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OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE

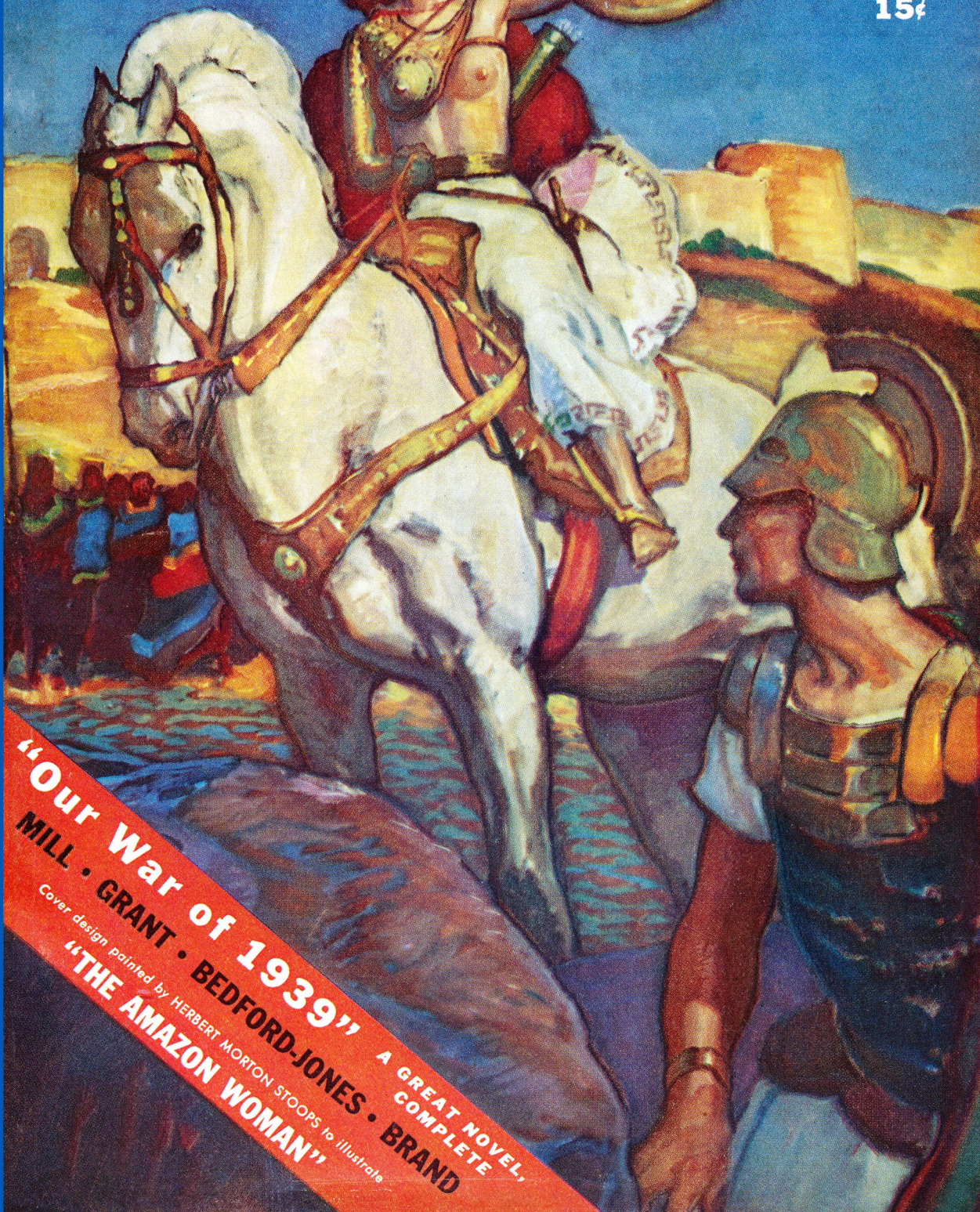
MARCH

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MARCH 1939

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 68 No. 5



"Our War of 1939" A GREAT NOVEL, COMPLETE
MILL • GRANT • BEDFORD-JONES • BRAND
Cover design painted by HERBERT MORTON STOPS to illustrate
"THE AMAZON WOMAN"



W. C. Andrews

The new canvas, thus rigged, formed a crude square-sail. . . . The *Lively* raced on, on for the free seas and her own name again. (See "Black Cargo," starting on page 32.)



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BLUE BOOK



MARCH, 1939

MAGAZINE

VOL. 68, NO. 5

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Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

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

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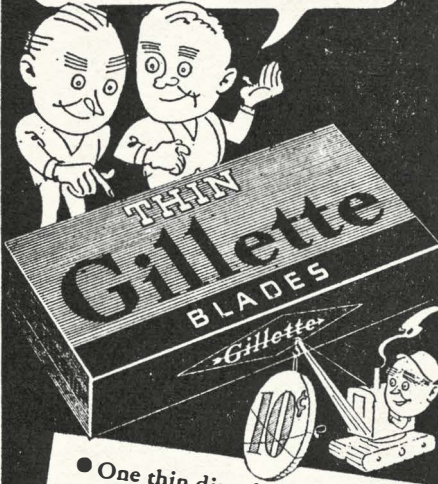
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The Magic of Mind

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Flying Fast—

GET out from under me, Illinois! And take your February slush. So that's the "Beautiful Ohio," that thread of mud. Top of the morning, Kentucky. How're you-all? I? *Fine!* Flying high, flying fast.

Chicago to the Gulf, Kentucky. Fastest thousand miles ever knocked off. Look: I had Tiny done in red and black because if she was a neutral, they couldn't see us in the sky, we're so fast.

"Fine," did I say, Kentucky? Double it! Sky-write it! I'm out on top, on top of the world. A smash hit, if I do say so. Got a brag coming, I guess. Worked my guts out—engineering, math, designing, test-flying coffins. Lived like a monk—studied like a fiend—swallowed bitter bread all my twenty-six years.

Yes, bitter, Kentucky. So bitter it gagged me. But I took it. Had to. Had to keep on, riding my star. Cornell, Tech, and two pinfeather years in good old Limpy's plant. But I rode the star. I'm there! Flying fast—flying far!

Chicago to Tampa. That's where I'll pay him off, tick him off, forget him. Twenty thousand in the pocket, Ken-

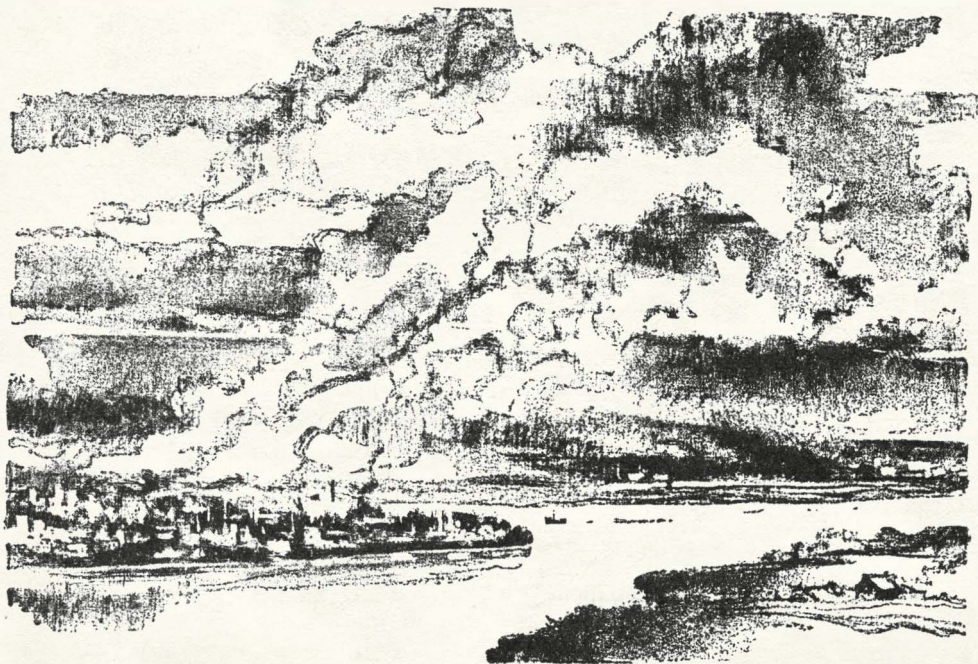
tucky. Army check. Twenty thousand for the synchronizer safety. No more bullet-sliced props, nor engines churning themselves out of planes.

Twenty grand for a gadget! But worth ten times the price, Kentucky. Remember that St. Louis Heinie—American, my eye!—who tried to get around me? "I'll gif you two hunnert t'ousand dollar, Spike." A pile of money, Kentucky, when you're twenty-six and broke. But you don't sell out your country. Not to anybody. Keep America two years ahead of the pack.

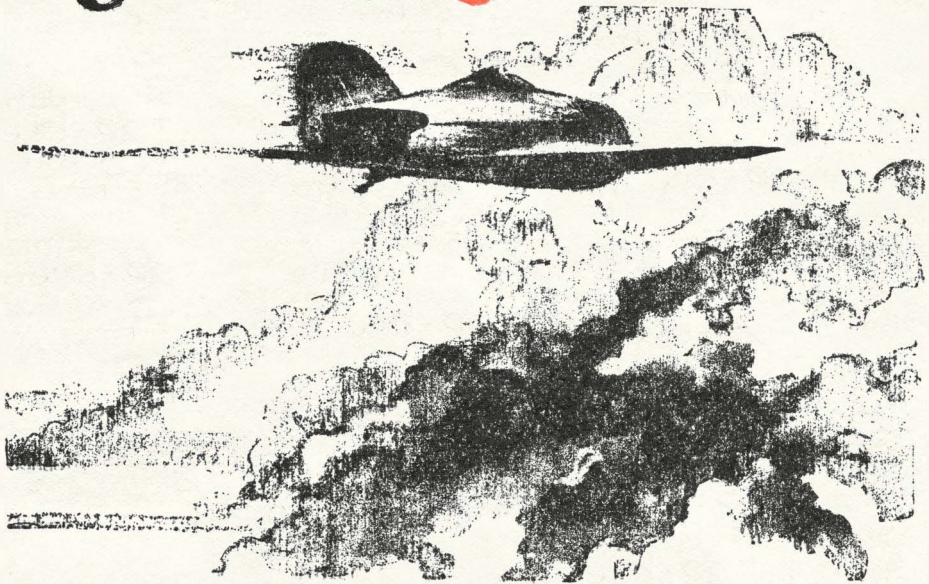
Suppose there'll be a whopping crowd at Tampa, besides the Army maneuvers men, to see the *Shooting Star* come in. *He'll* be there. Five minutes aside with him. Hand him the twenty grand. Hand him the bitter he handed me. . . .

What d'you think of my Tiny, Kentucky? More horses to the foot of spread than ever hit the air before! And she's mine. Old Limpy built her, but I dreamed her, and I took her up. Don't ask anybody else to test *my* coffins.

Lots of eyes on Tiny, Kentucky. Spying eyes. To steal her secrets if they



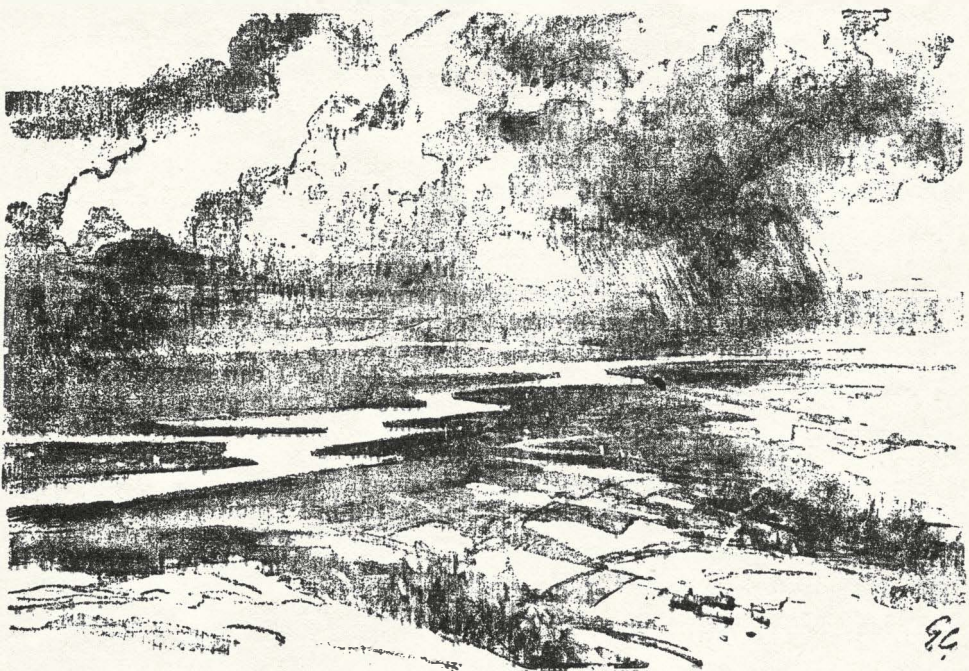
Flying Far



The story of a man with fire in his belly, dreams in his head. . . . By a writer who has himself done a lot of flying—the distinguished author of “The Silver Hawk” and “Forbidden Valley.”

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Illustrated by Grattan Condon



I rode my star—flying high, flying fast!

can, since they can't buy her. Soon as I burn up some air-races, Tiny joins the Army. A double gun, little more cockpit, little more spread for the horses. It'll tame her a bit, but she can take it and still ride the tail of any pursuit job in the air. By fall she'll be coming off old Limpy's line by the dozen. Army's where I want her. Navy too. Keep America ahead of the pack.

Gangway, dink cloud. *Swish!* Wait a minute, that river down there—hell, it's Tennessee! Good morning, Tennessee. How're yuh-all? And I? Fine! Flying high, flying fast!

Notice you're showing a tint of green on your south slopes, Tennessee. Looks nice. Flying out of winter into spring, into summer, this morning!

Listen, Tennessee: I've something to tell you. Got to talk fast, the way Tiny's burning latitude. You're where *he* came from. My dad. David Wildreth. Out of your squirrel-shooter hills. But he had the goods. On to Nashville, and Vanderbilt U. Itchy-footed young engineer. Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua, and back to the States—to Tampa, where Walt and Clyde, and I, were raised.

You turn out some good men, Tennessee. Lean and hard and full of nature. You turned out my dad. Give the devil his due—you turned out a good job there. Fire in his belly, dreams in his head. No dull stodgy dog, as Walt and Clyde grew up to be.

Know what he wanted to do, Tennessee, instead of grubbing around with irrigation lay-outs in Florida? Wanted to go back to Central America, be their Bolivar, make one good nation of those half-dozen postage stamps. Even thought a big-enough man could do the same with all South America. Cockeyed? Maybe. I'm just showing you he wasn't a dull dog.

DON'T blame this bitterness on me, Tennessee. I wanted it to be dad and son between us. But with me he was always a cold hard stone. Unnatural. Cornell, Tech, other dads dropping in for visits. . . . Tennessee, it choked me to watch. Never a visit in eight years. Just those checks. Twice a year a letter, cold as dry ice: "I trust you are continuing your brilliant work."

The worst of it, Tennessee, I didn't understand why he treated me so. Took me years to see it.

If ever I have a son, Tennessee, by all the gods, he'll have a dad! The wise-

crackers, with their cracks about palsie-walsie dad and son—if they'd lived my life, they wouldn't be so glib.

Imagine a young kid, Tennessee, feeling alone in the world, feeling himself unwelcome, and thinking, as a kid will, that some mysterious blight must rest upon him. Imagine the hobgoblins of those years. . . . When I finally did realize the cause, that didn't help. The trouble was no fault of mine. But I took the rap just the same.

What a laugh, Tennessee—those dull dogs Walt and Clyde. He was a dad to them, all right. Loved 'em as a father should. And look how they turned out. Dubs. Dime a dozen. . . . But me, I'm like him. Dad to those dull dogs, but no dad to me—*there's* the laugh.

GIVE the devil his due, Tennessee—he stuck to his irrigation, forgot his own ambitions, so we boys could have a chance. Didn't mistreat me about money or schooling. Gave me as good as—no, better than he gave Clyde and Walt. Saw me through. Expensive schooling.

Well, I'm paying him back. Twenty thousand. He can ease up now. Has Clyde or Walt ever sent him a penny?

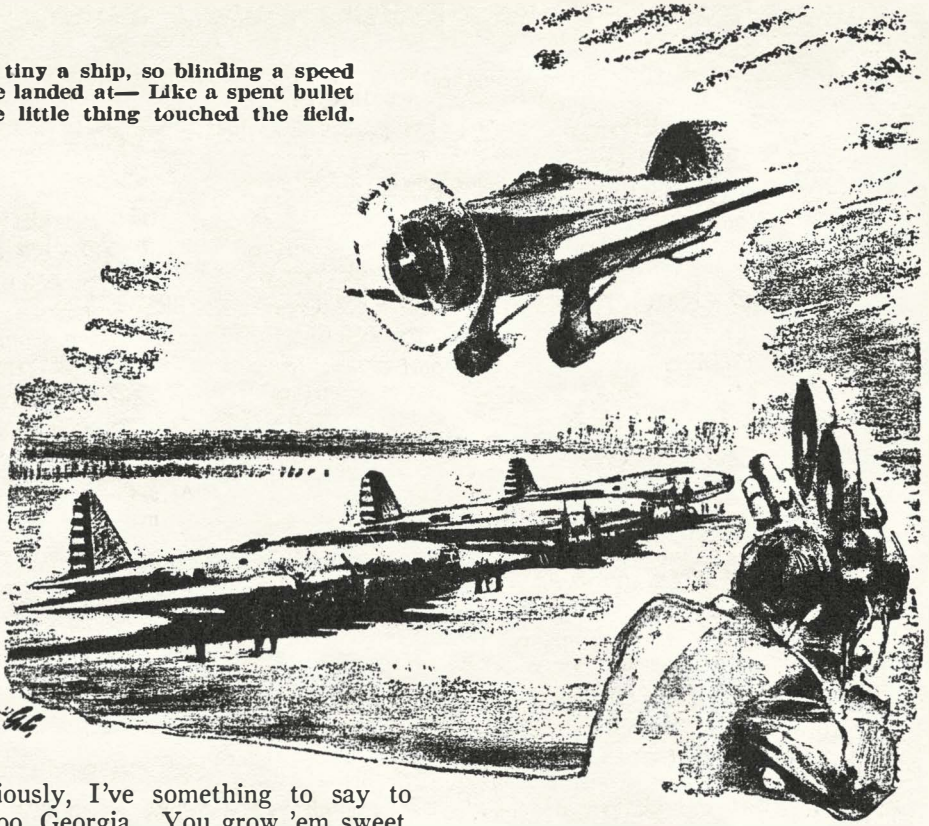
Maybe I shouldn't be so cynical, Tennessee. Maybe—if I can—I ought to put the cold slush behind. Stacks up nice, the future. Money rolling in. Flying high, fast, *far*. Friends everywhere. The Army crowd—"Hello, Spike, old Cracker!" People at the air-races—"There goes Spike Wildreth. I shook hands with him once."

If I can. Sometimes I'm a little scared, Tennessee. D'you remember that poem about the great god Pan? How he made a man into poet. Cut a reed from the river reeds, drew its pith out, carved and notched and fashioned the sorry thing till it could blow music. But it nevermore could be like the other reeds of the river. That's what I'm scared of. These twenty-six years didn't do me any good. Maybe I can snap out of it. . . .

More and more green in your carpet, Tennessee. Spring coming on fast. Those white flecks, that must be fruit-trees blooming. I didn't know you had so much red-hill country, Tenn— Lord, what sloppy navigating! Trip-clock and air-speed say I'm eighty miles deep into Georgia.

Mohnin', Gawjuh. How is yo'-all? Me? Ah'm fine. No weevils in mah cotton. Excusin' Ah aint hog-plastuhed wid money yit, Ah got evuhthing it taken.

So tiny a ship, so blinding a speed
she landed at— Like a spent bullet
the little thing touched the field.



Seriously, I've something to say to you too, Georgia. You grow 'em sweet. *Too* sweet sometimes. Like lotus to a man. The fire goes out of his belly; the horizons go out of his eyes. He gets grounded. Can't ride his star. Trades his glory for the old sorry cheat. I'd rather have Tiny than the sweetest you grow, Georgia. She may kill me, but she won't ground me. How about it, Tiny—going to ease down with me nice and smooth at Tampa? Or do we smash?

Maybe you remember her, Georgia—Rita, her name was—from a place near Macon. I never saw her; but her wedding picture, at nineteen—you can see by that why he turned away from glory.

She's just a name to me, Georgia. She died twenty-six years ago. But that wedding picture—so gossamer and lovely she'd take your breath away. So like a young angel you looked for wings. I can understand why he loved her more than his dreams. But no man ought ever to think that much of a woman. It's bound to bring evil.

Look what that business brought me, Georgia. Am I to blame that she died when I came? Unjust as hell. *I* didn't put in any order to be born. But then, such things don't go by justice. They go by queer quirks. He was poisoned against me from the first. In his eyes I was the cause of her death. Queer quirk.

Give the devil his due, Georgia—he tried to be just. Raised me, put me through. But he gave me bread alone. So I'm handing it back—then quits.

Wonder how he'll react, there at Tampa. He's no hypocrite. There'll be no, "Proud of you, Spike, my son," stuff. But when I line him up, run my bust at him, he won't take it lying down. That tick-off will be worth watching, Georgia.

Over the Okefenokee, somewhere. Can that be Jax, that smudge and glitter southeast? That blue's the Atlantic, but there's a mighty lot of Atlantic. Got to pick up something definite if I'm to hit Tampa on the nose. Flying this job is like shooting a rifle. You aim and pull, and hope you hit.

Little town, big white sign. *B-E-N-T-O-N*. Thanks, burg. Eight miles off course. Not bad for an aim and pull. Hello, Florida. Mighty green, Suwanee. Good to see you again, Florida. . . . Eight years. No headlines to my going away, but plenty to my coming back.

Wait till the Army crowd takes a look at my graphs! Good bunch, the Army flyers. Keeping America ahead of the pack.

Better be finding out how things are at Tampa. And where the Army formations are maneuvering this morning.

Wouldn't exactly like to pile into a flying fortress. Where's that frequency Gailbrecht wired me to use? Oh, yes, inked on the mike. . . .

"Spike Wildreth, Chicago-to-the-Gulf. To Army, Tampa." Come alive, down there, static-chaser. "Spike Wildreth, Chicago-to-the-Gulf. To Army, Tampa—"

"Army, Tampa. To Spike Wildreth. Where are you?"

"Over Lake City. How is it at Tampa?"

"Keep high over Dunnellon district. Flying fortresses in the air. Keep to twelve thousand. Repeat."

"Keep to twelve thousand over Dunnellon district. How's it at Tampa?"

"Okay. No wind, no weather."

"Traffic?"

"None. We cleared the air for you, and holding it clear."

"Thanks, Army. Coming—"

"Hang with. Lieutenant Gailbrecht, press and public-relations liaison, wants to tell you—"

"Put him on. Fast. Too busy to finger radio—"

"Spike?"

"What is it, Gail?"

"Come in carefully, son. You haven't got a rod to spare here. Not at your speed. Swing around and land from the southeast, so you won't have the glare. And listen, Spike. We've got a big crowd here on both sides. Hit that runway straight, man, or you might mess up some people."

"I'll hit her straight, Gail. Coming in."

FROM the radio truck Lieutenant Gailbrecht stepped down along the line of pea-shooters to the first bomber. Just beyond this ship waited a group of his superior officers, three of whom were chatting casually to a civilian in their midst, a tall oldish man of fifty-eight.

Though he had met Spike's father only that morning, Gailbrecht had taken a warm liking to the man. Quiet, cultured, touched with some deep melancholy, the elder Wildreth was plainly a person of considerable horizons. A worthy father to the brilliant, cynical Spike.

Quite tactful, Gailbrecht thought, for the officers to be chatting that way with David Wildreth through these last tense minutes. Air-men themselves, they were fully aware that this Chicago-to-the-Gulf flight might land Spike in honor or in eternity, before his father's eyes.

He motioned an enlisted man to place a ladder, and stepped up on a bomber wing, his lookout post.

A few minutes later he heard, above the welter of airport noises, the angry singing whine of a high-speed plane. At his signal the enlisted men up and down the runway came alert at their crowd-guarding job. A hush fell. Gailbrecht took a final glance around at the newsmen, photographers, war-planes, throngs of people, and the lone civilian standing with the officers.

IN the sky to the north he picked up a red-and-black gleam, slanting downward, incredibly fast. He watched it flash over the field at four thousand feet; then there followed the snap roll and tight loop that were Spike's reckless greeting to the thirty thousand.

For a minute or two thereafter he lost sight of the plane as it hurtled Gulfward for its swing. Then he saw it again, coming in, a blur of red and black. He held his breath. So tiny a ship, so blinding a speed she landed at—

Like a spent bullet, the little thing touched the field, seemed to ricochet, touched again, and came streaking down the runway, in beautiful control, till suddenly she was standing poised yonder, brave and jaunty in the bright sun.

A bedlam broke out—yelling, auto horns, shouts for a speech from Spike Wildreth. The loud-speaker on an Army truck called futilely for quiet.

Leading a detail of officers and men, Gailbrecht started for the plane. At his signal the press photographers poured out upon the runway. But the main crowd, as by his strict orders, were still kept back of the ropes. Spike Wildreth's plane was a secret job; and among that crowd—the Intelligence men said—were several foreign experts and shadowy hyphenates who yearned to send coded data home.

Pulling off his head-gear, Spike stood up in the cramped cockpit, shaking his head to clear the motor roar from his ears.

"Relax, Spike!" a photographer bade. "Give us a grin to shoot."

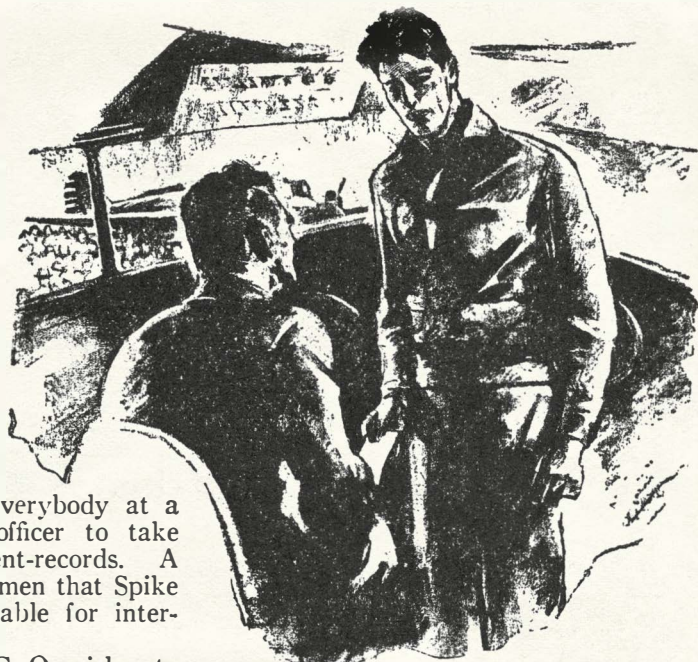
Gailbrecht looked up at the young flyer. But he saw no grin, no exultation. Even the splendid flight just safely ended did not seem to warm Spike up. If the youngster couldn't be human at a moment like this, what under heaven *could* thaw him?

"Congratulations, Spike."

"Thanks for your instructions, Gail."

Gailbrecht issued quiet orders. A squad to trundle the little ship from the run-

"Oh," David Wildreth said. "The pay-off!"
"Right. And I want to tell you why."



way, rope it off, keep everybody at a distance. A technical officer to take charge of the instrument-records. A sergeant to tell the news-men that Spike Wildreth would be available for interviews promptly.

"And now, Spike, the C. O. wishes to congratulate you officially. Also, I suppose you'd like a word with your dad."
"Right!"

In the clamor he and Spike walked across to the group of officers. Gailbrecht saluted. "Delivering Spike Wildreth, sirs." With the self-effacement which made him so excellent a liaison, he stepped back and watched.

The expression on David Wildreth's face surprised and troubled him. No gladness. No elation over a son's smashing triumph. Instead, a cold aloofness, matching Spike's own. What the devil—something wrong between those two?

Spike nodded curtly to the older man. "How d'you do?"

David Wildreth's reply was equally curt. It seemed to Gailbrecht their handshake might have been that of duelists.

As soon as the introductions and congratulations were over, Spike turned to Gailbrecht.

"If you can manage it, Gail, I want a few minutes alone with—uh—Mr. Wildreth."

Gailbrecht's uneasiness faded. Nothing wrong between the two Wildreths. This coldness was just their way, before others. Everything was all right. More than all right! A few words alone with his dad—that was Spike's first thought.

"I think I can manage it, Spike." Resourceful, he pointed at the bomber cabin. "That should do. Come along." As he took the two men toward the door: "But you'll have to speak to this crowd, Spike. I'll have a mike plugged into the loud-speaker. Mr. Wildreth, I'm afraid

you'll have to share your son around here for a few hours."

Spike stood aside, allowed David to precede him up the steps, followed, closed the door.

The clamor of the watching crowd swelled. Parent and son alone together—it touched the heart of the throng.

AS Spike faced David Wildreth in the bomber cabin, he was shocked at the changes eight years had brought. Visibly older, grayer, visible lines of tiredness. But the same coldness, the same alienation which Spike remembered from back into the mists of childhood.

He had not the faintest feeling that this man was his father. He did not even know how to address him; whether as "sir" or "dad" or "Mr. Wildreth." The situation was so awkward that he wanted to get this last meeting over with quickly and walk out into the bright wholesome sun again.

Without preamble he took a blue paper from his pocket and handed it over. "For you. It's already endorsed."

David Wildreth glanced at the twenty-thousand-dollar check. "For me?" He looked up at Spike. "For what?"

"For everything you ever gave me."
"Oh," David Wildreth said. "The pay-off! Quits."

"Right. And I want to tell you why."
"You needn't. You're quite justified in wanting it to be quits. So do I. But I don't care for your check."

"I didn't care for *your* checks. But I took 'em anyway. So, keep that."

David Wildreth dropped the check on the pilot's seat. His gray eyes met and clashed with Spike's. There was something in his gaze which started uneasiness tingling through Spike.

"You've got that money coming," Spike said tersely. "You saw me through. For the devil's sake, take the check and let's have the lie over with. Our relationship is a fraud and always has been."

The older man toyed thoughtfully with a bomb-release lever. Spike felt those gray eyes taking his measure, seeing what was right and what wrong in him. Finally:

"Spike,"—his tone was impersonal but not unkindly,—"I don't like this bitterness in you. Get rid of it. You've fine things ahead. You've worked faithfully; you're a real success already; you'll go far higher. But you could fly to the moon and still not find happiness."

He added, musingly: "Strange. You're the sort a person could wish for as a son. I don't mean a son to be proud of, sentimental about, and all that. I mean, you would have been justification of whatever sacrifice one might have made of his own ambitions."

"What's the drift?" Spike demanded, taut with uneasiness. "If you've something to say, say it."

"I'm coming to it. I didn't plan to resurrect this ghost, but I see I've got to.

Our relationship is largely to blame for your bitterness. I want to explain the past to you."

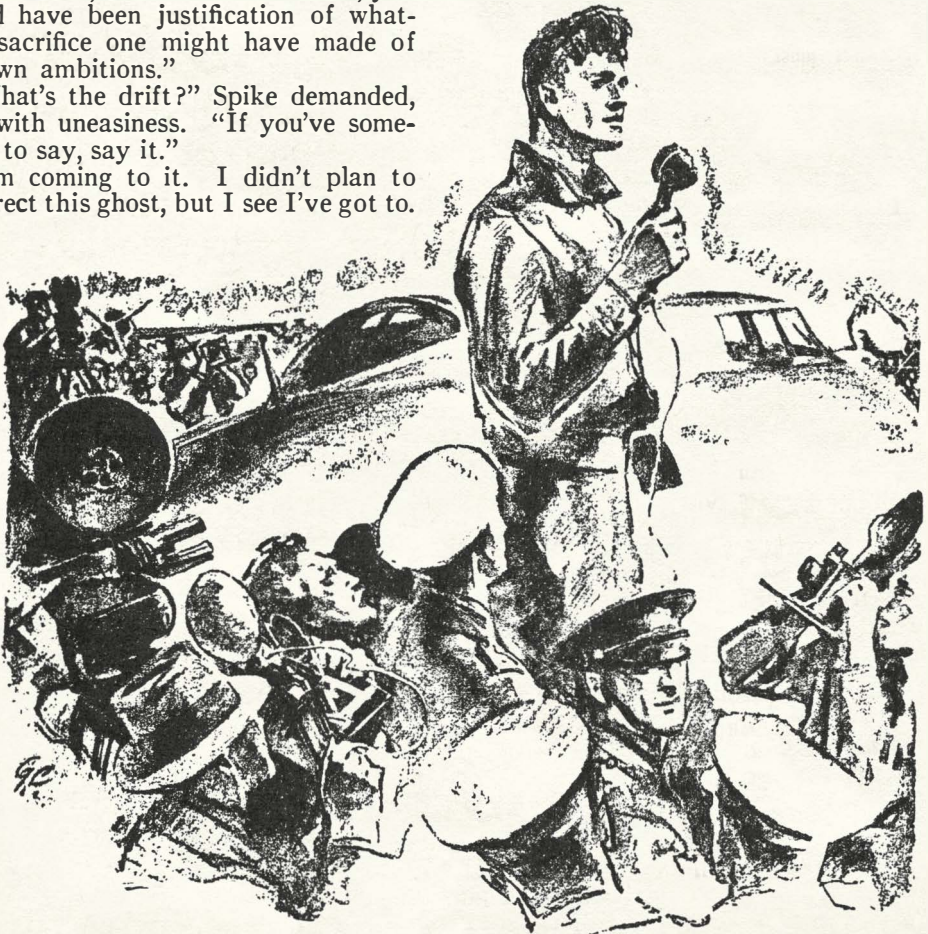
Spike braced himself. In David Wildreth's eyes he saw something coming, as abrupt as a power-dive smash.

"Let's have it."

"THE year before you were born, Spike," David Wildreth said, speaking with slow precision, "I engineered a big project south of Miami. Your mother wanted to stay here in Tampa. She was young, and liked the fast winter crowd. And she had more specific reasons for wanting to stay. A reason, rather. A certain man from Virginia."

Spike gasped. The disclosure took him like a club-blow over the eyes. Flittingly he saw again that wedding picture—the demure loveliness of the woman for whom young David Wildreth had traded his foot-loose dreams.

"I've tried," David Wildreth added, with a bitterness which half a lifetime



had not eased, "to think about that affair in the so-called modern way, and excuse it; but it still seems to me a gross dishonesty. When I learned, it hit me harder than this can possibly be hitting you. I don't believe I've ever since had complete faith in a human being.

"What would have happened between the three of us, I don't know. Decision was taken from our hands. She died. On that last day she told me the truth, Spike—about you."

Spike leaned weakly against a machine-gun, staring at the older man. His world seemed to have gone hurtling out of its orbit. The story sounded preposterous to him. Something to laugh at, laugh away.

But he could not laugh at it. In spite of the chaos of his thoughts, he knew that when David Wildreth said an important word, it was always true. Never an opinion or a half truth, but the whole, literal, hard, everlasting truth, as set down in the book of judgment.

For several moments they stood there staring at each other, Spike stunned by the revelation about himself. The tick-off, the words and sentences which he had been repeating down across a thousand miles, were suddenly snatched away, leaving him speechless. This truth, out of the past, sickened him. He felt as

though he had unexpectedly smashed and was wandering, in a daze of unreality, around the wreckage.

"But—but why," he finally managed, "didn't you tell me this before? Why've you kept it to yourself?"

"I had to consider Walt, Clyde, your mother's name. Besides, it was not a matter one could decently tell to a small child. I didn't have any justifiable occasion for telling you, till now."

"But he—did he simply pitch off, afterward?"

"It amounted to about that, Spike. Is the story clear to you now?"

Spike slowly nodded. In a foggy fashion he was realizing that he had been utterly mistaken about the cause of his childhood unwelcome. The estrangement between David Wildreth and himself did not spring from his mother's death, but from a reason even more profound, more elemental.

At the bomber door Gailbrecht was rapping. "Spike, old man, you'd better come out and say a word. I've the mike rigged up. They're yelling for you."

Spike shook his head. "Not now. In a little while, maybe—I'll try." He gestured Gailbrecht away.

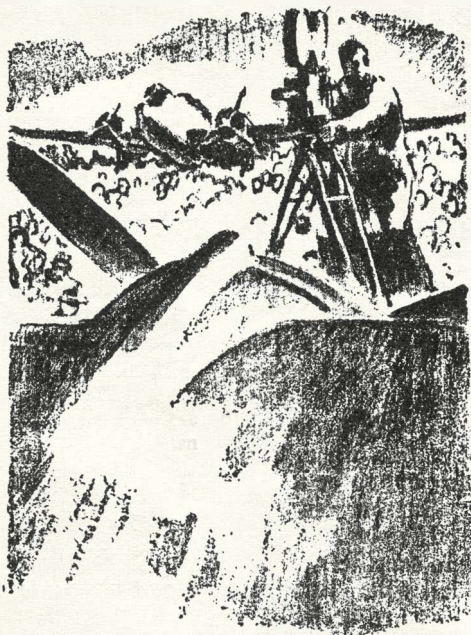
IT was clear enough to him now why David Wildreth had been so estranged from him. No parent's feeling, because—no parent. Quite plain. And if David Wildreth had been poisoned against him from the first, that too was understandable. For twenty-six years he, Spike Wildreth, had been the symbol of that disillusionment. From his birth to this present hour he had been a living reminder of that cheap treachery.

"One final word, Spike; then I'm leaving. Think over what you've just learned, and in the light of it try to understand my shortcomings. Not that I personally care for your good opinion. I merely want you to realize I didn't let you down. I don't want bitterness to ride you as it rode me."

Spike stepped between him and the door, and kept him from going. "No. There's something else."

"What?"

Spike groped toward a thought. . . . Twenty-six years ago one man had eased himself out of his responsibilities and pitched off. Another man had taken up a responsibility not his own, and had borne it to the best of his human power. Some nobility to that. Under the galling circumstances, a lot of nobility. . . .



"About myself, I haven't anything to say. But I want to tell you about my dad, here."

Those years of expensive schooling, those checks which came so dependably while one's own ambitions faded and grew old—yes, a lot of nobility!

"Do you want to know who he is?" David Wildreth asked. "Is that the 'something else'? Now that you're a smash hit, he might be glad to acknowledge you."

Spike sneered and clenched his fist. "Let him try. I'd break his bones. He's got no claim on me. It was you who were my—who stuck by me. You didn't do less than your duty, but a world more." The weariness, the iron-gray hair, the loneliness about David Wildreth, shook him as few things had ever done. "All I've meant in your life is a reminder, a burden. And yet, not five minutes ago, I was wanting to tick you off, like a blind fool."

"It was a bad road for us both," David said. He reached out his hand. "But this is the end of it, Spike, and we end on understanding."

SPIKE refused the handclasp. He was coming out of his crack-up daze and thinking again. As he looked at this man who had taken so bitter a blow and had been silent about it, out of decency to others, he felt a strange kinship with David Wildreth. Not of blood; destiny had cruelly decreed otherwise. But a kinship of spirit, of horizons, and the bitter road of the past.

"Yes," he said, to the older man, "luck dealt us both a rotten hand—yours the worst. But—but—"

"What, Spike?"

Looking at David's hand, still outstretched for the final good-will shake between them, Spike groped toward another thought. He laid hold of the thought finally, and it jolted him like a high-tension cable. But he clung with it. Right! Tremendously right! Chuck the rotten cards! Give destiny a kick!

Gailbrecht opened the bomber door. "Spike, you simply must come."

For a moment Spike wavered, looking from Gailbrecht to David Wildreth. His eyes narrowed; his fists clenched.

"Okay," he said to Gailbrecht. "Coming." He turned and walked out of the bomber cabin, a little uncertain about details, but sure of the general course he meant to pilot.

"Up on the wing, Spike," Gailbrecht directed him, "where they can see you. Here, man, don't forget to take the mike along."

Spike got up on the wing. In the hush, while he gathered his thoughts together, he looked around at the war-planes, crowd, officers; at Gailbrecht and David Wildreth on the bomber steps.

"I haven't got much to say," he began, somewhat haltingly; and heard his voice flung out across the throngs. Fine! The louder this was said, the better. Tell it to the thirty thousand. "About myself, I haven't anything to say." He glanced at David's puzzled face. "But I do want to tell you about—my dad here."

An applause broke out. Spike saw David Wildreth stiffen with astonishment and raise a hand to stop him.

He gripped the mike determinedly. "It was my dad here," he continued, his voice steadying, "who made this flight possible. He grub-staked this squab, saw me through, gave me the best schooling in the land. So, don't cheer me, cheer him."

And they did—a tremendous burst of cheering. Spike glanced again toward the bomber steps. Gailbrecht nodded. "Nice going, Spike." But David Wildreth stood there like a gaunt statue, a storm of emotions on his face.

"He worked hard to put me through," Spike went on. "What's more, he sacrificed a big part of his own life to give me a chance. He was young once, as I am now. He could have gone far. I'll have to be a hell of a big man ever to be as important as he'd have been."

FOR a moment the applause again stopped him; but then he went on, flinging his words out across the crowd, and waiting for a nod from David Wildreth—the nod that would approve the lie he was broadcasting.

A sweat broke out on his forehead. Lord, if this crowd only knew the truth! But then, *what was the truth here?* Dad to those dull dogs, Walt and Clyde? Not in a mile! But dad to Spike Wildreth—why not? Same fire in the belly, dreams in the head. What a cock-eyed deal—his actual sons not really his sons, but this other, the other man's son, turning out to be a true likeness, true son!

But he was nodding! Agreeing!

If only he wasn't so oldish and tired. He sacrificed a part of his life, as a real dad will. But recompense now, in some measure at least. Take him around to the air-races—"Governor, meet my dad." Stuff the twenty grand into his pocket. Make up to him for the dead ambitions. Take him along—flying high, flying far!

Illustrated
by
Paul C.
Chapman



HOSTAGE

*He was in as tough a spot as a man well could be, and he was no hero—
or was he, at that?*

By THOMAS DUNCAN

CLOSE to the business section of Turnford is an area where landladies distrust their tenants, where every grocery is also a delicatessen, and where no one would dream of conducting trade except for cash. The shadowy lodgers in the old houses drift in from nowhere; and sometimes, for reasons' best known to themselves, they vanish in the night.

In this half-world no landlady knew less about a tenant than Mrs. Neal knew about Lee Casson. His means of support were invisible. Usually his day began about noon, when he strolled toward town; and he seldom returned till after midnight.

Granite in January was no chillier than Lee Casson. An icy-gray pompadour, bright cold eyes, a narrow face with lines cutting the tan skin from thin nose to thin mouth—that was Casson. His taste in clothes ran to soft green hats, vivid tweeds, colored shirts. His handshake made you wish you weren't

wearing a ring; and his voice was a dry rasp, as if it had been chafed in getting past his teeth and out of his mouth.

He was such a cold man, who had obviously seen so much hard life, that you were amazed at the possession which stood on the dresser in his room. It was a photograph, the picture of a beautiful child of ten or eleven. Hers was the blondest hair in the world, and her face very nearly the most innocent. In this shabby room, where so many shabby people had dwelt, it reminded you of something fresh and wholesome and pure—mountain wind, perhaps, or a flower.

"Who's that pretty little girl?" Mrs. Neal had once asked.

Mr. Casson did not reply; no muscle in his face so much as twitched; he favored her with an unfriendly stare.

"Them eyes of his—like blue ice, I say," Mrs. Neal told Mrs. Riggerty.

Mr. Casson had occupied the room for almost a year; and for the past three



"Who's that pretty little girl?" Mrs. Neal once asked. Mr. Casson did not reply.

weeks he had paid no rent. Mrs. Neal was keeping a sharp watch on his luggage. She was a great blowsy woman who was not too proud to summon the police if a lodger eased open the front door and tiptoed into the night with his bags.

"He's a slick one," she told Mrs. Rigerty. "He could walk in the snow without leaving tracks."

YEARS before, in a New England city, there had been a great cold house and a cold man with a square mustache who was Father; and very far indeed in the past a warm-voiced woman used to kiss him and say: "But Lee darling, if you don't take your nap, you'll be so cross, honey." Father was in the cotton business; and a few months after Mother went away to what Aunt Hester said was the Blue Land, Father was standing in the hall with a strange woman, and he said, "This is your new mother," and Lee said, "I—don't want a new mother."

Nor would he call her Mother, and she said he was a bad boy, so then he really would be bad, just to show her; and before long it became a family legend that Lee Casson was a bad boy. At nine they caught him smoking; and at eleven it became known that he had been matching pennies; and Father said: "Every family has its black sheep, but I never thought I would be the one to sire ours. Why can't you be like your brother Charles?" And Lee said: "I don't want to be like Charles."

He prepped at a school in the Berkshires, where he figured in the usual boyhood scrapes; but because they were his

scrapes, everyone thought them darker and more portentous than Charles' or Cousin Dick's. At college he tasted his first real freedom, but it went to his head, and he spent more evenings in the city than on the campus; so he flunked three out of four November examinations, and the freshman dean told him good-by. He knew what would be said at home, so he didn't go home; he went West. He drove a delivery-wagon. He clerked. He worked in a shipping-room. He sold—a dozen different products in as many years. Finally he wrote a letter home; and from Father he received a very formal reply; and after that they exchanged brief letters regularly—twice a year.

Then he met Virginia.

Before that, he had never guessed what happiness was actually like. There were five golden years that compensated for all the sterile years that had gone before and all the lonely ones that came afterward. In the third year of their marriage, word arrived at their apartment in Des Moines that Father had died; and later a check was sent for fifty thousand dollars. Charles' was for twenty times that amount.

"Darling!" Virginia sang out. "Now we can afford—"

So another Virginia was born.

Three months later the first Virginia died, of pneumonia.

With a crushing wisdom, Lee Casson realized that for him the world could never again be a gay or gallant place. There remained his daughter. Life for her, he resolved, must be a shining journey.

That was why, when she was five, he was able to bring himself to part with her; to put her into Miss Lattimer's school for girls in Omaha. She was never to know, he decided, what occupation he had drifted into, largely because of loneliness.

You forget some of your loneliness when you concentrate on a poker hand. Or when you study racing forms.

SO he lived in various Midwestern cities, at first in hotels and then in lodging-houses; sometimes he won but more often he lost; and fifty thousand dollars isn't an inexhaustible sum. Almost a year ago, he had wandered to Turnford and the cheapest of lodgings—it had been a long spiral downward into the half-world, and he had crusted himself with a hardness and coldness that

was now second nature. Sometimes, glancing into a mirror, he was surprised that the wintry face was his. But it did not matter. What he had become, or was still to become, did not matter. Virginia was all that mattered. To think of her innocence purged and soothed his spirit, and left him exalted. Innocence was beautiful indeed to Lee Casson, probably because he so rarely encountered it.

ONE March morning Lee Casson mounted the littered steps of the Tenth Street Bowling Alley & Billiard Parlor and picked his way among the sporty men with cues to the rear of the smoky room. Outside a door that was marked "*G. L. (Happy) Fay, Mgr.*", he paused while Zip Kelly, whose occupation was bodyguard for Mr. Fay, patted his clothing. Lee Casson carried no gun, so Mr. Kelly permitted him to knock.

Happy Fay was a plump man of thirty, blond and bland. His pale eyes, his pink cheeks and fat chin suggested softness of character; but men believing him soft had come to grief. This appearance of weakness was further enhanced by a mustache so negligible that its tuft resembled some sparse-haired insect that had alighted on his upper lip.

He was doubtless the city's most prosperous young business man. Besides this billiard parlor, with its back rooms where horse-lovers could place friendly wagers, he owned Happy's Midnight Club; and he was president of a vague organization, Amusement Enterprises, which provided druggists with marble games whether they wanted them or not.

"Glad to see you, Lee," he smiled. "Do you know Velma Fletlock?"

Like Happy, Velma was plump and thirty. She had a bold face, glittering and hard, a down-turning selfish mouth, and red hair. Cheap jewelry covered her fingers and swung from her ears.

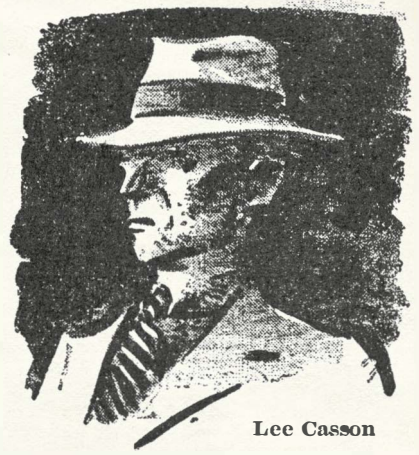
"Pleased t'meet you," she told Lee Casson, her voice friendly and brash. "Well, Hap," she said, rising, "I got to be going."

"Quite a kid, Velma," Happy chuckled after she had gone. "What's on your mind, Lee?"

Casson crossed his narrow knees and studied his fingernails.

"It's kind of hard to begin," he said. "But the fact is, I'm a little close run."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Happy said sympathetically. "What seems to be the trouble?"



Lee Casson

"I hit a dry stretch about six weeks ago."

"That happens. That's the way the breaks come."

"And in the meantime, I've had expenses. I was wondering, Hap, how you're fixed for loose change. You don't happen to have five hundred dollars I could use for a while?"

"Well, now, Lee—five hundred bucks is a fair chunk of money."

"I need a fair chunk."

"Maybe," Happy suggested, "I'd be doing you a favor not to give you that much—if your luck's run out on you."

"I don't want it for the ponies."

"No?"

Lee Casson slowly shook his head. Then, on a sudden impulse, he said: "I've a notion to explain the whole thing to you, Hap."

"Well—if it was ten bucks or even twenty-five you wanted. . . . But with five hundred—I'd have to know more—"

"I've got a daughter, Happy. She's eleven years old."

"I never knew that, Lee!"

"Not many do."

"She here in town?"

"She's in Omaha. In a private school."

"That must be expensive."

"It is. Read this."

He gave Happy a letter from the bur-sar of the school.

"Four hundred and seventy-two bucks you owe! That must be a high-class place."

"One of the best."

HAPPY puzzled through the letter. "Well, Lee, all they can do if you don't pay up, is send the kid here."

"I don't want them to send her here."



"No? Well what's wrong with the public schools? Then you wouldn't have this drag on you."

"I like to have that drag on me. And I don't want her to come here because—well, the truth of the matter is, she thinks I'm a big-shot. She thinks I'm a big-time business man."

"I never knew," Happy said, "that a man could think that much of a kid."

"Neither did I—till I had one."

Happy Fay became thoughtful; and at last he murmured: "You know, all this puts a different light on you wanting a loan. Maybe at that I could spare you five hundred."

"I don't have any security," Casson warned him; "and I don't know when I can pay you back—"

"Forget it. Something will come along—maybe I'll have a favor to ask of you some time."

"Anything within reason."

"But," Happy pointed out, "there's just one angle to it, Lee: Now, don't let this make you sore—I'm just protecting myself. Sometimes, you know, a man will cook up a story to get money—"

"This isn't cooked up."

"Don't get me wrong, Lee. I'm dead-sure you're on the up-and-up. But if you don't mind, I'll pay you twenty-eight dollars here. I've got a lawyer in Omaha who handles a little stuff for me, and I'll have him go out to that school and pay the four-seventy-two there—just to be sure this letter isn't cooked up, Lee."

"How will I know your lawyer's paid it?"

"You write to the school and tell them this mouthpiece will be in to pay, see? And have them send you the receipt. That fair enough?"

Lee Casson nodded. And like other men before him, he made the mistake of thinking that Happy Fay was an easy mark. His experience should have warned him that people like Happy Fay are seldom benevolent. . . .

Three days later a receipt came from Miss Lattimer's school. And with part

of the twenty-eight dollars, Lee Casson paid one week of his back rent. His situation was easier. Then one evening at the billiard parlor Happy Fay called him into the office.

"Draw that chair up close to the desk," Happy said guardedly. "I've got a proposition to go over, and I don't want to yell it."

Happy's blandness had vanished now; wrinkles troubled his brief forehead, and his fingers kept worrying the hairs of his mustache.

"Lee," he almost whispered, "I've got something hot. It's the biggest thing I've ever come across. You said the other day if you could ever do me a favor. . . . Well, Lee, here's your chance. If it goes off right, we'll call that debt square, and I'll give you another five hundred."

"What is it?"

HAPPY'S eyes were scarcely more than slits in his chubby face, and his tongue-tip grazed his dry lips.

"I'll put my cards on the table, Lee. Remember Clyde Wilbert?"

Lee Casson remembered. So did the Manufacturers' Trust Company. About three weeks ago Clyde Wilbert had left his position at the bank, taking forty thousand dollars with him. In El Paso he had been apprehended, and when he made a break, killed. In his pockets they found three hundred dollars, and that was all. The forty thousand was still missing.

"Clyde was a fine fellow," Happy declared. "He used to bowl here on Thursday nights, and we got pretty well acquainted."

"I used to see him here," Lee Casson recalled.

"All right—here's what happened: I had a letter from Clyde, just before he was shot. From El Paso. And he sent me this."

Happy produced a square of pasteboard—a baggage check.

"Clyde," Happy said slowly, "lost his nerve. He got to El Paso, and he was afraid to cross the border lugging a suitcase full of hot money. So you know what he did? He bought a railroad ticket back to Turnford; and he checked that grip on it. Then he sent me the check. The idea was that I would get the grip out of check and keep half the dough. The other half I was to send to Clyde in South America, after he got settled and wrote me. But he's dead,

now. . . . And that suitcase is in check at the Union Station."

"Where do I come in?"

"I'm getting to that. I want you to get that suitcase out of check for me."

Lee Casson sat very still, but his thoughts were beginning to race.

He said: "There's quite a bit of risk involved, isn't there?"

"Some."

"I'd say there's a good deal. It's a fifty-fifty chance that they were on Clyde Wilbert's trail when he checked that suitcase to Turnford. There are probably plain-clothes men at the station, waiting for some one to claim it."

"That," said Happy, "is why I don't get it out of check myself. That's why I'm giving you another five hundred to get it for me."

Lee Casson stared hard at Happy Fay.

"What you do, Lee, is this: get the suitcase and take it to your room. Not that I don't trust you, Lee, but I'll have Zip Kelly tailing you. You hold the suitcase in your room for a few hours. If nothing happens, I'll pick it up."

"And if anything does happen, where will I be?"

"Well, Lee, there's risk, naturally."

"I'd get soaked plenty if they found that hot money on me."

"Now, Lee, you're looking at it wrong. You want to look at it that they won't pick you up."

Lee Casson stood up. "I'm not interested."

"Sit down," Happy murmured.

"I don't want to hear any more about it."

"But Lee—you're going to hear—a lot more about it."

"What makes you think so?"

"Sit down, Lee. I don't like to talk to a guy who keeps edging toward the door. Sit down, and I'll tell you."

Lee sat.

"Do you think I loaned you that money because I loved you?"

"I didn't make any promises."

Happy smiled. "The fact is, Lee, I've been hunting for some one to do this job ever since I got Clyde's letter. Now, naturally, no one's going to take the risk unless—unless he'd rather take it than have something else happen. Unless maybe he's got a daughter."

"What's she got to do with it?"

"You think a good deal of her, don't you? You'd hate to have her turn out—wrong?"

"We'll leave her out of this."

"No, we won't, Lee. She's right in the middle of the whole thing. My lawyer in Omaha checked everything over—and it's like you said. She's a nice little girl. A mighty nice kid. Lee—if you should die—what do you suppose would happen to her?"

"My health keeps good."

"All right—but let's just suppose. Let's say you'd happen to be killed. Accidentally, of course—maybe hit by a car. Those things happen every day. All right, let's say you're dead. Here I am, your best friend. And being your best friend, the least I could do would be to run over to Omaha and pay up that school and get the kid. Her father's old friend—you understand. Well, I'd bring her here to Turnford—but what would I do with her? I'm a busy man, and I couldn't raise her right. Thing to do would be to find a woman to raise her, naturally. So I'd turn her over to Velma Fletlock—to raise. You met Velma the other day."

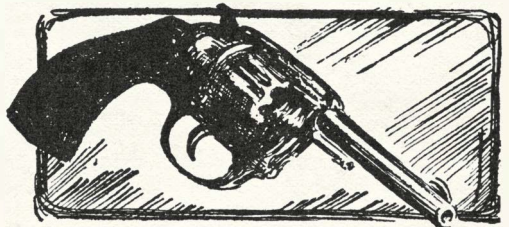
"There's just one thing wrong with that story, Happy. I'm not going to die."

Happy smiled pleasantly. "It's an odd thing, Lee, but you know another fellow said that to me. Just last fall. Name of Tubby McKeever. . . . You remember McKeever? Nice fellow. I liked him just as well as I like you."

"McKeever," Lee Casson said, "was killed by a hit-and-run driver out on Harper Road. But I'm careful in crossing streets."

"McKeever was careful too; and that's why I've never understood how he happened to be killed. You know, Lee, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if some guy had slugged him that night and then dumped him and run over him. It beats all how things like that happen, don't it?"

LEE CASSON walked home in a daze. The March night was foggy and warm, but his feet and his fingers were cold, and his teeth threatened to chatter. In his room he picked up Virginia's photograph, and after many minutes he saw himself in the mirror and was surprised





"Sit down, Lee; I don't like to talk to a guy who keeps edging toward the door."

to notice that he had forgotten to remove his hat and overcoat. He put down the picture, his fingers quivering like an old man's; and he lay on the bed and closed his eyes, attempting to bring calmness to his mind.

He considered going to the police and reporting that Happy Fay possessed that suitcase check; but Fay, of course, would deny everything. He had close friends at the city hall; he was a generous campaign contributor.

Or, Casson thought, he might telephone anonymously and tell the police that Tubby McKeever's death had not been accidental. But where would that lead? McKeever had been dead five months; Fay would deny that he had been near Harper Road on that night; he would probably even produce witnesses to swear that he had been elsewhere.

The disturbing truth was that Fay had become a powerful man in Turnford; every precinct worker in the teeming third ward was indebted to him; while Lee Casson was only a transient—a man without influence.

FAY had given him twenty-four hours to consider the proposal, and he wondered what would happen if tomorrow night he refused to get that suitcase. Would Fay carry out his subtle threat? That was conjectural; but Fay might. Men had been killed for less. Late some night a blow would crash his skull, and he would be dumped to a suburban pavement and run over. Another accident.

Not even a very important accident—a middle-aged man killed—a drifter, "occupation unknown; he is survived by a daughter in Omaha."

Casson's nervous system tightened. What would happen to that daughter in Omaha? He carried no insurance, and the very best that could happen would be none too good; and the worst that could happen—would Fay do what he had threatened? That again was conjectural; he might.

In imagination Lee Casson saw Happy Fay leading Virginia into the foul and notorious house of Velma Fletlock on Water Street. His thoughts recoiled, refusing to carry that imagined sequence to its logical and inevitable conclusion; he stood up and paced the room. If he had two hundred dollars, or even a hundred, he could slip away from Turnford and hurry to Omaha and get Virginia; and in two or three days they would be lost from Happy Fay in some California town. He could get a job of some sort and make a fresh start. But such a flight required money. He did not have a hundred dollars. He had less than ten dollars. And there was nothing left to pawn.

No sleep touched Lee Casson that night, and next morning he ate at a delicatessen near by and crept back to his room. He felt weak and sick. The March day was blustery, as full of confusion as his mind. For hours he lay staring at the ceiling, knowing that if he refused Fay, he would probably die. Not that he was afraid of death—he was a

very tired man; but when he thought of what consequences his death would bring to Virginia, a cold horror ran through him. During the afternoon a dangerous plan formed in his thoughts: he could telephone Red Umbenhower.

