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Magazine

March

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MARCH 1933

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 56 No. 5

"I am thinking you will be as good as to say it."

His narrowed eyes held a cold glitter. "Why?"

"You must know he is innocent. You must—"

"I know only what the evidence shows," he cut in, warily on his guard. "He may or may not have been one of my attackers. From the first blow I was dazed. But everything points to that he hired."

"Oh, no!" interrupted the Irish girl, her dark eyes shining softly. "The way of it is that he saved your life, that he fought for you and that he is in prison because of it."

"If that is true, why doesn't he bring some proof of it?"

"Proof!" she cried scornfully. "Between friends—"

"He's no friend of mine. The man is a meddler. I despise him."

"And I am liking him very much," she flung back stanchly.

Macdonald looked up at the vivid, flushed face and found it wholly charming. He liked her none the less because her fire eyes were hot and defiant in behalf of his rival.

"Very well," he smiled. "I'll get him out if you'll do me a good turn too."

"Thank you! It's a bargain."

"Then sing to me."

She moved to the piano. "What shall I sing?"

"Sing 'Divided.'"

Her long lashes veiled her soft eyes while she considered. In a way he had tricked her into singing for him a love-song she did not want to sing. But she made no protest. Swiftly she turned and slid along the bench. Her fingers touched the keys and she began.

He watched the beauty and warmth of her dainty youth with eyes that mirrored the hunger of his heart. How buoyantly she carried her dusky little head! With what a gallant spirit she did all things! He was usually a frank pagan, but when he was with her, it seemed to him that God spoke through her personality all sorts of brave, fine promises.

SHEBA paid her pledge in full. After the first two stanzas were finished, she sang the last ones as well.

An' what about the weather when I'd have ould Pat's boat? Is it me that would be feared to Grip the oars an' go afloat?

Oh, I could find hard by the light Of sun or moon or star. But there' cauldher things than salt waves Between us, so they are.

Oh anee!

Sure, well I know he'll never have The heart to come to me, An' love is wild as any wave That flanders over the sea.

'Tis the same if he is near me; 'Tis the same if he is far. His thoughts are hard an' ever hard Between us, so they are.

Oh anee!

Her hands dropped from the keys, and she turned slowly on the end of the seat. The dark lashes fell to her hot cheeks. He did not speak, but she felt the steady insistence of his gaze. In self-defense she looked at him.

The pallor of his face lent accent to the fire that smoldered in his eyes.

"I'm going to marry you, Sheba. Make up your mind to that, girl," he said harshly.

There was infinite pity in the look she gave him. "'There' cauldher things than salt waves between us, so they are," she quoted.

"Not if I love you and you love me. I'll trample down everything that comes between us."

He swung to a sitting position on the lounge. Through the steel-gray eyes in the blooding face his masterful spirit wrestled with hers. A lean-joined Samson, with broad, powerful shoulders and deep chest, he dominated his world ruthlessly. But this slim, Irish girl held her own.

"Must we go through that again?" she asked gently.

"Again and again until you see reason."

She knew the tremendous driving power of the man, and she was afraid in her heart that he would sweep her from the moorings to which she clung.

There is something else I haven't told you." The embarrassed blushes lifted bravely from the flushed cheeks to meet steadily his look. "I don't think that I—care for you. 'Tis I that am shamed at my . . . fickleness. But I don't—not with the full of my heart."

A page of the famous message in lemon juice (invisible until heated) in the January, 1917, Blue Book, upon which the claim against Germany for some \$40,000,000 damages on account of the Black Tom and Kingsland explosions, was largely based.

As the American claimants reconstruct the picture, this harmless-appearing magazine was carried by courier from an agent in Mexico to a man in the U. S. The last page was torn

out when found years afterward; but there was a further cipher missive in pin-pricks under certain words; as deciphered by the American claimants, it asked for funds, and by its reference to people accused of participation in sabotage activities, linked up the whole story.

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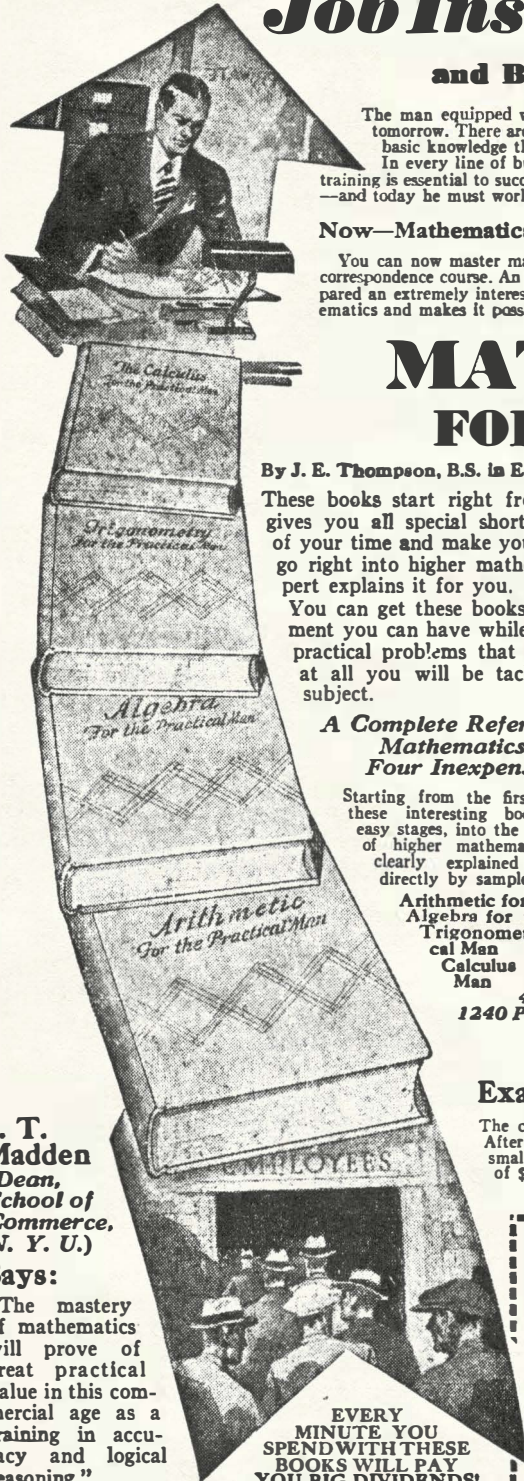
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MARCH, 1933

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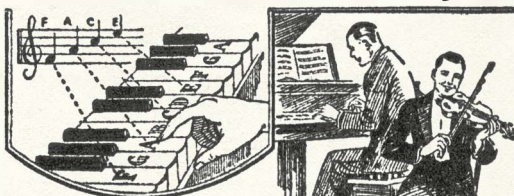
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give 'em time to forget all about you, I guess, before you'll come back. I hadn't intended to send you, but—it's yours if you want it. Lonesome sort of a job, though. Just got a court order to send a deputy to take possession of a mine called the Bright Hope—clear up on the big divide, off all the automobile routes, off the main roads, most off the map."

With a look of interest, the deputy lifted his regard from a nail-head in the floor.

"Seems," said Sheriff Hughes, pulling some papers from a pigeonhole of his desk, "that there's litigation about who owns the hole. Some Chicago bozo with a funny name like Pietro Capello claims he bought it from an old cuss who found it and went back to Chicago on a bust. Old-timer name of Callahan claims he never did sell, and never gave a transfer; and he gets him a lawyer to regain possession, which the Chicago man had got by sending out a lawyer named Moses. Typical Chicago shyster, looked to me. Anyhow, I get a court order to guard property and keep both sides off until case comes up for hearing. And mind you, Bill, it's to be watched! Because this is a case where possession means more than nine-tenths of the game. Now—do you want to go?"

"Nothing would suit me better than to crawl off into a hole and bury myself, the way I feel," Adams rumbled. "Start right away, do I? All right! I'll get an outfit together, and a pack-horse, and be off by noon. But if I were you, Tom, I'd let this county-seat think you'd tied a can on me and that I was rattlin' it east'ard on my tail."

Out over the old stage road, across the ford at the forks of the river, and then off into the high Sierras rode Bill Adams, glad to remove himself from the constant temptation to twist his quick hand to a holster. That night Bill camped with a shake-cutter. In the morning he

DEPUTY SHERIFF BILL ADAMS, sore from having got the worst of it on three successive occasions when he had been sent out to "bring in his man," was grouching to the Sheriff.

"Election just three months off, Tom," he growled, "and me breaking a good record you'd made! They're talkin' about it. I see 'em grin at me sometimes when they think I'm not looking. They didn't like it in the first place when you made me a deputy so soon after I came here. Just because we'd been buddies back in Oklahoma when she was tough, and—"

"You didn't get the breaks, Bill; I know that. I'm not accepting any resignations, either, not if it costs me a re-election. Here's a job that'll take you out into the tops of the hills, since you're so doggoned sensitive about things. It'll

Smoke

By ROY
NORTON

got vague trail directions, and decided that it was a pretty fair world after all; lot of sunshine up there, and everything quiet and peaceable, and nothing to worry about.

THE difference in time is a peculiar arrangement—that, and the course of the sun. Just about when Bill Adams was riding forward over a bad trail and feeling more contented, Pietro Capello in Chicago was banging a fat, hairy fist on the top of his desk and roaring a choice repertory of oaths he had learned when he was a stevedore in Naples. Mr. Capello had prospered by various methods. A considerable small army referred to him as the "King," and obeyed him as such, did he wriggle a fat finger and mutter that some one was to be "taken for a ride," or that a bomb under the house of some recalcitrant contributor might hoist things.

The King pressed a push-button, and his confidential henchman appeared. The King addressed him in Neapolitan, guttural, fast, rolling, and interlarded.

"Gigi," he said, "me—I nailed a gold-mine out in California off an old drunk the boys picked up. That is, I got me a paper which said he had sold me the mine, and I thought that was the end of it. Sent that lawyer Moses out there to get possession of it and planned to make it into a company and pass some of the stock to—well—never mind who. But now I get *this!*" He banged his fist on the letter that had come by air-mail.

"That old hick I got that mine from has put up a squall and got some one to back him, it seems, and he's started a law-suit to get his mine back. Court has ordered a deputy to take charge of her until the case comes off. Moses could fix it easy if the mine was here in Chicago, but out there he seems to have gone off his brain-walk. Hollers that he can't do anything—the fool! They've



got him so scared he doesn't know whether he's from Chicago or Jerusalem."

"*Si, si, signor,*" the listener said, not daring to grin. The King meditated.

"We've got at least five of our gang here that ought to get out of town until this racket blows over. Whenever a cop gets killed it makes the others sore, and y' never know what the dicks may do in a case like this. It's certain the five—you know the ones I mean: Yegg Miller, Gunner Francko, Blacky Banes, Cull Scheffer and the Rat—ought to take a vacation until this blows over. I want you to get the word to Oily Allesandro to gather 'em up. He's to be the boss; take them with him and go out there to this place, and—*get that mine!* Get possession of it, and hold it! We'll see whether a lot of rubes can— Go on! Going to stand there all day?"

DEPUTY Adams felt the balm of peace when he reached the Bright Hope mine. It was isolated enough to suit a hermit's desire for loneliness. There was a mining-camp that could be reached by a difficult trail across a sharp divide, he learned from the man he relieved. "Sho! Wonder why nobody told me about comin' that way?" he commented. "Would have been easier! I'll go across with you and telephone into the office that I'm here and on the job, then get myself some more supplies. No use in livin' on sowl-belly and frijoles when I can get canned stuff." And the departing caretaker, glad to get away from such isolation, guided him over the three scant miles of trail.

Bill Adams looked down the long street with its shade-trees, hospitable wooden porches and benches in front of old-fashioned "general stores," and thought that with occasional visits to this town of Colbert, things were not going to be so bad, after all. Then he bought some canned tomatoes and such luxuries, and returned to the Bright Hope.

As he had himself at times been a prospector and miner, the layout interested him and met with his approval: The big, single-roomed cabin, built but a few yards to one side of the "blacksmith's tunnel" on a patch of level ground and sheltered from northerly winds by an almost sheer cliff that rose upward for about a hundred feet before joining the climbing mountains, the spring of cold water that had been piped down to a faucet beside the cabin door, the comfortable porch, a tiny patch of vegetable garden—everything told his experienced eyes that the owner had faith in his property and had exercised work and patience in developing it. Bill sauntered to the tunnel entrance and found that the owner had built a big timber door to guard it from the curious. He smiled when he saw that the caretaker had found the key to the huge padlock, probably hanging on a nail in the cabin, had opened the door and had left the key in the lock.

The air of the mine was clean and pure. Bill felt a slight draft of air and with curiosity still keen, on another day he explored the cause and found an old upshoot and a half-decayed ladder, with an occasional rung missing, that exposed a star of daylight seventy-five to a hundred feet above. "That was his original prospect-hole," Bill muttered.

But even with all this to interest him, by the time nearly a week had elapsed he hungered for a change, and deciding

that the property was unstealable by any chance pilgrim who couldn't load it on a mule and carry it off, he went down on a sunny Saturday forenoon to visit Colbert and buy some fresh supplies.

But to the deputy's unduly sensitive mind he was again catching furtive grins as he passed down the street. His day was spoiled. He had hungered for human companionship, gossip, and a chance to loaf with other men; but now he decided to take the trail back to the Bright Hope. It was approaching evening when he loaded up his supplies, and trudged away; and it was dark when he reached the cabin of the Bright Hope. He turned the corner and all at once heard voices, all at once discovered men lounging on the little porch—and his eyes opened widely as he stopped in surprise.

"Geeze! Got a star on his shirt. Country cop!" exclaimed a hoarse voice, and another man laughed.

"Yep, I got a star all right," Adams said. "What do you men want here?"

HE heard a movement inside the cabin, and getting no reply from the men on the porch, turned in that direction. An oily-haired man with snakelike eyes stood in the dusk. He was holding a big automatic pistol leveled at Adams as he snarled: "We'll talk after one of the boys has lifted that rod off your belt. Stick 'em up."

His eyes shifting quickly to one side, the deputy saw that while his attention had been diverted by that man in the doorway, the five men on the porch had deftly produced similar weapons, all of which pointed his way. Slowly and rebelliously his hands went up in the face of such overpowering odds. The man in the cabin door laughed derisively and ordered: "Frisk him and bring him in. I'll strike a light and we'll have a better glauam at it. Country cops is my special meat."

A lamp glowed inside. Adams, disarmed, was herded inward and to the back of the cabin where, white with anger, he stood waiting for his captors to open conversation.

"So you're the guy we heard about that was up here protecting things, eh?" the oily-haired man asked, and Adams surmised that this was the leader.

"Yes, I'm the deputy sheriff," said Bill.

"Glad to meet yah," the oily-haired one remarked, his voice and grin sardonic. "S'pose you put your hands down and sit down on that stool there by you

till we decide how long we want you hanging round."

Adams lowered his hands and sat down, reflecting that if those guns were put away he might risk seizing the stool, smashing out the lamp, and charging for the open door; but the leader's next words dampened that project, for he directed: "Yegg, shut that door and bolt it. May as well tie this hick up too, until we get some chuck. I'm like a wolf for grub."

As a couple of the gangsters moved upon him the deputy stood up with fists unconsciously doubled and the leader said, "If he shows ugly, plug him."

"Why not do it anyhow, and get on with the eats?" demanded one of the men. "We're goin' to do it anyhow, aren't we? So why bother tyin' him up with a lot of rope and—"

"Shut your trap, you!" bawled Oily. "Who's the boss of this gang, you or me? Gunner, you and the Rat do as I said—tie this hick up and anchor him so he can't try to beat it until we get something to eat."

Realizing the danger of resistance and quite aware of the type of men watching him, the deputy made no struggle when they tied him so securely to the heavy stool that it would have hampered any attempt on his part even to regain his feet. The gangsters put away their guns. The man called Cull sliced and fried bacon, opened tin cans and set them around on the table while two others went out, cut the pack-ropes on the horse and brought in the new supplies.

"Pretty soft," the Rat remarked, handling the tinned goods. "This grub might come in handy, huh?" Some of the others were already arranging their blankets, all of which the deputy observed were new. Also not a man of them seemed to have much idea of making camp accommodations. They puzzled him somewhat. He wondered who they were, and where they had come from. They were all well supplied with liquor—a suit-case was apparently filled with ingenious tanks, which, had the deputy been wiser to the methods of professional Eastern bootleggers, might have provided him with a clue as to his captors' occupations. But the liquor seemed not to intoxicate save that it made one or two of them slightly garrulous. As the meal progressed they seemed to have forgotten their prisoner, or to regard him of such little importance that they ignored him. Adams almost forgot his

own predicament as he listened. By piecing together scraps of rough conversation, comments, and an occasional snarling dispute, the whole situation became plain, even the suggestion that some man called by them the "King" had probably stolen the Bright Hope from its lawful owner who, as the Rat loudly remarked, should have been "scragged and dumped into the lake with a ton of rock," or "taken for a ride when slushed." This brought up mention of similar cases where men had been done away with—clever but deadly plots. Hardened as the deputy was to quick tragedies of the frontier which he had known all his life, this gang of murderers chilled him to amazement. Hitherto he had not come in contact with murder as a profession.

Two things struck him as he listened. One was what fools these were to think they could come West and bully their way into any extended possession of the mine. The other feature suddenly came upon him with force, that although none of the conversation had incriminated the talkers, enough had been said to make his own death advisable, as far as they were concerned. He had not long to wait on this point.

THE RAT had dropped to silence and the deputy looked up to find his small, sloe-black eyes fixed upon him with a peculiarly hard stare.

"I puts in for that guy's blankets," he remarked, pointing at Adams.

"What d'ya mean?" demanded Oily.

"He'll not be needin' 'em any more and I'm goin' to be cold," the Rat replied.

"Sure. We're goin' to plug him, aint we? Then let the Rat do the dirty work of luggin' him outside, to earn his blankets," the man called Yegg seconded.

Other voices agreed in a chorus, some of the gangsters not even troubling to look around at the prisoner. But the hoarse voice of Oily got attention.

"There aint goin' to be no pluggin' yet," he said. There was a chorus of exclamations of astonishment and protest. Oily banged on the table with an empty tin and bawled: "Shut up, youse! Who's runnin' this outfit? Well, listen! Moses particularly told me there was to be no slaughterhouse work on this bozo we'd find here, on account of him bein' a deputy sheriff. Said we was to grab him and hold him so's he couldn't get any word out to the county seat. Moses is a lawyer, aint he? How much do you boneheads think you now about law,



and when it's best to pull a cannon or to forgit it? Huh?"

The growling went on in a lower key. All of the gang save the leader were urgent for a quick execution. Finally Oily was driven to compromise.

"Tell you what we'll do," he said. "We'll shut him in that hole out there until I can put it up to Moses and tell him you fellers think it safest to bump this cop off. If he comes around to think the same as you—good! But don't spill his works by doin' something ahead o' time. Moses might get us in bad with the King if things went wrong, and pass the buck to us. You know what *that* means!"

And then, as if fearful that he might yet be overruled, he brusquely ordered: "Here, Cull! Gimme a hand and we'll lug this bird, stool and all, out to that hole, and lock him in. That door and lock'd hold him if he was loose. I looked at 'em this afternoon. Come on."

Assisted by the man called Cull, he picked up the prisoner and they trudged out to the mine entrance, leaving behind them four snarling objectors, all of whom still wanted the deputy "shoved off." They heaved him into the darkness of the adit, stool and all, banged the big door shut and locked it.

Now Adams swore softly, and tested his bonds. For a minute he was in such a tempest of rage and mortification that he could not think coolly; then, steady-ing himself, he sat quietly striving to think. Suddenly he recalled stumbling over a loose, rusted strap-iron rail, back in an abandoned cross-cut. He bent his mind to recalling exactly where that strip of projecting iron was. He decided it had been in the second cross-cut—

an old one perhaps thirty or forty yards off to the right of the main drift. That ragged strip of iron offered almost his sole chance of liberation from his bonds.

"Here goes," he muttered, and throwing himself on his side he began painfully rolling himself, stool and all, up the muddy floor of the tunnel over the primitive rails. He was certain that nowhere was there a sump hole into which he might fall and when with his head—his only method of making certain—he felt the turn into the second cross-cut, he rolled into it.

"Luck's with me this far," he muttered, as he came into painful contact with the piece of rail, and wriggled himself into position to chafe through the ropes that bound his wrists behind him. In the process he inflicted a few wounds on himself. But they were nothing, were almost unheeded in his glee as he released himself from the stool. Somewhat stiffened and bruised, he now stood up and felt his way back to the mine entrance. He had no idea of attempting to force that heavy timber door which the mine owner had built to stay, using heavy lagging and a square timber set for lintels; but he remembered that he had seen a box of matches, a miner's pointed steel candlestick, and some spare candles, where they had been deposited in a niche just inside. He peered through the cracks between the lagging of the barricade and saw that the cabin door was shut. Through the window at its side he could see some sort of card game in progress and a flask in active circulation. Evidently the gangsters regarded their prisoner as securely and hopelessly held.

"They might come to bring me some blankets, a smoke, or to make me less uncomfortable — I don't think!" he growled as he felt his way back into the drift before lighting a candle, his mind troubled over the condition of that half-rotted and long-abandoned ladder which he must try to climb to liberty.

This proved no safe task. The ladder had originally been but roughly built of poles and cleats, and once, when he was halfway up, one of the latter broke beneath him and nothing but his hold on the upright saved him from falling forty or fifty feet to death below. At the final section, with starlight clear above his head, Adams found that one whole side had been removed and the other pole ripped loose and tossed downward to prevent any one from exploring the mine by its use.

An involuntary exclamation of disappointment burst from him and he held the candle high above his head, scanning the walls of the shaft to see if they offered even a precarious method of scaling the remaining twenty feet. The walls were smooth—too well-worked and worn to offer even a handhold. He clung there for a moment despairingly, peering upward into a fitful gloom. The light of the candle flickered in the draft of air, giving but little light. And then as if good fortune still held by him, the current suffered a brief lull, the candle-flame climbed to a clear and steady flame, and he saw a shadow seven or eight feet above him. It was a solitary pole which the mine-owner had torn loose from the top when he had destroyed the ladder, and evidently tossed downward into the shaft. It had fallen crosswise and jammed itself. Adams' mind quickly reasoned that somewhat higher up there might be rocky protuberances, if he could reach the pole, and if it was still strong enough to bear his weight. Slowly he climbed until he stood balanced with his feet on the tops of the remaining poles and his hands—one holding the candle from which hot grease ran down upon his upturned face—pressed against the wall of the shaft. The shaft was too big for him to reach both sides at once, and he felt aggrieved at such thorough workmanship of the original prospectors. The pole was just out of reach. He peered upward at its base and a grunt of satisfaction came from his strained lips when he discovered that it was lodged against a jut of rock that would hold. He tried to examine the condition of the slender pole. It looked none too sound. He debated whether he dared risk his life upon such a frail support; then concluded he might as well die from a fall as from bullet-wounds.

FIRST he stuck the steel point of the candle into a crevice as high as he could reach and where it would afford some light; then he gathered himself for the leap. He knew that if he failed to clutch the pole, or if it broke loose from its base or broke beneath his weight, the result would be the same, a hard and painful death. With this peril in mind, and the difficulty of a take-off from such a tenuous position, he leaped upward.

For an instant he thought he had missed the pole entirely; then his hands clutched it and he hung, suspended over a hundred feet of blackness, while it

quivered, threatened to break from its hold, settled somewhat at the higher end and then, as if even more securely wedged, became almost stationary.

SLOWLY, fearfully, he pulled himself upward, his wiry body and muscles obedient to his will, until his eyes were level with the butt of the pole and he saw that it was now securely fixed. There remained but to learn if it was still sound enough to stand the strain. Hanging there with one arm thrown across the pole, he recovered his candle, extinguished it, and thrust it into his hip pocket. It might be easier, he reflected whimsically, to die in the darkness. Then he swung beneath and stretched a hand out and upward.

The pole creaked, twisted, and swayed beneath his weight as if it were alive, but now that he had started his upward journey he went rapidly hand-over-hand until he came to the top. He saw that the stars were gratifyingly nearer, and carefully wriggled his weight up until he was on top of the pole, half-resting in a steep recline. He fumbled for his candlestick and candle; with patient, cautious effort he got it out, lighted it, and thrust it into a crevice, careful all the time to move as little as possible. Then, looking upward, he saw that here and there were little rough edges which would afford at least a handhold, and that if he could stand upright at the end of the pole he could reach the edge of the shaft with ease. He again balanced upward, succeeded in finding a firm handhold, then lifted his weight. The pole, released like a spring, bounded loose and clattered hollowly as it fell into the depths. The suggestive sound made Adams shiver. If he failed to reach the top there could now be no retreat.

He set his teeth and clutched for a higher hold, found the edge of the old shaft, made certain that the rock was firm, and a moment later stood on top—then suddenly sat down with knees trembling so violently from the reaction that they could not support him.

He began to consider his next movements. First, of course, he must get across the divide to Colbert. This being Saturday night and the hour not yet late, everything, even the general stores, would be open. Then what?

There were two courses open—one, telegraph the Sheriff; the other, endeavor to get assistance from the camp with which to overcome the outlaws. The

first, he decided, was impracticable, because it would be impossible for a posse to reach the mine before noon of the following day—and the gangsters, when they discovered his absence in the morning, as they inevitably must, might scatter and take to flight. The alternative of trying to enlist men from the camp who could and would fight seemed doubtful. It would take too much time to find such men—and would they respond to his leadership?

FOR a moment he cursed his predicament, then determinedly he got to his feet and struck out through the starlight and the glow of a rising moon for Colbert. He must first of all get to that point; then he could come to some decision. The moon had risen above the trees before he reached the top of the ridge. It seemed to him that he must be too late for action, and would find everything save the few make-believe dance-halls closed; but he was mistaken, and it was almost with a feeling of surprise that he saw all the lights glowing. Abruptly he halted and frowned.

"They laughed at me down there today," he thought. "They'd laugh harder than ever if they knew I had been beaten out again and had come to them for help. No—it's likely I couldn't get a man to come back with me—and if I did, he'd come to prove that I'd made a fool of myself, or was yellow. To hell with 'em! I'm goin' to fight this out alone and see who gets the last laugh!"

A half-hour later he was buying two heavy pistols from a general store.

"Must be goin' to practice up your shootin'," the storekeeper remarked when Adams ordered an unusual amount of ammunition.

"I reckon I am," Adams replied, unsmiling.

He paused at a night restaurant and ate a good meal, feeling his hunger, now that his habitual calmness had fully returned, together with determination as to what he must do. There was nothing in his demeanor as he sauntered out of the restaurant to indicate that he was going out, lone-handed, to wage battle, depending upon himself and luck alone for victory. His determination hardened as he climbed back over the trail—his fourth trip over it since sunrise, a twelve-mile tramp. But he was unaware of weariness when the cabin came into view.

The lights were still on and shining

through one of the side windows. He crept forward, after listening to hear if anyone was outside, and fixed his eyes upon a long narrow crack of light where the mud chinking had gone from between the logs. He gained it and peered within. The long, rough table on the opposite side of the cabin and well away from the door, was occupied; five of the gangsters were playing stud poker while the man called the Rat was standing behind with hands in his pockets looking on, and now and then cursing luck which evidently had gone against him. The wall light just inside the door, with its concave mirror reflector—which the deputy when he had first observed it esteemed an extravagance for a lone miner—threw a pool of light over the players and the table, leaving the side toward the door somewhat in darkness. The deputy considered for a moment and saw this advantage. If the players looked up, startled, the light, though not blinding them, would leave a man beneath it in some shadow of obscurity. He tried to see if the door was barred, but could not make certain, his angle of vision being too confined. For a moment he considered the advisability of opening fire through the chink, and then decided that a surprise offered better chances of success.

QUIETLY he retreated, and at some yards' distance swung his pistols tentatively in his hands as if to test their balance and weight; then he slipped one back into his belt and tiptoed toward the door, a square of darkness in the shadow at that side of the cabin, unilluminated by the moon. Cautiously he pressed on the crude latch, felt that the door was not barred, then threw the door wide.

"Put 'em up high!" he ordered as, astonished, they turned toward him, with that habitual quickness of the furtive. For an instant they paused as if transfixed, two of the players half-rising from their seats. Then with an oath the Rat whipped his hand toward his armpit—a mistake with a man like Adams, who instantly fired. The Rat crumpled inertly to the floor. Yegg attempted to take advantage of the moment and straightened to his feet with an automatic in his hand. The deputy shot again with that swift deadliness that had earned him a fearsome reputation on the border, and Yegg's gun clattered to the floor as he flung his hands out and pitched for-

ward on the table, sprawled and lifeless. Three of the others lost no time in thrusting hands toward the rafters, but Oily attempted to drop to the floor behind the table. With a shift quicker than light the deputy shot again, and Oily died without a groan. In the face of such calm execution as this, such absolute accuracy, the three remaining gangsters lost what little nerve they had left. This was different gunplay than they had ever seen in the East! This man was faster, cooler, more adept, and as remorseless in killing as the worst they had ever known. Fascinated, terrified, they stood motionless, staring at him through the pale wreaths of smoke.

"Anybody else want to risk it?" the deputy demanded, in a voice scarcely raised above the conversational pitch. "No?" he sneered, as they stood mute while he eyed them. "I'm sort of sorry! Your kind are too easy. Got no real guts. Walk over to that back wall and rub your noses against it. And see how high you can reach. Move!"

They obeyed in haste lest he change his mind and shoot again, and he walked toward them. As he stepped over the body of Oily, he glanced downward for a quick instant to make certain that the gang leader was beyond further interference. Then with the muzzle of his pistol pressed against spine of the first man facing the wall, he disarmed him without a word save, "Anybody who wants to turn and grapple me is welcome!"

His quick hands, deft with practice in search and seizure, left them unarmed and their pockets emptied, almost before the echoes had died away, and now he backed off toward the door, and out of it.

"Now turn around, and two of you put your hands on the shoulders ahead of you and march out here. You can lock-step if you want to; no doubt you've had practice."

SULLENLY they obeyed, one of them whining: "You aint goin' to take us outside and bump us off, are you?"

"I'm goin' to shoot if there's any funny moves," the deputy answered. "So don't try to make any breaks."

"Walk over to that mine entrance where you shut me in," he ordered the man called Cull, who headed the procession. "Then when you get to it, unlock that door. Key's in the big padlock, because I saw it there through the crack. Now then, steady—not too fast! This

is nice bright moonlight for shootin'. I like it."

Cull started to growl, but was gruffly told, "Shut up, or I'll shut you up for good!"—and walked ahead with the deputy a little to one side and taking full



advantage of the moonlight. They came to the huge door, absurdly heavy enough to guard a fortress; and the deputy came closer. If the gangsters were to attempt any break, it would be here, he thought, and he was grimly watchful and determined—but these three knew better than to take such deadly risks.

"Get inside," the deputy ordered when the door was opened. He herded them inward to the waiting blackness, slammed the door behind them, locked it, and as a further precaution wedged an additional timber beneath the iron hasp.

He returned to the cabin, made certain that its inmates were dead, blew out the light, shut the door, and with a long but weary stride again took the camp trail.

"I reckon if there hadn't been any trail here at all this mornin' I'd have worn one to bedrock today!" he thought.

He had no sense of personal victory; yet he thought with satisfaction that perhaps the results of the day might justify the Sheriff for one appointment.

And so, when he aroused a telegraph-operator from his bed to send an official message to the Sheriff the "key-puncher's" drowsiness disappeared and his mouth hung open as he read:

"Please start posse at once to take three Chicago gangster prisoners to jail. Also, bring coroner and three pine coffins. Bright Hope mine still in my charge. "Bill."

The Pearl of Price

An action-crammed novelette of the frontier Pacific islands, by the able author of "The Bamboo Jewel" and "Three Piece Dollar."

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

DURING five days the *Nautilus* had been whirled like a chip before the blast of the typhoon. Carson had obtained no sight of sun or stars since the blow first hit. Driven far off the course from Manila to Honolulu, blown somewhere into the northwest, he had not the slightest idea where he was. Somewhere, he guessed, near the almost unknown Hermes reefs.

Not that the *Nautilus* minded the weather a bit. She was a trig little schooner, almost a miniature, spotless and beautiful in each detail. A yacht, said most men, and they were not far amiss. Carson, a quiet, deep-eyed alert man, had found pearls after many a weary year, and had found the schooner as well. Then luck had come still faster, since he had no need of it.

There were not many in the crew. Looley, the wrinkled, sharp-eyed Chinese cook. Klang, the mate, a Malay of princely blood, as his fine, regular features testified, who had taken this name of "wanderer" to avoid using his own. Three other Malays, and his faithful man Sumbing, "the Scarred One." Not many, but every man worth while.

When Carson fell heir to the *Nautilus*, he inherited her secrets also. She had ever been careless about the law. Carson was careless about it himself, though he did not run counter to it. There were things aboard, however, best kept out of sight, and he had left them alone.

On the sixth morning the clouds broke, and a ray of sunlight sifted down from the east, almost level. The ray picked up a chip tossing off to starboard; a boat, whirling on the face of the rising waters. The huge seas were slow, tremendous, impossible to imagine unless one has experienced such things, with an elemental force almost beyond conception. With so short a crew, it were madness

to launch a boat. Klang, who had the helm, sent for Carson and bore down on the drifting craft. She was half swamped. Two bodies drifted face down in her, and a figure was in the stern, erect.

Somehow, Klang managed it. When Carson came on deck, the line had been flung and caught. The single figure was just coming aboard, the schooner falling away again before the wind. The boat was drifting away down the seas. A glance told everything; Carson turned to the figure now lying face down on the deck, senseless.

Klang joined him. Together they lifted the limp figure down the companion into the cabin. Then Carson sent the Malay to order coffee. He threw aside the lashed-down oilskin hat, exposing a coil of braided golden hair. A woman! He stared incredulously for an instant; then he poured brandy between the pale lips, and drew blankets about the roughly clad, splendid figure. After a moment the eyes opened—blue, vivid eyes.

"You're all right," said Carson awkwardly. "Here are clothes. Dress when you feel like it. Hurt?"

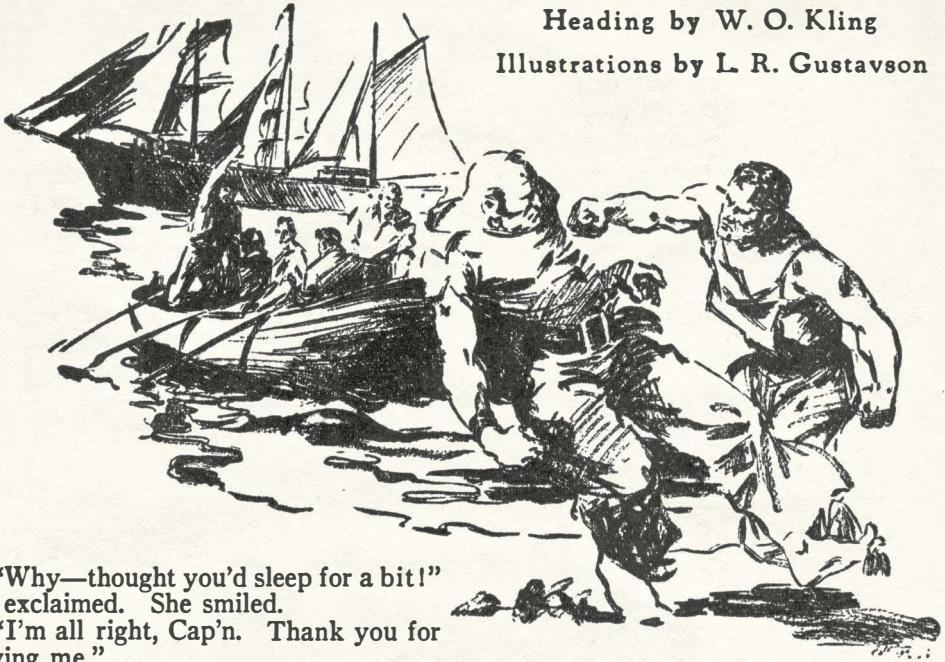
"No," said a deep, calm voice. "Just—cold."

"Warm up, then. . . . Ah, here we are." The yellow steward brought coffee in a pannikin. Carson helped the woman swallow it, then rose and went on deck, leaving her to sleep, as he thought.

"Good Lord! Now we're in for it," he muttered with distaste. "A woman! That's the devil's own luck. No place aboard here for a woman. And what a beauty!"

He was still thinking of her when suddenly she appeared before him, wearing the clothes he had laid out, holding the deck with feet as steady as his own, swaying a little to the rush and thrust of the long rollers.

Heading by W. O. Kling
Illustrations by L. R. Gustavson



"Why—thought you'd sleep for a bit!" he exclaimed. She smiled.

"I'm all right, Cap'n. Thank you for saving me."

She glanced about the schooner's decks, and her fine eyes lighted up. She could appreciate a craft like this. Carson said nothing. Yes, she was a beauty. Slim and slender, with a calm, poised look in her face, a quiet strength in every line of it. Wide-browed, wide of mouth and chin, thin of nostril; her shoulders wide, too, strength in her arms and the fine slim lines of her figure. Then she turned to him, her blue eyes alight and vibrant.

"What a splendid schooner this is! Cap'n—"

"Carson, ma'am."

SHE put out her hand. "Thank you again. I'm Helga Skyborg. My father was Cap'n Nels Skyborg of—"

"Of the *Arajura Lass*?" exclaimed Carson. Swift interest came into his face; his steely eyes quickened. "Why, I knew him well, years ago! We were pearling together all one season off the nor'-west coast! Where is he now? What's happened?"

"He's dead," she replied calmly. He saw a sudden sharp hurt in her deep blue eyes, but they did not falter, held his steely gaze calmly. "Two days ago. You were his friend? Carson. . . . He has spoken of you. I have heard of you more than once, Cap'n."

"We quarreled," said Carson. "I had a bad temper in those days. We weren't friends after."

"But he spoke well of you," she returned, to his surprise. "He said you were a just man. The quarrel was his fault."

They were silent for a little. Carson was astonished anew, that she should have spoken so of her father, so lately dead. He was amazed at such a meeting, at the woman herself.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-four." She looked at him gravely. "You will help me now?"

"Of course." Carson did not get her meaning. He thought she meant to aid her as a castaway, to see her safe ashore, cared for. "I'm bound for the islands, but this blow has knocked us galley-west, quite literally. You bet, Helga. I'll see that you're taken care of."

"That's good," she answered quietly. "We're not so far from the reefs now. I got away with two men, but they were both shot, dead. I was hit over the head—"

"Eh?" Carson came alive suddenly. "What are you talking about? What's happened?"

"Murder," she said. "They murdered him, and tried to carry me off!"

"Oh!" said Carson, and swallowed hard. "Who? Mutiny?"

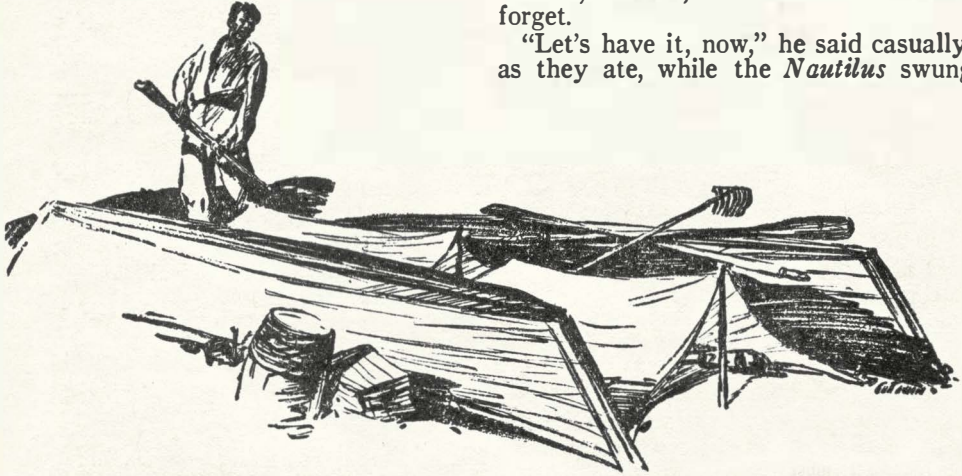
"No. Two men. They got my father to bring them to the reefs. They knew where pearls were, and we were going to fish on shares—"

"Where was all this?"

"The *Hermes* reefs."

"But no pearls are there," said Carson, frowning. "No beds. Those are American waters—"

"They've been found there, last year," she broke in. "Japanese pearlers began to strip the beds. These two men were kicked out by them, their schooner



Two boats were drawn up on the sand. . . . A pile of stores at one side, two small low tents. A man arose from the jagged coral, a rifle in his hands.

burned. That part was all true enough. They engaged my father on shares. We got there and found the beds and set to work. They had bribed some of our men."

"Come down to the cabin," said Carson abruptly. "Time for breakfast. Looks as though it were clearing off."

Her story gave him a jolt, sure enough, wakened him, rid him of self-consciousness. He forgot he was dealing with a woman. She caught the changed voice, the changed manner, and gave him a swift, curious glance.

Pearls in the *Hermes* reefs? That was a surprise, sure enough, but Carson had been out of touch with the pearling business for a year or more, since taking over the *Nautilus* and making the strike that had enriched him.

Fifteen hundred miles northwest of Honolulu—he knew the reefs, had even been there once, years ago. Few men knew of those inhospitable, dreaded coral shoals, unsurveyed since a United States ship had charted them and placed them under the Stars and Stripes nearly a hundred years before. They were off the beaten track, desolate, waterless, unvisited and unknown.

Looney had breakfast ready and waiting. Carson, eying the woman, saw that she had been through a good deal, but it meant little to her sturdy Norse blood. What would have shattered another woman left her calm-eyed, unmoved, well-poised as ever. He began to admire her secretly. With her, he was more at his ease now. One could forget—sometimes—that she was not a man. Carson, at least, was the sort who could forget.

"Let's have it, now," he said casually, as they ate, while the *Nautilus* swung

up the seas and went skidding down the long descents. "Who are these two chaps?"

"Maguire and Benders are the names."

"Hm!" The steely eyes narrowed. "I've heard of Maguire. Old-fashioned bullying type. Good pearler, and little good said of him. Who's this Benders?"

"More dangerous," she replied. "It was he who shot my father. He's a small man, smooth-faced, looks like a boy. He wanted me."

That gave Carson a mental picture of Benders, sure enough, and put a bad taste in his mouth to boot. He asked for no details, then or later. They were unimportant, as against the facts.

HE shifted the subject, spoke of the *Nautilus*, and she nodded quickly. Easy to see how Carson loved this little trim schooner of his, how she was his whole life, his world.

"Nothing like her afloat," he said, a glow of pride in his eyes. "You're safe enough now, so cheer up. Nothing with sails can catch us. Later on, I'll show you some pearls, maybe. Real pearls. This is no pearling lugger, but she's made the grade all the same. I know

every plank in her, every bit of teak and brass, every line and spar, like I'd built 'em."

"She's a lovely craft," said Helga, and looked him in the face. "And you're the right man to own her, Cap'n. But about those two men, now, Maguire and Benders—"

"Who's with 'em?" he asked. "How many?"

She made a gesture. "All of them. You see, Maguire furnished the crew. His own men."

"How did your father take you on such a cruise, with a crowd like that?"

"Why not?" she asked, giving him a level look. "I have a master's license." "You!"

A smile touched her eyes and lips, a fleeting smile at his astonishment. And Carson found her abruptly transformed. He had not seen her smile previously; it changed her whole expression, reminded him suddenly and powerfully that she was a woman, a very lovely woman.

"Are you one of the old-time seamen who snort at the idea of a woman master?" she asked gayly. "But there's got to be a Skyborg with a master's ticket, you know. That's what Father always said,"—and her face changed at mention of him. "I've sailed with him often, the past few years, and got my master's ticket only three months ago."

"Why aren't you married?" asked Carson.

"Why aren't you?" she shot back. "Or are you?"

He shook his head and got out his pipe. "Never clicked, somehow."

"Same with me. I'm not worried about it. A lot of women just want to marry a man; seems cheap to me, somehow. I want to marry more than that. It's hard to explain—"

"I get you," and Carson nodded quickly. Then he subsided. He was amazed at himself for discussing such things. "Pearls in the Hermes reefs? Are you sure about it?"

"A ten-per-cent yield," she said. "We've been there two weeks."

Carson whistled. The usual percentage was one pearl to every thousand shell.

"Virgin bed, eh?" he exclaimed. "Deep?"

"No. Beyond fifty feet there's coral mud. Oysters can't live there."

Carson got out his charts and presently discovered one showing the Hermes reef, or what was known of it. The atoll

was nearly twenty miles long by twelve wide and was formed by a series of reefs, most of them covered at high water, two or three being dignified by the name of islands. All were of living coral.

"The beds are all inside the lagoon," said Helga, pointing. "There's about fifteen fathom, in the deepest part, and most of the reefs are steep-to. The oysters are among the coral. The reefs outside the atoll are dangerous, with bad currents. We had to anchor fourteen miles off—and here, at Southeast Island, we had a camp. No big shell. The largest was about seven pounds."

"How many men are there now?" asked Carson again. "Kanakas?"

"No, whites. Two Filipino divers, Maguire and Benders; six hands forward, including the cook."

"What d'you expect me to do?" demanded Carson. "Walk in and tell them to hand over the lugger and the babies?"

"Why not?" Her direct gaze was fearless, simple as that of a child. "They've committed piracy, mutiny, murder! They don't dream any other ship is in these seas. And some of those babies are around fifty grains. It's worth while, isn't it?"

Carson shrugged, and pointed to the wall safe.

"If you're interested in pearls, there's a box full of 'em. I'm not."

She surveyed him with a puzzled expression.

"I don't understand. You wouldn't help me get those pearls?"

"No," said Carson. "I tell you, I've seen too much blood spilled over those babies. I don't like it. I don't like fighting. And let me tell you, those chaps won't knuckle down like lambs! Not a bit of it."

SHE said nothing for a long moment, but studied him as he sat smoking moodily.

"It means a good deal to me," she said, at last, gently.

Carson looked up.

"What does? The pearls?"

"Of course not. The lugger."

"Oh!" said Carson. His face changed subtly. He could understand this, entirely. This schooner of his had come to mean more than pearls or anything else to him. "Yes, I suppose the lugger's yours now. Yes. That's true. Is she much of a craft?"

Her deep eyes brightened. "Nothing like this one, of course. It's not what

she is, but what she stands for. She's ours—I mean, mine. That is, if we can get her back."

"Sure," said Carson, with a nod. "A poor thing, sir, but mine own—as somebody said. Yes, we'll have to do it."

"You will?" Her hand went out, caught his wrist in a quick, impulsive grip. "Promise?"

"No." Carson met her gaze, and his whimsical smile softened the hard-cut lines of his face. "No, Helga—I never promise."

"But—but I thought you said—"

"I said we'd get her back for you. That's enough." He patted her hand, then drew back. "And we'll do it, somehow. Sure!"

WITH the sail pulling her forward in the light, steady wind, the whaleboat threaded her way among the reefs. Klang was in the bow, watching for coral, his four men ready to take to the oars if necessary. Carson was at the tiller, alert, vigilant. Steering a whaleboat before the wind, even if she be a light, smaller than ordinary craft, requires care.

Oddly enough, he had caught no sight of the *Arafura Lass*. He had carefully come up on the reefs in order to surprise her at her old anchorage, but she was gone. Whether she had changed positions deliberately, or had run off to sea before the recent blow, he could not tell. It was not likely that Helga Skyborg had been mistaken about her position, however.

In order to determine matters, Carson was forced to take to the whaleboat and visit the lagoon island. He disliked to do it. He hated to leave the *Nautilus*, even for an hour. Much worse, he hated to leave her with no one except the woman and Looey to guard her. He must have the men with him, for if becalmed in that lagoon without oars, the whaleboat would be helpless.

The whole thing was distasteful to him, abhorrent. He was more than anxious to wash his hands of it entirely. He cursed the hour that had brought the woman aboard him, and then ashamedly took back his curses and damned destiny instead. Having given her his word to get back her lugger, he was bound to it. By good luck, however, he found a steady breeze and the whaleboat swept on toward Southeast Island, which commanded the entire lagoon. He would be back aboard the schooner long before

night, he figured, and his uneasiness wore away.

"Damned bad luck we couldn't come on the lugger and grab her!" he muttered, not for the first time. "If they've moved her position, she may be anywhere within a forty-mile radius, and as they're at the center of the circle and the *Nautilus* is at the circumference—blast it all! I don't like it a bit."

The sun struck down steady, warm, glittering. There was scarcely a wave breaking the surface of the shallow lagoon, protected as it was by miles of outflung reefs. The islets that rimmed its long oval rose only a few feet above the water. The *Nautilus* was long since out of sight, and Carson was not worried by his inability to sight the *Arafura Lass*. He knew that from a small boat, in a calm sea, the horizon is limited to three miles.

Southeast Island, for which he was making, lifted ahead, a mass of coral and glittering sand. Carson lifted his glasses and again inspected the islet. It appeared deserted. But Klang turned his head and grinned.

"They are there, tuan!" he called aft. He had, without glasses, detected something which Carson had missed, some indication that the islet was not deserted.

The whaleboat swung out a little, headed around a promontory of the islet, luffed, sped straight for the curve of beach now visible. Two boats were drawn up high on the white sand. A pile of stores at one side, two small, low tents, no sign of any man, greeted them. Now, with the wind no longer abaft, the nauseating reek of rotting shell smote them full force. There was the shell itself laid out on the sand to rot and open—a mass of it, over to the left. The islet, jagged with white coral upcrops above the sand, seemed deserted.

THEN, without warning, a man arose from the jagged coral, coolly strode down to the pile of stores and stood there, waiting for them to land. The sun glinted on the rifle in his hands. He was a tall, brawny figure, clad in tattered shirt and trousers, a mop of red hair flaming above a square, aggressive countenance. His appearance, thus, was a silent menace that Carson did not miss. Other men were hidden along the coral, no doubt, rifles ready. Carson stood up and waved his hand. Then he spoke softly, in Malay.

"Keep your guns down, out of sight!"

Push off as soon as I land. Klang! The lugger will be either at the northwest channel or off the western reefs. If I take off my hat, go at once. Try the western reefs first. If you see her, take her. Shoot anyone you find aboard. Leave two men to work her around, then come back to pick me up. Understand?"

"I understand, tuan," said Klang, in the bow.

FINDING the islet occupied had changed things in a flash. Until now, Carson's plans had been indeterminate, unsettled, formless. Now that he had found them here, it was certain that the lugger was not far away, probably unguarded. He dared not sheer off and go in search of her, lest those two boats on the shore come after him, get ahead of him—for she had to be found first. Better to chance things, throw these rascals off guard if possible. They would never dream that he had picked up Helga or knew the truth about them.

The oars were put out; the sail flapped idly, the sheet let fly. The red-haired man beside the pile of stores made no move, but stood grimly watching. The little whaleboat slid in, her nose touching the sand, and Carson went forward. Klang came aft to the tiller, passing him. The boat careened; then Carson stepped off and stooped, shoving her out. This would be construed as a mark of confidence by the watching man, and evidently was so construed. Carson waved his hand to the Malays and spoke in English, loudly.

"Go on back to the schooner. Take your time looking for likely ground. No hurry."

The sheet was drawn home. The boat leaned over, slipped away through the water as the sail caught. Carson turned to the man facing him, and gambled heavily.

"Didn't know you were around here," he observed. "Thought the place was deserted. Came in by the nor'-west channel and have been poking about."

There were three places the *Arafura Lass* might be found. One to the southwest, one to the west, one to the northwest. She was not in the first sheltered anchorage, and now—

The other grinned. "That channel is no good this monsoon," he said. "Should 'a' left your craft off the west reefs. Maguire is my name."

Carson removed the sun-helmet he had donned for this trip among the hot reefs,

and ran his fingers through his hair, not offering to shake hands. Klang would get that signal.

"Maguire, eh?" he said. "Glad to meet you, Cap'n. My name's Carson."

The other started slightly. His pale gray eyes narrowed, and his weather-seamed, aggressive features hardened.

"Carson!" he said slowly. "Well, I'll be hanged! I've heard of you, sure. Glad to meet you, Cap'n. I s'pose you smelled this shell clear down to Brisbane, huh? Always heard you had a nose for shell, and I guess it's true. Thought only the Japs knew about this place."

"That's how I learned," said Carson amiably. He got out pipe and pouch, and glanced around. "To judge from the shell, rumor spoke truth," he added. "I never supposed there was any shell about here."

"Nobody else did neither," returned Maguire, "until some Jap dropped in and tried, and got the truth. I s'pose it's all over the seven seas, now," he added glumly. "And we'll have a fleet o' luggers bearing down in no time. There was a Jap lugger here when we come, but she was in among the reefs. That blow we had the last three days got her. Drove her over there to the east and finished her among the reefs. Not a man got clear."

"Hm!" said Carson, and met the other's gaze. "Sure it was the blow?"

"Yes," said Maguire, and laid down his rifle. "Oh, I know what's in your mind, blast you! But it aint so. No use fighting over this. There's enough for them that comes first, and then the game's up. We're here ahead of the season, and it's been damned unsafe, let me tell you; no place for a lugger to lay up in the bad monsoon. Well, you aint figuring on running anybody out of here, I hope?"

CARSON shook his head and laughed. "Do I look like it, Cap'n?" he said mildly, with an amused air.

"Well, I've heard of you," retorted Maguire. "You're nobody's fool."

"Neither are you, by all accounts," and Carson chuckled. "My boys are taking a look at the ground, cruising about the lagoon. I won't touch any beds you're working. If we can come to a friendly understanding, why not?"

"Fair enough," said Maguire, and turned. "Benders! Come along, you chaps." He gave Carson a look. "See anything of any other craft?"

"Not a sign of any lugger the whole way. From Manila."

Maguire nodded. It was clear that he had fears of Japanese intrusion.

SIX hands forward, Helga had said, and two divers. Here were the divers, then—two small, slender brown men, first to come down from among the coral outcrop. Four other men with them. Unshaven, furtive-eyed rascals, these, typical scum of the waterfront. Last came Benders, whom Maguire deigned to introduce as his partner. He was a small man, little over five feet in height, but Carson knew instantly he was twice as dangerous as the burly Maguire. His pock-marked features, his brilliant black eyes, his lithe and agile step, all expressed the pugnacity which certain men of small size affect, as though only too ready to prove themselves better men than their larger companions. And the degenerate, boyish look of those features!

Benders showed more than this in his manner, however; it held a virulence, a reptilian venom, whose force astonished Carson. The man nodded to him and stroked a frayed black mustache.

"Heard of you, Cap'n. Tryin' to run us off, are you?"

"Now, Ben, lay off o' that!" said Maguire warningly. "Cap'n Carson aint that sort. We're all friendly. You, Steve, get to work and fix up grub. Gettin' on to noon, and the Cap'n joins us. Ben, you change your tone—"

"You mind your own business and I'll 'tend to mine," snapped Benders viciously. "No offense meant, Carson. We got a good thing and I don't aim to see nobody do us out of it, that's all."

"Don't blame you a bit," said Carson amiably. "You have a lugger of your own?"

"Aye," said Maguire, seating himself in the sand. Carson's whaleboat had disappeared, and apparently no one had paid it further attention. . . . Two men aboard the *Arajura Lass*, he reflected. Klang should be able to take care of them.

"Aye, an old craft we found at Manila," went on Maguire, watching his men, who had drifted down near the boats, with the exception of the cook, and were shaking dice. "The *Jenny J.*, and not much of a craft either, but good enough for this job."

"I suppose you've got your beds buoyed?" said Carson. "If so, we'll know

where not to go. Don't want any trouble if we can avoid it."

"Sure, sure," agreed Maguire heartily. Benders lit a cigarette and gave Carson a look.

"Don't care about whether we found any babies, huh?" he inquired. "Ain't interested in it a bit, huh?"

Carson's eyes dwelt upon him for a slow moment—a steady scrutiny that brought the angry blood into the man's face.

"Not a bit," he responded lazily. "I'm not interested in your property. If you want to pick a quarrel, you'll have a hard job."

"That's just his way, Cap'n," said Maguire. "He don't mean—"

"You blasted fool, will you speak for yourself?" snarled Benders, whirling on him for one blazing instant. Maguire's shaggy red brows drew down. His pale and unlovely eyes filled with a gust of hot passion; then he laughed and mastered himself. But his fingers clenched and clenched again as he sat.

"I'll tell ye flat out what I mean," said Benders, turning to Carson again. "We've struck a good thing, and now you come barging in. There's enough for two or for six; there's more'n we can touch, before the whole Jap fleet will be along to strip the reefs. But who's to know that you're on the level, huh? You aint no saint, Carson. I've heard things of you, sure. You don't pull the wool over my eyes, then cut my throat some dark night! Not much. You might's well know from the start that we're on the lookout, and you can be 'be same."

Carson laughed a little.

"That's fair enough, Benders," he returned. "I'll be the same, you bet! So you're serving notice on me, are you? Warning me that you'll be along some night to jump me, eh?"

MAGUIRE exploded in an oath of exasperation.

"No!" he bellowed. "Damn it, Carson, don't listen to that little fool! Why'd we want to jump you? Nothing of the kind! We got enough right now without wanting more. Ben, you're a cursed spitfire—"

Benders leaned forward like a flash and struck him across the mouth.

Maguire did not strike back. He reached out one foot, hooked Benders about the ankle, and threw him off balance. Then his bulk heaved forward. It reminded Carson of an octopus catch-

ing an open tridacna with one tentacle and then hitching himself forward on the giant clam bodily. The men came and stood around, grinning.

Maguire's tactics puzzled Carson. He had caught Benders by both wrists, held the man's arms out, and despite struggles and squirming, planted his knees on the smaller man's body. A torrent of foul curses poured from both men.

"Listen, you rat!" roared Maguire. "I've taken a lot off you, and I'm done! If you were any other man, I'd rip your damned black heart out, understand?"



The knife drove up and down. Maguire flung out his arms. The pearl glinted in the air, falling to the sand.

None of your cussed tricks with me either! You pull a knife and I'll blow the top of your head off. Get me?"

"All right, Cap'n," said Benders, with surprising meekness. He ceased to struggle. "But we're splitting up here and now. Divvy up the babies that's my share. I'm quitting."

"Quit and be damned," retorted Maguire, rising. "Suits me right enough. I can sleep nights if you aint around. You can take your share and walk away. Where'll you go?"

"With Carson," said Benders, getting to his feet and shaking off the sand. "Carson, you give me passage with you. Don't care where. I'll pay you, pay you well!"

"Sure," said Carson. "But suppose we let the whole thing drop right now. I see Steve has some grub ready, and I'm hungry. Fresh fish, eh? That's good. Have to get some myself next low tide. Suppose we eat, and let everything else slide."

THERE was no driftwood to be found; Steve did his cooking over a spirit lamp, and made a good job of it. Carson enjoyed his meal. He had quite recovered his usual good spirits by this time.

To his astonishment, he found that Benders was apparently firm in his purpose to break off with Maguire, nor did the latter oppose the break. Between the two men existed a deep-seated enmity, although the seamen were all with Maguire. The man Benders, to tell the truth, was utterly alien to all these others. Carson put him down for some crafty waterfront shark, who had perhaps rigged the whole game as regarded Skyborg and the *Arafura Lass*.

"Mind you," said Benders, "I'm takin' passage with you, Carson, but we're not partners, see? I'm satisfied with what I got already. Maguire, you can have the rest of the takin's here, and we quit complete. No more fishin' for me."

Carson chuckled. "How do you know

I won't cut your throat some dark night, Benders?"

The little man gave him a vicious glance, as Maguire guffawed at this.

"I can take care o' myself, Cap'n. And you're better to trust than this hunk of cheese here. How much do you want for passage? Where you bound?"

"Honolulu. Won't charge you anything," said Carson, and gave Maguire a wink. "Cap'n Maguire will pay me to get you off his hands—eh, Cap'n?"

"You're damned right," said Maguire. Benders loosed a torrent of oaths at him.

"Watch your step, Maguire," he concluded. "Or else, I'll do some talking."

"You try it, Ben, you try it," said Maguire calmly, but with a certain ferocity in his look that startled Carson. "Two can talk. And these men o' mine know a few things."

Benders glared around the circle of faces. Carson intervened smoothly.

"All hands pipe down. If you're going to break up, do it friendly, with no threats. Benders, you can tell me what you've learned about the pearl beds here, and where Maguire's fishing, and that'll more than pay your passage. Suit you, Cap'n?"

"Oh, sure," responded Maguire. "Long as you aint aiming to conflict with me, anything's agreeable. We'll split up the babies here and now. A third to you, Ben, a third to me, a third to the men. That's what we agreed."

He produced a chamois bag, and all hands fell to dividing the take of pearls, with much oath-starred wrangling.

From what he saw of those pearls, without making any close examination, Carson was again surprised. Some were large. All were apparently of exceptional luster. That virgin, untouched beds had been found here, was evident. He perceived that both Maguire and Benders knew pearls, also, and as the partition went on, it was clear that a fortune had been snatched from the hand of the luckless Cap'n Skyborg.

TIME passed; although he watched sharply, Carson saw nothing of his returning boat. The four men ran out one of their two boats and departed with the Filipino divers, heading across the atoll to one of the reefs just awash as the tide ran out. The division of pearls came to a snarling conclusion. Benders tucked his share into the pockets of a belt which he donned under his shirt.

"That your craft?" asked Maguire,

pointing to a fleck of sail just visible off to the westward. Carson, who had just picked it up, nodded.

"Probably."

"Well, I'll open some shell," said Maguire, and grinned at Benders. "You aint in on this take, neither! You can set there and see what you missed."

Benders curled his lip in a snarl.

Maguire went over to the rotting shell, filled a bucket with water, got out his big clasp-knife, and fell to work opening shell. Carson watched the boat, tacking down toward the islet, and presently made out that she held but two men. This showed that Klang had found the *Arafura Lass*, had taken the lugger and sent her around to join the *Nautilus*.

He could see clearly enough why Maguire was glad to be rid of Benders. The vicious little murderer of Cap'n Skyborg was no household pet. He was out for trouble all the time, he was irresponsible, one could not predict what he would say or do. Probably Maguire himself feared a knife in the throat some dark night.

SUDDENLY Carson was aware of Benders mouthing low words to him.

"Cap'n! That your boat coming?"

"Aye," said Carson.

"We're here alone with him," said Benders, jerking his head toward the broad back of Cap'n Maguire. "What say? He's got the babies in his shirt. You and me—split 'em. Huh?"

Carson felt a little sick as he met the venomous eyes, read their glittering message. Barely in time, he checked his impulsive words, remembered that both these rascals had been concerned in murder and worse. Thought of Helga Skyborg killed any chance sympathy for Maguire.

"Not me," he said calmly. "I won't interfere, if that's what you mean. It's not my show. If you carry it off, I won't claim any of the babies."

"You won't help him, huh?" muttered Benders.

Carson shrugged. "Nor you. That's fair enough."

Benders left him, strode across the sand toward the outspread shell. Maguire glanced around and held up one hand.

"Twenty-grain baby, Ben! See what you lost now, damn you!"

"Don't matter," said Benders. He took out a cigarette and lighted it, then snarled down at the seated Maguire: "Soon's that boat gets in, I'm gone."

Looks like a lot o' men in her, too. More than we seen before."

Startled, Maguire turned to glance at the approaching whaleboat.

Like a flash, Benders fell upon him. His agility was incredible. The knife in his hand drove up and down, again and again, every stroke deep into the broad back of Maguire. Carson could not have interfered if he would.

A FRIGHTFUL cry burst from Maguire. He flung out his arms. The pearl flew from his hand and glinted in the air, falling to the sand. Benders hurled himself at it. Maguire came to his feet. Streaming with blood, he caught up the water-bucket and hurled it. Struck full across the head, Benders pitched forward. Maguire took a step, then crumpled; he was dead as he struck the sand.

It had all happened swiftly, in the fraction of an instant.

Carson rose, looked out at his whaleboat. She was standing in for the beach, Klang and Sumbing alone in her. Maguire's boat was off across the lagoon, a couple of miles distant, still fishing.

Going to Benders, he stooped over the man, who was unconscious, and removed the money-belt with its pearls. Then he turned to the dead Maguire, and from the body took the chamois bag. Here in his hand was everything for which men had sinned and died, everything for which these ruffians had brought crime and terror into a woman's life. An ironic grimace twisted Carson's features.

"So much death, so much suffering, for so little!" he murmured. "Well, you go with the lugger, to her. After all, what better destination? You belong to her, you can insure her future, you can repay her for what you've done to her, damned glittering baubles!"

Carson, having devoted most of his life to pearls, had come to hate them.

The boat was in now, her nose scraping the sand, Klang leaping ashore. Carson turned again to Benders, reflectively, making a decision which was to mean much to him. He had intended taking Benders along, had intended it from the start, to let him face Helga and later a court for the murder of her father.

But now he changed his mind. Who was he, to drag the little reptile to the bar of justice? Far better to leave him here, marooned with his latest victim, their lugger gone, only a small boat for him and his scoundrelly companions. The

Japanese pearlers would be along soon enough. They would not starve. And loss of the pearls would be more bitter punishment to Benders than any the law could bring upon him.

So, with a nod of decision, Carson turned to face the eager Klang.

"You found the other schooner?"

"Yes, tuan," said Klang, his aquiline features, so different from the usual dish-faced Malay countenance, all alive with active thought. "We found her and did not waste cartridges. We put the steel into those two men aboard her. She is now circling around the outermost reefs and they'll bring her to our own ship."

"Very well," Carson pointed to the other boat, updrawn above high water mark. "Knock a hole in that boat, and we depart."

In his pocket was a stub of pencil. He went to the pile of stores, from an opened box took a tin of tomatoes, and tore off the paper wrapper. On the inside of this he wrote briefly:

For murder of Cap'n Skyborg, payment received.

