubby "drove it out."**

They heard a tired sigh and saw a man get out of the car. His features were indistinguishable in the darkness.

"Hello, there!" he called. "Haven't got a couple of spare tubes you can sell me, have you? Thirty-two fours?"

"Not that size," Tremont replied.

The man sighed again and walked casually toward them.

"Guess I'll have to patch up my old ones, then," he said wearily. "Sure fierce on tires, this country! Want to make Barstow tonight, if I can."

"Sorry we can't help you," Tremont responded. "We can give you a hand at patching up your tubes, though. I've got a pretty good vulcanizer in the car."

"Thanks!"

THE one word was a bark. Tremont's frame tensed. Something in the stranger's manner that had puzzled him was suddenly clear. The man's next words came as no surprise to him. They were uttered sharply:

"Better put 'em up, people!"

Jane and the two men caught the dull sheen of a heavy automatic. They obeyed the command in silence.

"If you can't give me a tube, maybe you can let me have one of your cars," the stranger went on, still keeping them carefully covered with his gun. "Think I'll take the big one. I'm rarin' to move an' move fast. Who's it belong to?"

"It belongs to me," said a small voice.

"Then you'll drive it for me, lady. I aint used to these foreign cars. And you'll drive faster than you ever drove before in your life. A posse may be on my trail. Then again, it may not. I think I gave 'em the slip. But I aint takin' no chances. Get that satchel out of my car an' let's go. If you pull me through this all right, I'll see that you get paid for your trouble."

Less than a minute later, while Gerard and Tremont stood motionless in the face of the bandit's gun, the big touring car drove away. The two men stood helplessly for a moment, watching the dwindling tail-light.

"My Lord!" Chubby breathed. "What'll we do?"

Tremont jumped for the coupé.

"We'll ride, that's what we'll do!" he shouted over his shoulder. "Come on!"

GERARD tumbled into the car. The self-starter shrieked. A moment later they were rolling off across the lake-bed.

In half a mile they came to the end of the hard surface. The car slid into twin sand ruts.

"We can't catch her!" Chubby shouted. "Aint got a chance!"

"We're going to try, anyway," Tremont answered, sliding the throttle down to the last notch. "Jane will be counting on us. She knows we'll follow. She'll do something; wreck the car maybe, or run off the road and get stuck in the sand. She's resourceful, Jane is. Got a head on her shoulders. She'll be depending on us. We can't fail her."

Chubby held his breath as the little car bounded along the road. Its speed increased slowly in the sand. But increase it did, until its speedometer showed thirty miles an hour, then thirty-two, thirty-five. Tremont gripped the steering wheel with all his strength, pulling the car around turns, over hummocks, across dry streambeds.

Chubby held tightly to the window frame and clenched his teeth. It seemed sheer suicide. The car would surely skid off the road. It would overturn. They would be crushed, cut by flying glass, left to die under the wreckage without hope of succor. A terrible death! And all the result of a fool girl's caprice. Why hadn't she stayed home where she belonged? No business tearing around the country alone. It was her fault. The whole thing was her fault. Chubby was vindictive—and thoroughly frightened.

"You'll kill us," he groaned at last, as the car skidded with a sickening lurch.

Tremont did not reply as he pulled the machine skillfully back into the road. His mind was on his driving, and on the taillight which gleamed fitfully far ahead of them. He was holding his own with the big car.

But if only Jane would run off the road! If only her car would break down! Then he could overtake them, could do something to rescue her.

"Have a heart, Shel!" Chubby moaned disconsolately. "Slow down! There aint no use killing us!"

BUT Tremont did not slow down. The throttle was still wide open and he made no move to close it. Mile after mile was reeled off. The moon appeared from behind distant mountains to the eastward. Tremont reached down and switched off his lights. If Jane did stop for anything, and he felt certain she would, he dared not run the risk of the bandit's seeing them and being warned of their approach.

Chubby, by this time, had slumped in a semi-conscious heap between the seat and the instrument-board. He was afraid and he didn't care who knew it. He didn't want to die. And yet something told him that death was inevitable. From the bandit's viewpoint, it was a case of "heads I win, tails you lose." Overtaking the man meant certain death at the hands of that heavy automatic. Failure to overtake him also meant certain death—under the car.

After a time that seemed hours, Chubby heard his friend shouting to him.

"On the job, Chub! Snap out of it! Get my automatic out of the pocket on your side and stand by for some action. I think Jane has stopped."

Tremont slowed down and proceeded cautiously. When he was approximately a half-mile from the touring car, he stopped the coupé and stepped quietly out onto the sand at the side of the road.

"Come on, Chubby, and be quiet about it," he whispered tersely. "We've got to creep up on them. Shouldn't make any noise in the sand. Did you get the gun? Here, give it to me."

Grasping the automatic, which Gerard offered with trembling fingers, Tremont slipped it into his pocket. He started cautiously down the road, followed by the stumbling fat man. In the deep sand they were as silent as wraiths of the night.

THEY were able to creep to within a few feet of the stalled car. It was off the road, Tremont made out at last, and was apparently stuck fast in a sand dune. The bandit was frantically scraping sand away from the wheels with his bare hands. Jane sat quietly in the front seat, apparently calm and unruffled.

Tremont crept forward slowly, his gun leveled.

"Steady!" he called at last. "Now you put 'em up!"

The bandit wheeled sharply. His hand flashed to his side. For a moment Tremont felt certain he would have to shoot. Then the man slowly raised his arms above his head.

"You got me, kid," he grunted.

"Quite true," Tremont grinned. "But just keep your hands up. Chubby, take his gun."

The bandit made no resistance as

Chubby took the automatic from his pocket.

"Now get into the back seat of the car," commanded Tremont. Turning to Jane: "Think you can get out without a shovel, Jane?"

She nodded hastily.

"Easily. I'm not stuck at all. Jump in and we'll take him into Barstow."

"Fine. Chub, you follow along with the 'coup.' Jane will take it easy so you can keep up without any trouble. We'll wait here until you catch up with us."

Tremont climbed into the back seat after the bandit, keeping him covered with his gun. The prisoner slouched listlessly in one corner of the tonneau.

"Good work, Jane," Tremont congratulated the girl. "I had a hunch you'd stall the car so that we could overtake you."

"It was nice of you to follow," she commented.

"You expected we'd come, didn't you?"

"Yes," she was forced to admit.

There was a silence of several minutes. Then, from Tremont:

"Suppose we all turn around and go home after we hand this man over to the authorities?"

JANE did not turn to answer him. "I told you I was going to Albuquerque," she reminded. "I don't see any reason why I should turn back. I'm sure I'm enjoying the trip."

"But can't you see it isn't safe?" Tremont insisted. "Here you've only been on the road for half a day and look what has happened already."

"This?" she queried lightly. "It's quite an experience. One doesn't have the opportunity to capture bank bandits every day. I am getting quite a kick out of it."

Tremont groaned audibly and lapsed into silence. Why argue? Jane had made up her mind. He knew that he, of all people, could not make her change it. After a time he heard the honking of a horn behind them. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that Chubby had arrived with the coupé.

"Let's go, Jane," Tremont ordered quietly. "And please take it easy. Chubby isn't much of a driver and he's afraid of these roads. If you drive fast, he wont be able to keep up with us."

Jane did not reply. Starting the motor, she swung the big car back into the road with scarcely an effort. As they got under way, however, Tremont observed that the girl had no intention of traveling slowly. She seemed to delight in driving the big car as fast as she dared. More perverseness, Tremont reflected grimly. A glance to the rear showed him that the coupé was fast dropping behind. Chubby was taking no chances in the treacherous sand.

The road-bed changed gradually as they whirled along in the darkness. The sand gave way to rocks and chuck-holes. The girl slowed down somewhat. And yet the big car jolted drunkenly, tossing the occupants of the tonneau back and forth from side to side.

"Better take it easy," Tremont cautioned at last. "You'll break a spring, sure."

The girl shrugged without replying. Did the speed of the car increase slightly, or was the road growing worse? Tremont was undecided. He knew only that he and his prisoner were bobbing about like two peas in a dried pod.

Since entering the car, the bandit had not spoken. Tremont scanned him as carefully as he could in the darkness. The man seemed utterly spent. Slumped in his seat, his chin on his chest, he presented a perfect picture of dejection and weariness. Yet Tremont took no chances. He still kept him covered with the automatic.

The road grew steadily worse, while the speed of the car seemed to increase. But Tremont made no further protest. He had done his part. If Jane wanted to wreck her car, it was her affair. Clinging to his seat with difficulty, he held his peace. What had been anger at first changed slowly to commiseration. He believed he understood Jane. He felt certain that she was thoroughly sick of her bargain by this time. She wanted to go home. Yet she was too proud to admit it. After all, he half hoped she would wreck the car. Then she would have to go home.

And as mile after mile was reeled off, it seemed increasingly certain that his hope would be realized. Jane was piqued at herself, at him, at the world in general. And she was taking it out on the car.

TREMONT never quite understood how the next incident took place. It was a result of his own carelessness, to be sure, but in after years he always cherished the secret conviction that it was really Jane's fault. Had she not been driving so fast, it would never have happened.

It began with a sudden skidding of the car. The machine swung half around, struck a ledge of rock and bounced at least two feet in the air. Tremont clutched wildly at a top-support, missed it, slid off the seat. The prisoner lurched toward him —involuntarily, it seemed at the moment.

Too late, Tremont caught the flash of an elbow very close to him. It struck him in the side of the head. The blow dazed him for the fraction of a second. Before he could muster his scattered wits and fire his gun, the bandit's fist found the point of his jaw. It was a smashing blow, delivered with the inhuman fury of a cornered animal. Tremont's form grew limp.

The bandit worked methodically. Taking the gun from Tremont's hand, he dropped it into his own pocket. Then he slipped an arm about the unconscious man, raised his body and tossed it over the side of the car.

JANE'S first inkling that the tables had been turned in the tonneau came when a none-too-gentle tap on her shoulder and the coarse tones of the bandit addressing her:

"Open her up a little, lady. I'm in command now and I crave more speed."

The girl was suddenly conscious that the tap on her shoulder was caused by the muzzle of a gun. She glanced around quickly.

"What did you do with him?" she demanded falteringly.

"Him? Tossed him out o' the car, o' course. I got my chance when you hit that bump back there. A little nudge alongside the head with my elbow and a right uppercut finished him off."

Jane reached for the emergency brake.

"I'm going to stop!" she declared.

"You do and I'll kill you!" came the terse response.

The girl's hand went back to the wheel.

"You don't need to worry about your friend," the bandit went on. "His partner'll pick him up and in a few hours he'll be none the worse for wear. But we've got to travel, lady. That flivver aint goin' to catch up with us again. Not by no means. Give her the gun. She'll stand it."

"The road's too bad," Jane objected tremulously. "I've been going as fast as I dare. I'll wreck the car if I drive any faster."

"We'll just see about that," the bandit responded. Reaching over her shoulder, he pulled the gas lever wide open. "Now keep your hands on the wheel," he ordered sharply. "I'll 'tend to the gas. Just hold her in the road. I know what a car can do here better than you do."

The machine leaped forward, swung around a slight turn and raced down a straight stretch of road. The speedometer touched forty before the man retarded the gas. To Jane, it seemed that every bump they struck must be the last. Surely no automobile could stand such a pace.

AT first she had intended to watch her opportunity and drive off the road, as she had done before. But there was no hope of doing that now. They were traveling too fast. She knew there were only two courses open to her. She could drive it out, as fast as the bandit chose to make her. Or she could run off the road, wreck the car, possibly kill herself.

Her decision was reached without undue cogitation. She drove it out. And it seemed that she was driving fully three times as fast as she had ever driven before in her life over a similar road. There was no hope now of the coupé's catching up with them. Not even Tremont, and he was probably injured, could drive the little flivver at such a breakneck speed.

Jane gave up hope. Would they never reach Barstow? Why, oh, why, had she ever left home? Why had she been so mean to Shel Tremont? Why had she not taken his advice and turned back? Why, indeed, had she refused to marry him, anyhow? Certainly he was devoted to her. Certainly she would be happy with him. She didn't want to go to Albuquerque. She was sick and tired of the whole trip. If only she had consented to marry Sheldon!

Although it seemed that they had covered a hundred miles at that terrific speed, Jane realized that it could not have been more than ten when the lights of Barstow loomed into sight ahead of them. She wondered if the bandit would make her drive through town without slowing down. He must have divined her thought. He reached forward suddenly and reduced the gas.

"Take it easy through town and watch your step," he ordered. "Just remember I've got you covered from the back seat. And I ain't afraid to shoot. Don't stop and don't try any monkey business. Just go right on through town. We're going to

make Needles tonight, or somebody'll know the reason why."

NEEDLES! It seemed as though she must die if the bandit forced her to drive to Needles. The knives of fatigue were piercing her shoulders. Her head whirled under the nervous tension which gripped her. Needles!— She'd wreck the car first! She'd die first!

But she did neither. Obediently she slowed down as they entered the town. She wanted to stop and yet she knew that she would not. She dared not stop! They swung into the main street of Barstow.

Suddenly Jane heard a loud clatter from behind. Her heart throbbed. Could it be Sheldon in the flivver? But that was impossible. Not even Sheldon could have caught up with them. The noise came closer. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she caught sight of a battered coupé drawing up beside her.

"Faster!" the bandit ordered hoarsely. "Give her the gun!"

His command was emphasized by the increased pressure of the automatic between her shoulders. Involuntarily her foot pressed the accelerator downward. The coupé was drawing ahead, careening wildly. The big car gathered momentum fast. But the flivver had the advantage of a greater speed at the start.

The two cars raced down the main street. Inch by inch the coupé drew ahead. A foot, ten feet, fifty feet!

Then swiftly the driver of the small machine swung it about, directly between two cars parked on either side of the street. There was a tinkling of shattered headlight and the coupé came to a trembling stop. The path of the touring car was blocked.

Jane acted instinctively. Her heart was in her throat. The gun against her back was completely forgotten. Her body stiffened. She threw her weight on the foot brake. Her hand grasped the emergency. She pulled it with all her might. The car skidded sidewise, straightened out, skidded again in a semicircle. There was a crash. Jane saw the coupé tip over onto its side, a front wheel spinning grotesquely in the air. She realized suddenly that her own car had stopped.

JANE was dazed. As from a great distance she saw running figures, heard shouts, the sound of a scuffle somewhere in the street. She made out two forms scrambling from the overturned coupé. The pressure of the gun against her shoulders was gone.

Her senses cleared somewhat. She felt herself lifted from the seat, felt strong arms about her. She looked up into the grimy face of Sheldon Tremont. It was very close to hers, reassuringly close. She sighed almost inaudibly.

"I—I didn't think you could drive so fast," she murmured.

Tremont answered her chokingly:

"I didn't. It was Chubby."

"Chubby!"

"Yes."

"And I thought Chubby was a baby—a coward!"

"Don't you believe it, Jane. He's as game as they make 'em. I was knocked out. Woke up in the flivver. Chubby had the throttle wide open, clear down to the last notch. And he left it there. He was scared to death, Jane. But he drove it out. He refused to give me the wheel. Said it would waste too much time. He drove it out himself, Jane."

"Dear old Chubby!" the girl murmured.

SHE relaxed, trembling. It was very restful, there in Sheldon's arms. Slowly it penetrated her dazed brain that it was the first time she had ever felt entirely at ease in the arms of Sheldon Tremont, the first time she had never felt a little trace of rebellion.

Through half-closed eyes, she saw the bandit slouching down the street between two burly figures. Then she caught sight of half a dozen men gathered about a rotund figure stretched at full length in the street, near the coupé. There was something familiar about that dust-begrimed form, about the soiled silk shirt and the grease-stained trousers which had once been white.

She heard an authoritative voice:

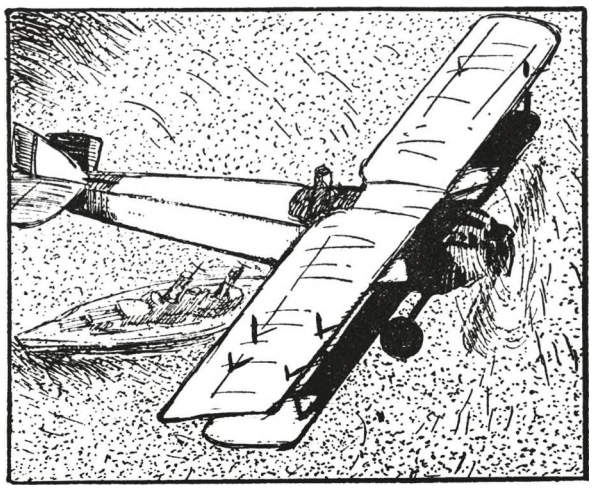
"Somebody get some water. He'll be all right. Not hurt. Just fainted. Guess he ain't used to the heat. Lord, he sure must have drove that flivver! Plucky kid, huh?"

The girl raised an unsteady hand and brushed back a lock of hair from the dirt-streaked face which bent over hers.

"Sheldon!" she whispered.

"Yes, dear."

"Take us home, please—Chubby and me!"



# *The Muted Quest*

*Adventure crowds close on the heels of adventure in this engrossing story by a relatively new writer to whose future work you will look forward with interest.*

## *By* L. P. HOLMES

FATE pulls some queer ones! There was I, Blake Grosvenor, one time aviator in Uncle Sam's Air Forces; of late a first-string cow-puncher and gun-slinger of note, now in that painful condition we Americans describe as being broke —stony broke!

I might add that such a condition was to me a brand-new sensation. Up to a time less than six months before, I was the sole, living heir to a very considerable amount of this world's goods, which had been amassed by Blake Grosvenor, Sr., who had held the controlling cattle interests over the major part of three counties in southwestern Arizona.

Had Dad stuck to his original trade this story would never have been written, and, barring accidents, I would have ambled along through a very unstirring and commonplace existence. But like any number of other luckless mortals, Dad was bitten by the oil bug and in less time than it takes to get from spring to winter, poor old Dad was a busted bubble. A crooked, shyster lawyer pulled the strings that brought about the final crash and Dad, reverting to type, went home, buckled on his revolver, and started on the warpath.

But Dad never had a chance—the lawyer saw him coming and used a sawed-off shotgun at short range. I took up the fight from there and out-gunned the shotgun artist. It was quite a mess, but through the efforts of some valuable friends the jury was persuaded to consider it a case of self-defense, and so turned me loose. Acting on the advice of these same friends, I left the country on the next train, thus avoiding other complications that might have sprouted into being. Months of drifting and a series of cattle-punching jobs finally saw me in Frisco with a train load of cattle. Here I fought with the boss, got fired, and topped it off with a spree. And so it was that I faced the bleak, inhospitable stretches of lower Market Street with that peculiarly "gone" feeling of a man who is desperately hungry and without any idea of where the necessary meal is to come from.

It was early May and the streets were full of swirling clouds of dank, chilly fog from the bay. I pulled my ears as deeply

## L. P. HOLMES

"MY birthplace," writes Mr. Holmes, "was the mountains, a nine-thousand-foot crest of them, and for practically all of my meager thirty-one years I have been within close proximity of them. What adventure I have found has been discovered within their fastnesses, and whatever creeds I may possess are products of their solidity and constancy." The swift-moving story of varied adventure which we print herewith is an excellent example of the work that is being done by the younger school of Western writers.

as possible into the collar of my coat and sauntered along, trying my darndest not to look as miserable as I felt. The morning rush of the commuters was on and close contact with these full-fed, industrious humans only served to accentuate my own predicament.

Suddenly the door of a chophouse swung open in my face and the mingled odors of coffee and frying meats served to crystallize a decision that had been slowly forming in my mind. Two doors farther on was one of the numerous pawnshops which line both sides of lower Market, and I turned into it. Regretfully I slid a hand under my left shoulder and lifting a heavy revolver from a specially built shoulder holster, I laid it on the counter.

"How much?" I questioned gruffly.

The dealer squinted carefully and appraised the gun with greedy eyes.

"Twelve and a half," he offered finally.

I laughed and reached for the gun. It was a beautiful weapon. Dad had had it made to special order and the factory had turned out a masterpiece. Twelve and a half—it was sacrilege!

"Fifteen," chattered the dealer as I started to turn away.

He followed me to the door.

"Twenty-five," he whined, as though the effort was painful.

I hesitated. Twenty-five dollars! Food, lodging and carfare back to the cattle ranges. Just then I caught another whiff from the chophouse. My fingers closed again about the engraved ivory butt of the .45. After all, a man must eat!

"Don't sell it!"

I cannot describe the authoritative quality of the voice which intruded itself into the argument, nor, for that matter can I describe successfully the owner of it.

HE was a little man, the top of his dove-gray Fedora barely reaching to my shoulder. The rest of his raiment was equally gray; a retiring, inoffensive gray, and ultra-conservative in every line of it. Even his face seemed faded. His chin, however, jutted aggressive and abrupt, and behind a pair of immense, owl-like spectacles his eyes snapped fearlessly.

Where he had dropped from was beyond me and how he was cognizant of what I was about to barter was equally mystifying, but that he was fully alive to what was going on, showed plainly in his next remark.

"The gun," he snapped succinctly, "is worth twice as much as he is offering. Don't be a fool!"

Despite a certain surge of impatience, I had to grin and I warmed to the fearless little intruder.

"My friend," I murmured politely, "as owner of this gun, I am quite aware of the truthfulness of your statement. However, when a person has not tasted food for upwards of forty-eight hours, comparative values are apt to become somewhat distorted, are they not?"

"H-m-m," grunted the little man. "I might have guessed it. Come along with me. We will settle the food problem in a hurry."

I balked at that. I was hungry, I was broke, and I was down on my luck, but I was still a long way from becoming an object of charity. I told him so.

"Charity!" he snorted belligerently. "Who said anything about charity? This is an advance out of your first month's wages. Come on and eat!"

AN hour later we boarded an uptown car. We got off at Geary and Powell and with the nonchalance and ease of one long used to such surroundings my employer sought the foyer of the St. Francis Hotel, and securing his key stepped into an elevator. On the fourth floor he opened the door of a small but sumptuous suite and motioned me to a chair. Producing a humidor of excellent cigars, he drew up another chair facing mine.

"Now," he said abruptly, "we'll get down to business. Tell me about yourself —everything."

I did the best I could, and while my recital was not cramped with too much modesty, neither was it a surfeit of egotism.

Several times I surprised a glow of satisfaction in my listener's eyes, particularly when I mentioned my ability to play with the control stick of a De Haviland. "I confess," remarked the little man quizzically, "that I am indebted beyond reason to some Power, omnipotent or otherwise. Really, I don't know whether to make an offering to Fate, or credit my own powers of discernment."

He lighted another cigar and found a more comfortable posture in his chair. For a time he gazed reflectively at the ceiling, then suddenly the blue eyes focused with a peculiar intentness directly on mine.

"I'm going to be fair," he burst out abruptly. "There is going to be danger for you in this undertaking. Just how much, I cannot say. Certainly there will be some, and of a very real and personal sort. At the same time I promise faithfully that I will not expect the unreasonable of you. However, if you have any doubts, now is the time to express them."

I COULD not control an inward smile. Danger! What is danger to Youth, to a life such as mine was, with scarce thirty years behind me? And especially when adventure and romance were beckoning out of the future?

"We wont worry about that part," I shrugged. "I have not lived so very long, yet I have found danger to be nine-tenths imagination and one-tenth actuality."

"Very well," crisply. "I might have known it. Now for the rest. From now until such time as I deem it wise to advise you further, you will know me as Professor Williams. The venture with which you are about to connect yourself is entirely worthy and within the law, and of an importance hard to estimate. Indeed I believe I am safe in saying that on our success or failure hang the destinies of several great Nations, of which the United States is one. Starting immediately, your salary will be one thousand dollars a month, and if our attempt is successful you will receive a bonus of twenty-five thousand. Is that satisfactory?"

Satisfactory! Whew! I was groggy. One thousand dollars a month! Twenty-five thou— And then a sickening suspicion hit me. With his mystifying adroitness, the little man was quick to grasp my thoughts and he smiled broadly.

"I know it sounds that way," he chuckled. "But I'm not. I'm as sane as you are. To prove it—here is five hundred dollars in advance. I want you to go down and pick out some good tailor and get a complete outfit. Those clothes you have on, while serviceable and quite the thing for range work, will hardly uphold the part you are to fulfill."

From a roll that seemed to my astounded eyes in the neighborhood of a loaf of bread in size, he stripped ten fifty-dollar bills and handed them to me.

"I may be gone when you get back—probably will be—and you may not see me again for several days. Incidentally this is Suite 410 and you will make these rooms your headquarters. Make no more acquaintances than necessary and maintain fairly close contact with the rooms—that is, drop in four or five times a day. For the rest—have a good time, but keep your eyes and ears open for anything of any sort which may strike you as strange. If anyone interrogates you, use your own name, but remember I am Professor Williams of the Smithsonian Institute and you are my assistant. We are spending a few weeks here in San Francisco pending preparations for a trip to the Aleutian Islands to study their volcanic origin. One last warning: it might be well for you to forgo contact with the fluid that cheers—and loosens men's tongues. Have I your promise?"

"Absolutely, Professor," I answered earnestly. "I'm off the stuff for life. I mean that."

The little fellow caught my hand in both of his and pressed it warmly. "Fine—fine!" he said. "Something tells me that finding you was a good omen."

I stood there with my hand on the knob of the door and looked down at the queer chap who was proving such a friend in need.

"How do you know that you can trust me?" I asked. "How do you know but what I may take this five hundred dollars and never show up again?"

He laughed again. "My boy, I know much more about you than you dream. For instance—I knew your father! Now run along and get those clothes."

A WEEK passed without my seeing the Professor again. In accordance with his instructions I played my part to the letter. Several times a day I went to the rooms for a smoke; in fact I spent most of the time in them, reading and luxuriating under the unaccustomed comforts. I went to a show or two in the evenings and dined in the hotel grill. My existence, however, was verging on the monotonous and I was fretting like a pampered schoolboy, when the first break came.

I had dined early that evening, and with a good cigar clamped between my teeth, set out to walk off some of the restlessness that seemed in a fair way to spoil my disposition. To this day I cannot recall the route I took, as I sought only action. But for three good hours I strode along, and when I finally felt the first twinges of weariness coming on, and thus began to

think of returning to the rooms, I found myself far down on the Embarcadero. I was several miles from my hotel.

I began sauntering back, keeping an eye open for a stray taxi, though I knew I was in a part of town little frequented by them. Somewhat annoyed, I stopped to light another cigar, half turning as I did so to shield the match from gusts of a damp wind which was snoring in off the Bay. My movement was evidently disconcerting to a man following somewhat closely behind me, for he too halted suddenly—to gaze with apparent nonchalance at the wares in a dingily lighted shipmonger's window.

He was a Japanese, a squat, wide-shouldered fellow with the rough, unkempt appearance of a laborer. He seemed entirely impervious to the questioning stare I gave him and when I finally started on, he soon shuffled past me and disappeared in the night.

SEVERAL blocks farther on I entered a section where extensive construction work was taking place. Piles of lumber, brick, cement, and mountains of lime barrels lined both sides of the pavement. The street lights—poor at best, in that section of the city—threw but the faintest glow, and for the most part the walk was shrouded with long shadows of varied intensity.

I had passed what seemed the deepest and darkest of these, when just the faintest crunch of a footstep sounded behind me. What was it that governed my subsequent actions? Call it instinct, sixth sense or what you will. I only know my body seemed to act of its own volition, entirely apart from conscious nerve impulses. I squatted, spun on my toes and launched myself headlong at the legs of a gorilla-like shape leaping upon me. Strapped close against me, under my left armpit, bulked my beloved revolver, yet here was one of the very few times in my life when I could not get at it with sufficient speed to handle the situation. Confronted with this exigency, my body and mind reacted to my college football training and I made a perfect diving tackle.

My adversary flopped across my back as I crashed against him, carrying his feet from the ground. And even as he fell I felt the burn of live steel searing across the fleshy part of my right leg. This much had my speedy action done for me. A second later and that knife would have found the hollow formed by the base of the neck and the collarbone and driven straight down through my heart! For such is the aim of a knife wielder!

The moment I struck the sidewalk I started rolling, back and forth—from side to side, still clinging tightly to my assailant's legs. Only in this manner could I hope to keep him from again using that deadly steel. Hard as such movement was on me, it was indubitably much more distressing to the would-be murderer, and when I finally managed to gather my feet under me and heave him bodily into a brick pile, he had apparently lost all interest in his original quest, for he bounced back like a rubber ball and raced madly away. I caught one clear glimpse of him as he crossed a shaft of light. It was the Japanese whom I had previously noticed.

Fully cognizant of my employer's wishes that I receive no more notoriety than absolutely necessary, I knew that I must at any cost keep my condition to myself. Therefore I brushed off my clothes as best I could, and limping ahead until clear of the construction district, I waited for a taxi. For once I was in luck. Less than five minutes passed before one came along. I hailed it and giving my address, climbed inside.

Safe for a time from observation, I set to work on my wounded leg. It was a nasty gash and was bleeding copiously. Reassured, however, that no artery had been severed, I bound it up with my handkerchief and neck scarf.

Once more in the rooms, I rang for a bellboy and sent him for a bottle of iodine. Gritting my teeth, I poured this disinfectant into the wound. It hurt like blazes, but I knew it would nullify any danger of poisoning.

I was still fighting the effects of this crude and painful application when a key grated in the door and it opened to admit the little man in gray.

His smiling welcome died in his throat as he saw my predicament, and he was on his knee examining the wound with the deftness of a doctor, before I could recover from my surprise. Without a word he scurried to a suitcase and returned with a small emergency kit. He laid out needles, sutures and bandages.

"I'm going to sew that up," he snapped abruptly. "I'll probably hurt you, but no worse than that confounded iodine. What

did you think you were doctoring—a horse? Now tell me about it—it will serve to keep your mind off the pain."

WHILE he worked I gave him the story, omitting none of the details, even going so far as to laugh at the picture of the departing Japanese.

"Humph," snorted the Professor. "There is youth for you! Dodging death by a split second and then laughing off the whole affair. When you get as old as I am, young fellow, you will have learned to place a different valuation upon earthly existence!"

Despite the gruffness of his speech, the Professor was the personification of gentleness. He did a job on that leg of mine that no surgeon need have been ashamed of, and he tucked me in bed with the solicitous care of a mother.

"Take it as easy as you can," he ordered. "All my preparations are complete, the boat is ready to sail and we leave in two days. I can't have you holding things up with that leg. I'm going down to get a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and I'll expect to see you asleep when I get back. If you aren't, it's an opiate for you, young fellow. Nothing like sleep to give Nature a chance to heal."

Sleep! What with the tumult of thoughts besieging me, and the nervous reaction to the rather disturbing events of the past couple of hours, the mere idea of sleep being possible for me seemed ridiculous. Besides, my leg had begun to throb steadily.

On one thing, however, I had not reckoned. I had lost more blood than I first thought and as soon as relaxation of a sort took place, a weakness somewhat akin to stupor stole over me, and I found my eyelids drooping. Fantasies drifted before my disordered vision—knife-wielding brown men, ships, the conflict of nations, dollars—thousands of them— Finally I slept.

