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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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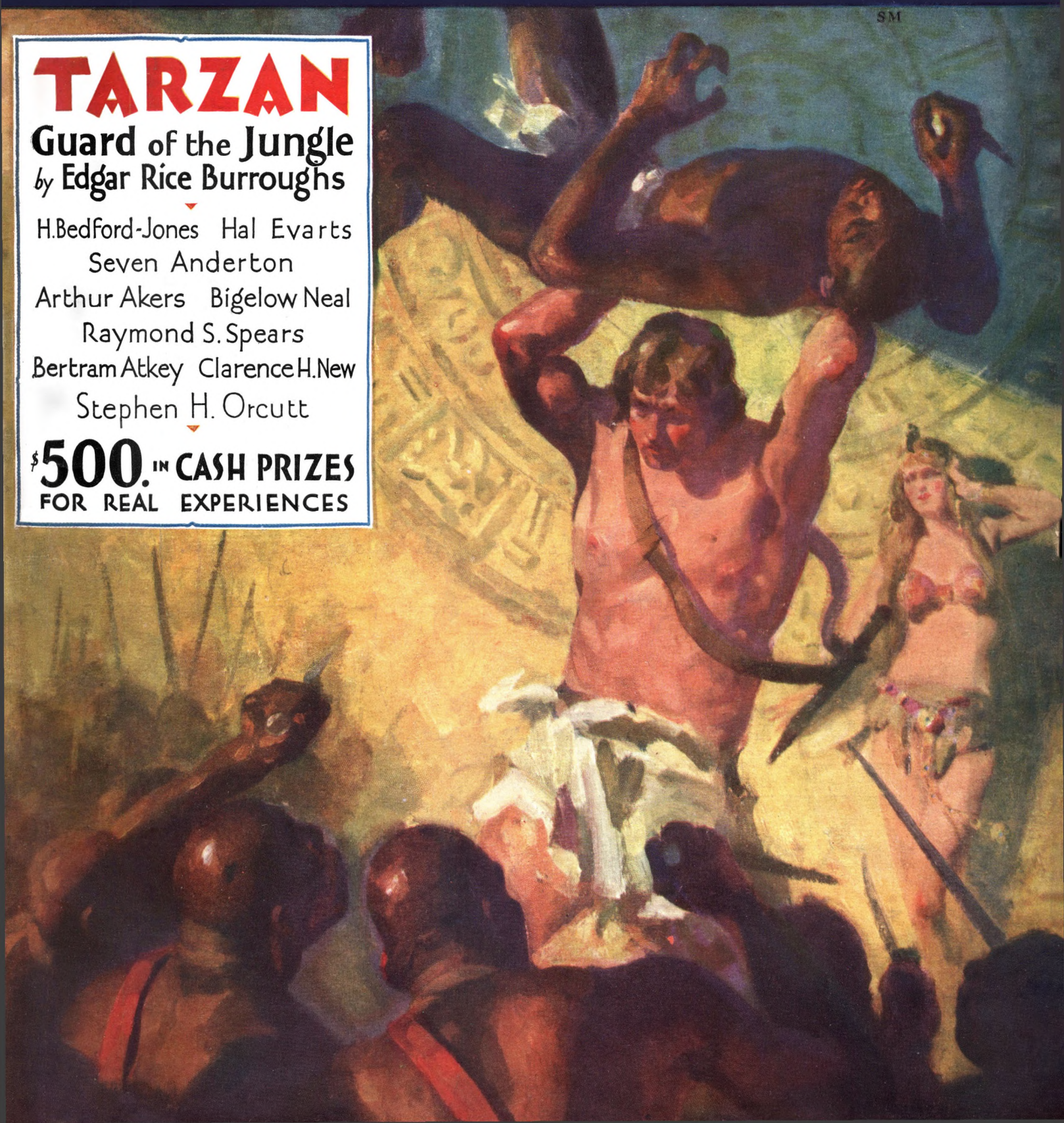

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SOVIET HOLDS U. S. VESSELS IN FAR NORTH

Crews of Silver Wave, Iskum and Belinda Under Arrest in Siberian Port Near Nome

Missionary Brings Word of Sailors' Plight; Prisoners Await Arrival of Officials

NOME, Alaska, June 18.—(By Associated Press.)—The American trading schooners Silver Wave, Iskum and Belinda are detained at East Cape, Siberia and their crews are under arrest on charges of violating trading laws of the soviet government of Russia, it was learned here today. The news of the plight of the three trading schooners was brought by the Rev. N. F. Hoyer, a missionary, who came here by way of East Cape after a winter on the Little Diomedes Islands, in Bering Strait. The crews and the craft were being held, Mr. Hoyer reported, un-

PIRATES *of the* FROZEN SEAS

by Captain Waldo W. Putta

The astounding adventures of a small trading schooner in the frozen reaches of Arctic Siberia

IT was the schooner *Iskum*—and it was a wintry sea indeed that she sailed—with the menace of floating icebergs—the terrors of danger from the Russian Soviet Republic—with tales of strange strays left stranded on those barren coasts—of a captain almost doomed because he was of the hated bourgeoisie—of dealings and counter dealings in the fur trade—of death and destruction that threatened often—and of a brave little schooner that made a gallant return.

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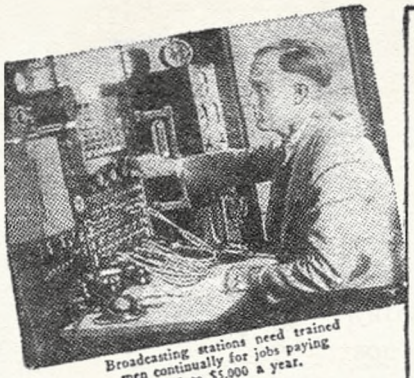

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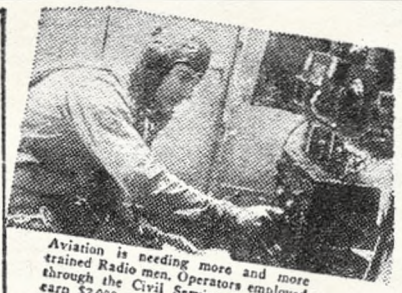

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Employment Service to all Graduates

Missing page

AMONG the amazements of life today, the racket runs first—easily. What is happening about us is so incredible that, if we did not know it was so, we could not convince ourselves of its reality. It is one thing to know a fact; quite another to feel it. For instance, when seven men were "chopped" down by a machine-gun in a garage in Chicago, the fact was flashed everywhere; but few of the millions who heard of it could *feel* the fact.

That is where the artist steps in—the man able to portray in a picture or in words the reality of the sensations which are merely sketched in the news.

Seven Anderton, whose story starts on the opposite page, is one of the present-day dealers in reality, who by presenting to you the people—their hopes and fears—gives you also the feeling which lets the fact really enter your consciousness. Reality, therefore, rides upon these pages.

Romance rides with it. It is good to enter fully into the realities about us; sometimes, at least, it is better to step from them into the wonderful realm of romance and into a world created by one of the greatest imaginations among living men. Edgar Rice Burroughs has this gift of creation which has made a veritable new world for millions of readers. Turn to "Tarzan" and you leave all else behind.

There is something decidedly unusual and intimately delightful in the story "Mississippi Magic," by Raymond Spears. Atkey and Akers see life in different amusing ways. And may we commend, among the many others, Clarence Herbert New to you again? —*The Editor.*

The Racket Wrecker

When a gangster has gone too far in arrogantly imposing his will on others, he can be outmaneuvered by one who knows his methods all too well.

By SEVEN ANDERTON

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

GOVERNOR JAMES BRYANT had been officially in charge of the State affairs of Illinois for three days when he received a visit from Coleman Dart, prominent Chicago criminal lawyer. After greeting the Governor, Dart handed a sealed envelope to the chief executive.

"That," said Dart in answer to the Governor's raised brows, "is a message which I was asked by my friend and client, Donald Hawley, to deliver personally into your hands. I will stop at Joliet on my way back to Chicago and deliver any reply you may care to send."

"How long has Hawley been in prison now?" asked the Governor. He had picked up a paper-knife and was slitting the envelope.

"A little more than two years," answered the attorney. "He was sent up for fifteen."

Five minutes ticked away while the Governor perused the four closely written pages of the message. His face was grave and thoughtful as he placed the letter in a drawer of his desk.

"Mr. Dart," inquired the executive, "do you honestly believe that Hawley is innocent of the crime for which he was sentenced? I remember, of course, that you defended him at his trial."

"On my personal and professional honor," replied the attorney, "I do. While he never told me so, I feel certain that he was framed; and the framing was done by some of the hoodlums and gangsters with whom he had been associated. Why they took that method of disposing of him instead of simply taking him for a ride or putting him on the spot, I can't imagine."

"And I can't imagine,"—the Governor frowned.—"how or why Donald Hawley ever became a gangster. His father was one of my dearest friends. During Donald's boyhood, I knew him well."

"I wouldn't say that he *was* a gangster," replied Dart. "He ran in poor company, I'll admit."

"He was a crooked gambler, was he not?"

"*Clever* is a better word," said the lawyer. "The dividing line is rather indefinite, I know. Hawley and I were—and are—quite close friends. I know his code. He played fair when gambling with square gamblers. When he found himself in a game with cheats and crooks, however, he seemed to take a sort of perverse delight in outcheating the cheaters."

"He ran a gambling-den in Chicago?" inquired Bryant.

"One of the biggest," answered Dart frankly. "And every game in the place absolutely on the square—while Hawley ran it. He was satisfied with the house percentage."

"It's a queer subject," said the Governor, smiling faintly, —"but granting that there is such a thing as an honest gambler, how does it happen that he became so proficient in trickery?"

"You should remember," replied the lawyer, "that Donald Hawley acquired his ability to do clever and mysterious things with cards and other objects before he became a professional gambler. He was considered one of the best magicians on the American vaudeville stage."

"Too bad he didn't remain in that field," the Governor observed. "Well, I have made my decision. You may say to Hawley for me that it's a bargain. Simply that. He will understand."

"Thanks, Governor," said the attorney, rising to depart.

WITH thoughtful gaze the Governor sat looking at the man his first pardon had released from prison. Donald Hawley had gone into prison a twenty-four-year-old boy, with a chip on his shoulder and a laugh in his heart. He had come out a sober-faced man of twenty-six. Something strange, indefinable, now smoldered in the deep gray eyes where a merry twinkle had formerly lurked.

He wore the same neat and expensive gray suit in which he had come to Joliet, but it now fitted him loosely. His long lean body was now at least fifteen pounds lighter than it had been when he was first assigned to his cell, for he had worked hard in the prison shops. His face was thin as well as grim, but thanks to his care to utilize every possible moment in the sunshine of the prison yard, he had no prison pallor.

"Of course, Donald," said Governor Bryant, " my friendship for your father—and for you—may have entered into

my reasons for granting you a pardon. However, your proposition in the message you sent by Coleman Dart was the principal influence. You promised, in return for your freedom, to rid me of the problem that confronts me in Chicago."

"I'll keep that promise," declared Hawley flatly.

"My reason for having you brought directly to me when you were released," explained the Governor, "was to ask you a number of questions. Do you realize that you have promised to tackle a very difficult and dangerous task?"

"I can and will do what I agreed to do," answered Hawley quietly.

"You cannot know how sincerely I hope that you can," said the Governor earnestly. "You have been away from Chicago for more than two years. Are you aware that the order of things with regard to the methods of organized crime have undergone quite a change?"

"I have read the papers," nodded Hawley. "And news comes to prison by various other ways."

"The formerly numerous gangs and criminal organizations have merged into one big union," continued the executive. "They no longer war among themselves, and are therefore the more efficient—and the more dangerous. I hate to admit it, but they absolutely dominate Chicago. Such of the police and other peace officers as are not corrupted by them, are rendered practically useless through fear. Not two weeks ago, a policeman shot and killed two of four men who were running from a suburban bank which they had robbed. The other two robbers escaped with most of the loot. The next day the policeman was riddled with bullets from a machine-gun while walking his beat in broad daylight. Things like that do not make policemen any more keen about doing their duty."

"You are not telling me any news, Governor," answered Hawley.

"Do you know that their reign of terror has become so complete," asked the Governor, after a moment of thoughtful silence, "that honest, wealthy and prominent men are almost daily paying large sums in tribute—extortion? They frequently protest to city, State and even national authorities—but they pay first and protest afterward. They dare not do otherwise."

Hawley's answer was a silent nod.

"And you still think you can remove this menace?" queried the executive. "Break the power of this organization whose tentacles reach even into this capital? Much as I wish to, I seem unable to picture you winning alone against a ring of which Chicago now stands in helpless fear."

"I never said that I would work alone," said Hawley. "I only promised you that I would completely and permanently smash Ace Aldini and his mob of hoodlums, gunmen, cutthroats, and thieves. I'm going to cool off the red-hots of Chicago until you can spot them by the icicles on their eyebrows. I did not tell you how I mean to do it—and I'm not going to tell you."

"You said in your letter," reminded the Governor, "that you would accomplish your purpose without bloodshed—without bringing back the old gang-battles and—"

"I said I'd do it without murder," interrupted Hawley. "There will be no killings unless in self-defense, and no gun-battles, I promise you. Furthermore, I will keep in touch with you and you can stop me at any time you wish. I have no fear that you will call a halt, Governor."

THERE was a long silence while the two men sat eye to eye. Hawley's face was expressionless. The Governor was studying his visitor intently.

"Donald," said the Governor finally, "somehow I have faith in you. There must be more than a little of your father in your make-up. I'm going to let you go ahead with whatever it is that you plan. I want you to answer just one more question. Are you settling a personal score in what you propose to do?"

"Several of them," answered Hawley frankly.

"That's all," said the executive, biting the end from a fresh cigar. "Thank you."

"Now I want to ask a favor of you," said Donald Hawley. "I have ten thousand dollars in a safety-deposit box in Chicago. I had it planted in case of just such an accident as happened. I could get it without trouble; but I do not intend to return to Chicago at once. Will you loan me a thousand? It shall be returned to you within a fortnight."

"All right," agreed the Governor after a brief silence. He reached for a check-book.

"Better give it to me in cash," observed Hawley dryly. "You are Governor now, you must remember."

A LITTLE west of Clark Street and less than thirty blocks north of Madison stood an old-fashioned brick mansion. This survivor of what had once been an exclusive neighborhood of homes was now flanked on either side by modern apartment buildings which towered two and three stories above its loftiest gable. It had been known as "Happy Don's Casino" in the days before misfortune had overtaken that young gambler. With the exit of Happy Don, it had in some manner that none saw fit to question, come under the rule of Ace Aldini.

Ace Aldini, cruel, ruthless and battle-scarred thug, had in the old days been chieftain of one of the numerous gangs which warred for supremacy in Chicago. Protecting and enlarging his territory by terrorist methods, he had gained a reputation as the most powerful of the city's racketeers. Then he had halted in his career of wholesale assassination and destruction, called gangland's lesser leaders into conference and brought about a truce which developed into a merger of all the opposing factions.

As a result, Ace Aldini now stood supreme at the helm of this gigantic juggernaut of organized crime and vice. The former leaders of the less powerful mobs had become the able lieutenants of the swarthy emperor of gangland. Chicago was at Aldini's mercy—and he had no mercy.

The gambling-den which had once belonged to Happy Don Hawley was now Aldini's favorite headquarters as well as one of his most prolific sources of income. Nightly, in the twenty-two rooms of the huge old house, hundreds of men and women gathered to gamble for fabulous stakes. Thousands of dollars frequently changed hands on a single whirl of a wheel, one roll of the dice, or the turn of a card.

Aldini had converted the place into a veritable fortress. Strong steel bars covered every window—and were none the less bars because their pattern was ornamental. Every door was of steel, skillfully painted in imitation of wood, and set in a frame of the same material. In the basement was a room that was the treasure-vault. This room was about sixteen feet square. Originally it had been one end of a huge basement den. It had but one door. The four walls were of thick concrete and the ceiling was a sheet of steel plate below the heavy oak joists of the floor. It was floored with concrete and there were no windows. The only ventilation, when the door was closed, was by the flue of the big old fireplace which took up half of one wall, and through a narrow slit in the foundation. This slit could not be called a window. It was only eighteen inches wide by eight or nine high and it was covered with steel bars two inches apart. The hinged window inside the bars was of frosted glass to admit light but defeat vision. From every room in the house a system of pneumatic tubes led to a big table in the center of this treasure-chamber. The only

object in the room besides the table and a chair was a big safe of the latest type with a time-lock.

The place closed promptly at three A. M. every day. At that hour, Ace Aldini was always seated at the table in the treasure-room. Down the tubes would come the leather boxes packed with the money from each gaming-table. Ace Aldini would extract the money from its containers and count it, before storing it away in the safe. Sometime during the next afternoon a part of the night's harvest was usually taken to a bank.

It was on the second Sunday night after the Governor's pardon had restored Donald Hawley's freedom. To be exact, it was ten minutes past three o'clock on Monday morning. Ace Aldini sat at the table in the strong-room, counting great stacks of bills. Saturday and Sunday nights were the big nights of the week in the Casino—and since the banks were not open on Sunday the takings of the two nights would repose in the strong-room safe until banking-hours on Monday.

Aldini was alone in the big house. The patrons had been shown out promptly at the stroke of three. The men in charge of the gaming-tables had followed immediately after sending their bundles of cash down the tubes. At the curb in front of the place stood Aldini's big limousine. The chauffeur and two gunmen, the racketeer chieftain's personal and ever-present bodyguard, waited for Aldini. They smoked cigarettes as they lolled in easy positions on the luxurious cushions. They knew it would take their chief the better part of an hour to finish with the check-up.

"Donald," said Governor Bryant, "do you realize that you have promised to tackle a very difficult and dangerous task?"

Six men, walking stealthily, approached the parked limousine from the rear. One of them appeared to be a mere boy. When they were within a dozen steps of the car they leaped forward, three going to each side of the big car. It was a warm night in late June and the windows of the car were open; six guns were covering the three gangsters before they were aware of danger.

"Put your hands against the top, all of you!" It was Donald Hawley speaking. He had spoken in a low tone, but there was that in his voice that brought instant obedience from the men in the limousine.

"Good," said Hawley. "Any of you move or make a sound and it will be curtains. —Get busy, Tom."

The man addressed pocketed his gun and got busy with a bundle that he carried under his left arm. The bundle contained a dozen stout leather straps such as encircle suitcases. In short order all three of the gangsters were disarmed and their ankles and wrists securely bound with the straps. Handkerchief gags were then thrust into their mouths and fastened there

"Take the wheel, Tom," ordered Hawley. "Keep these birds quiet or kill them. Wait for us if possible, but drive off at once if anybody gets inquisitive. We'll look after ourselves."

Tom drew his gun, pushed the captive chauffeur over and slid under the wheel, turning so that he could keep an eye on his prisoners. He started the motor and let it purr in readiness for an instant get-away.

The dimly lit side-street was quiet, deserted. Hawley, with the other four men at his heels, slipped swiftly and silently into the darkness of the narrow passage between the gambling-den and the apartment building next to it.

A crash of breaking glass caused Ace Aldini to look up, startled, from his task of counting a fortune. The long blue barrel of a forty-five had been thrust through the bars of the little ventilating slit of the strong-room, almost entirely clearing the frosted glass from its frame. The muzzle of the ugly weapon covered the racketeer unwaveringly.

"Don't move a hair or make a sound, Aldini," said a crisp voice. "This is Don Hawley. I owe you a killing, anyhow."

The swarthy face of the gangster went suddenly gray. His lips formed the words, "Don Hawley," but made no sound. His hands, before him on the table closed tightly over a sheaf of banknotes.

"I've come for some of what you took away from me," continued Hawley. "Little Gad Powers is on the roof. He'll be coming down the flue and out of the fireplace in a moment. He'll enjoy collecting from you. It will sort of salve his feelings. I'm paying him something on account for the money he would have made in the past two years if you hadn't run him out of work."

There was a faint scraping sound from the big fireplace and a moment later a little, wiry youth of twenty years emerged into the strong-room. He was black with dirt and soot from being lowered through the twenty-four-by-sixteen-inch flue by his confederates on the roof. He carried a bag and two suitcase straps in one hand. Hate and triumph gleamed in his narrowed brown eyes as he stepped softly toward the gray-faced Aldini.

This youth was Gad Powers. Until about two years before he had been one of the best jockeys on the turf. He was a clean youngster—and always rode that way. Those who follow the sport of kings had absolute faith in his squareness and he was proud of that faith. Then Ace Aldini's greedy hand had reached into the game. Powers found himself commanded to pull his mount when Aldini wanted it pulled. He was informed in no uncertain terms that he would go for a one-way ride if he failed to obey orders. The lad's answer had been his disappearance. Hawley had found him working as a theater usher in St. Louis under an assumed name.

"Move slowly and carefully, Aldini," ordered Hawley. "Get both hands up high and step over here toward me—so Gad won't have to get between me and you."

Aldini obeyed. Two minutes later he lay on the floor with his ankles and wrists securely bound. The little jockey picked up his bag and began to stuff the money on the table into it. That done, he went to the safe which

stood open awaiting the night's deposit, and ransacked every drawer and compartment.

"Get his wallet," said Hawley through the window as the youth turned away from the safe. "There's probably a nice wad in it."

The lad stooped over the bound gangster and procured the fat wallet. A moment later he was on his way up the chimney, a grinning little Santa Claus, bearing his gift in a direction contrary to tradition.

"Good night, Aldini," called Donald Hawley softly. "I hope you spend a comfortable night, but I doubt it. Maybe you wonder why I don't fill you full of lead for framing me into the Big House. You thought I was safely stowed away for the next ten years, didn't you? But you see that I'm not. I'll tell you why I don't bump you off right now. You are a goose—the goose that is going to lay me a lot of golden eggs. Think that over while you wait for somebody to find you and undo those straps!"

When Hawley and his four companions emerged from the dark passageway, the big limousine still stood at the curb. The street was still deserted and quiet. The five marauders paused beside the car.

"All right, Tom," said Donald Hawley to the man behind the wheel. "You beat it for the hangout, with these bozos. Woodard will ride in the back seat and see that they behave. The rest of us will be right along."

One of the men drew his gun and climbed into the back seat, settling himself between the two prisoners already there. The driver pocketed his weapon and turned to the wheel. The big car moved swiftly and quietly away. Hawley and the other three turned toward where the car in which they had arrived was parked, two blocks distant.

SOME thirty miles west of Chicago there stands an old farm-house surrounded by an uncared-for orchard and a grove of poplar and box-elder trees. The house, with its big barn and other neglected out-buildings, is set a quarter of a mile back from the by-road upon which it fronts. For a week these buildings and the eighty acres upon which they stood had been the property of Donald Hawley.

Summer dawn was just appearing in the east as Ace Aldini's captured limousine and the car bearing Hawley and his companions drove into the big barn. Half an hour later, the six comrades in the night's adventure sat around an oilcloth-covered table in the big low-ceilinged kitchen. Hawley had just finished counting the money.

"One hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars—and some odd hundreds," announced Hawley, with a chuckle. "Not a bad night of collecting—eh, boys?"

There were grins and murmurs of assent from the other men.

"We have already agreed once on a plan," went on Hawley, "but I'm putting it up to you once more. Shall we divide this up and call it a day—or will you fellows see me through?"

"Hell's fire, Don," drawled a tall, lanky chap whose name was Harry Woodard,—known as Hod Woodard to all followers of baseball,—"I wouldn't miss the fun for twice the money on that table! Aldini ran me out of baseball. He gave me my choice of either throwing a game whenever he said for me to, or being punctured with a lot of bullets. I did the only other thing there was to do—quit the game and went to work at whatever I could find. I'd probably be at common labor the rest of my life if you hadn't found me and let me in on this. I'm with you until the ship sinks, or until I can go back to playing baseball on the level."

"Fair enough," nodded Hawley. "What do you say, Gad?"

"Woodard spoke my piece for me," answered the grimy little jockey. "I'm with you until I can ride straight races again."

"And you, Tom?" Hawley asked, looking at the solidly built young man who had driven them away from the scene of the raid.

"I'm in to the ears," declared Tom Farley—"Terrible Tom" Farley, in the world of pugilism. "I want to go back in the ring and fight when I can do it on the square. But I'd drive a coal-truck until hell froze over before I'd take a dive whenever Ace Aldini had a bet on the other pug."

"That goes double," spoke up Frank (Bat) Gaffney, who, after battling his way to within challenging distance of the light-weight championship, had quit the ring rather than to fight a fixed fight at Ace Aldini's orders.

"When Aldini is out of the way," remarked Paul Tanner, "I can go back to Northwestern and finish school, play football another year—and play it on the level."

"So be it," nodded Donald Hawley. "I'll put this money away today where it will bring in a hundred and eighty-five dollars a week from now on. We sit tight here for another week while the rest of our friends arrive. Now bring in those three rats."

Woodard, Farley and Tanner went through a door that opened into the other part of the house. Presently they dragged into the kitchen three bound gangsters. The prisoners had been blindfolded during the last twenty miles of their ride and had no idea where they were. They were deposited in sitting postures against one wall of the kitchen. The gags were removed from their mouths.

"Pick your victim, Tom," nodded Hawley. The table had been pushed to the wall beside the stove, leaving the middle of the big room clear.

"I'll take that bird," said Tom Farley, pointing to Ace Aldini's erstwhile chauffeur. The chauffeur was a beefy, thick-set fellow, half an inch shorter than Farley, but several pounds heavier.

At a nod from Hawley, little Gad Powers loosened the chauffeur's bonds.

"Get up, you," ordered Hawley. "Move around for five minutes and get yourself limbered up. Tom Farley is going to entertain you with a little lesson in boxing."

In silence the fellow got to his feet and moved his stiffened arms and legs. There was sullen fear in his eyes.

"Aw, Don," he begged as his gaze came to rest on Hawley, "have a heart. I can't fight Farley. I—"

"That's too bad, for you," observed Hawley. "You'd better be limbering up!"

Heavy silence fell in the room. The chauffeur stood jerking, bending and flexing his arms and legs. Five minutes ticked past. Tom Farley stood erect with folded arms in the middle of the bare floor. He was in his shirt-sleeves and his collar was unbuttoned. His eyes were fixed steadily on the cowering gangster.

"All right," said Donald Hawley. "Step into it."

THE gangster licked his lips and made no move to advance. His eyes were fixed on Hawley's unrelenting face. Hawley nodded at Tom Farley, who stepped menacingly toward the cringing victim. The fighter's hands were clenched into rock-hard fists.

"What do you want me to do, Don?" croaked the hoodlum, his terrified eyes still on Hawley.

"Fight," answered Hawley crisply. "Because of you and the rest of your kind, Tom Farley hasn't been able to fight for more than a year. He needs practice—and you're going to give it to him."

"Put up your dukes, guy," growled Farley, "or I'll plaster you up against that wall until you'll have to be scraped off with a putty-knife!"

The fellow's terror-stricken eyes came slowly to meet

Farley's steely blue ones. His face was ashen; he made no move to defend himself. Farley feinted at the white face with his left. The victim threw up his arms in an instinctive move of protection. Farley's right came up in a swift uppercut that landed on the strategic spot beside the gangster's chin. The fellow's knees buckled, and he sank whimpering to the floor.

"Let me loose," growled the bigger of the two bound thugs still sitting against the wall. "I'll give Farley some practice!"

"You're *my* meat," snapped Hawley, "after Farley and Gaffney finish with your friends."

The curtain may be rung down on the next two hours in that kitchen. The scenes were not particularly pleasant, but plenty bloody. When the sun was an hour high Donald Hawley stood looking down at the three thugs, the last of whom lay writhing where Hawley's final blow had stretched him. Hawley's shirt was torn, his hair disheveled and blood ran from a cut lip. One eye was rapidly swelling shut.

"Listen, you rats," said Hawley, icy menace in his voice. "What has happened to you just now will be pleasant compared with what we'll do to you if you tell us anything but the truth. We have fixed a room for you in the basement. You'll be fed and have a good place to sleep, but you can't get out—and you'd better not try. If you give us a single bum steer, we'll take you out one at a time and beat you into pulp. We'll do it as often as necessary—so now answer straight!"

It was three o'clock Monday afternoon when the hirelings at the Casino finally found and freed Ace Aldini. The czar of gangland was in a murderous mood. He dispatched lieutenants to various places to bring funds with which to open the banks for play. Then he gathered his killers for a powwow.

That night a sinister fleet of cars prowled the streets of Chicago. In each car rode at least one man who knew Happy Don Hawley by sight. The man who had had the audacity to beard gangland's chief in his den was to meet swift and certain death on wings of hot lead wherever and when he was found. Nothing less would salve Ace Aldini's wounded pride. But Aldini's jackals prowled in vain that night. Happy Don Hawley had faded. All night Aldini sat in his little private office off the main gambling-room of the Casino waiting for the telephone-call which would tell him that Don Hawley had gone down loaded with lead from a sputtering machine-gun. As the hours wore on and the call did not come, the racketeer chief's eyes grew bloodshot with fury.

His collectors had come in from the various dives and speakeasies with bundles of cash. The games had opened as usual and the patrons of the place were milling about the gaming-rooms, ignorant of the events of the preceding night. In the strong-room, workmen finished closing the fireplace and the window with solid barriers of brick and steel, were paid and departed. One horse might have been stolen—but Aldini meant the stable to be safe for others.

Midnight came and passed. Still there came no report of Happy Don Hawley's demise. Other orders went out to the prowling assassins. Silent, frozen-faced men who kept a hand in their coat-pockets began to wander in and out of every place Hawley had ever been known to frequent. Quiet questions were asked and answered, but the man whose number was up was not found. Nor was there any word from Aldini's vanished chauffeur and bodyguard.

Three o'clock arrived. The Casino was closed and Aldini stuffed the night's proceeds into the strong-room safe without counting. He returned to his upstairs office with a newly recruited bodyguard. Here he raged and drank more whisky while the hunt went on.

Finally, as dawn seeped in through the shuttered windows, the racketeer called off his killers and ordered them to bed to rest and be ready to take up the search again the next night.

It would not have helped Aldini's mood any if he could have known how the man he sought was occupied. In the farmhouse kitchen, Happy Don and his companions sat over a hearty breakfast of ham, eggs, and coffee. In the next few days they were counting on being joined by many more men, all sworn enemies of Ace Aldini for substantially the same reasons as were the assembled crew.

Here was a bet that Ace Aldini had overlooked. He had dismissed too casually the men who had refused to be bought, and who had chosen discretion instead of foolhardy valor when confronted with a death

"Don't move a hair or make a sound, Aldini," said a crisp voice. "This is Don Hawley; I've come for some of what you took away from me."

threat—who had effaced themselves from the business, sport or profession in which Ace Aldini had tried to make them his tools for crooked gain.

During the long nights in his lonely cell and the hard days of labor in the prison shops, Donald Hawley had remembered those men. He had seen in them a potential weapon. He had found six of the men he wanted and was daily finding others. The day of reckoning was drawing near.

"Listen, fellows," said Hawley as he finished his second cup of coffee. "We have taken the first trick in this little game. At one stroke we have gathered in funds with which to carry on—and a lot of valuable information. I think we can count on what those rats downstairs told us being on the level. I doubt if they want any more boxing lessons very soon."

"I'm kinda hoping they lied," growled Bat Gaffney.

A chuckle went around the table. Donald Hawley joined it for a brief moment. Then his face sobered.

"Hold it," said their leader. "Let's not laugh too soon. Aldini is a poisonous snake, and dangerous. We must watch our step every minute—until his fangs are drawn. We stay out of Chicago for a while and let him wear his gunmen out, hunting for us. In the meantime, there'll be more of our gang coming in right along and we'll keep the ball rolling. Tonight we will twist Aldini's tail again. Here's how we'll do it."

Grins widened on the faces of his listeners as Hawley outlined his plan for the tail-twisting.

Just after dusk had fallen that night, Ace Aldini, in a big closed car with his new chauffeur and bodyguard, drove northward out of Chicago. Before leaving Aldini had again started his killers on the hunt for Don Hawley. He would be back about midnight, he told the lieutenants whom he left in charge of the Casino.

The racketeer chieftain and his escort were bound for a lonely spot on the shore of Lake Michigan, just north of the Illinois-Wisconsin line. In his pocket, Aldini carried twenty thousand dollars in cash. The money was to pay for a boatload of booze which would arrive at a natural landing-place promptly at ten o'clock that night. The liquor, Canadian, would be delivered by a canny and hard-boiled runner known as Canuck Sandy.

Canuck Sandy delivered a boatload of liquor to Aldini at this point every Tuesday night. He always collected his money before a case or bottle left his boat—and the money had to be cash. Aldini always went up in person to make the payment.

AT about the time Aldini's car was passing through Evanston, an auto bearing Don Hawley, Tom Farley, Bat Gaffney and Paul Tanner turned into a little-used by-road that twisted away from the pavement and through the thick timber to the place where Canuck Sandy's rum-running boat would later unload its cargo.

The landing-place was almost a mile from the highway, but Hawley stopped his car after covering only about a quarter of the distance. He had spotted a place where the car could be driven into the timber and hidden from sight in the woods. The hiding of the car was quickly accomplished and the four men returned to the by-road, lighting their way with flashes from electric torches. It was now dark. A little farther along the by-road they came to a place where the timber and brush walled the road thickly on each side.

"This will do," said Hawley. "Everybody get into the brush and lay low. The trucks should be along shortly."

"If those hoodlums told us the truth," observed Bat Gaffney.

"I think they did," answered Hawley.

The four men disappeared in the thick brush and silence settled. Half an hour later the sound of laboring motors echoed through the woods and then four huge trucks lumbered along the by-road. They passed the place where Hawley and his men lay hidden. They were the trucks that were to transport the boatload of Aldini's hooch to Chicago.

"All right," called Hawley softly, when the trucks had passed out of sight and the sound of their motors was a distant throb. "Let's work fast."

The electric torches flashed and the men began a rapid search of the timber. Fifteen minutes later two large fallen trees had been located and dragged across the by-road, forming a very effective barricade where a car coming from the highway would be within a dozen yards before its driver could see the obstruction. Happy Don then took a gallon can of gasoline which had been brought from the hidden car and walked back to a bend in the by-road. There he emptied the gasoline on the carpet of grass and leaves that littered the road. He next placed his men in strategic places in the brush, gave them instructions in a low crisp voice, and commanded silence.

IT lacked fifteen minutes of ten o'clock when Ace Aldini's car swung around the bend in the by-road and the powerful beam of its lamps fell upon the barricade. The brakes squealed and the big auto halted abruptly. The driver swore.

A match struck and tossed by Paul Tanner landed on the gasoline-drenched spot in the road. In a moment the leaping flames were flooding the road with light for a hundred yards in each direction.

"Sit tight, all of you," came Donald Hawley's voice from the brush. "If you move that car or start anything, we'll make the bus into a sieve and you birds into mincemeat. We meet again, Aldini!"

"Damn you, Don Hawley!" snarled Aldini. He had recognized that voice immediately.

"Damn me all you wish," answered Hawley. "But you birds get out of that car in a hurry and step around behind it with your hands in the air. Move carefully if you want to keep on living. There are four hand-organs and several rods trained on you. Get moving!"

The gangsters obeyed. Presently they stood in a row behind their car, their hands held high.

"Frisk them, Tom," ordered Hawley.

Carrying a sack, Tom Farley stepped from the brush and approached the scowling victims. There was a grin of delight on the fighter's face.

"You probably recognize Tom Farley, Aldini," chuckled Hawley. "You may remember that he didn't show up for his fight with Tug Lewis after you had sent him word that he was to take a dive before the fifth round."

Aldini did not answer. Farley removed half a dozen weapons from the persons of the four hoodlums, dropping the guns into his sack. From Aldini's inside coat pocket he took an enormous roll of bank-notes, bound with a stout rubber band.

"Thanks for the donation," called Hawley as the bundle of currency went into Tom's sack. "That will be a part payment on what you have caused Tom to lose in the past year."

Aldini merely grunted. Farley went to the car and searched it thoroughly, adding two automatic rifles to the contents of his sack. He then climbed into the car and started the motor.

"Get around in front of the car, you scum," ordered Hawley. "Move fast!"

The silent and sullen gangsters moved. When they were in front of the car, Farley put the gears in reverse and

quickly backed up, stopping the auto squarely over the flaming, gasoline-soaked litter. Then, grasping the sack of loot, the fighter leaped from the doomed car and disappeared in the direction of the auto they had hidden in the woods.

In two minutes the gangster's car was aflame. The sound of the motor, as Farley backed the other car into the by-road, droned through the timber.

"We'll be leaving now, Aldini," called Hawley. "That gasoline tank will be blowing up any minute. Don't you guys come toward the highway too quick, unless you want to meet a lot of fast-moving lead. So long—and thanks for another golden egg. Keep on being a good goose—and I'll not bump you off."

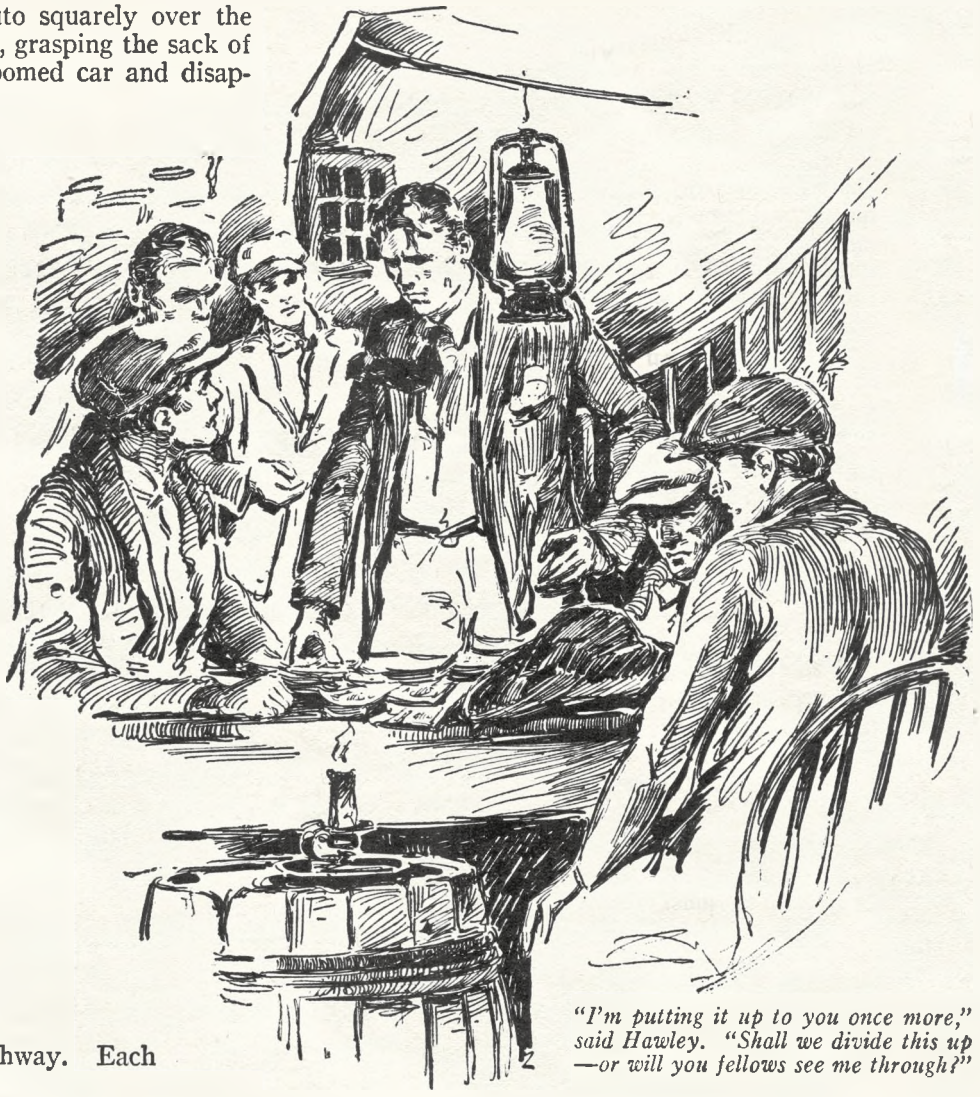
The car bearing Hawley and his companions was just turning onto the highway when the explosion of the tank in Aldini's burning car rumbled through the timber.

"Hot dog!" cried Bat Gaffney.

"We certainly put those bums on their feet," observed Paul Tanner.

"And the evening has just begun," chuckled Tom Farley.

Several miles farther south Farley, at a word from Hawley, turned their car into another by-road and once more the vehicle was hidden in the timber. In short order the four comrades emerged from the woods and made their way back along the road to a bridge over a dry creek-bed that crossed the highway. Each man carried a load of paraphernalia.



"I'm putting it up to you once more," said Hawley. "Shall we divide this up —or will you fellows see me through?"

At the bridge, Paul Tanner stood guard to warn of approaching cars. The others worked busily under the structure for half an hour. Then Tanner and Gaffney went into the brush on one side of the highway while Hawley and Farley, carrying a square box to which wires were attached, found hiding-places behind a vine-matted fence on the other side. The men now became silent. Now and then a car or truck sped past. Hours dragged on. It was nearly one o'clock.

"Maybe they couldn't get Canuck Sandy to let them have the booze without cash," muttered Farley to Hawley.

"Maybe," answered Hawley. "We'll wait until daylight, anyhow."

BACK in the timber Aldini and his henchmen fled hurriedly from the vicinity of the flame-wrapped auto. They were well out of the danger zone when the gas tank exploded.

"That will probably set the woods afire," observed one of the gunmen.

Words mingled with profanity, from Aldini, conveyed the opinion that there was little danger of the fire spreading. The woods were green and it had rained only two days before.

"What'll we do now?" asked one of the thugs.

"Walk to the landing-spot," snarled Aldini. "I'll have to make that damned Canuck take a check or come down to Chi with us for his money."

The rum boat was waiting when the four walking rascals reached the landing-place. The four trucks were drawn up ready to load. Aldini went directly to the dour Canadian smuggler and told him what had happened. It took half an hour of arguing before the skipper of the booze boat finally accepted a check, with a growled warning.

It was twelve o'clock when the cargo of the booze boat had been transferred to the trucks. The boat faded away across the dark water heading for the Canadian shore. The trucks were driven up as far as the scene of the fire and another half hour was spent in extinguishing the dying blaze and clearing the road of the twisted, hot mass of steel and tin—all that remained of a two-thousand-dollar car. It was a quarter past one o'clock when the four heavily loaded trucks emerged from the by-road and went rumbling down the pavement toward Chicago.

In the seat beside the driver of each truck rode a guard, armed with an automatic rifle. On top of the first load rode Ace Aldini and his three disgruntled henchmen. They intended to drop off at the first village and catch a train back to Chicago. Aldini was hoping to get back to the Casino before closing time. For several miles the trucks lumbered on.

Then disaster broke over Ace Aldini for the second time that night.

In his hiding-place behind the vine-covered fence, Donald Hawley had pushed down sharply on the plunger of the detonator which stood beside him. There was the crashing roar of a double explosion. Less than fifty yards ahead of the first truck in the caravan, the bridge across the dry creek-bed rose in a flash of destruction. The air was filled with debris and the next moment the gasoline-soaked creek-bed was a roaring cauldron of flame, lighting

up the scene with brilliant red light. The four trucks ground to a stop and the armed guards gripped their automatic rifles, looking about in vain for a target that did not appear.

"Got you again, Aldini," came Donald Hawley's mocking voice from his place of concealment. "If you are through living, let one of your murderers fire the first shot. My boys will do the rest. I was sorely tempted to send you and that first truck up with the bridge."

No shot came from the gangsters aboard the trucks. They seemed to be waiting orders from their chieftain, perched on the top of the load, a splendid target in the glow from the blazing creek-bed.

"All right, Aldini," snapped Hawley. "Start the shooting—or else tell your rats to get down, ditch their guns, and line up in front of this head truck."

In less than five minutes the twelve men were lined up as Hawley had ordered. The four automatic rifles lay in a pile beside the first truck. Hawley wanted to make haste for fear a stray auto might show up from one direction or the other.

"Do the honors, Bat," he called.

GUN in hand, Gaffney emerged from his hiding-place and approached the four trucks.

"You bozos all lie down on your faces and keep your arms stretched out," ordered Hawley. "Down quick, or we'll mow you down," he added sharply as the hoodlums hesitated.

The victims quickly took the undignified position Hawley had described. Walking to the back of the first truck, Bat Gaffney fired a shot into a case of bottled whisky. As the spirits began to drip from the case, Bat calmly touched a match to the liquid. When the blaze wrapped the case, Gaffney turned to the next truck. In less time than the telling takes, all four trucks were ablaze. Fed by the alcohol, the flames made quick headway into the contraband cargo. Gaffney picked up the automatic rifles and retired into the timber.

"Get the car out, Tom," said Hawley to Farley.

The fighters wasted no time in getting to their hidden car and backing it down as near to the blazing and bridgeless creek as was safe.

"So long again, Aldini," laughed Hawley, as he and the other two started toward the car where Tom sat ready to leave the scene in a hurry. "You can get up and watch the bonfire—after you hear our car start; but don't any of you move until then!"

Seated in their car, Hawley and his companions watched for several moments as the devouring flames spread rapidly over the four trucks and their cargo. The sound of exploding bottles mingled with the crackling of the fire. The twelve gangsters lay prone and motionless.

"Let's go," said Hawley finally in a low tone.

Farley let in the clutch and stepped on the accelerator. With a howl of gears, the open car leaped away from the scene. They were two hundred yards down the road before the first gun spoke, in the hand of the gangster who had scrambled to his feet. A bullet whined above their heads. Others followed as the gangsters got into action with their small arms. One bullet struck a rear fender and richocheted away into the darkness. But the raiders were too far away for the gangsters' revolvers to be effective.