Red Umbenhower: a surly and brutal man. He owned the Paradise Club; and his distaste for Happy Fay, their curt rivalry, was a half-world feud. He had been Tubby McKeever's brother-in-law. And he believed in direct action, as proved by a couple of murder charges, one of which had stuck for seven years, till he was paroled.

The police might choose to believe that Happy Fay was not responsible for Tubby McKeever's death; but Red Umbenhower would be more realistic. But, Casson told himself, he was not going to telephone Umbenhower; it was too perilous, too treacherous.

Through the wind, the noises of the city came to Casson's room: a siren, car horns, a banging street-car; voices of a jungle. The half-world and the under-world were no less a jungle because their vegetation was steel and concrete. The strong preyed on the weak, and the supreme law was self-preservation. That thought kept returning to him; and toward dusk he slipped into the gusty street and fought the wind to a drug-store. In the phone-booth his hands shook as he fingered the directory; and when he dropped the nickel into the slot, his fingers were stiff.

"Yeah, this is Umbenhower. Yeah. . . . Yeah. . . . You sure about that? Uh. . . . Uh! Who is this? I say who—"

Remaining anonymous, Lee Casson dropped the receiver on the hook. He felt easier. Umbenhower had sounded angry and purposeful. Vengeance, self-preservation: the blind jungle emotions had been loosed. There was a good chance that Umbenhower would remove Fay from human activity before Fay removed Lee Casson.

When he reached his lodging, Mrs. Neal gave him a telegram that had just arrived from Omaha—from Miss Lattimer's school for girls. Virginia Casson had been stricken with acute appendicitis and rushed to a hospital. They were operating, and they wanted money.

THREE hours later, with the conviction that he had battled destiny and lost, Lee Casson stepped across the shadowy boundary between the half-world and the underworld.

"I expected you," Happy Fay said. "Sit down."

He sat. His mind was numb. Happy's words seemed to reach him from a great distance:

"And after you get it, take a cab to your room. Stay there till I come. Now listen, Casson: you'll be watched every minute. Zip Kelly will be tailing you. Good luck."

Casson remained seated.

"What you waiting for?"

"My money."

"Pay you afterward."

"You'll pay me now."

That went on for a time. But he remained seated, and would not budge. . . . At last Fay was at the safe; and Lee Casson leafed through the currency and tucked it into his wallet. Then he stood up stiffly and marched to the door. Zip Kelly was lingering outside, a short man in a derby. Casson passed among the clicking billiard tables; and on the street, where the wind was still clamoring, hailed a cab.

"Union Station."

Through the rear window he saw another cab trailing; Zip Kelly was going to make certain that he performed his task according to instructions.

BY the time Casson paid off the cab and entered the station, he was more frightened than he had ever been. He could hear each loud and separate beat of his heart. His throat kept filling, and despite himself he glanced again and again over his shoulder. He saw Zip Kelly lingering near the far door. In his ears the station noises—a wailing child, a laughing fat man, a train announcer—merged into a continuous subdued roar. And through that roar came the sharp *click-clock* of his heels.

He circled the station, moving with the bored leisure of a man waiting for a train. As he passed, he looked casually across the counter and into the cave of the check-room. Two attendants were chatting. Was one a detective? He strolled on, suspicious of every person who sat on the long varnished benches. To gather composure, he sat down himself. The big clock said ten after nine, and he resolved that at a quarter after he would go through with the business.

He closed his eyes for a few seconds, realizing then how frightfully agitated he was. His heart kept laboring and his pulses were a-throb. He toyed with the notion of chucking it all: it was not too

late to leave the station. He could walk briskly to the door, gain the platform, take to his heels and hide somewhere among the cliffs of warehouses till he shook Zip Kelly. Then what? Happy Fay would not lightly forgive his disappearance with the five hundred dollars and the baggage-check. The whole Middle West, probably the whole country, would be too hot for him. He could never safely go to Omaha and his daughter. . . .

He looked carelessly over his shoulder. Zip Kelly stood by a weighing-machine, watching. The clock said fifteen after nine. He stood up and went to the baggage-counter and tossed down the scrap of pasteboard.

THE attendant disappeared among the shelves of luggage. Why the delay? Was he summoning the police? Casson lost track of time; he had been standing here waiting, for years. The veins in his temple were so jumping-full of blood that he feared they would burst. Then the attendant boosted the suitcase to the counter; and as Casson started across the station, he saw that the clock said only sixteen after nine.

He felt as conspicuous as a nudist. The grip must weigh a ton; it banged his legs; he thought everyone in the station must be watching. The street door was coming closer. He had almost reached it when it flashed open, admitting a uniformed policeman. Casson almost halted, then almost ran. But somehow he took hold of himself; he clamped his teeth and tightened his quivering lips. The policeman stepped aside. Casson opened the door and hailed a cab.

This was too easy! His hand struck the cushions of the cab; he was overwhelmed by the conviction that he had walked into a trap, and that for some reason—possibly to learn if he had confederates—the police were biding their

time. He looked behind and saw Zip Kelly's cab following. The certainty seized him that for the rest of his life he would look behind and see himself followed. . . . When he paid off his cab outside his lodging, he saw that Kelly's cab had stopped a half-block down the street.

Gaining the momentary safety of his room, Casson dropped the suitcase and sank weakly into a chair. His undershirt was drenched, and drops of sweat hung on his eyebrows. He tried to remain still, but his fingers drummed the chair and his feet tapped the floor. He resolved to keep his eyes from the suitcase, but it was a magnet. Forty thousand dollars! If they caught him with it, he would spend years in prison.

Downstairs a door opened, and he leaped up, shaking like a cur. Some one was ascending the stairs. He stumbled to the door, listening. The footsteps went along the hall and entered a room. Another lodger. He collapsed on the bed.

But he couldn't lie there. He couldn't calm his mind. He paced the room, smacking one fist into his palm; and at last he realized that his nerves wouldn't let him go through with this part of the agreement. He couldn't wait here for Happy Fay. Unless he could get the suitcase out of his possession, he was convinced that one of his turbulent blood-vessels would break. He jerked on his hat and plunged his arms into the sleeves of his overcoat. Then he lifted the suitcase and softly opened the door.

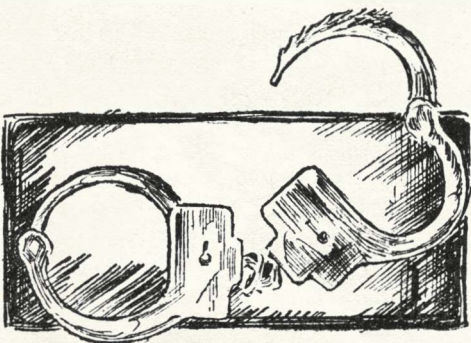
A dim light burned in the upper hall. Like a thief, he tiptoed down the complaining stair. In the lower hall he thought he heard the kitchen door squeak. He had visions of the police closing in from front and back. He reeled to the front door, yanked it open and stumbled across the porch and down the steps.

He wanted to run; but across the street a man stepped from the shadow of a tree. Zip Kelly. So he swung into an even stride; and on the opposite sidewalk, Kelly kept pace. Ten minutes of this would take him to Fay's office. He would leave the suitcase and be free. Free! He almost sobbed.

A block passed, and then another, and a wild joy soared in him. Perhaps no police had been waiting at the station. Perhaps—

A car squealed to a halt; a hard-mouthed man stepped out and grabbed his arm.

"You Lee Casson?"



In a rush, all the suspense left his body; he was almost relieved.

"Yes, Officer."

"Get in."

As he climbed into the squad car, he glimpsed Zip Kelly walking rapidly down the other side of the street and turning to run up an alley.

The car started, its radio flatly droning the squalid tidings of a city's corruption. He was surprised when the car, instead of heading toward town and police headquarters, circled round the block and halted before his lodging-house.

"All right, Casson, get out."

The driver remained at the wheel while the hard-mouthed man escorted him up the steps. Inside, Mrs. Neal whined:

"Mr. Casson—I hated to do it, Mr. Casson—but I got my bills to meet—and two weeks' rent you owe—"

"Never," the officer said, "try to skip a room bill."

COMPREHENSION came abruptly to Lee Casson, and he stammered, "I—I forgot—I wasn't—"

"Sneakin' out at night—"

"I—I was called to Omaha. My daughter, Officer. Read this."

He stuffed the telegram into the policeman's hand. Then he brought out his wallet and counted currency for Mrs. Neal.

"Golly," the officer said. For a fleet second Lee Casson glimpsed the human being beneath the uniform. "I got two daughters myself. . . . Appendicitis. . . . Too bad."

"I wasn't trying—to sneak out. The rest of my luggage is in my room. I was upset—and forgot to pay."

The policeman hesitated. He looked at Mrs. Neal.

"He paid you?"

"In full—he paid, Officer—maybe I shouldn't have called—but my own bills—"

"I guess, Casson," the policeman said, "we'll forget about it, since you paid. Hope your daughter—hope she—"

Just then, the driver of the squad car jerked open the door.

"Joe!" he exclaimed. "Come on! Radio just said that Happy Fay's been killed in his office."

And so Casson was free. And he was walking through the streets of a city's half-world; and in his wallet was five hundred dollars, and in his suitcase nearly forty thousand; and Happy Fay was



dead, and Zip Kelly was no longer following him. And he was free. If he wanted to, he could board the night train for Omaha—and forty thousand would pay for many an appendicitis operation, for many an evening gown. . . . Clyde Wilbert had stolen it, and Happy Fay had desired it so greedily that he had made the fatal error of pushing Lee Casson too hard. Red Umbenhower must have found it easy to shoot Fay tonight—for Fay's bodyguard had been otherwise occupied. Forty thousand dollars—swinging from his hand.

Forty thousand, Lee Casson thought, when he entered a cigar-store and put down the suitcase in a phone-booth.

"I guess," Lee Casson thought, "I was born a sap."

He called police headquarters.

"Don't know how it got here," he said, "but there's a suitcase been left here in a phone-booth. Naw—don't know what's inside. But no one is claiming it, and you'd better have it picked up."

On the street, newsboys were wailing: "Fay Slain. Police Search for Umbenhower!" And it occurred to Lee Casson that a kind of rough justice had been done—McKeever killed by Fay, Fay by Umbenhower, and now possibly Umbenhower by the State. He took a cab home; and there he used the phone again. Long distance, this time.

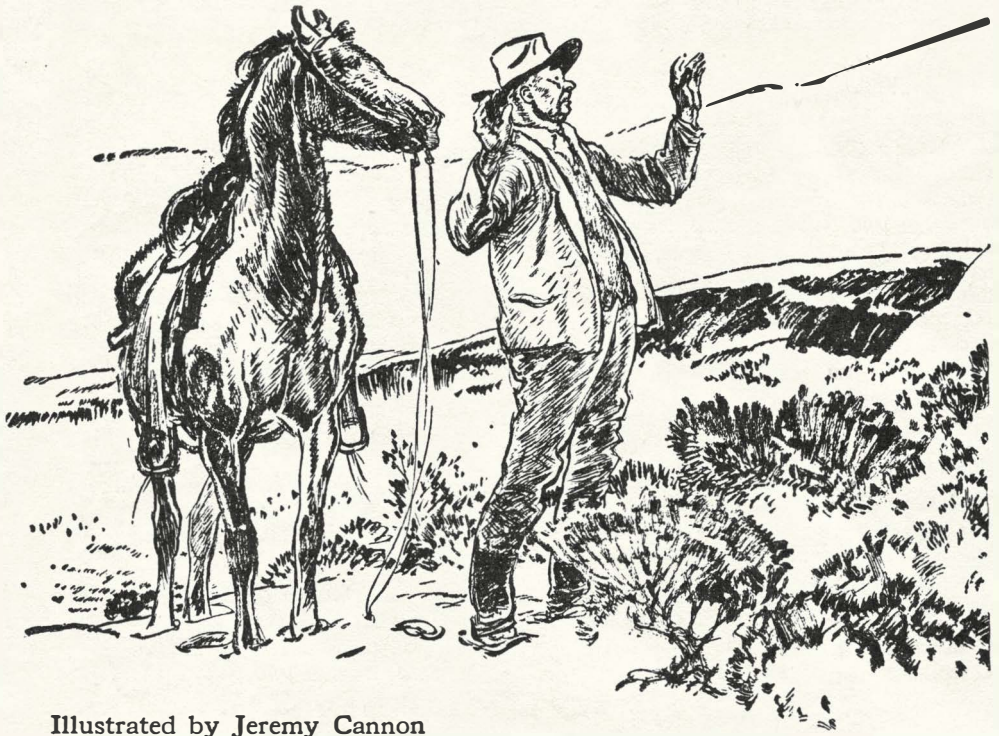
"A TELEGRAM?" the voice of Miss Lattimer said. "But I sent no telegram. Virginia ill? Certainly not—you may talk to her if you wish—"

If Lee Casson wished!

And while he waited, he remembered Fay's lawyer in Omaha: he must have sent that telegram. Happy Fay had been thorough.

And then, over the wire, came the clear voice of a beautiful child who was never to know the dark and crooked back-streets of a city's half-world.

"Hello, honey," Lee Casson said to her. "How would you like to leave with me tomorrow for California?"



Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

HE dreamed that heavy male voices were carrying on an argument near him; but what wakened him was something between the death-screach of a rabbit and the high whine of the buzz-saw when it comes ringing through the wood. He sat up, blinking. It was as hot under blankets in the cabin as though the stove were going full blast. He reached from his bunk, pushed open the door, and looked out at the first day of spring. Up there in the mountains, that was the way it came sometimes, when the sky cleared and the wind blew out of the warm south. The conversational grumbling was the breaking-up of the ice down in Tumble Creek; and that last outcry was the scream of an eagle. Above the brilliant wrack of the land-mist two of them were up there fighting, black against the sun, the bald-headed old veteran from the Sugarloaf, and some ambitious stranger. Now one of the pair folded his wings, dropped half a mile like a stone, and skidded away up Tumble Valley, leaving a scream behind him. . . .

Edson got out of his blankets and stood up. The effort made him dizzy. The winter had walled them in with white iron for five months; and during the last six weeks they had been on starving rations of flour-and-onion flapjacks. Twenty pounds of necessary muscle had been thumbed away from his body by the famine, and by the hard work of

drilling in the quartzite of their prospecting shaft. His knees were crazy with weakness, and the blood sang in his head as he called out: "Hi, Marty! It's here. The big thaw is on! We can get through! We can get out!"

Marty rolled from his side to his back and lay still, groaning. His face looked greenish-white. Toby Edson shook him by the shoulder. "Spring! It's spring!" he shouted. "Wake up, Marty!"

"Suppose we get through, what of it? Spring, hell! We're still stony broke," said Marty, without opening his eyes.

That was true. Edson almost had forgotten. They were flat. They hadn't fifteen cents between them.

"We'll go down and talk some credit out of old Marshall in the store," declared Edson.

Fordyke pushed himself up with his long arms and gaped as he stared at that steaming brilliance which rose over the valley. He was so weak that even when he sat still, he wavered a little. With a failing heart, Edson studied that sick face and the unsteadiness of the head.

The effort of speech twisted the lip of Fordyke into a sneer.

"It's no good," he said. "I'm too done in to make the trip. And if you go alone, nobody'll give you credit."

He shook his head with a slow movement. The sneer of nausea or of doubt was still on his mouth, and Edson hated the sight of it. He fought against the



Half a Partner

A vivid drama of the Western mining country today, by the able author of "Last Flight" and "The True Steel."

By MAX BRAND

admission that there was weakness of spirit as well as weakness of body in his friend. Besides, there was a touch of cruelty in Fordyke when he hinted at Edson's damaged reputation.

"You stay here and take it easy," said Edson. "I'll go down and come back with Buster loaded with chuck. I'll raise the wind somehow, or be damned."

"Now don't be a fool," cautioned Fordyke. "You want to get another notch on your gun?"

SUDDEN anger seized Edson. He was as weak as a woman, as an invalid.

As a matter of actual fact, there were no notches on his gun; but people had insisted on building up a legend about him. He was too ready with his tongue and his fists, that was all. Wherever there was a fight in which guns were pulled, rumor had a way of hitching Edson's name to the trouble. He had taken a certain pride in that dangerous reputation until he started asking Mary Darnley once a month to marry him, and discovered that she really meant it when she said no. After that, when he wanted to hit anyone, he put his hands in his pockets. Finally he sewed himself up for at least one peaceful winter by staking out a claim with his friend Martin Fordyke up on Tumble Mountain. He had a double purpose in this move, for it not only would enable him to grow accustomed to the ways of peace, but also it

would be tying the hands of Fordyke, who was Mary's most preferred young man. No matter what Mary had said, Edson was not yet licked.

He was perfectly willing to admit that Fordyke was a finer fellow and much more worthy of Mary, but he wanted to study that superiority at close quarters. Perhaps he could imitate it in the end. All winter long he had been trying to reach into the mind of his friend, and all winter he failed to discover the charm which made Mary love Fordyke.

He got into his clothes and took his thoughts outside the cabin for a moment. Old Buster, the white-faced mule, who was down the shoulder of the mountain pawing away snow to get at the bunch grass which grew scantily here and there, put back his ears in recognition of one of his masters. The thaw was on with a vengeance, and the air filled with a conversational whisper as the snow melted into runlets of water, trickling down Tumble Mountain. Faint thunder rolled across Tumble Valley, and through the dazzle of the mist he saw Pinckney Falls running a streak of silver down the face of the cliff. Perhaps already the ice was gone from the thousand granite steps of the trail.

He went back into the cabin, started a fire, shook the last flour out of the sack, chopped up an onion, and fried that revolting mess in pork-grease.

"That's every damned bit we have,"

commented Fordyke. "If you can't get through, we starve, eh?"

"We starve," answered Edson briefly, and helped Fordyke to a major portion of that last meal.

He had put in more time with single jack and double jack, during the winter, drilling at the quartzite, which was as hard as steel and as sticky as gum; therefore he had lost more pounds than Fordyke—but he was fed from a well of extra nerve energy that made him the leader and gave finality to his decisions. He managed to get down that breakfast before he pulled the saddle on Buster and shoved a gun into the saddle-holster.

"I finished drilling that hole yesterday," he told Fordyke, who leaned weakly in the doorway. "If you want to kill time, why not shoot it this morning?"

Fordyke merely answered: "Suppose you find Solomon's Stairway greased up with ice from the top to the bottom?"

"Then we'll save time by sliding down," said Edson.

"You'll slide to hell, you mean," commented Fordyke; but there was no real concern in his voice. It was as though the famine had starved out even the strength of their friendship. Edson kept thinking about that all the way to the head of Solomon's Stairway, where more than a hundred broken ledges made a sort of imperial descent into the valley mists. The mule went down with delicate steps, studying his footing with wise eyes, while Edson stared grimly ahead, not at the danger, but at his interview with old Marshall at the store.

FORDYKE, seated in the sun, dozed in a snakelike torpor for some time, but his knees were steadier under him when he pulled himself to his feet.

He went up to the shaft which told the hard, hungry story of the last months. There they had broken their hands and hearts for half a year, following a mere ghost of color that refused to widen into a workable vein; but Edson, who found the dim trace of gold, had refused to give up. It angered Fordyke to think how he had been mastered from the first by that dominant nature. Fighting dogs are fools; fighting men are fools; therefore Edson was a fool, and Fordyke was a greater fool for following him into the mountains like a half-wit hunting for the rainbow's pot of gold.

The damp cold of the winter was still in the shaft. He carried a light to the drilled hole which Edson had left; for a

week, now, his own starved arms had not been able to manage even an eight-pound hammer. He set the dynamite charge, lighted the fuse, and went outside, where the sun gave down on him a warm rain of strength. Then came the explosion. It was not a good, hard shot. By the sound of it, he knew that it had boot-legged; and something told him that would be the last hole they drilled in that stubborn vein. When he went in, he examined the effects of the shot negligently. The powder now knocked out a hole six inches wide at the mouth and smashed the ejected rock into the opposite wall of the shaft. He leaned over the little pile of debris with the lantern for a casual glance.

AT first he thought that it was a mere yellow glint from the lantern-light. But it was more solid than that: he could lift it between thumb and forefinger.

He jumped back to the hole which the explosion had left. Lantern-light refused to crawl down the narrows of that little opening. He lighted a match. The sulphur fumes made him cough the flame out. He lighted another. And now he saw it clearly, like a smudge of sunshine on one side of the little funnel. He plucked at it. Something came away, and he ran with it to the sunlight.

The thing made in his hand a jagged streak like a miniature lightning-stroke! It was wealth. If the vein held, it was dollars in tens of thousands.

He held that bit of wire-gold against his breast and shook his fist at the sky. His thought leaped across the blue and dazzle of Tumble Valley into the cushions of a Pullman, into the prow of a transatlantic liner; and all the domes and spires of the ancient world crowded up into his imaginings thicker than the pine trees of the lower valley.

The head of a climbing beast came nodding up over the shoulder of the mountain then; not the long, flopping ears of Buster returned from a vain attempt, but the beautiful bony head of a thoroughbred. He knew the girl by the horse almost sooner than he distinguished her face. It was Mary Darnley, and he blessed the sight of the panniers that her Gavgivan horse was bearing. Now she was dismounting at the door of the cabin; now she was holding up a whole ham by the hanging noose.

Fordyke ran toward her, stumbling, like a lucky sinner toward the gate of heaven.

"Marty, are you sick? Or have you been starving?" she was crying out at him. "Why didn't you come down to us? Was it the trail?" She was loving him with her eyes as she spoke.

"Partly ice, partly Toby. He's too damned proud to borrow until he has starved half a year."

He remembered that she belonged to him, and stooped to kiss her; then he was lifting the covers of the panniers and peering at their contents. It was hardly necessary to look. All the sweet kitchen fragrances of his knowledge—Thanksgiving and Christmas piled headlong together—set him laughing with a crazy delight.

The girl laughed a little too, out of sheer sympathy. "Has it panned out?" she asked. "Is Toby the wild fellow people think, or has he really the great heart that I used to mention? —Where is he now?"

"Rustling grub. . . . He's O.K.," said Fordyke, plumbing the pannier.

Something small and bright flashed from his hand to the ground. The girl picked it up. It was a crooked bit of wire, a shining spider-thread of gold. The excited grip of her hand covered it.

"Marty, have you had any luck in the mine?" she cried.

"Luck? Luck?" He looked up at her with suddenly narrowed eyes. "Not a trace. Ghost-gold," he said.

A sudden coldness of shadow fell across her heart while she listened to the lie. As she stared at him, he seemed to be receding into a new distance.

TOPY EDSON got down into the valley on a skidding, stumbling mule; but the ice was dissolving every moment, and he found muddy trails in the lowland. He let the mule go on at a shambling trot, but the farther he went, the more certain he grew that he never could talk ten cents' worth of credit out of old Marshall at the Crowfoot store. Instead, where the trails branched, he took the way toward Tumbletown. He could pawn the saddle, if necessary, and return bareback; but return with food he must. The green-white of Marty's face lay in the back of his mind like the whole horror of the winter, visualized. Then he came over the shoulder of Sullivan Hill, and saw Pete Doring coming up the trail, two loops beneath him. The instant he laid eyes on the man, Toby Edson knew what he would do—and he dismounted at once.



Doring was an unusual genius who inherited his father's money and talent as a moneylender, together with a special set of vices that were all his own. Among other things, he could forget his gambling debts. Toby Edson, remembering a scene in the back room of Patterson's saloon, spat on the ground in scorn and disgust. Then he pulled a bandana across the bridge of his nose, close up to the eyes, and knotted it behind his head. He left Buster deep in the brush, and stepped to the trail side as big Pete Doring brought his horse into a canter at the top of the hill. Edson came out of the shrubbery with the gun leveled.

Doring leaned as though to ride for his life. He changed his mind and wrenched his pony to a stop. As he slid down from the saddle, he began to whine: "Is that you, Bill? I know you, Bill, old boy. They been telling lies about me, Bill. Don't—"

He kept his hands reaching for the sky while his eyes watched the revolver with a sort of amazed horror. Edson reached inside the loose of Doring's coat and pulled out a wallet. Doring groaned. He twisted his body as though his vitals were being drawn out of him.

He pleaded: "Bill, will you listen to me? I swear to God the money in there

aint all mine. I've got old Doc Shore's cash in there. You wouldn't want old Doc Shore to be a beggar all the rest of his life, would you? You wouldn't go and do that, would you? Bill—"

His knee snapped up as he spoke. It knocked Edson's gun-hand high into the air and sent the revolver spinning away. Doring plunged into a clinch. An animal screeching of delight kept working in his throat from the moment he got his grip on Edson and felt that weakened body crumple. Edson found himself picked up like a child and flung with the weight of Doring crashing down on him.

Half of his life went out on a dark wave. Doring, with a bestial, laughing face, had him by the throat, beating his head against the ground. He struck at Doring's chin. His fist merely glanced across as though the laughter of Doring had blown it away. He jerked the arm back again, the elbow pointed. It struck home against the temple. A thousand electric wires went jangling up his arm, numbed to the shoulder; but Doring's weight spilled over him loose as water, and lay still.

He rolled that bulk away. A point of leather dangling from Doring's saddle he tore away. That served as a cord to tie the hands of the big fellow behind his back. When he picked up his gun, Doring had not moved. He made a snoring sound as though he were enjoying a peaceful sleep. His mouth was open, blowing muddy water away from his lips, for his face was in a shallow pool. Edson opened the wallet, took out a five-dollar bill, and tossed the wallet into the mud. Then he returned to Buster.

THE best way was straight back over the top of the hill. He wanted speed, but all he could get out of Buster was a rocking-horse gallop slower than a man could run. Perhaps that was why bad luck overtook him. Besides, he had been a fool. He should have looked on the off side of Doring's horse for the holstered rifle which was fitted there. He was up on the top of Sullivan's Hill when a blow struck him behind the shoulder and ran a long needle of pain through it. Afterward came the ringing report of the rifle. . . .

In the woods just beyond the crest of the hill he stopped. Doring did not follow, so he dismounted and peeled off shirt and undershirt. Hardly any blood came from the back orifice, but plenty ran out of the wider mouth in front.



He could move the shoulder without extra pain, which meant that no bone had been broken. The bleeding was the thing to stop. Inside the bark of a dead stump he found wood-rot that pulverized to dust. With that in the cup of his hand, he padded the mouths of the wound. Then with his teeth and right hand he tore the undershirt into strips and bandaged his shoulder. Afterward he huddled into the flannel shirt. He unstrapped his short mackinaw coat from behind the saddle, and put that on also. Finally he crawled up the side of Buster and started for Crowfoot.

There were no wits at all in his left arm. He kept the hand in a trousers' pocket as he jogged on. Of course after this he could not show himself at the store; but he remembered old Mexican Carlos, who used to peddle gin in the prohibition days. Carlos never had spent much time in jail, because he possessed the ability to keep his mouth shut; he kept it closed on this day when Toby, with his left hand still in his pocket, stood by the mule and asked for bacon, coffee, flour, molasses, eggs, and half a sack of apples. Carlos brought the stuff out, took the money, and offered no change; he merely looked at Toby with his old unwinking eyes and with his



"Mary, d'you understand that? I thought he was only half a man—half a partner!"

smile. It was not really a smile, but a folding of the lips over toothless gums. Toby forgot all about his change and rode away with a slight shuddering in his spinal marrow.

He licked the dry of his lips and started for Tumble Mountain. The pain was bad, and it grew worse. The left arm swelled. He hooked the left hand inside his collar to give it a higher support, but the arm kept on swelling. The pain was everywhere, particularly in the wrist, so that sometimes he felt as though the bullet had clipped through him at that point.

He ate two apples, and each one cleared a fainting fit away, washing the darkness out of his eyes. That was the way he reached the cabin, late in the afternoon. The feet of the mule were silent in the soft of the earth, so that when he dismounted and stood in the doorway, they had had no token of his coming.

His eyes would not believe what they saw. The whole table was heaped with food!

There was a story, somewhere, about the pelican that gave her blood for her young. He had had a feeling that he would be giving life to Marty, like that. Even that, according to his code, was not a repayment for the long months of their suffering and steady friendship; but it was the right sort of gesture. And now it was taken away from him. It was an empty hand that he offered, compared to what lay on that table.

INSTEAD of a pale face, Marty was flushed; there were glimmering, half-drunken lights of happiness in his eyes. He sang out: "Hi! He got it! Good old Toby, he *did* talk credit out of Marshal. . . . You can wring whisky out of iron, then, Toby. But come on in and sink a tooth in some of this stuff Mary brought. I'll carry in what you got."



It was wealth! If the vein held— His thoughts leaped.

Then Mary was holding his hand and examining him with anxious eyes.

"You can't be here. I'm not seeing straight," he told her.

"I had an idea you might be short of chuck," she said. "When I saw the thaw had started and heard the water running, I packed up some things and just came along."

He nodded understandingly: "Marty—that's right. You had to get through to Marty."

"And to you, Toby," she said.

"Sure," he nodded, grinning. "Because I'm his partner, and that gives me a share in you. I got some of the shine of your eyes, anyway; he gets the rest."

"You're sick, Toby," Mary asserted. "You're out on your feet."

"I'm a little tired, that's all," he told her. "That damned old Buster mule has more ways of going than you can shake a stick at, and they're all wrong."

She kept watching him, silently, and her eyes seemed to say: "Highway robbery—ten years in the pen for that."

So he turned to Marty, saying: "Shoot that hole this morning?"

"I shot it," said Marty, his back turned. "Same old story. Drew another blank."

"We'll have to pull out of here," nodded Toby Edson.

"We certainly will!" agreed Marty, lugging in a sack of potatoes. "Sit down there and take a wallop at that chuck, will you?"

"Later on. It looks great," answered Edson. "I'll stretch out on the bunk a minute."

He lay down. Individual weights closed his eyes. He could not get enough air unless his lips were parted.

The voice of Mary, as far away as a singing bird, said: "There's a brandy flask in my saddle pocket. Get it for me, Marty."

PRESENTLY an arm went under his head, and he breathed a small thin fragrance.

"What's the big idea?" asked Edson. "I don't have to be coddled."

She kept on lifting his head. Her face was so close to him that he could see only the lips and the chin and the throat. She was as brown as an Indian. No, it was a golden brown. She held the flask at his mouth. He took a big swallow.

"That's great," said Edson.

"What happened?" asked the girl.

"Nothing. . . . Mountain sickness, maybe. . . . What do you mean?"

"Why do you keep that left hand in the pocket?" she insisted.

"Why not?" he asked. "It's at home there."

"Don't be such a damned big brave man," said the girl. "You're sick with pain. What's the matter?"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Marty.

He hurried from the cabin, and came back carrying the revolver.

"It's all right," he said with a breath of relief. "It hasn't been fired. I just thought for a minute, Toby—"

"Don't be a damn' fool," said Toby. "I'll be taking a whack at that chuck."

He forced himself to the table and sat down. A small roast chicken was half demolished. He took a drumstick and began to eat it. Somehow the meat stuck in his throat.

"Why don't you use both hands?" asked the girl softly.

"Don't bother me, Mary," he said. "Let me take my ease in mine inn, will you?"

"What the devil is it all about?" asked Marty rather angrily.

"He's done something," said the girl. Toby glanced sharply at her. There were tears in her eyes.

"He paid more than cash for what he brought back to you, Marty," she went on. "Is it the arm? Is it the shoulder, Toby? Are you going to make a stranger of me? Do you think that *I'd* talk?"

"Talk be damned!" cried out Fordyke at the door. "Toby, whatever you did, the devil and all is coming after you. There's Sheriff Pete Grieve coming up the trail hell-bent!"

Toby got himself out into the open. He had a crazy idea of grabbing the mule and attempting flight. Then the reasonable part of his brain stopped him. Sheriff Pete Grieve was dismounting, now, beside them. He stood with his hands on his hips, looking like an older General Buster. He had a gray beard trimmed down sharp, as it were, by the wind of hard galloping.

He waved a greeting to them and said: "All right, Edson. You'd better be coming along with me."

"O.K." nodded Toby. "What's the charge?"

"Assault and highway robbery," said the Sheriff. "As long as you were assaulting somebody, I'm glad you picked out that skunk of a Doring. But we're going to put you away, Edson." He gathered high heat and anger as he spoke. "You've been handy with your fists and handy with your gun for a long time, young fellow; and now we're going to put you away where you'll have a good long rest. They can have their damned dirty gunmen in New York and Chicago but this is too far West for that sort of work. Get your clothes and come along with me."

EDSON nodded and stepped back into the cabin. It was as though the bullet had pierced him again, deeper down through his body.

Marty talked more with his hands than with his tongue. He kept making confused gestures of protest and stammering: "Can't you give him a break, Sheriff?"

"How do you know that it was Toby Edson?" asked the girl.

She kept her eyes on Marty, not on Pete Grieve, as she spoke.

"Know it was Edson? Why," said Pete Grieve, "Doring saw that white-faced mule, Buster; and he knew right away who must be riding him."

"Well, Marty could have ridden Buster, couldn't he?" she asked.

Pete Grieve shrugged. "Marty's always been a peaceable sort of kid."

"But he's Toby's partner," pointed out Mary. "And what would you do, Mr. Grieve, if you saw a partner of yours half starved? Wouldn't you even do robbery to get food for him?"

SHE kept looking at Marty as she talked. The Sheriff argued: "What's the big idea, anyway? What's all this partner stuff?"

"Why, you know what it is," answered the girl. "That's why we're better than the people back East. We have higher mountains and bigger friends, out here in the West."

The Sheriff grunted. But Marty, with fascinated eyes, was watching a delicate little thread of golden light which Mary stroked with the tips of her fingers, absently.

"You mean that Marty and Toby are as thick as all that?" demanded Pete Grieve.

"They're partners, aren't they?" asked Mary. She kept smiling, but the irony gave a new ring to her voice. "And partners out West would die for each other, wouldn't they?"

"What about it, Marty?" asked the Sheriff. "Did you go down there and stick up Doring?"

Fordyke narrowed his eyes as though he were looking at something far across the valley.

"I went down there and held up Doring," he said.

The girl started. She cried out: "No—Marty!" But then her words stopped with her lips parted over the last of them, and a brightness still working in her eyes.

"I might've known it was a kind of joke when Doring's whole wallet wasn't taken," commented the Sheriff. "But even if it's a first offense, highway robbery *aint* a joke. The judge is gonna give you a right smart bit of hell for this, Marty! Get on that mule and come along with me!"

The girl ran up to Fordyke and caught his hands. "It won't be a great thing, Marty dear," she said. "The judge will only give you a reprimand and a suspended sentence, or something like that. . . . He would have given Toby twenty years. . . . But it's no great thing to you."

"I guess it's a great enough thing," said Marty. "I've lost you, haven't I? And he's got you; and he has the kind of hands that'll keep you, too."

She kissed him. "I do love you, Marty," she whispered.

"Yeah. A little," he agreed. "But there's more to Toby. He's more man. And God bless you—the two of you!"

That was why Edson came to the door of the cabin with a saddle-bag of his things in his hand only to see the Sheriff with Marty Fordyke dropping out of sight down the trail. He blinked for a moment at that strange sight before some sort of vague understanding came to him. Then he started to cry out, and broke into a stumbling run in pursuit. The girl caught him and held him.

"They're gone!" she cried at him. "You can't catch them, Toby."

He stopped struggling to be gone, and looked up into the sky as the whole beauty of the situation came over him abruptly.

"He wants to go in my place!" murmured Toby. "My God, Mary, d'you understand that? I thought he was only half a partner. I thought he was only half a man. But he's gone in my place! Lend me Gavvigan, and I'll catch up with them!"

"You can't have Gavvigan," said the girl. "And don't you understand? They won't be hard on Marty. He won't get as much as thirty days."

"But why? Why did he do it? Is he that much man?"

"He did it because you stood up against guns to bring back food to him. And he'd struck enough luck today to make him big-hearted. . . . Look!"

"Wait a minute! Wire gold? *Wire* gold?" he shouted.

"He was keeping it back. The hole he shot this morning ripped open a pocket of it. He was saving it to tell you later, when you were a little steadier on your pins. You understand, Toby?"

"It knocks me silly," he told her. "Not prison—not stripes and all that—but gold. . . . And still, I can't see Marty going in my place. He *can't* be that much man!"

"Toby, he is, he is!" cried the girl. "He's going in your place because he knows that I love you!"

Edson put back a hand and gripped the edge of the door. "Don't laugh when you say that, honey," he warned her.

"Do I seem laughing?" she asked.

"No—more crying," said Edson. He got his one arm around her.

"There's a kind of a God in this, isn't there?" he asked. "And He's a great God, Mary; because he made a man like Marty Fordyke."

Black Cargo

The old-time slave-trade leads to the invention of a new sailing-ship rig in this colorful story—the twenty-seventh of the famous Ships and Men series.

CAPTAIN TRUMBULL scowled across the table. "What's the mother of invention?" he demanded truculently.

"Prevarication," said Mr. Miles, the first officer. There was a laugh, in which Captain Trumbull did not join. He was not a man who laughed very often; life had been grim to him, and he looked it.

"I'm not joking," he proclaimed dourly. "The barkentine rig always was half flesh, half fowl. Hermaphrodite was the old name for it. When you get through with all your silly pawking drivel, and Mr. Miles here has finished cutting his jokes, I'll give you the facts in the case. Get it all off your chests while I'm finding the sort of cigar I want."

He rose and stamped away toward the bar and the cigar-counter.

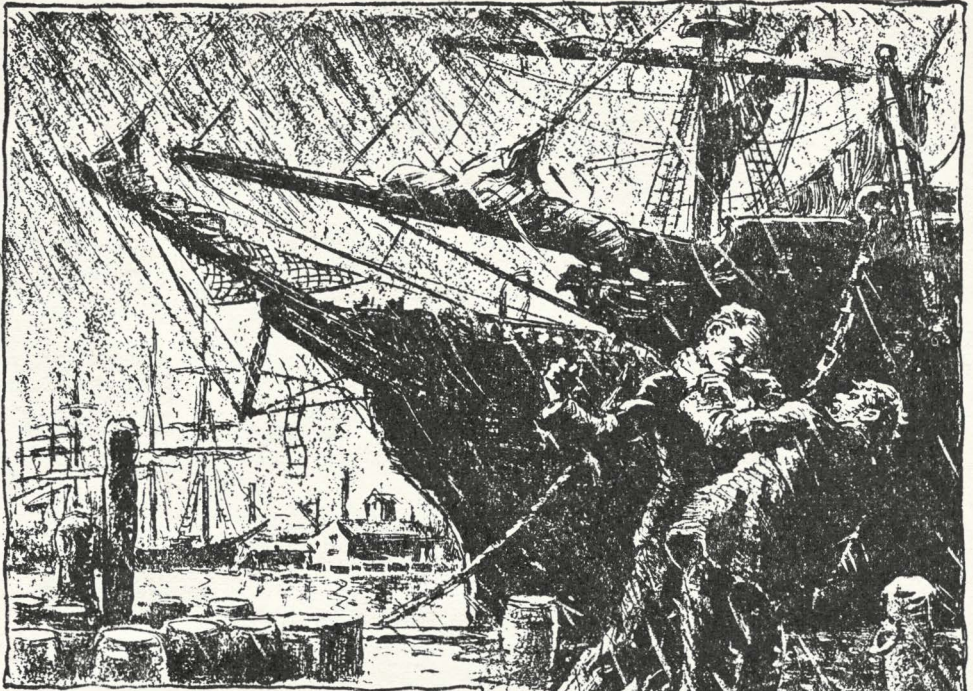
"I'll bet it's a long black one that'd choke a mule," said Mr. Miles.

We were sitting around a table in downtown San Francisco, talking about the new bridges and one thing and another. We had drifted together for dinner by sheer chance, but the presence of Captain Trumbull was no delight.

It was a hard, rocky presence, a strong one that made itself felt. You've met men like that—so uncompromising, so gaunt and rock-ribbed against the world, that they provoke instant dislike. Their very gaze is a challenge. The queer thing is that you may hate such a man at sight, yet you respect him. And so it was with Captain Trumbull.

"If you get a yarn out of that old shellback," said somebody, "it'll be all blood and rum—or worse!"

There was a laugh, and the talk went back to barkentines. It was the general opinion that this rig had come into being as a result of the greatest shipping depression ever known, caused by the



Glynn caught him off-balance, rushed him off his feet.

French and British embargoes during the first ten years of the past century, when England and Napoleon between them nearly ruined American shipping.

"Some Yankee skipper by the name o' Fallon invented the rig, I hear tell," said one voice. Captain Trumbull, who had returned to his seat at the table, heard this with a grunt. He had a long black cigar, sure enough.

"Why any Yankee coasting skipper would want square canvas for'ard," spoke up Mr. Miles, "I dunno. Or rather, how he'd learn that it could be used on a three-mast schooner. Schooner men love their little fore-and-afters and swear by 'em."

"Aye," said another. "And there's no better rig for beating up and down coast, and in narrow rivers with short tacking to do. Back in them days, the fast American schooners were about the only craft that could outsail the privateers and pirates that infested the whole coast. So why try out a new rig?"

"Probably," came a suggestion, "some fore-and-aft skipper, Fallon or another, got into some jam where nothing but square canvas on the foremast would do

him any good. A matter of life and death, maybe—"

"Where Necessity became the mother of Invention," barked Captain Trumbull all of a sudden. "That's what happened, too. Fallon was the man, Cap'n Tom Fallon. There's a yarn back of it to curl your hair."

Mr. Miles laughed. "Curl away, Cap'n! We've been around some. After a chap has looked into the waterfront situation from Suez to Shanghai, not to mention such places as Havre, his hair needs a lot to curl it."

Captain Trumbull regarded him with a severe eye, and replied without diplomacy:

"You, huh? You or me, we're babies compared to those Yankee skippers of around 1800. If we kill a man, we've got courts and unions and God knows what

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



to reckon with; but they killed 'em regardless, and no questions asked. They had to contend with pirates, slavers, all sorts of rascals—and with each other. Saints? Not by a danged sight! They were hard-fisted men, dealing in rum and slaves and human misery, and you bet there were rascals among 'em. Why, the oldtime bucko mates were just a mere hangover of brutality from those days! A skipper like Fallon had to fight fire with fire or go under; he had to be worse than the worst, and a little bit better than the best. He was all man, if he wanted to keep his ticket. A skipper in those times had to do things, and think nothing of it, that today would make newspaper headlines all over the world and land him behind the bars."

"Give us the yarn, Trumbull," spoke up a skipper from down the table. "Do you know how Fallon came to invent the barkentine rig?"

"I do," asserted Captain Trumbull truculently. "It all came about because Tom Fallon got knocked overboard and drowned, off the Florida cays. That is,

he was supposed to've drowned, only he didn't. Glynn, Butcher Glynn, boarded him and looted his schooner; that's how he got overboard. The *Betty Cross* was the fastest, liveliest thing under canvas; there was bad blood between the two men; and Glynn just laid aboard and grabbed. Glynn, mind you, was a respectable skipper out o' New York. He was in the slave trade, running blacks from the west coast of Africa over to Cuba or Charlestown, from time to time. He was a member of a shipping-firm in New York, too."

"Members of the firm usually are slavers," said some one, and there was a laugh. Captain Trumbull glared around for silence—and got it.

"Fallon had a half-brother," he went on. "Nobody knew about it; the name was John Martin, and he was no angel, but sometimes brothers stick together. Martin was an A.B. aboard Glynn's vessel when Tom Fallon came back to New York, with not another soul knowing him to be alive. He had lost everything with his schooner; nobody knew what had



The belaying-pin whipped out, and the crack of it was heard across the wind as it smacked home.

the less, he was on the prowl this night for a ship and a job together. Ship, job, money—everything staked on one desperate lone-hand play.

Leaning against the biting norther that searched through his ragged garments, Fallon passed beneath the trellis formed by the bowsprits of a hundred laid-up ships, a wilderness of stripped spars and weather-cracked masts reaching into the dark sky. He cursed it—everything included: The English, who had stopped American ships with their refusal to permit European trade; the French for the same reason; the President and a craven Congress who, in a super-anxiety to avoid disputes and war, allowed all commerce to sicken and die.

Tom Fallon had revolted against the law, against his own evil destiny, against the smug rascality whose “pull” protected Butcher Glynn. Thanks to John Martin, opportunity was in his grasp; and his grasp was strong enough, desperate enough, to grip and hold. . . .

A drift of fine rain and sleet needled through his rags and whetted his resolve. He slipped across the frozen mud of Governor’s Alley, passed Fly-market slip, and so reached Burling Slip at the foot of John Street. And there, close-warped as his brother had informed him, lay the craft he was seeking.

Covered by the obscuring haze, Fallon walked to the edge of the dock and looked the *Lively* squarely between the eyes; that sea-squinting gaze of his needed no daylight to discern the facts. Two hundred tons, he appraised her, with a knifelike bow and a run that wouldn’t draw a bucketful of dead water after her in a twenty-four-hour cruise. By her waterline, she was laden for a long voyage—cleared for Mexico, John Martin had said. Yes, Butcher Glynn was likely to head for Mexico! Once past the blockade, it was haul up for Africa and black ivory, and British frigates be damned!

No one was visible along her decks. All working canvas had been bent, and the kedges were astern in the stream, ready for a quick offshore haul. So Glynn was signing on a skipper this night to take her out, eh? Glynn, acting for that smug John Street firm of his. Glynn, who handled the details of the dirty work while he was ashore, between his own runs. Well, Glynn would

become of the *Betty Cross*; and there was just one thing Tom Fallon wanted—to get even with Butcher Glynn. So he met his half-brother in a groggery, and then he went walking in the bitter winter weather, and it was a walk worth describing to you.”

Well, no one would have dreamed that old Captain Trumbull had it in him, but he pitched into a masterly description of Fallon’s walk, that bitter night.

He brought up out of nothing the old Battery as it had once been, with the waterfront around it and along the East River—streets all a-smell with tar and hemp and molasses and rum, streets ranged with lofty square-riggers, squat New England coasters, rakish deepwater schooners that plied to the Caribbees and Mexico and Africa and farther.

A CHILL wind was whipping down from the north that gray cold evening; the frowsy waterfront was deserted. Trade and commerce seemed dead. Fallon could not hope to get a ship or a job, even were his identity known; none

get a skipper this night he was not bargaining for!

Fallon turned away, numb with cold, and his wind-burned eyes shifted from stream to streets. He gained the lee of a warehouse door and settled himself to wait in the shadows. If Martin were right, Glynn would be coming aboard after his drunken splurge, ready to await his skipper.

Glynn, with liquor in his belly and gold weighting his pockets! But more important than gold were the Custom House clearances and the bills-of-lading. Glynn would come with visions of a warm cabin, final arrangements, a last bottle of rum—and the *Lively* slipping out into the darkness.

Fallon smiled grimly. A new ship, Martin had told him; a fine new craft Glynn had fetched in and put to register. He peered out at the dark-rimmed lines of her, and a queer fluttering stirred in him, a stir of excitement. He could not account for it, and his smile died in a frown. Where was Glynn's fast-driving *Salem Lass*? Where was his own lost *Betty Cross*? No telling. . . .

Sleet drove thicker and faster; the warehouse doorway was colder than an ice-cavern. Presently the click of heels echoed down the empty street. Head down against the wind, snorting and splashing through the icy slush, appeared a tall figure. . . . Glynn, and alone! On came the man, until he was passing the very doorway. Then Fallon stepped out.

Stepped out, head bare, a jaunty greeting on his lips. Glynn halted, peered at him in the obscurity, recognized his voice, recognized him. An oath of wild alarm and terror broke from him:

"Fallon—Tom Fallon's ghost—get away from me—"

Fallon's fist landed, thudded home savagely, thudded again. Another blow, this time a crusher for the belt; but as it snapped home, Fallon's foot slipped on the cobbles.

He went sprawling. As he scrambled up, Glynn had all the recovery needed, and met him with a bellow. The two men hammered and slogged over the treacherous cobblestones, while the laid-up ships, groaning under dock-fetters, stared with stoppered eyes at these twisting, fighting shapes in the obscurity.

FALLON knew he had failed of his attempt. He had counted on surprise and the first driving blows to end things quickly, and he had failed. Unless he

did end the matter swiftly, his whole plan must go overboard. He could hope for no more than the satisfaction of hammering Butcher Glynn to a finish. . . .

Again he slipped—his boots were sodden things. This time Glynn was upon him before he could recover, caught him off balance, rushed him off his feet. As Fallon came half erect, Glynn's hobnailed boot went into him, low and foul; but that cursed sodden footgear of his had settled his hash. He writhed up, got in one savage crack, then sprawled face down on the stones, senseless.

GLYNN staggered, straightened up, gasped out wild curses. That one final blow had all but finished him. As he stood, catching his breath, a lantern bobbed and a form came on the run from the schooner—a man holding a lantern in one hand, long horse-pistol in the other.

"Ahoy! That you, Cap'n Glynn?" sounded his hoarse voice. "Need help?"

"Help?" grunted Glynn, wiping blood from his lips as he swung around, glaring at the man. "Ye cowardly skulker, I could ha' done with a hand, aye! So it's you, John Martin! Lay hold o' this blasted—"

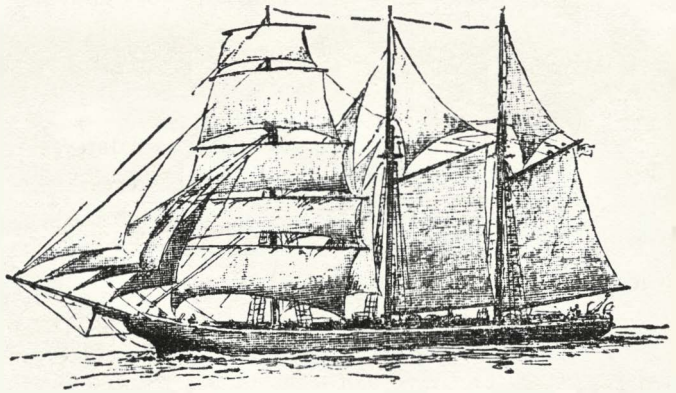
Desperately, Martin acted, foreseeing everything lost. Glynn was caught unawares by the swift, unsuspected attack. The pistol-barrel whaled him over the head, and without a sound, he crumpled beside the figure of Tom Fallon. . . .

As for Fallon, he had only dazed memories of what followed, until he found himself in the warm cabin of the schooner, Martin pouring rum down his throat. He stared around; then his jaw fell and his eyes widened incredulously.

The cabin of the *Lively*? No, not a bit of it. Here was a cabin glistening with bird's-eye maple, polished copper, hand-rubbed mahogany; the transom seats covered with leather, every nook and corner and scar and timber well remembered. Fallon passed a hand across his eyes, stared again. He was in his own cabin, aboard the *Betty Cross*!

Suddenly it all flashed on him. His amazed brain leaped at the truth. His own ship, of course! Glynn had made a few changes, altered the paint and so forth, had put her under some foreign registry by dint of a bribe to Mexican or Cuban officials—and this was the *Lively*. With Tom Fallon, master and owner of the vanished schooner supposedly dead and gone, it was safe enough.

Two hundred tons, Fallon appraised her, with a knifelike bow and a run that wouldn't draw a bucketful of water after her in a twenty-four-hour cruise.



Martin had left the cabin, and now came back with an armful of clothes—good sturdy garments.

The dazed Fallon looked up at him.

“Did you—did you know this was my old schooner, under a new name?”

Martin's long, narrow face was shot with astonishment.

“The *Betty Cross*? Why, no! Glynn's firm bought this hooker from some Cuban owner. He's been refitting her here. Good Lord, Tom! Then we can get the law on him—”

“The law be damned!” In a gust of anger, Tom Fallon came to his feet and began to strip off his rags. “What've we got to expect from the law? Months of delay, argument, law-sharks nipping us, trickery of all kinds—be damned to it! We'll go ahead as planned, or I will. Thanks for the clothes. I need 'em. So you fetched me aboard, eh? Good man! Where's Glynn?”

“Tied up and gagged, in that doorway. He'll keep.”

Fallon got into the garments, brass buttons and all: Glynn's outfit, no doubt.

Martin looked a lot like his tall half-brother. The same narrow features, the same high-bridged nose and crisp jaw. Only the eyes differed. Martin's were dark and eager, younger. Those of Fallon were stone-gray, cold, bitter hard, older.

“I'd like to lay that rogue aboard and take him to sea,” said Fallon. “And by heaven, I'll do it—”

“You won't if you're wise,” broke in John Martin. “Forget the past, Tom; you've got your ship again. You can change her back to the *Betty Cross* later. Some of your old crew will turn up, and then you can go to law if you like. Besides, don't chance it with Glynn aboard. The mate is Murphy, his old rascally standby. You've got to work and work fast if you're going to make sure of the ship this night.”

Fallon compressed his lips; then the harsh lines of his features relaxed.

“You're right. What's that you've got?—Oh, I see! I clear forgot about anything except what ship this was.”

He watched as Martin emptied his pockets of the loot taken from Glynn. Two small leather sacks of coin; keys, no doubt of the lockers aboard here; the ship's papers, all duly signed and sealed; and last, Glynn's watch and heavy gold fob-seal, the official seal of the shipping firm in which Butcher Glynn was a silent but important partner. With this seal, Fallon knew, he would be recognized and accredited in Africa or elsewhere.

“Me the master mariner and you the foremost hand, brother,” he observed. “That's strange, when you've got all the brains: You always did have.”

MARTIN grinned. “Nope; you're the leader, Tom. I rigged this deal, but it takes you to put it over. Everything's here. Since we parted at the tavern, I've heard from Murphy that Glynn is sailing tomorrow or next day himself, in the *Salem Lass*. And here,”—he paused to grab a scrap of paper,—“here's his rendezvous with whomever he got to captain this ship. Sierra Leone—ha! We've got everything, Tom!”

“Aye,” said Fallon, thrilling to the sheer exultation of it. “But regardless of moral right, it's piracy. We'll get a tail-block at the yardarm, and the two of us hanging betwixt high and low, if we're caught. You take this money and slip ashore. Leave me to handle—”

“Like hell!” flashed Martin. “I rigged this deal, and I'm putting it through with you. That goes!”

“All right, brother, have it your own way. You always were obstinate. Where's this Murphy, the mate?”

“Drinking with the rest of the swine, for'ard. I'm supposed to be lookout.”

Fallon nodded, and thankfully put down what was left of the rum.

Even while his hand moved, while he swallowed, the hard facts rushed through his brain: it must be a one-man job, and

a quick one. For the sake of their old mother back at Stonington, he could not risk the two of them swinging for piracy, or worse. He must knock John Martin on the head, put the money in his pocket, and leave him ashore.

As for himself—well, a dozen courses were open to him. The quickest and simplest was to play lone-hand bucko skipper, and sharp about it. One man could cow the score up forward into obedience; he had done it before now. Reefer Murphy was a good seaman, a vindictive little devil; well, Reefer could be handled.

"Let's go," said Fallon. "Rout Murphy out and send him aft."

He paced the after-deck. The night was black, but the rain had turned to snow, and this lightened things. Forward, a light showed briefly as the cuddy opened and closed again; a burst of raucous voices sounded and was silenced. Murphy came to the poop and passed the lantern in the mizzen rigging. A sharp, wide-shouldered little man, with a nose like a Cape pigeon.

"New cap'n aboard, sir?" he sang out. "That aint you, Cap'n Glynn—"

"New master, Mr. Murphy," said Fallon, coming closer to him. "Nip for'ard and break out the crew. We're in a hurry."

"Aye?" said the mate. "That's funny. Cap'n Glynn said you'd not be aboard until after he had transferred the gold to his own ship. I aint turning a hand until Cap'n Glynn changes the orders—"

Fallon hit him twice; no slipping sodden boots this time. Murphy collapsed in the scuppers. Fallon called sharply:

"John! Come and give me a hand with him. To the dock."

They took Murphy over the side and stowed him safely on the wharf. Presently Tom Fallon came back. He came back alone, breathing hard; the snow was heavier. The waterfront, with its dim occasional street lights, was silent.

Fallon went forward and broke out the dazed and drunken crew. His boots and fists stirred them into activity. There was Manuel, the Portygee second mate, and the rest were like unto him; all brown men, the whole eighteen, Cuban and Spanish and Verde Islander.

UPON a snowy drift of gale, the *Lively* was out and away to sea. There would be no trouble; these men would not begin to think, until next day. Fal-

lon turned in and got some sleep. He could risk it now better than later; the one crisis, he knew, would settle things.

He came on deck in the morning, sent the steward for his breakfast, and ate it at the rail, swigging down the hot coffee. All blockading ships had been eluded in the night and the snowy gale, but the wind was howling down out of the north-west. Fallon gave his orders. He caught the stare of Manuel, the staring eyes of the other men as they obeyed; they had small time to think, none to talk. Fallon got the schooner treble-reefed on fore and main, with the mizzen-sail stowed and gasketed. Then, pacing the heaving poop, he waited for the inevitable, alone except for the vague, well-wrapped figure of the man at the wheel.

HIS own ship under him again—still he could scarcely believe it. This, more than anything else, brought the old spring into his muscles, the old light into his gray eyes. His glance roved the decks eagerly enough. They were talking below, now, putting two and two together; perhaps some of them had recognized him. Another half-hour, and they'd be coming for an explanation. Fallon squeezed the belaying-pin stuck in his jacket pocket, and grinned frostily.

Gold aboard—Glynn's gold, to buy black ivory on the West Coast. Well, why not? A cargo of slaves meant big profits. They would be waiting there for delivery to Glynn, and with Glynn's seal and money, he would take the cargo himself. He might even see Butcher Glynn there, since the *Salem Lass* was bound on the same errand. He could get rid of these rats and ship a new crew there, too, Kroomen and a few whites. Then, the slaves sold, he could go back to his old West India trade, his ship under her own name again—

Fallon stopped short, staring at the helmsman. The latter looked up, grinned at him, and spoke.

"I've a hard head, Tom. Thought you were rid of me, eh?"

"Good Lord—*you!*" grunted Fallon. "Why, you fool, how did you get here? I thought I'd saved you from hanging for piracy, let alone being shot by the British for a slaver!"

"You always did send me home to Mother, but I'm a big boy now." And John Martin grinned joyously. "Didn't work, huh? I found a wherry, and barely got out in time to catch your fore-chains as you got up canvas."

"Well, you're here now, and I'm damned glad of it." Fallon broke into a laugh. "Hell's rising from below—and here it comes! You hold her steady and leave the heavy work to me."

"Look out for Frenchy," spoke up John Martin quickly. "He's the worst, and got a knife like a needle."

Fallon grunted, and moved toward the quarterdeck rail. Men were clustering in the waist, staring up; Manuel and two others were climbing the ladder. Fallon eyed them in grim frozen silence as they came. Frenchy, with the long mustaches and the sly glint of intelligence, was not hard to identify.

The three stopped short before his cold stare. They glowered at him, their hands already raw from fisting-in ice-hard canvas.

"Where's Cap'n Glynn, sir?" demanded Manuel without any preamble. "And Mr. Murphy? And who are you—"

The second mate held an eighteen-inch fid in his hairy, swarthy fist; he was ready for business, but Tom Fallon was a trifle readier. The belaying-pin whipped out, and the crack of it was heard across the wind as it smacked home.

The second man took a boot under the belt that laid him gasping and sprawling beside Manuel; but in came Frenchy with an oath and a sliver of steel. Warned of it, Fallon hit the arm with his belaying-pin, hit the man with his fist, and then started to take the deviltry out of him. He did it grimly, efficiently, and then booted the bleeding, whining man aft.

"Go take the helm. Mr. Martin! Come here."

Fallon lifted Manuel, kicked him back to life, and followed him down the ladder with the other man; then he stood grimly, John Martin beside him.

"I'm master here," he said. "Mr. Martin is mate. Who's the carpenter? Get below and sound the well. All hands, shake out a reef on the fore and main, and stand by to the handy-billies. Move, damn you, or I'll move you!"

Their staring hostility broke. That one brutal lesson of blood was enough; they obeyed quickly, if with curses.

FALLON kept them at it, that day, the next day, the day after, alternating watches with the one man he could trust. He knew exactly how much he could do with this ship of his, and did it to the limit, the pumps going steadily, the exhausted men moving about like shadows.