THERE was a stiff westerly wind snoring in from the Pacific, when the *Valiant* cleared the Heads and left in her foaming wake the fog-mottled shores of the Golden Gate. When a mile or two offshore she headed north and immediately took on a motion that dashed abruptly any favorable opinion I may have had of my abilities as a sailor. While entirely seaworthy, the *Valiant* seemed to my unpracticed eye to be little more than a good-sized yacht, and the cavortings those currents and tide rips, coupled with the wind, put her through, were most disconcerting to a confirmed landsman like myself.

Though snugly wrapped in rugs and lounging at length in a steamer chair, with the crisp, keen salty wind whistling and tugging about me, I soon knew beyond doubt that I was due to be a sick man—a very sick man!

I told the Professor so. He was in a chair at my side and enjoying himself immensely.

"Nonsense," he scoffed. "You will soon get over those first qualms. Look, man, isn't that shoreline a sight for the gods? And this air—what an appetite it gives one! I'll be glad when they announce mess."

The mention of food finished me. My world went to pieces right there. Put me in a De Haviland and I will outdo the *Valiant's* best—and guarantee to come up smiling. But the sickening side-slip of that darned boat had me licked.

For two days I lay in my bunk firmly believing that my separation from death was but a matter of hours. Most of the time it seemed that I knew nothing and cared less. I was smothered under the combined effect of apathy and nausea. Strangely enough, despite the condition of my mind and stomach, my leg was healing splendidly, and on the third morning when my head cleared somewhat, I managed to dress myself and limp on deck.

The wind was still blowing, keen as a knife and smarting with salt spray. The waves looked mountainous to me, but others on board accepted them as a matter of course. The boat was living up to her name, slugging ahead with bulldog tenacity. Suddenly I realized I was ravenously hungry. Things were looking up.

My strength came back rapidly, and I began enjoying myself. But I was an awful dub around the boat. Most of the terms the Captain and the crew used were a veritable jargon to me. I prowled around though and learned what I could. I conversed with the deck hands and held pow-wows in the depths of the oil-misted engine-room. Most of the men were agreeable enough, and put me right on all my weak points of ship nomenclature. Just two of the crew I found unapproachable. One of them was the cook, down on the articles as a Chinese, though something

about the cast of his features hinted of other blood—Malay perhaps, or Nipponese. The other was a deck hand—a Russian—a big, burly fellow with a harsh, rasping voice and eyes that betrayed no more feeling than would bits of polished jade.

Of the Professor I saw surprisingly little. He seemed to spend practically all his time in the tiny radio cabin of the *Valiant*. His manner had altered, also. He was very serious, never smiled and went about with the thoughtful, preoccupied air of a man who is concentrating every faculty and ounce of energy toward the accomplishment of some task. I enjoyed my few glimpses of him immensely, however—relished his keen, peppery abruptness, and found myself conceiving a genuine affection for him.

Left thus to myself, I spent a good deal of thought in endeavoring to solve the puzzle of the entire expedition. Not a word from anyone did I hear regarding our de tination and final function, but a growing attitude of strained listening and waiting about the entire boat became more discernible with each passing day. I soon grew to feel that I was the only one in ignorance of the real identity of our quest.

I did stumble across one hint of the part I was to play. While prowling about between decks one day I ran across a door that had previously been locked. Just now, however, it was ajar, and by the glow of a swinging electric bulb I could see one of the crew at work assembling a gas engine. I identified the type immediately. It was a Liberty—the very kind I had roared with through hundreds of miles of air! Also in a near-by crate I caught the gleaming surface of a prop!

I WAS very thoughtful when I went on deck. What kind of a job had I tied in with anyhow? Was it really within the law, or had I been duped? A speedy boat—a crew that would speak of nothing outside of ordinary routine affairs, a plane and a pilot for it—the pilot being me! I found myself growing a little resentful, and determined at the first opportunity to corner the Professor and have him put me right on a few little details. Rum-running, poaching, dope-smuggling—a dozen others—I considered all of them, but finally had to admit it had me licked. But come what would, I determined to have my rôle elucidated by the Professor at the first available chance.

The deck was in a state of excitement when I emerged. Everyone who could leave their posts were lined against the port rail, staring out across the heaving wastes. In a little group apart, stood the Professor, Captain Long and the first mate, Mr. Jenson. Spying me, the Professor beckoned me to his side, and handed me a powerful pair of Navy binoculars.

"Out there, Grosvenor," he pointed. "You have young eyes—see if you can make her out."

At first I could see nothing but the shifting sea, then suddenly as though spewed from the very depths, a low, black, pantherish shape shot into sight. She was broadside to us, and through the glasses her profile limned sharply. Sharp jutting prow, upflung muzzles of guns, superstructure, spars, more guns—then thinning down to a wasplike stern. A destroyer!

"Vessel of war," I announced. "A destroyer."

"We knew that already," snapped the Professor testily. "But what flag does she carry? Quick, man—before she alters her course!"

When I picked her up the second time she was in the trough with only masts and superstructure in sight. Abruptly she rode into full view and I could see she was bearing away. However, clear above her stern, flat as a board in the wind, was a tiny rectangle of yellow. On it—in stripes of red—was outlined the Rising Sun!

I lowered the glasses.

"Japanese," I remarked soberly, for in spite of myself the sight of that flag had chilled me.

At my side I felt the Captain stiffen.

"I thought as much," he muttered. He turned to the mate: "Mr. Jenson, set the course for Marsh Bay. It should be about a six-hour run and by that time the tide will be right for us to clear the Narrows."

The Professor, who had listened closely to the Captain's order, nodded in agreement, then turned abruptly to me. I felt almost alarmed at the tense seriousness of his face.

"Come," he announced. "The time has arrived, my boy, to acquaint you fully with the situation."

I followed him down to his cabin, where, after carefully locking the door, he indicated a chair for me, and seated himself on the edge of the bunk.

"In a general way," he began abruptly, "you are aware of the purpose of this ex-

pedition. I hinted to you before, of the tremendous responsibility which rests with us, and which I believe, in the final outcome, must be borne by your shoulders alone. No doubt, by this time you have visualized some connection between that Japanese ship and the mysterious attempt at your life by a Japanese in San Francisco. You are right! They are links in a tremendous chain of intrigue by which it is hoped to successfully remove from this country an invention that will give absolute air mastery to the world power possessing it. Conceive an airplane engine, weighing less than one hundred and fifty pounds, developing horsepower far in excess of anything yet designed, and with a fuel economy permitting a cruising radius of unheard-of limits.

"The plans of this engine are safe, but the model—a work of art less than one foot square—is in the possession of alien forces, stolen from the workshop of the inventor by a Japanese servant. For three years these alien forces have possessed it, though it is still within the limits of our country. We now have reason to believe the attempt to remove it will shortly be made, and that in this vicinity. The presence of the Japanese destroyer practically confirms our belief."

"But," I interrupted, "if they have had this model in their possession for three years, what is to prevent them from drawing plans from it or duplicating it several times and thus get at least one of the models safely away?"

"Fair enough," nodded the Professor, "except for one small item known to them as well as us. The plans of the engine, while revolutionary, are worthless without the formulæ of the metal used in construction. The written formulæ is safe with the original plans and for that reason it becomes absolutely necessary that the original model, built of this special alloy, be secured. Otherwise their efforts will be fruitless. Even with the original safely in their Government laboratories it means years of scientific research before they will solve the secret of the alloy. However, they will eventually arrive at the solution, and that once achieved will place in their hands a weapon immeasurably dangerous.

"A country, such as our own, with liberal ideas of peace and arbitration, can possess such a secret with safety. In the hands of other and more belligerent powers, it can become a menace to the entire world. Some of our more alert students of world politics declare an alliance between Japan, Germany and Russia to be inevitable—others believe such an alliance already exists. One needs but little imagination to visualize the threat such a combination represents. My boy—there can be no mistake made—if it costs our lives, that model must be recaptured or destroyed."

HE had placed before me a situation with ramifications appalling in their immensity. I ventured one more question:

"Why is it that our own Government does not take a hand in this? Surely they can appreciate the situation."

The Professor smiled—for the first time in several days—and produced a card from an inner pocket to hold before my astonished eyes. I flushed at my own stupidity.

"That's all right, my boy," he said kindly. "It is our business to hide our real identity. I feel very much flattered at having fooled you so successfully. Incidentally, you can readily see why our Government could not go at this thing openly. To involve either our Army or Navy would be to invite too much dangerous comment. But Washington is watching us—and praying a little, too, perhaps!"

Involuntarily I straightened, a strange thrill tingling along my spine. Funny how this patriotism thing gets you, isn't it?

THE time was early evening, and luminous dusk was just settling into the deepest hollows between the waves. I had finished mess and now, with a perfecto between my teeth, was balanced far up on the bow of the *Valiant*, my feet spread against the surge of the deck, my face stinging before the flying spindrift.

Two hours away, the shoreline was lifting in a dark, jagged line. Somewhere in that line lay our anchorage, Marsh Bay. The stars were coming out and the eastern horizon was shading to silver before a rising moon.

Within the last four hours, the *Valiant* was a metamorphosed ship. From an apparently aimless, cruising craft she had changed to a pulsing greyhound, driving with furious energy to her objective. This same energy apparently imbued all on board. Below decks, in the light of swinging bulbs, expert mechanics in the guise of deck hands were assembling a De Havi-

land. Once safely anchored, the various parts of the plane would be hoisted to deck, thence conveyed to the beach, where the final assembling would take place.

As the Professor had told me, the most plausible manner for moving the engine model was by airplane; however, it was entirely within reason that a speedy, seagoing launch be employed to make the transfer, and as soon as I was safely ashore with the plane and enough assistants to put it in shape, the *Valiant* was to leave us there with a portable radio and other supplies and put in her time cruising slowly up and down along the coast, keeping a wary eye out for just such an emergency, as well as keep the destroyer and her actions under surveillance.

Incidentally a machine gun had miraculously appeared on the bow of the *Valiant*, its effect calculated to bring any speed boat to time, no matter how desperate. All in all, conflict seemed imminent and I tingled with anticipation.

The phosphorescent course of a porpoise looped across our bow, then another and another. Amused at their antics, I leaned over watching their glowing paths. Then something seemed to explode at the back of my head in a great burst of light and I slid headlong into the hungry waters overside.

TO the chill of those waters I owe my life. The icy sting of them as they closed over my head banished like magic the effects of the blow, and when I finally came gasping to the surface, I was, comparatively speaking, alive to my predicament.

I had always considered myself a strong swimmer, yet I was strangely helpless in the turmoil about me. The combined effect of the speeding ship and the backwash of the water spun and buffeted me about like a shuttlecock. I tried to shout but couldn't, as I was half strangled with stinging brine. Suddenly a muffled, measured thumping, growing swiftly closer, impinged upon my disordered senses.

The propellers!

For a moment my heart stopped beating! Then I began battling madly to escape that ghastly threat. With every atom of strength I possessed, I tried to put distance between myself and the ship, but the inexorable suction of the speeding hull dragged me back. I managed to rear myself out of the water and look back. Hidden in a mass of snowy foam, Death —horrible, mangling Death—was bearing down upon me. Clammy fingers were reaching at my throat to throttle me.

And then—a dark object swung out from the side of the vessel and clanged softly back again. A bucket—swinging on a rope! Renewed hope drove me up—a single, last burst of strength flared through me. How far I managed to hurl myself from the water I do not know. I do know, however, that my hand closed on the rim of the bucket—and there I hung, my trailing feet not two yards from those deadly, thudding propeller blades!

My sensations for the next few seconds were a jumble of mingled thanksgiving and anger. For instance, I blessed the negligence of the deck hand whom I had seen sluicing down the deck earlier in the evening, with bucket after bucket of water, drawn from overside. And the anger that had leaped to being in me against the perpetrator of the cowardly attack, was of a cold, deadly quality that I knew from experience could only be wiped out in blood.

SLOWLY I struggled up. The rope was of small diameter and cut cruelly into my hands, but my deliverance from a dreadful death had so imbued me with new-found strength, that I never faltered in the climb. Soon I was again on deck.

By some coincidence I met no one as I went to my cabin, an occurrence I was really thankful for. Plainly there was a traitor on board—and could I keep all others in ignorance of what had happened, that particular individual was due for a tremendous shock the next time I met him. And I felt sure his deportment under that shock would betray him.

A brisk toweling and fresh clothes left me none the worse for my experience, and having draped my other clothes about so they would dry, I opened my grip and carefully strapped my heavy revolver to me. Two attempts at my life had been made—I was determined that the third one, should it come, would end disastrously for the attacker!

From the engine-room came a faint jangling. The steady thrumming of the engines fell off to half-speed. We were entering the Narrows to Marsh Bay.

Then through the open port beside me I heard a strange foreign cry—the sound of a falling body—then a hoarse bellow of rage!

It was a ghastly scene that met my eyes as I sprang from the dark companionway into luminous moonlight of the after deck. Sprawled face down in front of the door of the wheelhouse was Mr. Jenson, the first mate, his head a welter of brains and blood. Backed against the starboard rail was Captain Long, a broken arm hanging at his side. His other was lifted above his head in an attempt to ward off a second murderous blow from a poised and bloody capstan bar, in the hands of the burly Russian deck hand.

Captain Long's deliverance came through my abrupt appearance. As I leaped into view the deadly club faltered, a strange gasp, of mingled astonishment and fear, spouting gutturally from the Russian's lips. Visibly he blanched, his beady eyes rolling. A man who had seen a ghost might look the same. I knew in a flash who had knocked me overboard!

My hand slid to my left armpit, and before the dumfounded murderer could recover himself I drove two .45 slugs crashing into his barrel-like chest. He went down like a log.

"The wheel!" gasped Captain Long. "Quick, man—they are wrecking her!"

I dashed to the door of the wheelhouse, the interior of which was white with the glow of electric lights. Another shock awaited me. Slumped in a sitting position against the wall was the Professor, the breast of his soft white shirt smeared with crimson. At the wheel, spinning the spokes desperately, was the pseudo-Chinese cook. Now, however, minus the disguise of skull cap and queue, he stood forth unmistakably a Japanese—desperate, fanatical, in his service of Nippon.

He snarled like a cornered beast as I entered, and whipping out a bloodstained knife, sprang at me. It was close work and the finger of flame from my revolver must have seared his face. He was probably dead in the air, for he fell all asprawl at my feet.

Captain Long lurched past me, his one sound arm flashing to the engine-room telegraph. Full speed astern! Then with him directing me, I seized the wheel and spun it to starboard with all my strength. Scarce two hundred yards ahead, on the port bow, loomed the northern point of the Narrows, a jagged menace of foam-whipped rocks. Another minute with the wheel in the hands of the cook, and those same rocks would have been eating into the vitals of the *Valiant*. As it was, our clearance was only a matter of feet.

WITH the danger over, and the *Valiant* swinging once more to the safety of mid-channel, I had time to more fully comprehend the calamity that had struck the ship. The first mate, Mr. Jenson, was dead, his head smashed in like an eggshell. The Jap and the Russian had attacked together with plans evidently premeditated. The mate had received the first blow from the capstan bar and Captain Long, in going to his assistance, had grappled with the Russian only to be driven off with a broken arm. I had halted the next blow in the nick of time.

The Professor was badly wounded, though not fatally. He had been the recipient of the cook's attack and the blow of the latter's knife, aimed at the heart, had been turned by a rib to slash deeply across the chest muscles. The Professor was still conscious when I leaned over and picked him up in my arms. The game little chap even managed a smile.

"Fine work, my boy," he murmured. "Thank God, I didn't let you sell that gun!"

I soon had him in his bunk and aided the ship's quartermaster, who was also a surgeon and physician of sorts, in working over him. The wound required eight stitches, but the Professor grittily smiled through it all. When he had been made as easy as possible, I went back on deck to offer what aid I could.

The bodies had been removed and a couple of hands were busily scouring the gruesome stains from the deck and wheelhouse. Captain Long, his broken arm in splints and a sling, stood gamely at the shoulder of a wheelman, calmly directing the maneuvers of the *Valiant* until she could be anchored. My offer of assistance was refused with a shake of his head.

"Thanks, Mr. Grosvenor, we'll manage nicely now." He held out his sound hand. "Will you shake hands with me? I can never thank you sufficiently for your opportune appearance. And you probably never will appreciate just how many people you have placed in your debt."

THE next forty-eight hours were a nightmare of action! Marsh Bay was a tiny, crescent-shaped bay that was bounded on the shoreline by a perfect landing field for the plane. Picture a quarter-mile

stretch of hard packed beach, just slightly curved and a full hundred and fifty yards wide. At high tide this was decreased by some fifty feet, but even then there was plenty of room left between the water and the forest of pine and fir which leaped abruptly on the landward edge.

The De Haviland had been conveyed to the beach, piece by piece, and now was rapidly nearing completion as far as assembling was concerned. Every second of daylight had been employed and with nightfall searchlights from the *Valiant* had supplied necessary illumination to carry forward the work. Men were haggard and hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, but they worked with grim and silent speed.

I divided my time between the beach and the ship. Aboard I acted as messenger between the Professor and the radio cabin. The messages sent and received, were all in code and were so much Chinese to me.

The crow's-nest of the *Valiant* was occupied steadily, and the lookouts were constantly bringing in reports of a faint smudge of smoke above a thin black line, slipping to and fro along the western sea rim. The destroyer was waiting!

The plane was finally completed and I went over it with minute care. The mechanics had done a perfect job—the ship was right as a fiddle and ready to fly at a moment's notice. I ventured to warm the motor once and the Liberty thundered in beautiful cadence. With the stick of that new and perfect De Haviland in my hand I longed to take the air. A practice flight was impossible, however, under the circumstances. The plane was our ace in the hole. We could not risk its discovery by the alien destroyer.

WITH everything else in readiness, the necessary supplies were landed and the *Valiant* prepared to take to sea again in accordance with the original plans. A half-hour before she left the Professor sent for me. When I reached his cabin I found Captain Long also in attendance.

"Sit down, my boy," greeted the Professor. "This is to be our final council of war. I am not going to emphasize again the important part you are to play. Incidents that have happened within the past few days have no doubt driven home to you more strongly than any words of mine possibly could, the absolute ruthlessness we may expect from the forces operating against us. They will dare anything short of war to successfully remove that engine model. Few of our own countrymen appreciate the depth of Oriental intrigue. Suffice to say they have almost completely baffled our Secret Service Department on this occasion.

"I now believe, however, that we are working along the correct line of reasoning. Our position is most strategical and their final attempt to cross our boundaries is due any day or any hour. There is going to be one more addition to your plane. A machine gun is to be mounted—is being mounted now, in fact. You will use your own judgment about its use. If necessary, do not hesitate. Our Government stands behind you.

"A radio operator is to remain ashore with you and as far as possible I will keep you advised of what is going on. Another mystery still remains to be cleared up. When I first secured your services I advised you that until some future time, I was to be known as Professor Williams to you. That time has now arrived. With all pride I present myself as John R. Grosvenor—your father, Blake, was my brother!"

I COULD not speak. I merely shoved forth one big paw and gripped my uncle's hand until he winced with the pressure of it. I, who had imagined myself without kin, was not alone after all!

"Your father and I," went on the "Professor," "quarreled and separated when you were but a babe in arms. It was very foolish of us both, and while we both realized our mistake, stiff-necked pride kept us apart until it was too late. But you now appreciate, no doubt, that my employing you on this quest was not coincidence. I had looked up your qualifications in yo army record, and set about locating you. I found you at a time most propitious for all concerned."

A cabin boy knocked at the door.

"Steam is up, sir," he announced to Captain Long's query.

The Captain bid me good-by and went on deck. Uncle John held forth his hand again.

"Good-by, Blake," he murmured, his eyes slightly misted. "Show them how a Grosvenor can fight. God bless you, lad!"

Four of us were left on the beach when the *Valiant* steamed away, two mechanics, a radio operator and myself. We

had two tents and plenty of provisions and there was a spring of fresh water back in the edge of the timber. A pole was erected in the hard sand and a portable radio rigged. The two mechanics were busy mounting a machine gun on the plane, so I volunteered to knock a meal together, and, due to my training on the range, succeeded very creditably. Then the hours began to drag intolerably.

All through the day I wandered restlessly about. The radio operator hunched over his apparatus waiting with the stoic patience of an Indian. The mechanics had finished with the machine gun, yet continued to putter over the De Haviland with loving care. Sleek, light-winged as a bird, the plane hovered there on the sands, needing only a touch to become a quivering, sentient mechanism, thrumming and pulsing with life. The exposed part of the engine glittered with scrupulous cleaning, every nut was set; every wire strumming tight.

From time to time messages in code, expressing cheer and optimism, came in from the Professor, but the day wore on to a close without any word of action. The mechanics elected to sleep by the plane, the radio man curled up by his key, and I went to one of the tents.

Sleep did not come readily to me—my mind was in too much of a turmoil to make such a thing possible. The moon rose and was in its zenith before I finally slipped into a restless sleep.

It was still dark when I wakened to the urge of some one shaking my shoulder. It was the radio operator. "Quick, sir," he said, a note of excitement in his voice. "Here is an important message for you."

I sat up and reached for my flashlight. The operator had decoded the message and my blood began to leap as I grasped the significance of the lines:

Blake:

Plane has left from inland carrying model. Should be in sight by daylight. This is your cue—carry on!

UNCLE.

I swiftly pulled on my flying clothes. "Tell the mechanics to warm up the engine," I ordered. "Then let the ship know we have received their message and understand."

Soon the silence of the beach was split by a preliminary sputter of the Liberty, and in a moment, those cold cylinders got down to work and roared in beautiful unison.

By the time I appeared, the answer I had dictated had been sent to the ship and the operator was waiting with a pot of steaming coffee. I drank several cups of the coffee, then I lighted a cigarette and crawled into the cockpit of the plane, glancing over the instrument board with the old-time familiarity. Everything was as it should be and I idled the Liberty down until the prop was barely turning over. Then I sat back to wait.

In the east a line of gray spread along the sky, and shadows on the beach faded out. Day was breaking. One of the mechanics, who had gone up the beach a short distance, suddenly called and pointed back over the terraced tree-clad slopes inland. I cut out the engine entirely and listened. A faint thrumming filled the air and then so high above to be already in the rays of the rising sun I caught sight of a floating speck. A strange thrill leaped through me—the enemy!

I pulled down my goggles. "Contact!" I cried.

THE Liberty caught at the first try and the mechanics ran to remove the blocks from the wheels. A moment later I was in the air.

Ordinarily, in attaining elevation, it is a sound procedure to emulate the hawk and gain elevation by circling. However, the present crisis would permit of no such lengthy procedure. The plane I was pursuing was high—very high, and in order to be in a position to thwart their intended mission, it was necessary that I gain at least their elevation or more. So I pulled back the stick and opened the Liberty up. How that beauty climbed! Never a miss in the beautiful symphony of explosions—never a sign of faltering of any kind. And the sea fell away below me at amazing speed.

Two thousand feet, the altimeter read. I threw a glance to seaward. Almost below me was the *Valiant* and farther out—waiting, waiting—the somber outline of the destroyer showed. Even as I looked, a line of flags ran up to the topmast of the *Valiant*. During my idle moments aboard ship I had studied the signal book of the *Valiant* and I was now able to spell out the meaning of those fluttering bits of bunting. Just a single word—America! My blood surged to the thrill of it. And then, farther out, from the bow of the destroyer,

a rocket flamed palely in the soft morning sky.

I looked no more below me, but fixed my eyes grimly on my speeding quarry. I was relatively close now—close enough indeed to make out the figures of two men crouched in the cockpits. There was no doubt but that my abrupt appearance and swift gaining of altitude had startled and disconcerted them. Also my De Haviland was faster than their plane and I was gaining rapidly.

At eight thousand feet I was on a level with them and less than a quarter of a mile behind. I handled the stick with my left hand and my right closed on the trigger guard of the machine gun.

I did not want to use the gun unless forced to do it, but I determined to go to any lengths if necessary. Furthermore, I was puzzled as to what method was to be employed in transferring the precious model to the destroyer. The enemy was not a seaplane, and, without pontoons, landing in the water was of course out of the question.

Abruptly the enemy plane dipped its nose and went down in a long glide, straight toward the destroyer. Having no other recourse, I followed. Down, down, until the whole fabric and structure of the De Haviland quivered and shuddered with the strain. All the altitude I had gloried in gaining was gone in a matter of seconds. Down—down!

A scant two hundred feet above the water the plane ahead flattened out and then down from it like a plummet dropped a square white object. A spurt of water leaped when it struck, and the next moment the object appeared, dancing lightly on the surface of the waves. At the same instant the water about the stern of the destroyer boiled in foam and the slim snout of the warship gathered way.

HOW simple it all was! The model, evidently incased in a watertight container, was to be picked up by the destroyer. And there was I in a plane, unable to land on the water. But I was thinking swiftly and I grasped at a single inspiration. The enemy plane had zoomed sharply after dropping the case, and was now circling rapidly with the evident intention of intercepting me at any cost. I was still dropping, having been above and behind them and I saw a chance to evade them and also spoil their entire scheme.

Straight on I dived, the bobbing white case directly beneath me. Then I pulled back the release of the machine gun. The gun began to quiver with recoil and below me the surface of the water churned white beneath the impact of the speeding bullets. How often I had fired thus at ground targets while in the Army training schools!

The surface of the water was dangerously close now, but I bit my lips grimly and kept on. That model had to be sunk at any costs. I put all thoughts of self aside in the heart-rending effort of that moment. I knew I had hit the case, for it was in the very center of the bursts I had unloosed. But it seemed almost impossible to sink it.

A big wave tipped with trickling spume was curling in toward me. The crest leaned over the case and after the wave had gone on the case had disappeared. Then I pulled back on the stick with all my strength, my lips moving in a fervent prayer.

THE boys on the *Valiant,* who were watching the whole affair through glasses, told me afterward that they thought the water had me. I know it was but a matter of inches, for the salt spray of the whipping waves blinded my goggles momentarily. However, I came clear, which was really all that mattered.

Directly ahead of me was the knife-like prow of the destroyer, but, calling on the Liberty again, I fairly leaped into the clear. Beneath me I caught the blur of slant-eyed faces staring malignantly at me as I passed, but little I cared for looks or unspoken threats. I had succeeded in the face of terrific odds and my heart was singing with joy.

With a comfortable two thousand feet to ride on, I looked about. Almost over the destroyer hovered the enemy plane and even as I watched, two dark objects flashed downward. A moment later two white mushrooms appeared floating slowly toward the water. Both of the plane's occupants were parachuting down to be picked up.

Left to itself, their plane hovered aimlessly like a stricken bird. Then a bump of air caught it—it side-slipped, tipped and went into a stonelike nose dive. A few seconds later the waves claimed it. With a happy grin, I turned the faithful De Haviland back to the slightly curving beach of snowy sand that rimmed Marsh Bay.

# "Bunny"

*This is a story of real folks down Indiana way—a quiet story, in some aspects, and even more attractive to certain moods for that reason. See if you don't agree with us!*

## By WALTER GREENOUGH

FUNNY—how Life draws far-away threads together, sometimes, then unweaves them for a space, only to hurl them again into a knot! Life does that, I mean—not fiction. Looking back now, I think that no fiction could have imagined the coincidences that linked the facts around Dean Rogers' life one-half so astonishingly as they worked out themselves.

It was the summer of '24 when I ran into him so unexpectedly down at Ben Clark's little summer place in the Blackhawk Hills—not ten days after I'd spent an afternoon with poor old Joe Murphy, pitiful in his anguish, down at the veterans' convalescent hospital, and Joe and I had used up most of our brief time together expressing mutual surprise over "Bunny" Rogers' heroism in the Argonne. Joe's tale came back to me with a rush when I stepped into Ben's big dining-room, there on the hill overlooking the Deer Creek Valley, and saw Dean Rogers staring moodily off across the wide circle of the hills as he absorbed his oatmeal and cream.

Ben's place is stuck away in such a fashion that its clientele depends on those of us who have been there before. And there aren't many of us. Ben and Mrs. Ben take in a few city-tired folk throughout the summer season and give them a boat, and all the fried chicken they can eat, and turn them loose—for a consideration—to ramble up and down the network of streams there in the Blackhawk, bass-fishing, if they choose, or just loafing the splendid days away.

I got in late one night from Lawrence, and went right up to bed. And I was as surprised as I could be when I came down to breakfast the next morning to see old Bunny Rogers sitting there. And before I'd said a dozen words to him, I knew that he hadn't changed a bit—I mean his shyness.

"Well,—what on earth are you doing 'way down here?" I greeted him.

I thought I saw the shadow of a frown cross his face, when he looked up and recognized me. But I couldn't be sure. And he was profuse—for Dean—with his welcome.

"Hal! Why, it's great to run across

you again!" he said. "Sit down here and tell me about yourself. Where are you —still up at Lawrence? Practicing law, I suppose, as usual?"

Well, we just talked ourselves out in that one breakfast. I might have known we would. Couldn't drag a word out of him about the War—although I hinted broadly enough. I wanted to hear the story from his own lips. No luck. He was in his tramping clothes, laced boots and an old khaki suit, and as soon as the meal was finished he got up and stretched, and said he'd see me, maybe, that night. I couldn't very well ask him where he was going. It was too apparent that he was going alone. Same old human-shy Bunny!

I WAITED until he'd gone out across the ridge back of the Clark barn and then asked Mrs. Ben about him.

"Oh, him?" she answered. "Why, Mr. Rogers comes down here two-three times a year now and just walks. Says it helps a leg he's got that's a little stiff. He's up at Indianapolis, working at something in a library. Don't ever say much about himself. But his work keeps him inside a lot, I guess. And he likes to go wanderin' off by himself down here, and just walk. Once, earlier this spring, he stayed here a week. Usually it's only a couple o' days. Or one, maybe. Sort of funny chap, and shy, Mr. Rogers is. Acts like a February robin, somehow, to me! Lonesome man—awful lonesome-like!"

"Yes, he is funny," I said. "I used to know him very well. He's afraid of women, we always used to think!"

Mrs. Ben held her plump sides over that rare joke. "I jest bet he is, too!" she said.

"That stiff leg of his," I went on. "Has he ever told you how he got it?"

"Huh-uh!" my hostess said. "How'd he hurt it?"

"Well, I'll have to start in back yonder a while," I said, "when we were members of the same fraternity, down at school. Dean Rogers was one of us, but none of us felt that we ever knew him very well. He was the kind of a lad that would slip away to his room to study, night after night—when the rest of us were yodeling around the piano in order to aid digestion. Dean was a student. He didn't seem to know how to play at learning. And he was shy of human beings. The way he got his name, 'Bunny,' was because he sprinted across the campus down there, one April morning, away from Rena Martindale—the prettiest girl in school. She'd tried to get Dean to have a date with her at the Theta House the next Sunday afternoon. Old Bunny knew just how rotten she was in her history classes—and the faculty had just made him an instructor in the history department. Rena had a way of dating up young instructors who could help her in her classes. But she didn't get Bunny that way. He was too shy, in the first place. And too canny, in the second.

"We all used to wonder about Bunny down there at the old Phi Psi House. A shy fellow, always. We couldn't make a real brother of him, somehow. Like a mouse, he was, Bill Harger used to say: 'busy devil, but timorous.' And yet he always gave his time for us. Pulled half a dozen of us through the mid-terms more than once. But that day he ran from Rena Martindale—well, there wasn't a super-man in school that wouldn't have traded his Adam's apple or his chances at St. Peter's stile for that invitation from Rena. And Dean ran away from her! After that he was always 'Bunny' to us!