THE comrades reached the farmhouse stronghold half an hour before daylight. Gad Powers and Hod Woodard, on guard over the prisoners in the basement, were quickly relieved and told of the success that had attended the night's expedition.

The exuberant crew ate a hearty breakfast; then they all went to bed, except Farley, who was left to stand guard in the basement. They had weakened Ace Aldini by the loss of twenty thousand dollars in cash, a check for the same amount that he would not dare to dishonor, one automobile, four trucks, and their cargoes of liquor, to say nothing of several hundred dollars' worth of weapons. No small blow to the czar of gangland!

"And tonight will be still another night," chuckled Don Hawley.

From the most swanky haunt of gangland's elite to the lowest dive in Floptown, the underworld trembled with the wrath of Ace Aldini. News spread through his domain of the audacious thing that Happy Don Hawley and his crew had done to the big boss.

Aldini's killers and spies combed Chicago night and day for a trace of Happy Don. Holed up in his Casino stronghold, Aldini drank whisky and lashed his jackals into the hunt.

He was half crazed with drink and consuming anger. His language was lurid, pungent and unprintable. In two nights, Don Hawley had cost him upward of three hundred thousand dollars. He gulped another stiff drink of whisky and wished profanely that he could have one brief sight of Don Hawley from behind a machine-gun.

He would have to make other arrangements for getting his Canadian booze. He remembered with some satisfaction that he had at least enough liquor to supply his trade for two weeks stored in a secret cache. The jingle of bells in the gaming-rooms told him it was three o'clock—closing time. He staggered down to the treasure-room and once more stuffed the night's takings into the safe, uncounted.

During the day following the raid on the rum trucks, seventeen more men had arrived at the farmhouse rendezvous. They were all men who nursed grievances against Ace Aldini for reasons similar to those of the ones who had first rallied to Hawley's banner. They listened with unrepressed joy to the tales of what the little group of avengers had already accomplished—and enthusiastically declared allegiance.

Bedding and foodstuffs had already been laid in for the expected reinforcements. The big old farmhouse had now become a veritable barracks. From the crew of newcomers, Don Hawley picked four whom he thought best fitted for the task and sent them into the city to check up on various information that had been extracted from the three cowed rogues in the basement.

IT was past two o'clock in the morning when Hawley, accompanied by seven picked men, drove into the outskirts of Cicero. The rest of the band had been left at the farmhouse, sleeping in order to be ready for what might present itself on the following day and night. The eight in this night's raiding-party rode in Ace Aldini's big custom-built car.

Near a huge frame building that loomed in the darkness, Hawley halted the car and turned off the lights. The bulky building had in days gone been a livery-stable, later a garage and now it was used as a storehouse for booze by Ace Aldini.

Five minutes passed while the men in the big limousine sat silent in the parked car. The darkness was undisturbed by any sound. No light showed about the huge old building, squatting over its hoard of contraband spirits. But Hawley and his crew knew that at least half a dozen guards armed with machine-guns were somewhere within those windowless walls.

Death, for any of his own men, or even for others, was not in Donald Hawley's plan—if it could be avoided. He was counting on those guards having become careless

through the feeling of security brought on by almost a year of peace among the city's gangsters.

"Let's go," whispered Hawley. "Farley, you take the wheel and be ready to fade the moment the last one of us is in the bus."

Seven men slipped quietly into the darkness and deployed around the old stable. Each one carried a rifle and each acted on instructions previously given by Hawley. In a few minutes, they had reached the positions which had been their objectives. There were three men on each side of the building; Hawley was standing in the street, facing the big doors.

Suddenly Hawley jerked up the muzzle of his rifle and there was a sharp retort as a tongue of flame licked from its throat into the darkness. A second later the night was sputtering and crackling with the mingled crashes as seven rifles were emptied into the side and front of the wooden building.

The sound of the volley died as quickly as it had begun.

"Come on!" shouted Hawley, setting his men an example by dashing for the waiting car.

Farley, at the wheel, had started the motor. Seven flying figures lunged out of the darkness and leaped into the car. As the last ones tumbled in, Farley let in the clutch. The limousine leaped away with a howl of swiftly shifted gears. The doors of the big building burst open and a machine-gun spat fire and lead after the fleeing car. Farley took a corner on two wheels and the raiders were out of range of the sputtering gun. Seven or eight blocks away from the storehouse, Tom Farley stopped the car at Hawley's quiet command.

"Anybody hurt?" inquired Happy Don. Several bullets from the machine-gun had struck the back of the car.

"I think I'm nicked a little in the leg," answered Hod Woodard. "But it aint bad—only a graze."

Hod's grazed leg proved to be the extent of the damage. The men in the car all breathed sighs of relief.

"Look!" cried Tom Farley. "We got her!"

BACK in the direction of the old stable a red glow was beginning to color the night sky. More than two score of incendiary bullets fired into a store of alcoholic bottled goods had turned the warehouse into a furnace.

"That's that," observed Donald Hawley. "Let's fade."

Word of what had happened to his Cicero storehouse reached Ace Aldini just before four o'clock. Ten minutes afterward, word was out and being broadcast through the underworld for a mass-meeting of Ace Aldini's forces at a certain roadhouse some fifteen miles from the loop. Three hundred men had reported to the place before sunrise. They packed the big dance-pavilion. Every cold-blooded killer and every cunning or clever brain in Ace Aldini's sinister organization was gathered to listen to the orders of their chief.

"Listen," said Aldini, standing on a table and looking down upon that cluster of evil faces. "We've got to get Happy Don Hawley and get him quick! In the last three days he has cost us right close to a half million dollars. I think I have a line on his plan and the bunch who are helping him. I'm going to tell you the names of a lot of men for whom I want you to watch. I believe any one of them will lead us to Hawley's hide-out. When—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted a gruff voice. "I want to say something."

A big red-faced man had climbed onto another table at the side of the enormous room. He was Beef Grogan, who had been second in power in Chicago's warring gangland before the consolidation.

"You say Don Hawley has cost us a half million bucks," continued Beef Grogan. "Who do you mean by *us?* I haven't lost anything; and there's a lot more of us here who haven't. It kinda looks like you're workin' hell out of all of us to help you settle a grudge-fight between you and Don Hawley. You railroaded—"

The roar of a gun clattered through the pavilion. Beef Grogan's oration ended in a gasp. The big gangster's hands grasped his middle and he pitched backward from the table.

"Anybody else want to say anything before I finish?" demanded Aldini. He stood glaring at the crowd, his smoking automatic still in his hand.

A silence broken only by the dying moans of his victim was the answer of the cowed throng. "Then," snapped Aldini, "listen to me!"

NOON was nearing on the day of Ace Aldini's dawn conclave at the roadhouse. Governor Bryant, the chief of police of Chicago, and the mayor were seated in the latter's office.

"What seems to be wrong?" inquired the Governor.

"I wish to God I knew," answered the police chief. "I've got a feeling like I was sitting on top of a lighted bomb. Hell is simmering in Floptown and the dives. Aldini's cars are prowling the streets at all hours, loaded with killers. That's all I know, but it's plenty."

The Governor sat for several moments in silence. He was mentally reviewing the contents of the letter that had reached him by special delivery early that morning. The letter had come from Donald Hawley and in addition to the written pages had contained four one-thousand dollar bills. The letter said that one of the bills was in payment of the loan that the Governor had made to Hawley. The other three were to pay for the replacing of the bridge that had been blown up on the Chicago-Milwaukee highway. There had been other things in that letter. Those other things had given the Governor courage.

"I'm going to ask a blunt question," declared Bryant; "and I want a frank answer from both of you. Are you fellows afraid of Ace Aldini?"

"No," answered the mayor.

"No," echoed the chief of police.

"Then," remarked the Governor crisply, "you'd better both get busy and put a crimp in Aldini's activities. I can—and will—call out the National Guard, put Chicago under martial law and take personal charge unless you two gentlemen take this fellow Aldini in hand within reasonable time."

After a few more remarks, the Governor took his leave. Two worried city officials remained in conference for a long hour. The Governor went directly to a hotel where he engaged a suite. He intended to remain in the city for the next few days, in accordance with a request Donald Hawley had made in his letter.

After instructing his mob at the roadhouse and sending them off with orders to get a day of sleep and be ready for what the night might bring, Aldini returned to the Casino. There was a gleam of baleful determination in the racketeer's eyes. He meant to bring Don Hawley up short. All other business could stand still—or run itself—until that task was done.

Two men in flying-clothes were waiting at the Casino when Aldini returned. The gangster gave them money and some terse instructions. When the aviators had departed, Aldini took off his shoes, loosened his necktie, took a stiff drink of whisky and went to bed on the big couch in his office where he fell asleep heavily.

ALL day long two planes rode the sky in ever-widening circles about Chicago. Aldini's buzzards were hunting the hide-out of Don Hawley and his crew. It had

dawned on the racketeer chieftain that that hide-out was outside of the city. He had made a pretty shrewd guess as to the sort of place it would be. The pilots of the searching planes had been instructed accordingly.

Shortly after six o'clock, the flyers reported to their employer. The result was a list of some twenty-five places, one of which might be the lair of Don Hawley's marauders. Just after dusk, twenty-five cars, each carrying three men, left the city to investigate the suspected places and report to Aldini. All other activities could wait. Runners were sent out to the speak-easies, now clamoring for supplies, to tell them that they would have to wait a day or two. Aldini sat grimly at his telephone, awaiting reports from his scouts.

In the gaming-rooms, business went on as usual. Men and women wooed fortune vainly but persistently. Aldini had forgotten them. His mind was entirely filled with one thought—one purpose. Reports from the scouts began to come in. One by one, more than a dozen places were reported and scratched from the list that lay beside Aldini's telephone. The gangster chieftain's frown deepened as each reporting detail was ordered back to the city. He cursed Don Hawley fluently and fervently, and his eyes grew bloodshot as the liquor in the bottle on his desk grew less.

It was a few minutes after nine o'clock. Don Hawley and twenty of his followers were gathered in the farmhouse kitchen. There was an air of suppressed excitement in the room.

"We are rapidly putting Ace Aldini's business on the fritz," Hawley told the gathered men. "We have already made quite a nick in his cash and you can bet he's wondering right now how he is to supply his blind pigs with booze during the coming week. He'll be wondering more after we put his big still out of commission tonight. It's about a three-hour drive to the place where that still is. We'll leave here in half an hour and each car will go by the different routes I've already described.

"Each driver will time his trip to arrive at our meeting-place at about three o'clock. We meet at the crossroads half a mile east of the still. Besides destroying the still, we will probably be able to dump several hundred gallons of moonshine. That will leave Aldini facing a puzzle—and the speak-easies facing a drouth."

"Ace Aldini will bite himself," chuckled Bat Gaffney.

"That will be just too bad," answered Hawley dryly. "Well, let's get started. Everybody can get something to eat along the way. That will help kill the time. Remember, we all arrive at the meeting-place at three o'clock."

A dark-clad figure that had been crouching in the darkness underneath the open window of the kitchen crept stealthily away. One of Aldini's scouts had not only located Don Hawley's lair, but he had obtained an earful of information that would delight his chief. Safely away from the house, the gangster stood erect and hurried off to the car in which his companions waited.

The back door of the kitchen opened and little Gad Powers entered. There was a grin on the jockey's face.

"He's gone," announced Powers. "I heard the car going west, hell-bent, just now."

"Good," laughed Don Hawley. "When he tells Aldini what he heard, there'll be a young army started for that crossroads to wipe us out from ambush as we meet there at three o'clock. It's lucky that we got suspicious of those planes."

"You sure guessed right about some bozo coming snooping around here as soon as it was dark," observed Tom Farley.

Hawley bent and picked up a small flashlight bulb with attached wires which lay on the floor under the stove. It had flashed Gad Powers' signal that the prowling gangster was approaching the open kitchen window. The little jockey had been hidden in a clump of shrubbery, waiting for the spy to put in his appearance.

Hawley handed the bulb to Paul Tanner. "Roll up the wire and put this rig away in the cupboard," said Happy Don. "We may need it again."

SAVAGE joy spread over Ace Aldini's face as he listened to the telephoned report of his henchman who had located the farmhouse hide-out. It wouldn't be long now. Don Hawley would find out that Ace Aldini's affairs could not be meddled in without disaster! The racketeer ordered the reporting man to come back to town at once.

An hour later eight big powerful cars were heading westward out of Chicago, loaded with Aldini's armed killers. Wholesale slaughter was their intention. Don Hawley and his crew were to be massacred in cold blood when they drove into the ambush that was to be laid near the big still from which came most of the moonshine for the dives of Floptown.

But Donald Hawley had other plans.

Three o'clock came and the Casino closed. Aldini went down to the treasure-room and for the third time put away the receipts without counting. He hurried back upstairs to be near the telephone. By this time the machine-guns in the hands of his killers must have mowed down Donald Hawley and his companions. Aldini's ears ached to hear the news!

The last of the patrons and all but two of the atten-

He began to stuff the money into his bag. "Get his wallet," said Hawley, through the window.

dants had gone when Aldini came upstairs from putting away the night's cash.

"Go out to the car and wait for me," the racketeer ordered those two rogues.

Two or three minutes later, Aldini looked up with a start as the door of his office opened. He halted in the process of pouring a drink of whisky. His face went gray as he looked into the muzzle of a revolver, held in the steady hand of Happy Don Hawley.

"Take your drink," drawled Hawley, grinning. "You'll need its bracing influence. Then put your hands in the air and walk out into the other room. There are some old friends waiting to see you."

Disarmed and speechless with fright and rage, Aldini presently stood in the main gaming-room of the Casino. The two thugs whom he had told to wait for him in his car were also prisoners. They had been met by Hawley and his men as they opened the front door. At the points of guns, they had been backed into the house. Out in Aldini's car, two of Hawley's men were holding the chauffeur prisoner. All the rest were gathered in the gambling-hall.

"Lightning is about to strike twice in the same place, Aldini," said Hawley. "I've come for another golden egg."

"You, you—" the racketeer snarled.

"You probably thought I would be dead by this time, did you not?" chuckled Hawley. "Your gunmen will have a long wait for me."

Aldini glared but did not answer. His twisted mind was trying to realize how and where his plans had slipped up.

"Take that stuff and get busy on the safe," said Hawley to Tom Farley.

Farley and five others of the crew picked up a tank of gas and an acetylene torch which they had carried into the place with them, and started toward the door that led to the strong-room.

"Your pretty safe will be completely ruined by the time the boys get through working on it," said Hawley. "I hope there is enough in it to pay for all the time and trouble."

Ace Aldini gritted his teeth in rage as he remembered that three nights' receipts lay in that safe. In his zeal to catch and kill Happy Don, the racketeer had neglected to take any of the money to his banks.

"I'm going to take a look through your den in yonder while the fellows are burning their way into your strong-box," observed Hawley. "While I'm doing that, these boys here will look after you."

IN the little private office, Donald Hawley set methodically about his search. He took nothing, but he made numerous notes on a couple of sheets of paper. There was a widening grin on his lean face as he gathered the data for which he searched. In twenty minutes he went back into the big room where his crew and the prisoners waited. Tom Farley and his helpers had come up from the basement. The fighter was carrying a well-stuffed sack.

"What luck, Tom?" asked Hawley.

"Some haul," grinned Farley. "More than we got last time, I believe."

"Fair enough," said Hawley. "Let's go. Drag down some of those portiéres and tie these eggs up tight enough that we'll have a ten-minute start before they get loose."

The trussing up of the three gangsters was quickly done. Then, after Hawley had taken a peek out the front door and noted that the street was still quiet and deserted except for Aldini's car in which sat the captive chauffeur and his guards, the crew departed. Leaving the Casino, they scattered to the five cars which they had left parked in various near-by spots. Farley still carried the sack.

"Aldini would sure enjoy watching you boil in oil," observed Bat Gaffney at Hawley's elbow, while they hurried toward their waiting car.

Aldini and his two henchmen were less than ten minutes in freeing themselves from the portiére bonds. They dashed to the door and looked out upon what they had expected to see—an empty street. Their foes had vanished again. Aldini scorched the air with his vocabulary.

"Slater," snapped the gang-leader to one of his men, "hike for the garage, get a car and go tell those damned fools at the crossroads that I said for them to come back here quick."

The fellow went. Aldini ordered the other to get a gun and stand guard at the front door. Then he flung himself into his office, and gulped a tall drink of raw whisky.

"What in hell did the blankety-blank-blank want in here?" muttered the angry racketeer as he began to look about the office to see if anything was missing.

Presently he seated himself at the telephone. Once more the word spread for a meeting of the mob's leaders. Just after daylight, nearly two hundred rogues had gathered in the Casino. Included in the throng were the killers who had wasted the small hours in waiting at a lonely crossroads to slaughter Hawley and his comrades.

On their return from their vain vigil, those murderers had stopped at the farmhouse, where they found and liberated the three captives in the basement prison. Then they had set fire to the house and all the outbuildings before leaving.

Aldini told the assembled thugs of what had happened that night and outlined another plan for the downfall of Don Hawley. Then the thugs dispersed, to sleep and be ready for another night.

DAWN found Donald Hawley and his crew in a new hide-out. This one was a big, roughly built hunting-lodge which stood on a peninsula of high ground jutting into the Kankakee marshes. It was located in the center of a big duck-hunting preserve which belonged to Governor Bryant.

A count of the money from Ace Aldini's ruined safe showed that the common wealth of the crew had been increased by another two hundred thousand dollars. There was rejoicing.

"And what's next?" inquired Bat Gaffney, voicing the question in every mind.

"Some sleep," answered Hawley. "I got word to the boys working in town about our change of residence. They have this telephone-number. We'll probably get a call from them before night. Then we'll act accordingly."

There were only three bunks in the lodge, and scant bedding, but the building was roomy and the floors were dry. The crew retired without ceremony. It was midafternoon when the telephone awakened them. Hawley, with a grim smile, listened to the report from the men he had assigned to intelligence-tasks in the city.

"Good," he said, when the report was ended. "We'll get busy. You fellows come on out here." He had instructed them previously as to how to reach the lodge.

"Aldini is going to Peoria to deal with Shank Polcher for delivery of a big batch of booze," Hawley told his crew as he turned from the telephone. "His speak-easies are all dry. He's desperate—must have more hooch to keep any money coming in. We're getting that bird where we want him. It's time we had him as a house-guest for a while. We'll go get him. We have time to get a bite to eat in Kankakee and then head him off on the road to Peoria. Let's go. Farley, you and Gad take that sack of money and go put it with the other. Then come back here and wait until we arrive with Aldini."

The man who had reported by telephone to Donald Haw-

ley stepped from the booth and joined his three fellow spies who were waiting in the front of the drug-store.

"Don says for us to come right out to the lodge," he informed the others. "Guess he's got all the dope he wants."

"How do we go?" asked one of his companions.

"Grab a cab and walk the last mile."

THEY left the drug-store and stepped into a cab waiting conveniently at the curb. They gave the driver directions and settled back for the ride. Two hours later they stopped the cab at a little village, paid the driver and dismissed him. It was less than two miles from the village to the hunting-lodge. They would walk.

The cab had gone less than a mile on its return journey to Chicago when it met another car, carrying four men. Both cars stopped and the drivers exchanged a few words; then the cars moved on. The four men never realized that they were watched, cleverly and constantly, until they entered the lodge. Then their watchers sped back to Chicago.

The four waited in the deserted lodge for more than an hour. Then they were joined by Tom Farley and Gad Powers, returning from depositing the proceeds of the previous nights' raid. Another hour, and the band arrived with Ace Aldini and four of his henchmen as prisoners.

Dusk was settling as the five prisoners were herded into the lodge. The crew gathered around.

"Well, Aldini," snapped Hawley, "the end of your row is in sight. We have you pretty well milked dry for cash, except what you have in the banks. Tomorrow you are going to sign checks that will wipe out your accounts—and repay most of the honest men from whom you have extorted money. I checked up on your bank-books while I was in your office last night."

Aldini attempted to say something—but he choked on the words.

"I'm leaving you here under guard while I take the rest of the boys into Chicago and do another little chore or two that will put the finishing crimps into your rackets," went on Hawley. "In the morning we'll have the check-signing."

Six men in charge of Paul Tanner were left to guard the prisoners and the rest of the crew sped away for Chicago. They intended to gather in a few more of the ringleaders of Aldini's mobs. Reaching the city, they scattered, according to prearranged plans, about their task. Donald Hawley went directly to Governor Bryant's hotel-suite. He had been with the Governor less than fifteen minutes when there was a knock at the door and Tom Farley, with one of the men who had acted as spies for the crew, entered.

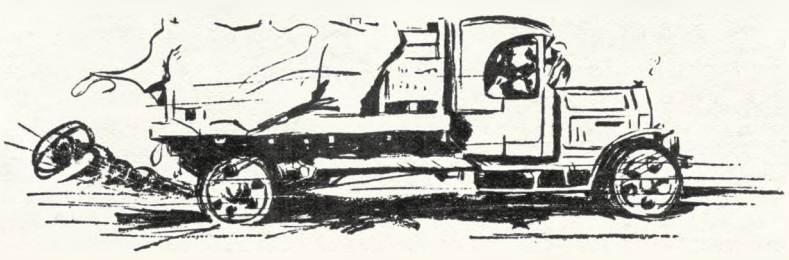
"Aldini's outfit has located the lodge!" cried Farley. "They are leaving town right now—a dozen carloads with an arsenal of machine-guns."

"Let's go!" cried Hawley. "I'll report to you as soon as I can, Governor."

"I'm going with you," answered the Governor quietly, but in a tone that brooked no argument.

"The rest of the boys are on their way," said Farley. "Our car is at the door. Good thing we had machine-guns under all the seats."

A dozen cars, packed with gangsters armed to the teeth, roared southward through the night. They were in command of Brace Felton, Aldini's right-hand man. Aldini was not expected back until after midnight, but he had left orders that the gang was to wipe out Hawley and his men the moment they were located. The Casino had been closed. All the picked killers rode in those racing cars.



A few minutes more than an hour after leaving the city behind, the gangsters' cars swung off the highway and roared down the drive that ran along the peninsula to the hidden hunting-lodge. Lights shone from the windows.

Paul Tanner, thinking his comrades had returned, opened the door. The night was suddenly a bedlam of rattling, sputtering machine-gun fire. Tanner reeled and pitched backward into the room. The lodge was now surrounded. The gangsters thought their chieftain far away in Peoria; well, they would have some pleasing news for him in the morning!

On all sides the guns of gangland spat leaden death into the building. The bullets tore through the thin walls of the lodge and swept the interior with a withering hail of destruction. Guns were emptied and new belts inserted. The gunners were literally tearing the lodge down with hissing streams of lead. From eaves to foundation the screaming messengers of their vengeance raked the lodge. Inside, eleven men had ceased to hear the death-song of the guns—Ace Aldini and four of his tools had died along with their six guards.

As the guns fell silent at a relayed order from Brace Felton, doom swept down upon the murderers. Five cars that had been tearing along on their trail reached the neck of the peninsula. The cars turned and made a barricade across the neck of high ground.

The killers were trapped! On three sides lay the dark and treacherous swamp. On the other, Donald Hawley and his men crouched in the shelter of the cars. Hawley's men were heavily armed with machine-guns and automatic rifles—and were authorized by the Governor of the State to use them.

And other cars were arriving. Back in Chicago, the Governor's private secretary had been busy on the telephone, carrying out his departing employer's hastily given instructions. State and county officers and their deputies were arriving in speeding cars to add their strength to the already entrenched forces of Donald Hawley.

A State officer took charge after a few brief words with Hawley and the Governor. The rats in their trap held a council of war—and decided to surrender. Half an hour later they were on their way to the cells, whence they would go to the gallows.

"WHAT are you going to do now, Donald?" asked Governor Bryant, as they were returning to Chicago with the rest of the crew trailing behind them.

"Farm," laughed Hawley. "I own a nice chunk of ground—and after I do some dividing with the boys I'll have plenty of money to put it in paying shape. I'm sorry Aldini didn't live long enough to sign those checks—but we can't have everything."

"You wouldn't want a position with me?" inquired the Governor.

"As what?"

"Say as official racket-wrecker." And the Governor smiled.

"I don't think you need a man for that particular job right now, Governor," observed Happy Don Hawley, with a grin. "But if you ever should, at some future time—you might give me first chance!"

MISSISSIPPI MAGIC

A quaint romance of modern shanty-boat life on the Father of Waters, by the jovial author of "The Mountain Sheriff."

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

THE beam of a kerosene lamp burning on the table of a shanty-boat shone through a square window to fall in distorted yellow shape on the restless, swirling short eddy at the foot of a steep lonely bend of the Mississippi. No curtain obscured the window. Surely a tripper that careless must be a soft-paw,—plumb ignorant,—Red Rufus thought, as he sat on his jon-boat thwart, his arm around a snag as he figured uneasily.

"Been bettin' I could work that boat!" Red mused. "Same time—uh-uh!"

Red had for days followed this craft, watching from afar, discerning inexperience in its navigation. Now for the first time he came within half a mile or so. Lots of times a man fools himself by not considering all sides of a Lower River proposition. For instance, it might be an old-timer who had no curtain because he didn't care a whoop. Red just couldn't afford to make mistakes, being in too much of a hurry. Somebody could give him a mere look and a loud laugh, making Red feel real foolish. Just a little man, using brains to compensate for lack of size, meagerness of beef, and other physical deficiencies.

Stretching his weathered neck, Red tipped his head like a bird, peering with widened eyes, wishing he had a rope to moor his square-ended rowboat so he could investigate more closely. Two miles or so below was a sandbar; there he could draw his hull onto a beach where it would stay without being tied—but that was an awful long ways to walk for less than a sure thing. Besides, leaving his boat was liable to tempt some rascal too much.

"If I thought it'd be any use, I'd drap down and walk back," he pondered uneasily. "Probably wouldn't amount to anything."

Glancing around to see if the night gloom would answer him, inspiring him with a bright idea, Red heard a gang of wild traveler-geese hurtling by overhead, their singing voices raining like gossip. The sound made him twinge, for cold weather had caught the birds in wheat-fields up the Missouri, forcing a thousand-mile jump, a norther behind them.

"Shu-u!" he grumbled. "I need a cabin; canvas is chilly raw, and sometimes it leaks as well as drips—'taint no comfort!"

The light baffling his eyes, he squinted and peered, shading first one pupil, then the other, trying to make out conditions. That was a dandy hull, about twenty-two foot long and seven foot wide, with a stout cabin. One man could handle it like a skiff, and it looked custom-built for a soft-paw—real fancy, and fair loot if one could graft it without too much trouble. He just wanted to see plain who was on board.

Suddenly the stern-deck door opened and a yellowish beam shot surprisingly into the thin mist. A figure stepped out, plainly silhouetted, standing at the stern emptying a dishpan over the bumper. Vigorously the woman wiped the pan with a large washrag, rinsing it in the river.

"Huh!" Rufus grumbled. "A dad-blasted new-married couple honeymooning down. A lady like that'd neveh be alone—no such luck!"

Turning away, he let go the branch and the jon-boat sucked away down the current, unseen in the gloom close to the bank. Soft-paws wandering down the river in couples are often careless about curtains, not knowing what eyes lurk in the dark of wild lonely waters. New married couples are happy too, not caring who knows it. Same time, though lacking in experience and thoughtfulness, if a man messes up with honeymooners he takes chances. A bridegroom is likely to be violent, unreasonable and show-off, protecting his bride and outfit. Besides, where she is he hangs around close more'n an old married man, and neither one is apt to stray far from a cozy floating nest, at first along. Course, after being married a year or two, Red reflected, they aren't so particular.

Disappointed, Red gloomily drifted down around Wild Bird Point and about seven miles downstream he skirted along the edge of a sandbar, his owl-eyes watching for a harbor landing. Coming close, he made sure it wasn't quicksand, and then stepping over he hauled his hull out and crawled into the miscellaneous blankets, canvas and quilts in the shelter of his A-tent, or cabin, on the stern two-thirds of his boat. He was disappointed, but he swallowed his feeling of hard luck. Another time he might strike it rich.

Red Rufus slept soundly, sung to sleep by the vibrant torrent going past, washing side-ripples to fall lapping-lapping on the sand. Now and then a gang of wild geese went by overhead, eternally speaking their minds. At intervals a flock of ducks, bunched like a charge of shot, hissed along close down. The night was warmish, but had a stinging tang in its fiber, nevertheless. Any minute there was likely to be the crash of a reaching catspaw as the storm from which the wildfowl were fleeing, swept down. Then it'd be cold and a man'd wish he had clothes and lots of them—a slicker without any holes in it, warm gloves and a good boat to lie in, snug. Course, Red had tried faithfully enough to pick up such a boat. Hadn't he wasted an hour or two up there in the bend, studying the situation of one?

ALL of a sudden the river bottoms were filled with a humming which grew louder and deeper. In a minute or two there was a terrific downpour of rain, clattering so loudly that Red sat up, listening with judicious ears.

"That's durn' near hail," he grumbled, and then as swiftly that gusty shower quit and quiet fell even more emphatically.

Something dropped just astern the jon-boat, splashing in the water. Red Rufus stiffened. What would be falling out of the sky like that? His ears hummed and throbbed. He heard other things falling; then another shower came, and when he struck a match to see if the canvas was leaking he saw a fine misty spray where raindrops splashed through.

"Hit'll swell tight soon's it's wet," he consoled himself,

She would have met Private Investigator Miles on the gangplank—only he realized that something was wrong.

but when he saw the deep indentations all over the tent, like fingers poked against it, he added: "Dog-gone! I bet that's hail!"

Then there were flares, bluish-white, distant, but brightening. He didn't need a match lighted to see. He heard a tumult, a roaring, and then a continuing crashing which sounded like tall timbers being twisted. The river-man's eyes distended and his thin tawny hair bushed out, as the incurves of his A-tent suddenly rounded out, stood distended for a minute and then with a loud tearing sound burst and stretched forth as streamers in a fury of fiery-blue glarings on all sides.

"Aw, gosh!" Red Rufus gasped, and grabbed at the thwart seat of his jon-boat which was lifting and teetering, pounding on the sand. His legs rose mysteriously; his blankets, canvas and quilts whipped away in a wafted, expansive fashion, visible for a flash against the quivering glow of lightning.

"Leggo my feet!" the river-man gasped. "Leggo!"

Clinging desperately to the boat seat, Red Rufus felt the craft tipping and bobbing along—first one end, then the other, hitting the bar. He squirmed under a terrific pelting by hail and drops of water that stung like shot. He was glad—it flashed across his mind—that he slept in his pants, account of that being less bother and one was ready thus for emergencies. Whatever the terrific power was which was carrying the jon-boat, or tip-tilting it about, suddenly it spurned its burden and there was a squash. Then hail and rain slashed down, whipping in from all directions, presently settling into a steady drive from one direction. The hail subsided into rain and the warmth of the night was gone in stinging, engrossing cold. That gripping chill just lifted Red Rufus up, shuddering.

"Cyclone!" he whimpered. "Shu-u! Hit tore off my rag-shack! I'll freeze to death! Lawse, hit mout of carried me right out into the riveh an' drowned me. I'm lucky!"

He looked around him, shielding his eyes from the rain, and saw the wastes of a sandbar hemmed in by hurtling gray columns of unimaginable rain. The bluish electric light which had given him vision dimmed rapidly as the center of the tornado ran on to spend itself in a final kick-off against a bluff twenty or thirty miles to the northeast.

"I aint left the sandbar yet!" he thought to himself, and feeling along the gunwales of his boat he made sure nothing was torn away but his tent. The jon-boat was still reasonably sound.

"Now I got to run around this hull so's I won't freeze to death!" Red Rufus sighed, having pawed along the bottom, hoping he would find that some of his bedding hadn't been blown away. Vain hope! Even his frying-pan and soup-pail were gone! One good thing, though, he had tied his boots together, and they had hooked under the stern seat, so he wasn't barefooted.

"I always was lucky!" he regarded the reversal of his fortunes, as he emptied out the water and pulled on the rubber boots. "Here I got my pants, a woolen army shirt and boots. I better put my pant-legs outside, though, so's the rain won't run down inside my boots. I'm glad I thought of that. If I hadn't, I'd had to take my boots off an' empty them out again. If a man's careless thataway, his feet get water-blisters; but as it is, they're cold, but washed."

He circled around his jon-boat which he could see as a dim, dark silhouette in the faint gray of the surrounding sand. He felt the sand and found it was fine-grained, and his feet trod on the hard wind-ripples with which the bar was covered. That showed he was high, and probably a long ways from the water. This fact made him grunt. The jon-boat was about all he could drag, and the farther it was from the water, the farther he would have to drag it; but of course not till daylight, when he could see which was the shortest cut back to the Mississippi.

The cold was crinkling him as he flung his arms and jumped and pranced around. When a man loses his shack thataway, course he has to take the consequences. Red Rufus had been caught before in a river-bottom cyclone, and he would probably be caught again, if he hung around that dad-blasted, miserable, aggravatin' Old Mississipp'. Anybody who wouldn't get off that riveh when the going was good deserved anything that befell his fool head! The wonder was everybody in the world didn't move right plumb clear and shut of those timber-brakes and cotton-lands, levees and cane ridges, sandbars and caving banks —there wa'n't a single redeeming feature to the whole scandalous country, from the clay deeps to the highest stars in the sky, no indeedy!

Red Rufus was sure that never in all his born days had he said so much of what was what, not caring who heard it, not giving one whooping cuss if the riveh hisself heard every word he spoke! It was some satisfaction to know that one's expression of his feelings was so adequate and so full of new, true ideas; and when dawn crept in first as a gray glow on one side, then as a pale ring clear around the horizon, and presently as a bright and almost silvery reflection on the river surface, he saw that the flood was about eighty rods away, showing the distance the wind had skipped his boat without upsetting it, or dumping him out; it wasn't everybody who had ridden in a cyclone thataway, no indeedy!

"Course," Red Rufus grumbled, "nobody won't believe me when I tell them how't happened, my heels cracking in the air an' me hanging to the seat! They'll prob'ly

say I'm jes' braggin'. Same time I got the satisfaction pussonally that it's so!"

The rain pelted unceasingly, sparkling in the big drops and each drop falling with a splash which burst into a myriad of tiny globules that spread a sparkling spray of dust like flying precious stone-dust a foot deep over the sand into which plunged the wind-blasted fury of downpour. Red Rufus paused his exercise to hump his shoulders, looking into his devastated jon-boat. In the lower end was four or five inches of water from the storm, with nuts floating on it.

"Huh!" he sighed. "A sight of rain fell last night! Hit won't let up—not for two-three days! Them hick'ry nuts an' pecans are all that wa'n't sucked out in the wind. I'm lucky—I can eat them. But prob'ly I'll freeze to death, cracking them."

He had a chunk of iron and near by on the sand was a piece of wrecked steamboat timber with an iron bolt-head in it. Straddling the beam, he shucked and ate hickory-nuts which were the size of hen's eggs—big shell-barks. These were meat and vegetables for any man. He stretched, shivered, worked his arms and shoulders, casting weather-wise glances around as he sized up the situation of miles of desert sandbar, a yellow river pouring by in a mile-wide torrent and a sky-full of wind-slanted rain that smoked in the cold.

"Now all I want's a good drink," he mused. "I'll have to find some place where the water c'lects and is clean."

He found that place in the top of a huge sycamore snag. There the smooth gray log had a trough depression in it several inches deep and six feet or so long. Here was lots of drinking-water, absolutely pure—rain-water distilled out of the sky! Red Rufus drank.

"If that log'd rolled oveh I'd been out of luck," he sighed, with a feeling of content. "I'd prob'ly had to gone clear over into the woods 'fore I'd found any to drink. Well, I s'pose I mout's well begin to drag that dad-blamed boat of mine back to the riveh. Theh aint no short way to it, neither."

HE tipped his boat over, emptying out the water, carefully heaped the hickory- and pecan-nuts back in, and began to lift, lug, drag his craft over the sand, struggling to return it to the eddy. The river would probably rise for a few days, but he didn't want to wait around there till high water floated him off. He'd probably starve, freeze or catch pneumonia, he couldn't guess what, in the meantime. A man has to be mighty careful how he looks after his interests down Old Mississipp'.

"I lost my paddle and both oars," he grumbled. "They prob'ly fell out in the river. 'Fore I start on down I'll look me up a piece of board, or something. I don't know what I'd better do about my boat. If I had some nice waterproof canvas and some nails I could pick up some framing and build me another rag shack; and then," he snarled, "prob'ly the first thing I knowed, another wind'd come along an' blow it off! If I'd had a rope last night, I could have tied into the bank and the wind'd gone over me, 'thout tearing me all up. Anybody says it's easy living down Old Mississip's a fool! Dad-blasted old creek keeps a man hustling all the time, repairin' his damages and making a living! Sometimes I'm mad enough to go up the bank, settle down, marry an' live respectable. If that'd been just a man up theh in the bend, and I could have fooled him, I'd got a nice boat with a good dry cabin. But cain't anybody gyp a new-married couple off their shanty-boat far 'nough to get it. 'Bout the only way to work *them*, is have something they need and charge 'm four-five times as much as it's good for. Course, that's prof'table, but it takes time."

Shuddering, shaking himself, twisting and studying the situation, Red Rufus every once in a while shook his head so violently that the spray from his thin hair and thick red whiskers flew around in a bright little halo. The storm had settled into a steady blow of wind out of the north, and the rain lines sloped swiftly out of the sky.

"Them birds knowed what was coming all right!" Red Rufus grumbled. "I expected a storm, but them durned cyclones always does surprise me. I never seen a warm spell in winter yet that wasn't a weather-breeder. I wonder if those new-marrieds wouldn't be good-natured? 'Taint more'n three-four miles up theh across the hook. Mebby if I spiel 'em a good one, I can get a hot breakfast, account of me looking kinda miserable. Nothin' else to do—mout's well try hit!"

SO, whistling and with hands in his trousers pockets, he headed into the wind, squinting, stepping to his own tune's measure, and his swing was vibrant to the old river-piece, "The Humming Norther." He had spent so much time dragging his jon-boat, eating hickory-nuts and studying the situation, that it was midmorning when he arrived at the cabin boat which was lying snug in the short eddy. The boat was white with red trimmings at the corner-boards and window-casings; the hull was red and a bright blue smoke was whipping, out of the kitchen galvanized pipe, the black fumes of fresh soft-coal. Red studied the craft awhile first.

Then he went to the top of the bank, drew down the corners of his lips, let his cheeks sag, tipped his head a bit to one side and called in a sorrowful tone:

"Aboard the bo't!"

No answer.

"Hey—on board theh!" he spoke louder.

No answer.

"Hi-i!" he shouted. "Hoo-hoo!"

He held one hand cupped over his left ear to make sure he caught any faintest sound. There came no reply. He fell to studying the shimmering slick of the eddy in which the hull rested. He watched along the edge of the strakes. The water heaped and sagged along the red boards, but there was no tiny rippling quiver to show that any one was moving around inside. He didn't like the looks of that, exactly—people who wait that way generally have a shotgun or something in their hands, ready.

He worked along the top of the bank, watchful and ready to jump if anything looked as though it was going to happen. The gangplank led to a stake driven in the bank. Four lines—two from the bows, two from the stern—led to good ties—snag roots, two stakes. It was a shipshape mooring. The knots were half-hitches with bites—that didn't look like a soft-paw! He studied the slick clay. There was a kind of footpath up the slope. He saw in the soft slick ground a good many footprints going and coming.

"Why, huh!" he breathed. "Them's female—they ain't no man's! Uh-uh! Course, he mout not be going out weatheh like this. She must be a nice lady, account of her carryin' in the wood—handles an ax fair—kinda misses where she hits, but uses a saw—*um-m-m*. Perhaps he's sickly, or pretends he is."

He stroked his red beard, which was curled up tight and thick.

"Didn't anybody answer—mebbe she's trippin' alone. My land—maybe she's one of them dis'pointed women beatin' it. They don't cyar 'bout nothing—I wonder'f I couldn't strike a bargain, takin' cyar of her—me knowin' Old Mississip' an' what to look out fur, an' so on—"

"Well," a sharp, bell-like voice interrupted his ideas, "what do you want?"

Red Rufus lifted his hands away from himself and turned, with his eyes full of anxiety, to see as well as hear. A young woman stood there with a wild goose hanging by a game stringer while she held leveled from her waist a repeating shotgun whose trigger she fingered carelessly.

"My gosh, lady!" Red backed away, his hands up. "All that ails me is I'm hongry an' my jon-boat got tore up in the cyclone an' I aint got any dry matches—ner anything to eat but hick'ry-nuts—"

"Lots of nourishment in them," the young woman remarked. "But you go stand against that gum-tree there, and don't you move. I'll set you up a snack if you behave yourself. If you don't—"

She lifted the muzzle of her shotgun ever so significantly.

"I always behave myse'f!" Red Rufus declared ingratiatingly. "Especially around the ladies."

"I think you're a liar," she replied unfeelingly. "Do as I tell you!"

He did, backing himself against the big gum-tree on the south lee side. Presently the young woman appeared. She had a piece of board about two feet long and a foot wide, covered with odds and ends of fried birds, hot-bread, a tomato-can full of steaming coffee, and soup-cans full of grape-sauce and remainders of various meals. The face of Red Rufus twitched up as he sniffed that hot coffee.

"My land, lady!" he gasped.

"You say you're in a jon-boat and the wind tore off the rag-shack?" she inquired.

"Yes'm."

"All right—then you're that fellow I've seen dropping down along the same reaches and bends I was in," she remarked. "Next time I see you near enough for identification I'm going to open on you with a 30-30 carbine. You know what a 30-30 is, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, lady! Yes indeedy!"

"All right. Eat—and then get out!"

"Yes'm," Red Rufus agreed; and as the young woman went on board the boat, closing the door behind her, he ate, sighing. "That lady knows what she's about—she aint no soft-paw! Funny I aint neveh met up with her before. I bet she's watchin' me through the window. Dog-gone, it makes me nervous! I betteh be moseying—I can eat some'res else lots easier! Them lone females aint safe—neveh know when they're goin' to shoot!"

He gathered up his tray and departed, grumbling.

CHAPTER II

EVERY winter some funny jigger comes down Old Mississip'. This year a tall thin fellow appeared in a twenty-foot skiff with outboard motor and a portable typewriter. He had staples along the gunwales and green cane hoops to put in them. Over the hoops he drew a hood which at night covered the boat from end to end. Then he had a canvas bunk, a gasoline stove and a regular outfit of cooking things, all nested and made out of aluminum. All day long he sat with his typewriter on his knees, writing. As fast as he covered one sheet of paper, he put in another and filled that one, too.

Mrs. Mahna saw him writing steady for four hours, on one sandbar. Jesse Haney saw him sitting on a snag up the bank, writing for three hours. When he wasn't writing he was snapping away with a dinky little camera, and if he hadn't been so innocent-looking, and polite about it, lots of times people he took pictures of might have thought something. As it was, they couldn't make out what ailed him, unless he was kinda that way, naturally. Course, lots come down Old Mississip' acting a little off and queer. This man seemed to mind his own business; at the same time, in a manner, he was a regular butter-in.

About the funniest thing he did was stop in the bayou below Buffalo Island. He just poked his bow in there, paddled and went right down to the boats and so on away back in the brake. He met Jerome Savey, first.

Savey said right sharp: "Howdy!"

"Oh, good day, sir!" he replied. "I'm a stranger on the river. Are you a shanty-boater?"

"Why—uh—what if I be?" Savey asked.

"I wish you'd tell me about it," the fellow replied. "You see I'm an author,—I mean I'm going to be some day,—and I want to write stories about the Mississippi river, and so on."

"Uh—going to write a history?"

"Well, no—not how Joliet discovered it and La Salle explored it, and so on, but perhaps, sometime, about shanty-boating." The skiff-tripper talked right frank and plain. "Just at present I am gathering materials for fiction."

"They aint any of them around here." Savey shook his head. "I never got to hear of none!"

"We-e-ll, if you'd just tell me about living in a shanty-boat and what you eat, and if you have any experiences—"

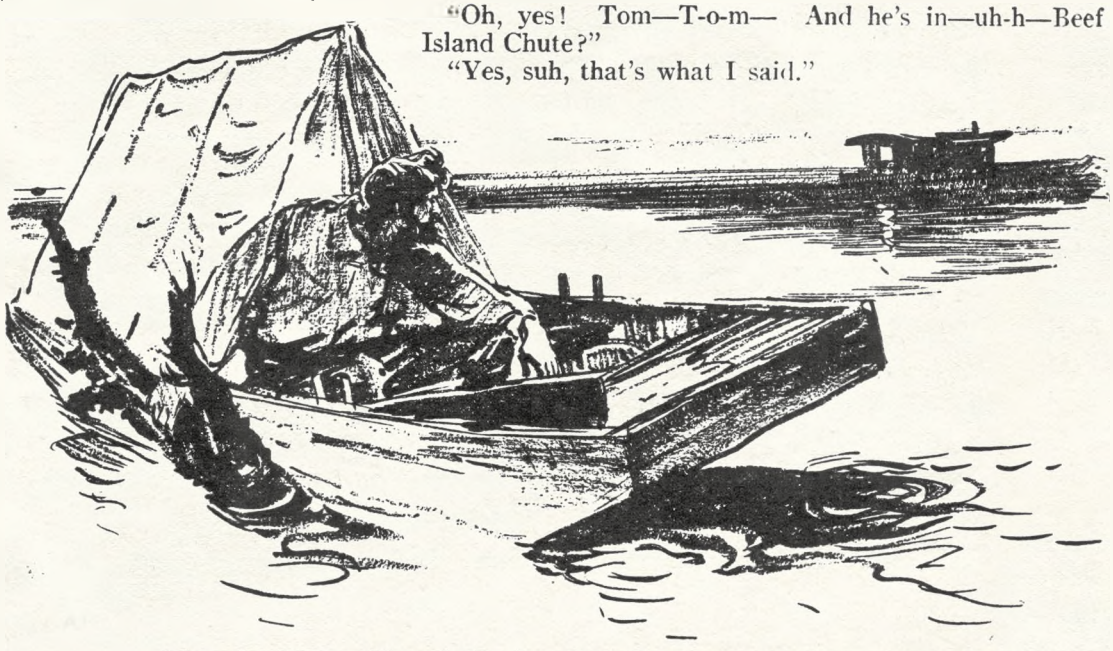
"Why, we have three squares a day," Savey admitted. "As to livin', we get a lot of kick out of it. Experiences—uh—nothin' int'restin', to write hist'ries about. There's an old feller down to Beef Island Chute, name of Tom Marshall. He's kind of a history himself. I aint been but ten-fifteen years on the riveh, myse'f."