The schooner sped on before the gale, black hull sleek as an oiled eel, slashing through graybacks that ran sometimes as high as the caps. Storm-trysail after trysail blew out of the bolt-ropes and went skittering to leeward over the raging seas, but new canvas went up, hauled aloft by bloody, half-frozen fingers.

Fallon was on deck day and night, a lean tireless phantom, savage of voice and fist. He was making no time, for he must drive far to the south to save his ship; and if it were any race, Glynn would have the advantage of him by waiting for the gale to blow out and then hauling a straight course; but what he wanted was to break those men, and he broke them.

EIGHT days the gale lasted; and when they ran out of it, all hands were worn to the bone, pale staggering men with no fight or mutiny left in them, and barely life itself; of Fallon they stood in mortal terror, as well they might.

Forty-six days the run stood, when they raised the green Sierra Leone hills. In those days Fallon had become convinced that Glynn would lose no time getting after him; the gold was aboard, plenty of it, and trade goods. He had ripped the very heart out of Butcher Glynn when he walked off with this ship and what was in her. And now it was Glynn who would pay the freight, but it was Tom Fallon who would load the slaves and sell them, and then head up for New York with the *Lively* washed out of existence, and his own schooner in her place again. A fine prospect, a fat prospect—if he made it.

They stood in to the coast, hunting for that secret river-mouth laid down in the private charts. Manuel had come to the fore these last few days; the swarthy man knew the coast dialects and every trick of the slave trade, and Fallon had need of him. Manuel bobbed his head, shook his gold earrings, and promised everything.

The river opened. A black pilot came aboard, and Fallon plied him with gin and questions. Captain Glynn? Not arrived, but expected; the barracoons were filled with prime Pangives, ready for him at thirty dollars a head. Fallon showed the gold fob-seal, and nothing more was needed. The slaves were his. But what about the British?

A frigate and a corvette had showed up a week ago, but had gone off toward the Rio Pongo. All was well. So the

schooner stood in, crossed the bar safely and headed up between the verdant river banks for the anchorage. John Martin was driving the men, breaking out guns from the hold, rigging the slave deck. Six long nines, and a gleaming brass thirty-two, for mounting on its pivot carriage.

Fallon watched Manuel, gabbling with the pilot and his helper, and frowned. How far this Portygee could be trusted—well, time would show. First came the palaver ashore, the trade goods and the bright gold coins. John Martin could handle all that.

He handled it to perfection, with Manuel helping him, while the schooner lay moored to the long palm-log jetty. With a curl of his lip, Fallon let the men have their run ashore. They were no better than the blacks there, or the blackleg whites who came thronging to the gangway, begging for rum or clothes. A sorry mongrel lot, deserters from other slavers or from King's ships; most of them served the black king, manned his guns or trained his soldiers. Tom Fallon talked with them, gave them rum, and bided his time. One or two among them had been good men once.

John Martin handled the palaver, yes; within two days the slaves began to come aboard. Manuel, under Fallon's watchful eye, paid out the trade goods and coin. Manuel was for packing in the poor wretches like smoked haddock, but Tom Fallon would have none of that. He took only half the cargo Glynn would have crammed below-deck; and to himself he cursed that his schooner should acquire the slave-reek. It would wash out of her when her honest name came back, he vowed.

THE days fled with never a hint of alarm from the lookout on the hill, who searched the sea for any sail. The ballast of palm oil went in; white ivory was stowed away. The last of the slaves were aboard. The water-butts were filled of a late night, and the pilot ordered for the dawn.

To Fallon, it was all like magic. Magic had laid hold of him from that moment in the cold and frozen night when he clapped eyes on the *Lively* and felt a shiver and stir of recognition in his heart—though he had not known what it was. Point to point, everything after that moment had gone without a hitch. Now the guns were in place, all was stowed, the hatches ready to clap on, the

schooner ready to fight or run as needed. The job was done.

John Martin summoned him in the dawn—summoned him to giant Pongo Jim, the most famous pilot of the coast, who regarded Fallon with his usual wide grin.

"Damned niggers desert last night," he said. "Boat-crew gone. Must get new crew before I take you out. No good!"

He waved his hand, touched his cocked hat, and strutted off the schooner. Tom Fallon looked at Martin, and what he read in the latter's face startled him.

"Well, John? What's wrong?"

"His boys aren't the only deserters," said John Martin. "Tom, the ship's empty. They're all gone!"

EMPTY it was. Not a man remained aboard. From Manuel to the cook, every man jack had taken his bag and decamped during the night.

"If you want 'em back," went on Martin, "I'll see the king and hold a palaver, and he'll send 'em back quick enough—"

"No," said Fallon. "Wait—let's see what the rats stole!"

They took a quick look all around. Strange to say, nothing of account was gone with the missing men. It was clear that Manuel had arranged matters with Pongo Jim. Glynn was expected daily; if the schooner could be held here until the *Salem Lass* arrived, Tom Fallon was in the soup.

"Pilot be damned!" he said cheerfully. "I can take her across the bar myself—high water at sunset. . . . Yes, it'll work out fine."

"But you can't sail her home with me to hand the lines and feed the slaves," said John Martin, as he prepared a hasty breakfast of fruit. Fallon gave him a look and a grin.

"You stop aboard, brother. Leave the crew to me. We sail at sunset."

He went down to the cabin, filled his pockets with Glynn's gold, or what was left of it, and then strode ashore. Far from being cast down, he was hugely relieved by this desertion; he had foreseen some such trick. He had his own ship, and now he was able to have his own crew. He asked nothing better of fate.

In the blinding heat of noonday he came back to the schooner, wilted with sweat, and behind him trailed ten men. And such men! Three were blackish Verde Islanders; the others were riffraff



Illustrated
by George
Avison

"The devil's luck,
brother!" said Fal-
lon. "The *Salem
Lass* and Glynn!"

of various bloods—all of them men who had gone native and had their fill of it, and were glad enough now to head back to the open world again.

"Here's ten," said Fallon to John Martin. "Break 'em in. Before sunset, we'll have a dozen more. Abel Stone, who was a Nantucket man once, will show up with four British deserters from down the beach, and six or seven Kroo boys who want to see the world. Now I'm ready for a bath and a bit of sleep. Work ahead tonight, brother!"

There was more work ahead that night than he dreamed.

Abel Stone showed up, with fourteen more men instead of eleven, and Fallon was well content. The Nantucket man was a wreck, but Fallon appointed him second mate, and before the offshore breeze sprang up with sunset, the *Lively* was ringing with laughter and eager voices, the shaggy desolate beachcombers were transformed into naked devils ready to work their hearts out, and the chained rows of slaves below decks had been fed and watered and tended.

"Let's go," said Tom Fallon, and ordered out the boats.

They towed the schooner downstream until she could catch the breeze in her upper canvas; then Fallon took the helm and held her for the bar. He had marked that channel carefully at their entry, and in the last flickering daylight the schooner slipped across with never a scrape.

Most of those men who had come aboard, seizing the chance of escape back to the larger life they had once cast aside, knew their business; by this time

every man of them knew the ship. Fallon's heart thrilled to the work of them as the stars glimmered out and the canvas went up, the greased blocks offering no whine of complaint. Away and away, with a long reach across the Middle Passage—

"Sail ho-o-o!" floated down a call from aloft.

Fallon leaped to the rail.

"Where away?"

"Four points on the larboard bow, sir. Just outside the cape."

JOHN MARTIN darted below and returned with the night-glass. Daylight enough was left. Fallon picked up the vessel that had so suddenly showed up around the cape, and then lowered the glass.

"The devil's luck, brother!" said he quietly. "The *Salem Lass* and Glynn—and we had to pop out slap into his arms! He's hauling about."

"Run for it," said Martin—but Fallon shook his head.

"I tried that once before; the *Lass* has the heels of us. This means business. Go for'ard and load the guns. Abel Stone's a gunner, or was; give him the long gun."

No King's ship at any rate—the men cheered, and fell to work with a will. The wind was freshening fast. Tom Fallon eyed the water, the shores, the starlit sea. The moon would be up in an hour, in a clear sky. Down to the southward, another long cape fell away to seaward—long rolling headlands down there, with deep water close in. All in

a moment, this swift appraisal of his keen gray eyes; then his course was decided, his resolve taken. Fight, if fight he must, but first run for it. And his only chance to outrun Glynn lay dead before the wind.

"Helm down, there!" rang his voice. "Ease off fore-sheets!"

MEN went leaping. The weather pennants were hauled over the stays; Fallon, displaying the strength of three men, hauled the spanker boom amidships alone. "Let go and haul!"—and the *Lively* came around quickly. Now she was heading south and west, away from Glynn's sail, toward those capes jutting afar.

The minutes passed. Fallon studied the other craft, a scant mile distant, and his heart sank. Aye, Glynn had overhauled him once before, and he remembered the bitter moment. The same now; he was certain of it. So intent was he, that he failed to note the outburst of voices forward, the furious storm of curses, the hot words.

"Tom!" John Martin came on the jump, panting and dismayed. "That damned slimy Manuel—the powder—every keg's been stove open and wet down!"

Fallon said nothing for a moment. Tricked! His chance of fighting Glynn was gone now. If he could not run or fight, he must give in, hand over everything.

"Break open the kegs," he said at last. "It's not so easy to flood a keg of powder. There'll be a little dry left, at the bottom of each keg. Give Abel that job, then you stand by with all hands."

Despair? No. He studied the other craft again. Glynn was overhauling him, no doubt about it. As though in answer to his thoughts, a spurt of flame leaped from the other ship, a dull roar; Glynn had a pivot gun mounted. The shot fell short.

Now Fallon thought fast. Often and often had he recalled that bitter moment when Glynn overhauled him off the Florida cays; that had been on a wind, as now. A vague notion had come to him once or twice—now he pinned it down in his mind. He was thinking of just what might be done, of just what must be done now, in a pinch. Every detail must be right. A slip would mean disaster. . . . What? Disaster? Why, disaster was already upon him, overhauling him fast!

A little laugh broke from him. The moon was trembling above the African hills. Another ten minutes and the sea would be a flood of molten silver. He went to John Martin and touched him on the shoulder.

"You stay here, brother, and don't let her jibe. I'm going forward."

"Can you do anything?"

"Make a spoon or spoil a horn," said Fallon grimly, and went forward. The men grouped around him, and he spoke quietly. "Break out the spare flying-jib boom."

The long, tapering spar was broken from its lashings. Fallon, with a rope's end, skinned aloft and directed the work from there. The rope was rove through the jib-boom sheave, and the heavy spar was parbuckled aloft. Three more sailors hurried aloft and aided Fallon to square the makeshift yard across the mast. Working with the sure rapidity of old seamen, they made a temporary truss and bibb. The yard was then swung free, and halyards and downhauls rove off.

All this in a few moments of time. Once Fallon's idea was grasped, the men threw themselves into the job heartily. Spare jibs were sent aloft, foot up, and seized to the spar; the head of the sail was hauled down and made fast to the main boom end, the leech of the up-ended jib paralleling the tack of the mainsail.

The new canvas thus rigged formed a crude but effective square-sail, and at once the schooner felt the drive of it. She went leaping ahead, but Fallon was not satisfied. He had the working-jib boom unshipped, and the men wrestled the tugging foresail across the deck, putting the schooner on the wind wing-and-wing.

AGAIN came the work of sending up a temporary yard, reeving halyards, tacks and downhauls. More canvas was broken up and bent on. Now a balanced rig was gained; the schooner came more to an even keel. Fallon, coming down from aloft, was met by Abel Stone, who touched his forelock.

"Got a little dry powder out o' them kags, sir," he reported. "Enough to make one likely charge for the long tom."

"Load and stand by," said Fallon, and hastened aft. John Martin was yelling at him, the men were shouting and cheering—he thought it was for the obvious success of this rig. The moon was up

now, and the *Lively* was dancing the other schooner behind as she raced.

The moon was up, yes; that was why Martin was shouting his throat out. He caught Fallon by the arm and swung him around, pointing frantically. The men forward had sighted those white splotches, and had suddenly fallen silent now. Fallon glimpsed them. He had no need of the night-glass Martin thrust at him. Once more his heart sank.

"Corvette and a frigate," he said dully.

THE moon had pricked them out, as they stood in from seaward. They had rounded the capes from the south, and then cut in for the river mouth, standing close-hauled, leaning towers of shimmering canvas. The frigate was drawing away to cut off Glynn's schooner, a lovely thing with all sail from courses to st'unsails glinting. But the other, the corvette—

"She's got us, Tom," said John Martin. "We can't outrun her."

True enough. The corvette was standing in to cut the schooner's course. Fallon saw instantly that she had him cut off from seaward flight. He might head on for the south and west to clear the capes, but then she would have him.

"Steady as she is," said Fallon, with the calm of desperation. "I'm going for'ard again."

"Look out you don't sp'il a horn this time," said Martin.

"Liable to make another spoon," flung back Tom Fallon, and was gone.

He came to where Abel Stone was working. The long thirty-two was loaded and swinging on its pivot.

"Enough powder for one charge, sir," said Abel. "That's a King's ship."

A flash of red, pale in the moonlight, broke from the corvette to point the words. The round-shot spurted, well ahead of the *Lively*; they were in range.

"Chance it," said Fallon curtly. "Even keel. If you miss, we swing for it."

"We swing anyhow, with them blacks below," said Abel Stone. "You'd best take the match, sir. Quill's all set and ready. I'll give the word."

Fallon took the glowing match. The quill, with its charge of powder, was set in the touch-hole, the end broken off and ready. He waited while Abel Stone directed the men, while the long gun swung and steadied. One look back; the frigate was fluttering away after Glynn's ship, detonations were drifting down the wind,

red flashes spurting; Butcher Glynn was done for, this night.

"Now, sir, *now!*"

Fallon brought down the match. Flame spurted from the touch-hole; the long gun reeled and thundered in a vomit of white smoke. The schooner shivered; the blacks down below lifted thin and dreadful screams of terror.

A yell burst along the deck, a frenzied yell of incredulous joy. That lovely pyramid of white was shattered in the moonlight. Not badly, but still shattered.

"I loaded w' grape, sir!" croaked Abel Stone. "Grape, to cut up her rigging. Got some of her top-hamper, anyhow."

"Down!" shouted Fallon suddenly, as the corvette swung. "Down, all hands!"

Too late. The red spurts blasted out as the corvette's broadside let go. The schooner raced on like a deer, almost lifted out of the water by that spread of canvas. Balls whistled and screamed in air. Splinters flew from the bulwarks; the little craft shivered again as the iron thudded into her.

Then it was done. The crisis was past, and she was racing on, unharmed. All safe aloft, and out of range before the stricken corvette could wear and fire again. All safe aloft—but on the deck beside the gleaming brass gun lay Abel Stone, a smile on his freshly shaven face, and death triumphant in his heart.

And the *Lively* raced on—on for the Middle Passage, on for the free seas and her own good name again, and a new rig to increase the story of ships and men.

CAPTAIN TRUMBULL ceased to speak. He struck a match and held it to his dead cigar-butt. There was a stir of relaxation around the table.

"So that's how it was!" said somebody. "All I got to say is, it's a darned good yarn, even if it aint true."

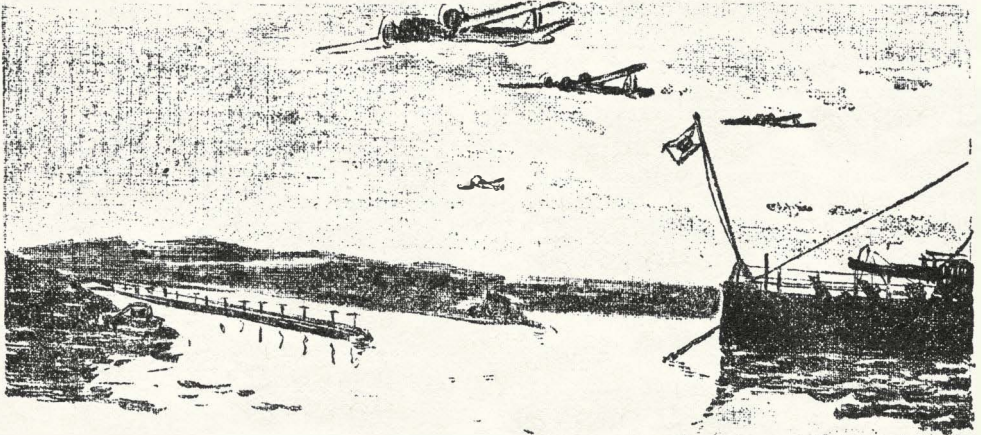
"Aint true?" roared out Captain Trumbull abruptly. "It's true, every word of it! That's how Fallon invented the rig. And inside o' five years, it was being copied on every sea. Every word of it is true!"

Mr. Miles leaned forward. "You say it's true, Captain Trumbull," he observed. "You may even think it's true. But—how do you know?"

Captain Trumbull looked at him for a moment, then turned fiery red.

"None of your damned business," he said, and stamped away.

Another swift-moving story of "Ships and Men" will appear in our next issue.



A thrill-crammed novel which tells what happened when a European dictator defied the Monroe Doctrine and sent his fleet against the Panama Canal.

OUR WAR

THIS is the inside story of a hectic chapter in the history of the world. Surely you remember those anxious days when hostile fleets were cruising off our home shores in both the Atlantic and the Pacific, while a third fleet belonging to a third power—it presented the most immediate menace—maneuvered off the Atlantic entrance of the Panama Canal.

It all started, of course, when one of the banana republics decided to confiscate some of its properties owned by foreigners. We protested. We went just as far as our good-neighbor policy would allow us to go.

Apparently that didn't please the war lord of a certain European power, and he announced that he would settle matters in his own way. We reminded him of the Monroe Doctrine. He retorted that the document we cited bound us to safeguard life and property in this hemisphere. We came back with the statement that we, and we alone, would decide our policy, and that we would enforce the Monroe Doctrine to the letter.

Then things began to happen. That was when we, here at home, had a taste of what it must have meant to live in London, Paris or Prague during equally critical times. . . .

You certainly must recall when the saber-rattler took to the radio, and

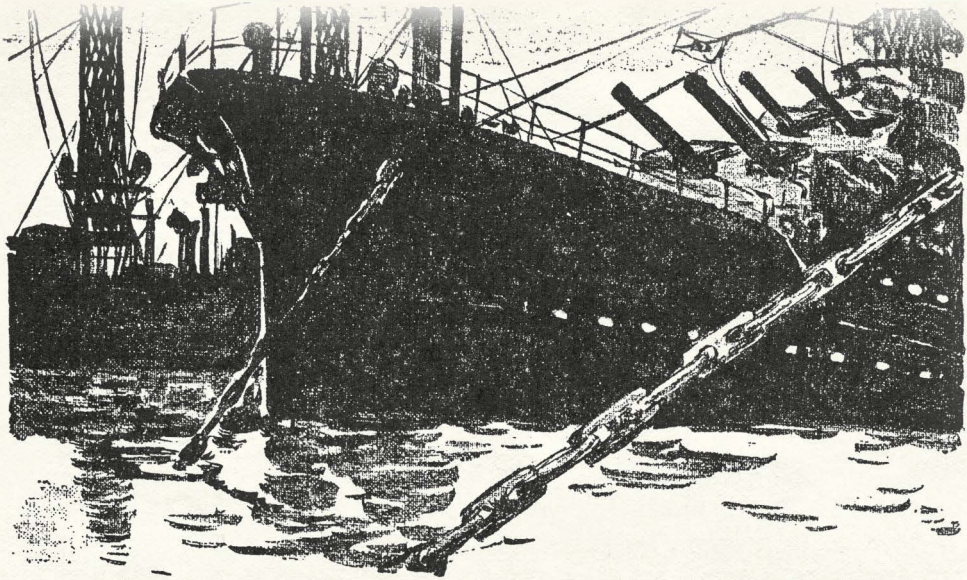
named a day. He told what would happen then—unless!

The day came. We had ignored the "unless." We waited nervously. But the hostile ships about the Panama Canal failed to move. Their guns were silent. Their hornets of death and destruction failed to take to the air. Then, after a day or two had passed, they quietly departed for their home waters.

This story explains why that happened. We, here at home, were so relieved that we didn't bother much about exact causes. To be sure, we listened eagerly to our radios while an official of our State Department read grave messages that had been exchanged among various nations. Then we shook our heads gravely, and muttered something about our statesmen "out-bluffing that madman."

That was about as close as we ever came to it; and before we had time to delve deeper, there was another crisis, this time in Europe. So the story remained untold, until now.

No ponderous State documents figure in it; for the story, in the main, concerns the lives of two ordinary unofficial Americans—brothers. It also includes their father, who heard his best friend ask for one of his sons, in order that the son might be transformed into what the world would call a tropical tramp.



of 1939

By ROBERT MILL

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Then the scene shifts to a college football game in the United States.

Both brothers appeared on that gridiron. Both were stars in their own right, both fine upstanding lads. But one played for glory, while the other fought on doggedly for the team, and for sheer love of the game. That enabled a man in the stands to make a decision. . . .

We heard the story one night, when we were sitting in a native cabaret in Colon. The entire front of the building was open; stretched out before us were the dark, narrow and mysterious streets of the Panamanian city: Honky-tonk pleasures, bawdy night-life, intrigue and danger. . . . Those narrow streets reeked with it, and they were the scene of a good part of the story.

It all began, however, in one of the clean, cool, flower-covered bungalows in the Canal Zone near by. Richard Malden sat on the screened porch, puffing easily upon his pipe, and watching the short tropical twilight change into dark, velvet night.

He was worth looking at a second time, this man Malden. He had a lean, hard body that had been baked by the sun, and ravaged by tropical disease, but which still functioned as fine machinery. His hair was the sandy shade that defies gray. His fine face revealed his iron will, yet at the same time hinted

of unusual understanding and the infinite capacity for sympathy. Along the Canal, where he had been an engineer since construction days, they knew him as a slave-driver during the day, and a prince of fellows, after hours.

Malden snapped on a light, and read for perhaps the sixth time a letter received in the latest mail from the States:

Dear Dad:

My turn to write this week, so here goes.

Looks as if we both have made the team, Joe at right half, while I will function at left. How is that for carrying on the Malden tradition at the old school?

You'll get a laugh at the nickname Joe has drawn. "Pan!" Honest. But not as bad as it sounds. Just short for "Panama." Joe brought it on himself by sounding off about home every time there is a nip of frost in the air.

We both send our best to Betty. And as for the best Dad in the world—well, you know.

Your son, Dick.

Malden folded the letter. It warmed a spot in his heart, a spot that had threatened to remain forever cold when the boys' mother had died. They were fine lads, he told himself, even if they were his sons.

He clapped his hands, and a black boy from Jamaica appeared.

"Rum and soda," he ordered. "For two. Major Larch will be here."

Larch arrived before the boy returned. He, even as Malden, wore civilian white linen, but it was easy to spot him as a military man. They exchanged greetings, the greetings of old friends.

"How are the boys?" asked Larch, as he chose a chair.

"Great." Malden smiled as he handed over the letter.

Larch read it through.

"An all-Malden backfield, eh?" he said. "Thought I detected proud-parent symptoms." Then the air of banter ceased; his voice became gruff. "You know, Dick, I came here to ask you for one of them."

Malden put his pipe aside.

"To ask me for one of them! Just what do you mean?"

MAJOR LARCH leaned forward. "Just that. . . . I need a man who knows Panama, and who knows its people. Merely speaking Spanish isn't enough. He must think as these people think. He must like them, and they must like him. He must know every man, woman, child and yellow dog in Colon and Panama City. He must be able to find his way blindfolded through every back alley. Both Joe and Dick answer that bill. Why, not so many years ago you were barking at them for going native."

"I see," said Malden, rather uncertainly. "Intelligence."

"Exactly."

"But both Joe and Dick have their heart set on engineering!"

"Engineers, and good ones, are a dime a dozen right now," came the retort.

"Maybe," Malden admitted. "But it is asking a good bit to expect a boy to give up his chosen career, put in four years at West Point, and—"

"I wasn't thinking about military intelligence," Larch interrupted.

Malden sat staring at his friend, chewing upon the stem of his pipe.

"You have a hell of a nerve!"

Major Larch settled back in his chair.

"You are damn' right I have," he admitted. "We both know what it means. Constant danger. No chance for glory. Only the scorn of friends, who won't understand—because, if the boy is to be any good to us, even his best friends won't suspect what he is doing." He spread both hands outward. "There, Dick, you can't say I wasn't fair."

The engineer was silent.

"By the same token," the army officer continued, "I am equally sincere, and striving just as hard to avoid the melodramatic, when I tell you that a devil's broth is being brewed here on this Isthmus. We can't cope with it, because we are working in the dark. The men we trust haven't the contacts; and operatives with the contacts can't be trusted. That is why we need a lad like Dick, or Joe."

He leaned forward in his eagerness.

"A lad like that can be worth more to us—to his country, if you will put it that way—than a regiment of soldiers, or a fleet of battleships."

He settled back, knowing his friend, and too shrewd to press his case when it was as good as won.

Malden was standing, his unlighted pipe clasped in his hand.

"All right, Larch." He laughed awkwardly. "Down here, we all are working for the same boss. I'll go along with you to the extent of not raising a finger, either for or against. You sell your goods direct. Dick, or Joe, will have to decide."

But Major Larch was not finished.

"Just a minute, Dick. Forget you are their father. You know those boys better than anybody else, and a whole lot depends upon this decision. Shall it be Dick, or Joe?"

Malden's face showed no hint of the inward struggle that lasted a full minute before he extended his hand.

"You are my good friend, Major. You always will be that. But don't ask me which one of my boys I want thrown to the wolves."

Major Larch stood up.

"Right, Dick. I am sailing for New York tomorrow on the *Ancon*. I'll drop in when I return."

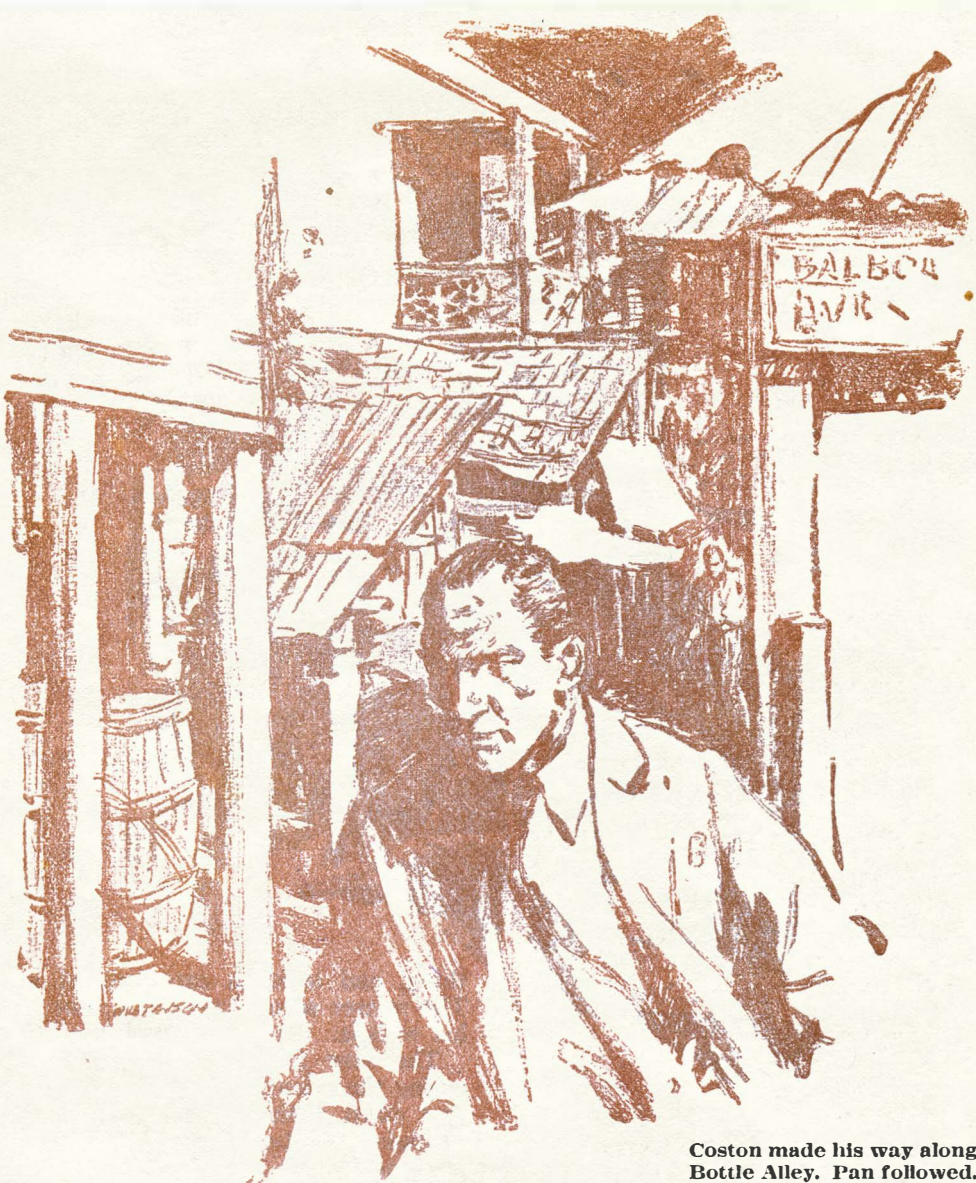
LEFT alone, Malden sat staring out into the inky tropical night. Then he picked up a telephone, and dialed a number.

"Miss Betty Stokes, please."

He waited.

"Hello, Betty. Dick Malden. Had a letter from the boys. They made it. Yes. Dick at left half, and Joe at right. Thought you would be glad to know. And they both sent you their love. . . . What's that? Righto."

He replaced the receiver. Fine girl, Betty. He loved her as if she were his own daughter. Dick, or Joe? He smiled



Coston made his way along Bottle Alley. Pan followed.

as he recalled the days when the care-free play of childhood had changed into a struggle for the smiles of a beautiful girl—who, almost overnight, was no longer a long-legged and somewhat awkward tomboy. It was a fair race, though.

The smile vanished. That race was as good as over, with the cards stacked against one of the contestants. Betty wasn't mercenary. But she was proud. It wouldn't take her long to decide between a rising young engineer and a—a tropical tramp. . . .

A cold wind whistled over the stadium; and Major Larch, newly arrived from Panama, snuggled into his great-coat. He was late, and it took him several minutes to become accustomed to the scene.

The scoreboard showed that State was having its troubles:

"State, 0; Opponents, 3."

The clock indicated that the game had a little less than three minutes to run. State had the ball on its own forty-yard line. It was a race against time, Major Larch decided, as he settled back.

But it was more than that, he saw, as the first two or three plays were unreeled. It was the test of the endurance of one man. State was pinning all its hopes on one man, and one simple play.

Time after time, a great running half-back charged through the tackles or around the ends. There was nothing spectacular about the gains, but they were consistent. All the hopes, and all the fears, of the huge crowd were bound up in that one man.

There was no need for Larch to consult his score-card.

"Come on, Dick!" roared the crowd. "Attaboy, Malden!" screamed one hysterical co-ed.



A fragment of conversation drifted out to him: "—We need the Canal."

The game continued. There was something almost uncanny about the small but steady gains. One first down after another was clicked off.

Major Larch concentrated his attention on the line. The ball-carrier started forward. Ahead of him was a blocking back, who took out one man, kept his feet, and hurled himself at another. The Major shifted his attention to the blocking back. On play after play he took out one, sometimes two, and even occasionally three tacklers. He did it so quietly, and apparently so easily, that it went unnoticed before the greater drama of the twisting and turning of the ball-carrier.

Then, at the conclusion of one play, the blocking back failed to rise. The State stands raised a perfunctory cheer, which ended in: "*Pan Malden!*" Dick pulled his brother to his feet, and stood supporting him. Pan muttered some-

thing, and took an experimental step. The referee seemed uncertain, but blew his whistle. The teams lined up.

The slow forward march continued, racing the relentless clock. State made first down, with five yards to go for a touchdown. The clock said only seconds remained. But Dick Malden was unable to get up, and the crowd groaned.

Pan was at his side when a trainer ran out. A circle formed around them. Dick remained in the game when play was resumed.

Two times Dick drove at left tackle. Two times Pan plowed ahead of him, clearing the way. Play was almost directly beneath Major Larch's seat. He could hear the labored breathing of the players.

The ball was snapped to Dick. Pan was ahead of him, clearing the way. Dick lunged forward, the crowd watching every stride, every turn. The line piled up. There was a moment of suspense—then the arm of the referee indicated that a touchdown had been scored. The bark of a gun marked the end of the game.

Major Larch stood grasping the rail, and watched the crowd sweep down on the field. Hundreds of hands seized

Dick Malden, and raised him to waiting shoulders. He was smiling.

Off to one side stood Pan Malden, tugging with the strap of a helmet. The Major was near enough to hear a man, obviously the State coach, call:

"Great going, Pan!"

The youth grinned his thanks, and then broke into a limping trot as he headed for the gymnasium.

It took Major Larch some minutes to extricate himself from the crowd; and an officious undergraduate barred his way when he tried to enter the gymnasium. The officer assumed just the amount of dignity needed.

"I am Major Larch," he said. "Will you be good enough to deliver this message?"

He produced a card; scribbled on it: "Does a hero have time for an old friend from home? Call me at the Mansion House tonight."

The undergraduate accepted the card. "Who gets it?" he demanded.

The Major hesitated just a second. "Pan Malden, if you please," he said.

SO, once the decision was made, it was as simple as that. Major Larch, when he returned to the Canal Zone, sought Dick Malden.

"It is Joe," he said. "He knows what it means, but he didn't hesitate."

"He wouldn't," said Pan's father. His glance went to the lawn of a bungalow near by, where a beautiful girl was tending the flowers. "That makes it easy for Betty to decide."

Major Larch was silent.

The engineer leaned forward.

"Major, Betty is one girl in a million. I know the rules on these things. But can't we tell her? We owe that to Joe—and to her."

Major Larch shook his head regretfully.

"Joe and I had that out. I trust Betty. But there would always be the chance that she would be trapped, perhaps in defense of Joe, into saying something that would ruin everything, and even cost his life. You know that, Dick. There is a reason for the rules. You, Dick, Joe and I are the only ones who know."

He stood up.

"You might drop a hint here and there that you are worried about Joe. Not keeping up with his studies. Home-sick. That sort of thing. Be good groundwork."

He extended his hand. "I won't say it, Dick. But you know how I feel."

COLLECTIVELY and individually, Canal Zone people will stack up with any similar number of people anywhere. However, they lead rather narrow and restricted lives. With the Army, the Navy and the Canal the only employers, every salary is known exactly. Moreover, the social status of wives and sisters is determined by the official position of the man of the family. By the same token, information spreads fast; and as is inevitable, bad news outraces good.

The Malden boys were figures of legend in Panama. Sporting pages of papers from the States still carried their names in headlines, when the word got about that all was not well with Joe, whom the headline writers referred to as Pan.

In a way, there was nothing unusual about that. More than one Canal Zone prodigy has been sent off with scholarships and high hopes, only to crack completely. Perhaps the fiery sun burns them out at an early age. Even the banana trees of the district suffer from a blight which is known as "Panama disease." Canal Zone residents use the same term to describe human ailments, ranging from plain laziness to chronic alcoholism; soon it was whispered about that Pan Malden had Panama disease.

Pan arrived close upon the heels of the report, and admitted, in answer to guarded questions, that he was "all washed up with college." He tried to explain it one night to a group of friends in the Strangers' Club, in Colon. He looked very fit, and quite handsome in his whites as he lounged in a rattan chair, giving a convincing impersonation of a young man who was very weary.

"What does it get you?" he demanded. "I looked out of my hotel window one morning in New York. Thousands of them were rushing toward subway entrances, like rats being poured into a hopper. I could see their faces. It was a gray, cold day. I weighed all that against even a pick-and-shovel job in Panama. Panama won."

There was an awkward silence.

"Have anything in mind?" asked Bates, who was in Maintenance.

"Why, no," Pan admitted. "I am sort of looking around."

It hadn't been as easy with Betty Stokes. After the first greetings were over, he took the bit in his teeth.

"I suppose getting tossed out of college won't draw three cheers from you, Betty."

She faced him frankly. "We are friends. I can't see that having a few letters after your name, or not having them, should affect our friendship." Her face clouded, and she made an impulsive gesture. "But it matters to you. Just what was the trouble, Joe?"

He hesitated. Then he grinned, the grin of the youngster who had taught her to swim; and only he knew the effort that grin cost.

"I guess it was just Panama disease," he admitted.

The evening wasn't much of a success after that, and he went home early. He found his father waiting for him on the porch.

"Sit down," said the engineer.

Pan couldn't think of anything to say.

"Outside of laying down some rather elementary ground-rules," his father began, "I always allowed you and Dick to run wild, and work out your own salvation. On the whole, I think you both have done a swell job."

He cleared his throat.

"I came down here when we first moved in and took on the job. They ran three hospital trains a day. Every day there was a burial party on Monkey Hill; and even then they couldn't keep up with the job. You had dinner with a man, drank his health, and the next morning you heard that he was dead. We fought nature, and we fought man in the shape of some of the finest cut-throats ever to lean on shovel-handles. We thought we had guts, those of us who came through."

His cough was suspicious.

"You have more guts than I, Joe. That's all. Good night."

"Good night, sir," said Pan.

THE next break came some weeks later, when Pan gathered up his belongings and moved across the invisible line that separates the Canal Zone from the Republic of Panama.

That seemed logical enough. Son or no son, Dick Malden refused to furnish lodging for a loafer. Barring government-owned hotels, with tourist prices, the Zone consists only of official quarters for workers.

Pan stopped to see Betty before he went.

"I gather that the old gentleman doesn't care for drones," he told her.

"That means moving across the line. I suppose—"

"You suppose wrong," she interrupted him. "I'll always be glad to see you. As long as I see the old you, the address doesn't matter."

A promise was on his lips, but the memory of an oath checked it.

"That's swell, Betty," he said.

ON Front Street, in Colon, the Mecca of all tourists in Panama, there is a Hindu shop run by a man with a rather unpronounceable name, who is known as Slim Jim. As a boy, while his mother shopped in the district, Pan had played on the floor of that store, carefully watched by the proprietor. It was that same coffee-colored gentleman, who, when he learned how things stood, hesitatingly made an offer.

Until something turned up, Pan was welcome to share his humble home above the bazaar. . . . No, there was no obligation. Quite the contrary. Pan, if he cared to, could help him with the books. There were letters to be written to customers in all parts of the world. Pan's presence, Slim Jim indicated, would be a godsend.

So Pan made his home among silks from Japan and India—linen from Ireland, jade from China, perfumes from France, human heads from Ecuador, shrunken by Jivaro Indians to the size of an orange, with every feature intact.

It was a nine-day wonder in the Canal Zone, and a life-saver to the tea-parties.

"Gone native!" said a lady whose husband's position entitled her to the seat at the head of the table. "Poor Mr. Malden!"

In the clubs, it was much the same.

"Tough on Dick Malden," said a stout colonel, whose bulging eyes made him resemble a bullfrog.

"Dick Malden is all man. He can take it." That was a commander, wearing the insignia of the submarine service—who three weeks later was to send his men out of a doomed submarine in the torpedo-tubes, while he was the one man to remain.

Gradually, however, the first excitement died down. It was some time later that the Zone had something else to whisper about. A captain, in charge of an important anti-aircraft battery, was sent back to the States, and quietly cashiered. For months the captain's wife had bought goods from Slim Jim in excess of her husband's salary. They



"Dick, what has happened to Pan? Is there something that can't be told, that explains all this?"

had no independent means, but the captain did have a friend, a certain importer, whose nationality was uncertain but whose interest in anti-aircraft gunnery was known. The importer also disappeared.

There was no reason to connect Pan Malden with the incident, for by this time he had moved on, and was tending the wheel in a gambling-house. The tea-tables had a May Day with that, but a Canal pilot eased the storm a bit.

"It shows the lad is honest," he declared. "The local government takes a cut from those wheels on a percentage basis. They are damned particular who they put on them."

ALL manner of men and women stood around that wheel. Among them was a civilian technical expert, who was conducting experiments with torpedoes. Night after night he was there, and each night he lost. One night, as he turned away from the table empty-handed, and with despair on his face, a smiling, ingratiating Oriental accosted him. They left the building together. They were not seen again.

That was just before Dick Malden came home from the States, a full-fledged engineer, and with a job on the Canal waiting for him. Pan first heard

about it from Betty Stokes. During the comparative cool of an early evening he saw her walking toward him in Front Street. He raised his hat, and was about to pass on, but she came to a stop directly before him.

"Dick is coming home, Pan. I thought you might want to know."

He shifted his weight from foot to foot, and avoided her gaze.

"Thank you, Betty. That's—that's great."

"Why haven't you come to see me?"

He hesitated.

"Is it because the old you is gone?"

She colored. "You know what I mean, Pan." They stood there, while men and women passed by, men and women with skins tinted ivory, skins tinted coffee, and skins tinted ebony. "I—I guess I miss the old Pan so much that I can forgive anything but that."

He took a step forward. "No. Not that, Betty. I swear it."

"Then I shall be expecting you, Pan."

That night Dick Malden, Senior, and Dick Malden, Junior, dined together on the flower-scented porch of the bungalow. They were sitting over their coffee, when the elder man said:

"I won't be selfish. Betty will be expecting you. After all, we have a great many nights together ahead of us."

"I want to see Betty," Dick said. "Joe and I had an understanding. We both—are sort of crazy about her. We felt that the best man would win, and promised that the loser would stand up and cheer. That was fair enough. Now—now it seems as if I'm hitting below the belt. It takes some of the pleasure out of coming home."

Malden, Senior, put down his pipe.

"Dick, we're engineers. We take on a certain job at an agreed price. After the job is under way, we may have strikes, landslides and other things to hinder us. We just dig in a little harder. We can't cry for sympathy, or expect it, because then everybody would say, and justly, that we were fools not to consider these contingencies when we took on the job." He toyed with his napkin, then threw it aside. "Joe bid in his job at a stated price. Neither you nor Betty figure in the contract."

The younger man was standing.

"Thanks, Dad. That helps a lot."

Three hours later Dick Malden and Betty Stokes sat on a wall which overlooked a picture sea. There had been so much to talk about: The days at college, the new job, her animated account of life in the Canal Zone while he had been away. Now they were silent, held by the magic the moon was working with the Caribbean.

The girl was the first to break the spell.

"Dick, what has happened to Pan?"

Dick Malden came back to the present with a start.

"I—I don't know, Betty."

She leaned forward.

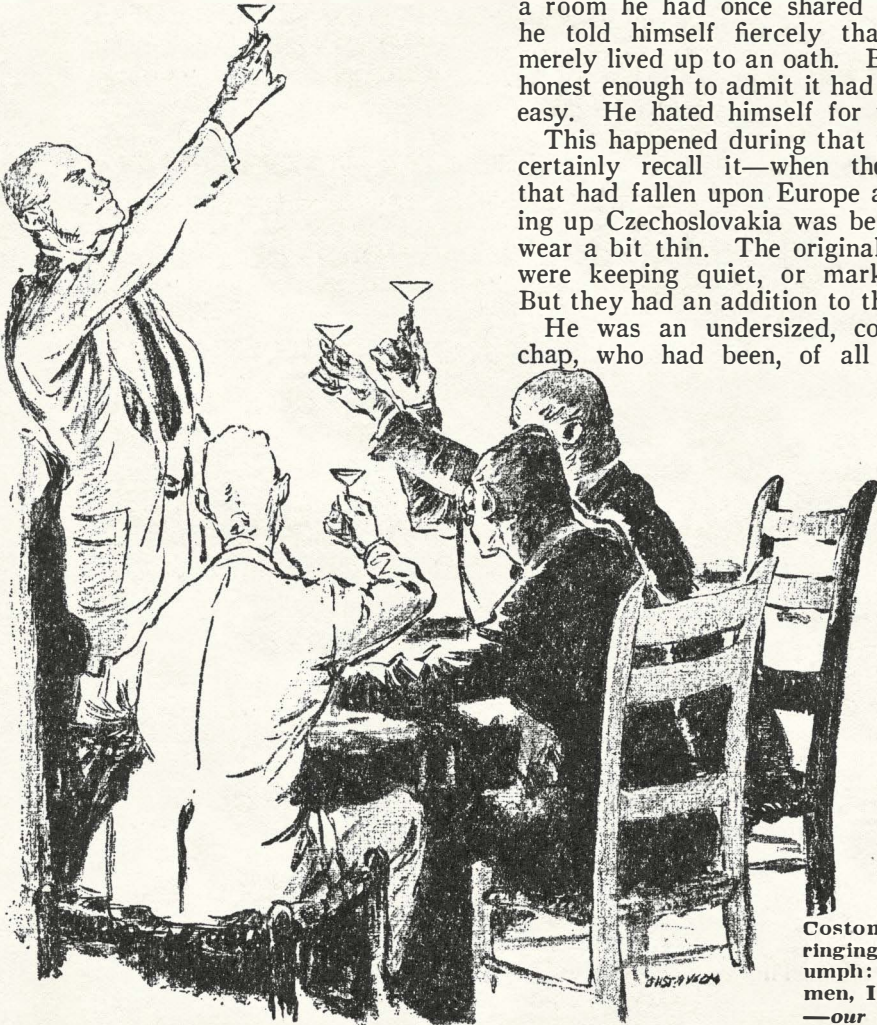
"Dick, is there something that can't be told, that explains all this?"

He hesitated. "I wouldn't know that, Betty."

Later, trying vainly to go to sleep in a room he had once shared with Pan, he told himself fiercely that he had merely lived up to an oath. But he was honest enough to admit it had been very easy. He hated himself for that.

This happened during that time—you certainly recall it—when the "peace" that had fallen upon Europe after carving up Czechoslovakia was beginning to wear a bit thin. The original dictators were keeping quiet, or marking time. But they had an addition to their ranks.

He was an undersized, coarse-faced chap, who had been, of all things, a



Coston's voice, ringing with triumph: "Gentlemen, I give you—our Panama Canal!"

millinery salesman! But his countrymen, formerly proud of their democracy, but convinced by what had happened that democracy was doomed, had rallied to his clarion call. You may have tuned in his speech, the one which, translated, summed up to about this:

He had no designs on Europe. Neither was he foolish enough to be interested in unprofitable colonies, which served only to build prestige. He was looking across the Atlantic to the logical and profitable markets for his country, Central and South America. He intended to have that trade. Furthermore, although these countries claimed to be democracies, in reality their ideology was the same as his. Therefore he was in honor bound to extend his protection to them. In fact, it might be necessary to extend that protection, even if it was not asked, in order to protect them from alien powers. . . .

We, here at home, uttered several chuckles over that. The general feeling was that he had taken on a large order. He had quite a bit of water to cross. We didn't take him very seriously—then.

But shortly thereafter our consuls in Central and South America began to deluge the State Department with confidential reports regarding a sudden influx of salesmen and merchants who cut prices to a point it was impossible for our business men to meet. Soon the result was an under-cover economic war.

There were very few signs of that economic war in the Canal Zone, but there was a sudden outbreak of labor trouble. The dock workers made impossible demands, and then went on strike, thereby crippling shipping. The Jamaica blacks, who furnish the bulk of the manpower necessary to keep the Canal in operation, began to organize.

All this was marked by unusual bitterness. In addition to the usual hatred of labor for capital, there was a strong undercurrent of anti-American feeling. The cry of "Yankee Imperialism" was openly raised.

PAN MALDEN, at this time, was living in a balconied rabbit-warren of a house on a street which a sign designated as Balboa Avenue, but which residents referred to as Bottle Alley. Here, amid blaring music, easy laughter and occasional curses, life began at noon, and continued until dawn.

That house, with its maze of halls, sheltered Canal laborers and their fam-

ilies—also dark-eyed girls who were hostesses in cabarets, Chinese, Hindus, five San Blas Indians who slept in a room hardly large enough for one man. And Pan Malden.

Also, a gentleman from a country to the south, who was generally credited with being the head of the "labor movement." And it so happened that this gentleman's room was separated from Pan's by only a thin board partition.

But there was no reason to connect Pan with what followed, for three Canal Zone policemen ignored the South American, and visited the luxurious Washington Hotel. There they called upon a gentleman who obviously hailed from some country in Europe, and told him his presence was no longer desired in the Canal Zone or Panama. He blustered and sputtered. They were very courteous, and rather patient, but they allowed him fifteen minutes to pack. Then they very kindly took him in their car to a ship flying the flag of his country.

Three weeks later the labor trouble was over. The gentleman from farther south told Pan—they were friendly by this time—that the financial support for the movement had been withdrawn. He explained that it was almost impossible to collect dues from the workers, and so organizers had lost interest. He was leaving. He invited Pan to come to see him if he ever visited Bogotá.

THAT night Pan met Major Larch, by appointment, at a lonely spot along the road between Colon and Gatun Lake.

"Do you know a tailor named Coston?" asked the Major.

"I know who he is," Pan said. "He has a little shop not far from where I live. He is new in Colon."

The Major nodded.

"Right. Part of the new deviltry we are up against." He placed his hand upon Pan's shoulder. "This is all we know: The consul of a certain European nation has a lot of business at Coston's shop. The United States has more to fear from that country than any other. Its dictator wasn't just talking when he said South and Central America were to be his. He means to take them, and he plans to do it soon.

"Naturally, they will be active here. Coston may be the works, or he may be small fry. That's your job, Pan. Find out."

"Yes sir," said Pan Malden.

Next morning the newspapers carried a short story to the effect that a banana republic had confiscated lands belonging to foreigners. The United States investments affected amounted to less than a million dollars, which wasn't so much as foreign investments go. The State Department, it was indicated, would demand compensation for the owners.

BUT Dick Malden had things far more important than that upon his mind when he came home late that night, and paused outside his father's door.

"You awake, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said his father. "Come in."

Dick entered, and sat on his father's bed.

"Betty and I have decided that we can make a go of it. I wanted you to be the first to know."

The man in the bed extended his hand.

"You're a lucky devil, Dick." He laughed. "And I am a happy old fool."

"I am lucky," Dick admitted. "It seems too good to be true." He stood up. "Well, I'll let you sleep."

His father lifted a restraining hand.

"Don't hurry. What's this General Hontoon was trying to tell me about you?"

The younger man laughed in a self-conscious way, trying to hide his pride.

"Oh, I've been detached from routine stuff for special work with the Military. It seems the war scares are getting acute. They have it figured out that in case of war, the Navy would more than have its hands full guarding both coastlines at home. That would leave us rather much on our own down here. For that reason, they are working out a defense for the Canal in which the Navy plays very little part."

He paused to light a cigarette.

"Mines placed off both approaches to the Canal. Additional anti-aircraft batteries, placed where they will do the most good. Working out new firing-plans for the railroad guns, and our other heavy artillery. Also, coördinating the whole thing."

He smiled.

"It is largely an engineering job. The Army supplies the technical knowledge, but they said they needed somebody not bound by Army tradition. That is where I come in. Also, the General said I was young enough not to say things couldn't be done just because they seemed to violate some rule of engineering we were taught at school."

His father groped for his pipe.

"How you getting along with it?" he asked.

"Great. You see, most of the actual work has been done. Now it is largely a paper problem, checking to see that everything has been coördinated, and hunting for spots where it can be improved." He laughed easily. "It means a special office, all to myself. And no end of a leg-up in a social way with the Military. Why, since I have started this work, even lieutenants' wives speak to me, a mere civilian."

"All that may be true," his father admitted. "But the General tells me you are doing a rather swell job."

"I am putting in hours enough," Dick said. He grinned. "Betty says that if it doesn't stop soon, we will have to reverse the order of things by getting a divorce before the marriage license."

"That would be novel," his father admitted. "But don't try it. I want Betty in the family." He put his pipe aside. "Good night."

IN Bottle Alley is a shooting-gallery which boasts an electric-lighted target resembling the form of a nude woman. This touch of the esthetic is much appreciated by the frequenters of the street, and the gallery has quite a play.

Sailors on shore leave, marking time before the more hectic pleasures of a Panama night, pause to try their luck upon the defenseless lady. Now and again, when the liners are in port, a bibulous tourist pushes through the throng to seize a gun, lean heavily upon the counter, and fire a volley of shots that constitute less of a menace to the luminous lady than to the attendants seeking shelter behind the counter.

It was a tragic spot to find an American, behind that counter. Yet there he stood: Pan Malden, who as a kid had been the best swimmer in the Canal Zone, the lad who had won mention as one of the best blocking backs in the United States. Yet there he stood, loading rifles, scooping in dimes and quarters, and exchanging wisecracks with patrons, much to the edification of the seemingly ever-present loafers, who impartially applauded the salty offerings.

Almost directly across the street was the shop of Coston, the tailor. It was a one-story shack, completely open in front, with only a soiled sheet to separate the living quarters in the rear. There, with the popping of the rifles and

the ribald cries plainly audible, Coston sat cross-legged upon the floor, always sewing.

He was an undersized, rather grimy-looking little fellow. But if he was not overly prepossessing, he certainly was a model of industry. And his industry, apparently, was not unrewarded.

There was a woman, obviously from the segregated district, who called quite frequently, and who appeared to be very interested in various fabrics. Another regular visitor Pan recognized was a barber, who worked in a shop frequented by enlisted men of the Army and Navy.

Several days had passed before Pan noticed a peculiar thing about Coston's business. The tailor sewed constantly. Men and women, apparently customers, visited him frequently. But there were no fittings. Neither were any finished garments delivered, either direct to a customer, or by messenger.

The rainy season had started, driving away the trade-winds; and it was a hot, humid night. Trade was dull in the gallery. But Coston, across the street, sewed diligently. The little tailor looked up as two men entered the shop. One of them, Pan Malden saw, was the consul of the country ruled by the dictator who called Central and South America his. The other man wore the uniform of the captain of a merchant vessel.

The three men conferred, apparently examining swatches of material. Coston nodded toward the rear of the shop. The consul made a gesture of dissent. Then he spoke rapidly. Coston nodded in agreement. The consul and the sea captain left the shop.

PAN MALDEN slouched along the counter to a fellow-worker. He spoke in Spanish:

"Pedro, I am not feeling well. There is no trade. I go to my home. I shall be back tomorrow."

Swarthy Pedro grinned broadly.

"Ha! You drink too much of the wine in the *cantina*. But a little sleep will fix that. Go with God. I shall explain to Carlos."

The soiled sheet was drawn across the shop. Soon Coston emerged from behind it, clad in a suit that obviously was saved for important occasions. He paused to close the shutters that constituted the front wall of the shop. Then he made his way along Bottle Alley.

Pan Malden, who had been lurking in the shadows near by, followed. Coston

crossed to Front Street. He walked rapidly—on and on, past the Washington Hotel. Now the streets were almost deserted, and Pan was forced to stay well in the rear.

Once, Pan was afraid that he had lost his quarry. Then he saw Coston making his way across a clearing that ended on the shore of Limon Bay. Pan waited, standing in the shadows formed by a clump of bamboo trees.

COSTON entered a shack that stood upon the very edge of the beach. Pan skirted the clearing and gained the shore. There was a drop of about thirty feet to the water, and the loose dirt was held in place by a sea-wall. Pan dropped into the shadow thrown by the wall, and crept forward to one side of the shack. Once there, two palm trees formed a shelter for him.

He was lying beneath an open window, and fragments of the conversation drifted out to him. Pan silently blessed his love for languages, which had caused him to study all that were offered.

Coston was speaking:

"—approaches mined. They have a plan of fire for the railroad guns, which they think will make them doubly effective, and at the same time make them impossible to hit. . . . New anti-aircraft batteries. . . . Don't realize importance of the confiscations in—"

Then an unfamiliar, cultured voice was heard. This speaker addressed the grimy little tailor with respect, and gave to him a title.

"Exactly. They are clever enough to realize they will need their fleet at home. Our European allies will see to that. But the first blow must be struck here. We need the Canal. Once we have it, we own the world."

Coston was speaking—with assurance and authority.

"We can have the Canal. The fixed fortifications can be taken care of easily. We must have the locations of all the new anti-aircraft batteries. I have some of them now. We must obtain the plan of fire for the railroad guns. Then the guns of our fleet, and our airplanes, can take care of them. Then the mine-fields are the only real obstacle confronting us. We must have the charts of those fields."

The other speaker cut in, rather impatiently.

"Agreed. But—"

"We can have them," Coston made haste to add. "I have laid the ground-

work. Everything looks favorable. But I have asked for a certain operative I know and trust. There has been no answer to my request."

"The operative will be here."

Then came Coston's voice, ringing with triumph.

"In that case, the game is as good as won. Gentlemen, I give you: '*Our Panama Canal!*'"

There were hoarse, muffled grunts of approval. Then words of farewell, mingled with plans for a future meeting.

PAN flattened himself on the ground, and burrowed against the trunks of the palm trees. The men left the building now; they were speaking in Spanish. Pan waited until they crossed the clearing and their forms were lost in darkness. Then he stood up, and stretched, for he was stiff from crouching in a cramped position.

His hands were raised above his head, and he was relaxed, when a metal object was thrust against his stomach. A man who apparently had been hiding on the ocean side of the shack, and who held the revolver, glided into view.

"Keep your hands up!" he ordered, in Spanish. He gave a mirthless chuckle. "That Coston thinks of everything. And tonight there was need of a rear guard."

The moon peeped through storm-clouds, and partially illuminated the scene. Pan recognized the man with the revolver. He was a resident of Bottle Alley known as the Bushmaster, a swarthy brute of uncertain nationality. The man, in turn, recognized Pan.

"Ha!" he gloated. "The American beachcomber. Clever. But your luck has run out." He was thinking aloud, apparently steeling himself for what he was about to do. "A shot. A body falls into the sea. The sharks do their work. That is all. Who is there to make a fuss over a beachcomber?"

Pan was silent. It was a waste of time to protest innocence. Even barring the handicap of the revolver pressed against him, he was no match for this brute in a hand-to-hand struggle.

Right beside them was the low sea-wall. Thirty feet below were the shark-infested waters of Limon Bay.

Pan lurched forward suddenly; his left hand seized the revolver, and thrust it aside. He closed in. The two men grappled. For a moment they toppled on the low sea-wall. Then over the wall they went, clutching and clawing at each other.

In the water Pan fought loose and struck out for the surface. The Bushmaster came up almost beside him, gasping for breath, swimming clumsily, and making heavy going of it. Cleaving the water about them were sinister fins.

Pan lunged in, and struck his foe a crippling blow. He was thinking clearly now. He fought back the mad desire to swim out for safety. That could not be—not yet. One of them must die.

A fin cut through the water, bearing down upon them. The fin turned, and a streak of white was visible as the shark turned to grab his prey. Pan seized the floundering Bushmaster with both hands, and pushed him toward the shark. Then he took a deep breath, and slipped under the water, heading for the sea-wall, with its thirty feet of slippery cement towering above him. He came to the surface and swam along beside the wall, heading for a pier some distance ahead—which, as he knew, was connected by stairs with the bluff above.

He was gliding through the water with a powerful stroke. But now the sharks were closing in about him. One came toward him twisting and turning. Pan waited until the dark form was almost upon him. Then he dived.