"And now comes the funny part—"

Mrs. Ben untied her apron and, with an expectant sigh, dropped her plump self into a chair by the window. Usually her guests didn't stop to chat with her this long.

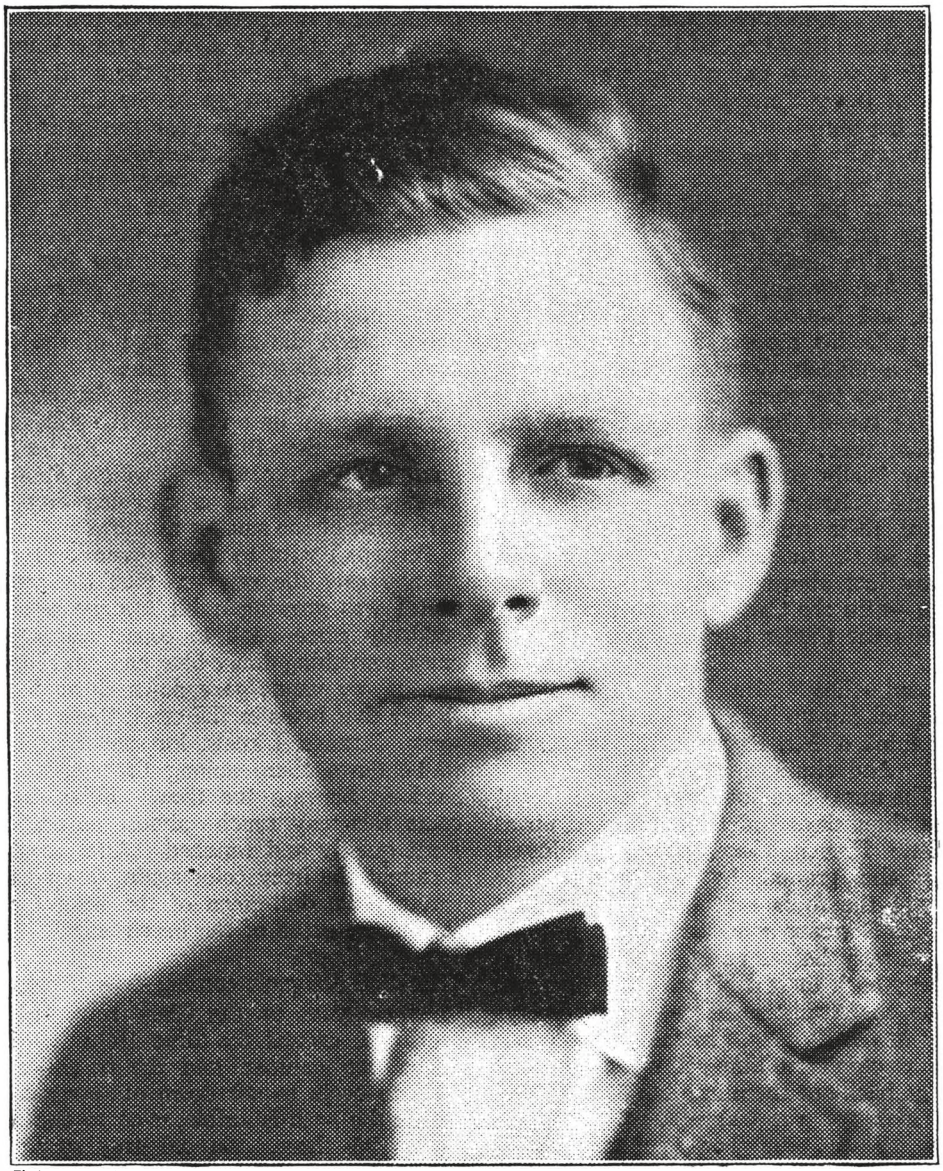
"Joe Murphy,—another one who was down at school with us,—was crippled up pretty badly in the War, and I saw him for a little while a week or so ago. He told me that Bunny had a dozen medals more or less—because of his heroism overseas!"

"Not *him!*" my hostess expostulated, breathlessly.

"Yes, shy old Bunny Rogers," I went on. "They brought Bunny into the same hospital where Joe Murphy was, and he heard the story from a nurse. She said Bunny'd been in a trench over there in a sector that must've run right down the old German boundary line, I guess. One morning, early, Bunny took out a raiding party and the second in command was a fellow named Carter."

MRS. BEN bounced up from her chair. "I wonder if it was Danny Carter?" She was fluttering around again, now, clearing away the breakfast dishes.

"I think that was the name—Danny



Photograph by Marceau

## WALTER P. GREENOUGH

THERE'S something about the soil and climate of Indiana that produces writing men. James Whitcomb Riley, Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, George Ade, Jonathan Brooks, William B. Sturm and many another came from the Hoosier State. So Mr. Greenough, who hails from Indianapolis, begins his writing career under a favorable star; and readers of this attractive story will agree that the future looks bright indeed for him.

Carter," I said. "He was the son of a judge back here somewhere, anyway."

"I know him—I mean I did, before the War!" Mrs. Ben was all expectation now. "Son of Judge Rans Carter, up to Cloverill—I bet you!"

She finally let me get on with the story Joe had told me.

"Carter got a bullet through the chest just as the two of 'em stumbled into some barbed-wire and Bunny saw him drop. They had to get through the wire, I guess, and Bunny stood up there hacking at it with his nippers while the sun and about a million German bullets were all coming up together. It seems there were just the two of them left there by the wire by that time. They'd gotten the others. Bunny finally got the wire cut and picked up this Carter boy and started back toward their trench. Just a little way along, so the nurse told Joe, a bullet got Bunny just above the knee and he went down—with the Carter boy on top of him. I guess the Carter boy was gone by that time."

"Lan' sakes!" Mrs. Ben stopped at the table, holding up both her hands. "Who'd ever think o' Mr. Rogers goin' through all that? And him so quiet-like!"

"The nurse told Joe that Bunny laid out there three days and finally showed up at a little French place, dragging himself along the ground by his hands. He thought the folks that tried to pick him up were Germans and told them to go to,—well, a very hot climate,—that he was on his way back to find his buddy! And just before the Armistice he cussed out everybody in the hospital, Joe told me, because they wouldn't let him get up out of bed and go back out there into No Man's Land and look for the Carter boy! Said he knew he was out there, suffering for a drink. He wouldn't believe it when they told him the Carter boy was dead."

"It aint b'lievable, hardly, is it?" Mrs. Ben said. "Don't seem like it could have been Mr. Rogers at all!"

"No, not Mr. Rogers," I said. "But I guess it's true enough. And that would explain his leg, wouldn't it?"

Mrs. Ben was dabbing at her eyes, now, with the corner of her apron. "Poor fellow!" she whispered. "Him havin' all that to think about—no wonder he's lonesome!"

I left her then, and went down to the creek-bank to scoop up a bucketful of minnows that Ben had left for me in the live-box. I untied the old scow and paddled slowly up Deer Creek toward the Blue Hole, thinking about Bunny Rogers.

I had a dandy strike in the swift water just at the north edge of the Clark farm and couldn't hold the boat steady enough to land him because of the current. Finally the old, green-striped scamp broke water right under the prow, shook his big, white mouth insultingly at me—and threw the hook and the mangled minnow five feet away, out toward the bank. Then he darted off, through the rushing green water, and I made the ancient sign of the discomfited gladiator, after him.

I set my paddle against the current again and drew on up toward the still, deep waters of the Blue Hole. Anchoring, finally, beneath a sweeping willow, above a mass of drift, I began catching croppies with some of the smaller minnows.

Perhaps I went to sleep, dreaming there. At any rate the sun was past the zenith and I was growing a bit hungry when I suddenly came back to consciousness because something dimly blue had crossed the line of my vague gaze down through the timber that hems in the creek there on the west. Strange, I knew, for something blue to be down there among the sun-striped shadows beneath the trees. Folks didn't come this way much—almost never. So I sat quietly and watched. After a while I caught the hazy color again, down there through the dull-green of the walnut and the bronze-green of the beech-leaves.

THERE'S a path coming down from the sugar-grove on the Clark ridge to the southwest toward the Blue Hole. It has to be late summer, and the beech-leaves have to begin to sift down quite regularly before the path is visible, even to one who knows it's there. An old gray sycamore has fallen, back there along the creek-bank to the southward from the Blue Hole, and lies across the little path. From where I sat, beneath the drooping canopy of the willow, I could just make out the dim, gray outline of the top of this old log. It lies in a little clearing, under gigantic trees that nearly all are of the first growth. I've rested there many a time, crossing the Clark farm to and from the Blue Hole. A little fairyland it is, in there, shut off from the world by the surrounding forest, opening only through the two narrow lanes where the dim path twists into and out of it. A place for lovers! Except that there

are so few lovers now, it seems to me, that take the trouble or the time to hunt for such a spot—there are so many flivvers!

Well, when my eyes grew accustomed to the shadows down there I saw that somebody in a blue dress was sitting on the old gray log. I almost thought then that I could hear the murmur of voices, but it probably was the little afternoon wind, touching the harpstrings of the willow-leaves above me. Then the croppies began to bite again. They bit so strenuously, and I was so inexpert at taking them that very shortly all the minnows were gone. I just knew it was to be an evening when the bass would bite, so I shoved the scow to shore and jumped out with the minnow-bucket to walk up across the ridge to Ben's and get another dozen or so big chubs, and perhaps a glass of milk and a sandwich.

I think I'd forgotten all about the blue dress down there through the trees, for I remember how utterly ridiculous I felt when I clambered up the little rise from the creek and found myself gazing down the twisted little pathway—straight into the big, dark, shy eyes of Dean Rogers! Bunny Rogers—sitting there on the old gray sycamore trunk, with his arm around a dream of a girl!

I say I gazed straight into his eyes. I did, because when you've clambered up the rise of the bank, you're standing almost in the edge of the little clearing, and the old log is scarcely a rod away. It might have been his instant frown that made me sense how black those eyes of his were —or maybe it was just the big shadows sweeping across the clearing there from the vast tent of the trees.

I would have turned about and gone some other way, but they'd seen me. It would be easier now to go on, even for Dean and the girl, and so I stooped for a moment to coil the little rope on top of the minnow-bucket so it wouldn't catch on the underbrush, and then I stumbled clumsily down the path toward them, with my face averted, giving them plenty of time to unhitch their hands, or draw farther apart there on the old gray log.

AND when I had taken a half-dozen steps and felt that I must look forward again, there was Dean sitting quietly —alone. The girl in the blue dress had vanished. He was tamping tobacco into an old black briar, and had moved over on the log so that I could step across it easily. He looked up briefly as I said apologetically that I had run out of bait and was sorry to have blundered into the Garden of Eden without knocking.

"Oh, you needn't mind," he said, evenly. "I might have expected it."

I let that pass, too, wondering if he'd invite me to sit down with him for a moment, there on his log. I should have known better—of course he wouldn't. He just sat there, searching in his pockets for his matches, and let me go on. And yet, I couldn't be angry at him, somehow.

When I got back to Ben's, there was nobody there, and I took the minnows from the live-box down at the creek-bank and hesitated a few minutes, turning over in my mind whether I'd have the nerve to go back along that path where Dean and the girl and their secret were.

Finally I decided Dean would realize I'd be coming back, and make his adjustments accordingly.

I tramped back along the little path and found the clearing completely empty. Exactly like the silly fellow, I told myself, to run away from his Garden, just because somebody else had blundered into it for a moment. I found myself wondering dimly how he was getting along, anyhow, in life—in competition with the hard, old world. It doesn't pay much attention, even to heroes, unless they keep on doing heroic things. Fellows can't run away and hide—and get very far.

And then I began to think about the girl. The picture of her kept me dreamily wondering. Such a quail-like girl she'd seemed, in the brief look I'd had at her. Poised, there on the old log, like a swift-running bird!

I had the good grace to say nothing more to Mrs. Ben about it all, which I think was pretty decent of me. I hoped that Dean would explain at the supper-table, but I might have known he wouldn't let me meet him there. The bass bit savagely when I got back to the drift, and it was after sundown when I came into the house. Dean had eaten, packed up his grip and insisted that Ben should drive him up to the interurban stop, there at Reelsville. The line runs from there through Cloverill and on up to Indianapolis.

I was tired, and slipped into bed long before Ben came back. And I'm not too old, or too much married myself to admit that if I had any dreams that night, they were splashed with hazy pictures of a

beautiful, bird-like girl sitting on an old gray log—poised there, rather, ready to take wing and fly away! A girl with hair the color of frost-tanned corn.

IT'S a long walk through the little pathway from Ben's down to the Blue Hole, and I said to Ben next morning that I wished there were some easier way to get up there to the old drift than walking or paddling the scow up the current. He asked why I didn't drive my car over to Dave Williamson's place and ask Dave to let me go through his woods to the Blue Hole. I said I knew there were a dozen bass in the Hole that I hadn't hooked.

"Dave's land runs almost to the creek there," Ben said. "He's a queer old varmint, but if ye'll tell him that I sent ye, mebbe he'll warm up a mite and let ye go through his woods. Be a lot closer for ye thataway."

I loaded up my car with a bucket of fresh minnows and my rods and tackle-box and went down around the Deer Creek Road to the Lawrence Pike, then through the long red covered bridge over Big Walnut, and back eastward, past the white church. I found the little road that Ben had told me of and bumped along it to Dave Williamson's gate. I got out to unlatch the fastening, and stood there gazing, enthralled.

Sweeping away into the Deer Creek Valley I saw a wide expanse of rich farmlands rolling down to meet the sinuous fringe of willows and elder and lonely sycamores that borders the creek southward from the Old Trails Highway. Off to the southward from Dave Williamson's buildings there was a vast barrier of woods, coming downward from the western ridges to hem in Deer Creek—uncleared land, some that had been timbered in past years, some virgin.

At the eastern edge of the forest-barrier lay the dense thickets among the up-reared beech and walnut and sycamore through which Deer Creek shrugs down over steep rock ledges to the oblong of still water that is the Blue Hole, then rushes along beside Ben Clark's little strips of valley cornland until it comes to the red iron bridge below the Clark house. Dave Williamson's place is shut from view if you are along the creek-bank, for the fringe of tall growth on each side of the water effectively hides the rising ground to the westward.

There was something vaguely familiar about the white farmhouse, as I stood there, pleasantly thrilled with the mighty sweep of country, not visible until one has rounded the shoulder of the ridge and come to the Williamson gate.

And yet I could not remember Dave Williamson—I was certain I did not know him. I drove the car slowly toward the gray barn that stands about midway between the house and the gate. Old Dave must be rich, I mused. Such a mammoth house—white, gaunt, rising like a gigantic sepulcher there on the tip of the barren hill, hemmed in to the southward by the sweeping forest and gazing off eternally, it seemed, across the miles of fertile valley to the east and north. A lonely sentinel,—no other house could I see across the valley,—but like some monarch's castle, standing there to urge rich tribute from acre upon acre of the finest cornland in the Blackhawk. A castle wherein might dwell with equal fitness, a beauteous princess in distress, or a grim ogre of the wilderness, perpetually thrusting out his hands across the valley to drag in mighty crops of golden ears. I wondered why I had not come this way before. Here was a man worth knowing!

HE was pottering around a traction engine in his tool-shed when I drove up, and he seemed glad to see me, in a surly sort of way. He had known my people, he said, when I introduced myself. My dad had been down to his place fishing, many times. And once, when I was very small, he'd brought me down, too. So that was why these hidden acres to the north of the great woods were familiar to me.

Dave finally said he guessed it would be all right for me to leave my car there in his barn-lot, and he told me how to go down through the woods to the Blue Hole.

I hung around with him for a time, while he pottered there at the engine. We talked about corn prospects and how wheat had turned out pretty good, after all the wet weather of the spring. I was saying that the bass were thinning down in all the Blackhawk streams, and he was nodding his iron-gray head in affirmation—when I glanced up toward the house, and saw the golden-haired girl!

She was a long way off, but I knew she was poised there on the broad white porch—ready to run with the swiftness of a mother-quail. I shot a quick glance at

Dave Williamson but he had his head down, busy with a rusty nut. I turned my back to the house and the girl, and busied myself with unpacking my fishing-things.

She had come quite close to us, with a telephone message to her father, before I turned so that she could see me. I felt my face go scarlet, as I saw hers blanch. She turned and spoke a low word in Dave's ear, where he was still bending over the engine. I stood like a bumpkin, watching her. When she turned again her face was still drained of color—white as the summer clouds that spread against the blue horizon-line. And as Dave started off brusquely to the house, without making a move to introduce us, she went up the slope behind her father—and, as I watched the graceful, swift steps she took, it seemed again that a mother-quail was fleeing swiftly from some danger of the woods.

I tried to call after her, finally. I would tell her that I was sorry about the day before—that I was a blundering idiot. But I would be going away very soon and she needn't fear for a moment that her secret wasn't safe with me! Her secret—and Dean's!

At the sound of my voice she literally sped toward Dave, passed him and raced on to the porch, her tiny, golden head held high, her toes, only, touching the ground, as a quail flees!

When she came to the porch, and they both were out of earshot from me, I saw her stop. Dave went on past her into the house—and she put up her little hand to her mouth and blew a tiny, bird-like kiss from the tips of her fingers to me!

Well, I stood there like amazed, naturally—but in maybe fifteen seconds I came to myself again, and started off through Dave's back pasture, down to the woods above the Blue Hole. After I'd gone possibly a hundred yards the whole thing suddenly struck me. She'd been thanking me—in her own way—for keeping her secret from old Dave! Quite a strange little fairy that Bunny Rogers had found in the ogre's castle down here in the Blackhawk Hills! And I couldn't help wondering what old Dave Williamson would have done—to her or to me—if he'd turned and seen that wind-thrown kiss!

I DREAMED away pretty much the whole day down there on the bank of the Blue Hole, and went along back to Ben's down the little woods path, through the clearing, after sunset—completely forgetting that I'd left my car standing in Dave Williamson's barn-lot!

I was washing in the tin pan that always rests on the board curbing of the stone-lined well at Ben's back door, when I remembered the car.

"Ye *are* crazy!" Ben said. "Come on in and eat, and I'll drive ye over there after while."

Ben was for going in to sit a spell with Dave and Lucy—so that was her name!—when we got over to Williamson's after dark, but I talked him out of it. Somehow I knew that the girl had been shuddering all the afternoon against the time when I'd have to come for my car—and that the nicest thing I could do for her, remembering the wind-blown kiss as I did, was to race the motor loudly when it started and drive back to Ben's with the cutout open. She'd know again, then, that her secret was to be safe with me! And I knew, somehow, that she'd like that!

SO that's what I did. Ben followed along behind me in his car, down by the Big Walnut Church and through the covered red bridge—and I didn't even keep him up when we got home to try and find out any more about her, though I wondered. A girl isn't afraid like that, unless—well, I wished that I knew why!

Ben helped me out voluntarily at breakfast the next morning. He used up a great deal of his vocabulary on Dave.

"Queer old fool, sometimes, Dave is," he said. "Kind of a miser, I guess. Only money he spends is on that girl o' his'n—Lucy. She's the sweetest thing there is around here, too! You ought to see her! And Dave's got a plenty o' money all right! Four hundred acres o' ground, too. Half of it a-growin' corn. And he's sold a whole lot o' wood off the rest, every winter. Folks all think he's rich. But ye wouldn't hardly know it, unless ye go over there behind the woods and take a look at his place. Jest keeps to himself a right smart, Dave does, since his wife died ten years ago. Awful queer bird, Dave is. Shot a man onct!"

"Shot a man?" I asked, incredulously. "That old fellow I met yesterday?"

"Yep—him!" Ben said. "Fellow used to come down here from your town a-fishin'. Nice sort o' fellow he was, too—Richardson, I b'lieve his name was."

WE were through with the meal then, and Ben stopped to bite off a piece of the old yellow twist he makes from his hill-garden tobacco crop. Then he sat down, out on the edge of the well-curb, and told me the story:

"Old Dave was born here in the Blackhawk," he began. "He's lived here all his life. Must be sixty or more now. Married Louise Willoughby when he was mighty clost to forty years old—and she wasn't more'n twenty or so. Funny sort o' match, it was—or seemed like, to us folks down here in the hills. Dave was 'way too old for the girl. We always thought he kind o' bulldozed her into it. She'd always had a lot o' fellows crazy after her. Everybody down here thought she was goin' to marry Rans Carter, up to Cloverill. He was older'n she was, too. But he thought a heap o' her, in them days. He's been judge up at Cloverill there for I don't know how many terms. Smarter'n a whip,—old Rans Carter is! And always has been a great friend o' Dave Williamson—even when Dave up and married Louise. Everybody said that'd end it between Dave and Rans, but it didn't seem to. Rans went on and married a girl up there at Cloverill, but he used to come down here and spend a lot o' time in the summers with Dave and Louise. Got to bringin' his wife and boy down, too, after while. That was when Lucy and Rans' boy was little tikes.

"Well, as I say, Dave Williamson was 'way too old for his wife. She was the kind of a girl that was jest a little flighty-like. She'd drive away off up to Cloverill in the rain, jest to git to town for a night. Was crazy about dancin' and such. And old Dave—well, you know how an old fellow like that is! Jest sort o' liked to set around—when he wasn't workin'. My wife, Anna, always said Louise Williamson reminded her of a rabbit in a steel trap, after she was married to Dave. Had that kind of a look in her eyes! I guess old Dave must 'a' always set down on her pretty hard.

"One time this fellow Richardson was down here a-fishin' and he stopped in at Williamson's for somethin'—a drink, I guess. And he seen Mrs. Williamson." Ben cleared his throat.

"Well, old Dave come in from plowin' that day and found this Richardson fellow a-settin' in the parlor talkin' to Mrs. Williamson. And she kind of jumped up, scared-like, when old Dave come in. Lucy was a little thing, then,—just a baby,—and she begun cryin', so they tell, over in the cradle. Sort o' sensed somethin' was goin' to be wrong, I guess.

"Dave started in on this fellow Richardson, askin' him what was he doin' a-hangin' around there, and Richardson got mad and fin'lly drew a knife on him—that's what Dave always told, anyhow. Dave's wife was screamin', tryin' to tell Dave that it was a mistake—and the baby was a-raisin' the roof by that time, too. It was right smart of a scene, they had, I guess. Anyway, Dave grabbed his shotgun and she tried to pull it away from him, yellin' all the time for Richardson to go away. Finally he did, but when he was down toward the barn a ways, Dave got loose from his wife and run out and shot at the fellow. Didn't kill him—but he would have if Richardson hadn't 'a' been so far away. As it was, Richardson got crippled up some.

"Some o' the fellow's friends up at Lawrence tried to git Dave indicted up at Cloverill, but nobody seemed to be able to git the straight o' the story,—wasn't so many folks down in the Hills in them days,—and Rans Carter was the judge up there, then. He jest naturally refused to call the grand jury together. Come down here and talked with Dave and his wife about it—and folks said he give old Dave a piece o' his mind. But they wasn't no grand jury called. Carter seen to that. Him and Dave had been mighty good friends for years! And Richardson got well all right. Judge Carter got criticised right smart over it by some folks, but it didn't seem to do no harm to his chances in the elections from then on. I guess folks kind o' thought mebbe Dave was right, at that!"

BEN meditated for a time and finally bit off another piece of the twist.

"Well," he resumed, "Mrs. Williamson never got over that time. Was jest a nervous wreck from then on. And fin'lly died of pneumonia about ten years ago, leavin' old Dave and Lucy up there on the Williamson hill, alone. And Lucy's kind o' shy. She traipses out through the big woods there above the Blue Hole all by herself, kind o' talkin' to the birds and rabbits, I guess. Old Dave sent her up to school at Lawrence for a while. But she come back—that was two-three years

ago—and now she and old Dave jest live alone up there together like a pair o' these here hermits you read about. Dave's never stood for none o' these young fellows here in the Blackhawk a-shinin' up to her, neither. Young Danny Skelton got crazy about Lucy a couple o' years ago, when he seen her up to the church one Sunday. He drove over to Williamson's that afternoon—and old Dave listened to him a while and then went in and got his shotgun. Young Danny's a-runnin' yit! It aint human to treat a girl like that, seems like!"

I agreed that it wasn't. And I was glad that we hadn't gone in to see old Dave and his daughter the night before. No wonder she reminded me of a quail—poised to flee!

"She's pretty as a picture!" I said to Ben, and then bit my lip. "I caught a glimpse of her when I was over there yesterday."

"Aint she—now?" Ben wanted to know. "Kind o' like one of these here little bluebells we find around the hills in the spring. Wears a blue dress a lot, she does. Frail-like, somehow, like the bluebells! Wither all up, if ye pull 'em—but gosh-durned sweet!"

Ben is sentimental like that. A real nice fellow, they all call Ben.

It was the next Saturday that I took the scow again and paddled up to the Blue Hole for a last try at the pesky croppies. Ben had got me a couple of hundred fine minnows and I'd forgotten all about my law office—convinced myself I needed the rest badly.

The old drift looked inviting again that morning and I settled down there beneath the willow. The croppies bit ravenously, and it wasn't long before I had taken plenty—also a stray bass or two. So I lay back in the bottom of the boat and dreamed away for I don't know how long.

What awakened me was the sharp crackling of twigs and dry weeds up on the bank beyond the fringe of trees that hem in the Blue Hole. Startling, it was, when I first roused and heard it. But then I thought maybe one of Dave Williamson's horses had got down into the woods from the pasture and was coming to the creek for a drink. After while the noise stopped all of a sudden—and I found myself listening intently for it to begin again. I began to feel uncomfortable about it, somehow. This sudden quiet began to get on my nerves more and more. Somehow I wished I'd brought Ben's little rifle along. And then I got to thinking how ridiculous it was for me to be lying out there in the edge of a stream in broad sunlight and worrying about something I couldn't see. I decided to call out to this thing that had stopped—over there behind the fringe of trees. But I didn't. Instead, I sat perfectly still there in the bottom of the boat, and waited.

I MUST have sat there five minutes, I guess—waiting—and my nerves got more and more on edge. Then one of my reels began to sing—the big one that held the line I'd thrown far out in midstream on the theory that I might snag a three-pounder. The noise of the reel startled me for a moment. But I reached down and got hold of the pole before it was jerked out of the boat—and then forgot all about the crackling up there in the dry weeds, for I had a fight for a couple of minutes with the old daddy of all bass. The old scamp finally drove straight at the boat—a nasty trick those big ones have—and broke water ten feet away with a sweep of slack line beneath him. I'd hate to say how far he threw that minnow and the hook, but I was raving mad and shaking like underwear on a clothesline in the wind, when I reeled in the empty line. I just took up the other lines and pulled my minnows out of the water, and headed in to the bank. Ben could come up the next day and bring the boat back downstream for me, I thought—I was through with the Blackhawk! You get that way sometimes—when you know you've loafed down there longer than you should.

At the bank there was an old water-moccasin crawling up around the roots of a little sycamore that was being slowly undermined by the current. I deliberately pushed the boat over to where I could reach him with the paddle—and smacked him across the back. It relieved me, somehow, to see him go squirming down through the green water. I don't like water-moccasins—I hate the look they give you!

Finally I clambered up the bank and started through the little clearing there to the south. I'd taken perhaps two steps, when I heard a little, scared scream, and I dropped the minnow-bucket right there in the path. I really ought to keep my nerves steadier.

For a minute I thought maybe I was

dreaming. There was the same strange picture ahead of me that I'd seen that other day! Dean Rogers—old Bunny Rogers—with his arm around the waist of Dave Williamson's daughter, the prettiest girl—pretty enough to eat!

The lid to the minnow-bucket had come open. It was a big, cast-iron affair, with a reinforced bottom that I'd had made from specifications of my own. A heavy, thick old thing, it was. Ben's minnows were spilling from it in a steady stream. I stooped down to fix the blamed thing—and I heard the gruffest, coldest voice I think there ever was in the world, right behind me!

"Git out o' my way, you crazy fool!" it said. "You don't belong in this, anyhow!"

I knew it was Dave Williamson even before I turned around to face him. And I'll swear I don't know to this minute what made me swing that heavy minnow-bucket, still half-filled with water and little fish, up around my own head and bring it down toward his! Maybe it was instinctive—that old hatred of mine for a water-moccasin! *They* have murder in their eyes, too!

He ducked to one side and the blow caught him on the shoulder. I saw his eyes—and I knew that Ben Clark had spoken truth when he said Dave Williamson once had shot a man. And then I saw that he was slowly raising an old shotgun toward Dean Rogers.

I guess the Lord loves fools or he wouldn't have made so many of 'em, and take care of 'em in the ways he does. But why he makes 'em as crazy as I am, I can't figure out. I jumped straight at the eyes of old Dave Williamson—and I had to go past his gun-barrel to do it! Of course the blamed minnow-bucket—thank God!—had to get tangled up with the end of that barrel, just as old Dave pulled the trigger! Well—I'll never want to be holding on to a minnow-bucket again under such circumstances! My wrist never has been the same since. It felt about twenty feet long—my wrist did!

I found out afterward that old Dave had just pulled the one trigger—it's a mighty good thing he didn't pull 'em both!

THE next thing I knew Dean Rogers was sitting on old Dave Williamson's chest—and the old man's mouth was frothing like a mad dog's. And then I began to feel like I was being suffocated. Somebody was squeezing my neck until I couldn't breathe! When I could pull my eyes away from that queer sight of Bunny Rogers holding down that old giant of a man and take stock of what it was that had clamped down on my windpipe I finally made out that the girl—the prettiest girl I guess I've ever seen—had both arms around my neck, and was whispering in little, sobbing sentences into my ear!

The little dear finally got it into her head that I wasn't hurt at all—and then you should have seen her go into reverse!

After while Bunny called over to me,—in a voice that somehow sounded differently from the one I'd always expected out of him,—and asked me to procure him a bit of rope. I took what was still hanging to the iron fringe of the minnow-bucket and we tied old Dave Williamson's hands behind his back. That sounds easy, but Bunny did it—not me! I didn't like the look out of old Dave's eyes, when he got crazy that way—too much like a water-moccasin!

Then we started—the four of us—back through the little path and across the Williamson woods to the house. I don't know why I went along. I was just getting conscious again, I guess. Anyhow, I found after while that I was carrying the shotgun and a string of fish. I broke the old gun open when we climbed the woods fence—and, sure enough, old Dave had just fired the one barrel.

WELL, there's not much more to tell. Dave said all there was to say on the way up to the house—and Lucy's sobbing kept him company. But Bunny Rogers never let go of the old man's arm all the way to the big, white house there on the hill. Two or three times I saw Dave make a swift movement to get out of that grasp—and every time he'd wince with pain as Bunny's hand tightened. It wasn't a pleasant trip—that wasn't!

Bunny somehow got the old man up on the front porch of that gaunt, old house, and gently lowered him into a hickory chair that was there against the weather boarding. Lucy and I were just to the steps.

"Now you listen very closely to what I'm going to say," we heard Bunny begin—and listen we all did!

"First of all, I'm going to untie your hands now," he began, "because you know that you wont hurt any of us from now

on." And the blamed fool untied 'em! Old Dave looked murder again—but just as the rope came off Bunny impaled him with those two great, dark things that the Lord gave the boy for eyes and Dave never made a move toward anyone! I still marvel some at that!

"And now," said Bunny, "you know Judge Carter over at Cloverill pretty well, don't you?"

DAVE'S eyes shot up to Bunny's for a moment then. But he just nodded, finally, and turned his gaze away. Lucy had quit sobbing and was standing there at the foot of the steps with me. I sort of felt her sink down to where she could sit on the lowest step.