"Just a minute—Thomas Marshall?"

"*Tom* Marshall."

"Oh, yes! Tom—T-o-m— And he's in—uh-h—Beef Island Chute?"

"Yes, suh, that's what I said."



"Been bettin' I could work that boat!" Red Rufus mused. "Same time—uh-uh!"

. . . . . .

"You see, I want those technical terms. They're an awful help if you're writing fiction. I mean they will be to me. You see,"—engagingly,—"I'm not much of a writer, yet. I've never been what you call inspired. I just have to write by main strength. Perhaps I never will be inspired—but anyhow, I'm a free-lance now. I used to work on a newspaper. I just thought if I could learn all the facts, and kind of used what actually happens, perhaps I could make up stories, without being inspired. If you are inspired, you know, you don't need to know anything —you just write stories right out of your own head."

"Yeh."

"It's like playing music."

"Music? Say, there's a feller down the bayou here, he can make a banjo talk—yes, sir!"

"What's his name, please?"

"Huh? What you want to know that for?"

"Well, I'll tell you. You see, when I make up a story, I don't want to use the real names of people. If I used the real names, somebody might think I meant him, or her. Then they would think they have just cause of complaint. When I know the real names, then I can use different names."

"Then you don't put down anybody you meet?" Savey asked.

"Oh, I put them all down, in my diary, but nobody ever sees my diary. Then when I use a name, it is fictitious."

"I seen my name in the newspaper, once," Savey sighed. "Course it made me mad; but that didn't do any good. That feller who picks a banjo is Rip Gillette. I live in that first boat there. Rip's down around the bend. I'll walk along down with you. He might think something, if he saw you coming. He don't play for money. He has to make a living, but he don't do it picking or anything like that. Who will I tell him you be?"

"Whom am I? Travers Wilicum. That's kind of a *nom-de-plume;* it's the name I write under. My real name is Smith, Joseph Howard Smith. My family don't like the idea of me being an author. They think I ought to go into business or law, something distinctive. That is why I picked the name Travers Wilicum. Something kind of different—and when I go home to Herkimer, nobody will suspect who I am, till I am established in literature, if ever I am. . . . Sometimes I have my doubts about it."

"IT'S a hard world," Savey remarked, seeing the skiff-tripper sigh. "I know Rip Gillette'll like to see you. Anybody would, I expect. We're kinda held pretty close to business, here in the bayou. Nothing but work all the time. Gillette, he plays music for us, some, and I bet you can he'p us pass the time too. I never seen no one like you before."

"Probably not!" Wilicum shook his head. "Some of us are establishing a new school of fiction literature. We hold that even in writing stories an author has to know something, and not depend on inspiration entirely."

"This feller Gillette, he says when he picks a new tune on the banjo he don't just make it up," Savey remarked, as they walked down the bank. "He says he always has something to start with, like a turkey gobbling or a levee mule braying. He takes some noise like that and keeps hitching noises to it, one after another, and kinda beats them along, *one-two-three, one-two-three,* like that. First thing he knows he's got a tune going. When he gets to going good on a new piece, dog-gone! Sometimes he has an awful hard time stopping it. It just kinda keeps going on and on."

"Just a moment!" Travers Wilicum wrote enthusiastically on his portable for a half-page at top speed; then he sighed, content. "You know, you've told me a new thing, one I'd never thought of before. You take a tune and it's like a story. You got to have a beginning, a middle and an end. The end's an awful nuisance—music or stories, either."

"Wait'll you hear some of Rip's pieces!" said Savey.

TRAVERS WILICUM stayed in the chute below Buffalo Island for days. When he came out, one of the cords on the back of his left hand was swelled up, he had written so much. He didn't take any photographs, though, except a few of shanty-boats. The shanty-boaters told him frankly that they didn't suspect him of anything but the most innocent intentions, minding his own business of writing fiction notes; at the same time, photographs were something different. When a man has thanked God once that he never had any picture took which would help find and identify him, he don't ever take any chances thataway again.

"I do wish these river people wouldn't try to stuff me with lies," Wilicum wrote in his notes. "They read stories in newspapers and magazines and tell them to me, wasting a lot of valuable time; what I want to know is the facts, —how they sharpen a knife, bait a hook, make dough-gods, build a houseboat or make love. I am grateful to them for their confidence in telling me so much about private affairs, like moonshine and grafting, the best way to throw bloodhounds off one's track, and why it doesn't pay to look for fresh-water pearls or trap furs when one can make so much with corn, wild honey and swamp grapes. Their naïve manners are delightful, the way the river people all keep trying to find the easiest way. I must emphasize their frankness in my fiction. But I mustn't forget that editorial hankerings are for structure and plot—and I must write like I am building a house, or anyhow a raft with a hog-pen on it."

Travers Wilicum dropped modestly down the Mississippi, completely unaware that he was attracting unusual attention. Word preceded him that he was traveling under an alias—Joe-Howard Smith, or something like that, being his real name. Of course that helped him immeasurably since a scouter having experience wasn't apt to give a fellow-fugitive away. He was also funny, and entertainers are everywhere at a premium. People treasured up things to say to him, nonchalantly, just to see him head for his portable typewriter to get it into permanent form. He would put down about a high tide, or just put down what everybody knows,—which was comical, and looked like a waste of time,—as recipes for Illinois hot-bread, a cat-road for hauling gum logs, lead nets to fish pounds in the overflow brakes.

Wilicum found a shanty-boat town moored in Putney Bend Eddy, below the Ohio. Mrs. Mahna assured him she had heard he was coming, and was anxious to get to see and hear him talk close-up, on account of her not believing the half that had preceded him. She invited him in to dinner, though she didn't have much, just red squirrels, hot-bread, some game fish, spuds, wild-grape jelly, gravy and one thing and another. At the same time she wasn't letting slip a chance like that.

Wilicum felt embarrassed by the river lady's cordiality. He had heard about her here and there below St. Louis. Like Mrs. Haney, at Memphis, everybody knew and respected her. Personally and professionally Wilicum desired to make the acquaintance of so well known a river personage.

He came somewhat before dinner was ready and Mrs. Mahna tentatively opened up on him. Politely she refrained from asking questions, but gave him numerous leads he could follow up about his starting down the Mis-

sissippi and where he'd tied up nights; who, why and what he was. One time she had come past Kaskaskia into Chester, Illinois, where she traded a poplar-pine boat for a spruce, white-oak framed one not so big—

"Excuse me!" Wilicum fidgeted doubtfully. "I'd like to write that down so I won't forget—"

"Well, great guzzard!" said Mrs. Mahna. "If I'm sayin' anything worth preserving like plums f'r future consumption—head to hit! Head to hit!"

Wilicum excused himself and returned in a hurry from his skiff, bringing his portable typewriter and plenty of paper in a red brief-envelope. He sat with the instrument on his lap, looking up expectantly at Mrs. Mahna, and saying:

"Now please go on, Mrs. Mahna. What was that you were saying?"

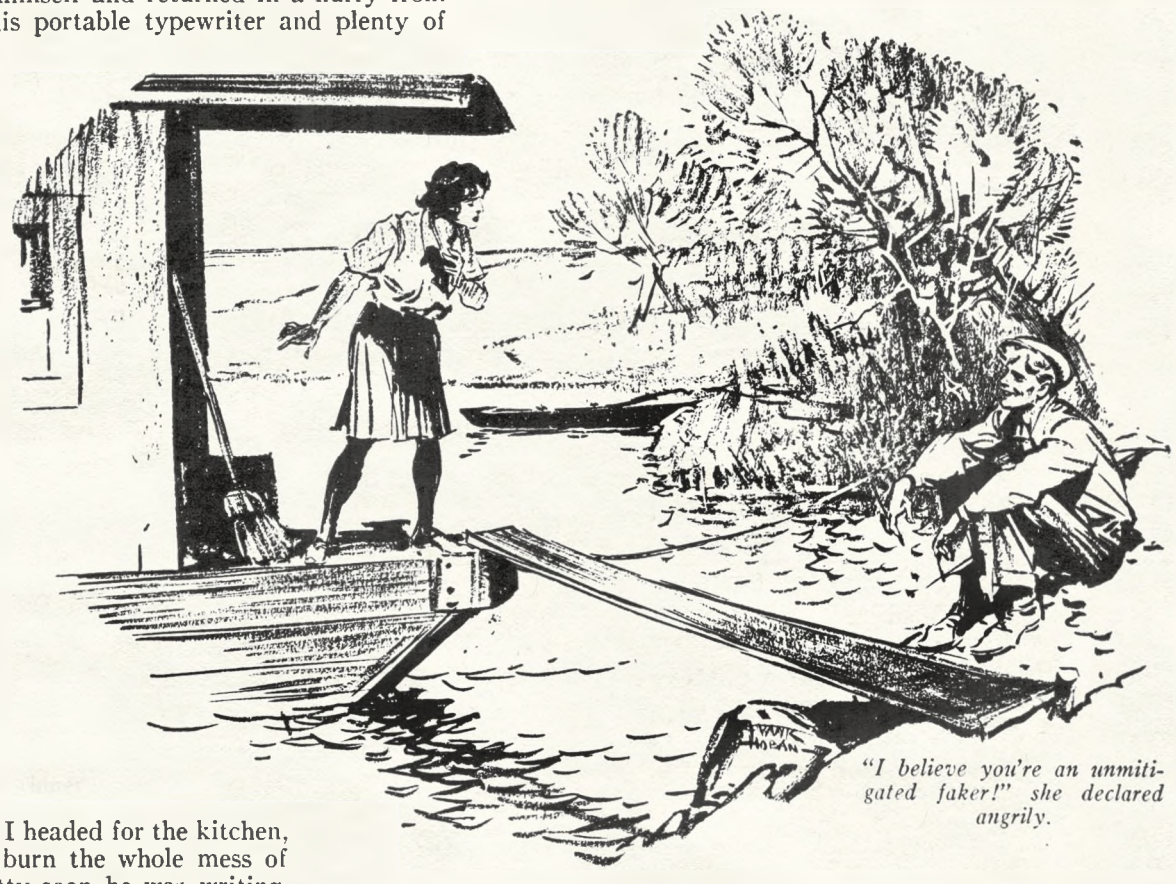
"Well, sir, you know," Mrs. Mahna said afterwards, "I was so dog-goned dumbfounded I couldn't let out a single squawk. I just looked at him, and swallered. My land! It *was* so; you couldn't speak to him that he didn't set right there and write it all down, in black an' white printing! I headed for the kitchen, not knowing if I'd burn the whole mess of dinner up; and pretty soon he was writing, and me not saying a thing! That got me. So I kinda eased around a spell, and you know, he was writing down the names of everything I had in that cabin? He was! I neveh was so embarrassed in my life! I grabbed some of my clothes off the hooks, an' begun to pick up around. My land! Next time one of them lit'rary fellers comes down an' I hear he's on the way, I bet I'll know what to expect and git ready for 'im!"

When they were sitting down to dinner, Mrs. Mahna sarcastically brought a soap-box and put the typewriter on top of it, right beside Wilicum.

"Plague-taked if he didn't thank me and turn around, while he was chawin' and write down what we had for dinner! That made me feel cheap." Mrs. Mahna clicked her teeth. "If I'd knowed I was going to be preserved in writing, I bet I'd had a genuine dinner, full of fixings for it. Anyhow, I made him promise all get-out he wouldn't 'tach my name to no such dinner as that. People'd think from that I don't know how to set up a good feed! Well, anyhow, I neveh had no difficulties getting a new husband when I've got shut of an old one. On the riveh I got a reputation as a cook, whatever they say in the books about me and my commonplaces."

In Putney Bend, Travers Wilicum learned that there was a lady down below who was tripping the river alone. Everybody was talking about her, wondering who she was. First along there had been some doubts as to whether she knew what she was doing or not, but somehow the rumor percolated around that she just sure did, having a good line of guns and knowing how to use them when necessary. Wilicum scented a story almost ready-made, when he heard of the strange lady; and though he had far from obtained in Putney Bend all that he might have had to write in his loose-leaf notebook, he decided he had better forthwith go and interview the lonely woman tripper.

He found her at the head of Wild Bird sandbar. The sunshine had come out after three days of high wind, cold rain and distinctly characteristic river weather. During the storm Wilicum had tied in close to the west bank. He had written in addenda, filled out notes from memory, and translated scrawls in shorthand on folded-up sheets of paper, on which he had fixed words representing whole pages of ideas. The storm itself, with its countless phenomena of sound, sight, smells and feels, had taken five thousand words, and even these paragraphs seemed meager in comparison with the multitudinous realities. But, anyhow, they would serve sometime when he was writing fiction. Editors wouldn't want much description; probably he wouldn't need more than a hundred or two of all those words, but he could pick the richest and juiciest of them.



"I believe you're an unmitigated faker!" she declared angrily.

The tripping lady had stretched a line from the top branch of a stranded oak snag to a cleat on the bow of her cabin boat, which was easily recognized on account of a pair of elk antlers over the bow-door. This showed the boat had come out of the Missouri, probably from Fort Benton, or up the Yellowstone. It was a river question if she had come all the way down, alone or otherwise, or if she bought the outfit at Mowbry, Omaha, K. C., St. Joe, or at some such place. Wilicum had carefully noted down the questions indicating the river curiosities, in order to help him know what to ask the stranger.

He landed about a hundred yards below, against the sandbar, a fair-to-middling polite distance and came up the line in his shirtsleeves, so that she could see he didn't have a gun and probably therefore meant no harm.

"Good day," he greeted her; "I am Travers Wilicum. I am from St. Louis, where I started on the river. I live in Herkimer, New York, when I am at home. I used to be a reporter on the *Telegram* and corresponded for the Little Falls *Times*. Then I had a spell on the Utica *Press*—"

"What ailed you?" the young woman inquired.

"What ailed me?" he repeated, puzzled.

"Yes; you said you had a spell, on the *Press*."

He caught his breath, then burst into laughter.

"Excuse me," he said. "I don't want to forget that!"

HE made a few notes on a piece of paper, while the young woman regarded him with immediately increasing interest and curiosity.

"Why didn't you want to forget that?" she inquired.

"Why, you see," he explained, "I want to be an author and write fiction stories. I was afraid I'd never be inspired, so I set out to find facts, data, story materials, in the—uh-h—commonplaces of other people. And I just made up my mind I would put down everything that seemed interesting, funny, meaty, remarkable, commonplace and so on. Then sometime, when I can figure up a story to tell, I can fill in the chinkings with facts, and won't have to strain my imagination trying to make up things to tell. You see, the trouble with writing stories is not having anything to put down. I'm getting all the things to put down, beforehand; then all I'll have to have is a plot. I think I could get along without that, only editors all tell me the plot is the most important thing of all."

"Editors are funny, aren't they?"

"*What!*" He stared at her aghast. "My, no! They're serious—the most serious thing in an author's life!"

"They aren't in mine."

"You may be in theirs," he said, rather darkly.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Why—uh—" He thought a moment. "I may as well be frank with you. I want to interview you, find out who you are and so on. Then sometime I can put you in a story, and even if editors don't mean anything to you, you'll mean a lot to them."

"Put *me* in a story?" She stared at him. "You'd better mind your own business."

"Fine!" He nodded, writing a note. "That gives me a whole lead as to your character! Have you had any experiences, since you started down the river?"

"Have you?" she demanded. "If you haven't, you're likely to begin right here!"

"Just a moment," he warned her. "I want those words in exactly that sequence—fair warning, you know. Lots of people talk that way on the river. Being an old newspaper-man, though, I've been able to convince them of my discretion and good intentions. Your name is Helen Grey, isn't it?"

"Helen Grey? No! I'm—uh—none of your business!"

"You wouldn't mind if I took some photographs of your boat and so on," he side-moved, drawing his tiny vest-pocket camera from his trousers pocket. It was a very small instrument, and he manipulated it expertly, with great rapidity. The young woman stood there bristling, amazed. Before she could more than catch her breath he was turning up the last of an eight-film roll.

"I'll bet I've got some dandies," he assured her. "I've a 4.5 lens and beyond ten feet it's a universal focus. I'll give you some prints when I have developed them."

Nonplused, she glared at him.

"I believe you're an unmitigated faker!" she declared angrily.

"Well, if I am, that's one advantage of my methods," he answered her serenely. "They say you came out of the Missouri River."

"How'd they know that?"

"Nobody saw you on the Ohio and you dropped by St. Louis without stopping. You didn't come through by Keokuk. That shows you came down the Big Muddy. Besides, those elk-antlers would be Upper Missouri trophies."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. When I said I had a spell on the Utica *Press* you caught me up. *Spell* is a habitual word in New England. You've kinda got that kind of a look too, besides a quick city way of speaking."

"You're—you're a detective?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I resemble a detective in one particular only," he replied; "I want to know the facts. My only hope in life is to know the truths. Man's greatest mistake is knowing things which aren't so."

"I don't see what you are bothering me for," she said, with feeling.

"I wouldn't annoy you for worlds." He shook his head. "I'm just as sorry as I can be. You see,"—he hesitated,—"the moment I heard about you I said to myself; 'There! She's just the one I need.' Already here on the river I've begun to see something. I've met lots of people. Oh, they're perfectly wonderful! But—well—they say Old Mississip' is liberal—gives anybody anything he needs, if one goes about it right. I've tried just as hard as I knew how to put things down right, everything. And just the other day, over opposite Cairo I found one of the dandiest characters for a story—'Picking Rip' Gillette, a banjo-player. He just thrilled me. And then Mrs. Mahna—she talked to me all one afternoon and I've been writing her down, off and on, for a week, and haven't yet got all she said. And now I've found you—"

"Found me?" she asked, puzzled.

"Yes," he asserted. "Helen Grey—I've been thinking about writing a story of the Mississippi shanty-boaters, with Helen Grey for the heroine. You've no idea how you coincide with my ideas of Helen Grey. She's kind of mysterious—she's very pretty—she comes down the river alone and everybody talks about her, but no one really knows who or what she is. Then, of course, there's some man comes along down, too—"

"Some perfectly impossible and ridiculous sap-head, I suppose?" she suggested, rather tartly.

"Why, no-o—I hadn't thought about that kind." He shook his head. "Of course—well, if the heroine's all right I don't know but what it'd be all right to have the hero a kind of poor simp."

"It'd be natural that he would be, don't you think?" she inquired.

"Why, say!" He looked at her. "You know—I wonder if he wouldn't likely be? Say—why—you never had any literary aspirations, did you?"

"I should hope not!" She shrugged her shoulders.

"You sort of have the right idea." He puzzled a moment. "If you did write, you'd belong to the realistic school, I fancy."

"I don't write," she insisted.

"YOU haven't happened to see kind of a small man, with bright red whiskers, large hands and blue pop-eyes, have you?" he asked, having come upon an old page of pencil-notes.

"A river-rat!" she said, with asperity. "In a skiff with an A-tent shack on it?"

"Yes—a rag-shack on a jon-boat," Wilicum agreed.

"Why?"

"Some people told me up the river I ought to see him,

and if he'd talk he could tell me all about pirates on the Mississippi. You've seen him?"

"You bet I have!" She jerked her head sharply. "Don't you have anything to do with him—he's bad! Gracious! There's no telling what he'd do to anyone like you! He didn't fool me any—"

"I suppose you just told him to pick up and get out!"

"I caught him just ready to snoop down on my boat, but soon as he saw I meant business, he backed right up. It was during the rain—awful cold! He was so wet and cold I just had to give him something to eat—"

"Where is he now?"

"That was two days ago. He went off down the sand-bar on foot. He said the storm tore his jon-boat canvas off—"

"I'm awful glad you told me that," said Wilicum. "That's just the kind of thing I need for my stories, specially if I write a novel. So you just pulled your gun and told him to go, eh?"

"Oh, you!" She gritted her teeth at him—and he wrote with instant care so as to get her words exactly right, to use for example when the literary urge should come.

CHAPTER III

WHISKY WILLIAMS was squinting down the river in the bend above Hickman when he saw a spot of color. The hue was pinkish; it loomed, a beacon point, above a boat which looked black; the boat was small, probably a skiff. Williams drew down his binoculars. The spot was the head of a man. Only one man that Williams knew anything about ever looked red so far away—so he headed over, and sure enough it was Red Rufus. He was sitting in a jon-boat, his long arms clasped across his shins, his heels hooked on the seat.

"Howdy," Williams greeted.

"Howdy," Rufus replied, without looking around. "Yo' need a new spark-plug in that motor, Williams."

"I know hit!" Williams snapped. "That'n you hear's kinda burned out. Aint got a new one's the only reason I aint took it out before. Did yo' know there's a feller askin' 'bout yo', coming down?"

"*What?*" Rufus turned and sat up quickly. "I aint been doin' anything. Who's he think he is, anyhow?"

"Kind of a tall thin feller," Williams replied. "I seen him up to Buffalo Island. Afterwards I heard he dropped down through the Chute theh—"

"He did? They let him come out?"

"Yeh—I didn't think it was safe myse'f. Savey said he talked real innocent. Neveh asked nothing about business—just music, hist'ries and so on. If a man says anything he writes it all down."

"What's hisn's name"

"Smith, they say. He's using the name of Travers Wilicum, though."

"Don't seem like he'd bother anybody—changing his name thataway! Betteh mind his own business, I'd think."

"I don't know. Somebody said he'd ought to see you, and he begun to ask. They told him you'd tell 'em about Old Mississip', piratin' and so on."

"I ain't going to tell nobody nothing!" Red declared emphatically. "Don't anybody know anything about Old Mississip', anyhow."

"I gotta be going," Williams declared. "Thought I'd betteh tell you he's on his way. Cain't always tell what's behind those fellers."

"Yeh, tha's so. I picked a feller's pocket to Mendova, one time an' if he didn't print killin' me off in the magazines, for ten years! I had to laugh, course. Same time I'm kinda leary of these here writing-fellers. They most use a man's real name sometimes—"

"I feel thataway, too," Williams admitted. "A man has to be awful particular what he gets in the papers about himself."

"I always behave myse'f," Red declared. "Especially around the ladies." "I think you are a liar," she replied unfeelingly.

Williams went on his way, leaving Red Rufus combing his curly beard with his fingers, and badly in doubt. Having anyone ask questions about him, especially a stranger, made him nervous. He couldn't remember anything lately which was likely to make trouble for him. At the same time he might have difficulty figuring out the right alibi, or whatever was needed. Besides, way things were, he would have to do something. Having lost about all his outfit except his jon-boat, due to the storm, he

wanted a chance to replenish things. To do this all he needed was a good chance; but he just had to have that chance. Trust him to recognize it, or take a hint!

Quite a few boats were tripping down the river. The autumn was late, but that bunched the prospects within a relatively short distance and all were on the move after the storm, if only to find some place to buy supplies. Red Rufus had his eyes open. Luck favored him. While he sat in his jon-boat, a glass-cabin cruiser came down the line and shut off the power a hundred yards or so upstream.

"Hello, Mister!" a dark-mustached man with piercing brown eyes greeted him. "Have you seen a lady down here with blue eyes, and nice-looking? She's about twenty-four years old."

"What's she doing?" Red asked.

"That we don't know—but she's in a brown motorboat which she bought at Omaha—"

"Is she rewarded?"

"Why, I'll give ten dollars for information about her," the man said.

"She's worth all that?" Red opened his eyes wide and innocently. "Now I tell you, yo' see that opening oveh theh? That's Winchester Chute. The water's gone down right much—cain't get in theh with more'n six-inch draft. There's a lady living alone down theh—about half a mile."

"Is that so? Why, perhaps—"

"Yes suh. Betteh take me oveh theh. I can watch yo' boat while yo' go down lookin' to see 'f it's the lady you mean. That boat's about twenty-four foot long. She went in on the rise awhile ago—"

"I'll be obliged to you." The man shook his head. "Good idea your watching my launch here; some bad actors down here."

"I guess that lady thought she'd betteh git in a backwater, afteh she'd seen some of us," Red remarked, as he clambered aboard the stranger's boat.

The man towed Red's jon-boat over to the head of the chute; there he borrowed the jon-boat and poled down behind the island point looking for the lady. As soon as he was out of sight, Red cast off the line of the glass-cabin motorboat and starting the engine, backed out and headed up the river. A man could go downstream in a jon-boat, but he would have difficulty going against the Mississippi current. Setting the steering-wheel in a becket, Red examined his new boat. He was very well satisfied with it.

"These detectors coming down looking for ladies," he said, "they don't suit me much. I thought that paint and red trimmin' looked real fresh on that woman's boat up to Wild Bird Bend! This feller's got a razor somewheres, and I'll shave and trim up some. I don't believe she'll know me, especially not in this swell cruiser. My land, I'm lucky!"

HE had floated down the river in the most dismal of circumstances; now he headed upstream with grub-box full and a tank-full of gasoline, lacking only clothes of a style to fit. He swung to the bank when he met a red-trimmed white shanty-boat coming down lazily. That was the lady's at which he had been fed, insulted and discomfited. He used binoculars to search the river, looking for the fellow in a skiff with an outboard motor, who was looking for a river-man to obtain histories. In order to retire from conspicuousness, Red cut his whiskers off, shaved the stubble and took some clothes from a suit-case uptown to a dealer, and drove a close bargain in swaps. He emerged with a jaunty golf suit, rigged from cap to oxford shoes—which it just happened somebody had sold the second-hand-clothes man, no questions answered.

Regarded in a mirror, Red Rufus wondered at his own metamorphosis. His nose was rather protrusive, his chin rather receding, his eyes large, blue and prominent, his teeth buck, and his ears outflaring. It would take a vivid imagination to connect him with the red spot like a floating flower on the river.

"I'll fix that dad-blasted woman!" he grumbled to himself. "What'd she go'n' run me off for, before I'd done anything?"

He circled into midstream and stopped the motor where the current would ease the launch along, circling in the bottom jets. He climbed on top the glass cabin and clasped his hands across his shins while he hooked his chin over his knees, for all the world like an eagle on a snag floating in the current. He watched the white shanty-boat which was inshore a bit, dragging along the edges of the eddies so the motorboat drew nearer to it.

PRESENTLY he was only thirty yards or so distant. The bows of the two craft turned toward each other. Sitting on the shanty-boat deck was the young woman.

"Howdy," the motorboater greeted her. "My name's Ralph Comstock. I'm from New York—old Manhattan, you know. It's none of my business, but a detective has come down the Mississippi from somewhere up the line, at Omaha, I believe. He's looking for a lady in a dirty brown shanty-boat."

"*What!*" she exclaimed.

"I thought prob'ly you'd like to hear any gossip." The man raised his hat. "Nice day, isn't it?"

"What kind of a looking man is he—that detective?" she asked.

"Black mustache, 'bout thirty or forty years old, bright dark eyes, and sort of square-shouldered and thickset."

"Well, what kind of a boat is he in, or isn't he—"

"Why, now, I'll tell you—he's changing his boats; so you'll have to kinda watch out, if you're interested," the river-man said. "The last I heard of him, he was disguised in a jon-boat, which he took off a river-feller without offering to pay for it. Yo' know those detectives! He's down below, lookin' for a brown shanty-boat 'bout twenty-four foot long."

"Why—" The woman gazed thoughtfully down the river. "Where was he?"

"Somewhere along below Hickman and above New Madrid, 's the last I heard of him. He won't come upstream, not without he takes a steamboat, or gets a tow. That jon-boat pulls hard; an' all he had was jes' a pole."

"I see. Who did he say he was looking after?"

"A lonely lady, with blue eyes, and twenty-four years old, in a brown shanty-boat."

"Her name?"

"He didn't say. He said he'd give ten dollars for information. Shucks, it'd be worth more'n that to find a good 'coon-hound."

"Of course; but 'coon-hounds are good for something—they're tractable, too," she replied seriously.

"They're which?"

"Why, dogs can be managed and are real serviceable. All they ask is their board and a warm place by the stove."

"Shu! But ladies—" The man smiled, sitting up brightly. "They're mostly a total loss when it comes to being managed and got something else to do."

She laughed.

"A lady with detectives after her prob'ly needs protection," he suggested. "Down these reaches it's sure lonesome!"

"You looking for a job?" she inquired.

"Yes'm!" he beamed.

"Right over there,"—she indicated a forest along the

distant river-bank,—"there's a logging-camp. See the tents? Well, probably you can get work—carrying water or helping the cook."

"Aw—say!" he said, intense disgust on his features.

She laughed in his face and, feeling embarrassed, he swung down from the glass cabin roof, crawled through the nearest open window and started his motor, backing away from the shanty-boat. Then he threw his gears into forward, and crossed to the eddy farthest from the possible work in the logging-camp. He noticed she had a carbine rifle leaning against the cabin.

"Huh!" he grumbled. "I wonder what anyone'd want to git that woman back for? She *wouldn't be any comfort to anybody! That* writing-feller must be along through here some'res. I don't need him none, now that I've got a nice motorboat. Same time, maybe he's got some money, and I need a little change, if I'm going to run a motorboat. But of course, I can get along a few days. Quite a lot of stuff here I could swap off, account of my waiting for money to come by mail—"

He grinned, threw over an anchor and went prowling through his prize, putting a record in the talking-machine and starting the blue-flame gasoline stove to cook a large meal, now that he was both hungry and had something to eat, any time he wanted it.

Then in the lazy waning of a warm and soothing day, he carried a mat up into the sunshine and stretched out to bask. That was comfort. The exasperations of feminine indifference, or worse, and detective investigation were forgotten in a doze. Then a distant throbbing aroused him. He sat up and saw approaching across the deadwater a long, wide skiff thrust forward by an outboard motor of enthusiastic power, steered by an eager-looking fellow, who had an open typewriter on the seat in front of him, a sheet of paper fluttering on the platen roll.

"*Shu-u!*" Rufus stretched lazily, watching keenly.

"Excuse me!" The tripper stopped alongside. "Have you seen a man with a very bright red beard, in a jon-boat—you know, square at the both ends and rounded out at the sides? It has a rag-shack—you know, a tent—over the stern."

"Not lately I haven't." Rufus shook his head thoughtfully. "Why?"

"Well, I'll tell you; my name's Travers Wilicum—not really, you know, but my family—I'm Joseph Howard Smith—they don't like the idea of having an author in our branch on account of business. So I choose a *nom-de-plume*. That man I'm speaking about is very well acquainted with the Mississippi River. I'm sure he could tell me, if he would be so kind, a great deal about life and times down here between the levees. You see, I make notes of everything I see or hear, and whatever people tell me. Then I can use those facts in making up stories."

"Yes, suh, I expect."

"They'll be absolutely true to life, and then anybody coming down the Mississippi would know what to expect. Now, I suspect you've lived on the river long enough to have feelings on the subject of the tidal uncertainties?"

"Uh-huh—I've been down the riveh before—"

"Did you ever come down in a shanty-boat?"

"I remember once—I never will forget that trip!" Rufus shook his head. "I had a nice thirty-two-foot hull, and I thought I'd have a store-boat, just so I could meet people. I made good money, but a little red-haired son-of-a-gun I took on as a deck-hand, account of his knowing how to make landings, left me up the bank one night."

"He floated away with your store-boat?"

"Oh, I didn't mind the financial loss; it was the funny feeling it give me, when I found I'd been played for a sucker. Well, I took a steamer down to N'Orleans, finishing my trip. I don't like to leave anything half done, so I did finish it. Funny thing about that, though; I went down on the *Kate,* and there were some card-sharks on board. They tried to inveigle me into a game of poker, after we'd been playing hearts for a while. So I let them. That was kind of funny. My uncle was George Devole, and after he reformed and began to write literature, he taught me a lot of things about cards. So I played with those scoundrels. They had marked cards, but I could read them just as good as they could. When I arrived in N'Orleans, I had all their cards, dice, and watches, three suit-cases and so on. Course, I threw their shameless cheating gambling-things into the river, but I gave them back their personal property. Just to teach them a lesson, I give the money I'd won to a feller who needed it. Then I went to a friend of mine, president of the Mardi Gras Stock Company, and got work for those rascals. They're settled down, now, and are reformed—and everybody says I did them worlds of good."

Miles poled with the long sapling, approaching the cabin boat with an air of indifference.

"Say— If you don't mind, I'll write that all down so I won't forget. Really, you must have had the most extraordinary experiences! George Devole your uncle, eh? Your name is Devole?"

"No—that's on my mother's side; my name's Whittier, an old New England name. I understand one of them was a poet—"

"Not John Greenleaf Whittier!"

"That's the name. We had a sad case, though, on my grandmother's side: A young man who used to wear a green coat—Greenleaf made me think of it—when he went to Harvard, because the rules prescribed black, and who kept a diary, wrote poetry and observed natural history—a very well-known man! Seems to me he had a shanty by a little lake and raised beans. What was his name? We've so many authors there in our New England branches, before the war—you know, the Civil War, not this last one. He wrote about the cod-fisheries, or was it Cape Cod, and about Walden—"

"Walden Pond? Not Thoreau—Henry David Thoreau?"

"That's the name! So you're an author, eh? Well, I won't hold it up against you, though to tell the truth, you know, all we children ever heard was writing histories and bellies-letters and poetries; so I went into trade, as I told you, running a store-boat."

"You didn't keep a diary, did you?"

"Oh, one spell. But I've kinda spleened against writing—fed up on it, you know."

"But you ought to write your experiences—they must be marvelous! I'd like to interview you, unless—"

"I don't like being interviewed; you see, when I stop in town along down—uh— I go to police stations sometimes and the reporters come flocking around—I know all the police, you see—good fellows! Clancy at Helena, and Addams at Memphis—known 'em for years! But come aboard—make yourself to home! Lots to eat—plenty of musical records—and if you smoke—"

"No, I never learned how—"

"You don't know what you miss! Take me, now, when I'm sitting down and nothing to do, a cigarette or a fifty-cent cigar—I'm kinda particular about my tobacco—I tell you, it's plumb comfort—"

"*Plumb comfort?* Now I'll just write that down, so I won't forget it. You know, those habitual little phrases make a story sound natural—"

"Well, of course. I met a writer one time, who come down the river in a rowboat. That was before outboard motors. He met a man, kind of a rascal, down at Memphis who picked his pocket. For ten-twelve years, that author killed this pocketpick in stories about the Mississippi, and Red—that's the river-rat—would read those stories and then write to the magazine-story fellow just letting him know there wa'n't any hard feelings."

"That'd make a good story, wouldn't it?" Wilicum exclaimed. "Why in the world don't you write those things yourself? That's humorous!"

"Oh, shucks! Those things—just ordinary! Besides that never seemed funny to me, but pathetic. That poor devil of a pocketpick couldn't pick up a magazine without feeling nervous which way he was going to get killed in it—drowning, hanging, caught in the sleet or flopped around in a cyclone. He had to stop reading magazines after a while, it was so bad on his nerves finding himse'f killed so often."

"Is that so! That must have been a psychological aberration—"

"A sickly which?"

"Just a moment—expressions like that—*um-m*—the influence of suggestion on the mind! Writers have a very great responsibility, the same as motion-pictures, not to suggest anything for susceptible minds run into grooves of crime, immorality, wrongs of any kind. It's awf'ly limiting to genius, but ordinary writers don't mind—'long's they don't think they have the fancy inspired instead of the plain varieties of working for a living."

"Uh-uh!" The host swallowed mentally and physically.

"I'm going to have to be very careful not to make the Mississippi too attractive," Wilicum expanded. "Life down here is so delicious, so full of charm and ease and jubilant solitudes, idyllic and splendid, the vast river dwarfing the humans till even their floating nests, like those of the grebes of hell-divers, are even less than water-beetles on a brook, in proportion. My only wonder is that hundreds of thousands do not come down here to enjoy the rare luxuries of houseboating."

"I wisht they would!" the river-man sighed. "Lawse! Then a man'd have a real chanct!"

"But the throngs would fill the lonely reaches with chatter—"

"Yeh, you bet—when they woke up, sometimes!" and the river-man grinned.

Wilicum was writing with flying fingers.

He had rather more than six thousand words in his evening notes; though he realized the fountain of information he had discovered had hardly more than dripped in proportion to what would later fall to his treasure-store, he declared he really must give his host a chance to sleep.

Accordingly, Wilicum betook himself on board his skiff. When he had shaken his boat for awhile in his retiring wriggles under the double-hood, the river-man heard him snoring gently and steadily with no interruptions or snuffles and snorts.

The skiff was swinging on its painter astern from the motor-launch.

Red Rufus gently let himself onto it, and performed then an efficient and skillful feat. He removed the outboard from over the skiff stern. He lifted the gasoline stove and nested cooking-outfit, went through Wilicum's clothes, emptied all his pockets and hesitated as he held the portable typewriter in his hands, balancing its probable hocking value of twenty dollars—and no questions asked—against the soft-paw's liability to bust if he didn't have some outlet for his feelings in the morning. Be it said that Red Rufus gently replaced the typewriting machine on the stern-seat where the funny writing-fellow would be able to use it as never before.

"If he don't get mad an' quit the riveh," Red mused, "maybe I can git to read, sometime, what he wrote when he come to in the morning!"

He left Wilicum his bottle of matches, his grub, and other necessities, but took whatever pleased his fancy, except that when he started to work down under the sleeper's swinging canvas bunk he found that the weight

was too great on the firearms to sneak them out without awakening his victim.

"If he come to, course I'd have to bat him on the head," Red mused. "Prob'ly hit's pretty soft, kinda thin-boned; I'd prob'ly bash hit in, lammin' too hard. I'd hate to kill 'im! He's too plumb innocent!"

Accordingly, having thoroughly looted the skiff according to his fancy, Red Rufus untied the painter and giving the skiff a shove, thrust it out into the main Mississippi current. He watched it with the detective's night-glasses to make sure the skiff did not swing back into the eddy, but it did not—slipped instead farther out into the crossing and vanished far down the bend.

"The riveh's falling," Red mused. "That'll keep him in midstream till he wakes up. Five hours—that'd be 'bout twenty-five miles. 'Bout daylight I'll start upstream.

That detector an' hist'ry-writer are liable to want to find me more than ever from now on!"

CHAPTER IV

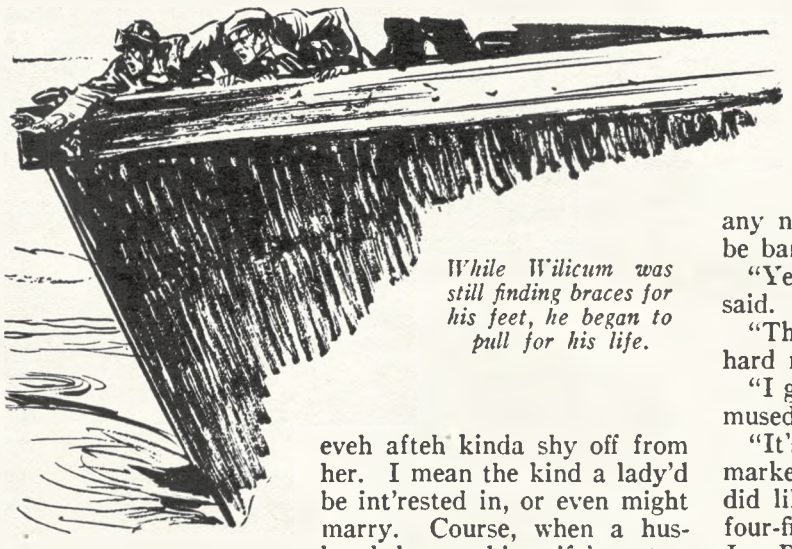
"EV'RY time I hear tell of a detector comin' down Old Mississip', it makes me mad!" Mrs. Mahna said with asperity. "If anyone's done anything, I don't see what's the use of pesterin' about hit. Course, if anyone's goin' to git the habit of doin' things, like stealin' or murderin' or so on, why he betteh be headed off. People that's bein' chased all oveh kingdom-come, they's nervous,—don't put their mind onto anything, but just jumps an' worries all the time. Them private detectors is worst of all. Hit's bad 'nough to be legalized, but doin' it on the quiet without no warrants—my land! That's disgusting!"

"I think so too," the nice lady answered wearily.

"An' if a lady's trippin' down alone, what with cyclones, quicksand, riveh-pirates, cross-currents, snags, an' neveh knowin' when some feller's going to git impudent—then to have a detector sneaking along watching! I wouldn't stand for hit. Fustest time he showed up in a lonesome bend with me, I bet I'd give him his come-uppance, yes, indeed!"

"How could one?"

"The firstest and completest way's just to shoot 'im an' be done with it," Mrs. Mahna declared. "Then theh's shootin' his boat chuck-full of holes, lettin' him sink. Using a small gun, generally a feller gits shot easy—painful but not killin'. Course, a lady hates to have a killin' on her mind; even if she does come clear in court, men



While Wilicum was still finding braces for his feet, he began to pull for his life.

eveh afteh kinda shy off from her. I mean the kind a lady'd be int'rested in, or even might marry. Course, when a husband knows his wife's got a limit to her endurance, he walks Spanish—but that kind aint much satisfaction, either. These namby-pamby fellers a lady can pull-haul around anyhow, they're kinda sickenin' too—damp gunpowder! They puff an' make a smoke, but aint got no bang to them."

"But detectives are harmless if they don't find you."

"Well, all I got to say is, I've told you there's a feller come down along into a glass-cabin cruiser, with a black mustache and sort of chunky-built, asking about a lady in a brown boat she bought to Omaha—"

"Did he mention her name?"

"Nope."

"Say why he wanted to find her?"

"He just asked all kinds of particulars about riveh ladies. Why, he come to my boat. I never was so put out! He give one look an' said I wasn't the lady he was looking for. I told him he was dog-gone lucky I wasn't, too! He tried to pass it off. I give him one look and slammed the door onto him. He's a fool, anyhow; instead of hailing from the bank he came right down on board, and rapped with his knuckles on my door. If I hadn't been theh to Putneys, I'd poured hot lead through the door an' mopped up the mess when I got around to it. I told him out the window what I thought of a man who'd come on board, 'thout bein' asked, and knocking instead of hailing. I come right down, tripping, so's to tell yo'. 'Taint none of my business, course; same time, I hate to see a lady who minds her own business pestered by some feller claiming he's a detector."

"Did you happen to see a man in a skiff who writes down everything anyone says to him?"

"You mean Travers Wilicum, alias Joseph Howard Smith?" Mrs. Mahna laughed. "Did he see you? Well, he come to my boat, and all he done was write and ask questions."

"He was here too." The young woman nodded. "He called me Helen Grey. That's as good a name as any, don't you think? He was very inquisitive. He was looking for a man with a red beard, some river-pirate, he said. He wanted to interview him."

"If an' when he does, he'll be dumb lucky if he don't wind up with a bag of sand tied to his neck, an' all his outfit took—"

"You don't think—"

"I know that Red Rufus scoundrel!" Mrs. Mahna declared. "I've been wishin' somebody'd shoot him—hard. One time he stole a skiff off me. He sneaked down in a pirogue an' filed off the iron chain I had it locked by. Good thirty-five dollar lap-streak St. Louis rowboat! Next time I met him, he had a hundred-dollar shotgun he'd took off some sport, an' a real swell case with lots of ammunition. I got the drop on him. He squawked, but I bet next time he steals a skiff off'n me he won't stay on Old Mississip' till after he hears I'm dead! I don't take no nonsense off'n anybody. I give you fair warning, Helen Grey-what's-your-name: You take any nonsense off'n a man, an' first thing yo' know yo'll be bamboozled an' married, or robbed an' in hard luck."

"Yes, I've gained that impression," the young woman said.

"Then it's all right, calling yo' Helen Grey? It's awful hard not having any name to go by."

"I guess Helen Grey's a good name," the young woman mused. "I don't know of any other I'd rather have."

"It's real nice; easy to remember," Mrs. Mahna remarked. "That's one thing about gittin' married I never did like. It got so one spell there they was calling me four-five different names. When I was married to Mr. Joe Palmer people would call me Mrs. Pierce or Mrs. Marshall—men I'd 'vorced from five-ten years before! Afteh a while they called me Mrs. Mahna afteh my firstest husband. That made it convenient. . . . I don't expect your husband'd ever look for anybody name of Helen Grey."

"My husband?" the girl repeated. "I never had a husband."

"What? *Neveh* married? What'd you run away from, for land sakes?"

"No, I never married." The young woman shook her head.

"Why, everybody had it figured out you'd quit yo' man—like most ladies that come alone down Old Mississip'!"

"There are lots of things for women to run away from."

"Yeh, course—but they're mostly all husbands, at that!" Mrs. Mahna declared. "Before or after taking—"

"Mr. Wilicum ought to have heard you say that!" suggested alias Helen Grey.

"Wa'n't he funny!" Mrs. Mahna chuckled. "He told me he needed two typewriters to keep track of me—I didn't know whether to kick him off the boat or feed him some more roast goose! Anyhow, I thought I'd betteh let you know 'bout that detector."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am," Helen Grey said. "I didn't think anyone knew I'd started down the river. They would want to find me. I thought the last place they'd look for me would be down here."

" 'Taint none of my business, but they probably found a map or something—or you told somebody."

"I didn't know, myself; I drove to Omaha, where I sold my car—bought a boat and painted it."

"That car was a dead giveaway!" Mrs. Mahna declared. "They knowed the number of it—license and all—"

"Why—of course! I must have been stupid. But Omaha is so far!"