*Carson, agent for Helga Skyborg,
Master of Arafura Lass.*

This paper he tucked under the hand of the still senseless Benders, then turned to his own whaleboat. Klang had knocked a gaping hole in the other boat, and now joined him. The whaleboat was shoved out, the sheet was hauled in. Carson settled down at the tiller as she heeled over and took the breeze, running to the southward across the lagoon. He looked back once at the two figures sprawled in the sand, and smiled thinly. At his feet were three rifles. The three men who had gone aboard the *Arafura Lass* had taken their rifles with them.

Sumbing, the scarred one, lifted his dog-face and sniffed the air.

"I smell fog, tuan," he said. Carson frowned, glanced around.

"Fog, with the wind blowing? Has Allah smitten your senses?"

"That is as may be, tuan. But here are reefs, far and wide, and the tide out, and I can smell fog."

CARSON grunted, but was uneasy none the less. The whaleboat drove on, gathering speed, with Klang perched in the bow, watching for coral pinnacles ahead. Sumbing chewed his betel-paste and spat scarlet over the leeward rail, and Carson watched the canvas, the tiny outflung reefs ahead, stretching on across the horizon toward the waiting *Nautilus*.

Behind them, on the sand, Benders sat up and caught sight of their rag of sail as he came to a cursing awakening, and saw whither they were heading.

It was a little after this that the wind failed altogether, and a bank of fog swept down and closed in opaquely upon the atoll, as it frequently does in those reef-thick waters.

FOR Helga Skyborg, the day passed monotonously. Wrinkled old Looney told her tales of Cap'n Carson, and the bright horizon remained unflecked and undimmed until mid-afternoon.

Then, as she went aloft with the glasses for the tenth time, Helga discerned two things. Off to the northeast lifted a grayish dimness; she knew it for fog, such as she had seen twice since coming to these reefs, and her heart contracted. She had forgotten to warn Carson of this peril, for in these waters it was a very real peril.

Off to the westward, however, she saw something else that made her forget the fog entirely. A tiny scrap of sail showed there, was gone, showed again. Watching it steadily, she knew it at last for the topsail of her own lugger—recognized it, indeed, where anyone else would have been uncertain whether it was a sail or a distant gull. She called down to Looney, exultantly.

"It's the lugger! He's got her, Looney! They're coming with her!"

Both of them took for granted that Carson was coming with the lugger. So they paid little heed to the fog-bank that so swiftly enclosed and hid the reefs. The lugger had circled well out of it, and held the faint breeze, and the fog did not quite come to the *Nautilus*, for she lay moored in the south channel where the wide rush of water broke the fog and checked its course. The *Arajura Lass* closed in gradually, the wind dying out by degrees, but it was a long while before she drew down within hail.

By this time, Helga had discovered only the three Malays aboard her. When she hailed them, she had no luck whatever, for she knew no Malay and they little English. Then Looney took a hand, when they had let drop the lugger's anchor and were swinging close by. Looney spoke Malay excellently; he was one of those Chinese from Gunning Api who have forgotten their own tongue across the centuries.

He learned what had taken place, so far as the three knew it, and passed the

information to Helga. At her command, he ordered the three to lower a boat, but there were none remaining on the lugger. Perforce she and Looney got the cutter of the *Nautilus* into the water and rowed it across the gap, and so Helga came to the deck of her own lugger again.

She sent Looney and the three Malays back to the *Nautilus* in the boat, and would listen to no protest. She wanted to be alone on this lugger, alone with her memories, alone with the sense of ownership and possession. She had much to do aboard here, before it could be cleansed of every last trace left by its recent occupants.

Accordingly, she fell to work down in the after-cabins, where the presence of her dead father lingered strongly. Maguire and his men had respected nothing aboard here, had not even respected her own cabin and her belongings,—but she wasted no futile tears over this. She made the best of things as they were, and from her father's old plundered sea-chest took what Maguire had disdained—an old-fashioned revolver. She loaded it and put it to one side, and went on with her work.

WITH the cabins in such shape as contented her orderly soul, she suddenly noticed that darkness was drawing down. She hurried on deck. The afternoon had nearly sped, and the edges of the fog had sent out tentacles to enclose the two schooners. She hailed the *Nautilus* and Looney made answer. The three Malays had gone off in their boat, taking the fog-horn, to try and find Carson. Occasionally Helga caught the thin, distant note of the horn, or thought she did. It was hard to make certain. . . .

She got a lantern alight and set to work in the galley, after breaking out some cabin stores, and soon had a meal ready. The fog, she knew from experience, might last for a full day or more, until a breeze came up to dispel it. No lights showed aboard the *Nautilus*, and Looney was incapable of rigging any, so she rigged an oakum flare and replenished it from time to time, to guide Carson or the Malays if they showed up.

It was while doing this that she found the three rifles on the transom of the cabins, where the Malays had left them in their hurry to get aboard the other craft. So the three men had gone off unarmed! Not that it mattered greatly; possession of the two schooners was the chief thing.



She called down exultantly: "It's the lugger. He's got her, Looney! They're coming with her!"

Then the voice of Benders came to her out of the mist.

She was standing at the rail when she heard it, plainly, clearly, uplifted in a curse. For an instant, paralyzed by it, she stood peering down at the water.

There was no boat, there were no other voices. She broke into a shaky laugh, listened again, but heard nothing. Beyond doubt, her ears had deceived her. A squeaking block, a rasp of anchor-chain, the cry of a bird—her subconscious fears had translated some such sound into the voice of Benders. She straightened up, resolutely throwing off her anxiety, and went to replenish the flare.

Time passed, with only the dull booming of surf on distant reefs to mark its going. After a long while, Helga went down into the after cabin, lit the lamp slung in gimballs, and began to enter up the rough log left by her father. She became absorbed in this, entering what had happened, her rescue by Carson, and their return to the reefs.

As she was writing the last words, she distinctly caught the thump of a boat against the lugger's side, followed by the clump of a booted foot on the deck overhead. It flashed across her instantly that the Malays wore no footgear. Therefore, Carson must have returned. Carson—or another!

Swiftly she rose, caught up the old revolver, darted into the passage and started up the ladder.

SHE was nearly at the deck, when a voice halted her like a shot, and held her aghast, dismayed, paralyzed for a moment. It was the voice of Sandy, one of Maguire's crew.

"Not a soul in sight," it said. "Decks clear empty, Benders. Light in the after cabin."

"Somebody's down there, huh?" This was the voice of Benders. It wakened fear and horror in the crouching girl. She was incredulous. She could not realize how the man had come here. "I'll just take a look. Question is, who lit that flare, huh? Where's our two men gone?"

"Clear enough now," broke in another voice. This was Limey, a rat-toothed little ruffian. "Blimey, that chap Carson fooled us proper! His boat went off and coppered the lugger, and his men fetched her around! The fog got him and he aint back yet, like you figured—"

"You there, Steve?" said Benders, a quick, rising thrill of excitement in his voice. "Get into the boat again, all of you except Limey—go grab that other schooner, quick! Before they wake up. Must be some one aboard her. Limey! You stop here with me. Don't go down. Wait!"

Hasty feet pounded the deck in obedience.

Helga crouched, her breath coming fast, a thousand expedients flitting across her brain—all of them useless. She was trapped here. There was only old Looney aboard the *Nautilus*, and none to warn him. They were going aboard her now, to take her by stealth. That was why Benders and Limey were waiting on deck above, until Steve and the others had the

Nautilus, before descending and causing any commotion here.

There was none to warn Looey—except herself.

She straightened up, crept up the steps, peered around the coaming. A mutter of voices, two dark shapes close by, at the rail, one of them her father's murderer. It was just such a night as this that Benders had put two bullets into her father's back. The thought of it steadied her, brought her to herself. She could not tell which of these two was Benders. No matter!

The old revolver swung up, leveled. She pressed the trigger. There was a click and a snap—the old cartridge had missed fire. A sharp exclamation from the rail, a low cry of warning.

Desperately she pressed the trigger again. A shot this time, a burst of fire, but the bullet went wild. She had missed her chance. A figure leaped at her, as the hammer fell again. Limey caught that bullet squarely. It blew off the top of his head. None the less, his body pitched against her with all its dead weight, carried her off her feet, sprawled with her at the bottom of the companionway. She dragged herself upright, just as the ray of a flashlight from above struck full upon her.

"You!"

The yell of recognition burst from the man above. She flung up the revolver—it snapped, and snapped again. In this awful instant she remembered, for the first time, that her father had said something about getting the firing-pin repaired. Then Benders was coming down the ladder like a fury, swift to realize his advantage.

He was upon her. A cry burst from Helga—a wild scream of anger, of panic, of horror. She struck out with the useless weapon in her hand. Benders was already smashing at her with the long, heavy flashlight. It struck her over the eyes; dazed her. She slipped in the blood of Limey, at her feet. As she did so, Benders brought down the flashlight, full across her head, and she pitched forward senseless.

DISREGARDING a commotion, a spatter of shots, from the other schooner, Benders flung open the cabin door, saw it was empty, then turned and dragged Helga into the light. He pounced upon her eagerly, his eyes aflame beneath the bandage around his head. With his knife, he slit the breeches of

the dead Limey into strips, and bound the wrists and ankles of the girl.

Then, rising, looking around, Benders caught sight of the logbook on the table. He went to it, saw the entries she had made, and devoured them greedily. Thus, he came to a perfect comprehension of all that had taken place. And as he read, he laughed softly.

"This cinches it!" he muttered. "They believe already that Carson murdered Cap'n Maguire, and when they read this, they'll never believe anything else! Neither will anyone. This clears away everything for us all, gives us an out! We'll loot Carson's ship, pick him up and get back the pearls, set fire to his ruddy craft—and sail into any harbor as cool as you please! Lay the piracy on him. Aye! With his reputation, he can stand it. And he won't be able to do any talking back, neither—not when we get done with him! Carson, by glory, we've got you and we're sitting on top of the world this minute!"

A hail drifted across from the *Nautilus*, a hail in the voice of Steve the cook, to let him know that his exultant statement was correct.

EVEN after the fog closed down, the breeze lasted—no new experience to Carson. He had seen the heaviest fogs come at the same time with a stiff breeze.

With coral underfoot, however, the sail must come down. Otherwise, it was suicide, for coral pinnacles were everywhere, and with no sun to reveal them, watching were vain. So the canvas came in, Klang and Sumbing put out the oars, and Carson steered their slow progress entirely by compass.

Slow or not, their first intimation of coral was when they ground into it.

They got off again, water streaming into the boat. Carson abandoned the tiller and worked with the bailer, grimly. Progress had to be abandoned, however. It was impossible to see twenty feet away from the boat. Twice they barely missed submerged reefs, which would have torn out the frail bottom of the whaleboat. Carson gave up, and drifted with the current, which at least tended in the right direction.

So the afternoon dragged on into darkness, maddening in its slowness.

Carson found that the *Arafura Lass* had been taken with grim simplicity. Klang had sailed up to her, Sumbing had gone aboard with him, and the curved knives had done the rest. He shrugged

and made no comment. The other three men could take her around the reefs and join the schooner, had probably done so long ere this.

Night closed down. Twice the note of a fog-horn reached them, only to recede and vanish in the thickness. Then, with startling clarity, the muffled crack of a shot whipped across the fog, followed by others. After that, silence.

"As Allah liveth!" exclaimed Klang. "Those shots were not far away, tuan!"

Carson made no reply. He knew the futility of trying for direction in this fog. A horrible uneasiness had beset him. It had been criminal to leave the *Nautilus* defenseless, he told himself, not to mention the girl Helga. His mind went back to those men who had been with Maguire. He knew at once that they must have out-smarted him, must have stolen past while he lay there idle and helpless in the fog. An agony of apprehension seethed within him, but he gave no sign of it. He sat staring into the blackness, a stricken man. There was almost no sea at all, and the ceaseless long thunder-roll of surf had sunk to a distant rumble. The boat swayed on the slowly heaving water, and Klang, taking the bailer, fell to work.

"We are not far from the ships," spoke up Sumbing abruptly, and lifted his face. "I can smell men, tuan."

Carson wakened. He was roused from his abstraction not by these words, which he recalled only after a moment or two, but by a coolness on his cheek, a breath. He came to himself, and straightened up.

"Unstep the mast!" he ordered abruptly, but kept his voice low. "Give me the bailer. Pass back the mast along the thwarts. Both of you spread out the sail like a tarpaulin for'ard, and get beneath it. Quickly, now!"

They must have thought him mad, must have stared blankly toward him there in the darkness. This concealment looked utterly asinine, at such an hour, under such conditions.

"Aye, tuan," said Klang, and the boat rocked as he moved forward.

"Take the rifles with you," said Carson. "All three of them. Be ready if I speak."

THE fog rushed past them; though they could not see it, they could feel the breeze. It spurred them, and they realized why Carson had spoken. They did not know his reason, nor did he

himself, save that he was on the alert, vigilant, filled with dread and forebodings. Then a star, and another, glimmered overhead, though the fog still closed them in like a moving, rushing wall, fleeing silently as the wind drove it in swirls and eddies.

Carson moved to the 'midships thwart and began to bail, for the water was gaining fast. The two Malays were lying covered by the canvas, just forward of him. At this moment the mist was gone as though cleft by some unseen knife. An uncanny golden light was spread over the sea, for the moon was just rising, and stars gleamed down coldly. The fog went sweeping away in two high gray walls, farther and farther.

Not two hundred feet away was the *Arajura Lass*, her lanterns glimmering. The *Nautilus* lay more distant, dark and apparently deserted.

CARSON started half erect, then sank back again. Swift, eager commands leaped to his lips, only to be checked. Imperceptibly but steadily the moon was rising, flooding everything with clear golden light, revealing his boat and his every action with startling distinctness. And from the lugger, not from his *Nautilus*, came a clear sharp cry in a woman's voice.

"Carson! Look out! They—"

The cry was checked, cut off short.

"Lie quiet," ordered Carson in Malay, softly.

He was perplexed, bewildered, one would have said frightened, had his nature been subject to fright. A light glimmered on the deck of the *Nautilus* and was gone again. Men were there, then. Not his own men, or they would have hailed him. And Helga was aboard the lugger, had tried to warn him! Benders, then, had taken both craft.

All this passed in the flash of an instant. Water came about his feet. He bent with the bailer, flung it over the gunwale in steady spurts of flashing phosphorescence, heard the two men under the canvas stir a little as the water reached them. He looked up toward the lugger, saw a man leap to her rail, and knew him for Benders.

"Ahoy, Carson!" came the voice, thinly in its exultation. "Come aboard, Cap'n, and finish our talk! Hit the coral, did you? Where's your other boat and your men?"

The other boat? For an instant hope thrilled Carson. He stood up, looked

around, but saw nothing of the other boat.

He was safe enough for the moment, and knew it. The pearls! Benders wanted them first, his life next. And now he had his choice. He could make for the *Nautilus*, or for this lugger where the girl Helga was plainly held captive. One wrench at his heart and soul; this was all. He did not hesitate, did not consider anything else possible, but turned toward Benders.

"Looks like you've got the best of me," he answered. "Yes, hit the coral, hit hard. Both men gone. Where's the other boat, then?"

BENDERS uttered a cackle of derisive laughter.

"Gone looking for you in the fog, the fools!" he answered. "We got rifles trained on you. Don't try any tricks, Cap'n. You come aboard and hand over them babies."

Carson stooped, bailed furiously for a moment, thinking hard and fast. Aboard the *Nautilus* a flame leaped out; the bullet sang overhead, and the whiplike rifle-crack echoed. Benders hurled a wrathful yell at the schooner.

"Steve! Quit shooting, you fool! It's all right, Cap'n—you come along here."

"I'm not doing so badly, thanks," returned Carson, again standing up. He knew that his occupation had been clearly discerned. "Might run up the sail, now that I've a breeze, and clear out. Thanks for telling about my other boat."

Benders let loose a volley of startled oaths.

"You try it, and we'll drill you!" he yelled, then calmed down. "Tryin' a bluff, are you? Bailing your head off. Yah! Don't come anything like that over me, Cap'n! You'll do no running with a hole punched in your boat! We've got both craft, and I've got your pearls right here—your pearls, savvy that? Out of your cabinsafe behind the panel! You step along here and hand over them babies you got off me and Maguire, and I'll let you take your ruddy schooner and clear out! That's a fair offer, aint it?"

"Aye," said Carson, "if you mean it."

He stooped again, bailing rapidly, but faster than was necessary. Again a low word in Malay:

"After I go aboard, follow quickly but quietly."

"I mean it, all right," hailed Benders with eager volubility. "You run for it, and we'll fill you full o' lead before you

get your mast stepped! Come aboard and hand over the pearls, and you can have your schooner. Give you my word of honor, Cap'n!"

"Aye?" returned Carson. "How about the men with you? They agree?"

Benders turned and spoke. Voices broke out around him in quick assent. Carson listened, his senses set to distinguish them. The two Filipinos and another. Three men with Benders, then, on the lugger. Probably three on the lugger, since there had been six in all. He scarcely heard what the little murderer had said about his pearls, although the words showed that Benders was speaking the truth and had found them.

"All right, then," said Carson, and leaned over, bailing hard.

"Four aboard there," he muttered in Malay. "Come quietly."

"Throw your gun overboard!" ordered Benders. Carson stood up, threw out his hands.

"Haven't any gun, you idiot! If I had, I'd drill you here and now!"

Benders laughed. "I believe you would at that, Cap'n! All right. Come on."

Under the ladder another boat swung, empty, on the dark side away from the *Nautilus*. Carson got out an oar, tugged at it clumsily, moved his craft through the water by degrees. He broke off to bail again, then resumed the oar. Little by little, his whaleboat edged in, until a man at the rail heaved out a coil of light line, and Carson caught it. They drew him in, and he edged his craft between the lugger and the boat, to the ladder.

AT the rail above stood Benders, leaning over, peering down at him.

"Ye needn't do no more bailing, Cap'n," he said mockingly. "Come along."

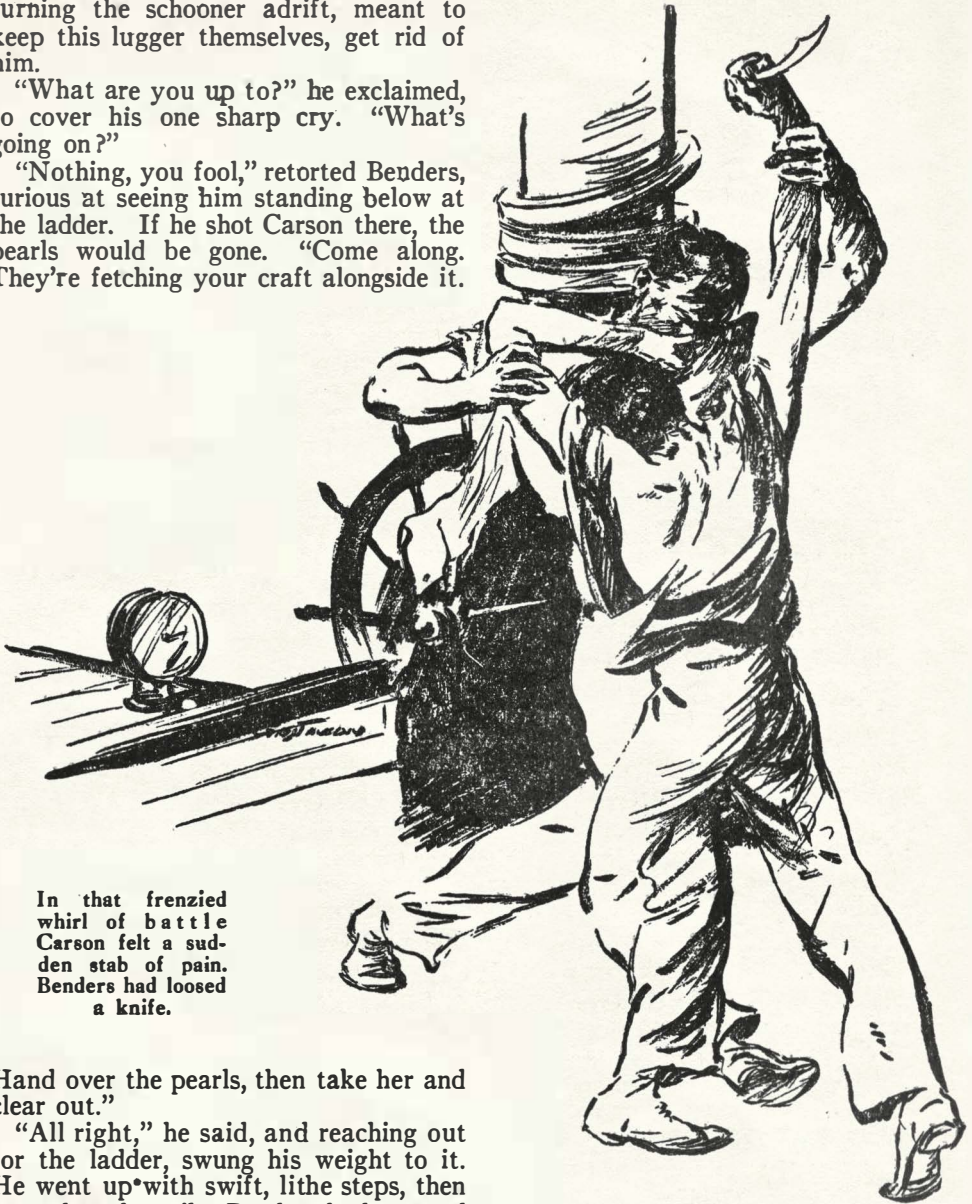
Carson reached out for the ladder, then checked himself. Across the moonlight from the *Nautilus*, now hidden from him by the bulk of the lugger, came a sound that he recognized on the instant, with incredulous dread; the rattle of chain going out through the hawse. The men there had knocked out the shackle, the chain was running out, the schooner was adrift. He knew he was right when he heard a vitriolic oath from Benders.

In a flash it all came to Carson. A low cry was wrenched from him, a cry of deep hurt, of wordless agony. He knew what they meant, knew they were

turning the schooner adrift, meant to keep this lugger themselves, get rid of him.

"What are you up to?" he exclaimed, to cover his one sharp cry. "What's going on?"

"Nothing, you fool," retorted Benders, furious at seeing him standing below at the ladder. If he shot Carson there, the pearls would be gone. "Come along. They're fetching your craft alongside it.



In that frenzied whirl of battle Carson felt a sudden stab of pain. Benders had loosed a knife.

Hand over the pearls, then take her and clear out."

"All right," he said, and reaching out for the ladder, swung his weight to it. He went up with swift, lithe steps, then paused at the rail. Benders had stepped back, a pistol in his hand. Carson looked at him in the moonlight.

"Careful, you little rat!" he exclaimed sharply. "Don't be tempted to use that gun on me, understand? Shoot me, and you'll never see those pearls of yours."

CARSON swung himself over the rail, dropped to the deck, and turned aft. A glance had shown him that the two Filipino divers and Benders' other man were slightly forward.

"What d'ye mean by that?" snapped Benders, his voice startled. "Hey, Cap'n! Where you think you're going? Halt, there!"

Carson chuckled and obeyed. He had found what he was seeking among the confusion of gear and litter that strewed the deck—the bight of a two-inch hawser. He stopped beside it, and turned to Benders. The latter and his three men were all intent upon him. One glance he cast at the *Nautilus*, and heart-sickness gripped at him. She was a little farther now, evidently in the grip of the swiftly running current. Well, no matter! He had made his choice and must abide by it. The fools!

"Give me a cigarette," he said calmly, alert for the first sign of a brown shape

coming over the rail. "Then I'll tell you where to find those pearls. Fair enough?"

"You bet, Cap'n," said Benders. "Watch him, you men!"

Carson slipped his foot under the end of the hawser.

"That schooner of mine isn't coming closer," he said. Benders, fumbling in his pocket, looked toward the *Nautilus*, and a grin touched his lips.

"She aint, for a fact," he said. "You might's well make up your mind to it, Cap'n. You don't get that schooner till I've got the babies—"

A silent dark shape came over the rail like a shadow, was followed by a second. The seaman, Sandy, uttered a startled exclamation. Carson's foot jerked up the end of the hawser, and catching it, he lashed Benders across the face with the hemp, flung himself bodily at the little man, bore him to the deck before Benders could realize what was happening.

A wild shriek from Sandy was echoed by terrified yells from the two Filipinos. A rifle cracked out, and Carson felt the thud as the bullet plowed into the deck beside him. He could see nothing of what was going on, however. Benders was fighting like a thrashing snake to get his pistol clear of Carson's grip, to get himself clear, to writhe away and reach his feet. And Carson had his hands full.

There was no second shot. The two Filipinos ran for it, screaming horribly, terrorized by those two leaping shadows whose knives flashed in the moonlight. Presently only one was screaming. Then he, too, fell silent.

IN his day Carson had gone through his share of rough-and-tumble fighting, but never had he encountered an opponent like Benders. The little man fought with demoniac intensity. The pistol went clattering, unregarded. The two men thrashed across the deck, intertwined. Presently Klang and Sumbing, their keen-bladed knives red, darted up and attempted to take a hand, but dared not, lest they harm Carson. Over and over went the two. In that mad and frenzied whirl of battle, Carson felt a sudden stab of pain, caught a yell of warning from Klang. Too late! Benders had loosed a knife.

He felt it bite into him, again and again. A thumb had wrenched at one eye, nearly blinding him. Then, suddenly, he had the knife-wrist in his left hand,

bending it back as they twisted and fought, and his right drove in again and again with frantic fury. Benders uttered a terrific scream, but it was choked as Carson's right hand closed about his throat. One wild spasmodic effort, one violent convulsion that hurled both men headlong against the rail with its frenzied, mad ferocity.

Then Carson realized that he was fighting a limp object, that the two Malays were dragging at him. He came to his feet, panting deeply, half blinded, and against the rail lay Benders with head and arm oddly twisted, grinning horribly in a set, unchanging grimace.

Carson tried to speak, but the stars whirled and he plunged into darkness. Klang caught him, lowered him to the deck, and the two brown men leaned over him.

WHEN he came to himself, Carson was alone, in the streaming moonlight.

He lifted himself painfully, sat up, leaned back against the rail. He was bewildered, very weak, but found that his arm and side had been hastily bandaged. Benders must have cut him up badly, then. He caught at the rail, lifted himself half erect, flung one long, agonized glance around the waters.

The *Nautilus* had disappeared.

He dropped back again and sat with his head drooping, all the bitterness of loss wrenching at him. A moment later there was a light, firm step and he looked up to see Helga coming to him, leaning over him with a cup.

"Here's coffee," she said. "Put it down, Cap'n."

He obeyed dumbly. She was wearing woman's clothes now, a white blouse and a skirt; the moonlight brought out the strength of her splendid features, her wide-shouldered body. She stooped, and took a little bundle from the deck and laid it in his lap—a large bandanna kerchief, knotted compactly.

"What's that?" asked Carson.

"Your pearls. From the schooner. Klang took them from Benders before he went."

"He went? Where?" Carson looked up, shoved aside the pearls.

"He and the other Malay. In the boat—"

She sprang quickly to the rail, as the distant crepitation of rifles came to them, a whole burst of shots. Then she turned and shook her head.

"Nothing visible. There's still fog over the reefs." Helga came and sat down beside him and took his hand. "Cap'n, I want to thank you. Not for this alone, but for—for everything," she said, in her low, rich voice. "From the very beginning, when you picked me up."

"It doesn't matter," said Carson in a toneless, dead response. "The schooner's gone. I know it. I can feel it. Nothing matters. Everything's gone, with her."

She was silent for a moment. Then her words startled him.

"Don't be a whining boy, Carson. That's not like you."

His head lifted under the sting.

"You don't know what that craft meant to me!" he said with swift, hoarse passion. "She was my life, everything I had. I loved her, do you understand? She's pulled me out of hard places, stood by me, worked for me, given me beauty and something beyond, something—"

"You talk like a beachcomber who has just lost his woman," she said.

Carson choked down an oath, sat silent. The comparison was apt. It hit him like a blow. He remembered suddenly that when he had picked up this girl she had just lost her father, her own lugger, everything she had—and she had not whined.

"By God, you're right!" he said. And for Carson, who never took the name of his creator in vain, these words spelled tremendous feeling.

"You have your pearls, at least," she said after a moment. "And there were others in your pockets—those you took from Maguire and Benders, I suppose. I found them when I was binding you up; they're safe, in the galley. I'll give you my share of them. Keep them. Take this lugger, if you like. Keep her. She's not a beauty, but she's good. I owe you everything. I want to make up to you—what you've lost was lost for me."

"Don't be a fool," said Carson roughly. "Pearls be damned!"

They sat for a long while in silence. Presently she rose and looked across the waters. Carson heard the creak of oars, but did not look up.

"Both boats," she said. "Klang in the first. The other three in the second."

THEN indeed Carson knew the *Nautilus* was gone, or those men would not have returned. He sat unmoving, but presently asked for a cigarette. His jacket lay at one side. Helga found a

cigarette, gave it to him, struck a match. Klang and the other Malays came up over the side and stood before him, then squatted in the Malay fashion of respect—even Klang, who rarely showed respect to any man.

"Well, what news?" asked Carson in the customary Malay phrase.

"The news is bad, tuan," returned Klang, regarding him stoically. "At the edge of the fog, those men put your ship on a coral ledge. They were drunk, all of them; they had broken into the liquor store. We went aboard and slew them, but the ship was sinking. We tried to get her papers, your things, but she went down very swiftly, slid off the ledge. She is gone."

ALL of them watched Carson fearfully, and the girl Helga, standing there straight and slim in the moonlight, held her gaze steadily upon him. He puffed at his cigarette for a space, then tossed it away, up and over the rail. In the silence, they heard the hiss as it struck the water. Carson held up his hand.

"Give me a lift, Helga, will you?"

She helped him to his feet. He looked out over the water, then turned to Klang and smiled.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "As Allah liveth, ye are true men. Better that the ship is lost, than you. Get to work here; bring in the boats, lift the anchor, send up canvas."

Klang leaped to his feet. "Tuan-ki," he cried, giving Carson the title of royalty, "only God knows the destiny of man! We who follow you, are proud to be your men."

He made a gesture to the others, and they leaped into action. But Carson turned to the girl and laughed a little, and pressed her hand.

"Helga, thanks for waking me to sense," he said abruptly. "What a fool a man can be at times! Shake."

She gave him a quick, strong grip, and her eyes were suddenly glorious and starry as she looked at him, but when she laughed, there was a catch in her throat.

"Fifteen hundred miles to Honolulu!" said Carson. "Let's go, Mister."

"Aye, aye, sir," she responded, and saluted smartly.

After all, there are better things in life than ships, and better friends to love, and better company in which to go questing across the horizon of the years. Fifteen hundred miles is a long way, but sometimes all too short.



The Chief

A specially attractive story of wilderness life by the gifted author of "Captain Jack" and other good ones.

THE golden glow of sunset filled the valley of the Missouri. The hush of a spring evening had settled over the elm- and cottonwood-bordered pond that stretched from somewhere far back in the timber, to the ever-shifting curtain of sand where the clear blue waters of the smaller stream mixed with the hurrying yellow flood of the river.

It was springtime in the land of the Dakotas. The cottonwoods had yet to unfold their leaves, and on a narrow pointed bar at the junction of the streams, a monster ice-cake, stranded by the spring flood, reared its white serrated edge against the sky.

Senónaqua the beaver sat bolt upright at the extremity of the sand-bar. His brown eyes were troubled, for the shadow of death hung over every living thing which dwelt in or on or about the pond; behind this scene of peace and quiet lay a threat in the form of a man, the trapper Keno Joe.

The meeting of Senónaqua and Keno Joe had occurred sometime before. The beaver, driven from his home by high water, sat on an ice-cake which was bobbing in the backwaters of the flood. In common with his mate and other members of his colony, he was marking time, waiting for the flood to subside. It was noonday, but Senónaqua was half asleep.

Keno Joe came down a deer-trail that led to the edge of the pond. On his back he carried a sack that bulged and clanked with traps. In his hand he carried a rifle, in his mouth was a corn-cob pipe. His matted beard was stained with tobacco juice. He was a frontiersman, or a reprobate, depending upon the point of view. But his mission was to exterminate every beaver and muskrat in Clear

Creek. Whether or not a wild thing lived tomorrow, he did not care—for on the morrow he would be somewhere else.

Seeing the beaver on the ice-cake, apparently unafraid, the trapper lowered his sack gently to the ground. His eyes were filled with gloating, for Senónaqua was the largest beaver he had ever seen. That pelt, glowing softly on the back like polished walnut, would buy whisky and tobacco for many months. Dropping to one knee, he raised his rifle and glanced along the sights.

But before Keno Joe could press the trigger the surface of the ice-cake was bare, and a column of water shot skyward to fall back on a vacant pond. Senónaqua had dived abruptly.

Keno Joe estimated the weight of his intended victim at seventy pounds, and the value of his hide at twice that of an ordinary pelt, because it was unique both in color and in size. Temporarily it had slipped through his fingers, but the trapper swore that he would not leave the valley of Clear Creek until Senónaqua's hide was stretched and dried on the side of his shack.

AND that was the start of a reign of terror. Wherever Senónaqua went, in daylight or at night, he saw the glint of half-concealed steel where traps were set for the feet of the unwary. Later, he saw shadowy forms above the traps, floating lifelessly and inert. At sunrise and at sunset he heard the crack of the trapper's rifle. The shores of the pond were lined with the carcasses of his victims, a feast for the magpies by day and for weasels by night.

For a month Senónaqua and his equally wise old mate held on. They saw their colony dwindle one by one until as far as they knew, they alone survived. Tonight as the beaver sat on the sand-bar he was trying to choose between two divergent paths. He might trust his for-

Engineer

By BIGELOW
NEAL

Illustrated by Margery Stocking



tunes to the river, or he might take to the prairie country and the headwaters of Clear Creek. At last he decided in favor of the latter course and several times he thumped his great tail on the hard-packed sand. When a brown head rose from the water before him in answer to his signal and he knew that his mate was ready to follow, he slid from the bar and floated out on the bosom of the pond. When she swung into line behind him, he set out upstream. Senónaqua and his mate had gone.

Keno Joe saw them pass, two hurrying shadows, deep in the clear blue water. He knew they were leaving and he knew where they would go. The killer smiled grimly. It would be an easy matter to follow and find them. To his mind their fate was sealed. . . .

The pond was no better than a mud-hole, and the creek a series of mud-holes strung together. The sluggish current was clogged with water-plants.

Along the shores a rank growth of coarse grasses arose and drooped and dipped into the water. There were no fish, for the shallow water froze solid to the bottom in winter. There were few muskrats, for everywhere the gray-green triangular heads of snapping-turtles protruded from the moss and their cold expressionless eyes were always watching for some living thing to kill. On the heavier floating moss-beds and on the narrow muddy shores sat rows of frogs, gray, green and brown. The whole pond was a place of stagnation.

All about it, however, lay a scene of natural beauty. Along the stream ash, box-elder, elms and occasionally a cottonwood towered above the shorter growth of choke-cherries and the color scheme was green and gray where wild olives grew like dusty snowbanks on the northern slopes, while everywhere the buffalo-grass was sprinkled thickly with clumps of sage.

Now it was evening and the heat of the day was gone. At the pond night-hawks were circling above the mosquito-infested swamp-grass and killdeers were streaking across the sky, their shrill cries mingling with the quavering calls of curlews and the charging thrum of the night-hawks.

A bittern arose with a loud "*chunk!*" of alarm as, rounding the bend below the narrows, Senónaqua's brown nose split the waters, sending waves to either side that caused the frogs to pitch and rock and blink on their floating perches, while the turtles drew in their heads and garter-snakes scurried from sight.

IN the water, and traveling rapidly, the beaver might easily be mistaken for a muskrat—for in swimming all but his head was submerged or hidden behind the wave which rolled before him. When he slowed down, however, his long back came to the surface and then his great length became apparent as well as his broad shoulders and rump and the base of his great flat tail. He swam with his front feet folded up against his body, driven forward mostly by the powerful thrusts of his hind feet which, unlike those in front, were webbed.

Leaving the narrows, the beaver found himself plowing into the widening waters of the pond and here he allowed his body to float broadside to the stream. For a long time he remained motionless; then, as if deciding that the prospect warranted a better view, a single thrust of his webbed feet drove him ashore, where he drew himself out upon the bank.

Here he became a different animal. Seemingly his body shortened and broadened. The power of his short legs be-

came evident as did the great breadth and length of his tail and the depth of a jaw designed to drive his long teeth through inches of the hardest wood. Here too the remarkable dexterity of his forefeet or hands became evident for, as he raised himself and sat upright, propped against his tail, he reached out with one hand and grasped a sand-willow to steady himself, much as a man might do under similar circumstances.

Meanwhile his mate joined him, occupying herself with clipping off a small cherry bush at a single bite and beginning her supper on the bark and smaller twigs.

For a while the old beaver surveyed the scene before him with every appearance of mingled emotions. Near by, the skull of a buffalo, bleached and white, protruded above the water, and just beyond it the ribs of a dead horse formed an arch over the surface; the first breath of the evening breeze played among its dried membranes to draw forth a note in keeping with the weirdness of the pond and shore-line. Again Senónaqua wrinkled his nose in obvious distaste. Looking farther up the pond, however, he noted the long sweep of its waters, the heavy growth of grass along the shore and the trees which lined the banks. He was seeing with the vision of the true engineer.

Presently he broke off his observation and cut a cherry tree, but even while eating he kept one eye focused on the pond like one who eats because he must, but whose mind is intent on the work of the night ahead.

APPARENTLY no communication of any kind passed between Senónaqua and his mate and yet somehow she must have understood they had come to the end of their journey; finishing her supper ahead of her companion, she waddled down the bank and floated out upon the bosom of the pond. After a moment of reflection, she set out upstream and threading her way between floating masses of weeds,—half walking, half swimming because of the shallow water,—she made a survey of the pond. Reaching the farther end, she turned and came back about halfway; there she stopped and began to tear away floating weeds.

Beginning near the middle of the pond, she cleared a narrow lane leading to the shore. Afterward she began digging at the bottom with both claws and mouth, bringing up lumps of oozy mud which

she allowed to settle back to the bottom again on the downstream side of her excavation. In time she had the beginning of a shallow trench. Later it became a well-defined ditch, growing deeper and deeper as she kept steadily at work during the long hours of the night.

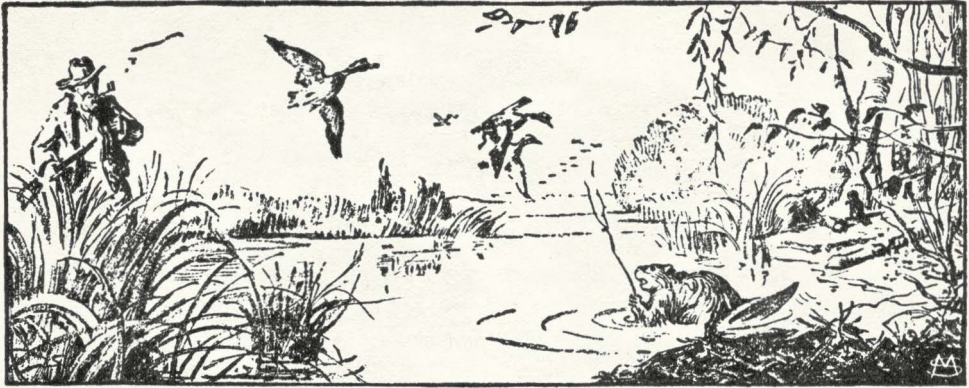
Meanwhile Senónaqua had finished his supper. Standing erect he gazed up and down the pond and scratched his belly as if he were trying hard to dig up an idea. At last he picked up the partially peeled cherry tree and holding it in his teeth, he dragged it down to the edge of the water and floated out, towing the tree by his side.

Several times he swam up and down the narrows. To the human eye there was little choice between one location and another but the old beaver had shifted into the character of an engineer and seemingly he was hard to satisfy. In several places he crossed and re-crossed the narrows, studying the bottom and either shore. In the end he selected a spot just below the buffalo skull and here, where a line stretched from bank to bank would measure perhaps twenty feet, he stopped. It was the narrowest place in sight.

As a preliminary measure he shifted the little tree from his teeth to his hands and sat up on the bottom of the stream. In that position he was about half out of the water. Standing the tree on end with the butt down, he pushed with all his might. But the results were nil; the bottom at that particular point happened to be covered with gravel and no power at his command sufficed to penetrate to any depth. Another period of scratching netted a new idea, however, and he laid the tree down in the water with its branches upstream. After a moment's contemplation he turned it end for end and pushed the lower end down into the gravel. Straightening up, he registered a spasm of impatience when he found that it promptly floated to the surface and threatened to drift away the moment he released his hold.

When his gaze happened to fall on the buffalo skull, a new idea arrived. Waddling over, he grasped the skull by one horn, pulled it loose from the mud and returned in triumph—to find that the tree had taken advantage of his absence to float off downstream.

Now Senónaqua proceeded to demonstrate one of the oddest idiosyncrasies of a strange people: Not for anything in the world would he go after that tree.



The trapper's eyes were filled with gloating. That pelt would buy tobacco and whisky for many months.

He might go below the site of his dam for a social call or merely to see the country, but never under any circumstances would he bring anything back. Upstream he would go, for a mile if necessary, and tow down bundle after bundle of wood—but the little cherry-tree lying there almost within reach had passed totally and forever out of his jurisdiction. Accordingly he made still another trip—to secure the tree upon which his mate had made her supper.

Fortunately the buffalo skull proved more stable than the tree had been and he found it exactly where he had left it. Fixing the new tree in place, he set the skull down on the sunken branches. The result was so gratifying that from a sedate and serious-minded engineer he became something closely resembling a romping puppy. Lifting his tail high in the air, he brought it down on the surface of the water with a tremendous splash. In a moment he had churned the narrows into foam. He flopped and flip-flopped, he darted this way and that, now cutting the water as cleanly as a knife, now hurling it aside in thrashing waves. When his fit of rejoicing passed and he sobered down to work again, he found that due to the commotion he had caused, his second tree had wiggled from beneath the skull and was floating serenely beside the first. At that he forsook the scene of his unproductive labors.

Swimming several rods up the pond, he made an investigation of the shore-line. Selecting a place where the bank sloped abruptly to the water, he began clearing a path up into the brush. Cutting every rosebush, every twig of buckbrush and even most of the grass, his progress was slow but the results were well defined. As he progressed the path behind him

became not only free from stubs but straight and smooth as well. The brush and small trees were piled on either side, with butts toward the path—and thus he spent the balance of the night, desisting only when dawn had long since come. Then, selecting a promising cherry-tree for breakfast, he dragged it down the newly made path, launched it on the pond and set out upstream, towing his breakfast behind him.

He had no difficulty in finding his mate. Indeed it is likely that through the chattering of their teeth or sundry tail-thumpings they had been in constant communication throughout the night.

When he found her he pulled his tree up into shallow water near the shore and fell to digging by her side. In so doing he demonstrated his strange versatility once again, for he turned himself into something that closely resembled an animated well-auger. Probably the ditch was already deep enough, for Senónaqua went to the shoreward end and began to bore his way directly into the bank; and before he grew weary of this task he had worked his way in until his head and shoulders were out of sight.

After breakfast the two homeless beavers slept awhile, hidden by the drooping grasses along the muddy bank; but in the absence of a permanent home both were restless and they continued work on the tunnel intermittently all through the day. At sundown, however, Senónaqua abandoned his desultory work on the hole in favor of supper and a return to his own field of operations at the foot of the pond.

The second attempt at construction of the dam proved more successful than the first. He had two trees left over from the family supper and the branches of these



Senónaqua could see the trap, only partly concealed in the spillway. Carefully he grasped the chain and pulled.

he laced together so that they were practically one. On this broader base the buffalo head sat much more firmly and in fact gave no more trouble.

Returning to the path and resuming his labors where he had suspended them in the morning, he pushed on into the brush until his highway reached a clump of cherry trees. These he began cutting and dragging to the water, usually one at a time and held in his teeth, but sometimes several in a bundle, clasped under an arm. In the latter case he walked erect but leaning forward and bending his shoulders like a man carrying a heavy load.

As each tree or bundle went down the path, he floated it directly to his dam. There he wove them in on either side of the buffalo skull, carrying clam-shells, gravel and mud to weight them down—and so rapidly did he work that when morning came the base of his dam stretched nearly halfway across the creek and looked, roughly, as if a miniature forest had sprung from under the water.

Both beavers spent the second day much as they had spent the first. The tunnel now reached a long way up under the bank and the end was well above the water-line. Ordinarily the work of ex-

cavation for a home would have taken many weeks—but Senónaqua's mate knew of a reason why there should be no delay; and so the expectant mother persisted in her toil and stopped only when the need for rest became imperative.

The following evening brought a great disappointment. It happened just as Senónaqua started toward the dam to begin his night's work. He had taken a bundle of brush in tow and was floating down the middle of the pond, when he caught a scent on the air. Faint as it was, it carried a chill to the heart of the old beaver, for it brought to his memory that reign of terror from which he had fled but a short time before.

Abandoning his bundle in midstream, he slipped silently under the water and clinging close to the muddy bottom worked his way among the weeds until near the shore. Under the bank he rose slowly and cautiously until the tip of his nose and his eyes were above the surface. Here he was well within the borders of the drooping water-grasses, and to all intents and purposes, invisible.

Slowly the minutes passed; nothing moved either on the bosom of the pond or in its immediate vicinity. The scent grew still stronger; then from somewhere back among the trees came the sound of stealthy movements in the brush. At that Senónaqua raised his head above the water, opening and closing his mouth several times in rapid succession. The result was a clicking, chattering sound which would travel over the surface of the water almost as well as along a wire. Having sent this warning to his mate, the brown head sank to its former level.

Now from above the low-growing brush on the farther shore, there ap-

peared the head and shoulders of a man. It was Keno Joe. When he noticed the floating bundle of brush, his eyes brightened and he straightened up for a better view. Glancing downstream, he saw the beginning of the dam, and he knew he had reached the end of his search. And even though he turned at last and went away, it was written on Senónaqua's book of fate that his dream of peace was dead.

FOR several nights Senónaqua kept away from the dam, for his sensitive nostrils still detected the greasy, smoky scent clinging to the weeds and bushes along the pond. During the interval he divided his time between watching for new signs of danger, and helping his mate with the excavation of the tunnel. With his aid, that project was soon brought to completion.

In its finished state the home consisted of four parts: the ditch on the bottom of the pond, the tunnel, the rooms in which they were to live and a harmless-looking pile of sticks on the ground above.

Although the purpose of the ditch may be a matter of dispute, it is probable that the reason for its excavation was to gain access to the deepest water should the shallower portions freeze solid during the winter. The tunnel led from well below the ice-level, upward until nearly on a level with the surrounding prairie and high enough to be safe in time of flood.

The living quarters consisted of two rooms, one above the other. The lower served two purposes. First it was intended as a place where the beavers could stop until the last water had drained from their fur, and secondly, it was the dining-room of the establishment. When ice locked the surface of the pond, they would bring the sticks and branches from their feed-bed to this room where the bark and tender portions might be eaten at leisure. The upper compartment—sometimes bedded deep with twigs or sage and grass—was the living-room. Both compartments were always kept absolutely clean. From the roof of the upper compartment a small ventilating shaft ran up to the surface. This explained the apparently aimless pile of sticks on the ground above. They were merely a blind to hide the entrance of the ventilating shaft and to prevent attacks by minks and weasels when the young of the beavers were left alone.

When finally the scent of the trapper had faded out, Senónaqua returned to

the dam. But his approach was cautious in the extreme. Wise to the ways of men, and of course not knowing that his fur was of no value in warm weather, he first examined the entire pond and shoreline, searching for traps, and paying particular attention to the area about the dam, his highway leading into the brush, and a small grass-covered bench near the water-line where he sometimes repaired to eat his meals. Finding nothing to arouse his suspicions, he resumed his labors on the dam, but once again he had become a hunted thing and now he worked mostly under cover of night.

At the end of two weeks the line of sticks and brush across the bottom of the narrows had lengthened and broadened, stretching from shore to shore and affording a firm foundation for the work which was to follow. In another week the superstructure had risen above the surface and the current was beginning to quicken as its progress became restricted among the branches. This the old beaver hastened, by cutting grass and pulling weeds with which to fill the spaces between the sticks. On the upper side of the dam he worked constantly with mud, building up the slope and plastering the entire surface.

IT was about this time that he returned home one morning to find a decided change in his family. There were three small beavers in the upper room, exact miniatures of their mother. To Senónaqua they meant little more than additional trouble and loss of sleep—especially the latter, for they swarmed over him during his resting-hours, chewing at his tail, his pointed ears and even at the sensitive end of his nose. In one way, however, their advent proved a great help, for now when he went to work in the evening he had a powerful and efficient helper at his side, since his mate—graduated from the preparation for motherhood—was free to aid in the construction of the dam.

Under their united efforts the structure grew without pause. By the middle of the summer the water had risen a foot or more and every night saw them still busily at work. Another month added another foot; now the water was running over the spillway in a plunging stream. And then something happened which gave the beavers a new reason for worry—a man in high boots and a khaki shirt appeared along the shore, one day at sunset. Of course the beavers perceived his

approach, and when he reached the dam neither of them was in sight.

Had they been able to comprehend his actions they might have saved themselves concern, for the newcomer did not act as had Keno Joe. To begin with, he walked slowly and seemingly was interested in a variety of things. Once he stopped by the seepage of a spring and stooped to examine the nest of a killdeer with its tiny burden of down and spindly legs.

When a baby cottontail scurried across his path and stopped near his feet, he did not throw one of the rocks in his hand; instead, he got down on his knees and tried to coax the little fellow within reach. When the cottontail scampered away he went on again and so to the shore of the creek near the end of the dam. Here he remained interestedly for a long time. He walked out on the dam, bending over to pull at several of the protruding sticks, stooping to study the method of weaving the trees together, and the clever work with grass and mud. After that he followed along the shore until he came to the path, where he paused for another long survey. Then he sat down meditatively on the bank.

LLOYD CONWAY had filed on the land which included Senónaqua's pond, years before. Afterward he found he had made a mistake, for at the head of the pond the creek-bed widened, or perhaps it might be more accurate to say it lost itself in a marsh many acres in extent. Before the first summer had passed Conway discovered that owing to the myriads of mosquitoes which bred in the stagnant water and hung in blue-gray clouds above the marsh and above his home, it would be almost impossible to raise stock—not to mention the intense discomfort to human beings.

The settler had contemplated a dam at the narrows, but owing to the frequent floods from melting snows and heavy rains a dam of human construction would need at least a concrete core and a cemented spillway large enough to accommodate any volume of water the floods might bring. The cost of the only solution was beyond his means, so he had struggled along as best he could. Now, sitting on the bank studying the work of this greatest born engineer of them all, Lloyd Conway caught a glimmer of hope for the future. . . .

Senónaqua and his mate were in a somewhat embarrassing position. The

water at the point they had selected for a hiding-place was none too deep, and in order to reach the middle of the pond they must first go directly toward the intruder. But as the minutes passed and the stranger made no overt move, something operated partially to quiet the fears of the old beaver.

In the end Senónaqua gave over his attempt at concealment and swam boldly out of his hiding-place. Still the man did not move, and soon the mother beaver followed. Once in deep water, Senónaqua raised his tail and brought it down with a resounding crash on the water. When the waves ran out, there were no beavers in sight and the man, realizing that the show was over, got to his feet and disappeared in the dusk.

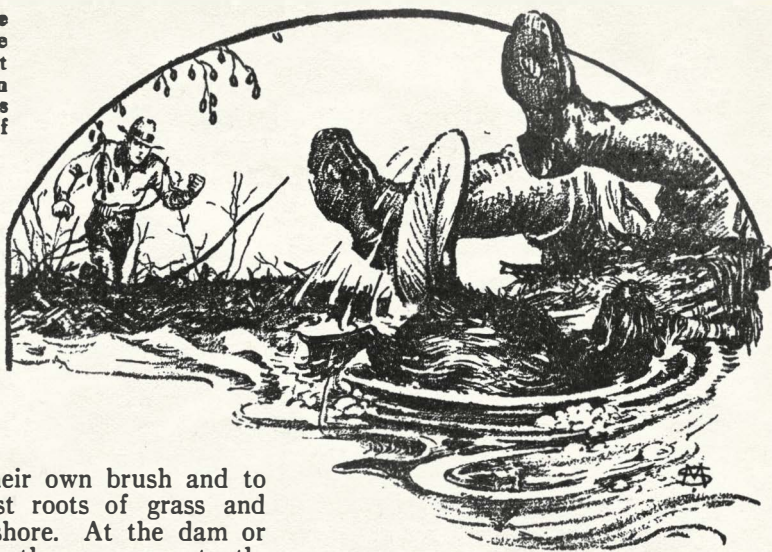
Nor was that the only call the stranger made upon the constructors of the dam. From that time on he came frequently; but his attitude seemed one of friendly interest and the beavers gradually grew accustomed to his visits, showing no fear other than to cease work and remain hidden until he had gone away.

One day they found he had left some small twigs of cottonwood on the shore. Now a cottonwood represents, to a beaver's mind, the ideal food, and Senónaqua accepted the offering. The next night there were more cottonwood twigs, and in time the beavers came to await the evening meal thus offered. Finally they grew so accustomed to the man that they paid little attention to him, even coming out on the bank to eat the cottonwood twigs before he had left the scene.

During the latter part of the summer the beavers undertook a new type of activity. Near their home they cleared another path back into the brush and began a second harvest of trees. These they dragged down to the water, and towed them to the deepest part of the pond just above the dam. There they dived with the butts, thrusting them firmly into the mud. The result of a month's labors netted what had every appearance of another transplanted forest beneath the water. This was their feed-bed. Here when winter shut down they would come, under the ice—either to eat from the sunken trees, or to carry branches back to their home for more deliberate consumption.

By this time the young ones were about the size of large muskrats and beginning to appear on short excursions of their own. Their début was a great relief to the mother, for they soon

Before Keno Joe could dodge, the beaver's broad flat tail struck him across both shins with the force of a battering-ram.



learned to cut their own brush and to find the tenderest roots of grass and reeds along the shore. At the dam or feed-bed, however, they were constantly in the way and required constant vigilance on the part of the parents to prevent their falling prey to snapping-turtles or wandering minks.

By early fall a decided change had come in the nature of the pond. For some reason most of the snapping-turtles had moved either up or down the stream. The mud-turtles too had decreased in numbers and the grass that the beavers had cut for the dam had left the bank denuded of its heavy growth so that snakes also had become a rarity. Part of the weeds and moss were in the dam and part were flooded out, so that now the pond stretched away in a beautiful expanse of clear and unobstructed water. Not only that, but the waters spreading back from the pond had filled the marsh by Lloyd Conway's home until it had become a shallow lake. Word had gone out over the incomprehensible telegraph-lines of the wild, and in some mysterious way fishes from the Missouri River had heard and were seeking admittance at the dam. At first they had tried to leap the obstruction, many of them falling back to die in the tangled brush. At last the beavers came to their rescue, for there is nothing a beaver detests more than rotting flesh of any kind. Accordingly, after several nights devoted to throwing flopping beauties out of the dam, they installed a spillway through which the travelers might attain the higher level with fewer casualties among themselves.

EVENTUALLY there came a time when dull skies replaced the sunshine and the sparkling murmur of the waves changed to a leaden sloshing

against the shores. Hurrying clouds swept low and occasional squalls of snow thickened the air. Later there were mornings when the slender grass-blades which drooped into the water were sheathed in ice.

During this first spell of cold weather the beavers awoke to a feverish degree of activity. With freezing nights it became possible to run a mud-cap across the top of the dam, which would successfully hold back the water until the thaws of early spring. It gave them another six inches of easy depth and the time had come for its installation.

With the dam practically finished, or so nearly that one good night's work would see it ready for the long winter, they turned from work to play. They plastered the steeper slope of Senónaqua's first path with mud, smoothing it down until, when frozen, it formed a kind of trough-shaped slide. Then on cold nights they carried water in their mouths, wetting the already frozen surface, and when the water had frozen into a glass-like sheet they began an apparently endless game of climbing the bank and sliding down on their bellies. This seemed to be their idea of genuine relaxation and pleasure. Indeed they enjoyed it so thoroughly that if nothing intervened they would keep the ice open at the foot of the slide nearly all winter, every night breaking the ice which had formed during the day and throwing out the splintered pieces so that their diving might be unobstructed.

Late in October came another change in the weather and a short spell when summer seemed to rule again. Then one

evening when Senónaqua came forth to his work, he caught a taint on the air. Although he had no knowledge of the canvas shelter, the rickety wagon and the half-starved ponies cleverly concealed in the chokecherry thicket, he caught the odor of willow smoke and this, with the taint already noticed, told him all too clearly that Keno Joe was abroad again.

Arriving at the dam, he found a cut in his mud-cap and he studied it a long time before repairing the break with new mud and grass. There was no trap, however, and the trapper did not appear.

The next night there was another break in the dam; this Senónaqua also repaired, but the second occurrence made him more suspicious and that night there was no work and no play at the slide.

On the third night the dam was broken in the same place and as Senónaqua cautiously approached he detected a new and puzzling scent. Whatever it was, it called for extra precaution, and the wily beaver climbed to the top of the dam at some little distance from the break. There he sat erect while he studied the situation before him.

Presently a gleam from the water of the spillway caught his gaze and now he remembered the scent and knew exactly with what he had to deal. Approaching the break, he looked down into the hurrying water. In spite of careful workmanship on the part of his enemy, he could see the chain buried in the brush and the trap only partly concealed in the spillway.

Very carefully he grasped the chain and pulled. The trap slid toward him; another tug, and a stick caught on the pan of the trap. As the jaws flew together, water spurted into the air and the excited beaver lost his hold on the chain. But he was working on familiar ground now, with years of experience behind him. In an hour he had woven the trap, chain and all, into the dam and covered them deep and well with mud.

TO all appearances the beaver had come to the end of his rope. The fact that he had turned a slimy, stagnant, mosquito- and snake-infested pond into a thing of beauty, would do nothing to plead his cause with Keno Joe. The fact that the snapping-turtles had gone and that flocks of geese and ducks had taken their place, that fishes had come to purify the water, that wild-rice fronds were already waving where slimy moss and algæ had once thrived, would not help him

now. Keno saw only the immediate value of the great brown pelt. To him there was no appreciation of beauty, no rudimentary idea of conservation.

In the semi-darkness of his home, huddled in the upper room with his mate and the trembling little ones, Senónaqua realized that danger overhung them all.

OUTSIDE the door of his home, instead of the former place of filth and stagnation there now lay a broad sheet of clear blue water. The bosom of the pond was crossed and criss-crossed with the waves of swimming ducks and waterfowl resting on their southward flight. Trout and perch flashed red and yellow in the sunlight and the great pike moved majestically in the deep green depths. From the top of the dam,—now higher than the head of the tall man who paused so often to watch the beavers at their work,—came the song of water falling into a dancing cone of foam.

Here Senónaqua and his descendants might have lived for years in happiness and in peace, for neither Senónaqua nor any of his kind ever killed or molested any living creature.

The reasoning powers of Senónaqua were not equal to summing up the arguments in his favor. To him the problem was much simpler; it had simmered down to a choice between two modes of death. If the dam were not repaired, the pond would freeze over; with the water lowered the ice would reach to the bottom, bringing extermination of all the fishes and a lingering death to the beavers, who could not reach their feed-bed. The alternative was death at the hands of Keno Joe, for were Senónaqua ever so clever the superior intelligence of the man must inevitably win. In the end the beaver's natural instinct to repair his dam overruled his caution and his fear.

Although Senónaqua possessed a high degree of intelligence, he lacked in imagination. The adventure of the trap in the spillway led him to focus all his attention on the likelihood of another similar attempt. Therefore when he came back the following night and saw a break in the same place, he failed to take into account the resourcefulness of his enemy. Thinking only in terms of the night before, he swam boldly to the break in the spillway. And then, just as he reached the shallow water, before he had time to think or act, steel jaws gripped his legs. Using a seemingly high order of intelligence in avoiding or setting, Senónaqua had

blindly stumbled into another. He was caught!

The trap was an under-water set weighted and fastened to a submerged wire so that every struggle would take the victim into deeper water. That Senónaqua did not die during the first moments of his imprisonment was due to the fact that his mind was really functioning again. Instead of thrashing about or trying to reach deeper water he buried his free claws in the woodwork of the dam and held on with all his strength. Under ordinary circumstances he might have cut off the imprisoned foot and made his escape, but at that juncture there came a crashing in the bushes and Keno Joe ran out upon the dam with an uplifted club in his hand. Senónaqua saw the blow coming and dodged. The club, grazing his ear, was driven deep into the mud-cap of the dam. Wrenching it free, the trapper, struck again. This time his aim was better and the beaver, impeded by the grip of the trap, failed to get entirely beyond reach though the blow fell not on the old engineer's head but across the powerful muscles of his neck and shoulders, thus spending itself with only a fraction of its intended damage. The shock and the pain, however, produced an effect on the beaver which had not entered into the calculations of the trapper. It drove Senónaqua to the point of taking the offensive—something almost entirely foreign to his kind.

Had the beaver been a warrior by nature, the power of his jaws would have been amply sufficient to crush the leg of the man before him. Those long curved teeth, driven by muscles capable of splitting and rending the hardest wood, would have torn the flesh from Keno's bones with ease. But Senónaqua was not a fighter by nature; never in his life had he used those vise-like jaws with deadly intent, and now as he saw the club about to fall once more, he used the only weapon he knew. Grasping the woodwork of the dam with his free front foot, he used it as a pivot and swung his rear end around with terrific force. Before Keno Joe could dodge, the broad flat tail of the captive struck him across both shins at once with the force of a battering-ram—and when Senónaqua swung about again to face his antagonist, Keno Joe was going down the face of the dam end over end. Nor did he stop until he had rolled and slid head-first into the dancing cone of foam at the foot of the spillway.

But the beaver's respite was only temporary, for now Keno Joe was frantic with rage. Disentangling himself from the brush at the foot of the dam, the trapper picked up another club—this time a longer and heavier one—and re-scaling the face of the dam, he swung the club and struck, again and again. Once Senónaqua dodged and was successful. Again he darted to one side but not quite far enough and the club fell heavily across his neck. Partly dazed and preferring to die in his own element, he loosed his hold on the dam and tried to dive. In so doing he received another glancing blow on the head which shut out the light of day.

Half unconscious, the old beaver clung to the bottom of the pond and fought to reach deeper water. He felt cruel hands grasping at his legs, at his throat, wrenching, choking and drawing him back along the wire. Powerless to resist, he felt the grip of the trapper gradually choking the life from his body. Then, in that last moment of realization, he felt the jar of another heavy body coming along the crest of the dam. From above came the impact of heavy bodies, the rush of swirling water and the trampling of feet. Dimly he saw the form of Keno Joe, now prone on the muddy bottom, and he saw hands reach down to drag the half-strangled trapper back to the surface. Then the beaver was in darkness.

AFTER a time lights began to flash again; Senónaqua became aware of a pain in his lungs. There was something hard beneath his breast, his head was hanging down and water was gurgling from his mouth. There was a pressure on his back too—the pressure of strong hands compressing and expanding his chest. Fear returned, and he struggled feebly. Then he heard a voice:

"Take it easy, old man—you'll be all right in a minute and neither that old reprobate hikin' up the bank yonder nor anybody else will ever bother you again."

Senónaqua did not understand the words, but he did feel the quality of friendship both in the voice and in the gently stroking hands. Gradually his brown eyes cleared. Now he was being lifted and carried out over the water. Gently he was lowered until he rested on the surface. Still a friendly hand was stroking his head. Silently the beaver slipped beneath the water; it opened and closed; the waves ran out to tiny ripples—and Senónaqua was gone.

The Knave Of Diamonds

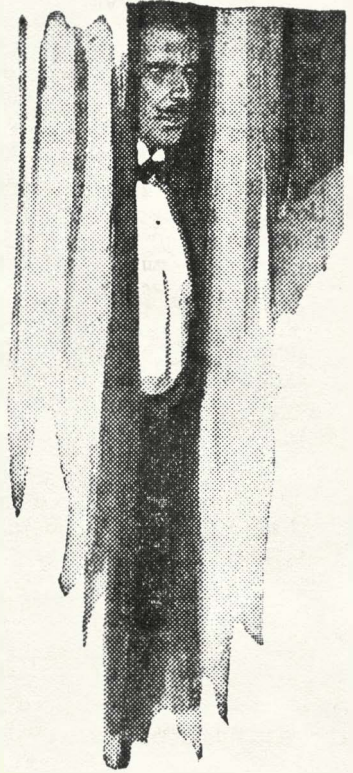
AS Madden went over the wall he swore, for he scratched his hands on the stubs of glass imbedded there. The top of the wall was studded with broken bits of the stuff set firmly in the concrete, but Madden had cleared a way through it with a small steel bar he carried in his kit. He had, however, missed a few slivers which dug into his palms. The pain was trifling, but the incident annoyed him; he was careful about his hands.

On the other side of the wall, he paused and looked at the house. He never had seen it before. It was a big place, built of marble—half Byzantine, half Moorish in its *motif*. Around it the grounds, formally cultivated, were thick with semi-tropical foliage. Madden stood concealed in a clump of palmettos.

Looking out from his concealment he saw in the light of the moon that the grounds were deserted. The party, then, was confined to the house. That was to his advantage. And if there were caretakers and gardeners, they must be—if they remained—enjoying the party behind the scenes with the other servants.

Madden could himself see and hear the party. From where he stood the big *salon* of the house was clearly visible to his left, through great French windows, which were open. Gay talk and warm laughter came to his ears. There were glimpses through the windows of proud men and lovely women. Madden could even hear their heels click as they walked about on the tile floor. Bemused, a smile of pleasure on his big face, he watched for a moment; it was then that he saw the woman.