"Well, sir," Bunny said, "Judge Carter happens to know me pretty well, and he mentioned you the other day, when I dropped over to court there to see him. I'd gone up there from Ben Clark's to ask the judge if he'd marry Lucy and me!"

Dave lowered his brows and glared.

"Lucy didn't want to run away to marry," Bunny went on. "She thinks too much of you—maybe still fears you some, too. But she's not going to, from now on. Because you're not going to hurt anybody after this, Father!"

If Dave had been a dog he would have showed his teeth at that! Bunny went on, not noticing Dave, except to hold his eyes with his own:

"Judge Carter gave me a letter to you. Said he'd known you for a long, long time, and that you know him. I don't know what's in the letter. But the judge said if I had any trouble with you I was to give it to you. He said you'd understand, when you read it, why he was writing. Somehow, I feel a little queer about giving it to you. Seems like I should do this thing myself. If you'll be decent, and let me tell you about myself, and about Lucy—"

Silently old Dave Williamson held out his hand. Bunny reached down into an inside pocket and handed him a long envelope. The old man tore it open and we all stood there, waiting, while he read.

AFTER a while Dave looked up, and I thought that there were a couple of tears streaking down across his furrowed old cheeks—but maybe I was wrong.

"Boy," he said, "—I'm sorry! I've always been a blamed old fool—and the good Lord's come along always to keep me from payin' penalties for what I'd set out to do! When are you aimin' to take my gal?"

"Let's see," said Bunny, "—tomorrow's Sunday, isn't it? Well, tomorrow'll do, I guess!" And he turned around and ate Lucy up with a look. Then he saw me.

"You'll stay over, and be best man—wont you, Hal?" he asked. And, believe it or not, the kid's eyes just bored through me for a second. Then he raised 'em away off over my head somewhere—as embarrassed and shy as a brown thrush!

"I will—if you'll introduce me to your fiancée," I said.

Lucy had her little feet gathered up under her, ready to run. And when Bunny came down the steps to her, blamed if the two of 'em didn't just start off down through the big yard—as if there were not another soul in the whole, wide world, but the two of them!

Old Dave Williamson and I just stood there gazing after them for a time. Then we looked at each other. I started to pass the time of day, or something, with him, but the old fellow walked over to where I was, and held out the letter to me, without saying a word.

I took it and read:

Dear Dave:

I know you'll understand why I'm changing things—in the will I've told you about. I am rewriting it. Lucy was to have had everything that I'll leave, just as I told you last summer—in memory of old times, Dave! But I've run across another that I can't die without remembering. And so I'm changing the will. Lucy will get half. The rest of it—there's an inventory of the property up in my safe-deposit box—I'm leaving to the lad who tried to save my Danny, over yonder in the Argonne Forest. I just found him a little while ago, Dave! His name is Dean Rogers. He's a shy sort of chap, I've discovered, and so he may need this letter to bring you to your senses—you old hellion! The boy doesn't know what's in this letter. But he knows me. And he knows that when I say you'll give your consent to his marrying Lucy, you'll do it! I know you, Dave! And this lad's the one you want for your girl! Give my love to her, and God bless her—and her children. I wish you'd come up to Cloverill with Lucy and Dean, and see me marry them.

Yours very truly,
RANSOM CARTER.

I've never heard how Judge Carter found out about Bunny—and Danny. But I'll bet it wasn't from Bunny!

# UNFORESEEN!

*A vivid and engrossing novelette dealing with a strange crime and its stranger results—by the gifted author of "Dancing Dan," "The Lobster List" and "The Strange Case of Alan Corwin."*

## By GEORGE L. KNAPP

FOR a man about to commit his first murder, James Drake was remarkably calm. He was so cool and self-possessed that he congratulated himself—just as Napoleon might have congratulated himself just before launching the thunderbolt at Austerlitz. He had prepared everything, foreseen everything; and when one knows just what is going to happen, excitement is superfluous. He meant this to be his last murder as well as his first; but he could not help thinking that a life of crime would be easy, if the criminal used brains.

The killing on which Drake was bent was necessary—he could see no escape from that conclusion. That scaly blackmailer Blenker had asked for it when he demanded, on pain of exposure, a price that could not be paid without risking exposure. When a young man is offered, on very favorable terms, a partnership in the importing house that employs him, has accepted, and sold a piece of real-estate to finance the deal, he cannot back out without incurring suspicion and inviting inquiry. When he is engaged to be married to a fascinating grass widow, well acquainted with masculine failings, he cannot afford a scandal. And when he is told, not in words but by plain implication, that he is expected to get money from his future wife to satisfy blackmail demands, he will fight if he has any manhood left; and Drake, in spite of some past peccadillos, was very much man.

The taxi in which he was riding, swerved violently to avoid a collision with a flivver, both drivers spouted genealogical remarks; but Drake only chuckled. Even on such a contingency as that, his plan was perfect. If he were killed on the way to his destination, people would wonder at the cheap undertaker's gloves in one coat pocket and the lead slug in the other; but no one could possibly guess what use he meant to make of them.

The plot had flashed on him, complete, the day before, as he watched the blackmailing reptile across the worn desk. He wondered if any betraying flash had shone in his eyes before he looked down, and pleaded in muffled tones for fair play. No matter; the scoundrel had not seen enough to frighten him; and the plan was flawless.

An alibi sworn to by responsible people frees an accused man even of suspicion. Drake had fixed an alibi. Ellison and Company had no clock in the office; one of Ellison's old-fashioned whimsies forbade. Miss Ryan, the stenographer, and the only member of the force with whom Drake was in daily contact after the morning conference, had a handsome wrist-watch which was constantly out of commission. She wore it because it was a present from her fiancé; but when she wanted to know the time, she asked Drake. This morning, he told her ten minutes past eleven when it really was five minutes before. That quarter of an hour was not much; but it was enough.

Blenker's office could be reached in ten minutes from Ellison's by taking a taxi to a near-by corner. Twenty minutes by foot and street-car from Blenker's den was a customer whom Drake had a good excuse for visiting. In calling on this customer, he usually walked from downtown, which again took about twenty minutes. With a quarter of an hour to spare, he could call on Blenker first. Mrs. Carson, the Jezebel who sat in the blackmailer's outer office and helped in his worst work as well as in his ostensible business of shark loans and note-shaving, boasted that she ate but two meals per day. She came to work fasting, remained at the office until eleven, and then, rain or shine, went out for a mixed breakfast and lunch. Until she came back, on the stroke of twelve, Blenker was alone.

Yes, the plan was perfect. . . . .

The taxi stopped. Drake got out, paid his fare and gave a moderate tip. He had no fear of being traced. To the casual eye and description, he looked and dressed just like ten thousand other young men in the city, and he had picked up the taxi on the street, right after giving Miss Ryan that misinformation about the time. He walked through the building he had named, turned left, then left again at the next corner, climbed the stairs softly, and entered the outer office. It was empty, as he had expected. Had Mrs. Carson been there, he would have asked for Blenker, indulged in another futile plea for decent treatment, and gone away, postponing the killing till next day. But the hag was gone—her desk, he noted, looked neater than usual; Drake drew on his gloves, swung open the door to the inner office, and stepped inside.

He stopped, puzzled and alarmed—automatically closing the door behind him. The inner office was empty too. There was the worn flat-topped desk, and beyond it the cheap swivel chair; there were the two uncomfortable-looking chairs in which victims sat to be skinned; there was the hatrack, with Blenker's coat and hat upon it—but where was Blenker? He would not have left, even for a minute, without locking the door; that shabby brief-case probably contained secrets that a dozen men would have committed burglary for, if they could have been sure of getting what they wanted. Where was he?

While these questions were racing through Drake's brain, some submerged instinct kept telling him that something was wrong. It was nothing that he saw, nothing that he heard, nothing—he thought—that he smelled; but there was something amiss, some undefined "presence" in the room that threatened his carefully laid plans. He stepped forward on tiptoe, balancing like a prize-fighter for instant attack or recoil—and his breath came in a sharp gasp as he saw that his hunch was right.

Blenker had gone out, indeed—gone to stay. His body was lying in a huddle behind the desk, as if he had slumped forward out of his chair, and from the back of his neck protruded the handle of a knife. Drake knew that knife. Blenker kept it as a letter-opener; but before it reached that humble estate, it had committed a fiendish double murder; and here it was back at its old-time tricks.

## CHAPTER II

DRAKE had come there to kill, and though the discovery that some one had beaten him to the crime was oddly daunting, he did not lose his head. Just as much as if he were actually guilty, his safety depended on his alibi, on getting away so quickly that the shift of his movements could not be detected. But he had no thought of leaving without the prize for which he had come.

He ran his eye around the room. The ground-glass windows were shut tightly, as usual—Blenker believed in privacy plus for himself, even when preparing publicity for his victims. The door to the hall was bolted, and there was no nook or cranny where a spy could hide. Drake shot the bolt on the door to the outer office, returned to the corpse, and stooping, placed his bare wrist on the dead man's face. It

was still warm. The knife had been driven in with a single strong blow, struck from behind and above; apparently it had cut the spinal cord, and since the weapon was left in the wound, there was little blood; but that was clotting.

"From ten minutes to half an hour ago," he decided. "I must hurry."

He straightened up, first slipping a red morocco notebook from Blenker's coat pocket. That book, he felt sure, contained some of the old villain's memoranda. Then he made a hasty dive at the brief-case. It contained several letters, among them the one he sought; and he put them all in his pocket. On the table was a legal-looking paper, and he pocketed that—it was a risk to take such things, but it might help some other poor devil; and with the thought, he stooped again, and ran his gloved hand over the haft of the knife. He didn't want anyone hanged for that killing, the less so since he felt a sort of irrational gratitude toward the unknown for saving him from the disagreeable necessity. He stopped a moment, standing close to the body, checked up his personal belongings, looked round for any unconsidered trifle, saw none, and left by way of the hall. At the bottom of the side stairs, he halted and looked at his watch. He felt as if he had lived a year since Miss Ryan had asked him the hour—but the exact time was just under seventeen minutes!

Out on the street he resolutely forced the mystery to the back of his mind, caught a street-car and rode toward his next port of call. He walked the last two blocks, and entered the store, wiping his forehead, and remarking that the day was warm.

"You walked, I suppose," said Mr. Levinson.

"Yes," said Drake, whose fondness for that exercise was well known. "It keeps a fellow fit."

"It would kill me, this weather," returned Levinson. "Every man to his taste, I suppose. Now, those invoices—"

THEY settled the business which was the excuse for Drake's call, and he left, taking a street-car back. The ride gave him a chance to go over the situation.

One thing he had not foreseen—who could? When did a man, bent on committing a murder, find that some other avenger had beaten him to the task by ten or twenty minutes? But Drake could not see that this altered the value of his plans or the security offered by his alibi. Miss Ryan would testify that he had not left the office till ten minutes after eleven, and Levinson that he had reached the store at twenty-five minutes before twelve. By no possible chance could he have made the side trip to Blenker's in that twenty-five minutes; it had taken good luck and good management to make it in forty-one. He had left no finger-prints, and the cheap gloves, accidentally brought home from a funeral months before, would be carried to the bottom of the river by that lead slug. Then he would go on to the office, destroy the papers and memorandum book—and he was safe. But who on earth could have done the task which Drake set out to do?

So absorbed did he become in this puzzle that he rode past the river. Berating himself sharply for this forgetfulness, he started to walk back—and caught himself hurrying, with one hand in the pocket containing the gloves. This would not do; he would saunter a ways, looking in at windows, till he recovered his poise. He dropped to a loiterer's pace, the while his brain clicked over the question again and again: who was it?

"YOU are not superstitious, I can see!" Drake came out of his brown study with a start. He was before the window of an animal-store, and the man addressing him was big and husky, with bronzed hands and face. He was forty-five or fifty years of age, well dressed and quite at home; but something about him spoke of the country though nothing hinted of yokel. Drake returned the smile.

"No, I don't believe I am superstitious," he said. "Why?"

"You walked under that ladder," said the big man, pointing. "I've been standing here ten minutes, and you're the first that didn't go around."

"Oh," said Drake, who had not seen the ladder before. "Really, I never think of such things. I wonder how that notion got started?"

"I heard a lecturer say that it was because the men who were hanged at Tyburn had to go under a ladder before they climbed it to the gallows," said the big man. "Sounds probable."

"Oh," said Drake, again. Hanging did not seem an inspiring subject of conversation, just now. That knife, who could— He turned to the window full of assorted doglets. "There's a mighty pretty pup,"

he said. "The chap with one ear higher than the other."

"Best in the window, though he wouldn't have a look-in at a bench show," said the stranger. "The judges want points, not brains. He's too wide between the eyes to fit the style, and that ear's against him, too."

"True," said Drake. "I like brains myself—in man or dog," he added, drumming on the glass. The pup they were discussing put his head on one side, and then pawed at the fingers. "You little scalawag!" said Drake. "I'd buy you if I had any place to keep you."

"Well, you might set up housekeeping," suggested the other. "That would make room for the little beggar."

"Unfortunately, it wouldn't," returned Drake, with a short laugh. "The lady doesn't like dogs." It was one of those confidences which one sometimes blurts out to a stranger because he is a stranger; but Drake regretted it the moment he had spoken.

"I'll have to leave you," he said, looking at his watch. "I've got a call to make over the river."

"Glad to have seen you," answered the big man, looking at his timepiece in turn, and then at a clock in the next window. "Your memorandum-book seems to be working out of your coat pocket."

Drake felt hastily. The Blenker memorandum was in no danger of falling; but it had worked up till an inch was showing, including a noticeable green blotch on one corner.

"Thanks," he said, transferring the thing to an inside pocket, and walked on. "Bungle Number Two!" he told himself as he went. "I'd better wake up and look out! I'll have to watch my step!"

## CHAPTER III

HE dropped the weighted gloves in the river without being seen, walked on over the stream, and went into a cafeteria he never had entered before for lunch. He saw no one whom he knew; no untoward circumstance happened; but his appetite was lacking. He tried to tell himself that it was the mystery of the interloper which bothered him; but the native honesty of his mind soon rejected that explanation. Abolishing blackmailers was all right in theory; in practice, it was distinctly upsetting, even when the actual work is performed by an unknown friend.

"Wonder how I'd feel if I'd put the job through myself," mused Drake. "Guess it's just as well I have no ambitions that way."

He left most of his lunch on the table and went back to the office. Ellison was there, which was an unusual thing at this hour, and much perturbed besides.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" exclaimed the head of the firm. "Miss Ryan's in the hospital!"

"What!" cried Drake.

"That jackass of a beau of hers called about half-past eleven," said Ellison. "He's been out of the city for months, and I told 'em to run along, just make sure that Miss Ryan got back around two. They took a taxi north to the park to have lunch at the boathouse, and slammed into an isle of safety on the way—I don't know how or why. Driver's scratched up; William's got a broken collar-bone; and Miss Ryan's still unconscious—I've just been talking to the hospital."

DRAKE'S hat had fallen. He recovered it and hung it up, his mind racing over the possibilities opened by this accident.

"Of all the cursed mischances—" The words seemed forced from his lips by some outside power; but to Ellison, they seemed natural enough.

"Isn't it? With plenty of work to do anyhow, and the Government asking a million questions besides. Well, it's worse on her than on us, poor girl! I'm going out there now."

Drake closed the door of his private office and sat alone, trying to think. Here it was, right at the outset: that unlooked-for chance which always, in the sermons of moralists and the yarns of fiction-writers, trips the criminal and brings his crafty machination to naught. Only, the thing now seemed to have a sort of back-spin. Drake wasn't a criminal, except in intent; but he stood in just as much danger as if he were, and his peril was the real killer's safety. He had scoffed at the retribution theory, thinking of the vast majority of crimes which go unpunished altogether; but now he wondered if the old warning were not a better guide than the new statistics. If Miss Ryan died—

He shook off the notion with a physical jerk, and turned to examine his plunder. There was a chattel mortgage on some poor

fellow's household goods, given that very morning. Probably it hadn't been recorded yet, and if it vanished, the man would not have to pay; Drake took satisfaction in the thought. There were four letters, one addressed to himself in the impulsive feminine hand which had given him thrills four years before and still had power to make his pulses beat a little faster. This was the basis of the blackmailer's latest demand. Blenker couldn't be honest about anything, Drake mused. He had bled the young man to the queen's taste on three other letters, turned them over at the last payment, vowing they were all that he ever had seen—and kept back this one to use if the victim became prosperous enough to bleed again. Well, he had paid; Drake could see that projecting knife-handle yet; and speaking of blood, who was the wielder of that weapon? He did not pause over the puzzle. Lighting a strong cigar to cover the smell, he burned the missive and washed the ashes down the drain of his washbowl; then he took up the other items.

ONLY one of the remaining letters was addressed to Blenker, and that, a moment's inspection proved, was a plea for mercy, written by some woman the day before. Drake did not read beyond the first paragraph, and carefully abstained from looking at the signature. He could not help seeing the names on the other two envelopes, but both were strange to him. He tore them up unread, together with the chattel mortgage, carried the fragments to the lavatory on another floor, and sent them down the sewer.

Office business occupied him fully for a time, so that it was more than an hour before he got a chance to examine the memorandum-book. It was a de luxe little volume, with costly paper and expensive binding; and, remembering the mean furnishings of Blenker's office, Drake's lips parted in a snarl.

"This is what the reptile loved!" he muttered. "This is the stuff he wanted to dress up and decorate. I'm glad—"

He checked himself and hurried his inspection. About a hundred names were there, all written in ink. Two were those of personal acquaintances, one of a high public official, one of a politician now retired, but a power in his day, two of men prominent in the city's business and professional life. One name he recognized as that of a woman famed for her charitable work, and wondered if she were paying for the sins of her lovable, scapegrace nephew, a veritable prince of tramps. After nearly every name was a sum, also written in ink, and below, other sums in pencil. Reference to his own case gave him the key. The figures in ink were estimates of what Blenker expected to get; the pencil memoranda told of actual collections. In about a dozen cases there were no pencil figures; the amount in ink stood alone. Evidently the scoundrel was not always successful in bleeding his victims. On the other hand, Drake had been put down at first for a thousand dollars; fifteen hundred had been collected in three installments; and there in fresh ink was another estimate of ten thousand set against him.

"I was the easy mark," he muttered. "He got more than he expected the first time, so he came back. Beware of being an easy mark—or of crowding one too far. I wonder how much he was trying to squeeze from the fellow that paid him with a knife?"

There was no way of answering that question. In all probability this little book contained the name of the killer; but it held no clue to his identity. Drake turned to the names against which no sum of money was set. There were seven of these, and two attracted his attention at once:

*J. R. (Slick) Nolan.*
*Lumpy Driggs.*

They were the only nicknames in the book. A red ink line had been drawn through Nolan's name, and one other had been ruled off in the same fashion; but both were legible. There was a check-mark in ink after "Lumpy Driggs," and other check-marks after most of the other names in this group. Drake gave up the puzzle with a shake of his head.

A PHONE-CALL from Ellison told him that Miss Ryan was out of danger, though still woozy, and he breathed more freely. He did not expect to need her help, but he wanted that alibi in reserve. The time might come when he would be glad to have it—not right away of course, but when the police got tired of running round in circles and began to interview, systematically, everyone whose name they could get from Mrs. Carson. He picked up an afternoon paper which some one had brought in, and read a brief story on the first page:

V. E. Blenker, moneylender, was found murdered in his office at 807 South Singatilk Street just before noon today. He had been stabbed through the neck with a knife picked up from his own desk, where it had been used as a paper-cutter. The spinal cord was severed, and death was instantaneous.

The body was discovered by his confidential clerk, Mrs. Emma Carson. The victim's watch was untouched, and several dollars in money were found on his person; but some papers, according to Mrs. Carson, were missing from his files. The police expect to have the guilty party under arrest in a few hours.

Drake grinned at this hackneyed bluff. He laid down the paper, noticed as he did so a smudge of dirt under his thumbnail, reached absently into his pocket for his nail-file—and dropped on his chair, eyes staring and face ashen. The file was gone!

Summoning all the will-power which he owned in no small measure, he went over the day's events. He had used the file at the office that morning. Therefore it must have fallen out since; and what place so likely for such an occurrence as Blenker's den? Yes, that was it; he had not heard it fall, but he remembered stepping on something when he stooped over the body. He had looked to his watch, pen, pencil, letters, pocketbook and memorandum-book before leaving; but he had forgotten the file.

It was characteristic of Drake that his face took on a fighting scowl as he realized what had happened. He immediately began to study the value of this evidence against him. Of itself, it was worthless; the file was a cheap, commonplace thing, like myriads of others. Its danger lay in the possibility of fingerprints. There was not more than half an inch at the larger end and a still smaller space at the point which would take such prints, however, and the rubbing in his pocket and his step would be likely to obliterate even these partial records. He tried to remember all about that hard object which he had felt through his thin-soled shoe; it was directly under the ball of his right foot, and he had turned a little on that foot as he faced round to the desk. Probably everything was all right—but he had traveled a thousand miles from his easy confidence of the morning in his ability to plan a perfect crime and foresee everything. Unforeseen incidents! This case was composed of them—beginning with the corpse!

Before leaving the office that evening, he copied the seven names which were not followed by estimates of blood money, and put the paper among some office memoranda where the police never would think of looking for it. He copied even the check-marks and the lines that crossed out two of the names. He cut out the leaves of the notebook and put them in his inside pocket; cut a square out of the cover containing Blenker's name in gold letters, and shredded this part to fragments which he scattered along the gutter for a block as he went homeward. He continued his walk till he came to where a load of coal was being put through a manhole in the sidewalk, dropped the mutilated book-cover through that, caught a car and rode home. Here, his first action was to hunt out an old nail-file, and put it in his pocket. Then, locking the door, he burned the leaves of the notebook, one by one, in the little grate, and stirred the ashes with a poker. No physical object remained to connect him with the visit to Blenker's office save the nail-file, and the more he thought of that, the less he feared it. Janitor work was rather sketchy around those diggings; if they traced the file to him and his finger-prints were on it, he would say that he had dropped it there the day before; and who could disprove his statement? He was beginning already to count on something less than the perfect clearance which he had planned at the beginning.

He took a shower, changed his clothes, and met his fiancée at a hotel for dinner. Everything went well until, in reciting the day's news, he mentioned Miss Ryan's accident. Something of the importance he attached to that event showed in his voice, and Mrs. Bascom's ready jealousy flashed up at once.

"Well, I must say you seem mighty upset at a little accident to a stenographer!" she remarked. Drake could not think of any explanation that he cared to make.

## CHAPTER IV

THE morning papers had the Blenker story on the first page at considerable length. The old villain's blackmailing activities were mentioned freely, and it was stated that the police believed some victim of Blenker's extortions had struck him down. Mrs. Carson was helping to check up all possible suspects, and seemed to fear a murderous assault herself. She insisted that the murderer intended to kill her too, though giving no reasons for this belief,

and that only the fact that she was absent on a special errand that morning had saved her life.

So that was why the hag's desk looked so neat, thought Drake. You never could tell. The firmest creatures of habit would go off at a tangent just when you wanted them to run true to form. It didn't matter, this time, but as a discouragement to crime, that truth hadn't received sufficient advertising.

As to the reconstruction of the crime, two theories were presented. The surgeon who happened to be passing and came in answer to Mrs. Carson's screams held that the killer had entered the private office by the hall door, come upon his victim from behind, which he could do from that entrance, seized him by the hair and forced his head forward with one hand while seizing the paper-cutter and striking home with the other. But Mrs. Carson insisted that the hall door always was bolted—which agreed with Drake's observations; so the police believed that the murderer must have come through the outer office. Blenker had reached for his revolver—prints of two finger tips were found on the barrel; but he had no chance to grasp it. No fingerprints were found on the knife—Drake chuckled grimly as he remembered wiping out the traces of his unknown predecessor, and wondered whether he would live to regret that act of impulsive generosity.

"Miss Ryan is pretty well bruised and shaken, but no bones are broken," said Ellison, coming in half an hour after the younger man.

"Good!" exclaimed Drake in heartfelt relief.

"She says she'll be back to work in a week; but she'll be doing well to make it in two," went on Ellison. "This Blenker case is a queer one. Have you read it?"

"Yes," said Drake warily.

"Whoever killed that reptile did a good job, though I suppose he'll go to the pen for it. Clever trick, though, to do the job with a knife picked up on the premises, instead of bringing in his own weapon. A detective told me years ago that a murder committed that way is hardest of all to trace, in the absence of fingerprints."

"I suppose that's true," said Drake. His own plan had been to break Blenker's neck, *à la Ben Hur*. "Odd this Carson bird should have been out, just at that time."

"The killer probably was watching for her to go out," said Ellison. "I don't approve murder; but it wont hurt my feelings very much if this fellow gets away. Blenker drove one woman to suicide that I know of, and no doubt there were others."

"It's a wonder he wasn't scragged long ago," remarked Drake.

"It is, that. Boy, I hope you never get into the clutches of a blackmailer; but if you ever do, fight from the drop of the hat! And come to me, I'll help you. . . . . What is it, Richard?"

"TWO gents to see Mr. Drake," returned the office-boy. Behind him loomed two husky individuals whose police connections were plain to the dullest eye at fifty yards; and Drake gave voiceless thanks that his face was in shadow, and the window at his back.

"I am Mr. Drake," he said. "What is it?"

"We're detectives," said the larger and uglier looking of the pair. "The chief wants you to step over to Headquarters for a while."

"Yes?" said Drake. "What about—what does he want?"

"You'll find it out when you get there," was the truculent answer.

"I'll find it out before I start," said Drake. He had decided before going to Blenker's office that if it ever came to questioning, he would take a high hand, and keep it, as became an innocent man. "What do you want?"

"We want you, I'm tellin' you; and you're goin' to come, too."

"Have you got a warrant?" demanded Ellison, and the officer shook his head. "Then what the devil do you mean by demanding that business men drop their work and run around after you?"

"We only want to ask him some questions," said the second man.

"Ask 'em here," said Ellison.

"Orders was to bring him to Headquarters."

"Orders had better start with a warrant, then," retorted Ellison. "You take this boy away without one, and I'll have a writ out for him in twenty minutes. —Nellie!" (to the girl at the switchboard) "Get Mr. Starrett on the phone, and tell him from me to hold himself ready to go into court with me for a writ of habeas corpus at once!" He faced the detectives

again, his iron gray hair bristling and eyes alight. "This is one case where the Police Department will keep within the law or I'll come damn' near knowing why!"

"Oh, I guess we can talk here," said the first speaker, sulkily enough. "You wont like it, though," he added to Drake.

"Don't mind my grief," answered the young man. There was nothing wrong with his nerve, once the tussle joined, and the prompt backing from Ellison was calculated to hearten anyone. The quartet entered the room of the head of the firm and closed the door. The leader of the official pair produced a nail-file.

"Ever see this?" he asked Drake. For a moment, the young man could not speak, but he covered the pause by bending forward to look. The bright surface held no sign of a fingerprint.

"Looks like mine," he said, taking it in one hand and fishing in his pocket with the other. "No, mine's here." He produced the lucky old relic and laid the two side by side. "This one's newer," he added, handing it back. "What about it?"

"We found this in Blenker's office," said the plain-clothes man, eying him narrowly. Drake merely looked inquiring, and the chap went on:

"The old girl out there says you knew him?"

"That's true."

"How well?"

"Not well at all. Entirely ill."

"I mean, how intimately did you know him?"

"I first learned of his existence four years ago. He had got hold of some letters that—compromised—a person in whom I was interested. He wanted me to pay for them."

"Did you do it?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"The amount doesn't matter. It was more than I could afford."

"Have you seen him since then?"

"I saw him last week. When we had our first dealings, he had three letters, and swore they were all. I bought them, as I told you; but he really had another letter that I supposed was destroyed. He sent for me last week, told me he'd heard I was going to be married, sprung this other letter, and wanted a lot of money for it."

"Go on," said both officers, as Drake paused.

"I told him I couldn't and wouldn't pay the sum demanded. He said it was that or exposure, and that I must bring the first installment Saturday of this week. I came away, not knowing what to do. Monday, he sent for me again, and repeated his threats. I felt pretty sick, though I tried not to let him see it; but then I got to thinking that he must be rather anxious not to come to a showdown, and so then I figured I'd sit tight for a while, and see what happened."

"And—murder happened. Mighty handy for you, wasn't it?"

"It sure was. If I knew the fellow who did it, I'd walk a mile to shake hands with him!" The detectives stared. The fact that they held much the same views did not make it less surprising to them that a person under suspicion should express himself so freely. Ellison struck in:

"Blenker's death would have been convenient to a lot of people any time in the last twenty years. I'm only surprised that some one didn't fill him with lead long ago."

"WELL, maybe," said the big officer. "The old woman out there says that Blenker was scared of you," he said, returning to Drake.

"Of me?" repeated the young man. "I'm afraid that isn't true. He took too many precautions. He kept a revolver in an open drawer, almost under his hand. I've been in his office maybe half a dozen times—to my sorrow—and I never saw that drawer shut. If he'd closed it for one half-second with the gun inside, I'd have pounded him to pulp; but he never did. He never gave me a chance."

"Humph! Somebody got past his gun."

"Or got in behind it," said Drake. "Doctor Madison's theory may be right. See here, are you two going round with the notion that I killed that old scalawag?"

"Somebody killed him."

"That's a safe guess," said Drake, with a short laugh. "But do you think I did?"

The officer who had taken the lead hesitated, and the other spoke quickly:

"No, we don't—I don't, anyway. But as Dan, here, says, somebody did, and we're asking questions of everybody that's been there lately."

"Fair enough," said Drake. "I'll tell you anything I can. Go ahead."

"Speakin' about bein' scared," said the first officer, taking up the quiz again, "what about this?"

He held out a slip of paper. Drake bent over it, motioning Ellison to join him. It contained the penciled words:

*Drake's getting ugly. Keep him waiting when he comes, and tell me.*

"Mrs. Carson says that's Blenker's writing," said the plain-clothes spokesman.

"Looks like it," admitted Drake.

"She says Blenker put that on her desk Monday, the day you were there. She'd gone out while you were talking with him, and when she come back, this was on her desk. How do you explain it?"

"I don't. This is the first time I ever heard of it."

"A thing like that's gotta be explained," insisted the policeman, heavily.

"Well, call up the old guy on the ouija board and ask him to explain it," retorted Drake. "He wrote it; I didn't."

The questioner looked shocked—no folk are more ponderously insistent on the conventions than policemen. The cross-quizzing went on for some minutes longer; but Drake refused to "register" either sorrow for Blenker's demise or anxiety about his own position. He answered pertinent questions with perfect readiness, resented instantly any attempt at bullying. Ellison played up to his lead perfectly by acting as if the entire story were old to him; and the investigators were shaking their heads when they left. Drake saw them into the elevator, and returned.

"Mr. Ellison," he said, "I—I'm never going to be able to thank you enough for the way you've stood by me, here. I want you to know one thing, right now—I didn't kill that old scoundrel. I don't know what you may think of me about other things—"

"I think you're a lovable young damn' fool," returned Ellison. "I'm going to stand by you to the finish; and that hasn't come yet. Lord, if you'd only come to me in the first place!"

"I wish I had!" said Drake fervently.

"I'd be much the more efficient criminal of the two," went on Ellison. "Say, how did Blenker come to get hold of those letters?"