"It aint across the street no more, not for those dadblasted 'Carcajous' detectors! They just line the cities with agencies and they watch everybody. The minute you started down the riveh they was afteh you. Good thing you painted the boat, an' throwed the brush ovehboard! But look out how you show yo'se'f around the big towns. A girl as pretty as you are'd be noticed. Your clothes hang too stylish an' fittin', for one thing. Another thing, they're asking for a lady who is all alone. Yo' better git somebody with you for a while. Some men is lots of protection. Some aint. Specially when you go uptown anywhere. You don't want to go up alone. Nobody much pays any attention to a girl what's got a fellow—but if she's alone, why, course, even married men size her up, wondering."

"But I don't want any escort—"

"Suit yourse'f! If yo'd rather be picked up by detectors than bother around having somebody with you, all right. None of my business!"

"But another girl—couldn't you—"

"Course, I'm willing. Same time, two women don't get along none too well, generally. We can go along together for a spell, but 'taint no perm'nent arrangement. Besides, everybody knows me, an' they mout suspicion you account of being a stranger. My land! It must be some comedown for you from where you was to be what you be now, ducking detectors!"

"Yes, that's so, Mrs. Mahna." Helen Grey nodded thoughtfully. "It was a very serious fall, I assure you."

"Now that needn't to bother yo' down thisaway," Mrs. Mahna said. "Theh's always talk, but that don't hurt none. We'll jes' kind of keep our eyes open, our mouths shut and our ears cocked. *Shu-u!* Theh's that blamed glass-cabin cruiser! He's headin' right for us! Yo' stay out of sight, Helen Grey—lemme do the talkin'!"

THE motorboat swung around and at a polite distance hailed. Mrs. Mahna stepped forth with an inquiring smile. Almost immediately she screwed up her face in astonishment.

"Dod-rat, Red Rufus—where'd yo' git that boat?"

"Oh, I traded for it!"

"What! I know betteh—yo' neveh had nothing anybody would trade—"

"I did so! I had a nice jon-boat, which could go into shallow water anywhere—"

"Where's that detector what had that boat?"

"Him?" Red Rufus blinked, looking around. "Oh, down b'low, some'res. He's lookin' for a lonely lady—down Winchester Chute."

"Great guzzard! Yo' sent him down to old Maw Menken! *Hue-e-e!*" Mrs. Mahna laughed aloud. "I'd like to see him when *she* comes roarin' out on him, disturbin' her peace!"

"I'd waited for him to come back on that account, only I was in a hurry," Red declared.

"He left that cruising boat with *you?*" Mrs. Mahna gasped. "Who'd he think yo' was, for goodness sake?"

"Jes' a feller who'd seen a lonely lady go into Winchester Chute—"

"Old Maw Menken went in theh seven years ago!"

"WELL, I seen her go!" Red Rufus said, with an injured air. "One lone woman's 'bout the same's anotheh—sputterin,' suspicious, uncertain—"

"Yo' be cyarful how yo' talk to me, Mister Man!"

"I didn't mean nothing!"

"No? What'd you come to these two boats for?"

"Why—uh—I knew that feller in this boat was a detector. He was looking for a lady—none of my business! I don't know what anybody'd be looking for a lady down Old Mississip' for, anyhow, less'n he wants to commit suicide, slow or sudden; same time, if I give a lady fair warning, I don't expect no favors. That feller said he'd give ten dollars for information. A lady can't be wuth much, if that's all they want to know about her—ten dollars' wuth! Huh!"

"You were going to let *me* know a detective was after *me?*" Helen Grey appeared, staring at the river-man.

"Yes'm."

"But *why*— After the way I treated you—"

"Yo' sure set a good table on that piece of soap-box!" Red replied.

"Yes—but—well, unshaven and the way you were—"

"I understood—course, a lady's got to be suspicious of a man's intentions. Lots aint honorable, I know that! I didn't blame yo'—"

"What's he talking about?" Mrs. Mahna turned to the young woman.

"Why—the other day—in that Norther, he came and he was wet—cold—I was afraid he meant something—"

"He did, too!"

"Aw—Mrs. Mahna!" Red interjected.

"I fed him, but drove him away with a gun!"

"That's the way to treat a man on the riveh!" Mrs. Mahna exclaimed with enthusiasm. "You must have had lots of experience on the riveh to know that! How many trips you made?"

"This is my first experience!"

"Well, my land! Yo' sure took hold quick! Some ladies neveh do to learn to treat a man sweet, but be ready to shoot!"

The motorboat drifted nearer to the two cabin boats. Tentatively Red dropped a loop on one of the steering-pins.

"Now don't yo' try no shenanigans," Mrs. Mahna warned. "Yo' behave yo'se'f—"

"I always—"

"Tell *me* that?" Mrs. Mahna picked up a kindling-hatchet. "Well, come oveh an' set! What yo' been doin', lately? Last I seen yo', yo' had a jon-boat with a hog-pen onto hit—rag-shack at that. Say, did yo' meet a feller looking for yo', name of Wilicum Joseph Howard Smith Travers, or something like that?"

"Uh—did I? What for?"

"He was asking about you—wanted you to talk histories to him about Old Mississip'."

"That so?" Red twisted a little uneasily.

"You've seen 'im!" Mrs. Mahna declared decisively.

"Why—uh—yes!" Red admitted. "He come along down yesterday. He sure puts down all anybody tells him—"

"If he put down all *you* told him, he don't use no dis-

Red reluctantly lugged the outboard out and heaved it onto the deck of the cabin boat.

crimination!" Mrs. Mahna announced. "Where's he at now?"

"It was kind of late when he went on board his boat under the hood to sleep. This mornin' he was gone on down, I expect. Anyhow, he wa'n't there."

Mrs. Mahna looked at him, whereupon he assumed an air of interest toward the river, looking up and down.

"If you done anything to him yo' oughta be 'shamed of yo'se'f, Red Rufus!" Mrs. Mahna glared. "Sometime somebody'll give yo' what's what, where yo' need hit!"

Helen Grey set a chair for Red Rufus in the sitting-room of Mrs. Mahna's boat. Then she crossed to her own cabin to take up a sweater. As she returned she chanced to look into the cabin of the cruiser. She saw a large aluminum outboard between the lockers on the floor. She studied it for a minute, then returned to the cabin of her own boat where she drew an automatic pistol with its holster from under her pillow. Casually she returned on board Mrs. Mahna's boat to sit opposite, a little behind Red Rufus, who was telling the old river-woman a good many things—of which she admitted a few might be true, as she had heard the same from some one else.

"Where'd yo' get that outboard that's in yo' cabin?" Mrs. Mahna suddenly demanded.

"Why—uh—I—" Red Rufus was disconcerted.

"It's the one Mr. Wilicum had on his skiff," Helen Grey said. "I was noticing it in particular."

"Yes'm!" Red Rufus assented. "He'n me's going to meet again down the riveh, so he asked me to take care of it, so—"

"How much other stuff'd yo' have left with you?" Mrs. Mahna asked pointedly.

"Why—uh—nothin'!"

"Well, yo' bring that outboard right oveh heah!" Mrs. Mahna ordered. "My land! Yo'd rob a corpse of his gold teeth! Git!"

Red reluctantly lugged the outboard out and heaved it onto the deck of the white-and-red cabin boat. Mrs. Mahna's was a blue, red-trimmed boat. The two women regarded him with such scornful exasperation that Red lifted the bowline from the oar-pin and shoved clear, sitting on his cabin and whistling resignedly.

"You don't suppose he did anything to that author, do you?" Helen Grey asked anxiously.

"No, probably not more'n robbed him. Long as Red aint got the skiff I expect that feller's all right. Yo' gettin' in'trested in that hist'ry writer?"

"Not particularly." The young woman shook her head. "It just seemed to me he was so—well—innocent, that he needed some one to look after him!"

"Men are all thataway," Mrs. Mahna declared. "Theh never was anything more helplesser than a baby, unless it was a man! You'll believe it too—afteh yo've had some of both husbands and kids. Lawse!"

"That river scoundrel robbed him!"

"Looks like! Only question is, how much he's got left—if anything."

"He may suffer—and he's—he's the most helpless man I ever saw!"

"Do him good—buck him up!" Mrs. Mahna declared. "When a man's been up against it once or twice it's a big he'p to him—"

"He—if he hasn't any money, he might starve!"

"Starve?" Mrs. Mahna asked scornfully. "With hickory-nuts, pecans, carp in the riveh, game-birds flying around? He can even find salt out in licks put down for cattle—block salt! The last thing I'd worry about down thisaway is a man starving. Let him get hongry enough, an' he'll get so's he'll 'preciate eating. I had a husband once who was always kicking about my cooking, saying it was too rich. One night he went 'coon-hunting an' didn't come out the Dark Corner for three days. Shu-u! He couldn't eat much for anotheh day or two—but my land! I could feed 'im anything afteh that, if only it was enough! Take fellers that know what honger is, they make good husbands for poor cooks. They sure appreciate good ones, too."

"I'd never thought of that!"

"A woman don't till she's had husbands, experience and babies." Mrs. Mahna shook her head. "It's too plaguey bad too. If young folks could only start in bright and experienced, like sixty or seventy years old, and kind of taper off into foolishness and gayety, like when we're eighteen or twenty! This old world's too hard on the young, wearing them all out and breaking their spirits making a living. But that feller Travers Smith Wilicum—do him good to get shook up and have to rustle once!"

"Well, I feel uneasy about him." Helen Grey shook her head as she glanced hither and yon across the wide shimmering yellow Mississippi.

CHAPTER V

JUDSON MILES was a private detective who believed in the frank and direct method of investigation. He had for a long time been proprietor of a lunch-*shoppe* halfway up the hill at Omaha, where he fed the hungry and longing for adventurous experience. A day came when he had a secure income from U. S. Government bonds, real estate (income properties), and no family. While he waited for customers during odd intervals of his occupation at the cash-register and along his horseshoe-shaped counter, he studied the famous, "Find Your Man Course, with special attention to the Female Offender, Reward Notices, and Character by the Ears." And so it chanced that on the last day of his proprietorship of the Eat Here Shoppe,—having sold it to two Grecian gentlemen,—he saw a young and mysterious woman eat in his place.

She was pretty, unpainted, blue-eyed and gentle-voiced, —a regular lady. She ate a steak, potatoes, and lemon pie, and drank milk. Ladies who ate as sensibly as that surprised and attracted Miles. Her hair was bobbed, slightly veiling her ears in a rolling cascade of auburn—natural curls, beautifully taken care of. She didn't look like a Female Offender, but of course one can never tell. She took her departure and when Judson Miles with a sigh of relief gave up his business he read the "Lost, Strayed and Stolen" columns of the newspapers for the day, and examined the reward notices which he received "free-gratis" from the police, the sheriff's office and the superintendent of the Carcajous, Inc., office in Omaha. All these higher-ups had enjoyed the fine coffee of his Shoppe, and reciprocated by sending him the reward-notices.

One day shortly thereafter Miles chanced to go into the post office, where he found thumb-tacked on the big bulletin-board a hand-bill dodger which read:

(Please Post Conspicuously)
$250 REWARD
Will Be Paid By the Undersigned for information which Will Lead to the Discovery of the Person Illustrated here; Adeline Laura Bonney—Private Secretary 24 Yrs. Blue Eyes, Fair Complex. wavy Auburn Hair, Nice Teeth, Long, slim hands. 135 lbs. (about, may be fatter) very bright and can move in any society. Innocent but Intelligent. VERY IMPORTANT TO FIND HER. Don't arrest; persuade.
Dilson, Keeps & Wickle, Attys at Law. Syracuse
Use Telegraph or Telephone if Located.

The picture of the person illustrated was very striking. Under it was printed, "*Taken at twenty years of age—may be fuller faced.*"

Judson Miles had some circulars and a detective magazine in his locked mail box, but he always examined the P. O. bulletin-board. He stared now at the reward-notice which had just been posted. Making sure no one was looking, he took it down and hurried to a quiet place. He had, sure as fate, seen that lady somewhere. Partly this was memory, and partly, he was gratified to feel, it was intuition. He thrilled to realize that he was gifted with a genuine hunch. This girl had eaten in his place some two weeks before! All unaware, he had entertained the two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar lady, wanted by the firm of attorneys in Syracuse.

The next thing to do was to find out where she went after leaving his lunchroom, or failing in that, back-track her to where she had come from. Things like this are a matter of infinite detail and persistence. Referring to his "Find Your Man" course, he read:

"If the object of search is a female, in addition to checking through hotels, boarding-houses, lodgings, visit all garages, restaurants and lunchrooms, places of public entertainment, and any particular localities the suspect, from her previous habits, occupation or connections, may be led to frequent or visit. A murderer, for example, is almost sure—unless caught in the meantime—to visit the scene of his crime. And places where firearms are handled, rented or repaired, are apt to be visited by sporting people and those interested in such things. A woman is apt, if stylishly inclined, to go to fashion-shows and such. Many ladies cannot resist bargain-sales."

Judson Miles tried to put himself in the wanted one's place. He considered Omaha by and large,—what it offered to a bright blue-eyed secretary, one who could move in any society, who was innocent but dangerous. He canvassed dressmakers and modistes; none recalled that pretty stranger. Then he went to the gun-stores, and the second one he came to elated him.

Tubal Vagness, champion repeating gunman of the second-class in breaking inanimate targets, was selling weapons in the firearms department of the Goods for the Man store. He had previously outfitted Miles with a fine set of handcuffs, an automatic pistol, belt, holster, and ammunition—and now, when he had a chance to tell Miles something he jumped at the opportunity.

"Blue-eyed and pretty?" Vagness exclaimed. "Sure I remember her! I never forget a lady who comes in and buys sporting goods, especially if she is pretty or alluring, or both. And this lady—that her picture? Say—she was here! She bought a 30-30 carbine, a repeating shotgun, a nice refined and lady-like automatic pistol for business, and a .22-caliber automatic for practice. She could shoot a little, but I gave her some fine points so she could shoot straight and fast. I tried to find out what her game was, but she wouldn't tell. And she carried her weapons away with her. She was coming in about three or four times, one day after another. Then I didn't see her any more. I tell you, she was a peach! But no nonsense—nobody ever insults her twice, I bet!"

This looked like a whole good line of clues. The next thing was to find out where she had gone from the Goods for the Man store. Vagness had seen her go in a taxi from the store, but in which taxi, he did not know. So Miles went to the drivers, both independent and corporation. Persistent patience was necessary. He knew many of the drivers, though, from lunch-counter association. They were all grateful for good meals, reasonably priced. The word went around that Judson wanted to find a skirt, thus and so. One day one of the independents hailed him as he stood nonplused and baffled at a busy corner.

"Hop in!" the driver bade him, and he jumped. "Comanche Bob says you're after a skirt who bought some guns? Well, I'll take you somewhere!"

DOWNTOWN, across the bridge to Council Bluffs and then to the right on a crooked dirt road which was dry in spots and mud-holed in others, they drove across a wooded bottom to the bank of the Missouri River. There was a river-man in a shanty-boat. His name was Fishing Tom and he had bought a brown shanty-boat off a party of sports who had come down from the Yellowstone; then he had sold the shanty-boat, which was about twenty-four foot long, to a blue-eyed lady. She was all business, besides, and drove a close bargain. She had towed across to the west bank, had taken on a lot of supplies, and then cut loose to trip down. That's all Fishing Tom knew.

"Where can I buy a motorboat?" Miles inquired, and Fishing Tom pointed to a glass-cabin launch.

"I can let you have it for three hundred dollars," the fisherman said. "I bought it cheap. It has a good motor, not so fast, but reliable. The fellow I bought it off of wanted a mighty fast boat, so he sold this cheap; but he made good money in it, at that."

So Miles went off down the Missouri, obtaining detective-

work practice as he followed his quarry. At intervals on the way he heard that a lady in a brown shanty-boat had gone past Kansas City, Carthage, St. Joe, and other points of interest down the Missouri. At St. Louis he found no one who had seen a brown shanty-boat with a pretty lady on board go by. Still, she probably had, unless she wanted to be caught by winter in the lower Missouri.

He found a good deal of encouragement at Buffalo Island, just above Cairo, the Jumping-off Place. Three rivermen assured him they saw a lady, the most beautiful in the world, going down in a brown shanty-boat. She had personally told them she was going right through to N'Orleans to take a steamboat—he'd better hurry!

AT Putney Bend he had stopped in for the night, and casually mentioned the object of his cruise. Through a mysterious carrying of voices in the fog he had heard an angry feminine voice say that it wa'n't right for any detector to be pestering after a lady; and then the voice went on to say how glad it was that the detector was going right through to N'Orleans, account of his boat would go so much faster than a shanty-boat without any power.

Thus luckily warned, Judson Miles began anew keen and open inquiries about the brown shanty-boat. Now fortune had at last favored him—he was going down the chute above Winchester Point in a jon-boat with his quarry just ahead of him, in a brown shanty-boat and hiding out! But for the kindness of a red-whiskered river-man he would likely never have known how close he had come to her.

Sure enough, there was a brown shanty-boat in a long, half-moon pool. Hoopnets were on the cabin roof, a large pile of driftwood and numerous fresh chips on the bank and a seven-pound ax indicated vigorous exercise. Miles poled and paddled with the long sapling, approaching the cabin boat with an air of indifference. He landed against the bank, and started up the gangplank.

Then an apparition showed itself—a personage arrayed in blue overalls, a woman's blouse and rubber hip boots, with snarled gray hair and a face the color of leather which has been boiled and dried hard. She had a stick of stovewood in her hand, and would have met Private Investigator Judson Miles halfway on the gangplank—only he realized that something was wrong; he had made a mistake, somehow, and this wasn't the missing Adeline Laura Bonney.

It was nip-and-tuck for a time through the brakes on the Point, but gradually Miles distanced his pursuer and, circling around, tried to arrive at the woman's house-boat to recover his borrowed jon-boat. The woman, however, had already returned and was examining the craft with her club, thumping the sides, and bottom to see if the wood was punk or still in good condition.

"Oh, well!" Miles remarked to himself, "I'll just pay that river-man five dollars or so for it—"

Accordingly, he went up to the head of the chute where he had left his motorboat in care of the red-whiskered man who had, in such a friendly way, warned him against bad actors who frequented the Mississippi. The motorboat was gone, though the place where it had rested, bow to the bank, was plain enough to be seen, the cutwater having jabbed the earth.

Judson Miles swallowed hard. In some excitement he ran up and down, looking for clues, but could see none. Torn between fears that his friend had sunk accidentally, in the dark waters, or had floated on downstream, or had pirated the craft, he started at last hurrying downstream, following the water-line. Thus he arrived at the edge of an enormous sandbar, a round dune being all that remained of the famous Island Number Ten of Civil War historic interest. Miles had carefully studied his Mississippi Commission Maps, to learn places and names, so he knew that was Island Number Ten. He kept going. From the top of the yellow dune he had a view of the Mississippi from far above Slough Neck Landing clear down to the sparkling mirage which was New Madrid of earthquake fame. New Madrid was the nearest place of importance, and Miles headed for it.

On his way to New Madrid, he made the astonishing and important discovery that everything he'd had in his pockets when he was on board the glass-cabin motorboat had been removed. He felt of his suspender strap for his badge of authority, indicative of his membership in the National Detectives' Association, Inc., being Duly Enrolled and a Student of the Collegiate Course, Post Graduate. But that fine piece of jewelry was gone.

At the woods' edge was a prostrate log which had been lodged by the high tide of the previous spring. The bark had all been shucked off and the round surface was smooth and inviting. Miles sat down to think this over; immediately he had an impression of discomfort. Then he found that his badge had been pinned to the seat of his trousers! He carefully removed it, having in mind a very important point from his detective course:

"When you find the work of criminals, *be sure to preserve any fingerprints that may have been left anywhere by them.*"

Taking the badge gingerly, by the edges, Judson Miles reached for his magnifying-glass—but it too had been removed from his waistcoat pocket, along with his tweezers, his pencils, his fountain-pen—in fact, everything. But with his naked eyes he could see on the shining spaciousness of the badge the unmistakable fingerprints of somebody—and he knew they were not his own, for every morning he had polished that badge with a chamois-skin.

THERE, now, was the reward of pains-taking! He had known bank-robbers to be caught by a carefully polished glass tumbler left handy for yeggs to use when they were blowing a safe. Miles had never heard of a pickpocket being betrayed by leaving his finger-marks on a detective's badge while pinning it to his victim's pants—but here was verified his detective-course promise:

"A day will come when as a result of your efforts you will come upon a new thing; you will *discover something no other detective ever knew or dreamed!* And on that day you will be amazed by the thrill of joy in your heart, no matter how discouraged you may have been but a moment previously!"

Moreover:

"There are criminals all around you; you never know when you are rubbing sleeves with one. You may be working on a case of trivial importance, when suddenly, without warning, you will find yourself in the midst of affairs of national concern, and even of international excitement. Our most successful of all investigators are, of course, spies on whose gleanings the fates of nations hang! Therefore, don't become too absorbed in a minor affair while perhaps passing up a $50,000 reward!"

"A thumbprint," Miles reflected. "Then there are a first and second finger—he works with a thumb and two fingers. I noticed he had funny big hands, that danged rat! I'll fix him, though! I'll go right to the fingerprint expert in New Madrid, or somewhere. Then I'll know for whom to look, officially as well as casually. I'll bet that fellow's bad! Maybe there's a bigger reward on him than on almost any one! Ought to be, anyhow. I guess he thought I was a darned fool—but I'll show him!"

Down in New Madrid, Miles drew from next to his skin one of the traveler's checks with which he had provided himself in a money-belt. He cashed this at the hotel

and after a square meal, for which his long day and exciting experiences had prepared him, he went around to the office of Chief Kinney Wagner of the police, and telling him confidentially what had happened, enlisted his sympathies and efforts. Together they studied the fingerprint, rogues' gallery and other data in the City Identification Department.

"Kinda seems to me I remember somebody like him," Chief Wagner squinted an eye. "Let's see!"

He went pawing into papers in a huge file. Presently he emerged with a thick red envelope and having pushed back a large number of things from the immediate front of him on his flat-top desk, he pulled the contents of the leather-board container out and shuffled them this way and that so as to have a larger area of view. There were notices of rewards, newspaper clippings, telegrams, photographs mounted and unmounted, and letters with lists of articles, and sundry odds and ends of diversified writing, printing, photostat, typewritten, mimeograph and so on. Out of these he extracted one square which read:

3M 9—25 MENDOVA CITY POLICE G. C. Class*****
Series 3

WANTED FOR GENERAL LARCENIES

DESCRIPTION

Age. Deceptive, 45.
Hgt. 5 ft. 4 in.
Wgt. 140 lbs.
Eyes. Blue, bright.
Hair. Thin, brownish.
Whiskers, bright red.
Complexion, medium.
Short, stocky, agile.
Hangs along Mississippi from Buffalo Island to The Passes.
Occupation, river rat.

Takes very Poor Photograph; picture liable to confuse attempts to identify this scoundrel.

Fingerprint Class
1 01 1
9 0

BERTILLON

Hgt.	60.0
O. A.	58.0
Trunk	87.6
H. L.	18.0
H. W.	14.9
Cheek	13.2
R. Ear	6.3
L. Foot	23.8
L. M. F.	11.3
L. L. F.	8.4
L. F. A.	42.0

Name, Unknown.
Alias John Sutts, alias Paul Suggs, alias Tom Watson, alias Kirk Hunt alias Red Rufus, alias George Coane, alias O. K. Board, alias Mister Mokay, alias Ozark Bend, alias Creole Red, alias Towhead Dan, alias Fred Bighton, ad lib.
(Changes name every trip)

A sneak-thief, river-pirate, double-crosser, commissary looter, game-law violator, con-man, gun-man, junk-stealer, hold-up, fur-thief, freshwater-pearl pennyweighter and robber, professional gambler, and a bad actor.

Characteristics

Affable talker, and can move in any society adapting his manners to his companions. Hangs out at Plum Point, Islands 35-36, Reelfoot Lake, Crow Island, Mendova, and Big Island and Arkansaw Old Mouth. *Don't believe anything he says unless corroborated.* Never works.

If located, Wire and Hold if possible, until we can send officers for him.

JASPER HADDAM, Chief of Police

"You know," Detective Judson Miles said, "that reads like him! Now let's examine the fingerprints."

Ten minutes later the two examiners straightened up and looked at each other:

"That's him!" Miles remarked with grim satisfaction.

The Chief nodded. "The next thing is to get him!"

CHAPTER VI

TRAVERS WILICUM slept deeply, rocked in the cradle of the Mississippi-river swells. Covered with soft sleeping-bag woolens, he could only dream of exquisite adventures—if he dreamed at all. Suddenly he was awakened by the blowing of a steamboat whistle, long, staccato and constant, rapidly growing louder.

He sat up, stretched, twisted his shoulders, reflecting that as he was in an eddy the steamboats could blow all they wanted to. At the same time there was so much noise it occurred to him to look out—perhaps he would see something of which to make a record. Accordingly, he poked his head up through the crack he opened at the overlaps of his canvas hoods.

To his astonishment, he was over against the east bank of the river, drifting swiftly down toward the front end of a great tow of barges. Along the bows of the barges were the tow-crew, yelling madly at him. The big towboat was using a lot of its steam, signaling and giving warnings.

"My gracious!" Wilicum gasped; then throwing back the hoods, he caught up the oars along the seats, threw them over and dropped the locks in place with such celerity as never before—and while he was still finding braces for his feet, he began to pull for his life.

There were five barges, each some forty feet wide—a two-hundred-foot breadth of doom! In the first glance Wilicum saw that he was opposite the middle of the second barge from the shore—the caving bank on the east. If he pulled straight across that space, he would be caught broadside; he must swing up the current and angle clear. So he headed shoreward, quartering upstream.

He saw the men standing breathlessly along the barge bows. He saw far beyond in the high house the pilot, a captain, sundry uniformed persons—and as the whistle had now stopped blowing, he was making in silence his desperate effort to escape being drawn and plowed under the tow. His struggle was to a margin of inches, and he was helped by a roll of slack water bulged slack by the bows. The stern of his skiff passed clear of the inside barge corner by all of thirty inches.

LIFTED by the bone at the jaw, his skiff tipped and swung over all safe. With an explosive release of his full breath, Travers Wilicum reached around for his typewriter. He discovered it on the stern thwart.

Quickly he retrieved it, and removing the cover, was glad he had put in a fresh sheet of paper, ready for instant service. He needed to get down every precious sensation and fact, every observation and more especially the plain, accurate descriptions of the men who had watched him escaping the undertow of that tow of forty barges.

"Why, how come I'm drifting loose?" he asked himself wonderingly, when he had written five pages, single-spaced. Now he realized as he gazed around that something was wrong, particularly at the skiff stern.

"Why, my outboard's gone!" he gasped.

Clad still only in his nightwear, he bethought himself to dress. His clothes, fortunately, were there—but the pockets were inside out. His lead-pencil, his fountain-pen, his jack-knife—his pocketbook, were all gone!

With gasping explosiveness Travers Wilicum crawled, pawing, through the jumbled tangles of his ransacked outfit. He recollected that his typewriter had always rested ready for business at his head. He had found it upside down on the rear thwart.

Worst of all, he had been cast adrift while asleep, to become the hapless victim of any tow or night-tripping craft, subject to every mid-channel mishap or deadly peril. Only slowly could Wilicum accept the fact that his gay and talkative host of the previous night had been merely stringing him, waiting for the chance thus to rob and turn him loose.

The scoundrel had apparently gone through everything as though his victim had been hypnotized. Wilicum began to write again on his machine, hardly able to believe the facts as he wrote them down.

"A magician," he observed, in part, "could hardly have done so thorough a job as handily! In the engrossing excitement of my peril I saw and did nothing but the

necessities for escape. When I recovered my typewriter I caught no significance in its being in the wrong place. I merely recorded the fact that I was adrift, not wondering how it happened. Only when I started to dress did I discover that my every pocket had been picked; even my comb in its case removed. That scamp took apparently everything he wanted in return for my sixteen pages or so of notes on his picaresque river lingo and experiences. He could have cut my throat, or bashed me on the head. I wonder if he didn't leave the typewriter because he knew I'd write all this down so carefully?"

Interlarding his memories with his immediate surroundings, Wilicum wrote all day. He forgot his breakfast; he didn't think of dinner. Night was falling when he became aware of a certain exhaustion. As he started to cook supper, he discovered that his gasoline stove, his aluminum nested cooking-outfit and his cutlery-case were all missing.

His enthusiasm at having had so curious, if embarrassing an adventure faded. He began to bristle. The evidence that the rascal had not only robbed him but had enjoyed his crime was only too plain. Even the typewriter had been dallied with as though the scamp had hesitated to play a joke or just hog the whole caboodle.

Finally, Wilicum made the interesting discovery that the man who called himself Whittier had missed the firearms with which the voyager had undertaken to add sport to his other data. A .22 repeating-rifle, a double-barrel 20-gauge shotgun, and a .45-caliber automatic had all been crowded up in the bow of the boat, and the canvas of the bunk on which the sleeper lay rested on the cases and holster so heavily that these had escaped the looter. Also, the boxes of ammunition under the bow had not been touched.

"He worked forward from the stern," Wilicum hastily noted. "I wish I had tucked my clothes in the bow instead of negligently over the middle seat!"

WILICUM landed and built a fire on the sand. He heated a can of beans in the flames, and otherwise got along with a minimum of utensils. Night fell swiftly while he was still eating, and he sat on the bow of his boat in the deepening gloom, listening to countless sounds, some distant and recognizable as those of birds, and some near and strange, as though he were catching the murmurings of the river's conscience. His glances swept the dark shadows of the woods, the swift dartings of Government channel-light reflections, and even the twinkling of the stars. That was all very well, but Travers Wilicum, alias Joseph Howard Smith, now regarded the whole exhibition as suspicious!

He had learned to write by the typewriter touch-system. Now he didn't switch on his battery light, a globe of which hung from his cane hoop overhead. He merely reassured himself of its presence, and then turned it off, while swiftly he wrote a description of the night scenes.

"I pushed off from the bar," he wrote, "and anchored out in the eddy deadwater. There are a thousand voices tonight. Up or downstream the eye goes searching in glances, trying to see plainly the shades and shapes which seem to go hither and yon, vanishing the moment one tries definitely to see out of the corner of the eyes what it is that moves and has a form—yet dissolves into nothing whatever under a direct gaze. And by the same token I prefer not to have a light lest some confounded river pirate come sneaking to my boat and with incredible deftness relieve me of everything I have left, if not my life itself. He could have killed me last night and I'd never have known what hit me. I suppose I should be grateful for his moderation."

When he had stretched out at last, ready to sleep, the fact that he had been made an easy victim grew more palpable to the tripper. He had been played for a sucker!

"I suppose he thinks I can't do a thing about it," he mused, "but I wonder— He told about somebody picking another author's pocket, one time, and thinking it was a good joke. I wonder if authors are generally regarded as easy marks, just because we don't bother to—*um-m*. I wonder if I oughtn't to make the Mississippi River safe for literature? Gracious! I *must* write that down! I can't afford to forget that!" And shivering in the cold, he put down new phrases and reactions.

"The worst of it is," he recorded, "I feel revengeful. I have a desire to make a scamp suffer as I have endured."

HE awakened from sleep which had arrived like a shadow seizing its prey, and stared in astonishment. The sun was shining, instead of a scattering few stars of the first dimension. Birds were singing their practice-songs in the warm and balmy morning. Squirrels were running among the branches of the trees opposite him. A flock of canvasback ducks were swimming within forty yards of the hooded-over skiff, and craftily Wilicum pot-shotted three of them. Before he was dressed he had a good stack of meat laid in the bottom of his boat.

"I don't know what I shall do," he sighed. "All my money stolen!"

The more he thought about his predicament, the angrier he grew. His glances swept the river with hope. He wanted to see that glass-cabin launch again! The river pirate had cut the skiff loose after robbing him. That meant the cruiser was up the river somewhere. He stared at his long oars. It would be hard pulling against the current; at the same time, it could be done—the skiff, though twenty feet long, had fine, fast lines.

Hauling in his anchor, Wilicum floated in the deadwater before a light southerly breeze while he studied the swing of the river current. If he could make up the eddies and reverse currents he would save a lot of bucking the main river flow. Accordingly, he began to row, a long steady stroke, and watched with satisfaction the trees standing along the bank shear past those deeper in the breaks as he gained distance upstream. He could even make headway, more than holding his own, when he cut across the channel to hit the lower end of a long sandbar eddy opposite. He had a lot to learn about where the currents slacked and where the main stream gain-speeded, but he gained more knowledge of the actualities of the huge torrent's gripping power in going five miles upstream than he had during weeks of casual floating, starting the outboard motor with an easy flip of the hand to go up tributaries or cut across from shore to shore.

"I don't know but the intellectual gain is worth the loss," he thought to himself when he was anchored at the head of those hard-won miles on his search for the scoundrel who traveled in a glass-cabin motorboat and after entertaining a guest, robbed him.

"No Arab'd do that!" Wilicum mused. "No hill-billy—nobody with a spark of human decency in him would steal from a visitor!"

Another day of rowing, begun after a sandbar breakfast, and kept up all day long, found Wilicum feeling lonely and weary as he slowly spread his double-hood over his skiff after anchoring in an unrecognized eddy in a straight river reach opposite a narrow sandbar.

At intervals during the day Wilicum had rested as reverse eddy current or slight breeze in a deadwater blew him northward. In those minutes he had written brief, staccato paragraphs, hardly more than strings of adjectives. A tired and breathless worker could not go into such fine details—a man rowing in a swift current could

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not pause to record his observations! As he reflected, —the chill night wind growing clammy against his sweat-stiff shirt,—he had needed this reversal of his good luck, touching him with the calamitous hand of the river pranking. Heretofore Old Mississip' had been a large and interesting phenomenon; now it was an enormous personality, given to chuckling when its mood was most deceptive.

Another morning and Travers Wilicum, author, was sore across his shoulders, yet even more determined in his attitude. He was slow in making up his mind, but he was now aroused to the necessity of punishing the miscreant. Otherwise decent people would never be safe down the river. If victims of scalawags allowed the tricksters to profit by their cheats and thefts, honesty would be at a discount.

Having eaten heartily of another sandbar meal, Wilicum continued on his way with now and then a glance over his shoulder to make sure he was taking the best advantage of eddies and slacks above the crossings.

HE was thus heading across the mid-stream, holding his upstream gain and swinging for the foot of an eddy opposite, when right by him a familiar voice exclaimed:

"Git thar, Eli!"

Wilicum jerked his head around and found himself almost in the shadow of two shanty-boats coming down in the current. On the bow-deck stood Mrs. Mahna, short and chunky, her arms akimbo.

"Why—Mrs. Mahna!" he exclaimed.

"You pull like you was going somewhere mad!"

"I am—both!" he replied, with considerable spirit. "A man cruising in a glass-windowed motorboat cruiser had me on board his boat, and then robbed me when I was asleep."

"You don't expect yo're going to run him down with that rowboat, do you?" Mrs. Mahna inquired. "Why, shucks! He can go sixty miles upstream to your ten!"

"I don't care if he can go a hundred; there's an end upstream to this river somewhere—"

"My land, you *are* stirred up!" Mrs. Mahna exclaimed.

"I'd better be going!" he said, bending to his oars.

"Hold on!" Mrs. Mahna shouted. "I got something for you! I want to give you a talking-to, besides!"

Wilicum hesitated with his oars poised, like a racer ready to start. Mrs. Mahna stepped into the cabin of the red-trimmed shantyboat and emerged with a bright aluminum outboard motor.

"Eveh see this?" she inquired.

"Why—gracious! That's the one was stolen from me!"

"I'll set hit onto this bow-bumper an' drive us into that eddy oveh theh!" Mrs. Mahna said. "Hit'll save us lugging out our daylights on the sweeps! I want t' know what's achin' you."

In half a minute she had the motor screwed fast, set down the battery and gave the wheel a jerk. The motor began to throb and sent the two shanty-boats surging against the current. Then by turning and working a sweep, Mrs. Mahna headed them for the eddy across the current. Wilicum was glad to get a line over a cleat to tow with the boats to the anchorage.

As they entered the slack water, the girl he had named alias Helen Grey emerged from her cabin.

"You've been having some experiences, I believe," she remarked.

"I have!" he declared with such spirit that Mrs. Mahna burst into a laugh as she threw over a patent anchor and paid out about twenty feet of line.

"So we heard." The young woman smiled.

"How'd that feller git yo' outboard—and what else did he take?" Mrs. Mahna asked with unusual lack of tact.

It took Wilicum about seven minutes to give the two the gist of his experience.

"Did yo' find that feller with a red beard?" Mrs. Mahna asked.

"No!" Wilicum shook his head. "But I don't believe he could tell me much more about river piracies than I learned myself!"

"You don't know how he came to have that motorboat?"

"No—why?"

"Well, *that* was Red Rufus—and that boat's the one the Omaha detector came down the riveh in—"

"That was Red Rufus!" Wilicum exploded. "He didn't have a red beard!"

"He don't have, always!" Mrs. Mahna grinned. "When he's dickering with soft-paws he's generally smooth-shaved. Sometimes he has a brown mustache, account of dyeing it. One spell when they was looking for him real persistent, he had a bright yellow mustache, just like gold. So you had a talk with him, eh? Well, yo' got what yo' were lookin' for!"

Wilicum stared at the two women. He gulped a little.

"Anyhow," he blurted, "I found him!"

"Yeh—maybe he found you!" Mrs. Mahna suggested. "You've been asking right smart about him. Ev'rybody told yo' he had a red beard. Then he shaved. I bet he had his suspicions."

"He knew I was asking about him?" Wilicum asked.

"Why, my lan'!" Mrs. Mahna laughed. "Ev'rybody talks about everything down Old Mississip'! If anyone hasn't hearn tell yo' was comin', he sure aint had his ears open, payin' 'tention!"

"I don't see how you secured that outboard," Wilicum remarked, puzzled.

"That's easy!" Mrs. Mahna grinned. "This yeah heroine of yourn, she held him up with a gun—an' then I took it. Trouble was, we didn't know what else went with it. I 'membered a can of gasoline an' Helen, hyar, she recognized the gas-stove an' a nestin' cooking-outfit. We saved them. What else'd he git? I see yo' got the writin'-machine."

"He left that—but he took all my—uh—what he could lay his hands on."

THE two women looked at him sharply; then they invited him in to a woman-cooked meal. He ate heartily; then took his leave. Swinging the outboard in its place over the stern of his skiff, he rebalanced his outfit for gasoline-power driving, and steered on his way. He was looking for the man who had wronged him. He had, the women knew, scant chance of finding the rascal, but they were glad to see him depart thus indignantly, all set for the task. Already he had been immeasurably changed by realization of his helplessness and incapacity against this scoundrel. They had seen in his bucking the current of Old Mississip' something novel and gripping.

With a wave of his hand he bade them farewell.

"Good luck!" the young woman called after him.

He raised his cap gallantly, smiled and turned to watch up the stream whose glassy wide surface his cutwater divided now nearly three times as swiftly as he could have rowed in still water. When he looked back presently, the two cabin boats were apparently no larger than cigar boxes; they were still at anchor as though the women intended to wait a day or two for him to return with the story of his fortune. . . . Then he strapped on his pistol and loaded his other firearms.

This delightful tale of soft-paws and shanty-boat dwellers on the Mississippi becomes even more engrossing in the forthcoming December issue.

The Phoenix Tourmaline

The author of many well-remembered Blue Book successes, like "Madagascar Gold" and "The Ship of Shadows" here offers a captivating mystery of life in the European colony of Saigon.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

FREEMAN walked ashore at Saigon, went to the Continental Hotel, registered, and looked at his watch. It was four o'clock.

"Send my luggage to my room," he said. "If I do not return tonight, hold it for me."

He went next to the offices of the Compagnie des Charbons, which owned the big coal-mines that fed all the coastwise steamers, sent in his card to the president, M. Maignien, and in less than one moment was in the presence of that gentleman—a thin-cheeked, dark-eyed man with an untidy grayish beard that was struggling to engulf his sharp-nosed features.

"I received your cable at Singapore, M. Maignien," said Freeman in French. "I did not cable you of my arrival, lest the business be of a private nature."

Maignien shook hands very joyfully, then glanced at his watch. "You have luggage?"

"It is at the hotel."

"Good; I'll send for it. This is Friday—excellent! Now, pardon me for a few moments while I arrange for my absence; we shall go to my villa in the hills, and return on Monday. Be seated, M. Freeman, be at home; a few details to arrange, no more!"

Freeman sat down and lighted a cigarette in his calm way. He was Asiatic buyer for the great firm of Haldeman & Co., whose establishments in Fifth Avenue and Rue de la Paix handle the largest jewel business in the world. Freeman knew all there was to know about precious stones. His draft on the firm was good for practically any amount. From a Malay sultan in Singapore he had bought for his firm the famous Nurmahal pearls, paying half a million in cold cash.

Maignien bustled in and out; he was a rather fussy gentleman, and nervous. When he had cleared his desk and finished his directions, he closed the door and sat down.

"I cabled your firm, monsieur, and they gave me your address; so I cabled you," he said. "If we can arrange a price, I desire to sell my collection—all of it. For twenty years I have been here in Saigon, and my investments have been fortunate. I have some good stones."

"I know them well," said Freeman, "although I have never seen them. You have the Siamese Twins, probably the most perfectly matched pair of perfect black pearls in the world; you have the seven rubies that disappeared from Burma in 1867, called the Tears of Buddha. You have the lapis-lazuli pendant made for the Dowager Empress of China; you have the fourteen absolutely flawless, but unluckily table-cut, diamonds that belonged to the Emperor of Annam. You—"

"How—how do you know all this?" asked M. Maignien.

"That is my business," said Freeman.

"Well, there is something you do not know, then—something rarer, if not actually more valuable, than all the rest."

"Rarity makes value for my firm," said Freeman.

"That is why I cabled."

"And what is this supreme wonder? A new acquisition?"

"I have had it for two years," said Maignien. "You must wait until you see it. I do not wish my family to know your business; my wife and her brother, to be exact. It is better for you to be interested in coal for an American or Singapore shipping firm."

Freeman merely nodded. In his business of buying, not merely jewels, but rare jewels, he had long since learned that those who sold to him usually did not want his business advertised. Not that Freeman would have dealt for an instant with any but the legitimate owners of stones; but these owners seldom wanted anyone to know that they were selling.

He knew of Maignien's collection; as he said, that was his business. Any flawless gem can of course be sold by Haldeman & Co., but they can more readily sell at a far higher price a stone which has association or history. And such things formed the collection of Maignien—a very rich man since the war. Fourteen flawless diamonds of antique cut would not fetch a great price; but if those fourteen had belonged to the Emperor of Annam, they would go for a prince's ransom.

ODDLY enough, as he sat there, Freeman was curious about that villa in the hills. For he was well aware that there are no hills anywhere near Saigon, which is set in the midst of wide rice-paddies and mangrove flats. Being acquainted with French psychology, he waited half-amusedly to see what M. Maignien's "hills" would prove to be.

He was so interested in this point that he forgot about the great rarity he was shortly to see. . . .

The conveyance in which Freeman traveled upriver with his host was a very handsome motor-launch in which Maignien commuted to and from the city. The two men sat beneath the awning, and the elderly Frenchman went into some detail as to his reasons for selling his collection. It was rather nervous detail, Freeman noted.

"My wife is a trifle younger than I am," he said, pawing at his beard. "She is, in fact, my second wife, and she longs to return to Paris. I am comfortable here, but after all, I have attained a certain age, and Paris beckons; it will be good to go back. I am not poor, and there will always be an income from the coal mines. But Paul—my wife's brother, you comprehend—well, my friend, I must confess that I do not care greatly for this Paul."

Freeman smoked and said little, listening with a rather cynical comprehension of what the situation must be.

"Paul has been with us for two months," said Maignien, his gaze flitting along the river's bank. Mention of Paul disturbed him, apparently. "He has a little money, a trifling income; not a great deal. He came out to take a position in the mines, but his health would not stand it, so he is with us. *Nom de Dieu!* He will not be with us long. Three days ago I told him he would take the next boat for France, or resume his position up north in the mines. This is his last week with us. My wife was tragic about it, but what would you? My home is my home."

"The position," observed Freeman, "has its difficulties; but it would have much greater ones, were you not a man of firmness and decision."

"I am not weak—I can be imposed upon to a certain point, no farther," returned Maignien, and this was true. "Me, I have never liked this *vaurien* Paul, nor has he liked me. No trouble, you comprehend; but the feeling is there below the surface. And as for these jewels, they represent wealth, which is safer in the bank. Here it is very nice to have them, to play with them, to show them to my friends; but of late I have lost my taste for them, to be honest. Twice there have been attempts made upon them."

"If you keep them in your home," said Freeman, "you are most unwise. A good many people know of your collection, my friend."

Maignien gestured vaguely. "That is why I cabled you."

Freeman perceived that this man had lost his self-confidence, realized the fact, resented it, and was helpless about it. Age, perhaps; domestic worries, the exigencies of a younger wife in a far country.

"How long have you been married?" asked Freeman slowly.

"A year and a half, this time," returned the other. Freeman said nothing, but his eyes narrowed. He felt vaguely sorry for M. Maignien.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Frenchman suddenly, and lifted an arm. "There—there, my friend! You see the hills, and my house. Is it not a charming scene?"

Eight or ten miles from town, conjectured Freeman. There were indeed hills above the river—gentle little eminences, all of fifty feet in height, with massed jungle behind. The clearing had been nicely done, a number of larger trees being left—great drooping casuarinas, and several vivid flame-trees. Between two of these slight eminences was built the house, with gardens around, a low wall, and boat-house and enclosed swimming-pool at the water's edge. Fountains played, the garden paths had been graveled—expensive work, here—and the finely timbered house was extensive and opulent.