She had come to stand by one of the open windows, and she was looking out absently into the night. She was, as she stood there, the most beautiful human being Madden ever had seen. Her white satin gown and white lace mantilla shone in the moonlight; and beneath the man-

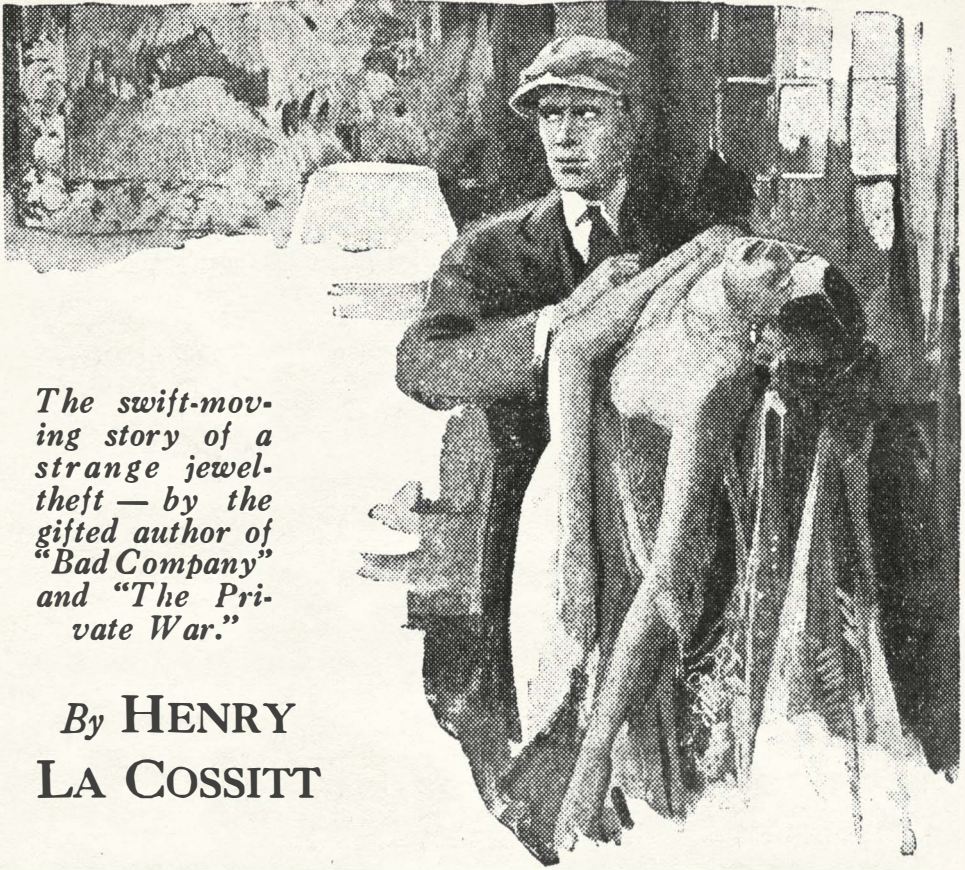


Illustrated by Joseph Chenoweth

tilla Madden could see the heavy blackness of her hair. For a moment she remained at the window; then she moved away.

Madden sighed in wonder. Then, smiling, he crept out from the bush and started across the lawn. Although he was a big man, his movements were lithe and swift. Darting among the shrubbery, he came within the faint shadow of the wall of the house, and there he stopped. Looking up, he counted those windows on the side of the house, the windows on the ground floor. The sixth was one with an ancient wooden balcony. This was the window Maceau had told him about; within it, he would find what he was after. Maceau had told him that too. Maceau, pretending business, had called several times on the man who owned this house, and Maceau was always right. This was one of Madden's verities.

He drew himself up to the balcony and swung over the railing. Under his heavy weight it creaked a little, but nothing more; it was of stout mahogany. Once over it, he paused and looked back, surveying the grounds as a matter of cau-



The swift-moving story of a strange jewel-theft — by the gifted author of "Bad Company" and "The Private War."

By HENRY
LA COSSITT

tion. But he saw more: From this height he could see over the wall and down the slope into Algeciras. The town lay like a dark garden, its twinkling lights springing like tiny orange flowers. To his left, against the glimmering sky, with the moon cresting it, loomed Gibraltar. He even could see the huge reflection of the rock in the placid bay. The vast beauty of what he saw held him for a moment. Then he turned.

Opening one of the panels of the window, he listened. From the front of the house came the faint sounds of the party. Within the room before him was shadowy silence. He slipped through the window. Opening his kit, he procured a small flashlight and with its sharp ray explored the walls. The finger of light moved slowly and then held steadily. Its circle revealed in an opening in a book-lined wall the safe Maceau had told him he would find. The Frenchman had been right, as usual. Madden stole across the room and began to work on the safe by the light of the flash.

As he worked his face assumed a soft, eager look. It was a large face, and coarse skin overlay its frame of big bones.

A blunted nose, huge and meaningless, grew out of it sullenly. On either side of the nose, gray eyes that usually were listless shone narrowly as he worked. Most of the time they held no such animation. Above them were big brows, heavy but irregular, fringing over his eye-pits like grass over the lip of a cliff. And his mouth, parted now in his excitement, was loose and thick-lipped. His body, crouched before the safe, was powerful and heavily muscled, but it was not graceful. The arms were too long; one of his shoulders sagged in a slovenly manner, and when he walked he shuffled along without using any of the power so obvious in his ample frame.

BUT if the power in Madden's body was indecisive and meaningless, that in his hands was concentrated and sure. They were long and strong, white and symmetrical. They were, in fact, the hands of an artist—and in his way, Madden was an artist. Once, indeed, he had been a jewel-designer, back in the States. With those hands, he could mount the

most minute gem, or he could adjust the hairlike mechanism of the tiniest watch; or, most important, he could feel—when his fingers were sandpapered and the nails filed to their quicks—the hidden, almost imperceptible tremors of the combination of a safe. . . .

The safe clicked; it opened. Madden reached inside, grasped the handle of a locked drawer, and drew the drawer open without effort. From this drawer he took a small velvet bag. Opening it, he threw his flashlight into it and there reflected from it into his face sparkling rays that caused his narrow eyes to blink. He drew the bag shut by its drawstring and turned to the window.

But he remained motionless, as he heard steps coming rapidly toward the room. They were quick steps, falling with precision—evidently the steps of a woman on high heels. Madden switched off his flash, looked at the window and decided he would not attempt it. It would make too much noise. Besides, the woman probably would pass. Feeling his way carefully along the wall, he came to the corner and pressed himself into it.

But the woman did not pass. She turned, just outside the portières that hung across the entrance to the room, and entered. Madden suppressed a frightened gasp, as the room was flooded suddenly with the dim radiance of a floor lamp.

The woman stood by the floor lamp, musing. She was the one Madden had seen at the front window, and for the moment she was not aware of him.

BUT he was terribly aware of her. His eyes, a moment before bulging with fright, softened once more. He stared at her slim figure outlined in white satin—at her bare arms, at her blue-black hair and luminous eyes, and at her small crimson mouth. He gazed in awe at the delicate lace of her white mantilla and the shining jeweled ivory of her comb. And he would not have run, then, even had he been sure of not being observed. His big mouth broke into a loose smile of wonder; his graceful hands, hanging limply at his sides, trembled.

The woman frowned, and as if suddenly conscious of something inimical, she turned, and saw the safe. And then she saw Madden.

For a moment she made no sound, no move. She only stared, her great eyes wide with fascinated horror. Then, in-

stinctively shrinking from him, she took a backward step; her face twisted in panic, and one of her small hands moved to her throat.

Madden sprang and smothered her scream with his hand. Under its pressure her cry became a stifled moan. She struggled feebly and helplessly, her body rigid. Then abruptly she became limp, her mantilla spreading on the floor as her head hung loosely over his arm. Her eyes were closed.

Madden looked down at her, smiling. He examined her features, as if he were a jeweler examining a precious stone. He put one of his unusual hands to her bare throat and drew it away quickly. So engrossed he was, that he did not hear the heavy stride of a man beyond the portières.

"*Madre de Dios!*" a man's voice exclaimed.

About the woman Madden's arms tightened convulsively. The soft light left his eyes; they became shot with terror and hate. With a snarl he let go his suddenly precious burden and sprang. With a dirk he had drawn swiftly from a leather sheath at his breast, he struck into the chest of a man who had appeared at the portières, and clutched at the man's throat with his free hand.

The man screamed just before Madden's hand caught his throat. He eluded the hand, but not the dirk. Uttering a throaty cry, he sank slowly toward the floor. Madden, as he withdrew the dirk, heard excited calls and hurrying footsteps.

He glanced swiftly at the woman on the floor; then he glanced back at the man he had attacked. On the man's white shirt there was a widening stain. Madden scowled. He turned, as the footsteps and excited voices drew nearer, and rushed to the window. With a crash and a splinter of glass he leaped through the frame, and over the old balcony to the yard below. There, without a break in his speed, he ran across the yard to the place that he had cleared in the wall. He vaulted the wall; on the other side, he turned into the road, running madly with huge strides. His course lay toward Algeciras, but when near the town he turned off to the right and fled across an open sloping plain. The slope led gently up a small hill, and up this hill he ran—over the hill and down the other side and to the sea, where he found his motorboat nosed into a little cove in the barren coast. He jumped into the boat,

cast off, turned the engine over and slipped out of the cove. Across the increasing swell of the straits the boat sped toward Africa, where in the cold light of the moon he could make out the eminence of the southern Pillar of Hercules, Monkey Hill.

The straits were comparatively calm. Madden passed the shadowy masses of ships of trade, some heading toward the quiet waters of the Mediterranean, others outward bound to the Atlantic; and from some of them as he passed, the watches shouted at him in greeting. But he paid no attention. There was in his soul a confused panic which was not stilled until, just before dawn, he slipped into the little shack several miles from Tangier, where he kept his boat. There, drawing the doors that gave on the sea, he slipped back in the darkness to sleep.

When he awakened the day was well along. Looking out, he saw that the sun had passed the meridian. But it was not time yet. He began to fret. Restlessly he looked about the shack, but there was nothing to do. He wished he were at his quarters in the city, where his things were. He could putter about with his tools, there! And then he thought of the bag in his pocket.

He pulled it out, loosened the drawstring, and dumped what it contained into his handkerchief. Through cracks in the roof of the shack vagrant rays of the sun fell and glittered on the heap in the white cloth. Diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds and amethysts jostled together brilliantly in the handkerchief as the big man, his strange eyes glistening, stared at them. He fondled them raptly, examining them against the rays of the sun, seeking for flaws he did not find. They were, as Maceau had said they would be, one of the finest small collections in Europe, and Madden's expert eye confirmed what Maceau had said. He did not think, then, of what they might bring; he thought only that they were beautiful. He felt that he would like to work many days in designing and mounting them. His imagining mind saw them in rings, in brooches, in necklaces, in pendants. He saw them about a woman's throat.

Suddenly he gave a start. A ruby, afire in the sharp dart of a sunbeam, threw its light at him. Its many facets charmed his eyes. Around it there grew in his imagination a circlet. To the circlet there was attached a delicate link, and to the link was fastened a thread-

like mesh chain. He thought: "She wore nothing about her throat. This ruby would lie gently there. The black hair, the olive skin, the white dress and the red of the ruby—it would be beautiful!"

He mused, and for minutes his vision held; then a little tremor of fear shook him—he had thought of Maceau. Hurdledly he replaced the ruby and the rest of the stones in the velvet bag.

AS the sun, red and soft, touched the horizon, Madden emerged from the shack and walked along a broad white road that overlooked the sea. He was going toward Tangier. He had, according to Maceau's orders, waited for twilight. But he was not thinking of Maceau now; he was thinking of the woman.

But abruptly his smile vanished and he scowled. He fumbled at his side and disengaged his thumb which had caught in the looped drawstring of the bag. For some reason it made him think of Maceau, and it occurred to him Maceau would not like the fact that he had used his dirk. That he had been forced to use his dirk, Maceau would not consider. Madden stopped abruptly in the road, wondering why it was necessary to tell Maceau he had used his dirk. Again the scowl appeared. Maceau, he knew, would hear of it. Maceau knew personally the man he had stabbed. Besides, the Spanish authorities in Tangier and the protectorate would be notified of the stabbing. It would become public. . . . But, with surprising shrewdness, Madden decided not to tell Maceau about the woman.

Preoccupied, frowning, he entered the city and went to his quarters. There he kept his jeweler's tools and a charcoal furnace which he used sometimes when he had gold enough to work with. And there he kept his canary, a bird he himself had caught in the African hills. He fed the canary, then changed his clothes—he liked to look well before Maceau—and went out again.

Deep in the city, near the bay, where the white road runs beneath the great wall of stone toward the south, he turned and entered a house. But as he entered it, he paused thoughtfully. Resolve and purpose crossed his aimless face. Cautiously he drew the bag from his pocket and opened it; in the dim light he sought for and found the ruby. He thrust it into his trousers pocket; then he closed the bag and put it into his coat pocket. If Maceau was not



to hear of the woman, he might as well not hear of the ruby either.

He ascended the stairs, which were dark and damp. At the top he entered by a door and there, on a dilapidated terrace that overlooked the sea, he found Maceau. Also, he found the crone Ayeesha. They were waiting for him.

They whirled in their chairs as he opened the door and stood framed in it, their faces half eager, half fearful. Their eyes gleamed in the light of an oil lamp that sat between them on a rickety table. By the lamp was a bottle of cognac, and they were rather far along in its consumption.

Maceau smiled, a slanting, cynical expression that revealed part of his extraordinarily white teeth. He was a man of small features, with an air of faded or perverted elegance about him. Somewhere, in his hazel eyes, or in the contour of his thick, gray-black hair, or in

the curve of his nostrils, or in the mere attitude of his body, there was lingering caste. Maceau might have been—could be—an aristocrat. One of his small, womanish hands held a *liqueur* glass as if he were making a gesture. His clothes were immaculate. But about him, exuding from his slanting smile and his dark and circled eyes there was an aura of ill health and dissipation and evil.

Ayeesha, looking at Madden, also smiled, toothlessly. In the uncertain light of the lamp, she seemed ageless and sexless—a witch. Her face, dry and parchmentlike, was a mass of tiny wrinkles. Her eyes, the once-black pupils ringed and sharp, shone like dark onyx. Her hands, spotted with age, shook as they held her glass. Ayeesha, creature of the Moorish ports, would dispose of the gems Madden had stolen.

"Well, you," she said to Madden, who had remained standing at the door, "is



If you had gold, said the traders, jingling their bags of French and Spanish coin, you had everything. Madden listened silently, and looked at the bags of gold.

it that you hesitate because you have failed?"

Madden shook his head. Ayeesha chuckled. Maceau's slanting smile grew higher. Madden strode heavily into the room and to the table, where he pulled from his pocket the velvet bag. He sat down and threw the bag on the table.

Maceau reached for the bag and turned it upside down. There fell from it the shower of incredible brilliance. On the table the scattered gems leaped like hail. Madden put up one of his hands and stopped an emerald as it started to roll to the floor. From Ayeesha came a hoarse chuckle of delight; from Maceau a voluptuous sigh.

Ayeesha gulped the remainder of her cognac.

"The stupid one," she said, pointing at Madden, "is useful after all."

"I cut my hand," said Madden, examining his palm, where was a little gash.

"How?" asked Maceau, but not in sympathy. His eyes were suspicious.

Madden did not look at Maceau. He was talking to relieve his uneasiness. "As I went over the wall," he said slowly, "I cut my hand on a piece of glass." He

held out his hand so they might see, but still he did not raise his eyes.

Maceau shrugged. Ayeesha cackled as if she were pleased, and muttered something in Arabic which the men could not understand. Maceau set a glass in his eye and examined the gems. When he had finished he looked at Madden and smiled. "Name of a name!" he said. "Perfect—most of them! We will be rich."

Madden nodded, his eyes still averted, and looked out from the terrace in the direction of Spain. Far away, against the sky, he could see the dark silhouette of Gibraltar, like a crouching sphinx. Frowning, he turned to his hand once more. Ayeesha was intent on the gems; she played with them as a child plays with marbles, but Maceau was watching Madden narrowly.

"You," said Maceau, "—there is something the matter with you. . . . Is it that you have hidden a gem or two, eh?"

Madden started. Perspiration grew on his forehead. He shifted uneasily in his chair and drew his hand across his trousers, where he felt the hard lump of the ruby. But he shook his head.

"No?" said Maceau. "I believe—"

"That big house," Madden blurted; "whose is it?"

Maceau eyed him a moment. "It is the house," he finally answered, "of José Sandoval. . . . Did you see him?"

The ruby burned like a live coal against Madden's leg.

"Yes," he answered.

Maceau frowned. Ayeesha looked up sharply from the gems. "So!" said the Frenchman. "It is that something happened, eh?"

Madden shifted in his seat. He pressed the ruby with his hand.

"Yes," he said.

"Tell me," said Maceau. He was very calm.

Madden breathed deeply. As he stared at Maceau's frown, little beads of sweat rolled down his big face. "I stabbed him," he said. "I think I killed him."

From Ayeesha came a sibilant gasp. Maceau leaned forward quickly and gripped the edges of the table, cursing. The table shook in his grasp. "Clown!" he spat at Madden. "Stupid clown!"

"It was all I could do!" cried Madden. "All I could do! They were having a party." He was staring at Maceau's eyes as if hypnotized. "He came upon me"—he paused—"at the safe." Madden's eyes were pleading with Maceau, but the Frenchman's frown was terrible. "It was all I could do!" Madden repeated in rising panic.

"Swine!" rasped Ayeesha. "Miserable swine!"

Maceau pounded a small fist on the table, cursing horribly. "Mother of God!" he shrilled. "Murder! They will hunt us like rats! They will hunt you like a rat!" Madden groaned. "*Beigneur Dieu!* What a specimen of an ape!"

He rose suddenly and struck Madden several times in rapid succession across the mouth. Madden put up his strong hands in fright before the Frenchman's anger. His mouth began to bleed.

"It was all I could do!" he cried.

Maceau, panting with anger and exertion, sank back into his chair, glaring at the other. Nervously he poured himself a cognac and gulped it. Another and another he drank, his eyes now staring out the window toward the silhouetted mass of Gibraltar.

Ayeesha also drank. "Well," she said finally, with a shrug, "what is it that we will do now? It is an excellent mess. . . . These"—she indicated the scattered gems on the table—"they are little drops of death, now!"

Maceau shook his head in exasperation. He darted a murderous glance at the cringing giant. But he did not answer the crone immediately. He looked down

at the floor, pounding the table absently with a small fist. Ayeesha, watching, shifted uncomfortably in her chair. Madden's heavy breathing rasped noisily.

"We will do," Maceau said finally, "that which it is wise to do. This specimen of an ape and I—we shall quit this place. You"—to Ayeesha—"will remain. And so"—he looked at the gems regretfully—"will these, because you are hidden more easily than we. Maceau"—he smiled ironically—"is not without fame; and this ox, here, will be wanted for murder. Therefore we will go, but when this miserable thing is past we will return. Until then," he concluded, looking at Ayeesha, "you will keep them, these little drops of death."

He swept his hand angrily across the table, and gathering the gems into the bag, handed the bag to Ayeesha. The crone clutched it against her chest.

"Where do you go—you and the stupid one?" she asked.

Maceau smiled obliquely. "You would know, hag? Very well, I shall tell you: far enough, to be sure, but near enough to observe a thieving witch!"

Ayeesha chuckled. "*Mon petit malin!* How sagacious!" Her tone was maliciously sarcastic. "Go and be cursed, *mon babouin!*"

But Maceau paid no attention. Already he had risen. Now he moved around the table and toward the door. Madden still sat stolidly, staring at the table. One of his long, perspiring hands moved backward and forward across the lump in his pocket. His eyes, staring at the table, were soft.

Maceau saw Madden's expression and swore. "Clown!" he snarled. "It is murder he commits—yet his eyes are those of a man in love!"

THE road wound through barren hills, a bumpy, primitive road, past little villages and walled towns, past grazing herds and traders' camps, toward the distant Atlas. The snowy peaks of the range glistened in the hot sun.

Madden was stolid, Maceau gloomy. At regular intervals along the miserable road, the Frenchman took long drafts from one of the cognac bottles he had brought with him, now and then turning to abuse the big man. But Madden paid no attention. Driving the little car at Maceau's instruction, he looked steadily ahead along the road.

"Bungler!" repeated Maceau. "Type of a toad!"

But Madden did not hear. "The circlet will be fine," he thought; "almost imperceptible—or perhaps it will be large enough to carry a tooled design. The link will be double and of a piece with the circlet. It will grow from the circlet like the petal of a flower. It will attach to the little chain. The chain will be thread-like, a fine mesh. It will be joined by a clasp none will see. The black hair, the olive skin, the white satin, the ruby, the tiny metal—"

"Clown!" muttered Maceau sourly. "Camel!"

They traveled the road until three days distant from Tangier. At a place in the foothills of the range where the trade routes pass on the way to both coasts, Madden, at Maceau's instruction, turned off the road and struck out across a plateau narrowed at the other end into a rocky and wooded ravine. At the entrance to the ravine they came upon a wooden shack, and as they approached, a dirty and unkempt Moor emerged, glaring suspiciously. But upon seeing Maceau, he waved a greeting. They halted.

Madden got out and carried the luggage inside. His canary's cage he hung just within the door of the shack, to the vast curiosity of the Moor. Maceau watched with contempt, then flung himself down beneath a tree and began to drink. Here they were to stay—how long, they did not know.

But to Madden it was all the same. By day, walking in the ravine, he examined the ruby against the sun; by night, if there were a moon, he held it so that its facets caught the cold light and it leaped alive.

He wandered into the near-by traders' camps and gambled; he talked with Riffs and with Arabs from the desert beyond. They told him of the Sahara and the distant mountains, of the Légion and of the sacred cities of the desert. They told him of ancient gems.

"But I must have metal," he thought. "I must have metal to make the circlet and the link and the fine mesh of the chain. I must get it somewhere; but where?"

Silver? If you would have silver, said the traders, you must search for it. Platinum? They did not understand. What was platinum? What was it like? More precious than silver? More precious than gold? They laughed at that. Nothing was more precious than gold, except honor and religion—and some-

times, they said, honor and religion could wait! Gold was more to the point. If you had gold, they said, holding up and jingling their bags of French and Spanish coin, you had everything. . . .

Madden listened and looked at the bags of gold. And one night, with Maceau and the Moor sleeping heavily, he stole through the mountain mists to the camp of the traders. Just before dawn he crept back to the shack. Over the snoring Maceau and the deeply breathing Moor he stepped to his pallet and lay down, at peace. Now he had the metal!

The traders left next day. Others came and departed, and then Madden and Maceau left. They had been gone over two months. It was not allowing much time, but Maceau was impatient.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he said, his faded eyes sparkling. "You and I, big ape—we will be rich."

But Madden thought: "The black, the olive, the white, the red, and the thin line of yellow. It will not take long to melt the coin; but it will take many days to fashion the chain, attach the link and bind the ruby. The design on the circlet—I am not decided. It will be just enough to relieve the severity, anyway. Or perhaps the circlet will be fine, so fine that none can see it."

IN Tangier they found Ayeesha. When they entered her terrace she chuckled maliciously.

"Ah, *mon babouin!*" she said to Maceau, and to Madden: "Stupid camel! You are back, eh? . . . Well, brains you have both alike, one equal to the other. . . . Is it that you like the mountain air, Maceau? Is it that you travel for health? Learn, wise one, that Sandoval lives! He"—she pointed at Madden—"does not even kill well! The recovery was in a few weeks." She laughed, pointing her bony finger at Maceau. And Maceau, because the jewels were near, laughed also. Madden heard, but did not laugh.

"I will melt the gold today," he thought. "The circlet will begin today; tomorrow, I may be able to start the chain."

"What of the stones?" asked Maceau.

"The stones?" said Ayeesha. "They are here, neatly placed. I have been waiting for you. There is a Jew, a precious wretch, in Melilla, who will pay well. He means to take them to America. Since you are here, it will

be perhaps tomorrow that he will be able to come. . . . *Babouin!* Two months!" She shook with laughter. . . .

Madden went directly to his rooms, hung up his canary, and brought out the ruby and the gold. Feverishly he began to work.

With a pencil he sketched the chain, the link, and the circlet with the ruby in it. This he made crudely, correcting it many times. When he thought that he had an adequate drawing to go by, he melted the gold and annealed it in the charcoal furnace. Then he rolled it while it was red-hot. First he made the circlet. That did not take long. When he had tempered the gold and rolled it, he again heated it, fashioned the circlet with his tools and welded it about the ruby. At one point in the circlet he drew the metal thin and pierced it for the double link. The ruby was bound. Of course, he must now file the circlet smooth and take off the rough edges; but the thing was started. Next, the chain would begin. Of course, this would take time, but he did not care how much; he was deliriously happy. . . .

Next day he started early. Over his tools and his flame he sweated and whistled. In its corner the canary warbled in the early sunlight, answering his whistle, and Madden, listening, had an inspiration. There was more than enough gold for the pendant; there should be a golden cage for the golden-throated bird. When he was through with the pendant, he would plate the bird's cage. But that could wait.

"I will make the chain longer than I intended," he thought. "It will be a soft chain, a pliable chain, and hardly more thick than a good-sized cord. It will lie about her throat like silk."

NOW and then, as he worked, he cast an eye on the ruby and smiled. It sparkled brilliantly from its circlet; the little double link rose from the circlet like a Burmese headdress.

Through the morning he worked and into the afternoon, and the chain was begun. The tiny, hairlike links emerged from the hot metal and were joined. The thing was on its way.

"A ruby always should have gold," he thought. "The colors are passionate, flaming. So is she. The pendant will be her symbol."

The sweat ran down his big face and hissed in the furnace. His breath came in long, even gusts.

But something startled him. He jerked painfully, burning himself on the furnace. He became aware of some one behind him. He turned, his teeth clenched, and saw Maceau.

The Frenchman, his face livid, was staring at the ruby.

MADDEN shook as if palsied. He looked pleadingly at Maceau, but Maceau said nothing for a moment. He simply stared at the ruby, his faded eyes bright with fury.

"It was just that I wanted to make something with it!" cried Madden. "That was all! I did not mean to steal it. Really, I did not mean to steal it!"

Maceau's features relaxed slowly and broke into his oblique smile.

"Of course," he said. "You did not mean to steal it. It was a surprise, eh? You kept it secret so that you might surprise us—is that it?"

"Yes, yes," cried Madden. "That is it!"

Maceau laughed. *Très gentil*, big ape, you are good to us!" The laughter died in his throat. His oblique smile twisted into a grimace of rage. "Thief!" he shrieked. "Refuse!" He struck the big man repeatedly across the mouth. Little rivulets of blood trickled slowly from Madden's lips. "And a ruby, at that—the best of the lot. You are a connoisseur, big ape!" He picked up the stone and examined it. "*Tiens!* A surprise, eh? . . . And the gold? Where did you get it?"

"It was mine," whined Madden. "It has been mine a long time!"

Maceau struck him again. "Liar! You stole it! . . . Where?"

Madden cringed. He was too cowed to dissemble further. "From the traders," he said.

"The traders!" raged Maceau. "In the mountains? Fool! Miserable idiot! For that we might have been killed, both of us." He paused, charmed by the ruby. For a moment he examined it fondly; then he pocketed it. He turned to the staring Madden, smiling cruelly. "Well, big ape, I came to tell you something. I will still tell you. The Jew is here tonight. He pays gold for the stones, but"—he laughed—"none for you, thieving dog! There will be no gold for you. . . . A surprise, eh?"

Laughing, he turned and walked from the room.

Madden stared after him. Down his purposeless face sweat rolled and con-

gealed. In his strange eyes there was the look of a child that has been hurt. Slowly he turned his gaze on the table. The gold was there; the litter of tools was there—but the ruby was not.

He rushed to the door. "No! No!" he screamed. "It is mine! I will have it!" He ran through a hallway to the street. "No! No!"

But when he reached the street Maceau was not in sight. There were only hundreds of faces, indifferent though surprised, staring at him. The pedestrians muttered. Some gave him a cau-

Madden seized Maceau by the throat and shook him viciously.



tious look and walked around him: others stopped and laughed at him.

The laughter sobered him. He turned slowly, and shuffled back into his room. There was the table, there the gold, there the penciled design. The design fluttered in a breeze that blew in the window from

the sea. The breeze picked up the paper and dropped it on the floor. It moved gently with a rustling sound in the little air-currents there. He picked it up and looked at it. Then mechanically he laid it on the table and weighted it with a piece of gold.

He put on his hat and went out.

Through the waning afternoon he wandered about the city, his face twisted in puzzlement. He wandered into the hills and sat down on a knoll overlooking the sea. Beyond the broad strip of the straits, the clifflike coast of Spain rose orange in the haze. The mass of Gibraltar rose, grave, in the clouds. Nearby, the spangled sails of the fishermen moved slowly across the water.

"I could have finished the chain before long," thought Madden. "I would have worked very fast."

In the west, the sun was sinking rapidly toward the horizon. The sky was clear and brazen. The sun touched. Madden, watching, half expected it to hiss. Slowly it fled the brazen sky and vanished behind the waves. When it was gone he rose and walked slowly toward the city along the white road.

"It would have been a beautiful chain," he thought. "It would have been a beautiful pendant. It would have been like antiques I have seen, antiques out of Egypt. On her breast it would have shone in splendor. Now the Jew will take it to America. It will be lost, ruined!" And Madden ground his jaws.

It was dusk when he reached the city, a still and sullen dusk that was oppressive. Across the straits the Spanish coast was lost in a darkening sky. About Gibraltar's crest the clouds hung low. The sea was ugly. There was no wind, but the white-caps still broke uneasily, as if vaguely disturbed. Madden, an emptiness pervading him, slumped down in a little café.

NIGHT, with the storm gathering fast, found him there. But he rose and wandered again, as far out as the *Sherif's* deserted palace and back again, to the mosque, to the bay, to the hotels.

"If Maceau had not come," he thought, "I might have finished an inch of the chain today. Maceau is greedy and evil. He must have all. He might have had the rest; I wanted only the ruby. Why must he have the ruby?"

Madden shook his head. He looked up as a peal of thunder rumbled out of the northern sky and pounded heavily in the narrow streets. He was at the entrance to one of the great *Kursaals*. . . . He ascended the steps.

Above, he did not stop in the ballroom. In the ballroom were music and laughter and men and women. There was happy confusion in the ballroom, but he wanted

to be alone. He walked on through to the outer terrace and sat down. He ordered cognac and sipped it absently.

"Maceau will be rich," he thought. "He and Ayeesha will divide the money. He will debauch himself and she will hoard it. When his money is gone I will have to steal more for him. Maceau is a devil."

He looked up, disturbed, as a clap of thunder broke over the water and rumbled into the town. It rounded slowly and sullenly. In the distance lightnings crossed glittering blades about the summit of Gibraltar. From the north the wind, rising now, bore the sound of the distant tumult. It was rushing toward the city.

Madden shuddered. The wind, the storm, the cataclysmic sky, stirred him uneasily. The ballroom became suddenly inviting. He got up abruptly from his chair and came inside. There, at a seat that ran around the wall, he sat down near a corner. But he still heard the salvo of the thunder; he still saw the darting tongues of lightning.

As he came in, the orchestra, silent for a while, started to play again. It was a strange melody; somewhere out of old Spain it came, melancholy, stirring. Its elegiac minors spoke of things Madden could not understand, but which wrenched his soul. It spoke of oppression and beauty, of cruelty and magnificence, of war and love.

"The ruby," he thought, "would have lain on her breast like a drop of blood."

He looked up, startled by a violent crash of thunder that shook the building and reverberated in the near-by hills. A jagged blade of lightning shot rapierlike across the sky. Madden, shaken, looked at the dancers, and as he looked he half rose from his seat.

He clutched the edge of his table. For an instant fear struck at his heart and his breath caught; then, fascinated, he sank back into his seat, calm once more.

She was dancing. Her white satin dress limned her grace and made it more alluring. Her dark head was lifted so that she looked into the face of her partner—a tall, dignified man, marked with the pallor of recent illness. His left arm, Madden noticed, was stiff. But he and the woman moved smoothly about the dimly lighted room; almost, it seemed, as if they were part of the melancholy music.

"I would have put the pendant about her throat," thought Madden. "It would

have been her talisman. Now it will be gone forever. Maceau will sell it so that he may get drunk. Maceau is a fiend."

The couple danced on. Madden, gazing raptly, mentally placed the pendant about the woman's throat. It flamed brilliantly; it delighted his eyes.

"It is lovely," he thought. "It belongs there; it must hang there forever."

He cringed as a swift flash of lightning crossed the sky that was visible through the door. It was followed by a crash that ground its way through the city, through the hills. It shook Madden to the marrow.

He looked at the dancing couple. They had stopped, as had the rest, startled by the crash. The woman turned to look out the door and Madden rose to his feet.

The ruby no longer seemed about her throat.

With a cry that was lost in the music, he plunged toward the door. He rushed through the door, down the steps and to the street, where he met the breaking storm.

The rain, violent, sheeting, came in furious gusts according to the wind, and beat upon his bare head. The lightning sped through the narrow streets like liquid fire; the thunder roared like water in a cañon. But through it Madden walked, his steps aimless no longer. There was a springing, catlike tread to his gait. His face, in the lightning's glare, became majestic, determined. He walked on steadily, through the drive of the storm, through the tides of thunder, the storm breaking about his big face like spray about a cliff.

But at Ayeesha's door he turned.

Relentlessly, his heavy tread pounding the stairs, he ascended to the terrace. Without pausing, he opened the door and entered. Those within already were looking uneasily at the door. They had heard his heavy tread. The Jew looked at Madden in fright. Maceau and Ayeesha looked at him in disturbed astonishment.

Rain-beaten, dripping, he glared at them out of unfamiliarly brilliant eyes. Slowly he looked from one to the other and then out at the storm-tortured sea. The sea bellowed and groaned beneath the darting blades of the lightning. It echoed the drums of the thunder.

Madden looked at Maceau and walked toward a table, where on a velvet cloth lay the gems. But Maceau had recovered his wits.

"So, big ape," he said, fuming, "it is not enough that I tell you—"

Madden seized Maceau by the throat, lifted him from his seat, and shook him viciously. The Frenchman, his faded eyes bulging, struggled frantically. In terror, Ayeesha and the Jew looked on.

"The stones!" screamed Ayeesha. "He will take the stones!"

The Jew reached for the stones. Madden knocked him flat with his free hand and hurled the unconscious Maceau on top of him. Then he reached for the gems.

He was not quick enough to evade Ayeesha's dagger, which skewered his arm, but he had the jewels. He drew the blade from his arm, threw Ayeesha into a corner, glanced briefly at the storm outside, and strode out.

WHEN Madden went over the wall this time, he did not scratch his hands. He followed the same procedure as he had before when he had stolen the jewels, but this time he was more cautious. There were no lights in the house; there was no one about the gardens. Everyone about the place was asleep.

He drew himself softly over the balcony and tried the panel of the window. It was locked, but he broke the glass gently and let himself in. Within the room, by the light of his flash, he laid the bag of gems on the table. He was not particularly interested in them, but at least Maceau should not have them. Beside them he meant to lay the pendant, but for a moment he hesitated, examining it by the light of his flash as it hung on his hand.

The chain was soft and pliable, almost like cloth of gold; the ruby sparkled from its delicate circlet; the little double link depended threadlike, attaching ruby and chain; the clasp at the back was so small it hardly could be seen. . . .

He sighed. He laid the thing on the table, switched off his flash and went out the window. He walked leisurely down the road, over the hill, to where his motorboat was nosed into the little cove. He turned the boat around, heading toward Africa. Above, the constellations glittered back at him like the jewels he had left at the house.

For an instant he wondered what he would do, now that he almost killed Maceau. But it did not bother him long. There was still enough gold; already he knew how he would go about decorating the canary's cage with it.

Breakers Ahead!

A fascinating novel of swift adventure at sea and ashore, by the noted author of "Sindbad of Oakland Creek," "The Hazardous Highway" and "Youth Rides Victorious."

By FREDERICK BECHDOLT

Illustrated by George Avison

THE letter was becoming yellowed with time; it had lain in Larry Hall's sea-chest for three years.

"Dear Sir," it ran.

"If you are Lawrence Hall, the son of Thomas Hall, who formerly lived some fifty miles down the coast from Monterey, you will find it to your advantage to answer this, or call in person at my office.

*"Very truly yours,
"A. L. Barton."*

And at the head of the page was engraved the signer's name together with the legend, "*Counselor at Law, Monterey, California.*"

Three years in his sea-chest; and three times Larry Hall had read it, every time with the intention to answer it.

But each time some violence of storm or spree or mutiny had interfered. Now Larry was wandering about San Francisco's old Barbary Coast, broke and looking for a job. And he found that job, and much more, in peculiar fashion.

He had noticed a Chinaman in rich native garb, landing from a schooner in the bay with her skipper. Now, hearing an outcry in a dark street, he came upon the Chinaman and the ship-captain beset by thugs, and sailed in himself. There was a fine fight—and at the end of it the thugs took to their heels, the Chinaman's bag of gold was strewn on the cobbles, and the skipper lay there also, badly hurt.

So it happened that Larry got that schooner captain's job and found himself taking the *Katherine* out of the bay bound for Ensenada in Mexico. There he picked up a strange and distasteful cargo—eighty-six Chinese, who were to

be delivered to one Bradley Hall at Trinidad Head, some forty miles below Monterey, along with a sack of gold to pay Bradley Hall for the further conveyance of this living contraband.

A strange cargo—and a strange voyage northward, for one night the first mate was lost overboard—struck down, though Larry did not know it, by a belaying-pin thrown from the shrouds above. . . . At Trinidad Head Larry was received by his namesake Bradley Hall in a fine if lonely house on the hills overlooking the sea, and completed the business transaction. Yet the affair had only begun for him.

For one thing, he was enabled to rescue Hall's ward Madeline from the attack of a savage dog Bradley Hall kept to guard the place; and this episode, curiously, won him the friendship of not only the girl but the dog also. Then Larry decided to spend the two days necessary to take on his next cargo—lime from Bradley Hall's kilns—in visiting Monterey and calling upon that lawyer who had written him three years before.

His host Bradley Hall loaned Larry a horse, and he set out. . . .

Where he was riding, the hillside was steep, and the trail was narrow. A shelf of the white limestone rose on his right hand, and on his left a clump of second-growth tan oak made a dense thicket.

A shout sounded behind him, and a rattle of hoofs. He started to draw rein. But in that latter movement he was too late. His horse had already leaped forward in fright at the outcry and the rattle of approaching hoofs.

A rope of rawhide, stretched taut! On the uphill end, a man who crouched upon

his hands and knees; on the downhill end another, perched on the summit of a huge limestone boulder, gripping the reata with both hands. The strands caught the rider under the chin. His head flew back as abruptly as if he had been struck by a clenched fist. His senses had gone before he was swept from the saddle. And when he fell, the horse leaped on.

Before he had fairly struck, the pair who had been holding the rope were behind him. And one of them was holding a bared knife. (*The story continues in detail.*)

LARRY had fallen on the downhill side of a steep slope, and had come to earth far below the pathway. The two who had waited at the ends of the reata knelt over him; the knife hung poised. Its bearer was leaning forward with the bare blade at the victim's throat; with his left hand he tilted back the chin, to make more certain of the jugular. He was one of those mixed breeds in whose Indian blood there runs a trace of the old Presidio Spanish; his heavy features were alive with a cruel ferocity; his lips were parted like a snarling dog's. Now, as the steel was moving toward the bare flesh, his companion seized him by the wrist.

"Easy, my friend." He hissed the

In that last instant before the kiln swallowed him, he uttered a shriek that echoed from one side of the cañon to the other.

words in their own tongue, the mongrel Spanish of the hill vaqueros. "This will not do."

"And why not?" the one who held the knife demanded with an oath. "Did we get him here to look at him, perhaps?"

"It is not that. To kill him, yes. But I have seen it done—as you would do it. And two of them, as we are now. And when it was over, those two and the dead man were of the one color—all three of them soaked in one man's blood." He shook his head at the memory. "You should have seen that one! As a chicken flopping when the head is cut off!"

The other slid the knife back into its sheath and swore.



"I had not thought of that," he said.

"And if trouble should come of it," his companion went on, "there are the clothes to tell the tale. No. Take him to the kiln; the fire is hot. Ten minutes, and there is nothing left. Is it not so, Pedro?"

And Pedro, who had swung from the saddle, leaving his horse on the trail above, nodded where he stood looking down on them.

"But you must be quick," he reminded them, "for he is not going to lie there like that waiting all day for you."

"Come you, then, and give us a hand." The one who had remonstrated was speaking. "He is not so light to carry, and the ground is rough."

Pedro complied in silence, leaving his horse to crop the sparse grass beside the trail, where Larry's animal fell to feeding likewise, forgetting the alarm of a few moments since.

IT was, as the last speaker had said, no light weight they bore; and the going was steep until they reached the pathway. Two of them at the senseless man's shoulders and one at his feet—they were breathing hard when they finally dropped their burden.

Here where they had halted, the narrow trail widened to a beaten patch of bare earth—a little open space upon the hillside. Above it, a shelf of the crystallized limestone, white as marble, from which the rock had been rent with blasting-powder. Below it, some ten feet or so, the throat of the largest kiln. The heat up here was like an oven; the smoke and gases were stifling. The three bearers knelt over their victim—a ragged trio, swarthy-faced, their black eyes swimming red with the evil excitement of murder.

"All right!" Pedro was speaking now. "Pick him up and throw him in." But the one who had delayed matters before shook his head. Of the trio he was the eldest by many years, grizzled and bent-backed.

"You forget what you promised us," he growled. "Do you think we do this for the fun, maybe? And burn up his money with him? No, *amigo*. We will see what he has in those pockets."

Pedro flung an oath at him. But the other paid no heed; his hand was already groping for the spoils.

The chance which plays so large a part in many such affairs as this had brought it about that Larry was lying

on his face. So none of the three saw the first flutterings of his lids; nor did they see his eyes open a moment later. He came back to the things about him with the acrid smell of the smoke and choking gases in his nostrils. And then he got the knowledge of a weight upon him; and of voices in his ears. Pedro, who was watching him narrowly, cried out to warn the other two.

Their victim was struggling to rise when they flung themselves upon him. And if there had been only one of them, it would have been the better, so far as their project was concerned, for they were hindering one another in their efforts to seize his limbs and pinion them to the earth.

His first movement had hurled off the old ruffian who sought to rob him. And as this one was leaping back, he called:

"The knife. And quick!"

Larry saw the blade flash upward, shining in the sunlight. He thought it was all over then. But the wielder struck wildly in his haste, and the steel thudded into the beaten earth beside his throat. The blow had driven it down to the hilt; and the man grunted with the effort as he plucked it forth.

Two men upon him now, and one kneeling beside him, the knife in his hand. Larry put all the strength he owned into the effort, as he heaved his body upward to dislodge that pair; he saw their dark faces, ashine with sweat, bending down close to his own. He sank back under their combined weight. He felt the sharp steel touching his throat. And then Pedro uttered a loud shout. There came a new sound—a deep bass roar—that drowned the Indian's cry of terror.

CHAPTER X

BRADLEY HALL was sitting in the flower-bedecked courtyard, finishing his after-breakfast cigarette. Now and again, although the morning was not hot, he mopped his big soft face with his linen handkerchief, pausing sometimes in the process to dab at a bead of perspiration which he had missed. The old Indian woman came from the house.

"The man from the ship is gone now," she said. And—to confirm her statement—the sound of receding hoofbeats came over the high wall from the road where Larry was riding away. She passed on hurriedly through the enclo-

sure, and the blind door which led to the long row of outbuildings slammed behind her. Hall sighed; he tossed away the stub of his cigarette and lighted another. He sat there for a long time.

HE had looked forward to this, the first day of Madeline's home-coming; he had been picturing to himself the pleasure that he was to get, sitting here where he was now, watching her as she came and went through the wide courtyard—holding his eyes upon her and thinking of the day to come. And now she was gone, leaving a curt message for him, and that was all. And this unpleasant complication had come to mar his day further. When he should have been enraptured in pleasant anticipations, he was sweating in the presence of certain visions which his imagination persisted in conjuring before him. For like many others who own no compunctions at all when it comes to the matter of a murder, he was a physical coward when it came to facing consequences. And it was so easy for such things to go wrong. . . .

An uproar beyond the high courtyard wall brought him to his feet, and his face was the color of unbaked dough. Voices of men, the scuffle of running feet; a woman's scream, and the door through which the old servant had passed so hurriedly a half-hour ago flew open. She flung it shut behind her and pressed her back against it. So she stood, wide-eyed and fearful. He had sunk down into his chair again, and he sat there regarding her in silence, waiting for her to speak.

"It is the great dog, el Toro," she gasped. "He has been loose all night, and this last half-hour the men have been fighting to catch him."

A sudden swelling of the tumult beyond the wall interrupted her. And above the voices of the vaqueros came the deep bass roaring of the dog.

"How did it happen?" His voice was as gentle as a woman's, but his face was old again, and ugly with the little lines upon it.

"It was when Pedro fed the four of them last evening that he got away," she cried.

Bradley Hall rose and walked slowly to the door; she stood aside at his approach; he flung it open and looked out. "They have him now." He shrugged his shoulders as he said it, and started to close the door.

From the courtyard wall to the stables there extended another walled space, shut in on one side by a high barrier of adobe bricks, and on the other by a row of low outbuildings; the earth was bare; and in the middle of the enclosure, where the dust was rising like smoke around them, two men were wrestling with the great dog—swarthy vaqueros, and one of them was on either side of the brute. Their hands were gripping the collar of steel links. A rawhide reata trailed from the group, squirming to their movements like a snake. It was with this that they had made the capture; but now that they had made it, they were far from through.

Bradley Hall paused in the act of closing the door. If it had been an unbroken horse that they were handling, the struggle would have been no fiercer. The great dog lunged forward even as Hall was watching; and the suddenness of the movement swept one of its captors from his feet. The man's grip relaxed. The brute tore free; it reared and flung its weight upon the other. The dust rose thick about them, hiding them completely.

A tawny form shot out of the swirling cloud; its streaked flanks gleamed in the morning sunlight. It was racing straight for the spot where Bradley Hall stood. He slammed the door shut and backed away from it.

And as he came to a halt, still gazing at the heavy planks, the Indian woman uttered a shriek. The dog soared into sight. It came over the eight-foot wall, the lean body outstretched, the legs still quivering from the leap, like an enormous missile hurtling toward its mark. And Bradley Hall went down before it.

Man and dog crashed to the sod together. And then, as swiftly as it had come, the animal sprang on. Its feet spurned the prostrate form beneath it, and it leaped over the opposite wall. And when the two luckless vaqueros rushed into the courtyard all smeared with dust and blood, the fugitive was racing down the road that led to the redwood cañon.

THE great dog sped down the slope, ignoring the turnings of the road, cutting across the angles. There was one idea in its mind, and that was the man whom it had followed. To it that man was as a god would be to you or me. To keep the privilege of hanging at Larry's heels, it had skulked back from the stone house, knowing—as dogs do know such things from experience—that

here it was liable to capture. But it had kept close by, lest it miss this master whom it had chosen; and so it had come to grief. Then the old bloody rage that made it a terror to every Indian and mixed blood about the place had leaped up, and Toro would have had much joy in mangling those two who had caught

ing, he flung himself aside to avoid those gleaming teeth. But it was not for him that Toro was leaping. He came like a bullet, and his full weight struck the man who held the knife at Larry's throat.

The weapon tinkled on the dry earth. Man and dog rolled over and over down



He saw the Indian's hand outstretched. Then Larry was upon him.

him with the reata in the chaparral; he would have left them in the dust of the courtyard, a pair of bloody heaps, if that single idea had not owned him. As it was, he took no more thought of them than he did of Bradley Hall, when he bowled the head of the house over in the courtyard.

Larry had gone down the hill, and Toro was going to find him. And in his eagerness he overran the forks of the trail down in the redwoods. But when he had gone some rods beyond, he retraced his steps. So for some moments he ran back and forth, until at length he got the scent where Larry had dismounted. And with whatever reasoning dogs use to solve such things, he knew that now he was to trail the horse.

He ran, head low, and silently. Up through the redwoods, and on past the groves of tan oak; on through the rocks and dagger plants. And suddenly he caught the scent of the man again. It was then that he saw the group above the lime-kiln and what was taking place there. He did not wait. He came on like a tawny streak in the sunshine, uttering his fearful roar. . . .

Pedro looked up, the first to hear his approach. And seeing what was com-

ing, he flung himself aside to avoid those gleaming teeth. But it was not for him that Toro was leaping. He came like a bullet, and his full weight struck the man who held the knife at Larry's throat. The weapon tinkled on the dry earth. Man and dog rolled over and over down the steep slope toward the throat of the burning kiln. The animal gained his feet; it was so close to the flames that the heat singed the hair on its flanks; and it staggered as it scrambled up the hill. The man went on. Where the red flames ceased and the gases showed in undulating waves of heat under the beginning of the smoke-cloud, he vanished. But in that last instant before the kiln swallowed him, he uttered a shriek that echoed from one side of the cañon to another, long after he had gone.

When the impact of that tawny body had struck among the three of them, the oldest of the thugs had rolled away like a rabbit. For a moment he too had been on the verge of plunging on into the furnace; but he had recovered himself just in time. He got to his feet, and stood there for a moment irresolute; then he saw the dog climbing toward him, and he fled.

Larry's head was still reeling when the thing had happened. The knife lay where it had fallen, a few feet away. And he saw Pedro creeping for the weapon. He saw the Indian's hand outstretched; the fingers closed on the hilt. Then Larry was upon him, and the two were wrestling for their lives.

They rolled over once. They hung there, at the summit of the smooth earthen chute down which the workmen rolled the lime-rock. And Larry was upper-

most. One hand was grasping the brown wrist above the knife. The fingers of the other hand were closing over the swarthy throat. The smoke swept lower with the veering of the wind, and the fumes all but strangled him. His head swam, and his senses were near to leaving him again.

His grip still held upon the swarthy throat. He saw the fingers that clinched the knife relax. And then there came, from down the trail, the sound of rapid hoofbeats.

Larry leaped to his feet. The hot gases had left him sick and weak; he reeled, and his head was swimming as he ran to his horse.

CHAPTER XI

THE two horses had ceased grazing, and they were standing on the steep mountain-side above the trail, heads up, ears pricked forward, some fifty yards or so away. In the brief time it took Larry to make that distance, a tremendous change came over all the landscape.

The fog which he had seen sweeping inland when he was riding up out of the timber, arrived: thick clouds of gray that turned to gleaming white where the sun fell upon them; they swirled onward, giving off jets of vapor that spread like smoke and vanished in the clear overhead. The tree-tops and the brush and the long stretches of hill land disappeared beneath the blanket. And out of that gray-white mystery came the noise of rapid hoofbeats, growing louder, the voices of the riders, speeding up the trail.

The sun was hot on Larry's back when he reached the horse, and it was glaring in his face when he turned with the bridle-reins in his hand, seeking to gain the uphill side before he placed his foot in the stirrup. He heard one of the riders shout:

"There he is now!"

And he was thinking this meant him. Then there was a moment's delay, for the horse was restless and would not stand. And in that moment while he swung into the saddle, the vanguard of the fog swooped down upon him. The heat was gone; he was enwrapped in cool mists; the brightness had departed with the warmth; the world was shut off from him by a vague drab curtain which left only a little circle where things were clearly visible.

Then the riders appeared, just beyond the limits of that circle where all objects were still plain. Horses and men swept by, like two huge gray ghosts. And Larry was still wondering whether that shout had meant him. And were those riders friends or enemies?

They showed vaguely in the moment of their passing, and they melted into the fog again. Now only the noise of the hoofs remained to tell of them. After what had taken place he was not in the mood for taking chances with any man hereabouts. He urged his horse farther up the hill. Another shout made him draw rein.

They were by the lime-kilns now; he could tell it from the voice.

"Here he goes. This way."

The scrape of hoofs and the rattle of loose rocks rolling down the slope; the grunting of the horses running up the mountain-side. Then the great dog shot into sight; and as it came on, something soared above it through the mists, something more slender than a striking snake. It settled down upon the animal—the noose of a reata.

"Got him!" the rider cried, and his companion shouted through the grayness:

"Careful, now! If you should hurt him, that devil would have you whipped till the blood runs down your back."

The scuffle of hoofs; the great dog's roar; the whining of a second reata—and the fog grew thicker, shutting them from view. Evidently the last noose had settled home, for they were talking more quietly, disputing as to who should dismount and handle the captive. And while they were in the middle of it—

"Oho!" one cried. "Here is Pedro." And the other shouted:

"I would not like to be you, Pedro, when you see the boss."

The voice of Pedro floated up the hill in answer, weak and hoarse, shaking with rage:

"Keep your worry for yourself, my friend! And when you ride home, tell that devil for me—"

IT was the mongrel Spanish of the hills that they were speaking; there is no language richer in ribald insult. He had delved deep into the foulness of the wineshops and the dives for the message.

"Me," he added, "I am riding away from him and his place today."

Larry did not wait for any more. As to what might happen if he made his

presence known to these others, he had no idea. But he was sure of one thing—there was nothing to be gained by so doing. The summit of the ridge was near; he was thinking that, if discovery should come, he could get on across that skyline and be in hiding.

But discovery did not come. He listened to the voices of the two vaqueros and the noises of the struggle as they tied the great dog's limbs with the reatas. And it was only that warning which he had overheard—the knowledge that they would do the brute no harm for fear of what punishment might come to them—only this that kept him from dashing in to liberate the friend who had saved him. Soon afterward they departed with their prisoner. Larry waited until he heard Pedro catching up his horse. And when the Indian had ridden away, he started on.

WHICH way? He remembered that one who had plunged down into the throat of the kiln before his eyes. This tragedy helped him to decide. For though he had as yet no inkling of the man by whose orders he was to have died,—although he still failed to connect last night's escape with today's,—he had small trust in Bradley Hall. And he felt that when he reported the death which he had witnessed,—if he did report it,—it would be to the authorities at Monterey. That was one reason. The other was more potent.

This latter was the girl who had ridden before him up the coast. If he were to take the long back track by way of the cañon mouth, his chances of overtaking her would be slim indeed. So he hung to the short-cut.

The fog was growing thicker, and the wind was cool. The great hills had become a place of vague mysteries; and he traveled always within a narrow circle, surrounded by a damp curtain of gray mists whose folds at times seemed to part a little, to reveal some outcrop of the living rock or a lonely tree or clump of brush. Always these appearances came in silence and suddenly. Out of the depths two thousand feet below and more, the roaring of the hair seals on a wave-lashed rock drifted upward to his ears—a dreary sound; it seemed as if it had risen out of another world.

He pressed his horse on eagerly. And there was good reason for his haste; for he had today and tomorrow as his own, and that was all. If he hoped to see

the writer of that letter and to make his return before the sailing of the schooner, there was no time to spare.

THE trail wound in and out as hill trails do, following the easy contours for the most part; and there were many other paths beaten down by the cattle cutting across it. The fog hid all the landmarks; and in his eagerness Larry did not look as closely as he might have. Just when it was that he got lost he did not know; but after he had been riding for a good three hours, he began to realize that he must have failed to keep the proper route. For he was still on the lofty ridges, when he should have been down on the coast road long since. And the beaten track which the horse was following had thinned out and vanished.

Only one thing to do—find a ridge and follow it downward; and he knew the California hills well enough from his boyhood days to realize that this might not be an easy job; for it was not every ridge that a man and horse could negotiate.

He went on slowly now, seeking for a route. The first attempt brought him to the summit of a cliff, and the second into a maze of chaparral; and when he had regained the summit from the last, it was away past the middle of the afternoon. Here where he was riding, the tan oaks and the live oaks grew all about, with long streamers of Spanish moss hanging from their branches. There was a winding cattle-trail among them; and after he had followed this for a half hour or so, it grew wider. A mile farther on, and it had become a well-beaten track. The horse's ears went forward, and the mists seemed to part; a little house of split redwood boards appeared before him. The animal threw up its head and whinnied. And then a queer thing happened.

The door of the cabin was flung open. A woman stood upon the threshold—a lean creature, poorly clothed; her dark eyes were fixed in a strange stare; they widened suddenly as they met Larry's, and the swarthy face was twisted with fear. She stepped back and started to close the door.

He called to her in Spanish: "I am looking for a way down to the road."

The door banged shut. And her voice came from behind it:

"You are on the trail. It leads down the ridge."

He rode past the house; the door remained tightly shut. But when he had gone a little way beyond, he looked back and saw that she was holding it open a crack, as if to make certain that he was keeping on. He noticed this; and he noticed a shed near by with two saddle-horses standing just within. And then he saw where the trail turned down the hill ahead of him. So he spurred his horse, and the mists closed in behind him, shutting the buildings from his view.

No doubt of it; she had told him the truth as to his route. The trail was wide here and well-beaten—one of those sled roads by which the settlers of the hills brought down the peeled tanbark to the highway. It took the long ridge in a series of wide loops, so steep in places that the horse tucked its hind legs under its body. The oaks ceased, and there was a long interval of wild oats, with golden poppies, folded in the fog's dimness as if it were night-time. And then the dark loom of the redwoods, and the sound of a stream brawling in a cañon's bed on the right hand. He came on down among the huge trees, where the earth was soft and the horse made no sound. He saw the coast road ahead.

Near evening now; and here in the cañon it was already deep twilight. The stream was noisy; and it was only the good chance of Larry's having stopped at the crossing to let his mount drink which made it possible for him to hear the dull thudding of two horses coming up the narrow path.

IT was that chance by which he discovered their approach. And it was a distrust of any passing traveler that made him act as he did upon the discovery. For the memory of that woman in the lonely little house upon the summit hung with him—of her face all twisted with an ugly fear, and the way she had darted back into the room the moment she saw him. This—and what he had already gone through today.

So he pulled up the horse, touched it with the spurs and rode off the trail—upstream for a few yards, into the shadow of some redwoods. The trees had grown up hundreds of years ago as seedlings in a circle around a parent stump. Here in the center of the ring, with the huge trunks around him and the fog to make the dimness deeper, he was completely hidden from the crossing.

Two horsemen, and they were already at the bank. And one of them was say-

ing, in the mongrel Spanish of the coast hills:

"I will tell you, then. Maria has her in the cabin on the ridge."

The other swore at his horse, and Larry thought he knew that voice. He looked out between the trees. The form showed vaguely through the fog. It was Pedro.

The cursing ceased, and Larry was wishing with all his heart that these two would ride on, when the other man spoke.

"Better to let them drink. There is no water on the ridge. The spring has dried. It was to fill the canteens that I came down the hill. The girl says she is thirsty."

STILL the listener had no idea as to whom he meant or what was going on in that flimsy cabin which he had passed a little while ago; and his only hope was that they would not linger here too long. Now for some moments the only sounds to break the silence were the pleasant rattle of the stream and the eager sucking of the drinking animals.

Pedro eased his body in the saddle.

"See now," he said, "the way a man's luck goes; and if the priest was to tell you this, he would say it was the good saints did it. You come down the hill for water, and I am riding up the road to Monterey. And so we meet."

"And even though you are Maria's cousin and my own good friend," the other cried, "I would have kept my teeth shut on this matter, if you had not told me first, how you were looking for the chance to play even with that devil. Now there are three of us together."

The horses had ceased drinking; the two riders touched them with the spurs; and there was a clashing of iron shoes upon the boulders in the creek-bed as they started on. The noise ceased; and the dull thudding of the hoofs on the soft earth was growing fainter; the dusk had closed in behind the receding forms, and Larry was telling himself that in another moment the way would be clear for him, for the road was close at hand. Then a voice floated back through the shadows.

"How did you know this Madeline was on the road?" And then the answer, barely audible above the thumping of the hoofs—

"It was Maria who saw her setting out this morning, and learned that she was riding to Monterey. And it was Maria made the plan." The voice was grow-

ing fainter; there were intervals when the words were blurred. "To hold her—to make that devil pay—or then to kill—" The distance drowned all else.

So for perhaps a minute, and then a vagrant eddy of the breeze carried to him a final fragment. It was Pedro:

"And I too saw her setting out—and told that captain from the ship . . . the Piñon trail."

CHAPTER XII

IT took some time for Larry to realize the truth. It seemed to him at first that his imagination must have been at work, coloring those words to which he had been listening, adding to them, perhaps. And he had to go back over them, repeating them to himself, before he was convinced.

The sound of the horses had ceased; it was growing darker down here in the cañon, and the air was clammy. He was struggling with his disbelief—with his sense of what should be in a world where things were orderly. He had a feeling as if he were in the middle of an ugly dream.

But there was no discounting the facts—no escape from them. This man, who had tried to kill him only a few hours before, was riding up the hill with another of his mongrel breed—on their way to the house which he had passed on the ridge. He thought of the woman who had come to the door when he passed, and of the way she had acted. And this half-mad creature was guarding the girl—

"Madeline!" He repeated the name to himself in a whisper.

The road lay close by; he could seek there for help. But he dismissed the idea as soon as it occurred. For in this unsettled country it might be hours before he reached a house. And his common sense told him there was no time to lose. Whatever reason might lie behind that abduction, one thing was sure—those three were not going to linger on the ridge so near the highway for long.

Before he started up the hill he rode back to the crossing of the stream and let his horse finish the drink which the coming of those two had interrupted. For he might need all its strength soon. Then he set forth on the long climb. Slow going, and he made frequent halts to breathe the animal—to listen for some sound, lest he should overtake the pair

ahead. If he had only brought a weapon! It was the first time in his life that he had ever tasted that regret.

Out here on the grassy ridges there was some faint light left from the sunset, and the fog was beginning to melt away. So where he rode, the mists were thicker than they were higher up. And this was all to his advantage. Nevertheless he went slowly, and he listened often; and he struggled with himself to repress the hot impatience which goaded him on, reminding himself that if he were to come to any harm now, her only help was gone.

Darkness had climbed up out of the sea long before he neared the summit; and the stars were bright when he saw the dark masses of the live oaks outlined against the sky above him. He halted. Silence up there. Once he heard a horse blowing, as it fed; and then the stillness closed in again.

Larry went on, and gained the top. Here he dismounted, and tied his animal to a tree beside the trail. Then he stole on afoot through the darkness toward the little blur of light that marked the house for him. Near the shed he paused. Four horses here, all busy at their grain; and while he was peering through the dimness, his hand fell on an object that brought to him a sudden thrill of thankfulness.

It was a thick stake of hardwood—one of four, fixed at the corners of a sled for hauling tanbark. He wrenched it loose, and the feeling of its weight was comforting. With such a club, he told himself, one could split a man's skull.

He started toward the house, but the movement frightened one of the horses, and it pulled back upon the tie-rope, with a scuffling of hoofs that could have been heard a mile away.

THE door flew open, and the lamplight gushed out; Larry saw a man standing there in the brightness, leaning forward, shading his eyes with his hand. And a voice came from the room behind this one, a woman's voice, but there was a hardness in it—a cold level ring like metal touching metal—which made it seem inhuman.

"What is it now, you fool?" The man muttered some reply, and she laughed; it was not pleasant to hear that laugh.

"It is that buckskin sitting back upon the rope again," she said. The door closed, and the light was blotted out. Larry started on once more.



José stood irresolute for a moment, trying to look into the gloom. Then he started on—and Larry struck.

Slow progress, stealing through the gloom; and he was sweating with the eagerness to act; but he had the knowledge that his life was not his own to risk just now; and that kept him cautious. At last he found himself beside the wall, close by the single square of window; and he could hear their voices plainly here.

"I tell you, he rode right by; he did not stop when he asked the way. By this time he is five miles along the coast road." It was the woman speaking, Larry could see her face in profile with the light upon it; and the locks of dead-black hair hanging in disorder around it; the eyes were dilated—the light that came from them was terrible to look upon.

"Well, then, why did we not see him?" The speaker was hidden by the wall, but he knew the voice was Pedro's.

"For the reason that he saw you first, my friend, and he was afraid to meet you after that which you have told me happened at the lime-kilns."

Larry was thinking while he listened to her, that of these three, she was by far the most deadly. She was as dangerous as one of those rattlesnakes in August, that strike blindly at every moving thing within reach of their fangs.

Pedro was grumbling to himself:

"I do not like it, just the same." She leaned across the table toward him, and her thin face was all seamed with lines; the eyes were like two coals.

"You are afraid, the two of you! For why? Because this is a girl. Bah!" She spat the word at him. "For that, she is the easier to handle. And—if the money does not come—the easier to kill her; a man makes a fight for it. But she—why, look you, I will cut her throat myself, if the need comes."

She had plucked a knife from the table and she was holding it before her, laughing silently, and the light of the lamp was red on her eyes. For a moment Larry felt a sudden nausea. He pressed his teeth tight, and he looked away from her over that portion of the room which lay within the angle of his vision. There was a door in the wall beyond; and he knew that this would lead into another room—the prisoner would be there.

Two men, and this woman who was more terrible than any man! And they were armed, all three of them; no doubt of that. This was no time for rough-and-tumble fighting. Once he began to act now, it must be straight toward a purpose—and with no chance of things going wrong.

The room into which that door gave, was on the opposite side of the house.

If he only knew as to her plight in there—whether she were able to help herself, when he came to her aid. He backed away in the darkness, and crept around the building. A little leanto here, and there was a single window; he found it with his fingers, but it was boarded over; and there was no door to the outside. He pressed his ear close to the boards, but he could hear nothing. Then for a moment he had the idea to let her know that he was here—to speak, perhaps, or to tap on the barrier before the window. But he told himself the risk would be too great—that if they were to hear the slightest sound, the chance of rescue would be gone. He stole back to the spot where he had been before.