"Bought 'em," said Drake. "I—the young lady and I had a disagreement; she returned my letters and asked for hers. I sent 'em back, and somebody stole 'em from her. Two were—mighty easy to misread; the others wouldn't have counted by themselves. The thief sold 'em to Blenker."

"Know who it was?"

"I've always thought it was some woman boarder at the same place. The young lady insisted it was a chap who was employed there a couple of weeks as a sort of roustabout. I saw him; he looked like a crook, all right; but nobody could figure how he had the chance to get at them, in her room."

"Can't expect honest folks to figure out all the chances a crook knows," returned Ellison, shaking his head. "I'd be inclined to credit Ruth's guess, myself. Oh, don't look so shocked, and don't think you let the cat out of the bag; I knew all about it—except the letters, of course—long ago. Ruth's hot-headed and impulsive, but she's a mighty fine young woman, for all that—a darned sight better than—than some."

What he started to say was "better than Mrs. Bascom," and the narrow escape from blurting out his feelings made both men wriggle uncomfortably. He went on quickly to cover the incident:

"You handled those birds perfectly, just now; but there'll be a comeback. That big fellow knows just about enough to come in out of the rain. He'll feel sure you're guilty—because he can't understand you."

"Mr. Ellison," said Drake suddenly, "I've got to tell you the whole story. It wouldn't be fair to wait. I'm not guilty; but the only reason I'm not is that somebody got ahead of me. I—this must sound incredible, but it's true—I went there yesterday to kill him, and found him dead!"

Ellison stared for a minute, got up, made sure that no one was listening at the door, and returned to his seat:

"You're either a bigger fool than I thought, Jimmy, or you're imagining things," he said quietly. "Tell me this whole business, just as it happened."

DRAKE did so, sparing nothing: the faked alibi, the quick side trip, the discovery, the seizure of the letters, papers and notebook. Ellison heard him in silence, save for a chuckle at the chattel mortgage. When the recital was finished, he rose and put a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"You are an awful fool, Jimmy," he said. "But I don't seem to like you any the less."

"Do you believe me?" asked Drake.

"Of course," answered Ellison. "You were imagining things, just as I said. You

imagined you were going to kill him. You weren't. If you'd found him alive and got past his gun, you'd have beaten him to a jelly, and damn' well right, too; but you wouldn't have killed him except by accident. You darned quixotic chaps, with your fierce resolutions and incurable gentleness underneath— I'd make a lot better criminal myself. There's no use expecting the police to believe you, though."

"That's true," said Drake. "I'm in just as bad a hole as if I had killed him."

"Mighty near it, anyway. Don't worry; we'll get you through all right, somehow. There's nothing to do now but wait—and hope Miss Ryan remembers that date you gave her. Lord, wouldn't that be a joke! An innocent man saved by a fake like that!"

"It's a joke I'll have to grow up to, I'm afraid," answered Drake with a wry smile.

"I expect; but don't let it bother you more than you can help. One thing, though—and see that you obey orders: you're to phone me every night at ten o'clock and every morning at seven. Any time I don't hear from you at those hours, I'll be around to see what's happened. Remember, now."

"I'll remember," said Drake. "But why?"

"Third degree," was the terse answer. "I've seen one innocent boy hanged on a forced confession in this town; I don't care to see another—though there isn't a jury on earth that would hang you, even if they found you guilty."

## CHAPTER V

THAT evening Drake thought he was shadowed, but took no steps to make sure. The next evening there could be no doubt about it, and some one had been through his rooms. He called up the Detective Bureau, asked for Dan, and begged that worthy to please put things back where he found them, next time. The reply was a cussword cut across as the receiver slammed on the hook, and Drake treated himself to a chuckle.

"I hardly see why they're keeping on your trail that way," said Ellison. "They may quit, now. The only thing we can do is to sit tight and see what happens—unless you want to consult Starrett right away," he added.

"No," said Drake. "I prefer to keep my damned imbecility known to as narrow a circle as possible. Now, for the last time, don't you want to wait with this partnership business till the row blows over?"

Ellison's answer was to take the papers from a drawer, point to the dotted line, and proffer a pen. Drake's eyesight was not quite clear as he signed. . . . .

The Blenker case was crowded from the first page by other news; but it did not die out. The public was more interested than one would have thought possible, considering the character of the victim. No one seemed to care about punishment; Drake mingled with crowds and listened to conversations in barber-shop, restaurant and theater without hearing a word of that tenor; but everyone was intrigued by the puzzle.

BUT the police were not free to drop the matter. An anti-administration paper was making savage attacks on police efficiency, using the Blenker case among others as illustrations, and the "force" had to keep active. A number of men were arrested and "grilled," as the invariable newspaper phrase has it, without the slightest result. A few days after the search of his room, Drake entered his partner's office and pointed to a name.

"Yes," said Ellison. "I noticed they were quizzing the poor devil—think he stole some papers; but he's cleared himself."

"He's the chap who gave that chattel mortgage," said Drake. "I remember the name, Joseph Kazmierski—there can't be two of them. Isn't there some way to get word to that fellow to sit tight and refuse to pay? They can't collect, you know, in the absence of that mortgage."

"Um—maybe. I'll keep it in mind—but don't you make a move that way. You darned galoot!" he added in friendly reproach. "Helping the under dog!"

"Well, I may be the under dog myself, before long," said Drake.

"The chance is growing less, I think, though you never can tell. I see the Carson creature didn't believe this poor Pole guilty."

Two or three days more passed, and then there came a larger sensation for the friends. Lumpy Driggs was arrested. He denied any knowledge of the affair and offered an alibi; but he was fresh from fourteen months in prison, and the police

held him till Mrs. Carson could look him over. She gave him a clean bill of health at once. He had not been in Blenker's office for years, and the last time he was there, before going to prison, Blenker gave him some work to do, and helped him.

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much," quoted Ellison.

"Well, she steered 'em away from that Polish chap, too," said Drake. "By the way, did you get word to him about the mortgage?"

"I did, indirectly. But the Carson dame never got so emphatic about Mr. Kazmierski as she does about the Honorable Driggs. I wonder why. You wouldn't think he'd make friends among the ladies, to look at his picture."

HE opened a paper which neither of them usually bought, pointing to a picture on an inside page. Drake started, bent closer and stared for a minute, and then straightened up with a puzzled scowl.

"That's the scalawag that Ruth suspected of stealing her letters!"

"What!" exclaimed Ellison.

"Not a doubt of it," returned the younger man. "I forget his name then—it wasn't Driggs, though; but I'd swear to that mug."

"Ruth was right," said Ellison. "Wonder if that was the 'work' Blenker gave him. It rather confirms a guess of mine."

He got out the slip of paper on which Drake had copied the seven names.

"Here's my guess," he said. "These gents are chaps who have brought Blenker tips on good things in the blackmail line. Mr. Driggs brought only one tip—those letters, of course. One check against the name of Driggs. Mr. Nolan brought two bits of easy money. Two checks for Slick Nolan. These two chaps whose names are ruled off are dead—I had Starrett get the dope on them from the police. What do you think of it?"

"It's a better guess than I've been able to make," said Drake. "But I don't think it covers the ground. Blenker surely got tips from more than seven people."

"You'd think so. Maybe he has another record, somewhere. I don't pretend that my guess explains everything, but it's the best I can think of. We'll see if anything comes along to upset it."

Nothing of any sort came along for a few days. The office was still getting on without Miss Ryan, whose nerves were shaken much worse than had been expected. Drake knew that he was still under espionage, but felt that it was lessening in severity, and began to look forward to the time when he could breathe freely once more, when something happened that puzzled him till the entire mystery was cleared up.

Drake rented a front room with alcove and bath from a widow who had a grown daughter and a boy about sixteen. This boy, Frank, was a radio fan, and had made a home set of which he was intensely proud, with some reason. Drake came home one evening about ten from a dinner and drive with Mrs. Bascom, phoned Ellison as per schedule, and as soon as he got to the head of the stairs, was called to Frank's room to hear a concert. He went, finding there the only other roomer, a bachelor of about sixty, employed in a downtown bank. The three sat, listening and talking, for more than an hour. Drake was starting for his own room and bed when the front doorbell rang. Frank went down to open it, and came back, followed by two plain-clothes men. They stopped as they noted the little group in the back room.

"Your name Drake?" asked one of them.

"Yes," said Drake.

"When did you get in?"

Drake stared a moment, looked at his watch, and answered with deliberation:

"I got in about five minutes before ten, maybe six. May I ask why you are so interested in my movements?"

"When did you go out again?" queried the officer, disregarding the counter question.

"Go out again?" repeated Drake in bewilderment. Frank spoke:

"He aint been out, Mister. He came here soon's he got back, an' he's been here ever since."

The other roomer confirmed the statement, and the officer shook his head. "Wait here till I come back," he commanded, and asked for the telephone. He talked in low tones into the instrument for two or three minutes, and came back upstairs.

"Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Drake," he said courteously. "We got a report that made it necessary to ask a few questions, but you've answered 'em all right. Good night."

He left, showing by his manner that it was useless to ask him questions, and the three were left to puzzle.

THE morning papers next day carried an item that a window in Mrs. Carson's residence had been jimmied by a burglar, but that the intruder had been scared away by the widow's screams before effecting an entrance. She described the man as young, tall, dressed in gray clothes, with dark hair and wide shoulders.

"Might be a description of you, Jimmy," said Ellison lightly.

"The cops thought so too, I guess," returned the younger man.

"But why did the cops think it?" went on Ellison. "Answer, because the charming Carson person wanted 'em to think it. That's plain. But, once more, why? Did you have any particular row with her while you were paying tribute?"

"No," said Drake. "I loathed her, of course; but she's used to that. Everybody's doing it."

"But she says that this man came to kill her to close her mouth on the Blenker case. Why the devil should anyone bother about closing her mouth now? She must have told all she knows about it, days ago. But here she talks as if she had a secret that some one would murder her to keep from the police or the public, and then gives a description, vague enough, I admit, but certain, under the circumstances, to send the police looking for you. You've got an enemy there, Jimmy, and I'd give more than a box of cigars to know why."

## CHAPTER VI

DRAKE did not think it wise to leave the city while the police were unsatisfied as to his innocence, and Ellison preferred to take his vacation in the winter. But Ellison's daughter, summering at a lake a long day's drive from the city, had been coaxing her father to come for a week with her and his grandchildren, and the old gentleman felt that matters had reached a point which made it safe for him to leave. He carefully impressed on Drake the need of making twice daily reports, and the young man, more out of gratitude than from any feeling of necessity, promised to do so. That settled, Ellison stepped into his car early one Friday morning, and headed north.

Several persons called him during working hours, but the phone girl merely said that Mr. Ellison was not at the office that day, and either passed them on to Drake or took their messages without giving any needless information. When she went to lunch, the office-boy, in spite of instructions which seemed pointless to him, was less reticent. At least two persons learned from him that Mr. Ellison had gone to Lake Tanagra, and one of these was Drake's plain-clothes friend Dan Birch.

Drake knew nothing of this leak. He put through his work at the office, and in the evening took Mrs. Bascom to dinner and a movie show. She scoffed a little at his statement that he must call Ellison at precisely ten o'clock, and told Drake that he was teamed up with an old fogy, and had better make a new start. Also, considerably to Drake's surprise, she talked quite a bit of the Blenker case; she had spoken of it before, he remembered; but it was newer and more interesting then. He saw her home, reached his own quarters at the appointed time, and put in a long-distance call. Contrary to his usual experience, the connection was made almost at once. He reported everything serene, asked about the children, the fishing and the weather, told his old friend not to worry about anything in the city, accepted the return warnings, hung up the receiver and went upstairs. When he entered his room, Dan stepped from behind the door, and his partner rose from a chair by the table.

"This time, you're comin' to Headquarters, young fellow," said Birch grimly.

"Well, you didn't need to lie in wait for me like a couple of burglars," retorted Drake. "I'll just tell Frank—"

"You'll tell nobody!" interrupted the petty tyrant, grasping his shoulder. The other detective caught him by the arm. Resistance obviously would only make matters worse. Drake shrugged his shoulders.

"Charming manners you fellows have," he said. "I met a detective the other night who was a gentleman, too. Wonder how he got on the force?"

The smaller and more sensible of the officers chuckled appreciatively. Dan snorted. Together they led Drake downstairs; and he noted, with a sinking sensation at the pit of the stomach, that none of the family was in evidence. Plainly, they had been warned. However, it probably wouldn't amount to much, he told himself. The trio went round the corner to a waiting taxi, and were driven to the station. Once there, one of the officers asked Drake some casual question; he answered; and immediately there was a

feminine squeal, and a screen of policemen parted to reveal Mrs. Carson.

"That's his voice!" she cried, wringing her hands in seeming great distress. "That's the voice I heard in the private office the fatal day, when poor, dear Mr. Blenker was done to his death! Oh, I couldn't bear to think it, such a smooth young man; and yet, I just knew he was the murderer, all the time!"

"What the devil!" exclaimed Drake; but they gave him no chance to finish. He was hurried to the back of the building, thrust into a secluded room, and Sergeant Kratz, rather famous for his success in securing confessions, began the inquisition:

"You might as well come clean, young fellow! You see, the old girl's identified your voice. You sneaked up there an' bumped Blenker off to keep him from spoiling your match with the widow. We've got the goods on you, four ways from the ace. Now, come across, an' tell just how it happened—and no stallin'!"

DRAKE was badly scared, more than he had ever been since counting himself a grown man. But his reason was still in control, and the vicious unfairness of the performance roused his temper. He had not uttered a word on the "fatal day;" the Carson hag was lying, and it followed that the sergeant was lying too. The code of contemptuous defiance which he had laid out for himself returned to him now, plainly the wisest course to pursue in the present crisis. He took a few deep breaths to steady his nerves for the ordeal, looked the sergeant over with contempt showing in every line of his face, and asked in a hoarse voice:

"How would you like to go to hell?"

The unexpected counter-attack made the bully gasp, and before he could speak, Drake went on:

"That old rip is lying, and I believe you know it. I told all I knew about this case when your men came to the office, and that was nothing. I'm not even going to repeat it. I'm not going to say another word about the business until my lawyer tells me to speak. Now, go ahead with your third degree, and be damned!"

For a moment, he thought the sergeant would strike, and tensed his muscles for the spring that should give back a partial payment before succumbing to numbers. But the earlier scene at the office was his salvation now. Ellison was a man of influence, and he was standing by Drake; there would be a fine roar anyway, and it would cost some one his uniform if this insolent youngster were beaten up as he deserved. Kratz unclenched his fist, though the effort at self-control nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"We'll see how long you keep that up!" he said grimly.

They went at Drake by relays. They yelled, coaxed, pleaded, argued. They waved the carefully uncleaned knife before his eyes. They did the same by the note which Blenker had left for Mrs. Carson. They spoke confidently of clues which had been found in his office or his room. They called him all the evil names they could think of; and they told him he was a fine fellow, whom no one could blame for bumping off such an old reprobate, and who would get off easy, if only he would "come clean." They threatened him with fists, clubs, rubber hose and the water-cure. They turned a dazzling light in his eyes and kept him standing till he fooled them by sitting down suddenly on the floor. They wove guesses and surmises into positive statements, and demanded that he confess their truth. They made fantastic assertions in hope of rousing him to contradiction. They accused him of a list of amours that would have taxed the prowess of Don Juan—but they never mentioned the name of the rash girl who had written those infernal letters. They knew of the case, of course; the Carson rip had posted them; but apparently she had forgotten the name, and Drake, sweating under the terrific ordeal, still gloated mightily.

Hour after hour the torture—it was nothing less—continued; and hour after hour Drake maintained his obstinate silence. To himself, he sometimes muttered, "Stick it, you fool!" as if it were a litany, or "Defiance—defiance—defiance!" as if it were a spell; but to the grilling inquisitors he spoke not a word. His muteness fairly maddened them. Kratz gave way to Birch, and Birch to a man named Davis; and Drake met each in turn, and all their numerous assistants, with the same blank wall of silence. He lost all count of time. By midnight he thought it must be morning; but when, after dragging eons, morning arrived, he could not credit its presence. Night had lasted so long that day was a revolutionary innovation, not lightly to be credited.

Through the day, he was merely kept

awake, with a certain amount of incidental grilling; but that night the inquisition was turned on in full force once more. Drake hardly knew what his questioners said. His whole mind had centered on the one task of holding his tongue. All that night the grilling lasted, and then for centuries of daylight; and then suddenly it stopped. Drake looked up, saw Ellison with the chief of police, heard his friend's indignant voice —and went to sleep. He did not waken when they carried him to a hotel and put him to bed.

## CHAPTER VII

LATE that afternoon Drake swam up from plumbless depths of slumber to find Ellison shaking his shoulder.

"Sorry to rouse you, boy," said the older man. "But there's a lot of work to do, and not too much time to do it. Take a shower; I'll have coffee here by the time you're through; and then we've got to talk. Starrett's coming—here he is, now."

Drake greeted the lawyer, stretched prodigiously, and vanished into the bathroom. When he reappeared, the cold spray had tautened his nerves and cleared his head, and while he dressed, they talked.

"When did they pinch you?" asked Ellison.

"Friday. What day is today?" countered Drake.

"Sunday. Then they had you two nights and one day. Did they get anything out of you with all that deviling?"

"They did not." Drake spoke between clenched teeth. "All I told 'em was to go to hell!"

"Bully!" exclaimed Starrett and Ellison in the same breath. The older man went on:

"No sleep, I suppose?"

"Not a wink."

"They didn't beat you?"

"No. They were aching to, but didn't seem to dare. I gathered they were afraid of what would happen when you got on the job. Now, tell me how you came to be here."

"That boy Frank, where you live, called me on long distance. Some one—I don't know who, yet—called me Saturday morning at our appointed time. Central had cut us off before I got to the phone, but they said it was a man's voice, so I supposed it was you, and that everything was all right. I ought to have known better," he added bitterly.

"Everything is all right," said Drake. "What next?"

"That cub—he can have a job with our firm any minute he wants one. He called up in the morning, but he wouldn't talk to anyone but me. I was out, motoring; and that blessed kid must have stuck close to the end of a wire till almost ten, when I got in. I went to the phone expecting to hear your voice, and found you were arrested; so I came."

"I see—no, I don't! There's no train at that hour; you couldn't get to Breeze Harbor in time—do you mean to tell me that you drove down here at night?"

"It had to be done," returned Ellison.

"You don't need to be surprised at anything like that," said Starrett. "He blew in here, routed the mayor out of bed, I suspect, made him come to the chief of police, and so we got you. You see, there isn't a formal charge against you yet, but they'll go before the grand jury tomorrow and ask for an indictment. When they get that, you may have to stay in confinement till you're cleared."

"In the hands of that same bunch?"

"Oh, no. You'll be in custody of the sheriff, and there'll be no more third-degree business; but I want to get everything you can tell me before you're locked up again. You really had some dealings with this shark Blenker, did you?"

"Yes," said Drake.

"Let me tell it," said Ellison, for Drake's breakfast had come, and the young man was looking at it hungrily. "If I make mistakes or leave out anything, Jimmy can take it up; but let him eat while he can."

So Ellison told, and not being a man of many mistakes, there were no corrections to make, though there were many additions before the lawyer settled back in his seat and shook his head.

"Talk about your cross-word puzzles!" he said. "This has 'em beaten, four ways. If Miss Ryan remembers what you've told her about the time and didn't discover that it was a fake, and if the other chap remembers when you got to his place, you're cleared, of course. If either one of 'em's forgotten, we're in for a tough little time."

"Suppose I go into court and tell the whole story, just as it happened, and as you've got it? What then?"

"It would be asking for conviction," re-

turned the lawyer. "No jury on earth would believe it."

"You and Mr. Ellison believe it."

"Yes. He believed it because he knew you, and I, partly because you certainly have every mark of a fellow who's telling the truth, but chiefly because I know him. You can't expect a jury to look at it that way."

"Well, let's see Miss Ryan," said Ellison. "I've got my car here, and we wont borrow trouble till we have to."

Miss Ryan was pale and nervous when they reached her, and plainly not yet in shape for work. Ellison stated the case, and she listened with wrinkling forehead.

"I—I'm very sorry," she said when he had finished. "But I—I don't remember the time!"

DRAKE sat motionless. He had borne so much that his sensibilities were dulled, but here was disaster. His carefully prepared alibi had dissolved, and his accidental innocence was no protection. He was caught in a net where truth was deadly and only a fake could save, and the lie he had told with such cunning foresight had been wiped from the brain to which it was committed by that cursed crash in the taxi. He heard Ellison's protest, heard the lawyer's suave encouragement; and then, with the tenacious grit which was at the bedrock of his nature, took a hand himself.

"Miss Ryan," he said, "do you remember the letters I dictated that morning?"

"One to Jenkins," she said at once. "One to Stall & Company—" This less positively and after a second's halt. "One, I think, to—those new process people—Markland. That's all."

"Not quite all," said Drake. "There was one to Shurtleff."

"I don't remember that," she answered.

No leading could get her past that point. She had recalled the letters in order; the first readily, the second not so readily, the third with difficulty—and the fourth not at all. They explained to her how much her testimony meant; but though this distressed her, it did not change her answers. "I wish I could remember. I've not a doubt it's just as you say," she said. "But I don't recall even asking you the time."

They left her at last to call on the doctor who had charge of her case. He heard them through, and shook his head.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that you're out of luck," he said. "It is not at all uncommon for a shock and concussion, such as happened to Miss Ryan, to wipe out the memory of events just preceding the accident. Sometimes the slate is rubbed clean for hours previous to the injury. I should say this is a case of that character."

"But she remembers Williams coming in, and going out to the car with him," protested Ellison.

"Naturally. She is engaged to Mr. Williams, and he has been away for some months. Naturally his coming made a stronger impression on her mind than the routine matters of the office. This question of the time was something even less than routine—a passing circumstance that might be forgotten without any shock."

"Is this loss of memory likely to continue?" asked Starrett.

"There's no telling. If you want a guess, which frankly is nothing more than a guess, I should say that after a time she will remember this letter you speak of, but that she will not recall asking you about the time. I'm really very sorry, gentlemen. I wish you had told the time to me. I should be perfectly willing to lie a little, under the circumstances; I've no doubt whatever that Mr. Drake is innocent, and I know from the experience of a patient that Blenker deserved killing, anyway. But Miss Ryan is morbidly conscientious; if she tried to persuade herself that she remembered, she'd break down in a minute."

"Oh, we wouldn't want her to try that," said Starrett.

"Wouldn't you?" said the doctor quizzically. "Well, I would, in your place. But it's no good."

THEY shook hands and left. On the sidewalk Starrett paused.

"Mr. Drake," he said, "the right thing for me to do in this case is to turn you over to Billy Wemblow. He'd get you off, and I'm not sure that I can."

"I want to be cleared, not just got off!" said Drake. "You stick to the case. Mr. Ellison, I ought to see Mrs. Bascom. It wont be easy to tell her—"

"It's in the morning papers," interrupted Ellison dryly. "I'll have to go with you, to keep my word to the chief; but I'll wait outside. Starrett and I can plot and conspire while you're in talking with the lady."

Starrett amended the proposal by saying that he had better go downtown and do a little looking up on one or two matters. They let him off at the nearest elevated station, and drove to Mrs. Bascom's apartment. She opened the door herself, drew him inside, gave him a hasty kiss, and then plunged into a cross-examination.

"Jimmy," she said, "did that awful man —have any letters that—that related to me?"

"Why, no," he answered, laughing a little. "What in the world put that notion in your head?"

"Sometimes people write things they've no business to—about others, I mean," she explained. "Are you sure he—he—"

"He never pretended to have anything that would bother you in any way," said Drake.

"But you said they weren't any letters that you'd written?" she protested.

"That's true," he said, wondering whither her mind was leading. Mrs. Bascom straightened in her chair; her fine brows drew together in a frown, and when she spoke again, her voice was sharp and metallic:

"Jimmy Drake, have you been paying money to keep that pencil-pusher out of trouble?"

"What in Sam Hill are you talking about?" demanded Drake.

"I'm talking about that red-headed stenographer in your office! Come to think of it, I remember you were mighty upset when she got a little bump in a taxi!"

"For heaven's sake, Cora, don't be silly!" he exclaimed. "Miss Ryan has nothing to do with this—except that the little bump you speak of has jarred her so she can't remember something that would clear me in ten minutes. Those letters were written by somebody I knew before I ever saw you."

"How many times have you seen her since?"

Drake rose. "I really haven't time for any more of this," he said. "Since you ask, I haven't seen her for three years. I fancy I was to blame for the misunderstanding between us—and that's the last question on that subject I ever shall answer. Good night!"

He stalked out to the car where Ellison waited. The older man, after a shrewd look, put his arm across Drake's shoulder and told the driver: "Home."

## CHAPTER VIII

DRAKE was arrested the next day, formally charged with Blenker's murder. Starrett immediately moved to get him released on bail. Contrary to the common belief, bail is often granted in murder cases, unless the presumption of cold-blooded, deliberate slaughter is overwhelming, which certainly was not so in this instance. But the city had been having a crime-wave of more than usual proportions, and public indignation against favors to accused persons was running high; so the best Starrett could get was the privilege of arguing the case ten days later. Meantime, Drake must stay in jail.

While he was having this enforced leisure, Starrett and Ellison were scheming mightily to clear him. They had the advantage of knowing the police case perfectly, for the administration paper, declaring Drake's arrest to be a triumph of detective work, had obligingly told the grounds on which the State would seek a conviction. Drake admitted being blackmailed by Blenker; yet no letter or paper in any way furnishing basis for such blackmail had been found in the vast mass of compromising material which had been discovered in Blenker's office and vaults. The inference was that Drake had carried away the incriminating documents after killing Blenker. Mrs. Carson could swear to hearing Drake's voice in the inner office just a few minutes before finding the body, and an elevator man in the Tonty Building, where Ellison & Company were located, remembered taking down the "accused" at half-past ten on the morning of the murder. And there was other evidence, the paper declared, to be revealed at the trial.

"Do you suppose that other evidence is a bluff?" asked Ellison.

"Maybe, but we can't bank on it," returned Starrett. "If only Miss Ryan could remember what she was told!"

"Yes, if," said Ellison. "I see they've released that Driggs chap."

"Naturally. If they're going to prosecute Drake, they've no reason to hold anyone else. There's no claim that more than one was involved in the killing."

"It struck me," said Ellison slowly, "that this Carson person was more than a little interested in seeing to it that Lumpy Driggs was not held. Remember how she spoke up for him that first time?"

"Yes," said Starrett. An indexed file

of clippings on the case lay before him, and he consulted it as he spoke. "Yes," he repeated, after reading a moment. "She was pretty positive, but that might be just anxiety to save an innocent man from annoyance."

"I'm not much impressed with Mrs. Carson as a defender of innocence," retorted Ellison. "There's something queer about that burglar story she told, too. And she's lying now; that's certain. Drake vows he did not utter a syllable in the office that day, and I believe him."

"So do I. He'd be a rotten liar, that fellow. If we put him on the stand,—and I'm afraid we'll have to,—he'll blurt out the whole story, and no jury alive will believe it. But as to Mrs. Carson: she's clearly got a grudge against Drake. If we can prove that, it will discount her testimony. The McGovern detective agency has done some investigating for me, and always played square. I'll get Mac over here, if you say so, and see what he can do."

"Go ahead," said Ellison, pushing the phone across the table. The lawyer called his number, gave his message, and settled back in his chair.

"There's another thing I must do," he said while waiting. "I must go to Blenker's office, and then try to see how soon I can get to Levinson's store without a taxi. From what Drake tells me, Mrs. Carson hasn't given our desperate criminal time enough to make the trip. What's the matter?" he added, for Ellison had given a short, mirthless laugh.

"Make your experiment, but don't count on it," was the answer. "Levinson told me the police have seen him and asked him about the time. You'll find Mrs. Carson will set the date far enough back to tally."

McGOVERN came, a smooth-shaven, ruddy-faced man of sixty, completely commonplace in appearance, save for a pair of twinkling blue eyes. He heard the story through, took notes, asked a couple of questions, and then gave his preliminary verdict.

"Chief trouble with this case is that it covers too much territory. Everybody that had dealings with Blenker had reason to wish him dead. All of 'em can't be guilty. But what's the matter with Mrs. Carson taking a crack at him herself? Anybody looked up her alibi?"

Nobody had, and the other two men, amateurs in criminal affairs, looked at each other foolishly.

"Mind you, I don't think she did it," said McGovern, rolling his cigar to the other corner of his mouth. "Women don't often use a knife. It has happened, though, and she's a hard-boiled old bird, if ever there was one. Point is, she had a better chance than anybody else, and if she can't clear her skirts by an airtight alibi, her testimony goes flooey."

"Guess you'd better go ahead, Mac, and do anything you think necessary," said Starrett. Ellison confirmed the commission with a nod. McGovern shifted his cigar again, and spoke:

"This list of seven names you've given me is mighty funny. I know five of 'em, and they're all crooks. That aint all, either. This Nolan bird died on his last stretch in the pen; they let him out a week before he cashed in with *t. b.* He'd swindled a firm that employs me, so I helped get the evidence that sent him over the road; and where do you suppose I got most of it?"

The listeners shook their heads. McGovern gave a chuckle, and answered his own question:

"I got it from Blenker. That's the old boy that turned Slick up. I never knew why. Then when Slick dies, Blenker rules him off in red ink. It's mighty funny. Wonder if this was his goat list?"

"I don't know what to make of it," said Ellison, and Starrett nodded.

"That makes three that don't know, then," said McGovern. "Well, I'll see what we can do. First one I'm going after is that chap that gave the chattel mortgage Drake swiped. We know he was around not long before the thing happened. Then I'll see what kind of a line I can get on Mrs. Carson. But it looks to me as if the best you can do is to raise a reasonable doubt."

"That's not good enough," said Ellison.

"Better'n conviction, aint it?" asked McGovern, who was a realist.

"Doesn't the use of a knife look as if some foreigner did the work?" struck in Starrett.

"No," said McGovern. "They use a knife on the other side, but that's one business where they get Americanized, real quick. I can't think of a foreign killing in a year that was done with a sticker; it's always a gun. No, looks to me as if this knife was used just to fog up the case, and that means some good thinking."

## CHAPTER IX

IT was a week before McGovern made a report, and then he called by phone, asking if he could meet both Starrett and Ellison. An appointment was made at the latter's office, and when the time came, McGovern entered, piloting a worried-looking man of middle age.

"This is Mr. Kazmierski, gentlemen," said McGovern. "Mr. Starrett, the lawyer; Mr. Ellison, the man who owns this office. You don't need to be afraid of either of them; they'll play fair with you. Now, tell them what you told me, about Mrs. Carson."

"I see her," said the man, twisting his cap in his hands.

"Who was with her?" asked McGovern.

"That man—him." The witness pointed to a picture of Lumpy Driggs which McGovern had taken from his pocket.

"Where did you see them?"

"Blenker place. She give him money."

"All right; now just go ahead, and tell how it happened."

"Me, I'm night watchman," explained Kazmierski. "Got job now, long time out o' work. No job, no good; lots o' kids. My wife, she get sick."

"And then?" prompted McGovern as the man paused.

"Two—t'ree day before Blenker, he get kill'—mebbe week before, I go there. Want money. Blenker out. She there, Mis' Cars'."

"Mrs. Carson was there," repeated McGovern. "Go on."