Servants appeared as the launch drew in to the landing; M. Maignien was certainly treated with great respect by his domestics. And with affection by his wife, for she appeared at the entrance to the screened veranda and waved a hand, her husband blowing a kiss in return. Freeman eyed this exchange sardonically, and watched his luggage being taken in hand.

He walked up to the house with his host, and midway met his hostess and was introduced. He was not particularly astonished to find Madame Maignien a good twenty—perhaps more—years younger than her husband. She was a statuesque lady with a large nose, a wide and unhandsome mouth, and a firm chin; plenty of character in that face, thought Freeman. Her greeting was little short of effusive, and the affectionate embrace she tendered her spouse was not at all French in its lack of reserve. Also, Maignien seemed a trifle astonished, though greatly pleased, by her warmth.

"And where is Paul?" he asked.

"Oh, he is mounting his butterflies and packing those already mounted," she returned, and gave Freeman a bright smile. "Paul is my little brother, you understand, monsieur. He loves butterflies, and mounts them beautifully on plaster-of-paris blocks behind glass."

"That is true," said Maignien. "His work is really excellent; you must see his specimens. —By the way, my dear, I have a cabin for him on Monday's boat. He will be glad to hear it."

"You are so good!" And the lady regarded her spouse with glowing affection. Freeman began to feel a trifle uncomfortable. He did not like hypocrites particularly, and his cynical eye perceived that to which Maignien was superbly blind.

The interior of the house was charming in its way, if not in what Freeman considered the best of taste; no expense had been spared upon it, at all events. As the three of them passed through the music-room, Freeman's eye was caught by the portrait of a dark young man, which stood in a silver frame upon the piano.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "And this—"

"My brother," said Mme. Maignien. "Paul Lenormand. Is he not handsome?"

"Very," said Freeman, looking hard at the portrait. "I am envious, madame!"

She laughed pleasantly, made some casual answer, and Freeman went on to his room.

He found his luggage already there, and promised to rejoin his hosts after a bath and a change. The room was large, pleasant, cool, and opened upon the garden; the rattan blinds were triced up, for the sun was already dropping out of sight and a breeze was drifting in. Freeman stood motionless for a long minute, looking out upon the garden. Then he started slightly, hearing a voice that came to him with faint but penetrating clearness—a man's voice, irritated and alarmed.

"*Diantre!* A man—an American, you say? To remain until—"

That was all. Freeman frowned a little as he stared out upon the hillside with its walks and flowers and foun-

Freeman talked; M. le Préfet listened, astonished.

. . .

tains; then he compressed his lips and turned to his luggage. He opened a suit-case, fingered through its contents with exploring hand, and took up the pistol for which he had obtained a permit before landing. It was empty, but in another moment he had slipped a loaded clip into the butt. Then he put the pistol away again.

"Paul Lenormand, eh?" he said, and his lips curved in the sardonic smile which many men had little liked to see. "Poor Maignien! But why, I wonder, the butterflies?"

"This is not so very old," said Freeman, "but it is the most beautiful tourmaline I have ever seen."

Unfortunately, he had no answer to this question, for some little time . . . .

Freeman shrank from telling Maignien the stark truth. Beneath his ironic outer shell he had, like many Americans, a stratum of sensitive nature that was almost sentimental, and he could well see that his news would give Maignien a mortal blow. Besides, Freeman was in the dark as to certain things and wanted to ferret them out. And there was always the chance that he himself could remedy the situation and avoid wounding poor Maignien; a false mercy, yet a very natural feeling.

Contrary to Freeman's expectation, dinner proved to be not only very pleasant, but even a gay meal; obviously Paul Lenormand had accepted his dismissal with good grace, and there was not a trace of strain between him and his brother-in-law. Lenormand was much younger than his sister. He was the dark, rather sleek type of man, thin and lissom, which has become associated with the term *gigolo;* his dark, direct eyes held a veiled menace, and his manners were beyond criticism. He said quite frankly that he would be glad to return to Europe, and he spoke of Maignien's kindness to him with a hint of emotion that moved the older man almost to affection. Clearly, Maignien regretted his unkind words to Freeman, regarding this young man.

FREEMAN talked coal with his host, expressed a vivid desire to see the collection of jewels whose fame had reached him, and showed much interest in the work of Lenormand with butterflies; he accepted an invitation to visit the latter's workshop in the morning. Madame Maignien proved herself a charming woman, and all in all Freeman would have enjoyed himself amazingly—except for what he knew.

"Yet what can the man do?" he asked himself repeatedly. "He cannot steal the jewels; he could not get out of the country at all, and he could not hope to conceal their loss. There can be no question of Maignien's death; in such an event, his widow would inherit—ah, but would she? However, a mere murder would not necessitate this careful preparation. No, there is something behind all this, something I do not yet know."

He knew that his own identity, and his business here, was not suspected by Madame Maignien or her brother.

Dinner over, cigars half finished, brother Paul went to the music-room, where he played the piano with a masterly touch and chatted with his sister. Maignien escorted his guest to view the famous collection of gems.

The two men passed to a small study and smoking-room at the rear of the house, and Maignien paused before a little door in the wall of the study. He had the average Frenchman's faith in locks, provided they were large and cunning enough. From his pocket he drew a key-ring, and smiled at Freeman.

"You see, *mon ami,* I do not leave these things about foolishly," he confided. "This little room is of massive teak, has no other entrance—not even a window—and the only keys are in my pocket. Once inside, the thief finds a massive steel box to which I alone hold the key—a box too heavy to be readily carried off. *Voilà!*"

He flung open the teakwood door to disclose a small room, no larger than a closet. Upon the floor reposed an old-fashioned safe that opened with a key.

From this safe, Maignien brought forth over a dozen boxes and cases, which he disposed upon the table in his study. He selected a large morocco case, retaining it in his hand, then drew up a chair for Freeman.

"There, monsieur, examine at your pleasure; the supreme wonder I reserve until you have seen the others. Here are fresh cheroots; they will fetch us more coffee presently."

So saying, he sank into a chair, and Freeman turned to the jewel-boxes on the table. One by one, pencil and paper at his elbow, he examined the contents of those boxes and jotted down a list of them, together with a code system of letters that represented the probable resale price of each and the price which he was willing to pay. All were here, the famed gems of which he had heard: the Annam diamonds, the Tears of Buddha, the Siamese Twins, and many others, with a number of lesser but highly valuable stones. Last he came to the lapis pendant made for the old Empress Dowager; a pendant of the finest lapis, so exquisitely carved that it had been two years in the making, kept within box after box of gorgeous brocade and wrapped in a fragment of imperial silk tapestry.

At last the inspection was finished, and solemnly Maignien laid before him the morocco case.

"You have seen them all, my friend: but here is something which you have never seen, and of which I doubt if you have ever heard. It was not catalogued with the others."

"Catalogued?" Freeman looked up suddenly. "I did not know these stones had been catalogued at all."

"But yes." Maignien rose and took from a shelf a thin brochure. "This was privately printed for me at the Government printery; the illustrations are life-size. Only a half-dozen copies were struck off, as presents for official friends."

Freeman frowned thoughtfully as he examined the little brochure. He found all the stones listed and described, with what was known of their histories, and each was pictured in very handsome colored plates. He examined the booklet minutely, comparing the illustrations with the actual gems, and their exactitude astonished and startled him. Here in his hand was the answer to his chief problem.

"When was this printed?" he asked abruptly.

"Two years ago. Unfortunately, the supreme wonder was not then in my possession, so it is not shown there."

Freeman pushed aside the brochure and opened the morocco case. Maignien remained silent; he knew there was no need of telling this man what he was looking at.

Screwing his glass into his eye, Freeman examined it minutely. It was a small, flat block of crystal, three inches by two, half an inch thick. Each side was carved fantastically with a phœnix design—most intricate work, obviously Chinese in origin. One side of this crystal was a rare and delicate sea-green; the other side was an equally delicate rose pink—the thing was a perfect example of the Chinese love of working up a parti-colored stone into a design wherein the natural colors would play a part. The crystal was pierced to be used as a pendant.

"What species of butterfly is this?" asked Freeman. "Alas!" Lenormand grinaced. "I am no scientist, Monsieur."

Freeman took the glass from his eye. "This is not so very old," he said, "but it is the most beautiful tourmaline I have ever seen, monsieur. It has a history?"

"I do not know," said Maignien. "I got it from a Chinese refugee from Yunnan. He called it the Phœnix Tourmaline, and would tell me nothing about it. There is a glow to it, eh?"

"More than that," said Freeman, and fondled the tourmaline in his palm.

It deserved the name; used as he was to stones, this crystal of two colors gave him something to think about. There was something fascinating, even to him, in the deep, soft glow. Another close examination showed that it was a flawless gem crystal, not the usual type where the greater flaws and imperfections have been cut out. This must have been a perfect block of Nature's fashioning, and the two colors were fused in an even line.

THEN, under the strong glass, Freeman saw something else no casual eye would have noted. Outlining the intricacies of the carving, here and there at the inner points of the design, was a faint line of white. Freeman removed his scarfpin and with the point followed these lines, loosening a fine white powder. He tasted it, but made no comment.

"What is it?" asked Maignien curiously.

"A little dirt," said Freeman. "Perhaps some one polished the thing and did not clean it thoroughly." He laid down the glass and the gem. "Monsieur, you have a remarkable collection here. You have no family to whom you would leave these things—no children by your first marriage, perhaps?"

"But yes, monsieur—two sons, who are in France," said Maignien. "However, in my opinion it would be better to leave them money than such treasures as these, which might be stolen upon my death."

Freeman nodded. He comprehended everything now—or at least, if not everything, then enough to give light upon the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Do you wish to discuss price, monsieur?" he asked courteously. "Or let it wait until tomorrow, perhaps?"

Maignien shook his head, and dabbed at his brow with a silk handkerchief.

"No. I understand how you Americans do business, monsieur; let us do it your way. I must confess to a nervousness, a species of apprehension; it has weighed upon me for some time. Perhaps it is sheer imagination; perhaps it comes from my heart, for which I am undergoing treatment. At all events, let us see!"

For an hour or more they sat there, discussing the collection piece by piece, stone by stone, discussing price and costs and markets. Freeman was astonished by the ease of it; these negotiations should have required weeks, for thrifty Gallic merchantmen long since squeezed the Queen of Scots and all her countrymen out of France, and no matter what his wealth, your Frenchman would sooner haggle than do anything else, except eat.

Maignien, however, showed none of this racial trait. The bargaining was in francs, and it came to a very large sum; but when it was ended, Maignien's figure was within five thousand francs of the figure Freeman had set himself as purchase price. He waived the five thousand, and made his flat offer. Maignien considered a moment, then nodded.

"Good; I accept," he said quietly. "You are a gentleman, monsieur; me, I do not desire to prolong these negotiations. Let us do business in your American way."

"Agreed," said Freeman, and produced pen and paper. "I'll make out a bill of sale, and the stones become my property. They remain in your keeping until you have cabled in regard to the draft I give you—no, I must insist on this detail. You can send a cablegram down to the city tomorrow, and receive an answer at once. I'll give you a sight draft on my firm, which the Banque de l'Indo-Chine will accept at face on Monday. Better, perhaps, to have them send the cable tomorrow."

So it was agreed. The bill of sale, itemizing the collection, was written out and signed, and the gems were Freeman's property.

He joined Maignien in a drink to celebrate the bargain. Yet he showed none of his real exultation; he had done a tremendous stroke of business, but he knew he had an unwelcome task remaining ahead of him.

When he retired that night, he took the automatic pistol from his grip and placed it in his jacket pocket.

"Tomorrow," he murmured, as he turned out the light, "I shall have a brief conversation with M. Paul Lenormand—a very brief conversation, I hope!"

He was to regret most bitterly that he had postponed this conversation until the morrow. But what one of us can see ahead to another day?

FREEMAN wakened early.

"The collection is now my property," he reflected, as he leisurely dressed. "Therefore I can rightfully take up the matter with Lenormand, give him twenty-four hours to be gone, or less. It will save Maignien the shock and pain which the exposure would cause him. It may even save a tragedy all around."

So thought Freeman, in his simplicity—forgetting that the swift shock of the knife is always better than the slow agony of an ulcer.

When he went downstairs he met a soft-voiced servant who escorted him to the dining-room and there brought him rolls and coffee—they had not known he was up and around. Monsieur Lenormand had been at work for half an hour; his workshop was in a summer-house at the upper end of the garden. Freeman inquired if the young man always rose thus early, and found that he did not. He made no comment.

He breakfasted lightly, then strolled out to the garden. He filled and lighted his pipe, and made his way along the graveled path toward the pavilion at the upper end—a little octagon building, gay with vermilion and gilding, being built in the Chinese fashion. As he drew near, his feet crunching on the gravel, Lenormand came into the doorway and looked out at him, then cried cordial greeting.

"Good morning, monsieur! You are about early. Welcome to my little workshop! Come right in and let us see if we can find entertainment for you!"

So saying, the young man ducked out of sight, as though he were engaged at some important work—or had something to conceal. Freeman wondered.

Stopping, he entered at the doorway, and stood gazing around. Before him was a long, wide work-bench at which Lenormand stood. Upon the floor was a half-emptied sack of plaster-of-paris. At one end of the bench were little squares of glass, binding tape, tools, butterflies pinned to cards. Along the bench stood molds, and square cakes of hardened plaster from these molds.

Lenormand waved his hand gayly. "There, monsieur—a touch more, and we have it! Allow me to present you the finished product. Not bad, eh?"

IN his hand Freeman took the finished product—a plaster cake five inches square. In the center of this, held in a depression shaped to its general outline in the mold, was a gorgeous blue-and-gold butterfly of large size. Over this had been fitted a glass, held in place by a passe-partout binding. The work was neat, and the result beautiful.

"What species of butterfly is this?" asked Freeman.

"Alas!" Lenormand grimaced. "I am no scientist, monsieur. I collect the beautiful; that is all. It interests me. See, I have nearly sixty completed over there in that pile. These few will be finished before noon; then I pack them all. It interests you?"

Freeman nodded, and looked at the bench. Upon it were nearly twenty molds, into which the plaster had apparently just been poured. Before each was set a butterfly, ready for mounting when the plaster had hardened, also a glass to fit the square of plaster.

"Isn't there danger of breakage?" asked Freeman.

The young man shrugged. "Perhaps; but as you see, each is two inches thick, and they will be well packed. And what would you? It is an amusement; it interests me."

Freeman looked at him, removed his pipe, and was about to ask a question that would most certainly have startled, perhaps even terrified, brother Paul. A sound checked him, however.

This sound was the long, shrill scream of a woman, coming from the house.

Lenormand looked up; the color drained out of his face as he met Freeman's eyes. The plaster-set butterfly in his hands dropped and broke.

Then as the scream was repeated, both men dashed out of the place and ran across the garden. A frightened native servant met them at the door.

"Quickly, messieurs—poor M. Maignien is dead!"

There ensued a very chaotic quarter of an hour.

LENORMAND took charge, for Madame Maignien was prostrated temporarily, and Freeman lent a hand. Maignien was dead, indeed; he had fallen asleep and had died peacefully in his sleep, no doubt from the aneurism of the heart to which he was subject. Lenormand summoned Lon-tran, the native boy who ran the launch, and was about to send him to the city when Freeman intervened.

"Perhaps, monsieur," he said quietly, "it might be better if I myself went for the doctor? I could then tell him what I know, on the way back."

"You would be so kind? By all means, then," assented Lenormand, with obvious relief. "I will give you his address—"

So Freeman set off for Saigon in the launch, which was urged to fullest speed. All the way downstream he sat wordless, smoking most of the time, eyes fastened upon the water and the mangrove-bordered rice paddies.

"If I had only warned him!" he thought. "Yet—of what could I have warned him?"

Upon reaching Saigon, he did not go to the address of Maignien's doctor. Instead, he went direct to the Prefecture, sent in his card and certain documents, and was immediately brought to the presence of M. le Préfet, a very trim and soldierly man, who returned his documents and shook hands with him impressively.

For ten minutes Freeman talked, while M. le Préfet listened with every symptom of astonishment.

"But, monsieur!" he exclaimed, when Freeman had finished. "If this is as you say—which I doubt not at all—it is an affair of honor, of domestic life. And there has been no crime."

"That remains to be seen," said Freeman. "You will come?"

"But of a certainty!" The Frenchman rose. "Our own doctor shall accompany us—he can perform the autopsy, while I proceed with the official inquiry."

So the launch sped back up the river, with M. le Préfet, a police surgeon, and six trim native policemen keeping Freeman company, not to mention the secretary of M. le Préfet.

Their arrival created something of a sensation, but Lenormand met them and conducted them into the house. Madame had quieted somewhat, and would be able to appear. While a table was being set up in the salon and M. le Préfet arranged his numerous documents, the surgeon examined the body and returned with word that Maignien had apparently died from a heart-seizure. Then he vanished again, without asking permission from anyone, to conduct the autopsy by himself.

M. le Préfet opened the inquiry, while his secretary wrote rapidly. The servants gave their testimony; then Madame Maignien appeared, and the official greeted her with great sympathy, for grief had ravaged her features and her voice was very feeble.

Yes, she said, she had entered her husband's room to awaken him, as was her daily custom; and upon touching him—

There she broke down, sobbing. M. le Préfet excused her; nay, he forced her to go to her own room and rest, for there was no further immediate need of her testimony. When she had departed, the prefect requested that the clothes and personal effects of the deceased be brought to him, and they were fetched and set upon a chair beside him.

He went through the pockets and laid various articles upon the table; last of all he laid a folded paper. Then he looked at Lenormand and Freeman.

"Now, messieurs! First, M. Freeman, if you please. Your papers?"

Freeman produced them. The prefect looked them over and returned them.

"Correct. Your business?"

"I am a buyer for a firm of jewel merchants," said Freeman. "My business here was to buy the jewel collection of M. Maignien."

LENORMAND started, began to speak, then checked himself. His eyes widened upon Freeman, and a slow pallor grew in his cheeks.

"You accomplished this business?"

"Last night. Here is the bill of sale." Freeman laid the signed paper on the table. "I gave M. Maignien a draft for the amount indicated."

"It is here." And M. le Préfet opened the folded paper he had taken from the pocket of Maignien's coat.

"Touching the property which I purchased, monsieur—" began Freeman.

"In due time, monsieur," said the prefect coldly. "M. Lenormand—your papers, please."

Lenormand produced the ever-necessary French identity card.

The prefect studied it, then laid down upon the table and transfixed Lenormand with a quiet stare.

"An excellent forgery," he said. "I believe, monsieur, that your real name is Bourisson?"

Lenormand's face was beaded with perspiration. His eyes were ghastly.

"I—yes, monsieur," he said in a low voice.

"Two years ago," went on the prefect, "you were implicated in a jewel swindle in Kobe, Japan, and expelled from the country?"

The hunted gaze of Lenormand flicked from one to another of the faces around him.

"That—that is true, monsieur," he murmured.

"Then you are not the brother of Madame Maignien?"

DESPERATELY Lenormand pulled himself together. "Monsieur!" he exclaimed in a sudden burst of rapid speech. "Consider—we have loved each other for years! She married this older man—she did not love him in the least—"

"Monsieur," intervened the prefect gravely, "I am concerned only with your offense in bearing a false identity card. Unless a crime has been committed, your love-affairs do not interest me in the least; and apparently no crime has been committed here. That a lover should forge his identity in order to be near his mistress,"—and he shrugged,—"is perhaps an offense which might gain the sympathy of the judge. And I am not the judge."—Then as Lenormand sank back in his chair, the prefect looked at Freeman.

"Monsieur, you can identify these jewels, which are your property?"

"Certainly," said Freeman quietly. "They are itemized on the bill of sale. Also, there is a catalogue with illustrations of them."

"Let us obtain them." And the prefect rose, taking from the table Maignien's keys. "You can assist me, gentlemen, if you will be so kind. Ah—"

THE surgeon entered, came to the table, and spoke in a low voice.

"Very good," said the prefect. "You will return to Saigon at once and proceed with the analysis."

And he led the way to the study of Maignien.

There he examined the door of the teakwood room; it was locked, and bore no signs of any forcible opening. He unlocked it. Inside, he unlocked the safe and, with two of his policemen assisting, bore the loads of jewel-boxes to the table in the salon. When everyone was in place again, he motioned to Freeman.

"Very good, monsieur. Will you have the kindness to examine the jewels?"

Freeman opened the case containing the Siamese Twins. They looked up at him, grayish-white, dusky, beautiful. He went from box to box, and the prefect checked off the list on the bill of sale as he proceeded. Last of all he opened the morocco case containing the Phœnix Tourmaline, and named it.

All this while, the gaze of the man called Lenormand remained fastened upon him in a sort of terrified fascination and suspense.

"Then, monsieur," said the prefect, "the collection of jewels is as you left it last night?"

"No," said Freeman. "The jewels have been stolen, and duplicates have been put in their places, monsieur."

There was a tense, startled silence. Then Lenormand leaped to his feet.

"But you, monsieur, are the only person who has left this house today!" he cried out.

FREEMAN looked at the young man gravely, steadily, but did not reply. M. le Préfet squared around in his chair.

"So! It would appear that a crime has been committed, after all," he observed, and gave Freeman a glance of admiring wonder. "M. Lenormand—"

"You cannot accuse me!" exclaimed Lenormand passionately. "I have not been out of this house except to welcome you. Jewels such as these could not be quickly nor easily hidden—and these jewels were in place last night, as M. Freeman admits! If these are duplicates, how did they get in the boxes? Where are the originals? No one has touched them since last night. The keys have not left the possession of M. Maignien. You cannot accuse me, I tell you—search my room, search everywhere! But—the exchange of false for real might have been made by this American last night; and he might have taken the real stones to Saigon this morning!"

"Quite true," observed M. le Préfet placidly. "What say you, M. Freeman?"

"I have several things to say." And Freeman held a light to his cigar. Then he turned to the prefect. "Will you have the goodness to instruct M. Lenormand to answer my questions? Or wait—perhaps I can reconstruct for you all that has passed."

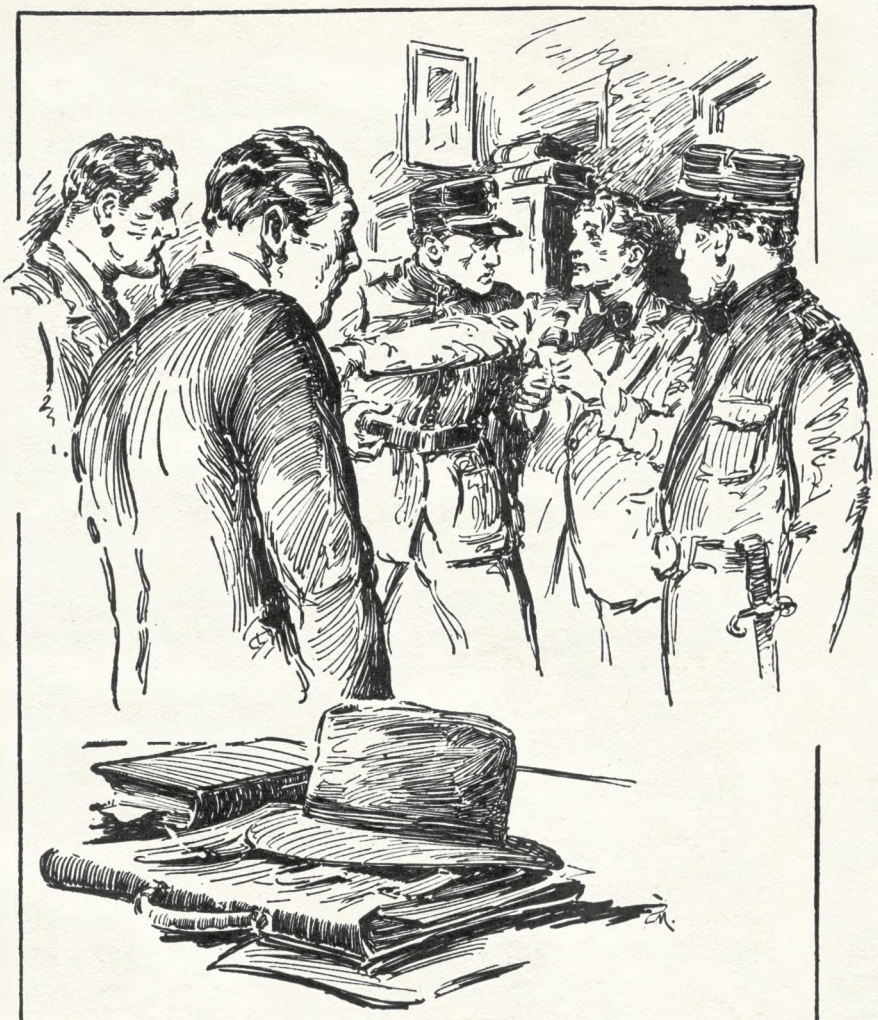
He paused, examined his cigar, then puffed at it contentedly.

"Two years ago," he said, "M. Maignien was unwise enough to print a few copies of a catalogue describing his jewels in detail, with colored illustrations, life-size. A year and a half ago, he married for the second time. How and where and why, I am not aware. But I would suggest that an investigation into the past of his wife would disclose acquaintance with our friend M. Lenormand."

"You lie!" cried out Lenormand, white with anger—or other emotion. Two of the policemen moved quietly in, one on either side of him.

"Now let us imagine," pursued Freeman calmly, "that a copy of M. Maignien's catalogue fell into the hands of M. Lenormand, whose photograph is very well known to men in the gem trade as that of a gentleman not to be trusted. With such a catalogue, it would be no great trick to have duplicates made of each item in this collection; the work would take a little time, and some money. Then, let us say, Madame Maignien's brother—who very possibly is her lover in reality—shows up here and is made welcome by a simple, unsuspecting old man. In his luggage are concealed the duplicates of the jewels. But what does he find when he arrives here? That, since the catalogue was printed, M. Maignien has acquired another jewel—a jewel almost beyond price for its rarity, if not in its intrinsic value. Possibly the brother sees this jewel—it is this, the Phœnix Tourmaline."

Freeman opened the morocco case and laid bare the duplicate—which was beautiful enough in itself, despite its false coloring.



"You lie!" cried Lenormand, white with anger—or other emotion.

"Being an expert, the brother knows its value, and resolves to have it with the rest," he went on. "But how to make a duplicate? He is a cautious man; he dares not try to photograph it. He knows that there could be no safety in actually stealing the jewels outright. However, he has been able to get access to the keys that unlock the little room and the safe; he has made duplicate keys. So what does he do? He takes the Phœnix Tourmaline, and being a very good workman, makes a cast of it, in plaster-of-paris. Then he brushes it off and puts it back—which was a mistake. He should have washed it very carefully. When we find the real Phœnix Tourmaline, it will show faint but distinct traces of the operation. Now he sends the cast to Japan, where a duplicate is made in colored glass, following the intricate design and so forth. Receipt of this delays him here in Saigon a full six weeks longer than he had intended to stay. But the duplicate finally arrives—"

Lenormand came to his feet. He was furious, raving denials, accusations, until presently he got himself in hand and, deadly pale, uttered a simple and eloquent rebuttal which was astonishing in its coherence, by contrast with his preceding words. It was as though terror had shocked him into clarity of thought.

REFLECTIVELY M. le Préfet listened to him, allowed him to finish, and then turned to Freeman.

"Monsieur, there is much in what this man says. Your hypothetical case has really no objective. Reflect! Supposing such a crime as you depict were contemplated—where would be the reason? The woman in the case would naturally inherit after the death of her husband; there would be no object in all this work, all this trouble and expense, of making duplicates. You have insinuated that the murder of her husband was contemplated—"

"Your pardon, M. le Préfet, I have insinuated no such thing," said Freeman stolidly. "I do not believe that M. Maignien was murdered. I do not believe that his murder was so much as contemplated. Let me remind you that I have not finished my hypothetical case."

The prefect gestured significantly and sat back in his chair, while Lenormand gazed at Freeman with slow astonishment in his eyes.

"The duplicate arrives from Japan," continued Freeman, in his calm, inexorable voice. "All is now complete. The brother-in-law has become a nuisance; the husband fears him, procures him passage for France, kicks him out. He goes, taking the genuine jewels, leaving the false ones in their place; he knows that the husband seldom inspects them, and that by the time the substitution is discovered, he will be safe in Bangkok or elsewhere beyond extradition, even could the theft be proven against him. And later he divides with the woman, his mistress. That is the way the crime was pictured in theory. In actual fact, we know that something went amiss. A man—myself—came casually and recognized Lenormand as a jewel swindler. So!

"You raise the question of motive; very good—I was coming to that., M. Maignien was subject to heart-sei-

zures. He was elderly, excitable; he could not last very long. If he did, the end might be hastened. But if and when he died—would his wife inherit? Not so, as I understand your law, M. le Préfet. By a former marriage, there were two sons, now residing in France. There would be a division of the property, of which the collection formed a large part."

A subdued exclamation escaped the prefect.

Then Lenormand rose, deadly quiet, and spoke in a firm voice.

"M. le Préfet," he said, "all this is very clever; but it is nonsense. My crime is that I loved another man's wife; I confess it, and," he added with a certain impressive dignity, as he glanced around, "I am willing to suffer for it—if the court declares it to be a crime! As for these jewels—that is another matter."

"You are right," said Freeman. "It is another matter altogether. When they were stolen, they were my property. Therefore it is my right to demand that you be arrested for the theft."

"There is no proof, monsieur," said Lenormand firmly. "All you have said is theory. You have brought no proof against me; I deny every word of your fantastic theory! It is I, on the contrary, who demand that *you* be arrested for the theft. You substituted the false stones for the genuine ones. Your next move will be to repudiate the check that you gave in payment."

"Not at all," said Freeman, looking at the man steadily.

"Come, monsieur," said the prefect, a trifle uneasily. "This man speaks the truth. There is no proof whatever of your charge. Nothing could establish your theory, except—"

"Except finding the jewels in his possession." Freeman beckoned to one of the policemen. "With your permission, M. le Préfet—"

He spoke, low-voiced, to the little brown man, who saluted smartly and left the room.

"An impressive bluff, monsieur!" Lenormand uttered a curt laugh. "But I have not those jewels. How could they be hidden? How could they be taken out of the country, indeed?"

"In a very simple fashion which I am about to explain," said Freeman. "If I am wrong, it will be shown, and my whole theory will then fall to pieces."

With a grunt, Lenormand resumed his chair; across his face swept waves of suspicion, startled doubt, swift incredulity and hope. Sweat sprang on his brow, and he wiped it away. . . .

The policeman reëntered the room, came to the table, saluted, and laid down one of the molds from the workbench in the summer-house. At sight of it, Lenormand's eyes dilated with terror.

"If I wanted to get the jewels away," said Freeman quietly, "I would collect butterflies and mount them—in this manner."

He twisted the wooden screws at the sides of the mold, which opened. Upon the table rested a white block of plaster, bearing a depression in the shape of a butterfly. Freeman picked it up—then suddenly dashed it down upon the floor.

The plaster was shattered. From its fragments came a shaft of light; there in the afternoon sunlight lay the Phœnix Tourmaline.

Lenormand fell back in his chair in a dead faint. . . . .

"But, monsieur, how on earth did you know?" exclaimed M. le Préfet, regarding Freeman with a certain awe. "You had no previous knowledge—how could you have evolved this theory, so accurate in each detail?"

"That," returned Freeman, with a faint smile, "is my business, monsieur!"

Two Thousand in Gold

By RAY HUMPHREYS

Illustrated by William Schmedtgen

JOE DARLEY stepped out of the Pine Cone Roominghouse and blinked and rubbed his eyes in surprise. Directly across the narrow street, plastered on the side of the dingy depot was a brilliant yellow poster with flaming red letters that seemed ablaze in the early morning sunshine.

TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS IN GOLD
Will Be Paid As a
REWARD

For the arrest and conviction of the two men who held up the Gunsight-Central City stage Thursday—OR for the recovery of the loot taken in said holdup.

THE GUNSIGHT STAGE LINES

Joe read the announcement twice, to be sure there wasn't any "catch" in it. Then, with a hopeful grin, he hurried on to his work at the barns of the Gunsight Stage Lines, where he was listed on the company payroll as "handyman." Joe was twenty-one years old and Irish—and had all the love of excitement that such a combination of youth and nationality would indicate.

"I could use that two thousand in gold," exclaimed Joe to himself. "An' it's like I was tellin' ol' Pappy Stewart yesterday—t'warn't no ordinary robbers held up that mail coach, not on your life! They were slick, them *hombres* were! An' they're still in the district, I'm thinkin'. Yes, I'll say me a word to the supe—"

But Sam Hayes, the stage-line superintendent, was in no mood to waste much time on a mere handy-man that morning. Hayes had been upset ever since old Pappy Stewart, senior driver for the company, had arrived late Thursday with his six black mules in a lather of sweat and announced shrilly that he had been held up and robbed by two men in Dead Horse Gulch. The loss, in mail-pouches and a number of valuable express packages, had been estimated at about five thousand dollars.

"Wal?" growled Hayes, as Joe Darley rather hesitantly approached him.

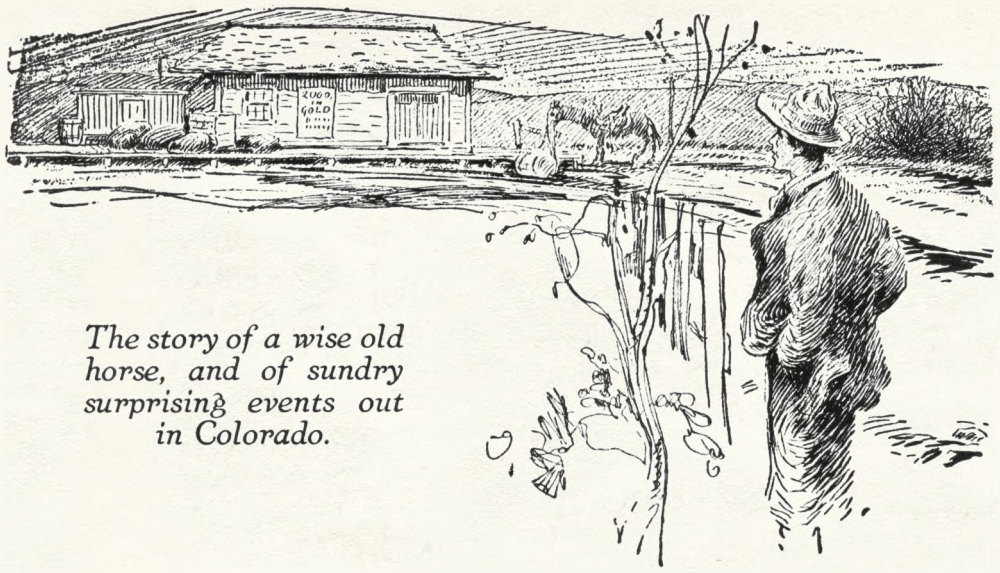
"It's about the reward I sees that the company is offerin'," began Joe, doffing his big hat.

"What about it?" demanded Hayes, scowling.

"I would like to get it, sir," said Joe Darley frankly, his blue eyes sparkling. "I have me an idea that I could mebbe find them robbers or mebbe the stuff they stole—meanin' the loot, as th' yaller posters say. I was tellin' ol' Pappy Stewart yesterday—"

The superintendent laughed outright at that.

"An' ye are probably mindin' to ask fer time off to go chasin' rainbows," whooped Hayes. "Wal, ye'll not git it



The story of a wise old horse, and of sundry surprising events out in Colorado.

—I kin tell you that right this minnit! It's a handy-man that you are, employed to massage the company mules an' wait on them, an' to wash wagons an' polish harness, an' be ready to replace a driver now an' then should the need arise; you are a handy-man, Darley, an' no detective, so you mind your own business now—"

"Yes, sir," said Joe. "But after me hours here mebbe I kin—"

"Yes?" encouraged the superintendent.

"I could snoop around a bit," went on Joe, fumbling with his old hat. "I got an idear I could locate the robbers, mebbe—"

The superintendent looked at Darley for a full minute; then the frown on Hayes' face lifted and a grin spread across his features. He took off his hat and scratched his head reflectively.

"You have the right idear, with the company's interests to heart," said the superintendent, "but you are mindin' to waste your time goin' after robbers—they're out of the country long before this. But I'm glad you presented yourself here to me this mawnin'. Bill Dixon is sick an' goin' to take a long leave of absence—an' I think you're the right man fer that night mail-route, Conifer to Baileys, Shawnee an' Fairplay—if you'll mind business an'—"

"I will!" cried Joe eagerly.

"I've turned Dixon's two ol' hosses out on pasture," went on the superintendent blandly; "they're too slow, anyhow. But that fine big black hoss, Captain Lee—you kin take him—"

Joe's face fell.

"The black?" he asked.

"Yes—an' a fine, fast hoss—"

"You mean the killer?"

"Killer, me eye!" roared Superintendent Hayes wrathfully. "He's a good hoss, that's all—a blamed good hoss—an' just because he's lookin' like he's ready to jump through the bridle at all times aint no reason to call him no killer! What danged nonsense! Why, with a good hoss like that you kin likely slice an hour, mebbe, off your run—"

"Or break my neck!" said Joe; but he added quickly: "However, I aint afraid of him, Mister Hayes; I'll take him, if you say!"

"That's settled, then," said Hayes. "You go home now an' rest, an' report at seven o'clock this evenin'—an' mind, leave the robber-chasin' to the sheriff an' such—who are paid to be bloodhounds!"

"Yes, sir," Joe replied meekly, as he walked away.

JOE was on hand a few minutes before seven o'clock that evening, ready to substitute for old Bill Dixon on the Conifer to Fairplay mail-route. Pappy Stewart had just pulled in with the Central City stage, and the Fairplay mail pouch, woefully flat, was tossed to Joe. Old Pappy noticed that instantly.

"Be you ridin' to Fairplay now?" asked Pappy kindly.

"Yes," said Joe proudly.

"He's goin' to try to do so," corrected Red Feeney, the stable-boss. "It's just took me an' two fellers an' three ropes an' plenty o' ol'-fashioned profanity to git that black hoss Captain Lee saddled fer him—nobody's rid that hoss yet—"

"Great guns, lad—you're not goin' to try!" cried Pappy.

"It's the supe's orders," grunted Feeney wrathfully; "but it's plain out-an'-out murder, if you should ask *me* about it—"

"I'm not worried," lied Joe; "but, Pappy, did you see the posters advertisin' the two-thousand-dollar reward for your hold-up men—"

"Come on, come on, here, Darley!" roared Superintendent Hayes, arriving at that moment. "Get your hoss an' beat it—you're carryin' United States mail now—on schedule, too! Beat it!"

The stable-boy led Captain Lee, the big black horse, forward. A hush fell. Old Pappy went grunting among his mules, not caring to watch the boy mount. The stable-boss Feeney disappeared into the grain-room. The superintendent stood waiting. But Joe fooled them all. He took the black's reins.

"I'm leadin' him a bit to git acquainted with him," said Joe. "He's probably nervous, standin' in a stall so long. *Adios,* gents—see you in th' mawnin'!"

And Joe walked away, leading the fretting black horse. The night mail-route to Fairplay led to the west from Gunsight, first along Calf Mountain, past the old, deserted "Rat Town," which had once been a thriving suburb of Gunsight. Now, however, it was merely a collection of weathered skeleton shacks, the home of hordes of rats. Joe led Captain Lee up Calf Mountain and through Rat Town, then down the other side of Calf Mountain and along the Lariat Trail to Chicago Creek. The horse champed at the bit, shook his magnificent head, blew through his nostrils, and rolled his eyes in challenge, but Joe walked steadily on—and talked.

"Nice boy," said Joe; "nice ol' boy! We'll get acquainted, seein' we got to do it, thanks to the supe. They say you're a killer, Captain Lee, an' that nobody kin ride you—but nobody is goin' to try fer a while, either! We'll git along—you'll enjoy th' night exercise—we'll be friends sooner or later, boy, just wait an' see if we aren't—just wait—"

The mail was very late into Conifer that night, much later into Baileys, and still later into Shawnee and Fairplay. It was a long walk for Joe Darley and he walked every step of the way, leading the black horse. The postmaster at Fairplay swore it was a shame—but Joe walked back to Gunsight, arriving several hours late, still leading the black horse. No one saw him until he reached the barns and then the fact that he was afoot was not considered, for riders always dismounted in the barn-yard.

"I was plumb worried," Feeney grunted. "I was afraid—"

"We got along nice," said Joe wearily. . . . .

"I'll have sugar fer you, Captain," said Joe to the black horse that night, "every night from now on—you like it, don't you? We're bound to be friends yet! You just take it easy; I aint in no hurry to ride—I'm a good walker, thank God! It's a nice route we've got too, after we once git over Calf Mountain—that's kinda steep, aint it, Captain?"

The horse tossed his head and snorted.

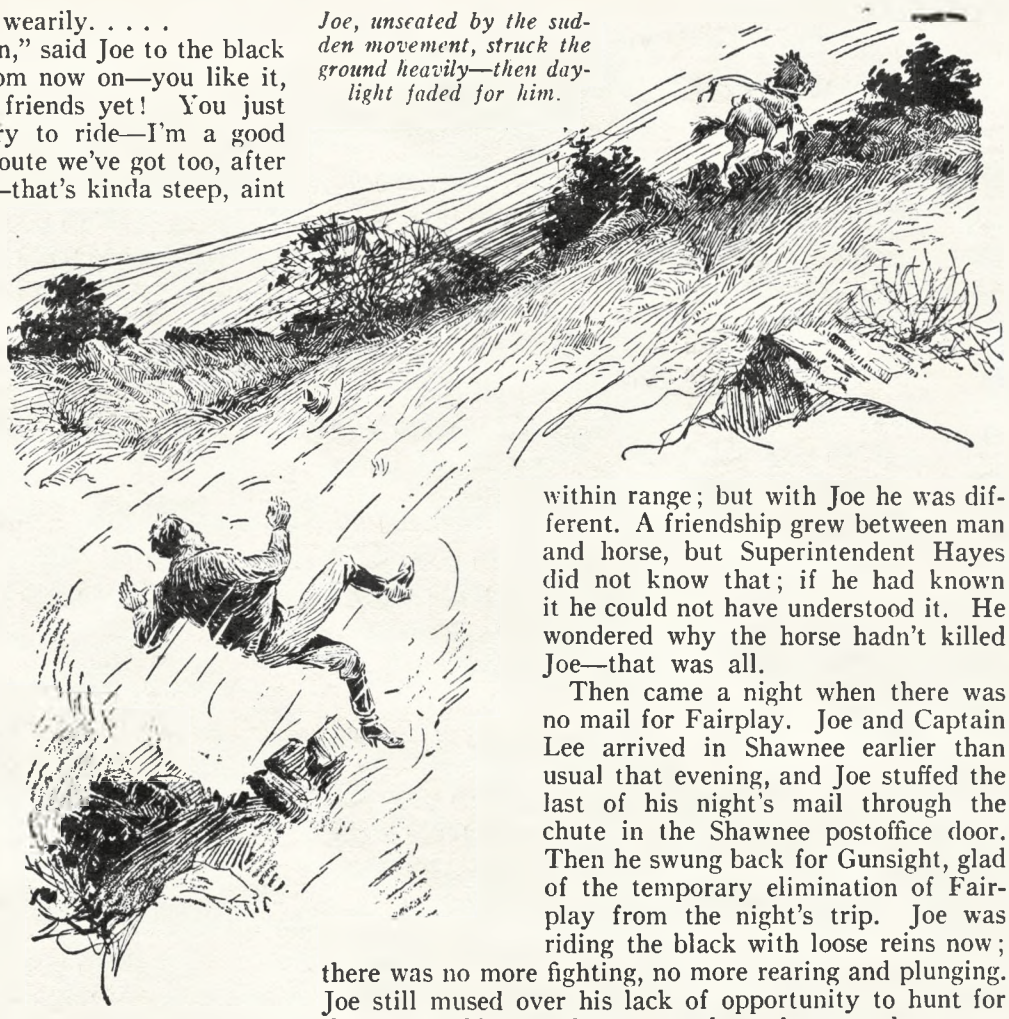
"I've got to make good on this job, Captain," explained Joe, "an' it's up to you to help me to do it, so we gotta be friends. I wish we could find them robbers that held up Pappy Stewart's stage an' git the two thousand dollars reward in gold—wouldn't that be swell? I have me a good notion that they're hid out somewhar, fer I heard the sheriff say he was sure they hadn't got through to Denver—with all the roads watched. Come on along, Captain; we got to walk a little faster!"

The mail was late again that night. But the postmaster at Fairplay had taken a liking to the blue-eyed Irish lad, and no complaint went in from him. The mail was merely pushed through the doors of the post-offices in Conifer, Baileys and Shawnee, as Joe went along, so no one in those villages knew just what time it had arrived. So there was no complaint from those quarters. Every night Joe walked his route, leading the big black, talking to the horse, petting it, stopping to feed it sugar at regular intervals. Feeney suspected something was wrong, seeing how late Joe returned of mornings, but he held his tongue. He liked Joe—and what the superintendent didn't know wouldn't hurt him!

The mail went on foot to Fairplay for the better part of two weeks; then, one spring night, Joe mounted Captain Lee. The horse reared and plunged, but Joe was a good horseman. He spoke to the black and stroked its neck, and eventually Captain Lee consented to trot without bucking. The mail was only half an hour late into Conifer that night, and was on time at Shawnee. It was early at Fairplay; the old postmaster was surprised, but he cautioned Joe against the black horse. Joe got back to Gunsight before breakfast-time. After that night the mail went through on schedule. The stablemen wondered, but Joe made no explanation.