The woman was still sitting by the table near the window; she was playing with the knife, the while she talked. And as he looked at her face, Larry was wondering what it could have been—what of poverty or misuse by others could have twisted a woman's features into so terrible a mask. Her voice was like the sound of stones dropping into a deep pit.

"When the horses have done their feeding, we will saddle up," she was saying. "And tomorrow we will send the word out from the hills. And if the money does not come, why then—perhaps it is a soft finger we will send the next time." She laughed again.

It was that remark about saddling up which gave Larry his idea. That, and the man who had stood in the doorway listening to the noise of the horses a little while before.

"And if they only come, one at a time!" He whispered the words as though they were a prayer.

THEN he departed for the shed where the animals were feeding. It was a three-sided structure, roofed with shakes; the open side was hidden from the house. For this he was thankful, seeing therein his best chance. The stake which he had taken from the sled was still in his hand.

His own horse was tied some distance beyond the shed. It took him a long time to find it, for the night was black dark now. He untied the hair rope, and started back up the trail past the house on foot, leading the animal; and he went very slowly, a few steps and then a halt, then another interval. When he started on each time, he felt for the beaten trail with his feet; for the dead leaves

of the tan oaks lay thick here and a horse would make considerable noise among them. There was one place where he passed within some fifty yards of the house; and here he redoubled his caution. At last he was well by and he found a clump of trees; he tied the knot loosely, so that a single pull would free it; then he stole back to the shed.

NOW he went over the details of what was to follow. It did not seem so much of a plan—plenty of opportunities for matters to go wrong. But it was the best that he could do. And if failure came, he was determined on one thing—to make such a fight of it as would keep those three engaged and leave the way clear for Madeline, no matter what might happen to himself.

The house was quiet when he passed it this time. And when he reached the shed, the horses were still eating. He slipped into the place and untied one. It snorted loudly, and backed away. The other three were seized by the alarm, and the place resounded to the noise of their hoofs as they pulled back on the tie-ropes in seeking to free themselves. Larry crept to the corner of the shed and waited.

The door of the house flew open. A man came forth. He showed plainly in the pathway of the lamplight, bending forward as he ran. It was the younger one, José. And now he was near the place where Larry crouched with the wooden billet raised over his shoulder.

Here where he had come, the light was fainter. He showed, a dim shape in the darkness. Something had brought him to a stop. He stood irresolute for a moment, leaning forward, trying to look into the gloom. Then he started on. And Larry struck.

José leaped aside, and the blow missed him. The club clattered upon the earth, as Larry sprang upon him and gripped him by the throat.

The two of them went down together. And Larry felt his fingers sinking into the soft flesh. He freed one hand and sent his clenched fist to the jaw with all the force in his body behind it. The man fell back limp.

Larry leaped to his feet. The uproar of the horses was growing louder. A tie-rope snapped, and the second one broke away. It rushed by him so close that it all but knocked him from his feet. The voice of the woman came from the house.

"José!" she called the name again, and then Pedro shot forth into the light. Larry felt for the stake, but could not find it. The half-breed was coming on a run. He passed the corner of the shed, shouting for his companion. No chance to put him out of action now. The risk would be too great.

The noise of the horses drowned the sound of Larry's feet as he ran toward the house. He halted, for the woman had come out. He stood fast in the darkness while she passed within ten yards of him.

Then he ran on and plunged into the room. He reached the door beyond, and pulled at the knob. But it was locked.

CHAPTER XIII

LARRY stepped away from the door; he was on the point of hurling himself upon it to break it down. But the knowledge that the crash would bring those others here on the run held him back for the moment. He looked about the room.

One of those little rooms, so common in the hill country, where homesteaders spent the lonely months in holding down their claims; the walls of split boards were covered with a layer of newspapers, yellowed with age and stained with dirt; the odor of old grease and smoke hung thick in here; and he was thinking—as a man does on such irrelevant subjects during the tense intervals while action hangs suspended—that undoubtedly the occupants had been of the same mongrel breed as those three who held it down tonight. There were two homemade chairs and a rusted little cook-stove, and the rude table, where a cheap kerosene lamp was smoking in the draft. And the wavering light glinted on an object which made him catch his breath. A key!

He seized it, and as he stepped back to the locked door, he glanced upon the fan-shaped patch of orange where the lamplight spread into the night. All of this which had taken place since he had come into the room, had used only the space of a few seconds. For the woman Maria, who had passed him on her way from the house, had just come to a halt at the corner of the shed; and the uproar of the plunging horses was still going on; he heard her voice above it, as she called her man's name.

"José!" And then the voice of Pedro answering from the darkness beyond:

"I do not find him here."

And while Larry was taking in these things, he gained the door. He thrust in the key. It turned. And in the passing of the next moment, he crossed the threshold.

The lamplight from behind him cut the room in half; and his heart sank, for all he saw within was a pallet bed upon the floor—merely a heap of dry bracken, with two blankets spread upon it; and there was no occupant. Then he heard Madeline's voice. It came out of the blackness beyond the light—hardly more than a whisper.

"It is you!" And he saw her now, a vague shadow in the darkness, where she was standing with her back against the wall. As she spoke, she came to him with arms outstretched; he took her hands in his, and when he looked into her eyes, he was swept with a deep wondering admiration; for they were steady, and there was no sign of fear in them.

"You are all right?" She nodded, and he went on under his breath: "We must be quick. Before they're back!"

When he turned toward the outer room, she was still holding him by the hand. There was something in the clasp of her tight fingers upon his own—the feeling that she was holding to him with all her trust—that gave him a confidence greater than any weapon; it was not the sureness of what he could do—it was the knowledge that he had to do it, that she was depending on him now.

AS they stepped into the outer room, he was conscious of another thing that he had heard while he was whispering to her—a voice down there at the shed, the voice of the woman Maria. A single scream, and it had died away at once. He knew that she had found José.

The horses had ceased their plunging. He could hear the rattle of hoofs where one was running down the hill. The light from the open doorway revealed no moving form. And the animal which he had led by the cabin was waiting, only a little way up the trail. Then Larry's ear caught a new sound. A little stirring, hardly more than the rustle of the night breeze in the leaves of the tan oaks and not unlike it. As he listened it grew plainer, drawing nearer in the darkness. And now he heard the swishing of a woman's skirt; with it, there came the *pad-pad* of rapid feet on the hard earth.

He drew Madeline aside, within the

shelter of the wall; and he stood with her behind him close by the door. And then Maria appeared upon the threshold.

She remained there for an instant only. And in the sight of her, during that flash of time, Larry got a picture which

Larry was not conscious of her weight as he ran on. . . . The horse loomed ahead of them.



would stay with him as long as he lived; for the red light of murder was in her great black eyes and her face was all twisted with deep lines; her hair hung loose, stirring a little as if the locks were living serpents. It was such a head as the old sculptor had imagined conceiving his Medusa. She was leaning forward, and her lank breast was rising with one indrawn breath—for she had been running hard. And in her hand she held a naked knife. The dark eyes roved swiftly, taking in the room.

LARRY seized the wrist above the hand that held the knife; and even as he gripped it, he struck with his free hand.

In the strange quick way that a man's instincts work, his did then. There was no thought back of it. And he had more fear of this maddened creature than he would have had of a man. Yet when he struck it was not with his fist but with

the heel of his hand. And she fell with a choking sigh; the knife dropped on the floor within the doorway. He bent beside her huddled form and picked it up.

"Now!" he whispered, and he felt the girl's fingers close upon his own. They ran together from the room. And as they hurried through the darkness, he told her of the horse which he had left up the trail. She made no answer but her hand pressed his more tightly.

Here where they were running the dead leaves of the tan oaks lay thick; the harsh rustling ceased suddenly and they found themselves on the beaten bridle path.

"Only a little way farther," he told her.

"I can make it all right." But even as she was speaking, she stumbled and she was falling when he caught her.

"It is my ankle." She caught her breath sharply with the pain, and sank back into his arms.

And as he stood there holding her a shout came from behind; and the strident scream of the woman answered from the house. He looked around, and what he saw back there made him curse himself for having failed to slay. For they were coming now, all three of them,

whose lives he had held in his hand at one time or another during this last day. There where the lamplight cut its widening pathway through the gloom, they showed; the man Pedro was running on ahead, his body bent low, until his long arms almost touched the ground. The girl had heard and Larry saw her face, a little triangle of white, with the faint shine of the stars on the eyes upturned to his.

"Put your arms about my neck," he bade her. "Now tight!" And as she complied, he gripped her body and he swung her from the earth. He was not conscious of her weight as he ran on. The horse loomed out of the darkness ahead of them; it snorted and shied away; he spoke to soothe it, and lifted her into the saddle as if she were a child. His fingers found the tie-rope; he slipped the knot free. And he sprang aside as the animal leaped by him. The clash of hoofs sounded upon the stones; then the girl was gone.

He turned; Pedro was rushing upon him.

The half-breed halted in the middle of his stride. The two men stood there for a moment, and the starlight gleamed on the blades of their weapons. Then they closed.

And as they came together, the left hand of each sought the other's right wrist. Their fingers clamped in; and they wrestled thus in silence; the only sound they made was their hoarse breathing. Their bodies swayed; and the two knives hung poised above their heads, immobile.

And the other two came on, the man and the woman running side by side.

Larry felt the fingers of the half-breed biting into his wrist like segments of steel pressing inward to the slow turning of a vise. Deeper and deeper! And the wrist which he was holding was twisting, slowly at first, and now a little more freely. His own arm was being driven backward; he could feel the muscles rending with the twist upon them. And he knew that this could only last for perhaps a fraction of another second, that his strength was no match for that of the man whom he was fighting. And if he died—the girl—

He remembered the trick that he had learned in the old fore-castle days when he was a sailor before the mast—the trick of foul fighting which some old hand in the rough game had shown him—which he had used in the Chinatown



alley when the going was hard and the odds were heavy against him. For in the fighting of the men who follow the sea—as is the case with most men who fight for a purpose and not for the amusement of others—there are none of those niceties which the prize-ring knows. A savage trick, and when it worked it got results.

So now, at the last moment, he put all the strength of his arms into one final effort to hold this other from him. And as he did this, he stepped back. Then, when he had got the space he needed, he drove his foot upward with the full weight of his leg behind the kick. It landed in the man's midsection.

THE thick body sagged forward; the legs buckled, and Pedro sank without a sound. Larry stood over him. It was in his mind to use the knife now, to make assurance doubly sure. But before he could deliver the blow, he heard the sound of swift footsteps close behind him.

He whirled in time to see the two of them, Maria and José. And the woman was upon him, like a poisonous cat. Her lank arms wound around his neck; her teeth sank into his arm. He struggled to tear her from him. And the man came on with his knife raised high to strike.

Then a huge black bulk broke through the darkness. There was a clash of iron

shoes on the rocks; and a crashing of the brush. José uttered a single scream as the horse and rider bore him down. And Larry flung the woman from him.

CHAPTER XIV

PEDRO was moaning where he lay, helpless with pain; José was a black huddle in the starlight; the woman Maria was creeping away in the shadows of the great trees. Out of it all one fact came to Larry—the danger into which the girl had thrown herself.

"What are you doing here?" he cried. "Get up behind me!" she bade him quietly.

He thrust his foot into the stirrup and vaulted to the horse's back; she urged the animal forward so abruptly that he all but lost his seat. And as they rode on the dead run back along the trail by which he had approached the cabin of split boards that afternoon, there was small chance for speech, for the going was rough and they had all they could do to dodge the branches that seemed to reach out from every side at them. So for a matter of two miles, and then the pace slackened.

"You know the trail?" he asked.

"I knew it when I was a little girl," she replied; and then, as if the matter were rankling in her mind: "Back there—when you said that—you didn't think I'd go away and leave you, surely?"

"It was all right—the way it turned out. But, if you'd come to harm—it was that I was thinking of."

"And you?" she asked. "After what you did for me! Supposing you'd been killed, while I was riding safe?"

The horse eased down to the gentle Spanish trot. They were traveling where the land lay open along the summit of the main ridge. Off to their right the great slopes fell away and away in the darkness to the invisible ocean, whose deep sonorous moaning came up at times on the faint night breeze. He could feel the soft warmth of her body leaning back in the saddle against his own; and there were moments when her face was so close that a stray lock of her hair would brush his cheek.

So far the two of them had ridden with a single idea—to put as much distance as possible between themselves and those three back at the cabin. Now Madeline reined up and looked about her. The loom of the lofty ridges was

visible against the stars; and one could pick out the larger landmarks.

"Near here somewhere the trail bears off to the left, to drop into the cañon behind the ridge and cross the next divide to the Arroyo Seco," she said. And while she spoke, Larry slid from the horse's back.

"I'll walk now," he announced. She leaned down toward him and she laid her hand on his shoulder; her voice was vibrant with a sudden tenderness.

"I wish that I could walk beside you."

"Is the ankle bad?" he asked.

"Not very."

He knew that was a lie; the knowledge made the love which had been growing in his heart, surge through him, so that he realized its fullness now. And he wished that he could take her in his arms and tell her of it. They went on in silence for another mile. The sky above the eastern ridges was glowing to the moon's approach when she drew rein again.

"This is the place," she said, and she pointed to the faint line of the trail winding off through the pale wild oats, to swing down into the darkness of the cañon at their left. "We'll go a little farther up the ridge." He kept pace beside the horse and when they had gained the shadow of a grove of wind twisted live oaks a few hundred yards beyond, they halted.

"Now help me down," she bade him, and he held her in his arms while she dismounted. In spite of herself she cried out when she rested her weight on the injured ankle; and he could see the lines of pain on her face in the growing light.

"It's all right." Her voice had regained its steadiness. "We'll attend to it later." And as she spoke she raised her hand.

"Hark!"

"I hear them," he whispered, "coming behind us."

Just then the moon rose and its light flooded all the open places. He led the horse away into the deeper shadows. And the sound of hoofs grew plainer on the trail.

"Keep your hand over his nose," she bade him, "for fear he nickers."

HE complied in silence and the clatter of approaching riders came nearer. The moments passed and then the three of them appeared; the woman first, with her dark hair streaming down about her twisted face in the moonlight; and be-

hind her the two men. Pedro rode last and his body was slumped forward, swaying in the saddle. They went through the gleaming wild oats and on down the hill and the blackness of the cañon swallowed them. Gradually the drumming of the hoofs died away.

"You see," she told him after they had waited a long time, "they had to go over to the valley to get out of the country where they'd be safe, now that they've failed."

"Failed?"

She caught the question in his voice as he repeated the word and she shook her head.

"I can only tell you what I know and that is little enough. This woman, Maria; I remember her when I was a little girl. Today, when I saw her, it was the first time in years and she has changed so that she had to tell me her name before I recognized her. It was down on the coast road that I met them. The man was with her—the one that I rode down.

"I did not suspect anything. Why should I? This always was a friendly country, as I had known it. I cannot understand the change. And when those two told me that I must go with them—and threatened me with death—it was more than I could believe at first. And then they took me to the summit—to the house where you found me. And afterward Pedro came and I heard his voice in the other room—I thought that he would help me!"

SHE was silent for a moment and she seemed to be struggling to repress her grief; and when she went on her voice broke a little.

"But when I caught what he was saying—planning with them, to take me farther back into the hills—and they talked of killing me, if the money was not sent that they would ask—" She turned her face to Larry, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Pedro had been kind to me before. Why, it was he who first taught me to handle a horse!"

And Larry was thinking of the Indian's last words before he had ridden away from the lime kilns that morning—the defiance to Bradley Hall. So, by the strange manner in which matters sometimes work out, the facts themselves misled him; and he had no suspicion of the man who had given orders for his death. He only saw the one conspiracy—by

which those three had finally come together at the cabin on the ridge.

"Well, it's all right now," he said, seeking to soothe her.

"Yes. It is all right because you came!" She did not strive to hide the feeling in her voice; and when he looked into her face he saw it in her eyes.

"How did you find me?" she asked.

THEN he told her how Pedro had met him in the cañon and lured him up the side trail; and of the ambush by the lime kilns and the great dog coming to his rescue; and how he had strayed from the trail in the fog afterward.

"Blind luck," he said when he had finished the tale.

"There is much in this that I cannot understand," she murmured. "But you were right. Luck took you to me today. The same blind luck that brought you to me last night, when I needed you." She was speaking as if it were to herself. "I wish—that had been long before—" She uttered the last words in a whisper and her hands were clenched; she was looking straight before her, wide-eyed, as if she were trying to see into the future. And then, of a sudden, the light went from her eyes and her face seemed to have tightened with pain. He thought it was her injured ankle and he sprang to his feet.

"I'd forgotten. You're hurt."

"Hurt." As she understood his meaning she smiled faintly, and there was sorrow in the smile. "Yes. I am hurt."

"I'll get the shoe off now," he cried, and knelt at her feet, unlacing it; and when he glanced up at her and saw how white her face was, he reproached himself for having been so slow in this.

"A little way down the trail, where it dips into the cañon, there's a spring," she told him, "and I'm very thirsty." He hurried off; and she leaned back against the trunk of a gnarled live oak, watching him out of sight in the moonlight. She was thinking of many things—of years gone by when she had come to the great stone house on the summit above Trinidad Head, a little slip of a girl, with only a child's memories of her parents who had died; of the years that had followed while she had been growing up, with the knowledge—it seemed to her that this knowledge had always been a portion of her life—that in days to come she was to marry Bradley Hall and to be the mistress of that house. And then the years at school.

And the home-coming only the other day. And the sudden rebellion which had sprung into her heart then—the rebellion against this ordained future, which had been growing with the budding of her womanhood, which had leaped to a hot flame of anger at her fate when she had seen Bradley Hall's pallid face and the leaden eyes regarding her that afternoon—

And last evening by the pool beside the rocks, when she was listening to the singing of the sailors down there on the beach two thousand feet below, and Larry had come up the road to her. And now tonight—

And he had come to her too late.

SHE caught sight of him where the trail topped the bare summit of the ridge and she pressed her lips; she drove the anguish from her eyes. And she told herself that if she ever were brave, it must be now—lest he might see and perhaps suspect a little of the truth. For she wanted to hide that coming marriage from him, as if it were a shameful thing. If she had but known what was in his heart then it would have saved the two of them from much of pain and much of danger. But she did not suspect his love.

She was managing to smile a little when he came and she drank from the battered can that he had found beside the spring. And after that he laved the ankle in cold water. When he had finished, she caught him looking up into her face, as he knelt there at her feet.

"I wish," he said abruptly, "you'd tell me more—about yourself."

Her smile grew brighter and there was a new light in her eyes that made his heart leap. For this was the one thing which she did not want to do—to tell him of herself. And, so she must beguile him from the subject.

"Nothing to tell," she answered quickly. "The hills here when I was a little girl, and then school. But I was wishing you would tell me more about the sea—and strange places." And seeing his dark eyes fixed upon her wistfully, she bade him come and sit beside her. So he complied and, although the hunger to learn something of her past was strong in him, he began to forget it, watching her face as he spun yarns of the wild years before the mast; the years that had followed on the quarterdeck.

But it had been a long day with him and a weary one; and he had not touched

food since early morning. And the stress of those large emotions which surge through a man—no matter how seasoned a hand he may be—when he faces death, had left their own deep reactions. So, without his knowing it, his voice trailed off. And he ceased talking; his head sank on his chest and he was asleep, leaning against the trunk of the live oak beside her.

Asleep, and striving to awaken—and at every effort subsiding into sleep again; with moments when he knew dimly what was going on about him; and other intervals when these realities blurred into the figments of dreams. Just what was real and what was dreaming he did not know. It was only his common sense—the processes of cold reason—that made him distinguish between them afterward. But sometimes common sense is wrong; cold reason works without the knowledge of its premises.

So Larry believed—when he came to think upon it later on—that in his dreams he had felt her fingers closing over his hand and her hair brushing his cheek.

When he did awaken he found the moonlight streaming in upon them and she was asleep beside him.

LARRY swore at himself for having been so lax, and roused himself to alertness. He sat there watching her, leaning back against the trunk of the live oak, with the lids drooping over her eyes and her soft lips parted ever so little; and the mass of her hair glowing like molten copper in the moonlight.

The dawn was creeping over the eastern hills and the little flecks of cloud were turning a deep pink, when her eyes opened. And his heart leaped as he saw her smile when she first looked into his face.

The light was growing when he helped her on the horse and they went down the trail, past the cabin where he had found her last night; on to the coast road. And sometimes during that long journey he wondered at her silence; why she was looking before her with the shadow of pain in her blue eyes.

And if he had not been so wrapped up in the love which had so recently come to him; or if he had not been a follower of the seven seas—and therefore as guileless as a small boy when it came to women and their ways—then he would have noticed many things which escaped him utterly. One of these was when they reached the first hill ranch,



The mongrel gasped out the story—
how Pedro had told them this killing
must be done.

where they got food, and another horse. There was a woman in the doorway when they came and the expression on her face, as she looked upon the two of them together, would have been enough to set a man to questioning himself as to what was in the wind. A big brawny creature, she was, dark-skinned and speaking only the Spanish. She said but little while they were there, and her face remained enigmatic, but after they had gone she shook her head and shrugged her wide shoulders, as one who would say: "Well, what can you expect under the circumstances?"

But Larry saw nothing of all this. And he wondered at times why Madeline was so silent. Silent and always looking straight before her. If he had but known how she was wishing—wishing with all her being—that he would speak of other things now than the sea—of love, for instance— And in his ignorance he kept his love within himself.

IT was evening when they reached the redwood cañon at the foot of the road which led up the hill's flank to the great house of stone. Here she drew rein; she turned her face to him; it was strangely white; her lips were compressed.

"I'm going on alone," she said. And when he started to demur, she shook her head. "Your horse will follow by himself."

"As you say," he answered quietly, and swung from the saddle. For his pride had come to him and he was sorely hurt.

She was on the point of going on, when she seemed to take thought, and she

pulled up sharply. She stretched out her hands to him.

He took them in his and she said: "You've never told me your name."

And when he had spoken it,

"Larry," she repeated it softly, looking down into his face. "And I am Madeline."

And then her fingers tightened on his.

"Say good-by to me now." She spoke barely above a whisper. He did not know—he did not even suspect—what made her face so pale and drawn.

"But it is not good-by," he cried. "I'm coming tomorrow before I sail."

Instead of answering she urged the horse forward, and she went on up the hill without looking back at him.

CHAPTER XV

THEY say that love is blind, which may or may not be true; but there is one thing which no man will dispute: those who have been smitten with love are often blinded to all else—which was the case with Larry that next day.

They had worked the *Katherine* out to her anchorage and she lay there, low in the water with her cargo, waiting for the noon tide, to spread her sails and seek the open sea. Her young skipper was standing by the rail; his eyes were on the shore, less than a mile away. The great stone house looked down upon him from the mountain top, and the bleak windows were like rows of inscrutable eyes. The winding road which climbed the hill's flank from the depths of the redwood cañon was never empty this morning; horsemen and foot travelers and creaking carts going and coming since the sun had risen.

Now it was a pair of swarthy vaqueros riding side by side at the gentle Spanish trot; and now a burly stockman from up the coast trail, decked out in his Sunday-go-to-meeting-best, which meant, in that part of California, the wide-rimmed black hat and high-heeled boots and perhaps a huge pair of silver-plated spurs. Here and there a woman showed among the guests. And some of these had come from as far away as Monterey. On the hilltop the thin smoke columns wound from barbecue pits into the cloudless sky. To all of which this watcher, who was as greatly concerned in the coming proceedings as the two principals themselves, was paying no heed whatever. For when Larry's eyes

rested on the land, his thoughts were too busy with the girl, who had told him her name at parting, to allow other matters to enter them.

RILEY came up beside him, chewing the invariable sliver of wood. And Larry looked around at the footstep. Riley's face was serene and his demeanor unperturbed; you would have thought if you had seen him then that his mind was free from care.

"Long as you got through your adventures with a whole skin, I suppose we ought to count it lucky; but I can't help wishing you'd picked up that revolver I spoke of, while you was in the hills," he said.

"That bunch up for'ard been showing any sign of trouble?" Larry asked. The other removed the sliver and spat over the rail before he answered.

"Only that they are too civil—and when you run onto two or three of 'em together, they close up like clams. As if they'd been talkin' of something mighty private. That—and a feelin' I've got—such as comes to a man in a dead calm when the glass is droppin' out of sight."

"Now you've reminded me," Larry told him, "I'll see if I can't lay hold of a revolver when I go ashore this morning—if there's one about the place."

"Going to make a call at the big house?" Riley was smiling when he asked it, and seeing Larry flush, he went on, "I thought perhaps you'd be paying your respects to the bridegroom before you sailed."

"Bridegroom?" Larry shook his head, "I didn't know there was to be a wedding."

"That's so; you been away. Well there is. And that's the reason for all this liveliness a hore. More folks at Trinidad Head than there ever was before. It's coming off at noon; and they've fetched a preacher from Monterey to do the splicin'."

"Who's to be married?" Larry asked indifferently.

Riley shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, your namesake for one. As to the lady, you can search me. I've got no idee who'd marry him. But I'll lay my wages for this v'yege that whoever she is, it's his money she's after."

Larry was thinking of Bradley Hall when he nodded.

"You'd win your bet, Riley," and as he poked he smiled at the absurdity of any

woman's giving herself to the master of the stone house on the hill. "And," he added, "I'll go you one further. She'll regret her bargain before she's a week older."

If he had suspected of whom it was that he had made that light remark; or if he had the faintest premonition of what was going on at this moment up there behind the walls of the stone house—where a girl sat dry-eyed and stricken to dumbness with the thing that confronted her—where a man sat silent and eager, passing his tongue over his pallid lips—if he had the least idea of any of these things, the smile would have frozen then and there. But it remained. And presently the yawl was waiting with the sailors at the oars.

Riley stood by the rail as the boat shoved off; and although he had his own suspicions of trouble, he remained serene; for he was of the breed who never let the future bother them too deeply, preferring to meet its developments when they come. But if he could have heard what was being said just then down in the forecabin, he would have lost some of that serenity.

FOR the most part the hands were idle, waiting for the coming of the tide when they would be summoned to work; and several were lounging about the forward deck; but six were sitting on their bunks in the dimness of their cramped quarters; and their chins were on their hands, their elbows on their knees; their eyes were hard, alight with ugly excitement, as they listened to the Greek. He crouched before them, squatting on the deck, and his white teeth gleamed as he spoke to them.

"I say, tonight. And first we'll settle them two squareheads, and then the pair back in the cabin. And listen, mates. If we can lay them by the heels without any of the rough stuff, all the better. Then we can run down the coast and put them ashore som'eres below Ensenada; and after that it's Acapulco or Panama, and every man for himself with his share. But if they make a fight, mind this, you don't get hung any higher for killin' a man than you do for mutiny on the high seas." And the others nodded. . . .

Meanwhile the yawl was on its way to the gleaming beach; and Larry was sitting in the sternsheets holding his eyes on the house of white stone far above him on the mountain. Gazing at its blank windows, wondering what strange

drama was working to its climax behind them—to bring a wife to its putty-faced master. His thoughts went to Madeline. What was she doing there? And what relationship did she bear to this man, whom he liked so little? Some kin, perhaps? He shook his head at the idea. And why had she been so silent during all that long journey yesterday? It seemed to him, now he came to think it over, that all he had done by coming here to this place which had been luring him for years, was to run his body into danger and to run his mind into a maze of blind riddles.

No, there was one thing more. Although he had learned nothing of that letter or the man who had written it, he had, at least, found Madeline. And having found her, he was coming to her now—to tell her that some day he would return. He would return—for her!

So he was thinking; and, with the truth so near to him, he had not the remotest idea of its nature. He went on up the hill, paying no heed to the things about him. Down in the redwoods, there were several long pits where swarthy men were barbecuing beef on spits; and near by, other swarthy men were drinking red wine at a table of split boards. He did not even see them. On the winding road a rider passed him every now and then: belated guests on their way to the festivities at the house. They wondered at his presence; he hardly realized theirs.

The blind door of the house was wide open this morning and the room was filled with men and women; their voices made a great buzz as Larry stood on the threshold looking in upon them. But Bradley Hall was not in sight. Nor was there any sign of Madeline. He turned away to the courtyard.

Here too the door in the wall was open and, within the flowered garden other guests were gathered. He recalled afterward, as through a mist, the face of one—a shrewd fallow face all lined about the eyes with crow's-feet; and how the eyes rested on him as he stood there in the doorway with a curious searching expression, as if the man had seen a resemblance that puzzled him—a grizzled man, gray-mustached, and clad in black.

BUT this was a mere glimpse, got in passing. And then Larry found the old Indian woman facing him. He told her of his quest. And she fell back from him as if he were a thief.

"The Señorita Madeline!" she cried. "You wish to see her?"

"And why not?" he asked.

She shook her head and her rheumy old eyes grew frightened as they rested on his resolute young face.

"You do not know then?" she faltered.

"I do not know," he repeated; and he shook his head. "No. I do not know why I should not see her, if that is what you mean."

"But she is in her room now. She is putting on her wedding-dress."

"Her wedding-dress!" Larry ceased speaking. Now he knew.

He stiffened where he stood. All the bewilderment was gone. It was clear before him. And then without a word he turned away.

TO marry this man, Bradley Hall! Over and over—the only thought he had; the only thing of which he was conscious. The guests had all come. No one was upon the hill. Larry had the road alone. But if there had been a thousand about him, going back and forth, he would not have been aware of one of them as he walked away from the stone house. She was going to marry this man Bradley Hall!

The blow was so heavy, it had come so unexpectedly, that he did not yet feel the revulsion, which was to come with it. Only the fact itself. His mind had no room for more than that.

And so he came down among the redwoods where the swarthy men were drinking red wine about the long table in the shadows and the smoke of the meat rose from the ruddy coals in the barbecue pits. And a drunkard staggering from one of the rude benches, lurched against him.

Larry was stepping back, half aware of the collision; when the man uttered an exclamation and then the young fellow noticed the face. It was the oldest one of the trio who had been about to murder him there at the lime kilns. The mongrel recognized him at the same instant and started to leap away. And Larry seized him by the throat.

For the moment the feeling of this flesh between his fingers brought to him a relief; and he had a sudden hot idea of killing the thug with his bare hands. The other's knees buckled under him; he groveled upon them and he held his hands clasped before him, as if he were in prayer.

And Larry released his grip. You cannot kill a man who is on his knees before you—not even if you are half mad with grief. He shook the sodden heap of flesh. And the other gasped.



"Wait!" Larry came straight through them, like some pirate of days gone by.

"But let me live and I will tell you—"

"Tell me—what?" Larry growled.

"It was not for myself—we did not seek your life because of our wishes, Señor Captain. It was because we were told—"

"Told? Who told you?" Asking the question Larry began to realize its answer. He was standing, straight, black-browed and terrible, scowling down into the swarthy face.

He gripped the half-breed by the collar.

"Come on with me," he bade him quietly. And when the two of them had gone down on the beach, beyond the trees, where there was none about—

"Now, if you want to live—the truth, and quick."

And the mongrel gasped out the story, how Pedro had failed with the boulder on the cliff trail the night before; and in the morning had come to the two of them; and had told them this killing must be done for Bradley Hall.

And Larry knew it was the truth.

"Go now," he said when the man had

done. And after that he stood on the beach alone. So for some minutes, and his face was like iron. And then he started back along the road that he had just traveled. Back up the hill. Just how he was going to do this thing that had come into his mind he did not know. But he knew he was going to carry it straight through.

And when the *Katherine* weighed anchor within the hour, to seek the open sea, Madeline was going to be on board.

CHAPTER XVI

THE swarthy men about the barbecue pits and the wine-drinkers at the long table fell silent when Larry went by; their eyes followed him through the redwoods until the huge brown trunks closed in behind him where the road began to mount the hill. Just what had taken place between him and the grizzled lime-burner, they did not know; but there was that in his set face which made them feel that what they had witnessed was but the beginning; and more than one nudged his neighbor, assuring him that the wedding guests up there on the mountain top were due for some sort of an unpleasant surprise. They were, all of them, humble men—wood-choppers, vaqueros and packers from the hill trails—and the Indian blood was strong in them. This, they assured themselves, was none of their affair. Meanwhile the wine was excellent, the meat was broiled. They shrugged their shoulders and returned to the good cheer.

And Larry strode on up the winding road. His mind was clear; there was but little of mystery left now. He thought back on that first evening, when he had come up to the stone house; and Bradley Hall had stood there in the living-room, fingering the canvas sack of gold-pieces, and he was sure that from then on, the man had been plotting to do away with him.

And that certainly was enough for him. He did not search for causes. The rage which comes to a man, when he discovers that another has been plotting his murder—the deep desire to exact punishment which surged throughout his being, making him terrible to look upon—was small compared to the purpose which dominated him.

Even his longing for Madeline was of less consequence than that purpose. Because he loved her—and because his love



was great—he would have given her up for all time; he would have given up the hope of ever seeing her again, if by so doing he would prevent this man from having her.

From the time when he had heard the story, as the old lime-burner gasped it out down there on the beach, but one idea possessed him—to save her from this monstrous marriage. The vision of those two was before him: the girl, like some fresh sweet flower; the man with his soft face and leaden eyes, and murder in his heart! And the minister was up there at the stone house now, waiting to say the words that would bind them together.

He was going to save her from that. But there was little time left for him.

HE climbed the long hill. And now he was beside the pool where he had seen her the first time, in the evening when the sailors were singing in the moonlight below them. The sound of the *Katherine's* bell came to his ears, floating up from the little bay. Eight bells. Noontime.

What was that Riley had said about

the wedding? Noontime. Perhaps he would be too late!

He turned to take the last stretch of the road to the stone house. And here came a brown-skinned vaquero, in his shirt sleeves, swinging his lithe body to the gentle movements of a palomino horse. Pale gold, that animal, with bleached mane and tail, and fine limbed; it danced impatiently and it tossed its head against the bit's restraint. The man was riding barebacked. And Larry smiled; there was no mirth in the smile—just the grim joy of purpose, whose fulfillment is now promised.

The faint echoes of the schooner's bell faded away. Noontime. Time for them to begin. Well, a man and a woman are not married until the last word is said—until their promises have been made. And that takes some minutes. He waited for the rider to come on.

The man was singing to himself, one of those songs which the herders of cattle are forever singing, whether they be cowboys on the wide bleak inland ranges or vaqueros where the tawny hills of California come down to the restless sea; a

ballad of love and wild deeds, dripping with sentiment and interlarded with verses that were distinctly Rabelaisian. His dark eyes were fairly swimming with good fellowship for all the world. For there was plenty of wine to drink up here on the hilltop as well as down in the redwoods. And when he saw Larry he drew rein.

"You are riding a fine horse," the latter told him quietly.

"And you," the other answered unctuously, "have good judgment, my friend. This palomino carried his owner down from Monterey in six hours and he'll make it back as quickly; and if you were to ride him tomorrow, he'd be ready for another day."

LARRY had his hand on the bridle's cheek-strap. He fondled the animal's sleek neck while the vaquero spoke.

"Well broken, too?" he asked.

"With children he is like a dog; and with a man—well, you see him now." The rider swayed a little as he spoke.

"I would like to feel him under me," Larry's voice was soft, his manner ingratiating—but the other shook his head.

"Oh, no, *amigo*. He is not for every one to ride, this horse."

"Then I will have to take him, friend."

Larry's voice was gentle and his face was undisturbed; the rider looked down, striving to comprehend.

Then he laughed. "You joke," he cried.

But his mirth vanished as he said it. For Larry had whipped one arm about his waist.

It was very much as when one heaves a sack of grain to his shoulder, that movement. Excepting that the burden did not stop there; it went straight on. One moment and the man was sitting on the golden horse; in the next, he was flying through the air, with arms and legs outspread. He crashed into the chaparral beside the spring and when he recovered his badly shaken senses, he looked up to see Larry vaulting to the animal's bare back. A clatter of hoofs and a whirl of dust and the palomino was off up the road on the dead run.

With the first leap that the horse made, his cap fell to the road and was trampled beneath the flying hoofs. So he rode on bareheaded, and his soft shirt was open at the throat, showing the head of the dragon which some Oriental had tattooed in red and blue upon his chest in the wild years gone by.

Two hundred yards, and here where the road came to its end beside the great house of white stone, the open door revealed an empty living-room; the doorway beyond gave him a glimpse of the guests gathered in the flowered courtyard, all there and all with their backs to him, looking in the one direction, where there were two whose faces were turned toward him.

And in the next instant the horse was leaping past the courtyard entrance, and Larry got the clear imprint of those two faces. The face of Bradley Hall, like a mask of soft dough, with the colorless eyes and the pale hair; and Madeline's face, like a delicate white blossom. Her great blue eyes widened, meeting his, as with a sudden hope. Then the wall came between them and he reined the horse to an abrupt stop.

Into the stillness came a voice; it came from beyond the courtyard wall. A man's voice, held to the peculiar level intonation, by which so many clergymen accentuate the solemnity of the rituals, pronounced at christenings and at marriages and beside the open grave.

"Dearly beloved brethren, we are gathered together—"

Larry started toward the courtyard door.

CHAPTER XVII

WHILE Larry was coming ashore from the *Katherine*, Madeline was alone in her room. For more than an hour past she had been standing here, the center of a circle of women—women whom she had known since she was a little child. Now on her wedding morning they had come to help her through the last details of her toilette. Some of them had come for forty miles and some were nearer neighbors along the winding coast road. And the sight of these familiar faces, which she had not seen during these recent years away at school, made her keep her head well back, her eyes dry from tears. But when they had her in the wedding-dress and the noon hour was drawing near, she asked them to go. So in these final moments she was by herself.

This thing to which she had grown accustomed as a prospect in her life—for which she had been prepared since childhood—now seemed to her unbelievable. During the last few days while she had been facing it, close by and unescapable,

it had become so monstrous that it did not appear possible. And even at this final hour, she had a feeling that, somehow or other, she was going to be told it was untrue. It was, with her, as if she were struggling in the throes of an ugly dream, knowing in her inner consciousness that she was asleep and that she would wake up to find herself in the world of real people—to forget the figments of her imagination.

That feeling had done much to help her through the morning. But now she sat alone, confronted by the truth.

It occurred to her then that she had never been consulted in this matter; that, from the first time she could remember, it had been put before her as a part of her life. When she had been brought here to the stone house from the hill ranch where her parents had died, and people had told her that Bradley Hall was her guardian, she had accepted it as children do such things, without question. And, in the same way, she had accepted the idea that, when she grew to womanhood, she was to become his wife. Even during the last year or so away at school, she had taken it as a matter of course.

It was when she came back home and saw the master of the house looking at her, loose-lipped and avid, that rebellion had first surged through her. And then, while she was filled with that aversion, Larry had come.

She sat there thinking of him as she had seen him that evening by the spring, when the great dog leaped for her throat. She saw him now as she had seen him while he told her of the sea and the strange ports in far corners of the world. She lived over that other evening, when she was sick with fear of death, and he burst into the room where she was imprisoned; and they fled together out along the lofty ridges above the sea.

Ah! If he only cared for her as she had come to care for him! If he had loved her then and told her of his love. She would have gone on with him—anywhere. He would have carried her away, to marry her—

TEARS were in her eyes. And she could hear the voices of the women outside the door, waiting for her.

He had come twice, this rover of the seven seas; and he had saved her twice. But this time he was not coming. By now he had learned of the marriage. And within the hour he would be sailing away.

And she would stand here on the hill, with that soft-faced old man—her husband—by her side; she would see the schooner's gleaming canvas slipping out of sight along the skyline.

She dried her eyes and rose to her feet. The door opened. . . . Time to go.

SHE was in a daze as she walked through the house, to the courtyard. She saw their faces out there among the flowers; faces of the men and women whom she had known since her girlhood—and they seemed to her like faces in a dream.

And then she found herself standing with Bradley Hall beside her. She heard the rattle of hoofs; she saw the palomino horse and its rider passing the courtyard door. And she knew in that moment that the ugly dream was drawing to its close. Larry had come the third time.

She looked at Bradley Hall, and she knew that he too had seen. For now his breath was coming quick; his lips were parted, like those of a panting dog. The drops of perspiration stood out on his big pale face. She could keep her eyes upon him, for she was not afraid now.

And the others, standing there behind the clergyman, saw her smile; and some of the women nudged one another, for women are wise at reading such things in a girl's face; and they found something in her smile which spelled trouble for Bradley Hall.

The clergyman began reciting the words by which the marriage sacrament is brought—line by line—to its conclusion. And, once while he was speaking, the guests were startled by a queer interruption, from Bradley Hall—one word:

"Faster!" He said it in a hoarse whisper, passing his tongue over his dry lips.

The clergyman ceased speaking and his eyes were wide with astonishment. He gazed at the prospective bridegroom in silence; and then, having recovered his composure, he resumed.

There was one among the guests who noted all these things—and what came after—with a cool shrewd composure; for though he did not understand them at the time, he had his own good reasons for keeping his eyes open; and he was accustomed, by long experience in the courts of law, to unexpected developments in the affairs of men and women. A grizzled man, with a sallow face, and many lines about the eyes—clad all in black; he happened to be looking around

toward the door in the courtyard wall. And so he was the first of all the company to discover Larry there.

"Wait!"

The guests turned their heads at the sound of Larry's voice. Through them he came—bareheaded, his shirt open at the throat; black-browed and terrible—like some pirate of days gone by.

The minister fell silent again. Those nearest shrank back. And Bradley Hall uttered a choking cry. His face was livid, and his lips were working.

A woman shrieked. Some of the more timid guests were on their way to the house. The others stood there staring, trying to understand the meaning of this strange interruption. Then Bradley Hall shouted:

"Lay hold of him!"

LARRY laughed, and there was something in the sound of that laugh which made those nearest to him draw away. The women caught their breaths.

Bradley Hall took a step toward him. The doughy face was livid; the soft fingers were working spasmodically. For the moment he had forgotten fear, and he was desperate.

Larry's hand shot out—his open hand; and the heel of the palm struck the soft face. Bradley Hall collapsed, a sprawling form, that looked grotesquely like a monstrous black spider, in the midst of the flower beds.

Then Madeline stood alone. Her eyes had not left Larry since he had entered the place.

"Come," he said, and his voice was gentle. She started toward him, and he saw her flinching as she took the first step, for the ankle still pained her at times. He sprang to her side and took her in his arms as if she were a child. And it had all taken place so quickly that some of the more fearful guests who had started for the house when he first appeared, were not yet on the veranda, when he strode out through the flower beds, carrying the girl in her silken wedding-dress.

The palomino horse was waiting just outside the wall. Larry lifted her to its back and vaulted up behind her. One arm was about her waist, and she held the loose reins.

"Head for the beach," he bade her; and they were off.

Down the long hill road he held her

close to him; and she had no thought now save of the one thing. The ugly dream was over—and the world had become sweet again. As to the future, it was like the past, with which she was now done. For the moment only the present concerned her. She had escaped. So they passed among the tan oaks and came among the shadows of the redwoods. The swarthy men about the barbecue pits and the drinkers at the table leaped up and looked at them wide-eyed as they rode by. And then these dived like frightened rabbits into the thickets, seeing the great dog Toro at the horse's heels.

Whether he had broken loose, or whether some one up there had released him, Larry never learned. And as yet he did not know that he was here.

The palomino took the loose sand out in the dunes on the dead run. The yawl was waiting at the waterline. And the two seamen stared at the pair of riders with their mouths agape. Then they sprang to action on hearing their skipper's voice.

"Stand by to shove off." He lifted the girl down in his arms and placed her in the sternsheets. And then they heard a shout.

Half a dozen riders burst into sight, emerging from the redwoods. Bradley Hall was foremost. They came on at the dead run.

"Shove off, and lively!" The sailors strained their backs to Larry's order and the yawl shot into the placid waters of the bay. Sitting in the sternsheets with the girl beside him, he looked back. The figures of the horsemen were growing small on the beach. The great house of white stone gleamed in the hot sunshine on the mountain top.

WHEN the yawl was alongside the schooner and he had helped Madeline to the *Katherine's* deck, Larry heard one of the sailors utter an exclamation. A tawny head was thrust from the water close by. The dog Toro had swum in the boat's wake. Larry reached down and seized the steel collar. He dragged the great beast on board.

A moment later, as he climbed over the rail, he had a glimpse of Riley's face. The mate was standing on the quarter-deck. His eyes were on Madeline, and he was frowning, as a man does when he reads trouble in the wind.

The thrilling climax of this vivid tale of romance and adventure in Old California will appear in the next, the April, issue.

Flying Justice



Illustrated by
George Wert

*A young pilot walks in-
to a bank hold-up, flies
into gun-play — and
lands right side up.*

By SIDNEY BOWEN

"PAPER, Mister?" asked the boy. The pilot stopped, dug a thumb and forefinger into the change pocket of his jerkin and found it empty. He switched to his trousers' pocket and pulled out a twenty-dollar bill.

"Aint got change for that, Mister. There's the Plymouth Trust over there. The place with the stone steps."

The pilot—his name was Geoffrey Preston—crossed the street and went up the stone steps. At the top he paused and regarded the bill which he still held in his hand. It was well crumpled, and it represented the sum total of his funds at the moment. He still had sixteen hundred miles to go before setting his plane down at Springfield, Massachusetts, for the job Bill Jenkins had promised.

He shrugged his shoulders and pushed through the revolving doors. The teller's cage was empty. Preston leaned against the little shelf in front and waited. There were no other customers in the bank. The pilot glanced at the wall clock; it lacked two minutes to closing time. He took a step toward the door, but went no farther. A latch clicked, and the teller entered the cage.

Preston slid the twenty-dollar bill under the little brass-barred window.

"Change this, please," he requested.

The man in the cage accepted it and flipped it to one side. From a sectioned box in front of him, he drew out three

fives and four one-dollar bills. Then he tapped several keys of a coin-changer. The silver he placed on top of the bills; then he started to slide the lot under the little brass window. Halfway there his hand stopped short. The silver slid off and clinked onto the counter. Two of the bills fluttered down.

The pilot glanced up at the teller's face. It had turned a pasty yellow, and the mouth sagged open. Preston stared at him and started to speak, but didn't. Something blunt and hard was being pressed against the small of his back. He was pushed against the little shelf. Hot breath that reeked of gin fanned his ear.

"Don't try moving!" came a low voice. And in slightly louder tone: "You, in there, shove it all out, quick. And be sure to keep your mitts above the counter!"

The man in the cage obeyed. The entire contents of the sectioned box was removed and shoved under the little brass door in three separate piles of bills. The teller's hands fell limply back of the counter. Then a dirty hand, with the forearm encased in a dark blue coat sleeve, darted into Preston's line of vision. Three times it appeared and clawed up a pile of bills. Then the pressure at the small of the pilot's back increased momentarily. Hot breath fanned his ear again.

"Stay just like that, the two of you! Get me? And don't move for five minutes, see? I'm nervous on the trigger, I am!"

The pilot stood rigid and stared straight at the teller. The teller stood rigid and stared straight back. The pressure of the blunt, hard object against the small of the pilot's back was re-

moved. Soft footsteps retreated across the marble floor. Then the teller's lips quivered and he shouted:

"*Thief! Stop him! Stop thief!*"

Preston flung himself flat on the floor. A voice snarled a curse. Feet pounded on the marble. A door was flung open, and a second voice called out sharply:

"Here, there, stop! I say, *stop!*"

A revolver-shot echoed through the place. A man's voice choked and gasped. Then a body fell heavily to the floor. Preston jerked his head around in time to see a gray hat with a thatch of fiery red hair beneath it disappear through the revolving doors. Ten feet in front of the doors lay the huddled face-down figure of a gray-haired man.

BEDLAM broke loose inside the bank. Office doors banged open; white-faced men and women stared wildly about, then rushed forward. Two women screamed and fainted where they were. Preston reached the crumpled figure first. Dropping to his knees, he turned the body over. There was a tiny blue hole in the forehead. A drop or two of blood trickled out.

Preston stood up and grabbed hold of the man nearest him.

"Call police headquarters, quick!" he ordered. And then to two others: "Take him into that office there. Then get these women back out of the way!"

The pilot shouted the last sentence over his shoulder as he made for the revolving doors. Dashing across the street, he buttonholed the newsboy.

"Say, son, a man with a gray hat and red hair just left the bank. See which way he went?"

"I didn't see any man come out of the bank, Mister. Want your paper now?"

"Later, son," the pilot said. Then he ran back to the bank.

Inside he met the teller.

"Get the police, all right?" he questioned.

"Yes," said the teller. "They are on the way down now."

"Who's the dead man?"

The teller told Preston that the dead man was James P. Hodges, president of the Plymouth Trust Company. He went on to explain that the dead president had been the richest man in the community. He had been one of the city's founders, and a man of very eccentric opinions. He had a deep-rooted and firm belief in the inherent honesty of mankind. For that reason he never permitted a guard

of any sort to be stationed in the bank. This was the bank's first robbery in the whole twenty years of its existence. The dead man had also been a friend to everyone in need. In cases of default he had made up the deficit out of his own pocket. Practically every employee in the place had grown up in his job.

"Good God," the man groaned as he finished, "why did I yell?"

"Yes," the pilot snapped unsympathetically. "Why were you so dumb as to do that?"

At that moment two policemen and a plain-clothes man entered the bank. Preston stepped up to them.

"In there," he directed, and pointed to the office door.

The plain-clothes man nodded and went inside. The two policemen followed him and closed the door. In a few minutes the plain-clothes man came out. He jabbed a thumb at the phone on a near-by desk.

"That connected outside?"

The teller informed him that it was, and he called a number. After three or four minutes of more listening than talking, he slammed the receiver back on the hook and frowned. One of the policemen came out of the office of the dead bank president.

"What'd the Chief have to say, Joe?" he asked.

The plain-clothes man grunted.

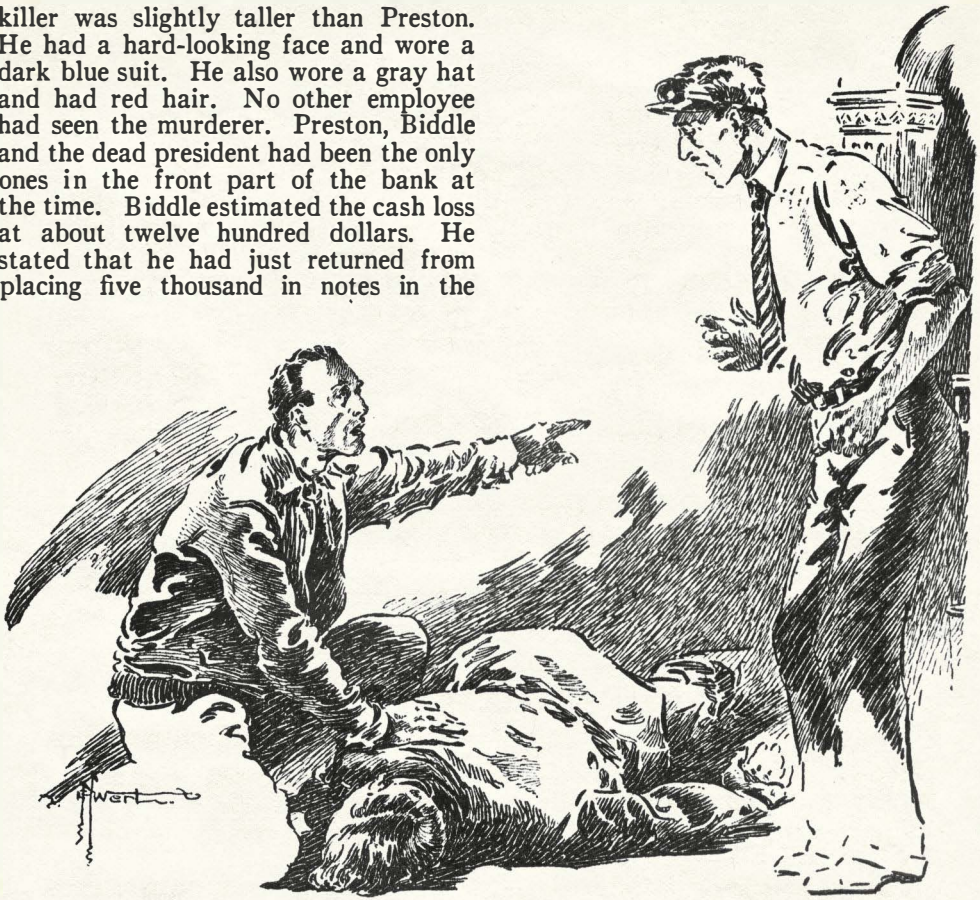
"Plenty! The district attorney is taking complete charge. Sending Carrigan down. He's on his way now. The Chief says to lay off till Carrigan gets here, then to take care of the body when Dan arrives with the wagon. The district attorney's breaking it to Mrs. Hodges."

The pair mumbled a few sentences to each other, and presently a tall man with horn-rimmed glasses entered the bank. The plain-clothes man immediately took him off to one side and said a few words in low tone. The other nodded, and then the plain-clothes man and the policeman returned to the office of the dead man. The man with the horn-rimmed glasses walked up to Preston and the group of bank employees.

"My name's Carrigan," he said bluntly. "I'm from the district attorney's office. Who saw this, and how did it happen?"

The pilot acted as spokesman for the group and told all he knew. The teller, who gave his name as Biddle, described the murderer as best he could, which wasn't much. According to Biddle, the

killer was slightly taller than Preston. He had a hard-looking face and wore a dark blue suit. He also wore a gray hat and had red hair. No other employee had seen the murderer. Preston, Biddle and the dead president had been the only ones in the front part of the bank at the time. Biddle estimated the cash loss at about twelve hundred dollars. He stated that he had just returned from placing five thousand in notes in the



Preston reached the crumpled figure first. . . . "Call police headquarters, quick!" he ordered.

downstairs vault when the robbery took place.

The man from the district attorney's office eventually dismissed everyone except Preston and the teller. He ushered them into a vacant office, where he motioned to a couple of chairs and took one himself. Then he started questioning the teller regarding the movements during the day of himself and of his employer. At the end of fifteen minutes or so he told the teller to go.

As the door closed behind the official, Carrigan bent his gaze on Preston's face. "Stranger in Plymouth?"

The pilot nodded.

"Yes. I've been in California for the last three years. On my way east now."

Carrigan's eyebrows went up slightly. "Train?" he asked casually.

"No," Preston replied. "By plane. I forced-landed in the field up by those car-barns north of here this morning. Engine trouble. Had to come in town to get a new plug."

"Did you get it?"

For an answer the pilot pulled a standard spark-plug from his pocket and laid it on the desk-top. As an afterthought he placed a local garage receipt beside it. Carrigan hardly gave them a glance.

"What were you doing in California? Flying?" he asked.

"Yes, for the movies," the pilot informed him.

The man from the district attorney's office seemed quite impressed.

"Must have been interesting work, that," he commented. "A little vacation trip east now, eh?"

"No," the pilot corrected. "I lost my job with the movies. Now I'm barnstorming to a new job in Springfield, Massachusetts."

Carrigan looked puzzled.

"Barnstorming, did you say?"

"That's joy-hopping passengers, whenever you get the chance," Preston explained. "It helps meet expenses on a long cross-country trip."

"Oh, I see," the other nodded. "And you made an unintentional landing here

in Plymouth. Tell me, just how was it you happened to be in the bank when the robbery and the killing took place?"

In detail Preston described his movements from the time he stopped at the news-stand to the time the police arrived. When he had finished, the man from the district attorney's told him to wait, and went outside. He returned in less than five minutes. As he seated himself, he smiled at the pilot.

"The newsboy is still waiting to sell you a paper."

As the pilot grinned, the door opened and one of the two policemen came in.

"Mr. Holmes on the wire, sir," he said. "The call has been switched in here."

Carrigan took up the phone.

"Carrigan speaking. . . . Yes, Mr. Holmes. . . . No, not much of a description. . . . Sounds like this man Red Holland. . . . No, only one customer—getting a twenty-dollar bill changed. . . . Yes, he's here with me now. . . . What's that? Yes sir. All right. . . . The family? Yes sir, Chief Hardy is seeing to that. . . . Yes sir, every road and the station. . . . Everyone will be stopped. . . . Yes sir, I will. . . G'bye."

THE man from the district attorney's office hung up and turned to the policeman.

"The family has offered five thousand dollars' reward, dead or alive," he said. "The coroner's inquest will be held in Mr. Holmes' office tomorrow morning at ten. Mr. Holmes wants the watch of the roads and the railroad station doubled if necessary. He's very much upset by this. Mr. Hodges was his closest friend. I guess it will be all night to-night for you boys. Have they come for the body yet?"

The policeman nodded.

"Yeah. Sweeney come and got it five minutes ago. We're reporting back to the station-house now."

"All right," said Carrigan, and the uniformed man went out.

"Well, Mr.—er—pardon, what was the name?"

"Preston, Geoffrey Preston."

"Oh, yes. Well, Mr. Preston, I'm afraid you will have to spend the night here in Plymouth. Mr. Holmes, the district attorney, wants you to be present at the inquest tomorrow morning. You and Mr. Biddle are the only witnesses, you know."

The pilot frowned. The prospect of a delay was not pleasing.

"I don't think I can add to what I've already told you," he said with a show of annoyance. "Where do I stay—in jail?"

"Oh, of course not," the other put in hastily. "You are not being held on a criminal charge, Mr. Preston. Merely as a material witness. Just the same as Mr. Biddle. We just don't want you to leave the city until the coroner's inquest is completed. You may spend the night any place you like."

"On what?"

"What do you mean, on what?"

"The last twenty dollars to my name was in the twelve hundred that he got," Preston informed him.

"Oh, so that's the trouble," Carrigan smiled. "Well, I'll tell you. You go over to the Grand Hotel, and tell Herb Fess, the manager, that I want him to fix you up with food and bed until tomorrow. Our office will pay the bill. I'm sure you'll get your twenty dollars tomorrow when everything is straightened out."

"No, wait a minute," he added after a pause. "I'll go over to the Grand with you and speak to Fess. He's rather a peculiar chap at times."

It was only a matter of a quarter of an hour before Preston was properly registered at the Grand Hotel. Carrigan left him at the elevator.

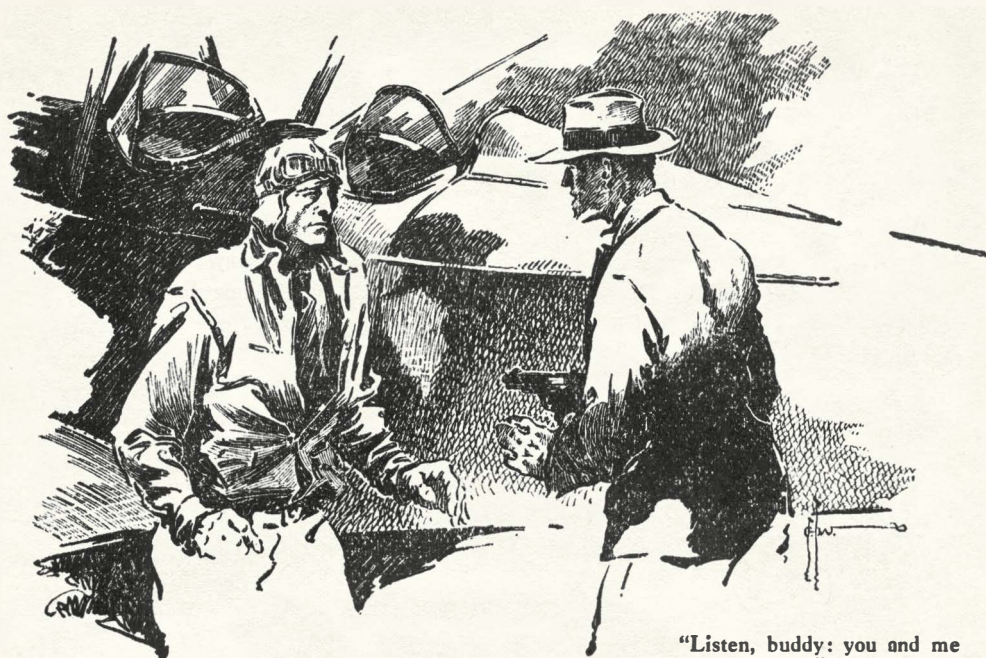
"I'm sorry about the delay, Mr. Preston," he said on parting. "But it really can't be helped. In a case like this, you know, everyone is under suspicion. Be at the district attorney's office tomorrow by ten o'clock, won't you? Ninth floor of the Civil Courts Building. Anyone will tell you where it is. I imagine that you'll be on your way by noon."

"Just a second, Mr. Carrigan," Preston checked him as he turned away. "Are there any objections to my going out and fixing up my ship this afternoon? I want to be ready to get right off, when I can. My bags are out there too."

Carrigan stroked his chin thoughtfully. "By the way, Mr. Preston," he said suddenly, "you must have some sort of airplane registration card and a license. Do you happen to have them with you?"

The pilot said he had, and immediately produced both. Carrigan studied them for a moment, and then placed them in his own pocket.

"I'll return these to you tomorrow," he remarked in an offhand manner. "Yes," he added, "I guess that it will be all right for you to work on your machine this afternoon, if you wish. You



"Listen, buddy: you and me are traveling, see?"

say it's out in the field by the car-barns? Well, I'll see that some one is sent out to guard it tonight. I may come out for a few minutes myself. I've never seen an airplane close to."

In view of the fact that the opportunity had been forced upon him, Preston spent the best part of an hour giving his plane a complete inspection and checking. As he was spending the night in Plymouth, he hauled his two bags out of the front cockpit and placed them to one side. His parachute he left as it was, in the rear cockpit. The tools he had used in changing the spark-plug he slipped back in the tool-case. The case he put in the tiny compartment built into the fuselage back of the rear seat. He locked the little compartment door, and put the key into his pocket. Then he climbed into the rear cockpit and started the engine.

Throttling the power-plant to its lowest possible number of revolutions, he got out and walked around the wing-tips, then stepped up on top of the right wheel of the landing gear. Shielding his face with his hand against the wash of the revolving propeller, he listened intently for several moments to the firing of the engine's cylinders. Finally he got down off the wheel, ducked under the lower wing and climbed up on the fuselage step at the rear cockpit. He then studied the readings of the oil and temperature gauges. Eventually he reached

his hand in to take hold of the ignition-switch and shut off the engine.

"Leave it alone!"

Preston jerked his head up from inside the cockpit. On the other side of the fuselage was a man. He wore a dark blue suit and a gray hat. He had a hard-looking face, and red hair. He also had a gun in his right hand. The muzzle was on a line with Preston's head.

"Step down, quick!"

The pilot stepped to the ground and waited as the man with the gun walked around the tail of the plane. The gun did not cease to cover Preston for an instant. As the man in the blue suit walked up, he showed yellow, uneven teeth in what was supposed to be a grin.

"I figured you as a pilot, there in the bank," he said. "Guys in this dump don't wear them kind of jackets. I figured right on this field, too. Listen, buddy: you and me are traveling, see? I've been waiting a long time for you. Get out that parachute you got there in back!"

Preston made no movement other than to sway slightly forward. The gunman's eyes narrowed. He tightened his grip on the revolver.

"Easy, easy!" he snarled. "You seen me dust off that guy in the bank, didn't you? Well, you're no better'n him. Get out that chute, quick!"

The pilot flexed his fingers once or twice, and then turned and hauled the

parachute out of the rear cockpit. He dropped it on the ground in front of the gunman. The man stooped down and picked it up, his gun still leveled at Preston. After considerable difficulty, as he only had one free hand, the gunman got the parachute-harness buckled and hooked in place. He grinned at the pilot again.

"I know how these things work," he said. "This aint my first ride in a plane. Now listen: you're gonna fly me straight south over the line and set me down, see? Then you can go where the hell you want. But get this straight! Any funny business by you, and I'll plug you and step off with the chute! Get it? Now step back and keep your hands still!"

Preston stepped back without a word as the gunman started to hitch himself up with one hand and into the front cockpit. Even when the gun swung to one side for a moment as the gunman wiggled backward, the pilot stayed right where he was. Finally the man got settled in position. He was kneeling on the seat and facing the tail of the plane. His gun was just in sight above the top of the cockpit rim. He motioned to Preston.

"Get in," he ordered. "And remember—any funny business, and I'll plug you sure as hell!"

WITH the gun-muzzle following every move, Preston climbed into the rear cockpit. He strapped his helmet under his chin, first removing the goggles and jamming them into his pocket. With quick motions he fastened the safety-belt. He pulled it a notch tighter than usual. Then he shoved the throttle forward and "cleared" the cylinders of the engine. The plane rolled forward a bit, then stopped as the pilot retarded the throttle.

The first blast of wind from the propeller sent the gunman's hat sailing over the side. He cursed, made a wild grab for it with his free hand and missed.

"The hell with it!" he yelled. "Get moving!"

As Preston reached for the throttle, he caught sight of two figures running across the field from the left. One of them had on a policeman's uniform. The other was in civilian clothes. Preston recognized him instantly. It was Carrigan. He was shouting as the policeman spurred ahead of him.

The gunman jerked his head in that direction, and snapped it right back.

"Step on it, quick!" he husked.

The finger crooked around the trigger quivered. Out the corner of his eye Preston saw that the policeman was almost up to them. For a fraction of a second he hesitated, and then rammèd the throttle open wide. The engine roared into full life, and the plane lurched forward. The policeman had turned, and was now running with the plane. He threw himself forward and made a frantic grab for one of the wing struts. In that instant the gunman jerked his gun around and fired. The policeman's fingers slipped off the strut. He turned completely around, then pitched forward in the cloud of dust from the propeller blast.

No sooner had the gun been fired than it was right back on a line with the pilot's head. The gunman's eyes had become mere slits on either side of his nose. His lips were drawn back to the gums of his stained teeth. The pilot looked past him and ahead.

The wheels were now running lightly over the uneven surface of the field. A cross-wind started to swerve the nose to the left. Preston checked it with a touch of right rudder, and the plane roared on in a straight line. Finally the wheels cleared, but the pilot made no effort to climb steeply. In fact, he continued to hold the plane close to the ground.