"He there, too, this man,"—pointing again to the picture of Lumpy Driggs. "They got row, talk ugly. Not big talk—ugly. She tell me go way, wait. He tell me get hell out. I go—wait down by stairs. Purt' soon, he come down, stuffin' money in pants. Go out. I wait Blenker come. I go in; he give me little money; lots note, me gotta pay. Want writing—my furn'ture. Damn' bad business."

The listeners agreed; a stenographer was called in, and the gist of Mr. Kazmierski's remarks taken down and verified. Then he departed, happy with a ten-dollar bill. McGovern turned to his clients.

"We can prove that the old dame lied when she said Driggs hadn't been there. He's an ex-convict; he was hanging round. That makes another suspect to fog things up; worth something."

"Yes, if we can't get anything better," agreed Starrett. "I'd like it a lot more if it weren't for that money Mr. Driggs was stuffing in his pants. That makes it look as if one blackmailer were bleeding another, and the jury will think so too."

"Still, it's something," insisted McGovern. "It's all I got, too. The Carson's got an alibi that we may dent a little, but I don't think we can break it. As for her past history: she's a widow; her husband kept a little store out on the West Side, where he died eight or ten years ago. They had a cat-and-dog time, I guess. She worked for Blenker even before her husband died; but they were married when they came there, and I can't find out a thing about her. Carson hailed from Pennsylvania—I got a line on him; but Mrs. Carson's a mystery. I'm inclined to think he got her through some matrimony ad. They had no children."

"Well, keep after it, and get anything you can," said Ellison. He ushered his callers to the door, and stopped, staring at a young woman who rose from a chair in the outer office, where she had been waiting for him.

"WHY, how do you do, Ruth!" he exclaimed, offering his hand and signaling a warning with his eyes. He held the door for her till she passed and closed it behind him as he followed. Then he bowed with old-fashioned courtliness, and spoke in a lower tone.

"Forgive me for using your Christian name," he said. "I don't want any of the force to know that Miss Stanton is back. They might let it slip to the police."

"Don't the police know it now?" she demanded.

"I don't think so. Drake is sure they don't know your name. The letters were gone, and he thinks Carson forgot it."

"Forget? Not much. She's holding it back for her own reasons. How is he?"

"Jimmy? He's perfectly well. In a bad fix, of course."

"I know," she said with a brief nod. "It's all my fault. That's why I've come."

"Don't you think it was rash?" asked Ellison.

"I don't care, and please don't scold—about that." She dabbed at her brown eyes with a handkerchief, but went on at once: "Jimmy—Mr. Drake—is in trouble, through my foolishness, and I had to come. There must be something I can do. If nothing else, why, this."

She opened the bag at her wrist, fished out a bundle of bills and laid them on the desk.

"There's a thousand dollars, and you're to take it and use it for—Mr. Drake, and not say a word to him about it. And now tell me what else there is I can do."

"I always did like you, Ruth," said Ellison, after a moment's pause. "That doesn't change my belief that you ought to be spanked. You've rushed here in just the same headlong way that you wrote those fool letters—"

"Not quite," said Ruth, flushing. "So Jimmy told you? Well, it's all right; I don't see how he could help it."

"He told me nothing, except that the letters were four years old," said Ellison. "I could put two and two together for the rest. Jimmy's a gentleman."

"Thoroughbred!" agreed the young woman. "But you haven't told me what there is I can do."

"I'm afraid the best thing you can do is to take the first train out of town, before the police connect you with Drake. You see, their case is weak on the motive side, just now. It wouldn't be, if they got one look at you."

"You've kissed the Blarney stone!" retorted Ruth. "Is—Mrs. Bascom—standing by Jimmy in this trouble?"

"Not the way you are," he returned.

"Well, she hasn't the same reason," said Ruth. There was silence for a minute before Ellison said:

"You haven't asked yet whether Jimmy's guilty."

"Oh, I know he isn't," was the cool reply. "He wouldn't stab anybody in the back. If they'd found the old—bloodsucker choked to death or with his neck broken, I'd think Jimmy might have done it—but not a knife, from behind. He must have been there, though, to get those letters."

"I don't see that it's necessary to tell you much," grumbled Ellison. He did tell, however. Ruth heard him through without a word.

"The blessed—gentleman!" she said, when the recital was finished. "Wiping off that knife-handle! That's just like him! And I knew it, all the time, and still—"

"Now, no post mortems!" said Ellison. "Things aren't as black as they look, for either Jimmy or you. Now, take this money, go find a place to stay quietly—I can see it would be cruel to send you out of the city. And let me hear from you by phone. Don't come here again, but phone me, and I'll see you."

"All right," said the girl. "I'll go—but the money stays here."

## CHAPTER X

WHEN it came time to argue the motion to admit Drake to bail, Starrett received an unofficial message from the State's Attorney's office. If he would give his personal word to let the case come to trial early in the October term of court, no particular objection to bail would be offered. Otherwise the prosecution would fight any such leniency. Starrett resented such an arbitrary attitude.

"Oh, take him at his word!" said Drake. "It's worth something to be back at the desk for a while. Besides, we'll be as near ready for trial in October as we're ever likely to be."

"I'm not so sure," demurred Starrett. "This is a mighty complicated case."

"Not a bit. This case is the essence of simplicity," retorted Drake. "It consists entirely of one damned unforeseen incident after another, and it's going on just that way to the end. Nothing has happened as anybody expected, and nothing will. I appreciate everything you've done, but I'll bet a new hat you'll change your plan of defense at least twice after you get in the courtroom! Come, now!"

"He may be right, at that," said Ellison as the lawyer shook his head. "Even if things go against us—which I wont admit—there's always an appeal."

"All right," said Starrett. "We'll accept." The bail was fixed at a hundred thousand dollars, and Drake went back to the office, free—on a string.

THE weeks that followed settled quickly into a routine—difficult, but not wholly unpleasant. Drake went about his business as usual, save for an added grim determination that brought results. Outside office hours, however, he could not pick up the threads where they had been dropped. The break between himself and Mrs. Bascom widened instead of closing. He asked permission to call as soon as released, and it was granted; but his reception was a cool one. Truth was, the lady had made up her mind to break the engagement, but having some decent sport-

ing instincts, did not mean to do so until Drake was cleared. He read her design with little trouble, and wondered why he cared so little.

With Ruth the case was different. Ellison had told the young man of her coming, and Drake received the news with a mixture of dismay and gratitude which soon fused into a strong desire to renew the acquaintance. This, of course, could not be considered. Ruth found a position with a firm for which she had worked some years before; but she and Drake did not meet, write or even phone each other. Ellison, however, did not need to be so careful of his movements, and he was ready, not to say eager, to play John Alden without the results likely to happen to a younger emissary.

"A girl who'll come back, ready to face that kind of music for the sake of fair play, is worth tying to," he insisted.

"There never was anything wrong with Ruth's pluck and loyalty," answered Drake. "But you have to get the lady's consent to do any tying, you know, and one isn't always at liberty—"

"Bosh!" interrupted Ellison. "Sometimes I think the younger generation has let its nerve all run to impudence!"

THE case continued to display its erratic, baffling character. McGovern brought in some information that was of value, but nothing that was decisive. Mrs. Carson's story of her movements on the "fatal day" was not entirely convincing, but there were no gaps that could be made obvious to a jury. Her earlier life still remained a complete mystery. One witness was found who could testify to overhearing a bitter quarrel between Mrs. Carson and Blenker, but that was more than a year before. Mrs. Carson, according to this person, had told Blenker that he ought to have his throat cut, and that some day, what he deserved would come to him!

"We're going to win or lose by accident," said Drake to Ellison the night before the trial was to begin. "Starrett's doing all any man can, and he'll take advantage of any break that comes; but the gods are playing their cards too close for us to get a peek at them."

"It certainly looks that way," agreed Ellison.

"No matter how it goes, I want you to know that I appreciate the way you've stood by me," went on Drake. "Not one man in a million would do it. And please tell Ruth the same."

"Tell her yourself!" retorted Ellison. "You'll be free to do it—free in both ways—I wont admit the chance of anything else."

Ruth wanted to see and hear something of the trial, and finding that Mrs. Bascom was not to be present on the opening day, Ellison called for the young woman in his car. McGovern was with him, come to see if anything would give him a clue which he might follow to advantage; and Ellison left them sitting together when he returned to the office. The process of selecting a jury was not highly exciting, and Ruth's attention soon strayed to the spectators in the courtroom. Presently she nudged McGovern and whispered a question:

"Who is that woman with the black hat and the high cheekbones, over here, to the right?"

"That's Mrs. Carson," answered McGovern, following her pointing finger. "What's the matter?" he added as Ruth gave a start.

"Have you got a picture of that Driggs?" she asked in a tense whisper.

"Guess so. Why?" He began digging in his pockets without waiting for an answer. "Here it is," he added, laying an excellent newspaper photo on the girl's knee. She stared at it, then looked at Mrs. Carson for a long minute, then turned on McGovern as if she were minded to shake him.

"Are all men blind?" she demanded. "Let's get out of here! Quick!" McGovern led the way outside; she backed him into a recess in the long hallway, and told him something that made his jaw drop and put a look of unalloyed pleasure in his twinkling eyes.

"Holy mackerel!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure!" she snapped. "Now, for goodness' sake, hurry out and get the proof of it!"

## CHAPTER XI

STARRETT was no hand to boggle over the selection of a jury, but when he got McGovern's message asking for time, he began to comb the venire more carefully as the easiest method of delay. The assistant State's Attorney, cocky, con-

ceited and spoiling for an argument on anything, played straight into the older lawyer's hands, and the afternoon ended with only three jurors chosen. Then, for the first time, Starrett learned the reason for the request, and whistled.

"How much more time do you want?" he asked.

"Tomorrow ought to be enough," said McGovern.

THE jury was completed at the end of the next day, Wednesday; Thursday morning the work of trial began. The assistant State's Attorney outlined his case. The State would prove that James Drake was a murderer. They would prove the motive—the prisoner was being blackmailed by the man now dead. They would prove opportunity. Finally, they would produce a witness who heard the prisoner's voice in Blenker's office at about the time of the crime, and another who saw him leaving some minutes later. The jury must remember that murder is murder, no matter what the character of the victim. Blenker was a blackmailer; but that did not give the accused the right to strike him down, to stab him cruelly from behind. . . . .

The strident voice rasped on, while the jury, after the first two minutes, turned to study the prisoner, and the prisoner sat with a face as expressionless as that of a wooden Indian, and Mr. Starrett polished his nails and now and then tried—not too arduously—to conceal a yawn. Then the first witness was called, Dan Birch. He told of the hurry-up call to Blenker's office, of the finding and position of the body, identified the knife, the nail-file, gave the history of his search of the premises and his call on Drake. Mr. Starrett seemed scarcely interested when he began cross-examination.

"Did you find any fingerprints on this nail-file?"

"No sir."

"Had they been wiped away?"

"No, not like the knife-handle was." Drake's face maintained its gravity with some effort.

"You could see," volunteered Birch, "there'd been prints on the file, but they was blurred, as if some one had stepped on it, maybe."

"I see. What did Mr. Drake say when you showed him this file?"

"He said it looked like his."

"But it wasn't his?"

"Well, he had another one in his pocket, just like it."

"Did you think he was in the habit of carrying nail-files in pairs?"

"I don't suppose so."

"Did Mr. Drake hedge or dodge or try to hide anything when you were interviewing him?"

"N-no,"—with manifest reluctance.

"He very meanly and perversely refused to act like a guilty man, eh?"

The State's Attorney sprang up. Starrett stood smiling at the jury as if asking them to overlook the bumptiousness of his young opponent, and when the wrangle was over, began again;

"Did my client show any nervousness or fear when you talked with him?"

"No!" said Birch emphatically. "You couldn't scare that guy." A subdued giggle went around the room, in which Starrett joined.

"No," he agreed, "you couldn't, I guess, while he's innocent. That's all."

Two or three witnesses followed who were not cross-questioned, and then came the elevator man. He gave his evidence glibly, but with many furtive side-glances.

"You say that Mr. Drake, here, rode down with you at half-past ten that morning?" asked Starrett on cross-examination.

"Yes sir."

"How do you know the time so exactly?"

"I just happened to notice it."

"Do you notice the time that every tenant of the building goes in and out?"

"No, but I noticed this."

"Where did you work before coming to the Tonty Building as elevator man?"

"On the West Side."

"In what building?"

"The Nonesuch."

"What trouble did you get into there?" A hot wrangle followed, but the question was admitted in modified form, and the witness answered, reluctantly:

"I—they said I—made hooch."

"Who said so?"

"The—the judge."

"And you went to jail for thirty days?"

"Yes sir."

"Were there other charges against you of the same sort?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Mr. Skobel, knowing your record, how long did it take the police to get you to remember that Mr. Drake came down at half-past ten?"

The State objected and was sustained, but the jury exchanged knowing grins.

WHEN Mrs. Carson was called, Starrett looked round. McGovern was not where he should have been, standing just inside the door. Indeed, he was not in the room at all; and frowning slightly, the lawyer turned back to pay heed to the State's star witness. He had to admit that she was a convincing liar. Her tale was plausible in itself and well told beside; she referred to Blenker as the "poor man" or the "poor, dear man;" she exhibited dramatic fear of Drake. Some of her histrionics were rather crude, but plainly they were effective with the jury; and when, after identifying the note in which Blenker expressed some dread of the young man he was blackmailing, she began to weep, several jurors cleared their throats in sympathy. Her identification of Drake's voice as that which she had heard in the inner office was of the most positive kind.

"What kind of an employer did you find Mr. Blenker?" asked Starrett.

"Very good and considerate," was the answer, and the witness drew her thin lips a little tighter, as if to make sure that they should let slip nothing by chance.

"Never found fault?"

"Never!"

"I don't suppose he ever had occasion to with you?"

"He never did."

"Did you ever have a quarrel with him?"

"No, indeed! Why should I?"

"Oh, it's nothing unusual to have a run-in with the boss. Didn't you ever have cross words with Blenker?"

"Never once!"

"Mrs. Carson!" Starrett stepped a pace nearer and his voice hardened. "Did you ever tell Blenker that he ought to have his throat cut, and some day he would get it?"

The drowsing courtroom was galvanized to fresh life at the query. The State's Attorney objected, apparently to give his witness time to win back her poise, was overruled, Starrett pressed the question and the woman licked her dry lips as she answered: "No!"

"Better think a minute before you let that answer stand," suggested Starrett. "What about it, now?"

"I never said any such thing."

"Um! What was your maiden name, Mrs. Carson?"

More objections. Meanwhile Starrett was looking anxiously around the courtroom. What the devil was the matter with McGovern, anyway? The court overruled the objection, and Mrs. Carson stated that her maiden name was Smith. The audience chuckled. Out of the tail of his eye, the lawyer saw McGovern squeezing through the press at the door, and asked abruptly:

"How many children have you, Mrs. Carson?"

"I haven't any."

"Mrs. Carson, you have a son who goes by the name of Lumpy Driggs. How did he come to have that name?"

A paper was thrust into Starrett's hand as he spoke, but he kept his eyes riveted on the witness. Her face was ghastly, and she shrank back in the chair until, with her long nose and gray hair and protruding teeth and little eyes dancing with fear and fury, she looked the image of a she-wolf at bay. The State's Attorney blustered and bristled with objections. They were overruled, and Mrs. Carson answered hoarsely:

"Driggs is not my son!"

"You know him?"

"Yes."

"But you deny that he is your son?"

"I object to this browbeating of witnesses!" exclaimed the State's Attorney virtuously. Starrett smiled, and for the first time, glanced at the roll that had been thrust into his hand. It was a newspaper—one of those morning editions of an evening paper that drop from the presses hour by hour. Half opening it, he caught sight of a name; and then the judge's voice was heard, ordering the cross-examination to proceed. Mrs. Carson repeated her denial that Lumpy was her offspring. Starrett opened the paper, gave a slight start, pondered a moment, and spoke in a softened, regretful tone:

"Mrs. Carson, I am sorry to bring you bad news, but—read that!"

He held up the paper in such a position that several of the jury could read it too. Across the top of the page in three-inch letters ran the legend: "EX-CONVICT KILLED WHILE RESISTING ARREST!" and below, in a smaller head, only two columns wide, the words: "LUMPY DRIGGS SHOT TO DEATH!"

The State's Attorney was shouting objections when Mrs. Carson slumped from her chair in a faint.

## CHAPTER XII

THE courtroom hummed like a beehive when the noon recess was taken. This was something like; this was drama, the thing that, with a bit of juicy scandal now and then, paid court fans for their patient vigils through days of dull arguments and duller detailed testimony. The blackmailer's aid had a convict son—and who knew that son's father? Blenker was nominated freely for the position; but others, while having no substitute candidate, pointed out that there was nothing to show that Blenker and the woman had met until the boy was a youth in his 'teens. Anyway, it was a crackerjack story, and there'd be more to follow.

"They'll never convict that young fellow now," declared one speaker.

"No, but he's guilty, just the same," said another.

Both remarks carried to Drake's ears. He knew that they represented public opinion. As matters stood, he felt sure of an acquittal; but it would be for lack of convicting evidence, not because the jury believed him innocent. Unless Mrs. Carson, now that the son she was protecting had died, should confess that he was the guilty man— That hope ended before it found words; she could not make such a confession without owning herself an accessory; and she would hate Drake for the loss of her boy. He stared ahead, unseeing; and suddenly became aware that a tall figure had moved into the field of his vision. His eyes came to focus with a start, and he recognized the tall countryman with whom he had discussed dogs on what Mrs. Carson called the "fatal day." The man smiled and bowed; he seemed waiting for some one. Drake went out in custody of a deputy sheriff, leaving Ellison and Starrett in conference.

Outside the courtroom, Drake suddenly laughed aloud.

"What's so funny?" demanded his guardian.

"Oh," said Drake, "I bet my lawyer that he'd have to change his plan of defense twice after the trial started. He's done it, already, and now I'm going to bet him that he'll change again."

WHEN court reconvened, the prosecution had only one important witness, the man who claimed to have seen Drake leaving the neighborhood of Blenker's office. His identification was by no means so positive as the State could wish. Starrett spoke aside to the State's Attorney, who stared, apparently suspicious of a trap, but finally nodded. The defense thereupon waived further cross-examination of Mrs. Carson, who was reported ill and unable to take the stand, and the State rested its case.

Starrett rose.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "when I took this case, I knew that my client could not be convicted; but I saw no way in which he could be completely vindicated. I have heard remarks in this courtroom, indicating that spectators held the same view. They see that the State's case is far too weak to justify a conviction, but they believe my client guilty.

"I am confident that they will not hold that view more than half an hour longer, however.

"The State says that this murder was committed between eleven o'clock, and eleven-fifteen. Their whole case rests on that matter of dates. The evidence of their hooch-maker, Skobel, and their blackmailer's aid, Mrs. Carson, all converges to that brief span of minutes. We accept the State's timing, and we ask you to realize what that means. Either my client, Mr. Drake, killed Blenker between eleven and a quarter past eleven on the morning in question, or he did not kill him at all. —Mr. Walters!"

The big, brown-faced man who had joked Drake about walking under a ladder came forward and took the stand.

"Your name?" asked Starrett.

"Frank Walters."

"Your address?"

"Caverley Hotel. My home is in Deaconport."

"Your business?"

"I breed Percheron horses. The Deaconport Percheron farms belong to my family and myself."

"How large are those farms?"

"About three thousand acres."

"Did you exhibit at the last stock show in this city?"

"Yes sir. We took the draft-horse sweepstakes."

"Do you know the defendant?"

"Yes sir—by sight, that is."

"When did you first meet him?"

"On June twenty-third, this year."

"The day of the crime?"

"Yes sir."

"State the circumstances."

"Why, I had nothing to do for half an hour, and was loafing along, watching windows and people, when this man came by. He walked under a ladder, and I joked him about it—most folks think that brings bad luck. We got to talking, mostly about the puppies in an animal-store there."

"How long did you talk?"

"Between five and ten minutes. It was just a quarter past eleven when we separated."

"How do you come to know the time?"

"He looked at his watch, said he had business over the river, and walked that way. I looked at my watch, and then at the clock in the jewelry store window next door, to see if I had the right time."

"And you found your watch correct, and the time was a quarter past eleven?"

"Yes sir."

"Take the witness."

"Had you ever seen the defendant before?" asked the State's Attorney.

"No sir."

"Do you often talk with chance strangers?"

"Yes sir," said the big man, with a grin that the jury gave back. "It's a small-town habit, but I've never got over it."

TWO or three more questions were asked, and then the witness was dismissed. Drake sat fairly stunned. This man whom he had not seen till an hour after finding Blenker's body was giving him an unbreakable alibi! It was the climax, the capsheaf of the succession of unforeseen incidents, unexpected happenings, that had dogged his footsteps, for good and for ill, since the moment when he gave a fake time to Miss Ryan and set out for the blackmailer's den. He heard a low-toned colloquy, and then the case was submitted to the jury without argument. The judge's charge was of the briefest; the jury filed out; and in barely the time required to smoke a pipe and take a ballot was back with a verdict: *"Not Guilty!"*

Even in that brief wait Drake had learned of Ruth's recognition of the blood kinship between Mrs. Carson and Lumpy Driggs, and of the abortive effort to bring the latter into the courtroom. Undoubtedly it was he who had killed Blenker, and the reason was plain; he had cheated Blenker in a dirty deal they had worked together, and the wily old blackmailer had sent Driggs up for one prison term and was threatening to send him again. "Just like Slick Nolan," explained McGovern. "That was old Blenker's goat list, the fellows he was out to get. I had that hunch at the start, if you remember, and didn't follow it up."

"I remember," said Ellison.

DRAKE thanked the jurymen for their verdict and Starrett for his defense, pressed Ellison's hand in a grip that meant more than words, and went out. At the door a uniformed messenger handed him a package addressed in Mrs. Bascom's writing. He knew what was inside it, the engagement ring he had given her, and doubtless a totally superfluous note. Well, he was glad of it; and when Ellison came and took him to see Ruth, he would be gladder still; and then, just ahead and plainly waiting for him, he saw Walters.

"I—I don't know how to thank you," he began, which was the literal truth. "Folks always would have thought I was guilty if you hadn't given that evidence in my favor."

"Well, I didn't give it till I was sure you were innocent," returned the big man. "Sometime, when you've nothing much to do, I'd like the real story of your movements that day. You were at the old scoundrel's office, I know. By the way, have you destroyed that notebook yet?"

"Wh-what?" gasped Drake.

"Blenker got his hooks into a nephew of mine," said the big man, "and was bleeding him proper till the kid called me in. I went to see Blenker, and told him if he ever cheeped again, I'd break his back across my knee. That's when I saw the notebook that was working out of your pocket that day—I didn't place it till you'd gone."

"But—you testified—you said—" Drake floundered helplessly.

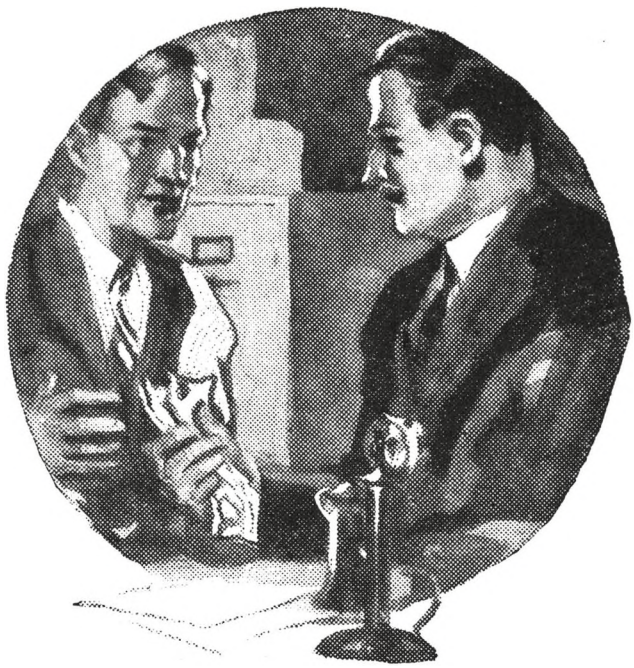
"I did, and I told the truth. Wasn't necessary to tell anything else, thanks to that smart-aleck State's Attorney. I wonder if he'll ever think of the joker?"

"What's that?" asked Drake.

"Daylight saving," said Walters. "You see, my watch kept real time, sun time. It showed a quarter past eleven when your watch and that jeweler's clock were calling it a quarter past twelve."

**"McKeever's Dinosaur," the strange, strange story of a prehistoric monster made into a household pet, will be Dr. Knapp's contribution to an early issue.**

*This Real Experience in business has some surprises in it that lend special interest. Perhaps you yourself could contribute a prize-winning true story of business life.*



# The Eskimos Buy Ice

By **R. A. Jacks**

IF the good folk who are interested in reclaiming men who go wrong, would abandon all the schemes they propose and concentrate on one reform, I am certain a larger percentage of prison graduates would go straight.

Give the paroled or discharged convict a suit of clothes made by a real tailor, instead of the terrible bags now the fashion in the checking-out rooms of penitentiaries, and the departing guest will at least get a job before some detective begins to make his life miserable.

Had Billy Webber been decently attired on his graduation from Joliet, he would not have found it necessary to invade St. Joe and turn the rays of his confidence man's talents on me, a country editor.

He could have done business with a banker and, perhaps, made more money.

What a salesman Webber was!

Ten minutes after he had entered the shabby office of my country weekly, the *Rail Splitter*, I had declined five different proposals.

Three of them were old. A couple of them were new to me, even after twenty years in metropolitan newspaper work, with its varied experience of humankind.

I laughed at him. I knew those prison clothes and recognized him as a confidence man of the first water. Still, newspaper work is, in a way, a bit of a "con game." The writers always are dressing up old stories to appear new. One hesitates to hurt the feelings of a fellow-worker in the same vineyard. So I was diplomatic.

Casually I mentioned my former connection with a newspaper in the city in which he had been sentenced to prison. He thereupon discovered to me the versatility of his art.

"I get you," he remarked. "You know the game. You probably know me. I'll come clean. I'm just out of stir, and I'm broke. Also I'm hungry. Give me the chance to make the price of a meal, anyhow."

FEW are immune to the flattery of being classified as "wise guys." I was not. Gladly I would have given him a helping hand had I not been shackled by troubles of my own. These were no secret, so I unveiled them to him.

I had purchased the newspaper property some seven months before. The price was ten thousand dollars. Making an initial payment of five thousand I had agreed to pay one thousand every six months until the balance, including accrued interest, was paid.

In an attempt to run a clean, honest, fearless publication, I had run afoul of a group of men, negligible as intellects or human beings, but rich as wealth is measured in the rural districts, and consequently influential. Note-shaving and petty predatory politics were their means of increasing their substance.

My predecessor had been their mouthpiece, and had fattened somewhat on the crumbs they overlooked. I opposed them. Because of their power to shut off my credit with the local banks, I was being strangled to financial death.

Credits in the country run a long time. Settlements are made once a year, seldom more frequently. Subscriptions sometimes are allowed to run for five or six years before the farmer gets around to pay the country editor. Country editors, nevertheless, must pay their paper and supply bills every sixty days. Pay-rolls must be paid weekly. I had a comparatively large pay-roll, because five weeklies, for as many towns, were issued from my St. Joe plant.

Because my bank loans had been cut off, I had been compelled to exhaust every friendly resource outside my trade territory to raise the money for the first installment on my mortgage.

"You see," I told Webber, "you're not the only one who can spin a hard-luck yarn."

Yet, feeling I could let no man go from my door hungry, I invited him to my home for supper and to pass the night, and gave him a five-dollar bill.

"I've been up against it in several parts of this world," I told him, "and five dollars more or less will make little difference when the grand smash comes."

After the evening meal we talked. The peculiarities of rural life were new to him. I pointed out that in the matters of food and shelter the rustic population extended the same careless credit they demanded for themselves in all business dealings.

That fact intrigued him. He wanted to become a salesman for me. I assured him that a salesman would starve to death trying to sell printing for a country shop.

"If I were broke at the North Pole," he told me, "I'd sell ice to the Eskimos. So long as you can get credit for food, you can board me, so I'll not starve until we can collect some cash on my business."

I warned him that I might be forced out of business before we collected the money to pay his commission, but that did not disturb him.

"Please let me worry about my commissions," he insisted. "Give me a list of what you have to sell, the best prices you can offer for quantity orders, and turn me loose. I believe I can make enough money to give me a new start and at the same time pull you out of the hole."

A WEEK after he began operations, the shop was swamped with work. Night and day I kept a force of printers going, but the wizardry of Webber's salesmanship kept the demand ahead of the production. By some magic he did enough cash business to meet his own road expenses and the pay-roll. But as I had feared, the bulk of the business was on long-term credit.

The city business man, required to wait a long time for the farmer to pay, demands the same long credit from the country editor. In two months our bills receivable were well over the twenty-five-thousand-dollar mark. Every account was gilt-edged, but I knew that long before they paid, the mortgage-holder would foreclose. I, at least, never would profit from Webber's activity. My stock of raw material was about exhausted.

I did not want to order any more, for I knew I couldn't raise the cash to pay for it before the ruin of my business hopes.

"It's no use," I told Webber. "I can't raise the cash. I haven't the stock to fill any more orders. Put in a claim for your commission; I'll take a bankruptcy, and maybe I can salvage carfare to New York or Chicago."

"All right," he laughed. "Let's quit selling. The books show the firm to be perfectly solvent. Let's incorporate the business before you give up."

I could see no reason for incorporating a failure. It made no difference to me whether the men who cut off my loans—so necessary to any business man required to extend credit—ruined me as an individual or as a corporation. Yet Webber sold me the idea, as he sold everything he undertook to sell.

"We'll pass the corporation off as a new owner, and maybe we can collect some cash," he said.

He was amazingly familiar with every detail of corporation law, and in a week or so my little plant became "The St. Joe Printing and Publishing Co., Inc.," with capital stock of twenty-five thousand dollars. I protested against incorporating for so large a sum a property valued at ten thousand, in which I had an actual equity of only six thousand.

He assured me that the accounts on the books, although slow of collection, plus "good will" based on his own phenomenal sales, plus the actual physical value of the plant, made the incorporation valuation perfectly legal.

I let him have his way. The affair was too involved for my meager knowledge of financing.

FOR two months after that I seldom saw him. Now and then he sent a cash order for printing, but he seemed to avoid St. Joe. The second installment on my mortgage soon would be due. I was informed by the holder—on instructions from my enemies, I knew—that if it was not paid on the minute, he would foreclose.

Incidentally, in trying to drum up a little business, more through force of habit than because it would do me any good, I learned that my property, even had I not incurred the hostility of the men who shut off my bank credits, would provide only a hand-to-mouth living at best. I had been "stung." The hostility I had stirred merely hastened the loss of my savings. I would have sacrificed them anyhow, rather than continue the hopeless grind operation of the property would be.

Webber's remarkable selling had been accomplished by gathering several years' business in a couple of months. He had loaded every possible customer of the shop with enough printing to last for years. I found, too, that he had assured them they might pay for it over a period of years. It was uncanny salesmanship, but it had saturated the territory. The printing shop, in so far as commercial work was concerned, might as well close.

A WEEK before my installment became due, Webber appeared. He radiated prosperity.

"Guess you'd begun to think I was a poor collector," he remarked, adding:

"I don't suppose you'll be able to meet that installment on the mortgage?"