"If the supe had only let me off," said Joe, to his horse, "I might have found that pair o' stage robbers who held ol' Pappy Stewart up a month ago—or mebbe the mail an' express loot they took; it's all still in the hills here, I'll bet a dollar—an' I might have found it—if—"

THE mail-route from Gunsight to Conifer to Fairplay seemed to grow shorter every night. Captain Lee became accustomed to his boy rider and began to pick up speed as he left off fancy steps. Indeed, the horse became almost gentle, as far as Joe Darley was concerned, though at the Gunsight stable he was still a vicious brute to the stablemen—he continued to bite and kick when they came within range; but with Joe he was different. A friendship grew between man and horse, but Superintendent Hayes did not know that; if he had known it he could not have understood it. He wondered why the horse hadn't killed Joe—that was all.



Joe, unseated by the sudden movement, struck the ground heavily—then daylight faded for him.

Then came a night when there was no mail for Fairplay. Joe and Captain Lee arrived in Shawnee earlier than usual that evening, and Joe stuffed the last of his night's mail through the chute in the Shawnee postoffice door. Then he swung back for Gunsight, glad of the temporary elimination of Fairplay from the night's trip. Joe was riding the black with loose reins now; there was no more fighting, no more rearing and plunging. Joe still mused over his lack of opportunity to hunt for the stage robbers and get a crack at the reward.

"I guess my idear was worth something to me after all, though," he informed Captain Lee that night, "fer no sooner had I mentioned the thing to the supe but he promotes me to this route! And that supe is no fairy godmother, neither; he aint doin' things just fer kindness—not that gentleman! But mebbe some day I'll—"

Joe drowsed in the saddle that night. The black seemed to understand that his rider was weary; the big horse racked along carefully through the night. Joe was only partially awake when Captain Lee struck the level stretch of road that ran through deserted Rat Town. The town, more properly a collection of decaying sheds, huddled down the mountain slope from the road. Joe dully noticed the old gray shacks on his right, and knew he was only some fifteen minutes out of Gunsight.

Then it happened.

Captain Lee pointed his ears suddenly, snorted and jumped sideways with all four legs. He struck the edge of the road and scrambled for a foothold there. Joe, unseated by the sudden movement, saw a man's head peer out from above a patch of wild-currant bushes.

The next minute Joe struck the ground heavily on his head and one shoulder. He had a momentary fear of Captain Lee's thrashing hoofs and then daylight faded out for him. He rolled over and over, down the gravel slope, into Rat Town. He brought up with a crash against a ramshackle old building, and laid there motionless. The black regained the road and stopped, and the man in the currant-bush patch thereupon swore and threw a stone at the horse, scaring him back up the road towards Calf Mountain. Then the man ran for Joe, picking up a larger rock as he went. He would fix this mail rider right!

Suddenly there was a terrific crash up the mountain-

side. Captain Lee, his ears straight back along his shining head, eyes glittering, yellow teeth bared under a snarling upper lip, was coming down the slope in an avalanche of small stones and loose sand.

The man from the currant-bush patch went suddenly pale and heaved the big stone he was carrying straight at the charging horse. His aim was poor, and the black came on, squealing like a wild stallion. The man dodged, trying to reach an old stump some seven or eight feet away. He failed; then the fiery black horse was upon him. There was a collision that sent the man sprawling and the black followed with avenging hoofs. Bones crunched; there was one groan. Then the black, tossing his magnificent head, went up the slope like a deer, took the road toward Gunsight, and disappeared. . . . .

Three-quarters of an hour later half a dozen white-faced horsemen drew sudden rein on the road above Rat Town. Red Feeney, the Gunsight Stage Lines stable-boss, pointed down the mountain slope. The other men—Sheriff Markey and Deputy-sheriff Pat Boyne and three stage-line hostlers—tumbled off their horses.

"Thar he is, down by that stump!" roared Feeney, leaping for the slope. "Looks to me like he's daid, too, pore kid! We'll shoot that black devil fer this!"

Feeney went sliding and skidding down the mountainside, followed by the sheriff and the rest. Grabbing the old stump to help halt his precipitous slide, Feeney came to a stop above the mangled body. He reached for it tenderly, turned it over—

"Why—it's Hayes!" gasped the stable-boss.

"The superintendent!" cried the sheriff, bending over. "An' dead as a doornail, Red—tromped to pieces, almost!"

"Wal, what in tarnation—" began the awed stable-boss.

"Look at over thar, ag'in' the ol' house!" whooped Deputy-sheriff Pat Boyne, pointing. Everyone looked. There, partly propped against the shack, was Joe Darley, limp as a rag, chin sunk on breast, eyes closed. Feeney reached Joe in half a dozen jumps, bent over him, then straightened up with a yell.

"You, Tom Egan!" he roared to one of the hostlers. "Slide on down to the creek an' fetch up some water—quick—in your hat! The kid's alive—hurry, hurry!"

Five minutes later, under the strenuous first-aid measures applied by the little group, Joe opened his eyes.

"The black hoss throwed you, Joe—" began Red Feeney.

Joe nodded painfully and gulped down some water.

"We'll shoot the black devil fer that, Superintendent Hayes or no Superintendent Hayes," went on Feeney; then he checked himself. "Say, kid, do you know—"

"You'll not shoot Captain Lee!" Joe cried out. "It wasn't his fault, Red—he wasn't to blame! I remember—I wasn't careful—he didn't mean to toss me at all—I remember now—thar was a man popped up quick out o' some currant bushes as we come along—scared Captain Lee—an' he shied—"

"A man?" asked the sheriff.

"Er—yes," said Joe hesitantly. "I think it was—yes—I recognized the supe—Mister Hayes!"

The men looked at each other at that, but it was Feeney, the stable-boss, who spoke first.

. . . . . .

"The black came tearin' in, like a cyclone," he whispered, "an' we all knowed what we had feared had happened. I run fer Mister Hayes, but he wasn't to home. Then I got some o' the boys, an' we come along lookin' fer you, Joe, expectin' to find you dead fer sure! But you say you saw the supe around here, Joe?"

Joe lifted a hand to his bruised forehead.

"I was thinkin', Red—or mebbe I was dreamin' it—but what would the supe be doin' here this time o' mawnin'? We was early gettin' back, you know, me an' Captain Lee—thar was no mail fer Fairplay. Wal, I was dreamin' or thinkin' that mebbe that stage loot or the stage robbers is here—in Rat Town— Mebbe the supe knowed it or guessed it hisself—"

No one spoke; no one had time to speak, before Deputy Sheriff Pat Boyne, who had stepped around the corner of the old shack against which Joe was resting, reappeared, a big mail-pouch in each hand.

"The other four an' a lot o' packages, busted open, are in the shack, Sheriff," he said. "An' thar's a rifle thar an' two masks an' a hat—I guess we got the stuff they took from ol' Pappy Stewart's stage a month ago! The hat has initials in it—S. H.—which—wal, I dunno—"

Joe Darley smiled despite his pain.

"S. H.?" he muttered through his swollen lips. "Sam Hayes, eh? Wal, now I know why the supe was prowlin' around here as we come along—jus' lookin' to see that his loot was safe! Hid out, jus' as I figgered, until—"

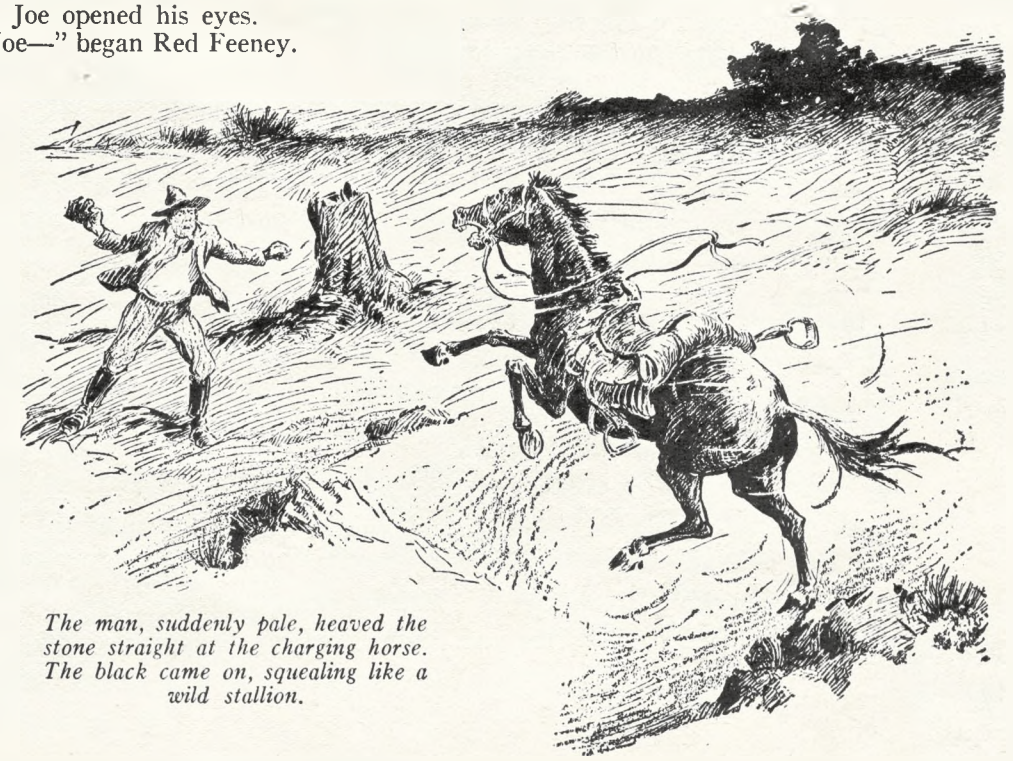
RED FEENEY turned and glanced up the hill toward the stump, where lay the trampled remains of Hayes.

"Now I know," said Red slowly, "why the supe insisted on makin' you ride that black hoss, Joe—he kinda feared you might git that reward, as you has, I guess—an' he figgered the black hoss would sort o' attend to matters! Wal, all I got to say is this—the black has attended to matters—but we won't shoot him!"

"No, sir," moaned Joe; "he aint no killer, Red—"

The stable boss looked again at the trampled body up the hill; then he laid a cool hand on the boy's forehead.

"If he is," said old Feeney thoughtfully, "if he is a killer, Joe—he uses judgment—an' I guess the Gunsight Stage Lines aint shootin' no hoss jus' fer usin' judgment!"



The man, suddenly pale, heaved the stone straight at the charging horse. The black came on, squealing like a wild stallion.

The Misunderstanding with Louis XIV

In doubling on the trail of former existence, a man may find himself a hero—or quite the opposite.

By BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

WHILE traveling in India Mr. Hobart Honey of London happened to save the life of an important Tibetan lama; and in gratitude the reverend gentleman bestowed upon him a remarkable gift—namely, a bottle, itself a rare and most valuable example of Chinese glassware, containing certain pellets possessing the singular power of temporarily reinstating the swallower of any one of them in one of his previous existences.

Mr. Honey—unmarried, middle-aged—had taken some months to screw himself up to the point of an experiment. Nothing but an insatiable curiosity and a very good opinion of himself would have driven him to it. If he could swallow a pill and be certain of finding himself back in the days when he was, possibly, King Solomon, Julius Cæsar, Richard the First, or some such notable man, that would be quite satisfactory. But there seemed to be a certain risk that he might select a pill which would land him back on some prehistoric prairie in the form of a two-toed jackass, or something of that kind.

At length Mr. Honey made the experiment—and found himself the court chiropodist to Queen Semiramis! He had a difficult time in Babylon, and rejoiced when it was over; but curiosity drove him to further ventures—in which he found himself, successively, a singularly miserable cave-man, an unsuccessful and sorely bedeviled pirate, an anthropoid ape condemned to fight a lion in a Roman amphitheater, a charcoal-burner who happened to save the life of William the Conqueror, and an assassin in the service of Queen Cleopatra. Disheartened but persevering, Mr. Honey tried again, to find himself a character better known, though far from praiseworthy—none other, indeed than the notorious Guy Fawkes.

It was without enthusiasm that Mr. Hobart Honey, sitting comfortably in his study in company with Peter, his pale-eared black cat, removed the stopper of his pill-bottle preparatory to swallowing his ninth pill. Rather was it with the grim determination of a man who has embarked upon an unpleasant undertaking, but nevertheless is determined to see it through to the bitter end.

Gone was the delightful feeling of curiosity and expectation which at first had preceded his experiments with the pills; and the pleasing anticipation of discovering himself transplanted, so to speak, from a Baker Street flat to the glories of an ancient throne was no longer with him. He had realized that—to use an Americanism—there were "no thrones in his." The only sensation of which Mr. Honey was now aware was one of horrid doubt as to what particular kind of rogue or villain he would find himself to be when the pill had done its fell work. To such an extent had the pills lowered his self-esteem.

BUT for all that the author proposed doggedly to persevere, for he could not altogether abandon a lingering hope that he might yet find himself deposited, as it were, in an incarnation in which life was worth living. Perhaps he might find himself to be a knight, or even a humble archer; surely that was a sufficiently modest ambition! At a pinch he would not object to being Simon

the Cellarer. After all, it was a respectable way of earning a living, and might conceivably give him a very valuable knowledge of the drinks of those days, which would be something gained, if not much.

So, with a rather forced and slightly reckless laugh, which did not deceive Peter for an instant, Mr. Honey swallowed Pill Number Nine, and left it to do its worst—which it did promptly and efficaciously.

Mr. Honey "awoke" to find himself in Paris. Not, of course, the Paris of these days, but the Paris of the days of the grand monarch Louis XIV.

The view-point from which Mr. Honey was first regarding Paris was somewhat restricted—in fact, from a bed of straw in a stable in one of the lowest quarters of the city. He was sharing this bed with an ass, and one of the ass' hoofs was resting upon his chest in the friendliest way—almost, indeed, as though the ass had thrown a protecting near foreleg over Mr. Honey. It was a one-stall stable, and there were no other occupants, except an elderly he-goat of completely disreputable appearance, who desisted occasionally from his efforts to devour portions of the ass' harness, hanging close by, in order to survey the pair on the straw with an extremely sardonic expression.

Mr. Honey, with a gesture of profound annoyance, violently threw off the embracing hoof of the ass—causing the animal to bray briefly but discordantly in its sleep—and sat up abruptly.

It was significant that his first thought, in spite of his drowsiness, was for the long Italian rapier at his side. This slender but markedly businesslike weapon he proceeded to draw from an extraordinarily shabby sheath, and lovingly polished it upon his rather short and shabby breeches.

He handled the sinister instrument of dispatch as though he loved it—as indeed he did—not merely because it was a remarkably good rapier, but because it was absolutely the only article of value which he possessed, except perhaps a tolerably nifty little dagger which he wore at his belt. Further, it was his sole means of livelihood.

For Mr. Honey was now about to reëxperience a few brief hours of life as it was in the days when he had been—and now again really was—Signor Hoba Hona, a bravo of Italy in, be it added, somewhat reduced circumstances.

It was mainly upon his reduced circumstances that he reflected as he mechanically polished and repolished his pliant stock-in-trade.

"Was it, then, for this that I adventured from the sunny South to this town of Paris?" he muttered in the excellent French which he had learned from his mother, a Frenchwoman. "To forgather with asses and goats in their unsavory kennels because I lack the price of a bed and breakfast? Hah! I do not think so—decidedly not!"

He executed a brilliant lunge at the interested goat, handling the glittering blade with the deftness of a master.

"Hah, there, goat!" he observed, suppling his wrist with his customary swift and intricate morning exercise.

The gleaming point quivered and flashed within an inch of the hide of the sardonic-looking goat. "Would thou wert a fat bourgeois stuffed with gold, and in a dark alley, goat!" said Mr. Honey, lunging elaborately—a little too elaborately, indeed, for his foot slipped, carrying him irresistibly forward stiff-armed, so that without in the least intending to do so, he ran the goat through as though it were merely blotting-paper.

"Bah!" went the goat hurriedly, and died abruptly.

The bravo withdrew his point with a startled oath, and examined it carefully, for it had jarred against the brick wall on the far side of the goat.

"An accident, ass," he said uneasily. "I swear it. I might have ruined the rapier as well as the goat."

But the ass merely looked disgusted, as did a man who had appeared at the doorway at the moment of the fatal stroke, and who now entered the stable, even as Mr. Honey wiped the rapier.

The newcomer evidently a low-class innkeeper, saw instantly what had happened, and burst forthwith into a torrent of French.

Three times Mr. Honey endeavored desperately to explain, and three times he failed.

The voice of the innkeeper began to rise, and the bravo perceived that it was time to be leaving. So, with an extraordinarily quick twisting movement, he transferred his grip from the hilt to halfway down the round blade of the rapier, and struck the innkeeper violently over the ear.

The innkeeper ceased his lamentations, and dropped quietly down upon the still recumbent ass.

Mr. Honey examined him swiftly.

" 'Tis but a bruise; he will recover himself in time," he muttered presently. He sheathed his weapon, searched the innkeeper, found a purse, requisitioned it, and swiftly departed from that place.

"Always a traitor and ingrate," murmured the king. "You have a traitor's reward."

Such were the events which ushered in Mr. Honey's first dawn in Paris. It was not a very brilliant start for an ambitious bravo, who, finding business impossibly slack in Italy, had migrated to Paris in search of advancement—but he hoped to do better. There were plenty of openings for a steady and industrious bravo whose prices were reasonable just along then, and Signor Hoba Hona knew it.

Louis XIV was at his zenith, and things were going with a whirl in the French capital. Money was being spent very freely by those who had it to spend. Love-affairs were extremely plentiful, intrigues, private enmities, and jealousies even more so, and, despite his somewhat squalid start in Paris, Hoba Hona, having transferred the contents of the innkeeper's purse to his own, felt his sunny Southern nature expand and warm as he walked along searching for a hostelry wherein to breakfast and think of his future.

"It is impossible that a man like me can fail to get on here," he mused. "What? As good a swordsman as ever came out of Italy, and twice as handy with the dagger as any man I ever met! Let me but get one order from a nobleman to remove some objectionable person or other, and the rest will follow. It won't be long before Mother

will get some remittances which will surprise her."

He twirled his mustache and swaggered into a good-looking inn, where he proceeded with the chill arrogance of a man who lived on his blade, to rap out orders for a very extensive meal indeed.

They made haste to attend to his requirements. It was too early in the morning for many customers to be abroad; indeed, Mr. Honey was the only customer in the dining-room except one—a thin, elderly person with rather weasel-like features, dressed well, but quietly. He looked as though he might be a politician, or somebody connected with such law as there was in Paris in those days. He was breakfasting at a table in the window, and Hoba Hona who like most unstudious men liked company, civilly requested permission to share the table.

The political man slid across the table a bulging purse. "Take that, friend; and at the hour of three be at—" He dropped his voice to a whisper.

The political-looking person acquiesced readily; he went so far, indeed, as to state that it would be a great pleasure to him, running his eye over Mr. Honey as he spoke, in a needle-pointed gaze that left very little of the bravo's outward appearance unnoted.

Both men were evidently hungry, and little beyond ordinary civilities was said for about three-quarters of an hour. Then, engulfing the quart of wine he had ordered, and calling for a further quart, Mr. Honey leaned back with a sigh of content.

Twirling his gigantic black mustache, he gazed across at his tablemate.

"A fair city, sir," he said conversationally. The political-looking man reflected for a moment.

"It is alleged to be, sir," he said cautiously. Then, expanding a little, he added: "It is fair to those who can pay their way."

"Ha, ha!" went Mr. Honey, with a somewhat forced laugh. "You are of a practical turn of mind, I perceive. And how fares it with those who cannot pay their way, sir?"

"Meagerly, my friend, meagerly," responded the politician. "They die considerably."

"Ha! Is that so?" The bravo frowned. "And how fares it with a man who is prepared to carve his way, good sir? What does Paris hold for a man of gentle birth who is a past-master of the rapier, whose dagger-work is perfection, whose wits are keen, whose brains are super-excellent, and whose person is highly presentable? How fares it in Paris with such a man?"

"That would largely depend upon his courage and industry. Do you know of such a man?" inquired the politician, gazing at Mr. Honey through half-closed lids.

"He sits before you," said the bravo complacently.

"Indeed?" murmured the other, with but mild interest.

"Fresh from Rome," added Mr. Honey.

"Ah!"

"With the best blade in all Italy to keep him company." The bravo tapped his rapier.

"Could you not find service in the South?" asked the politician.

"I refused orders from one king, two princes, several cardinals, and a large number of noblemen," lied Hoba robustly. "*Why,* you will ask. Because I was afflicted with an itch to see Paris again—I am half-French—I declined them all. I said: 'When I return, gentles, we will talk together, but—for the nonce there is nothing—er—doing. Let me alone. I am for Paris!' And I came away. Here I am—a good man, a rare man, a godsend to anyone in need of a bravo! Have you such a need, sir, or do you know anyone who has? I am open to accept contracts for a week or so on paltry terms. Later, up goes the price. Anything, anywhere, any time. I will run your man through in fair fight or in foul, according to price. I will pull him down and release him from the cares and anxieties of this life, in the open or up an alley, as per orders. I use daggers, rapiers, broadswords, pistols, sandbags, mallets, crowbars, saws, razors, hammers, any weapon you choose to name, all equally well. My motto, sir, is '*Business*'. If you want anyone pinked in the mazzard, let me know, and I will quote you. If you prefer to have him shoved over a cliff, call on me and name your figure. My name, sir, is Hoba Hona. Mother hush their children with the sound of it in Italy, and men step off the sidewalk when they see me coming. And my terms are low, but for quick cash; no credit given in any circumstances whatever. Are you on?"

The political man surveyed him in silence for a moment, then suddenly slid across the table a bulging purse.

"Take that, friend, as a precursor of many larger ones to come, and at the hour of three be at—"

He dropped his voice to a whisper, naming an address, rose abruptly, and without waiting an instant save to glean that Mr. Honey understood, he slid out of the room. . . .

At three o'clock Mr. Honey was at the appointed place—to wit, a side-door of a mysterious-looking house in a side courtyard in a side-street. It was, indeed, a very side-long affair altogether. The political man, looking more political than ever, received him silently at the door, and steered him to a small apartment furnished with excessive plainness.

"Here," said the man, locking, bolting, and barring the door, "we shall be unheard and unseen."

Mr. Honey sighed gustily and sat down.

"Dry work, talking!" he said. "However, let's get on with it. What do you want done? And whom? And how much?"

The political person leaned across the table, and gimleting Mr. Honey with his eyes, began to whisper. He whispered long and earnestly, the bravo nodding his complete comprehension.

Presently he finished, with a final question as to what Mr. Honey would charge.

"Charge? Let me see," said the bravo musingly. "You

want me to go tonight to one of the pavilions of the king near Versailles and await the arrival of a gentleman in a crimson cloak, who will reach there to dine with Madame la Marquise de Montespan at eight o'clock precisely. I am to obliterate him and return here to report. Well, it will cost you a thousand pistoles net cash. Killing people round kings' pavilions comes high, you know."

The political-looking person pushed a bulging leather bag across the table without hesitation.

"There are twelve hundred pistoles there," he said. "Do your work; then remain at the inn, living quietly, until you hear from or see me again."

"Very good, sir," replied Mr. Honey, with a new respect in his voice.

He had expected to be offered a hundred pistoles, and would have taken ten rather than lose the contract.

At seven-thirty that evening the bravo might have been seen standing behind a tall thick shrub at the side of a path, some twenty yards from a beautiful little pavilion in the woods, not far from the palace at Versailles. He held his naked rapier in his hand, and was peering steadily up the path.

He looked much like a beast of prey crouching for his spring. There was in his pose a sinister and tense alertness that augured ill indeed for the gentleman who was coming to dine at the pavilion with Madame de Montespan, king's favorite, that evening.

Mr. Honey intended to make no mistakes. This was his chance in life, he argued; for while he had not the very faintest notion as to whom the political-looking person was, he knew that the man was a somebody, and he intended to please him.

So he crouched, waiting and staring.

Then suddenly a big black hound came running silently along the path toward the pavilion.

"Hah!" breathed Mr. Honey.

The hound saw him when he was about three yards away, and without hesitation, leaped at him, like a dog that had been trained to leap at strangers on sight.

The bravo's wrist moved slightly, and the hound seemed to transfix itself upon the ever-ready blade. The thing was magically swift. Within a space of seconds, the hound was dead and dragged into the brushwood.

Then a man came strolling along the path at a leisured pace, humming an air, all unsuspecting.

The bravo, who had dismissed the affair of the hound much as one brushes off a fly from one's cheek, balanced himself, and just as the newcomer came level with the bush, he stepped swiftly out.

Even as he did so a woman's voice rang out warningly from the pavilion.

But the rapier bent like a bow—the king, wisely, was wearing a chain-mail shirt.

"Take care, Louis! An assassin!"

Louis!

Too late to stop the deadly thrust, Mr. Honey realized whom he was killing. The King! The man he had fondly believed he was serving through the political-looking person!

But the rapier, striking true to a hair over the king's heart, bent like a bow and completely failed to penetrate.

The king, wisely, was wearing a chain-mail shirt—and a good one. This would not have saved him, however, had Mr. Honey not discovered in the nick of time with whom he was dealing—for the bravo knew all about chain mail, and his long slender dagger was in his left hand ready to perforate the king where he did not wear mail. But he did not use it. Instead, he dropped on his knees and apologized.

The king looked him over thoughtfully; a very beautiful woman came down the path from the pavilion.

"Shall I signal for the guards, Sire, and have him thrown into prison, pending his torture and execution at dawn?" she said.

Louis XIV shook his head.

"Not immediately, I think, dear madame. I am curious about the rascal. Who are you, fellow, and why do you wish to kill me?"

"Pardon, Sire," said Mr. Honey hurriedly; "it was a case of mistaken identity. I am a bravo, fresh from Italy, and I believed that I was employed to kill an enemy of Your Majesty."

"Employed by whom?"

Without hesitation Mr. Honey described the person of political appearance, and briefly gave the details of the contract. The king's interest deepened. But with a meaning glance at Mr. Honey, which the bravo rightly interpreted as a warning to say no more for a space, the monarch turned to the lady and, with a tender firmness which for all its tenderness brooked no denial, escorted her back to the pavilion.

"It is not seemly that these little ears should hear the base and sordid details of the low intrigue which I must have from the bravo," said Louis fondly, and returned to Mr. Honey.

"Now, ruffian, speak plainly!" he ordered. "You were hired to kill a gentleman in a crimson cloak who was to dine with Madame the Marquise and you believed that you would be serving me by doing so? That is your story? It never occurred to you, dolt, that the gentleman in the crimson cloak might be the King of France, eh? And you believed, ass, that the King of France found it necessary to hire a bravo from Italy to clear a rival out of his way? *Foh,* you are

a fool, I perceive! A million blades are at my disposal, lout, for any purpose."

Humbly, Mr. Honey said that he realized that now. It had escaped his attention before, he added.

"It is merely another plot against my life, clown," said Louis serenely. "And I know perfectly the spinner of it. He shall provide us a little diversion this evening. Remain there, oaf!"

The king blew a shrill call upon a little gold whistle, and within five seconds armed men were racing down the path.

"D'Artagnan," said the king to the foremost of the men, a tough-looking individual in the uniform of the King's Guard. "Dismiss your men—save for Messieurs Porthos, Athos, and Aramis."

The person called D'Artagnan did so.

"It is done, Sire," he announced, rather unnecessarily, as all the men disappeared save himself and three—none other than the famous three musketeers Porthos, Athos, and Aramis.

The king waved an airy hand toward Mr. Honey.

"This black-avised grotesque has attempted to assassinate us, D'Artagnan," said the king.

"Ah!" went the quartette, and turned to the unfortunate bravo. But Mr. Honey was not daunted.

"So be it—four to one!" he said, the point of his rapier flickering like the tongue of a snake. "Mark me, my birds—oaf and lout I may be, but I know my job. Come on!"

But the king intervened to spoil what promised to be a very gory little affair. He ordered the musketeers to put up their steel, and gave a few low-voiced instructions to D'Artagnan. Presently the four men hurried away, and the king turned to Mr. Honey.

"I have sent for the person who employed you to assassinate me," he said. "Doubtless, believing that his plot has miscarried, he will hasten hither. He will come by this path—for all others will be barred to him. Now, I have often felt curious to see a genuine bravo engaged upon his business. Therefore, take your stand and dispatch me this traitor in the correct style of the best bravi. If the work pleases me I may give you your life!"

Mr. Honey did not hesitate. Bowing deeply, he turned away, and made his simple preparations.

"I will show the king how a real bravo gets his daily bread, or I'm a Dutchman," mused Mr. Honey. "And when it is over, if he doesn't feel that, as a matter of common-sense, he ought to import a few more of us—under my command—it will be because he doesn't know real talent when he sees it."

The minutes passed, and, just as the light began to fade, a step sounded from down the path, and the political-looking person came hurrying into view. Mr. Honey, his own life at stake, watched him from behind his bush like a cat.

He worked so swiftly and silently that his victim never realized that he was in grave trouble. Like a cat Mr. Honey watched; like a cat he sprang. This man also was wearing a mail shirt, but it only prolonged his life by three-sixteenths of a second. The bravo seemed almost to sense the mail; he used the dagger, and the hirer of assassins perished without a sound.

THE king paled slightly as he saw that it was not the mail shirt which had saved him. Mr. Honey turned from his victim, bowing deeply, as the king came across and peered down at the dead man.

"Always a viper, traitor, and ingrate!" he murmured. "Well, you have a traitor's reward."

He mentioned no names, and Mr. Honey never knew who the man was. It never occurred to him to inquire—for it was all in the day's work.

The king turned to the bravo.

"A foul trade, bravo!" he said. "I would love to break you on the wheel. But I promised you your life. Begone! If you are in Paris at noon tomorrow you are a dead man!"

Mr. Honey took this as a hint that he need not remain—and he went away. "And that's gratitude!" he said sourly, as he passed out of the wood.

A sudden figure barred his way.

"Monsieur the bravo, I think?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"I am D'Artagnan, and I do not like your face. It is so offensively ugly that it causes me to feel giddy. I wish to fight you because of your face. My friends also"—three more figures loomed through the dusk—"find your features extremely nauseating. They too desire to fight you."

Mr. Honey understood that D'Artagnan was deliberately insulting him to provoke a quarrel. They could not fight him on the grounds of what had occurred that evening, for the king's word protected him.

But if a new quarrel cropped up it simplified things.

"Well, you wart, you and your friends have come to the right man!" Mr. Honey snarled, and his blade came *wheeping* out. "How will you have it? Here and now and one by one—or would you prefer to fight me together? Just as you wish!"

"This is not the hour—we must attend the king!" snapped D'Artagnan. "But tomorrow at dawn, behind the Luxembourg. Does that suit you?"

"It does! I will settle your affair there, pale pups!" said Mr. Honey.

"At dawn then, monsieur, behind the Luxembourg," they said simultaneously.

"I shall be there!" said Mr. Honey.

BUT he was not; by no means was he there. He was, instead, in his flat in London—for even as D'Artagnan and his trio vanished in the direction of the pavilion, the power of the pill waned, and Mr. Honey found himself transferred without warning back to the Twentieth Century.

And, curiously enough, when one considers what an extremely mild-mannered and law-abiding man he was in his modern incarnation, Mr. Honey found himself, for the first time, well satisfied with his adventure.

As he said to Peter the cat, prior to settling down to work:

"I may have been a ruffian—probably I was—but, at any rate, I was a skillful and courageous ruffian, in my way. It isn't everyone who would have taken on D'Artagnan, Porthos, Athos and Aramis as readily as I did—or, at least as I should have done, if I had had time. That is something, at all events. How say you, Peter?"

But Peter had nothing to say. Evidently he did not approve of bravos. Nor, actually, did Mr. Honey—when his enthusiasm cooled down; at any rate, he kept his experience to himself.

This was just as well, for nobody would have believed him had he told them of it. They would have attributed it to dreaming or drink—probably the latter. Already several of his friends had recently told Mr. Honey that he seemed to be changing—becoming harder, harsher, colder. So the burglar who broke into Mr. Honey's flat that night, and took away, among other things, the Chinese glassware bottle containing the marvelous pills, probably did the author a far better turn than he did himself.

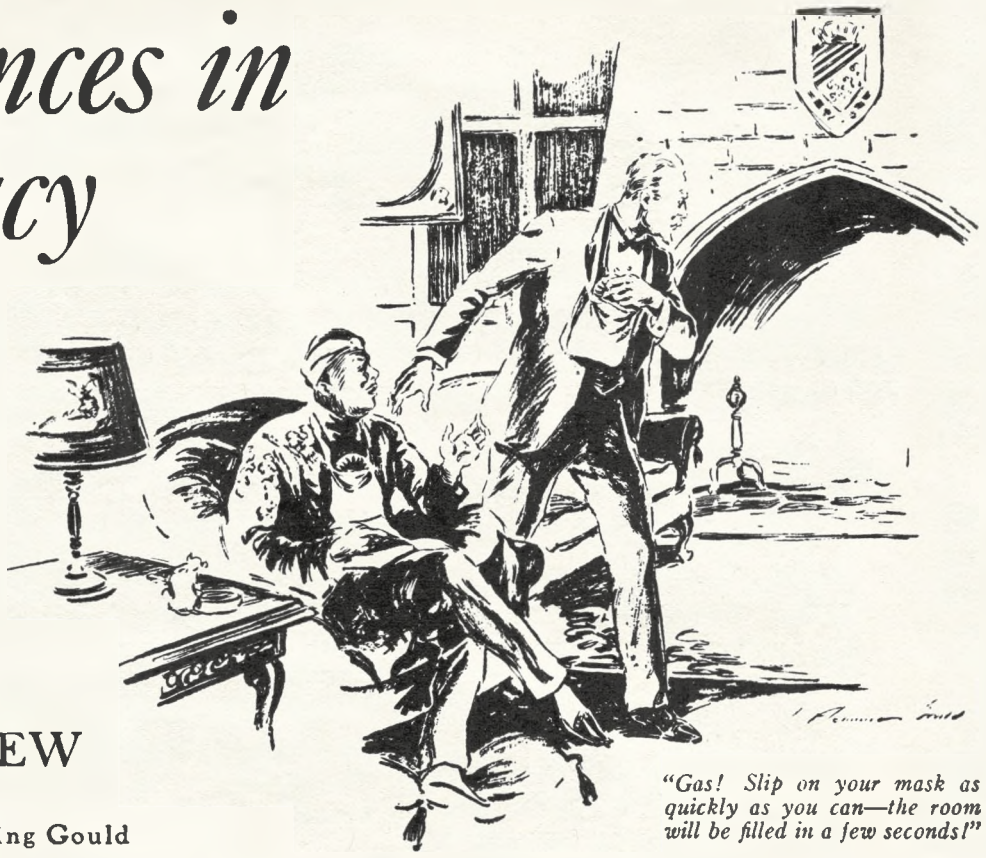
After the first shock, Mr. Honey bore his loss with remarkable fortitude—indeed, with cheeriness—though he often wondered whether that misguided burglar ever chanced to swallow one of the pills—and what happened to the man if he did.

But naturally he never found out.

THE END.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

The uncanny ability of the Free Lances to scent trouble and forestall it is strikingly portrayed in this engrossing story.



"Gas! Slip on your mask as quickly as you can—the room will be filled in a few seconds!"

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

THE Marquess and Marchioness of Lyonesse, accompanied by Earl Lammerford and Prince Abdool of Afridistan, had been spending a fortnight with old friends in Santiago, Chile, and were on their way home in their famous deep-sea yacht *Rance Sylvia*—which had run up the west coast, through the Panama Canal and was now approaching Land's End. They were looking forward in pleasant anticipation to being home again in Trevor Hall, Devon—the only place in the world where the Marquess felt that he could relax entirely without annoyance or worry of any sort. They were speaking of this as they sat in the big comfortable salon, when the radio operator's voice came booming from the dictaphone on a bulkhead shelf by Trevor's desk.

"Message just picked up, sir, from the Kirkee beam-station southeast of Bombay to our radio intelligence service in Whitehall."

"Very good, Martin! Carry on!" said Trevor.

"The Maharajah of Bandracore came down by rail yesterday, from Namullahbad to Bombay, with a retinue of thirty or more and is sailing for Brindisi this afternoon on the *Poona,* of the P. & O. Has arranged for state visits in Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London—where he has leased the town-house of the Duke of Aylbury and expects to spend a month or six weeks. The *Poona* sailed from her anchorage off the Apollo Bunder at three in the afternoon."

"The devil! Any communication from the Viceroy, Martin?"

"No, sir—not yet. I thought of that, and have asked Whitehall to relay anything they get."

"My word, what a mess!" exclaimed the Marquess, turning to the group. "Presumably, the Viceroy never knew a word about it until Bandracore and his suite were actually sailin' on the P. & O. boat. But what were the I. S. S. about, that they didn't pick up some hint of this —conditions bein' what they are out there? Prob'ly wouldn't have done much good if they had—Bandracore's one of the most thoroughly obstinate chaps in all India! He must have kept his intentions dev'lish close, if none of the Indian Service men got the slightest indication of it!"

Lammerford's forehead was puckered in a frown of anxiety.

"If Bandracore were one of the weaker Princes, this wouldn't be so bad," he said slowly; "but he's just the opposite type—educated at Balliol, and a man of the world—thinks nothing can happen to him—mainly because nothing serious ever *has* happened in the past—an' that the dozen 'strong men' in his suite are fully able to protect him and his property against any sort of danger. He knows London—has seen Scotland Yard keep the percentage of murder down to less than a tenth of what it is in his own country—an' thinks he can stay a month in the city with jewels worth over a million sterling—wearin' 'em openly whenever he feels like it, with perfect impunity. And of course at these State durbars arranged for him, he'll not feel dressed unless he's wearin' the entire outfit!"

"Knowing the Oriental mind as we do, I fancy we may credit him with the best of intentions in this visit," Trevor remarked. "He's one of the most loyal supporters of the British Raj, and controls his people absolutely. Presumably he's making this round of State visits to the European Governm'nts as a mark of confidence in Whitehall. What he doesn't see, and can't be made to see, is that he's giving the malcontents the very chance they've been hopin' an' praying for to put the British Raj in a thoroughly treacherous light before all the world. Bandracore is running a whale of a risk from two diff'rent sorts of criminals in making this trip—politicals, who will kill him if they can for the sake of putting us in an impossible position, and crooks, who certainly will do their damnedest to get away with those jewels! And the catch of it is that he's quite safe from either until the moment he sets foot on British soil! When he reaches England, this Labor Gov-

ernm'nt will order Scotland Yard to give the man a reasonable amount of protection, and let it go at that. They're in more or less sympathy with the Indian Nationalists and wouldn't be greatly concerned if we lost India altogether. On the other hand, France, Italy, Portugal and Germany would! If we lose India, it means a general destruction of white influence throughout the Orient—and when it comes to that, the Western world will have a real 'yellow peril' to consider!"

WHEN the *Ranee* dropped them at Trevor Hall and then steamed around to her home-anchorage in Salcombe Harbor, Trevor found his anticipated relaxation out of the question. Although it would be at least two months before the Maharajah of Bandracore reached London with his suite, Trevor and his friends were convinced they would need that much time to make effective preparations for safeguarding His Highness.

On the third day after reaching home, the Marquess flew to London in one of his planes and immediately tried to locate the Duke of Aylbury—whom he finally ran down in the Carlton Club.

Aylbury was an acquaintance of many years' standing—a fellow Conservative with both respect and liking for Trevor. When they had found a secluded corner, he admitted having received a friendly letter from Bandracore in which he had expressed the intention of being in London at some time within a year. Aylbury had cabled him at once offering his big town-house overlooking Hyde Park and describing the arrangements which could be made in it to accommodate His Highness' entire suite, and Bandracore had promptly cabled a deposit to cover at least six weeks' rental—accepting the offer with thanks.

"It struck me, Trevor, that with any reasonable detail from Scotland Yard, the Maharajah will be fairly safe in that house of mine," said Aylbury. "The house is double-width and four stories high. Top floor has six good-sized rooms an' two smaller ones—easy enough to put twenty narrow beds up there for his suite an' accommodate ten more on the third floor, leaving the entire second for Bandracore and the three or four who always sleep near him. He dined with us a couple of years after he came down from Oxford—I showed him over the house at that time; so when I cabled him, he knew it was about what he'd need. It's a mistake, of course, for him to come here at this time. However, as he seemed determined to come, this house of mine ought to make the problem a bit less diffic'lt. What?"

"Aye—it'll help! I say, Aylbury—this proposition is so delicate that I've decided to lend a hand wherever it seemed likely to be effective. Now, if you'll show me the plans of your house, and take me over it, I'll take over the matter of providing all the protection Bandracore should need while he's in it. Sir James Baldwin, who's just been moved up to the Deputy Commissionership of the C. I. D., will exceed whatever orders he gets from the F. O. as far as he dares in this matter, when I explain what we're up against—"

"Excellent, by Jove! Dev'lish fortunate you looked me up, Trevor!" exclaimed Aylbury. "There's a lot of us in the Upper House who know how serious this matter is—but most of 'em lack initiative—an' imagination as well."

AFTER the Duke had shown Trevor the builders' plans of his house—which dated back to William IV—the Marquess called attention to some very faint dotted lines in the thickness of two walls.

"Could those be secret passages, by any chance?" he asked.

"Aye. They'll not have been examined for a matter of six years—since I last went through 'em, oiling the hinges an' locks—never had any occasion to use 'em, d'ye see. There's no chance for any outsider discoverin' 'em because I fancy I'm the only livin' person who knows the secret; they're not shown on the plans filed with the Building Department. But to be on the safe side, I'll take you through 'em—may be good places to put a couple of P. C.'s."

Trevor found that the passage in the south wall ran from a cellar wine-closet up to the owner's bedroom on the second floor—concealed in the massive chimney which permitted mediæval fireplaces on parlor and second floors. The other ran up the north wall in a similar manner—affording communication between another bedroom and the library, in the rear of the drawing-room below.

The Marquess made a hasty pencil-sketch of the floor plans—omitting the secret passages—and took them along to his own mansion in Park Lane to study over with Prince Abdool.

Just after he left the Duke's house, a handsome landaulet drove slowly by on the Park side of the street, and a couple of dark faces peered furtively at the building as it passed. In addition to the men with dark complexions, there were two Londoners of the upper middle-class—the sort who presumably have good commercial berths in the city, and join one of the not-too-expensive clubs. When the car finally turned southward, it took them to a respectable but quite ordinary house in lower Pimlico, not far from the river. In an upper room of this house, four other men sat waiting for them—two more Londoners and a couple of Hindus. One of the white men who had been in the car seemed to be the leader—because of his obvious brains and initiative. The others waited for him to speak.

"Well—we've examined the Duke's house carefully," he said. "I see nothing to interfere with the plan I blocked out this morning, provided there's no hitch as to Bandracore's actually occupying it with his suite and keeping the jewels with him, there. Are you certain he has accepted the Duke's offer, Ghopal Dal?"

"I TALK with my brother in private office, Bombay— by wireless-telephone—at big expense. He say Maharajah send by cable to Duke rupees three thousan' for rentum of seex week'. Maharajah would not pay if inhabiting in mind other house," replied one of the Hindus.

"Fancy that's all the assurance we need, Ghopal! Now, Brady—how about your end of it? The smaller house on the right of the Duke's belongs to the Countess of Melthorpe, who is visiting her married daughter in western Canada. What did you ascertain from her estate agents?"

"They'll lease the house to us, furnished—if references are satisfactory—for three months—not a day longer," said the man called Brady. "Rentals in advance on the first of each month. We guarantee three months' rent—but they reserve the right to terminate the lease and occupancy at any moment if anything seems unsatisfactory. You'll be taking the house as a married couple, with Catarina, I suppose, Blomfield? With her two brothers and a Hindu khansamah—or something of the sort?"

"Aye—unless the Chief has other views. Of course we're only executives in the organization. But I can tell you one thing: We have just about the biggest and most perfectly organized association for this sort of thing in Europe—an organization which pays infernally well if its orders are efficiently carried out—but takes your life with as little compunction as you'd crush a water-bug under your heel, if you try to welsh. Get this fact into your heads, you chaps. You can never get out of the organization! We take no chances upon your keeping your mouth shut—that point we attend to ourselves. You follow me,

I trust? Very good! The Chief may have some couple well known in London society who will appear as the lessees of that house—but I'm of the impression that he thinks Catarina an' I will do. I'll copy the architect's plans at the Building Departm'nt; then we'll know exactly how we can use the house. There's one point we'll have to bear in mind: This Labor Governm'nt isn't going to order anything spectacular in the way of protection for Bandracore—but some of the old Foreign Office men are likely to go beyond any orders that may be given. It'll not be anything of a walk-over, you know—just remember that!"

THE next day the Marquess of Lyonesse, accompanied by the Deputy Commissioner, let himself into Aylbury's house with duplicate keys the Duke had given him, and made a microscopic examination of the building from top to bottom. Sir James was taken through the secret passages and shown exactly where the springs which opened the wainscot-panels were located—testing them himself until he could instantly open any one of them and close the panel after him, in a few seconds.

When they had been over the house twice, from roof to cellar, the Deputy Commissioner said thoughtfully:

"Before we go any further in this, My Lord Marquess, I shall have to ask for more information. You see our line is entirely on the criminal side—not the political. Of course I know perfectly well who the Maharajah is and I assume that he is one of the independent ruling princes of India who has a deal of influence among the other sovereign princes. Very good! He now takes a notion to visit the European States an' then come here for a stay of a month or more. He'll be received by His Majesty with all the courtesy befitting his rank. He'll naturally fetch his wonderful collection of jewels with him to wear upon such occasions—jewels which, of course, will be placed in our strongest safe-deposit vaults at other times. Now—just why does he run any more risk of losing his life or his jewels while here, than in any of the Continental cities? Could you give me that side of it?"