As the bouncing over the ground stopped, the gunman's face relaxed. He grinned at Preston and then glanced back at the trail of dust on the field. His grin broadened into a chuckle. His shoulders shook, and for a moment the muzzle of the gun pointed above Preston's head.

The plane was now not more than twenty feet off the ground and rushing toward a line of trees at the far end of the field. The pilot took one quick look at the gunman and then ducked head downward into the cockpit. At the same time he shoved the stick forward and jammed on right rudder. His free hand shot forward to yank back the throttle and snap the ignition switch in what was practically one movement. He completed the movement by bracing his forearm against the instrument board, and burying his head face downward in the crook of his arm.

The sudden swerve of the plane flung the gunman up against the side of his cockpit. He cursed, and pulled the trigger of his gun. The bullet ripped down the top of the fuselage and through the

rudder. In that same instant the lower right wing tip crabbed on the ground and swerved the plane farther to the right. Then the wing-tip crumpled, and the right wheel crabbed and buckled. That pulled the nose down, and the propeller slashed into the earth. Then the engine mashed into the ground, and the whole machine plowed forward. Wing-spars snapped, and fabric ripped, as with a final lurch the plane went spinning over on its back.

Hanging head downward on his safety-belt, Preston ran his hands over his body. The only pain he felt was when he pressed his right shoulder. And then it was not enough to make him wince much. He closed his eyes a moment, and pressed the fingertips of his two hands against his temples. A pounding in his head gradually eased up. Taking a deep breath, he reached up into the cockpit and got hold of a bracing wire. With one hand he pulled his body up until the weight was off the safety-belt. Then he unsnapped the buckle with the other hand. The buckle came loose with a rush, but Preston checked a head-first plunge downward by holding onto the wire with one hand and bracing the other palm first against the surface of the ground. Then he slowly lowered himself until his feet slid out of the cockpit and onto the ground. Rolling over on his stomach, he crawled clear of the wreckage. He was just getting to his knees, when footsteps came pounding up. It was Carrigan.

"Hurt, Preston?" the man panted. "I saw he had you covered back there, and then I heard the shot! Did he get you?"

The pilot started to shake his head, but stopped immediately. The pounding in his head returned. He swayed a bit, and Carrigan grabbed hold of him.

"Steady there, Preston!"

He closed his eyes tight for a moment, and then opened them and grinned.

"All right now, Mr. Carrigan, thanks. Just a little dizziness. What about that policeman?"

"Officer Burke is dead," Carrigan said quietly. "Right between the eyes. Never knew what struck him. God, what a fiend!"

He shot the last sentence out the corner of his mouth as he started to pull at the crumpled and twisted wing-section that completely hid the front cockpit of the plane. Preston gave him a hand, and together they soon forced an opening up underneath. The gunman's legs were

pinned under the engine. His body was twisted around to the left. His head, with an arm flung over it, was wedged up against the side of the cockpit. The revolver was still clutched in the fingers of the other hand. Carrigan reached up, pried them loose and took the gun.

After considerable difficulty they finally succeeded in freeing the man's legs. Then as Preston made the opening wider, Carrigan hauled the gunman clear of the wreckage and turned him over on his back. The eyes were closed. Blood was streaming down the side of the face from a gash at the temple. The man was breathing faintly. Carrigan knelt beside him and bandaged the man's head with his handkerchief.

"It's Holland, all right," he muttered. "And he has the bank loot on him. I'll just take charge of that!"

From the man's pockets he took out all the bank-notes and stuffed them in his own coat pocket. Then he stood up.

"I hope he lives to see the chair!" he breathed fervently. "God, Preston, but you were lucky! Burke and I reached the edge of the field just as he was making you stand back while he got into the plane. We took a chance and ran for it. Poor Burke! What caused the crash, anyway? Did the motor fail again?"

"No," said Preston. "I crashed on purpose."

TWO hours later Carrigan ushered the pilot into Mr. Holmes' office. The district attorney came forward immediately and shook hands.

"I'm certainly very glad to meet you, Mr. Preston," he said warmly. "Won't you sit down, please?"

When they were all seated the district attorney continued:

"Mr. Carrigan told me most of it over the phone, Mr. Preston," he said. "I asked him to bring you here, because I want to thank you personally for what you have done. Mr. Hodges was my closest friend. It was you who brought his murderer to justice. In this particular case we might call it flying justice. It took courage to crash your airplane on purpose like that. You might have killed yourself!"

The pilot smiled. "Oh, I think not," he said. "You see, I'm rather experienced in that sort of thing. Crashing planes is part of my profession, you might say. I've been doing it for the movies for the last three years. Today's crash was my forty-second."

The Secret of Zogra

A specially interesting adventure of the Intelligence officer known to the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia.

WITH a face as expressionless as a saucer, the Chinese woman Foo Wong placed the platter of fried *bêche-de-mer* upon the table before the dark Eurasian. With eyes that seemed smoldering queerly, he watched her.

She poured out the coffee.

"There is a man—a white man—lying on the beach," she said calmly.

Ignatius Moylan, keeper of the lighthouse, jerked to his feet.

"A white man!" he cried.

Still with that expressionless face, the Chinese woman nodded. Her black hair, cut in a fringe, fell in a jet cascade over her forehead. The high cheek-bones, the oblique eyes, and the pink flush suffusing her yellow skin enhanced her fantastic beauty. And to emphasize the pallor of her detachment, she wore a long black silk coat.

"Who is he? How did he get here?" asked Ignatius Moylan.

The woman gave a hardly perceptible shrug of her shoulders.

"I do not know. I saw him lying on the beach. He may be dead." And she placed a bowl of sugar on the table.

Except for one locked room, he could find nothing suspicious. . . . He realized instinctively that he was being watched. He swung round. The expressionless, saucer-like face of Foo Wong was there—a strange, exotic creature. Yet, otherwise, the respectable wife of a lighthouse-keeper.

But Ignatius Moylan had already abandoned his breakfast, and seizing his topee, he plunged through the doorway. The hot blanket of dazzling light that in the daytime smothers the Red Sea, almost obliterated the tall white column of the lighthouse from which he emerged. It burned all color from sky and sea; it reflected the dazzling whiteness of the coral beneath his feet.

Foo Wong was right. A figure lay sprawled on the beach, half in and half out of the sea—an almost naked figure,

with one blotch of color that even the sun could not change. The white man had a head of bright red hair.

After the first shock of surprise, Ignatius Moylan recovered himself. He drew a revolver from his pocket and cautiously approached that still figure; scarce a yard away, he halted. And then he received a second shock. The recum-



bent man was regarding him with open eyes. This red-haired waif washed up by the sea was not dead. . . . He even spoke.

"Give me a hand!"

The brown finger of the Eurasian crooked round the trigger of his revolver.

"Who are you?" he asked.

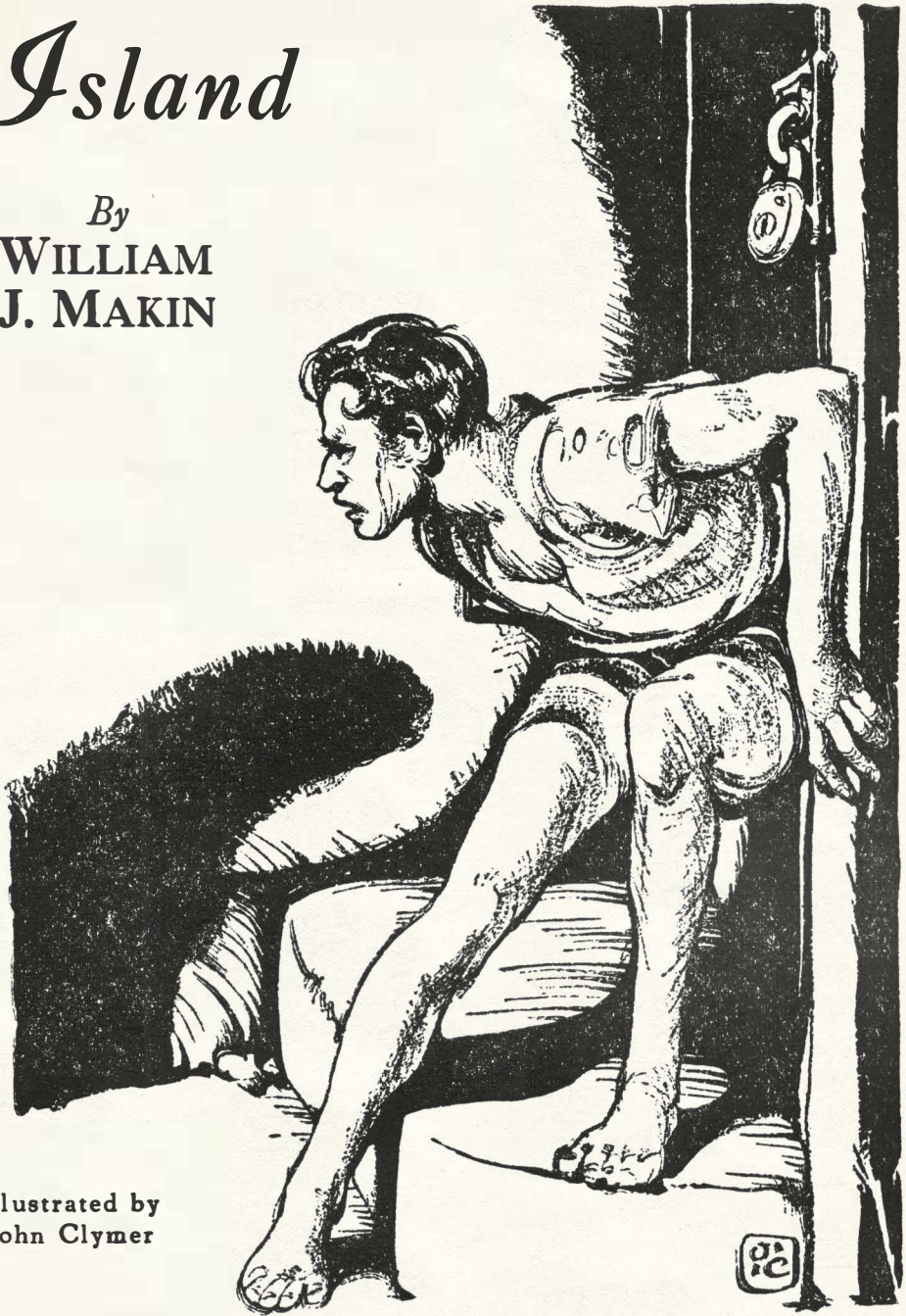
The man smiled.

"Sorry I haven't a visiting-card with me. Is a name really necessary under these circumstances?"

The Eurasian bent a little forward.

Island

By
WILLIAM
J. MAKIN



Illustrated by
John Clymer

"It is very necessary," he said quietly. The red-haired man tried to scramble to his feet. He found the revolver thrust against his body.

"I want your name—and the reason for your being on this island," said the Eurasian in the high-pitched voice of his kind.

"Does Rex Nerval convey anything to you?" asked the man, now squatting on the beach.

"Nothing at all," replied the Eurasian.

"Thank goodness for that," murmured the other. "I have to admit that it is known only too well to the police in Paris and London. They even sent two men out to Aden to take me back to the dubious security of Dartmoor. We were on our way last night when I saw the homely flash of this lighthouse. I decided to drop overboard and swim for it. I hardly expected to be received with—er—a revolver."

"An escaped crook, eh?" The Eura-

sian considered. The revolver was still directed at the squatting figure.

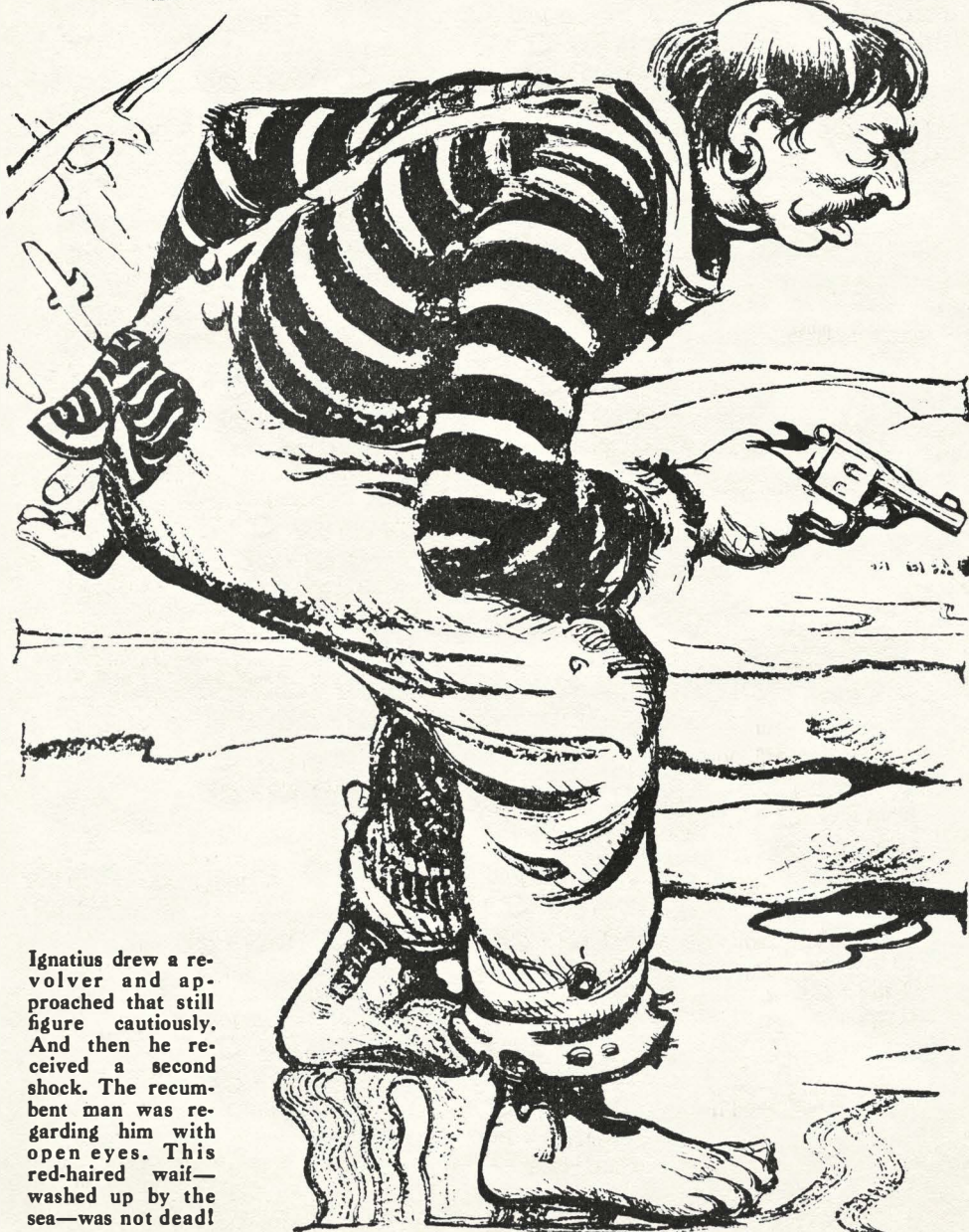
"I hate the term, but—er—well, as you will."

"And you mean to tell me you swam a mile—two miles probably—through this sea?"

"I do. It was a little wearying; but here I am."

"What was the liner? The P. and O. ship doesn't pass until Tuesday."

"Doesn't it?" The figure on the beach was unconcerned. "I'm afraid I wasn't traveling luxuriously. The ship I left so unceremoniously was a Dutch liner,



Ignatius drew a revolver and approached that still figure cautiously. And then he received a second shock. The recumbent man was regarding him with open eyes. This red-haired waif—washed up by the sea—was not dead!

the *Batavia*. They're probably lamenting my loss at the moment."

The smoldering light seemed to die away for the moment in the eyes of the Eurasian. At the same time the red-headed man stifled a sigh of relief. It was luck that the dhow in which he had voyaged near to the island should have seen the Dutch liner coming toward them. The lighthouse keeper had also marked it. Later, the red-headed man had dropped overboard from the dhow, and dressed only in a thin shirt, a pair of khaki shorts and a belt, he had swum quietly to the island. Then he lay there, waiting for the morning.

But the Eurasian was considering a problem.

"My duty is to hand you over to the first British ship I can signal," he said.

"I suppose it is," replied the stranger cheerfully. "But is it really necessary?"

"Get up!" ordered the Eurasian.

The man staggered to his feet.

"Put your hands above your head!"

He did as he was told. He felt the revolver held by the Eurasian thrust into his back while a hand went through his scanty clothing. Satisfied there was no weapon, the Eurasian took his revolver away.

"That's right," he said. "Now we'll go inside. And please remember that I possess a revolver and will not have the slightest hesitation in using it. My companion happens to be ill. You can work in his place. Later, you'll be put aboard a British ship."

The other smiled.

"Excellent! Perhaps I may be permitted to have breakfast?"

They were walking toward the lighthouse as they spoke. The Chinese woman Foo Wong appeared.

"Breakfast is ready," she murmured.

Two places had been laid at the table.



Ignatius Moylan regarded her shrewdly. But with that unchanged, expressionless face she was pouring out the coffee for the red-headed man, who had calmly seated himself.

"I'M the perfect fool," decided Paul Rodgers. "A bottle of Japanese beer and the babble of a drunken skipper has sent me on a wild-goose chase. A fortnight wasted! The sooner I get off this damned island the better."

It was a humiliating conclusion. For five days Rodgers—an Intelligence officer known throughout the Sudan as the Wolf of Arabia—had been on the island, and a more placid, unexciting existence could not have been imagined. Ignatius Moylan had taught him the necessary duties—the cleaning of the reflectors, even the working of the mechanism, the *click-click-click* of which was a tantalizing rhythm in his brain every night.

The flash had never varied. It had been "four—three—four," for night after night. The first two nights Rodgers had remained awake, lying in his little room and peering into the darkness of the Red Sea. He could see the surface of the water caught by that bright beam. He knew the ghostly touch of the light. And despite the *click-click-click* of the mechanism that sounded like some gigantic clock throughout this slender white pillar in the midst of the sea, he also counted the light. But it never varied. There was something godlike in its inevitability.

True, Ignatius Moylan never allowed the man he had found on the beach to be on duty at night. But was there anything extraordinary in that? The Eurasian seemed a stickler for duty. The idea that he might be the brain behind this gun-running into the Sudan became preposterous. The man was merely part of the mechanism of the lighthouse—a machine.

YET the fellow had moments of emotion. In the circular dining-room a caged canary whistled blithely. Occasionally Ignatius Moylan would press his brown face against the gilded bars, his smoldering eyes alight with emotion, and he would whistle to the bird in some tuneless fashion of his own.

"Prettee bird!" he would whisper, and reluctantly take himself away. He insisted upon feeding the bird and cleaning the cage himself. Once, when Rodgers out of sheer curiosity had gone near the

cage, the Eurasian jerked forth the revolver and leveled it at him.

"Get away!" he cried. "Leave the bird alone, you crook!"

With a shrug of his shoulders, the other had left the room. While the Eurasian slobbered over the bird, Paul Rodgers had taken the opportunity of exploring the lighthouse thoroughly. Except for one locked room, he could find nothing suspicious. He was trying the door of this room, where he judged the stores to be kept, when he realized instinctively that he was being watched. He swung round. The expressionless, saucer-like face of Foo Wong was there.

"You want something?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Through oblique eyes she watched him depart. . . .

A strange, exotic creature with her black silk coat and polished fringe of hair—yet, otherwise, the respectable wife of a lighthouse-keeper; she cooked, managed the stores, and spent several hours each day fishing for *bêche-de-mer*. Both she and her husband had a passion for this delicacy fried. Foo Wong was silent and efficient. Like her husband she had a sense of duty. She also looked after the other Eurasian who was ill.

RODGERS had seen this man on the day of his arrival. He was the John Petersen whose name had been included in that message from the Residency. The fellow seemed to have an attack of malaria.

"Why not signal a passing ship for a doctor?" suggested Rodgers.

Ignatius Moylan had smiled.

"A little fever is not dangerous. I have medicine here." Then his smoldering eyes had turned upon Rodgers. "When I signal for a ship it will be to hand you over, my friend! So don't be in a hurry."

Paul Rodgers had also stood in the blazing sunshine on the narrow platform surrounding the reflectors. This was the place where the old beggar who had cringed in Kelly's Bar had been trapped one night and blinded by the light. It was a cage of glass and steel poised in the white scorched sky. A small gun, almost like a miniature howitzer, was clamped to the platform; this was the rocket-firing apparatus.

He gazed into the dizzying depths below. The sea was pellucid. Coral and sea plants seemed to sway lazily in the current. And through these placid wa-

ters a shark nosed, its white belly swirling upward as it glided after small fish. Rodgers shivered, even in the sunshine.

One . . . two . . . three . . . four—How that rhythm persisted in the mind! He sensed it, even though in the daytime the prisms were silent. Ignatius Moylan had accompanied him to this height, to gaze across the shimmering surface of the Red Sea at some passing vessel that had the appearance of a toy ship on a sheet of glass. The Eurasian focused a telescope. In the log-book, which Rodgers had secretly conned, careful entries had been made of such ships as came within the orbit of the lighthouse. A more satisfactory lighthouse-keeper at a salary of one hundred rupees a month could not be imagined.

ON the sixth morning, as they stood upon the little gallery, a gray shape came stealing through the sun haze. The Eurasian leveled his telescope. He peered for a few seconds, lowered the telescope and said quietly:

"It's the cruiser *Lexingham*—with the Admiral aboard. She's sure to signal us if she comes close."

Rodgers did not reply. His humiliation seemed complete. At the same time he recognized that here was his opportunity of being taken off Zogra Island. Should he seize it? Why not confess to this ordinary and respectable lighthouse-keeper that he wanted to reach the mainland? He could be ashore again in a few hours and begin his search for the gun-runners in more likely surroundings. He turned abruptly to the other.

But the words stopped short; for the Eurasian had his smoldering eyes fixed on him, and there was a sardonic twist to his features. For one brief moment the mask had dropped from the face of Ignatius Moylan. And in that same brief moment Rodgers drew in his breath sharply.

"You were going to say—" As the Eurasian spoke the mask dropped into place.

"Nothing," replied Rodgers, gazing in the direction of the cruiser.

He felt the keen glance of the Eurasian upon him. The next moment he heard Moylan's voice, saying carelessly:

"They're signaling now—asking us if everything is all right. . . . Keep them in sight while I run up the flags."

Rodgers nodded. He heard the Eurasian depart through the trap door, and begin the descent of those stone steps

that plunged in circular fashion to the base of the lighthouse.

And as Rodgers stood on that little gallery, a telescope to his eye, and the cruiser in full view, his mind was singing like a dynamo with an exciting thought. Was the ordinary attitude of the Eurasian lighthouse-keeper a deliberate pose? He had seen Ignatius Moylan without his mask. A different man—a dangerous man. The most dangerous criminal was not the convict-marked, old-offender type. The police could easily discover the man in that gallery. But the criminal who lived an ordinary life in an ordinary suburb—who caught the 9:20 every morning and returned by the 6:15—such a man might baffle the police for years. Only the pseudo artist goes about with long hair and a black shirt; the real artist is often undistinguished in his bowler hat.

Ignatius Moylan was ordinary—too ordinary. He was playing a drama, but playing it too well. Was this man with the expressionless wife and the chirruping canary the master gun-runner of the Red Sea?

"I think I'll stay a little longer," Rodgers decided.

At that moment two signal flags fluttered up a cord toward the gallery; by their color Rodgers realized what they indicated. . . . "O. K."

Through his telescope he saw the cruiser signal a farewell. Then he turned his back upon that expanse of sea and sky and walked to the trapdoor that led downward to adventure.

NEARLY midnight. . . . Paul Rodgers was sleeping lightly in his room. Suddenly he jerked his head in the darkness, every sense alert. Something had happened.

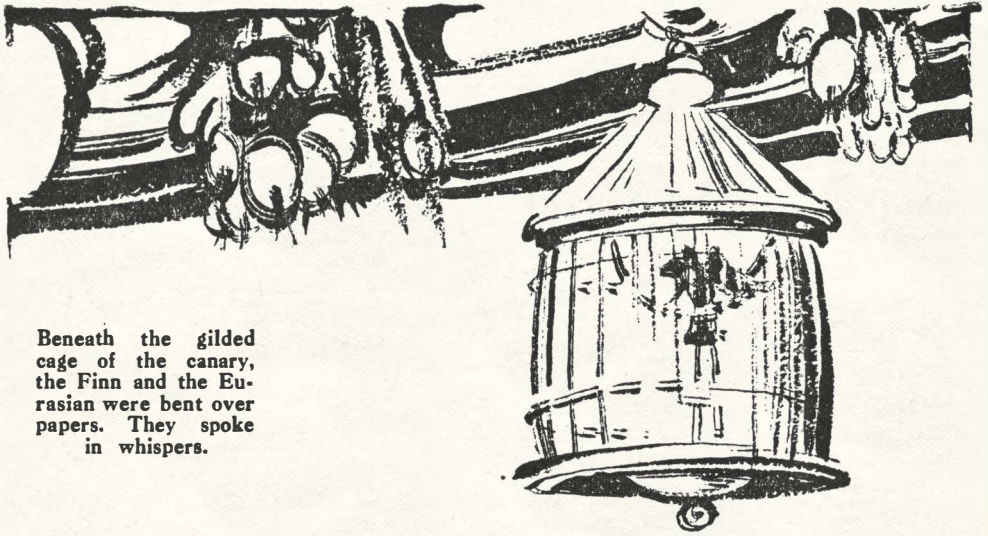
At once he realized what had wakened him. The symphony of the mechanism, amidst which he lived, had changed to a different tune-beat. Thoroughly roused, he listened tensely.

One—two—three. One—two—three—four. One—two—three.

He clawed quickly at the window. He gazed out at the waste of sea. There was the light, sweeping like a giant beam to the horizon.

One—two—three. Then darkness. With the mechanism clicking in his mind, he counted.

Then the light again. It had changed. It was the "three-four" flash. Some signal was being sent out!



Beneath the gilded cage of the canary, the Finn and the Eurasian were bent over papers. They spoke in whispers.



His Arab training sent him quickly and silently out of bed. In a few moments he had dressed. From the moment of his waking it could not have been three minutes. Yet even as he moved stealthily toward the door, the symphony changed again.

One—two—three—four. One—two—three. One—two—three—four.

He turned abruptly to the window. Yes, the light was sweeping with its accustomed regularity. The old flash: *Four—three—four.* A man doubtful of his own senses might easily have believed that the whole business had been a trick of sleep. But Rodgers knew.

There was a sudden knock on the door.

"Are you awake?" a voice growled.

Rodgers recognized the Eurasian. He did not reply.

Again the knock.

"Get up you lazy crook!"

"What's matter?" yawned Rodgers, from the darkness.

"I want you down below—at once!" ordered the Eurasian. "Get dressed and come down. The store-ship is arriving."

"All right."

Rodgers moved silently to the window again. He peered into the waste of sea, following that flashing beam as it sliced the darkness. But he could see no steamer lights. Two minutes later he opened the door and descended the stairs.

In the living-room Ignatius Moylan was busy writing in his log-book. He looked up as Rodgers entered.

"You've got to do some honest work tonight, landing stores," he said. "A change of occupation is good for a crook."

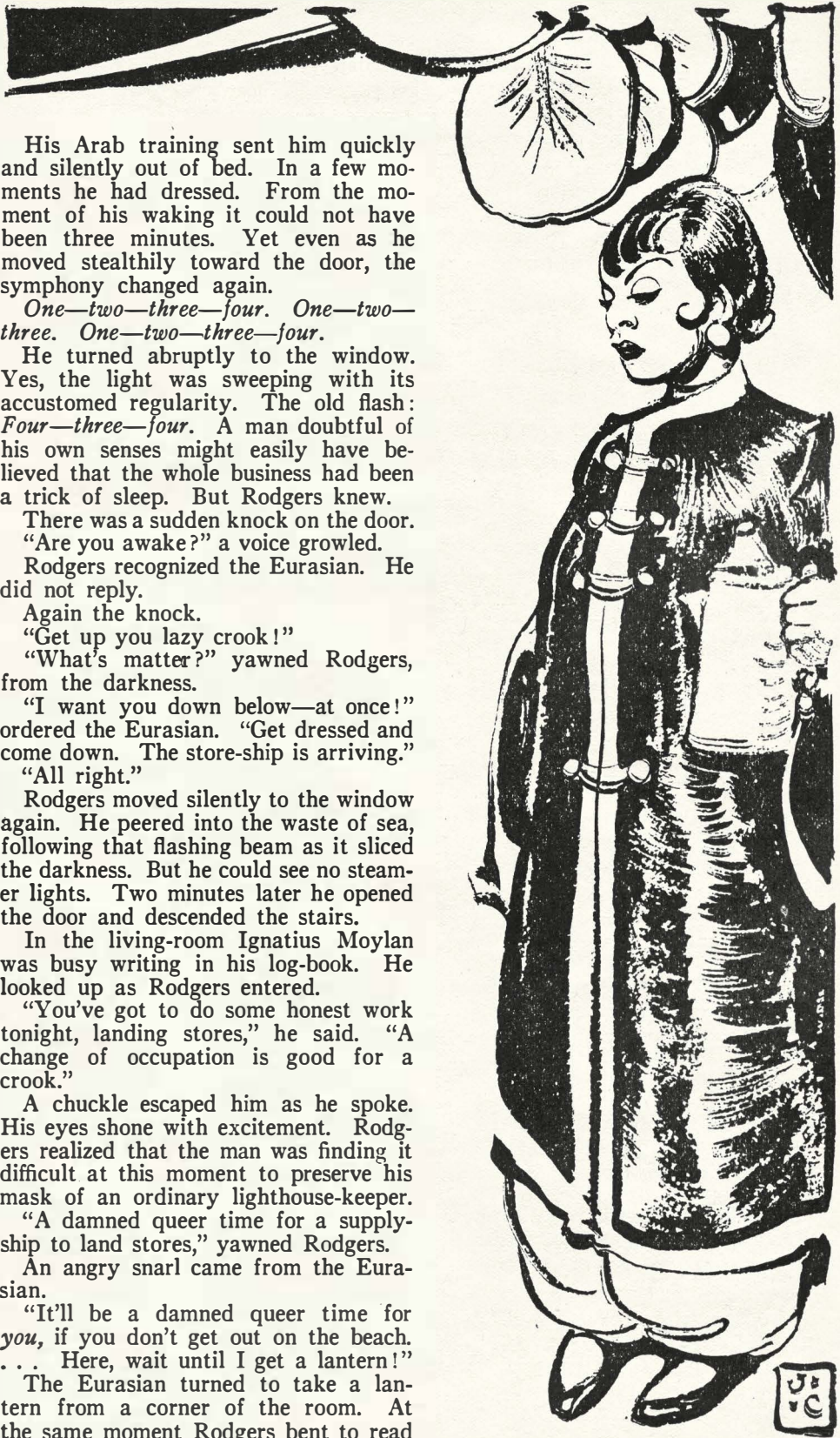
A chuckle escaped him as he spoke. His eyes shone with excitement. Rodgers realized that the man was finding it difficult at this moment to preserve his mask of an ordinary lighthouse-keeper.

"A damned queer time for a supply-ship to land stores," yawned Rodgers.

An angry snarl came from the Eurasian.

"It'll be a damned queer time for *you*, if you don't get out on the beach. . . . Here, wait until I get a lantern!"

The Eurasian turned to take a lantern from a corner of the room. At the same moment Rodgers bent to read



the last entry in the log-book. There, in the fine handwriting of the Eurasian, was the brief announcement:

11:0 P. M. *Cruiser Lexington turned on course—apparently making for Mas-sawah.*

"I'm ready," said Rodgers quietly, and he followed the Eurasian through the doorway toward the beach.

IT was a still, hot night. The sea lapped the coral reef with the gentle ripple of lake water. There was no moon. Dimly the white pillar of the lighthouse could be discerned in the darkness. And the beam flashed with regular monotony.

Then came the soft *chug-chug* of a motor-launch. It was almost upon the island before Rodgers realized it. He judged the exhaust had been skilfully silenced. A tall man stepped ashore with practised ease.

The Eurasian held the lantern aloft. "Good-evening, Captain!"

"Goot-evenin', sir!" replied a voice that sounded familiar to Rodgers. "I haf the stuff."

"Well, get it ashore, and don't hang about."

There was the tone of command in the Eurasian's voice now. Ignatius Moylan was sloughing off the character of a lighthouse-keeper, for that of a man engaged in the biggest gun-running enterprise of the Red Sea.

"Is der cache open?" asked the tall man who had stepped ashore.

"Yes. So get to work!"

As the lantern swung across the darkness it flashed for a moment on the tall figure, revealing a sallow face with a shock of fair hair. The Finn—the same man who had sneered openly in Kelly's Bar in Aden. Rodgers was grateful for the darkness. He lurched toward the boat where a number of seamen were unloading cases with exceptional care.

"Vere iss Petersen?" he heard the Finn ask.

"Ill in bed—fever," replied the Eurasian.

"Who den iss dis?"

"A crook—jumped from a liner. He's safe enough."

Stumbling over the coral, bowed down with the weight of the cases, the Wolf of Arabia sweated and grinned. He realized at once that these were rifles and ammunition that were being landed on the island. Methodically and scientifically they were being stacked in the

basement storeroom of the lighthouse. Rodgers wondered what the Admiral would say if he could see this sweating, red-headed figure actually engaged with the gang of gun-runners. And the rendezvous was a lighthouse that had calmly signaled "O. K." to the cruiser *Lexington*! Moreover, the master mind of the gun-running business was an Eurasian drawing a Government salary of one hundred rupees a month.

But the situation was serious enough. Although Rodgers was in the heart of the enemy's camp, he was powerless to do anything. Some five hundred rifles had been landed, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. Twice the softly chugging motorboat had made the journey between the phantom steamer of the darkness and the ghostly coral reef lapped gently by the sea. And above their activities the beam was slicing the darkness. *One—two—three—four.*

In another ten minutes the job would be finished, and the steamer and its crew would take their departure. Mixing with the crew,—chiefly Finns, a few negroes, two Portuguese, and some non-descripts,—Rodgers heard them whisper the name of the steamer—*Baroud*. They chuckled over the ease with which they had evaded the cruiser *Lexington*. *H. M. S. Lexington!* That last entry in the log-book flashed into the mind of Rodgers. Somewhere within the orbit of the lighthouse the cruiser would now be throbbing toward the Italian coastline of the Red Sea.

THERE was a chance, a thousand-to-one chance; it must be taken. The last cases were being carried ashore. Calmly Rodgers stalked into the living-room of the lighthouse. Beneath the gilded cage of the canary, the Finn and the Eurasian were bent over papers. They spoke in whispers. Foo Wong, dressed in the inevitable black silk coat, was pouring out coffee for the two men. All three glanced up as Rodgers entered.

He felt their eyes upon him. At all costs he must not betray himself, for a few minutes. The whispers had stopped. There was silence. The canary chirruped sleepily.

"What do you want?" asked the Eurasian, a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

Rodgers smiled, unperturbed.

"Everything's ashore. I'm just going to my room for a moment."

He could see a puzzled expression coming into the Finn's eyes. It was the

prelude to recognition. With a casual nod to the Eurasian, Rodgers strolled across the room. Hurry would be fatal. He reached the door, opened it, and began to climb the stone staircase.

"Dat man haf very red hair," he heard the Finn say.

"What of it?" asked Ignatius Moylan.

"Somehow I seem to remember dat—"

RODGERS heard no more; he was racing catlike up that stone staircase. He ran into his room, tore a strip of sheet from his bed, and in three seconds was again racing upward. The noise of the prisms as they clicked endlessly in their symphony came nearer to him. He sweated and staggered, his lungs nearly bursting in the agony of effort. With a convulsive gesture he flung open the trapdoor. The next moment he was on the little gallery, feeling his way with outstretched hands, like a blind man through the white-hot brilliance of light.

One—two—three—four. Then blessed darkness for three seconds. But it left Rodgers more blind than ever. He stumbled; he almost pitched forward into the sea, one hundred and eighty feet below. But he had found what he sought—the rocket apparatus.

Once again that white hell of light. . . . Convulsively Rodgers seized one of the rockets. He fitted it, feeling in the blindness of this dazzling light for the socket. Darkness again. He sobbed with relief. . . .

"But I remember now," the Finn was saying, in the living-room below.

"Remember what?" asked the Eurasian. The papers were cleared from the table and he was anxious for the Finn to get the steamer away.

"Why, I remember dat red-haired man!"

"The crook, eh?" smiled the Eurasian, pushing his brown face against the bars of the gilded cage.

"He no crook," snarled the Finn. "I see him, a sailor in Kelly's Bar at Aden. He talk to a drunken skipper who say he see this light gif a *one—two—dree* flash. I remember him well."

The Eurasian twisted round. In his dark eyes there was a sudden gleam.

"Are you sure?" he asked quietly.

Foo Wong removed the coffee-cups.

At that same moment there was an explosion followed by a screaming sound. It sounded like something tearing the black envelope of the sky. Instinctively

both men left the room and rushed to the reef. They were just in time to see the fiery trail of a red and green rocket falling to the sea.

"*Mein Gott!*" growled the Finn, drawing a revolver. "Dat red-haired devil is signaling! He must die."

But even as he stumbled back to the lighthouse, another rocket soared into the night sky. Like children, all the figures on the reef stood static, waiting for the burst. It came, a few seconds later, a shower of red and green trailing lights.

The beam of the lighthouse swung round. *One—two—three—four.* They caught a glimpse of a tiny figure poised in that cage of light, fumbling desperately with the rocket apparatus.

"The cunning devil has guessed everything," snarled the Eurasian. "Come on, Captain. He's got to be stopped. He'll have a cruiser here if they sight those rockets."

"A cruiser!"

The word was enough for the Finn. He and the Eurasian rushed into the lighthouse. They scrambled up the stone staircase; they reached the trapdoor. It was locked from the other side. The Finn thrust his revolver forward.

"ONE moment!" And the Eurasian caught at his hand; that sardonic twist was on the brown features. In the darkness both men waited. They heard the explosion of another rocket, and that screaming, tearing sound in the darkness. Above all was the monotonous click of the prisms as they moved into place.

One—two—three—four.

"We vaste time!" growled the Finn.

"No." The Eurasian shook his head. "I expect the cruiser has already sighted those rockets and is turning back on her course. She'll be here in three hours, and will be asking awkward questions."

"Vell?"

"Am I to show them the body of a man with bullet-holes in him?"

"Vy not drow him into der sea?"

"Because the sea has a habit of throwing up its dead, Captain."

"Vell, let me take his body aboard der *Baroud.*"

Again the Eurasian shook his head. "And how explain those rockets being fired in the night?"

The Finn was puzzled. As he stood there the scream of another rocket was heard.

"I shall let them take away a madman, a blind madman," said the Eurasian quietly. "Once before a man who saw too much was caught in that case of light. They tell me he still crawls about Aden."

Even the sallow face of the Finn paled. "You tink he be der same?" he whispered.

Ignatius Moylan smiled. He had recovered his poise.

"I'm sure of it. The light is controlled from the chamber below. And he is unarmed." As he spoke, the Eurasian stretched a hand above his head. There was the noise of a bolt being shot. "Our red-haired friend is now a prisoner—a human moth dancing against six million candle-power. I think three hours will be quite long enough, eh, Captain?"

And with a laugh he clapped the Finn on the shoulder. That laugh unnerved the Finn. Hurriedly he scrambled down the stone staircase.

"I must my ship get away!" he growled over his shoulder. "Dat cruiser might be curious."

"The sooner the better," the Eurasian agreed, and followed him out of the lighthouse on to the reef. There was a hurried hustling of the sailors, a few whispers in the darkness, and a minute later the soft *chug-chug* of the motor-boat was lost.

Ignatius Moylan stood alone on that ghostly white coral reef. He looked up at that glass cage of light. A lurching figure was placing the last rocket in position. A flash, and it screamed through the night bursting into a trail that drooped toward a steamer already moving silently into the darkness.

One—two—three—four. The blinding beam of light flashed forth. The Eurasian saw that puny figure place its hands against its eyes as though to protect itself.

He laughed softly, and strolled back to the living-room. He pushed his brown face once more against the cage that held the canary.

"Prettee bird!" he whispered.

In the background Foo Wong watched him, her face saucer-like.

THREE hours later another beam broke athwart that of the Zogra Island light. It was the searchlight of the cruiser *Lexingham*. It wavered a little, and then rested on the white coral. Simultaneously, a steam launch fussed toward the island.

A lieutenant landed. A group of blue-jackets followed. They were met by an apologetic Eurasian.

"What's the trouble?" asked the lieutenant. "A dozen distress rockets have been fired."

"A sad case—a very sad case," murmured the Eurasian. "A man who jumped overboard from a liner, a crook, calling himself Rex Nerval, was washed up on this island. He has been helping me, for my companion is sick. And tonight this crook went mad. He ran to the gallery at the top of the lighthouse, locked himself in with the light, and began firing all those rockets."

"Why didn't you get after him?" asked the lieutenant, striding toward the lighthouse.

"I couldn't, being unarmed," said the Eurasian. "And my wife here too. He was very dangerous."

"How long has he been there?"

They were climbing the stone staircase now.

"Three hours," replied the Eurasian.

"Good heavens! He'll be blind."

"I hope not," said the Eurasian solicitously.

They reached the trapdoor. It was still locked from the outside. The lieutenant gave an order. A bluejacket came forward and with an ax began smashing through the lock. A moment later they were all clambering onto the terrace.

For some time they stood there, blinded by the light.

"Switch off this beam for a minute!" ordered the lieutenant.

"Yes, sir," replied the Eurasian, and descended the staircase.

A MINUTE later the lieutenant bent over the prone figure of a man in the darkness. He dragged him toward the trapdoor. Then he brought an electric torch to bear upon his burden. What he saw caused him to whistle in surprise. For the figure was a red-haired man with a bandage bound tightly round his eyes.

Quickly he removed the strips of white cloth. Gray eyes blinked into his.

"By all that's wonderful, Rodgers!" cried the lieutenant.

The gray eyes blinked again.

"Is it—er—Adamson?"

"It is," grinned the lieutenant.

"Thank goodness you came, even though it's almost too late. . . . But get a grip on that damned Eurasian."

"What d'you mean?"

The lieutenant was beginning to think it *was* a madman who lay before him!

"He's a gun-runner of the first order," said the Wolf of Arabia. "Down below in this excellent lighthouse you'll find enough arms and ammunition to set the whole Sudan ablaze. But go down and get that Eurasian, my dear fellow, before he discovers that I have my sight still, and also some sanity."

The lieutenant hurried down the staircase. The Eurasian was still bending over the mechanism of the lights. With a jerk of his wrist he switched on the beam again.

"Is the poor fellow blind?" he asked softly.

The lieutenant nodded, but that nod was to the bluejackets. They seized Ignatius Moylan.

"You're going for a trip in a cruiser, my little *chee-chee*," said the lieutenant. "And we're going to inspect that store-room of yours."

BLANK amazement was in the brown face of the Eurasian. He raised his gleaming eyes and saw Rodgers slowly descending the staircase. A thick bandage was in his hands. The Intelligence officer nodded.

"Yes, I was ready for the light. You see I met that poor devil who had been trapped here before. I realized the danger. And after I had fired the rockets, I bandaged my eyes."

"Who are you?" asked the Eurasian.

"Oh, just nobody," smiled Rodgers in reply. "I think we'll go down below, Lieutenant."

They began the slow descent. Rodgers stumbled slightly; his gray eyes were still blinking.

"But why should the fellow choose a lighthouse for gun-running?" asked the lieutenant.

"Because it was the rendezvous least likely to be suspected," explained Rodgers. "A Finnish steamer cruised in this neighborhood. As soon as the flash changed to 'three—four—three,' the skipper knew that the coast was clear. He steamed in, delivered his cargo, and was off again. Later, a signal—the same signal—was given to the dhows waiting off the African coast. They sailed out, collected the guns, and delivered them ashore. Each party knew it was safe, for the lighthouse-keeper had every opportunity of knowing the whereabouts of the cruiser or the sloops."

Another one of these intriguing tales of the Wolf of Arabia will appear in an early issue.

"Damned clever," agreed the lieutenant.

They reached the living-room. The canary still chirruped in its cage.

"I think he really was fond of that bird," said Rodgers, taking the cage in his hands. "But he had a reason for it. In the bottom of this cage," he drew out a drawer—"are all the papers giving details of his gun-running ventures. Very useful information for the Admiral, I imagine."

As he spoke he extracted the cluster of papers and thrust them in his pocket. Simultaneously, the Chinese woman Foo Wong entered the room. She gazed round blankly at the group of bluejackets. Then her eyes fell upon the Eurasian, guarded by two bluejackets. For once, that saucer-like expression was wiped away, and tears started to her eyes.

"My wife," explained the Eurasian to the lieutenant. "Will you permit me to say good-by to her?"

The lieutenant nodded and the Eurasian stepped forward. Foo Wong did not move. Once again her face had become set. Quietly she spoke a few words in Chinese.

Ignatius Moylan drooped his head. She came closer, her arm extended. The Eurasian raised his smoldering eyes to her face. The next moment he collapsed—she had plunged a knife into him.

"Thank you," he murmured to her, in English.

The lieutenant, the bluejackets, and Rodgers had started forward; but they were too late. The knife fell from Foo Wong's hand, and clattered to the floor. Something resembling a smile broke across her yellow face.

"That's the end of things here," said Rodgers, gazing down at the dying Eurasian. "Perhaps it's the best ending." . . .

He turned to the lieutenant. "I want to get aboard the cruiser, quickly. There's a steamer somewhere in that darkness, that I want to find. Can I borrow your launch?"

"Of course."

FIVE minutes later Rodgers stepped aboard the gently throbbing deck of *H. M. S. Lexington*.

"Is the Admiral aboard?" he asked the captain.

"Asleep!" was the whispered reply.

Rodgers squared his shoulders. "I think he'd better be wakened," he said boldly.

The Chicago Lily

THE prosecuting attorney had the old woman cornered like a rat in the court-room. There were no jurors to sway, but there was His Honor himself, his clever old face remote and curiously tired; and likewise there were spectators in the room whose emotional reactions were as evident, somehow, as the *rat-tat-tat* of telegraphy.

The spectators only mattered to the prosecuting attorney, who had found a juicy bit in this minor item of the court's calendar. A succulent bit—with the sweet taste of publicity to it.

But there was the boy Charley Heath, bewildered and anxious. And there was Grandmother Heath, that old woman of various sobriquets. Born Lily Meadows, she would die remembered curiously—as “Mother,” as “Chicago Lil,” as, more generally, “the Chicago Lily.” These two, certainly, were aware only of each other—and of the wise old face above the bench.

“I recognize this woman!” bellowed the attorney. “Your Honor, I venture to—”

Yes, he had her cornered. The Chicago Lily—cornered like a rat!

A professional “mother,” was this old woman. Strange sons of the court-room she'd had—and stranger daughters. It was a queer-enough calling, but one in which she was skilled almost past the believing. Certain wise gentlemen in the dark corners of numerous cities knew of this skill, however, and were quite ready, on occasion, to pay well for it.

There was her appearance: She was very little, with shoulders curved tiredly, and clad in decent, shabby black. Always her white hair was neat under a small, nondescript bonnet, and always her hands were genteel and pathetic in patched and faded gloves. Her grammar was execrable, both natively and professionally, but her voice was as gentle as a lady's. You could think of a cross and bewildered child being soothed and charmed by the caress of that voice.

BUT now it was husky and strained, and sobs tore through it, like snags in a frail fabric. Because, you see, the



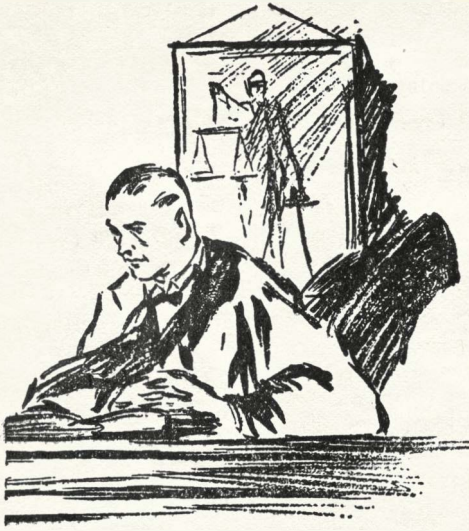
boy Charley really was her grandson—and who would believe her now?

In the springtime of the Chicago Lily there had been just such another boy Charley. He'd had yellow hair and trustful blue eyes. The Chicago Lily had had great love for him, mingled with a little contempt. But he had trotted into his grave, quite as casually and as unimportantly as he had trotted through life, leaving his otherwise bride with a very small son.

For that son, too, she had had great love, mingled with a little contempt. She had seen to it that he'd had what she liked to call a “chancet.” He'd learned a trade in a city far distant from the chosen spots of the Lily's career, and at eighteen he had married a colorless young woman who also had a trade. Sentimentally the Lily had washed her hands of them then—only to find those same hands burdened again when her son and daughter-in-law were killed in an automobile wreck.

For there was a third boy Charley. And there was no contempt in the Lily's love for her grandchild. Absurdly and unreasonably she worshiped him—so that it was more imperative and at the same time more difficult for her to give him, too, his “chancet.”

She'd put this third boy Charley in



By **JOSEPHINE
BENTHAM**

Illustrated by George Wert

charge of a most respectable aunt, now dead." He'd never known about her other children, her professional children. She'd have sent every one of them to jail or to hell itself before she'd have let him know. Their ways had been apart. And when he'd wired from San Francisco for her and she had come to find him behind the too-familiar bars, she had not, just at first, even recognized him. It had been four years.

Charley was seventeen now, and a wrong 'un. It didn't look as if the court were going to be lenient with him now, there being a question of a drug-store hold-up in which Charley had featured, with a gay bandanna drawn over nose and mouth. He had been caught.

And now the grandmother of Charley Heath gripped the edge of the bench with two shabbily gloved little hands.

"Your Honor—"

"Those gloves!" the prosecuting attorney protested. "Those old-woman gloves! She wears 'em, Your Honor, for a reason." He was yipping now, like an excited dog, that prances around its victim. "Will you ask her to take off those gloves, Your Honor?"

The grandmother of Charley Heath was requested by the court to remove her gloves. And then, when very reluctantly she allowed the attorney to look at her

A "human document"—the curious life-story of one of the strangest characters known to the underworld.

hands, he found and displayed the marks of countless cigarettes—deep stains of yellow-brown against the index and second fingers of her left hand. The hand of the Chicago Lily!

She crumpled, then, into a heap before the bench. They lifted her into a chair. And still the prosecuting attorney talked. . . .

The history of her childhood and early womanhood stretched back along tortuous, devious alleys—into the out-of-the-way haunts of out-of-the-way streets. The Chicago Lily had been skilled along many lines in her time. No trick at all to imagine those little hands sly and swift over the edge of a bargain-counter. Not hard to think of those pussy-cat feet turning dark corners and pattering along unmentionable avenues to certain dubious destinations. Ears alert, eyes keen, fingertips sensitive. And this to say nothing of a mind that worked with the precision of a steel trap. Nobody had ever put over anything much on the Chicago Lily.

She must have made money in her time, but no one ever knew what she did with it. There was a rumor that she had married before she was twenty, and that for a while she had had a home. But that couldn't have lasted long, because now she was in Philadelphia . . . now she was in Denver . . . now she was cat-footing along the sunny side-streets of Los Angeles.

The police had a definite line on the Denver incident—this back in 1925. Not the line that the Lily herself had on it, staring back now on the episode, while the prosecuting attorney sketched the outline:

IT had begun, this Denver episode, in a little room in the rear of Mike Daly's saloon.

"Here's the layout, Lil," Dutch Anderson was saying. "Now get this, see? The kid's about nineteen—but he's nobody's fool, see, and nobody's got no dope on him. An' he's a rat of a kid—pass for six-seventeen easy. Tha's where you come in—"

"Yeh," interjected the Chicago Lily.

"I know them hard-boiled kids. What's there in it for me?"

And daintily the Chicago Lily killed a whisky straight, not a shadow of expression crossing her white little face.

Then the Lily lit a fresh cigarette—*there* you had the one vice that gripped her—and surveyed her companion calmly.

"Well?" she said, in that soft and curiously attractive voice of hers. "Well?"

"Well, this kid, see—he drove the bus for this doctor, see, for five-six mont's. It was a big haul, and we was goin' to pull it off easy, see? He was goin' to let Steve—Steve O'Hearn—in by the side door, proper as you please, an' after Steve had cleaned the upstairs, he was goin' to steer Steve out ag'in. Steve was goin' to pass the haul to me; Steve and I was goin' diff'runt ways—that would leave the kid sittin' pretty. The idee was that the kid'd stay on drivin' the doc's bus with a flock o' alibis, see?"

The Lily sighed. "If you guys can think of any fancy way to get yourself in the jug, you're right onto it, aint you? Now, if—"

"Never you mind about that now," said Dutch, a bit testily. He'd listened to the Lily going strong on the subtleties of crime before. "I was just givin' you the plain dope, see? There was more to it than that. But—my God, who'd 'a' thought the kid'd be so damn' dumb! He—"

"I know. He don't wait'll the house is quiet before he lets Steve in. If—"

"Yeh," said Dutch Anderson sulkily. "But the idee is they got the goods on the kid *now*. The doc comes down findin' him lookin' goofy in the middle of the parlor. Steve's got away by that time, and the kid has some silver tucked in his pockets—"

"He goin' to squeal?"

DUTCH looked at her now with a certain admiration. The Chicago Lily always came to the point with a swift and unerring precision.

"He won't," he assured her, "if we get 'im outa the mess. He's played hard, along with our say-so, on bein' jus' seventeen, and the only support of his ma, that's a widow-woman. And that's you, see. No jury. Jus' a case of talkin' to the judge. The kid's to plead guilty an' ask f'r probation, see? Jus' a few weeps, and there's fifty in it for you."

"Fifty!" said the Chicago Lily.

She brought from her pocketbook a very small and very clean handkerchief, which she passed fastidiously under her nose. It was as if there were an evil odor in the room.

"We-ell," Dutch Anderson reminded her irritably, "it aint as if we got the price of a schooner outa this. And the fifty's the kid's own money he's saved up."

"Well, I aint the one that's headed for the pen, am I? And I'm takin' no chancet, aint I? Come on, how much more's he got saved up?"

"God A'mighty! You got a heart like a hunk o' lead! What if this kid was your own brat, see? You go ag'inst all my notions o' women!"

THE Lily sniffed, daintily as a great lady in a theater.

"You an' your notions o' women aint got no more to do with me than a war in China. If the kid aint got no more saved up, you an' this Steve can sweeten the pot yourself. I don't look so swell in a un'form my own self."

"A century, then. An' not a damn' cent more. But remember—the kid's not so dumb. He might come in handy for you some day—"

And so, finally, it was agreed.

In a Denver court-room the Chicago Lily swayed in her decent black against the shoulder of a wise-eyed boy half a head taller than herself. Her hand, fluttering and pathetic in shabby black gloves, gripped the edge of the judge's bench.

"He's—he's my boy, Your Honor—my *son*! I aint given him the right chancet maybe, Your Honor, what with the washin' and all, I—oh, dear God!"

"There, there! You and your boy have been in Denver long, Mrs. Flannagan?"

Light on her feet, the Lily. "No, Your Honor." If Dutch Anderson could have been there, he'd have sucked in a little breath of admiration. "No sir; my other son sent me from N'Yawk las' month—I've got a cough, sir—"

The Chicago Lily even gave evidence of the cough, smiling through it as if it had been a joke—to crop up just then. But it racked her small and delicate body rather distressingly. . . . The Lily gave a reassuring glance at her boy, and smiled faintly. The boy squeezed her hand.

"Such a good son to me, Your Honor—"

The judge looked at the boy—looked again.

"Look here, son, didn't you come up before me in the Juvenile Court about four years ago?"

The boy sent his eyes flying to the Lily. Viciously she dug her fingers into a gloved palm. They hadn't told her about that! And now—the fool, the damn' little fool! Didn't he know he had to answer a question like that—one way or the other—yes or no—*quick!* But she herself had been a fool to mix up in small stuff like this. . . .

"Ye-es sir," the boy admitted sulkily.

"That," put in the Lily pleadingly, "was one time he ran away from home. I'd—I'd hoped he wouldn't be blamed for that now, Your Honor—"

The judge gave her a faint smile. She was confident, then, that he had seen through them both. Only once in a long while did she meet a man she couldn't fool. . . . But the judge, seeing some serviceable stuff in the boy, had let him off rather lightly. That had meant probation for him, but two years for her. . . . The worst of it was, she was on the records. It was after the Denver episode that she had shaved her head and taken to a white wig. She had studied make-up, too, until she'd made a fine art of it.

OF course the prosecuting attorney knew merely the skeleton of all this. But he had dwelt upon the episode as forcefully as possible, because it so resembled the comic tragedy now going on in the San Francisco court. "He's—he's my boy, Your Honor—my son!"

But the Chicago Lily, seeming to be listening dully to the prosecuting attorney, stared right through him to the past. Her thoughts—usually so orderly and precise and to the point—fluttered like frantic birds inside her head. That Denver kid—she ought to have remembered about him, and the wise guy back of the bench. What'd ever happened to the Denver kid? Oh, yes—he'd been sent up for croaking a guy last summer. And Dutch Anderson—he'd been a pretty good egg, though. After she got out that time, he'd staked her to Wyoming. Charley was in school there, staying with his aunt—as decent a woman as you'd ever meet in a church. She hadn't seen him for six months—and Lord, how he'd grown in that six months! Thick little stockings that he wore out at the knees

as if they'd been tissue paper. And the way he'd smiled—you wanted to hug the gizzard out of him. Her third boy Charley—

"And the next account of this woman in police records," yipped the prosecuting attorney, "concerns her activities in Chicago, her birthplace. This was in 1927, and she was wearing a white wig. But she has been identified as the same woman who operated in Denver. She—"

IN Chicago! That, of course, had been the affair of Mabel Smith. There had been five grand in that for the Lily. She'd earned it.

This time she'd gone through the preliminaries in a lawyer's office. There'd been cards face up, so to speak, on the desk that was between herself and Dinky Patterson. She'd been primed before she came there about Dinky Patterson. So there was a half-smile of understanding on her lips when she'd entered the dark little office. Back of the plain oak flat-topped desk sat Dinky Patterson himself. And at once she comprehended the source and the scope of this man's reputation. He could have got the Pope's blessing for Judas Iscariot, said the knowing ones. Well, the knowing ones weren't far wrong.

"Of course," the exponent of criminal law remarked to the Lily, "I wouldn't touch this case unless my sympathy for little Miss Smith—"

The Lily's bright eyes came up swiftly as a child's under the wrinkled lids.

"Cut it," said the Lily.

They appraised each other calmly and with considerable interest for a moment.

"Then you have some previous knowledge, correct or incorrect, on what we may call my—abilities," said the lawyer. "Suppose, then, you permit me to run over my sketchy information concerning your own career."

The Chicago Lily nodded, shaking a cigarette loose from a mashed paper packet. Courteously the attorney struck a match for her, held it to her cigarette—and the flare of light in that dim room revealed every line of her face for an instant. Dinky Patterson only needed a moment to study any face. This one was small and white and sensitive-skinned, with eyes overlarge for it. The nose of an elderly gentlewoman, and only the faintest drag of the lip. Fine hair, smooth and white, in neat little scallop under her hat. Delicate, nervous hands—the index and second fingers badly

stained with nicotine. But Dinky Patterson, like everybody else, was struck most with the remarkable eyes. Only a few women—with great capacities for good or for evil—have eyes like that. Shrewd and soft by turn, as if she had only to concentrate for a second to send bitterness or gentleness into the glance from them.

"Apparently," said Dinky Patterson, "you have been more fortunate than is customary. Physically, you're a 'type.' Little and brittle-looking—"

"And sorta homely," the Lily added impatiently. Always she had resented unnecessary palaver, even from celebrities.

"An' now," she added, "what's there in this for me?"

NOT for the first time in her life the Chicago Lily received a glance of half-reluctant admiration. With no further preliminaries, Patterson went into the details of the Smith case.

Mabel Smith! She was one of the few women the Chicago Lily had ever admired. Mabel had beautiful red hair, and her eyes were deeply blue. And her strong young body was extraordinarily beautiful—Mabel Smith knew that, and made frequent use of the knowledge. Born to the Loop, and of it—she'd been a character in Chicago long before the police had got her framed. Even then she was only twenty-one—and cornered, she was like a raging little wild beast.

She was, moreover, Jim Murphy's girl. Jim Murphy, entering with the nonchalance of long acquaintance into Patterson's office—a diamond big as a dime shining from the flat expanse of his shirt-front—had been emphatic about it.

"You get her outa this, see?" he'd said. "If you never do another damn' thing in your whole rotten life—you get her outa this, see?"

"None of that rough talk around here, Murphy!"

The big man had crumpled over the desk like a sack of meal. "I know—I know! But God, I'm crazy about her, man! I'll give yuh—"

The Chicago Lily was to have part of what Jim Murphy had promised to the lawyer. And Dinky Patterson was inclined to be generous. Rather a good deal depended on the swing of this trial—a jury trial, in which a red-haired girl was to be accused of murdering a cripple. Sticky enough mess to put your fingers into; but sticky with money, too.

"I'm not sayin' I'll help, an' I'm not sayin' I won't," opined the Chicago Lily, pulling at her third cigarette. "But it looks to me as if this frail aint got one chancet in three billion. A cripple!"

"They've certainly got it pinned on her," Dinky Patterson said thoughtfully. "At least three dozen people saw her lam this bird over the head—in one of the lowest dives in this man's town."

"Three dozen—"

Patterson anticipated. "Some of them can't be bought. There was a party from uptown, slumming—as the filthy luck would have it!"

The Chicago Lily became mildly interested. "What had this guy done to her?"

"Not a thing in God's world! She'd only seen him half a dozen times. And her defense is—you can laugh this off if you want to; I can't—her defense is that the cripple got on her nerves! She just didn't like his looks. She was half-seas over, of course; but to tell a jury about it—these red-haired women ought to be drowned when they're born."

"In which case," the Chicago Lily said softly, "neither you nor me would have so much coin stuffed away in our socks."

Her notorious companion indulged in a very near approach to a grin. Half an hour before, he had dropped all pretense of rhetoric with the Lily. As easily—albeit guardedly—they were talking together now, as if they had been comrades for years.

THERE was much to say of Mabel Smith, and not much of it to say in her behalf—save only the mention of her rather remarkable beauty. But there was this to bolster her defense: she was a character in Chicago, true; but like most characters of her sort, she only existed as a sort of bright but shadowy vision of the night life. She had no substance; there was no previous record of her, as far as Patterson could discover—and he could discover a lot—in the police records. It was quite possible to establish the Chicago Lily, some weeks before the trial, as Mabel's mother—in a rooming-house whose landlady had had previous dealings with both Dinky Patterson and Big Jim Murphy.

Separately, of course, each of the women was coached in the part. Patterson had concocted an amazing story—amazing in its very simplicity—that dove-tailed dates and incidents in the lives of both. There were artifices in the form of



Mabel Smith had caught up a bronze lamp, and brought it in one terrible stroke against the little man's head.

pet nicknames and childhood memories. And the court-room behavior was rehearsed down to a fine point that could only have been discernible to an eye like Patterson's own. The Lily in her rôle of mother went to see the girl Mabel in her cell. And even in these meetings there was artifice. The Lily had the red-haired girl in her arms, all through each interview, and in the Lily's eyes was an indescribable softness. She was, as Dinky Patterson noted with quiet satisfaction, "working up" to her big scene.

The day came then, when, steps faltering, the Chicago Lily took the stand. A distant clock had struck three—court had been convened at ten on the previous morning; and now all the State's evidence against Mabel Smith had been presented. There had been a rather horrid rustle in the room, that rustle of a mob which has been wrought up to blood lust.

The evidence against Mabel Smith had been damningly clear and convincing. A drunken girl of the night, with a temper to match the devil's own, enraged because a hapless cripple had trod on her satin slipper—goaded to murder. Actually thirty-two people had been there to witness the crime, and there were six of the most reliable of these thirty-two in court as witnesses for the prosecution. They had testified in accurate and faithful detail to the very blow that Mabel Smith had struck. She had caught up a heavy bronze lamp-stand from a near-by table and brought it in one swift,

terrible stroke against the little man's head.

"Be sworn," the clerk was commanding, right hand lifted.

This ceremony over, the Chicago Lily gave a bewildered glance toward the counsel for the defendant. Admirable—that glance. You see, Mother Smith had never been in a court-room before. She stumbled as they helped her to the witness-stand, and Patterson glanced as if in apology at the jurors. One must have patience with Mother Smith.

"What is your name?" asked Patterson, commencing the direct examination.

"Lilian Smith, sir."

"Your age?"

"I'm sixty-seven come Christmas day, sir."

"Your address?"

The address rolled off the Lily's tongue, as if mechanically. But it was evident that she was using every power to concentrate. Only her nervousness showed in the twist and turn of her black-gloved fingers. Once in a while she brought a little clean white handkerchief to her eyes, and her delicate mouth contracted a bit before she was able to resume testimony.

"What is your occupation, Mrs. Smith?" the lawyer asked gently.

"I do odd jobs, sir. I aint able to keep a job steady, 'count of my back, sir. But my daughter Mabel—"

"Keep to the questions, please, Mrs. Smith."

But the jury had had time to savor the softness in her voice when she said "my daughter Mabel."

"Does your daughter, Mabel Smith, make her home with you, Mrs. Smith?" Patterson resumed.

"Yes sir."

"Ah—did you give your consent or sanction at any time to any of the resorts which, according to the testimony, your daughter was in the habit of frequenting?"