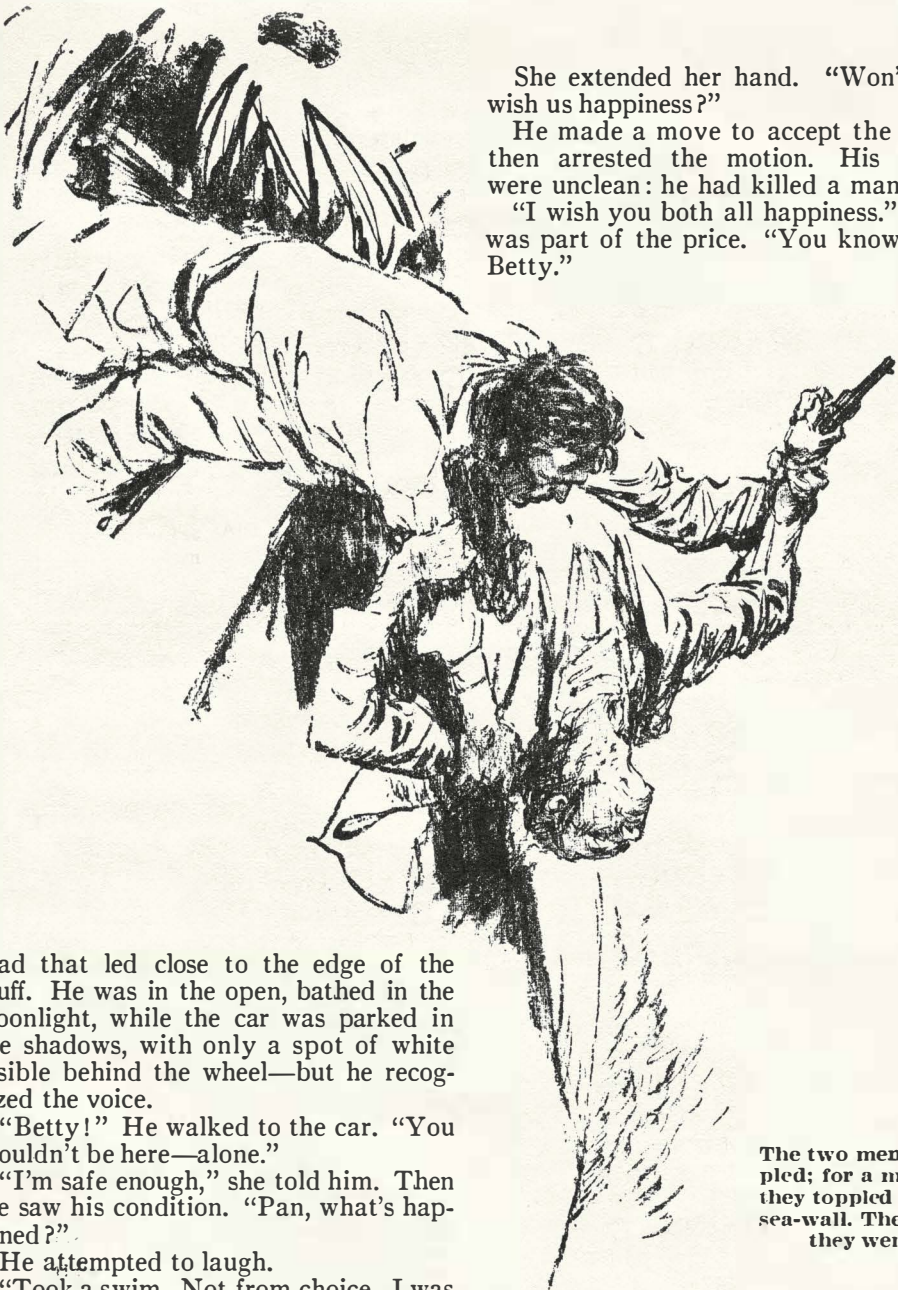
There was the sound of splashing, and the swishing of a powerful form, as the shark crashed against the sea wall. Pan came to the surface. The pier was just ahead. But two other fins were heading toward him. He seized the edge of the pier. Summoning his strength, he drew himself up, and fell there—exhausted.

IT was some time later when Pan sat up and took stock of the scene. The moon was out. There was almost no breeze, and the waters of Limon Bay were like a millpond. The patch of water where he had fought with the Bushmaster was transformed by a shadow into a golden pool of picture-book beauty. But Pan Malden sat there, staring at his hands, and murmuring: "I have killed a man!"

Then came realization that he must report to Major Larch without delay. He struggled to his feet, grasped the rungs of the ladder, and mounted to the bluff above. There he stood for a moment, while he gained his breath. The water ran from his sodden clothes, and made little pools on the ground. He was hatless, his hair plastered to his head.

"Pan!"

He gave a start at the cry, and turned to where a roadster was parked on a



She extended her hand. "Won't you wish us happiness?"

He made a move to accept the hand, then arrested the motion. His hands were unclean: he had killed a man.

"I wish you both all happiness." This was part of the price. "You know that, Betty."

road that led close to the edge of the bluff. He was in the open, bathed in the moonlight, while the car was parked in the shadows, with only a spot of white visible behind the wheel—but he recognized the voice.

"Betty!" He walked to the car. "You shouldn't be here—alone."

"I'm safe enough," she told him. Then she saw his condition. "Pan, what's happened?"

He attempted to laugh.

"Took a swim. Not from choice. I was walking along the sea-wall, and I fell."

She produced a handkerchief, and daubed at blood that was seeping from a cut on his forehead.

"You're hurt!"

He shrugged. "Probably cut myself against the wall. But what are you doing here?"

Her manner became reserved.

"I had a date to pick up Dick. He is working late. He wasn't quite ready. I drove out here to wait, and to cool off." She made a pretense of glancing at her wrist-watch. "About time to get started." She hesitated. "Pan, Dick and I are—"

"I know, Betty," he said.

The two men grappled; for a moment they toppled on the sea-wall. Then over they went.

"But you won't shake hands?"

He stood there silent, miserable.

"I'm sorry, Pan." She pressed down on the starter, and the motor came to life. "Good night."

THAT same night, in far-away Washington, officials of the State Department worked late. They had before them a communication from the dictator who was on the rampage, in which he declared that citizens of his country owned valuable property that had been confiscated by the small Central American republic. He demanded that the United States recover that property immediately,

or obtain a cash indemnity covering the full value of the property seized.

They also had before them a decoded message from the United States minister to the southern republic. He said that the property in question had been acquired shortly before its seizure by the government, that the dictator had an agent in the country who was on close terms with the officials of the banana republic, and that the seizure of the property seemed to be a plan conceived by the dictator, or at least an action which he approved.

The State Department officials looked worried as they framed a note to the president of the banana republic. It was stiff in tone, but not drastic enough to warrant the cry of "imperialism."

Then they turned their attention to a note to the dictator. They informed him of the steps they had taken with the smaller republic. They also told him in diplomatic language that the United States would not act as a bill-collector for European nations which had business relations with Central and South American countries. They concluded with the assertion that the Monroe Doctrine would cause the United States to regard with grave concern any attempt of a European power to collect bills by force in this hemisphere.

That done, they went to their homes, there to pray that what they suspected was incorrect.

AT about the time they did that, Dick Malden locked the door of his office in Cristobal, and walked out to a car where Betty Stokes was waiting.

"The late Mr. Malden," she taunted him.

He grinned as he seated himself beside her.

"Sorry, Betty. Duty comes first. Defenders of the nation, and all that."

The car purred its way along the deserted streets.

"I saw Pan tonight."

The old uneasiness came over Dick. There was the memory of the oath.

"You did?" he said.

Why must she keep mentioning Pan? He had made his choice. The price was his, Pan's. But he, Dick, had been paying for it constantly. It was something that had settled between himself and Betty. It was like a cloud that marred their perfect happiness. No, more like a ghost—the ghost of a man gone from their lives, but who refused to stay dead. Like a Haitian zombie.

"Yes. I was parked on the Drive, overlooking the Bay. Pan came up the ladder from the pier. He had been in the water, and he was cut and bleeding. He said he slipped, and fell in."

"He—he was all right?"

The old affection prompted that anxious question.

"Yes. I think so."

In his relief, he turned to flippancy.

"Well, he picked a nice night for it, and a nice place. Full of sharks."

"His clothes were torn," she continued. "I thought he had been fighting. And falling off sea-walls doesn't sound like Pan."

"Perhaps rum and sea-walls don't mix."

Even as he blurted it out, he told himself that he was protecting Pan; but in his heart he knew that he really was trying to kill a ghost that would not die.

She shook her head. "He hadn't been drinking." She hesitated. "I told him about—about us."

"What did he say?"

"He wished us happiness. But he wouldn't shake hands."

The car glided to a stop before her home.

"Coming in?" She asked it perfunctorily.

"Not tonight, Betty." He had to get away from that ghost. "I'm rather tired."

"Very well."

He gathered her in his arms, but her body was tense, unyielding. Her lips, when his brushed them, were cool, unresponsive. He drew away.

"Care to play chauffeur again tomorrow night?" he asked her.

"I think not, Dick."

"Then I'll drop in when I get home. I'll make it early as I can."

"Don't come in unless there's a light on the porch, Dick. I may turn in early. I have been feeling rather—rather seedy lately."

He started to protest, to plead with her. Then he cut the words short.

"Fair enough. Good night, Betty."

NEXT day Pan was back in the shooting-gallery that boasted the illuminated lady as a target. Coston was busy with his sewing. Nobody seemed to miss the Bushmaster.

The day after that the late afternoon papers in the United States reported that the southern republic had answered promptly. The confiscated lands would be paid for, according to the story, when,

and if, the smaller republic had the money available. A study of the financial affairs of the country indicated that would hardly be within the life-span of even a newborn infant.

There had been no reply from the European dictator; but the early morning papers of the next day carried what State Department officials were inclined to believe might be his answer.

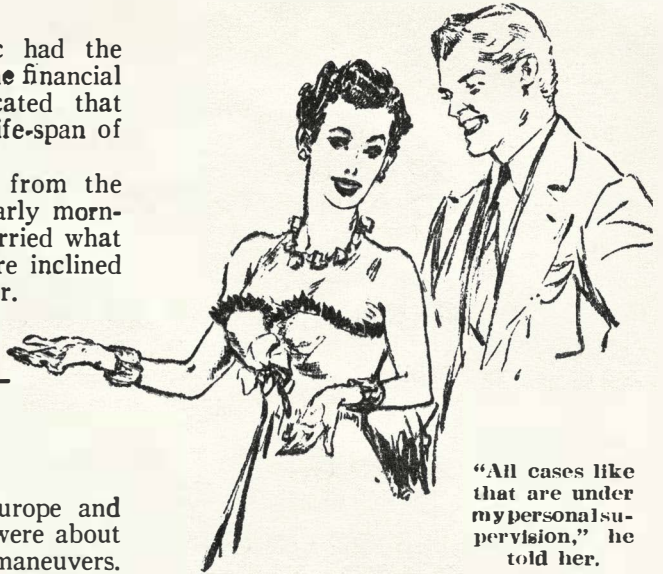
**"Here I am, stranded—
for days and days."**

Three countries, two in Europe and one in Asia, announced they were about to start long-range naval maneuvers. Strictly routine, of course, and designed only to test the cruising range of their fleets. The dictator was sending a powerful "good will fleet" to the Caribbean. The fleet of a second European nation, which was bound to him by alliances, would go through certain "long-distance problems" about three hundred miles off the Atlantic Coast of the United States.

The Asiatic power was sending its ships into our waters, according to informed diplomatic circles, largely because we, in previous years, had conducted war games in Far Eastern waters. Officials disavowed any connection with the European movements.

LATE that night, and early the following morning, in Washington, the Navy Department, the War Department, the Department of State and the full Cabinet, made a decision. Our small Atlantic fleet, composed mainly of light cruisers, was to be augmented by heavy ships from the Pacific fleet, making two fleets of about equal strength. The Panama Canal was vital now, for it would be needed to shift ships to meet the greater emergency, wherever it befell. Nevertheless, with both our coast-lines menaced, we couldn't afford ships to defend the Canal. It was up to the Army.

It was a tense, subdued meeting; and because even high officials are human, certain members of the Cabinet could not refrain from pointing out that they had fought for two self-sustaining and powerful fleets, one for each ocean. There was no answer from men who formerly had been against a big navy. The President, himself a Big Navy man, who had been attacked by "peace societies," sat



**"All cases like
that are under
my personal su-
pervision," he
told her.**

at the head of the table, his forehead creased by wrinkles of anxiety. . . .

Early the same morning, Dick Malden stood outside his office, and paused uncertainly. He had worked late, purposefully. No use to go home, and allow Betty, lying in a darkened room, the pleasure of peering out to see him gaze longingly at a light that was not burning.

No, he decided, he would make it good and late; so late that he wouldn't go in even if a light had been burning. Betty was being difficult again. It happened every time she saw Pan. Dick was getting tired of it. This time—

A car passed; and the occupants, seeing him standing there, halted. He recognized Luke and Grace Parsons.

"Hello, you greasy grind," called Parsons. "Why don't you go home?"

"Where's Betty?" asked his wife.

"Betty is at home, probably in bed," Dick said. "She hasn't been feeling quite up to snuff lately."

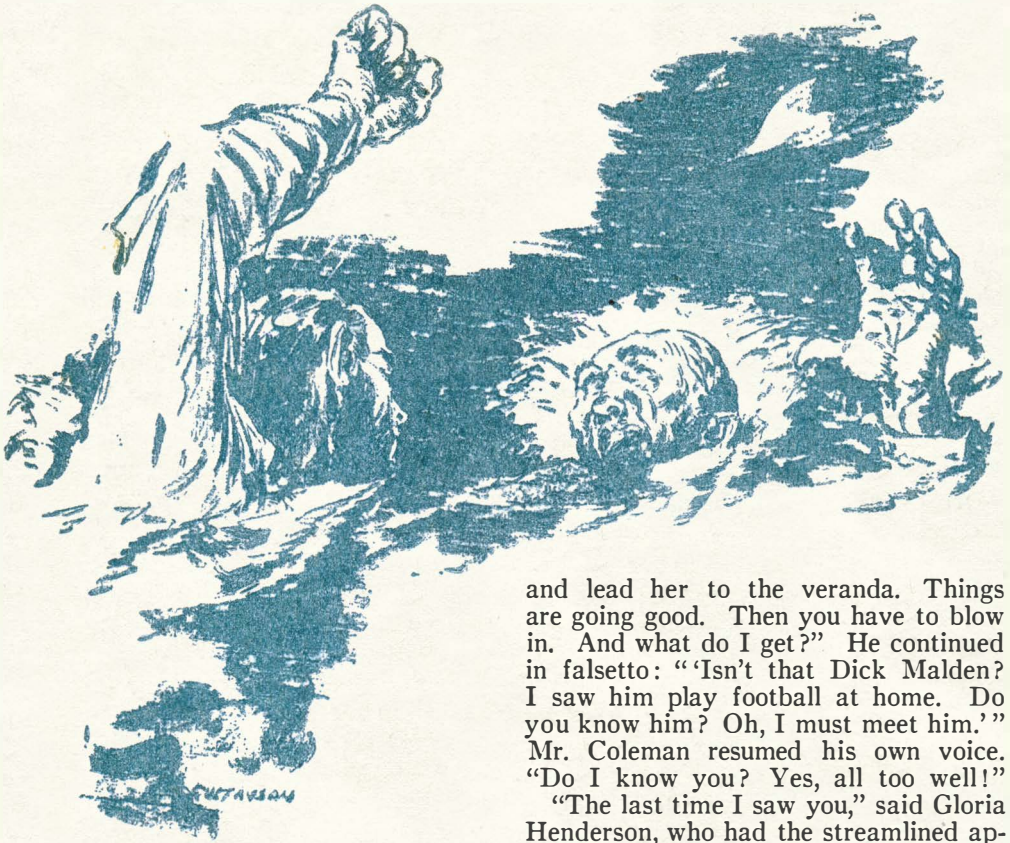
The woman laughed.

"Healthiest-looking invalid I ever saw! Don't worry, Dick. If all the tiffs Luke and I have had were laid end to end—"

"I'll even give you the old Parsons formula," said the man. "Keep them worried. Step out a bit."

"That worked so well with you!" his wife taunted him.

"You are here, aren't you?" he retorted. "But to can the comedy, there are swell doings at the Washington tonight. Still going strong when Grace and I left, being old married folks. Several new numbers from the States. A bit touristy, but nice. And they are short on extra men. Why don't you take a



Pan struck his foe a crippling blow . . . one of them must die.

run over, and appear as God's gift? You know, all work and no play—"

Dick grinned.

"It's a thought," he admitted.

"And why not?" he asked himself when the Parsons couple had driven on.

He certainly had some recreation coming to him. Just because Betty was sulking, he wasn't doomed to a work-eat-and-sleep existence.

He hailed a passing taxicab.

"Washington Hotel," he told the driver.

THE lobby was decked with flowers, ablaze with lights; and on the dance-floor couples moved about to music coming from an orchestra hidden by tropical plants. The wife of a general beamed approval upon Dick, and he arose to the occasion by dancing with her. That duty disposed of, he watched the wife of a Navy lieutenant dance by in the arms of a man from Maintenance, and he cut in. Then the music ceased, and he found Coleman, of Engineering, standing beside him.

"What is it you have that I haven't got?" Coleman demanded. "I look over the new numbers, and stake a claim on the best. Cut her away from the herd,

and lead her to the veranda. Things are going good. Then you have to blow in. And what do I get?" He continued in falsetto: "Isn't that Dick Malden? I saw him play football at home. Do you know him? Oh, I must meet him." Mr. Coleman resumed his own voice. "Do I know you? Yes, all too well!"

"The last time I saw you," said Gloria Henderson, who had the streamlined appearance and assurance of Fifty-second Street, "you had a football under your arm, and you were going places."

Dick Malden smiled. He liked this girl. She was a reminder of home, an antidote for long hours of work and swirling figures—a welcome change from girls of the Canal Zone—who, naturally, talked shop.

"Why didn't you call to me?" he asked. "I surely would have stopped."

"Would you?" She studied him appraisingly. "I doubt it. Seems to me several gentlemen tried to attract your attention, but you gave the impression you didn't wish to be disturbed."

"I was in a bit of a hurry," he admitted. "But here—nobody hurries in Panama." He gazed at her with frank approval. "I know of only one thing that stirs us to a burst of speed."

"And that is?" she prompted him.

"When we meet a girl from home, who is a living example of all that we are missing down here. Then we must snap out of our lazy pace, and enjoy to the fullest every precious minute. It is a Cinderella story in reverse. The clock strikes twelve, and the Princess returns to her luxury liner. We stay on. All the world may meet in Panama, but 'Hello' and 'Good-by' are spoken in the same breath."

She laughed easily.

"Spoken like a poet rather than a triple-threat halfback and a—you're an engineer, aren't you? But you can't get rid of me that easily."

He leaned toward her. "You're staying on?"

"It is a long story. Let's talk about you."

"I prefer long stories—about you."

"You can't say you haven't been warned," she told him. "You see, Dad retired the first of the year. He and Mother decided to take a trip around the world. The old dears hate crowds. They detest formal clothes, and a swing band drives them to the verge of apoplexy. But they love the sea. So Dad had a sea-captain he knows pick them out a nice clean freighter."

DICK MALDEN sighed.

"I knew there was a ship in the story. There always is. And I can guess the next chapter. You are here to meet them, and to join them on the voyage."

"Aren't you clever? But I won't have you making cracks about this ship. I began to grow fond of her about—well, about ten minutes ago. She may be only a freighter, but she is as whimsical as a glamour-girl. They had her date-book marked for a straight run from Trinidad to Cristobal. But at the very last minute she decided to stop off, and perhaps have a cocktail with some twenty or thirty islands, more or less, in the Leeward and Windward groups. So here I am. Stranded. On the beach. And for days and days."

He was smiling with relief.

"We have a society that takes care of cases like that," he told her. "I happen to be the executive secretary. All cases are under my personal supervision."

"Splendid. But how do you find time for this welfare work? Mr. Coleman told me that you are Mr. Panama Canal, in person. He said you keep it running, and that then you double in brass, and tell the Army and Navy how to keep it from the countries that would like to take it away from us."

"Now that the society has taken on your case," he declared, "it is my duty to tell you that you should believe very little Coleman tells you. It also is my duty to explain that I have two offices. In one of them, I do my work connected with the Canal. Incidentally, I have been spending too much time there lately, and neglecting the affairs of the so-

ciety. You see, my second office, from which I conduct the affairs of the society, is right here in the Washington Hotel."

"And where is your first office?" she asked.

"When you left the pier after landing, what was the first thing you noticed?" he parried.

She laughed. "To be honest, a little black boy without any clothes."

"And then?"

"I believe I do recall a rather attractive white building."

"I have my office there. On the first floor. Easy to find."

He became mockingly serious.

"Now that you are a ward of the society, I hope you will feel free to consult me at any time. If I am not in my office here, try the other one."

"Thank you—I may do that." Gloria plucked at a spray of bougainvillea, and held it beneath her chin. "I'm beginning to like Panama."

Dick Malden reached out, and calmly removed two tall glasses from a tray in the hands of a passing Jamaica boy. He handed one to the girl.

"To the freighter," he said. "May she stay a year at each island!"

"You are so thoughtful." Her eyes mocked him above the frosted glass. "Dad and Mother love the sea."

THE dictator sent a sharper note to the United States, receiving a sharper reply. Pan Malden worked on in the shooting-gallery. Coston continued diligently with his sewing.

And on a certain morning Dick Malden, the father of Pan and Dick, happened to meet Betty Stokes as she was about to board the train that runs across the Isthmus to Balboa and Panama City.

"Where away, Betty?" he asked, as he swung her bag aboard.

"Balboa," she told him. "Mary Larch has invited me over for a week."

He made a gesture of helplessness.

"If I thought it would do any good, I would hammer some sense into him." He flexed his long, powerful arms. "I can still do it."

Betty Stokes smiled, a little sadly.

"That wouldn't help," she said. "It is something Dick has to work out for himself.

"I don't blame him," she hastened to add. "He has been away, and he looks at things in a different manner than we do down here. I was just the girl next

door. You and Dad always made no secret of your wish that it would be either Dick or Pan. Then Pan"—her voice broke a trifle—"Pan was out. I guess Dick just thought it was up to him to do the right thing. Better to have it settled now than later."

He stood there on the platform, holding both her hands.

"You are a wonderful girl, Betty. And you are right, dead right. You always are."

"I am not doing this to worry Dick," she continued. "Please believe me. But he is interested in this girl from the States, and I want him to have every chance really to decide."

The engineer bent, and brushed her hands with his lips.

"Betty, you are too good for any man." The train began to move. "Even my boys." He swung easily to the platform, and stood there grinning up at her. "Take a look at the world's most unnatural father," he ordered. . . .

The next move came from the dictator. He was determined to have the money due him from the southern republic. The United States had warned him not to use force against the little republic in an attempt to collect it. Very well. If the United States produced the money due him, he would not use force. That money could be collected from the smaller republic, or taken from the United States Treasury. He didn't care where it came from. But he would have it. Or else!

THAT night, as Pan Malden looked over the shoulders of the men gathered before the shooting-gallery, he saw an American girl making her way along Bottle Alley. She held a white skirt over one arm, and she made her way through the motley throng with the assurance possible only to an American girl. She was headed for the establishment of Coston the tailor.

Pan loaded a gun, handed it to a patron, and stepped aside. He saw two Panamanians crowd the girl to the curb. She slipped, and one white shoe slid down, to be sullied by a Colon gutter.

The girl uttered an oath. Pan, outwardly indifferent, stiffened to attention. That oath, which came at a time when the girl was momentarily off her guard, had been uttered in a European tongue, the same language spoken by Coston when he met the men in the shack along the shore of Limon Bay.

Now the girl had entered the tailor's shop, and was displaying the skirt to Coston. Pan Malden accepted an empty gun from a grinning Chinese sailor, who had broken two electric-light bulbs.

From a radio near by, tuned loud, as most Colon radios are, came the excited voice of an announcer as he read a special news-bulletin. The dictator had his answer. He would receive no money from the United States. The United States was negotiating with the smaller republic. Pending the outcome of those negotiations, he was advised, in polite language, to keep hands off.

Furthermore, the radio news continued, the United States was advised that the dictator's fleet was in the Caribbean, somewhere southwest of Jamaica. The presence of that fleet in waters adjacent to the southern republic, or the Panama Canal, would be considered by the United States as an unfriendly act.

DICK MALDEN worked late over a table upon which charts and blueprints were piled. Outside his windows, fingers of light stabbed at the sky as the Signal Corps went through searchlight drill. There was the distant drone of planes, flying high above the white fingers, and trying to avoid them. Grim reminders of days ahead.

There were more grim reminders along the waterfront, where lights twinkled at empty anchorages. A few gunboats, one or two light cruisers, some destroyers and the submarine flotilla at Coca Sola were all that remained. All other warships had been rushed to the home fleets in the Atlantic and the Pacific.

That was what made this work so vitally important, and justified the long hours. Everything was in place, done as well as was possible with human hands. The Army was ready for the test, if it came. But to a person responsible for the battle-plan, it was a case of check and double-check, even while awaiting the test.

There was a knock at the door. Dick looked up.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened, and Gloria Henderson entered. Her smile was a bit uncertain; and she advanced slowly, as if not quite sure of her welcome.

"Now you'll regret a rash invitation," she said. "I've taken you at your word."

"Swell!" said Dick heartily. He pushed some papers aside.

She seated herself on the table, swinging her long slender legs to and fro.

"Do I rate a cigarette?" She accepted one from him. "Thanks."

He waited.

"This is an official visit," she told him. She was mockingly serious. "When in doubt, consult the executive secretary. Dick, are we going to have war?"

He shrugged. "God knows! I hope not," he added.

"If we are," she said, "it might be smart for a certain lady beachcomber to make tracks for New York."

"I hardly think it is as serious as that," he interposed hastily. "You know, if it looked too bad, they would begin to evacuate the non-essential civilian population."

She laughed aloud. "Thanks for the compliment, Dick."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Why, listing me with the non-essentials."

"You may not be essential to the United States Government, Gloria, but you are very essential to me. I—"

She lifted a restraining hand. Her manner was light.

"Please! A time and place for everything. Not in a business office. You make me feel like a little stenographer with designs on the boss." She picked up a chart. "What is this?"

"That," he told her, "shows the position of certain objects floating beneath the surface of Limon Bay. Your liner probably passed over some of them on the way in. But if a man in a tower had pressed a key—"

"Ugh!" She threw the chart aside. "The Washington veranda gets a bit tiresome, but at least there is nothing to remind one of mines." She stood up.

He reached for his hat. "I am going with you."

"No. Please. You are working. Besides, I have been shopping, and I feel grimy. I want a shower more than anything else." She glanced at her wrist-watch. "But if you should happen to be at your other office in about an hour—"

SHE had been gone less than five minutes, when the door opened again. Dick Malden looked up with a start.

"Pan!" he cried. "What—"

Pan Malden closed the door, and locked it.

"Hello, sucker!" Pan was unsmiling as he spoke.

Dick's face flushed with anger. His fists were clenched.

"So that explains this brotherly visit! All right, Pan. You have asked for this. Stick to your spying, and keep out of my personal affairs. You always did do the Galahad when Betty was concerned," he added.

They stood close together, each man taking the measure of the other. One was dressed in the clean white of the tropics, the other in tattered trousers, a soiled shirt of uncertain color, and shoes with run-down heels—the garb of the beachcomber.

"Betty doesn't enter into this." Pan spoke slowly. "But my spying, as you call it, is getting all mixed up with what you think are your personal affairs. If you don't like it, don't blame me. Take it up with your girl friend."

Dick's anger was mounting.

"You talk like a fool! I suppose you're insinuating that there's something shady about Gloria Henderson. She is an American girl, who lives in New York. She is waiting here to join her parents, who are on a trip around the world. Gloria a spy! That's good. You fellows get so you see a spy behind every palm tree."

PAN kept his temper in check with an effort.

"I'm not here to argue with you, Dick. I'm here to tell you some things for your own good. You're going to listen to me."

He walked away from his irate brother, and seated himself on the table.

"The United States is on the brink of war. The country that is trying to provoke that war has an agent here named Coston. Recently, Coston met his superiors here, and gave them a rough outline of the plans for the defense of the Canal. He said that he had made preliminary plans to obtain all the necessary charts and blueprints, and that all he needed was a certain operative. They said the operative was on the way. Then they drank to the Canal, their Canal. I heard them." Unconsciously he glanced at his hands. "I had to kill a man that night."

Dick stood biting his lip, and staring at the papers scattered about.

"We didn't touch Coston," Pan continued, "because we knew that through him we could reach the new operative. I spotted her tonight—your girl friend."

"You are crazy!" Dick cried. "Just because she came here tonight! I invited her. Why, when she happened to

pick up a chart of a mine-field, and I began to explain it a bit, she tossed it aside."

"I know she did." Pan spoke quietly. "I was standing outside the window through it all. I heard your insanity." His voice was filled with emotion. "But now, damn you, you are going to snap out of it. You are going to use your common sense. You are an attractive chap, yes, but you aren't Robert Taylor and Clark Gable, done up in one package. And how did you meet the girl? Did you arrange it, or did she?"

DICK moistened his lips with his tongue.

"I—"

Pan ignored him.

"Tonight she came to Bottle Alley, bringing a skirt to Coston's tailor shop. American girls don't prowl around Bottle Alley alone. The Washington Hotel has maid-service. And even if she didn't want to use it, why would she pick Coston, when tailors are a dime a dozen in Colon?"

"Maybe she—"

"*Maybe?*" Pan made a whip of the word. "She stumbled outside Coston's place, and accidentally stepped in the gutter. That threw her off her guard. She swore. And when she was being herself, she swore in the language of Coston's country."

The anger had faded from Dick's face; and it was replaced by doubt and apprehension.

"But she didn't take anything here," he protested. "And she wasn't even interested."

Pan made a gesture of resignation.

"Do you need a diagram, Dick? She came to make sure that what they wanted was here. It was, of course; and it has been right along. But they couldn't believe anybody would be that careless. In their country, they don't do things that way."

"Those papers are locked up every night," Dick hastened to defend himself. He indicated an office safe. "In there."

Pan smiled.

"It might hold out against a can-opener. But let me finish. We haven't too much time."

He stood up, and began to unbutton his tattered shirt, talking as he did so:

"When she was sure, she left. She wouldn't let you go with her. That was to give her time to report to Coston. She made a date to meet you in an hour.

That was to make sure you wouldn't be in the way when they come for what they want."

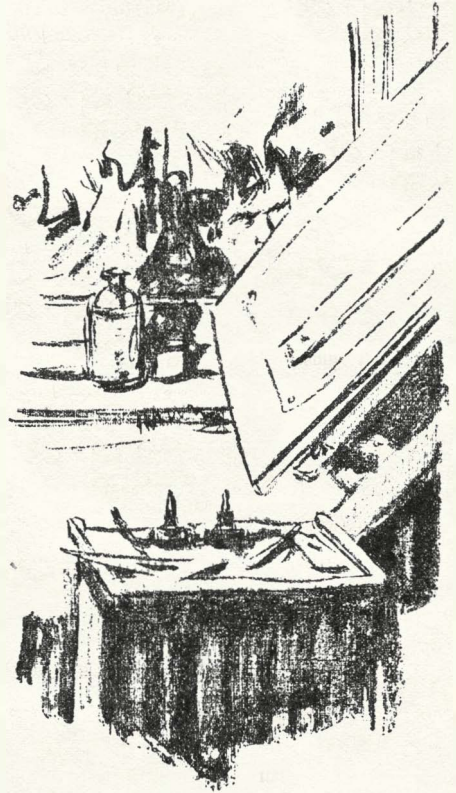
Dick was on his feet, gathering up charts and blueprints.

"They are out of luck!" he cried. "These things go in the safe. And we will have a ring of Canal Zone policemen around them."

He reached for a telephone.

"No!" Pan seized his hand. "Wait."

Pan slipped out of his shirt. He stripped off a sleeveless undershirt. A broad band of gauze was wound around



his body, above the waist. He tore it away, and a sheaf of charts and blueprints, which had been rolled around his body, fell to the floor. He picked them up. He was smiling.

"We want them to have what they want. This version of it!"

"But why?"

Pan shrugged. "I wouldn't know. Just a cog in the machine. I take orders. The men who give them hoped it would work out this way. They prepared for it. Get that safe open, Dick. We don't want it to look too easy."

Dick twirled the dial of the safe, and the doors swung open. They gathered

"That," he told her, "shows the position of certain objects floating in Limon Bay."



up the papers Pan had carried around his body, and placed them in the safe. They shut it, and Dick twisted the knobs experimentally. Then Pan began to roll up the papers with which Dick had been working.

"These are our problem now," Pan said. "We can't leave them here. You can't take them with you, because you have a date; and when you leave here you are going right to it."

Dick made a gesture for mercy.

"Don't rub it in, Pan," he pleaded.

"Skip that," Pan ordered. "You are going to keep the date, because if you didn't they would smell a rat. We've worked too hard, and we've been too lucky, to take any chances now."

"I can't do it," Dick protested. "It would be—"

Pan stood beside him, firm and unyielding.

"You are going through with it," he repeated. "You are going to make a

payment on account for your foolishness. Good God, Dick! I have given up my career. I have accepted the scorn of all the people I knew and liked. I tossed away my chances with Betty. Now it is your turn to ante up a bit. You are going to put your pride in your pocket, and act the part of a fatuous ass."

Dick straightened. "Very well, Pan."

But Pan, taking assent for granted, was attacking the real problem:

"I can't take them with me, because I plan to spend the balance of the night in some bush, waiting for burglars. I won't interfere with them, but it will be nice to know just who they are." He smiled. "There probably won't be any trouble, but you never know; and these things are too dangerous to gamble with."

Again Dick reached for the telephone.

"How about having somebody come and get them?"

"No." Pan reached forward, and held down the hook. "We have wasted too much time. We can't take a chance of doing anything that might attract attention, and scare them off."

He stood in the center of the floor, looking about for something that would offer a solution to the problem. Then, as much of a surprise as if a bomb had exploded, there came the sound of a knock at the door.

They both stiffened, and glanced at each other inquiringly. The knock was repeated.

Pan flattened himself against the side wall, and stood facing the door. He fumbled inside the front of his trousers, and produced a small, ugly automatic.

"Open the door," he ordered Dick, speaking softly. "Open it just a few inches, and then step aside."

Dick advanced to the door. The key grated in the lock. The door swung open and Dick quickly stepped aside.

"Betty!" he cried.

Betty Stokes entered the room. She walked unseeing by Dick, his mouth partly open in surprise, and addressed herself to Pan.

"How about trusting them to me, Pan? I'll take them to your father. He'll know what to do. Even if they are watching the building, they won't suspect a girl."

Dick took a step forward.

"Betty, what are you—"

She faced him, thereby giving the first sign she knew he was present.

"Not checking up on you, Dick. I came home on the night train. I saw lights in your office, and stopped to tell you that I have had time to think it out, and that I have decided it was all a mistake. But out in the hall I heard Pan's voice. Then I played eaves-dropper."

"Betty!" Dick's hands were outstretched. "I've been a fool. Give me a chance to—"

"Skip that!" The harsh command came from Pan. "You will have time for all that later. Right now, we have to work fast." He turned to the girl. "How can you carry these, Betty?"

"Under—under my clothes. You two turn your backs."

They obeyed. There was the sound of rustling silk, and crackling paper.

"All right."

They turned. The papers on the table had disappeared.

PAN walked to the door, and held it open. Betty Stokes went out of the room. Neither spoke as she drew abreast; and she did not stop. But she turned, and until she was out of sight

in the dimly-lighted hall, her eyes sought Pan Malden. It was as if they were seeing something for which they had hungered long, something of which they would never see enough. . . .

Coston, the tailor, sat cross-legged in his shop, sewing. The shooting-gallery, which boasted the luminous lady as a target, had a steady play; but Pan Malden was not among the vari-colored attendants behind its counters. Gloria Henderson remained at the Washington.

And from bungalow to bungalow in the Canal Zone, and from bazaar to rabbit-warren in the near-by Republic of Panama, there spread a rumor. An office in an administration building of the Canal had been burglarized. There were two schools of information: High officials, when approached on the subject, first denied all knowledge. When pinned down, they denied indignantly that anything of value had been stolen. Under-officials and minor employees, however, had a different version. They intimated that certain important plans and papers had been in the loot obtained.

IT was this latter version that was whispered over the teacups and in the bazaars. And there were certain outward manifestations to support it. Canal and Army officials held constant conferences. Dick Malden was summoned to several of them. He emerged white of face, and obviously worried.

Whereupon the tea parties drew the name of Dick Malden, Sr., into the discussion. Didn't he have the worst luck with those boys of his? One a beach-comber, now the other mixed up in this latest affair. There was a girl in it, a girl staying at the Washington. Tough on Betty Stokes, wasn't it? And by the way, what had become of Pan? Some of the boys said he wasn't hanging around that native shooting-gallery any more. But none, apparently, knew.

Then Panama, the United States and the whole world forgot all minor matters, and turned worried eyes and ears to something that came like a bolt out of the blue. The saber-rattler made a world-wide broadcast.

You certainly heard that speech. He said that a state of anarchy existed in certain parts of Central and South America. He said that he had appealed to the United States to end that condition, and restore a civilized form of life that could be tolerated by the decent, peace-loving people of all the world. He cried

that his plea fell upon deaf ears. He stressed what he called his patience. But he declared that his patience was ended. Then he delivered his ultimatum.

He spoke, of course, in his own tongue. But during frequent and long pauses, the translators were busy, so we could follow him easily, no matter how limited our linguistic ability. The translators worked to the accompaniment of a crowd roar. That roar, to us here in the United States, was the most tragic and most sinister part of it all. Those people, everyday people much like ourselves, honestly believed him.

Because of an inspired press, a controlled radio, and all forms of censorship, they accepted him as a champion of civilization, and a devotee of peace, driven to take desperate measures. They, just like us, hated war to the depths of their souls, but they cheered him to the echo when he cried out that he had given the United States forty-eight hours to land marines in the southern republic, and reclaim the properties that had been taken from their rightful owners.

That crowd screamed with hysterical enthusiasm while he roared the threat that if his demands were not met, he would at once take possession of the Panama Canal, a necessary base from which to operate, while he restored civilization to lands in which anarchy reigned. His confidence in his ability to fulfill that threat was shown by the assurance in his voice, and the few words with which he made it.

STUNNED, we turned away from our radios. In a sane world, this just couldn't be. But unfortunately, our memories were long. We recalled when another dictator had roared threats to Europe. That crisis had been averted by an agreement. Some people had called it an ignominious surrender. We, through the years after that event, had seen the toll that had followed it. But being human, we almost wished the marines would be landed. . . .

After the first shock had worn off, we began to dig up our gardens, and the public parks. We, even as the people of Europe, formed in line to receive gas-masks. We were given blue light bulbs for our cars, and our homes. We practiced "black-outs." And we prayed.

Most of our prayers went up for a group of sleepy, haggard men, sitting about a table in Washington. They knew that one hostile fleet, with air-

plane-carriers, was cruising off our Atlantic coast cities, while another one was within striking distance in the Pacific. They too had been tempted to yield. But they knew that surrender would provide only a temporary respite, at the conclusion of which they would be confronted with even greater peril.

Now they had decided to stake everything upon one desperate *coup*. It was drama that would be played out in the Canal Zone, far away, thus adding to their anxiety. The first acts had been played. The climax was nearing.

We, of course, knew nothing of all this. But we did know that a message had been sent to the mad saber-rattler:

The United States would not land marines in the smaller republic. The United States would defend the Panama Canal to the last man.

That was when we made plans to evacuate our coast cities. . . .

Major Larch emerged from Army Headquarters on the heights overlooking Balboa on the Pacific side of the Isthmus, entered a military car, and was driven to the airport near by. He boarded a swift pursuit plane, and was carried to the Atlantic side. A waiting car took him to his own quarters.

PAN MALDEN, cleanly shaved, well groomed, and clad in spotless whites, stood up as the Major entered the living-room.

"Come," said Major Larch.

They walked to the car. They drove through Cristobal. Into Colon. Down the street called Bottle Alley. The car came to a halt. On one side was the shooting-gallery where Pan had worked. On the other the tailor shop where Coston sat cross-legged, sewing.

They entered that shop. Coston stood up. He advanced toward them a little uncertainly.

"Yes, gentlemen. How can I serve you?"

"I am Major Larch, of Military Intelligence. This gentlemen is Mr. Malden, one of our trusted operatives."

Coston was very white.

"Yes, gentlemen. But I fail to see—"

"Let's not waste words," said Major Larch. "You serve your country. We serve ours."

Great beads of perspiration stood out on Coston's forehead, but he bowed.

"At your service, gentlemen."

"Several nights ago," Major Larch continued, "your operatives stole what



Pan flattened himself against the side wall. "Open the door," he ordered Dick.

you believe to be the plans of defense of the Panama Canal."

Coston was silent.

"We allowed the theft to be successful. We permitted you to get those plans to your fleet. And the word was flashed to your country that everything was set for an easy conquest of the Panama Canal."

The Major was smiling.

"If we must stand off an attack, we hope it is based in accordance with the information in those plans. Your guns will be shelling, and your airplanes will be avoiding, anti-aircraft batteries that do not exist. Your guns will be firing on our railroad guns in places that are jungle, and nothing else. Your ships may sail into Limon Bay, but even if they escape our gunfire, not one of them will get by the mines. In other words, we prepared a set of plans especially for you."

COSTON had regained some of his composure.

"I have failed—yes. The fact that you are here proves that. We take that into consideration when we enter this work. I am willing to pay the price. But I pride myself that I know something of your country, and your countrymen. In other words, Major, I recognize Yankee bluff; and you are undertaking a monumental bluff."

Major Larch turned to Pan.

"Tell him," he ordered.

Pan began to speak. He described the meeting in the shack on the shore of Limon Bay. He repeated the conversation there, including the toast that was drunk. He told of his struggle with the Bushmaster. Then his story went on to the girl who called herself Gloria Henderson. Her visit to Coston. The oath in the foreign tongue. Her call at Dick's office. He gave the exact minute the office was robbed, identified the robbers, and outlined exactly their procedure.

"And now?" Larch demanded.

Coston leaned a bit weakly against the counter.

"I have failed—failed completely." He shrugged. "I am ready."

But Larch made no move.

"We both are soldiers, Coston."

A great pride sustained the stricken little man.

"I have been piped aboard war vessels of my country, with the crews drawn up at attention."

"Exactly," said Major Larch. "That is why I am making you a proposition as one soldier to another. You are free until tonight. You will not be watched. You are free to go where you will, to communicate with your fleet. We will return here tonight. If you are here, we will have to do our duty."

Coston stared at them in disbelief.

"Why—why do you do this?"

Major Larch leaned forward in his earnestness, and pounded the counter.

"Because we would do anything—anything honorable—to prevent war."

"But—but why are you so sure I will confess my miserable failure to my countrymen?"

Major Larch relaxed.

"Because you are a soldier, and a man of honor. We have checked. We know the blood that flows in your veins. It would be impossible for you to remain silent while thousands of your countrymen, trusting you implicitly, went out doomed to failure, and due to die like rats in a trap."

There was silence in the little shop for a long moment, a silence broken only by popping of rifles, and ribald cries from the shooting-gallery across the street.

"You are clever, Major," said Coston. "You win again."

Major Larch made no reply.

"I give you my promise—a soldier's promise—that I will communicate with my fleet. I also promise that you will find me here tonight."

Major Larch bowed.

"I accept your first promise. But I release you from any obligation regarding the second. If you fulfill the first, we will consider the matter closed."

Coston smiled bitterly.

"I understand, Major. It *is* a sorry choice. But I have made it. I prefer not to die at the hands of my countrymen. You will find me here."

There was respect in Major Larch's voice as he said quietly:

"I hope, sir, that I would have the courage to make the same choice, under the same circumstances."

NIGHT in Colon. A hot, sticky night, in which the humid air seemed charged with dread and apprehension. All the usual carnival pleasures were there; but they were for the most part deserted, and therefore even more grotesque than usual.

Tourists had fled. Merchant ships had scurried for safety, and their crews



were missing from the streets. On the few ships of the Navy that remained, there was no shore leave. Soldiers were held at their posts.

So Bottle Alley was almost as quiet as a country lane when Major Larch and Pan Malden drove to the shop of Coston the tailor. The front of the building was open. The interior of the shop was lighted. But there was no sign of the occupant.

"Coston!" Major Larch called.

No reply.

They walked to the sheet that partitioned the room, and drew it aside. Coston sat in a chair, facing a flag of his country, which was hung on the wall. But his eyes were unseeing, his body was slumped in a grotesque position, and there was a round hole in his forehead.

"He kept his promise," said Pan.

"Yes," Major Larch agreed. "Maybe it is better this way."

Before they reëntered their car, Pan tore the flag from the wall, and used it to cover the staring eyes.

They drove to the Washington Hotel.

"To see Miss Gloria Henderson," Major Larch told the clerk.

"She is not in her room," said the clerk, after a session with the telephone. "I'll have her paged."

Soon the grinning black boy was back.

"She do not answer, sar."

Larch flipped him a coin.

"Get your passkey," he ordered the clerk, "and come with us."

They found the girl who called herself Gloria Henderson stretched out on the bed. The poison had been effective, but not overkind.

Their next stop was the Cristobal station of the Canal Zone Police, where a husky lieutenant with the map of Ireland on his face greeted them. Larch handed him a list of names.

"Have the Panamanian police pick them up, and turn them over to you. Then hold them for us. Can do?"

"That I can," said the policeman. "And gladly." He rubbed his huge hands together in gleeful anticipation. "Sure, and I have been longing to get some of those babies on this side of the line."

Then they went to Major Larch's quarters—to wait for the police report. Their work was done.

THAT is the story, told as I heard it from the lips of a group of Canal Zone men, while we sat around a table in a native cabaret in Colon.

"In case your memory is a bit hazy," said a chap from Accounting, who is a stickler for exactness, "the saber-rattler stalled for time just before the deadline. He hadn't changed his spots, but he wasn't going to lose his precious navy. One of his stooges, the ruler of a neighboring country, was persuaded to ask him to defer action. It was an obvious face-saver, but he grasped at the straw, pretended to attach great importance to the plea from his neighbor, and offered to mediate. Washington said we would be ready to talk after he picked up his battleships and went home. And that was just what he did."

"Right," said a man whose uniform bore the oak leaves of a major. "And did his precious allies take a sneak! They like dictators, but they like dictators who deliver. They didn't love us—they don't today, for that matter; but they weren't going to be left holding the

bag. The two fleets off our home coasts faded away like a morning mist."

"The comedy relief," said a stout lad wearing spectacles, who is the local agent for a large fruit company, "was supplied by the banana republic. It restored the lands taken from our citizens. It held on to those taken from the dictator's subjects. Divine justice, says I."

A tall chap in Engineering yawned.

"I guess that about covers it," he said.

"**N**OT quite," I protested. "What became of young Pan Malden? And Betty Stokes?"

The tall engineer grinned.

"You lads go strong on the moonlight-and-roses stuff, don't you? Well, we aim to please. After the official call on Coston, Pan was all washed up on undercover stuff. He went into Engineering, where he belongs. He and Betty were married, with all the Zone's female tongue-waggers on hand to cluck over how beautiful Betty looked, and to point out that they always had believed in Pan. That should be good for your last ten pages."

"And if you care to go beyond the conventional ending," said a man in Maintenance, "there is now a little Pan. Swell kid—but if he survives the spoiling of his granddad, who happens to be our chief engineer, he will be a miracle man."

"It is a swell story," I told them. "I enjoyed it a lot. I particularly liked the bit about the football game. Larch was undecided which boy to take. Pan forgot about glory, and played the game. Larch was keen enough to spot that. I think the saber-rattler was licked right then. And as long as we can turn out men like Pan Malden, Larch, and the others, I have—"

The tall engineer clapped his hands.

"Another round, Pasquale," he told the sleepy Panamanian waiter who answered. Then he addressed the group about the table: "The visiting delegate is beginning to slip. Next thing he will be babbling of battles won on the playing-fields of Eaton, pukka sahibs carrying the white man's burden under a scorching sun, and pride of empire. Much too hot for that sort of thing."

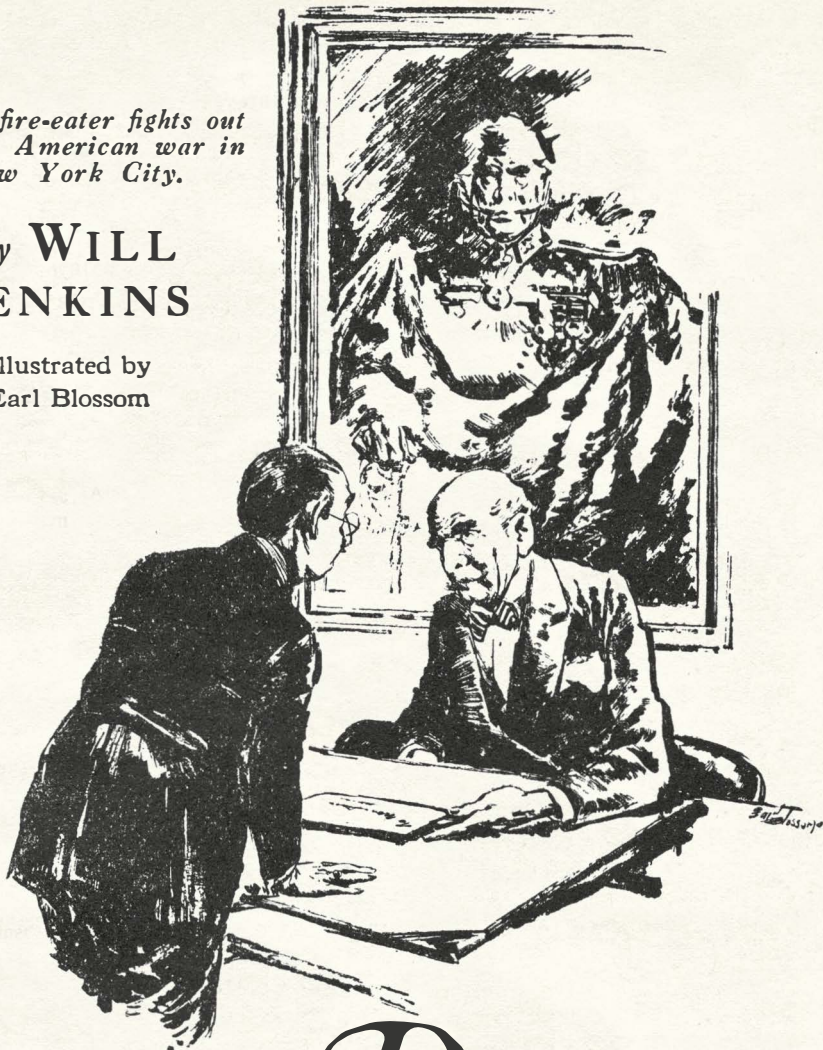
The boy replenished our glasses.

"I signed the chit," said the engineer, "and that makes it an unusual drink. But don't linger over it. Some of you birds are feeble-minded enough to believe this guy. For the good of your immortal souls—if any—go home!"

*An old fire-eater fights out
a South American war in
New York City.*

By **WILL
JENKINS**

Illustrated by
Earl Blossom



A Loan of Dynamite

THE rumble of traffic came from below the windows of Señor O'Donoju's office. Trucks and sedans and coupés and side-car combinations; delivery-wagons and more trucks and still more passenger-cars. The sound was of Manhattan. But Señor O'Donoju was not. He was erect and prosperous of appearance, with an aquiline nose from Spanish ancestry, and no apparent resemblance to the Irish Jacobite from whom his name was derived. *La Prensa* lay folded on his desk, with a *Times* below it. His telephone-book was English. His calendar was Spanish. His desk was strictly American in design and in the businesslike absence of documentary litter. But the large oil portrait on

the wall was Latin-American in every detail. Its subject was a soldier in a florid uniform, making a magnificent gesture. The workmanship of the portrait was good. The frame was elaborate. A gilded wreath of laurel surrounded the title-plate at the bottom of the frame.

Gen. Cipriano Morales, liberador y salvador de su nación. Él fue un mártir á sus principios y pasados sus últimos años en destierro, que fue la mas noble si la menos feliz parte de su vida.

There would doubtless have been more, but the gilt plate would not hold it.

Señor O'Donoju signed a document and slipped it into an envelope. He nodded to his chief clerk.

"Carlos?"

"*El taxicab, Señor O'Donoju.*"

"*Bueno,*" said Señor O'Donoju. He sealed the envelope with some care and offered it to his clerk. "I leave this with you, Carlos. If it should seem wise to you, tomorrow you may open and read it."

THE clerk blinked suddenly through his spectacles.

"And there is another matter." Señor O'Donoju indicated the large oil portrait. "As you know, General Morales was my nearest friend. If I do not tell you otherwise, tomorrow I wish you to see that his picture is delivered, carefully, to my daughter."

The clerk grew pale. Apprehension shone through his spectacles.

"*Pero, Señor O'Donoju!*" he said in alarm. "*Ud. no intende—*"

"I intend to leave the office in your care until I return," said Señor O'Donoju severely. "I repose great trust in you, Carlos. And I wish to give you one absolute command: Though General Morales was my nearest friend, I desire that his son, the Señor Alfredo Morales, shall not ever set foot in my office, my place of business or my home. Not under any circumstances!"

"*S-si, Señor O'Donoju,*" said the clerk desperately. "*Pero—*"

"That being understood," said Señor O'Donoju, "I will go down to the taxicab."

He went to a little closet, extracted his hat and an ivory-handled cane, and put the hat carefully on his head at the angle made essential by long custom. He picked up a small leather traveling-bag—which was empty—from beside his desk. His clerk opened his mouth, and stammered unhappily:

"*Señor O'Donoju, no es—no es un duelo?*"

"A duel?" said Señor O'Donoju. "In Nuevo York? Absurd, Carlos! No. I do not fight a duel. I go upon an errand which concerns the honor of my friend the General Morales. He being dead, and his son being somewhat remiss in the matter, it is for me as his friend to attend to the affair. But I do not fight a duel."

Yet he shook hands with his pale-faced clerk before he went down and into the waiting taxi—which is not the action of one going upon a commonplace errand.

In the taxi he sat impassive, his hands folded upon the ivory handle of his stick. He was olive-skinned, clear-eyed, with the air of one not only born but habit-

uated to command. He looked through the wire-glass partition between the two parts of the taxi. The cab headed north. He gazed upon surface-cars and upon the under parts of Elevated structures. He saw limousines and trucks. Electric delivery-cars and thumping wrecks upon four wheels. Pick-up trucks with cryptic parcels, other cabs—Manhattan traffic.

His taxi turned to the right, to where a gray-painted plank structure covered the sidewalk. The space behind it was startlingly empty of stone and brick. A monster dump-truck came clawing up a steep ramp and into the street. It rolled away, filled with fragments of clay-smearred rock. There was a sudden dull concussion down in the excavation below. Blasting, of course. Pedestrians did not turn their heads.

Señor O'Donoju alighted and paid the driver.

"But if you wish to wait," he said with the delicate precision of utterance of the foreigner who speaks perfect English, "I shall return in ten minutes, and will of course pay you for waiting."

He walked directly to the gray-painted structure. He turned in it, down the clay-smearred ramp. A voice bellowed: "*Hey! No admittance! Y'can't come in here!*"

Señor O'Donoju turned his head and explained politely;

"*Señ—*Mr. Hardwick is expecting me."

He went on. There was clear sky above him. Raw earth and naked stone all about, strangely topped by rough plank wall and—above the wall—the astonishingly completed walls of other buildings long past the stage of being excavated for. There were two men whose function in life seemed to be the waving of red flags. Other men held stuttering, vociferous spider-legs against the naked stone. A huge steam-shovel deliberately dumped seemingly destructive loads of broken rock and smudging clay into trucks.

A FIGURE waved an arm—Edward Hardwick, junior architect in charge. He came clambering over to where Señor O'Donoju stood. They shook hands.

"Would you like to look things over, sir?"

Señor O'Donoju smiled politely.

"I do not think so. Not at the moment." He paused. "It must have seemed strange to you," he added after an instant, "for me to telephone you and ask that you permit me to meet you here."



"I wish to borrow, for two hours, some fifteen sticks of dynamite. . . . They should be packed in my bag, here."

"Not at all, sir," said the younger man untruthfully. "It is a pleasure to have you here."

"I called you," said Señor O'Donoju smoothly, "because I think that you are my friend."

The younger man flushed uneasily.

"I hope so, sir. And your daughter—I would like to be something more—"

"Which," said Señor O'Donoju, "we will discuss at another time. In my lifetime, Señor Hardwick, I have had one friend whom I would trust with my life or my honor: the General Cipriano Morales, of whom you have heard me speak. I find I am in need of another friend,—General Morales being dead,—who will accede to a request as unquestioningly, trusting in my honor, as my friend the General would have done. And I have come to you, asking that you be such a friend."

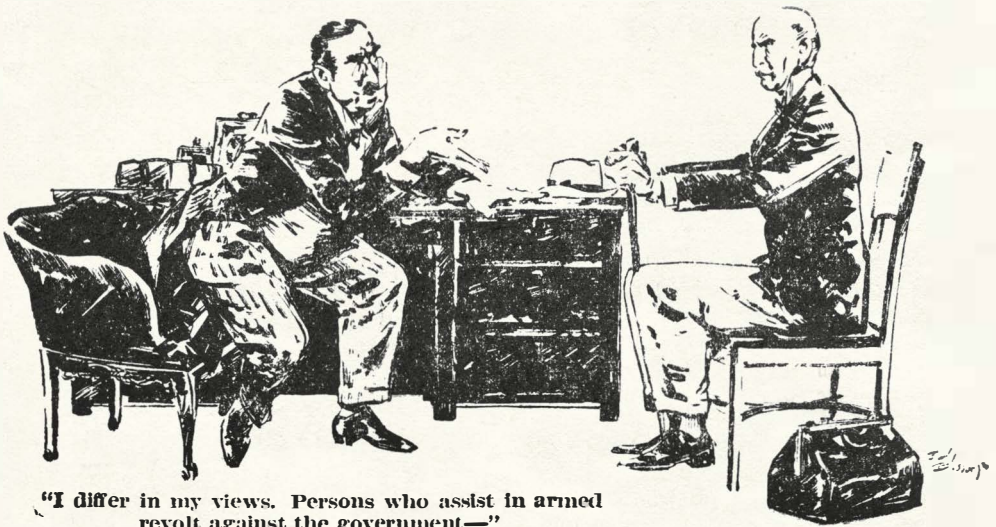
The young man bit his lip. Then he said directly:

"Señor O'Donoju, you know I've been coming to your house because of your daughter Paula. You know that I've been trying to get up the nerve to—well—ask you—"

"I did not come," said Señor O'Donoju severely, "to make a bargain. I came to ask you to be my friend."

The younger man flushed more deeply. "I did not intend to drive a bargain, sir. I—well—I like you, sir. Really. If I happen also to be in love with Paula, we can leave that out for the moment. So—if I can do anything for you, as a friend only, you have only to name it."

SEÑOR O'DONOJU smiled. And this time it was not merely a polite smile. It was genuine. He looked approvingly at the younger man.



"I differ in my views. Persons who assist in armed revolt against the government—"

"Well said, my friend! Well said! Then I request that you make me a loan of certain objects which I will return in two hours—and which will not leave my hands. But which you must either loan me without question or not at all."

With his ivory-headed cane and the incongruous empty traveling-bag in his hand, Señor O'Donoju looked invincibly foreign, entirely at home, and wholly at his ease in the chaos of an excavation for a twenty-story building. He smiled at the shock-headed young architect who was half a foot taller than he, and who regarded him uncomfortably. The young man knitted his brows.

"If you'll name it, sir," he repeated doggedly, "it's yours."

"I wish to borrow," said Señor O'Donoju comfortably, "for two hours only, some fifteen sticks of dynamite. Perhaps twenty. They should be packed in my bag, here."

IN the taxicab, going downtown beyond his office, Señor O'Donoju smiled faintly to himself. It was the smile of an older man meditating upon the behavior of a younger one. Señor Hardwick believed implicitly that he had acted solely out of friendship for Paula's father. He had not. It was not possible. But he had believed it was as great friendship as a young man could feel for the father of a girl he wished to marry. And as such, it was a compliment which Señor O'Donoju appreciated at its full value. Highly. And of course the young man had seethed with curiosity, and he had felt moments of acute unease at the idea of permitting these sticks of dynamite to go about the streets of New York in a taxicab. He had given an excess of

apologetic instructions pertaining to extreme care on the part of Señor O'Donoju. There had even been a suspicious moisture upon his forehead when Señor O'Donoju shook hands and departed, and he had made an arrested gesture as if to call him back. But he did not.