"No," I told him, "but I wouldn't if I could. I'd let them foreclose. I was stung badly when I bought this."

"In that case we might as well settle up," he remarked. "I'll have to charge you twenty-five per cent commission for selling and collecting and everything. Here's a list of the entries to be made on the proper books. And here's the cash."

He drew out a large roll of bills. They were in thousand-dollar denominations. Fifteen of them he counted off and handed to me.

"I always do business with cash—force of habit," he grinned. "It leaves no trail in case some chap who isn't wide awake gets the bad end of a bargain.

"It's real," he assured me as I fingered the money in a sort of daze, hardly realizing that I was saved and had a neat profit to boot.

"But," I protested, when I had recovered sufficiently to speak, "you sold all that printing under an agreement that they could take years to pay for it. How did you manage to collect?"

"Printing?" he laughed. "That money has nothing to do with printing. Remember I told you I could sell ice to the Eskimos?"

I acknowledged recollection of some such statement.

"Well," he continued, "I did it. If these gents who are so anxious for your scalp only knew it, they would have that scalp in a week when your mortgage is foreclosed. They had as much need of the controlling interest in this property as the Eskimos have of imported ice. But I managed to sell them the stock—for twenty thousand dollars. They want the pleasure of firing you. I'll sue them for my commission on that printing business as soon as they get you formally fired. Much obliged for giving me a new start!"

*A more exciting sport than stalking a great black jaguar which is also hunting you in a Central American jungle would be difficult to imagine: a narrative of real experience memorable indeed.*

# The Black Tiger

By **Albert Lord Wilcox**

THE campfire threw into bold relief the weathered features of the native boatmen and packers who sat across from me.

The circle of brilliancy emanating from the blazing wood quickly faded into obscurity, where the jungle pressed in, revealing the ghostly outlines of a giant, spur-rooted mahogany, a white-barked bongo and a shadowy curtain of verdure. Beyond was utter darkness, save when a leaping flame displayed grotesque festoons of a riotous growth of vines that dropped down from hidden tree-tops like the contorted coils of monstrous serpents. The dank, moldy odor from the dense forest, mingling with the tang of smoke from the fire, permeated the atmosphere like an incense.

A week before, my native "boy" Juan—who had guided me in former travels on the upper waters of the Tuyra, where I sought for fustic to use as a dye material for uniforms—had informed me there was "much gold" to be found at the headwaters of the Tuquesa.

It was thus that I was here, enticed by the lure of the yellow metal, the spirit of a great adventure and a love for the mysteries of the unknown—here in the primeval forests untouched by white man at the mouth of the Tuquesa, where she pours her waters into the Chucunaque, which in turn ultimately casts it all into the great Pacific.

A week of arduous effort had brought us on the first lap of our journey.

My campside reverie was broken by a peculiar yodeling cry from the river near by, and the rattle of a heavy *cayuca* being pulled upon the shore. My men started from their work of cutting up and smoking the venison we had procured earlier in the day, and sent out a call that was quickly answered by four Chokoi Indians stalking into camp. Short of stature, they stood before us, clean of limb,

lean-muscled, and clothed in nothing much but a gee-string and adorned with necklaces of crocodile teeth; most noticeable of all were long silver earrings dangling from the lobes of their ears.

After the usual salutations, they squatted at the fireside, and absorbed the heat in comfort, for the tropic nights in this region are cold, although only a few degrees north of the equator.

In a few minutes they drifted into conversation with my men, one of their number acting as spokesman, and my attention was caught as his narrative progressed.

"You and the Señor must not hunt *cuneyo*" (agouti) "along the river side at night around here, for the black tiger with the evil spirit lurks in the jungle, and he has killed much stock and people."

In Central and South America, the jaguar is called tiger. There are two of the larger class, the well-known spotted variety, and the black of the same species and size, which is more feared and in some localities is known under the name of the Congo. Like all of the denizens of the forests, they respect men and seldom attack unless provoked, but I do know of two authentic cases of deliberate assault that resulted fatally to man, so that my attention was attracted by mention of this tiger killing people.

As the natives are timid and superstitious, I feared the desertion of my men, who were already casting nervous glances into the surrounding darkness.

Thus it was that I broke into the narration with the query: "How do you know it was the same tiger that killed all the stock along the rivers, and what man has he killed?"

My question drew the attention of the speaker to me, and he respectfully related as follows:

"Two nights ago, Domingo Castillo, who has a *finca* below here on the Chucunaque, heard a hog squeal. He ran out with his dog and gun, and saw a tiger carrying away his hog. It was moonlight. The dog came up with the tiger as he was crossing a *quebrado* near by, and the tiger dropped the hog and turned on the dog and killed him. Then Domingo shot at him, and the tiger attacked him, and only by running was he able to reach his house in time to save his life. The next day the hog was gone.

"A little lower down on the river a man is missing, and a boy in our *campo* above here went into the woods to shoot birds, and he has not come back. And our women, washing at the river, saw this tiger prowling through the bush near by and were much frightened and they fear to go to the river again. Then too, much stock has been killed."

"But," I insisted, "how do you know it was the same tiger? And no one actually saw him kill the man."

"We do know," he replied, "it was the same tiger, señor, for at Domingo's, the next morning, I saw the tiger-tracks and the dead dog, and I saw the tracks at the river where the women washed, and others have seen the tracks where stock was killed, and they are the same. On the left front foot there was a piece gone from the center pad, and all the tracks are the same. It will be well for the Señor to have his fire kept up through the night. It was to tell you this that we came when we saw the light of your campfire."

WE had pushed along fast during the day in order to reach our present camping place, and it was late when we arrived, so that our stock of firewood was inadequate for the night, and I knew the utter impossibility of inducing my men to gather more in the darkness, after the story just related; so I thanked them for the warning they had brought, but assured them that we were not afraid of tigers as we had good guns.

Shortly afterward, the Indians saluted and left.

My men were distinctly nervous, but resumed their work of hanging the meat on the smoke-racks, and when finished, they rolled up in their blankets close to the fire and were soon asleep.

After a period of restlessness, I too dropped off in slumber, to awaken in the early morning before the men had aroused. Something seemed wrong to me, but it was several minutes before I realized that the meat was gone. Hurrying over to the smoke-racks, I looked down into the dead ashes and saw clearly in evidence the tracks of a large "tiger," and upon examining them more carefully, "from one toe a piece was gone." Knowing the danger of this discovery by my men, I erased all signs with my boot and looked around for more, but except where the fire had burned, the vegetation was too rank to register any more.

Carelessly I awakened the men and

casually asked them what they had done with the meat. This brought them up standing, facing toward the empty racks, with the cry: "The black tiger with the evil spirit!"

I tried to laugh away their alarm, and they became somewhat mollified when they were unable to find any traces to substantiate their fears. They were, however, anxious to get away as soon as possible.

Our journey for the day would permit of only a few hours of water travel before the Tuquesa rose up into the mountains with a succession of rapids too riotous and rough for navigation. From here on we were to walk up the gravelly bed of the river, which was made possible by the dry season reducing the flow of water to an inconsiderable volume.

Our journey to the canoe cache was covered without event. Juan and his men, six in number, arranged their packs and we began our trip on foot, with the objective, an old camp and shack, five hours' travel above us.

As usual, I took the lead with my rifle, in the hope of replenishing our depleted larder, as an abundance of game comes down from the mountains at this season to get water along the courses that have not dried up. It had been a relief to get away from the neighborhood of the black tiger—not from fear of his attacking us, but with the fear that my men might desert.

DURING the afternoon, I picked up a mountain hog and a small red deer, and we arrived early at our camping-place. Here we decided to camp in the open in preference to the old shack, as myriads of scorpions abide in the old thatched roofs of these deserted houses and have the uncomfortable habit of dropping down from above, so that if one happens to be in the way, the results are apt to give the recipient a few hours of extreme discomfort. It was with a smile that I noted the fact that the men were gathering a large quantity of firewood, which registered that their minds still dwelt on the story of the black tiger. The routine of camp life, cleaning up, cooking and preparing the meat to carry with us, occupied the period before bedtime, which comes early after a long hike.

As was customary, I had one side of the fire and my men the other. In the middle of the night I awoke, sitting straight up with a start, and could feel a chill of apprehension run along my spine. What had startled me? I did not know, for as I looked about, there was nothing unusual. The fire still burned, although it had died down; so I arose and poked it up. As it burst into flame, it seemed as though a black object slunk into the darkness from the edge of the enlarged circle of light, and while I was not sure, it brought again the chill of alarm and the tension of expectancy.

At a glance I saw the meat still hanging as it had been placed. Nothing was apparently wrong, and I tried to convince myself that it was a case of frayed nerves, but my subconsciousness remained obdurate. What had seemed to be the utter silence of the night began to register sounds to my quickened senses; there was the hum of countless night insects, an almost deafening croak of frogs from the river-side, and the rasp of labored breath from one of the men.

A large, drab-colored moth fluttered foolishly into the blaze of the replenished fire.

Then came the unmistakable crack of a twig broken beneath the foot of a stealthy prowler of the night. My muscles stiffened about the stock of my gun as I peered into the darkness, but without avail, for I could see nothing and it was not repeated.

My tortured nerves and straining eyes finally relaxed, and sitting down on my blankets, I waited, still alert and receptive to the slightest unusual note; but it did not come, and gradually drifting into calm, I again slept, until the soft light of dawn awakened me to the appraisal that all was well; the meat still hung where it had been placed, and I was disgusted and ashamed of my night alarm.

MY men were soon stirring and trailed lazily down to the river for a morning's wash. They had been gone but a moment before I heard excited exclamations and cries from the river, and hurrying down to seek the cause of disturbance, I found them stooping over near the edge of a deep pool. As I came up, they separated, and gesticulating wildly, pointed to prints clearly outlined in the wet sand, crying: "Look! Look, señor, the black tiger!"

There was no question as to the identity of our prowling friend, and no chance for

evasion. They were clearly the replica of those in the ashes of our previous camp. I was nonplused to think that the brute would have trailed us this far, and knowing the character of the native, realized the difficulty of holding them, with the knowledge of this fact.

It was too serious to make light of, and I took Juan to one side, as I knew I could depend upon him to stick and to hold the men, if it was humanly possible.

"Well, Juan," I said, "what about it? Can you keep them, or will they quit?"

"Señor, I don't know," he said. "They are much frightened. Some I can hold, but how many I don't know until we have talked."

It would have been a great disappointment to give up at this stage of the journey, but without men to pack in the necessary supplies, it would be impossible to go on.

Juan gathered the men at the edge of the pool, and much disturbed, I wandered up to the camp. The more I thought of the awkward situation that confronted me, the more determined I was to go on. There would be a chance for me to do some talking on my own hook when Juan finished his palaver, if he proved unsuccessful.

It was not long before there were sounds of the men coming up from the river, and I assumed an air of indifference which I did not feel.

Juan, acting as spokesman, said: "Señor, Pablo, José and Ricardo will not go on."

Looking at them in disgust, I said: "You are certainly a fine lot of men! Frightened at a shadow and an Indian tale. You agreed to go with me and complete the work, and I was to pay you on our return to Yavisa. Do you think I am going to pay you one cent for what you have done?"

"No, señor," they replied. "We are willing to go without the money, but we will not go on with the black tiger trailing us."

"Will you not," I said, "go on for one more day, with the understanding that if there is any evidence of the black tiger following and I do not kill him, we will then all turn back and I will pay you for the whole trip?"

It was a gamble, but I had to take it, and I was determined to get that black tiger if he showed up.

The men talked together for some time; then Juan came and informed me: "José will go on under these conditions, but Pablo and Ricardo cannot be persuaded."

My efforts to induce them to change this decision was unavailing, so I told the deserters they might take one of the *cayucas* at the cache, and I would decide what course to take with them upon my return to Yavisa. It meant that we had four men to pack instead of six, and necessitated breaking up our packs and leaving part of our supplies at the present camp, to be sent back for when needed. Pablo and Ricardo gathered food sufficient to take them out on the back trail, and started before we resumed our upward journey.

IT was a solemn and cheerless procession that began the morning tramp with me, for they were superstitiously inclined to a belief in disaster, and had no heart in proceeding farther.

Contrary to the usual custom, I dropped behind with my rifle and could see an air of relief on the part of the men.

It was not merely my desire to relieve a tension that was nearing the breaking-point, but with the hope that I might get sight of our trailing pest, the black tiger,—though as they seldom travel during the day, there was slight expectation of seeing him, except for the fact that he must have trailed us the day before.

Somewhere around ten o'clock I was lying in the shade of an overhanging tree on a flat rock at the edge of a deep pool, looking down into the water at some fish, swimming about in peaceful unconcern in the cool depths.

The men were traveling slowly, and coming within hearing distance, I had stopped to give them an opportunity of getting ahead. When it seemed that a sufficient time had elapsed, I lifted my head preparatory to arising. It brought me facing down the river, and what I saw froze me into immobility. Four or five hundred yards below me was a magnificent specimen of the black tiger, presumably our unshakable companion.

Slipping my gun around, I sighted down on him, as he sniffed at our tracks. It was a long shot, and in the hope that he might resume his journey upward in the river-bed, I hesitated; but after swaying his tail restlessly back and forth and gazing up the river, he leaped up the bank into the forest.

It seemed impossible that he could have seen me, as a cat's eyes are none too good

in the daytime, and I felt sure I had made no motion that could have attracted him. Trusting that he would show up again in the river-bed, I waited for some little time motionless, but there was no such luck.

When I did start, it was with my mind made up on a plan that had occurred to me, that seemed reasonable and promising.

THE custom on the trail in this region is to stop at eleven o'clock to cook coffee, eat some rice and meat and rest up through the hottest part of the day, resuming the grind about one.

By taking a quick pace, I came up with the men shortly before eleven, and walked with them until we came to a point which seemed ideal to carry through my strategy. Right near a sharp bend in the river was a spot sparsely covered with bush, and just beyond, near a cut bank, was an old tree that had been uprooted and carried down in a freshet to be lodged in the receding water with the protruding roots serving as an anchor. At the roots the swirling waters had dug a hole in the gravel bed deep enough to conceal the body of a man, and the several months without rain had left it dry. It offered ideal concealment, with an absolute command of the site selected for the noon sojourn a distance of seventy-five or a hundred yards below.

Calling Juan to one side, I told him of having seen the tiger following, and that I wanted our noon rest to be made on the point, in order to give me a chance for a shot when the afternoon trip had been resumed. My thought was to scatter scraps of meat about where we had lunched that might entice our trailing friend to stop for a snack before he took up his afternoon job.

While hungry, it was hard for me to eat a thing, so consumed was I with the plan for dispatching the tiger. Juan, too, was restless and perturbed, and when the men stretched out for a noonday siesta, he slipped over to where I reclined in the shade, and in an undertone said: "It is well, señor, that I stay with you and let the men go on alone, for there is a danger that all may not go well and I have a gun and may help."

Knowing his belief in the supernatural, and his overcoming fear which was mirrored in the pale, set expression of resolve in his face, it was a mark of loyalty that made my throat thicken with gratitude.

"It wont do, Juan," I said. "The men will surely suspect something, and you can help me more by going on with them and making sufficient noise to advertise our departure, to allay any suspicion on the part of the tiger."

Juan demurred but slightly as he realized that I was right, and started the men early, while I lolled back with the avowed intention of taking a siesta.

As they moved around the bend of the river, I heard Juan break bravely into song, followed by some of the other men.

Carefully I scattered about scraps of meat I had held out for the purpose, and made my way to the site of my ambuscade.

As I crouched down out of sight, I noted with satisfaction that the wind was blowing across the river, preventing any warning scent.

It seemed an interminable time that I lay there under the keen suspense of expectation, while my eyes were glued on the point where I hoped to see the black tiger appear. The distant range of forest-decked mountains, clothed in a film of blue haze, the varying shade of foliage from light green to deepest emerald, the neutral tints of the shadows and the brilliant sun-bathed gravel of the river, all were but a frame for that particular spot. . . . .

An indescribable sense of uneasiness coming over me, coupled with an uncanny premonition of something amiss, caused me to glance up at the jungle-covered bank to my right. What I saw petrified me, for on the edge of the cut bank ten feet above me and not twenty feet away, was the black tiger crouched ready for a spring.

HIS vicious head, with its burning eyes, and two front paws set tense for a leap, were all that betrayed him. Realizing he was in the act of launching himself upon me, my action was rather instinctive than subject to thought. Throwing my rifle across my hip, I fired and at the same time dropped flat in the hole to avoid as much as possible the weight of the flying beast. Almost instantly I heard a thud and felt a light blow on my shoulder. Then I was standing straight up looking down at the black tiger—lying inert and lifeless on the gravel at the edge of the hole.

One paw had dropped over the edge and struck me a powerless blow. My bullet, a soft-nose, had caught him exactly between the eyes, nearly tearing off the top of his head.

## The Black Tiger

When a man tells you there is no such thing as luck, please refer him to me, for it was sheer luck and nothing more that saved me from a tragic end. As I crawled out of that hole to the river-bed, the perspiration ran off my face in streamlets, and I trembled from the reaction as from the chill of a fever.

A shout from upriver appraised me of the fact that the men, hearing my shot, were coming back, and I looked up quickly to see Juan running toward me and the other men closely following. When they saw the black tiger, dead, they fairly shrieked with relief.

By this time I had pulled myself together and come back to normalcy. Curiously picking up the limp left front foot, I turned it over, and "from one toe a piece was gone." This settled it, and with a smile of reassurance I let it drop.

As the men started in to skin the carcass, I sat watching the process listlessly. With this tedious work finished, Juan came to me with a peculiar question: "Does the Señor want anything but the hide of the tiger?"

"Of course not, Juan. Why?"

"We may then have what we wish, Señor?" I assented, and at a word from Juan, the boy José, who was an expert with a knife, deftly opened up the chest, and reaching into the aperture, brought out a bloody object that proved to be the heart of the black tiger. Taking it to a near-by pool he washed it, and laying it on a flat stone, cut it into four equal parts.

This done, the men grouped around in a circle, squatting down on their heels, Indian-fashion, and each deliberately began eating the piece before him. There seemed to be some formal rite in the act, and disgusted, I waited with consuming curiosity until it was over in order to signal Juan to my side to ask: "What in the world did you do that for?"

"Señor," he replied, "we eat the heart of the black tiger that we may be as brave as the white man." I have since learned that this is a custom among the natives of this locality when a killer has been dispatched by a white man, but at the time, it is not necessary for me to say, I felt like a fraud and a hypocrite to be the recipient of this compliment, when I recalled the shock of weakness that had nearly overcome me—and the stroke of pure luck which had enabled me to kill the black tiger!

# Private McFeelan

*ADVENTURE of the most thrilling kind is described in this remarkable narrative of Real Experience in the Great War. Perhaps you also could send in a story of a man as interesting as McFeelan.*

WE were on maneuvers during the summer of 1912. I was then a junior subaltern in my regiment, the Royal Blankshires, a famous Irish corps, and I was in command of Number Five Platoon, comprising fifty-four non-commissioned officers and men. I was busy shaving and getting ready for the day's parades when my soldier servant brought in my mail and the routine orders.

"Private McFeelan's in the guard tent again, sir," he said.

I don't know exactly what I said, but a nice little trickle of blood running down my cheek didn't improve my temper. Although I knew a lot about military life in theory, having been born in the regiment, (my father had commanded it at the time he was mortally wounded, as it was termed, in the war of '99-02), I had but five months' actual service. Consequently I was very raw in practice, and things easily upset me. And Private McFeelan would upset anybody!

I never troubled to ask my batman what McFeelan had been doing to be placed under arrest. I knew. "Drunk and dis-

*By*

**Captain**
**Michael O'Hara**

orderly" would surely be one of the charges. Probably fighting, too, and perhaps other offenses that loom big in military life.

Not that McFeelan himself was disliked. Far from it, for he was a big, lovable giant, strong as an ox, with a heart like a child's. He was generous to a fault, too, and would give a beggar his last penny. In fact, one night when he was drunk, he took his shirt off his back, gave it to an old man, and marched back to barracks carrying his scarlet tunic on his arm! He got fourteen days' cells for that. On parade he was the smartest soldier in his platoon, so that it was hard to be continually punishing him. But the fact remained that he was a drunkard and couldn't be kept from fighting when liquored up.

Now, in the British army of those days discipline was very strict, and each regiment guarded its name in every possible way. That meant that an habitual offender sooner or later was "drummed out." As I went to the regimental office, I knew I was in for a "telling off" from my company commander. There was little consolation in the thought that he would get it nearly as bad from the adjutant, who would have pins stuck in him by the colonel. However, it happened that I was soon to see the last of McFeelan. At least, I thought so. His charges read:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1st Charge: | Conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. |
| 2nd Charge: | Drunk and disorderly. |
| 3rd Charge: | Violently resisting the escort. |
| 4th Charge: | Losing, by neglect, his clothing and equipment. |

"The same old story," thought I, as I listened to the evidence. McFeelan's face was a sight, all bruised, and with his lower lip broken open. I felt sorry for him, despite the fact that he had spoiled my platoon's conduct-record. The colonel literally started wailing as he heard it all. "And all this in front of other regiments, and taking his belt and coat off to fight. And blacking a military police corporal's eyes. And smashing the guard-room windows." At last I thought he would have an apoplectic fit. Finally he burst out: "An absolute disgrace to my regiment. I

wont have him in it any longer. Get him discharged."

And so the adjutant made out the usual papers, and in due course the following casualty appeared in orders:

> Discharged from His Majesty's Service as being worthless and incorrigible: No. 10779, Private Patrick McFeelan.

TWO years later, near the end of July, 1914, we were again on maneuvers, but this time it was not McFeelan that occupied my thoughts. Instead it was *war*—for the signs in Europe, accentuated by the murder of the Austrian archduke at Sarajevo, seemed to make this certain. Sure enough, the Blankshires, as part of the second division of the "Old Contemptibles," hopped over to France within the next three weeks, and were in the thick of it at Mons and the Marne. Naturally, we lost many lives. My platoon lost thirty-one in seven weeks. Sixteen times thirty-one make how many? That will tell you what the regiment needed in new men.

We had come out of the line for four days "rest," and to refit, and receive reinforcements from our depot at home. A draft of one hundred and ten men arrived at dusk the second night out of the trenches, and I, along with other officers, stood waiting by as the sergeant-major called the roll. At last he called: "Private McFeelan."

"Here, sorr," came the answer.

There was a moment's pause; then the warrant officer shot over to where a big, burly soldier stood at the end of the rear rank. *"Private Patrick McFeelan!* It is you, then, bejabers? Where in the name of God have you come from?"

"Oireland, sorr," was the calm reply.

"Faith, and Oi know ut," yelled the sergeant-major, lapsing into brogue in his astonishment. "And so will the colonel, soon, ye blackguard! You'll be more trouble and disgrace than the whole of the regiment put together."

But peace- and war-time conditions differ vastly, and McFeelan would have to stay in the regiment till he was killed or wounded: and what was more, he would inevitably come to my small command. Such were my thoughts on the matter, and I wasn't so happy about it. However, I told McFeelan off pretty strongly, and cautioned him to leave the drink alone. "Sure, sorr," he answered, "I wont touch a drap av anything sthrong." I had my doubts about that, nevertheless!

And so it proved. Within twenty-four hours there were four "drunks" on the report sheet, headed by "Private P. McFeelan." As Pat had received no pay when he joined, and obviously had none since he arrived, the question in my mind was: "Where did he get the drink?" The sergeant-major answered the query before it was asked. "McFeelan got drunk on rum, sir. The Army Service Corps has reported that a gallon jar of rum was stolen from one of the transport wagons." So Pat was going to be my bugbear once again!

AS the regiment had to go into the line the next night, the C. O. gave McFeelan a telling off and fourteen days' field punishment Number Two, which meant heavy chores when he came out of the line, if he was still alive. A lot Pat worried about that!

Here's an instance of McFeelan's utter disregard of danger, and one, incidentally, that explained why I always had and always will have a soft spot in my heart for him. Incidentally, too, another instance comes to light toward the end of this story as further proof. Once we were in the line, standing thigh deep in cold, half-frozen slush. All of a sudden bullets began to fly overhead, obviously aimed at some mark behind us. I didn't know what to make of it, but ordered "stand to" for everybody. Judge of my astonishment, when I looked behind, to see McFeelan perched on top of a ruined house some three hundred yards away, hacking at a huge balk of timber. Through my field-glasses I saw him extend his fingers to his nose, in due appreciation of the enemy's marksmanship, I suppose, before he dropped to the ground.

Soon afterward he reappeared in the front line, dragging his prize with him. I started telling him off for leaving the front line without permission (an offense punishable with death), and promising him all sorts of dire results if he did any more things he shouldn't. Can you guess what his reply was? "Oi beg your pardon, sorr, but Oi thought you looked a wee bit cold, and Oi thought maybe you might like a wee fire and a drap o' hot tay to warm ye up, sorr." What can you do or say to a fellow like that? I just walked away.

Well, McFeelan got too much for us, and so the C. O. sent him to a Labor Company

behind the lines, where he was supposed to make roads and mend bridges. I thought I was going to have peace, even in the midst of war, but I didn't know my man! Back he came in two weeks with another entry on his conduct sheet, with the remark, "*Returned* to Unit." When I asked him to give an account of himself, he said:

"Well, sorr, the sarjint told me Oi couldn't work, so Oi told him Oi could foight anyway, and bedad Oi did, so Oi did." I closed the interview hastily!

Pat worried me nearly blind, and he was more trouble than the rest of my company put together (for I had increased in rank through regrettable casualties), whether we were in the line or out of it. No matter what I did, or didn't do, drink he got inside, and havoc started outside. At that time I never knew the debt of gratitude I should owe him.

THE war went on, in spite of my troubles, and the time came when we began to take the offensive more easily. In one particular sector the general staff had ordered a frontal attack on a ridge which had enabled the enemy to dominate us and the country for miles around. But everybody on the spot said a frontal attack was suicidal. We had tried twice, and been beaten back, and we were to attack again at dawn. It was raining, and the half-frozen mud was not pleasant, to say the least, and our rations hadn't come up. I tried to keep warm by walking the whole length of my company front, out in the open. As I passed by McFeelan, who was busy cleaning his Lewis (automatic) gun, I looked at my watch. It said one o'clock, five hours before dawn. Just then a terrific shout went up, and there was McFeelan, standing on top of the trench, sending a shower of bullets in the direction of the enemy, and yelling like a madman: "Come on, me bhoys! Kick the divils to hell out av ut!"

I was flabbergasted. Anyway, I don't remember much of anything till I woke up the next day in hospital. I have a vague recollection of trying to stop Pat, and then as the whole of the regiment sprang up like one man, trying my best to keep my men together. I remembered, too, that McFeelan picked me up from the enemy second trench and carried me back to the regimental aid post, and then disappeared into the fight again. In a fight, you will only find a man like that in one place—the thick of it! However, to continue:

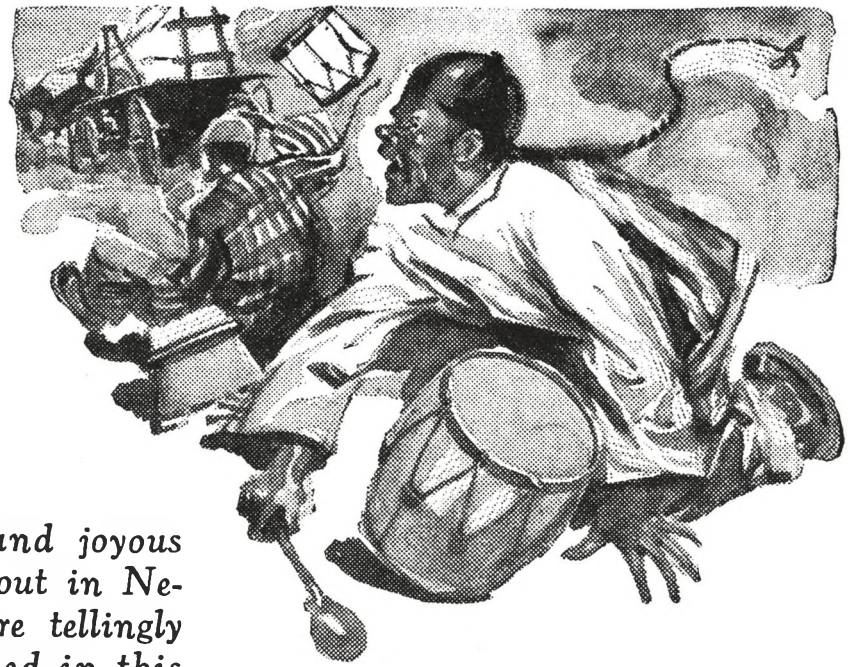
Back in a casualty clearing-station (the feel of soft linen sheets just beggars description on an occasion like that), they told me that the ridge had been captured one hour before zero hour; that McFeelan had been killed, but had been recommended for the Victoria Cross for his intrepidity in starting the attack as he did, and for saving my life. Had I been kept waiting for stretcher-bearers I should have bled to death, they told me. I felt the loss of this gallant man so much that if there had been no one watching I think I would have wept.

Two days later the general in command of the army came to the hospital to see me. I rather anticipated that, for I knew the dear old man very well, and though he had a title, and lots of decorations, and was very pompous, he really was a tip-topper. He was ushered to my bedside like a demigod, and then he started off: "Er—my dear O'Hara, I'm glad you are alive, at any rate. Your mother will be delighted to get you home for a spell. Er—I have recommended that you receive a bar to your Military Cross."

I thanked him and he went on: "Er—that man of yours—McFeelan I believe his name is. I—er—have recommended that he be awarded the highest award possible for any officer or soldier to receive, the Victoria Cross. And—er—O'Hara, the bally scoundrel isn't dead!"

My heart thumped, and I tried to sit up in my excitement. "I found him sitting on top of a barrel on a table in a ruined *estaminet* on the ridge, with three other drunken privates with him, and seven of the enemy dead just heaped in a corner."

And away the general went, without even saying good-by. I knew the reason. There were tears in his eyes—as in mine. McFeelan still lived!



*Wild and joyous doings out in Nevada are tellingly presented in this especially amusing Real Experience in the field of Humor.*

# Pigtails and Horseflesh

By **Bob Elliott**

"ME no likee horse. Horse, him no walkee likee man. Him walkee like um no-good cart. Shakee old Ki Sing up like um hell."

We fellows couldn't gracefully disagree, seeing we'd just been drinking tea with him; so we smiled and explained that we didn't have much trouble making our broncs walk like men. Then we passed the farewells around and rode off, still tasting tea. Tea, mind you, in Carson City, Nevada, during the 'seventies! There wasn't any way out of it, though. Jake and Bill and had found a wild eyed Chink out in the sage a week before, and had brought him in to town, thinking he must belong there somewhere, for half of Carson in those days was yellow. And he sure enough did belong. He was assistant high potentate, or its equivalent, and he'd got lost while out looking for wild onions or garlic, or mice. He couldn't talk English at all, but a few days later we got word that we were to appear at the house of Ki Sing, down in Chinatown, for tea. It turned out to be a thanksgiving party, and we were heaped with gifts until we couldn't hold any more—teacups and bamboo sprouts and grass sandals and silk kimonos!

KI SING, we found, was the high pote of the town, an exalted pote, in fact, most exalted in all the Sierra country. And he could talk pidgeon English. He thanked us for bringing his helper back, thanked us for coming to honor him by drinking tea, thanked us for appreciating

honor, thanked us for living. But when we offered him a horse to ride about his work, he balked. "Me no likee horse," and all the rest of it.