The prosecuting attorney frowned, and several members of the jury bent forward to catch the old woman's reply.

"I—I don't understand, sir."

PATTERSON hesitated for a moment, as if to find words for so simple a soul.

"Did you, then, Mrs. Smith, allow your daughter to go out every night anywhere she wanted to go?"

The clean little handkerchief went up to the Chicago Lily's eyes. "I—oh, no, sir! But my Mabel was so pretty and young, sir—and I'm so old, so tired at nights, sir—"

"And now, Mrs. Smith, on the evening of—"

And so—on and on and on—droned the voice of the counsel for the defense. A number of times the prosecuting attorney barked objections. Occasionally these objections were overruled by the court, but they had had an effect upon the jury.

Sometimes you would have thought that Patterson himself was prosecuting the old woman on the witness-stand, so relentless was his questioning, so swift his probing. But always, although she faltered, she had extenuation for her daughter, faith in her, love for her.

And then, when the old woman was visibly shaking with weariness and anxiety and despair, the counsel for the defendant straightened his shoulders, swept a commanding glance toward the jury, and thundered at the witness:

"You know of no reason, then, Mrs. Smith, why your daughter should have brutally murdered a cripple she scarcely knew—in the presence, moreover, of thirty-odd witnesses? You know of no reason for that, Mrs. Smith?"

"Well, I—her pa was a cripple, sir." The little white handkerchief tore in her hands, and so quiet was the courtroom that every man on the jury could hear the thin rip of it. "Oh, her pa was a cripple, sir!"

"Her father is dead, Mrs. Smith?"

"Yes sir. When my baby—when Mabel was ten. Just so little and so pretty,

—sir—" A trembling black-gloved hand marked off from the floor the height of the child Mabel. Then the fingerprints of that hand crept up to the old white cheek, and everyone in the court followed the gesture. On the old woman's face was horror, and the sickening fear of some never-forgotten memory.

"Had she any reason to hate her father, her crippled father, Mrs. Smith?"

"Oh—yes sir! He was strong, for all his leg—and he beat her—he beat both of us somethin' cruel, sir. She was always afraid to speak to him, sir, but he thought she was makin' fun of him, sir—he was that mean. An' from the bed he died on, he shook his fist at her—her tremblin' in the doorway, sir—an' says—he says—"

"Mrs. Smith! Pull yourself together if you can, please. What did the defendant's father say to her then, Mrs. Smith?"

The Chicago Lily spoke then in a choked, rasping voice that carried to every corner of the crowded court-room.

"He says: 'It's a cripple that curses you now, an' it's a cripple that'll knock the sneer off your face some day.' An' he swore, sir, somethin' dreadful. Her little face went white, sir, an' she fell all in a heap—"

AT this point the defendant covered her face with her hands. And the Chicago Lily, shaken, turned piteous eyes to her questioner.

"Are you inferring, Mrs. Smith, that because this girl hated her father, who was a cripple, that she should be forgiven for *murdering* another cripple? A man who had never harmed her?"

The district attorney was on his feet, shouting: "I object to that as irrelevant, incompetent, immaterial and prejudicial in character—"

The court sustained the objection; whereupon the Chicago Lily, being questioned again, went on:

"Whenever my Mabel got excited, sir, she'd talk about that. I couldn't seem to make her believe her pa couldn't really've laid a curse on her that way, sir. She'd go an' dream about cripples—and whenever she got excited an' saw a cripple, sir—"

"You mean, Mrs. Smith, that being under the influence of alcohol on the night of the crime, she confused the crippled boy with this unfortunate early memory—"

"I object!" howled the district attor-

ney. "Your Honor, the counsel for the defendant deliberately—"

There was uproar in the court-room, calmed finally by the racket of the gavel against the bench. But during those five minutes the sympathy of the room had definitely veered. For the first time since her arrest Mabel Smith stood in a light not altogether harsh. You could visualize her as a pretty, frightened little red-haired child—trembling under the curse of a half-crazy crippled father. You could imagine her carrying the memory of that curse with her through the years. You could think of her as being led astray by evil companions, too much for a frail mother to cope with. Likewise you could think of her as intoxicated, suddenly seeing through blurred eyes this man with the twisted leg—reverting to that old horror—

BUT for the second time in her career, the Chicago Lily had played in bad luck.

The State was too clever for Dinky Patterson, inexplicably enough; for with the onslaught of rebuttal testimony, the prosecuting attorney produced sufficient evidence that Mabel Smith's father had been a humble artisan, sound in body and in mind—that Mabel Smith had lived not with a mother but with, variously, a mail bandit, a café musician, a man known as "Mr. M." and half a dozen others. The Chicago Lily was accused of perjury, and tried. . . . There had been three years in State's prison. . . .

"And this woman," shouted the prosecuting attorney in the San Francisco court-room, "was later proved to be the woman known as 'Mother,' 'Chicago Lil' and 'the Chicago Lily.' She has thrown mud on the fair name of the legal profession; she has jeered at justice at the very moment she faced a judge's bench with tears in her eyes; she has perjured her immortal soul a thousand times for the sake of a few filthy dollars in her pocket! She has served terms in Colorado and in Illinois, and if there is any justice in California, she will serve a third term in our own State's prison."

There was more of this. The prosecuting attorney was anxious that his name should be in the papers that night, this sort of publicity being more than a little useful. But the Chicago Lily heard little of it, if any at all. Her eyes, shining with tears, were fixed on the judge.

"But Charley's my own grandson, Your Honor," she whispered, almost

painfully. "He—I—he's my boy—I kep' sendin' him money—"

The attorney had a little nip of sarcasm for this. "That's a likely sort of story, isn't it, Your Honor?"

The Chicago Lily, trying to find words—sacred words, words she hadn't used before—faltered before this sarcasm. And then, with one last supreme effort, she squared her slim shoulders and stood straight and proud before the bench.

"I'm what you call bad, Your Honor, but I aint so bad as some people suppose. I aint dumb, neither. I aint so dumb that I don't know a *likly story*. Why, say, this here's the kind o' thing that just does happen! I seen it again an' again, sir. All the people that play with dirt, Your Honor, they get some o' their own kind o' dirt back at 'em in the end. I seen it happen again an' again. Why, back in Chi—"

Heaven knows, she'd listened to enough harangues from counsels-for-the-defense in her own day! And she knew more than most of them put together. So she told, now, of the people who played with dirt. She told of the dirt she'd played with herself. She told strange, sordid, impudent, evil tales that no grandmother should find it necessary to recount before her boy. But she told them well—she told them convincingly.

The judge played with the pencil in his hand. He looked rather tired and rather old—and very wise.

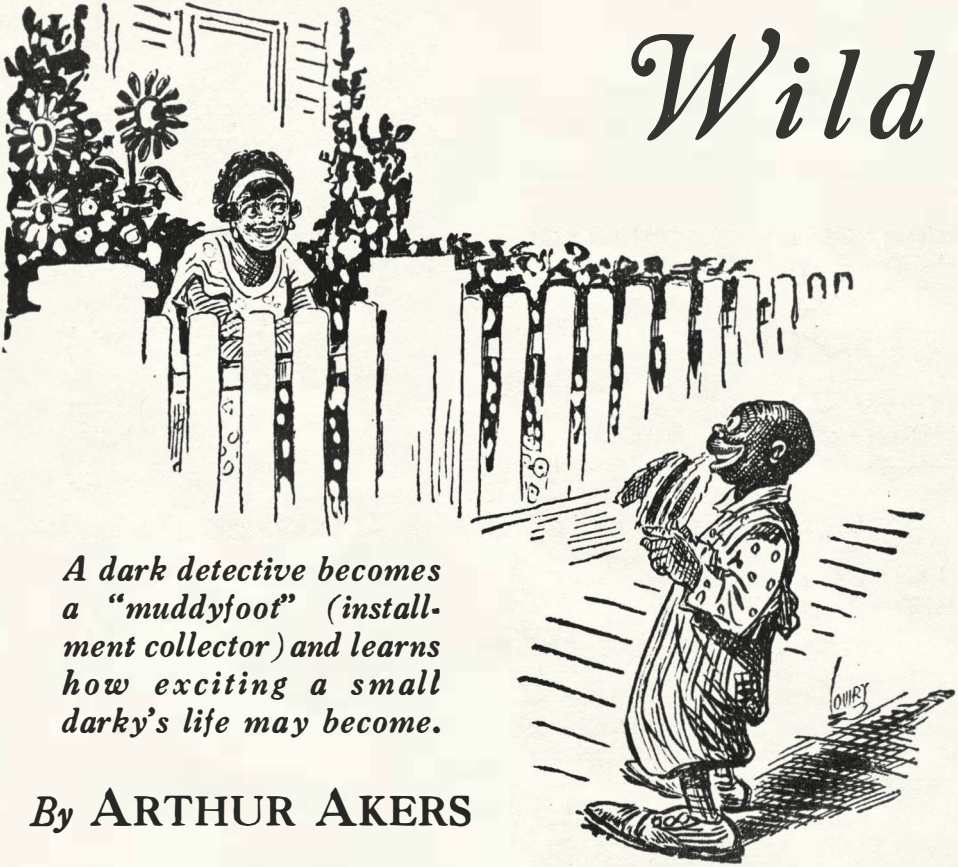
The Chicago Lily stopped short. He hadn't even been listening. She might have known he'd be the last one to believe a liar.

THE judge's eyes were fixed upon the third boy Charley. He had seen the darkening red that had crept over the boy's cheeks as the Chicago Lily talked. And he had seen the look in the boy's eyes. There might have been admiration, if this had only been the Chicago Lily. But this old woman was the boy's grandmother. Duly the judge appraised the shame that was in the eyes of the boy Charley.

But now the old woman in black had slumped into a little, beaten heap in the witness-box. The judge took one of her hands in his—nor did he seem to notice, now, the glaring and incongruous stains of nicotine.

"You'd better find a little house in town, Mrs. Heath, for you and the boy. You understand—you're both on probation now."

Wild



A dark detective becomes a "muddyfoot" (installment collector) and learns how exciting a small darky's life may become.

By ARTHUR AKERS

KEEP on lappin' up all dat wild-owl milk round de speak-easy," criticised "Loose Change" Jackson unkindly as Bugwine Breck eased a small head through a big door, "and somebody gwine have to hold a mirror in front yo' mouth, see is you dead *both* ways from de neck."

Mr. Breck lowered his pint-sized frame gingerly into a splint-bottom chair and groaned. "Old owl milk must have went sour," he attempted diagnosis of his difficulties. "I ricollects eve'ything up to de time I starts playin' de bull-fiddle in de church—"

"*Dat wuz time before last,*" corrected Loose Change scornfully. "You done hired yo'self out since—"

"Says *huh?*"

"Aint you remember Samson G. Bates hirin' you?"

"Wuz *dat* who it wuz?" Relief crossed the pained face of Mr. Breck. "Knewed all mawnin' I wuz workin' for somebody; jest couldn't figure out who it was!"

"Samson hired you, in Gladstone's old job. Gladstone git fired for bein' dumb."

Fresh details bothered Bugwine. Samson G. Bates was Baptist Hill's man of many businesses. "Samson hired me do-

in' whut?" he delved further for definiteness.

"Muddyfootin' for he fu'niture store."

"Hot dawg!" Mr. Breck brightened.

"Muddyfooting," as installment-collecting is known in darkest Alabama, gave a boy access to all of Baptist Hill's best back doors. Samson sold to the women, and now Bugwine Breck would collect from them. Mr. Breck creased a frayed and faded blue overall leg carefully between a splay thumb and finger in preparation.

"Collects noble," he celebrated his commercial elevation, "soon as I accumulates Gladstone and finds out de low-down on de job."

"In dat case, gives you check on account my ownsef," continued Mr. Jackson grudgingly, "soon as gits me some mo' checks."

Knots re-furrowed Bugwine's brow. "How-come 'checks?'" he puzzled.

"Checks on de *bank*, ign'ant! Big man like me, instead of all time messin' wid money, jest write out a check; bank pay off instead of me."

Mr. Breck's eyes glistened admiringly. So that was it! No wonder Ammonia Jackson had all that new furniture—old bank was paying for it!

Owl Milk

Illustrated by
Everett Lowry

Which reminded him: "Ducktooth Carnes' wife Emma got a whole pa'cel of new fu'niture, too, here lately."

Mr. Jackson's brow darkened betrayingly. "Yeah," he grumbled. "Dat's half de trouble I is in!"

"How-come Emma's fu'niture is yo' trouble?"

"Account old bee done bit her—one dem social bees. Her and my wife, 'Monia, got a big waw on."

"War?"

"Means is 'Monia throw a party, Emma throw a fit. Is Emma give a *re*-ception, 'Monia give a dance. Is Emma buy a new bed-slat, 'Monia got to gallop out and buy a bureau and four-five chairs. 'Bout to bust me and de bank, both."

Bugwine blinked. So prominence had its penalties! But, at that, his pressing need now was to see Gladstone, and find out what his new job was—before Samson found out that he didn't know.

The third fried-fish stand combed by Bugwine revealed the seven-foot Gladstone; he was distinguished by a shape like an interrogation-mark, a high voice, and a low mental r.p.m.

"Somebody say fish good for de brains," outlined Gladstone at the interruption of Bugwine's entrance.

"Better throw yo'self a tooth over a couple of whales, den. Loose-Change jest tellin' me you so dumb dat I is got yo' old job now, muddyfootin'."

"Been tryin' to study up a way to git myse'f back in good wid Samson," confessed Mr. Smith above the denuded framework of his channel-cat.

"Best way for you to git right," Bugwine seized opportunity, "is give me de low-down on muddyfootin' dem Baptist Hillers. How Samson work it?"

"Samson 'collects or cripples,'" quoted Mr. Smith painfully. "And he jest as liable to cripple de collector as de customer, is somep'n aint suit him."

"S'pose de customer aint got it?"

"Den Samson send you back wid de truck to 'cumulate de fu'niture. He keep one dem liens wrop' round eve'ything. Even is dey jest owe for part, he pulls all."

Mr. Breck grew more bug-eyed at this glimpse of the seamier side of business.

"Workin' for Samson," summarized Gladstone, "you gives satisfaction or you's sunk."

Meanwhile, in his furniture store on the Hill, that soured business-man, Samson G. Bates, scowled above his ledger. Turn-over was bad and collections were worse. For with Samson the business-cycle ran: sale, delinquency, repossession; re-sale, *ad infinitum*—with the real profits beginning to appear after the third re-sale of the same article.

His scowl deepened now in ferocity: the forenoon, he discovered, was half gone and his new collector still had not reported for duty.

YET, speaking of angels— Nattily attired in his flap-crowned straw hat, two left shoes, and a much-larger white-gentleman's shank-length linen plus-fours, Mr. Breck now presented himself, suitcase in hand.

"Bugwine Breck—r'arin' to collect!" he announced his presence and purpose.

Mr. Bates heaved himself heavily to his feet. He weighed two hundred, spoke bass, and had a cold eye for collectors—particularly his own.

"Whut de suitcase for?" he eyed that object malevolently.

"P-put de money in," Bugwine betrayed an optimism that was already taking to the boats beneath Mr. Bates' glare.

"Last boy I has collectin'," rumbled Samson pointedly, "aint got no sense and 'initiative."

Bugwine waived "initiative." "All broke out wid brains," he confined himself to words he understood.

"'Collects or cripples,' in my fu'niture business," continued Samson firmly. "Customers remits, or I repossesses. Keeps a lien on eve'ything. And aint no profit selling piece of fu'niture jest *once*—it's de repeat business dat counts. Dey pays or I pulls—aint keer how good-lookin' a gal is or how loud she hollers."

Mr. Breck swallowed twice. It took a hard-boiled egg to muddyfoot for this Samson!

Mr. Bates fumbled with one stack of papers on his desk. Then he picked up another. "Keeps two piles," he referred to them. "One's bills, one's checks—*bum* checks. Me and de Sheriff 'tends to de checks; you 'tends to de bills."

"Rallies noble round de bills!" Bugwine made further effort to establish himself solidly in Samson's good graces.

"You better! Now, Muddyfoot, go *muddyfoot!* —Startin' wid dis here four-dollars bill against Emma Carnes, over on Ash Street."

"Loose-Change Jackson, over dar on Ash Street, say *he* gwine gimme check, too," volunteered Muddyfoot Breck ingratiatingly.

"Whut kind of check? He's fur back on he bill now—"

"Bank check, he say—"

Samson snorted. "Listen, louse!" he barked. "Learnin' a boy like Loose Change Jackson to write is jest de same as unlocking de door to de jail-house for him. Gittin' fed up wid dem checks of his'n, specially after he git hisself a wife like dat 'Monia woman."

Bugwine back-tracked hastily. "Aint no class to 'Monia," he concurred diplomatically.

"Sho aint! Git no meaner dan she is, and dey p'izens dey ownselfs and dies. Git a chance to, too, and she'll make a bigger monkey out of you dan Gawd done. Now, git!"

MR. BRECK got. But when halfway up Baptist Hill, he garnered a bit of gossip that gave him pause. Loose Change Jackson—manifestly under pressure—was his informant. "Aint mind flingin' a party when dey aint crowd me wid it," he grumbled loudly. "But 'Monia done step on de gas too fast dis time."

Bugwine fanned-out both ears for any dirt that might be fixing to get dished.

"Grand Wuthymost Matron de women's lodge—from Boligee," Loose Change resentfully bulletined, "git herself a notion to come to town sudden. Den Emma hear about it before 'Monia is, and put out invites for a big *re*-ception to her at four 'clock today—"

"Sounds like Emma got a hawss on 'Monia," admired Mr. Breck.

"Is, twel 'Monia done shoot off a *bigger* gun," Mr. Jackson further reported the social warfare's newest engagement, "by invitin' all de same ones to a bigger blowout to de Wuthymost Matron, at her house, at *three*. Dat make Emma's party

nothin' but de concert after de main show done over at our house."

"Sho is a hawss on Emma," veered Mr. Breck. "But Emma still got a party—at four. Maybe she'll go over strong wid de Wuthymost Matron yit—"

"Dat's whut's still pesterin' 'Monia," confessed Loose Change darkly. "She busy now tryin' figure out one mo' way to mess up Emma, jest to cinch it."

But Mr. Breck's professional instincts stirred. "Says you wuz gwine gimme check on yo' fu'niture bill," he reminded. "I aims to make myself solid wid Samson, pushin' collections."

"Aint been workin' for Samson but a hour—and you gittin' jest like him," rebuked Mr. Jackson. "All time thinkin' 'bout money!"

"All right, gimme nine bucks and I quits thinkin' 'bout it."

"Gittin' rid of you is cheap at nine bucks. Stand back while I writes de check!" And it was done forthwith.

With the check of Loose Change Jackson securely pocketed, Bugwine shuffled farther up the Hill—a hill already beginning to buzz at its sun-blistered back doors with gossip of the newest battle imminent in an old war. Midway up it, Bugwine encountered his predecessor.

"Whut Samson say 'bout me?" Gladstone betrayed his chief concern.

"Plenty. Den he start conferrin' wid me and forgit you."

"Sho is wish I could git back in good wid him," mourned Gladstone. "Meals gittin' so fur apart I cain't hardly stretch from breakfast to dinner no mo'."

"Aint no way for you to git in good wid Samson no more," deliberated the inflated Bugwine, "excep'n' to git mixed up accidental in somep'n whut'll pleasure him—"

"Like gittin' my back broke!" interjected Mr. Smith unhappily.

"You might go along wid me," hazarded Bugwine helpfully, "and he'p me collect from Emma Carnes."

Approach to the Carnes' kitchen confirmed Loose Change's report. All was bustle and stir there. The smoke of social battle entered Mr. Breck's nostrils and stirred him to strategy. "Looks like you is fixin' put over a fast one on 'Monia, Miss Emma," he greeted the latter social leader at her door.

"Entertainin' de Wuthymost Grand Matron at four o'clock, is all," admitted Emma pridefully. Then the shadow: "—Is she can still eat, after dat Ammonia Jackson git through tryin' to crab

my party by givin' one her ownself a hour sooner."

Beauty in distress ever moved Bugwine. "All de Wuthymost Matrons I ever see," he drew gallantly on personal experience, "can eat *two* parties widout ever loosenin' dey belt."

But Emma's distraught eyes had strayed absently—and disapprovingly—elsewhere. "Whut dat wid you?" she indicated Gladstone's gloomy length.

"Gladstone."

"Dat whut I's skeered of. He e't up a whole party I wuz fixin' to give, last time he come hangin' round."



bucks," Bugwine struggled to give the devil his due.

"Den beat it!" Emma directed.

"Is you git it?" Gladstone questioned anxiously as they cleared the gateway.



Mr. Bates heaved himself heavily to his feet. He weighed two hundred, spoke bass, and had a cold eye for collectors—particularly his own.

The starving Gladstone involuntarily snapped at and engulfed a passing locust.

"He aint eat nothin' no more now," explained Mr. Breck reassuringly. "He jest gwine about wid me, tryin' to study up some way to git hisself back in right wid Samson again. I comes to collect de four dollars due Samson today on yo' fu'niture."

Emma went down into the Rayon First National, and came up with two dollars.

"Four dollars, de paper say," pointed out Bugwine.

"—And *two* dollars, de stockin' say," retorted Emma acidly. "Gives Samson de rest when I gits it, by Ducktooth."

Mr. Breck floundered. Samson was a stickler for full payments: they paid or he pulled the furniture, old instructions said. Leaving a boy puzzled—

"Bet you aint git *dat* much from dat four-flushin' Loose Change and 'Monia, neither," snapped Emma irritably.

"Yeah, he gimme check for nine

"Gits part of it. Two bucks—"

"Samson sho gwine be sore," forecast Gladstone gloomily.

Mr. Breck fidgeted at having his own forebodings confirmed—and had an inspiration. "How 'bout you takin' Samson in dis check of Loose Change's," he suggested, "while I studies out dis two bucks' business?"

Gladstone debated. "Anything Samson like, it's gittin' money," he decided. "Maybe I make myself a hit wid him, den. Gimme de check. Meets you in 'bout a hour, in front de barber-shop speak-easy."

Four doors farther down Ash Street, Mr. Breck encountered something new and flattering in the form of Ammonia Jackson, hanging carelessly over her front gate in a nonchalance that belied her reported imminent social display.

"Hears you is a big business-man wid Samson now, Bugwine," she greeted him.

Bugwine broke into a strut. Ordinarily, Ammonia didn't notice him.

"'Collects or cripples,'" he gave his countersign.

"Aint it so! How you and Samson gittin' on?"

"Aint know yit," Bugwine betrayed his main worry. That two-dollar part payment of Emma's kept rankling.

"Way to git on de good side of Samson," rejoined Ammonia surely, "is make a grand-stand play. Do dat, and you's solid wid him for life."

"Grand-stand how?"

"Show some 'nitiative—do whut Samson would do, widout him tellin' you."

Bugwine recalled that word *initiative*. Samson himself had used it: now he knew what it meant.

"You looks kind of wore off above de ankles, too," Ammonia seemingly shifted the subject. "Why aint you step in and lap yo'self up a drink? Sort of git yo'self organized—and tell me how you is makin' out collectin' from dat four-flushin' Emma Carnes."

FORTY minutes later Bugwine could still walk anything but a tight-rope—as he had just proven by successfully steering himself through a kitchen littered with preparations for crushing Emma Carnes socially by a party designed to put a Worthmost Matron on a bicarbonate-of-soda diet an hour before she could reach Emma.

"Whuff! Sho laps noble!" pronounced Mr. Breck thickly, as he piloted a pair of widely spaced left shoes between Ammonia Jackson's gateposts, outbound with a full cargo of wild-owl milk and wilder ideas—both craftily furnished by Ammonia. Particularly the ideas.

Three blocks up Baptist Hill, depressing reaction made itself felt, however. Through the clouds that enveloped him, Bugwine perceived that his standing with Samson was still imperiled. Samson had said collect four dollars from Emma Carnes, and he had collected two. Ammonia had spent thirty minutes instilling in him what that meant when Samson saw him. Now only a grand-stand play—to use her exact words—lay between himself and Gladstone and trouble. Resource and initiative, in brief; with his duty in the case of Emma Carnes growing clearer and more distasteful every minute.

This in turn called now for a conference with the more experienced Gladstone; who proved easy to find, due to his having miscalculated the resistive powers of a too-long empty stomach.

"Brains workin' noble—jest my laigs lays down on me," Mr. Smith explained his position alongside an overflowing ash-can at the curb, a scant half-block from the fatal barber-shop.

"Is Samson take Loose Change's check all right?" Bugwine sounded out the situation around the edges first. Old head was beginning to whirl right now!

"Took it and bit it—and gallop to'ds de bank," summarized Gladstone sleepily. "Us aint solid wid him yit."

"Brains is all us needs to do dat now—and a grand-stand play whut's all set."

The pronoun penetrated deeper into the Gladstonian fog. "*Us?*" he fumbled.

"Gits a swell idea," continued Mr. Breck alcoholically, "from dat Ammonia Jackson. Make me and you stand in good wid Samson when us pulls it."

Mr. Smith proved in no condition to grasp ideas easily. "Pull whut?" he hiccoughed hazily.

"Grand-stand play," explained Bugwine, propping himself upright with the aid of the can. "Nish—nish—'*nitiative* does it. Do whut Samson would do, widout him tellin' us."

Gladstone got his feet half under him. "Samson collects or cripples," continued Bugwine laboriously. "Dey pays or he pulls all de fu'niture—on dat lien. Us do de same, and git in solid wid him."

"Understands eve'ything excep'n whut you means," confessed Gladstone.

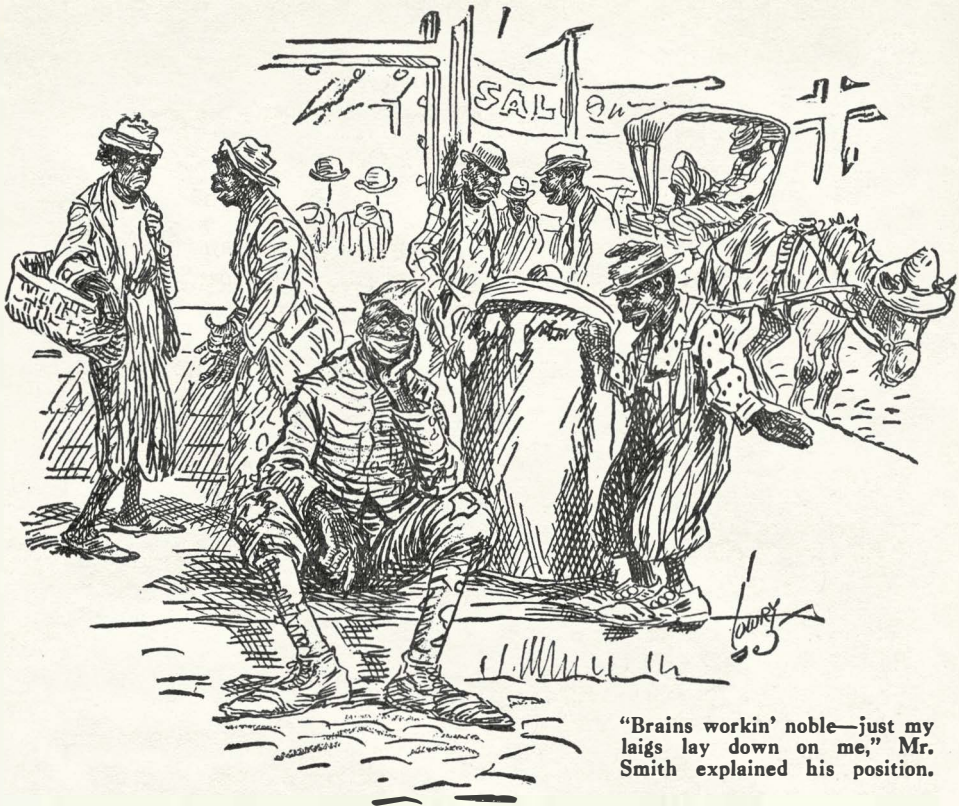
"Listen! Emma Carnes owed Samson four bucks. She pay him two. Dat make Samson sore, is he know 'bout it. So us aint tell him—us jest goes and grand-stand plays, haulin' all de fu'niture out of Emma's house, back to Samson's store. Dat make a hit wid him, and me and you is in solid wid Samson for thinkin' it up first, see?"

But light glimmered disturbingly in Gladstone's personal darkness. "But Emma fixin' to pull a party to de Wuthymost Matron right away," he objected. "Aint it gum up Emma's party is her fu'niture all gone when de Wuthymost Matron and all dem other lodge sisters comes?"

Mr. Breck endeavored to give a novel thought due consideration, but lacked the necessary facilities. "Ammonia aint say nothin' 'bout *dat*," he achieved at length. 'Sides, wuzn't so drunk, you wouldn't think up all dat foolishness. How yo' laigs?"

Gladstone instituted tests. "Little loose at de bottoms, is all," he reported.

"Too much owl milk done mess you



"Brains workin' noble—just my laigs lay down on me," Mr. Smith explained his position.

up in de hoofs," reproved Bugwine thickly. "Stay sober like me, and you got mo' head left for businesh."

But progress of the pair toward Samson's store and moving-van proved difficult, due to sudden confusing complications incident to mixing owl milk and music. Unable to account satisfactorily for the latter by squeezing himself between the legs of taller and close-standing spectators along the crowded curbs of Ash Street, Mr. Breck called lustily for broadcasts from his taller associate. "Whut all dat fuss gwine by?" he demanded.

"Alex Dinghouse's one-man band—playin' in de back seat of Latham Hooper's taxi," reported Gladstone groggily, "—wid—wid hipp'potamus follerin' behind. Look like Loose Change Jackson settin' alongside Alex, 'sistin' wid de drum."

"Huccome de band?"

"Ugh-oh!" Mr. Smith achieved further focus of fast-wavering eyes and intellect. "Dat must be de Wuthymost Matron all swoll' up and ridin' to de lodge-hall wid Ammonia and Latham on de front seat."

"Dat means us aint got no time to fool around!" Urgency seized Mr.

Breck by the scruff of his spiritual neck. "Old business comin' to a head."

"Old owl milk weakenin', too," demurred Mr. Smith. "Let's us lap up a little more, back of de barber-shop here."

"Reorganizes myself a little, too," concurred Bugwine, turning in enthusiastically at the designated door. "Us got a heap of heavy liftin' on at Emma's."

Gladstone drowned any disagreeable references to hard labor in a tin cup of a liquid that not only cheered but ate holes in the cup. "Sho wish I could git in good wid Samson again—and start eatin'," he resumed his regular plaint.

"Forgit eatin' and ric'lect trucks," directed Bugwine officiously. "Stick around wid me, and you gits in good wid Samson in no time now. Headin' dat way!"

Goggle-eyed and dazed, the pair came again to Ash Street.

"Whar at de house? R'arin' to move fu'niture!" demanded Gladstone manfully.

Bugwine watched Baptist Hill revolving upside down. "Here de place now," he heard himself through the fog. "Recognizes de party. Throw yo' hat in de door, first, Gladstone, see is nobody home, while I backs up de truck."

"Throw whose door through whut hat?" interrogated Mr. Smith indistinctly. "Aims to crope up to de door and look. Aint never been shot yit."

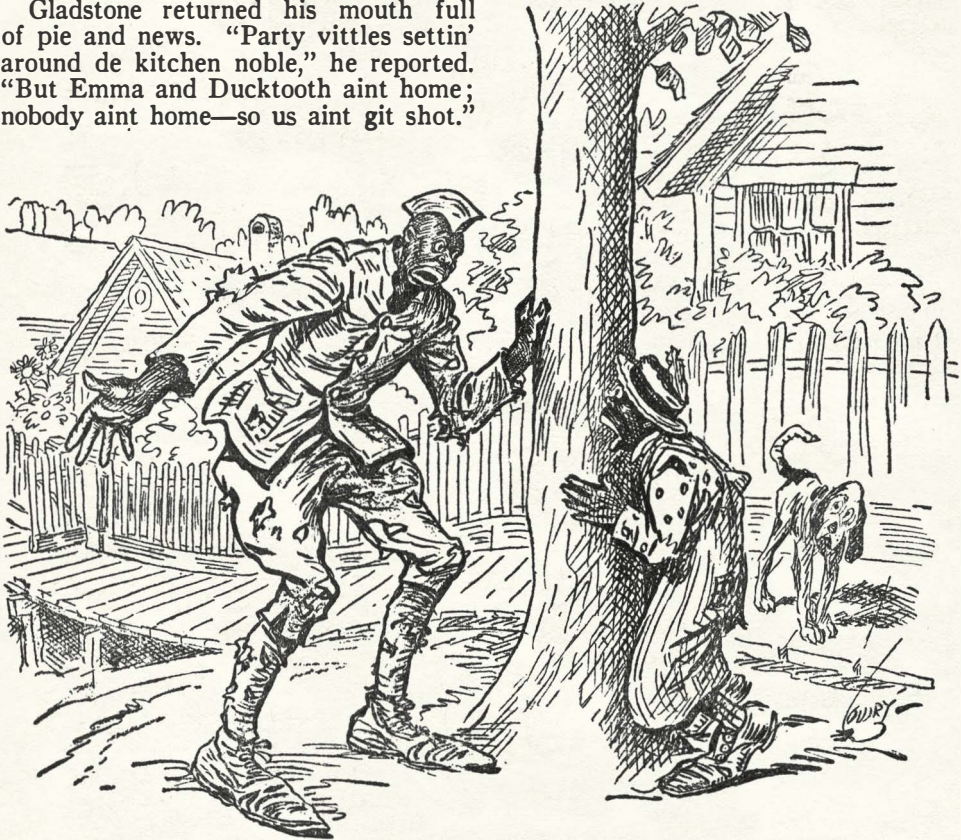
"Suit yo'self," quarreled Mr. Breck magnanimously. "Us got to start movin' all dat fu'niture, repossessin' it widout no fuss is us can he'p it."

Gladstone returned his mouth full of pie and news. "Party vittles settin' around de kitchen noble," he reported. "But Emma and Ducktooth aint home; nobody aint home—so us aint git shot."

Looks jest like him. I kind of hate to git good-looker like Emma in a jam, but business is business!"

Gladstone stirred uneasily; something vague was also stirring in his brain.

"Sho will put Ammonia Jackson on top de pile: she scum up de idea," reflected



Bugwine clutched at a tree, and went into a tail-spin. Interrogations mingled devastatingly with the owl milk.

"Luck, rally round!" caroled Bugwine unsteadily. "Us fixin' git solid wid Samson. Emma pays or us pulls! Grab hold dat sofa and heave, Gladstone!"

In its liquid form, Alabama corn liquor works fast—both ways. Hence, glancing backward shortly into the well-filled van, rumbling merrily if erratically toward Samson's store, Mr. Breck found his mental mists clearing.

"Boy, us wuz lucky!" he addressed his fellow-aspirant for Mr. Bates' favor. "Repossesses eve'y stick of fu'niture Emma got, and not a shot fired! Sho would like see Emma pullin' a party now, in a empty house!"

"Aims to lay low twel Ducktooth calm down some wid dat rabbit-gun of his'n," Gladstone added a gloomier note.

"Ducktooth'll think Samson done it.

Mr. Breck as he backed the van to Samson's back door.

But Gladstone was still stuck on a previous mental dead center. "Sho feels curious to find out how Emma gittin' on, pullin' a party in a empty house," he sighed.

"You aint think nobody'd invite *you* to it, is you?" Mr. Breck surveyed disgustedly the scow-footed length of his gangling aide, still clad in a tattered uniform of a private of the A. E. F.

"Well, us could be kind of walkin' by, and look in—"

From which idea grew a reconnoitering party.

"Keep dem feets fixed so you can call on 'em sudden," directed Mr. Breck strategically, as they neared the ravaged residence of Emma Carnes.

Rounding the corner nearest their goal revealed disturbance there. The block was a-boil, with the crowd centering at the house of Carnes.

"*Ugh-oh!*" escaped Gladstone. "Us is done play hell!"

"Sho is a gang of 'em!" admired Bugwine apprehensively.

"Us done give 'em somep'n to gang *about!*" crowed Mr. Smith pridefully. "When us gits solid wid Samson, aint leave nothin' but de kitchen sink."

BUT just here furrows appeared between Mr. Breck's brows. There was an unaccountable note in the clamor ahead. He quickened his pace. Then, squarely in front of Emma's doorway, the incredible thrust itself upon him. He rubbed his eyes, but what he saw was still the same.

"*You git on ahead and look—see whut you sees!*" he hissed to the equally bewildered Gladstone.

Gladstone obeyed, then hastened back, aghast. "Grand Wuthymost Matron, and Emma, and eve'ybody dar," he gasped. "Pullin' a party—and *de house plumb full of fu'niture again!*"

Bugwine clutched at a tree, and went into a tail-spin. Interrogations mingled devastatingly with the owl milk. He and Gladstone had just finished denuding this house of Emma's furniture under Samson's lien—and here it was reported fully furnished again already!

"Trouble wid gittin' a drunk to he'p you,"—he whirled on the gaping Gladstone,—"*he keeps on seein' things when dey aint nothin' to see. Let me look!*"

But Mr. Breck also could only return in consternation—and with an explanation.

"Dat house full of fu'niture," he delivered himself of the latter, "*beca'ze us aint never took it out!*"

The already weakened intellect of that dim bulb, Gladstone, snapped under the strain. "You—you means," he gulped, "*dat I aint carry dat sofa and all dem beds and things to de van and haul 'em back to Samson's?*"

Bugwine was limping in anguished circles before the inescapable. "Cain't mean nothin' else," he mourned before revelation at its worst. "Us aint moved *nothin'*. You jest gits a overdose of owl milk and *thunk* you moved all dat fu'niture. . . . And I believed you. Boy, us aint got nowhars but backwards, gittin' solid wid Samson now!"

The stricken Gladstone propped him-

self feebly against a telephone-pole and watched Ash Street whirl about his head. In his ears was a ringing, and the crash of his dreams concerning reinstatement in the good graces of Samson—including meals. He could understand everything except why his back was so sore, if he hadn't moved anything.

"Wonder whut us done wid all dat fu'niture us aint move?" he scabbled weakly in the corners of his mind.

"Tells you us aint moved none!" Bugwine barked impatiently.

But when a thick-skull like Gladstone got hold of an idea he couldn't let it go until it thundered. "Let's go look some more at whut I aint done," he proposed. "Feels in my back like I done moved a whole store-full of fu'niture."

"Dat jest de owl milk lingerin' round! But come on," Bugwine surrendered peevishly.

Back at Samson's store, however, startling developments again flung Bugwine far beyond his mental depth. For at a distance of a block, Mr. Bates could be heard bellowing angrily in his best bass, for Mr. Breck.

"*Ugh-oh!*" quavered Mr. Smith weakly. He had heard Samson G. Bates in full cry after a collector before. And now they were particularly vulnerable—he and Bugwine—with their cherished grand-stand play just gone wrong.

MR. BRECK drove himself reluctantly to face his employer, Gladstone following, wall-eyed and skittish. You gave Samson service or you were sunk.

"Here me," admitted Bugwine uneasily.

"Is dat so!" boomed Mr. Bates belligerently. "But whut I craves to know aint whar *is* you, but whar *wuz* you?"

Bugwine blinked: that had been both-ering him too!

"Whut kind of collector is you, no-how?" Mr. Bates replaced an unanswered question with another.

Mr. Breck swallowed and eyed his feet. "Gits two bucks from Emma Carnes," he defended. "Couldn't git four, like you say on de paper. Two wuz all she had in her stockin'—"

"Emma Carnes! *Emma Carnes?* Who said nothin' about Emma Carnes? She done come in wid two dollars Ducktooth winned at de shootin'-gallery, and say you done got de other two. Whut *I's* talkin' about is Loose Change Jackson—whut you git from him—"

"Gits bank check," interrupted Bugwine in relief. He had shone there! "For nine bucks. Aint Gladstone give it to you?"

"Bank check? Rubber check, you means!" roared Samson. "And it happen jest once too often now, too! I aint fool wid dat four-flusher no mo'. You git out and crank up de truck, and go *pull eve'y stick of fu'niture him and 'Monia's got!* You hear me?"

Bugwine leaped convulsively. He glanced in alarm at the clock on Samson's wall.

"Pull 'Monia's fu'niture?" he stutted. Sobriety was lending enormity to the act. "Why, she—she jest is finish her party to de Wuthymost Matron—"

Mr. Breck paused in the grip of inadequacy. He had become conscious of a distant disturbance of the peace—one that he now realized had been going on for some time, high-pitched, hysterical—from the direction of Ash Street.

"Shet up!" Mr. Bates' bellow brought him back to the furniture business with a start. "Business is business. I collects or cripples, and you knows it. Dey pays or you pulls de fu'niture—startin' immediate."

He was striding wrathfully back through his cluttered storeroom, with Bugwine trotting agonizedly beside him, and Gladstone shuffling gloomily in their wake.

Then suddenly it was Samson's turn to show amazement, as he neared the rear doorway. "Why—why—whut? How? Huh?" he sputtered, bulging-eyed, at what he saw there.

And in a flash, what bewildered Samson enlightened and dazzled Bugwine. He saw all! —How owl milk might be mightier than the mind; how an awful error committed under its influence might also hoist a social schemer by her own petard, and solidify two muddypoos in Samson's graces as men of initiative after all—provided a boy grabbed the credit for it fast enough! For now he knew what had caused those hysterical screams—and where he and Gladstone, at a socially most-inopportune hour, had got all this furniture that was even now melting Mr. Bates' amazement into approbation.

"Yeah," he heard himself boasting to Samson and the stars, "dat whut me and Gladstone 'lowed: Business is business—all de time us wuz repossessin' dis here fu'niture, along about two o'clock, out of *Ammonia Jackson's* house!"

The Abducted Premier

*A specially interesting
adventure of the Free
Lances in Diplomacy.*

By CLARENCE
HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

MUCH to the surprise of Londoners in the West End, a high board fence had risen all around the famous Jacobean mansion in Park Lane known throughout Europe as the town residence of the Marquess of Lyónesse, and what little could be seen of the roof-cornices showed a gang of men at work demolishing the house. There was no opening in the fence on the Park Lane side—at the rear of the property on Park Street, there was a single heavy gate through which the lorries full of débris passed out. The gang of men at work upon the premises were said to be strangers in London working by agreement with the local labor-unions. And nobody was admitted inside the fence, night or day, until he had convinced the superintendent that he had lawful business there.

For several mornings a well-dressed man with a black beard, hair cut *en brosse* and thick-lensed spectacles—accompanied by another who gave the impression of being a commercial man in the city—had besieged the gate with one excuse or another trying to get inside and watch the demolition proceedings, but without success. They had tried to look over upon the property from neighboring houses, but permission had been curtly refused by the owners. Time after time they had explained to the gatekeeper that they desired to purchase the prop-



Like a wraith, His Lordship made his way to the rear door of the villa.

erty if he would put them in touch with the owner—and finally they put this up to the superintendent when he chanced to be at the gate.

The superintendent turned and glanced at a man in a raincoat and felt hat, who was talking to one of the workmen inside. Then he said:

"The gentleman yonder is by way of being a representative of the owner; I might speak to him and see if he has time for a word with you. —No! . . . You'll *not* come inside! Wait here outside the gate!"

The man in the raincoat finally came out. He was dressed in tweeds which had the appearance of having been out in all sorts of weather. "What is it you wish, sir?" he asked.

"We wouldt like to make t'e offer for thiss broperty—if you put us in touch mit der owner before it iss pulled down. Der house, as we see him pefore der fence go up, wass admirably adapted for der nursing-home of a most famous Berlin Doktor—we wouldt pay any reasonable sum."

"Sorry—but the property is not for sale at any price. It is to be entirely rebuilt into a large apartm'nt building, running through to Park Street. The plans are all drawn—contracts all let. So you see there's no argum'nt in the matter."

"But—but—where iss der Lordt Mar-

quess going to live? He must have der town house somewhere!"

"If you've got to know, you might ask him, I suppose. Flats are creepin' in all through the West End—with taxes what they are, one cawn't afford big town houses any more."

While they stood talking, the superintendent and one of his foremen—both from the Marquess' Devon estate, like all the rest of the men inside—kept glancing that way.

"Jimmy, would you say there's anything about his nibs that reminds you of some one you know? Any little motion or way of speakin'?"

"Aye—but I can't plice it, d'ye see. Once, when 'e 'ad 'is back to us, yonder, y'mighta thought 'twas 'Is Ludship—then 'e turns about, like, an' y'sees it aint—"

"'Twas the Guv'nor I was thinkin' of, myself. I've see His Lordship change while I was lookin' at him—on the yacht, when some one he didn't like came up the ladder—until the visitor thought he was somebody else— I say! This agent's goin' off in his taxi ahead of those two speculators! Thought he was going to tell us what was to be done with that second-story stuff? There's Glover beckoning from the gate—mebbe he told *him!* What is it, Glover?"

"Agent says we're to put a double guard on the gate, sir—an' double the night-watch! Says a lot of bounders seem determined to 'ave a look at the innards of the 'ouse an' tunnels as we rip out, an' it'll be up to us to see they don't get it."

IN Park Street the "agent" stepped into his waiting taxi just as the other two drove away in their private car. Picking up the speaking-tube, he said to the driver:

"Fancy you can follow that car without those birds spotting you, Thomas?"

"Aye, sir. Mightn't be so easy with one of the new cabs—fancy we should dull 'em a bit before usin'. But this one looks as if she'd had a good bit of wear—there must be a thousand lookin' a good bit like her in London. After we've turned a few corners those felleys'll not know whether they ever saw this partic'lar cab before."

Across Vauxhall Bridge—down through Brixton to the little village of Beddington, west of Croydon. Here the car ahead turned into a private lane going back to a large villa five or six hundred



MacDougal, bleary from drugging, tried to get out of bed in order to put up some sort of struggle.

feet back of the road and as much as that from any other building. As the lane and the main road were bordered with fairly tall hedges, they got only a glimpse of the villa, but could tell by faint sounds which came to them that the car was being run into a garage—and the doors afterward locked.

"Can you locate that villa without any trouble tonight, Thomas?" asked the Marquess.

"Aye, sir—easily. Would you wish me to 'ave a look-see at those two chaps, sir?"

"If there's a pub near the villa, see what you can pick up about them—an' the general layout of grounds, villa and garage. Of course if you can get any idea of what goes on inside, so much the better—but don't risk getting hurt or arrested. Now—we'll get back to the Embankm'nt."

FOR the past eighteen months, after demolition of an older hotel and several private buildings, a huge caravansary had been slowly assuming shape and attractiveness on the Embankment. Its central "keep"—too large to be called a tower—is higher than anything else in London, but the lower surrounding sides and set-backs are so perfectly propor-

tioned that the architectural skyline is pleasing rather than jarring by comparison with its neighbors on either side. And the somewhat mysterious syndicate which built and owns it decided upon the name Hotel Royal George. Its private rooms and suites are equipped with every known modern convenience—its public rooms the last word in taste and magnificence.

But unknown to the public—no information obtainable—is the existence upon upper floors of seven private apartments, three of them occupying an entire floor each, in the central "keep." Each is as complete in every detail as a private house, and absolutely cut off from the floors above and below; every lift and stairway-door is in a private passage not accessible to other guests or even the hotel servants, and guarded by trick-locks in addition to their pass-keys. Service-lifts from the hotel kitchens communicate with the kitchen of each apartment, but they travel inside a steel safe, guarded with a combination-lock at the top of the shaft. Each apartment is reached only by a single private lift and a private stairway to the next floor below.

The Royal George was the first of the London skyscrapers. With the city real-

estate increasing in value every day and the staggering taxation offsetting the rentals, no remedy was available for London property-owners but to go higher from the street level in the most desirable neighborhoods in order to make buildings and ground-area pay—as other cities had learned years before.

WHEN the taxi drove down the tunnel to the cab-rank in the basement of the Royal George, the "agent" got out and watched the cab sink down a lift to the garage three levels below. Then he entered the basement hall, walked along to a door with the brass number "A-5" on it, inserted a latch-key while he pressed the knob with the other hand in a certain way, and stepped into a little private hall. At the farther end he manipulated a door in a different way, and stepped into the private lift—which accommodated eight persons comfortably—and ran smoothly up to the twentieth floor of the "keep," where he came out into the vestibule and drawing-room of a beautifully furnished apartment. This took in the entire floor, and comprised thirty rooms of various sizes, including a large banqueting hall paneled in Circassian walnut which ran up through the floor above to a carved Tudor ceiling twenty-five feet high (though isolated by fire-brick walls from everything else on that floor), a smaller breakfast-room—suitable also for small family dinners—and a long living-room with windows overlooking the Thames east and west. There was included a sound-proofed "communication-room" with wires leading, in underground conduits and a Channel cable, to Trevor Hall in South Devon, to the Radio Communication Building in Whitehall and to the telephone exchange in the general post-office—and an experimenting-room well equipped with electrical, chemical and mechanical appliances.

Ten minutes after his arrival the "agent"—who was really George Llangollen Trevor, first Marquess of Lyonesse—was steaming in a big porcelain tub.

AN hour later he joined the Marchioness, and his son and daughter-in-law, at the dinner-table. Knowing he had been in Park Lane, they asked:

"Are the men fairly started in getting the house down?"

"They've most of the roof off and some of the top floor—I'd say they'll finish inside of three weeks. Er—some of you

were rather ridiculing the idea that anyone still had suspicions of us as meddlers in political affairs. Well—for three days a couple of presumable Germans, and at other times three Ukrainians, have been trying in every conceivable way to obtain employment as workmen on the job. When they gave that up, they changed their appearance an' came back with requests to inspect before the work went any farther an' put in bids for purchase, just as the property now is. Of course the idea is to see what secrets of construction the house had, if any. And if one or two of them do see our hidden wall-passages—tunnels an' chambers underground—they'll be certain to know a lot of things which have been mere conjecture up to this time—we'll have a lot more trouble dealing with them in future, not to mention the risk. But our Devon men have been a good many years keepin' spies out of Trevor Hall, and we've enough of 'em here to maintain a double guard all the time. As soon as the excavation is finished for the apartm'nt building we're puttin' up, we don't care what anybody sees, though I fancy there'll be a few unusual features in three of the flats. The whole West End is running down—but we might find one of those flats useful upon occasion."

"HAVE you any idea who those spies were?" Lord Ivo asked; and his father nodded complacently.

"I will have, in the morning. Jenkins was standing in Park Street this afternoon, in front of Abdool's old house, an' heard them talking outside the fence. Jenkins learned to speak German during the war—an' he understood that one of them was either a doctor with some reputation as a surgeon, or was acting for some such man. His companion said to him that our house would be quite the place for his nursing-home and operating-quarters, in case any of the Cabinet Men should need his professional services—and he very emphatically agreed. When Jenkins told me, that sort of stuck in my mind. So when the two started off in a handsome car, Thomas followed with the taxi—to a large villa not more than a mile west of our own hangars outside the Customs Lines at Croydon. Rather isolated villa—yet if their passports were in order, in twenty minutes the lot of them could be up in a mail-plane, and leaving for any place. That location is about all that we or the F. O. need, to know what they are."

"How did that taxi idea happen to strike you, George?" the Marchioness inquired.

"Came to me one night when I was trailing a chap in just this way. High-powered taxis are being used more and more all over the United Kingdom when people need transportation and there's no train leavin' for some time—and if a few of our men buy them, presumably to run as independent owners, who's going to dig further into the proposition than that? What? I garage 'em right here under the hotel with a lot of others, have 'em carefully watched at all times, and instantly available. Anybody seeing one of us getting into such a cab naturally supposes we phoned for it—and each of our cabs apparently is registered with a diff'rent comp'ny, though owned an' driven by one of our own men under an independent license. A taxi may go with impunity, d'ye see, many places both in and out of London where a private car would arouse suspicion at first glance."

NEXT morning Thomas reported, giving a detailed description of the villa and its general inside planning as far as he could figure it. From near-by trees he'd been able to look with a field-glass into windows on the two upper floors—finding to his surprise that there were more rooms than he had supposed, one of them being fitted up as an operating-room with a well-equipped laboratory adjoining a consulting-room on the farther side—also a number of bedrooms with hospital furniture and equipment. The heavy man with the thick glasses was locally thought to be Doktor Franz Hauptmann, and the man who had been his companion in Park Street that afternoon was some sort of political staff of the villa, including three who seemed to act as nurse, orderly and interne, were a mixture of various nationalities. At a neighboring pub it was vaguely presumed that there might be one or two patients under treatment at that time, though nobody had seen any being taken into the place—or, in fact, knew as much about the outfit as Thomas had picked up, with the aid of his glasses. A woman supposed to be a foreigner, though speaking fair lower-class English, did some of the marketing in the village, but the neighbors saw little of those who might be staying in the house. Everything purchased was

paid for in cash, however—so the local attitude was distinctly favorable.

After Thomas had gone to the Trevor service-quarters, the Marquess lighted a morning pipe and made himself comfortable with cushions on the long window-seat of the living-room overlooking the Thames, east and west, with Big Ben and his tower far below. With a coaxing "*prrr-aou*," a soft and glossy specimen of feline magnificence leaped softly to the cushions beside him, put a tentative paw upon his chest and rubbed a sleek head against his chin—then turned himself around three times and coiled himself in the Marquess' lap, one greenish-golden eye partly open as the Marchioness came lightly across the big living-room and seated herself beside them.

"You don't look as if you had anything on your mind, George, but I had a sort of hunch at breakfast that you were trying to figure something out—and not getting it. Suppose you 'fess up?"

"Well—I'm trying to get behind what there might have been in the remark Jenkins overheard from that supposed German physician whom Thomas an' I followed down to the Croydon neighborhood—about the Park Lane house being exactly suitable for a nursing-home, in case any of the Cabinet Men should need his professional services. You can put several diff'rent constructions upon that, d'ye see, Nan. It's entirely possible that he has treated or prescribed for a couple of the Ministers now in the Governm't—especially if he's one of those Berlin specialists who has worked up a reputation. If so, I agree with him. Our old mansion is near enough to Westminster to be an ideal location for any of the Governm't men—natural enough, his trying to buy it. On the other hand, if that outfit are some of the underground politicals we know so well—we might place a much more sinister construction upon the remark. What? —Wonder if Lammy's in town this morning?"

"I think he was coming over on the early plane from Le Bourget. I'll tell him to come down, if he has nothing important on hand."

IN a few moments, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives came down in the private lift from his own spacious apartment, and joined the Marquess on the window-seat. As they looked out over the vast mosaic of bricks and mortar that is London, Trevor briefly sketched for his



The door swung open, revealing the Herr Doktor covering the passage with a revolver.

old friend the incident of the foreigners trying to get into the Park Lane premises, and what he had learned about their presumable headquarters.

"Ever hear of a Berlin surgeon known as Doktor Franz Hauptmann, Lammy?" he asked.

"Name's somehow a bit familiar—wait a bit till I light a pipe an' think. . . . Aye—prob'ly the same party! Why—there was a colonel on the General Staff durin' the war, d'ye see, who was given permission to operate on hospital cases among the prisoners—all the practical experimentation he could wish. He pulled off some amazingly dangerous operations successfully, and was building up a big reputation, after the armistice—until it was found that he was paying lump sums to unemployed men and women for the privilege of practicing on them with his scalpel. Some of them lived—much benefited by his operations; but several died under his treat'm't. He disappeared after losing his professional standing in Berlin—supposed to have practiced in Prague, Warsaw, Belgrade—then there were rumors of his bein' a 'political' in the service of some Central European governm't. But he was too skillful a surgeon to have all his practice wiped out—it's said he still performs some rather amazing operations. The man is wealthy; he has money enough to please his fancy in almost any line. It's entirely possible that some of the Governm't men are among his patients. By the way—speaking of Governm't men—I was talkin' with a certain notable just yesterday. There's some idea of havin' a conference of Premiers in Paris, each accompanied by some other Cabinet Minister, to discuss the amount of armam't Germany is practically known to be acquirin', and exchange notes with Berlin that might come pretty close to an ultimatum from the League—France, Italy, Japan and England being represented—with the United States, if they care to send anyone—"

"Just something in the air—or more definite than that?"

"Well—in Paris they're expecting some such conference to take place early in September—"

"That means MacDougal will be going over—prob'ly take Sanderson with him from the F. O.?"

"Aye—it's understood they've both accepted the invitation."

"H-m-m—wonder how Wilhelmstrasse likes the idea? They know about it,

of course! Would they consider it worth while to meddle with that conference in some way—or cynically ask what they propose to do about it?"

"All depends upon what accord there might be among the four Powers. If all of them agreed to use pressure—which isn't likely—Berlin would be keen to side-step it. But if the Premiers should find it diffic'lt to reach an understanding, so that the conference is really quite inconclusive—eh?"

The Marquess nodded gravely.

AS the end of the month approached, the Marquess noticed an absence of comment in the newspapers upon any rumored conference of Premiers in Paris—though he knew from the Foreign Office that both MacDougal and Sanderson had booked accommodations there for the first week in September. Evidently the press had been muzzled, for reasons of state.

But for no reason, beyond the sort of premonition which he had come to consider psychic,—from the many instances in which events had followed just about as he had imagined them,—Trevor felt a growing uneasiness concerning MacDougal, who like all public men of governmental caliber, received his share of mysterious and threatening letters. Such men always are targets for weak-minded assassins and unscrupulous secret agents. Finally, on the first of the month—three days before he'd understood the Premier was crossing to Le Bourget—the Marquess drove around to Number Ten Downing Street and asked to see him. The butler, who had grown old on the premises and knew by sight most of the prominent men in Europe, welcomed him with evident pleasure—but with what seemed an undercurrent of anxiety.

"His Excellency is not in the 'ouse at present, m'Lud Marquess, I'm sorry to say. A gentleman called some hours ago with a request for a private interview upon a matter of urgent importance. It seemed to be a note from one of 'Is Excellency's closest friends asking 'im to come to 'is 'ouse—as 'e 'ad just been injured and was confined to 'is bed. The gentleman said 'e 'ad 'is car outside an' 'oped 'Is Excellency could accompany 'im at once—evidently 'e fancied Mr. MacDougal's friend was by way of being in a rather serious condition, bein' attended by Sir Dighton Webb, the famous medico."

"Who was the injured friend, Winterbottom?"

"That, m'Lud Marquess, I could not tell you—no names bein' mentioned in my hearing; I was not near enough to catch more than occasional words—quite by accident, you will understand, sir. All I know is that it must have been some one quite close to 'Is Excellency in a friendly way—whose writing he recognized, in spite of it bein' a bit shaky. So I fetched 'is hat an' top coat—saw him get into the gentleman's car an' drive off down Whitehall. But 'e said when leavin' that 'e would return as soon as possible—there bein' two important h'appointm'nts 'ere before dinner. An' 'e's not turned up—an' I'm a bit uneasy, sir."

"You say the car drove down Whitehall—toward one of the bridges, Winterbottom—as if on the way down into Surrey? Can you think of any close friends of Mr. MacDougal's down in that direction?"

"Well, no, m'Lud, I can't say that I do—though of course 'e might 'ave, at that. The gentleman who fetched the note would be rather on the thin side—eyes a bit near together, like—well-dressed but not, I'd say, expensively—"

Some vague recollection was prodding the Marquess' brain. "Bitte, by Jove!" he mused. "Wonder if it could have been? If it *was* Bitte—that means some association with the spectacled chap who looked like a German professor—and presumably, with the discredited Army surgeon Franz Hauptmann, who wanted to buy a proper nursing-home *for operations upon some of the Governm't men!* Now, I wonder—"

REQUESTING permission to use the telephone, the Marquess was put through to Lammerford's apartment in the Royal George—and rapidly sketched what Winterbottom had told him, together with the inference that had come streaking through his mind.

"If they have taken him down to that villa at Beddington, MacDougal is in serious danger right now—no telling just what sort of danger, either! I'm driving down as fast as Achmet can get me there. It'll be dark before we reach the place, but Achmet will park the car near the next house down the road—while I have a look-see. Thomas will be in the Royal George now, and he knows all about the villa—suppose you come down in his cab at once. If I

find them taking MacDougal somewhere else, I'll phone or get word to our hangars outside the Croydon Customs Lines—you can pick it up there. Leave a description of the villa's location with Nan."

As the car, driven by the faithful Afghan chauffeur, ran smoothly down into Surrey, the Marquess drew from a large compartment under the rear seat a thick woolen sweater which he put on under his sack coat, substituted a tweed cap for his stylish fedora—discarding his top-coat—and buckled a leather holster with a service-automatic under his left arm. As they approached Beddington, the night air became sharp with a touch of frost in it—and it occurred to Trevor that a man past middle life was a fool to take upon himself a job of political knight-errantry for a man who was more an acquaintance than a friend. On the other hand, for more than a quarter-century, Trevor and his associates had repeatedly proved themselves more than a match for the best brains in political schemes—and it was rather difficult to sit passive now.

WHEN they stopped near the hedge-bordered lane in Beddington, he disappeared up it noiselessly, cautiously worked around to the rear of the premises, and located the garage. This was locked, but could be entered without much delay. Inside there were two fast cars; one, answering closely Winterbottom's description, was still warm—which suggested urgency at no matter what odds.

Trevor hastily slashed the tires of both cars, just as a means of preventing what might otherwise prove to be a long chase.

Like a disembodied wraith, His Lordship then made his way from the garage to the rear door of the villa's service-quarters—finding the door opened at a touch.

Hearing voices in two of the basement rooms, he slipped into the hallway and along it to the service-stairs, leading to upper floors. These he went up like a black cat in the shadows of a city alley. On the next floor, a light showed under the door of what Thomas had described as a consulting-room and study, with an operating-room adjoining it on one side and dispensary on the other. Some one was moving about in it, so he went up another flight. On this floor, in the built-on wing, a number of rooms opened

on either side off a center hall. After glancing into three of these, he stepped into the last one; evidently it was used as patients' quarters when under treatment—but probably was not likely to be used that night.

This, thought His Lordship, would do very well as a hiding-place in case he needed one quickly—so he stood just inside the door, occasionally looking up and down the hall.

FOR several minutes nothing happened. Then a small man in an interne's suit came up a stairway at the other end, from the main part of the villa, and opened the second door. Evidently he made an examination of some one inside—then came out into the hall followed by a nurse, who closed the door and asked: "Will the Herr Doktor operate to-night?"

"Can't—without risk of killing the man. He'll be conscious within fifteen minutes, I'd say, but until noon tomorrow his heart-action will be weak from the effects of drugging in the car—and an operation on the brain might stop it altogether. And that isn't the idea at all. He must go to Paris—apparently in normal condition—three days from now. If operated upon, he simply couldn't.

"So the Herr Doktor has told the Chief he has decided to use a drug whose active principle he recently isolated from a plant found in Borneo—one of the orchidæ. After the fourth or fifth injection of it, the patient is slightly confused and dopy for a couple of days—then apparently normal as long as he doesn't put any strain on his brain. The moment he does, he suddenly becomes unable to concentrate at all—gets confused; the symptoms are rather like a light stroke, though they disappear after a few hours' rest. Then he seems normal until again he tries to concentrate. For example, if he merely listens during the conference, he gives no evidence that anything's wrong with him. But the minute he tries to argue his own point of view, he loses the sequence of his phrasing and doesn't get it again until his brain has rested.

"Well—if no more than two of the Premiers at that conference act in such a way—apparently from mere temporary indispositions—the conference gets nowhere. If three of them are doped, it'll come pretty close to sowing the seeds of another war before they stop quarreling and go home."

"How long will the effects of that drug last?"

"Depends upon individual resistance. The Herr Doktor says he has had three patients reacting to it in the same way for over a year, after six hypos—then one a month was sufficient to keep them so indefinitely. In others, there was reaction against the drug which made them normal again in three months—and it took five or six injections to put them under again."

The nurse yawned. "Are you sending up anybody to relieve me so I can get some dinner? I'm frightfully done."

"Not necessary," said the small man briskly. "I doubt if he has strength enough to walk when he recovers consciousness—not for a few hours, at least. Just lock the door on the outside and take your time over your dinner—leave the key in the lock in case somebody else comes up for a look at him. As long as there's no whisky or brandy in the room, he won't do much moving if he does wake up. Might give him a shot when you come up—the Herr Doktor wants some strength in him before he injects the drug."

As the man disappeared down the stairs, the nurse looked rapidly about the room, examined the patient, went out, locked the door and followed to get her dinner. In the second room beyond, the Marquess—who at the moment bore little resemblance to a nobleman, especially one known all over the globe—stood just inside the door figuring the time he might have before one of the household came up the stairs, and whether it was really possible to get the Premier out of the house in that time. Clearly, it was *not* possible, in the circumstances—but it had to be done somehow!

THE nurse was scarcely downstairs when he unlocked that door, bolted it on the inside, and went over to the bed where MacDougal, in pajamas, was trying to prop himself up on one elbow—his eyes bleary from the drugging, but his jaw set with grim determination. With a noticeable effort he fixed his eyes upon His Lordship, who was turning away from the door. Failing to recognize him in that rig, he tried to get his feet out of bed in order to put up some sort of struggle, if possible. Then Trevor took off his cap, placed a finger on his lips, and whispered:

"Not so unconscious as they thought! Eh, old chap?"

"N-no. Reaction to drugs a bit weak in my case. I've been more than half conscious for an hour—but kept still to get some point as to where I was an' what they proposed doing with me."

"Good an' plenty! . . . Make no mistake about that! We must get out of here, somehow, at once! —Fancy your clothes would be in that wardrobe—what? Any clothes will do—keep still till I fetch 'em over! I'll help you get into them."

IT took but a moment to snatch the clothes and hat MacDougal had been wearing—and less than five minutes to get into them. Then the Marquess pulled the double blankets off the bed, and tore them into strips and knotted these together, making two ropes about thirty-eight feet long exclusive of knots. One of these ropes he tied to the iron bedstead, and cautiously lowered the other end out of the window.