"*No hay amigo*," said Señor O'Donoju humorously to himself as his taxicab wormed on through traffic in which instant catastrophe seemed inevitable, "*no hay amigo mas que un joven*."

The tall buildings on either side shut out nineteen-twentieths of the heavens. The monotonous dull-windowed buildings took all color from the world. The taxi was one of a stream of rolling, pulsing vehicles, some polished and some dusty; some new and purring, and some old and sputtering in their progress. They flowed in tides down the narrow streets, now arrested by a cross-flow from side ways and now swirling about a taller, slower-moving surface-car or truck. There was no noise but the noise of the traffic. There was no smell but of rubber tires and gasoline. There was no light but the grayish light from a ribbon of sky overhead.

Señor O'Donoju sat with his traveling-bag on his knee, held in place by one hand. The other held the ivory-handled stick.

The taxi swerved precariously, then stopped, and a grimy hand reached back.

The door opened. Señor O'Donoju stepped out upon the sidewalk. He paid the chauffeur. He walked into the building casting his eyes upward at the shield and coat-of-arms of that Central American republic to which an Irish Jacobite had retired to marry and grow rich some centuries ago. He stepped into the eleva-

tor, olive-skinned, very erect and prosperous of appearance. He removed his really fine straw hat when a gum-chewing stenographer entered. He did not look at her, not even when she engaged in persiflage with the elevator operator.

He got out at his appointed floor, where the coat-of-arms of his native country displayed itself in many colors upon an opaque glass door. He shifted his stick to the hand which carried the bag. He opened the door. A male clerk in the anteroom glanced up and—recognizing his manner—rose to ask politely what he wanted. In seconds, he was ushered into the inner office.

THE Señor O'Donoju shook hands warmly with his acquaintance, the consul-general. He inquired with punctilious politeness concerning the health of each member of the consul-general's family. Then he seated himself and leaned back comfortably when the necessary formalities were over and it was possible, with politeness, to mention the purpose of his visit.

"I have come," he explained, "to verify a most unhappy impression of a fellow-countryman who should hold a position of the warmest in my heart. You remember, of course, my friend General Morales?"

"A great man," observed the consul-general warmly. "A very great man! It is deplorable that his last years were spent in exile. I recognize the necessity, without ceasing to admire the man. We were of opposed political opinions, you recall."

"*Pero sí*," said Señor O'Donoju. "But I speak of his son, Alfredo Morales. He presented himself to me sometime since, and for the sake of his father I made him welcome even in my home."

The consul-general regarded the smoke of his cigar with a certain fixity of attention.

"I have met the Señor Morales," he observed. "An unfortunate young man. He desires to return to our native land."

"So I have learned," said Señor O'Donoju. "But to me he spoke only of his need of monetary aid—which I gave him, for the sake of his father. We were young together, the General and I. Never were there such friends as General Morales and myself—when we were young. As we grew older, our paths diverged, it is true. He rose to glory which our nation will never allow to fade, while I—"

"Señor O'Donoju," said the consul-general in mild protest, "it is also service to our country to practice honorable commerce."

"Thank you," said Señor O'Donoju. He inclined his head and puffed upon his cigar. "But despite our different paths of life, our friendship never waned. General Morales was my nearest friend. It is a matter of which I am deeply proud."

"And in spite of it," observed the consul-general in an admiring tone, "you have never been viewed with disfavor by our government. Your conduct—"

"My friendship with General Morales was complete," said Señor O'Donoju severely. "Had he ever asked my aid, though in a fashion to put me in disfavor with a dozen governments, he would have had it!"

The consul-general said something indistinct about how fortunate such a request had not been made. His eyes wandered to a carefully wrapped and sealed parcel on a desk at one side of the room. They returned. Señor O'Donoju followed his eyes.

"But all this is known to you," he said less severely. "The point of my inquiry is that Alfredo Morales told me that his father had left him his memoirs. He showed me extracts from them. It was General Morales' duty to his country to write out the story of his struggles. He had done that duty. But of course—as I pointed out to his son—his history should not be published until it could no longer be made the excuse for the political persecution of certain persons mentioned in it."

AT this, the consul-general looked pained.

"*Amigo mio*," he said, "I revere General Morales' memory, as all do. But I opposed him. In fact, I have a bullet remaining in my leg from having fought against him in his last revolution. So that in all amiability I differ in my views. Persons who assist in armed revolt against the government—"

Señor O'Donoju shrugged.

"Let us not be political. General Morales' memoirs discuss the revolutions in which he engaged, in detail. Designed, as history, to be published fifty years after his death, they are explicit. They describe all plans, all details, and the treacheries leading to all failures. They name persons who are not officially known to the government as having

assisted him. And as history, all this is admirable. But as contemporary literature, it would be fatal to men who trusted him."

The consul-general regarded his cigar for a moment.

"It is true," he admitted. "One would wish—"

"One would wish such memoirs to be preserved for posterity," said Señor O'Donoju, "but not revealed as yet. Is it not so?"

"*Exactamente,*" agreed the consul-general. "To revive such matters—"

"Would be excuse for confiscations and shootings," observed Señor O'Donoju, "which might be profitable to members of the government, but not especially honorable in the persons who brought them about. And therefore, since my friend's son was in great need of money, I purchased General Morales' memoirs from him."

"I congratulate you! As a matter of history—"

"It is a matter of my friend's honor," said Señor O'Donoju very quietly. "Alfredo Morales demanded that I, as his father's friend, pay more for them than would you, as the representative of the government which exiled his father. That I pay more to preserve the faith of my friend than the government would pay for excuse to ruin and kill certain honorable men. But I paid it—for the papers written by General Morales with his own hand, to be a part of the history of our country."

The consul-general looked acutely uncomfortable.

"**B**UT having paid," said Señor O'Donoju, more quietly still, "I did not receive them. Until now I learn that Alfredo Morales, having received money from me, then sold the manuscript to you. So that the honor of my friend—in the possession of his memoirs—is in your hands."

The consul-general moved uneasily in his chair.

"*Amigo mio—*"

"The manuscript is mine," said Señor O'Donoju gently. "In law and in honor, it belongs to me. You have it. I ask you to surrender it to me."

The consul-general regarded his cigar unhappily.

"Señor O'Donoju," he said uncomfortably, "I admit all that you say. But I am an official of our nation. I have received orders. I have carried them out.

I have paid money belonging to the republic—"

"I will repay you," said Señor O'Donoju steadily, "even what you paid to my friend's son for the honor of his father."

The consul-general pressed a button on his desk. There was a slight stirring in the outer office. The door cracked open.

"I repeat," said the consul-general, more firmly, "that I am an official of our government. I have General Morales' memoirs. *Si.* They are there, in that package already sealed with the diplomatic seal to be forwarded. And after all, Señor O'Donoju, it is to you but solicitude for the wishes of a friend—"

"For the honor of a friend," said Señor O'Donoju. "That parcel—if that is it—means the impoverishment, the exile, the death of men who trusted my friend. Unless you surrender it. And I ask you to surrender it. I am its owner by every consideration of law and honesty. I make formal demand upon you for my property."

SLOWLY the door opened a bit wider. The consul-general nodded. The door opened fully. The male clerk of the anteroom stood in the opening, his hand in his pocket.

The consul-general rose.

"Señor O'Donoju," he said painfully, "I regret what I am required to say. I have been ordered to secure General Morales' memoirs, and I have them. I have been ordered to forward them to our government. The consequences of my obedience I deplore, and I sympathize deeply—"

"Then give me my property," said Señor O'Donoju calmly.

"But while I accept your word,—indeed I believe you,—I cannot yield. And I inform you, señor, that this consulate is by law the territory of our nation. It is foreign soil here. No legal demand can enter here. And my clerk and myself are armed—"

Señor O'Donoju painstakingly knocked off the ash from his cigar.

"I have but one other reason to offer," he observed. "May I show it to you, señor?"

He pressed the stud of his traveling-bag. It opened. Señor O'Donoju rose, presenting the opened bag for inspection.

"I have," he said gently, "eighteen sticks of dynamite here. I am much concerned for the honor of my old friend

General Morales. If I should drop this bag, the explosion will destroy this office and its contents—which will assuredly include the memoirs General Morales' honor requires should not yet be published, lest those who helped him should suffer. I mention that a struggle with me, or even if I should be shot dead here upon soil which is legally that of our own country, would result in such an explosion."

He paused. The consul-general turned white. Instinctively he flinched.

"Pero, Señor O'Donoju," he said with but a trace of unsteadiness, "I cannot believe you would be so reckless, so murderous—"

Señor O'Donoju closed the bag carefully.

"I offer my word of honor," he said calmly, "that either I leave here with my property, or with my property destroyed. The General Morales, señor, was my friend."

There was a gulping noise at the door. The clerk there was ashen. Señor O'Donoju picked up his ivory-handled stick. He settled his hat upon his head at the angle made necessary by long custom. He walked across the office to the table on which the sealed parcel reposed. He scratched at the paper with his finger-nail and glanced at what the tear exposed. He tucked the parcel under his arm.

"Señor O'Donoju," said the consul-general in a strained voice, "the local police will be notified. And your government will resent this! Exile is the least—"

"*Naturalmente,*" agreed Señor O'Donoju calmly. "But I have but recovered property legally mine. And as for exile—"

He shrugged before he smiled, in the act of passing out the door. The sickly-faced clerk drew back in horror before him.

Señor O'Donoju bowed politely and went through the outer doorway. He was small, erect, prosperous of appearance. He looked strange, carrying not only a traveling-bag, but a paper-wrapped parcel and an ivory-headed stick.

A MONSTER dump-truck clawed its way up a steep ramp and into the street. It rolled away. There was a sudden dull concussion below. Blasting, of course.

There were limousines and delivery-trucks in the street, and sedans and taxi-

cabs and all the other varieties of wheeled traffic in Manhattan.

A taxicab stopped before a gray-painted wooden structure. Señor O'Donoju alighted, carrying only a traveling-bag and his cane. He paid the chauffeur and walked quietly to the ramp. He entered it, and a voice bellowed hoarsely; "Hey! No admittance! Y'can't—" But the shock-headed junior architect in charge wrung Señor O'Donoju's hand and then mopped his forehead—which was not at all warm.

"I—was worried, sir," he said shakily. "If anything had happened to you, sir, Paula—"

"I have returned what I borrowed," said Señor O'Donoju somewhat severely. "I would be obliged if you would put it in its proper place. And if you can spare a moment afterward—"

THE young man hurried away. He came back again with the empty bag. He was still more than a little pale.

"I—worried, sir," he repeated. "If the stuff had gone off, Paula would have been heartbroken, and she'd have blamed me—"

Señor O'Donoju said calmly;

"I took it to an office where I had business, and then to a bank, where I placed something in a safe-deposit box. Then I returned. It never left my hands. You had no reason to fear."

"But I—did, sir. If I'd gone along, I wouldn't have been bothered so much. Next time, sir, please—"

Señor O'Donoju smiled. It was a warm smile. A friendly one. He reached out and touched the young man's shoulder.

"*Bueno!* Now I seem to recall that you wished to ask a favor of me and that I put you off. But what was it?"

The young man, stumbling and somewhat absurd, told him in a sweating earnestness. And Señor O'Donoju smilingly granted the favor—which was permission for a hypocritical pretense that Paula had not, previously, but now would consent to marry Mr. Edward Hardwick.

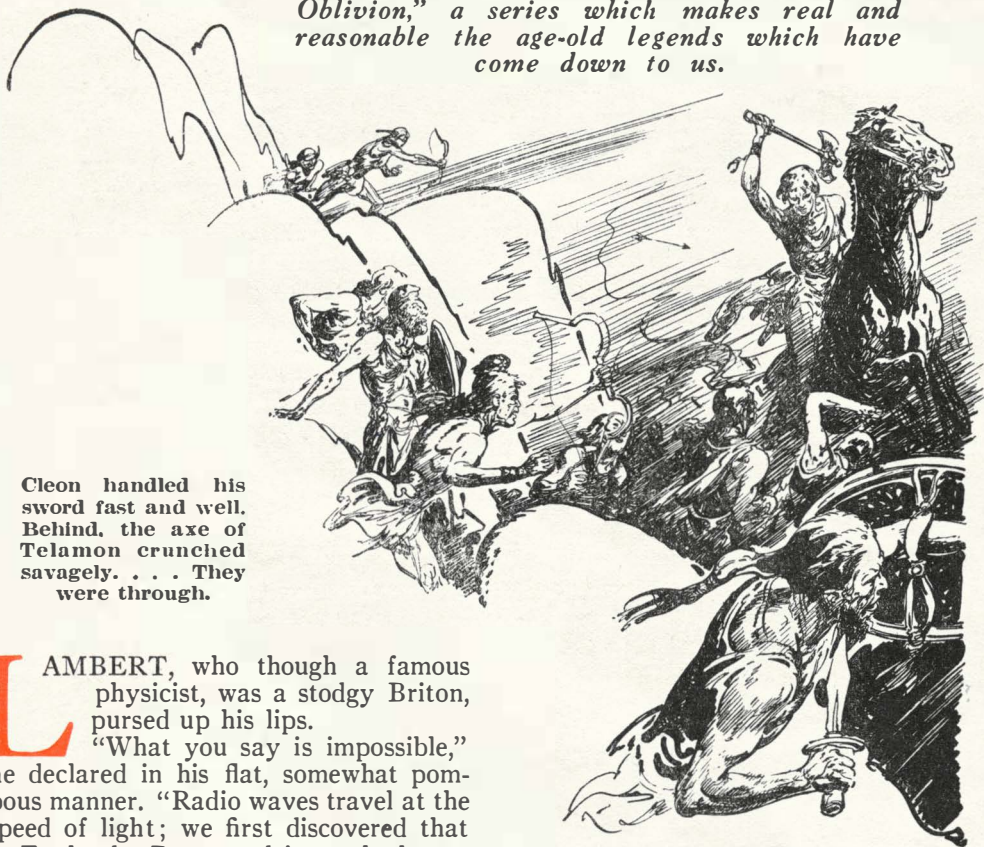
"And believe me, sir," said the young man, gratefully, "we'll be much more than friends—"

But Señor O'Donoju shook his head as he interjected:

"Oh, no! I have spoken of my friend General Morales. If we are such friends as he and I once were, that will be enough."

Amazon Woman

A valiant figure, this warrior of a girl who dominates the fifth story in "Trumpets from Oblivion," a series which makes real and reasonable the age-old legends which have come down to us.



Cleon handled his sword fast and well. Behind, the axe of Telamon crunched savagely. . . . They were through.

LAMBERT, who though a famous physicist, was a stodgy Briton, pursed up his lips.

"What you say is impossible," he declared in his flat, somewhat pompous manner. "Radio waves travel at the speed of light; we first discovered that in England. But sound is much slower. Therefore your statement is impossible."

"Norman Fletcher has made it possible," I rejoined. He waved his hand.

"He may be a great scientist here in America; we never heard of him in England. You say he recaptures sound and light from the past, and recreates scenes, such as the death of Cleopatra. That may be theoretically possible, or to recreate her voice; but not both at once. No, my dear fellow. It's impossible."

So was Lambert; but he was a famous man just the same, and an honored guest in our city. I abandoned the argument.

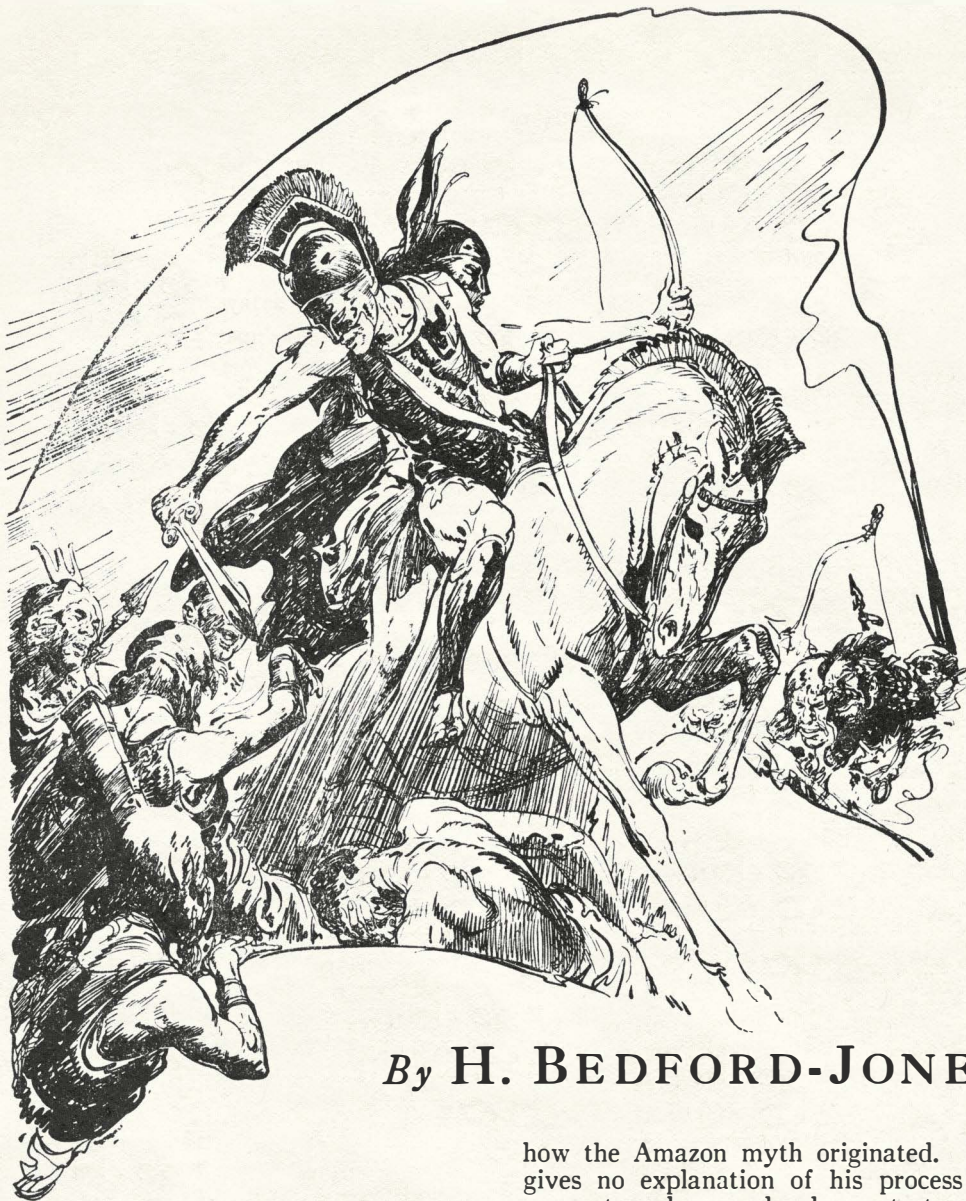
"What," I asked, "is your theory regarding the origin of the Amazon myth? You know, the fighting women who had nothing to do with men. The Amazon River got its name because a tribe of some such females was supposed to inhabit its territory."

Lambert regarded me with his steady, slightly unpleasant look.

"I have no theory," he said placidly. "No one could have any theory. The myth of the Amazons goes back beyond known history. Doubtless there was such a tribe of women in ancient Greece or Asia Minor."

"Norman Fletcher," I said (and he frowned at the name), "believes that all these legends are founded upon fact of some sort. With his apparatus, which has something to do with his ultrasonic wave experiments, he has succeeded in bringing back scenes from the dim past, showing the origin of such beliefs and myths. A sort of television,—though he denies it is that,—from thousands of years ago."

Lambert smiled tolerantly. "My word, you Americans are gullible! Any such



By H. BEDFORD-JONES

trickery can be readily exposed and explained, you know."

"Wait," I exclaimed. "Whether you know of his work or not, Fletcher is famous for his electrical and radio discoveries. He's no trickster, but a modern wizard of the first water. An old man, wealthy. For years his laboratories have been maintained by the Pan-American Electric Corporation; he's the genius behind their remarkable innovations."

"And he performs the impossible?" queried Lambert, with a sniff.

"You came here," I said, "to address our Inventors' Club tomorrow. Fletcher has done our same group the honor to demonstrate his discoveries, week by week. Tonight, as it happens, he's invited us to witness his demonstration of

how the Amazon myth originated. He gives no explanation of his process or apparatus; he merely demonstrates. I have his permission to bring a guest at any time. Will you go?"

Lambert was stubborn, but no fool. He knew about the Pan-American Electric, though he had not known that Norman Fletcher was the amazing genius behind that corporation. When he found I was serious, he accepted the invitation eagerly.

WE were to assemble at Fletcher's house, or rather his laboratory and estate outside town, after dinner. Our Inventors' Club contained a number of really remarkable men, in various lines. Yet none of us had fully decided whether Norman Fletcher was displaying to us some marvelous scientific apparatus of the future, or putting something over on us in the way of illusion.



I did not tell Lambert this, of course. I never tell a cocksure man anything more than I must. And I had a sneaking idea that perhaps he, who was Fletcher's superior as a recognized scientist, might somehow pierce to the secret of those amazing demonstrations.

I motored out with my guest, and the other members of the club met us at Fletcher's big stone mansion. The butler explained that Norman Fletcher had not yet returned from dinner with friends; meantime, we were to make ourselves comfortable in the laboratory. So, with his excellent cigars and easy chairs, we did.

Lambert was, of course, the lion of our little hour. One or two of my friends got me aside, found that our host was unaware of his presence, and grinned delightedly. They had the same thought I did. If there was really any trickery, Lambert would see through it; and he was not the kind to yield to illusion.

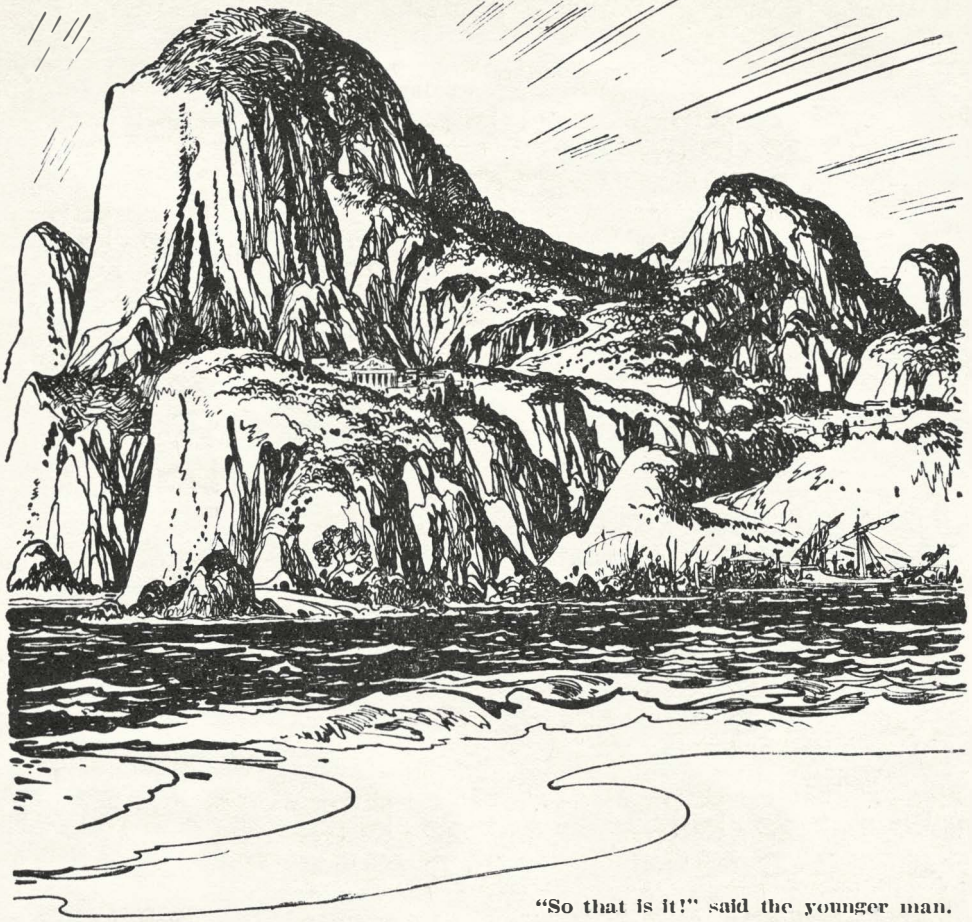
Still, these suspicions appeared ungenerous and unworthy, when old Norman

Fletcher did walk in. His erect, white-haired presence was magnetic. He met Lambert with unfeigned delight; he had, he said, arranged to meet Lambert next day and take him over the laboratories, but this prior arrival was unexpected. His warmth thawed even the cold Briton.

LIGHTING a cigar, Fletcher took his seat at the controls, which resembled the manual of an organ. He touched a key or two, the room-lights sank low, and he smiled at us as he said:

"Gentlemen, our subject for tonight is the Amazon myth; and while the tubes are warming, I might say that this is one of the most consistently patterned of all myths. It is always the same: A country of warrior women, who expose one breast, who avoid all men, and are hostile to strangers. We find it alike in Asia, Africa, South America, elsewhere. The queen of the Amazons appears in the *Iliad*. What is remarkable about it?"

"The very consistency you just mentioned," said some one.



"So that is it!" said the younger man.

"Right," agreed Norman Fletcher, smiling. "Alike everywhere. This might well argue a single remote origin of the legend, perhaps about the year 2000 B.C., to venture a guess. Handed on by one race or nation to another, the legend remained within its fixed grooves—why? Because it was logical, true, and lay so far in the past that it had no cause to change. New Amazon countries were discovered or imagined, and they kept the same attributes of the old myth."

"Which began—where?" I demanded.

"In Asia Minor. In the empire of the Hittites, that Mongolian race whose rule extended from the Aegean to the Euphrates, at the close of the Bronze Age. The race that fought Egypt bitterly. Only within recent years has its story been exhumed from the dead past, by Sayce or other scholars—"

Norman Fletcher paused, and became attentive to his controls, as the light came.

Now, our chairs were placed facing a perfectly blank wall of stone. There was no apparatus visible here; it was all

out of the way. This was an outside wall of the laboratory, running straight to the roof twenty feet above; and it was solid stone. I, aware of what was coming, had chosen a seat that gave me a view of Lambert.

THE light, which came apparently from nowhere at all, played on that stone wall. It was no projected ray or beam; it just took shape and grew. As it grew, the solid stone was dissolved.

No other words can express it. Where had been stone, was now a window upon the past. Not an actual opening, for outside was black night; yet through this wall we were looking upon sunlight and blue sea, and a rocky coast. Now came Norman Fletcher's voice again.

"The coast of Asiatic Turkey, on the Black Sea, near the ancient ruins of a forgotten city that the Turks call Boghaz Keui—"

His voice died away, drowned out by the steady monotonous slapping of waves under a boat's prow. The light increased; the coast grew, and became plainer. A



river-mouth opened, a settlement and wharves clustered about it, and looming above it a hill, with more hills beyond. This one was topped by buildings, groves, shrines, until it was a thing of gleaming beauty in the sunlight.

The boat was a long, low Greek galley, thrusting ahead with its one square sail. The crew clustered in the benches or astern. Two men stood in the bow, one old, one young, staring at the hill and the wharves and settlement ahead.

"So that is it!" said the younger man.

The older laughed.

"No, far from it, Cleon! Merely the outpost, the sentinel to keep off intruders. This way your brother passed, five years ago. He stood with me as you stand now, and swore he would enter this land or die. He did not die—that I know; yet he vanished."

"And I'll learn his fate, or rescue him. Five years! He must be dead, Dion;

yet I'll follow him. To me, he was all the world—a demigod and more. I've waited these five years to get here with you; I've crossed the seas; I've worked up with the trading-company; now I'm here."

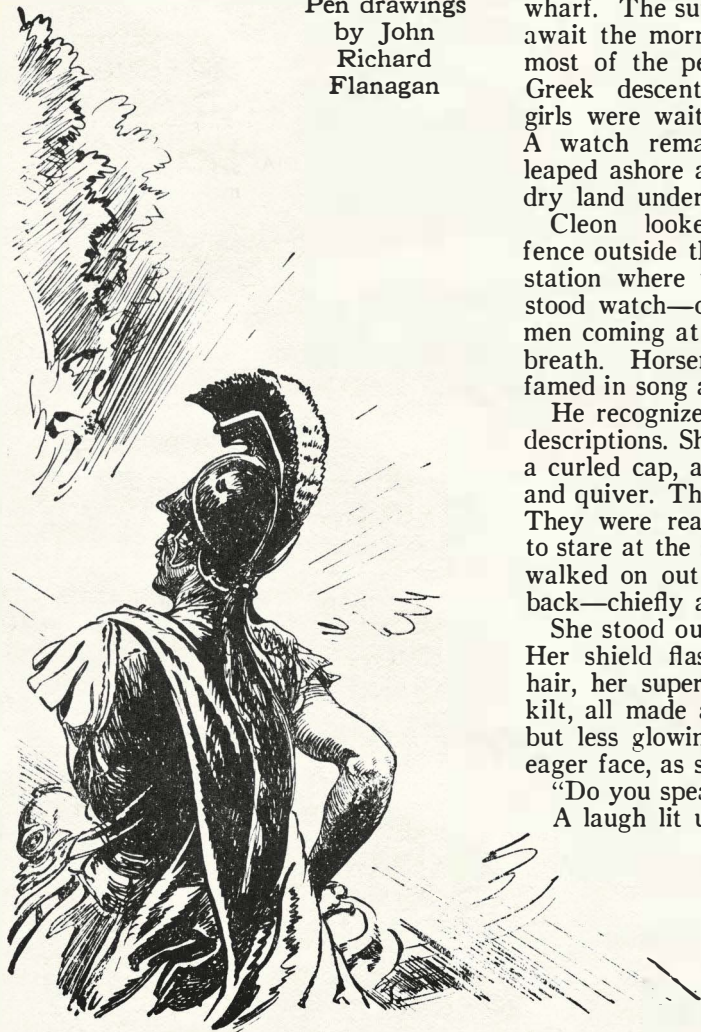
"And your ambition will prove a hollow mockery. You'll learn nothing."

Cleon's brows drew down. For so young a man, he had a heavy, straight, intent look, such as comes to one who has a long while followed a single purpose and one ambition.

"We'll see about that. Here comes a boat out to meet us. —Ho, men! In sail!"

They were just off the river mouth, with its miserable collection of huts and makeshift dwellings, wharves and sheds. Only the hill, with its groves and temples, hinted that the tales of a glorious city back from the shore might be true, and a more glorious country beyond, a country of which minstrels sang, but which no man of Greece had seen.

Pen drawings
by John
Richard
Flanagan



To the old shipmaster Dion, to all these other Greeks, this was no more than a trading-voyage, on company business. To Cleon, it was merely a means to an end. Here was the land of mystery and terror, the land ruled by fighting women, the empire that had planted colonies at Ephesus and elsewhere: and to enter it was death! To pass the limits allotted to traders, was death. But his brother had passed; and Cleon meant to pass.

A small-boat put out from shore, ran alongside, and two men came aboard. One was an olive-skinned, slant-eyed man with long hair twisted in a tail; the other acted as interpreter. Where from? Corinth. The Island Trading Company. Pass and papers? Dion produced them. Good. Take the wharf straight ahead; when the galley is empty, draw her up on the shore for calking and scraping.

The small-boat saw them in to the wharf. The sun was low; business could await the morrow. Here in the hamlet most of the people were Greeks, or of Greek descent. Wineshops beckoned; girls were waiting with flower-garlands. A watch remaining aboard, all hands leaped ashore and thanked the gods for dry land underfoot again.

Cleon looked farther—beyond the fence outside the hamlet, and the guard station where the little slant-eyed men stood watch—on to half a dozen horsemen coming at a gallop. He caught his breath. Horsemen? No! The women famed in song and story, the Amazons!

He recognized them instantly, by the descriptions. Short kilts, one breast bare, a curled cap, a half-moon shield, a bow and quiver. They were there, in the life! They were real, reining in their horses to stare at the ship, to stare at him. He walked on out to the fence, and stared back—chiefly at the flame-haired girl.

She stood out from the rest instantly. Her shield flashed gold. Her red-gold hair, her superb white steed, her white kilt, all made a glowing spot of color—but less glowing than her eyes and her eager face, as she urged her horse closer.

"Do you speak our tongue?" he asked. A laugh lit up her face.

She broke out earnestly:
"You must go back now, at once, while there's time! If you go farther, it means death. Go back!"

"Why not? Did you come on the ship? From far Crete?"

"Not quite so far," said he. "Ah, goddess! You are very beautiful; I think your beauty must come from heaven! Where will you be at moonrise tonight?"

"At moonrise?" Surprised, she gestured toward the hill. "I'm on guard until then, serving the goddess. We go back to the city after moonrise."

"Good! An hour after moonrise, come along the road that leads up the river—



Cleon had heard of Amazons; now he had met one who transcended all others.

say, a mile from here," he blurted out impulsively. "I want to talk with you. I want to know you, and—"

She shrank. "You fool! You madman! They'll kill you! Do no such thing. Why, you must be insane!"

All this poured out of her in one hot breath. Then her companions urged their horses around, laughing, and the whole group went tearing off at a wild gallop. Cleon stared after them, until Dion and others dragged him away.

Now everyone crowded into the wine-shops, eating, drinking, bragging and brawling as pockets emptied; but he, the yellow-haired Greek, drank alone; and ate and drank again. He was first officer of the galley and looked it, wide in shoulder and jaw, with command in his eye, a reckless kill-devil twist to his lips, and corded muscles in arms and wrists.

As he sat, queer thoughts rioted in him. His driving ambition suddenly had two objectives instead of one. He had heard much of the Amazons, who ruled all this empire of mystery in the east; those glorious fighting women, under

whom the queer slant-eyed men were said to be slaves and serfs. Other seamen had heard of them, had seen them in the flesh, and around them had grown up many fantastic legends. Cleon was inclined to doubt many of these yarns.

Now he had visioned one who transcended all the others. In his heart he felt that she had been drawn to him; in her eyes had leaped a kindling eager welcome. Despite the dismay and shrinking and hot words, she would keep the rendezvous tonight; he was sure of it. But would he? There lay the question. It startled him, wakened him, put his brain to work. He began to ask questions of those around, to listen, to observe.

"Carelessness is the thief of success," his idolized brother had been wont to say. He remembered this. He was careful, now, most careful. He did not let even Dion guess what he intended to do this night.

THE moon was behind a cloud-bank when he quietly slipped out of the wineshop. He had his bronze Cretan sword, a long, leaf-shaped weapon, razor keen; his helmet, sandals, purple robe, a pouch with money. Nothing else, for the conquest of a realm of mystery, except the head so proudly and masterfully set between his shoulders.

In the open he paused. From the hamlet, he knew, a road disappeared up the valley beside the river; a road rumored to go to the enchanted, unknown city of mystery somewhere close among the hills. But at the village barrier the squat, ugly guards watched by day and night. Cleon turned his back on the road and the barrier, and went down to the shore and the fishing craft, where there were no guards.

Hittites, these slant-eyed warriors with double-faced axes. In their eyes it was unthinkable that any stranger should deliberately court death by passing inland; they were posted to keep back fools and drunken men. So, as Cleon waded out into the water, there was none to see or care.

He progressed quietly down the shore past the hamlet to where black rocks arose. With some difficulty he landed on the rocks, circled well around hamlet and barrier, and came dripping into the road. Thus simply, the first obstacle was passed. There were, luckily, no dogs about.

The cold water brought reality; to think that the Amazon would keep the

rendezvous struck him as absurd and fantastic. Still, the look in her face, her eyes! He trudged along the cart-track, and found that it curved in under the very side of the templed hill. He halted, and looked up at the groves and shrines. He was now on the side away from the sea. He had plenty of time; the moon was still hidden. Why not take a closer look? The thought persisted.

From the hill was coming music, the clash of bells and cymbals, the sound of women's voices singing in chorus. Guards, in service of the goddess, she had said. What goddess? Cleon was curious; these heathen probably had queer uncivilized deities. He eyed the dark slopes in the starlight, eyed the flaring torches in the upper groves, and abruptly went at the climb. No guards on this side, perhaps.

He encountered no danger, except from thorns; he mounted swiftly, silently, and was surprised by the height which he attained. The brush and trees were thick. Above him loomed a wall. He reached it, found a stout vine, and gained the top. There he crouched, daring no farther, fascinated by the spectacle in the torchlight beyond.

To Greek eyes, accustomed to rude buildings and primitive architecture, the shrines here seemed like veritable homes of the gods—graceful structures, wide porticos, ornaments and columns innumerable. The grove of trees was alight from urns of ruddy fire, showing figures dancing and singing, the music swirling wilder and madder—all women, apparently, with armored figures of Amazons here and there.

Suddenly Cleon became aware that the moon was coming out from behind the clouds. He turned, then halted, staring.

The moon was now in golden flood. And off where he had seen only solid hills, he now beheld something else pricked out by the mellow radiance—something seeming visible only from this very hill. It was the city of mystery, the city that poets named Themiscyra.

NOT far distant, though farther by the roundabout road up the cañon, it stood out distinct and clear like an actual vision of enchantment. Cleon caught his breath; then he understood that those buildings surrounded by hills must be lit up by fires or illuminations; this day, no doubt, was some festival of the unknown goddess. A cluster of magic beauty, dimmed by distance, the white structures rose in lofty grandeur.

Abruptly, he remembered his rendezvous, and started his descent. At once the city was lost to sight, but the memory of it lingered. He realized that sheer good luck had led him to this vision of unseen things, beheld by no other Greek eyes, at a moment and a spot which alone would reveal it.

DOWN in the rough road again, he trudged on until he came to a clump of trees, with clear spaces ahead and behind. Here he waited for a while, listening. Presently he caught the click of a horse's hoofs. Peering forth from shelter, he saw the white steed. She had come! And she was alone.

He stepped out into the moonlight. The horse snorted; the Amazon drew rein for a startled instant, staring. Then she slipped from the saddle, holding her reins.

"So—you were not joking or boasting!" she said in a low, tense voice.

"After I saw you, no," Cleon rejoined. "Surely you must be the queen of these warrior women, these Amazons!"

"Queen? Warrior women?" She looked bewildered, then broke out at him earnestly: "You must go back, now, at once, while there's time! If you go farther, it means death, and worse than death. Go back, do you hear?"

Cleon laughed a little. "I've been too long seeking this road, to go back now. Especially since finding you."

"Oh! You must be daft!" she said with impatient anger. Then she leaned forward, peering intently at him. "Is it possible that you are Cleon?" she asked. "Cleon, the son of Agias?"

Amazement leaped within him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Then you are indeed some goddess, to know me!"

"Don't be absurd; I'm nothing of the kind," she said sharply. "However, suppose you tell me why you came here and why you're so determined to risk death!"

Puzzled, bewildered, Cleon answered: "Five years ago my brother came here, and disappeared seeking the wondrous city that lies beyond the hills, and the Amazons. I have come to find him."

"Ah! I knew it must be so!" she murmured. "You have his look. Even had he never told us about you, I would have known—"

"Then you know him!" Cleon, with sudden comprehension, came close to her, breaking into eager words. "He is alive and well!"

"He is alive," she said, giving him a strange look. "Are you absolutely determined to find him, even if it means death? Think well!"

"I've thought for five years." Cleon laughed softly as he spoke. "Yes."

"Very well." She threw the reins over her arm and turned. "Come along, in among the trees. It's dangerous here; others will be coming. Wait a little, and talk; then we may go ahead safely."

HE assented without question. They threaded their way into the copse; the horse was tied; with a sigh of relief she put off quiver and half-moon shield, and sat beside him, tossing back her long red-gold hair.

"Ah! I've been on duty ten hours; it's good to relax. Well, start at the beginning. My name's Maia; I'm captain of the temple guards, and it's a dog's life. Your brother Telamon is overseer of the slaves in the quarries. He had an eye burned out, a hand and a foot struck off, and went into slavery, when they picked him up exploring the country. We have supervision over the quarries. That is how I know him. It's very simple."

Cleon chilled. His brother, mutilated!

"At least, he's alive."

"It's more than you'll be."

"No matter. I can help him, see him, talk to him. Then, if death comes, what of it! At least, I'll buy it dear: with sight of new things, unknown wonders, the enchanted city of Themiscyra that no man has seen, yet is sung by minstrels afar! To pierce mystery and terror, and then die—well, fate might be worse."

"You're a strange man, but I like you," said Maia. "You can't do these things you talk about, without help. Where will you get it?"

"From you," he said. "I could see that in your eyes, Maia. Ah! Quiet!"

He caught hold of her suddenly, warningly. Voices drifted along the road, with the sounding hoofs of horses. A little company of Amazons appeared and passed by, laughing and jesting. Cleon relaxed, loosed her, and lifted her hand to his lips. She spoke angrily.

"I suppose you think I'm fair game for any foreign seaman?"

"No, my dear, no," Cleon rejoined. "You are a goddess."

She laughed, but her laugh had a harsh and wondering ring.

"Cleon, your head is certainly full of queer ideas! Amazons, for example. Where did you hear such nonsense?"

"Everyone knows it," he said in surprise. "You fighting women, whose queen rules all this country! Seamen have seen you frequently. It's no secret."

She sighed. "Yes, I remember your brother had the same odd fancies. I was doing my first guard service, when they brought him to the quarries. And this enchanted city you mentioned—well, it's real enough. But no Amazons, no queen, no fighting women!"

"What?" He touched her bow and shield. "Why, then, these arms?"

"Cleon, the Hittites rule all this land," she said earnestly. "It's their empire; they have their own rulers—a cruel people. Now, only women may serve the goddess; other gods have priests, but she has only priestesses, temple servants, guards—all women."

"What goddess are you talking about?" he demanded.

The girl gestured impatiently.

"She has many names. The great earth-goddess. Your brother says that in your country she is known as Cybele or Demeter."

"Oh, I see!" murmured Cleon. "And here only women serve her?"

"Precisely. At most times no men are allowed in the groves or temples. Every temple has hundreds of us guards, and after our period of service, we become priestesses. Our duty is to keep out all men. But seamen or foreigners have often seen us on duty. They have taken for granted that we're fighting women, Amazons, that the country all belongs to us. But far from it, far from it!"

Her voice took on bitter accents.

"Ours is no pleasant destiny. Next week, I myself become a temple priestess; we have no choice. It's a high honor to be a priestess, yes. But for some of us who regard virtue and purity as sacred things, it's a frightful, a horrible honor! I can't make you comprehend it all, but I'd prefer death, a thousand times!" Her voice was impassioned, athrob with emotion. "Better death, than such honor!"

"Well, I don't quite understand, but let it pass for the moment," said Cleon. "How can I reach my brother Telamon?"

SHE reached out and took hold of his hand.

"With my help, as you said. With my help, you can aid him to escape, and get away safely with him. I'll give my help—on one condition!"

Cleon kissed her fingers again.

"Granted. Name it."

AMAZON WOMAN

"That you take me with you, away from this land of blood and terror!"

"Done," said he; and his heart sang for joy, and he caught her to him quickly. "Ah, goddess or woman, or both, we belong to each other! I knew it at the first sight of you; my heart told me everything—yes, it's a bargain!"

She kissed him, briefly, and drew back. "Will your men at the ship miss you?"

"They'll say nothing."

"Very well. Tomorrow you'll hide, with your brother. Tomorrow night, you and he and I will seek the seashore again. Come; it's safe now; the moon is sinking."

CLEON understood that behind this attitude of hers was something he did not yet grasp, some background he did not comprehend; but he was content to seek reasons later. Clean with youth and the salt sea air and vigorous heritages, he was far from guessing what depths of Oriental abomination were reached in the worship of the "great goddess" of the Hittite people, a bacchanalian routine destined to plague and debase the world for thousands of years.

The moon was dying in the west. They walked, leading the white horse, gradually climbing along the roadway that followed the river. Ahead, Cleon caught glimpses of the city on the cliffs.

"We go not there, but to the right," said Maia, and spoke bitterly. "We of the temple guards, destined to be priestesses, are barracked separately, near the quarry slaves. We ourselves are no better than serfs; a life of honor and ease and shame, for we are chosen to serve the base appetites of men."

"Yes? I've heard rumors of queer things that take place in these parts," said Cleon. "But I thought men were banished from your temples?"

"Except once a year, at the great feast; but there are other temples." She turned suddenly to him. "Will that sword at your hip cut?"

"It is sharp."

"Good. Cut my leg, here. . . . Cut, I say! I need an excuse to get off duty tomorrow and tomorrow night. I'll say that I fell on a spear-point. Cut!"

He bared the bronze sword, and slashed at her thigh, with a groan. She refused to let him touch the hurt, but mounted and went on, the blood streaming over leg and foot and horse's belly.

Not far at all. The valley showed buildings to the left; these were the bar-

racks of the guards or Amazons, and the stables. She guided him to the right, to the very edge of a great gulf in the rock, and dismounted by a stout pillar that stood alone. In the pillar was a huge metal ring.

"The quarries are here; the slaves are here; your brother is here," she said. "You can reach the quarries only by descending a long ladder. The first length of the ladder is taken up at night, to prevent escape, although all the slaves are mutilated besides. Tear your robe into two strips, and it will be long enough. I can let you down by it. Tomorrow night, I'll let down a rope-ladder. But think well! You can still turn back safely!"

With a laugh, he caught her, kissed her, and faced the gulf. . . .

The robe ripped apart and knotted, he let himself over the edge while she held the makeshift line. Below, he found the rungs of a ladder set in the rock.

"All's well! Until tomorrow night," he said. From above, he heard her call the name of Telamon, repeating it softly, until a reply came from below.

He was on his way down. Voices floated up from the pits in the rock. The noisome odors of unwashed and untended slaves rose rank to spoil the night. Cleon kept on, finding that other ladders joined the first. He came at last to the bottom. Chains clanked dismally, and a hoarse voice said in Greek:

"Who is it? Who are you?"

Cleon turned his face to the moonlight. A gasp, a wild sobbing cry, and fingers gripped him.

"You, you! Cleon, my brother—it can't be true—"

"True, Telamon, true."

They embraced and then went and sat in darkness, torn by emotion, trying to find coherent words; for each of them, talk was hard. Cleon, despite the preparation given him, had found his brother a stranger—a rough, shaggy man who walked with a rude crutch, and who had only one hand, which was fastened by a chain to his one foot. Only the voice was the same as of old.

PRESENTLY tears were past, and cool sanity returned. Cleon related his story by snatches; they consumed bread and wine together and the crippled man fell into soft, wild laughter.

"So you had the same crazy notions, Cleon—aye, all the outside world has them, I know! Amazons. A queen, a

city of mystery and enchantment. Bah! The Amazons are temple guards. The city is a hell of cruelty and luxury. These olive-skinned Hittites are a fierce, inhuman people. Wait till you see how the slaves are treated! But I know this girl Maia. You were lucky to have met her. A noble and glorious woman—"

His voice halted, then went on:

"The noblest woman in all this accursed country. No wonder she shrinks before the fate in store for her, a fate welcomed by most of them as a high honor! It's a rich land, Cleon, wealthy past belief. The cities are filled with riches, crammed with luxury, with vice, with abomination of all kinds. . . . But I see you're worn out. Sleep here, in my own hut; remain here, and be safe. If she comes tomorrow night, there's a good chance after all. By the gods, it seems incredible! If we get a boat, and get away—ha! The very idea makes the brain burst! It's all impossible; but the gods may favor us; and after all, it's best to die trying."

So Cleon slept in the overseer's hut, and wakened not until morning.

With daylight, Cleon remained close hidden, but received shock upon shock, for all was in plain sight. First, his brother, a shaggy crippled monster; then the slaves, from all races, hideously crippled like his brother; then, occasional Hittites who came and went. Fierce men, olive-hued, slant of eye, cruel of hand; he saw cruelties that day to leave him cringing and shaken.

And on the rock of the fringing cliffs, fronting his refuge, he saw cut and carved the figures of temple guards, Amazons, with their kilts and half-moon shields—looking down, and laughing. Symbols, these, of tyranny, oppression and inhumanity past all credence. He heard men talking; and the talk he heard, the mention of things in camp and city, opened his eyes to the Orient.

Adventure, mystery, enchantment, were stripped away; harsh realities remained, to burn the soul and sear the free Greek spirit. Cleon had not known that such things could be; it was his first meeting with the Eastern world, the first encounter of Nordic and Mongol-Asiatic. The Turanian hordes whose empire had gripped all this eastern-stretching land appalled him. The luxury, the vice, the mass abomination, was devastating.

He now saw all that Maia had not been able to tell him—at least, he perceived enough to understand. He saw why she had welcomed his advent, his help, why she chose to risk death with him rather than life here. And when



AMAZON WOMAN

Chains clanked; a hoarse voice said:
"Who is it? Who are you?"



sunset came and his brother Telamon came stumping in with rations of bread and wine, he looked up and shivered.

"Ha!" said Telamon. "I see you've absorbed a thing or two. You look ten years older. Still greedy for what lies over the horizon—adventure, the lure of the unknown?"

"No," broke in Cleon harshly. "Why haven't you escaped before this? Are there guards?"

"None are needed. Where to go, and how? A leg off, or a hand off—the mark of a slave. It means torture if caught. Who'd risk it?"

"Somewhere to go now," said Cleon. And the other nodded.

"Thanks to you. So old Dion's still shipmaster? Will he take us aboard?"

"Can't hope for that," Cleon replied. "The trading-company has an agent aboard; the men will be scattered, the cargo half unloaded. No; we must take some fishing-boat. I saw plenty on the shore, there at the river mouth. Follow the coast to the straits, and go on through to the farther sea—our own sea. Agreed?"

"Aye; then tell our story everywhere!" Telamon grimly exclaimed. "Bring a few ships of our Greeks over here to land and raid, burn, slay—ha! All this silly tale about Amazons has frightened us long enough. We've seen temples with their guardian women by the hundred; we've imagined things, and the yarns have grown to fantastic dimensions. Now that's all ended. These women can't fight. Now we'll go back and tell the truth to the world!"

"And then avenge what they've done to you," added Cleon, kindling to the thought. "What fools we've been! We've always thought that this was the end of the world; now we know better. It goes farther. Even the Cretans, with their navies, never pierced to the truth of these matters. They too believed in the Amazon country. . . . Well, enough of dreams. We must get away before we can do anything. It's time that Maia was here. Can you climb those ladders?"

"With one foot and one hand gone? Not easily."

"Then you can mount on my shoulders. . . . Let's see your chains."

These presented no great difficulty. The hardened Cretan sword hacked through the links, and Telamon was free.

In the darkness they came to the mounting-ladders. Slaves lacking hands or feet could at a pinch rove such paths;

but with an entire length of ladder removed from above, escape was impossible.

Cleon mounted a little way and called. Maia's voice floated down. Satisfied that all was prepared, he descended and got Telamon mounted pickaback, then tackled the climb. It was well that his shoulders were powerful; long before the top was reached, he was gasping under the burden. The final ascent up the loosely swaying rope ladder was pure torture. At the top, he somehow staggered over and came down with a crash, aching and exhausted.

"All's well that ends well," said Telamon, picking himself up with a laugh. "Ha, Maia! Greetings, girl."

SHE joined them in the obscurity, and Cleon clasped her hands. Horses were waiting, and moonrise was quivering in the eastern sky. Only two horses; there must be double riding this night, but Telamon could have one beast to himself.

Then, seeing Telamon unwind a coil of light, strong line from about his waist, Cleon exclaimed sharply:

"So that's why you were so cursed heavy! What's it for?"

Telamon grunted. "Do you think those slaves down below didn't know what was afoot? I had to buy their silence. All they want is to die fighting and killing. I promised to let down this line. It'll help 'em up the ladders, and particularly the rope ladder."

"You know what it means?" broke in the girl, sharply.

"Aye, if a couple of hundred of those poor devils get up, your wondrous city of Themiscyra will taste a little blood and fire this night! It'll distract attention from us, however."

"Well, tie it to the pillar-ring," said Cleon impatiently. "Then I'll give you a boost into the saddle, and we'll be off."

Telamon, who had made fast his line, let it slip down the ladder's length, and Cleon helped him to mount. Then he was up behind the girl, with joyous greeting.

"Bad news," she said, deftly stringing her bow and thrumming the taut gut string. "Some of your drunken seamen had a row with the Hittite guards at the hamlet today. More guards have been sent down; also a guard-post has been established at the narrow bend of the road, above the river. We can't get past them."

"We'll get through them," said Cleon, but his heart sank. With a woman and a helpless cripple, what chance? "Have they horses?"

"No; they're all from the infantry detachments."

"We'll lead. Telamon, you follow. Maia, can you swim?"

"Of course; it's part of our training."

"Then the gods favor us! Lead ahead."

The horses moved on. The moon lifted, and Cleon suppressed a groan. This was the culminating peril, for darkness was their best ally—but there was no help for it. . . .

As they went, he plied Maia with questions about herself, the country, the Hittites. These Turanians were terrible as fighters, but they hated and feared the sea. Their trading cities, down the coast, were strictly warded against all foreigners. Sometimes this duty was left to the female temple guards, the Amazons; it was easy to see how the legend of warrior-women had originated.

Of herself, Maia spoke briefly. She was of the royal race that had ruled here before the Hittites came; she, like all others of that race, was devoted from infancy to the temple service. Another way, as she said bitterly, of obliterating that race.

So, as they talked, they came toward the narrows. From its grip at her saddle, Maia took the double-bladed axe, which was with the bow the particular weapon of the Amazons, and a symbol of the two-headed eagle of the Hittites. She passed it to Telamon.

"Every blow may count," she said briefly. He uttered his harsh laugh.

"Thanks, Maia! Now I'm a man again, as I may prove before the night's out."

"Careful! There they are—"

One look showed Cleon there was no hope of evasion. Cliff on one side, river on the other; in the center of the roadway a score of men camped, on watch, stirring. An officer was striding out to meet the horses.

"Give him your arrow and ride through them," he said to the girl.

THE animals quickened pace. The officer called out angrily. The bowstring twanged; the shaft tumbled him out of the way, a yell went up. Straight in the mass of men plunged the horses, but the Hittites gave no inch. They leaped, stabbed, hurled themselves like madmen at the two beasts.

Cleon handled his sword fast and well. He cut down a man who came leaping in from the side, slashing at another clinging to the horse's neck. Behind Cleon, the axe of Telamon crunched savagely, crunched again as armor gave to his blows. . . . Then they were through, and speeding from the yelling soldiery.

"Hurt?" cried Cleon.

"No; only the cut you gave me last night." Maia gave a laugh, and glanced back. "They're running after us. We've only a couple of miles more to the shore. What then?"

"Avoid the hamlet and make for the rocks north of it," said he promptly. "You and I must swim around for a boat and leave Telamon. We must go softly, quietly, and get off unobserved."

"You expect a lot," she said dryly. Behind them, Telamon grunted approval of the double-bladed axe. They rode on, at speed, until they had to slow the horses lest the Hittite guard ahead take warning. Behind, far outdistanced, the pursuit was still in place, grimly following.

MAIA drew rein abruptly, as another track crossed the road. She slid down. "Loose the horses here, and they may throw off the pursuit."

"I've no crutch, girl," growled Telamon.

"Use me," she panted, with her eager, vibrant laugh.

The horses were stung to headlong gallop down the cross track. The three went on, Cleon and Maia supporting Telamon. They skirted the hamlet, as yet unalarmed, and gained the rocks where Cleon and landed the previous night. In the clear moonlight, the jagged granite was black, the water was black.

"Wait here, brother," said Cleon. "Take care of Maia's bow and shafts. I'll keep my sword. Quick, Maia! No time to waste."

He led the way into the water, and she followed.

The hamlet was asleep. They swam down, turned in, found the sloping beach beneath their feet, and headed for the boats pulled up. Then the shouts of the pursuers alarmed the guard-post at the barrier. Men began to turn out; voices rose; arms clashed. Luckily, their attention was not directed to the beach, but landward.

Cleon flung himself at a stout fishing craft pulled up less far than the others. Maia joined him. Together they tugged

and shoved; the boat moved, slid, took the water. The voices rose more fiercely; a shout pealed up, then another, deeper and hoarser, in the voice of Telamon.

"They've found him!" gasped the girl. "Hurry—oh, hurry!"

A clang of metal, a death-yell, lent force to her words. The whole hamlet was by this time in turmoil and alarm. Cleon was in the boat now, dragging Maia after him, getting out an oar; the mast was still stepped, the sail furled, but there was no time for that now. The boat moved, moved faster, heading for the point of rocks.

Clash and clang of metal again, the deep hoarse shout of defiance, the yelp of dying men, told of the double-bladed axe at work. As they neared the rocks, the clear moonlight made everything mercilessly distinct. Another gasp came from the girl.

"The bow—I forgot! He can't use it!"

He was there, in between two of the jutting rocks where they could get at him only from the front. The axe swung; the harsh voice blared; clash upon clash, as the crowding figures heaved up at him and fell away again under those smashing blows. The boat touched, and Maia, with a leap, was ashore.

Cleon cursed as her leap sent the boat out. Then he had it in again, and followed. Telamon had gained momentary respite. The Hittites had drawn back. A new yell arose from them, a yell of dismay and anger, as the figure of Maia appeared, snatching up bow and quiver. Cleon, sword ready, showed beside her.

"To the boat, brother!" he said sharply, and took the half-moon shield Maia shoved at him. "Quickly!"

Telamon went scrambling, hobbling away. With a new yell and a rush, the Hittites surged forward at the gap in the rocks.

CLEON met them, sword and shield, as they trampled the dead men in the way and came at him. The bronze blade flashed and bit deep; the shield warded off thirsting weapons. They pressed in; a spear-point slid under his shield, but he evaded it and smote the holder where head and shoulders came together. Another slash, a thrust into a darkly evil face, a scream. The dying man caught his leg and pulled him down.

Then, behind him, the bowstring twanged and twanged again. With a ringing thud, the shaft sped home.

Screams sounded; the wave of dark figures was broken. Cleon came to his feet again, meeting the rush of a man who slid in from one side, crashing shield into axe, stabbing with the keen bronze. That man plunged like a diver, but his dive was into the arms of death.

Cleon leaped back beside Maia. "No use!" he panted. "Too many—look!"

Too many, indeed. They were flooding along, weapons glittering in the moonlight. Arrows were flicking around the pair, clashing on the rocks. The bowstring twanged again and yet again, striking death into the massed throng. But next rush would overcome them; already the ring of Hittites was shoving forward.

"Be ready! Run for the boat!" exclaimed Maia, and then lifted her voice in a great shout: "Look! Men of Themiscyra, look at your city! The enemy are in it—look!"

Some turned, looking up the valley. Cries of consternation and fury burst from them; others turned and saw. Every arm was palsied, as they became aware of the lurid light in the sky, the flames leaping from the high doomed city as from some great funeral pyre, lighting the hills and the silvery sky in red ruin.

Maia beside him, Cleon was scrambling for the boat. She was aboard now; Telamon had an oar out in his one hand; with a shove and a leap, Cleon followed the girl and laid hold of another oar.

A Hittite came leaping in pursuit. Maia's bowstring twanged, and he went headlong into the water. Then the boat was sweeping out and out in the moonlight, urged ever farther by the two oars, until she was floating at safe distance on the tideless sea, and Cleon was fumbling at the brown sail.

The canvas rose and filled. Telamon's oar steered her out; the shouting men, the rocks, the hamlet lights, died and merged and were gone. Only the spurning flare of fire from the inland hills told of how these loosed slaves had sought vengeance and found it. Cleon stood beside the girl, his arm around her, their heads etched in the moonlight like the heads on some ancient coin.

THE moonlight faded. The boat vanished; the two heads, the two faces aglow with exultation and high emotion, lingered and then died. The room lights flashed on, and Norman Fletcher, turn-

ing to us once more, picked up his forgotten cigar.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said urbanely. "I think we all know, now, how the legend of Amazons originated?"

I THINK most of us had the same thought. Damn the legend! The whole thing was a contradiction. Some one put it into anxious, irritated words.