"He's one of the three most loyal friends of the British Raj in all India," Trevor explained. "All India is today fairly seething with communist revolt. If he is killed on British soil it puts us in the position of betraying our salt and permitting the murder of a devoted friend who trusted us. If his jewels are stolen, it is almost as great an outrage. Either or both will just about make the Indian pot boil over—prob'ly mean the loss of India. This is the sort of opportunity the Nationalists have been praying for! They'll jump at it!"

"MY word, sir! This is by way of bein' a more serious matter than I thought!" said Baldwin. "The unfortunate feature is that we have now evidence as to the existence of a big criminal organization operating in all the European capitals—an organization with the cleverest sort of brains scientifically directin' it!"

"Aye—that isn't news to me, Sir James. We knew of it before you did at the Yard—because it goes over onto the political side as well. It's that same organization which I'm trying to outguess an' guard against! Where would you figure their starting in, here?"

"That'll take a bit of thinkin'. Who lives next door?"

"The Countess of Melthorpe, on the right. Out of town at present and the house is closed—but presumably she'll return by the time the season opens—before Bandracore reaches London. That's her habit. On the other side is Sir Barnington Heppleby, the lipstick-an'-cosmetic millionaire. He's in residence with his family—above suspicion, I'd say."

"For that matter—everyone along this block is supposed to be! How about the houses in the rear—on the other street?"

"Easy enough to lease one temporarily—but easily guarded against. Three constables in the rear garden of this house would be able to prevent an attack from that direction—over several brick walls."

"Aye—Your Lordship is quite right as to that, I fancy. They'd prob'ly come over the nearly flat roofs—but we'd have that point guarded, of course. I say, My Lord Marquess, aren't we thinking too much of guarding a house which already would be well guarded by the Prince's own men—and not enough about lookin' after him when he's driving about the town and suburbs in his car? That's about the easiest place of all to kill and rob him—even in broad daylight, if that gang are clever enough to work it out!"

"That was one of the first points I arranged to cover. A gang attacking him in the street would be wearing either constables' uniforms or Hindu clothing like that of his own suite—in the mix-up even the Maharajah and the police themselves would be in doubt as to which was friend and which enemy. But I fancy I've covered that contingency pretty well. The most of the jewels will be left in this house under the guard of his own men a good deal of the time—he'll not wear 'em while lunching or dining with friends about town in the clubs or hotels."

NOW we follow the movements of the Maharajah himself—and three Foreign Office men whom the Marquess had summoned to a conference after they had obtained two months' leave. Unknown to Bandracore, these men had followed him from one Continental city to another, keeping him under close surveillance.

In London the Maharajah and his retinue settled down after a round of princely entertainment. The Marquess and Prince Abdool had met him at Folkestone and accompanied him to London. When he heard that there would be a force of plain-clothes police in the house during his stay, Bandracore at first refused point-blank to permit anything of the sort, pointing out that he had just traveled all over Europe without the slightest attempt to molest him. But Trevor gave him the British side of it so convincingly that he finally agreed to accept whatever provisions were made for his safety. He absolutely balked, however, at putting his jewels in a safe-deposit vault.

The F. O. men reported that five Hindus had been following the Maharajah from one city to another and were then in the dock neighborhood of London, though under close espionage. But so absolutely circumspect had been their movements that neither the F. O. men nor Scotland Yard had turned up a trace of connection with Blomfield, Ghopal Dal, Brady or others of the gang—who so far were unknown and unsuspected. When this particular lot had moved into the Countess' house as Mr. and Mrs. Seldon Byers—with Mrs. Byers' two brothers and a Hindu servant—Sir James at once saw the estate agents in reference to them. But the references given were so unimpeachable, and the appearance of all five so entirely respectable that he couldn't find the slightest evidence of anything suspicious, especially as they had leased the house two months before Bandracore's arrival in London—at a time when even the newspapers had no information whatever that he had taken the Duke's house for his stay.

It had been the Marquess' hunch that at least two constables should be posted in the Aylbury house every night from the time the Maharajah took it up to the moment of his arrival—but Sir James pointed out that this idle employment of officers needed in other places would be almost certain to draw upon him Parliamentary inquiry which he was trying to avoid until the time came when he actually

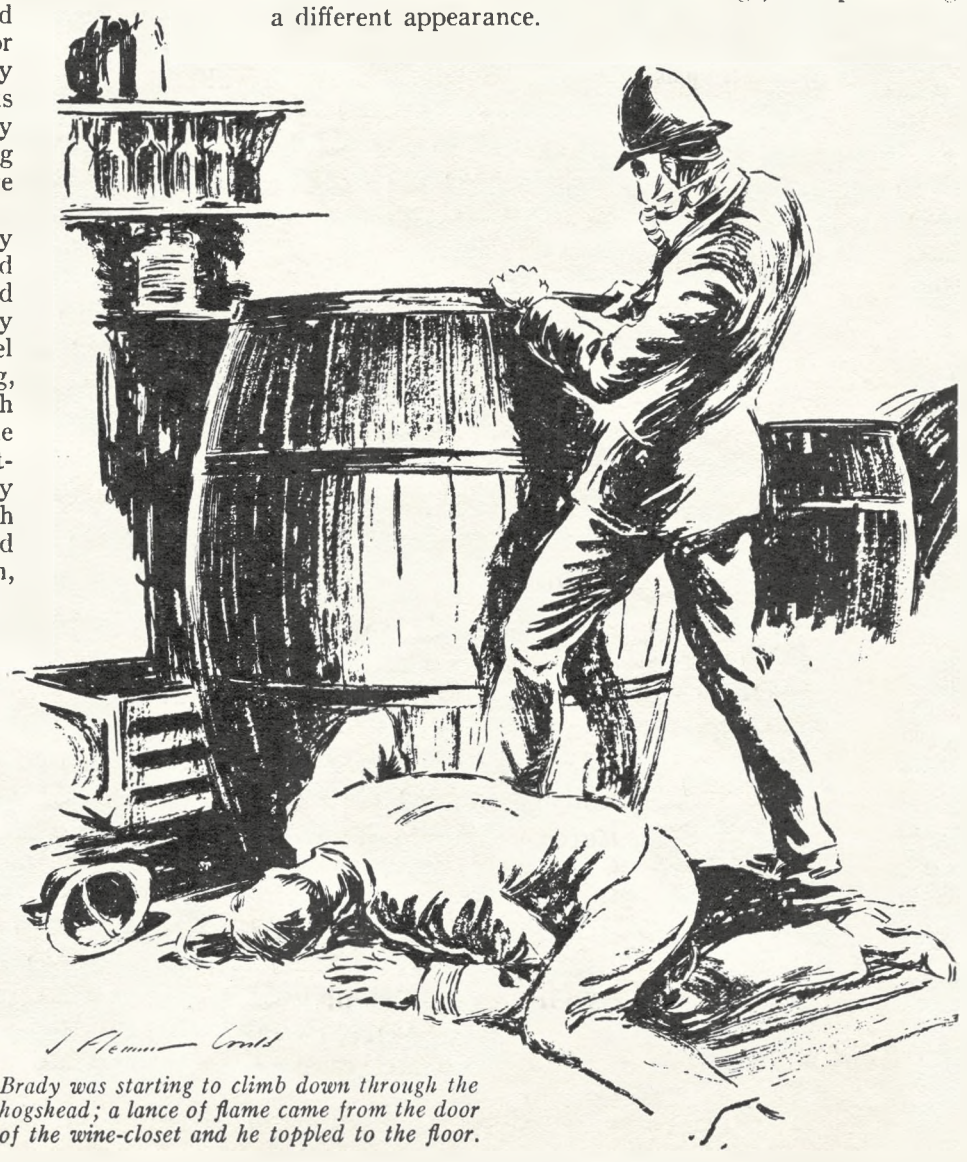
had to use a good deal larger force than he was authorized to in Bandracore's case. He had the house thoroughly inspected twice a week and discovered nothing suspicious in it. Yet the Marquess had been right just the same; with the house occupied even by a couple of constables, it would have been much more difficult—if not impossible—to do what the men next door actually did without attracting attention to themselves.

The first move in Blomfield's activities was the use of four highly sensitive microphone-transmitters attached to portable receiving sets in which three radiotron tubes amplified so greatly whatever the microphones picked up, that with a microphone held tightly against the dividing wall upon each floor, it was possible for him to be certain that no human being was in the Duke's house during certain nights. Upon the occasions when the two Yard men inspected the house, Blomfield and his confederates heard every word they spoke—heard the squeaking of their shoes on the floor—the creaking of floor and stair-boards. Consequently they found opportunity to drill four-inch holes through the wall into the chimney-flues of the Duke's house on each floor, just above the fireplaces, front and back. One night they got into the house through a roof-skylight and carefully removed every grain of the brick-dust which had fallen down the flues upon the stones of the fireplaces, and before they left they searched and measured the cellar, along the dividing wall between the two houses. In the rear corner against the wall, standing upon several rough two-inch planks, they came upon an old hogshead used as a receptacle for wooden boxes and crates, and carefully figured out the position of this in its relation to their own cellar. When they returned over the roof, after removing all traces of their invasion, they were ready for their next move.

On their side of the cellar wall they dug a pit in the floor eight feet deep and four feet square, which they lined and braced with bits of board. Then they drove a short four-by-four-foot tunnel under the foundation of the wall and dug, upward, a three-by-three-foot shaft which came exactly under the bottom of the hogshead in the Duke's cellar. Shifting the hogshead to one side, they sawed through three of the rough planks in such a way that, when it had been replaced in its former position, the cuts were hidden and the planks—held by bolts and hinges—could be let down into the shaft at will. The bottom of the cask was then cut out—fastened with hinges and bolts so that it could be pushed up inside when the planks underneath had been dropped. Owing to the unwieldy size and weight of the hogshead, there wasn't one chance in a thousand that, even in shifting it, anybody would tip it far enough to see the hinge and bolt on the under side. As there were but six forty-watt bulbs in the whole of the big double cellar, there wasn't enough light to see the joints in the planking under the hogshead unless one looked closely with a flashlight after the thing had been shifted. They then screwed cleats on the inside of the cask in positions which held an old discarded crate as if it had got jammed in that position.

Three weeks before the Maharajah was due in London, all their arrangements had been completed without attracting the slightest attention from police or anybody else. The earth removed from the two shafts and tunnel—which didn't amount to a great deal—had been put in a reserve coal-bin at the forward end of the Countess' cellar, and six inches of loose coal shoveled on top of it—after which, the shaft was concealed under a couple of old crates. The holes drilled through the dividing wall on each floor were in positions where pictures or trophies belonging to the Countess hung over and concealed them. Had the police raided the house and discovered these evidences of criminal activity there wasn't a scrap of evidence to show that the work hadn't been done long before "Mr. and Mrs. Seldon Byers" leased the place. . . .

Upon the evening that Blomfield and his confederates finished their preparations the Marquess of Lyonesse was dining at the Piccadilly with Captain James Walsingham of the F. O., when a thick-set, bearded man whom the waiters seemed to know came in with a dark-complexioned guest—who might have been of any nationality from his cosmopolitan manner, but whom Trevor and the Captain spotted very quickly as an educated Hindu. His companion puzzled the Marquess—who was certain that he had seen the man in other surroundings, and presenting a different appearance.



Brady was starting to climb down through the hogshead; a lance of flame came from the door of the wine-closet and he toppled to the floor.

"I say, Jimmy! . . . . Who the devil is that fellow?" he asked the Captain. "The waiters seemed to know him at a glance!"

"Well—they would, you know," replied Walsingham. "He's by way of bein' a gourmand, and a connoisseur in vintage wines—a man supposed to be worth anything you like to figure, from his various int'rests. Nobody can mention a comp'ny upon whose Board he sits—but he's said to have accounts in four of the biggest London Banks. It's said he buys political influence when he needs it an' sails pretty close to the wind in some of his transactions—but nobody seems to name one that would come under that head. Since he first came swimming into our pond, some five years ago, he's been known as Herman Barthold, capitalist and commercial developer, who always has leisure to come and go wherever his fancy takes him on business or pleasure. The man with him is Gohrantje Dass—one of an importing firm here in London—head office, Calcutta. Son of a subordinate clerk in a native banking-house. Nobody knows how or where he got the money for a start—unless he was backed by the Nationalist organization, as I suspect—but he was educated at Harrow and Cambridge—went in for the socialist side, of course. We think in Downing Street that he's one of the big Nationalist leaders who swims pretty deep and is building up that organization into something which is dev'lish dangerous right now, though we've not been able to prove anything of the sort against him.

"H-m-m—you're sitting in with us on this Bandracore affair, Jimmy—an' you know Sir James has been dev'lish uneasy, of late, over a super-criminal organization which he is positive exists—using modern scientific methods and controlled by brainy men. It struck me, as you were speaking, that this Herman Barthold would be exactly the type to head such a super-criminal association—work out the problems in the background. And Gohrantje Dass, yonder—if he really is a big executive of the Hindu Nationalists—would be the most probable man to be associated with the super-criminal organization in such a proposition as this one of Bandracore's—he to look after the Maharajah's elimination, and Barthold to figure out a successful jewel-theft. Eh?"

"My word! That's an idea worth mulling over, Marquess—it fits in amazingly! I say! . . . . Bandracore isn't due for another three weeks. But within a couple of days I'll have some of our chaps on the trail of both those men, night an' day—just in case. Eh? Might turn up something a bit surprising!"

Now this was but one of the many instances where the goddess of chance loads the dice with opportunity—and never afterward repeats the particular throw. Had the Marquess and Walsingham shadowed those two men when they came out of the Piccadilly, they would have established a suspicious connection that would have enabled them to smash the big criminal association or permanently cripple it within a month—but there didn't appear to be any reason for acting as promptly as that, for Barthold and Dass were both men of position and social affiliations in London who could be located at almost any time. The catch in the proposition was that, upon that particular evening, the two called upon Blomfield and his confederates in the Countess' house for the first and only time during the progress of the whole affair—the only time when any sort of connection might have been established with the others. Having satisfied himself that the lessees of the Countess' house had been sufficiently vouched for, Sir James had given no orders at that time concerning a report upon any callers who might visit them.

Blomfield, Catarina and Brady knew Herman Barthold as presumably one of the organization's inner circle—one of perhaps four or five chief executives—but it never had occurred to them that he might be actually the dreaded "Chief" in supreme command. Upon the three occasions when Blomfield had talked with the chief, he had been a man of noticeably different voice, manner and general appearance. Barthold could have defied every one of them to prove anything against them. It is true, he had roughly drawn upon a scrap of wrapping-paper a certain symbol which compelled them to carry out blindly whatever orders he might give them, and had then lighted his cigar with the burning paper—but the proof was merely their word against his. And they had been told that perhaps half a dozen men had the authority to give them orders over that ideograph. Cobwebby stuff to swear before a British jury!

When they sat down in the Countess' study back of the drawing-room, Blomfield gave his callers a résumé of just what had been done in the way of preparation—after which he led the way down into the cellar and showed them the old crates on the floor in the rear.

Barthold nodded thoughtfully.

"Good! Excellent! . . . . Not a thing actually to implicate you in all this if you sit tight and stick to your denials. Well—I think we shall make a bit of a test—a sort of time-schedule. If everything goes off according to plan we'll have an hour or two for anything we care to do. But we can't depend upon things moving like clockwork—there will be a hitch, somewhere. I'd say that we should finish up in fifteen minutes at the outside. The Duke has had his library safe fetched up to his private bedroom, which is to be occupied by Bandracore, as I understand. How good a safe is it?"

"Good modern house-safe—the average 'pete-man' would have to drill and blow the lock—prob'ly an hour or so. I've opened it twice by listening with my ear tight against the steel and feeling of it with the tips of my fingers. If they don't change the combination, I'll open it inside of a minute. If they do—five minutes at the outside. The jewels will be locked in it overnight—there's no other place in the house where he could put them away with any safety. By the way, Barthold—it's thoroughly understood, you know, that Ghopal is to give us a good fifteen minutes to get off in the car with the stones before he and his lot operate on Bandracore! Otherwise—we'll just shoot them to insure our get-away!"

"You'll not have to; that arrangement is thoroughly understood. Now we'll go down through your tunnel— up to that safe—open it—get back—wait ten minutes for Ghopal's schedule—and see how long we really need."

The six men went down the shaft-ladder, crawled through the tunnel, climbed the smaller ladder in the other shaft, dropped the hinged planks, pushed up the hogshead-bottom, lifted over the old crate without making a sound, climbed through the hogshead, and went up to

the second floor. When they had all returned, Barthold said they had taken just twelve minutes—outside of Ghopal's time—and thought twenty-five minutes would be ample.

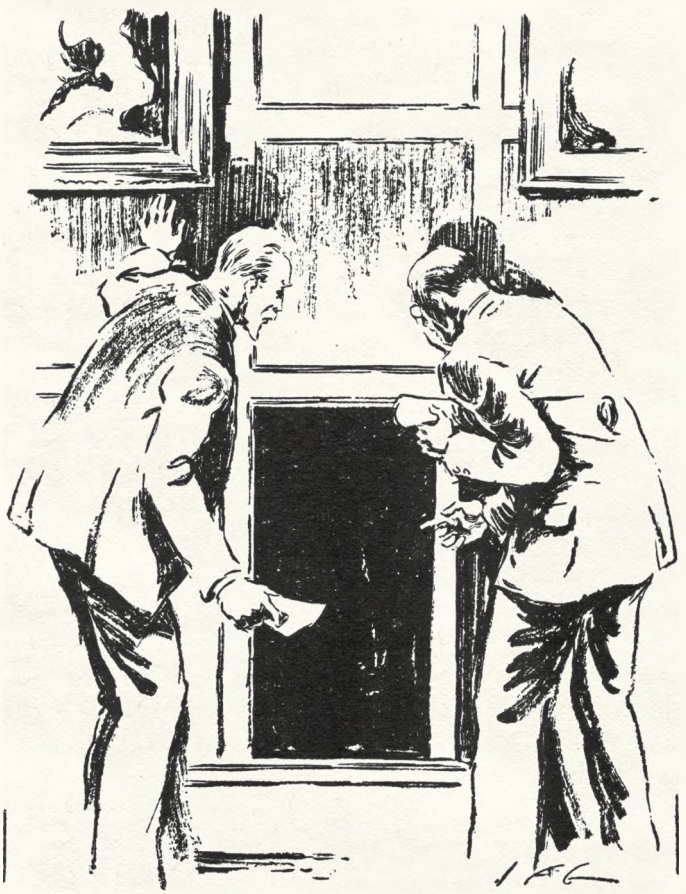
Next morning, while Blomfield and his gang were out in various parts of the city, the Marquess and Walsingham came around to the Aylbury house for another inspection—to see if anything fresh occurred to them. It was the Captain's first visit. After going from the roof to the cellar, they went back to the Duke's bedroom.

"It seems to me, Marquess, that if I were trying to pull off anything like this, I'd tackle the Maharajah when he was out somewhere in his car," Walsingham remarked. "Just why have you decided they wont try that?"

"They might try to *kill* him that way—but they couldn't be sure of the jewels," Trevor explained. "When he goes to a durbar at Buckingham or Windsor, there will be a sufficient escort to prevent them from getting anywhere near him an' I've made a few arrangem'nts of my own in addition to that. If he's not going to any big social function, he'll have but a few of the jewels on him. The proposition is so infernally big that about their only chance for success lies in making one good job of it. And I'm willing to wager it'll be tried in this house."

"H-m-m—wait a bit! Let me figure that over. Bandracore an' his suite count up about thirty-five. You're havin' six P. C.'s inside the house—three more on the roof—three in the rear garden—and one standing by a police telephone that'll fetch one of the flying squads in less than three minutes. Now—you can see as well as I do that this means putting forty-seven men, besides Bandracore, completely out of business right at the start—before they attempt another move. How will they do that?"

"Stout fella, Jimmy! I don't know why I hadn't thought of that before! Sir James didn't, either! I suppose it would have occurred to one of us before it was too late—and yet, by a fluke, it might not! It's a gas-proposition, of course—no other way of pulling it off! I don't see yet how they can get gas into the house—but they will! Doubtless have it all figured out even now. Well—the answer to that is, gas-masks for every man in the house—every minute of the day or night. As we used to in the war—hanging around our necks—put 'em on at the first little smart in our noses. An' not a word of it mentioned outside of the house! Masks camouflaged with something to prevent the tradesmen from seein' an' twigging 'em—an' gossiping about 'em outside. It'll take some doing to drill Bandracore an' his suite in using the masks, but it'll have to be done—otherwise we'll have some thoroughly dead men on our hands!"



Sir James was shown exactly where the springs which opened the secret wainscot-panels were located—testing them himself.

THERE is always a nice psychological point between attack and defense—most strategists holding that considerable advantage must always lie with the attack. In the offensive, there is exact knowledge of the object to be attained, and one or two alternate variations in case the first thrust is unexpectedly met. In the defense, there is seldom advance knowledge of the points to be attacked—it is usually a matter of outguessing the enemy, if possible, and being prepared for him.

Considering the magnitude of what they were attempting, it was somewhat surprising that Blomfield's gang and the additional men who had been sneaked in to assist in the attempt showed no evidence of nervousness as the appointed night drew near. Probably one reason for the cool way in which they were approaching the proposition was the fact of their almost ridiculous successes in five or six previous affairs running to rather staggering sums in the way of booty. They saw no reason now for failure. . . .

Captain Walsingham and Sir James Baldwin were dining with the Trevors in Park Lane on that zero evening. Manderson, the Foreign Secretary, had been joking them in Downing Street that afternoon over what he called the ridiculous nonsense of maintaining so heavy a guard over the Hindu Prince. It had seemed to them at the time that Manderson was defying the Fates. Trevor even mildly advised him to "touch wood" or buy himself a rabbit's foot!

And as they sat down in the big Jacobean library, across the hall, for their coffee and tobacco, a phone-call from one of Captain Walsingham's F. O. men in the East End proved the soundness of this suggestion. The Secret-Service man reported that several Hindus whom he had been closely watching in the dock neighborhood had suddenly left in taxis and were apparently making for the Hyde Park district. This seemed to the party about all the hint needed. Trevor decided upon going around to the Aylbury house about midnight and remaining there a few hours. Walsingham and Sir James promptly expressed their intention of accompanying him. Lammerford and Prince Abdool would have gone also, but the Marquess vetoed it.

"You chaps are first-chop fighting-men—but in this case you'd simply be adding two more in an already overcrowded house. If there's really a gas-attack an' that bunch of Hindus lose their heads in spite of all their drilling, they may bring about a lot of casualties in spite of anything we can do. Can't shout orders through a gas-mask, you know!"

When they reached the house, the Maharajah was reading in the Duke's library, while his three personal attendants squatted upon rugs at the other end of the room. Two of the Yard men were in the big hall with half a

dozen of the Hindu guard. Seated upon the steps of the secret passage behind a wainscot-panel within six feet of His Highness was a detective sergeant with an automatic in one hand and the other on the panel spring. On the second floor there were two P. C.'s and six of the well-armed Hindu bodyguard. On the top floor sixteen men were asleep—twelve of them due to go on duty later.

Trevor and his companions settled down in comfortable chairs for a chat with Bandracore.

OF course Blomfield's gang realized that there would be at least fifteen men on duty all night in the next house, and fairly wide-awake—they knew there would be no such luck as striking any time when the entire household were asleep. But they counted upon the usual drowsiness about two o'clock, and had decided that would be as good a time to start anything as they were likely to get. No word had leaked out about the gas-masks. They assumed, as would everyone else, that a gas-attack in a house so thoroughly guarded would be considered impossible, and no measures taken to guard against it. . . .

The Marquess—keyed up to an unusually sensitive pitch—heard the faint *plop* of the thin container on the library hearthstones, and jumped to his feet, automatically slipping the gas-mask over his face—but delayed just long enough, holding his breath, to drop the Maharajah's mask over his head and to say, sharply, but not loudly:

"*Gas!* . . . . *Gas!* . . . . Slip on your masks as quickly as you can—the room will be filled in a few seconds! Get out into the hall! Quickly!"

As the Hindus ran out, Trevor slid back the wainscot-panel, pushed Bandracore into the secret passage, and quickly closed the panel again. The sergeant was putting on his mask—said he would run up and call down the other passage to warn Sergeant Farrar—then return and stand by His Highness—all of which had been understood with Trevor before. Slipping up his mask for a moment, the Marquess said in Bandracore's ear that probably very little of the gas would penetrate into the secret passage, which was ventilated by a duct running up to the top of the chimney, and warned him to stay where he was until he or Walsingham came back to get him. Then Trevor raced up the steps, out through the panel in the second-floor room and up to the top floor, where he assisted the Yard men in waking the sleeping Hindus and getting them out into the halls with their masks on, assisted by others who had remembered their drill sufficiently to get everybody out of the rooms and down into the big foyer on the parlor floor, through which a current of air was blowing from a large rear window. Four of the sleeping Hindus were already beyond help; several of the others had scarcely enough strength to get downstairs after all of the doors opening into the halls had been closed.

Supposing that the gas-containers had been dropped down the chimneys from the roof, it looked as though the main attack was coming from that direction and that the constables up there must be dead or hard-pressed. The Marquess, followed by Sir James and two constables, raced up through the scuttle, only to find everything quiet up there, and they hurried back again to the lower floor.

Meanwhile four men in police uniforms, and three others dressed exactly like the Hindus of Bandracore's suite, all with gas-masks over their faces, quietly climbed out of the hogshead in the cellar and went up to the second floor without being questioned or stopped by anyone. In a crowd of forty men wearing gas-masks, who would think of questioning police constables in uniform or men of the Maharajah's household? Who could see enough of their faces to suspect them? Leaving two supposed constables guarding the door, the others went into Bandracore's bedroom, where they had the safe open inside of two minutes, and dumped the jewels upon a big silk handkerchief. This they twisted into a round bundle and covered with a spare gas-mask, which swung from Blomfield's left hand as he left the room and beckoned his men downstairs again as if posting them in different parts of the house.

As nobody appeared to be following them, Blomfield led his men casually down the basement stairs into the cellar and stopped by an old deal table upon which he opened up the silk handkerchief and sorted the jewels into three piles—motioning to Brady and another man to stow them securely inside their shirts and button the police tunics over them, and doing the same with his own pile. He then pointed toward the hogshead. Brady was starting to climb down through it when a lance of orange-colored flame came streaking from the door of the wine-closet—and he toppled to the floor. The other man was scrambling up over the edge when a bullet through his spine cramped his fingers over the edge of the cask—the lifeless body hung there until the fingers were pried loose.

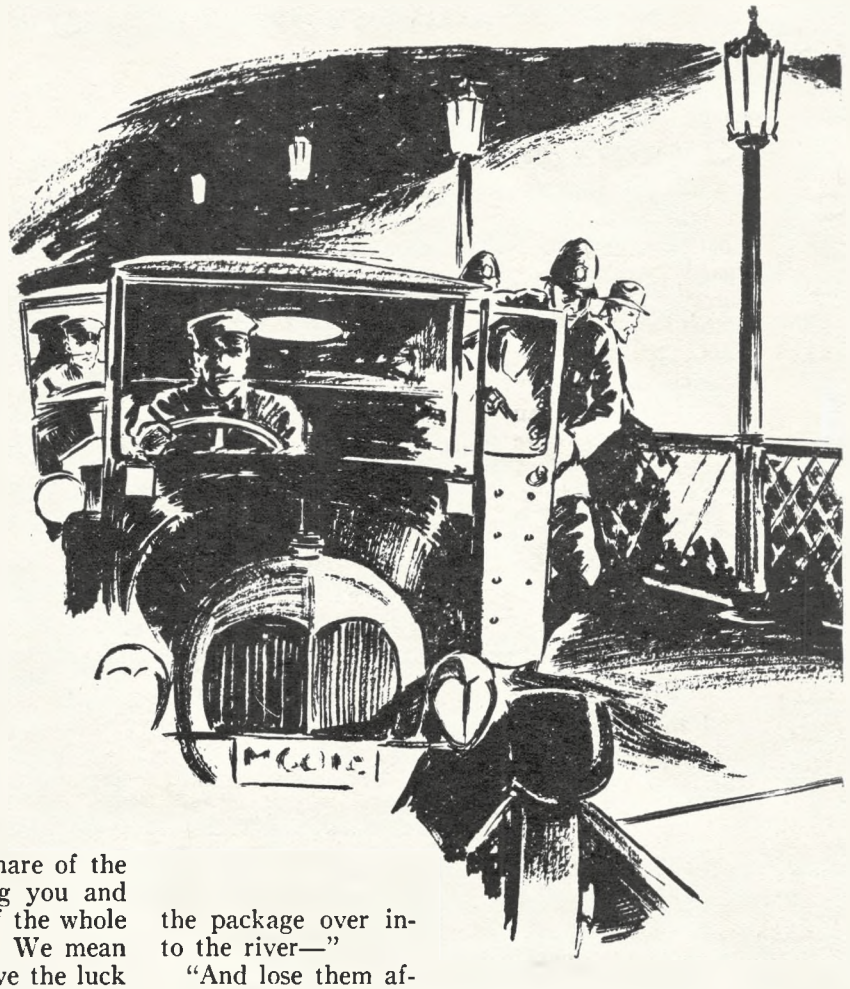
Walsingham, running into the Maharajah's bedroom to see if anyone had been left in there, had found Sergeant Farrar stepping out of the secret panel. Suspecting that an entrance might have been obtained in some way through the cellar, he stepped into the passage, motioning the detective sergeant to close the panel as he followed. They hurried down as silently as they could, stepped out into the wine-closet—and watched Blomfield through a crack in the door as he divided the jewels. When the intruders started toward the big hogshead, the Captain began firing. But while he was doing so, Blomfield cut loose with his own gun—one of the shots going through Farrar's shoulder and the other grazing the Captain's skull just enough to make him dizzy for a moment. Before his head cleared again, Blomfield had run up the basement stairs and quietly gone out of the basement door, which he unbolted, removing the gas-mask as he went. He heard the bell of a flying-squad wagon as he stepped out upon the sidewalk—but he was around the corner before it appeared, and disappeared into a waiting car.

ALL this, of course, had occurred in a very short time: it was probably less than five minutes between the time Trevor gave the alarm in the library, shoved His Highness into the secret passage, ran up to the roof with Sir James, and returned to get the sleeping men out into the halls. Knowing nothing of the uniformed constables and Hindus who had gone up to Bandracore's bedroom a moment before, his first anxiety was for the safety of the Maharajah—and he slipped into the library passage from the other room on the second floor. His Highness and Sergeant Maltby were quietly sitting on the steps with their masks on.

Throwing his pocket flashlight on a page of his loose-leaf memorandum-book, Trevor wrote instructions for the sergeant to get two constables of whom he was absolutely sure, and fetch them into the library—then completely to surround the Maharajah as the five of them walked out of the front door and down the steps to the Marquess' car still parked at the curb. Trevor was taking no chances of having his friend knifed or shot.

When they were safely inside the car, he said:

"They counted upon getting Your Highness with the gas, either in your bedroom or the library. I don't know just what's happening in there now, but the one point we can gamble on is that there are at least a few Hindu Nationalists in the house, somewhere, waiting their chance to knife or strangle you. Until we've cleaned the place out and found how they got in, you're going to be my guest in Park Lane. I'll leave you there with the March-



ioness and Prince Abdool—then I'll come back an' see what really did happen. Hello! Now that's dev'lish odd! D'you see that constable come out of the basement door? . . . . See him—walking along to the corner—taking his time as if nothing had been going on in there?"

The Marquess picked up the tube and spoke to his chauffeur.

"I say, Achmet! Run the car along to the corner an' see where that constable goes! Looks to me as if he were one of the gang who got in. My word! He's turning down the side street—he had that car waiting for him! —Achmet, follow that car! Don't let it get away from you! No use trying to keep out of sight—he'll know we're after him when he looks around."

"You think, Trevor," asked Bandracore, "that this man we are following could have had time to open that safe and get any of my jewels? Hardly possible!"

"I think, old chap, that this affair was planned to the last infinitesimal detail by a super-criminal organization that has been getting away with some of the most staggering robberies. I'm almost positive that your damned Indian Nationalists have been working with this organization—not for any share of the jewels, but for the opportunity of eliminating you and holding up the British Raj to the execration of the whole world. So far, your life and liberty are safe. We mean to jolly well see that they remain so—if we have the luck to outguess those devils. But—if you want my opinion—I'd say they prob'ly cleaned out that safe. I doubt if they'd permit any one of their lot to take the whole of the loot away with him— Hmph! . . . That car certainly is heading for the river! . . . Vauxhall Bridge, prob'ly—an' somewhere on the Surrey side! —Overhaul 'em, Achmet—get right on their tail an' we'll see what happens! Maltby, you three get your guns ready, so you can step out on the running-board an' shoot! It's likely enough they'll begin potting at us through that little rear window, pretty soon. We don't know how many are in that car—but our glass is all bullet-proof, so they can't hit us, an' this car can run circles around that one!"

Meanwhile the man and the woman in the other car had been attending to their own affairs. Pulling down the curtains as soon as he stepped into the car, Blomfield had stripped off the summer-weight uniform, revealing a lounge-suit underneath. A little alcohol and water loosened the false mustache and cleaned off the slight grease-pencil makeup. A constable's lightweight tunic and trousers, properly folded, make a much smaller bundle than one might fancy—especially if wrapped in strong manila paper and tied securely. Before knotting the string, however, he took a look out of the rear window and saw the following car less than fifty feet behind.

"Looks as though we're in for it, Catarina! I'm going to chuck this uniform out through the window as soon as we're well on the bridge—but they'll quite possibly see it go over the parapet—know we got rid of some sort of evidence. We can deny that and stick it out—or could, if it were not for the jewels. No use letting you take them—if you jumped, they'd nab you in half a block. If I get out and you go on with the car, they'll drop a couple of men to arrest me and let the others follow you. This car is no match for theirs, good as it is. Now—just a moment! I have it! I'll tie up the jewels inside this uniform—they're heavy enough to sink it—then toss the package over into the river—"

"And lose them after all our work? No! Listen here! . . . . . This is the car the Chief gave me—it has a secret compartment under the seat—"

"Which they'll find if they have to rip the whole tonneau to bits! No—my plan is better! I've been down in a diving-suit at night. With a powerful watertight flashlight, it's no diffic'lt matter to locate anything on bottom in fifteen or twenty feet of water. After a month or two, we get hold of an old barge and small tug—come slowly down the river at night an' get jammed going through one of the arches, as barges often do. We'll know where the jewels are—and these are the big ones—the pick of the lot! Even if we lay low for six months, we know where the stones are to be found."

"Suppose Scotland Yard sends down a diver in the daytime—to look for the package we dropped?"

"Here's an idea! There's a bit of fog settlin' down—it'll be a bit misty on the bridge. We stop the car in the middle. I jump out an' run across to the parapet—you after me as if I were going to drown myself an' you were trying to stop me. In the scuffle, I drop the package over into the water. You coax me back into the car. And we go on as if nothing had happened—with not a particle of evidence against us! Eh?"

"H-m-m—that's not so bad, Ned. Fancy it may work—with a bit of mist to help. We're almost down to Vauxnall! Tie up the stones in the lining of that tunic, with the trousers outside—and knot 'em securely. The paper won't last under water, but the cloth'll hold them."

But neither of the pair realized just how closely six pairs of eyes were following every swerve of their car. Blomfield had scarcely jumped out and run across to the parapet with the woman after him when there was a shrill screech of brake-shoes and the following car slithered along to a stop almost on top of the other. Sergeant Maltby and his constables jumped and ran toward the struggling

Blomfield had scarcely run across to the parapet, the woman after him, when the following car slithered to a stop.

couple. But the Marquess, with more subtle comprehension that the whole action was a trick of some sort, jumped for the nearest part of the parapet instead—and was just in time to see in the illumination from the arc-lights along the bridge, a package dropping over the edge from the man's hand. Blomfield hadn't noticed in his absorption over planning the trick—and might have missed anyhow because of the darkness along the river—a string of three small barges towed by a little tug which were passing under that arch of the Vauxhall Bridge at the moment. What the Marquess did see, just by a lucky fluke, was that the falling package, instead of striking the water, had dropped in a line which must have carried it directly into the hold of the empty second barge.

Maltby arrested the man and woman in spite of their story of the attempted suicide. Trevor reminded him that he had nothing to hold them on, but suggested his two constables taking them in their own car to the Yard for a thorough search and seeing if the inspector could think up some excuse for holding them. When they drove away he said, hurriedly:

"Maltby, you get hold of a telephone as quickly as you can! Put through a call for the river police to stop every craft of any sort coming down the river, an' hold it in the Pool below London Bridge until I get there. Every craft of any sort—particularly barges! Then you get a taxi and wait for me at the Pool boat-landing—get in communication with the river police, there. I don't dare let the Maharajah out of my sight until he's safely at my Park Lane house—and this leaves me rather short-handed, getting him there. But as soon as I can I'll join you at the Pool!"

AS Countess Nan, Earl Lammerford and Prince Abdool had been friends of Bandracore's for years, he found himself entirely at home in the Trevor mansion. Prince Abdool at once volunteered a trip to the Duke's house to obtain his personal attendants and a supply of clothing.

While awaiting his return, the Marquess had been driven to the Pool—where he found an interested river inspector who already had stopped half a dozen small craft and was at the moment herding a string of three empty barges over into the Pool—hauled by a tug which displayed two blue lights with a red underneath them. Trevor was confident that these were the ones which had passed under Vauxhall Bridge less than three-quarters of an hour before—for barge navigation is slow at night on the Thames—and he climbed from the police-launch up over the side of the second barge. Throwing a beam from his flashlight down into the empty hold, he almost immediately spotted a brown-paper-wrapped parcel which nobody had seen falling into it. There was a helmsman on the last barge, steering the tow—and on the tug—but nobody on the middle barge.

One of the police climbed down into the hold and passed up the package to Trevor, after which the Marquess handed the inspector a very nice bonus for himself and each of his men—then took Maltby along to Park Lane with him.

Captain Walsingham had returned with Prince Abdool and the Maharajah's attendants—fetching with him a package which he unrolled upon the library table. He said that, hearing the footsteps of men running down the basement stairs after the shooting, he had remained in the wine-closet until a couple of Hindus came running through the cellar to jump down through the hogshead. He shouted for them to stop, and fired one shot over their heads. But they kept on—taking pot-shots at him as they ran—so he had caught each of them with a single shot, while in the very act of going down the shaft. One of them landed on his head at the bottom of it with a bullet-hole through his heart.

He had reached this point in his narrative when Trevor and Maltby returned—and went on with it.

"Altogether—we came off just about even, d'ye see. They killed five of Bandracore's suite with gas—knifed one of the constables rather seriously—touch-an'-go with him—and wounded three others. But I potted two white bounders an' two brownies, in the cellar—Sir James and his men killed two more on the parlor-floor in a mix-up when they took the Maharajah's secretary for Bandracore himself. Well, as I told you, I saw the jewels divided up on that cellar-table by the bounder who seemed to be the Number One boy in this raid. Undoubtedly the one you chased in the car—bit of topping luck, that! When I got over bein' dizzy from that shot—I had to kill those two brownies. Couldn't let 'em get away—no telling who they'd've killed upstairs or what loot they might have on 'em! Then I went over and got the jewels those two white rotters had stowed away inside their shirts. Here's my lot! Now—what did Your Lordship get?"

Trevor unrolled the uniform, disclosing more jewels.

"Hmph! . . . . Looks to me as if we'd actually recovered the lot just by fool luck—plus being on the job at the right moment. But of course I don't know just what our friend had. I say, old chap!"—to Bandracore. "Sit down here—an' sort out this mess. I'd say, without being a jewel-expert, that there's well over a million sterling in these playthings of yours; but you know about what you had—we don't. I really fancy we might take the credit for studying this proposition during the last two months and figuring how we could protect you. But this showdown was just a streak of blue luck—that's all we can say about it! I'm going to buy a rabbit's-foot—and an old horseshoe—an' a four-leaf-clover—to carry about durin' the rest of your stay. We love you, Bandracore—delighted to have you with us; but things certainly are a bit hectic when you drop in! What?"

TARZAN

Savagery and civilization—the intrigue of world politics, both modern and ancient, contrast strangely in this thrilling new tale of the incomparable Tarzan.

AS little Nkima, Tarzan's messenger-monkey, swung through the tree-tops in purposeless search of distraction—for his heart was sad at his master's long absence—he spied a large party of white men and black, encamped in the African jungle. Had Nkima but known it, he held the fate of Europe in his little pink palm—for this encampment was composed of several men, and one woman, who were plotting in the interests of Communism for the day when Moscow should dominate the world. Their immediate reason for this expedition was to obtain the fabled gold from the treasure-vaults of Opar; this would furnish funds for their plan to embroil the world in war—leading, so they hoped, to the establishment of autonomous Soviet states everywhere.

This daring undertaking, with its stupendous possibilities, was being engineered by one Peter Zveri, a burly fellow who brooked neither suggestions nor opposition, save from the woman in the party, Zora Drinov, a beautiful Russian girl who felt she was serving the cause of Communism by acting in a trusted clerical capacity to Zveri. Others in the party were Miguel Romero, a swarthy young Mexican, and two Russians, Michael Dorsky and Paul Ivitch. There were also Raghunath Jafar, an East Indian whose chief interest was in Zora; the Arab sheik Abu Batu and his warriors, animated to temporary loyalty to Zveri by two motives—a lust for loot, and bitter hatred of British dominion; and a large group of blacks—camp boys and porters, with a number of stalwart Galla warriors, commanded by the savage black chieftain Kitembo, who saw in this connection with Zveri an opportunity for regaining his former influence over his tribesmen, an influence which had been greatly undermined by the British.

This motley assemblage, held together by varying aims—secretly cherished or openly avowed—awaited impatiently the arrival of Wayne Colt, a reputedly wealthy American whose affiliation with the expedition was to lend prestige to the cause. Inaction had frayed the nerves of the party, however; indeed there had already been a clash between Zveri and Romero; and the big leader decided to make a foray upon Opar while waiting. Leaving the Hindu, Jafar, and Zora in camp with a guard of blacks, the raiding party set out, to be gone several days. The Hindu surreptitiously sent the blacks out hunting, and seized this opportunity to force his attentions upon Zora; but the American Wayne Colt, with his devoted Philippine follower Antonio Mori and their party of natives reached the scene, and effected an opportune rescue. Jafar's hate was aroused by this frustration of his plan; soon thereafter he attempted to shoot Colt from ambush but was himself struck down by an arrow from an unseen source. The superstitious blacks declared the arrow to have been fired by a demon.

But it happened that the mighty Tarzan—filling Nkima's heart with joy by an unexpected return to the jungle—had come upon the camp soon after the departure of Zveri's expedition, and had been observing the scene from a lofty tree-top. He had seen Colt's rescue of Zora and Jafar's at-

Tarzan raised the body high above his head and cast it in the faces of the priests charging upon him.

Guard of the Jungle

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

tempt at revenge. He it was who had shot the fatal arrow. And later that night, after overhearing Zora's explanations to the American of Zveri's purpose to embroil the world in war, Tarzan, to terrify the awe-struck blacks, exhumed Jafar's hastily buried body and flung it into the camp. Then he swung rapidly away—by a route far shorter than that taken by Zveri—to warn La, the high priestess of Opar, of the approaching marauders.

It had been long since Tarzan had visited Opar, but upon that last occasion, when he had reëstablished La's supremacy, following the defeat of the high priest Cadj, he had been convinced of the friendliness not only of La but of her savage, grotesque retainers. Therefore he approached openly and fearlessly the crumbling ruins of the great temple Opar, passed through corridors and chambers, and came at last to a heavy door. Fearlessly he pushed it open and stepped across the threshold—and at that instant a knotted club descended heavily upon his head, felling him senseless to the floor. (*The story continues in detail*:)

INSTANTLY he was surrounded by a score of gnarled and knotted men. Their matted beards fell low upon their hairy chests as they rolled forward upon their short, crooked legs. They chattered in low growling gutturals as they bound their victim's wrists and ankles with stout thongs. Then they lifted him and carried him along other corridors and through the crumbling glories of magnificent apartments to a great tiled room, at one end of which a dark-browed young woman sat upon a massive throne resting upon a dais a few feet above the level of the floor.

Standing beside the girl upon the throne was another of the gnarled and knotted men. Upon his arms and legs were bands of gold and about his throat many necklaces. Upon the floor beneath these two was a gathering of men and women—the priests and priestesses of the Flaming God of Opar.

Tarzan's captors carried their victim to the foot of the throne and tossed his body upon the tile floor. Almost simultaneously the ape-man regained consciousness and opening his eyes looked about him.

"Is it he?" demanded the girl upon the throne.

One of Tarzan's captors saw that he had regained consciousness and with the help of others dragged him roughly to his feet.

"It is he, Oah," exclaimed the man at her side.

An expression of venomous hatred convulsed the face of the woman. "God has been good to His high priestess," she said. "I have prayed for this day to come, as I prayed for the other—and as the other came, so has this."

Tarzan looked quickly from the woman to the man at her side. "What is the meaning of this, Dooth?" he demanded of the man. "Where is La? Where is your high priestess?"

The girl rose angrily from her throne. "Know, man of the outer world, that *I* am high priestess! I, Oah, am high priestess of the Flaming God."

Tarzan ignored her. "Where is La?" he demanded again of Dooth.

Oah flew into a frenzy of rage. "She is dead!" she screamed, advancing to the edge of the dais as though to leap upon Tarzan, the jeweled handle of her sacrificial knife gleaming in the sunlight which poured through a great aperture where a portion of the ancient roof of the throne-room had fallen in. "She is dead!" she repeated. "Dead—as you will be, when next we honor the Flaming God with the lifeblood of a man! La was weak. She loved you and thus she betrayed her god who had chosen you for sacrifice. But Oah is strong—strong with the hate she has nursed in her breast since Tarzan and La stole the throne of Opar from her. . . . Take him away!" she screamed to his captors. "And let me not see him again until I behold him bound to the altar in the court of sacrifice."