"Fancy they'll hold our weight?" Macdougal asked anxiously.

"Easily—one at a time! I tore those strips six inches wide. But this one is only a bluff. Come down the hall to one of the vacant rooms."

As they went out he locked the door and put the key in his pocket. When they were in the other room, with the door bolted, he explained:

"It'll not take 'em long to find another key an' open your door. In the darkness, the open window an' rope of blankets should make 'em fancy you were stronger than they supposed—here, man, take a good pull at this whisky!—an' let yourself down by it. If we're in luck, pretty much everyone in the house will run out to search the grounds and the neighborhood. We'll get a better chance to walk down—slip out without being seen—and conceal ourselves until we can reach my car. Meanwhile—I'll just wrap this other rope around my waist in case we do have to let ourselves down from any place. —Feel a bit stronger?"

"Aye—beginning to. I say, Marquess! . . . When they see that rope of blanket-strips from the window, there's nothing to show I had any assistance—any friend in the house! What?"

"That's what I had in mind. More chance of their all running out after you, if they fancy you're on your own. If the dining-room is anywhere near the Doktor's consulting-room in the main part of the house, the servants must go out of a door on the opposite side of the



Hass had seen his quarry turn toward the hangars; and he was prepared.

kitchen from the little rear service-hall. We might slip out that way before anyone comes up those service-stairs—but it's a risk—eh?"

"Hmph! I'll *take* some risk to get out of this place! Consider, Trevor! Practically every person in this outfit has about him or her one or more hypodermic syringes. One jab in passing—one scratch in any sort of a scuffle—and one is booked for something irrevocable! May be ord'n'ry druggin'—or tetanus, insanity, paralysis, or death in twenty loathsome forms! I say let's get out as quickly as we possibly can!"

The Marquess agreed heartily—so after listening intently at the top of the service-stairs, they descended noiselessly to the main floor, six feet above the ground, and were about to proceed into the little basement hall at the rear, when they heard some one running out of the kitchen and coming up. Opening the nearest door within reach, the Marquess pulled MacDougal into a narrow passage a split second before one of the gang appeared at the top of the stairs and hurried along to the Herr Doktor's consulting-room; this, the fugitives found, was just the other side of an open door in the dispensary, which they had entered from the passage through a door usually kept bolted. In the hall behind them they could hear a man and woman talking. Escape cut off at both ends! The Marquess, however—feeling certain none would dare enter the dispensary from the hall while the Doktor was in the house—drew MacDougal back into the little passage, bolting both of its doors.

And then the Doktor came into the dispensary with the man who looked like an interne. The latter was asking:

"Have you considered, Herr Doktor, what can be done in case MacDougal should be traced down here and a detail of police surrounded the house?"

"Give him a hypo to cloud his mind—say we found an abandoned car pulled up by the roadside with him inside, ap-

parently having had a stroke—and that we were taking care of him until tomorrow at least. Let them take him home if they wish. But—he would be so carefully guarded afterward that we couldn't get him again—so he'd have to be shot with as little delay as possible. We can't have him discussing our affairs at that conference!"

The Doktor's tone was as casual and cold-blooded as if he were speaking of a problem in chess instead of a man's life. And the Premier shivered—hoping he'd wake up soon and find it nothing but a ghastly dream.

The Marquess laid an ear against the door into the hall, and was about to open it for a look when he heard excited voices. Men were running up the stairs—two remaining in the hall—one, running into the consulting-room to tell the Doktor their prisoner had escaped. Then a muttered conference ensued, which the two in the passage couldn't make out. Soft footsteps padded across the dispensary, and the whole casing of a trick door into the passage swung wide on concealed hinges—some one's bolting it on the inside had evidently been foreseen—revealing the Herr Doktor covering the passage with a revolver.

"So! Your Excellency haf der strong constitution—you wass conscious before we t'ink—you tear t'e blanket and t'row him out of t'e window— But you haf nodt t'e strength to slide down him—t'ere iss no footprints in der soft flowerped at t'e bottom! Also—out in t'e hall—you step in t'at wet place, and leave wet footprint outside dot passage door—pointing in! *Ja!*"

FOR just so long, the Marquess—standing behind MacDougal in the dark passage—was not seen. And a stunning concussion filled the dispensary as two shots that blended as one sent the pistols spinning from the hands of the Doktor and the man behind him.

"Hands up—both of you! You too, Mr. Interne! Back out, there, into the

other room! —Mac! . . . Shut an' bolt this trick door—from this side!"

As the three backed out into the consulting-room, two things happened at the same moment: A couple of burly foreigners slipped in by the hall door with pistols raised—and an icy wind blew the heavy rep curtains slightly in from one of the windows. And before the thugs could aim their pistols, shots from behind the window-curtains crippled a wrist of each. Then a tall soldierly figure, muffled in thick coat and sweater, stepped into the room.

"George—you two drop out of the window into the garden, and then cover these birds while I'm following you! There's a detail of the county police outside."

As Earl Lammerford started to swing himself out of the window behind the curtains, the Herr Doktor lowered his hands to reach for a poisoned barb of steel—and Earl Lammerford fired with the swift precision for which he was famous. . . . Never again would this too-capable surgeon use his right hand in his profession.

Then Lammerford let himself down the six feet into the garden, grasped the arms of the other two, and hurried them along in the darkness toward the main road.

"Quietly, now—don't make a sound if you can help it! There are four of the bounders prowlin' about the grounds, somewhere! Fill your magazine, George, an' shoot to kill if they see us—that's what *they'll* be doin'!"

WHEN they found a thin place in the hedge along the road, and had squeezed through it, the Marquess asked:

"Where are your county police, Lammy?"

"Pure bluff—had no time to get 'em—knew if Mac *was* here he would be needin' help on the jump! Parked the taxi alongside your car an' came in for a look-see—"

"Well, they can't chase us. I put their cars out of commission before I went in—"

"I fancied that was your little touch! Unfortunately, the last four arrivals here, this evening, came in two high-powered cars that are now up in the lane—turned about—headed this way. Doubt if they can catch us unless in a traffic-jam—but they'll prob'ly be along in less than five minutes. We've to figure out the safest place we can get His Excellency before morning. Downing Street's

no good—they'll shoot him from another cat first time he goes out!"

"H-m-m—he'd be absolutely safe in Devon—Trevor Hall— Wait a bit! He's got to be in Paris Thursday for the conference; he'll be safe enough there at our house in the Avenue de Neuilly—an' the other Premiers as well. Why not drive to our hangars at Croydon,—two fast amphibians there now,—go to Paris at once, phone the other Ministers to be my guests—an' hold the conference there? I'll take the responsibility of defendin' 'em against any attack that can be made upon the place—even bombing—the French Governm't'll have an aerial patrol overhead. Eh, Mac? How does that strike you?"

"But how about my appointm'nts—tomorrow and Wednesday?"

"Well—how about your *life*? After the conference is safely over they'll have no immediate object in killin' you. Your man can fetch your luggage to Paris by first plane in the morning—an' you can handle your appointm'nts by phone to a considerable extent. What?"

"Get into the car, you two! We're takin' big chances on talking here—those cars'll be down the lane at any moment!" Lammerford urged.

"Right! —Thomas! You drive the taxi up to Downing Street as fast as you can get there—then to the Embankm't. Stop at the first pub' three miles from here, and phone our hangars at Croydon to have one of the amphibians rolled out, waiting for us, at once.—Achmet! Drive us west an' north, at first—fast as you can go, safely. Then east to Sydenham. I'll give you further directions along there."

As Lammerford had expected, the conspirators' cars were close after them—coming out of the lane in time to see Thomas disappearing with his taxi up the first Streatham road and hear faint sounds of the Marquess' car going west. The swiftest of the pursuing autos followed the taxi, on the supposition the Premier would be returning to Whitehall, and the other spurred after Achmet.

Looking back along a straight stretch of the road, the Marquess made out the dimmed lights of the other car coming over the top of a hill. He told Achmet to cut across east, circle around south, and make the Trevor hangars outside of the Croydon lines as quickly as he could.

It took them just eighteen minutes to reach the hangars, get into the fast am-

phibian, and off the ground. Meanwhile, Hass, the leader in the first pursuing car, had seen his quarry turn toward the hangars; and he was prepared for this eventuality also. He ordered his driver to turn south to a smooth field with some barns on it not far from the airdrome. Here he wheeled out from under a wide shed a scout-plane with two machine-guns and radio-equipment; then he went up and flew over the airdrome with its floodlight illumination.

None of the Croydon planes seemed about to go up, but he saw a car run up to three private hangars outside the lines—saw three men jump out and climb into a waiting amphibian which seemed to be in the air before he thought the motors could be warmed up. In fact it was less than five minutes after he got up himself. It was guesswork, of course—yet in the floodlight reflection from the airdrome he would have sworn to the Premier's figure and hat as he got into the plane. Also, none of the three men had any hand-luggage—which seemed additional proof they were the ones he was after. It didn't once occur to Hass that the larger and much heavier amphibian was any match for his smaller fast plane—nor could he see with his prism night-glasses any evidence of machine-guns on the big boat. Cabin-planes are seldom armed in time of peace. So he gained altitude, and figured upon following above the other plane until it was over the middle of the Channel.

NOW, the Marquess of Lyonesse has been for years one of the most daring and skillful of aviators. On his estate in South Devon, he and his most intimate friends build various types of planes which hold world-records in various lines—some of them as yet unknown outside their immediate circle. And the scientists in his machine-shops and laboratories have perfected discoveries in radio-activity, electricity and chemistry which will make England practically invincible when some other nation declares war upon her. One of these is the use of extremely high frequencies, directed by a long copper electrode encased in glass, to short-circuit the spark in any motor from a distance, and put it out of business. Every one of the Trevor planes is equipped with this as well as with broadcasting and receiving-sets of high power.

Above the Croydon flood-lights, the Marquess had noticed the smaller plane

circling overhead—and at once he told his pilot that he would fly the amphibian himself. He sent it up like a rocket until level with the other, which had shut off all its lights—then headed south-east as if he had reached his plane's ceiling.

"Lammy! . . . Those birds after us are no fools! One of 'em seems to have figured that Mac might decide to reach Paris at once instead of going home—the bounder would know a Cabinet Minister can get a plane any time he wants it. Anyhow—there's a smaller boat over there looks damn' suspicious. If he tries to follow an' get over us, crossin' the Channel, we'll know! Put on a head-frame an' see if they've got radio, an' are talking to anybody!"

THERE was silence in the cabin until they flew over Folkestone and the Channel—then an exclamation from Lammerford:

"Aye—he's talking! . . . Wait a bit! He's talkin' in Russian—to that communist headquarters in Paris. . . . Wow! He's giving instructions to them to get us if he misses—but he thinks he'll not fail to get us in mid-Channel with his machine-guns. Guess that settles it, George!"

"No doubt of it," Trevor agreed grimly. "Take the stick, Jerry, while I start up the fan-motor outside an' get some high-frequ'ncy with the transformers!"

With what seemed to the pursuer a totally amazing exhibition of power and speed in the big amphibian, she darted ahead, climbed well above the other plane—banked—switched on a powerful pencil of light from the top of her wing—swung it back and forth until it spotted the other boat, abreast and below. Then a long electrode ran out through a small port in the cabin-wall and the Marquess switched in his high-frequency.

Blinded by the searchlight, the other pilot lost control when his motor stopped. He felt half paralyzed. . . . The plane went into a tailspin and pitched into the waters of the Channel from two thousand meters. . . .

Later—there was a more or less secret conference of Premiers and other Cabinet men in the Paris home of the Trevors on the Avenue de Neuilly—guarded by high concrete walls and high-voltage current, together with various other phenomena. MacDougal and Sanderson returned to Downing Street safely. And that was that.

The Murder



FOR a few moments silence hung like a black, dead weight between the two men. They were separated merely by the width of an ordinary library table; and it would seem that the thin little man sitting in a chair should have been afraid of the face that bent toward him. It was filled with fierce rage, and belonged to a young, powerful man.

But the little man smiled, in the dark, crooked way he had of showing his unconcern and his complete hold on the situation. It was not a pleasant smile. It lacked the wholesome element of mirth, and the visage that formed its background was much too dusky and evil. It was a curiously bizarre face, exotic, swarthy, lighted by black eyes that glowed with a cruel, sinister quality. This man was young also, but his strength was mental. His hair was straight and sleekly black, and though he was garbed with careful and fastidious concession to the styles of American civilization, it was easy to see that his origins and his system of thought were indissolubly linked with strange, far-away lands of mystery and intrigue. A dangerous man, if his purposes were dangerous, for he had the will and the intelligence to carry them out.

The table was strewn with newspaper clippings. Some were large, and topped by lurid headlines. Others were smaller, some even tiny, of a paragraph or two. All were upon the same subject, differing considerably in detail, as though the subject had taken many turns and twistings,

and the range of them covered approximately a year. It was easy to see that these clippings had been the object of examination.

Arthur Seagrove stood on the other side of the table. There was a chair behind him, from which he had just risen. His hands gripped the ends of the table. He bent forward. In those few moments laden with ominous silence, sheer rage flamed on his face. Then this became mingled with a flicker of impotence, and some of the threat passed away. He relaxed his grip on the table, and a slight droop crept into his shoulders.

"I'm wondering," he said in a slow, husky voice, "whether to throw you out or call the police."

The man in the chair shrugged.

"As you wish," he said, and again smiled with unconcern. He added, speaking very careful and exact English, as a tongue acquired through diligent study by a man seeking perfection in it: "But do not forget, sir, what these newspaper articles say. I have tempted many men to call the police. Some have yielded to the temptation. One died while he was at the telephone, as you have just read. The others—well, one day, two days, three days they lived. But they died. The police could not save them. Now you, sir, are very young and very rich. I cannot believe that you want to die."

"I—I'm not going to die. I'm going to get you—you and your mob. You've got to come to the end of your rope sometime. You can't keep this thing up successfully. You've got hold of the wrong man this time!"

It was plain to see that Arthur Seagrove did not believe his own brave words. That fact would not be lost upon even a stupid man, and his visitor was far from stupid.

"I shall not interfere if you wish to go to the telephone, Mr. Seagrove. I shall sit exactly where I am."

Seagrove stared at him. He sat down and began to finger the clippings again, scowling at them. He ran the fingers of one hand through his thick brown hair. It was a very strong-looking hand. Only two years had elapsed since Arthur Sea-

Master

grove's name appeared frequently in the newspapers as that of a star college athlete. But he was up against a game now in which all his college training, in classroom and on the field, seemed weak and futile.

"I don't understand how you get by with it," he said presently, impressed, bewildered. "It certainly beats me! Right here in New York! I've been reading these things in the papers from time to time for a year. I couldn't believe it, and still I did believe it. It's absurd!"

His words only emphasized his bewilderment.

"And you never thought that some day you would receive a call from us. Very strange, Mr. Seagrove—is it not?"

Seagrove looked up. The sharp, grim look had come again.

"Which one of these are you?" he demanded. "In these murder stories there are several names mentioned. Which one of the mob are you?"

"I am Heri-Moo," the visitor replied placidly, somewhat proudly, adding with a slight bow of the head: "Heri-Moo, at your service, sir."

Seagrove ignored the mocking irony of the offer. He scanned the clippings for the name of Heri-Moo, and found it in several places, prominently—even in some of the headlines.

"Heri-Moo, eh?" he remarked. "Well, you've been a pretty busy individual in the last year, Heri-Moo, with all the stealing and murdering you've been up to. Now supposing I grab you by the throat right now, and twist your neck till your tongue hangs out—slam you on the floor maybe, and call the police. Where do you suppose you might finish, eh—Heri-Moo?"

Heri-Moo made no audible rejoinder. He merely shrugged, but the shrug was rejoinder enough. It told of his indifference to threats.

"I guess maybe you'd finish in the electric chair—eh, Heri-Moo?"

The little man shook his head.

"Possibly," he rejoined, "if you were able to perform the various feats you suggest. I do not mean, sir, to reflect upon your physical strength, nor to boast of

The amazing story of a strange Oriental criminal who struck terror to the heart of a great American city, and of the exciting event which preceded his ultimate defeat.

By

ROY L. HINDS

Illustrated by Joseph Maturio

my own. I would be helpless in your hands. I am a very small man, and I learned early in life that one so lacking in bodily strength should train his intellect, if he is to meet strong men upon equal terms. I acknowledge your superiority in one way, but must remind you of my superiority in another. I refer you to the clipping—I think you have it in your hand—about the man who died at the telephone."

THE bewildered look returned to Seagrove's face. He looked down at the clipping, and began to rumple his hair again.

"Well, you got the best of him some way," he admitted. "At the telephone—they found him on the floor."

"With no marks of violence upon him," Heri-Moo suggested.

"Yes, that's right. No marks of violence."

"And no poison was found in his body."

"Yes, that's right. That's still a mystery. How did you kill that fellow, Heri-Moo?"

"I did not have to wait until he got to the telephone," the visitor said. "I could have accomplished my purpose any moment before, just as I could with you at this moment. But I gave him a chance. I thought he might change his mind, even after he took the receiver from its hook. I gave him all the chance I could. It was only when he asked the operator to send the police that I acted."

"How?"

"Pardon me for not being more explicit."

"Do you mean to say that you can kill me as we sit here?"

"I can."

"Without shooting me, or throwing a knife at me—or something like that?"

"Very early in our conversation," Heri-Moo suggested, "I placed you more at ease by assuring you that I have no such weapon on my person. I exhibited my pockets to you."

Seagrove nodded. He remembered also that this singular individual had not once permitted him to get within arm's-reach. When the conversation opened, they were standing. If Seagrove moved closer, Heri-Moo moved away. He had been careful to keep the table between them.

The newspaper clippings, which refreshed Arthur Seagrove's mind upon the sinister plot involving fortunes in money and human life, chronicled in the papers for a year, were weighty evidence. A man alone in an apartment, even his own apartment, with Heri-Moo, would be a fool to fly into the face of that evidence. Not one of the "corsair murders," as they were called, had been solved. Not a man implicated in one of them had ever been found. Nothing had been found except the bodies of the victims—and a few days after each tragedy, a letter to the police confessing the crime, and signed: "*Jitli, the Corsair of Manhattan.*"

THERE had been four of these murders within a year. There had been nineteen cases in which the victims paid the ransom demanded by Jitli, and thereby escaped with their lives. Nothing ever appeared in the newspapers about these latter cases until the ransom had been paid and Jitli and his crew vanished into safety.

The record was impressive. Arthur Seagrove hardly ventured to follow his impulses.

"Now I'll tell you what I'll do," Seagrove suggested. "I shall keep quiet about your visit to me—absolutely, as you warned me—if you will send this fellow Jitli here to see me."

"Jitli never makes calls," said Heri-Moo.

"You're afraid I'll get him here, and have police planted in the apartment, eh?"

"You could not do that, sir. Jitli would not enter the apartment unless

you were alone in it. And you would never get out of it alive if you had arranged for help to arrive after he came."

Seagrove shook his head, and set his lips grimly. When he opened them it was to say:

"You fellows have certainly got murder down to a fine art. I believe what you say. I can't help believing it. What do you do—get on a fellow's trail and never leave it until he pays or dies?"

"We take numerous precautions, sir."

"Are all these fellows of the same tribe?"

"Tribe!" Heri-Moo rejoined, indignantly. "Ours is not a tribe, sir. We come from a very ancient civilization, and were practicing the sciences and the arts while your respected forefathers were savages. You are in error, sir."

"Well, I mean, are you all of the same race?"

"We are descendants of ancient kings, sir—as Jitli has confessed in his letters to the police, which you may read in the clippings."

"And you have mysterious ways of killing men—without violence, without leaving a trace of poison in their systems?"

"Again I refer you to the clippings, sir."

Seagrove meditated. He was quite cool. It would pay him to be so. If the astounding proposals and threats of Heri-Moo had not been backed up by the record provided in the clippings, it is likely that he would have gone to his death in his own apartment. But the modern piratical plots of Jitli had had the city talking for a year. This threat was deadly serious. Seagrove dropped the clippings he had been fussing with, and leaned forward, his elbows on the table.

"And you say that Jitli never makes calls?"

"Never. He leads a very indolent life, sir. His humble servants, of whom I am one, attend to his affairs."

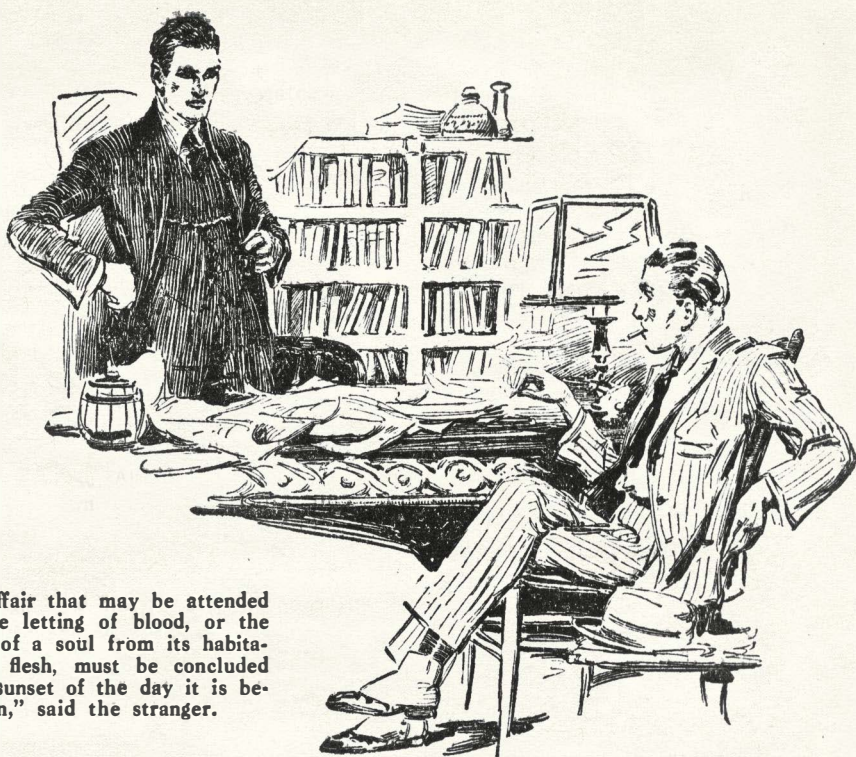
"How long am I to have for a decision upon your demands?"

"Until sunset, sir."

"It is now twenty minutes past two."

"Yes sir—twenty minutes past two. The sun will set on this summer's evening at exactly thirteen minutes past seven. You have until that time."

"Supposing I'm a few minutes late?" Seagrove inquired, very much intrigued, despite the precariousness of his position, by the exact, precise plans and operations of the sinister Jitli.



"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood, or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh, must be concluded before sunset of the day it is begun," said the stranger.

"At fourteen minutes past seven," said Heri-Moo, "your life would be declared forfeit by my master—and nothing could save it. At any moment thereafter his wrath might descend."

"You don't mean to say that he'd have a fellow killed if he was a minute late in giving his decision—if he agreed to pay, and did pay!"

"He would have no other choice, sir. If he defied the fates by extending your time limit, they would take their revenge upon him."

"Yes? Well, I don't pretend to understand—"

"I shall explain, sir. It is an ancient legend among our people that any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh must be concluded, or at least the bargain closed, before sunset of the day upon which it is begun."

SEAGROVE gazed attentively at this man who talked of murder as casually and nonchalantly as he might have discussed the sale of a painting.

Seagrove watched the man's hands. They were long-fingered, and seemed to crawl about the arms of the chair like insects. He must have something in one of his pockets that could be jerked out

instantly and put into action—or up one of his sleeves. He thought of some device which might spray a deadly liquid into an assailant's face. But all this was conjecture. And Heri-Moo was watching him every moment. Despite a general air of security and relaxation, there was a subtle tenseness in the man.

Seagrove continued to toy with the clippings as he cudged his brain for some device by which he could match cunning with cunning. But he felt painfully helpless. He did, however, manage to work one of the clippings toward the edge of the table.

"It is not necessary for me to remind you," said Heri-Moo, "that it is now twenty-five minutes past two."

"Well, yes—what of it?"

"Your bank will close at three, sir."

"You demand payment today? I thought you said that if I gave you my decision by sunset that would be sufficient."

"If your decision is favorable, you should have the money on your person, sir: fifty thousand dollars. It is quite easy for you to telephone the bank to send that amount to your apartment and that you will give the messenger a check for it. I understand that you have often made large withdrawals in that manner, from your apartment here."

"How do you know that?"

"It is true. I know, sir. You will pardon me if I go to the telephone with you, to hear what you have to say. It is important that I take a precaution against marked bills. It is important also that the bills be delivered to you while I am here, no note to be larger than a hundred dollars."

"No, I shall not do it that way. Before sunset," Seagrove promised, "I shall give you a decision one way or the other. If I decide to pay, I can get the money tomorrow—"

Heri-Moo made a significant gesture toward the clippings.

"The men who opposed my suggestions," he said, "were unfortunate, as you may read. I have told you my wishes, sir."

Seagrove had never seen a more terrible face than that which now confronted him. He had to choose—obey or fight. Four men had chosen to fight. Four men had died.

"All right," he said, and got up.

They went into the foyer, Seagrove in the lead. Heri-Moo kept out of the big man's reach. He stood idly while Seagrove telephoned the bank.

"Be very careful of the inflections of your voice," said Heri-Moo. "There must not be the slightest trace of nervousness or alarm in it. You can manage that. I can see that you are a man of courage, and can control your nerves if you wish. I say this for your protection—for if the bank should become suspicious and send some one here to investigate, I should have no choice but to escape. I should have to remove you and whomever the bank might send. Careful now—just a straight business call."

Seagrove obeyed.

BACK in the sitting-room of his suite, he wrote a check for fifty thousand dollars.

"I'm not going to pay you when the money comes," he said. "I must have time for thought. You must return for a decision."

"Very well, sir."

Heri-Moo's acquiescence to this proposal was a relief. Seagrove suggested that he would have his answer at seven o'clock; and strangely, the guest agreed readily to return to the apartment at that time. It was bewildering—the calm assurance of the man against a possibility of Seagrove's getting in touch with a

friend and warning him of his predicament!

Heri-Moo examined the check, however, to see that no note had been written on it. The signature was steadily accurate. Seagrove had been warned that the conspirators had a specimen of his signature, and that Heri-Moo had studied it carefully.

Heri-Moo did not come close to take the check from him. He ordered that it be laid upon the table and that Seagrove withdraw a little. Then he picked it up. And all the while Heri-Moo kept on top of the litter of clippings the one about the man who was stricken dead at his telephone. There was a picture of the victim in that clipping. It was a constant reminder for implicit obedience.

The bank called Seagrove back on the telephone, as is customary in transactions of that sort, to verify the fact that the call for the money had really come from him and not from some crook who schemed to waylay the messenger. . . .

The messenger came with the money.

"Of course," Heri-Moo had said just before, "even if you should trap me, do you think that would save your life? No, no! It would only insure your death, sir. Jitli would not rest until he had taken his revenge."

The messenger had gone away without having seen Heri-Moo, who, during the brief transaction, observed things from the bedroom, the door of which he kept slightly open. Seagrove had been told where to stand, so that his face would be constantly visible to Heri-Moo, with the messenger's back to the bedroom.

Neither on the telephone or during his brief business with the messenger had Arthur Seagrove given the slightest hint that he had fallen into the hands of that master of murder who had been called the Corsair of Manhattan.

"You will gather up my clippings for me, please," said Heri-Moo.

Seagrove did so—put the clippings into their envelope, all except one, which he had managed to slide beneath the table scarf.

Heri-Moo thrust the envelope into his pocket. He lingered a few minutes, to reiterate many of his warnings, and to leave various instructions.

"Remember," was one thing he said, "that every gentleman who has been approached by Jitli has paid—or died. They were shrewd, intelligent men. They tried various tricks. None succeeded. They paid—or died."

Then he departed, smiling the crooked smile that had no more of laughter in it than might be found in the grimace of a hangman.

CHAPTER II

ARTHUR SEAGROVE hastened back from the door to the living-room. His simple ruse, whether anything came of it or not, had worked. He had the one clipping of all that bunch that he wanted—one no more than half a column in length, and with a one-column head on it.

Eagerly, Seagrove studied the slip of printed paper.

On the reverse side there was part of an advertisement, with white spaces in it. In a couple of these spaces some one had drawn designs with a pencil.

These designs resembled nothing so much as crude attempts to draw a wagon-wheel; yet as the young man studied them closely, he realized that they did not represent attempts at all. They were the careless results of a man's meditations over an outspread paper, with a pencil in his hand.

The individual who held that pencil had only a subconscious idea of what he was doing with it. His mind was upon more weighty projects. He may have been talking with some one. He may have been sitting alone, thinking. The white spaces of the advertisement lay before him. His fingers held a lead pencil. Casually, he drew a circle. Then he drew lines from one edge of the circle to the other, with the result that spokes were formed in the wheel. Then, in the very center where the straight lines crossed, he had drawn a small circle and filled it in—the hub of the wheel. Before he had finished, he had drawn at least one more of these designs. A man preoccupied. It was a slim clue—yet the hand of the Murder Master himself, the ringleader of that redoubtable band, may have held the pencil.

A very slim clue—but a man fighting for his life clutches at straws.

And Seagrove *was* fighting for his life. He had made up his mind to fight. He would not pay the fifty-thousand-dollar ransom demanded by the Murder Master's agent, Heri-Moo.

Seagrove rumbled his hair, and gazed into the street, in an effort to spot some individual who might be watching the house and his windows. The apartment

house was in East Sixty-fourth Street, close to Central Park. Across the street there was a row of private dwellings and other apartment houses. There was no one loitering in the street. What persons were visible were on the move, and seemed paying no attention whatever to Art Seagrove's windows.

It was now half-past three.

Seagrove came to a pause at the table, and he gazed at the open parcel of bank-notes, which he had checked over as soon as Heri-Moo departed. There were one thousand bank-notes in the package, but he had not counted them individually. They were assembled in small packets, and each packet bore a paper binder on which was printed the amount it contained. There were three one-hundred-dollar bills, two hundred of fifty dollars each, and twenty-dollar bills to the number of five hundred. Fifty thousand dollars!

Heri-Moo had seen the package of money, yet he had made only a rather indifferent suggestion that it be turned over to him at once! He had not demanded it. His only demands had been that Seagrove get the money from the bank and that he decide whether or not to pay before sundown!

IT was strange indeed. Seagrove had been left alone, with his money intact. He could easily telephone for the police or to friends. He could make any number of moves within the next two or three hours to circumvent the Murder Master.

But could he? That mental question was a stiff jolt to his nerves. The fact that he had been left alone, in his own apartment, unbound, with a telephone, and able to leave the house if he wished, hinted at precautions already taken to keep help from reaching him.

And yet—four men had attempted to outwit the Murder Master. And four men had died.

Many others had met his demands, and then complained to the police. It was difficult to say how many had paid their ransoms and kept quiet about it, still terrified. Of these there would be no mention in the newspapers.

"But I won't pay," Seagrove told himself, "and I won't die. There must be some way to beat that mob! If I pay and keep still about it, it's just one more incident in the life of the Corsair, as he calls himself. If I complain to the police, the newspapers will have me down as another victim who was unwilling to

fight him—afraid. The only thing to do is *not* to pay—*fight!*"

In this resolve, he forgot nothing of what he had read—the newspaper description of this arch-criminal as the most ruthless and successful rogue who had operated in America since the pirates left the Spanish Main was not an overstatement. For a solid year the Murder Master had taken his toll in wealth and life.

His method of slaying was beyond the most active imagination. The most skillful surgeons and diagnosticians in the city had performed autopsies on the bodies of the four men who had paid with their lives. They had found the cause of death, each time, but the manner in which that cause was set into motion was a dark and terrible mystery.

An embolism. That had been the verdict in all four cases. A clot, a sudden solidification of a sufficient quantity of blood in a vein to obstruct the valvular action of the heart when the clot reached that organ. In all four cases this had wrought death.

IN the first instance, when the first victim of the Corsair died thus in a subway train, the casualty had been set down as a natural death—although he had uttered a terrified yell just preceding his collapse. This was unusual in a case of embolism, for the victim of it who is stricken naturally is dead without pain or warning that any thing is wrong with him. The cry had not been explained, though later, in the light of developments, it was assumed that before he was stricken he caught sight of one of his pursuers, in that crowded subway car, but had been unable to point to or indicate in any manner the man who had frightened him.

The autopsy revealed the clot, the embolism.

This man had informed the police of the demands that had been made upon him. The police had assumed that death by a gunshot or stabbing would be attempted, if any attempt were made; and there had been a police guard in the man's office and in his home. A policeman accompanied him, in plain clothes, in his business trips about the city.

But the Murder Master had got his man—got him apparently without a direct movement against him, and so stealthily that no one in the subway car noticed an untoward action on the part of any passenger. There was no mark found upon the man's body.

When the second victim of the Corsair was found dead at his telephone, it was from embolism again, with absolutely no sign of its having come about from any but natural causes.

The third man died in the crowded lobby of a theater. He, like the first, had cried out. Again it was assumed that his horror-stricken gaze had lighted upon the man he knew would attempt to kill him, but that the slayer performed his terrible deed instantly thereafter. Embolism again.

The medical fraternity could not solve the mystery. They could name poisons which, taken internally or by injection, would cause solidifying of the blood, the production of innumerable clots, but they could not suggest a poison that would cause merely one tiny clot to form and thereafter leave no trace of its having been swallowed or injected.

"When it is my wish to strike," said Jitli in a letter, "no man may stay my hand. Death is a servant at my command. I summon him. I direct him. I bid him lay his cold finger upon my enemies. Unseen, unheard, unfelt, he strikes—a gentle touch. Perhaps only the pointing of a finger. Who shall say? A beckoning, perhaps, seen only by the man he calls. None may deny it. None may avoid it."

The mysterious and devastating embolism developed in the veins of the fourth victim in his own home, while he was alone with Heri-Moo, whose name was often mentioned in the letters of Jitli the Murder Master. The only evidence of a struggle was an overturned chair, but Heri-Moo may have upset that in his rush out of the room after the murder. From what had gone before in respect to the other victims, it was readily believed that Heri-Moo had been able to inflict death without a fight.

Arthur Seagrove was distressingly aware of all these facts when he made his decision not to pay but to fight. But—"If I don't pay," he reflected, "they will keep in touch with me. Yes, indeed—they'll keep in touch with me!"

"If I pay them," he continued reasoning, "they will simply withdraw again, and I should never get a trace of them. I'll keep them after me—but I must see to it that they don't get too close."

Arthur Seagrove was wealthy, by inheritance. He was young, and unattached in a business way. He had just returned from a trip around the world of more than a year's duration, follow-

ing his graduation from a university. There were several business prospects that he was considering, connections with financial concerns, but none pressing.

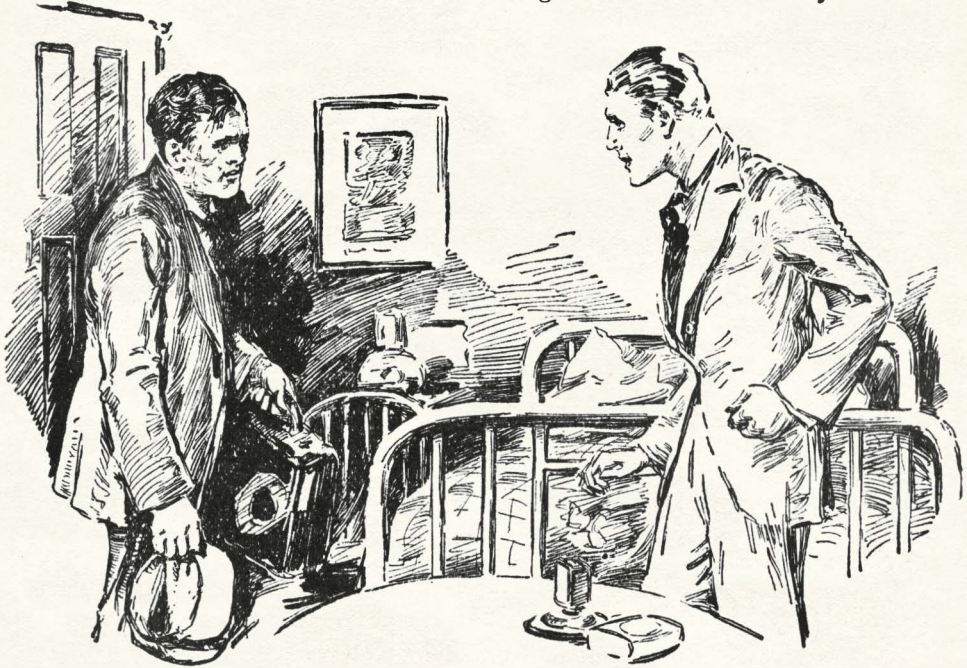
He set his lips tightly together. He walked to the windows and gazed down into the street. It was four-thirty now.

The sun would set at thirteen minutes past seven. Heri-Moo had evidently con-

together for six months in Paris and Rome, where Julia had gone with her mother. The Moores had returned to America. Seagrove had gone east, on his trip around the world.

Julia had been rather indifferent toward him since his return to New York. She liked men who did things. . . .

Apart from the death of his father and then the death of his mother, Arthur Seagrove had faced no really serious fact



sulted an almanac. It was a precise detail calculated to impress a prospective victim.

"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh must be concluded, or at least the bargain closed, before sunset of the day upon which it is begun." So Heri-Moo had said.

CHAPTER III

GRADUALLY there came to Seagrove, as he wandered about the apartment trying to think out an effective plan, an enthusiasm for the adventure.

Hitherto Seagrove had lived a care-free existence. He had too much money for a man of his temperament. That was how Julia Moore expressed it.

Seagrove was sure that he loved Julia Moore. He had met her during his college days, and later they were thrown

"If the cops ever found this dough on me, I'd go up fer life! —What're you lookin' at me so funny fer—uh?"

in life until Heri-Moo walked into his apartment. Abroad, whenever the New York papers reached him, he had read of Jitli and Heri-Moo and their diabolical operations. He could hardly help reading it. The papers had been full of it.

And now that he found himself opposing the Murder Master and his crew, some grim, stubborn element in his make-up came to the surface for the first time.

"At least," he mused, as he dressed carefully for the expedition he contemplated, "I've got something to do now. I've got a real job on my hands."

He was surprised that the cashier at the bank, with whom he had talked when asking that the fifty thousand dollars be sent to his apartment, and who was something of a personal friend, had not remonstrated with him. He had made several similar withdrawals, since returning to New York, but none had been

for more than five thousand dollars; the cashier must have thought that Seagrove planned a furious plunge into some gambling game. Yet he had not uttered his usual words of caution.

"I suppose he's disgusted with me," was Seagrove's thought—"as Julia is. Well, I've got to see Julia before I step into this thing."

He hesitated to telephone. Yet the idea that the Murder Master and his gang had any means of listening in on his private telephone was preposterous. He did not even have to call through the apartment-house switchboard.

He had decided, however, not to make a single move until he had a carefully laid plan in mind. He had it now.

He was dressed very plainly. Into his wall safe he put his watch and jewelry. In a small leather case he put the fifty thousand dollars.

"Maybe Heri-Moo is the Murder Master, and not just one of the gang," he reflected. "Nobody has ever seen the 'Corsair.' Perhaps he's a mythical figure shoved in by Heri-Moo for effect. There are other nutty names mentioned in the papers. There may be a gang—or there may be just one man who has created the illusion of a gang. Other names appear in Jitli's letters, but it's Heri-Moo who's the most prominent."

At length he went to his telephone and lifted the receiver. And his call went through without difficulty.

"Julia," he said, "I've got to see you this evening."

"But I have another appointment, Arthur."

"Yes, that's what you've told me every time I've called lately. But this is important, Julia. It's probably the most important thing that ever happened to me—and I've got to tell you about it."

"What is it, Arthur?"

"Can't talk about it on the phone, but if you can see me for half an hour this evening—say at eight-thirty—well, I won't bother you again, at least for a while."

"But that is an awkward time. I was going to the theater."

"Well, I don't like to ask you to break an engagement—and wouldn't if there was any other way out of it. Something big has happened to me, Julia. If you don't see me this evening, you may never see me again."

"Are you going away?"

"Don't know. Don't know what's go-

ing to happen to me from one minute to another, and—"

"Arthur, have you had too many cocktails?"

"I swear I'm sober, Julia! Not a single one today."

"You do sound awfully sane, and serious, but I can't imagine what's happened."

"That isn't all of it, Julia. You wouldn't be able to imagine in a thousand years. Now, I can't come to your house. You'll have to meet me out somewhere, not in any crowd, or where anyone else is around. Say, in the park somewhere—and it must be after dark. Between eight-thirty and nine. It's unusual, I know, Julia—but there's a good reason for it."

There was an earnestness in his tone not to be mistaken. She made the appointment—a quarter to nine, on the walk just east of Cleopatra's Needle, in Central Park.

"And you *must* come alone," he insisted before she hung up.

Presently Seagrove went to his telephone again. The man he meant to call lived with his family in the basement of the apartment-house—the superintendent. Seagrove looked up his number in the directory, and got him on the wire, preferring that method to using the house phone in the hall.

He asked the superintendent to come to his apartment as quickly as he could, but indirectly.

"I'll explain it all when you get up here," he said. "I'm on the fourth floor. Ride in the elevator up to about the sixth, and then walk down to the fourth. If anyone sees you—that is, anyone you don't know—in the halls, don't come to my door until you're sure you are not observed."

"Yes sir. All right, Mr. Seagrove."

In a few minutes the superintendent entered Seagrove's apartment. Yes, he was certain that no one had seen him on any of the floors. No, he had not seen at any time any strangers loitering about who might be watching the house.

"I have a strange request to make," said Seagrove. "Is there any way I can get out of this house without being seen?"

"Well, that depends on who's watching you, and where they might be—if there is anyone watching you."

He studied the young man curiously.

"You know me well enough," Seagrove suggested, "to feel quite sure that I'm not trying to dodge the police, and that

you won't get into any trouble by helping me."

"Certainly, Mr. Seagrove. I am not worrying about that."

"All right. Now, this is a private affair that I shall have to be excused from explaining. But I need your help. I've got to get out of the house in a way that no one will see me leaving it—after dark preferably. And I've got to get out of *this* apartment now. Could I go down to your apartment and stay there until dark?"

"Why, certainly."

And so that end of it was arranged. Carrying the case containing the fifty thousand dollars, Seagrove rode down to the basement in an elevator operated by the superintendent himself, who sent the elevator-boy on an errand.

This circumstance was a deep mystery to the superintendent and his wife, yet they asked no questions. The young man spent the time agreeably enough—and he and the superintendent framed up what Seagrove was sure was a certain device of avoiding being seen upon his departure.

SEVEN o'clock arrived. Now Heri-Moo would be at his door to keep the appointment, to get Seagrove's answer. He would slip upstairs, as he had before, while the elevator-boy, who was also the hall attendant and operated the switchboard, was busy elsewhere. Heri-Moo would ring Seagrove's doorbell. . . .

In any event, Arthur Seagrove would be chalked down as man Number Five to suffer that mysterious death.

Seagrove watched the clock on the mantel. His own watch was in his wall safe. He wanted no expensive jewelry on his person, and had dressed in the oldest and darkest suit he had.

The minutes crept by. Ten, eleven, twelve minutes past seven. Thirteen! Sundown!

He could not change his mind now. Even if he could find Heri-Moo and hand him the fifty thousand dollars, it was too late to save his life. That was now declared forfeit.

"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood—"

Well, it was past sundown.

Sitting down to have dinner as a guest of the household, Seagrove drew a sigh of relief. He was pitted against the Corsair of Manhattan now, and was glad that all the waverings and uncertainties of the afternoon had been resisted.

At twenty minutes past eight the superintendent left the apartment, and sent the elevator boy out. Operating the elevator himself, he took Seagrove to the top floor. No one was in sight there. He hid Seagrove and his small leather case in a closet, then he ran the elevator back down to the first floor, and left it there. Then he walked up the long distance to the top, slowly, but he was out of breath when he got there.

The coast was clear, and he led Seagrove to the roof. Over the tops of five apartment houses they went, until they came to the one they sought. The superintendent of this building was a friend of Seagrove's conductor, and he was waiting for them. He escorted Seagrove downstairs in order that the young man might not be mistaken for a prowler.

This house was on a corner, and from it Seagrove was enabled to get into the throngs of the avenue without having shown his face in the cross-street on which his own house fronted.

Speedily, he walked away. After a block or two he got a taxicab and rode to the park gate nearest Cleopatra's Needle.

He walked into the park. Julia Moore should appear on the walk near the Needle at a quarter of nine, but she was not in sight. Seagrove wandered up and down, waiting. There were very few pedestrians abroad, though a few people sat on benches around the famous Egyptian monument at the top of the knoll.

It had never occurred to him that Julia might fail to keep the appointment.

But an hour went by, with no sign of her.

Brooding on his disappointment, nervous at the approach of every pedestrian, sizing every man up as a possible emissary of the Murder Master, it was almost ten o'clock when Seagrove snapped into action. It seemed a certainty now that Julia had broken the appointment, and he walked out of the park, carrying the fortune in the little leather case.

He got into a taxicab, and gave directions to Fourteenth Street and Third Avenue. So far as he could make out, he had not been shadowed at any time. Disconsolate, he looked back frequently, studying the occupants of vehicles behind. He watched faces in the street.

At the corner where he left the taxi he stepped into a phone-booth, and called the Moore house.

The word came that Julia was not there. He asked for her mother.

"Why," she exclaimed when he ex-

plained his call to her, "she went out to keep an appointment with you, Arthur. She should be home; I thought she was with you."

"What time did she leave, Mrs. Moore?"

"She was late leaving—afraid she might miss you; five or ten minutes late, she said. It's very strange!"

"Perhaps she went on to the theater," he suggested, trying to calm the mother.

"Oh, she wouldn't do that!" Mrs. Moore insisted. "She wasn't dressed for the theater."

"Listen, Mrs. Moore—I'm sure everything is all right. Please don't worry. I shall look for her." He tried to say this encouragingly, but hadn't the faintest idea of where to begin such a hunt, except to call a few mutual friends. "I'll call you back every few minutes, until we locate her."

"Yes, do, Arthur—please!"

A number of telephone-calls failed to bring a trace of Julia. Her mother was frantically calling friends also.

Julia had vanished!

CHAPTER IV

BY midnight the hope in Seagrove's heart had ebbed to a low point.

He knew that the police should be notified. At twelve o'clock Mrs. Moore knew it also, yet despite her fears she had the natural aversion of a wealthy and exclusive woman to calling in the police, horrified at the thought of lurid headlines in the papers.

Over the phone Seagrove told Mrs. Moore that he was leaving to continue the search, and advised her to ask advice better than his—named an elderly lawyer and his wife, close friends of the Moores, and urged her to ask them to come to her. She said she would.

Seagrove then set about executing the plans he had in mind before the astounding disappearance of Julia Moore. He went back to the vicinity of Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street. Near by was a small hotel he had noticed several times, a quiet family hotel wherein people of moderate means made their homes. He engaged a room, paying a week in advance, and registered under an assumed name. He went up to the room, which, he was glad to observe, was clean and comfortable. There he had meant to go into hiding, and to set himself to the task of unearthing the Corsair's lair.

But what he should do now depended altogether on developments concerning Julia Moore.

He put the money-case in the closet. There was no place in the room where the money could be easily hidden, and he had no time for elaborate preparations.

He locked his door, put the key in his pocket and went again into the streets. It was nearly one o'clock. Agonizing thoughts of what might have happened to Julia stirred an inward frenzy. Had he embroiled Julia in the terrible net being woven about him by the Corsair?

Had those fiends some way of listening in on his telephone calls, and had they heard his conversation with the girl? If so, they knew of the appointment, and probably had kidnaped her. Were they following him now?

In a small restaurant he stepped into another telephone-booth and called Mrs. Moore. The lawyer, Mr. Elzivir Curts, had arrived, and Seagrove asked to speak with him.

"See here, young man," the old attorney admonished, "it's time that you tell just what you know about this."

"What do you mean, Mr. Curts?"

"It was very unusual, most unusual, sir—you asking Julia to meet you in the park, after dark. And now Julia is missing. What does this mean, young man?"

Seagrove, who knew the lawyer—he and his father had been friends—meditated a moment. He had to reveal his own plight, so that her mother and friends could act speedily in Julia's case.

"Well, Mr. Curts," he said, "I'm in a jam. I can't talk about it on the telephone, and—and I can't go up there to see you. But I will give you a hint. I'll mention a name, and you can see what I mean. It's a name that's been in the papers a lot. Listen—I mean the Corsair."

There was a dead silence on the wire. Arthur could imagine the horrified look that must have crossed the old gentleman's face.

"Do—do you mean, Arthur, that—that *he* has a hand in this?"

"Yes, Mr. Curts—that's exactly what I mean."

"He has been after Julia?"

"No, I don't mean that. He has been after me, since shortly after noon. I meant to go into hiding, and I think I gave him the dodge from my apartment house. I wanted to talk to Julia. You can see why I asked her to meet me in



The old fellow was certainly studying Seagrove sharply. His eyes burned behind glasses with ancient octagonal rims. . . . "You have very good taste in books," he was saying.

the park. I thought we could meet and have a few minutes' talk without danger—and then, I was going to do something. But we didn't meet. I was there all right, but Julia didn't appear. I'm as worried as you are—more, I can tell you! Nobody could worry any more about Julia than I am doing. I think you'd better notify the police—tell them just what I've told you."

"I'm going to do just that, Arthur," responded the lawyer after a moment. "You are in a serious predicament, I am afraid. If you are sure that they do not know your whereabouts now, I advise you to go into hiding immediately. But keep in touch with me. I shall be here until Julia is found."

"Yes sir—I'll keep in touch with you as long as I can."

"I'll communicate at once with the police commissioner, Arthur. I advise you to get a gun as quickly as you can. Avoid crowds. Watch every man that

approaches you. I wish— Listen, Arthur, I have an idea! Why don't you go immediately to the Tombs, and ask to be locked up until we can run these scoundrels to earth. I'll telephone the keeper at the Tombs—"

"No, Mr. Curts," Seagrove cut in. "That might save me, but not Julia—if she is in their hands. I shall be as busy as the police, only I'm going to keep away from the police. They'll be watching for me to show up perhaps, at the home of some friend, or at headquarters, or some police station. But I'm going to fool them. I'm going it alone!"

"Well, perhaps you're right," Mr. Curts agreed. "But don't fail to let me hear from you, as often as you can."

"I won't, sir."

In the street again, Seagrove's helplessness came in upon him in a melancholy rush. There had been in his mind a certain plan, but the mystery of Julia Moore's disappearance had scattered

that. He should, however, follow that plan, as much for Julia's sake as his own. He wandered about a little, thinking.

It had seemed to him that the depre-dations committed by the Murder Master, who called himself Jitli, the Corsair of Manhattan, and his crew could be traced into whatever quarter of the city most frequented by the Eurasian population. There was hardly a race upon earth that was not represented in cosmopolitan New York.

But Seagrove thought that he might, through bribery—and that had been the reason he brought along the fifty thousand dollars—get hold of some compatriot of Heri-Moo who would work with him; who would consent to give him at least as much of an insight as he could into his people and their habits in the city. A shrewd man with fifty thousand dollars to spend might accomplish much. And yet—who were the villain's compatriots? A mongrel, the man was, evidently, with a mixture of Mongolian and Caucasian blood.

Seagrove's chances of success were slim, certainly, but his life was now at stake, and the girl he loved was probably in the hands of the killers.

He went back to his room in the little hotel. The night clerk took him up in a wabby elevator.

Seagrove opened the closet door, to hang up his coat and cap. He glanced into a corner of the closet, thinking of the little leather case, containing fifty thousand dollars' worth of bank-notes.

The case was gone!

CHAPTER V

SEAGROVE'S hope of having thrown the Corsair's agents off his trail fled at that moment.

He turned quickly, bent and peered under the bed. There was no intruder in the room. He had locked the door with the key and also pushed in a strong bolt, when he first came inside.

Some one had entered that room without breaking the lock, for he was positive of having locked the door when he went out. It was a flimsy lock, he had noticed, and operated by a key that would be easy of duplication.

He lifted the window and looked out. There was no fire-escape anywhere near his window—nothing but the flat side of the hotel, three stories down to the street, and no ledge or cornice as a foot-

hold for a prowler. The thief had come and gone through the door.

Seagrove paced the floor. There was a possibility, even a strong probability, that the money had been stolen by some one not connected with the Corsair. Hotel prowlers, snooping from room to room, were common enough.

But it was safer to proceed upon the assumption that one of the Murder Master's men had been on his trail. A man engineering such a wholesale plot in plunder and murder as the Corsair would have at his command any number of fellows skillful in the arts of shadowing.

Seagrove was roused from the uneasy sleep into which he had at length fallen by a knocking upon his door. He sat up in bed, mystified.

There was no good reason for that knock. None of his friends were aware of his whereabouts.

Yet the knock sounded again; and now that Seagrove was fully awake, he detected in it a slow, guarded furtiveness—as though the knocker wanted only the occupant of the room to hear. He got out of bed and stepped to the door.

"Who is it?"

"Buddy," said a cautious voice close to the crack of the door, "I aint got the heart to do it."

"Do what?"

"Well, you know. Open the door. I'll be a friend o' your'n from now on. I got the stuff right here—an' you can have it back."

There was an earnest quality in the voice, an indefinable note that reassured him. He decided to take a chance—but be ready with his fists.

He opened the door, guardedly, and peeped out. A strange-looking individual confronted him—a middle-aged man, with about as tough a face as he had ever seen. His nose had been broken and healed crookedly. One ear was about twice as thick as the other. He was not a man whom anyone would associate with such an enterprise as was being conducted by the Corsair. It might be easy enough to imagine this fellow as a burglar or as a stick-up man, but never as a participant in such subtle crime as Heri-Moo committed.

But—he carried Seagrove's little leather case.

The young man opened the door wider and stepped back. As the visitor hulked into the room, Seagrove said:

"Now, keep at arm's-length away from me, if you don't want trouble. Put the

case on the floor. Shut the door and stand with your back against it. Don't—come—near—me!"

The newcomer stared in amazement. His heavy jaw dropped. The friendly grin disappeared.

"Say-y-y!" he began. "What's the idee, buddy? Think I come here to put on some rough stuff? Not me! I come 'cause I played a dirty stunt on you las' night. It aint in my line, see—friskin' an A-one guy—an' I lugged the kale back. Wha'd you think—I come fer more?"

"I'm not taking any chances," Seagrove responded. "I can't afford to."

"Oh, I know, buddy. Maybe you think I'm a dick, eh—an' lugged back an empty case—but you're wrong. Wrong! The hull works is there. If that dough is A-one—an' I can't believe it yet—well, you might slip me a few hundred fer bein' so honest. Outside o' that, I don't want nothin'—not nothin'."

Seagrove continued to size him up.

"I know you're an A-one guy," the caller went on, "an' when I seen you dashin' around town—in an' out o' taxicabs, in an' out o' telephone-booths—I got you right, see. I heeled you. I knowed you'd lifted some stuff, an' was makin' it away—so thinks I, here's me, just outa stir, with about six dollars to my name, an' nothin' in sight. There's an A-one guy that's hottin' it with the swag. He might need help, says I. I'll horn in, an' see if I can't do somethin' to earn a piece o' his change. When the clerk took you up in the elevator, I moseyed in an' got your room number off the register. Thinks I, I'll call on that lad—tell him the fix I'm in, an' maybe he'll le' me do somethin' to drag down some dough. Lotsa times when I was heavy with the sugar I sweetened fellas that was broke. So I sneaked up to this room an' knocked. No answer. I knocked again, an' spoke, sayin' I was a friend. But you didn't answer. Well, I out with my slipkey an' opened the door. I was des'prate then. My six bucks was gone. Flat, I was! I couldn't think straight. I guess it's 'cause I been in stir twelve years. My head's twisted. Anyhow, in I come. I grabbed that case out o' the closet, an' away I went! Down in a lodgin'-house I pinned the lock of it open—an' it looked like I'd just robbed Henry Ford. I never seen that much dough in my life! It scairt me. I'm still scairt, I guess—or I wouldn't of come back. I aint slep' a wink. If the cops ever found that dough on me, up I'd go fer life! If

they couldn't prove I stole it, they'd fix it somehow to git me put away. Well—what're you lookin' at me so funny fer—uh?"

There was a strange look on the face of young Arthur Seagrove. As this man talked the mystery of the stolen fifty thousand faded away into thin air. Once again reassurance came to him that he had probably succeeded in throwing the Murder Master's men off his trail. Furthermore, if this man was what he said—and there didn't seem the slightest doubt of it—he would be a valuable help.

"Well," Seagrove said, in reply to the question, "I look funny, I suppose, because it's a surprise to have a man return fifty thousand dollars that he's grabbed and made away with."

THE man removed his hat, scratched his bullet-shaped head.

"You aint no more surprised 'n I am," he rejoined. "I guess I'm nuts! I must of been nuts or I wouldn't of took it in the first place. I'm an A-one guy myself, fella. On the square, I am!"

"I believe you are."

"I was anyhow—but I guess twelve years in stir kinda makes me loony." He looked at the case and back at Seagrove.

"Say," he demanded, "is that *real* kale?"

"Sure. It's real money."

"Well, it looked good, but I couldn't believe it. I didn't even dare to change one o' them bills. They're phony, thinks I, queer. If I git nailed shovin' a queer bill, it's life fer me. Once more, an' I'm a fourth offender. That's life, buddy. Thinks I, I'll see if that young fella's still in that room. If he is, I'll hand the stuff back, an' ast him fer—"

"You don't have to beg for a thing. You're welcome to what you want. What's your name?"

"Moxey—Alfred Moxey. But nobody ever calls me Alfred—just plain Moxey. Maybe you—"

"Listen!"

The roar of an elevated train had subsided, and through the open window came the strident cry of a newsboy.

"All about the Corsair pursuin' a millionaire an' kidnagin' a society girl! Poiper here—poiper! Corsair pursues millionaire—"

The cry became unintelligible.

"Listen, Moxey—go out and get the papers for me, will you?"

"Sure thing!"

There was a sharp look in Moxey's eyes. He too had heard that boy's cry.

It was in the papers, under big headlines. The flight of Arthur Seagrove, the young millionaire, and his announcement over the telephone to Elzivir Curts, the lawyer, that he was being pursued by emissaries of Jitli, the Corsair of Manhattan. The disappearance of Julia Moore the society girl—and there, on the first page of one paper, side by side, were their pictures. It was probable that Julia Moore had been kidnaped. The stricken mother, and the city as well, waited anxiously the expected demand for ransom—or worse news.

But there was an astounding piece of news in the papers for Seagrove, something beyond what he already knew.

The Corsair had written another of his letters, special delivery, to the police department. The post office had delivered it out of hours when a clerk came across it in the mails, noticing the bold scrawl, "*From the Corsair*," across the top of the envelope. It had reached the department about the time of Elzivir Curts' call.

There was the letter, reproduced in every morning paper, two of them exhibiting photostatic copies. It read:

Arthur Seagrove is doomed. It has been so decreed. Nothing can save him. Wall him about with policemen, encase him in armor—and still the deadly clot will find its way to his heart. He missed the life vouchsafed him by the golden sun. He allowed it to go down in darkness without his tribute, and down into darkness he too shall go. When he topples and falls, let it be a warning to all. The Corsair must have the gold he demands!

This was the most brazen declaration ever made by the Murder Master. He had never before publicly pronounced the doom of any man, but had slain his man and then sent his letter afterward.

MOXEY was reading one paper. He finished the Corsair's letter.

"Holy smokes, young fella! You gotta do somethin'!"

"That's what I have, Moxey. Now listen: you know now who I am. I'm going to make a proposition to you—"

"Don't waste no time with propositions, young fella!" Moxey cut in. He had snapped up out of his chair. One hand clutched the paper. The other big fist was clenched so fiercely that the knuckles gleamed white. "I'm your man!" he added.

They shook hands. Seagrove realized the vital value of this partnership.

"You know the East Side well, don't you, Moxey?"

"There's only one place I know better," was the reply, "and that's Sing Sing."

"We've got to have guns, Moxey."

"Well now, Mr. Seagrove—that's a job that aint so easy, buyin' a gun if you aint got a permit. If I try anything like that—well, like I told you, I'm a fourth offender the next time a jury says guilty."

"No jury is going to say guilty. Anything you do in this case, Moxey, is a piece of police work, and—"

"I—I don't wanta do no police work. Don't call it that, young fella. It don't set well. Me an' the police never did git along, an' what I'm doin' is fer a young fella that I kinda took a likin' to when I first seen him—an' like better now, because he had the nerve to tell them dagoes he wouldn't pay! I'm helpin' you, an' not the police."

"All right, Moxey. Your prejudices don't alter the main point. Let's get busy. First we've got to have breakfast—then guns. Now you understand all about the Corsair, don't you?"

"Sure! I been readin' all that stuff in the papers fer months and months. We guys in stir been talkin' a lot about the Corsair. He aint our kind, an'—"

"Have you any ideas about him, Moxey? Any of your friends ever said he might be some one they knew?"

"No—no. I aint got no idee who he is. No more'n you have. If I did, I'd say so—but I aint."

"He's a maniac," Seagrove suggested, "some foreigner who's gone crazy, and got a gang together, for stealing and murder. The first job he did turned out all right, and he's kept it up. He must be crazy, or he wouldn't write all those letters."

"That's part o' the game, young fella. Don't you see—the killin's an' them letters got the town scairt. That's the game. You git a town scairt once, an' you can do just about like you want. The fellas he goes after now just wilt right away, an' pay. I'll bet there's a bunch of 'em that're payin' an' never mentionin' it to the police."

"That's my idea, Moxey."

"An' somehow folks git the idee that a furriner's a lot worse'n a white man when he gits started on a killin' spree. See what I mean?"

"What do you mean, Moxey?"

"Well—this Corsair guy might not be a furriner a-tall. He might be a white



Seagrove shifted Bow-litt's heavy cane to his left hand, concealing the movement behind the desk.

man, an American—just like me an' you."

"But I saw one of them, Moxey," Seagrove explained. "He called on me. He was certainly a foreigner—a Moor, he called himself, just as Jitli describes himself as a Moor. But he's apparently of mixed race—"

"Well, I don't know nuthin' about them dagoes, but I'm just sayin' that some smart white man, an American maybe—what's to keep him from gittin' a few o' them dagoes around him, an' then startin' somethin' like this? Y'u can bet he's got an idea that folks'd be scairt if they thought they was up against furriners like that."

"You may be right."

"I knowed a crook one time that didn't have nobody but Chinamen in his gang. They pulled some funny stuff—myst'ry stuff—an' the police was runnin' around in circles. They couldn't figger the Chinks like they can white men. But it was a white man that cooked up all the games the Chinks played. There was a killin' or two, an' a whole lot o' stealin'—but the white man got too cocky. He tried bigger an' bigger stuff—till he crashed."

"Your idea sounds reasonable, Moxey."

It certainly was a stroke of rare fortune that brought Alfred Moxey, crook,

to Arthur Seagrove. The invaluable aid that Moxey could render was indicated from the outset.

"Now you don't want even the cops to locate you," said he. "If they git a-hold o' you, you'll hafta take orders from 'em. All right. First thing, then, is not to look like Arthur Seagrove. That's easy. Yank that cap down on the side o' yer head—look tough. Kinda keep yer mouth screwed around, an' one eye squinted. That's it. You don't look much like that picture in the paper now. Kinda drop yer shoulders when you walk, an' hang yer head. Fine! An' don't forget it."

Moxey consented to get the guns; he knew of places where guns were sold illegally. And he soon came back with two automatic pistols, and cartridges.

They concealed the fifty thousand dollars by pulling tacks out of the carpet in one corner, laying the carpet back, spreading the bills out widely and thinly, so that there would be no bulge, then replacing the carpet. Then they set out, Moxey following as a bodyguard.

It was a curious experience for Seagrove, slouching along the street like a young tough. And then they heard the newsboys again, calling their first editions of the evening papers.

"Corsair demands a million for the life of society girl!"

CHAPTER VI

THE demand had been made upon Julia's mother.

It was the boldest and most extravagant *coup* yet engineered by the Murder Master. The ego that possesses every criminal after a series of successes, had bounded to dizzy heights.

Sundown that very day was the limit set for payment of the ransom.

"Any affair that may be attended with the letting of blood or the release of a soul from its habitation of flesh must be concluded, or at least the bargain closed, before sunset of the day upon which it is begun."

The fateful words of Heri-Moo had been repeated in the letter which had reached Julia's mother. She was prostrated. The lawyer, Elzivir Curts, was acting for the Moores. He was in close consultation with the police commissioner. Detectives, regulars and reserves, were combing the city.

The letter of the Corsair revealed that Julia Moore never would have been disturbed if Arthur Seagrove had paid his own ransom.

In a cigar-store Seagrove went into a telephone-booth, and called the Moore house. He got Elzivir Curts.

"I've just read the news in the paper," Seagrove said. "The million they demand is guaranteed. Pay it, or make arrangements to pay it. Scour the banks, and dig up a million dollars in cash. Leave it wherever they say. I'll pay it."

"Arthur," Mr. Curts begged, "go to the police commissioner immediately. He's scouring the city for you."

"There's nothing I can tell him beyond what he already knows, Mr. Curts. I've got a good chance of keeping them off my trail if I lie low. If I run around with the police, I'll be spotted, and they'll get me as they got the others. My only chance is to keep out of their sight, and I'm starting a detective game of my own today."

He continued to resist all pleadings.

"How do they expect you to pay them the million dollars?" he asked Mr. Curts. "The papers don't say."

"They haven't indicated that as yet," he was told. "All they want today is Mrs. Moore's agreement to pay it. She is to make the announcement in time for the last editions of the evening papers. If her agreement is in those papers, Julia's life will be spared. Then, I suppose, we shall hear from the Corsair

again—with instructions as to how to pay."