"But they got away, Mr. Fletcher! And if they did, then they told the truth about all this mythical country. And that would explode the whole Amazon legend!"

"But they didn't get away, and the legend persisted," said Norman Fletcher, slowly. "That is perfectly obvious, gentlemen. We saw them escape, yes. What became of them? I don't know. I can't tell. They never reached Greece; that is certain, for the legend was never exploded. The Hittite empire disintegrated. By that time, customs had changed; the temple women were no longer armed and attired like the mythical Amazons, and the origin of the legend never became known. We have seen it tonight, actually; unfortunately, we have no proof of it."

"I beg to differ."

My friend Parker, the explorer, who has been everywhere in Asia, stood up.

"I've seen the ruins of that city," he said. "Some day it will be dug up. But I've seen more. On the cliffs flanking those hill-ruins, are ancient carvings, showing women in Amazon garb, with two-headed axes and all. Amazons. Now, that's sober fact. How it got into your story, I don't know. But the carvings are there, and are recorded."

As we filed out, I turned to my guest Lambert, got him into a corner, and put the matter to him.

"Come, let's have it!" I exclaimed. "You saw what happened. If it's some illusion, you'd know it. If the whole thing is the scientific marvel it seems, you'd know that, too. What do you think of it?"

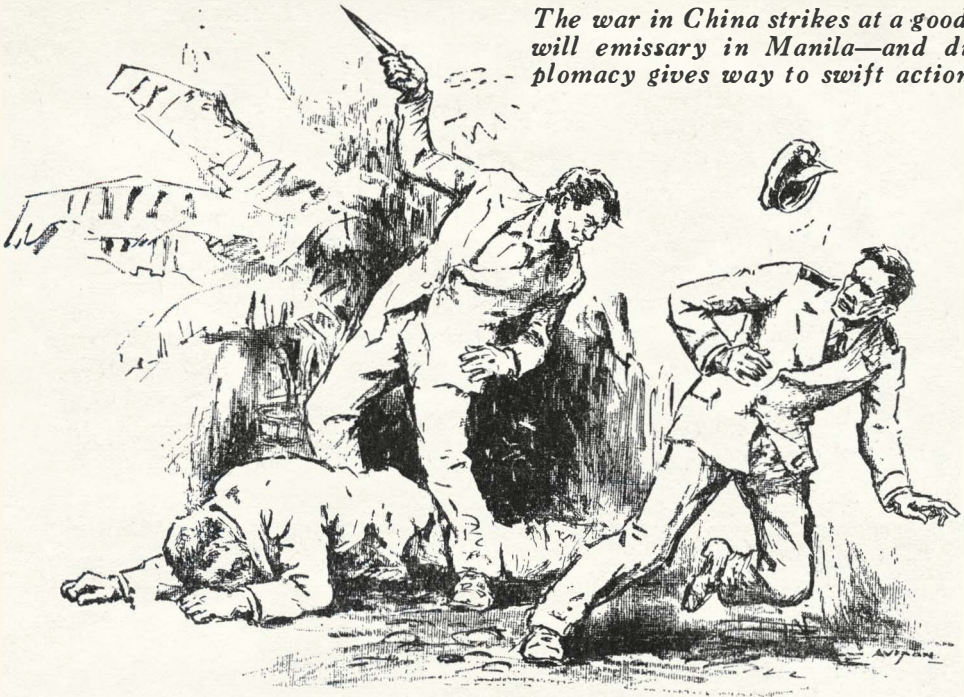
By his look, I saw that the Briton was profoundly disturbed. He gave me a sharp glance, and his firm lips compressed. Then he drew himself up.

"The answer, sir, is very simple," he said in his slightly pompous way. "The whole thing is rankly, utterly impossible! That's all."

Which was, perhaps, as good an answer as any—that he could make.

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

The war in China strikes at a goodwill emissary in Manila—and diplomacy gives way to swift action.



Japanese Sandman

By DAVID NEALE GOLDENSON

Illustrated by George Avison

THEY were a queerly assorted pair, the two Americans sitting in an office of Malacayan Palace in Manila, talking in hushed tones. John Schuyler, the secretary to the Governor General—small, slender, with *pince-nez* perilously perched halfway down his thin nose—rested gingerly on the edge of his chair and looked admiringly across a flat-topped desk at his visitor. Lieutenant Peter Brent, Naval Intelligence—lean and trim in his starched linen uniform, all white with gold at the shoulders—returned his host's gaze.

Schuyler said: "You see, I'm rather new at this sort of thing—only a month. I—I don't want to bother the Governor about something that may prove—" He broke off abruptly and leaned toward the officer. "An important communication is missing."

Peter Brent betrayed no surprise. He said nothing.

"A decoded State Department message I kept locked in this middle drawer," the secretary explained. "The drawer was forced open."

"What was the message?"

"Instructions relative to reception of Prince Hamakuchi of Japan. He's due in Manila tomorrow for an official visit."

"I know."

Schuyler's eyebrows rose. "Why, how did you—the newspapers haven't—" He coughed. "Do you know why?"

"Yes. This is the Prince's first stop on a world tour. He's to be sort of a goodwill ambassador, explaining to the various nations that what Japan desires primarily is to be recognized as the guardian of peace in east Asia." Brent paused. "Do you know the real reason?"

The secretary's eyeglasses almost left his nose. "Real reason?"

"Yes," the officer said flatly. "Prince Hamakuchi, favorite uncle of the Em-



"Death to all Japs!" Gregg screamed.
 "Wipe out the Yellow Peril!"

peror, is Japan's leading pacifist. He has led the fight against military appropriations and has built up such an extensive following that the jingo crowd want him out of the country; this goodwill cruise is just an excuse to get rid of him. There's no other way, what with his being of royal blood and in unusually good standing with the Mikado. Hence this trip for an old man who definitely wants peace and wants to persuade the world that his nation wants it, while the sword-rattlers in Tokio carry on an undeclared war."

Schuyler blinked. "In other words, the Prince is acting as a smoke-screen."

"Right. Unwittingly, the Prince has been detailed as a Japanese 'Sand man,' with the job of lulling the other powers to sleep."

"You seem to know—"

The door opened, admitting a Filipino houseboy. The native, a wiry chocolate-colored young man in white duck jacket and trousers, his feet protected by loose straw sandals, shuffled up to the desk.

"You rang, sir?"

The secretary shook his head. "No, Felipe."

"Pardon, sir." Brent saw the native's gaze sweep the stacks of correspondence on the desk-top. "Thought you did, sir." Felipe turned and moved toward the door.

Schuyler waited for the door to close behind the servant before he withdrew a ring of keys from his pocket. He unlocked the center drawer of his desk, took out a flimsy sheet, and handed it to Brent. "This is a copy of the missing communication. It came yesterday. In code, of course."

Peter Brent read:

Although Prince Hamakuchi's visit to Manila is to be regarded as that of an official representative of his government, the Japanese Foreign Office advises that the Prince requests the omission of all military ceremonies, such as gun salutes, guards of honor, etc. The Prince is traveling with only a civilian retinue. Under no circumstances will armed guards, military or otherwise, be furnished His Highness.

"Social visit, eh?" Brent returned the paper to the desk. He pulled at his left ear. "Wonder if this idealism originated with the Prince or in the pure hearts of the jingoists?"

The smaller man started. "D'you really think—"

Brent shrugged. "It's a moot question. When did you miss this message?"

"This morning, ten o'clock. It was the only thing taken. Nothing else of much importance in the drawer—only routine communications. The lock was sprung. I had a new one put on."

Peter Brent went around behind the desk and looked at the open drawer. "Knife scratches. Not much of a lock, was it?"

"No. Just the ordinary—"

SCHUYLER'S voice stopped; his thin jaw hung open in amazement as he watched the naval officer cross noiselessly to the door. Brent jerked it open.

Felipe stood there. In his hands was a tray holding a pitcher and two glasses. Without a glance at the officer standing in his path, he sidled around him and entered the room.

The secretary shoved the message into the drawer.

Brent watched the native approach the desk. Something in the native's left sandal caught the American's eye.

"Cold lemonade, sir," Felipe said.

"Oh." Schuyler was quite patently puzzled. "Yes. Yes, of course."

As Felipe poured the beverage into the two glasses, Brent resumed his seat.

"Thank you," Schuyler said. "You may leave the rest here."

"Yes sir." The native turned and started away from the desk.

PETER BRENT did not have to leave his chair to trip the servant. Only the officer knew it was no accident. Felipe stumbled and sprawled awkwardly to the floor. In one agile movement, Brent was at his side, offering aid.

"Clumsy of me," he muttered apologetically.

But it was only the officer's left hand that was helpful: his right, bent upon another mission, sped to the native's sandal.

Felipe got to his feet, a flush visible beneath the brown of his face, and strode sullenly out.

Brent stood with his hands clenched. As the door closed, he placed his right hand casually into a pocket and withdrew it, unclenched. He sat down, smiling sheepishly at his host.

"Good boy, that Felipe," Schuyler said, trying to be nonchalant. "No servant problem here." He sipped his drink reminiscently. "In Detroit—"

"How long has Felipe been here?"

"How long? Now, that's a coincidence. Felipe and I came here the same day. He came well recommended, too. Senator Aguilar—"

"Senator Geronimo Aguilar?"

"Yes; you know, the minority leader."

Peter Brent's hand traveled characteristically to his left ear. "I know. Who else has access to your office?"

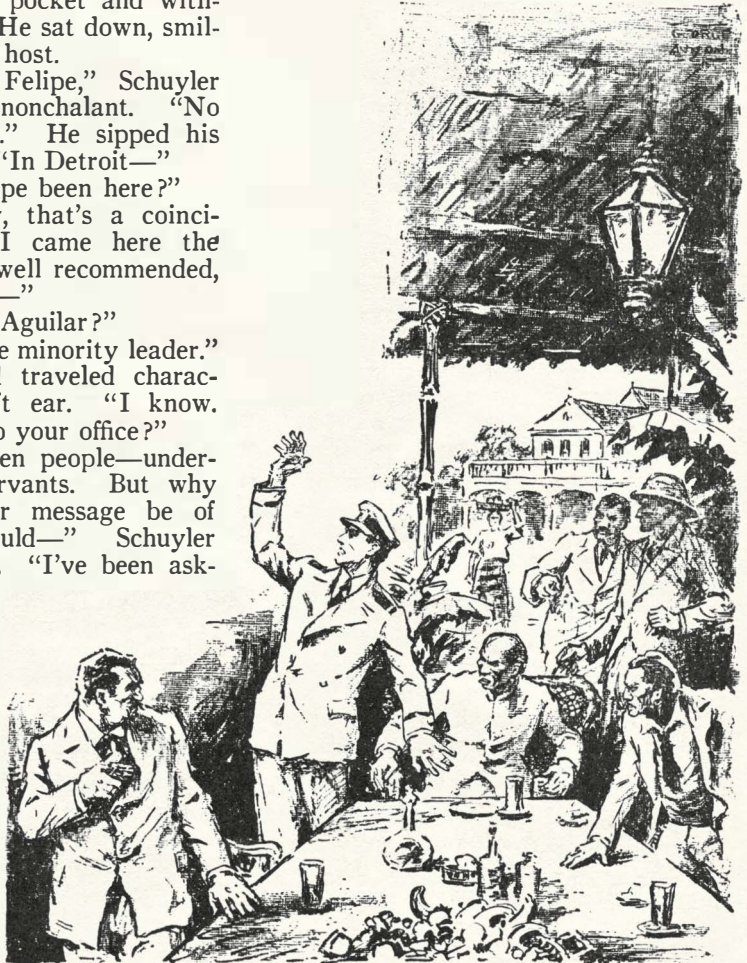
"Any one of a dozen people—under-secretaries, clerks, servants. But why should this particular message be of interest? Why should—" Schuyler shrugged despairingly. "I've been ask-

ing myself those questions all morning. Then I thought of you." The little man's mild eyes suddenly brightened. "I've read the reports of your work with that White Russian plot in Changchun, and with the rebel Nineteenth Route Army in Shanghai."

The naval officer swallowed some lemonade. "I just guessed right."

"Call it that." The secretary smiled approvingly into his caller's forceful gray eyes, set wide apart beneath a high forehead across which fell a stray lock of brown hair. "Your guesses saved American lives. I know your reputation, Lieutenant Brent. That's why I asked you to come here." He paused, plainly embarrassed. "I—I want to make good at this job. . . . Prince Hamakuchi is such an important guest. . . . This missing communication—I'm worried." Schuyler removed his glasses and raised myopic eyes to the officer. "Will you help me?"

"Of course I will." Peter Brent smiled in an effort to quiet the appre-



Peter Brent sprang between the Prince and the balcony. . . . His eyes blazing, Aguilar yanked a short automatic from inside his coat.

hensive secretary. "The message will turn up somewhere, I'm sure." His tone was light, and it had the desired effect: Schuyler's face cleared. Brent went on: "What's planned for the Prince?"

"His ship docks at noon. After tiffin with the Governor, and their talk, the Prince will be guest of honor at a garden-party in the Palace grounds. I have been very careful with the invitation-list. The Prince's ship leaves at six o'clock."

"A short flight for the Dove of Peace. He'll need more time in the other capitals."

"Yes." Schuyler nodded in agreement. "But with no guards—and I don't dare cross the State Department's orders, or the Governor's—"

Brent stood up. "I'll be around—somewhere."

The secretary darted out from behind his desk. "Thank you, Lieutenant. I'll feel better with you here." His hand came out abruptly. "Till tomorrow."

They shook hands. "Right," Peter Brent said. He opened the door, stepped into the broad corridor, and glanced unconcernedly about. He saw nobody, but heard a curious sound: it could have been a loose sandal flapping against a bare foot.

Outside, he emerged from the shade of the Palace veranda into the dazzling Manila afternoon, his brass buttons and gold stripes reflecting the sun's rays as though with a challenge, his lithe frame casting a long shadow upon the velvety green turf. A *calesa* rolled up. Brent looked at the driver and climbed aboard, the open vehicle groaning under his weight. Without waiting for his passenger's directions, the *cochero* took a firmer toe-hold on the dashboard rail and whipped his diminutive horse into a racing start. After six energetic paces the pony slowed down to a lazy *clop-clop*.

ONCE clear of the Palace, Brent took from his pocket a folded flimsy sheet. Carefully spreading it out upon his knees, he read it. It was the missing State Department message, snatched by him from Felipe's sandal.

The Intelligence officer leaned back against the straw matting of the carriage seat. He thought: "Ten to one, the Big Boss has already got the news. Twenty to one, our dumb little brown brother will never suspect me." As the *calesa* rounded the foliage-covered bulk of the Manila Hotel and headed into the Luneta, he said: "Manila in July is no picnic, Ignacio."

The *cochero* moved his head slightly to the right. "Ah, señor," he replied matter-of-factly, "please to observe the palms were never greener." He turned his head a bit more to the right until he could see his passenger out of an eye-corner. "Geronimo Aguilar has a nephew at the Palace."

Lieutenant Brent leaned forward, gazing out to seaward. "Felipe?"

"Felipe."

"Anything else?"

"No, señor."

THE *calesa* came to a squeaking stop before the Army and Navy Club. Brent hopped out and flipped a peso at the *cochero*. Ignacio caught it expertly.

"Who am I, señor," he proclaimed, grinning, and pocketing the coin, "to accept *dinero* from one who has braved the unclean waters of the Pasig to save my life?"

The officer laughed. "It'll be a cold day in—" He stopped as an old woman came up to him, carrying a basket of native sweets and American chewing gum.

"Rice-cakes, señor?" she asked in Tagalog dialect, presenting the basket.

"Yes, Maria," Brent replied in the same tongue. "How is Manuel getting along?"

"Fine, señor, fine." The woman's smile disclosed her few remaining teeth blackened by the betel nut. "But one short year, and he will be a lawyer, thanks to you, señor. It is not every employer that tutors his houseboy. And without your kindness when tuition-money was needed, Manuel would have died a servant." She handed him a rice-cake, making much of the gesture. "Señor," she whispered, "you know of the garden party tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"You will do well to watch one Walter Gregg."

Brent transferred some silver to her palm. "Where did you get this?"

"One hears things, señor."

"Who is Walter Gregg?"

The woman hunched her shoulders. "*Americano*."

Several Army officers sauntered out of the Club, and the sweets-vendor shifted her attention to them. Brent made his way to his rooms. He thought: "I win the first bet."

Presently he was once again in front of the Club, this time in mufti. Ignacio and Maria were gone. He hailed a waiting motorcar.

JAPANESE SANDMAN

"Santa Cruz Plaza," he told the driver.

It was a fast trip. Directing the chauffeur to stop at the Cathedral, Brent got out, overpaid the native to avoid the inevitable wrangling, and waited for the car to disappear around a corner. He crossed the crowded Plaza and entered an establishment identified by a large sign that read: FIGHTING COCK SALOON.

The man he wanted to see stood at the far end of the bar, fanning himself vigorously. Patrick Dunaway, veteran of the insurrection, now proprietor of the Fighting Cock, was a huge man, his once florid face now a leathern color and deeply furrowed by ravaging elements a stranger to the tropics never knows. His thick lips closed over a black misshapen cheroot, while watery eyes seemed to take in everything at once, from customers standing and sitting, to the three bartenders and two cash-registers. He greeted Peter Brent with all the effusiveness a white man can muster in Manila in July. He indicated a corner table, and once seated in what was obviously his special chair, ordered Singapore gin slings.

"Long time no see, Lieutenant."

Brent made short work of the amenities. Then:

"Who is Walter Gregg, Pat?"

"Now, now," the fat man protested, as if by rote. "How should I know? Why not try the Constabulary?"

BRENT did not answer: he merely spread his hands palms upward. A waiter brought bottles and glasses. Patrick Dunaway waited for him to leave their table.

"Sorry, Lieutenant. Should've known better'n to ask *you* any questions." He poured cherry brandy, gin and soda into the glasses. "You didn't ask me none that time down in Iloilo when the *gu-gus* framed me, eh?" He gulped his drink. "Say, I'll never forget—"

"Who's Walter Gregg?"

"Hunh? Oh, that punk? Listen, Lieutenant: you don't want nothin' to do with a egg like that. He's a dope. He'll knife you in the back."

"Where's he from? What's he doing here?"

"Says he's from Frisco, wealthy family, but I say he's lyin'. I say he's on the lam from some rap in the States. Anyway, he lands in the Islands three months ago, gets a job in Mindanao on a hemp plantation—"

"Whose plantation?"

"Aguilar's. Senator Aguilar's. This punk's down there six-seven weeks, and he grabs off somethin' like four thousand pesos. The Japs down there—lots of 'em around Davao Gulf—want to send him up for all they can get on him, but somethin' happened. Aguilar says all of a sudden no, not to send the *Americano* up. Next thing Gregg shows in Manila, drunk all the time and shootin' off his trap against the Japs. I say he's crazy."

"How does he live?"

DUNAWAY moved his massive shoulders. "Search me. This Gregg don't do a thing but drink and—say, you wanna see him?"

The officer nodded. With much wheezing, Dunaway got to his feet and waddled toward a rear door, Brent at his side. In a small back room the Intelligence officer saw a young American seated at a table with an excessively rouged *mestiza*. Walter Gregg's thin and haggard cheeks burned with an unnatural glow; his eyes, at once bright and glassy, stared fixedly at a green drink held in agitated fingers; his dilated nostrils, his moist red lips twitched ceaselessly. Peter Brent indicated to his ponderous friend that he had seen enough. They returned to the barroom.

"Cocaine," Brent said evenly.

Dunaway put his fan back to work. "I told you he was a dope."

"Where does he live?"

"In a room on Calle Real in the Walled City, upstairs of Ah Whan's joint. It's a dump."

"You've been there?"

"On business. Now an' then the punk forgets about his bills."

Brent pulled his left ear. "How's his credit now?"

"It's shot. I really ought to throw him out—"

"Don't, Pat. Carry him on the cuff a little longer—till after tomorrow, anyway. I'll stand good."

The fat man stared at his countryman. "What's the idea, Lieutenant?"

"Give Gregg what he wants. He'll probably leave here soon." Brent seemed to be thinking aloud. "I'm pretty sure he will. I'll have a little talk with him. You get him back here in the morning. Keep him here. It'll be a big help."

"Sa-ay, I aint gonna wet-nurse that hop-head."

"It's important, Pat. Very important. I'm beginning to catch on."

The palm-leaf fan moved faster. "Catch on?"

"Pat, a drunk's aim isn't any too accurate. I'll be back in the morning; you have him here."

"Aim? What is this—"

But Peter Brent was already halfway across the room. He turned and waved at his friend, certain in the knowledge that his request would be heeded.

As he stepped out onto the Plaza, he saw that the traffic had thickened—trolleys, motors, *calesas* moving with the perceptibly quickened pace that comes in the coolness of approaching twilight. In the western sky he marked how the last rays of the sun had spread a variegated panoply over the rugged outline of Mariveles. The thin straight line that was Peter Brent's mouth twisted into an ironic slant. He must not fail. Should this guess go wrong, Manila's next sunset might usher in a grave diplomatic crisis.

Peter Brent walked briskly in the direction of the Walled City.

SHORTLY after noon next day, at a singularly simple ceremony on the Nippon Lines dock, John Schuyler stood meekly at the Governor General's elbow as his chief welcomed Prince Hamakuchi to Manila. Looking diffidently about him, the little secretary read into every strange face direful threats. He was certain that this quiet greeting was in reality only the hush that is a precursor of disaster.

Just then an escape-valve abaft the great liner's stack shot out a jet of steam with a tremendous roar. Schuyler's heart went into a power dive; his hands moved in a quick birdlike gesture to his eyes to shield the mental picture of the kimono-clad Prince lying mortally wounded on the pier. He looked at the royal visitor and saw him chatting amiably with the Governor. Schuyler felt foolish for his fears. . . . Still, Lieutenant Brent should have been at the dock. He had promised to be there.

The Governor led his guest along the pier to where the official motorcars were waiting. Schuyler followed. His lips moved in conversation with the Prince's lone aide, a dapper young Japanese, but his thoughts were elsewhere. They were troubled thoughts, dwelling unhappily upon the risk involved in this unguarded procession. If only Brent were here—he at least could offer some measure of protection.

Schuyler watched the Governor and Prince Hamakuchi enter the leading automobile. He was about to escort the aide to the second car, when he saw some one climb into its tonneau and signal to him. Politely indicating that the aide accompany the Governor and the Prince, Schuyler helped him into the first auto, closed the door, nodded to the chauffeur, and quickly made his way to the second machine.

"W-why, Lieutenant Brent," he said to the man who had signaled, "where've you—why weren't you on the dock?"

The leading car moved off. Brent said: "Hop in." Schuyler sank wearily into the seat beside the Intelligence officer. Their auto started.

"You've no idea how glad I am to see you."

"Did you get my message?" Brent asked.

"Yes. But I—I don't understand. Felipe's my best boy. I'll have a number of things for him to do."

Brent chose to ignore Schuyler's statement.

"Will you be at the main tiffin?"

"No. It's for the Governor and the Prince only. I'm to eat with the aide."

"Good. You're entertaining another guest. Me."

"W-why—uh—that's fine." The little man flashed Brent an uneasy glance. "Now, about Felipe—"

"You will not call on Felipe for any special duties," Brent cut in emphatically. "Let him go about his own business."

"You can't—" Schuyler reddened. "See here, Brent, something's wrong. What is it?"

THEY were passing through the Escolta. Peter Brent let his gaze wander from an American-looking building set incongruously among frame structures with jalousies lining canopied balconies, to a mud-caked carabao-drawn cart, back to the tremulous man next to him. He hesitated, debating whether Schuyler could bear the shock of what he had to tell.

"Tell me," Schuyler insisted, his voice quavering.

"Prince Hamakuchi's life is in danger," Brent said briefly.

The little man's eyes seemed to go back into his head.

"W-what!"

"An American named Gregg is going to shoot the Prince at the garden-party."

"H-how d'you know—"

"Gregg told me."

"Good heavens!" Schuyler's eyes snapped in the direction of the car ahead. "We've got to stop—"

"Steady." Brent placed a restraining hand on the other's arm. "We're not to stop anything."

"B-but think what this means: an American killing a Japanese prince in an American reservation."

"I know exactly what it means," the Intelligence officer said smoothly. "If Prince Hamakuchi is assassinated, it would be a sure-fire incident for the war-dogs."

FOR a long moment the secretary looked searchingly at the tall man next to him. He sighed. "I understand, Lieutenant. You've already caught this Walter Gregg."

Peter Brent shook his head. "No. The garden-party goes on with Walter Gregg."

"Great Scott, man! D'you realize—" The panic-stricken Schuyler half-rose in his seat, and was jerked back by Brent.

"Sorry," the officer said. "Now listen to me: calling off the garden-party or putting Gregg in jail beforehand won't help matters any. There's more behind this murderous scheme—queer angles I've been working on for some time—"

"B-but the Prince—"

Peter Brent's eyes stopped the little man. "Get this, Schuyler: Gregg is merely a tool of somebody higher up. Uncle Sam wants that somebody."

Schuyler's face worked. "Who?"

"An enemy, and a devilishly clever one. But this time—" Brent saw the leading car enter the Palace driveway. He added hastily: "Remember about Felipe."

Their auto, slowed to a stop. Schuyler wet his lips.

"Felipe? Oh, yes. What's he—who's the leader—"

Brent brushed by the secretary on his way to the door of the car. "You'll be surprised," he whispered. . . .

Tiffin proved to be a delightful affair for Peter Brent. Unfortunately, he was the only one of the three at table who appeared to enjoy himself. Schuyler sat timorously in his chair, fearful of the formidable afternoon in store. The Prince's aide, when introduced to Brent, was, in Japanese fashion, most polite. When he inquired of the tall American, "Are you not the Lieutenant Brent of



Gregg reeled, and toppled from the balcony.

the Navy?" and the reply was a smiling "Yes," he stiffened. And when he said, "You spent twelve months in Tokio?" to which Brent retorted, "Eighteen months," the jaunty Japanese froze.

Throughout the meal Brent kept a sharp lookout for a glimpse of Felipe, but the Filipino was not to be seen.

AT four o'clock Felipe entered the shaded dining-room and shuffled up to Schuyler.

"The guests are arriving, sir."

The secretary pushed back his chair. Felipe left the room. Brent thought: "That second bet is still doubtful."

The three men stood up. Brent caught Schuyler's eyes. The two Americans lagged a bit behind.

The Intelligence officer bent his head. He said: "Take me to the center balcony overlooking the garden."

Schuyler nodded nervously. Through the open door he saw that the aide had joined the Prince and the Governor in the corridor. He beckoned to the officer and led him through a side door and up a flight of stairs into a large room, obviously a library. Venetian blinds covered three pairs of high glass doors. Brent crossed over to the center doors, opened them, and stepped out onto a small fern-shaded balcony above the garden. Below him a group of waiters bustled about long tables laden with appetizing tidbits and bottles in ice buckets. Not more than fifteen yards from where he stood, Brent saw a striped awning under which wicker chairs were placed.

"For the receiving-line," Schuyler explained.

"The Prince will be facing this way, standing or sitting, eh? Did Felipe arrange the chairs?"

"Y-yes." The terrified secretary clutched at the officer's sleeve. "It's not too late—"

"Brace up," Brent said sharply. "I'll take all responsibility."

"At least let me place a guard—"

"Remember your orders." Peter Brent turned on his heel and marched from the balcony. When he reached the garden, the Governor and the Prince were already beneath the canopy. The Intelligence officer took his place in the line moving slowly toward the officials.

"WELL, Lieutenant Brent," the Governor said warmly, taking the officer's hand. "Thought you were in Tsing-tao with the Admiral." He turned to the Prince. "Lieutenant Peter Brent—"

The old man's face grew stern. He said something in Japanese to his aide at his side. The neat Oriental answered crisply. The Prince nodded coldly to Peter Brent, and turned to greet the next guest.

Brent skirted the awning uprights and came to a casual stop directly behind the Prince. He lighted a cigarette, inhaled deeply, and glanced up at the center balcony. He saw Felipe come through the open doors and clear a space at the low rail by moving two ferns. Brent smoked on.

Guests came in a seemingly endless current. Politicians, diplomats, planters, business men—and their ladies. No uniforms. Brent listened to a torrent of names: Sabadista, Von Bruenhoff, Elizalde, Nakadate, Jackson, Battaglia—

"Senator Geronimo Aguilar."

Brent let his cigarette fall to the grass, crunching it with his heel. He looked at the man being presented to the Prince, noted the *politico's* sleek appearance, from spotless white shoes to glistening black hair. The officer's gaze came to rest on Senator Aguilar's immaculate linen coat—at a slight bulge just below his left armpit.

Peter Brent watched Aguilar walk to the nearest table, accept a glass of punch, and turn toward the receiving-line. Brent thought: "I win the second bet."

A waiter came up to the Intelligence officer, proffering a drink. "He's here, señor," the Filipino whispered.

HIS eyes on the center balcony, Brent nodded. He saw an unkempt figure stagger through the open doors and lean heavily on the rail. Walter Gregg's bloodshot eyes slid sideways in their sockets, drunkenly surveying the crowd below him. Behind the glass doors, Brent made out a crouching form.

The Intelligence officer's eyes snapped to Senator Aguilar. He tensed as he saw the politician replace his glass upon the table, withdraw a handkerchief from his breast pocket, and raise it to his lips.

"Aiee!" It was Felipe's voice.

All eyes traveled to the balcony, where they saw a native houseboy struggle with a maniacal American, saw the man brush the servant aside and whip out a revolver.

"Death to all Japs!" Gregg screamed, his pistol describing crazy arcs. "Wipe out the Yellow Peril!"

For a hushed breathless split-second the guests stood as though transfixed. Not Peter Brent: he sprang between the Prince and the balcony.

There was a shot. Confusion.

The Prince's aide, jabbering in Japanese, started looking for an exit.

Brent grabbed his arm. "*Shizuka ni!*" he whipped.

Gregg fired again. Most of the guests scrambled for safety. Brent held his ground, his tall frame obscuring the royal Japanese.

A third shot. Nothing happened. The gun in Gregg's hand shook so it seemed certain it must drop. He laughed—it was more an hysterical scream than

laughter—fired a fourth shot, and let the gun slip from his hand. It fell noiselessly to the soft grass. Gregg reeled to the rail, looked dazedly after the gun, and toppled from the balcony.

"Drunken fool!" a harsh voice rasped.

Peter Brent's lips compressed. This was the moment he had gambled for. He glanced to his right, saw Senator Aguilar approaching the canopy, his hand reaching inside his coat.

Brent stepped from in front of the Prince and waited for the evidence he needed. It came. His black eyes blazing with fury, Aguilar yanked his hand from inside his coat. It held a short ugly automatic. He pointed it at Prince Hamakuchi.

Peter Brent's right fist traveled a short distance. But it traveled fast and landed hard. The Filipino crumpled to the ground like a burst paper bag. The Intelligence officer stooped to retrieve the fallen pistol.

"*Hayaku!*" The aged Prince's voice cracked.

Brent half-turned in time to glimpse a flash of steel plunging toward the spot where his back had been. He raised his arm instinctively as Felipe's knife finished its trajectory. The fingers of Brent's free hand closed around the native's throat and threw him forcibly to the ground. Brent felt a sharp flame of pain in his upper arm.

AGAIN Peter Brent was in the secretary's office in the Palace. A doctor finished dressing his wound.

"Nothing much," the physician said. "Take it easy for a few days."

Brent smiled his thanks. The door flew open and Schuyler whisked in, his *pince-nez* askew, his thin face streaming sweat. He looked questioningly at the Intelligence officer and received a reassuring nod.

"What about Gregg?" Brent asked.

"Broke his neck—poor devil." Schuyler hovered solicitously about the officer's chair. "Tell me—" he began, and stopped, flushing. "How did Aguilar—"

Peter Brent gestured with his good hand. "It all begins with Aguilar's passionate desire for immediate independence. You knew of course he owns a valuable plantation in Mindanao."

"No, I didn't. But this independence thing—every Filipino wants that. They're going to get it in a few years." The secretary shrugged. "What they're going to do with it remains to be seen."

"That's the economist's point of view," Brent said. "Aguilar's angle was different. He wanted more wealth and power, and he knew that a complete severance from the States would get it for him. He knew also that immediate liberation could only come from trouble between Japan and the United States. And I think, though I have no proof, that certain Chinese fanatics invested in the scheme to get American help against Japanese aggression. Can't say that I blame them."

Schuyler looked blank. "B-but why—"

"Gold has been discovered in Mindanao. Aguilar wanted and was promised the governorship of the province in the event of our retiring from the Islands." Brent reached for a cigarette. "How's the party?"

"Almost over." Admiration warmed the little man's tone. "How—uh—how did Gregg come to do such a thing?"

"Aguilar had Gregg where he wanted him, feeding him money and dope, the while keeping him out of Bilibid prison for embezzlement."

"But you knew Gregg was going to do this. Why did you let him shoot? Why did you take such a long chance?"

"Gregg was too full to hit anything. Besides, it was an easy matter this morning to reload his gun with blanks." The officer placed the unlighted cigarette between his lips. "I had to let Gregg shoot and mess up the whole show in order to get Aguilar's goat. You see, the Filipino temperament is anything but calm, and I knew that the Senator's—"

The Governor General came in, followed by Prince Hamakuchi and his aide. The Governor laid a fatherly hand on Brent's shoulder.

"Rather hot going for a while, eh, Lieutenant?"

Peter Brent accepted a light from the sprightly Japanese aide. "Manila in July is usually uncomfortable, sir," he said.

PRINCE HAMAKUCHI of the royal household of Japan did an unroyal thing: he extended a wide-sleeved arm toward the seated American naval officer. His delicate yellow hand was lost in Brent's ample palm.

"My thanks," the Prince said earnestly. "You've averted a greater tragedy than the mere taking of my life."

"All in the day's work, Your Highness." A smile flickered on Peter Brent's lips. "Don't miss your boat, Prince. You've got a big job ahead of you."

Sailor's Home



A stirring story of adventure with the North Atlantic sealing fleet.

By CAPTAIN
DINGLE

IT was the crash that hurt Peter. Just as he was well on his way home, too. Everything peaceful, everybody snug, no weather, no nothing but a little bit of mist that bothered nobody, and—*blam!* Just like that.

Peter swam stiffly, but he swam stoutly. He'd never let the old devil sea beat him now. He was bound home, after so many stark years. But he had never expected this. His breathing was difficult. Why did that doubly wall-eyed steambot have to do this to him? His arms were heavy as lead—those arms that had pulled and hauled, heaved and launched so tirelessly! He had always said that sailors and steamboats didn't belong together. If he hadn't been in such a hurry to get home he'd never have joined this doubly-to-be-condemned steamer blundering through the blindness and getting struck down like this. Swimming was not so good—for old hands—

Something bumped Peter. It crippled his right shoulder and it knocked his hard old gray head. It dumped him under; it rolled him and bounced him; he could swear it laughed at him. But Peter flung out his arms, grinning wryly at the pain of his bruised shoulder, and his fishhook of a fist gripped something solid—the brace bumpkin of a barque. . . .

The barque seemed to be hove-to. He drew in great breaths, and slowly hauled

himself up until he could grip the gunwale above him. There he clung, panting. The night mist had deepened as midnight neared. The Bay of Bengal was recovering from a gale that left it simmering under an oily scum, with weed, and driftwood, and secrets. The wind had fallen even since Peter found himself in the water, and the water was warm; it had a slippery feeling. The stars could be seen on the horizon from his low elevation, though they might be hidden to eyes from a steamer's bridge. Peter peered around. But the sea lay black to his gaze under a misty blanket.

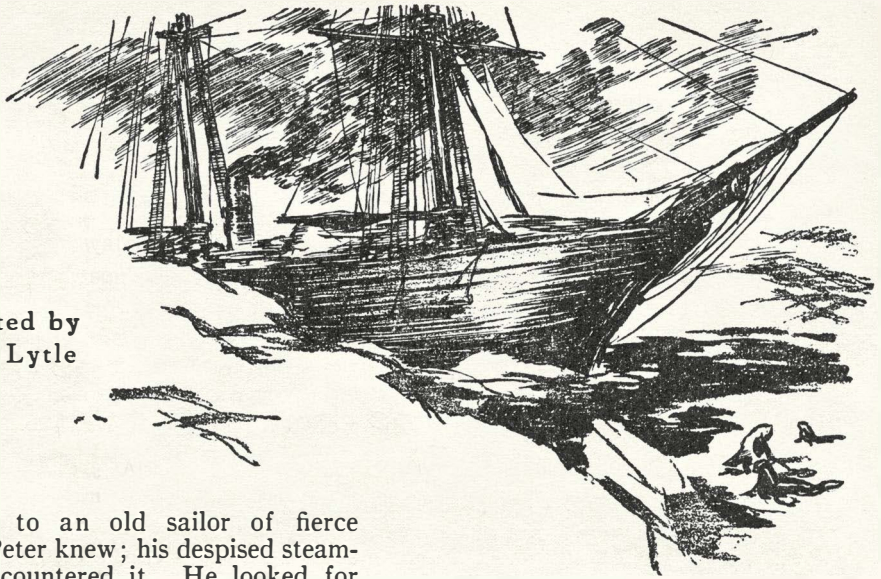
At his ear he heard a noise, and turned to resume his painful climb. A porthole was almost at his hand. The ship lay in darkness. He wondered why nobody had appeared when he caught that bumpkin. The barque lay silent as the heart of a great sea in the instant before it breaks; it felt dead. Now in that porthole was a light, and a terrified face.

Peter gained the deck, peered about.

The decks lay bare and unpeopled. Sails were set, but they lay a-back to the masts. No light pierced the darkness. The mist lay like an evil miasma over all. Peter stood with water dripping from his scanty attire; he was shivering now with chill. But there had been that awful, terrified face at the porthole. Somebody was on board this seemingly dead ship! Among the voices of gear and sea he fancied he heard other voices, and Peter was an old sailor who believed that strange things could happen at sea. He ran with a shambling gait and found the door to the saloon. It was barred. He crept up the poop-ladder and found the companionway. It too was barred.

These doors barred on the outside

Illustrated by
Arthur Lytle



whispered to an old sailor of fierce weather. Peter knew; his despised steamer had encountered it. He looked for the boats on the galleys, but the mist was baffling. He knew from the clatter of gear aloft that this barque was not hove-to in a proper manner. She felt knock-kneed somehow, as if she had lost some responsible gear. Peter took down the batten from the companionway door and felt his way down the stairs. He saw no light. There was a queer, sneezy sort of smell down there—a foul smell.

THEN he saw a thread of light under a door and heard a frightened voice. His sea sense avoided collision with the table and chairs, and he fumbled at a locked door, with the key in the lock. Half a minute later he stood in the open door of a gaudily equipped stateroom, and a terrified young Bengali boy was clinging to him like a half-smothered cat, mouthing and clawing. Things rolling on the floor told of fiercer motion previously than ruled now.

“Pull yerself together, me lad! What’s the hookum? Where’s everybody?” Peter inquired, gently setting the lad down on the settee and looking around. He found matches, went out and lit the great lamp over the table, and let his eyes rove. He found wine in a rack, and a jar of sweet biscuits. While the lad was devouring these as if famished, Peter took a survey of the spacious interior. It was the saloon of an oldtime clipper; but it bore evidence of having long been the domain of an unseamanly people.

“They didn’t cut and run because of storm, and leave you to drown?” he demanded.

The lad broke into a torrent of words.

“It was no storm! The ship was sailing smoothly. But the passengers were sick. The captain said we must leave them. I would not go into those small boats. The captain tried to drag me, and I was angry. Then I was thrown inside, and when I tried to come out the door was fastened. After that came the storm. I do not know what has happened. Once a great smash I heard, and I was thrown to the floor, my nose making blood. I lay so long. I get up, and look from the port glass. There I see your face, rising from the sea. Now you are here. It is all I know.” The Bengali incontinently fainted, leaving Peter trying to puzzle out the riddle.

Stolidly Peter worked over the lad. When he recovered, and fell asleep, Peter slept beside him.

A brilliant dawn flooded the ship, and Peter inspected her. A sour smell pervaded her. She had been in collision; all her head gear was hanging in the water; the foreyards swung loosely, some braces having carried away. Then Peter saw a broken lifebuoy with a steamer’s name on it. It was the name of the steamer that had sunk under him. This was the ship that had killed that steamer. And if the boy spoke truth it was a deserted ship driving blindly that had dealt the stroke.

He opened the main hatch. Up surged a blast of fetid air. Up rose a moaning. He stuck his head over the coaming, and drew back hurriedly. The Bengali stood at the poop rail, entirely self-possessed now that the danger to himself was past.

"They are coolies," he called out. "Coolies for Chagos. Are any alive?"

It took Peter an hour to decide between dead and alive. Any problem involved in the situation was beyond him. All he knew was that here were dead people who had to be dumped overboard, and here were living, all sick, but living, who must be cared for.

"Come here!" he ordered the Bengali lad, and when there was reluctance he enforced obedience in the only way he knew. He dragged the lad to his work, and drove him like a slave. In two desperate hours' work, he buried the dead. Another hour saw sixty starved and terrified men and women on deck—shivering, wolfing parboiled rice. Peter then drove the ablest men to secure the loose gear, and since the ship had no headsails and could not sail by the wind, he put her before it, and made the young Bengali steer, teaching him by methods which made him able in half an hour.

ALL the while the ship wallowed forward toward whatever first appeared, Peter was thinking of his ill luck. For twenty years in the steamy East, he had worked as few men work, to save money enough to go home. After a man has supported a family at home all that time out of his earnings, saving anything at all demands hard living for himself. But Peter had not minded that. Hadn't he a family to go to? Wouldn't his home-coming be worth all he had suffered? Then the steamer had to get run down. Of course, he was glad he was not drowned; but here he was marooned, to all intents and purposes, aboard a disreputable coolie barque, full to the hatches with death, and sailing wherever the winds chose to blow her.

"Who owns her?" he asked the Bengali as they ate biscuit and *ghee*, with night coming on again.

"She was owned by my uncle and me. I think she was insured. My uncle was captain. I do not care who owns the ship." The lad shrugged. "I am glad I am alive. Is it not better that we throw overboard also those very sick men? I do not want to catch the sickness." The lad filled his mouth with biscuit, dusted his hands, and stretched himself on the skylight, while Peter steered through the night.

Would he ever get home? Of course, those kids of his were only stepchildren, but a sailor is lucky to have even stepchildren. When he married that shrewd

widow, having saved a bit of money which made him attractive to her, she had soon convinced him that the Far East was the place for a sailor who had a family to support. Wages were better, expenses less. She knew he wanted his children—her children—to be well brought up; with her little bit of money and his savings she could run a quality boarding-house. He could always come home—say, once a year—and they'd be very happy. But in twenty years he had not gone home. He sent money monthly, and never left his ship even for an hour, unless on business. Not that he minded. There were always letters, every mail. True, they mostly asked him for money; but often there were photos of his wife, good-looking and prosperous, and of the boy and girl, as smart as paint and very well fed.

Of course there was the insurance she had urged him to take out. That cost money. But he always was handy with his hands. He worked rugs, and sennit and canvas things, and sold them. He had saved, too. That was the thing. It took twenty years, and his wife had died, but he had carried on with the kids, as he had promised her; and now he was going home to see them. They would be glad to welcome him. . . .

And here was this old death-trap, blundering blindly on.

SUNRISE silhouetted a sharp peak of land. Day revealed a small steamer smoking fussily out of a harbor. Noon saw the plague-ship towed to an anchorage, and then the decks were noisy with officials. The ship was clapped into quarantine, and Peter was confined aboard. For a month he fumed and fretted; then he was allowed to go ashore, and a fat and important Bengali Babu effusively greeted the lad and gave a decidedly patronizing hand to Peter.

"My client is very grateful to you for helping him to bring his ship to port, sar. Of course we saved your life from drowning. But it is better to be generous than to be perhaps unjust. Here is therefore your ticket to go to Rangoon on the steamer by which I came today to conduct my client's business. Here is also five hundred rupees—a gift most munificent of my client. You will want to thank him personally for saving your life, and for making you this so-handsome gift."

Peter did thank the young Bengali. That was Peter's way. But for that old

ship he must have drowned. Some men might have thought of salvage possibilities, and wasted much time finding out that a native court dealing with a case where a part-owner and many coolies remain on board the ship in question may put small value on the services of a white man picked up at sea.

PETER went to Rangoon. He found letters there. The one he valued was from the children. They suggested that it might be better if he came home later. They wanted him to send money, because Ralph was just leaving school and wanted to visit Italy before settling down; and Rosamond needed an expensive outfit before she could accept the invitation to visit friends. Peter bought himself a scanty outfit of clothes, sent home the balance of his five hundred rupees, then looked for a ship. He found a stout barque lying down by Monkey Point, and her master was an old friend. He had been a boy when Peter first became bos'n. The barque had no crew yet, and Captain Grover welcomed Peter in the galley, where he was eating tiffin cooked by himself.

"Just the man!" he hailed. "Thought you'd gone home. You're getting old, Peter, and ought to quit going to sea. What d'ye think o' this for a galley? Dammit, man, you'd fit this place like a stove-lid! I pay my cook more than my bos'n. How about it? If you aint going home, might as well ship with an old friend."

Peter smiled, peering around the spotless little sea kitchen. He ate a curried sausage hungrily. The galley was all glossy with new paint; her stove was modern and everything was handy. He had often wished that when his sea days were done he might fall into such a berth. Of course, going as cook wasn't going to sea.

"I pay my cook two hundred rupees a month," the skipper hinted. He really liked Peter, and wanted to see the old chap in a snug berth.

"Them sossidges is tasty," said Peter, reaching for another. His eyes blinked. He had reckoned up what two hundred rupees meant in real money. "Where you going?"

"Nagasaki. Got a charter for six trips, then I'm going home myself."

"I got to make money, Captain Grover. I'd like for you to give me a passage north. I'm goin' sealing. There's money in sealing."

"You don't need money that bad, Peter. How about that fine family o' yours? Better ship with me, and go home when I go."

"I lost all I had in that steamer," said Peter, munching hungrily. "I'll thank you for a passage home when you go. But I shall try sealing first." The old fellow sighed, his head on one side. This was a comfortable galley, and sealing was a bleak, hard life. He wished he might never know harder work than to cook in a galley like this. Good grub, too, if this he had eaten was a sample. But he needed money. There was never a word of affection in those home letters he got, but at least there were words of thanks—thanking him, old Peter. How many old shellbacks afloat could point to pictures of children like he could and show letters that thanked him as they did?

GROVER too had much to thank Peter for. He had got on; but well he knew he might never have survived his youth at sea but for Peter's kindness and shrewd tuition. If the old chap really had the money-fever that badly, he'd help him all he could.

"I wish you'd stay with me, Peter," he said at last. "If you won't, I'll give you a passage to anywhere we touch. When my time's up, there's a passage home for you too. Want any money?"

"I got enough," said Peter. "Borried money has to be paid back, and I need all I shall earn. You never had no nice kids to look after, did you? I'll work by the ship till she's ready for sea, and thank you kindly."

Peter worked, and expected no pay. He made the passage, and worked as if he were one of the crew. That too was Peter's way. The passage took two months, against the monsoon, and he counted that two months wasted. Grover had closely estimated Peter's actual condition, and on arrival in Nagasaki gave him as much money as he would have earned had he signed on. There were also sealers in port, one with a skipper who owed Grover as much as Grover owed to Peter.

"I got you a berth," announced Grover, "and this is advance," handing over the money. "I still think you were foolish not to go after that Babu for a heap of money for taking in that ship. However, if you want to be foolish, it's your own affair. Don't forget there's a job in my galley, or a passage home when you're ready."

Peter went over the side, smiling bravely. He had taken a last long look into that snug, warm, handy galley. The Burmese cook presiding there now would have been just as comfortable in any old galley. He couldn't appreciate perfection like that. But cooks earned so much, no more. Sealers earned what they earned, and some of them made money. Peter stumped on board the auxiliary schooner he was directed to, trying to look as if he had been sealing all his life. The rough, scarred individuals about the dirty decks might have frightened an ordinary man—but not Peter.

"You the man Grover sent?" barked a whiskered giant, fitting a murderous knife into a new handle.

Peter said yes.

"What did you do to him that he wants to kill ye?" The giant spat over-side, wiping his whiskers on a hand as furry as a sealskin. "Been sealin' before?"

Peter resented the tone. He glanced around the untidy vessel.

"No," he said sharply, as if speaking to a refractory seaman. "But anything you or any other sailorman can do, I can do." He kicked a tangle of rope. "Looks as if you aint got a sailorman aboard o' you."

A group of men as tough as the skipper began to joke, regarding Peter almost pityingly. The giant skipper stared at Peter for a moment, then laughed too.

"Run along and dump yer dunnage into a bunk, sonny. I got a job for a sailor like you."

Peter found wondering men when he entered the sealer's fore-castle. The men of the group outside followed him in.

"You was born with a caul, wasn't you?" said one.

"You aint Big Ben's brother, are you?" queried another.

Peter still smarted from being called "sonny" by Big Ben, who had but half Peter's years.

"I aint nothing but a seaman able to do a seaman's work," said Peter, looking about for an empty bunk.

BIG BEN discovered that Peter was right. It is bitter weather at times among the Kuriles. The business of the schooner was sealing; and since putting in an auxiliary engine, Big Ben gave less attention to the sailing equipment. Peter found it all in a shocking mess. He went to work to put it right. Long before the vessel arrived on the grounds

she was as fit and able to sail as if she had never known a motor. And when it came to weather, it was not Peter who crowded into the sooty galley for warmth. He knew too little about sealing to put that gory business ahead of the business of sailing the vessel.

"You'll make a sealer yet, sonny," Big Ben assured him, and left him to take care of the ship in a driving blizzard while all hands played poker under a smoky lamp and gambled with the shares they had yet to earn.

TINY JORROCKS made friends with Peter—the young always found in him a friend. Tiny was bigger than Big Ben; a rather simple youth whose great frame had sapped his vitality and retarded the development of his brain. The sealers made him their butt, heedless of that day to come when Tiny's body, full-grown, must be matched with a better-nourished intelligence.

"I been aboard here a year, and I never been let steer yet," Tiny told Peter, coming to him through the blinding snow. "We come across from Vancouver, and was weeks at sea. Ben kept me doin' boy's jobs. When we got into the seals, I got onto the work fine. They can't keep me out of a full share. But I didn't come to sea to be a butcher. I want to learn to be a sailor. I know you're a sailor, Peter, 'cause all hands is jealous of you. Last man we had like you, Big Ben made him mate. Ben don't like this mate. You teach me steerin', and I'll keep a lookout ahint yer back. You'll need that on the ice."

So Tiny learned to steer, and Peter acquired a bodyguard he wanted as little as he wanted wings. Big Ben began to find fault with Lars Toivo, and that affronted chief mate began to pass the grouch on to Peter. Peter stood it all with a smile. As long as it was only a grouch, it was not worth while bothering about. When they started out after seals, and the great droves of seals had to be driven and separated into pods of thirty or so for killing,—night work, all of it,—there was Tiny always alongside Peter, and Toivo was of the breed which holds a giant at the value of size. That perhaps was the root of Big Ben's contempt for him.

"You pick out the seals about three years old," Tiny instructed Peter on the first foray. "Them's the size," pointing out a group. "All younger you let go for another season. Then you just walk

up to 'em, like this,"—illustrating,—“hit 'em over the snoot like *this*, and that's all there is to it.” Tiny waded into a small pod, killed five with as much indifference as he might knock over five skittles, and dragged the bodies into a heap. Peter followed his example, and wielded his club mechanically; but he did not like this business. He liked it less when the seals had to be skinned. He disliked butchery. He wished he had tried whaling. But Big Ben had given him this chance on account of the chance

A terrified boy was clinging to him like a half-smothered cat. “Pull yerself together, me lad! Where's everybody?” Peter inquired.

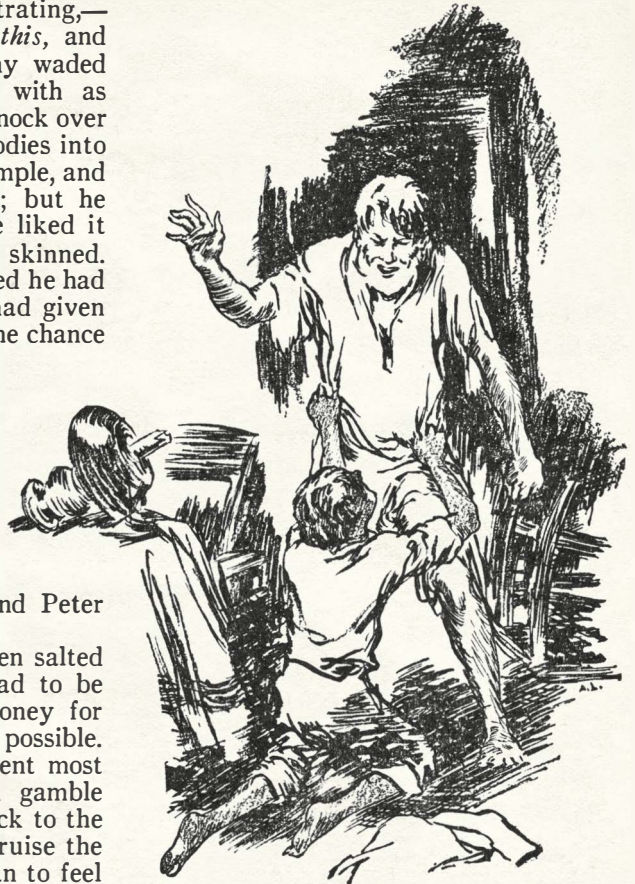
Grover had once given him, and Peter never let a friend down.

Then, when the skins had been salted at the kenches, and a cargo had to be landed, Peter received more money for his share than he had believed possible. The sealers went ashore and spent most of their earnings; they would gamble away the rest on the passage back to the ice. The vessel was going to cruise the Aleutians next trip. Peter began to feel that he might stick this job until Grover was ready to go home.

He sent money home. In doing so he found letters in the office for him. There was a long letter from Grover which Peter glanced through, without clearly understanding it. There was a letter from home that warmed his old heart. It was a request for money; but such a request as no father could deny. Rosamond was going to be an artist. Her studies would cost money. Of course, if Peter preferred, she'd give up the idea.

Peter reckoned up his money. . . . She should be an artist! What other old shellback could point to a daughter who was a famous artist? Then Ralph had gone to Italy, and, sorrowful tale, had been shamefully deceived by an old gentleman who vowed he was Peter's best friend. Of course, had that been true, Peter would have wanted his son to help an old friend in need. Unfortunately the old gentleman was a fraud—and it had cost Ralph all his money so that he had been compelled to leave debts in Italy.

Peter trudged back to the office in Kobe and sent home all his money. It was good to be able to do that. He



enclosed a letter asking for the dear children's latest photographs. Big Ben had hinted that he might make him mate after the next trip. Then he'd have a berth in which to hang notable pictures to be proud of. . . .

Grover's letter, at the second reading, sent old Peter trudging ashore again. Big Ben began to roar evil witticisms after him. The men wondered how he could stay ashore so long and go so often and come back so straight. But Peter made this last trip shoreward. He grumbled while he made it, and only made it because his friend asked a favor of him. He went to a notary, and in halting, labored lines he wrote for Grover a detailed account of his broken homeward voyage in the sunken steamer, of his falling in with the coolie ship, and of bringing her to port. What Grover wanted that for, Peter could not imagine. He had told the yarn until he was tired of it. But Grover said he wanted to send it to a magazine, and it must be certified before a notary. If it was accepted, and paid for, Grover would hold the money until he saw Peter. It might

buy him a go-ashore suit for that final passage home.

"That's the last time I'll spin *that* cuffer!" grumbled Peter, shooting it into the mail-box.

THE sealer slipped to sea with a crew blind drunk. Peter forward, Tiny Jorrocks steering, and Big Ben draped through the main rigging for support but still able to navigate, took her out through the Bungo Strait; when the open sea lay ahead Big Ben promoted Peter to be mate, and left the vessel in his hands, pitching to the deck like a falling mast the moment he surrendered responsibility.

"I aint sure Lars Toivo will like it," grinned Peter. "I aint so sure I'm goin' to like it either."

"Don't you worry," Tiny said loudly. There was a new note in Tiny's voice since last trip; now it seemed to fit the great body better. It was manlike. "Toivo aint never goin' to harm you while I'm handy."

"I aint worryin', Tiny," replied Peter with a shrug. "If Big Ben says so, I suppose I'm mate. So long as I'm mate I'll be mate. Full an' by, Tiny, full an' by—you're pinchin' her."

It was Lars Toivo who first opened bleary eyes and looked around. Then he asserted the authority he still believed he held. He peered around the deserted decks, sniffed at the cold galley, and staggered aft to where Peter steered.

"Start a fire and make me some coffee," he told Peter, and laid hands on the wheel. Peter was simple and peaceful; but he had been promoted.

"You make coffee for all hands," said Peter, gently removing the encroaching hand. "I am the mate now. The skipper said so." It was characteristic of Peter that, once given authority, he did not trouble to turn to Tiny for corroboration. Lars Toivo would not have taken Tiny's word anyhow. He had bulldozed Tiny for months. He knew Peter for a quiet old stick too, always yammering about his fine family at home, always willing to lend a hand, or to stand double watches for anybody strong enough to order him to.

"You are mate, eh?" he snarled, slapping away Peter's hand from the top spoke, and treading on his toes. "Cook's mate, that's you! I was mate when I went to sleep. Aint been no shipwreck since that I've heard of. G'wan! Start something."

Peter started something—but not the galley fire. Surprisingly, he shoved Lars Toivo away, and in the instant of shock the late mate stood on spraddled legs, blinking. Then he slid forward, and punched Peter on the nose, knocking Peter loose from the helm. Peter sat down abruptly, shaking his head. Slowly he rose; when he was halfway erect, Toivo drew back and swung a kick at his stomach. But the kick never landed. The wheel was beginning to spin. Tiny laid one huge hand to the spokes, thrust out a long leg, and kicked away Toivo's sole supporting foot as Peter scrambled up and launched his own righteously angry fist full upon his foe's chin. Toivo went down with a *whop*, asleep again.

"That's you, old sailor!" roared Big Ben, appearing from the scuttle whence he had watched the encounter. "I was wonderin' when you'd show something that'd make Grover fond o' you. You'll do! Treat 'em all like that, and you an' me's bound to get on. Where's a bucket?"

Big Ben found one, drew it full of freezing water, and dashed it into Toivo's face. Another, and another followed; then the bewildered man stumbled to his feet, rubbing water from his eyes.

"Start a fire in the galley, and make us coffee," Big Ben ordered him. "Get a move on, too. I'd make you cook, only you'd p'ison us."

Toivo lurched into the galley. Big Ben glanced at Tiny with a curious grin. He had seen that little bit of leg action. "Tiny, you better watch yourself. Toivo aint the man to forget that trip-up."

"He better watch himself," growled Tiny, and Ben realized that the young giant had become a man.

IN a blizzard the schooner ran along the ice, holding off from disaster by the sound of breakers and the growling of broken floes. Big Ben was too daring: He caught glimpses of mighty droves of seals on the shore ice. They would fill his vessel to the hatches in three days of fierce killing.

"Take the sail off her," he ordered, and the engine was started. Then Big Ben himself sat aloft in the howling blinding blasts and coned his vessel through a tortuous lane fringed with crushing death on both sides.

"Port!" he yelled. Tiny ported.

"Steady! Port a bit more!" Men who had not yet discerned the full blossoming of Tiny Jorrocks crowded aft,

uneasy about their helmsman. Tiny steered stolidly, chewing hard. He could just see Peter, at the foot of the mast, ready to pass on Ben's orders.

"Starb'd! Hard! Steady! Get your grappnels ready, Peter!" Ben started to come down. The vessel crushed past a mass of slush, and slid gently along the lee side of a great floe which was apparently grounded on the shore. In the silent swirl of the blizzard the seals loomed like flies on a white sheet.