WE got over the tea, in time, and about forgot the affair, though we always got a thrill when we saw Ki Sing navigating his buxom old self around town. He always wore a jacket that looked on him quite a lot the way a vivid red circus tent would have if it was splotched with orange suns and green dragons and yellow sunfish. It rested *on* him, truly—on him clear down to the waist, for he was built like a baseball five feet through. He was sixty inches at the equator and only a wee bit less in height. But his face shone up above his ball of a body like a Placerville nugget exalted to the size of a gold pan, and his eyes were the general size and shape of a pod of green garden peas. We'd see him rolling down the street, and when he got right opposite, he'd lift his hand ceremoniously and say, in a wee, pinched voice, "Howdy, Missy Bob!" and grin as if he hadn't seen us for a month.

Then one afternoon a little Chink came running up the main street and jabbered something at me, and I got hold of Doc Bond, and the three of us went scurrying back together, down into Chinatown. There we found a lot of jabbering little yellow fellows in Ki Sing's little house, with a big table set in the front room and all the trimmings for a feast laid out. And at one end there sat the old pote himself, eyes closed and his face relaxed. Doc took a look at him, felt his pulse, listened at his chest, and all that, and turned around and said: "Too much chow mein."

There was a little Chinese medicine-man or preacher there, and he shook his head. "Too many debils," he muttered.

IT didn't make much difference which it was, chow mein or devils; Ki Sing was dead. That was the important fact. And after carting him back to his bedroom, we went back uptown and left his friends to work out his funeral plans.

Next day a little yellow chap sought me out and began to tell me something important. At last I understood that Ki Sing was to have a real Chinese funeral, and whatever that means in Asia, in Carson City it seemed to mean horses. I couldn't savvy at first; the old man didn't like horses, so why should he have them at his funeral? But I finally got it that when a man of lowest rank dies over there, he must have one horse among the mourners. If he's twice that rank, he has a team. And Ki Sing deserved a thousand! Could I get them?

I got hold of Jake and Bill, and we set to work. We had four days, and in that time we scraped every ranch from the valleys clear up to Lake Tahoe, and at last rounded up two hundred and fifty safe mounts to march in the parade. There were more horses to be had, but they were a little wild, and we figured this was a funeral, not a rodeo. You see, these China boys had said something about riding the horses.

We got them into town and rigged out saddles for most of them. Then we turned them over to the South Siders, and waited. We were getting ten dollars apiece for the use of the horses, so we could afford to loaf around town a few days.

THINGS were all set for Saturday. Jim Sparks, the carpenter, had reinforced the hearse, and the old black mares belonging to the undertaker were fresh curried.

Main Street was well populated, for about everyone had heard what was going to happen, and real Chinese funerals weren't everyday affairs.

Promptly at noon the funeral began, with the setting off of cannon firecrackers down in Chinatown. Then there was a chorus of yowling, and pretty soon the parade appeared down at the other end of the street.

It looked like a pack of red-feathered ostriches lumbering along, what we could see of it at first, with those thin bronco legs underneath and the flopping robes on top. Then it came closer, and we saw the whole length of the line, something like a row of loud colored rags hung out on a picket fence. Only these pickets moved!

Up in front were eight moguls decked out in long red robes, and even having robes draped over their horses too. Then came the hearse, all draped in colors. Behind it were eight more moguls in their red robes and pigtails. Then came a hayrack, draped, all loaded with bass drums and red-robed yellow boys. And strung out behind that were the balance of the ponies, each topped by a kimono and a pigtail.

They were all riding as if they were in

rocking chairs upholstered with carpet-tacks wrong end up. They didn't know they had stirrups, and their yellow fingers clutched at the saddle-horns as if they were iron-handles, or washboards. There they sat, robes flapping their own horses and those behind them, and their faces as animated as green apples.

THE ponies looked docile enough until one saw their eyes. A horse's eyes, you know, are like a woman's lips: they pretty well tell what the owner thinks about things. And these broncs were all rolling their eyes until darn little of the brown part showed—they were mostly whites. Those plumb gentle ponies was all ready to turn bad broncs again. I was all set to say something about it, when the biggest bass drummer on the hay rack let out a yelp. Then he yelped again, and every one there brought down a drumstick. *"Blum!"* He yelped again, and once more, and there it was again, *"Blu-u-mmm!"* He yelped a fifth time, too, but when the sixth yelp sounded, there wasn't any *"Blum"* with it. There didn't need to be. There was noise enough without it. And besides, the bass drummer was sitting in the street.

His brother drummers were there, too, what ones of them weren't still rolling or hanging to lamp-posts. The hayrack never did stop, though they used part of it for kindling in Gardnerville, sixteen miles south.

In two minutes you couldn't have told if you were in a circus or a rodeo or Hades. Chinamen were standing, sitting, running and lying everywhere, and every one of them was shouting. Horses were squealing; windows were crashing; dogs were barking. Pigtails fluttered from façades, and red robes floated from hitch-racks. Chinese—the language—sputtered like firecrackers.

In the first five minutes we were so busy dodging Chinamen we didn't pay any attention to the ponies. After that we couldn't find them to pay attention to. The first one we spotted was in Sam Appleton's saloon, away back in a corner, shivering as if he had the ague. The next one was back of the livery stable, neck broken from running head-on into a tree. And the only other one we found that night was up on a woodshed, a full five-foot jump.

We caught the old mares with the hearse two miles out in the sage, and buried old Ki Sing right there. Both back wheels were gone from the hearse, so we couldn't have taken him anywhere else if we'd had to. And next morning we set out to find the nags. During the night seven more of the real tame ones drifted back, and we rode out in force to hunt.

Three miles out, I saw the sage waving and headed for it, rope a-twirling. But what should I sight when I got there but a yelping Chink, streaking it like a jackrabbit! Another mile, and the same thing happened again. Next time there were two of them, and they ran from each other just as they did from me. But most of the yellow boys were farther out. The next week I flushed six from one cedar thicket over beyond the Comstock—forty miles from Carson.

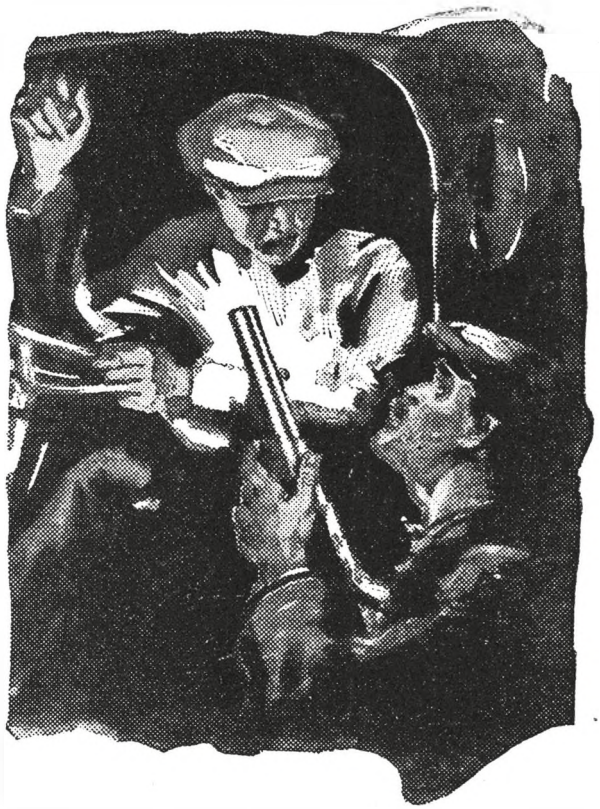
BY the end of the month we'd gathered fifty head of horses, all old, wind-broken nags. The good ones were gone to the tall timber. And even those old ponies ran like deer at the smell of a Chinaman. Now, if it had been Chinks we were salvaging, we'd have recovered at least two hundred per cent, for I alone flushed no less than one hundred and fifty of them, and all the other boys had scores almost as high. They were so wild we couldn't even rope them, and because they didn't know east from west, out there in the sage, Carson's Chinatown declined rapidly after that. The wild ones out in the sage must have died there of old age. They never came back.

The following spring, mysterious herds of horses began to pop up everywhere in that district. People first thought they were range stock, but when they tried to get close and look at their brands, they found out different. They were wild, very wild. And some newcomers a few years later saw those wild nags roaming over the mesas and started a story about a mare that strayed from an expedition Cortez sent up north from Mexico three hundred years ago, and they said Nevada's wild horse herds were all colts from that mare. Pretty story, all right, but just remember next time you hear it about old Ki Sing, the chief high pote of Carson's South Side. "Me no likee horse," the old fellow had said; and then he went and started the horse movement back to nature. Not only started it, but kept the original movers right on going!

*By*

**Gordon Haig**

*This extraordinary Real Experience deals with a curious mystery in the rum-running line—and mysteries in that field are significant. You will find here a goodly portion of adventure as well.*



# Cargoes of the Night

THE lucky guys who gather around their home tables and drink gin and Scotch delivered by their bootlegger never have the slightest idea of what us birds go through while running that stuff in at night. Part of this wild tale that I'm going to write down can be verified by the records of the San Francisco Prohibition office. If I remember correctly, a big Irishman by the name of Kelly was in charge then. I'm sure it was some of Kelly's men who tried to hold me up that night. Believe me, I've never shown any curiosity in the matter. By the same token, I'm not giving you my right name, for those birds still have me on their list of "those wanted."

I came back from France with lungs that made it sure death for me to tackle office work again. Since the only other thing I knew was automobiles, I left my home in Stockton, California, went to San Francisco, and had the good luck to land a job with the Red Top Cab Company. Then I had the rotten luck to skid into a police car one wet night, and that ended my job. In a month I was broke again, ashamed to go back home, and feeling pretty desperate.

A Red Top driver had recommended a certain hotel not far from the corner of Mason and O'Farrell, and I had moved there. This hotel, to this day, is a hangout for smugglers and big bootleggers, the guys who furnish the money and the brains, but let the little fellows take all the risks of going over. It was only natural that I should meet these birds and become acquainted. In spite of all I had read about the men who violate the prohibition laws,

I found most of these chaps a pretty fair bunch of good, all-around square shooters. Some of them I didn't take to—Red Heany, for instance; but when Big Joe came to me one day and offered me fifty bucks for a few hours' work, I thought twice, then said: "Lead me to it!"

The job Joe had for me was running a load of liquor from a little town in San Matéo County to a certain address in San Francisco. It looked like duck soup to me, and at nine o'clock that night I got behind the wheel of one of Joe's big cars and hit out for the San Bruno road.

I got to the town of P—, went to the address Joe had given me, and picked up a man who showed me the way to the cache of smuggled Scotch and gin. This was in a God-forsaken spot some distance out of town and within earshot of the beach. It was so dark I couldn't see a thing; yet we didn't dare use our flashlights; and it was so still I could hear nothing but the pounding of the surf. Believe me, I was glad when we had the stuff loaded and had started back. Joe's man dropped off again at the little town, and I drove back to San Francisco. Nobody stopped me. I delivered the cases, met Joe at my hotel, and got my fifty bucks. I paid part of my hotel bill, then stepped out for a big steak at Stanley Girard's.

DURING the following three months I made many trips for Joe, for which he paid me close to five hundred dollars a month. It was the most money I had ever earned, and I was having a pretty good time, I thought. Easy come, easy go, is an old but a pretty true story. If Joe, or anybody else, had said to me in the beginning: "Do you want a job as rum-runner?" I would have kicked him out of the room. But you see how easy I worked into the business. Before I knew it, I was the pal of rum-smugglers and bootleggers, talking their language, sharing their confidence, and doing a lot of work for them. There was only one that I refused to associate with, and that was this Red Heany. I didn't know anything against him, but I didn't like him. He gave me the creeps whenever he came around. I put up with him only because I knew Joe depended on him for a certain line of work.

One night Joe came to my room and asked me if I could run a truck. I had heard talk of three hundred and fifty cases of Scotch being landed near P—, and I had also heard that both the prohi's and hi-jackers were laying for it. I was pretty sure that I knew what Joe was going to spring, and I lost no time telling him that I could run a truck with one hand and shoot like hell with the other. Joe smiled, and that settled it.

THE arrangements, Joe explained, were to be entirely different this time. I was to drive, and Red was to sit beside me, ready for rough work if necessary. If there was any trouble, I was to take orders from Red. Then Joe opened up and spilled a little news he had. I was being watched! In order to beat the game, I was to slip out after dark, take a taxi to the Ferry Building, go to Oakland, then take the train for San José, where Red was to meet me.

All this panned out as per arrangements, and I found Red waiting for me in a closed car. Red asked me if I wanted a drink before we started, and I told him pretty straight that I didn't drink on the job, and didn't think he should. He let it go at that, but I didn't like the look in his little eyes, nor the twist of his mouth.

It was about eleven o'clock when Red had me stop in a dark and lonely spot about five miles from P—. He explained that another man would pick up the car and take it back, and that he and I were to walk down the road about a mile to where the loaded truck was waiting.

A husky young storm was blowing up off the Pacific as we started down that road, and there was something about that walk at that hour of the night that almost got my goat. I couldn't see a thing except the shadows of the trees bending in the wind, and there wasn't a sound except the howl of the wind and the moaning of the surf. Red didn't help matters any. He never said a word, but he kept looking back over his shoulder and acted as if he expected something to happen any minute.

NOTHING did happen, however, until we had picked up the loaded truck and were on the road about a half-hour. I was driving, making a little better than thirty. Red was perched on the seat beside me, his little eyes glued to the road ahead.

Suddenly I spotted a tail-light on the

side of the road about a hundred yards ahead. At the same time somebody on Red's side of the road turned a powerful spot-light on us and held it there while I ran about fifty feet. This showed us up without interfering with my driving. I was asking Red what that meant, when I noticed the tail-light swing into the road. Red began cussing a blue streak, said they were prohi's, and for me to keep going even if I had to knock that car into the ditch.

I GAVE her the gas. I didn't like the idea of hitting anybody, because I knew that our big truck, loaded to the guards with cases of liquor, would annihilate anything we struck. So I drove carefully, and watched my chance. Pretty soon I heard Red cussing again, and shouting that a car had turned in behind us. Then the car ahead slowed down. Two men jumped off and began waving flashlights. "Knock hell out of 'em!" Red shouted in my ear.

Well, I don't know just how it happened. Maybe the prohi's miscalculated the width of the road; and maybe I just had a fool's luck. Anyway, I gave the old truck her head. The two men with flashlights took a header into the ditch, and with no more than the width of a hair between us, I roared by that car like a corner of hell busted loose. They tried to follow, but when Red smashed their windshield with his first shot, they dropped out of the running.

I thought we were in the clear then, but Red kept perched on the edge of his seat looking ahead like he was expecting something. We had left the officers about ten miles behind, when Red suddenly reached for my light-switch. "Are both lights burning?" he asked, and before I knew what he was up to, he turned off the lights, then turned them back on. "Yes, both are burning," he said.

Now, I wasn't born yesterday. I got a hunch right off that Red was up to some dirty trick, that flashing them lights was a signal. So I wasn't surprised when I saw a big touring car turn suddenly into the road ahead of us. "Who's that?" Red shouted to me, pulling his gun. "You'd better slow down. There's no prohi's around here."

I didn't say anything, but I slowed down. Pretty soon I was near enough to see that I'd never get by this car without hitting it; and when three hard-looking customers with sawed-off shotguns came from behind the car, it began to look like I'd never get by alive.

"Hi-jackers!" yelled Red, and started cussing again. "We're done for! Stop! You damn' fool! Stop!"

About twenty feet from the touring car, I stopped, but I left the motor running. The three men ran toward us. One of them came to my side of the truck and started climbing toward me. The two others went to Red's side. While one held his shotgun on us, the other told Red to pass over his rod. I saw Red lean out of the car. Something was said that I couldn't catch, because right then the man at my elbow bawled out at me: "Get out of there, you —— ——! I'll take that wheel!"

Now, I had been cussing the ball-handle of my gear-shift because it was always coming off, but it proved to be a friend in need. "All right," I replied, as though I didn't give a hang, and turned as though to get out of the seat. Instead, I struck the most vicious blow I ever gave a man this side of the trenches. Square between the eyes I hit him with that heavy ball-handle. He crumpled up and fell in the rear. Then I turned quickly, drove my foot into the seat of Red's pants and sent him headlong into his hi-jacker friend. As I threw the car in gear, and the big truck started moving, the other hi-jacker fired, and a million pieces of shattered glass sprayed over me like hot lead.

I thought I was killed, or blinded for life, but I didn't have time right then to bother about that. Squinting through one eye, I swerved the truck far enough to one side to save my left light, then smashed into the car the liquor bandits had run across the road. As we hit, I almost took a header over my wheel and through my broken windshield, but hung on. The other car lifted a little, seemed to shudder, then rolled over into the ditch —and the open road was ahead of me. Believe me, I made the most of it!

WHEN I was pretty sure I wasn't being followed, I stopped, cleaned the broken glass out of my car, and washed the blood off my face. I was glad to find I wasn't hurt so much, although I'd be marked for some time to come. Joe would have to get another man to do his rum-running for a while, I thought. Afterward, when

I knew the whole truth, I got a kick out of that! Me worrying about Joe!

It must have been after four when I slowed down to go by an all-night bootlegging joint known as the B— Café. There were always quite a few cars parked around this place, and generally one or two harness cops in sight.

I had passed the café and was about to speed up again, when a man sprang out of a closed car and ran toward me. More trouble, I thought; and then I made the bird as one of Joe's men. Before I could stop, he was in the seat where Red had been.

"Keep going," he told me, "but turn off where I tell you. Say, what's happened to your windshield? And where's Red?"

"Hi-jackers," I replied. "What are you doing here? Any trouble?"

"Trouble, hell!" he snorted. "Joe's been pinched. We got to hide this stuff for a while. And don't you show your mug around your hotel! If you do, it's curtains for you."

I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to say. Joe pinched! And my hotel watched! Nice mess!

WE turned off Mission after a while and went by a winding course to some out-of-the-way spot I'd never seen before, and down a dark alley. There two men came out and started carrying the booze into what looked like an old barn. Joe's man handed me a ten-dollar bill.

"That's all I got with me," he was saying, but just then I happened to be looking past him, down the alley. I saw three men coming, and they looked like they meant business. I turned around. Three other men were coming upon us from the other end of the alley. I let out a yell and made a dive for the barn.

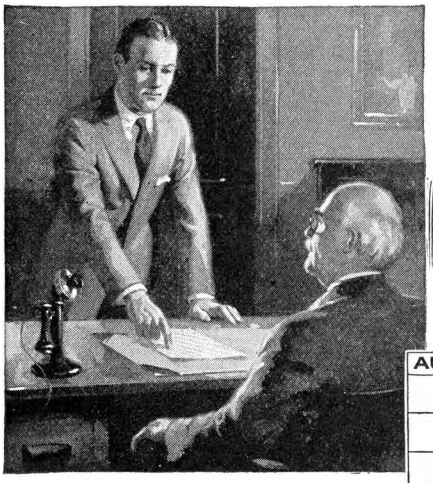
I felt pretty sure that we were in a trap, so when I got to the front door of the barn, I looked out before I showed myself. Sure enough, a man was standing in the shadow of the house watching the door where I stood. He shouted, and ran toward me as I slipped out the door, but I didn't stop. Running along the side of the barn, I hopped over the fence into the other yard. Behind me there was shouting and shooting, both, as I ran across this yard, jumped over another fence, then beat it for the street in front. In the street, I hugged the shadows along the walk, and sure stepped.

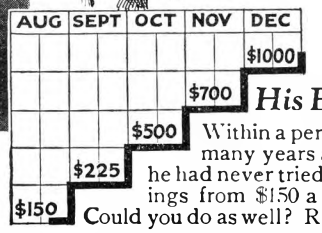
I got to a friend's house before daylight, and hid out there for three days. In that time my face healed over some, I got some new clothes, and I had learned the worst.

Just when we thought we were going good and making a safe clean-up, the D. J. men were getting the goods on us. They hooked Joe on a conspiracy charge, and on one charge or another bagged every one of the gang except me—and Red. I knew why they didn't get me, and I suspect I know why they didn't get Red. A bird that would take Joe's money, then play into the hands of hi-jackers, wouldn't be above selling out to prohi's at the same time.

So it happened that exactly four months after I landed in San Francisco broke and out of work, I left it—broke and out of work! But I had learned a good lesson. No more "easy money" for me. Today I'm pulling down a hundred and fifty bucks at an honest job. That isn't a lot of jack, but I can sleep nights!

# $1,800 a Year in August
# $12,000 a Year in December






*With or without previous experience, Salesmanship offers you a field of unlimited opportunity*

*For Years a Letter Carrier, at $1,800 a Year— in Five Months $12,000 a Year*

## *His Experience May be Yours*

Within a period of six months, J. J. Graney, for many years a letter carrier, stepped into a field he had never tried, made good, and boosted his earnings from $150 a month to around $1,000 a month. Could you do as well? Read in the paragraphs that follow—

*How J. J. Graney Climbed to Success by*

## The LaSalle Salary-Doubling Plan

J. J. Graney had never sold goods in his life. He was a letter carrier earning top pay of $1,800 a year. He determined to quit—and turned to LaSalle for help. Before he had completed his sixth assignment of the LaSalle course in Modern Salesmanship, he tackled the job of selling real estate in a rapidly developing suburban district. The first month he made $225; the second month $500; the third month $700; and in a letter to LaSalle he writes—"The present month I expect to earn more than $1,000."

S. N. Williams, a Kentucky man, was actually in the selling field, but not doing as well as he wished to do. He, also, turned to LaSalle for help. "My salary was practically doubled a short time ago," he writes, "but my greatest satisfaction comes from knowing that the amount of business I have written this year is easily five times greater than before."

When are ***you*** going to give yourself the chance in this world that you're entitled to? Isn't it better to follow a clearly-defined and well-organized ***plan*** which you ***know*** will lead you to greater and greater earnings than to trust your advancement to day-to-day experience—missing opportunity after opportunity, just because you have never mastered the art of selling?

Whether or not you have had sales experience—that is not important, The point is that any man of average intelligence who will follow the LaSalle ***salary-doubling plan*** can quickly multiply his earnings. And this fact applies with doubled force to the man now in the field who is sincerely striving to increase his volume, to really ***sell*** in dozens of places which he now is forced to leave without an order.

The complete story of the LaSalle ***salary-doubling plan*** which thousands of men have followed with such gratifying results is outlined in a fascinating book entitled "Modern Salesmanship." This book tells clearly of the opportunities in the selling field—points the way to a quick mastery of the very methods whereby the big producers top the list year after year, earn big five-figure salaries. The information contained in this book is of priceless value to the man seriously ambitious to make a real success in the selling field. And—the coupon brings it to you ***free.***

If your future is worth a two-cent stamp and two minutes of your time—place the coupon in the mail TODAY.

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**

*The World's Largest Business Training Institution*

**Dept. 3369-R** **CHICAGO**

Please tell me about your ***salary-doubling plan*** as applied to my advancement in the business field checked below. Send also copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation.


**☐ Modern Salesmanship**

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Law: Degree of LL. B.
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Railway Station Management
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Commercial Spanish
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- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching

Name .....

Present Position .....

Address .....

# CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

### HELP WANTED

Why not sell us your spare time, $2 an hour, $19.70 daily easy for full time, introducing New Style Guaranteed Hosiery for men, women, children. 57 styles, 40 colors, including silks, lisles, heathers. No capital or experience required. Just write orders. We deliver and collect. YOUR PAY DAILY, also monthly bonus. Free auto offer besides. We supply samples.
Macochee Textile Co., Card 1543, Cincinnati, O.

Agents. Best, biggest, most beautiful line New Hosiery. Every pair guaranteed. All styles. Finest quality. Our Silk Hosiery beats them all. Low priced. Make $160 month. Spare time workers, many in small towns, make $12 to $18. Don't delay. Write for samples.
Jennings Co., Dept. 320, Dayton, Ohio

Tailoring Salesmen: Our guaranteed $23.50 and $31.50 tailored to order suits are $10 to $20 cheaper than store prices; commission in advance; monthly bonus; protected territory; beautiful assortment 6x9 swatches free. Our national advertising campaign makes selling easy—big repeat business. DeLonge's record $343 in one week. In one state alone 47 men average $57.18 weekly.
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Big money and Fast Sales. Every owner buys Gold Initials for his auto. You charge $1.50; make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 148, East Orange, N. J.

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TOBACCO HABIT Cured or No Pay. Any form, cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chewing or snuff. Guaranteed. Harmless. Used by over 600,000 people. Full treatment sent on trial. Costs $1.50 if it cures. Nothing if it fails. Superba Co., N1, Baltimore, Md.

200 Kinds of IRON, WOOD and WIRE PUZZLES. Leader and Illustrated List 10 cents.
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# SPECIALIZATION

This is an age of specialization in every field of activity. So complex is civilization and so keen the competition in the affairs of men, that success and happiness are assured only to the man or woman who knows his craft—his art—his business.

If you would achieve success, you must first be trained. In the old days training was only acquired by years of arduous apprenticeship. Now in these days when education is so far reaching, there are schools organized to teach in a comprehensive way every specific line of endeavor.

**ART SCHOOLS Schools of Design** — If you have a desire to paint, draw, design clothes or hats, then an art school or a school of costume design will help you to put your talent to profitable use.

**CONSERVATORIES OF MUSIC** — If your inclination is to sing or play the violin or piano, then a conservatory of music is what you are looking for.

**SCHOOLS OF DOMESTIC SCIENCE** — If you have a knack for cooking or running a house, a school of domestic science or housecraft will train you to do it in the best possible way.

**DRAMATIC SCHOOLS** — You may feel the lure of the stage or the movies. There are a dozen different schools of dramatic art or stagecraft that will give you the necessary training.

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All these vocational schools are advertised in THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE. If you are undecided as to what school to choose, write us and we will be glad to advise you.

*Address The Department of Education*

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# Promoted Over 35 Candidates

*Accountancy Brings 200% "Raise"*

6 MONTHS 12 MONTHS 18 MONTHS 24 MONTHS

"When I enrolled for LaSalle training in Higher Accountancy," writes J. L. Trudell, a Michigan man, "I was doing the simplest kind of clerical work. I had had no previous bookkeeping experience. Before completing half the course—within a period of about eight months—three promotions brought me to be Assistant to the Chief Accountant. Within another year I was given entire charge of accounting, over about thirty-five assistants. The first of the year I was promoted to be Director of Advertising with present earnings nearly 200% more than when I first enrolled. I am very grateful for LaSalle training."

***Send for Salary-Doubling Plan***

Are you—like Trudell—following a well-organized plan to double—triple—quadruple your salary? Or are you relying for advancement upon day-to-day experience? LaSalle offers a sound and practical ***salary-doubling plan*** which has added millions and millions of dollars to the earning power of its members. If a successful career is worth a 2c stamp and two minutes of your time, check the field of advancement that appeals to you, fill in your name and address, and place the coupon in the mail TODAY.

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**

*The World's Largest Business Training Institution*

**Dept. 3369-HR Chicago**

I would welcome details of your *salary-doubling plan*, together with copy of "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays," also a copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation.


☐ **Higher Accountancy**

Training for positions as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.

**Other LaSalle Opportunities**

LaSalle opens the way to success in every important field of business. If more interested in one of the fields indicated below, check here:

☐ Business Management
☐ Modern Salesmanship
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Railway Station Management
☐ Law—Degree of LL.B.
☐ Commercial Law
☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
☐ Banking and Finance
☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
☐ Personnel and Employment Management
☐ Expert Bookkeeping
☐ Business English
☐ Commercial Spanish
☐ Effective Speaking
☐ C. P. A. Coaching

Name .....

Present Position .....

Address .....

# To Every Doubting Thomas!

## My Contract!


### By Alois Merke

*Founder of Famous Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York*

# NEW HAIR in 30 Days Or Absolutely No Cost

**Are you a skeptic? Are you one of the thousands who simply *must* be shown? All right. I don't blame you. You have all the right in the world to doubt. But will you do *this* for me? Will you give me the *chance* to show you? Here's my contract to you in black and white! I positively *GUARANTEE* to grow new hair for you in 30 days—or I'll pay every penny of the cost myself!**

LOTS of you men have been reading my ads month after month. Thousands of you have already taken my remarkable treatment and now possess healthy hair. But a few have hesitated. Possibly you're one of them. Why? Is it because you think your case is hopeless? Is it because you have already wasted a lot of money on useless, ineffectual treatments? Or is it simply because you don't believe my claims?

No matter what the reason for your delay I can only say this: I am now offering you an ironclad contract. A positive *guarantee* of new hair in 30 days—or no cost. So why not investigate without the risk of a penny? I'm sure no barber ever gave you such an absolute guarantee. No matter how thin your hair may be—no matter how fast it is falling out—no matter how many treatments you have tried without results—my contract holds. New hair in 30 days—or the trial costs you absolutely nothing!

How can I make such a startling offer? Well, my whole amazing treatment is based on a recent scientific discovery: In most cases of baldness the hair roots are not *dead*, but merely *dormant*—asleep. Through undernourishment, dandruff and other causes the hair roots have become starved and shrunken—literally gone into a state of "suspended animation." Ordinary tonics, massages, oils fail to grow new hair because they treat only the surface of the scalp and don't even attempt to reach the real cause of baldness—the starving, sleeping *roots*. To make a tree grow you wouldn't rub a "growing fluid" on the bark. You'd get at the roots.

And that's exactly what my scientific treatment does! It gets right down to these dormant hair roots. It carries nourishment to them. It wakens them. It invigorates them. No artificial hair tonics—no rubbing. Yet most people are surprised at how quickly new, healthy hair begins to appear. And, best of all, this new scientific system is so wonderfully simple you can take it right in your own home—in any home which has electricity—without the slightest bother—and at a cost of *only a few cents a day.*

### EVIDENCE!

***Hair About Gone***

"My hair had been falling for the last two years and I had hardly any more hair on the front of my head. But since I started using your treatment I am raising a new crop of hair. Your treatment is best I ever saw." — O. J., Northbridge, Mass.

***New Hair on Bald Spots***

"I have used Thermocap Treatment for 8 weeks, and although the top of my head has been entirely bald for 6 years, the results up to the present are gratifying. In fact the entire bald spot is covered with a fine growth of hair."—W. C. Kenmore, Ohio.

## Here's My Contract

I admit there are a few cases of baldness that nothing in the world can help. And yet so many thousands have benefited by this marvelously effective treatment that I gladly make you this wonderful offer. Try this remarkable treatment for 30 days at my risk. See what it can do *in your case.* Then, at the end of thirty days, if you are not positively delighted with the new growth of hair produced—just say so. Tell me the treatment hasn't done everything I said it would do. And without any quibbling whatsoever I'll return every penny you have paid me.

## Free Booklet Tells All

Lack of space prevents me from giving you all the facts about this amazing treatment and the wonderful contract and absolute guarantee I offer you. If you will simply sign and mail the coupon below I'll send you—absolutely free—a remarkably interesting booklet, telling in detail the whole story about this remarkable system which is growing new hair for thousands all over the country. No obligation! Clip and mail the coupon now. Allied Merke Institutes, Dept. 763, 512 Fifth Ave., New York City.

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Please send me—without cost or obligation—a copy of your book describing the Merke System.

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