"Well, be sure, Mr. Curts, to have that agreement in the evening papers."

"Oh, yes—we have already attended to that, on the advice of the police commissioner. That will be in the papers, though we may decide later not to pay it."

"Don't take any chances. Do everything they ask, even pay the million, if the police can't get Julia before it's time to pay. They'll kill her instantly, if they detect a trick."

"The police commissioner is handling all that."

"I'll be responsible for the million."

That was all Seagrove could do. Just one single clue he had. In his pocket reposed the clipping he had held out from Heri-Moo, the slip of paper with part of an advertisement on the back, with wheels drawn in pencil in the white spaces of it. Somehow, that seemed to be a link with the Corsair.

IN a forlorn hope Seagrove set out with Moxey. If he could find a loitering place of Heri-Moo's race, locate some spot where they gathered, a coffee-house, a tobacco-shop, or a pool-room, a start might be made. So they wandered about the East Side, in and out of places that Moxey suggested, but without revealing to anyone that they were together.

As the hours went by, the futility of this quest bore in upon Seagrove. Not one man did they see who might, from the looks of him, be said either to belong to Heri-Moo's race or to have anything in common with him. Seagrove began to realize that his only hope was to let Heri-Moo find him, and then, through Moxey, turn the tables upon the Eurasian.

The best thing to do, he decided, was to return to the neighborhood of his uptown apartment or to the vicinity of Julia Moore's home, and there loiter about until Heri-Moo or some other member of the Corsair's gang should sight him. Seagrove and Moxey would remain apart, within sight of each other. In brief Seagrove himself was to be the bait that would draw out one of the killers; and then Moxey was to get busy.

It seemed a good idea. It got better and better in Seagrove's mind as he wandered along the Bowery, on the way back to the hotel. He stopped occasionally to gaze into shop-windows and to take furtive looks at Moxey.

But on one occasion he did not see Moxey.

This disturbed him; he did not think Moxey had deliberately given him the slip. But had Moxey got a clue, had he stumbled upon some one in the street crowds, and then gone off on a mission of his own, with no time or chance to notify his employer?

Finally Seagrove returned to the little hotel and waited.

AT twenty minutes past four Moxey came in, breathless.

"I seen a funny-lookin' guy followin' you," he said.

"Following me—where?"

"In the Bowery, an' along the avenue. He followed you right to this hotel, on the other side o' the street. He seen you stop in the doorway, an' when you come inside he hopped in a taxi an' beat it. I hopped in a taxi too, an' beat it right after him."

"See where he went?"

"Yeah, I guess so. He got outa the taxi in Ninth Avenue, an' walked up the street a ways, two or three doors. Then he come up missin', while I was payin' my driver off. But my eyes were off'm him fer only a coupla seconds. I been hangin' around over there, hopin' he'd show up again, but—"

"That's close enough, Moxey. If you've got him located within a block, if he disappeared in some building in that block—why, we'll run him down. But tell me—what'd he look like?"

"Well, he looked like that guy you told me about. Little, with a face that was kinda black and still wasn't black. You know what I mean."

"Yes—swarthy. How was he dressed?"

"Like a dude, all spick and span—with gaiters."

Seagrove nodded and said: "That sounds good, Moxey. And you're sure he was following me?"

"That's a cinch. He's good, too, on the shadow. He kep' outa yer sight. I kep' outa yer sight, too—afraid maybe you'd do sump'n' to tip me off to him."

"That's all right, Moxey. I guess maybe they've been on my trail right along. I'll bet they've been on my heels all day, but just didn't get a chance to slip the works to me. He saw me come into the hotel here, and decided I'd stay in the room awhile. Then he went back to report. Moxey, if we can locate the place where he made his report—"

"I can show you that block in Ninth

Avenue where he come up missin'. Guess maybe we c'n figger sump'n' out."

"That's what we can, Moxey. Let's go!"

They went together this time, in a taxi from which they disembarked two squares from the block they sought. On the way Moxey described the business establishments in that block—a cigar-store on the south corner, a fruit-store, a haberdashery, a vacant shop, a second-hand bookshop, a delicatessen, a shoe-repairing place and so on. At intervals, Moxey said, there were stairways leading to the dwelling flats above. It was in lower Ninth Avenue, traversed by the elevated, a gloomy, littered section of the city.

From across the street, Seagrove studied the buildings that interested him. He had an idea that Heri-Moo, if it was Heri-Moo that Moxey had trailed, had disappeared up one of the stairways. He could not conceive of any of those little shops as being the lair of the Murder Master. He hardly knew where to start in, but an idea did come to him, as he studied the heavily laden rack in front of the bookshop. He could visit that establishment, and probably get into conversation with the proprietor. From him he could get perhaps an idea of some of the families that lived in the shabby flats overhead.

Was Julia Moore being held captive behind some of those murky windows? The thought sent Seagrove across the street swiftly. Moxey was stationed at a vantage-point in the street.

ENOCH BOWLITT
Books Rare and Modern.

That was the legend on the window toward which Seagrove headed.

BUT despite the urge that was upon him from the thought that he might at this moment be within striking distance of Julia's place of captivity, he did not forget that he was dealing with death—the man in the subway car, another in the crowded lobby of a theater, a third at the telephone in his own apartment, the fourth in his own home!

So Seagrove was alert as he crossed the street. It was a dingy little shop that he peered into. First he stopped at the rack on the sidewalk and studied the volumes thereon. It was a good chance to loiter, and to study the street throngs for the sinister face of Heri-Moo.



Arthur Seagrove was the first to reach Julia's side.

Moxey was studying faces, too—and watching windows.

Enoch Bowlitt—an odd name; it had the tang of the sea in it. He could imagine a sailor on an old clipper ship having the name of Enoch Bowlitt. He stepped into the shop. Mr. Bowlitt should prove an interesting individual.

Mr. Bowlitt came forward. There were no other customers.

He was a withered old fellow, but his bent form told of younger days when he probably looked tall and strong. His face had a grizzled power in it; his eyes were bright and searching. He wore a faded suit and a wing collar with a large tie, dark and plain.

"I'm interested in sea stories," said Seagrove.

"Well, young man," said the slow, cracked voice of Enoch Bowlitt, "I have a few."

He thrust his bony head out. His eyes were very bright.

"Back this way, sir."

He led the way toward the rear, stopped at a row of shelves and said: "I have my shop pretty well spaced off, sir. I can lay my hands on any kind of a book I have without much hunting. On these six shelves you will find sea stories. Pirate stories in plenty, if it's thrills you're after. Phœnician pirates, Carthaginian pirates, Moors, Romans, all those fellows who ravaged the Mediterranean. And here we are,"—running a gnarled finger along a certain row—"the Spanish Main! Anything you might want, sir. Help yourself."

"Thank you. Ah, you seem to be interested in the sea, too."

"I am."

The old fellow was certainly studying Seagrove sharply, but that was probably just his way. His eyes burned behind glasses that provided another ancient touch—with their octagonal rims.

"I followed the sea," he added brusquely, and went back to his desk.

Seagrove had a scheme. He would

manifest a keen interest in Enoch Bowlitt's adventures, draw him into friendly talk and slip in questions about the neighborhood.

The ends of the shelves in question ran down to the desk, but Seagrove was just now at the other end of them. He did not see the outspread newspaper on Enoch Bowlitt's desk—a paper from which the likenesses of Arthur Seagrove and Julia Moore looked up.

Mr. Bowlitt got up, wandered out a rear door and closed it behind him. Seagrove divided his glances between the titles on the shelves and the face of Moxey in the street. He was hoping Moxey would again spot Heri-Moo, and signal him.

Mr. Bowlitt returned to the shop, sat down at his desk again, folded the newspaper and laid it aside.

Seagrove engaged him in conversation, and Mr. Bowlitt thawed. He came around and stood at the shelves with his customer. They talked very pleasantly now. Seagrove tried out a few questions about the people in the neighborhood who bought books, and got friendly answers. He glanced through the window at Moxey occasionally.

Presently Bowlitt excused himself and walked to the front of the store. He stood in the doorway, looking into the street. From somewhere he summoned a man, and that fellow stepped inside, dragged the shutters from behind a row of shelves, and outside again, began to put them up at the windows.

Mr. Bowlitt was old-fashioned in that respect, too, it appeared. He still used the old-time shutters at his windows.

HE returned to Seagrove, who was now near the desk.

"Don't be in a hurry, young man," he said. "I'm catching an evening train for Philadelphia, but there's no hurry. Take your time."

"Thank you."

Seagrove meant to go before the shutters excluded the visage of Moxey. Mr. Bowlitt began to look at the volumes his customer had picked out, and seemed to be calculating their price. There was a gaslight above the desk. Seagrove's glance fell upon the large blotter below it.

"You have very good taste in books," Bowlitt was saying.

Seagrove stared at the blotter, sideways, doubting the evidence of his own eyes:

Some one in a meditative frame of mind had drawn at least a score of little wheels upon the blotter.

The same design that was twice repeated upon the clipping Seagrove had in his pocket!

The Corsair—the Murder Master!

CHAPTER VII

A TREMOR, a chill shudder, rippled over the young man's flesh from head to foot—the reaction of surprise and the sudden realization that he was perhaps trapped in the lair of the killer. He turned, with a show of casualness. But as he turned, Enoch Bowlitt moved—moved with a new and astonishing speed. Before Seagrove could make a move to defend himself, the pistol had been snatched from its amateurish concealment in his hip pocket, and Bowlitt had darted with it behind a table piled high with books.

The shutters were up. The door was locked. The fellow who had put up the shutters, and who evidently had been standing guard somewhere in the street, was meandering back toward Seagrove, a mirthless grin on his face. Seagrove was trapped. And now Heri-Moo himself appeared.

The Eurasian came into the shop by way of the rear door. He glanced at Seagrove—and then did an astonishing thing: Swiftly, he moved toward the big fellow coming from the front. He was very sly about it, a serpent gliding toward unsuspecting prey, for the man's attention was fixed on Seagrove. Suddenly Heri-Moo was at the big man's side, and his right hand performed a darting movement. And instantly the big fellow's face turned from a visage of menace against Seagrove to a staring mask of horror. A yell escaped his lips, and died down to a gurgle in his throat. Then he fell.

Seagrove had meanwhile seized the only weapon at hand, Enoch Bowlitt's heavy walking-stick, from a corner behind the desk. He had no time to speculate as to why Heri-Moo had inflicted his mysterious death-thrust upon a man who, by all the evidence, was a fellow-conspirator. For Heri-Moo was coming at him now—Heri-Moo, and death!

It lurked in his hand. The evidence lay on the floor, for the big fellow was clearly dead. The strange Eurasian had made only a slight movement toward

him, from the side, a mere touch. Yet there he lay, dead.

The crooked grin was on Heri-Moo's face. There was murder in that grin.

What could he expect to do, that tiny little man? Well, what had he done to five men already, one just a moment ago? He had killed them in a twinkling. So sure of the result was Enoch Bowlitt that he stood placidly behind the table of books. But his face had turned as murderous as Heri-Moo's. He watched this game of life and death, rapt. It was the face of a maniac!

Seagrove crouched, determined if possible to strike down this monster. The odds would not be so great if Moxey would only show up. What had become of the man?

CLOSER and closer the little Eurasian was coming, watching his chance. It seemed to Seagrove that if he removed his eyes from the black, glistening orbs of Heri-Moo for the space of a wink, the secret death would strike him. But he remembered one important thing: Heri-Moo's movement toward the fellow dead on the floor had been with his right hand. And so Seagrove shifted the cane to his left, crouching yet, concealing the movement behind the desk.

Then he leaped suddenly and struck with the heavy cane—not at Heri-Moo's head, but at his right hand. The blow cracked.

This was a signal that filled that little bookshop with violent movement. Heri-Moo howled, and grabbed his injured right hand with his left. Seagrove sprang over the desk, and while Heri-Moo strove to get in close, for that brief but fatal thrust, beat savagely at his hands with the cane.

A tiny object gleamed on the floor. Seagrove stepped on it as Heri-Moo reached for it, and then laid out the Eurasian with a crack on the head.

The fury of sound brought the scream of a woman. It was muffled by distance and by partitions, yet it had the effect of turning Seagrove into a wild man.

Julia!

Somewhere in that place, above or below, Julia Moore was held captive. She screamed again, and Seagrove shouted in answer.

But he had no chance to go to her then; for a rear door burst open, and three yellow-faced men, evidently mongrels like Heri-Moo, rushed in; and each carried a purposeful pistol.

In a desperate attempt to strike at his enemies separately, Seagrove leaped at Enoch Bowlitt in a flying football tackle. Bowlitt fired but missed; and the two came to the floor together. The old man was no match for Seagrove, who quickly wrested the weapon from him, and then struggled to his feet, clasping Bowlitt close to him as a shield.

Then it was that Seagrove learned the temper of this desperate crew. For after a brief hesitation and a swift interchange in their own tongue, the three in the rear leveled their pistols and began firing. At once Bowlitt went limp in Seagrove's clasp, seriously hurt, it was apparent. And though Seagrove answered his enemies' fire, his living—or dying—shield hampered him; and he would doubtless have quickly lost the battle but for the help that now came.

For the front door was burst open with a crash; Moxey sprawled in with it, and after him came the police, with drawn guns. The firing redoubled; and then—

A sudden silence. . . . Enoch Bowlitt had slipped limply to the floor. And the swarthy criminals who had not hesitated to sacrifice him lay there also, dead or wounded.

ARTHUR SEAGROVE, jamming his way ahead of the police up the stairway that led off a passage to Enoch Bowlitt's flat above, was the first to reach the side of Julia Moore. She had been tied hand and foot and bound to a heavy chair, when word came up to her guards that Seagrove was in the bookshop below.

She stood up for a moment after her thongs were cut, and then fell forward into Seagrove's arms. In just a few moments she regained her strength sufficiently to go to the telephone, and to give the news to her mother. . . .

As Julia and Seagrove sped uptown in a taxi, they heard newsboys shouting in the streets:

"Corsair captured! Julia Moore rescued by Seagrove! Extra—extra! All about the capture of the Murder Master!"

But they returned to police headquarters that night, at the behest of the commissioner. Detectives were scouring the city, running down all possible leads respecting Enoch Bowlitt and Heri-Moo, and phoning in their reports. Julia and Seagrove, in the office of the commissioner, the door of which was besieged by reporters, were apprised of these re-

ports as fast as they came in. All the devices known to the police were being employed to wring confessions from Heri-Moo and the two wounded Eurasians captured in the bookshop. One of the latter was dead; and Bowlitt lay unconscious in a hospital.

It developed that Moxey had held some conversation with the man left on guard by Heri-Moo; and the Eurasian, from a window upstairs, saw this. He instantly leaped to the conclusion that his man had betrayed him, and that he had brought Arthur Seagrove and his bodyguard to the bookshop. So Heri-Moo killed his own man as quickly as he could, killed him while the fellow really was bent on slaying Seagrove.

THE report from the medical examiner was read to Julia and Seagrove:

"From the hypodermic syringe found broken on the floor of the bookshop the laboratory recovered a few drops of fluid, of which tests have been made. It is a poison, name unknown. It forms a clot the instant it is introduced into a vein or a capillary, by turning a small amount of blood to a jelly. This clot, reaching the heart a very few seconds later, causes instant death, by stopping valvular action. The poison perhaps is some old secret of some Asiatic people.

"A very small needle was used, so small as to leave no wound. A man armed with such a syringe containing that poison could easily kill a man who was in combat with him. All that was necessary was for him to get close enough to jab with the needle, into any part of the adversary's body. A tiny bit of the poison introduced into the capillaries, that network of connecting ducts between the arteries and the veins, forms a clot in the space of about a second, congealing sufficient blood in the bloodstream to cause death. In perhaps two more seconds the clot reaches the heart, and the victim falls dead. He would have just about time enough, between the pain of the jab and the stoppage of his heart, to cry out and to make a few motions."

That was the Corsair's secret. But who was the Corsair?

"If the man with the real brains is still at large," the commissioner suggested, "perhaps we haven't heard the last of these murders yet. He's just brazen enough to try something, and quickly, too."

But at this point the chief of detectives entered, and after saluting, made his report.

"You may find this hard to believe, Chief," he said, "but this Bowlitt is our Murder Master. He isn't the brains behind the poison plot—that is, he didn't find the poison. That came from Heri-Moo, no doubt. You see Heri-Moo, if starting on a campaign of extortion and murder, would want to find about as safe a place as he could as a retreat. What was safer than that dingy old bookshop?

"The reports we've got in from the Federal authorities say that Bowlitt, as a sailor thirty-seven years ago, was mixed up in a mutiny at sea. He served a few years in prison. After that, by his own admission, he came to New York and worked around the harbor. When his health went back on him, he bought that bookshop.

"His neighbors say he always acted a little cracked, and the young fellow that worked for him up to a year ago says he was a great reader of pirate stories—histories, fiction, and all that. Well, we've copied those notes to the police and the newspapers, on that rickety old typewriter in his shop. There's no question but what they were written on the same machine. Bowlitt's our man!"

ENOCH BOWLITT never recovered consciousness to confess; and Heri-Moo died by his own hand in jail. But a large part of the Murder Master's loot was found hidden in the cellar of the old book-shop; and the weird crimes peculiar to the Corsair of Manhattan have not been repeated. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Seagrove never look upon Cleopatra's Needle, as their car passes through Central Park without recalling that hectic night when they failed to keep their tryst there. And this thought always induces another—of gratitude that they escaped the fate Heri-Moo had in store for them.

On these motor-excursions the car is usually driven by their chauffeur, and man-of-all-work, Alfred Moxey. *Usually*, we say; for Moxey succumbs now and then—at rarer and rarer intervals, be it said to his credit—to the lure of habits formed long ago. But upon these occasions he comes back so earnestly repentant that forgiveness follows as a matter of course.



REAL

A professional hunter of Arizona writes of one dangerous night when he was caught in a bear-trap—and a wolf-pack threatened.

The Bear

ONE spring old Bear Jones came to me. "Jack," he said, "the bear are raising the devil down along the Sycamore Cañon. The stock-men are offering good bounties on grizzlies. I would like mighty well to collect some of that, but I'm not as young as I once was, and my eyes are not good any more. You know, a feller only has to miss once. If you will go along, we will split the money any way you say."

His right name was Cyrus E. Jones, a famous bear-hunter in his younger days.

"Well, Bear," I said, "nobody ever has to beg me to go bear-hunting, but there is not much snow for tracking, and that means we'll have to trap them. I don't get much kick out of trapping bear."

"Come on and go," he said. "You aint turning down cash, are you? Besides, I'll do the trapping, and you can hunt."

At daybreak next morning we were well on our way. Bear and wolf-traps, grub and bedding were all loaded on a buck-board. Two good saddle-horses were led behind. We camped at the old cabin on the east side of Big Sycamore Cañon. There was plenty of bear sign. We set six No. 6 traps in the most likely places, using whatever we could get for bait.

Next morning I made the rounds of the traps set the day before, while Bear went down to look over the Kelsey and Barney Springs country.

"There's a bear using the old Barney trail in and out of Sycamore," he reported; "and down below the spring I found where a lion had killed a deer and eaten part of it. I took one whole side and used it for bear bait, making a set along the trail. Then I went over to the Kel-

sey place and found where a bear had killed a cow. We got no more traps, so we better bring in one from Bear Cañon tomorrow and make a set at that cow."

Next day I looked the sets over. There had been nothing around the second trap examined, so Bear took it up and went back to make his new set. The next to the last trap visited was gone. The ground was torn up, and several small trees pulled up by the roots. Some were broken off. We had caught our first grizzly, but the next thing was to find him. He was gone, trap, toggle and all. I followed him down Bear Cañon for two miles till I came to a falls fifty feet high, with sides almost perpendicular. Fifty yards below this was a sheer drop of several hundred feet. I slipped up to this first falls and looked over. There lay the bear by a large pool of water. I could have killed him there, but could not have got even his hide out of that hole, and I wanted both hide and trap.

While I was trying to make up my mind what to do, he got my scent. He raised his massive head slowly, the hair on his back and neck standing on end. I let him see me, and he came out of that hole with ease. I had made a hasty retreat up the steep cañon wall, and not any too soon! It took nine shots to stop that big fellow, trapped as he was; and when he finally went down, he was getting too close for comfort. I skinned him out, carried the skin up the cañon where we could come for it with a horse, and throwing the hide over a manzanita tree, I went back for the trap.

I reached camp about eight p. m., very tired. Bear Jones was still up. "Well, what luck?" he greeted me.

"A big grizzly. He is all skinned out." And I told him exactly where he could find both the bear-skin and trap.

EXPERIENCES

Each of us has had at least one crowded hour of excitement in his life that is well worth telling about. Here five of your fellow-readers relate their most interesting adventures. If you would like to try your hand at this Real Experience contest, read the detailed notice on Page Four.

Trap by JACK TOOKER

"But let me tell you something, son," said Bear. "Any time you find a trap gone, you come for me. Don't you try to kill one of those grizzlies. If you'd missed a vital spot the first shot, that big fellow would have got you, shore."

Next morning Bear could not find his clamp to set the traps. I let him have mine, as I was not likely to need it. He rode off to bring in the skin and reset the trap. I went to the Kelsey place; indications were that bear had been visiting this place in the daytime. So I decided to lay for them.

I chose a place above and out of the wind from the carcass. Wild turkey, deer and many cattle came in to water, but no bear. I stayed as long as I could see to shoot; then I left. It was dark by the time I had gone a short distance, and there was no moon. But after several hours of stumbling I managed to reach the trail in the Barney Springs cañon.

IT was on the north side and near this trail that the trap was set. I had been here often, but did not know the exact location of the trap. By getting down low so that I could get an object between me and the sky-line, I could see fairly well. I finally located the half of deer hanging in a small tree, and then made a guess as to which side of the tree the trap would be located on. I guessed wrong. I felt the pan of the trap give under my weight, and tried to jump clear, but too late! I was caught in one of the largest bear-traps made.

There was that first shock, but very little pain. I felt for my clamp with which the springs on a bear-trap are compressed. Then I remembered that Bear had it. Then I thought if I had my pliers, I could take off the nuts that held the trap together, and in that man-

ner get out. No pliers. They had been left in camp. I began to do some deep thinking. I had told the old man not to worry about me and never to hunt for me. . . .

It was cold; I must get out of that trap some way, and I did not want a frozen foot, so I built a fire. It furnished both light and warmth.

I examined the nuts on the bottom of the trap and found that they were riveted. No chance to get them off. I worked for several hours to get the ring off the drag. I needed it. If I could compress one spring, I could slip this ring over it, and with wedges hold it, while I compressed the other. I thought of my rifle-barrel as a pry. I moved over to a pine tree away from the fire, dragging the trap after me. There I found an exposed root, got the trap near it, stuck the front end of the gun-barrel under the root, and threw my weight on the stock. It broke. Then I put my weight on the breach of the gun. The trap spring gave a little, but the gun-barrel bent as if it were made of lead. The stock was broken, the front sight knocked off, and the barrel bent. It was useless, so I turned it over and bent it back and forth several times. I had ruined the gun, but it had given me an idea. All I had to do was find something for a pry, and I would be free in a short time.

Then I heard a rustle in the bushes near me. There was a pair of green eyes, close together and near the ground—no doubt a fox. I remembered that the trap had been set in an oak thicket. One of those sturdy little oak saplings would be just the thing for a pry. I dragged the heavy trap back again where it had been set. The fire had died down. I had the feeling that I was not alone, and

that there was an animal near me; I seemed to get the odor, and looked about me. There, not twenty paces away, I saw large pale green or yellowish eyes. I recognized them: at once—a lion!

From up the trail came the lonesome howl of a wolf. It was answered from a short distance to the south. The lion left. Still another wolf howled across the little cañon to the north. At least three wolves had located me and knew I was in trouble. Wild animals soon know when a man is in distress. Here was I, a thirty-six-pound trap fastened to my leg, and armed only with a belt-ax.

I set to work chopping down a small oak about the size of my arm. The ax-head came off the handle, and while I scratched around among the leaves for it, I heard a snarl at my back. As I straightened up, a large dark form sprang away. There were eyes on all sides of me, and not more than twenty steps away. I crawled to the fire and threw some dry leaves and twigs on the coals.

I knew the wolves would not come near the fire, so set to work repairing my little ax. I whittled out a green oak wedge, put the ax on the handle, and by the light of the fire found a stone with which I drove the wedge home. Then I crawled back to the oak; a few more blows, and the little tree fell.

At the noise of the falling tree, the wolves left, but soon returned. Trimming up the tree, I cut off about eight feet and crawled back to the fire, picked out a piece of burning wood and started toward the big pine tree where I had bent the gun-barrel in trying to free myself. At this time I felt a tingle in my trapped toes, which assured me that the circulation was not all shut off. But there was still no pain. By putting the end of the pole under the root and working the trap-spring up under it, I soon had one spring down, and by using the ring and wedges, held it down. Then I moved the trap over, bringing the pole down on the other spring and the jaws fell apart. Even then it was not easy to get my foot out past those teeth.

When I was at last free, I was indeed thankful. My torch had gone out, and the wolves were still lurking about. I was crawling back to the fire when two wolves darted in at me, as though I were a crippled deer. I stood up on my knees and faced them with my ax. They growled menacingly, showed their fangs, and slunk back. I dared not again turn my back on them. They had been with-

in five or six feet of me. The next time they might sink those fangs into my neck. I faced them and worked sidewise toward the fire, where, after much difficulty, I removed the boot. Three teeth had penetrated the flesh above the ankle. The boot was half full of blood, but the wounds had stopped bleeding.

By rubbing, life began to return, and then I began to suffer. At first I thought that the wounds were the cause of the pain. But I soon discovered that it was the fire causing the real agony. My foot was frozen, or very nearly so. Armed with my little ax, I crawled to the stream that ran down from the Barney Spring, and there soaked my leg in the ice-cold water. It must have taken at least an hour to get the frost out of that foot and leg. When I returned to the fire, it was daylight. This time the fire felt good, but as the frost left the leg, the bleeding commenced again, so I bound the wounds tightly with my bandanna handkerchief over the underwear. The swelling had been greatly reduced. I put on my socks and boot, lacing the boot tight, and started for camp.

THE sun was up, and no animals were in sight. That foot was like a club. It would not walk, but I kept at it. At the spring I drank my fill of cold water. It was necessary to rest every few feet. The farther I went, the better the leg performed, but I became weak and sick. I stopped to rest in a sunny spot at the edge of the trail. The horrible scene of the night came back to me. It was then I realized how easily I could have lost my life in that trap. Had I become frightened and broken my leg— But I was safe now; two more miles, and I would be in camp where I could eat, rest and sleep. . . .

There was some one tugging at my mackinaw. "What's the matter? What you doing here?"

I told him my story.

Bear was a noted two-gun man, and had faced bad men, and nine grizzlies that I know of; but tears were rolling down his face as I finished. "And I had your clamp!" he mourned. The old man tenderly helped me into the saddle and led the horse back to camp. . . .

Two days later I could visit the traps on horseback. In three weeks I was well. In addition to bear, I went back after wolves. We caught three more grizzlies, and I had the satisfaction of getting four of those shaggy gray wolf-devils.



In the Box-Car

An orphan boy is adopted by a hobo sign-painter—and his adventures climax in a death-struggle with vicious tramps.

By

HARRY STRONG

I WAS born and reared in a little two-room log cabin far back in the Kentucky hills. When I was about twelve, my widowed mother died, and I was left without kith or kin. The few neighbors in that sparsely settled community were very poor; none offered to take me in, so I wandered to the "settlements" in the hope of finding a home or job of some kind.

It was late one afternoon, and raining, when I trudged wearily into the little town of Greenup, Kentucky. That was my first sight of a town or railroad. And, ignorant, timid little "hilly-billy" that I was, I walked the streets till dark, unable to summon the courage to accost any of the inhabitants. Then, cold, wet and hungry, I crawled into an empty box-car and went to sleep. It was there, the next morning, that "Pittsburgh Red" found me. And he, the hulking, red-headed, lazy brute, realizing that my forlorn appearance would receive a ready response from kind-hearted housewives, took possession of me at once. He used me as a meal-ticket, compelling me to go with him bumming freight-trains and begging "chuck" for him at back doors. I hated and feared him and was anxious to get out of his clutches, but was afraid to go it alone. Besides, he had me thoroughly cowed by threatening to kill

me if I ever attempted to get away. Sometimes he'd order me to fetch him pie or cake, and if I failed to get it, he'd beat me up. . . .

One evening we were loitering around a water-tank on the outskirts of Chillicothe, Ohio. I'd just returned from some near-by houses with a bundle of back-door "hand-outs."

Red was sitting on a pile of cross-ties awaiting my return. He was, as usual, in an ugly humor.

"W'at de hell kept youse so long?" he snarled, making a pass at me with a dirty, freckled, ham-like hand. I ducked the blow, threw the bundle of food on the ties and darted back out of reach. He knew that "chuck" was hard to get in that neighborhood, but he wanted to keep me cowed. Snarling curses at me, he tore the bundle open and began greedily devouring the contents. I was hungry, but I waited till he had his hands and mouth full before venturing to help myself. Then I sidled closer and timidly selected a sandwich of bread and bacon.

But as I started to take a bite, Red suddenly shot out a foot and kicked me viciously in the stomach. I doubled up, groaning in agony. Red laughed uproariously.

Just then there came the quick shuffle of feet on the graveled road-bed, and a figure came hurtling across the tracks out of the shadows.

"Kick a kid, will ye, ye rat!" roared an Irish-brogue voice, and a stout arm shot out, a fist smacked against Red's jaw, bowling him over backward. That human cyclone gave Red no time to

recover. He grabbed him by the collar, jerked him from the ties and knocked him to his knees. Then, still grasping him by the collar, he drove his fist time and again into Red's face, and with every blow he'd yell, "Kick a kid, will ye, kick a kid, will ye!" while Red pleaded for mercy.

SURPRISED into forgetfulness of my own hurt, I stared in dumb amazement at the man who was giving Red the beating of his life.

The newcomer was squat, stocky, built like a bulldog; but I couldn't understand how even he could whip a man like Red until later when I saw his arms. The muscles bulged like bundles of steel cables. His biceps were so large they'd burst the sleeves of an ordinary cheap shirt when he'd crook his arms. Presently he released Red, who fell to the ground and lay there groaning. Then the stocky figure turned, looked me over a minute and with a curt, "Come on, kid," started off down the track.

That's how I met "Shorty," the hobo sign-painter. From then on Shorty and I were pals. Never again did I have to beg for food at 'back doors. Shorty was a genius at his trade, made good money and kept us well supplied in food and clothing. In fact, he was more like a father than a pal to me. Not only did he try to look after my physical well-being, but in his awkward yet kindly way, he endeavored to raise me to a higher moral and intellectual plane than his own. He would spend hours teaching me to read from newspapers—a tedious job and very trying to his Irish temperament, for I'd never gone to school a day in my life, and knew not one letter from another. Yet he stuck to the task and rarely lost patience. He seldom used profanity except when angry, and sometimes he'd drink to excess, but he never allowed me to do either. "Ye mustn't pattern after me, kid," he'd admonish me. "I aint nothin' but jest a no-account hobo an' won't never be nothin' else. But you're young an' gotta chance to make somethin' o' yourself. An', by the saints, I'm gonna see that you do it too! It aint fitten fer ye to be hoboin' around over the country with the likes o' me. I'm gonna find a home fer ye among dacent people," he'd declare with an earnestness that left no doubt of his sincerity.

Yet for some reason, he never found that home, and I suspect it was because

he'd grown as fond of me as I had of him and dreaded the day of parting. When working a town we'd stay in cheap but clean boarding-houses. But we never stayed long in one place, for Shorty was a natural-born hobo. Consequently, while going from town to town, we never rode the "cushions," but always traveled on freight-trains.

It was this hobo complex, and that beating that he gave Pittsburgh Red, that cost Shorty his life a few months later. This is how it happened: We were traveling over a road that at that time was reputed to be infested by the worst gang of thugs in the country. It was rumored that this gang thought nothing of slugging a fellow-hobo and rifling his pockets of a few cents and then throwing him from the speeding train. The next morning there would be just another dead hobo found along the right-of-way, and "accidental death" would be the verdict.

IT was a chilly night in early April. Shorty and I had boarded a freight-train and been lucky enough to find a fairly clean, empty box-car. We'd spread some newspapers on the floor, then lain down and gone to sleep. I awoke with the flare of a match in my face and voices sounding in my ears. I stared up into three evil, grinning faces. One of them was Pittsburgh Red's. But he was not looking at me. He was leering down at Shorty, who lay just in front of me.

"Well, well, look who's here! If it aint de hobo sign-painter," he jeered. Then the leer on his ugly mug suddenly gave place to savage rage. "Listen, you lousy bum! I been lookin' fer youse all over de map, see? I been wantin' to pay youse back fer w'at youse done to me dat night at Chilli-cotie, see? An' here's where youse git yours wit interest," he snarled, aiming a vicious kick at Shorty's head.

Shorty tried to jerk back, but we were lying too close together, and I interfered with his movements. I heard a bone-crushing thud, and a groan, as Red's heavy shoe landed in Shorty's face. Then all three plied him with feet and fists. There came the smack and slap of blows and kicks; curses, grunts and groans. I received a jolt in the ribs that sent me spinning into a far corner. I crouched there, terror-stricken, for I was only a twelve-year-old kid, weighing much less than a hundred pounds, and either of

the three burly thugs could have tossed me half the length of the car with one hand.

In the uncertain light from the open doors, I saw Shorty lunge to his feet, heard his fist smash into a face, and a man went down. Blows and kicks were raining on Shorty from every direction. He was fighting for his life there in the darkness of that swaying, speeding box-car and he knew it; and—he almost won.

A man was down; another was staggering back from a smashing upper-cut from Shorty's mighty right, when I caught the glimpse of an arm as it rose and fell.

There came that dull, unmistakable "sog" of a blackjack, and Shorty crumpled to the floor. A match flared, and the blood-smeared faces showed that Shorty had given a good account of himself. But he now lay inert at Red's feet. They wasted no time nor words discussing what they were about to do. They understood each other, that gang did. The man on the floor was scrambling to his feet, cursing through bloody lips. He and another grabbed Shorty by the legs and arms and carried him to the door. Then they began swinging him between them, as men do a sack of grain they are about to pitch.

Then Pittsburgh Red interfered. "Not dat way, gang! Let's fix dat guy right! Under de buggy wid 'im," he yelled, and sprang forward to assist. I knew only too well what Red meant. They'd throw Shorty under the wheels.

WHAT emotions governed my actions then, I cannot say. I wish that I could look back to that tragic moment and make myself believe that I was actuated solely by the heroic desire to save my friend. It would be a great consolation to me to think that I had forgotten self for the moment and had gone heroically to the assistance of the best friend I ever had. But I believe my predominant emotions were terror, horror and, above all, self-preservation, for I knew that Shorty's fate would be my own. They'd not let me live to tell what had happened.

They were all three kneeling on the floor and swinging to get the necessary momentum to throw Shorty under the wheels. Red was in the middle, holding Shorty by the belt. Like a screaming wildcat I leaped from that corner and hurled my puny weight against Red's huge bulk. Red was off balance, and

my push was sufficient to send him plunging head-first out the door. He fell against Shorty, wrenching him from the grasp of the other two, who had all that they could do to save themselves from falling. My momentum, and collision with Red, had sent me sprawling on the floor and several feet beyond the door. I knew that in another moment the two thugs would be upon me. If they caught me, it would be just too bad. I scrambled quickly to my feet, desperate as a cornered rat. I had just one chance—a slim one. I ducked my head between my shoulders and took a running jump through the opposite door.

I landed on my feet in loose gravel, and went rolling end over end down a steep embankment. I don't know how long I lay there, dazed, but when I opened my eyes, I was lying on my back among a patch of weeds. Presently my head cleared, and I scrambled to my feet. My left arm was useless, and I was scratched and bruised. I saw a light in the distance across the fields and started toward it. I reached the back door of a large brick farmhouse about daybreak. I was unnerved, on the verge of collapse, and must have presented a sorry sight to kindly Mrs. Reed, who answered my knock.

She started back and threw up her hands in amazement at sight of me. "Oh, you poor child, whatever has happened to you!" she cried, and that motherly sympathetic outburst went straight to my lonesome, miserable soul and broke down the last remnant of my self-control. I struggled to keep back the tears, but they came in a flood, and dirty little ragamuffin though I was, she gathered me into her arms, where I sobbed out my story. It was thus that I found the home that Shorty repeatedly had declared I should have.

MR. REED and one of his hired men started out at once to search the railroad right-of-way. They returned a short while later, and their grave faces told the tale all too plainly. Shorty and Red were both dead.

Though responsible for Red's death, I felt neither remorse nor condemnation. My only regret was that I'd been unable to prevent the death of my friend. As to what became of Red's two pals, I never learned, for I made my home with the Reeds for years thereafter—and I have never ridden a freight-train from that day to this.

Down Below



A weird experience with a crafty maniacal miner, far underground—and a narrow escape.

By NOEL A. RADDATZ

"IF you want the Birthday Gift mine, look sharp. Brewster selling cheap. Wire reply, Ham's Siding. Waiting."
"LANG."

I was representing the Winona Gold Mines Limited, and for a long time had been searching for a real gold show. Lang was a scout of mine.

I wired Lang to expect me and caught a "mixed" train for Ham's Siding. We camped that night at the hotel, and next morning, as soon as we had breakfasted, we rode out on hired horses toward a dark range of mountains. It was wild country away from the Siding, but we hit a trail through the leafy iron-barks and spreading gums, that led us into a deep gorge where a clear stream ran between steep razor-backed ridges of great height. As we rode through the creek, I heard the rumble of explosives. We rode round a bend in the stream and saw ahead the gray crags and jutting rocks of nature's own mountain fortress. A narrow track zigzagged up the mountain-side to where, about halfway up the peak, a dark hole showed in the crumbling wall. We tied our horses at the base and walked up.

Brewster was expecting us, and a tug on the bell-cord brought him to the surface. He seemed a typical miner—lean, tall, muscular and with a large beard. Lang introduced me, and after a brief chat he invited us below.

Without going into the details of the business, sufficient to say that I sampled the mine from end to end and was well satisfied. There was good gold there, without a doubt. It glittered in the face of every drive, and the lode was all free-milling stone.

We were about to ascend the mine when we were suddenly transfixed with horror. An agonized scream, utterly unhuman, sounding like a noise from an-

other world, broke upon us through the darkness. My hair stood erect. Lang shivered and stepped back.

"Wha-a-t's that?" he gasped.

"It's the wind," Brewster laughed. "It rushes up the gorge and into the open drive, where the bottling up acts as a whistle. You soon get used to that. Come on—we'll go up."

The explanation was plausible enough, but the sound had left me shaken.

Out in the open, as we were arranging the deal, I found ample time to study Brewster. Outwardly he struck me as being a decent enough fellow and his price was O. K. if the assay was right, but he insisted on being paid in cash, and not by check. As this could easily be arranged, I thought nothing of it.

IT took some time at the head office before assays were completed and the necessary documents prepared, and several weeks elapsed before I again stepped off the "mixed" at Ham's Siding.

I rode alone this time, Lang being absent on business of his own.

Brewster, dust-begrimed and a trifle anxious, met me at the tunnel mouth.

"Brought the cash?" he asked.

I nodded, and tapped my pockets thoughtlessly; whereupon his face brightened, and he apologized for not being at the Siding to meet me.

"The truth is," he continued, "I've been working. I've struck it thick! That last shot opened up a seam of almost solid gold. You'll clear yourself in a week. It's down on the fifth level. Come on and see for yourself."

He passed into the drive, lit a candle and started to go down. I followed close on his heels. We had not descended far before I became conscious of strange sounds that permeated the air. Neither

shrieks nor moans, but noises muffled, sad and mournful. The air was thick and clammy. Brewster moved down in front, a grim monster in the flickering light, shoulders hunched, and one arm flung out wide in front to shield the candle from the bats that flew in great numbers about our heads. Suddenly he turned abruptly. We were in front of the fifth level.

"It's in there," he almost whispered.

We went into the drive and walked between stout props and jagged rock walls for a time. Somehow I found myself in the lead at the end. The queer noises had died down, and everything hung close and still. I was peering intently at the blank wall for signs of gold, when something cold and hard jabbed me in the back of my neck. I wheeled; Brewster was standing behind me. On his face was a sinister grin and in his right hand an ugly revolver.

"Move an inch, and you're a dead man!" he rasped.

For a brief space I could not have moved voluntarily. Then I began to look about for some weapon. There was spalled quartz in plenty on the earthen floor—a good enough weapon in a strong hand; but I knew the moment I stooped, he'd shoot.

Then I was jerked sharply from my feet and fell heavily on the sharp quartz. Brewster had somehow roped me! For a moment my senses wavered, and I was too stunned to move; and when I did, I found I was securely bound hand and foot. Brewster was standing by, a picture of evil as he fumbled with the precious bank-notes. He crammed them into his trousers pockets and flashed the candle-trouser on the rock wall.

"Now," he grunted, "I'm going to tell you something. You'll never see the outside world again! And bear this in mind: there is no gold in this mine. It's a salted show."

I tried hard to swallow the ignominy I felt. I had been neatly tricked.

Brewster now laid something long and sinuous on the earth beside me. I looked at him. He pointed a scornful finger toward the loosely plaited object, and in a flash I understood. Fuses!

"I've prepared a fine exit for you. At the end of each of those fuses are seven plugs of high explosive." He waved his arms expressively.

"But you can't!" I yelled. "It's impossible. It's murder! The police!"

"The police! Let them come. When I leave here, you'll have fifty feet of dirt

above you. It will take them a month to dig you out, and by that time I'll have vanished." And ignoring me altogether, he set about priming the fuses.

The priming finished, he dragged me closer and picked up the candle butt.

"I've given you plenty of fuse, so you can begin your prayers," he taunted.

His shoulders were bent low, and his back was toward me. I heard a fizz. "Number one!" he muttered; and then—a scream! Loud, piercing and vibrant, it came echoing through the mine.

BREWSTER sprang erect and faced about. His fingers were knotted round his revolver-butt, and terror was on his face. Then it came again—nearer, clearer than before. A blood-curdling bay, charged with death!

A shadow appeared in the drive. Brewster fired, but it came on. Brewster crouched low in the corner, and powder-fumes spread through the atmosphere.

The shadow was near—a distorted shape. One bound, and it was upon us—a leaping, swaying form. Another shriek, three more shots—a flash and a groan! Brewster staggered weakly. His revolver clattered on the rocks. I caught one glimpse of a wild black face peering into mine, felt the snick of a knife, and the unknown vanished into the shadows again. But I was free.

The fuse was burning low in the drill-hole now, so I sprang to assist Brewster, who was lying limp, blood oozing from his back.

With a sudden strength born of desperation, I dragged him out of the drive. I was fighting against time now. A flash—a terrific roar! The earth shook—and a giant arm slapped me across the face and hurled me backwards. I got up, shaken, and staggered upward until I saw light. Once again I knew I was safe.

Brewster lived long enough to confess his villainy to the police. It seemed he had collected several aborigines, black fellows, and chained them to the face of the drives, compelling them to work or starve. And it was the wails of these poor devils that startled us so much on my first visit to the mine. Then he conceived the idea of "salting" the show and selling out. It was so well done that I confess I was taken in. The black fellows, poor demented beggars, were found wandering in the hills some days later.

To this day I consider myself a very fortunate man, and when I think of my ordeal "down below" I shudder.



The Tree-topper

The most dangerous of all woodsman's jobs proved Mr. Day's courage thoroughly.

By KEN DAY

in the direction from which it had come: We had all heard cries like that before.

Our eyes were all drawn to the top of a huge fir, possibly a hundred yards distant. It was barren of limbs save at the top where the branches had not been cut; but instead of pointing skyward as Nature intended, the top of this tree was sagging toward the earth. It had split the trunk of the tree as it sagged.

I could have shut my eyes and seen the events which had preceded this picture: Danny Reed the high-climber, scaling the trunk of the huge tree, cutting the limbs as he went until he reached the required height; then the top of the tree as he prepared to cut it out and leave only the gaunt trunk which was to be a spar-tree, holding the giant bull-block two hundred feet above the earth for the highline to run through as it reached out a quarter of a mile away and dragged the huge logs toward the loading dock.

I could picture Danny as he girdled the trunk there at the top, cutting the tough bark so that when the top sagged and fell the trunk would not split and crush him against his life-belt. I could imagine him, callous to the ever-present threat of these giants with which he was so familiar, as he perhaps failed to cut the bark entirely around the tree before he topped. I could see him as he cut the top out; it swayed, and instead of breaking away cleanly and hurtling toward the ground the tough bark held the falling top, splitting the trunk of the tree until it was held only by Danny's life-belt—and his body, now being ground to pulp under the awful strain.

This, I knew, was what had happened; I had seen it before.

As I watched, breathlessly, I saw that Danny was moving—he was still alive. I saw his left arm reach out and encircle the part of the trunk which was pressing

A GAIN I swung the twenty-pound sledge; it crashed into the wedge and the huge tree shivered. Chris Larsen's sledge smashed down onto the other wedge and another tremor ran through the body of the huge fir which towered nearly two hundred feet into the air. Once more the twenty pounds of steel at the end of the ash stave in my hand rose and fell. This time the wedge twisted sidewise under the blow and I knew that the massive tree was toppling.

"Timber-r-r-r-r!"

That cry echoed through the woods as Chris and I dropped our sledges and retreated to safety. We watched the once-proud monarch of the Oregon woods as it swayed toward the undercut, seemed to pause for a second in its flight, and then gathered momentum and toppled over, crashing to earth with a jar that shook the ground and deafened the ears.

It had hardly hit the ground before the hard-boiled crew of Swedes were swarming onto it, the blades of their keen axes flashing in the sunlight as they denuded it of limbs.

Chris wiped the sweat from his face with a bandanna; I tipped up a canteen and was just starting to swallow a drink of water when a piercing scream rent the air. All activity ceased as we gazed

against him. If the top should break away now, I knew that the split would snap together, cutting off his arm like so much butter; if the rope broke, the part of the trunk to which he was holding might plunge to the ground instead of the other half from which dangled the top of the tree.

For the first time I noticed that Danny still held his ax in his right hand. I saw his right arm raise slowly, clearly telling the tremendous strain under which those tortured muscles labored. The ax was raised high; it flashed in the air, and the rope parted with a snap as the blade severed it. The straining top, released now, swept downward, tearing a huge slab from the tree—but not the piece to which Danny was clinging.

I saw him hanging like a spider as the top of that tree whipped through the air and finally came to rest.

The camp, deathly quiet, suddenly rang with the shouts of men.

Nels Svenstrom, the woods boss, appeared from the bunkhouse with a pair of spurs and a rope in his hands; almost before I realized what I was doing, I had donned the spurs, encircled the tree with the rope, and started climbing toward Danny. I had done some climbing before just for the fun of it, using Danny's spurs, as he and I bunked in the same room and had become good friends.

But I had never climbed to the top of a tree, and before I had covered half the distance I was wishing that I had never started. However, my own stubborn pride as well as the thought of Danny clinging up there alone spurred me on.

After what seemed years, I reached the top. Danny's face was as white as paper and the cords stood out on his face and neck like taut steel under the bloodless skin. He tried to grin as I fastened the rope around his waist, but slumped against the rope in a dead faint.

Somehow, I managed to reach the ground with my limp burden. As I lowered him into the arms waiting to receive him and dropped the few remaining feet to the ground, my knees gave way and I fell full length.

As I rested, I saw them carry Danny to a speeder which was on the track. One of the men cranked it and started with his helpless passenger to the nearest town, twenty miles away.

As I was unfastening the spurs from my legs, Nels Svenstrom approached me.

"I guess you'll have to take over his job," he said.

"I don't want it," I replied, "get somebody else."

He shook his head.

"This is the busiest time of the year in all the camps and it may be several days before I can get an experienced climber. I've telephoned to the main office, but until one shows up you can do the work. We've got to get a tree rigged up right away."

I knew it would be useless to argue with this big Swede. The camp was a small one and ran on a short margin. Work could not stop for the death of one man, and I knew that if I refused to take the job I would be taking the next "shay" back to town. Besides, the thought of the extra three dollars a day was welcome when I remembered that I had lost my last pay-check in a blackjack game. So I finally agreed.

BY quitting time that night I had become somewhat accustomed to the work, and before the next day was over I had lost all fear of the heights and was beginning to enjoy my new job. I told Nels that he could cancel the order for another climber if he thought that I would fill the bill, and he readily agreed.

In a short time I came to understand the feelings of these men who work high in the air. Heretofore, I had thought that it was a spirit of foolhardiness or the fact that they were just too phlegmatic to realize the danger under which they worked, but as the days passed I realized that there was something about it that got into your blood: the height, looking down on the men who toiled below you, the sway of the tree in the breeze as you neared the top, the swish of the top as it flashed past you and dropped earthward, and the mighty whip of the released trunk as the top dropped away.

I soon learned the knack of bracing my legs as the top of the mighty trunk swayed in these wild gyrations; I learned how to flip my rope away from the trunk of the tree and drop from ten to fifteen feet before I dug the sharp spurs into the thick bark for another flip and a drop. I had seen climbers who could drop their hats and reach the ground in this fashion before the dropping hat did; while I never became this good, still I was proud of my ability to sail down the side of a tree with hardly a stop.

One day I was nearing the top of a tall fir, but this was an old story to me now. Like Danny, in my familiarity with these

tall trees, and with the overconfidence of youth, I was beginning to get careless.

I looked at my watch: eleven o'clock. I would have time to top this tree before dinner.

My ax bit into the bark and I soon had the tree girdled. I had never forgotten the sight of Danny and consequently, though I might be careless in other ways, I was always sure that the bark was cut clear around the tree before I started to saw out the top.

I had just finished cutting the bark when I heard a crackling sound and felt a slight tremor run through the trunk and transmit itself to me through the tautness of my belt. I looked up. The top of that tree was slowly but surely swaying toward me!

FOR a moment I was paralyzed; I'll never forget the helpless feeling I had as I watched that heavy top slowly topple toward me. I was directly in the line of its fall, and I knew that as it fell I would be brushed from that tree like a fly.

The heart of the tree had been rotten and girdling it had weakened it enough to let it break off. My mind flashed ahead and I knew for a certainty what was going to happen, but still I seemed unable to move.

There was another crackling as the few remaining fibers in the heart of the tree tore loose. The sound seemed to bring me out of the trance. Frantically I dug my spurs into the bark as I sidled around the tree—if I could reach the other side, the falling branches might miss me. But I was too late.

I was engulfed as the top of the mighty tree plunged downward. I felt my belt give, and felt myself falling. I clutched frantically at the rope and felt my fingers close over one frayed end; then my arms were nearly jerked from their sockets as the rope tightened, and I felt myself sailing dizzily through the air. I was free of the falling top now. I felt myself snap through the air like a bullet as the trunk, released by the falling top, swung far to one side. I shut my eyes and waited for the crash, for I knew I must be hurtling through the air as from a huge catapult.

Then came a shock I cannot describe and for a moment I thought I had hit the ground. My arms felt as though they'd been twisted from their sockets; then I again felt the rush of wind past my ears.

Suddenly I realized what was happening. The other end of the rope had caught on the trunk of the tree as the top dropped to the ground; and here I was like a fly on the tip end of a mighty whip as the huge trunk lashed furiously to and fro in its mad gyrations. My body snapped at the end of that two-hundred-foot whip as I was flung madly one way and then the other, as far as that rope would let me go.

I realized that the rope could not stand this strain for long; it must either break or come unfastened from the entangling grip of the tree. I did not think of my grip on the rope at all. I must have subconsciously realized that the rope would break before my clutch would loosen.

But by some miracle the rope held.

After a time I realized that I was hanging comparatively still against the trunk of the tree. Instinctively I dug my spurs into the bark. My hands were twisted around the rope and when I attempted to let go my muscles refused to relax their death-grip.

Just as darkness was once again descending upon me, I felt arms grasp my waist and I realized that help had arrived. But I was unable to aid my rescuer and he, after securing my body to the tree with another safety-belt, had to tear my hands from the rope. I knew what he was doing, but was powerless to help him.

I came to, to find myself lying on the ground. The sounds of a lumber-camp filled the air: creaking blocks, the snort of the donkey-engine, the ring of the saws, and the thousand and one other sounds so familiar to the woods.

Nels Svenstrom was standing over me; behind him I could see the gaunt shape of the spar-tree, and halfway up it was the Swede who had carried me down. The work of the camp must go on.

AFTER my terrifying experience, perhaps I should have shuddered at the sight of that tree and hoped never to see another—but I did not. My only emotion was that of jealousy as I watched that Swede slowly climb the tree that I should be rigging! It was in my blood. I knew I could no more stay out of the swaying tops of those giants than a sailor can forsake the ocean.

Two weeks later, after being discharged from the hospital, I experienced one of the thrills of my life as my spurs once more bit into the thick bark of a fir and I started upward.

Captured

An American officer is captured by rebellious Nicaraguans.

By DANA TODD



I WOKE looking at the muzzle of a Krag rifle! And my brother-officer Lieutenant Zeke Blue likewise.

On each side of our mosquito nets were members of our company at Yali, Aguarica. We were the only two Americans in the province, and commanded the post of a hundred-odd native soldiers.

But for some weeks all had not been well. We felt a tensivity in the command that concerned us.

It seemed that things were worse since we had sent Larios down to the court-martial in Granagua for attempting to incite a mutiny. We had caught him with slips of paper signed in red (it looked like blood), whereby a dozen and a half of our more slovenly soldiers had entered into a pact to rid themselves of our presence. When he was made a national hero, a martyr, and the best lawyer in the country came to his defense, it didn't help us a bit. And then when he only got six months from the court (they had sworn in seven native lawyers to hear the case)—well, you can see we were not in the most comfortable spot in Central America!

"You are both our prisoners, Tenientes," said the ring-leader, our good Sergeant Matamoros. "If you do not try to escape us, we shall make you no harm. If you are unpleasant, we shall be more unpleasant to you." This from the scoundrel to whom I had taught English over a period of eighteen months!

"What is the meaning of this?" Zeke asked him severely.

"Don't you realize what you are doing, Sergeant?" I chimed in.

"Most clearly, my Lieutenant," the blackguard replied. "We realize it, and have planned that you will not communicate with any of your gringo friends. We are about to place the two of you in the *carcel*, temporarily. Further than that, we have not as yet decided."

"But man, you can't get away with this; you know that," Blue protested.

"We have planned carefully, Lieutenant; do not think that our plans will go wrong."

They made us dress hurriedly, and true to their word, dragged us over to the hoosegow, which we had very carefully built to hold our prisoners, not ourselves. We had supervised its construction of adobe and heavy wooden bars. We had even drawn the plans for it. And now, here we were—guests of our own hotel.

The town was going about in excited activity; the "boy scouts" were apparently all in on it, for we could see them dashing about collecting things from the townspeople. Then they started to bring together bedding and clothing-rolls.

One group went by the small barred window where we could see they were carrying a big phonograph and several cases of beer. We had already heard singing. Apparently this was going to be a fiesta-patrol. Just a good old celebration of throwing off the yoke of the Blonde Beasts from the North!

Zeke grew morose.

"Pal, it looks like we were spending our last moments hereabouts. I think we'd better write some notes on the walls here."

Sounded like a good soldierly idea to me. Then whoever learned of the uprising and came in there could find out what had happened.

Fortunately they had left us with a pencil, though they had very carefully purloined our pistols, watches and even our toilet articles.

We wrote: "*Eight A. M., Tuesday, 25 August. Captured by mutineers, Matamoros in charge. They are getting ready to leave. God knows where; we don't.*"

We were writing this behind the single bunk that was in the place so they'd not see it when they came for us.

About noon they brought us dinner; and at about one (we could guess time better now, for the sun was where we could see it) in sauntered the commander of the garrison, Sergeant Matamoros, and his staff of Corporals Ruiz, Limones and Suarez. The Sergeant had on both our forty-fives, and the others had visited our gallery of souvenirs and lifted all the pearl-handled and other fancy pistols we had taken from peace-loving citizens who looked more like bandits to us, and whose arms permits were not found by us.

"My dear señores," Matamoros began, and proceeded to give us a lecture on the "tyranny" we had inflicted on them. After a great tirade and letting us know that we hadn't been such bad guys ourselves, for which they'd treat us well, he informed us that we were going to join the army of Jamino, the rebel *jefe*.

THERE was no use talking to this black so-and-so; he was so swelled up with his newly-acquired importance that he gave us to understand we were to speak when addressed, not otherwise.

Well, he left in about fifteen minutes from the grand entry, with no less fanfare and flare of trumpets, and we were left with our unpleasant thoughts.

Matamoros seemed quite sober, as did the others with him; but most of the men were roaring drunk by now, and out in the afternoon sun, too. That does no good to a drinking man.

After the afternoon rain, they came for us; thank heaven, they brought mules.

We were securely roped to our own saddles on our own mules and escorted around to the corral, where we found a more-or-less make-shift caravan, outfitted for the trail with phonograph, beer-cases, and—yes, they had remembered to take some food along. We counted most of our stores on the pack-mules. However, we couldn't see that they had any ammunition beyond what they were carrying in their cartridge-belts, which don't hold a hundred and twenty rounds as ours are made to, but only fifty, since they don't like to overload or overwork themselves carrying such nonessentials as ammunition, on the trail.

After an hour or two, and still before dark, the entourage had moved as far as the river outside of town and was crossing it and reforming on the other side.

We were entrusted to but one sentry, fortunately, and immediately began to take hope, for he was not a bad soldier and we could see possibilities. Our place in the column was between the main body and the pack-train; Matamoros and "staff" went between the point vanguard and the main body.

When we had finally got started on our trip to join the enemy, Blue and I began working on this lad, a fat good-natured harmless young fellow, who, we didn't think was any too strong for the mutiny, anyhow. At first he was afraid to listen to us, but as the main body moved away from us and we got our mules to hold back, the lad began weakening, and we commenced to make an impression on him with our story of how easy it would be to desert the mutiny and go in like a good soldier with us, and we'd get him a medal and even stripes for his sleeve.

Finally he said: "Well, Tenientes, I believe you, and I think we can make it to Palacagoso before morning, without their missing us for an hour or two after we leave the patrol; and it would be impossible to find us even after ten minutes. If you'll make good your promises to me, I'll try it."

OUR friend and savior selected a side trail, the next one we passed, and we followed him confidently.

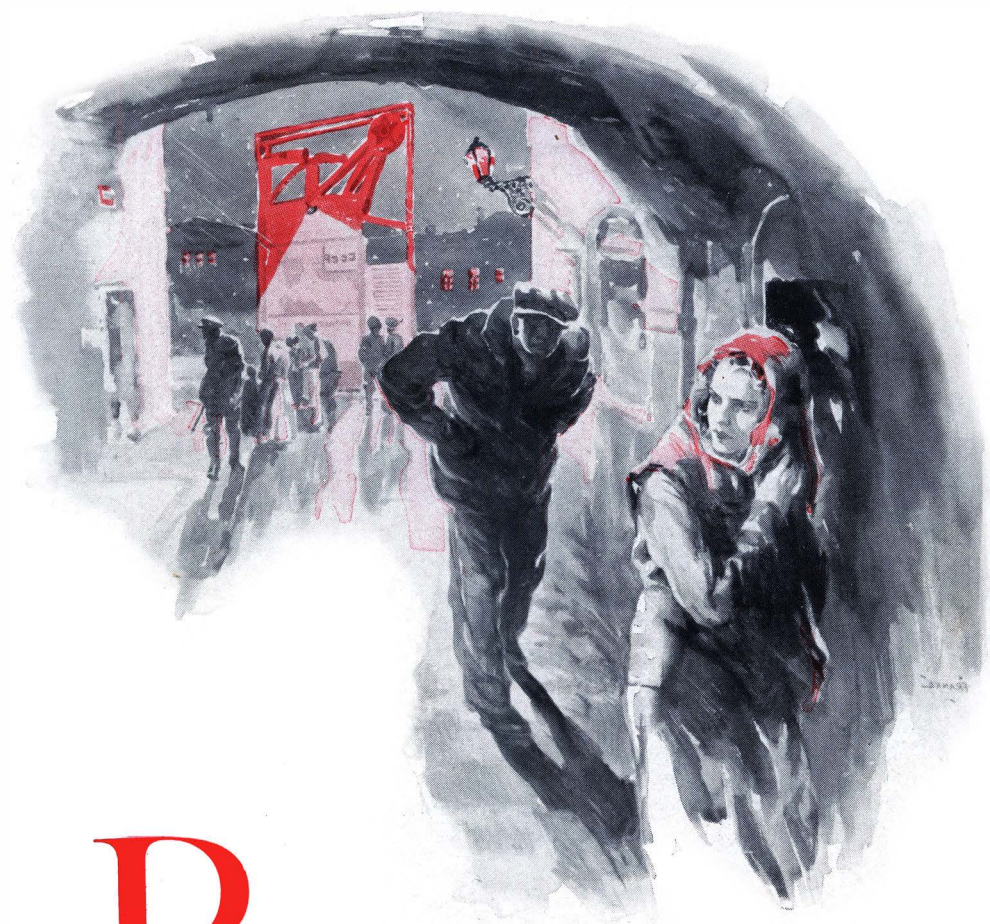
The first hour we rode as quietly as possible but as fast as we could, and got off the mules every quarter-hour to give them a couple minutes' blow, and to listen for any warning we might hear of others being near us. The night was black, and we couldn't see a thing, but the mules kept their sure footing. The second hour we had to slacken pace a bit.

Fortunately—although it would have been just too bad for the other fellow—we met no one on the trail. The night seemed to last forever; but dawn cracked finally, as it does even on tense occasions, and we found we were nearly there.

By pushing our mules unmercifully, we reached the departmental post of Palacagoso by eight o'clock next morning, reported to Colonel Good and were back on the trail for Yali—to find a deserted town and read our own message on the jail-house wall.

We made good our promises to our guard, too.

See page 4 for full details of our prize offer for Real Experiences.



Red Terror

By S. ANDREW WOOD

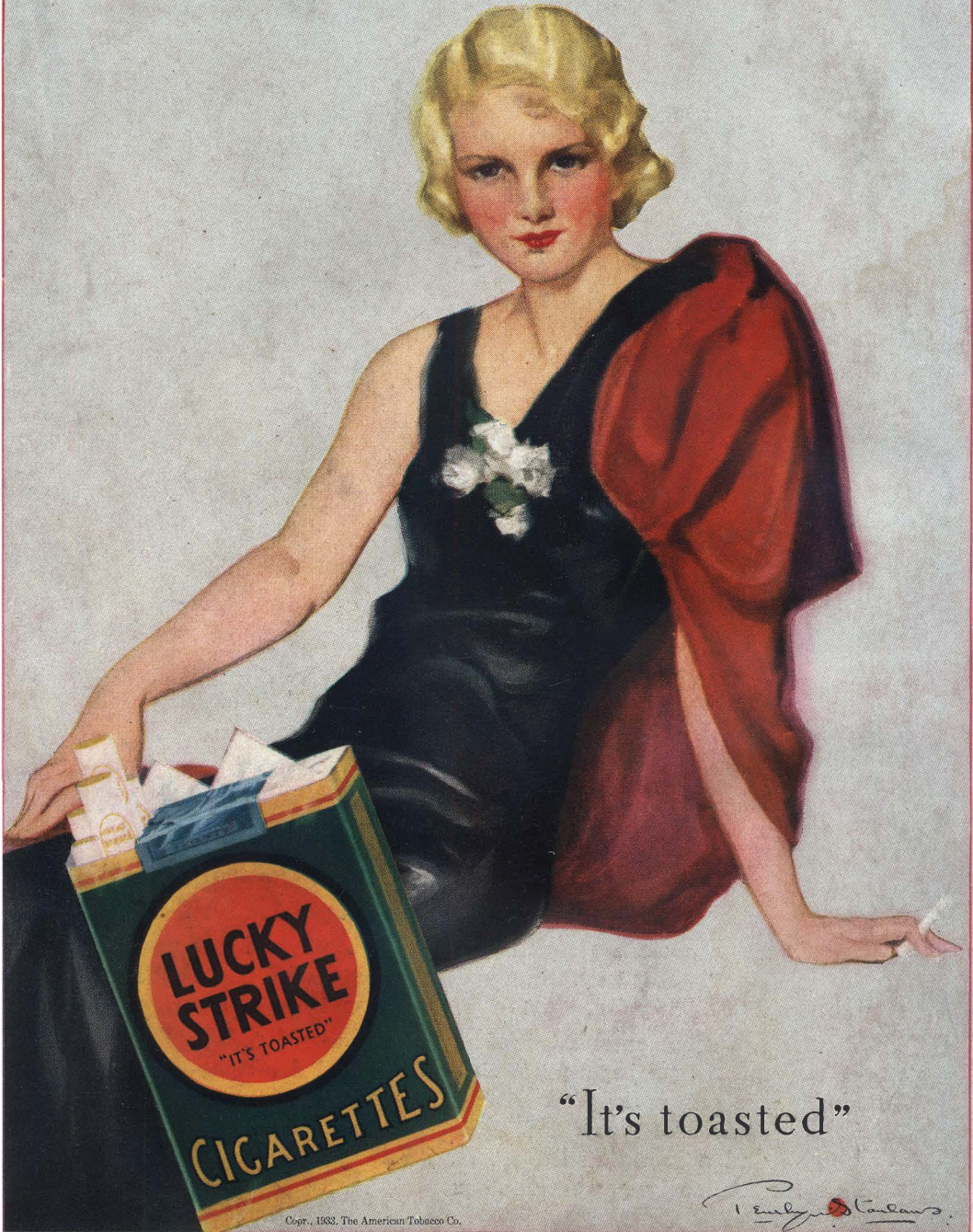
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