WITH clubs and knives the killers went out. In five minutes the parties were lost to each other. The snow fell steadily in the lee of the land. The wind higher up shrieked. Big Ben, Peter, Toivo and Tiny were in one party; for an hour they killed, grunting with the force of their strokes. Small seals slipped away; some old fellows scented danger and avoided them. The seals they wanted,—the killables,—put up their soft muzzles to be struck. Big Ben strode among them like a pestilence. Toivo struck down all, old or young, striking with a rhythmic venom that knew no check. Tiny killed because it was the work he signed on for. He would have killed cows, or dug potatoes, with the same indifference. Peter killed carefully, but efficiently; that last sharing-out had awakened him to the great possibilities of seal killing. Why, in a few trips like the last he could go home in a liner, and live like a gentleman all his days, with those smart kids of his! Seals—money—home!

Peter paused, wearied with the killing. He heard the chugging blows of the others. Around him was a white wall. The schooner was somewhere behind it, but *where* was a puzzle. He called to Tiny, and presently the giant shape materialized out of the white. Together they called the others. Far away, other voices could be heard faintly. The shrieking of the wind was like the eldritch cries of witches riding thorny brooms aloft. Big Ben's voice carried from far off, then Toivo's; Tiny followed Peter. Soon they were together—four men, and four hundred sleek corpses.

"Can't make the vessel out till this snow stops," Big Ben declared, drawing his skinning-knife. "Skin what we got, boys. This'll be a catch that'll make our fortunes. Gosh, it's thick!"

The snow cleared suddenly, in a hard squall off the land. Upon the heels of the squall came a chill daybreak. The

gray half-light crept across the ice, revealing four great heaps of red carcasses, and four piles of pelts; beside each one crouched a weary man.

Peter was cold. The others had burrowed under the raw pelts for warmth, but Peter had not attained to that hardihood yet. He was first to rouse because of his coldness. The others were but seconds after him, for Peter's cry was like a gunshot.

"The ice is adrift!" he yelled. Big Ben lumbered to his feet, shedding bloody skins. Lars Toivo fell to cursing, even before he discerned the real situation. Tiny stood behind Peter, staring over his head, his mouth open.

"The sons o' geishas have left us!" barked Big Ben.

"It aint them, Ben, it's the ice break-in'," said Peter, and pointed. The vessel moved slowly in a great floe that had gripped her. On another floe were black dots, at first easily mistaken for seals; but closer scrutiny showed them erect, and running along the ice abreast of the schooner. A wide run of water lay between ship and men. A glance shoreward showed a widening stretch of sea between all the ice and the shore.

"The wind's off the land, too," Peter remarked.

Big Ben laughed unpleasantly. "This is swimmer's day. Can you swim, Lars?"

"You know damn' well I can't!" growled Lars.

BEN chuckled again. He couldn't swim, either. And the only man who might safely look forward to gaining the vessel and finding at least food and shelter, with a chance of getting clear, would be a strong swimmer. "You swim, don't you, Tiny?"

Tiny shook his head. He was staring at the bleak expanse of ice and freezing sea.

"You can swim, Peter," said Ben. "I know you can, for Grover told me about you bein' picked up by that coolie ship after hours a-swimmin'. Better get a move on, before the schooner's too far."

Peter shook his head.

"Wouldn't do no good. One man couldn't work that vessel loose. She's movin' west. So's this floe. We better walk and keep abreast of her. She's likely to come closer. Aint nothin' to be uneasy about. Let's walk, before we freeze."

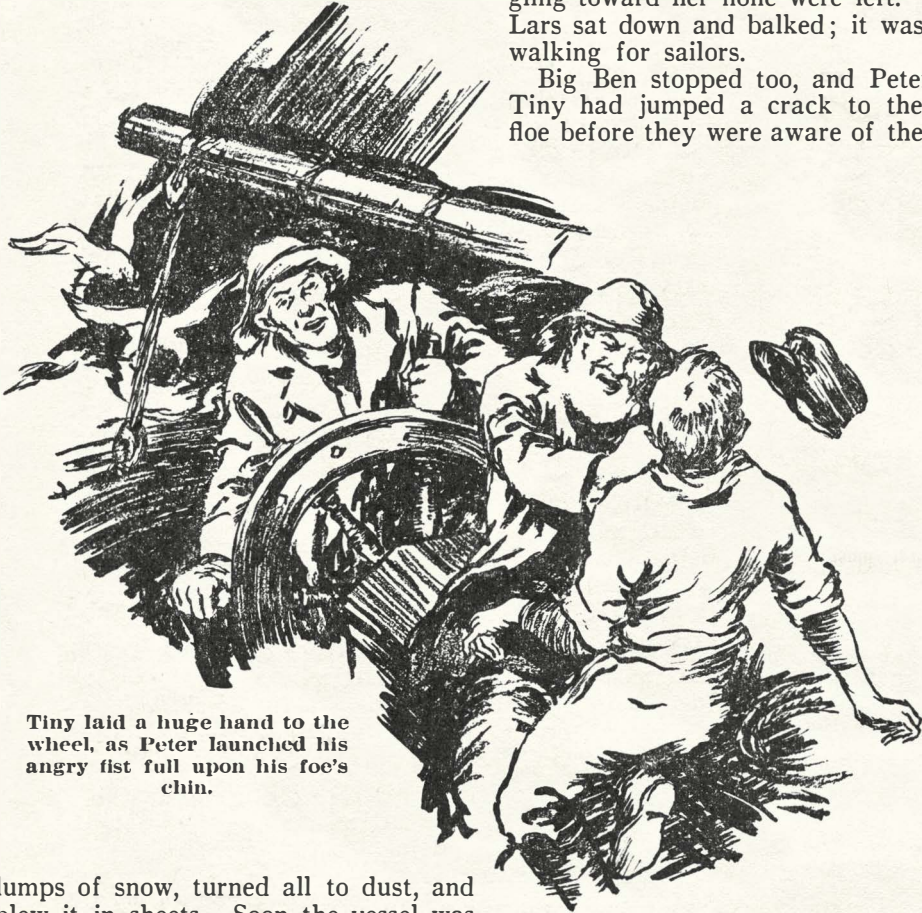
Lars was already cutting up a seal and gnawing raw meat. Ben chewed a bit

of ice and slashed at the red meat too. It seemed natural that Peter should take the lead in advice. This was trouble, and Peter was familiar with trouble. Tiny cut a great slab of meat for himself and Peter. They started to walk. The wind picked up particles of ice and

"Come on," said Peter patiently. "We got to make that big piece ahead, or we'll never see the schooner again. Lean on me if ye're tired, Ben."

Big Ben laughed in contempt, and carried on. The early dusk came down. The schooner seemed farther away. Of all the distant dots that had been struggling toward her none were left. Then Lars sat down and balked; it was hard walking for sailors.

Big Ben stopped too, and Peter and Tiny had jumped a crack to the next floe before they were aware of the halt.



Tiny laid a huge hand to the wheel, as Peter launched his angry fist full upon his foe's chin.

lumps of snow, turned all to dust, and blew it in sheets. Soon the vessel was indistinct. Now and then she disappeared. But Peter's eyes were keen, and he saw that if they walked fast she kept more or less the same relative position with regard to them.

The distant dots that were men split up into smaller groups than at first. When Ben had stopped twice, cursing the footing, he realized what had happened. The ice was breaking up. When next the air was clear a group of five or six men had gone altogether. Lars Toivo gnawed at his meat, and stumbled along in surly silence. Soon the ice was cracking. More than once they had to jump to another floe. At noon Big Ben stopped with a curse, took out tobacco, and swore he'd not go another step until he was good and ready.

"Let's give 'em a hand, Tiny," said Peter, and jumped back again. The ice broke fast. Darkness was upon them. Not far ahead was a stretch of sound ice, of which the end could not be seen. Peter pointed that out. Big Ben saw, and tried the widening leap. Lars refused, and Peter and Tiny took hold of him. Together they made the attempt. Lars fell into the sea, dragging Peter halfway in with him. One of Peter's legs was wet to the hip, and the ice bruised him cruelly. Lars went under; with desperate strength they hauled him out. Darkness fell like a curtain. Big Ben was gone; his fur cap floated on the water. The ice floated over him.

Toivo wanted to sleep. Tiny was sleepy too. Peter's eyes would not keep

open. Yet they must walk. They must not stop now, or they would freeze. Peter's leg was numb, and his heavy clothes cracked with ice. Toivo was congealing into a clumsy effigy. He stopped.

"You must carry him, Tiny," said Peter. "I'll carry the meat. I'll give you a hand when you're tired."

Tiny obeyed, carrying Toivo because Peter told him to. Twice he laid him down, declaring the man was dead, and twice he took him up, at Peter's command. When next he laid him down Peter struggled to take up the burden. His numbed leg gave way, and he fell. Then Tiny picked his man up whimperingly and staggered on, Peter dragging himself after.

Through the night they stumbled on. The wind dropped. Peter's leg had no feeling. Tiny knew that the man he bore was dead. His own blood thudded hot and thick at his temples; he was warmed by his labor. Peter would not let him stop; he kept behind with his skinning-knife, prodding the giant now and then. Tiny had wept, then cursed; now he was swearing that he'd carry Peter if he could dump Toivo. Peter cut a piece of meat, stuck it in Tiny's mouth, and rasped, "Carry on!"

At midforenoon, they saw the schooner again, far off. They did not see the small steamer beyond her. Peter barked at Tiny, and they put their heads down and shuffled forward. Tiny fell with his frozen bundle. Peter fell over them. It was longer now before they got started again. Tiny could not pick up his load; he and Peter took it by a leg each, and dragged it like a sled. It was dusk again. The schooner was nearer, but she might as well have been a thousand miles away. Tiny fell again, and could not get up. His great frame and stout heart had given their last ounce of effort. Peter dragged Tiny a few yards, then Toivo—one at a time, and going back for the other. Each drag was yards shorter than the last. Then it seemed to Peter that his eyes exploded. Lights dazzled him. Sleep stole over him.

THE men of the patrol vessel flashed their lanterns on the trio. They laid Tiny on a sledge. Toivo was so dead that they built a cairn of ice over him. They doubted about Peter. His one leg was so badly frosted that it could have been lopped off with no pain to him. But in the end they carried Tiny and Peter to their steamer, and with the derelict

schooner in tow, made all speed for Hakodate. The patrol captain gravely considered Peter. Tiny was already beginning to take notice. Hot food, hot grog, and a good sleep revived him. But Peter was in dire straits. At least a leg must come off. Could he live until they reached port?

The captain took his courage in his hands and took off Peter's leg—then left the navigation to his chief officer while he nursed the patient back to flickering life.

"Can't let a man like that die without going all out to save him," the captain said. "Look how he dragged his two mates—must have been a mile! Him with a leg like that!"

PETER awoke in the hospital. The first face he looked upon when quite conscious was Grover's.

"You're a hero, Peter!" grinned Grover. "The country's talking about you. My barque's in Nagasaki, and I'll take you down with me when they let you loose. I hear you're to get a medal!"

"Medal? Who wants a medal?" grumbled Peter. "It's a leg I'm lacking! How can I ever go to sea now? And how'll I ever get home to see them kids? I dunno why that skipper sawed my leg off. He musta been hungry for practice!"

Grover had another bit of news, but he let it wait until he carried Peter on board the barque and sailed for Rangoon. Then he sat on the rail, watching Peter try out his new peg leg. Peter shook his head sadly; when a sailor gets a timber-toe, it's good-by, sailor! Grover could keep his news no longer.

"Peter," he said, falling in alongside and helping the uncertain steps; "remember that coolie ship? You got five hundred rupees out of that job—when you ought to've got enough to keep you for the rest of your life. I wasn't going to let them get away with that. You sent me a affidavit about it, and I put the authorities to work—and what d'ye think? Those coolies for Chagos was nothing more than slaves for Zanzibar! The ship's been seized, and there's four thousand dollars waiting for you to take up! Now what about it?" He patted Peter on the back.

Peter grinned broadly. "Couldn't come at a better time!" he said. "I lost all I had again, I suppose. There wasn't no skins aboard the schooner yet. I can send some money home to

my kids, and then have enough to go home with myself. I'm glad that steamer sunk!"

Grover had done more than he had admitted. He had got in communication with friends at home, and found out much about Peter's fine family. Now he was as anxious for Peter to get home as Peter himself was.

"Listen, Peter," he said. "You let me invest your money with mine in a cargo for the barque. She's homeward bound this time from Rangoon. Then you come as cook. A timber-toe won't hinder you in that galley. You'll save passage-money, and be more comfortable than doin' nothing. Think it over. That long giant Tiny is achin' to know what you're goin' to do. He wants to join the barque—and from what I can see of him this far, I'll be glad to ship him as bos'n after this passage. But he won't go where *you* aint goin'. I believe that great infant'll hang onto you if he has to clap on a pinafore and play nurse. It beats me how people fall for you, you old bad-luck penny!"

PETER sat in that fine galley. The barque had taken in her cargo; among it was his investment. His wooden leg hampered him not a bit. He could sit on the locker, peeling sweet potatoes, and see through the door his cozy little berth. All white and royal blue it was, like the barque's graceful hull. The bunk was clean, sprung, and snug as man could desire. He had hoped to have some new pictures to hang there, but there had been no mail for him. It was high time he got home. Those kids of his might need him! When they didn't write to him he was apt to get anxious. This was a splendid start. The tug was letting go; in two hours the barque would be heading for home, with a fresh fair breeze. He was as good as there!

That was a pleasant voyage. Peter could sit in his fine galley in the sunshine, and dream. Captain Grover had mates he could trust; he often came along to chat with Peter; and if he found his bos'n already there enjoying a pipe and a yarn, Grover was no martinet, to object to the friends of his partner. Peter was partner in this smart barque—don't forget that! And the food was good, the cabin steward civil, the crew all young fellows glad to be going home after a few years on the Coast. There was nothing to make the passage unhappy. Not even the Cape of Storms

growled; dread Agulhas laughed at the dancing barque speeding along with fair wind and current. Trades blew where expected, and harder than usual. In all Peter's going to sea never had the good luck stuck to him like this.

It was good to see him as the barque slipped like a ghost through the dreaded calm belt about the Western Islands. From her mastheads twenty sail could be seen, stationary as wooden ducks in a pond. The barque held on to a breeze that fanned her past that not-so-distant halt. Peter would sit at his galley door, dressed in good white clothes, his pipe going freely, tranquilly pounding up salt horse to limber it before it went into hash. Tiny Jorrocks might be superintending the watch in some job of polishing-up; but he never forbade a word of chat or chaff with the cook. Down came a young able seaman from aloft, with a twinkle in his eye for Peter.

"Them ships out there are all London ships, Peter," he stated.

"How do you know, that far off?" demanded Peter. His oldest loves had been London ships.

"I can see they all got painted taffrails. Liverpool ships keeps their taffrails polished bright."

"Huh! You was in Liverpool ships, was you?" grunted Peter ominously.

"Yes, sir! Smart ships."

"Then you ought to know all about London ships' taffrails, me son—that's the only part of a London ship a Liverpool ship ever sees! Be glad you're in a London ship now."

Peter scored. The young fellows liked him. Apart from his intelligent use of good food for their nourishment, he was a fine old fellow. Always his galley was full of friendly young sailors. It was like home in there. He had no pictures to show them; but his medal hung on the bulkhead and they knew he had well earned it. He never paraded it. They never got him to talk about it. Tiny did all that for him. But they got him to talk of other things—and they accepted him as a wise old friend.

"Smart as paint, old Peter is," they would remark to each other. "Sez to young Nobby, he sez, 'Taffrails is the only part of a London ship a Liverpool ship ever sees.' Just like that! I'm comin' back in this ship, I am."

LIKE home it was, Peter felt comfortably. But it was not really home, of course; he'd find *that* when he knocked

SAILOR'S HOME

on the door and was welcomed by those fine kids. He'd just let them make a fuss over him at first. He'd not say a word about his money invested in the barque's cargo. Grover would realize on that for him, and then he'd spring the surprise on them. Oh, they'd have a time of it! Tomorrow they'd see him!

HE dressed with care. His galley was full of well-wishers. He put on the new blue suit he had bought in Rangoon. It wasn't a very good fit, but not bad for a Burmese. It was more plum-colored than blue, but it was new. He had a smart bowler hat—gloves too, but he grinned a bit sheepishly and put those in his pocket. Then the ship's company saw him over the gangway. Grover sang out "so long" from the poop, reminding him to be on board early next day, to pay off and to collect his profits. Then Peter shouldered his canvas bag, and marched off to his home. . . .

It was dark when he found the house, a nice little house in a good street. The windows were brilliantly lighted, as if to welcome him. He stood for a long moment, his heart almost suffocating him. Then he gathered his courage and stumped up the steps, his peg leg ringing sharply on the stone. He rang the bell, and stood there trembling. His face was red and shining; his eyes shone, and were moist. The door opened, and a wave of sound came out. A young man stood there, staring insolently. He saw the canvas bag, the wooden leg.

"Don't want any!" he snapped, and would have shut the door. Peter almost chuckled. It was not the welcome he had expected, but he could see how it was. Twenty years is a long time—this young man had been a baby when Peter had last seen him.

"I'm your father, Ralph," he said. The door opened again. Ralph stared harder. Unsmiling, he looked Peter up and down. A slim young woman appeared beside Ralph, a cigarette between her lips.

"What's he want?" she asked sharply.

"It's Father," said Ralph, in an undertone. "Some more young people appeared. 'Shoo 'em inside!" he whispered to her. "Come on inside, Father. We'll attract a crowd pretty soon."

Peter sighed. He stumped in, dragging his bag. The drawing-room door was wide open, and music and laughter filled the place. A shrill young voice asked who the old tramp was. Ralph hurried Peter past the lighted door and steered

him along a passage to the kitchen. Rosamond answered the shrill query in a voice scarcely less shrill.

"Oh, some old sailor selling things, I suppose. Go on, Jerry, put on a new record and mix a cocktail. Be back soon."

Ralph and Rosamond lit a gas-jet in the cold kitchen. They stared in frank distaste at Peter and glanced furtively at each other. Ralph's mouth quirked at the corners. Rosamond wrinkled her pert nose.

"Sit down, Father. I'll get you something to drink," said Ralph, and slipped away to make excuses to his guests.

"I'll get you a cigar," said Rosamond, and followed Ralph, to explain to her friends that this old guy was not really her father. The old guy heard her saying that.

Peter had not taken the offered chair. He looked around the cold kitchen. They had put him here—after all he had suffered to get home to see them, after all those stark years! They were ashamed of him—afraid to let their friends know about him. He thought sadly of that snug galley aboard the barque. He heard voices as a door opened again. He heard words. . . . As silently as if he owned four padded feet instead of one foot and a wooden peg, he picked up his bag, opened the back door, and departed.

WHEN the night watchman of the barque went to light the galley fire before calling the hands, he found Peter, dressed in clean white, the red glow of the comfortable fire making his face a picture of contentment, brewing the morning coffee. After one moment of breathless surprise the watchman yelled along the deck that old Peter was back. In two minutes the galley was crowded with back-slapping friends with honesty in their jovial blows. Captain Grover appeared, aroused by the noise.

"It's like New Year's!" he muttered. Then Peter smiled with the high courage that was ever in him.

"I wouldn't be happy in a house," he said, and handed the captain his coffee.

Grover had discovered most of the facts concerning the home Peter believed he was coming to, through correspondence with friends. But he had wanted the old fellow to see for himself, for Peter would never have believed, had he heard it from others.

"There's only one home for an old sailor like that!" Grover mused. "He'll be happier, now he's in it."



A Million

The fascinating story of a young man who backed himself to make a million dollars in one year through the exercise of "Personal Mystery."

By

FULTON
GRANT

The story thus far:

FOR young Bentley Dewert, it had been tough going ever since Hartswell, the city editor, had fired him—until that fateful day of the two letters. The first was from his landlady, giving him one week to pay up—or else. The second was from Ephraim Brood, president of a well-known soap company, stating that Hartswell had recommended him for a job.

"You," Brood said to him, "are a failure. I'm a success. Know why?"

"I wouldn't," said Bentley bitterly, "be here if I did."

"Right. I'll tell you why: Because I own the secret of success, and you don't. If you've read 'The Count of Monte Cristo,' you've seen it work. Personal mystery made the sailor *Edmond Dantes* over into the magnificent *Monte Cristo*. Let people *imagine* things about him. Didn't talk about himself. . . . Personal mystery, boy! Greatest force in the world!"

"Very interesting, Mr. Brood. But—well, just how does it concern me?"

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-actor. I'm going to write a book. Going to give my formula to the world. Need a stooge—somebody to *live* that book. While I write it! That's your job. Pay you money to be my stooge. You'll make a million dollars. That's the proof of the formula. How's that for a job? Want it?"

Dewert took the fantastic job. With the five hundred dollars capital Brood provided, he bought new clothes, put up at the fashionable Washington Towers—

and bribed a bellboy to give him a list of important people registered there. He chose a name at random—that of Camille Archambault, a French airplane-buyer. Then he bribed the hotel clerk *not* to let Archambault know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and those overeager young men as promptly jumped to conclusions and printed a story about Archambault and the mysterious Mr. Destiny. As a result of *that*, the airplane-manufacturer Hartlow suspected that "Mr. Destiny" was the agent of a rival concern—and paid him six thousand dollars to keep away.

Meanwhile one night at dinner Dewert was greatly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, and was wondering what sort of personal mystery he could employ to make her acquaintance, when the old fellow choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley took them to his rooms and called a doctor. Afterward he politely left them alone there a few moments; when he returned, they had vanished—leaving her wrap, but no message.

The newspapers supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the asylum in which, she believed, he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared. Seeking to connect the mysterious Mr. Destiny with the case, more headlines followed. Lorraine then arranged a meeting with Bentley and begged him to sue the papers for libel. And when he refused, she did a surpris-

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for John J. Destiny

ing thing: gave herself up as an accomplice in Buntsman Graymaster's escape.

That was that—a weird puzzle. Trying to forget it, Dewert reported to Brood, and under his direction, undertook to further the Personal Mystery business by renting an office downtown. He found one promptly—and more trouble, for he innocently took a sublease from a phony Southern colonel who had just gypped a man from Texas out of five thousand dollars.

Bentley undertook to get the Texan's money back for him, and after a hair-raising experience in Wall Street, he succeeded. He learned, too, that some of the keen and canny Wall Street brokers were no less susceptible to the influence

of personal mystery than anyone else. Indeed, the well-known but none-too-scrupulous Edward Ryster, who was operating a "pool," offered Bentley a bonus of ten thousand dollars above the market price for the large block of Southways shares that he supposed Bentley owned. And when Bentley, (who possessed only a hundred of these shares), learned from another tough broker, Jo Caddis, that the Exchange was going to refuse to list the issue, he made a bee-line for Ryster's office. (*The story continues in detail.*)

MR. Ed Ryster was faintly ironic, faintly quizzical.

"Forgive the bluntness of an old hand



at this stock-market game," he was saying. "But your sudden decision doesn't ring quite true, Mr. Destiny. You say you'd be satisfied with a decent profit—that this O.R.G. show has got bigger than you bargained for. Now, that's just fine. Excellent and very laudable. But I must insist, young man, that it isn't quite human. In Wall Street it is only one in a thousand who is satisfied with a mere good profit when there are millions to be made."

"But you yourself urged me—" Bentley tried to banish from his face any sign of the sudden uneasiness he felt, but the broker cut in on him:

"Suggested, not urged," he revised. "It would be to my advantage to absorb your holdings in O.R.G.—as I explained to you—even at 125. But I can't help feeling—well, that there's a catch to you somewhere."

"What catch?"

"I don't know, frankly. It's only a feeling. For instance, there are quite fantastic rumors about your holdings of Southways. You've got yourself talked about. You hold anything from one hundred thousand up. . . . I've heard talk of much more."

"I don't recall having mentioned the extent of my holdings to anyone," Bentley stated. This interview was not going well. Ryster had been eager to buy, but now he was stalling.

"That's just it," said the broker. "You've been too close-mouthed not to be hiding something, too smart for a mere tyro."

"Thanks."

"And assuming that you've picked up enough Southways to get you a chunk of fifty thousand shares when O.R.G. Class B is listed tomorrow—"

"Quite an assumption, isn't it?"

"It will do to illustrate," said the broker, a little sourly, and went on with his hypothesis: "And if you picked them up at around forty, which is probable, then you laid out over two million dollars. Two—million—dollars!"

HE said it and repeated it, like a challenge. He paused and waited for Bentley to comment. Bentley felt enormously uncomfortable inwardly, but managed to maintain his calm silence, and Ryster went on, pinching his words: "But you don't," he said, "quite look the part."

"What part?" It was a feeble retort, and Bentley knew it.

"People with that much money to play the market are just about known," Ryster went on dryly. "Yet you come bobbing up in a cloud of mystery, young man; and I, for one, can't swallow it. Even on margin, you must have put out over a million, and you still don't look like that much money."

"So," said Bentley shakily, "what?"

"So," said Ryster, caustically now, "you're fronting for somebody—some group with money, using you as a blind."

"Interesting deduction."

"I'll bet it's true. And if it is, I've got to know the reason why your group is pulling out—suddenly, like this. I'm going to know, too."

IT was a fantastically ironical situation, with Personal Mystery working too well, working Bentley out of a chance to take the broker's offer, perhaps, even out of the small profits he had cleared from selling old Jossop's original shares of swindle stock. He stood to lose even the proceeds of his adventure with Hartlow and his first experiment in Personal Mystery—everything he had made since he signed Brood's contract. Panic filled him. He was floundering for words. He felt suddenly that Caddis had either lied to him or had been wrong, that Ryster was far stronger, far more sure of himself than he had been led to believe.

But he made his boldest play now, desperately and almost hopelessly. He got to his feet, snatched up his hat and walked toward the door, saying:

"Well, I guess that settles it, Mr. Ryster. No use wasting each other's time. I could have used that ten-thousand-dollar bonus, though." And then he reached the hall.

He heard the telephone ring on Ryster's desk. He cursed inwardly as the broker spoke into the transmitter:

"Hello. . . . Hello—yes, this is Ryster. Oh, it's you."

A dismal cloud of gloom seemed to settle upon Bentley as he walked down the hall. He had talked himself out of the deal. Luck played against him. If only that infernal phone hadn't rung just then! He had played his trump card and lost. He had missed his one last—

Then he heard the broker's voice calling him:

"Wait a minute—come back here. . . . I say, Destiny!"

A new note seemed to have crept into the man's speech, something tense and

excited and troubled. Ryster seemed a little pale as Bentley came back. The telephone was askew on its cradle. A bead of perspiration showed on Ryster's nose. Plainly something had been said over the phone which affected the whole situation. Perhaps, after all—

"I've got to take a chance on you, Destiny," the broker was saying. "There has been some misunderstanding. . . . The board—the Exchange—ah—how long will it take you to get your hands on those rights? Get them ready for transfer, I mean?"

Bentley felt elation surge through him like new wine.

"Oh, as to that," he said with a tremendous casualness, "I have them with me. But of course if—"

The broker seemed shockingly relieved.

"I'll write you your check for ten thousand right now. You fill out the transfers—here's a form. Most extraordinary how my associates can—well, no matter. But—" He seemed almost pleading now, and Bentley was impressed to see a man so quickly changed. "But—if I could be sure that you and your group will stay out—"

"Mr. Ryster," Bentley said, "I can give you my personal word of honor—if it's worth anything—that I have no intention of entering the market in O.R.G. or anything else, if you buy me out. I can also answer for what you please to call 'my group.' You can believe it or not."

The man looked at him with red-rimmed eyes, staring, almost gaping.

"I hope that's true, young man. I hope to God it's true."

And Bentley watched his pen write across his check-book, a little tremblingly. Then he himself began filling in the curious document which the broker put into his hands.

He took the check, folded it and put it in his pocket. He laid on the desk the long envelope which Crump & Shriven had delivered to him, while the broker picked up the transfer slip and read it.

"But—but my God, boy," said Ryster, suddenly, "this is only for one hundred shares of O.R.G. What the devil—"

BENTLEY'S manner was bland in the extreme.

"That's all there is, Mr. Ryster," he said. "That's all I ever owned."

"Why, you damned young crook!" The broker was fuming. "You can't get

away with it. Give me back that check before I have you in jail."

"I don't," said Bentley, "see just why I should. And I don't believe you will have me arrested. . . . For many reasons! There is nothing crooked in my taking your check, Mr. Ryster. It was yourself who did all the talking about what you pleased to call my 'holdings.' It was you who *assumed* that I held fifty thousand shares."

"But your telegram—"

"My telegram was a private matter. If you chose to open and read it and act on it, it seems to be your error. And I'm going to hold you to the letter of your promise, Mr. Ryster. You owe me for one hundred shares of O.R.G. Class B at one hundred and twenty-five a share—exactly twelve thousand five hundred dollars—your own price. And I think you'll pay it, sir."

"Why, you damned little chiseler, I'll have you—"

"Just a minute, sir. Before you make threats, I might suggest that you inquire about those Southways shares from Colonel Jossop. . . . I understand you—ah—you know him—slightly. It might be difficult to explain your acquaintance with Jossop to the board of governors of the Exchange. Awkward, you know. It seems to me that there is a little homely proverb about a man straddling a fence. Something about being sure his feet are well braced on both sides. Do I make myself clear?"

The broker stared, then slowly nodded.

DISOURAGING and depressing were the next thirty days; as Bentley sat at his desk listening to the street noises, the only sounds that penetrated his solitary, empty little office, he was plunged into a deep slough of despond.

As the tedium of endless days went by with not a visitor in the place, not a breath of adventure on any horizon, he had grown increasingly restless and unaccountably angry—angry at himself and especially so at Ephraim Brood.

"The old fool ought to know when it's time to change," he kept telling himself. "Just because I had a couple of good breaks at first doesn't prove that dollars are going to take wings and walk in my door on account of a little hocus-pocus of his Personal Mystery scheme."

That was the thing that galled. He had got into this Personal Mystery business, only to find that it seemingly had played out before it was well begun.

There was plenty of cause for his alarm now, and he could prove it in black and white. If he were to follow Brood's schedule of \$2600 a day, thereby gathering in his million dollars out of a year of ghost-acting for Brood, he was shockingly behind.

"A fellow never realizes how big a million dollars really is," he told himself, "until he begins to get ideas of having it. It's like reaching for the moon. If it weren't for letting Brood down, I'd call it a day."

Endless bits of paper, scattered over his desk, carried the tell-tale figures. He had recapitulated them endlessly on a foolscap pad, only to tear it up and begin again. But the result was always the same. The totals told a factual story.

TAKEN IN

Brood's advance	\$ 500.00
Chronicle's option	500.00
Hartlow Deal	6,000.00
Ryster bonus	10,000.00
Sale of stock rights.....	12,500.00
	<hr/>
Total income	\$29,500.00

PUT OUT

Hotel (15 da. @ \$7.50).....	\$ 112.50
(month @ 200).....	200.00
Clothes	250.00
Miss Rylan (advance).....	240.00
(arrears)	30.00
Meals	35.00
Tips, etc.	75.00
Tel. & Tel.	3.75
Misc. Personal	47.82
Lost to Jossop.....	1,000.00
Actual office rent.....	400.00
Paid for Southways.....	5,500.00
Brokers Commission	1,875.00
	<hr/>
Total Expenses	\$ 9,769.07

Income	\$29,500.00
Outgo	9,769.07
	<hr/>

Net Profit

It had a nice look, that \$19,730.93. It was a good, comfortable sum of money in anybody's currency. And for a young man whose capital, forty-five days ago, had been only thirty cents (with debts of exactly that many dollars), it ought to have been a rather staggering sum.

Ought to be, but was not. It seemed somehow puny now. It had a threadbare look. A mere \$19,730.93, forsooth! Only a drop in the bucket by compari-

son to the \$117,000 he ought to have had snugly in the bank if he were to make that fabulous million.

"Just another flop," he muttered, snatching the offending paper and crumpling it into a ball. "I guess I'm born to be a flop. Flopped as a writer, then as a newspaper man, and then when a nut like Brood practically lays a fortune in my lap, I even muffed that, too. A hundred-thousand-dollar flop!"

Then he added in perverse desperation: "Well, to hell with it. I'm going back to the hotel and buy me a dinner, then hit the hay. Maybe a miracle will happen overnight if I lay off worrying about it."

And he put on his hat and coat.

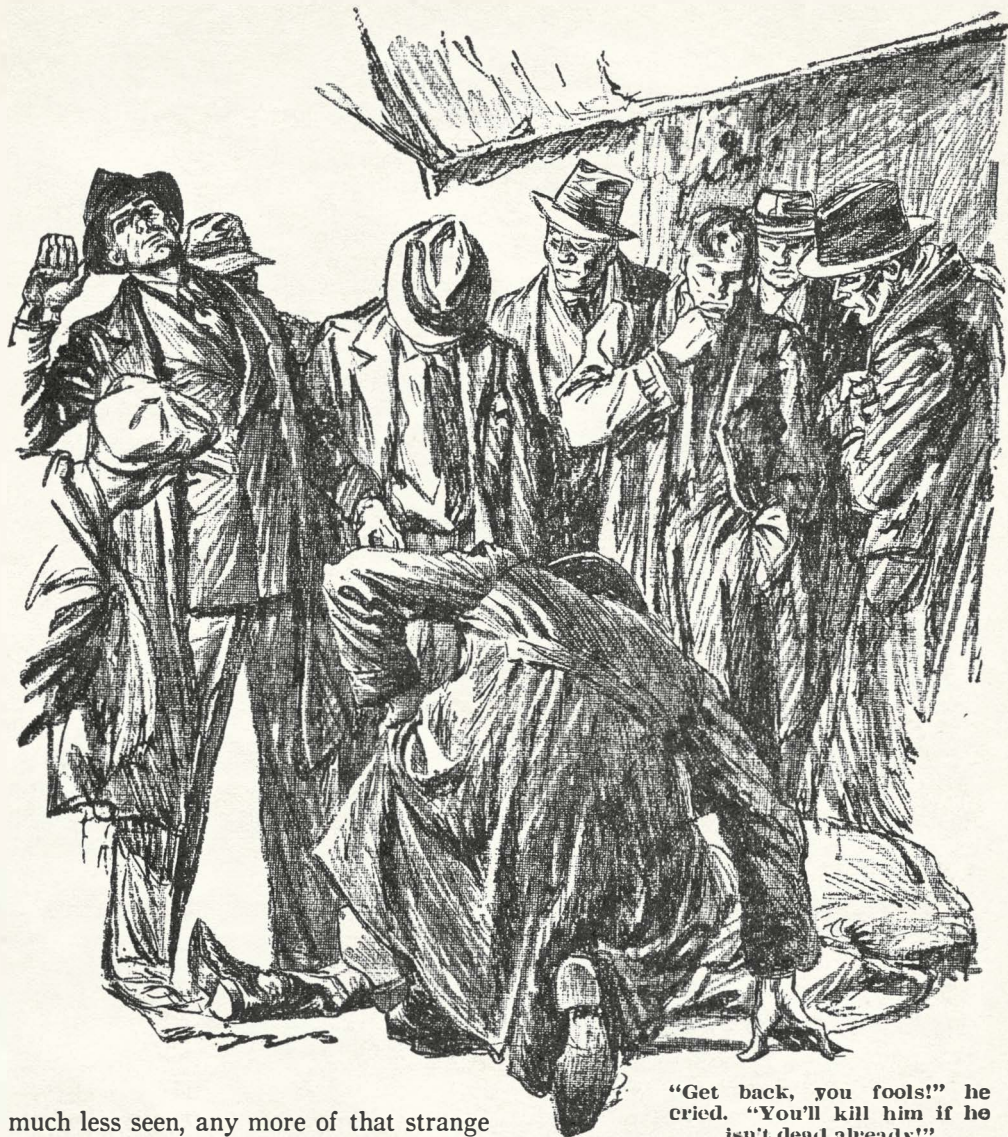
BUT there were more subtle regrets about those "lost" thirty days than the bare consideration of money. There was the dread, haunting inaction. No active young fellow with a still youthful gift of enthusiasm can sit, hours daily, in a stuffy, silent, dull office, reading multitudes of newspapers and playing cross-word puzzles while he waits for Adventure to knock on his door. For the sake of exercise, and because he detested subways, Bentley had fallen into the habit of walking at least part of the way from the hotel to his office in the morning. And as he walked, of course, he brooded on his recent career:

The Hartlow business had been fun; perhaps a little distressing at the end, but certainly a good beginning. The Ryster thing had been rather bitter, actually. He had made money. Personal Mystery had worked. But somehow he did not like the savor of what had happened in that Wall Street adventure.

For Mr. Ed Ryster, as Pyramid Jo Caddis had prophesied, had been caught in his own web of double-double-crossing. The Exchange had tossed the ambiguous new issue of O.R.G. out of its window in a drastic clean-up ruling. Broker Ryster, hauled before an investigating board, had confessed his hypocritical duplicity and had been suspended from membership in the Exchange, while the newspapers covered him with well-deserved mud. But somehow Bentley disliked the feel of having profited by it.

And then it all had stopped. . . . Thirty long, tedious, inactive days!

Even the Graymaster case, flaring up for a moment and dragging Bentley into its curious reaches, had all but died out in the newspapers. He had not heard,



much less seen, any more of that strange young lady Lorraine Graymaster. The judge before whom she had been brought after her gesture of voluntary capitulation had dismissed her case with much utterance of vague language. The district attorney had apparently abandoned his search for her eccentric uncle Buntsman Graymaster. Just why seemed not too clear, and Bentley had often wondered about the affair, albeit he had assured himself that he was well out of it. Still, it was the only mystery, the only romantic thing left in his life. Only two days ago there had been a brief paragraph in the press which had left him a little confused. It was in one of those broken editorials in which the editor deigns to make rapid and often caustic comment on the vagaries of city life, by quick pithy references:

"Get back, you fools!" he cried. "You'll kill him if he isn't dead already!"

". . . Among other curiosities is the fact that a person adjudged to be a lunatic by a jury of his peers is still at large, and for all we know may continue to be. No one seems quite to understand why the bloodhounds of the Law have abandoned their scent, but we may assume that the entire matter which set Park Avenue tongues to wagging last month has been, in some odd manner, settled 'out of court.'"

"I guess," had been Bentley's comment, "it's only one of those queer things. But I wonder what really did happen to the old geezer—and Brown Curly too. If they were to ask me, I'd say she was more screwy than her uncle. Funny business."



"Trouble is, you think Personal Mystery's a kind of abracadabra."

And thus he would have dismissed it, had it not been for what he began to call in his own mind "the Mystery of the Old Window-washer." For one morning, happening to glance up at a man washing windows high above a Sixth Avenue corner, he was struck by the fact that the fellow's face seemed somehow vaguely familiar. He stood and stared—then suddenly decided that it was none other than Buntsman Graymaster whom the old window-washer resembled! That, of course, was patently absurd. "Guess this business is driving me nuts!" he decided, and went on his way.

But the resemblance somehow haunted Bentley, and thereafter he strolled past that corner every morning. For it was entirely possible, he reasoned, that Graymaster could have a black-sheep down-and-out brother who resembled him. And it was also quite possible that if Bentley could catch the old fellow on the street-level sometime, he might engage him in conversation and get a clue to the whole mysterious business.

EPHRAIM BROOD had been adamant about Bentley's staying in the Pine Street office. Twice Bentley had ventured to visit him, and three times he had telephoned, almost pathetically urging the old man to give him a change of scenery, put him, as Brood himself had expressed it, into a "new situation." But Brood had refused. Moreover, he had refused with his typical explosiveness.

"Who in thunder," he demanded, "is running this show, you or me, boy?" And he dismissed Bentley's urgent plea with an abrupt:

"Trouble with you is, you're still hypnotized with Personal Mystery. You're playing *at* it, instead of using it. Just

because it started working right off, you think it's a kind of abracadabra that will go on working all by itself—like hatching an egg. You're too eager. You're playing schoolboy. You've got the best set-up in the world down there. You've got your corporation papers now, haven't you? And you've got twenty-five thousand dollars capital. What more d'you want, boy—molasses on it? Go back to your job and sit tight. Things'll happen, all right." Then he softened a little and laid his hand on Bentley's shoulder with a new, gentler and more fatherly gesture.

"Keep up your enthusiasm, boy," he said. "Rome wasn't built in a day, remember. And if you go for a spell without making any money, you'll catch up. Law of averages is on your side, boy—along with the Law of Personal Mystery."

And that had been that.

BENTLEY had, it is true, finally got himself incorporated under the somewhat ambiguous and cryptic firm-name of *Destiny, Inc.* His charter, obtained after two weeks of waiting and through the agency of an obscure lawyer whose offices were in the same building on Pine Street, permitted him to carry on almost any kind of business imaginable. It was, in brief, a masterpiece of broadness; and the lawyer—one Evers Dunne Bradshaw, had shown himself astonishingly capable at such matters for a man chosen at perfect random.

But there Bentley had remained, charter and capital stock and all, empowered by the State to manufacture, sell, buy, trade or negotiate anything from toothpicks to skyscrapers, without a show or a vestige of any business whatsoever darkening his door.

And that night, as he crept into bed at his hotel, he put his case neatly, if ruefully, with this summing-up remark:

"It's just been a freak series of coincidences, that's all. Doesn't prove a thing. You can't prove a theory by a couple of incidents that just happen to work out pat. And it's a darned shame, too. I was getting so I really *wanted* to prove the old bird's Personal Mystery. . . . Going sentimental about it, I guess."

On that thought he closed his sleepy eyes. "Tomorrow," he reflected wearily, "will be another day. I'm going to rub a mental rabbit's foot and see if I can't get something to happen. This waiting is just getting me down."

And so he slept, while the inner wheels which churn out the life-pattern of men whirred on, somehow merrily, somehow ironically.

For tomorrow "things" did happen.

IT was a Wednesday morning. Early November had come in with a growl and a sneer at puny mortals. The gods of winter were growling in the wind and blowing their flute-songs mournfully through the frozen streets. A thin but fast-gaining snow powdered the air as though to establish winter's precedent, slowing down traffic and bedeviling pedestrians. Frosted sidewalks tinkled underfoot. Rubber tires crunched in the new snow like teeth in a piecrust.

This morning, as usual, the mysterious window-washer was at work, though he was situated slightly lower than his usual perch. He had apparently completed the upper floors and was now dangling from the sill of a third-story window, hanging on with one hand while with the other he sloshed and wiped, grinning impishly down at the thronging crowds as though he guessed their secrets and knew that they were hurrying and scurrying for nothing of any consequence. And as if he thought it a good joke on them all.

The Sixth Avenue corner, right there, is one of the busiest in the world. Just as Bentley arrived and had espied his man, there occurred one of those perpetual traffic-tangles. A fleet of trucks had skewed to a forced standstill because a hand-cart laden with textile samples had been too deliberate in crossing. Horns blew. Whistles shrilled. Two traffic cops in torrents of rage were exhorting the truck-drivers and waving their blue-coated arms frantically. The pedestrian crowd wore angry, thwarted faces.

And over their heads the old window-washer grinned down like old Father Time himself, amused at this human greed, human stupidity and impatience.

Then, without prelude, it happened.

Crack!

The sharp sound came from across the street, overhead. The quick tinkle of glass, the screech of an hysterical woman, the sudden tensing of the crowd told the story: A pistol shot.

In Bentley's ear, a woman screamed:

"Dear God, look! He's falling! He's shot! Oh, Mother Mary!"

And sure enough, the aged window-washer, slipping from his perch where a



gaping break in a great glass pane showed that the bullet had struck, was dangling and clutching with frenzied hand at a coping, clutching, slipping, losing hold, dropping, catching at a window-flagpole which broke his fall, then tumbling with a sickening screech, hands flapping in the air, body soaring—only to be caught again on an awning over the ground-floor shop, which broke his fall but came down with him.

"Gee, he's kilt! Migawd, it's moider!" somebody shouted, and the crowd swept Bentley bodily toward the spot where a limp body lay enshrouded in striped canvas. His feet were almost treading on the man. He braced his back against the pressing bodies and cried out:

"Get back, you fools! You'll kill him, you'll crush him if he isn't dead already. . . . Get back! Give him air!"

He fought them. They yielded a little and stood gawkishly. Nothing is so heedlessly cruel as a curious crowd. Where were those cops? Why didn't they get there?

Bentley snatched the awning cloth away. The meager, wizened body of the man rolled out, limply, lifelessly. A sudden sense of need seized Bentley. He lifted the little man, watching the head dangle, then started as he saw the face.

It was the face of Buntsman Gray-master himself—the missing eccentric physician, disguised in the rags of a window-washer!

THE little eyes opened suddenly, and their impishness stared into Bentley's. The pinched, Voltairian mouth moved. Recognition! The little old man shuddered, squirmed, snapped his right foot away from somebody's hand—somebody

who was trying to pick him up. Then he scrambled to his feet, yelled something rather caustic to the straining crowd, looked up just in time to see a cop pushing his way through, and said to Bentley in a crisp little voice:

"That was too close for fun. Hope you can keep your mouth shut, young man. For your own sake, too. Name's Destiny, isn't it?"

Then he ducked, plunged through the fringe of the crowd where they skirted the railing of the basement entrance to the corner building, and was somehow lost in the very numbers of them.

That was about all. The cop had broken through, puffing. "What's going on?" he demanded. "Who's shot—and where'd he go?"

Bentley answered him.

"I think it was a window-washer," he said. "But I don't think he was shot. I think he wasn't even hurt—just tumbled and got hooked on the awning. Anyhow, he got away."

"The hell you say!" said the policeman.

But a dozen voices in chorus confirmed Bentley's story. Names and addresses of witnesses, Bentley's included, were taken. Questions were asked. Was it or was it not a shot?

Nobody was quite sure now. It might, admittedly, have been a backfire. The washer might have got scared, broken a pane and fallen—or fainted—or slipped. A hundred theories were offered.

But Bentley, as he disappeared into the subway entrance, knew that a shot had been fired.

"Now what," he demanded of himself, "do you know about that? That old Graymaster duck playing window-washer when he's got all the money in the world! No wonder they couldn't find him. It must mean something—something pretty queer, too."

BENTLEY was still puzzling over the oddity of the street-scene he had witnessed that morning when the man appeared. It is certain that the fellow must have come through the little ante-room, and stood awhile before speaking, but as far as Bentley had observed he had merely materialized. There had been nothing there; then suddenly there was a voice.

"All alone?" said the voice.

The man was impeccably dressed. His overcoat was of one of those costly materials which seem shaggy and heavy

but which are really featherweight. It was raglan-cut, giving him a faint outline of a slouch. His hat, too, was very patently hand-built to affect a somewhat rakish and battered appearance, albeit the "batteredness" may have cost upward of twenty dollars on Fifth Avenue. A smile hovered over the fellow's lips, yet the eyes were chilly, the lips thin and tight, the sallow face sun-tanned to a deep yellow. He was a man whom anyone would have been tempted to stare after—meet him in the Bronx or Timbuctoo.

"All alone?" he asked, but there was an assumption in the tone.

"Yes," said Bentley. "What can I do for you?"

"I wonder," said the man, and without invitation he came and sat loungingly in Bentley's other office chair.

"So you're John J. Destiny?" It was neither a question nor quite a statement. "Destiny — P.M." the fellow echoed, half to himself. "Fake name, fake title, of course, what?"

A TOUCH of the Englishman there. But there was no sting in the charge. The man still smiled, in his odd way.

"Perhaps," said Bentley, faintly irritated, "you'd be good enough to begin by telling me *your* name—and the reason for this visit."

"Perhaps," said the fellow, "I will. Suppose you call me Ross—Peter Ross. It isn't my name, but that will keep us on a sort of par, what?"

There seemed to be nothing to say to this, so Bentley remained silent. Ross went on, tapping a rose-tipped cigarette languidly on his hand.

"You're young—much younger than I had fancied."

"You didn't come here to take stock of my personal appearance," Bentley said; but the man Ross shrugged.

"Partly that. Partly to—shall I say warn you, against putting your nose in other people's business. Clear?"

"No."

The man paused, staring straight at Bentley. They exchanged stares. Ross finally said:

"You witnessed an accident just now—window-cleaner."

"Why—why, yes, I did."

"Then forget it. It never happened. You weren't there. You drove to your office by taxi. Besides, you have no acquaintance among window-washers. Unfortunately you gave your name among

other witnesses. Fortunately, you didn't talk. If you had you might never have got here. Clear?"

It was clear—the warning part of it. It was clear that someone had seen the moment's flash of recognition between Bentley and Buntsman Graymaster, had overheard the old man call him by name, clear that old Buntsman Graymaster was involved in something which was being actively resented by someone else, clear that this was a warning to Bentley to keep out of it—whatever it was.

"That," said Bentley, "is pretty strong language."

"Right-o," agreed the man, nodding. "We aren't savages. "We know your name has been coupled with Graymaster and his niece by the papers. But we have concluded that it was largely coincidence—or sentiment, perhaps. There is a chance that Graymaster will get in touch with you. It would be like him—his psychology. So I have come to tell you, don't. Just don't, that's all."

Bentley stared at him, reddening a little. Who were "we?" Who was telling what to do and what not? This rankled. He said:

"Were you, by any chance Buntsman Graymaster's—ah—acquaintance in the asylum? You aren't trying to make me believe that there is anything sane in what you're saying, are you? I don't like threats, Mr. Ross, open or covert. I don't scare easily. And I think I'm beginning to resent you."

Ross opened his mouth to reply, but the telephone rang.

"Careful," Ross said, as Bentley lifted the receiver. "Very careful—remember."

The voice over the wire was odd, too. A rasping, whispering voice said:

"Destiny—young Destiny? Don't answer—call me Jones. Meet me—music-room—library—seven o'clock tonight—don't talk—you know who—watch your step. They might—anything."

Then the wire clicked and went dead.

RETAINING the phone in his hand, Bentley spoke briskly into the mouth-piece. It was, he felt, a pretty good act. It was stimulated by his catching sight, out of the corner of an eye, of the ominous bulge in Mr. Peter Ross' coat pocket, where that mysterious gentleman had, just as ominously, thrust his hand.

"Okay, Jones," he said, and then he let his imagination run riot. "Okay, I've been waiting for that information. Thanks. What's that? Yes, I'll buy

the mortgage, but not at that price. Not a penny over five thousand. No, not a penny more. . . . What's that? Hell, no, tell him he can take it or leave it. You know how I do business. Phone me the answer."

Then he hung up. "What," he demanded of Ross, "were you saying? Sorry to interrupt. I seem to remember you were warning me—or could it have been a threat?"

Ross frowned.

"It could be," he answered bluntly. "You're a cagey number, Destiny. Don't outsmart yourself. Take well-meant advice and keep out of things that are bigger than you are." He paused, then added, "Well, cheerio. Probably I'll not be seeing you again."

"That'll be nice," said Bentley. Ross frowned again but kept his peace. He walked to the door and turned at the threshold to say, "And it won't do anybody any good to call the cops on this, my friend. Might be unhealthy, even. Remember!" Then he closed the door.

THE music-room at the big Public Library is scarcely a clubby place. It is quiet. You can sit there and dream. Or, if you go in for it, you can pore over valuable musical manuscripts and rare, seldom-heard scores. Some people even compose there.

But the subtleties of musical color were far from Bentley's thoughts as he sat there. All afternoon he had puzzled over the incredible metamorphosis of a window-washer into the much-sought-for and fabulously wealthy patent-medicine Cræsus, Buntsman Graymaster. Clearly Graymaster was hiding and doing a good job of it. The police would hardly look for Park Avenue's eccentric millionaire in the risky, unpleasant occupation of washing windows for a few dollars weekly. But if the police would not, *somebody* had. There was mystery in Graymaster. What was it Lorraine had said that crazy day in the taxi? "Something big, something terrible behind all this. . . . If you have any patriotism, any love for home and country—" Queer, sententious words for a young girl; but after that pistol-shot, and that Mr. Ross—

Six forty-five. Six forty-nine. Six fifty-two—fifty-five—seven o'clock. . . . Had he misunderstood? Had he made a mistake?

Seven-five. . . . A lean, ascetic-looking old gentleman with shaggy white hair came in, carrying an instrument-case. He

croaked to the clerk at the book-desk, demanding some musical composition which sounded foreign and remote to Bentley. And when he turned and walked toward the reading-table, Bentley was startled

opened it, rumbled and grumbled to himself in a foreign-sounding language, and buried his nose in the box. Presently he began scribbling notes.

Suddenly a bit of paper was flicked



in spite of himself. For under the hat, under the streaming white hair, the face was that of Buntsman Graymaster.

The old man croaked into a seat directly beside Bentley at the table and busied himself by scribbling demand-slips until the book-boy brought him a heavy manuscript of musical score enclosed in a dusty box. The old fellow

along the table and slid under Bentley's eyes. Scrawled in shaky handwriting was the pencil notation:

"Follow me. Destroy."

Bentley unostentatiously crumpled the note and tore it to bits under the table.

Then the old man closed his box of manuscript with a snap, carried it to the clerk, grumbled something about the inadequacy of the library's sources, and



A terrible light burst from somewhere near him; he heard a cry of pain—felt the hands relax.

pattered out the door, swinging his heavy instrument-case.

Bentley got up slowly, gathered his coat and hat, nodded to the clerk, who gave him a polite, "Good night, sir."

Then he too walked out of the music-room, just in time to see the old fellow's hat disappearing around the marble cornice where the winding steps lead to the floor below.

It was still snowing outside. The first snowfall of the year was coming thickly, stickily, whitely, catching a city of hu-

mans by surprise and wrapping humanity in a great white blanket of chill. There was nothing about the figure of the little old man kiting along with his instrument-case to suggest that he was aware of Bentley following him. He walked briskly, sure of his step. He went like a man with a destination and a determination to get there. He turned abruptly at Fortieth Street and padded through the slushy snow toward Sixth Avenue, while Bentley came along behind at a distance of forty yards or more.

THEY crossed Sixth Avenue with its rattling night-traffic, turned south and turned west again on Thirty-seventh Street, going slower now as the old man began to show signs of fatigue and effort from the hard walking.

"Now, just why in hell am I doing this?" Bentley asked himself a dozen times. "If ever I stepped into something that is none of my business, I'm doing it now. Something—God knows what kind of thing, but I'll bet there's trouble in it somewhere. That guy who called himself Ross—"

It was novelesque; it was out of the norm of things; it couldn't be happening.

But it was. The little old man was there, still plowing along the almost black street and going as though he meant it. And he had written that note, had made that telephone-call, had just barely escaped with life and limb when somebody shot at him on his window perch. You could make practically anything out of that you might want to.

After you cross Sixth Avenue, Thirty-seventh Street grows pretty desolate at night, because it is neither flesh, fish nor fowl, so to speak—neither a bustling business neighborhood (albeit it rubs elbows with the textile trade) nor yet residential, (although smart landlords still rent former lofts as apartments for not-too-choosy residents) but when you get across Eighth Avenue, you are really in the dark. Desolation was this night wrapped in a wet snow blanket.

"A nice comfortable place—for a murder," Bentley decided, watching the little old man sloshing along. "I'll bet the old duck has forgotten all about me. I'm getting sort of fed up with this."

He stopped for an instant to fish a cigarette out of his jacket pocket and to feel for his lighter. The walking figure ahead melted into the dark. Suddenly there was a stir—nothing tangible, really, for the sound was almost inaudible. It

was a faint, short bleating sound, lost, almost, in the flickering crackle of snow. There was motion and commotion just ahead. There was a soft thud. He hurried. Two moving figures were stooping; a third was dangling between them. And presently the misty tableau vanished from view into the street-side, the basement of one of the houses.

"Now what the hell—"

His feet seemed insecure, but he urged them on. Something had certainly happened—something wrong. The old man was gone. Where there had been only his plodding figure an instant before, he had seen shadows, violently active. He ran. A faint scuffling sound came to him.

And without taking thought for his own safety, Bentley leaped into the absolute black of the areaway of a building from which the sounds seemed to come.

An iron gate-door, such as is often used in basements below street-level, creaked on rusty hinges. Bentley hurled his excited, puzzled, athletic body down the single step of the basement-way. He heard a croaked exclamation:

"What the—"

Then something struck him a violent blow in the side, and he lashed out with both fists. His hand struck padded cloth. He seized it and hung on. Something heavy cracked against his shoulder. He sensed that he had hold of a struggling man's coat-collar, and that another man was flailing at him with a heavy object.

He leaped high, using the collar as a lever. Perhaps his hold had thrown the coat-owner off balance, for his jump landed him high on big shoulders, which seemed to sink under him, and they all crashed together in the snow. A hand closed on his neck. A fist grazed his face. He butted with his head and the heaving shoulders relaxed, but the arm of an invisible assailant was around him, and the heavy, leaden thing struck him a sharp blow on the forehead. And dully he felt consciousness slipping from him. A heavy boot buried itself in his groin. Demons of agonyscampered through him.

IN a violent heave, determined not to let himself slip into unconsciousness, Bentley tried to arch his back against the pressure of the invisible body which was weighing him down. Anger surged in him. Nobody could kick him like that and get away with it. Nobody could—

And then came the light.

It was a terrible light. It burst from somewhere near him. It was of an in-

tensity which seemed unbelievable. It was like a silent explosion. Broad daylight, millions of sun-candlepower seemed to burst from behind and flood the dark areaway with blaze.

And then his very eyes seemed to burn. His pupils seemed to be withered, his eyeballs shrivel in their sockets. An indescribable pain shot through his head. The flash of light became a powerful blow that numbed his nerves. He heard a sharp, hoarse cry of pain; he felt the hands which had seized him relax.

Then darkness shut him in.

WHEN he awoke, he was in his hotel room. Pain throbbled in his head. A cloth bandage was about his forehead and caked blood on the skin. He was on his bed. The light was turned on somewhere—soft, far away, but even through his closed eyelids the faint, dull light was agony. He felt as though his eyes had been burned in their sockets. A little pad of wet cloth lay over them; and when he removed it, letting more light through his closed lids, the agony increased.

He lay still for minutes. Then, with an effort, he forced himself to sit up. He ached in every muscle. The lump on his forehead was white-hot. The pain behind his eyes was like liquid fire burning. He sank back again, hardly wondering how it was he got to his rooms, hardly remembering the dark street, the scuffle in the snow, the vanishing figure of old Graymaster, a fight—and that terrible flash of light. He sank back; and presently the very intensity of pain throbbled him into sleep. . . .

It was morning when he awoke. The pain in his eyes had gone, but the lump on his forehead assured him that his memories were stark reality. He sat up and found himself fully dressed. His collar had been loosened. A little pitcher of water containing some aromatic chemical stood near his bed on a stand.

The buzzer at his door announced a visitor. It was the night room-clerk, going off duty at eight o'clock.

"Good morning, sir. . . . Hope you're feeling better this morning."

"Thanks," said Bentley. "I'll live, I think. How did I get here?"

Plainly the clerk was convinced that he had been overindulging in alcohol, for his smile had that implication.

"The young lady, sir—and a taxi-driver. They had a bit of a time with you, too. Pardon my saying so, sir."

"What young lady?"

"Why—" The clerk's grin was full of superiority. "Why, she must have been with you during the evening, sir. Quite charming, I must say, sir."

"But I—I wasn't with anybody!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the clerk. "You must have had yourself quite a binge to forget her. No offense, sir, only she was quite beautiful. And very attentive, too. She seemed very concerned about you, sir. Said your eyes troubled you. . . . Of course we understood—ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Bentley let it go at that, and presently the clerk left him.

"Now what," he demanded of the empty room, "can you make out of that? I follow an old duck down a dark snowy street. I get into a fight. *Pop!* I get clouted on the head with a persuader. Then there's that God-awful light, and I go out cold in the snow. I wake up right in my own digs, lugged here by a beautiful but mysterious lady. I'd call that pretty screwy. . . . But I know I didn't have a drink."

It was fully a quarter of an hour later when, after taking his bath and soaking his injured head with the hottest water bearable, he found the folded little paper. It was tucked under the scarf of his dresser so that only an inconspicuous end projected. He might, in fact, never have seen it at all save a subconscious feeling that something—he had not quite reasoned what—was lacking from the picture. Whoever the lady was (and he had formed a pretty good idea) must have known him and known his address. Besides, any casual woman, finding a man unconscious in an alleyway, would have gone to the police, not to his hotel with a wild story like that.

SO there was a kind of premonition that caught his breath as he picked up the folded paper. It was merely a piece of hotel stationery, probably taken from his own desk and hastily scrawled.

Thanks for everything. Sorry about the other day. Your eyes will be all right in the morning. It takes six hours, but you didn't get much light. We owe you a great deal now. Please be careful.

There was no signature, but he knew it needed none.

"So it was Brown Curls," he mused. "She's a weird little number, that girl. I'll bet she's the thoroughbred I figured she was at first, only—well, either I'm having a fancy case of high-powered



imagination, or she's mixed up with that uncle of hers in something that would make a dime-novel or a movie-thriller look like the Harvard Classics—"

And he added later, as a rueful afterthought:

"And so am I, for that matter. I wish to heaven I knew what it was. And what does she mean: '*It takes six hours, but you didn't get much light*'? I think I'm going to need a bodyguard."

IT required no little effort and much fortitude, that morning, for Bentley to leave the hotel, walk openly in the streets and go downtown to his office with the shadowy feeling of suspense which was born of the night's adventure. His head had cleared of its pain, albeit the lump remained to remind him grimly that he had, as he himself said it, "stuck out his neck." His eyes had recovered from the effect of that hideous light (whatever it was) quite as the unsigned note from Lorraine Graymaster had promised him. Physically he was well enough; but he was depressed—and not a little afraid.

"You can't," he told himself, as he stepped into the comparative safety of the subway express, "laugh a thing like this off. If it were just that old Graymaster is cracked and a victim of hallucinations, then why would that Ross gent come down to my place and hand

me a warning? If I wasn't a damfool, I'd take the next train to far-away places. I'm sure up to my neck in something, and I haven't the foggiest idea what. Well, it's their move now, and I'll bet I'll be hearing from them soon."

Time proved, however, that this was a wrong guess. The day crept by, like other days, and nothing at all happened.

More than once during the day, however, he was tempted to call the police and report the whole fantastic episode. Surely this could be a matter for police protection. Still, some inner sense of repugnance argued against it.

"If those boys took a pot-shot at Graymaster right on a crowded Sixth Avenue corner, with two cops right there, I guess the police couldn't do me much good," he reasoned sagely. "And besides, I'd have to give the old man away to prove my story, even if I could make the cops believe any such weird yarn."

So he abandoned that idea.

Another thing, however, puzzled him beyond measure.

"What gets me," he mused late in the afternoon, "is that damned light. *She* mentioned it, didn't she? Nobody ever saw such a light. It practically blinded me and knocked me out. Why, it must have been a billion candlepower—if it *was* a light. Anyhow, it sure put a stop to things right then—lucky for me. I'd give something to know what it was."

"She seemed very concerned about you, sir. Said your eyes troubled you—ha-ha-ha!"



His nervousness decreased a little next day, after a good night's sleep without danger or interruption brought him refreshed and calm to his office again. The monotony of waiting counterbalanced his fear of the unexpected.

Three more days, a fourth; and still nothing came, nothing happened. He might, for all New York seemed to care, be non-existent or dead. He began planning and scheming schemes by which he might entice or compel some new victim for his formula to work upon, into his office. He considered the possibility of advertising in the "Business Opportunities" columns, or composing circular letters, even of dressing in some outlandish costume and parading the streets.

But he dismissed them all with the echo of Brood's own words:

"Go back to your job, boy, and sit tight. Keep up your enthusiasm. Rome wasn't built in a day, remember."

Still, he resented the inaction. Time and time again he lifted the telephone to call Ephraim Brood and to make one more plea. . . . Perhaps he ought to tell Brood about the Graymaster business. Perhaps that would change his mind.

But each time he paused and quietly laid the receiver down again as he seemed to hear, in his inner consciousness, the fiery little man's probable response:

"Don't come to me with any such crazy yarn, boy. Serves you right, any-

how. Meddling with women again! I warned you, didn't I? I don't hire you to play squire to Junior Leaguers and their uncles. Now you get out of here and go back to work and keep your mind on Personal Mystery, that's what."

BY Tuesday, Bentley's depression was at its height. The debit side of the Personal Mystery balance had mounted, now, to an astronomical figure. He was already over one hundred and thirty thousand dollars short of his allotment. A sense of inadequacy was heavy upon him. No good telling himself to be calm. No good writing it all down in pencil, to contemplate the mounting debit figures dolefully. No good sitting at his desk, listening tensely for the ghostly footsteps of Adventure which did not come. He decided to march straight to Ephraim Brood and admit the futility of it all, quit, break his contract.

And then, almost on the very crest of decision, came the sound of that key turning in his outside door.

He started; he himself had presumably the only key in his pocket. That he had locked the door at all was due to a habit formed during those first worried days after the attack on Graymaster into which he had been so inevitably drawn. Lurking thugs with evil weapons seemed to haunt every shadow. He had locked his door, daily, as a simple precaution.

The fears had grown dim as his more personal worries had increased, but the habit of locking his door had persisted.

And now, a key was turning in his lock; and his door was swinging quietly open.

"Hey!" he cried out. "Who's there? What the—"

No verbal answer; but the rangy figure of the man who had called himself Ross stepped in and cut off Bentley's outcry with a gesture.

"Sit tight, Destiny," said the flat voice; and a small automatic in Ross' hand gave emphasis to the order.

BENTLEY sat tight. No words were available for response.

"This is it, this is it!" he could almost hear himself thinking. "Here it is—whatever it is!" But aloud he said:

"I hoped you wouldn't come back."

The man merely nodded.

"You didn't hope hard enough, friend. Careful. Don't try anything. Take a look out of your window to the window across the street before you start anything you'll regret."

Bentley looked. The street was quite narrow, and across its gap he could see, half-hidden in the relative darkness of what seemed to be an office window, the head and shoulders of a man, hunched a little, and gripping some object with nervous tenseness.

"That's a Mannlicher express-rifle he's got, Destiny," said Ross' harsh voice. "Take that into consideration. You might be interested to know that he's been there for five days. I could have snapped my fingers any time, and the place where your face is would have suddenly become very messy. Hollow soft-lead bullets are—well, destructive."

Bentley shivered.

"But you didn't snap," he said. "Why the consideration?"

Ross' smile was mirthless.

"If we had thought it necessary," he said, "we might have removed you from circulation any time since your little—incident the other night in Thirty-seventh Street. You can thank science, and the little lady, that the police did not pick up a frozen body next morning. Those chaps were working on you, and they aren't the type to leave a job undone. However, the lady and her light saved you." He paused, then added:

"Perhaps to give *me* the pleasure."

"Nice people, you are—whoever you are," Bentley observed; but in his mind

he was wondering. "The lady and her light,"—just what did that mean?

"Don't," said Ross abruptly, "play the buffoon."

"Just what do you expect me to do, Ross—grovel and plead? I don't know just why you seem to be on my neck, but since you are—get on with it. Or do you want to tell me what it's all about?"

Ross spoke slowly:

"Now that," he said, "is a queer tone to take—for you." He apparently meant something by that, but it was over Bentley's head. However, Ross went on: "We don't want to leave a trail of blood for the newspapers to whine over—even the Doctor knows that, stubborn as he is. Frankly, my lad, I'd prefer to get what we want without—ah—violence."

"Just what," said Bentley, "do you want?"

Ross leered. "That's not even good acting, Destiny," he said. "Especially after this morning."

"Why, this morning?"

"So? You didn't know about the Doc? Our noble savior of mankind turned himself over to the cops this morning. You were here at the time, of course. Still, you knew he would, sooner or later."

"Did I?"

Ross said nothing. Bentley, edging himself imperceptibly away from the direct view of the window across the street, stalled for time. He said, curtly:

"So what, Ross? You have an idea to spill, I gather?"

Ross nodded. "Yes," he muttered, "I think I see the set-up now. Not bad, either. It would be smart of the old man to go back to the asylum—knowing you had the formula."

"All right, so you've decided I have the formula. Now what?" He felt that an effort at irony was his sole refuge. He simply *had* to discover what Ross was talking about, the clue to this whole amazing business of Graymaster.

But it was the word "*formula*" that both stymied him and urged him on. What formula? The old Doctor was some kind of chemist, he knew—had made millions in patent medicines. But patent medicines wouldn't be likely to create a situation like this. It had to be something more important—and valuable.

AND here was Ross, coolly accusing him, Bentley, of having some formula! Why—it was pure, unadulterated Personal Mystery, if you wanted to call it that. Only it had a catch to it. You

couldn't play any million-dollar games with it. Because to do that, you had to have an inkling of what it was about.

Ross was saying:

"You're a canny lad, Destiny. But now they've left you holding the bag."

"Who have? What bag?"

"That old fanatic, Graymaster—and his niece, too."

Bentley flared. "Lay off her—"

Ross grinned largely, evilly.

"*Touché*, eh?" he said. "I had forgotten your romantic feeling. Apologies, friend." Then he went into a frown. "But don't be fooled, Destiny. That girl is the smart one. She's using you. She's used others before you."

WHAT did he mean? What *did* he mean? Let him talk, and the whole thing might come out. Play up to him, keep down that absurd resentment. Who was Lorraine Graymaster, anyhow—just a girl he didn't really know. Besides, she *had* tried to use him: she had tried to get him to sue those newspapers . . . talking about "duty to humanity" and other sententious things. . . . Make him talk, now, make Ross talk.

"Suppose," said Bentley, "you go into details."

Ross eyed him, then said, in his clipped way:

"Right-o. The girl saved you the other night—incidentally she put two husky men in the hospital with that damned light. She took you to your hotel. I'm willing to bet she slipped you a copy of that formula then."

"What makes you think so? And if she did, then what?"

"Because Graymaster must have got rid of it, or he wouldn't have given himself up, and because that would be the smart kind of thing the girl would do. . . . A guess, I'll admit, but a good one. And if you've got it, son, you might just as well take the easy way. We'll get it, sooner or later."

Bentley considered all that. Small pieces of it were fitting together now—only the main fragment was still missing. What kind of a formula?

"Do I gather you're making me a proposition, Ross?"

"Not me, personally. I'm only a hired man, Destiny. But I can take you where that formula will be worth money—a lot of money, Destiny."

"How much?"

"Can't say, exactly. Your quixotic doctor turned down a cool million for it."

"Why did he?"

Ross gave that bleak grin once more.

"Now you're stalling, Destiny," he said. "We don't need to go over that story, do we? But in case your ignorance is not all bluff, I'll tell you that your friend Dr. Graymaster may not be actually insane, but he's cracked on fanatic patriotism."

"And you think maybe I'm not patriotic?"

"I think you'll see it isn't a question of patriotism. We're not planning to make war on America."

"War?"

Ross ignored him.

"Besides, the War Department turned Graymaster down flat. They don't want his invention as a gift or for money. If they're foolish, it's not unpatriotic to sell an invention to some one else, is it? You come with me, Destiny, and keep your wits bright, and I can make you a very rich young man—if you play our way. You aren't in this, really. You owe the Graymasters nothing. Don't be stupidly sentimental." And he added slyly: "And don't let a pair of gray eyes get you into a narrow place, young friend. Come with me, and—"

"Wait," Bentley said. "Wait—let me think a bit. Don't rush me."

And Mr. Alias Peter Ross nodded, his bleak eyes showing a faint touch of relief. He relaxed his automatic, letting it dangle on his knee. He glanced at his wrist-watch, then said:

"I'll give you five minutes. After that, it's my party—on my terms."

THE phantasmagoria of vivid thoughts crowding through Bentley's mind during that brief interval would require volumes to record. A jig-saw puzzle whose pieces would never fit until one lost one was discovered. The word "*war*" stood out. That was a kind of clue to it. "*War*" and "*formula*." If the old Doctor had an invention, it was of military nature. *That* could explain all this mystery-within-mystery, this oddity of public shooting, spying and all that.

Then came the word "*light*." Nothing military about a light. Unless it meant a death-ray. That was far-fetched.

But one thing was clear—a clear case for Personal Mystery. Here was Ross—or whatever his name was—accusing him (no other word for it) of possessing, or obtaining, or hiding, or of having access to something which some other country wanted. Offering him money for it. But



"Take a look across the street, before you start anything you'll regret."

the Graymaster girl hadn't given him any formula. Still, if Ross thought so—

"Time's up, lad. How about it?"

"I'll play the hand out," said Bentley, and the words had more meaning, perhaps, than Ross suspected.

The automatic was steady again. Bentley got into his coat. Ross nudged him toward the door and took his arm, slipping the gun into his pocket, where Bentley could still feel it pressing against his side through the cloth.

"Sorry," said Ross. "I can't take any chances. Act up, now, and don't make me have to use this thing."

He closed the office door behind them, locked it, and rang for the elevator. The car was slow in coming, but when it arrived, Bentley's last hope vanished—it was not the old elevator operator, but a new face; and a glance, exchanged between the man and Ross, convinced him that he was in the pay of "them," whoever they were.

Downstairs a long European car was drawn up at the curb. A chauffeur in livery stood waiting, opened the door as Ross edged Bentley toward it—in a manner which any passer-by, though there were none, would have thought friendly. But as Bentley stepped inside the darkened tonneau, something heavy fell on his head and he fell forward unconscious.

JUST where Bentley was when he recovered consciousness, he never knew.

The base of his skull hurt violently, and was sore to the touch.

He was no longer in the car. He was stretched out on a long divan, in a high-ceilinged room with long heavy draperies drawn across the French windows. Dizzily he got to his feet, walked toward the draped window at one end of the room and pulled the curtain-cord, drawing the draperies apart and revealing a broad white expanse of snow. The country, of course. They had taken him out of the city. That crack on the head was an anesthetic to keep him from knowing just where. The door of the room would be locked, of course. Some one would come, presently and ask—what was it? Oh yes, all that crazy business about a formula that a girl was supposed to have given him. Ridiculous, of course. How could they be so gullible? Lorraine Graymaster had given him nothing—or had she? Yes, she had—that note. What had become of the note?

It is hard to push the memory back over five days and pick up a sequence of

details. He could see himself that morning, his head bandaged, his eyes aching as though seared with an iron, picking that folded paper from his dresser. He could remember reading it, puzzling over it . . . Then what?

Had he thrown it away—or put it in his desk for future reference?

He simply could not recall it.

"But that wouldn't be what they want. That was a spontaneous little note, even if it was kind of queer and cryptic." So he told himself. But the very word *Cryptic* in his mind formulated another idea. Code—could it be code? Improbable, but possible.

"SO the name," said a dry voice behind him, "is Destiny?"

Bentley spun around. It was a little man with an astonishingly large cranium who stood in the doorway. The huge head was thatched with bristling gray hair, and the face was given a spadelike aspect by a triangle of pointed beard and heavy mustaches, tilted a little upward.

And gleaming through a monocle whose ribbon dangled to the man's waistcoat, was a single eye, luminous, baleful, poignant, incisive. The other was obliterated by a long scar which cleft the man's face from brow to chin, like the slash of a knife—or a saber.

"That's the name," said Bentley. "Where's Ross? Now that you've got me here, I suppose I haven't even the chance he promised me."

"Come with me," said the man, ignoring Bentley's observation altogether. Bentley followed him out the door into a short corridor. They turned and entered a large room which might have been a drawing-room, but now had a long table down its center—at which sat eight men. At sight, Bentley knew them for Europeans. No American group would, all as one man, stand and click heels as the little man entered; nor would they all wear beards as these did.

At each end of the table were empty chairs. The little man with one eye indicated the lower one, saying:

"Mr. Destiny will sit there, please. Be seated, messieurs." And he walked to the upper end, while all obeyed.

"Rossenisch," he said then.

A door at the far end of the room opened, and the man called Ross came in.

"Your Highness?" he said.

"Inform us in our own language, precisely what it is we may expect of Mr. Destiny," said the little man.

Ross clicked his heels. Suddenly he seemed different, a man accustomed not to command, but to obey. He bowed from the waist at the group around the table, severally and individually. Then he began speaking in a quick, staccato gibberish which Bentley neither understood nor recognized, although he felt it had a Slavic or perhaps Germanic lilt.

Presently Ross had finished; he bowed several times more, and withdrew—all this while without so much as a glance in Bentley's direction. Then the little man addressed as "Your Highness" lifted his dry voice again:

"Stand, Mr. Destiny."

Bentley got up. Why not? There was nothing to be gained by resistance.

"It is clear then" (the pronunciation was "*eet ees clair, den,*") "that you have information which you will sell?"

"Frankly, I don't know. I never said so. I've insisted I have nothing. I was told that if I came here, I would be given a chance to make money. I came—not altogether under my own power, because somebody tapped me on the head with a persuader. And now I'm here. I can't tell you what I don't know. So I'll wait until you make me a proposition. Then I'll decide what I'll do."

His Highness gave a monstrous diabolical wink with his one good eye.

"The young American is an independent spirit, gentlemen," he said. "And a shrewd bargainer."

Bentley waited for more. It came:

"Is the sum of fifty thousand dollars, in your estimation, an important piece of money?"

"It sure is."

"It is yours, young man, for informing us whether or not the young woman of whom you know left any written word in your room when she so gallantly transported you there. We are acquainted with the details. Do not quibble. You know precisely what I mean."

"Yes—" Bentley was hesitant. "She did leave something. But it's only honest to tell you it isn't worth your money."

"And why?"

"Two reasons: Because it was just a 'thank you' note, and because I've lost it. I don't know where it is."

THE baleful eye frowned, if such a closing of it and a rumpling of the livid scar could be called a frown.

"That," said His Highness, "could be—unfortunate—for you."

"I suppose so. I can't help it."

There was a buzz of conversation in their own outlandish tongue. There were gestures; there were shrugged shoulders. Presently the one-eyed one said:

"And your memory? It is good, no?"

"Pretty good. But I wouldn't guarantee a perfect reconstruction of a bit of writing I only saw when I was feeling pretty sick, and five days ago, at that."

The little man motioned Bentley to resume his seat, commenting:

"Honesty is a baffling virtue, so very seldom encountered. And difficult to believe when seen—"

Bentley sat down, saying:

"I'm not any more honest than the next man, but I know when I'm in a bad spot. People don't hand out fifty thousand dollars for nothing—not when they could hold me here until they got it anyhow. There's a catch in this. I'm not a fool."

His Highness made a wry smile.

"No man is a fool—by his own standards," he said. "And you are correct. We will not pay you money for something of no purpose. If it is true, as we suspect, that the young woman's note contains a code, then we will pay. If not—" He shrugged and his one eye rolled significantly.

"I guess," said Bentley, "I'll have to take it the way it comes. Give me a pencil, and I'll try to write it out. I don't promise anything."

His Highness uttered a sharp word. The meeting rose—all save Bentley—as one man, and the bearded gentlemen filed out of a door, only the one-eyed little man remaining.

"Writing materials are here," he said, indicating a drawer with his hand. "We afford you the benefit of solitude. Be smart!" And he walked out stiffly.

IT was almost comic opera. It had nothing in common with reality; these men were characters out of a book. . . . This couldn't be happening right here in Westchester, or wherever they were. Yet the soreness at the back of his head gave it a painful twinge of reality. And now what had he to do? Sit down and write word for word a message of five lines that he had glanced at through a fog of sickness. Fifty thousand dollars! Good Lord, what would be worth fifty thousand dollars—a few scrawled words?

But of course, he reasoned, they wouldn't pay him. They'd probably chuck his body under a country culvert somewhere, or cast him in a cement

mold. You read about things like that, even in the newspapers. Still, he had to take the chance.

Words came to him quickly.

"Thanks for everything," he wrote. He remembered those three words clearly. And, "Sorry about the other day." He could see the high, arched orthography, the hurried, tumbled letters written by a nervous, worried girl. "The other day," meant the day she had met him in the station, of course, and her unaccountable behavior in the taxicab. But what the rest of it? About his eyes, of course. Said they'd be all right in the morning. But how did she say it? He got up and paced the hardwood floor. What was it, exactly? How could a man remember the exact words?

HE tried to focus, to concentrate. A million foreign extraneous thoughts crowded in on him: Pictures of old Brood, telling him what a fool he was. Pictures of old Graymaster's half-sneering smile, which was just a little mad, yet contained a lingering warmth.

Hundreds of pictures, but nothing more of that insignificant little note Lorraine had left in his hotel. Just nothing.

But who were these people, practically kidnaping an American citizen, bribing him to sell some fantastic military secret, threatening his life? To hell with them—he'd make a break for it! He could get out of that window before anyone could get to him. He'd chance it.

He was at the window. He flung back the long curtains. He had his hand on the handle-catch. The window was opening in the middle. He had one foot on the ledge. He could feel the glitter of sunlight on snow. . . .

And then he stepped back.

A man below had covered him with the glinting muzzle of a machine-gun.

Whatever they were, this was no comic-opera crowd. They meant business.

Back at the table again. . . . Writing and rewriting and writing again. Two sentences, eight words. He was sure of those, but the rest weren't there at all. Just gone—something about his eyes, about light, and about six hours, something obscure, almost meaningless. It *could* have been a code. Perhaps it was. Perhaps the girl and her old crank of an uncle had been using him. . . .

Then suddenly:

"The telephone—that's it!" he fairly cried out. "I put it under the telephone. I remember it now, just as plainly. I

was on my way out, and I stuck it under the telephone so it wouldn't get lost!"

He dropped his pencil. He called out:

"Hey!" And waited. "Hey, hey!" he yelled. No answer. Then another thought: If he did somehow succeed in remembering those words, they might not be code, and they might be worse than useless. Or if they were code, what would force these strong-hands to pay him fifty thousand dollars? A push, a crack on the head, a silenced rifle-bullet, a couple of bags of Portland cement and some sand, and the world might never learn that Bentley Dewert, alias John J. Destiny, was occupying the place of honor in the center of a concrete pile on some rich foreigner's boat-pier. But if he could get them to come back to the hotel with him—

"Hey, Your Highness!" he yelled.

Steps at the door. The one-eyed fellow's spadelike beard and his ponderous dome of gray thatch appeared.

"It is not necessary to shout, young American. The acoustics here are excellent. One hears you—at a distance. What is it?"

"I can't seem to recall more than the first two sentences, sir, not to be sure. But—"

The single eye bored into him. There was a slow flush on the gray face.

"That is most unfortunate—for you, my young American. Perhaps there are ways of—ah—stimulating your memory. Ways not so pleasant."

Suddenly Bentley was not afraid. He had an urge to laugh. So they would torture him, would they? Then he had been right. They would never pay him that money, even if he did remember the girl's note. He'd fool them now.

"Just a minute!" he said. "I told you I couldn't remember. I didn't tell you the rest. I can do better. I remember now where I put the note. I can get you the original—for cash money."

"The original?" His Highness was impressed.

"For cash money—fifty thousand dollars."

"Ah—yes, of course. And where is it, young man?"

BENTLEY was not to be caught. He said:

"Back in the city."

"Your hotel? Your office? Where?"

"Where I can get it—or lead you to it. After I'm sure of the money."

"You don't trust us, then?"

"Not much. Would you, in my place?"

The single eye blinked. A faint smile, or at least an expanding of the lips.

"Rossenisch!" Again that simple word, and Ross appeared in the door behind His Highness as though by some magic.

"Our young American has tricks, yes? It is now that he remembers where is the letter from the young woman—the original letter. It could be true, no?"

"I would say so, sir," said Ross; and Bentley could have liked the man deeply as a friend at that instant.

The one-eyed fellow said:

"But he wishes to be sure of his money. He does not trust us, this American."

"Americans are known for their shrewdness, Your Highness."

"H-m-m—so it would appear." His Highness turned to Bentley now, saying: "And just how would you assure yourself of this money? What is to prevent us from promising, with no intent to keep our promise? Our position seems to be the stronger one."

"Sure it is—only—only if you plan to kill me anyhow, I could lie, and you'd never get the formula or the letter or whatever you think it is. Or if you tried beating me up or torturing me, I could—"

ONE-EYE grimaced suddenly.

"Such talk of torture! You read too many novels, young American."

"Call it that," said Bentley grimly.

"And your plan to insure our good faith?"

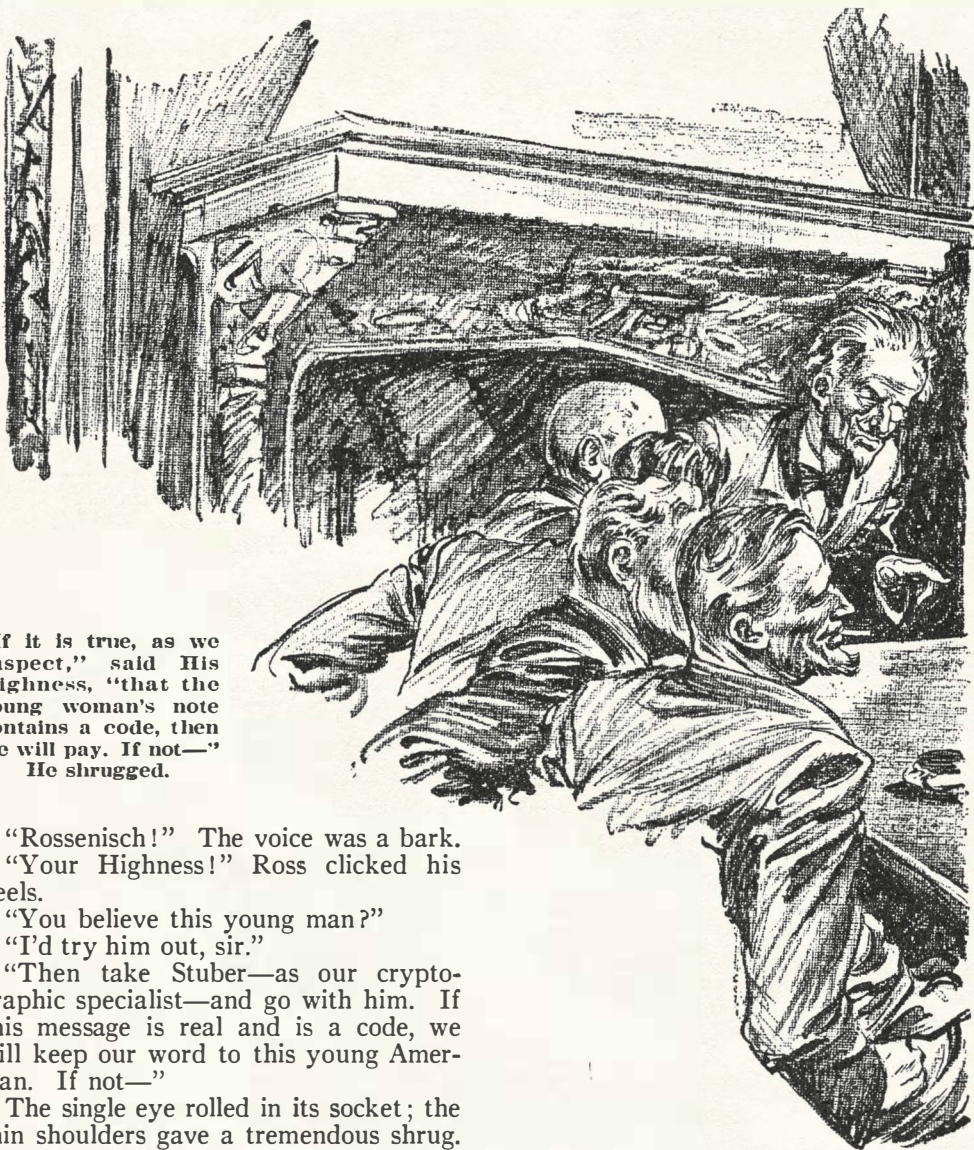
"A certified check before we leave here. You can come with me, or send some of your flunkies. If the letter isn't jake—well, I'm only one man without a gun."

The one-eyed fellow was almost cackling with silent laughter.

"Bravo!" he said. "Our young American has perception. Is it not so, Rossenisch? *Ja, ja*, but he has that." But he turned suddenly bristling, and glared out of his single orb, saying: "And where, wise young American, would we obtain a certified check in this lonely spot?"

"I don't know. I don't know where we are. But you probably can get it. You have a car. You go to New York. It can't be after banking-hours yet."

Bentley became suddenly afraid that he sounded too pleading, too eager. If they only would fall for it, if they only would. . . . Even without his fifty thousand—he didn't quite believe in that anyhow—he'd have a chance to get away in the hotel. If they only—



"If it is true, as we suspect," said His Highness, "that the young woman's note contains a code, then we will pay. If not—"
He shrugged.

"Rossenisch!" The voice was a bark.
"Your Highness!" Ross clicked his heels.

"You believe this young man?"

"I'd try him out, sir."

"Then take Stuber—as our cryptographic specialist—and go with him. If this message is real and is a code, we will keep our word to this young American. If not—"

The single eye rolled in its socket; the thin shoulders gave a tremendous shrug. Words were not needed. Bentley chilled.

IN the car they had him blindfolded. Ross—or Rossenisch, as little One-eye called him—sat next to Bentley, holding his automatic close, holding his hand tightly on the bandage which covered Bentley's eyes. The fattish fellow with a white beard that barely dribbled over his chin sat on the other side. He was called Von Stuber—or just Stuber, by His Highness. He had no visible or sensible weapon, but he had a deadly face, and Bentley felt him to be, in some intangible way, more deadly than Ross' gun. Ross was a queer one. He spoke better English than the others. He had a trace of Oxford in his speech; yet he had a foreign manner too. But he was more sensitive under his hardboiled exterior than His Highness under his polish and precision. Deadly, those other men.

Then the bandage came off; and as it was whisked away, Ross was saying:

"All right, young friend; we're in the city, now. You can look all you want."

"Thanks." Bentley's accents were ironical. "I don't much care. I'm only glad to get rid of—your friends. Believe me, I don't want to go back there."

Outside was Broadway, uptown. The car sped rapidly, pausing only for an occasional traffic snarl or a light. Presently it turned into a side street in the Eighties, with a slight wrenching of brakes. Bentley said:

"You haven't asked me where to go."

"We're going to a bank."

"Then this money is no gag?"

"Not unless you gag on it, friend."

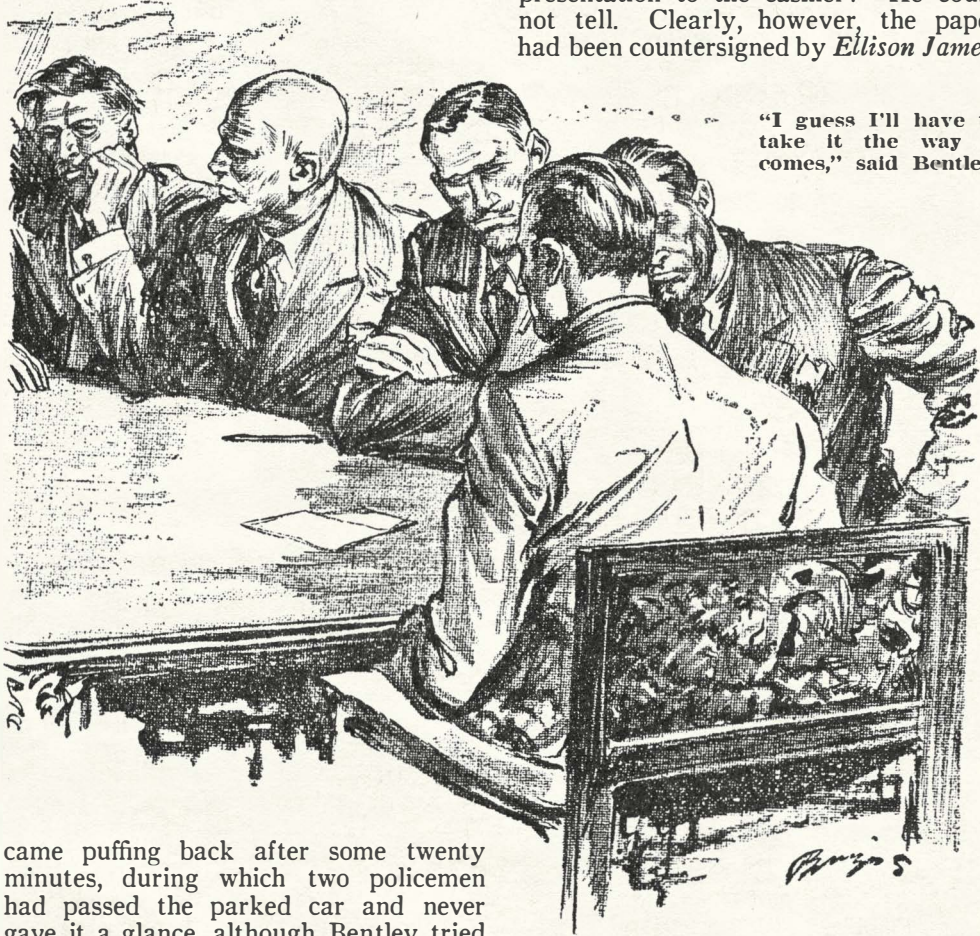
The car drew up at an uptown branch of one of the country's largest banking institutions. Stuber got out of the car,

while Ross, automatic dangling in his hand, sat and looked at Bentley.

"This has been friendly so far," he said, with evident meaning. "Keep it that way."

Bentley nodded. The man Stuber

that the rest of the name was "Stuber." He was disappointed. He had hoped to gain some clue to the identity of His One-eyed Highness through that signature. Had Stuber signed it? Or had some other individual written it before presentation to the cashier? He could not tell. Clearly, however, the paper had been countersigned by *Ellison James*,



"I guess I'll have to take it the way it comes," said Bentley.

came puffing back after some twenty minutes, during which two policemen had passed the parked car and never gave it a glance, although Bentley tried to twist his face into expressions of acute agony, hoping they would come to investigate. Stuber thrust an envelope into Ross' hand with a guttural growl and a glare at Bentley. Plainly he did not believe in indulging this young American.

"Well, friend," Ross said, "from now on it's your party. Where do we go?"

"Wasn't there something about a certified check?" Bentley asked him, and Ross gave him an odd look, then put the envelope into his hand.

"You'll be a rich man—if you live," he said.

Bentley opened the envelope. There could be no doubt about the check's validity. It was signed with an undecipherable scrawl out of which Bentley made a "Von" but could not be certain

Cashier; and with such a signature would be honored anywhere.

Bentley put the envelope into his pocket, saying:

"Well, we'll drive to my hotel, now."

Ross gave him a quick, hot glance.

"Don't make any mistakes, son. We've gone over your hotel room with a fine-tooth comb."

"I haven't," said Bentley, "told you the note was in my room. Besides, you could have missed it. . . . Give me a chance."

But the look on Ross' face, as he nodded slowly and gave instructions to the driver, was not nice to see.

THE car rolled along, Bentley's nervousness increasing with every block. Who were these men? From what coun-

try? Spies, of course. Secret agents. Every country seems to have spies in America. But why? What was it after all that they wanted?

Call it that the "formula" had something to do with that "light." And it must be something of a military nature. People don't go around murdering people for a mere light. Or would it be a death-ray after all? Pretty far-fetched, that. A death-ray was too remote a possibility to take seriously. It must be something else.

Anyhow, *this* was serious. Ross might be a jovial fellow in his hard-boiled way, but that gun of his was real. And in just a minute, now, they'd be at the Washington Towers. What then? Suppose the note had been taken from under the telephone? Could be, of course. The housemaid could have taken it, thrown it away. Very likely. And once alone in his rooms with those men, it would be a tough spot. Or suppose they found the note? It would not be what they wanted, of course. No formula in the thing. No code. About a chance in a million that they were right about that. No, he had to make a break somewhere—in the hotel lobby, of course. They wouldn't dare start shooting in there. Perhaps the hotel dick would be hanging around. He often was.

The car was stopping now, and Ross became immediately on the alert, his gun pressed more tightly into Bentley's side through the cloth of his coat.

"Careful, now," he said, as though he had read Bentley's mind.

The belted doorman who ushered them out of the machine did not suspect that the "bond of friendship" which caused these three gentlemen to cling so close together was an automatic of foreign make under the coat of one. Neither did the pressing knot of passers-by. But just before entering the lobby, one of them said queerly:

"We'll try the side entrance, friends." And he steered his little party abruptly out of the doorman's hands. At that, the pompous doorman stopped and stared after them, mouth open.

"Gee, can't they make up their minds?" he demanded of the empty air.

IT was not, however, the official side entrance to which Ross guided Bentley, but rather to the service-door, a little below toward Lexington Avenue; and Bentley's momentary hopes were dashed and lost in a sudden sense of panic.

There wouldn't be any lobby. Nor any detective. Nor any chance for a break—unless some freak of circumstances produced it.

"I'm in for it, now," he kept thinking. "There's not a chance in ten that that note will still be there; and if it is, it won't be worth a damn to them; and if that Stuber is a code-expert, won't he just love to take it out on me!"

But the service door was open. They were inside. A short passage led to a broad, tiled room which gave on the service elevators. An elevator car was waiting there, a uniformed operator lounging on his feet and reading a paper. Bentley's hopes shot up again, only to be dashed once more. For Ross said a short, quick word in his foreign tongue, and the uniformed hotel employee jumped as though stuck with a pin, clicking heels, saluting.

ROSS barked again, gutturally. So this was how they had been able to search his rooms! Whoever they were, these foreigners were well organized in America. Ross jostled Bentley into the waiting car behind Stuber, and they went up rapidly, stopping at Bentley's floor. The maze of gray-walled corridors was empty. Not even the floor matron was at her desk. They passed down and through the service door to Bentley's rooms. Ross closed and locked the door behind them, then turned, drawing his gun and holding it point-blank at Bentley's chest.

"Now," he said, "let's have it."

"I thought," said Bentley, "this was still a friendly party. Why all the artillery?"

"Shut up and produce. Where's the note?"

Bentley tried hard to produce the swagger in his manner which he was far from feeling. A weird, half-possible plan had come to him. His hands in his pocket, wringing wet with nervous perspiration, had felt a hardish, solid oblong object which his sense of touch told him was an ink-eraser picked up inadvertently at his office. It might serve him now. He turned a broad grin on Ross, saying:

"Won't you gentlemen be seated? This is my big moment. All I know is where I put the note. I can't promise it's there. If it isn't—well, I can guess the answer. That's my chance. Sit down. You can shoot just as well sitting as standing—if you feel you must."

Ross gave him his grin back again, saying:

"You're a cool one, I admit, Destiny."

And Stuber grumbled in his beard.

But they sat—Ross on the edge of Bentley's bed, Stuber in a chair. Bentley walked straight to the telephone and reached for it, but Ross barked:

"None of that, now!"

Bentley shrugged.

"I'm not going to ring the phone. Besides, you've got me covered. This is part of the game. Just watch."

HE lifted the phone, a large square-based affair of the improved French type, big enough at its bottom to cover a full sized piece of note-paper. A sudden fear crept through him as his hand touched the phone. Would it be there? Had he remembered rightly? Had the housemaid moved it? Chances—one out of ten!

Then he gripped the instrument in his right hand and lifted it high. . . .

The folded piece of note-paper lay untouched underneath.

"*Abracadabra!*" said Bentley with forced facetiousness. "Behold, gentlemen—the end of your quest!"

Their eyes stared for an instant. The gun in Ross' hand sagged a little. That was all Bentley needed.

It was not hard now, with no eyes directly on him, to lift the receiver from its cradle a mere trifle, still talking the while, and picking up the note with his left hand, holding it out to them. It was quite easy to slip, unobserved, the little ink-eraser between the Y-bars of the phone's cradle, so that the receiver would not press down the switch. He talked fast. He talked almost gleefully.

"So you see, gentlemen, the American young man is quite as honest—and shrewd—as he is reputed to be." He was setting the telephone back in its place on the little table now. "I've done all I promised. I can't tell you whether this is code or not. I leave that to you." He had taken his right hand away. In his heart was a little prayer that the switch would not close. That ought to flash a light at the operator's desk. She ought to jiggle her hand-switch, get no attention, then send a man up to see what was wrong. It was just a chance—

Ross snatched the letter from Bentley's hand, read it, passed it on to Stuber, saying in English:

"It looks like nothing at all to me, Stuber. Try your stuff on it." Then to Bentley, tightening his grip on the gun:

"Sit down over there, son. This isn't finished yet."

There was an almost imperceptible squeak from the direction of the telephone. Bentley's ears were tuned for it. The others, in their natural excitement, did not hear it. It was faint, but it sounded, to Bentley, like a bellow. A thin voice, far away, was calling "Hello, hello, hello, are you there? Are you using this line?"

Bentley kept talking.

"Now you're going to learn how you've been kidding yourselves," he was saying. Anything would do. He must keep talking. They mustn't hear that voice in the telephone. "Not that I trust you, but you've got to admit I never promised anything more than this. How about it, Stuber?"

"Shut up," said Ross. Stuber put on nose-glasses and was studying the letter. He frowned. He said "*Och!*" or perhaps "*Ach!*" He grumbled and mumbled in his foreign jargon. He pulled a pencil from his pocket and scribbled on the note's margin. There was an instant of silence that was terrible. Bentley's heart thudded. If that voice on the wire should squeak once more—

But it did not.

Suddenly the man Stuber uttered a loud, explosive sound which, in any language, could have been nothing but profanity. His great fat hands crumpled the paper. He glared at Bentley.

"*Ach!*" he said. "Like I t'ink, dot iss not'ings. Ve are fool, ve are—"

In his hand appeared a small knife.

THEN there was a knock at the door. And the buzzer rang loudly.

"Mr. Destiny?" The voice was clear through the panel.

"Hello?" Bentley's voice was casual. He gave Ross a glance. The man's automatic was leveled, but Bentley knew he would not dare to shoot now. He lifted his hand, raised his thumb gently to his nose, and went confidently to the door, opening it with a twist of the lock.

A uniformed house-man stood there, looking full into the room.

"Your telephone, sir. . . . *Hey!*"

The last was a startled cry as Bentley dashed him aside and plunged into the outer hall.

Personal Mystery seems to have become a double-edged tool, in the hands of Bentley. Further chapters in his life as young Destiny appear in the April issue.

Siberian Trader

IN the spring of 1913 we outfitted the newly purchased *S. S. Belvedere* at Seattle, having taken its master, Captain Stephen Cottle, along with the ship, for one of our regular trading trips to Siberia. Contrary to one of the superstitions of the sea, Captain Cottle had his wife with him. Everyone on board liked her. She was what would be called in any language a lovely lady. But the traditions of the sea are strong, and there was a good deal of silent objection to having a woman on board.

However, we felt fortunate in having Cottle in command of the ship, for he was an excellent navigator in ice, had been a whaler with many years' experience behind him, and knew how to take advantage of the ice so that it became an asset instead of a liability.

Meanwhile, Vilhjalmur Stefansson had equipped the *Karluk* and two small schooners and sailed from Vancouver, B. C., on his third Arctic expedition under the auspices of the Canadian Government, in an attempt to add to the important knowledge he had already contributed on the life of the Eskimos, and other scientific data. This expedition was particularly intended to enable him to investigate his theory that it was possible to sustain human life even in parts of the Arctic where no man had ever lived, depending entirely on the resources of the country for food and fuel. The story of the expedition and of what he learned and of the catastrophe which visited him, he himself has told in "The Friendly Arctic." I wish here not to repeat his story but only to tell that part of it which touched the story of my own life and that of the crew of the *Belvedere*.

After leaving the Siberian coast on our first trip on the *Belvedere*, we called at Nome, Alaska, to pick up freight for the Stefansson expedition and for the Mounted Police stationed at Herschel Island, about seventy-five miles from Demarcation Point, the boundary between Alaska and Canada along the Arctic shore. As we pushed away from Nome for Herschel Island, in the middle of August, at a time when Los Angeles and New York were doubtless sweltering with heat, we encountered some of the worst ice conditions which had afflicted the Arctic for years; and soon we were caught fast in it, unable to move either onward to Herschel or back

to port at Nome. As usually happens when a condition like this exists, we were not without company. Near by was the *Polar Bear*, captained by L. L. Lane, with whom the Hibbard Stewart Company and I had been associated in a trade venture in 1912. Not far away also was the motorship *Elvira* under the command of Captain C. T. Pedersen, a veteran Arctic skipper, and also one of Stefansson's small schooners; all were as incapable of movement as we were.

Indeed, the *Elvira* had been so badly damaged by the ice that Pedersen abandoned her, coming with his entire crew onto the *Belvedere*, where we received them as guests for the long winter.

No one knew where the *Karluk*, the main ship of the Stefansson expedition, was. Captain Bartlett had taken the *Karluk* on an offshore lead, and no one there believed that she could have escaped becoming fast in the ice and drifting toward the Siberian Arctic.

I was extremely anxious to get news of our position to the Mounted Police on Herschel Island, about sixty-five miles away, and let them know that both their supplies and the Stefansson supplies, which were also to have been delivered to Herschel, were aboard. Consequently, about the middle of September, Arnold Castle and Dan Sweeney, sailors, and Thompson, a native from Indian Point, and I, started on the sixty-five-mile trip across the ice with a small Yukon sled, a tent, a small stove built from two kerosene cans, and a few supplies. We felt sure that we could make it in three days, or four at the outside.

About fifteen miles from the ship we struck open water along the beach, caused by an outlet from a lagoon. In order to get to the other side, we were forced to take to the sea ice and make a detour of several miles offshore.

Thompson, the native, didn't like the looks of it and shook his head in disapproval.

"Now summer time, no winter yet," he objected; but we kept on.

We kept the sled in the middle, with a line out from each corner, spread apart as much as possible to keep the weight widely distributed, and even kept our

REAL EX-

For details of our prize offer for true

By CAPTAIN OLAF SWENSON

feet wide apart in the same effort. Sweeney, who was the lightest man in the outfit, went ahead; Castle and I followed on ropes opposite each other, and "Summer-time" Thompson brought up the rear.

Sweeney had no difficulty skimming over the ice, even though at every step it gave like a rubber blanket. But suddenly I, who was much heavier, felt myself slipping. I let out a yell to hold everything, and then found myself in water up to my armpits.

There I lay, my arms out over the ice like the front flippers of a walrus, trying vainly to climb up, only to have the ice break through every time I tried to put my weight on it. Castle also had started to go through but had thrown himself on the sled, and although that eventually went down too, he managed to slide off it and regain his feet on solid ice.

While Sweeney and Castle seemed to be running around in circles trying to find something—a pole, a rope, a ladder—(almost anything like that which might be lying around on top a frozen ocean!) to extend to me, and were of course finding nothing, I kept plowing a furrow through the ice in my efforts to get to the top. Finally good old Thompson, the accurate weather man, who had doubtless seen more than one of his native friends in exactly my predicament, went at the job systematically. Lying on his belly, he wriggled slowly toward me until I could reach his extended hand. Then he put his entire mechanism in reverse, and I slowly slid out onto the ice like a seal.

The miracle of it was that, having saved my life, he never reproached me with a word or a look for having made it necessary, by my obstinate disregard of his good advice, to do so.

None of us carried any extra change of clothes; and after a night of drying out in a tent on shore before our tin-can stove, I fighting meanwhile to keep bare knees from roasting and bare back from freezing, we found the ice frozen solidly enough to proceed without further immersions. However, we did not reach Herschel in four days, but in two weeks.

PERIENCES

stories of Real Experience, see Page 3



LATER, when we had made our way back to the *Belvedere*, we found that we would have to do something to replenish her supplies. We had brought with us enough of everything for our own use, but having Captain Pedersen's men on board had doubled our consumption.

Captain Pedersen and I decided that we would strike out overland by dogsled to Fairbanks, Alaska. Several others on board decided to go out also; Captain Lane of the *Polar Bear* wanted to go, but Lane and his party thought that it would be best to go by way of Fort McPherson, while Pedersen and I decided to strike out directly overland from where the ship lay, saving four or five hundred miles of traveling, even though the route we would take was one which had never before been successfully traveled by white men.

With both of us planning the difficult and hazardous trip across country to Fairbanks, Lane had a tremendous desire to get there first to beat Pedersen and me in a race, even though it would not be officially declared a race or run completely according to rule. His desire was heightened by the fact that meanwhile Nome had received definite information that the Stefansson expedition had been lost, and in the mail which Pedersen and I would carry out were letters and telegrams carrying news of the Stefansson expedition.

REAL EXPERIENCES

It took only that news for all of us to redouble our efforts. We got started as soon as was possible and went into the interior. Every day we would start traveling at five in the morning and keep on until we could not travel any more at night for exhaustion. We took the finest possible care of our dogs to save their strength. We even put harnesses on Pedersen and me, and we pulled with the dogs.

Then we began to play with Captain Lane, who, we were quite sure, was coming behind us. We managed to leave little messages behind for him. At one place we crossed a stream where there was an open spot of water, and the water was so clear that we could see trout swimming around. Here we wrote a note to him on the heavy frost on the ice, saying, "*Good fishing here,*" and misdated it, so that when Lane's party came and found it, they would think that they were rapidly overtaking us.

Five days from the coast we got into a terrific snowstorm, which completely obscured the sky, and made the entire world about us simply one whirling mass of white, with nothing to give any indication of direction. We had a small compass with us, and Pedersen took it out so that we could follow our direction by that. But in looking at it, he dropped it into the fine snow at our feet. We both went down on our hands and knees and began to look for it, but without success. Then we began to pan the snow, taking it up a scoopful at a time and examining every particle of it. We kept at it for hours, but never did find the compass. At last we gave up, and from there on we followed the natural trend of the watershed, which forced us into long detours.

Following this route, we hit Lake Chandler, and came to the house of an Indian named Peter. We were short of dog-feed, and we needed more dogs, which Peter had. Finally we bribed him with a watch and the promise of ten dollars a day, and started out over an old Hudson's Bay trail.

I never shall forget the last day of our trip going into Fairbanks. We made fifty-three miles that day, and that was fifty-three miles of walking and running. We did not have enough dogs to permit us to add our weight to their loads. In the morning we decided we would try to finish the trip that day, and Pedersen and I took turns breaking trail. There were mile-posts between Circle City and Fairbanks on the Government trail, fifty-three of them. Pedersen would

run ahead of the dogs until he had counted eight of them, and then I would run ahead until I had counted eight of them. It was snowing and blowing terribly, and everybody at Circle City had cautioned us against going through the pass, saying that we would never get over the mountain; but both Pedersen and I were determined that Lane was not going to make monkeys of us, and we had a hunch that once over the mountain we would find better weather; so we put ropes around our waists, tied the other ends to the lead dogs, and actually dragged them up the mountain and through the pass. Just as we had expected, we found better weather on the other side, and the rest of the going was simpler. We got into Fairbanks at eleven o'clock that night, having made fifty-three miles since five that morning. The whole trip had taken us twenty-six days, a record for speed in that country.

WE went to the hotel at Fairbanks; and you may imagine what even the comparative comforts of a Fairbanks hotel would look like to us, after twenty-six days and nights like those through which we had just passed. Our native fur clothing was torn and dirty, but we were feeling rather pleased with ourselves, and happy, and not at all like the tough *hombres* we must have looked.

But the hotel clerk saw us from another point of view. He gave one look at us and put us both in a little room about eight by ten, with two rickety cots in it and no window. Well, all things are relative, and here we were—in paradise. It never occurred to either of us to complain. We just went at the business of digging in for the night.

But we hadn't got very far with it when some newspaper men, who knew what it was all about from the mail and telegrams we had disposed of before checking in at the hotel, rushed in to interview us. We told them all we knew, and then one of them looked around the room and laughed.

"Did you fellows ask for a room like this?" he said.

I looked up in surprise, realizing for the first time, what kind of a hole we had crawled into, and told him that we had not thought anything about it. He went downstairs and in a moment the clerk came up, and of course, moved us to the finest room in the hotel.

Ten days later Captain Lane reached Fairbanks.

Escape from Derbent

An American helps in a strange jail-break in remote Russia.

By MICHAEL FORLAN

If you should meet some one in Soviet Russia not afraid to talk, which is very unlikely, he would tell you there are three sorts of people in that country—people in jail, people who have been in jail, and people who will sooner or later go to jail.

Despite my American birth and citizenship, when my time came, I too went to jail. To be exact, I went to twenty-five various jails, including the infamous "Nightingale" Monastery on a subarctic island in the White Sea. At various times and places I had as jail buddies a bishop of the Orthodox Church, a youthful leader of the student revolt in the Crimea, a professor of Oriental languages, a Georgian prince, a Baltic baron, a former cabinet minister of the Czar, a Tartar caviar-fisherman from the Azov, an O.G.P.U. spy, a pickpocket from Rostov-on-the-Don, and a verminous, bewhiskered old faker who professed to be the Messiah. Finally, I had a jeweler from the Caucasus mountains, whom this tale closest concerns.

The jeweler's name was Nazir. I had not known him on *swaboda*, which is to say "outside," although I had met many of his countrymen. He was a Lesghi, a native of Daghestan, a mountain state in the northerly part of the Caucasus noted for its clever jewelers and armorers.

The Lesghis were artisans widely known when Richard fought the Saracens. A Lesghi jeweler can embellish and encrust anything from the long naked blade of a *kindjal* to the corrugated horns of his pet fighting ram. With delicate chisels he can cut threadlike channels in the steel barrel of a rifle to make a most intricate design, and then beat soft gold into the crevices to produce incrustations of amazing beauty and delicacy. And he can carve with equal skill the polished face of a ruby or sapphire, and fill the design with gold so that one small stone will bear in shining letters a complete quotation from the Koran, guaranteed to avert the evil



eye, an enemy's bullet or the wife's ill temper.

Nazir and I struck up a partnership in the prison at Derbent on the Caspian Sea, where I was held over several weeks on my long trek north to the prison camp. He had accumulated a number of choice bones from the prison soup-pot, and I owned about two feet of copper wire. Pooling our material, we began the manufacture of little bone manicure-knives. The knives had two sides of bone riveted together with my copper wire, and were each designed with two or more bone blades. There was always a blade for cleaning the nails, one for a toothpick, and so on.

In return for the knives, Nazir and I received bread, sunflower-seed oil, and occasional hunks of cheese or a little tobacco. Working together, we built up in a short time a firm friendship, although we had scarcely a hundred words of a common language in which to converse.

Derbent prison at this time confined both political prisoners, to which class Nazir and I belonged, and common felons. Although treatment of the two categories differed greatly in favor of the felons, both groups were turned into the yard together for daily exercise periods. Many of the non-political prisoners were taken out each day to work on jobs in the village. Some were unaccompanied by guards; and prison restrictions in general rested lightly on them, although all were required to be locked in their cells for the night.

Nazir had long planned to escape, and swore he would make a break for liberty if ever he were taken outside the walls. Since political prisoners had never been detailed on labor squads, however, it seemed unlikely he would ever have a chance.

One morning Nazir called me aside,

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and after making certain we were unobserved, he handed me a paper. Unfolding it, I found it entirely blank except for an impression from the rubber stamp of the prison commandant's office in the lower left corner. There were the familiar crossed hammer and sickle, encircled by several rows of lettering which read "*North Caucasus Penal Committee, Special House of Detention, Derbent, Office of the Commandant.*"

"Where did you get this?" I gasped my surprise.

"I made it," Nazir admitted modestly; but I could see he was pleased with the astonishment his clever counterfeit had caused me. And then he explained he had carved the stamp from a fragment of watermelon rind, copying the design and wording from a similar stamp on his vaccination-certificate.

"We shall write out a work pass and march through these gates as soon as you say," he assured me. "We can take a few trusty friends from among my countrymen; and by nightfall we shall be deep in the mountains where no Russian has ever been."

"That's all right for you," I thanked him sadly; "but it won't help me. My wife and children and friends are not safe in the mountains as are yours. They are scattered through the cities, and would be arrested by the O.G.P.U. as soon as news of my escape came. They would be held as hostages, perhaps killed, if I failed to surrender immediately."

NAZIR did not dispute this, for he knew as well as I the cruel methods of the secret police, and he went about his final arrangements for escape a little saddened because I could not accompany him.

It was decided he would impersonate with his group one of the numerous squads which daily were detailed to paint and plaster at the village police headquarters. Nazir and the four friends he had chosen scraped lime and whitewash from the walls until they had accumulated a cupful. On the morning set for the attempt, all five men liberally spattered their clothes and shoes with a mixture of the scrapings with water, so as to have it appear they had been engaged on the painting work for some time.

The previous night I had filled out the work pass with a pen whittled from a splinter of bamboo broom-handle, using a piece of indelible pencil dissolved in water for ink—the same, fortunately, as that used by the prison authorities. The pass

read: "*You are authorized to pass bearer and detail of four citizen convicts for work on headquarters outside the walls.*" And I had signed it with a flourishing forgery of the prison commandant's initials traced from a list of prison regulations pasted on our cell door.

IT seemed hours before our room was released for morning exercise in the big yard. When we at last got there, several working parties were already lounging around the main gate awaiting inspection by the guard. Nazir and the four other Lesghis who had cast their lot with him sauntered up to the guard shack and stood near the other details.

Everything was absurdly easy, although it left me trembling with excitement and apprehension. Segregated in a far corner of the yard to prevent a bolt through the gate, we other prisoners watched the groups at the guardhouse. To the others, it was mere repetition of a familiar morning scene, serving only to fill them with envy of men getting out of jail for a few hours. To me it was a grim gamble, and I could not have been more tense had I been a member of the escaping group. The officer of the guard scarcely glanced at the pass. His men ran rough quick hands over Nazir and his friends to make sure they were smuggling nothing out of the prison, and a moment later escorted them through the barrier.

"Halt there!" shouted the guard officer; and as Nazir turned around, his frightened eyes betrayed his indecision whether to run for it or risk further scrutiny by the guard. But the officer merely handed the counterfeit pass back to Nazir, saying as he did so: "How the devil did you expect to get back into the prison without this pass?"

Nazir and his men went stumbling off along the cobbled road that leads away from the prison, and I watched them longingly until the huge gates clanged shut cutting off all view of the world outside.

Back in my cell again, I took the counterfeit seal from its hiding-place and lifted it out of the can of water in which we had kept it to prevent shriveling. I was now sole proprietor of the knife-factory and would have liked to keep this memento of Nazir; but it was too dangerous a piece of evidence to preserve. I knew the guards would overrun the prison that night when evening count revealed five prisoners gone. So I put the seal down on the stone flagging and carefully ground it to a pulp under my heel.

"LIVING SACRIFICE TORN FROM TIDAL WAVE"

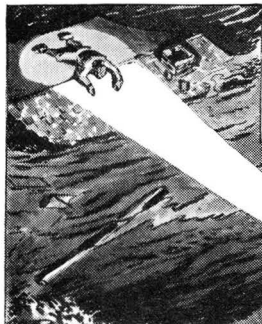


**HURRICANE VICTIM
RESCUED BY POWERFUL
BEAM, SAYS SEAFARER**

① "Mrs. Suermondt and I were at our beach cottage at West Barrington, R. I., when my barometer told me a hurricane was coming," writes Captain R. K. Suermondt, 3 Woodville Park, Roxbury, Mass. "We fled to the



home of a neighbor. I took my barometer under one arm and my big 5-cell flashlight under the other. We saw our own house blown to kindling. Then we saw that terrifying 10-foot tidal wave push mercilessly up the river, spreading death and destruction over the Providence valley.



② "I rushed out with my flashlight to help the neighbors in rescuing whatever might be saved. At ten o'clock that night our flashlights were still searching the river, when someone shouted, 'Here comes a whole house!' And when I put my powerful, long-range light on it, something lay huddled on the roof.



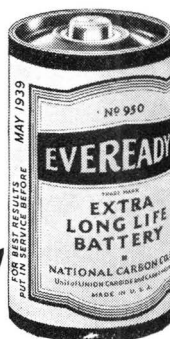
③ "We put out a boat and succeeded in bringing back the still form of an unconscious man. For hours he had ridden this floating catafalque. He hoodwinked death only because those five 'Eveready' fresh dated batteries bored through the night and reached him.

④ "This experience convinces me not only of what a flashlight can do, but of the need of having good batteries in it, 'Eveready' batteries, the kind you know are fresh!"

(Signed)

R. K. Suermondt

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