They cut the bonds that secured Tarzan's ankles so that he might walk, but even though his wrists were tied behind him it was evident that they still held him in great fear, for they put ropes about his neck and his arms and led him as man might lead a lion. Down into the familiar darkness of the pits of Opar they led him, lighting the way with torches, and when finally they had brought him to the dungeon in which he was to be confined it was some time before they could muster sufficient courage to cut the bonds that held his wrists; even then they did not do so until they had again bound his ankles securely so that they might escape from the chamber and bolt the door before he could release his feet and pursue them, for thus greatly had the prowess of Tarzan impressed itself upon the brains of the crooked priests of Opar.

Tarzan had been in the dungeons of Opar before—and, before, he had escaped; so he set to work immediately seeking for a means of escape from his present predicament, for he knew the chances were that Oah would not long delay the moment for which she had prayed—the instant when she should plunge the gleaming sacrificial knife into his breast.

Quickly removing the thongs from his ankles, Tarzan groped his way carefully along the walls of his cell until he had made a complete circuit of it; then, similarly, he examined the floor. He discovered that he was in a rectangular chamber about ten feet long and eight wide and that by standing upon his tiptoes he could just reach the ceiling. The only opening was the door through which he had entered. A small opening in this, protected by iron bars, gave the cell its only ventilation, but as it opened upon a dark corridor it admitted no light.

Tarzan examined the bolts and the hinges of the door, but they were, as he had conjectured, too substantial to be forced. Then, for the first time, he saw that a priest sat on guard in the corridor without, thus putting a definite end to any idea of surreptitious escape.

FOR three days and nights priests relieved each other at intervals; but upon the morning of the fourth day Tarzan discovered that the corridor was empty and once again he turned his attention actively to thoughts of escape.

It had so happened that at the time of Tarzan's capture his hunting-knife had been hidden by the tail of the leopard-skin which formed his loin-cloth, and in their excitement the ignorant, half-human priests of Opar had overlooked it when they took his other weapons away from him. Doubly thankful was Tarzan for this good fortune, since for sentimental reasons he cherished the hunting-knife of his long-dead sire—the knife that had started him upon the upward path to ascendancy over the beasts of the jungle that day,—now long gone,—when more by accident than intent he had plunged it into the heart of Bolgani the gorilla. But for more practical reasons it was indeed a gift from the gods, since it afforded him not only a weapon of defense, but an instrument wherewith he might seek to make good his escape.

YEARS before Tarzan of the Apes had escaped from the pits of Opar; he well knew the construction of their massive walls. Granite blocks of various sizes, hand-hewn to fit with perfection, were laid in courses without mortar, the one wall that he had passed through having been fifteen feet in thickness. Fortune had favored him upon that occasion in that he had been placed in a cell which, unknown to the present inhabitants of Opar, had a secret entrance, the opening of which was closed by a single layer of loosely laid courses that the ape-man had been able to remove without great effort.

Naturally he sought for a similar condition in the cell in which he now found himself, but his search was not crowned with success. No single stone could he budge from its place, anchored as each was by the tremendous weight of the temple walls they supported. And so, perforce, he turned his attention toward the door.

He knew that there were few locks in Opar, since the present degraded inhabitants of the city had not developed sufficient ingenuity either to repair old ones or construct new. Those locks that he had seen were ponderous affairs opened by huge keys and were, he guessed, of an antiquity that reached back to the days of Atlantis; but for the most part, heavy bolts and bars secured such doors as might be fastened at all and he surmised that it was such a crude contrivance which now barred his way to freedom.

Groping his way to the door, he examined the small opening that let in air. It was about shoulder high and perhaps ten inches square and was equipped with four vertical iron bars half an inch square, set an inch and a half apart—too close to permit him to insert his hands between them; but this fact did not entirely discourage the ape-man. Perhaps there was another way.

His steel-thewed fingers closed upon the center of one of the bars. With his left hand he clung to another and bracing one knee high against the door he slowly flexed his right elbow. Rolling like plastic steel, the muscles of his forearm and his biceps swelled; gradually the bar bent inward.

The ape-man smiled as he took a new grip upon the iron bar. Then he surged backward with all his weight and all the strength of that mighty arm, and the bar bent to a wide U as he wrenched it from its sockets.

He tried to insert his arm through the new opening, but it still was too small. A moment later another bar was torn away and now, his arm thrust through the aperture to its full length, he groped for the bar or bolts that held him prisoner.

At the fullest extent to which he could reach his fingertips downward against the door, he just touched the top of the bar, which was a timber about three inches in thickness. Its other dimensions, however, he was unable to ascertain, nor whether it would release by raising one end or must be drawn back through keepers.

To have freedom almost within one's grasp and yet to be denied it was maddening; but if the ape-man felt any such reaction he did not show it, so perfect was his self-control.

Withdrawing his arm from the aperture, he removed his hunting-knife from his scabbard and, again reaching outward, pressed the point of the blade into the wood of the bar. At first he tried lifting the bar by this means, but his knife-point only pulled out of the wood. Next, he attempted to move the bar backward in a horizontal plane. In this he was successful, and though the distance that he

moved it in one effort was small, he was satisfied, for he knew that patience would win its reward.

Never more than a quarter of an inch, sometimes only a sixteenth of an inch at a time, Tarzan slowly worked the bar backward. He worked methodically and carefully, never hurrying, never affected by nervous anxiety, although he knew not at what moment a savage warrior-priest of Opar might make his rounds. At last his efforts were rewarded, and the door swung upon its hinges.

Stepping quickly out, Tarzan shot the bar behind him; then, knowing no other avenue of escape, he turned back up the corridor along which his captors had conducted him to his prison cell. Faintly in the distance he discerned a lessening darkness and toward this he moved upon silent feet. As the light increased slightly he saw that the corridor was about ten feet wide and that at irregular intervals it was pierced by doors, all of which were closed and secured by bolts or bars.

A hundred yards from the cell in which he had been incarcerated he crossed a transverse corridor and here he paused an instant to investigate with palpitating nostrils and keen eyes and ears. In neither direction could he discern any light, but faint sounds came to his ears indicating that life existed somewhere behind the doors along this corridor, and his nostrils were assailed by a medley of scents—the sweet aroma of incense, the odor of human bodies and the acrid scent of carnivores. But there was nothing there to attract his further investigation, so he continued on his way along the corridor toward the rapidly increasing light ahead.

He had advanced but a short distance when his keen ears detected the sound of approaching footsteps. Here was no place to risk discovery; slowly he fell back toward the transverse corridor, intending to take concealment there until the danger had passed. But it was already closer than he had imagined—an instant later half a dozen priests of Opar turned into the corridor from one just ahead of him. They saw him instantly and halted, peering through the gloom.

"It is the ape-man," said one. "He has escaped!" And with their knotted cudgels and their wicked knives they advanced upon him.

That they came slowly evidenced the respect in which they held his prowess, but still they came; and Tarzan fell back, for even he, armed only with a knife, was no match for six of these savage half-men with their heavy cudgels. As he retreated, a plan formed quickly in his alert mind and when he reached the transverse corridor he backed slowly into it. Knowing that now that he was hidden from them they would come very slowly, fearing that he might be lying in wait for them, he turned and ran swiftly along the corridor. He passed several doors, not because he was looking for any door in particular, but because he knew that the more difficult it was for them to find him the greater his chances of eluding them. At last he paused before one secured by a huge wooden bar. Quickly he raised it, opened the door and stepped within, just as the leader of the priests stepped into view at the intersection of the corridor.

The instant that Tarzan stepped into the dark and gloomy chamber beyond he knew that he had made a fearful blunder. Strong in his nostrils was the acrid scent of Numa the lion; the silence of the pit was shattered by a savage roar. In the dark background Tarzan saw two yellow-green eyes flaming with hate.

And then the lion charged.

CHAPTER VI

Before the Walls of Opar

PETER ZVERI established camp at the edge of the forest, at the foot of the barrier cliff that guards the desolate valley of Opar. Here he left his porters and a few askari as guards; then, with his fighting-men, guided by Kitembo, he commenced the arduous climb of the summit.

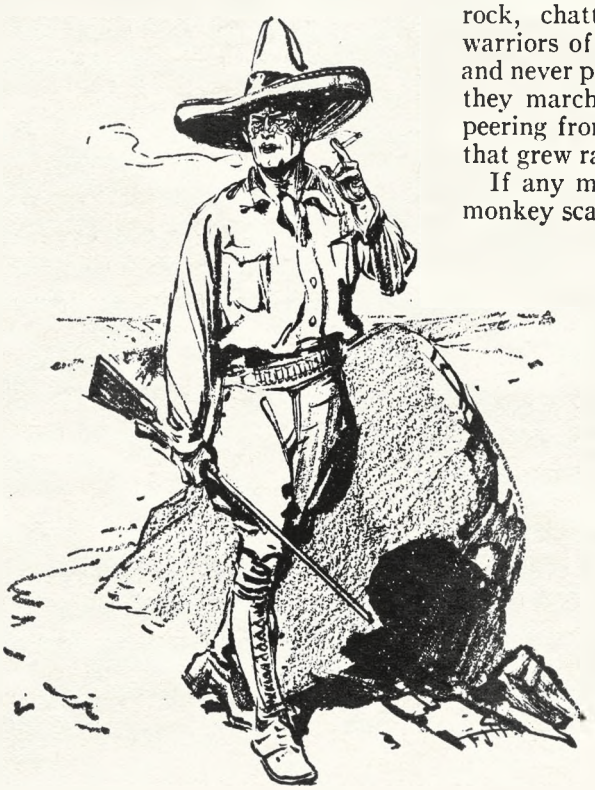
None of them had ever come this way before, not even Kitembo,—though he knew the exact location of Opar from one who had seen it,—and so when the first view of the distant city broke upon them they were filled with awe, and vague questionings arose in the primitive minds of the black men.

It was a silent party which filed across the dusty plain toward Opar; nor were the blacks the only members of the expedition to be assailed with doubt, for in their black tents on distant deserts the Arabs had imbibed with the milk of their mothers the fear of jân and ghrôl, and they had heard, too, of the fabled city of Nimmr, which it was not well for men to approach. With such thoughts and forebodings were the minds of the men filled as they approached the towering ruins of the ancient Atlantian city.

From the top of the great boulder that guards the outer entrance to the treasure vaults of Opar a little monkey watched the progress of the expedition across the valley. He was a much-distraught little monkey, for in his heart he knew that his master should be warned of the coming of these many Gomangani and Tarmangani with their thunder-sticks—but fear of the forbidding ruins gave him pause and so he danced about upon the top of the rock, chattering and scolding. But the warriors of Peter Zveri marched right past and never paid any attention to him—and as they marched other eyes were upon them, peering from out of the foliage of the trees that grew rank among the ruins.

If any member of the party saw a little monkey scampering quickly past upon their right, or saw him clamber up the ruined outer wall of Opar, he gave the matter no thought. The minds of all were occupied by speculation as to what lay within that gloomy pile.

Kitembo did not know the location of the treasure-vaults of Opar. He had only agreed to guide Zveri to the city; but, like Zveri, he entertained no doubt that it would be easy to discover the vaults if they were unable to wring the location from any of the inhabitants of the city. Surprised, indeed, would they have been had they known that no living Oparian knew either of the location of the treasure-vaults or of their existence—and that



In the distance Romero saw the dust of the fleeing expedition; and he started in pursuit.

among all living men, only Tarzan and some of his Waziri warriors knew their location or how to reach them.

"The place is nothing but a deserted ruin," said Zveri to one of his white companions.

"It is an ominous-looking place, though," replied the other, "and it has already had its effect upon the men."

Zveri shrugged. "This might frighten them at night," he said, "but not in broad daylight."

THEY were close to the ruined outer wall now, which frowned down upon them menacingly; here they halted while several searched for an opening. Abu Batu was the first to find it—the narrow crevice with the flight of concrete steps leading upward. "Here is a way through, Comrade," he called to Zveri.

"Take some of your men with you and reconnoiter," ordered Zveri.

Abu Batu summoned half a dozen of his black men, who advanced with evident reluctance.

Gathering the skirt of his thob about him, the sheik entered the crevice. At the same instant a piercing screech broke from the interior of the ruined city—a long-drawn, high-pitched shriek that ended in a series of low moans. The Bedauwy halted; the blacks froze in terrified rigidity.

"Go on!" yelled Zveri. "A scream can't kill you!"

"Wullah," exclaimed one of the Aarabs; "but jân can."

"Get out of there, then!" cried Zveri angrily. "If you damned cowards are afraid to go, I'll go in myself!"

There was no argument. The Aarabs stepped aside. And then a little monkey, screaming with terror, appeared upon the top of the wall from the inside of the city. His sudden and noisy appearance brought every eye to bear upon him. They saw him turn an affrighted glance backward over his shoulder and then, with a loud scream, leap far out to the ground below. It scarcely seemed he could survive the jump—yet it barely sufficed to interrupt his flight, for he was on his way again in an instant as, with prodigious leaps and bounds, he fled screaming out across the barren plains.

It was the last straw. The shaken nerves of the blacks gave to the sudden strain and almost with one accord they turned and fled the dismal city, while close upon their heels were Abu Batu and his desert warriors.

Peter Zveri and his three white companions, finding themselves suddenly deserted, looked at one another questioningly.

"The dirty cowards!" exclaimed Zveri angrily. "You go back, Mike, and see if you can rally them. We are going on in, now that we are here."

Michael Dorsky, only too glad of any assignment that took him further away from Opar, started at a brisk run after the fleeing warriors, while Zveri turned again to the fissure with Miguel Romero and Paul Ivitch at his heels.

The three men passed through the outer wall and entered the courtyard, across which they saw the lofty inner wall rising before them. Romero was the first to find the opening that led to the city proper and, calling to his fellows, he stepped boldly into the narrow passage, when once again the hideous scream shattered the brooding silence of the ancient temple.

The three men halted. Zveri wiped the perspiration from his brow. "I think we have gone as far as we can, alone," he said. "Perhaps we had all better go back and rally the men. There is no sense in doing anything foolhardy."

Miguel Romero threw him a contemptuous sneer, but Ivitch assured Zveri that the suggestion met with his entire approval.

The two men crossed the court quickly without waiting to see whether the Mexican followed them or not, and were soon once again outside the city.

"Where is Miguel?" asked Ivitch suddenly.

Zveri looked around. "Romero!" he shouted in a loud voice, but there was no reply.

"It must have got him," said Ivitch, with a shudder.

"Small loss!" grumbled Zveri.

But whatever the thing was that Ivitch feared, it had not as yet gotten the young Mexican, who, after watching his companions' precipitate flight, had continued on through the opening in the inner wall, determined to have at least one look at the interior of the ancient city of Opar which he had traveled so far to see.

Before his eyes spread a magnificent panorama of stately ruins. At the sight the young and impressionable Latin-American stood spellbound. Again the eerie wail rose from the interior of a great building before him, but if he was frightened Romero gave no evidence of it. Perhaps he grasped his rifle a little more tightly; perhaps he loosened his revolver in his holster; but he did not retreat. He was awed by the stately grandeur of the scene before him, where age and ruin seemed only to enhance its pristine magnificence.

A movement within the temple caught his attention. He saw a figure emerge from somewhere,—the figure of a gnarled and knotted man that rolled on short crooked legs,—and then another and another came, until there were fully a hundred of the savage creatures approaching slowly toward him. He saw their knotted bludgeons and their knives and he realized that here was a menace more effective than an unearthly scream.

With a shrug he backed into the passageway. "I cannot fight an army single-handed," he muttered. Rapidly he crossed the outer court, passed through the first great wall and stood again upon the plain outside the city. In the distance he saw the dust of the fleeing expedition and, with a grin he started in pursuit, swinging along at an easy walk as he puffed upon a cigarette. From the top of the rocky hill at his left a little monkey saw him pass—a little monkey which still trembled from fright, but whose terrified screams had now become only low, pitiful moans. It had been a hard day for little Nkima.

SO rapid had been the retreat of the expedition that Zveri, with Dorsky and Ivitch, did not overtake the main party until the majority of it was already descending the barrier cliffs—nor could any threats or promises stay the retreat, which ended only when camp was reached.

Immediately Zveri called Abu Batu, together with Dorsky and Ivitch, into council. The affair had been Zveri's first reverse; and it was a serious one, inasmuch as he had banked so heavily upon the inexhaustible store of gold to be found in the treasure-vaults of Opar. He berated Abu Batu, Kitembo, their ancestors, and all their followers, for cowardice—but all that he accomplished was to arouse the anger and resentment of these two leaders.

"We came with you to fight the white men, not demons and ghosts," said Kitembo. "I am not afraid. I would go into the city; but my men will not accompany me—and I cannot fight the enemy alone."

"Nor I," said Abu Batu.

"I know," said Zveri with a sneer, "you are both brave men, but you are much better runners than you are fighters. Look at us—we were not afraid; we went in, and we were not harmed."

"Where is Comrade Romero?" demanded Abu Batu.

"Well, perhaps *he* is lost," admitted Zveri. "What do you expect? To win a battle without losing a man?"

"There was no battle," said Kitembo, "and the man who went farthest into the accursed city did not return."

Dorsky looked up suddenly. "There he is now!" he exclaimed, and as all eyes turned up the trail toward Opar

they saw Miguel Romero strolling jauntily into camp, unharmed.

"Greeting, my brave comrades!" he cried to them. "I am glad to find you alive. I feared that you might all succumb to heart-failure."

Sullen silence greeted his raillery and no one spoke until he had approached and seated himself near them.

"What detained you?" demanded Zveri presently.

"I wanted to see what was beyond the inner wall," replied the Mexican.

"And you saw?" asked Abu Batu.

"I saw magnificent buildings in splendid ruins," replied Romero.

"And what else?" asked Kitembo.

"I saw a company of strange warriors—short heavy men on crooked legs, with long powerful arms and hairy bodies. They came out of a great building that might have been a temple. There were too many of them for me. I could not fight them alone, so I came away."

"Did they have weapons?" asked Zveri.

"Clubs and knives," replied Romero.

"You see?" exclaimed Zveri. "Just a band of savages armed with clubs! We could take the city without the loss of a man."

"What did they look like?" demanded Kitembo. "Describe them to me." And when Romero had done so, with careful attention to details, Kitembo shook his head. "It is as I thought," he said. "They are not men; they are demons."

"Men or demons, we are going back and take their city," said Zveri angrily. "We must have the gold of Opar."

"You may go, white man," said Kitembo, "but you will go alone. I know my men and I tell you that they will not follow you there. Lead us against white men, or brown men, or black men, and we will follow you. But we will not follow you against demons and ghosts."

"And you, Abu Batu?" demanded Zveri.

"I have talked with my men on the return from the city and they tell me that they will not go back there. They will not fight the jan and ghrol. They heard the voice of the jin warning them away, and they are afraid."

Zveri stormed and threatened and cajoled, but all to no effect. Neither the Aarab sheik nor the African chief could be moved.

"There is still a way," said Romero.

"And what is that?" asked Zveri.

"When the gringo comes with the Philippine, there will be six of us who are neither Aarabs nor Africans. We six can take Opar."

Paul Ivitch made a wry face and Zveri cleared his throat.

"If we are killed," said the latter, "our whole plan is wrecked. There will be no one left to carry on."

Romero shrugged. "It was only a suggestion," he said; "but of course if you are afraid—"

"I am not afraid!" stormed Zveri. "But neither am I a fool."

An ill-concealed sneer curved Romero's lips. "I am going to eat," he said, and, rising, he left them. . . .

The day following his advent into the camp of his fellow-conspirators, Wayne Colt wrote a long message in cipher and dispatched it to the Coast by one of his boys.

From her tent Zora Drinov had seen the message given to the boy. She had seen him place it in the end of a forked stick and start off upon his long journey. Shortly afterward, Colt joined her in the shade of a great tree beside her tent.

"You sent a message this morning, Comrade Colt," she said.

Oah flew into a frenzy of rage. "La is dead!" she screamed. "Dead—as you will be, when next we honor the Flaming God with the lifeblood of a man!"

He looked up at her quickly. "Yes," he said.

"Perhaps you should know that only Comrade Zveri is permitted to send messages from the expedition," she told him.

"I did not know," he said. "This was merely in relation to some funds that were to have been awaiting me when I reached the Coast. They were not there. I sent the boy back after them."

"Oh!" she said; then their conversation drifted to other topics.

That afternoon he took his rifle and went out to look for game and Zora went with him. That evening they had supper together again, but this time she was the hostess.

And so the days passed, until an excited native aroused the camp one day with an announcement that the expedition was returning. No words were necessary to apprise those who had been left behind that victory had not perched upon the banner of their little army. Failure was clearly written upon the faces of the leaders.

Zveri greeted Zora and Colt, introducing the latter to his companions, and when Tony had been similarly presented the returning warriors threw themselves down upon cots or upon the ground to rest.

That night, as they gathered around the supper-table, each party narrated the adventures that had befallen them since the expedition had left camp. Colt and Zora were thrilled by the stories of weird Opar, but no less mysterious was their tale of the death of Raghunath Jafar and his burial and uncanny resurrection.

"Not one of the boys would touch the body after that," said Zora. "Tony and Comrade Colt had to bury him themselves."

"I hope you made a good job of it this time," said Miguel.

"He hasn't come back again," said Colt with a grin.

"Who could have dug him up in the first place?" demanded Zveri.

"None of the boys, certainly," said Zora. "They were all too much frightened by the peculiar circumstances surrounding his death."

"It must have been the same creature that killed him," said Colt; "and whoever or whatever it was must have been possessed of almost superhuman strength to have carried away that heavy corpse into a tree and drop it upon us."

"The most uncanny feature of it to me," said Zora, "is the fact that it was accomplished in absolute silence. I'll swear that not even a leaf rustled until just before the body hurtled down upon our table."

"It could have been only a man," said Zveri.

"Unquestionably," said Colt. "But what a man!"

As the company broke up later, repairing to their various tents, Zveri detained Zora with a gesture. "I want to talk to you a minute, Zora," he said, and the girl sank back into the chair she had just quitted. "What do you think of this American?" asked Zveri softly. "You have had a good opportunity to size him up."

"He seems to be all right. He is a very likable fellow," replied the girl.

"He said or did nothing, then, that might arouse your suspicion?" demanded Zveri.

"No," said Zora, "nothing at all."

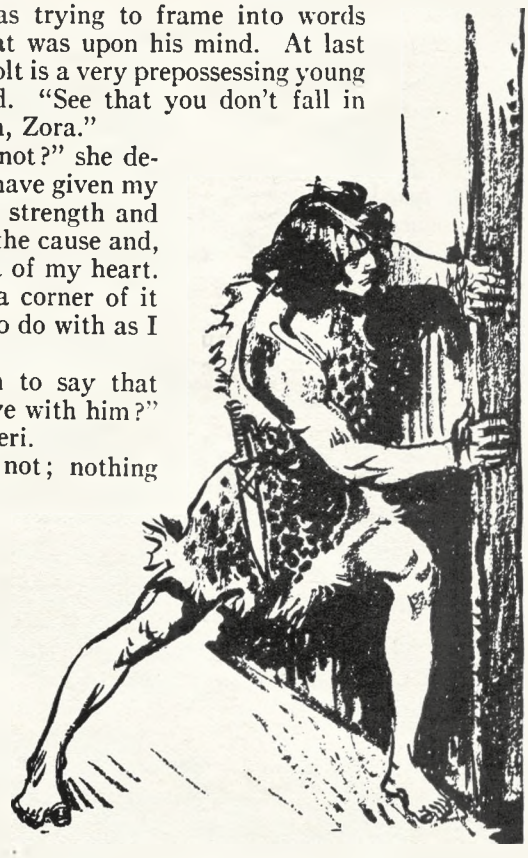
"You two have been alone here together for a number of days," continued Zveri. "Did he treat you with perfect respect?"

"He was certainly much more respectful than your friend Raghunath Jafar!"

"Don't mention that dog to me," said Zveri. "I wish that I had been here to kill him myself."

"I told him that you would when you got back; but some one beat you to it."

They were silent for several moments. It was evident that Zveri was trying to frame into words something that was upon his mind. At last he spoke. "Colt is a very prepossessing young man," he said. "See that you don't fall in love with him, Zora."



"And why not?" she demanded. "I have given my mind and my strength and my talent to the cause and, perhaps, most of my heart. But there is a corner of it that is mine to do with as I wish."

"You mean to say that you are in love with him?" demanded Zveri.

"Certainly not; nothing of the kind. Such an idea had not entered my head. I just want you to know, Peter, that in matters of this kind you may not dictate to me."

"Listen, Zora—you know perfectly well that I love you; and what is more, I am going to have you. I get what I go after."

"Don't bore me, Peter. I have no time now for anything so foolish as love. When we are through with this undertaking, perhaps I shall give it a little thought."

"I want you to give it a lot of thought right now, Zora," he insisted. "There are some details in relation to this expedition that I have not told you. I have not divulged them to anyone—but I am going to tell you now, because I love you and you are going to become my wife. There is more at stake in this for us than you dream. After all the risks and the hardships, I do not intend to surrender the power and wealth that I shall have gained, to anyone."

"You mean not even to the cause?" she asked.

"I mean not even to the cause—except that I shall use them both for the cause."

"Then what do you intend? I do not understand you."

"I intend to make myself Emperor of Africa," he said, "and I intend to make you my Empress."

"Peter!" she cried. "Are you crazy?"

"Yes, I am crazy for power, for riches—and for you."

"You can never do it, Peter. You know how far-reaching are the tentacles of the power we serve. If you fail it, if you turn traitor, those tentacles will reach you and drag you down to destruction."

"When I win my goal, my power will be as great as theirs, and then I may defy them."

"But how about these others with us, who are serving loyally the cause which they think you represent? They will tear you to pieces, Peter!"

The man laughed. "You do not know them, Zora. They are all alike; all men and women are alike. If I offered to make them Grand Dukes and give them each a palace and a harem, they would slit their own mothers' throats to obtain such a prize."

The girl arose. "I am astounded, Peter! I thought that you, at least, were sincere."

He arose quickly and grasped her by the arm. "Listen, Zora," he hissed in her ear, "I love you—and because I love

Drawing the door quickly inward, Tarzan slipped behind it as the lion charged.

you I have put my life in your hands. But understand this; If you betray me, I shall kill you! Do not forget that."

"You did not have to tell me that, Peter. I was quite well aware of it."

"And you will not betray me?" he demanded.

"I never betray a friend, Peter," she said. . . .

The next morning Zveri was engaged in working out the details of a second expedition to Opar, based upon Romero's suggestions. It was decided that this time they would call for volunteers, and as the Europeans, the two Americans and the Filipino had already indicated their willingness to take part in the adventure, it remained now only to seek to enlist the services of some of the blacks and Aarabs.

For this purpose Zveri summoned the entire company to a palaver. Here he explained just what they proposed doing. He stressed the fact that Comrade Romero had seen the inhabitants of the city and that they were only stunted savages, armed with sticks. Eloquently he explained how easily they might be overcome with rifles.

Practically the entire party was willing to go as far as the walls of Opar, but there were only ten warriors who would agree to enter the city with the white men; all of these were from the askaris who had been left behind to guard camp and from those who had accompanied Colt from the Coast, none of whom had been subjected to the terrors of Opar. Not one of those who had heard the weird screams issuing from the ruins would agree to enter the city and it was admitted among the whites that it was not at all unlikely that their ten volunteers might suddenly develop a change of heart when they actually stood before the frowning portals of Opar and heard the weird warning cry from its defenders.

SEVERAL days were spent in making careful preparations for the new expedition, but at last the final detail was completed and early one morning Zveri and his followers set out once more upon the trail to Opar.

Zora Drinov had wished to accompany them, but as Zveri was expecting messages from various agents throughout Northern Africa, it was necessary to leave her behind. Abu Batu and his warriors were left to guard the camp and these, with a few black servants, were all who did not accompany the expedition.

Since the failure of the first expedition and the fiasco at the gates of Opar, the relations between Abu Batu and Zveri had been strained. The sheik and his warriors smarted under the charges of cowardice, and though they would not volunteer to enter the city of Opar, they still resented the affront of being selected to remain behind as camp guards; and so it was that as the others departed the Aarabs sat whispering over their thick coffee, their swart scowling faces half-hidden by their thorribs.

They did not deign even to glance at their departing comrades; but the eyes of Abu Batu were fixed meditatively upon the slender figure of Zora Drinov.

CHAPTER VII

Betrayed

THE heart of little Nkima had been torn by conflicting emotions, as from the vantage-point of the rocky hillock he watched the hasty departure of Miquel Romero from the city of Opar. Seeing these brave Tarmangani, armed with death-dealing thunder-sticks, driven away from the ruins, he was convinced that something terrible must have befallen his master within the grim recesses of that crumbling pile. His loyal heart prompted him to return and investigate, but Nkima was only a very little Manu—a little Manu who was much afraid—and though he started twice again toward Opar he could not muster his courage to the sticking-point; and at last, whimpering pitifully, he turned back across the plains toward the grim forest, where at least the dangers were familiar ones. . . .

The door of the gloomy chamber which Tarzan had entered swung inward and his hands were still upon it as the menacing roar of the lion apprised him of the danger of his situation.

Agile and quick is Numa the lion, but with even greater celerity functioned the mind and muscles of Tarzan of the Apes. In the instant that the lion sprang toward him a picture of the whole scene flashed to the mind of the ape-man. He saw the gnarled priests of Opar advancing along the corridor in pursuit of him; he saw the heavy door that swung inward; he saw the charging lion—and he pieced these various factors together to create a situation far more to his advantage than they normally presented.

Drawing the door quickly inward, he slipped behind it as the lion charged—with the result that the beast, either carried forward by his own momentum or sensing escape, sprang into the corridor full in the faces of the advancing priests; and at the same instant Tarzan closed the door behind him.

Just what happened in the corridor without he could not see, but from the growls and screams that receded quickly into the distance he was able to picture a scene which brought a quiet smile to his lips—and an instant later a piercing shriek of agony and terror announced the fate of at least one of the fleeing Oparians.

Realizing that he would gain nothing by remaining where he was, Tarzan decided to leave the cell and seek a way out of the labyrinthine mazes of the pits beneath Opar. He knew that the lion upon its prey would doubtless bar his

passage along the route he had been following when his escape had been interrupted by the priests and though, as a last resort, he might face Numa, he was of no mind to invite such an unnecessary risk.

But when he sought to open the heavy door he found that he could not budge it, and in an instant he realized what had happened—he was once again in prison in the dungeons of Opar!

The bar that secured this particular door was not of the sliding type, but, working upon a pin at the inner end, dropped into heavy wrought-iron keepers bolted to the door itself and to its frame. When he had entered he had raised the bar, and in slamming the door to it had dropped into place of its own weight, imprisoning him as effectually as though the work had been done by the hand of man.

The darkness of the corridor without was less intense than that upon which his former cell had been located and though not enough light entered the cell to illuminate its interior, there was sufficient to show him the nature of the ventilating opening in the door, which he found to consist of a number of small round holes, none of which was of sufficient diameter to permit him to pass his hand through in an attempt to raise the bar.

AS Tarzan stood in momentary contemplation of this new predicament, the sound of stealthy movement came to him from the black recesses at the rear of the cell. He wheeled quickly, drawing his hunting-knife from its sheath.

He did not have to ask himself what the author of this sound might be, for he knew that the only other living creature that might have occupied this cell with its former inmate was another lion. Why it had not joined in the attack upon him, he could not guess, but that it would eventually seize him was a foregone conclusion. Probably even now it was preparing to sneak upon him. He wished that his eyes might penetrate the darkness, for if he could see the lion as it charged, he might be better prepared to meet it. In the past he had met the charges of other lions, but always before he had been able to see their swift spring and to elude the sweep of their mighty claws as they reared upon their hind legs to seize him. Now it would be different and for once in his life, Tarzan of the Apes felt death was inescapable.

He was not afraid, but he did not wish to die and he knew that the price at which he would sell his life would cost his antagonist dearly. In silence he waited. Again he heard that faint, yet ominous sound. The foul air of the cell reeked with the stench of carnivores; from a distant corridor he heard the growling of a lion at its kill.

And then a voice broke the silence.

"Who are you?" it asked. It was the voice of a woman and it came from the back of the cell in which the ape-man was imprisoned.

"Where are you?" demanded Tarzan.

"I am here at the back of the cell," replied the woman.

"Where is the lion?"

"He went out when you opened the door," she replied.

"Yes, I know," said Tarzan. "But the other one—where is he?"

"There is no other one. There was but one lion here and it is gone. —Ah, now I know you!" she exclaimed. "I know the voice. It is Tarzan!"

"La!" exclaimed the ape-man, advancing quickly across the cell. "How could you be here with the lion and still live?"

"I am in an adjoining cell that is separated from this one by a door made of iron bars," replied La. Tarzan heard metal hinges creak. "It is not locked," she said. "It was not necessary to lock it, for it opened into this other cell where the lion was."

Groping forward through the dark, the two advanced until their hands touched one another.

La pressed close to Tarzan. She was trembling. "I have been afraid," she said; "but I shall not be afraid now."

"I shall not be of much help to you," said Tarzan. "I also am a prisoner."

"I know it," replied La. "But I always feel safe when you are near."

"Tell me what has happened," demanded Tarzan. "How is it that Oah is posing as high priestess, and you are a prisoner in your own dungeons?"

"I forgave Oah her former treason—when she conspired with Cadj to wrest my power from me," explained La. "But she could not exist without intrigue and duplicity. To further her ambitions, she made love to Dooth, who has been high priest since Jad-bal-ja killed Cadj. They spread stories about me through the city—and as my people have never forgiven me for my friendship for you, they succeeded in winning enough to their cause to overthrow and imprison me. All the ideas were Oah's, for Dooth and the other priests, as you well know, are stupid beasts. It was Oah's idea to imprison me thus, with a lion for company, merely to make my suffering more terrible, until the time should come when she might prevail upon the priests to offer me in sacrifice to the Flaming God. In that she has had some difficulty, I know, as those who have brought my food have told me."

"How could they bring food to you here?" asked Tarzan. "No one could pass through the outer cell while the lion was there."

"There is another opening in the lion's cell, that leads into a low, narrow corridor into which they can drop meat from above. Thus they would entice the lion from this outer cell, after which they would lower a gate of iron bars across the opening of the small corridor into which he went, and while he was thus imprisoned they brought my food to me. But they did not feed him much. He was always hungry, often growling and pawing at the bars of my cell. Perhaps Oah hoped that some day he would batter them down."

"Where does this other corridor, in which they fed the lion, lead?" asked Tarzan.

"I do not know," replied La, "but I imagine that it is only a blind tunnel built in ancient times for this very purpose."

"We must have a look at it," said Tarzan. "It may offer a means of escape."

"Why not escape through the door by which you entered?" asked La, and when the ape-man had explained why this was impossible, she pointed out the location of the entrance to the small tunnel.

"We must get out of here as quickly as possible, if it is possible at all," said Tarzan, "for if they are able to capture the lion, they will certainly return him to this cell."

"They will capture him," said La. "There is no question as to that."

"Then I had better hurry and make my investigation of the tunnel," said Tarzan, "for it might prove embarrassing were they to return him to the cell while I was in the tunnel, if it proved to be a blind one."

"I will listen at the outer door while you investigate," said La. "Make haste."

GROPING his way toward the section of the wall La had indicated, Tarzan found a heavy grating of iron closing an aperture leading into a low, narrow corridor. Lifting the barrier, Tarzan entered and with his hands extended before him, moved forward in a crouching position, since the low ceiling would not permit him to stand erect. He had progressed but a short distance when he dis-

covered that the corridor made an abrupt right-angle turn to the left and beyond the turn he saw at a short distance a faint luminosity. Moving quickly forward, he came to the end of the corridor, at the bottom of a vertical shaft, the interior of which was illuminated by subdued daylight. The shaft was constructed of the usual rough-hewn granite of the foundation walls of the city, but here set with no great nicety or precision, giving the interior of the shaft a rough and uneven surface.

"Listen, Zora," Zveri hissed. "If you betray me, I shall kill you! Do not forget that!"

As Tarzan was examining it he heard La's voice coming along the tunnel from the cell in which he had left her. Her tone was excited, and her message one that presaged a situation wrought with extreme danger to them both.

"Make haste, Tarzan! They are returning with the lion!"

The ape-man hurried quickly back to the mouth of the tunnel.

"Quick!" he cried to La, as he raised the gate that had fallen behind him after he had passed through.

"In there?" she demanded in an affrighted voice.

"It is our only chance of escape," replied the ape-man.

Without another word La crowded into the corridor beside him. Tarzan lowered the grating and, with La following closely behind him, returned to the opening leading into the shaft.

Without a word, he lifted La in his arms and raised her as high as he could. Nor did she need be told what to do; with little difficulty she found both hand- and foot-holds upon the rough surface of the shaft's interior and with Tarzan just below, assisting and steadying her, she made her way slowly aloft.

The shaft led directly upward into a room in the tower, which overlooked the entire city of Opar, and here, concealed by the crumbling walls, they paused to formulate their plans.

They both knew that their greatest danger lay in discovery by one of the numerous monkeys which infest the ruins of Opar, with which the inhabitants of the city are able to converse. Tarzan was anxious to be away from Opar that he might thwart the plans of the white men who had invaded his domain. But first he wished to bring about the downfall of La's enemies and reinstate her upon the throne of Opar, or if that should prove impossible, to insure the safety of her flight.

As he viewed her now in the light of day he was struck again by the matchlessness of her deathless beauty, that neither time nor care nor danger seemed capable of dimming—and he wondered what he should do with her, where he could take her; where this savage priestess of the Flaming God could find a place in all the world, outside the walls of Opar, with the environment of which she would harmonize. And as he pondered he was forced to admit to himself that no such place existed. La was of Opar—a savage queen born to rule a race of savage half-men; as well introduce a tigress to the salons of civilization as La of Opar! Two or three thousand years earlier she might have been a *Cleopatra* or a *Sheba*, but today she could be only La of Opar.

For a time they had sat in silence, the beautiful eyes of the high priestess fixed upon the stern profile of the forest god.

"Tarzan!" she said at last.

The man looked up. "What is it, La?" he asked.

"I still love you, Tarzan," she said in a low voice.

A troubled expression came into the eyes of the ape-man. "Let us not speak of that," he said.

"I like to speak of it," she said. "It gives me sorrow, but it is a sweet sorrow—the only sweetness that has ever come into my life."

Tarzan extended a bronzed hand and laid it upon her slender fingers. "You have always possessed my heart, La," he said, "up to the point of love. If my affection goes no further than this, it is through no fault of mine nor yours."

La laughed. "It is certainly through no fault of mine, Tarzan," she said; "but I know that such things are not ordered by ourselves. Love is a gift of the gods. Sometimes it is awarded as a recompense; sometimes as a punishment. For me it has been a punishment, perhaps—but I would not have it otherwise. I have nurtured it in my breast since first I met you and without that love, however hopeless it may be, I should not care to live."

Tarzan made no reply and the two relapsed into silence, waiting for night to fall that they might descend into the city unobserved. Tarzan's alert mind was occupied with plans for reinstating La upon her throne, and presently they fell to discussing these.

"Just before the Flaming God goes to his rest at night," said La, "the priests and the priestesses all gather in the throne-room. There they will be tonight before the throne upon which Oah will be seated. Then may we descend to the city."

"And then what?" asked Tarzan.

"If we can kill Oah in the throne-room," said La, "and Dooth at the same time, they would have no leaders—and without leaders they are lost."

"I cannot kill a woman," said Tarzan.

"*I* can," said La; "and you can attend to Dooth. You certainly would not object to killing him?"

"If he attacked I would kill him," said Tarzan, "but not otherwise. Tarzan kills only in self-defense and for food, or when there is no other way to thwart an enemy."

In the floor of the ancient room in which they were waiting were two openings; one was the mouth of the shaft through which they had ascended from the dungeons; the other opened into a similar but larger shaft, to the bottom of which ran a long wooden ladder set in the masonry of its sides. It was this shaft which offered them a means of escape from the tower; and as Tarzan sat with his eyes resting idly upon the opening, an unpleasant thought suddenly obtruded itself upon his consciousness.

He turned toward La. "We had forgotten," he said, "that whoever casts the meat down the shaft to the lion must ascend by this other shaft. We may not be as safe from detection here as we had hoped."

"They do not feed the lion very often," said La; "not every day."

"When did they feed him last?" asked Tarzan.

"I do not recall," said La. "Time drags so heavily in the darkness of the cell that I lost count of days."

"*S-st!*" cautioned Tarzan. "Some one is ascending now."

Silently the ape-man arose and crossed the floor to the opening, where he crouched upon the side opposite the ladder. La moved stealthily to his side, so that the ascending man, whose back would be toward them, as he emerged from the shaft, would not see them.

Slowly the man ascended. They could hear his shuffling progress coming nearer and nearer to the top. He did not climb as the ape-like priests of Opar are wont to climb. Tarzan thought perhaps he was carrying a load either of such weight or cumbersomeness as to retard his progress, but when finally his head came into view the ape-man saw that he was an old man, which accounted for his lack of agility. Then powerful fingers closed about the throat of the unsuspecting Oparian, and he was lifted bodily out of the shaft.

"Silence!" said the ape-man. "Do as you are told—and you will not be harmed."

La had snatched a knife from the girdle of their victim, and now Tarzan forced him to the floor of the room and slightly released his hold upon the fellow's throat, turning him around so that he faced them.

An expression of incredulity and surprise crossed the face of the old priest as his eyes fell upon La.

"Darus!" exclaimed La.

"All honor to the Flaming God who has ordered your escape!" exclaimed the priest joyfully.

La turned to Tarzan. "You need not fear Darus," she said. "He will not betray us. Of all the priests of Opar, there never lived one more loyal to his queen."

"That is right," said the old man, shaking his head.

"Are there many more loyal to the high priestess, La?" demanded Tarzan.

"Yes, very many," replied Darus; "but

"Silence!" said the ape-man. "Do as you are told—and you will not be harmed."

they are afraid. Oah is a she-devil and Dooth is a fool. Between the two there is no longer either safety or happiness in Opar."

"How many are there whom you absolutely know may be depended upon?" demanded La.

"Oh, very many," replied Darus.

"Gather them in the throne-room tonight then, Darus, and as the Flaming God goes to his couch be ready to strike at the enemies of La, your priestess."

"You will be there?" asked Darus.

"I shall be there," replied La. "This, your dagger, shall be the signal. When you see La of Opar plunge it into the breast of Oah the false priestess, fall upon those who are the enemies of La."

"It shall be done, just as you say," Darus assured her; "and now I must throw this meat to the lion and be gone."

Slowly the old priest descended the ladder, gibbering and muttering to himself, after he had cast a few bones and scraps of meat into the other shaft to the lion.

"You are quite sure you can trust him, La?" demanded Tarzan.

"Absolutely," replied the girl. "Darus would die for me—and I know that he hates Oah and Dooth."

The slow remaining hours of the afternoon dragged on; the sun was low in the west and now the two must take their greatest risk, that of descending into the city while it was still light and making their way to the throne-room—although the risk was greatly minimized by the fact that the inhabitants of the city were all supposed to be congregated in the throne-room at this time, performing the age-old rite with which they speeded the Flaming God to his night of rest. Without interruption they descended to the base of the tower, crossed the courtyard and entered the temple. Through devious and roundabout passages, La led the way to a small doorway that opened into the throne-room at the back of the dais upon which the throne stood. Here she paused, listening to the services being conducted within the great chamber, waiting for the cue that would bring them to a point when all within the room, except the high priestess, were prostrated, with their faces pressed against the floor.

"I am crying for joy," La said. "—joy that perhaps I shall be with you for a long time."

When that instant arrived, La swung open the door and leaped silently upon the dais, behind the throne in which her victim sat. Close behind her came Tarzan—and in that first instant both realized that they had been betrayed, for the dais was swarming with priests ready to seize them.

Already one had caught La by an arm, but before he could drag her away Tarzan sprang upon him, seized him by the neck and jerked his head backward so suddenly and with such force that the sound of his snapping vertebræ could be heard across the rooom. Then he raised the body high above his head and cast it in the faces of the priests charging upon him. As they staggered back, he seized La and swung her into the corridor along which they had approached the throne-room.

It was useless to stand and fight, for he knew that even though he might hold his own for awhile, they must eventually overcome him and that once they laid their hands upon La they would tear her limb from limb.

Down the corridor behind them came the yelling horde of priests, and in their wake, screaming for the blood of her victim, was Oah.

"Make for the outer walls by the shortest route, La," directed Tarzan, and the girl sped on winged feet, leading him through the labyrinthine corridors of the ruins until they broke suddenly into the chamber of the seven pillars of gold, and then Tarzan knew the way.

No longer needing his guide, and—realizing that the priests were overtaking them—being fleeter of foot than La, he swept the girl into his arms and sped through the echoing chambers of the temple toward the inner wall. Across the courtyard and through the outer wall he ran; still the priests pursued, urged on by the screaming Oah. Out across the deserted valley they fled and now the priests were losing ground, for their short, crooked legs could not compete with the speed of Tarzan's clean-limbed stride, even though he was burdened by the weight of La.

The sudden darkness of the near tropics that follows the setting of the sun soon obliterated the pursuers from their sight and a short time thereafter the sounds of pursuit ceased and Tarzan knew that the chase had been abandoned, for the men of Opar have no love for the darkness of the outer world.

Then Tarzan paused and lowered La to the ground; but as he did so her soft arms encircled his neck and she pressed close to him, her cheek against his breast, and burst into tears.

"Do not cry, La," he said. "We shall come again to Opar and when we do you shall be seated upon your throne again."

"I am not crying for that," she replied.

"Then why do you cry?" he asked.

"I am crying for joy," she said, "—joy that perhaps I shall be alone with you now for a long time."

In pity, Tarzan pressed her to him for a long moment, and then they set off once more toward the barrier cliff.

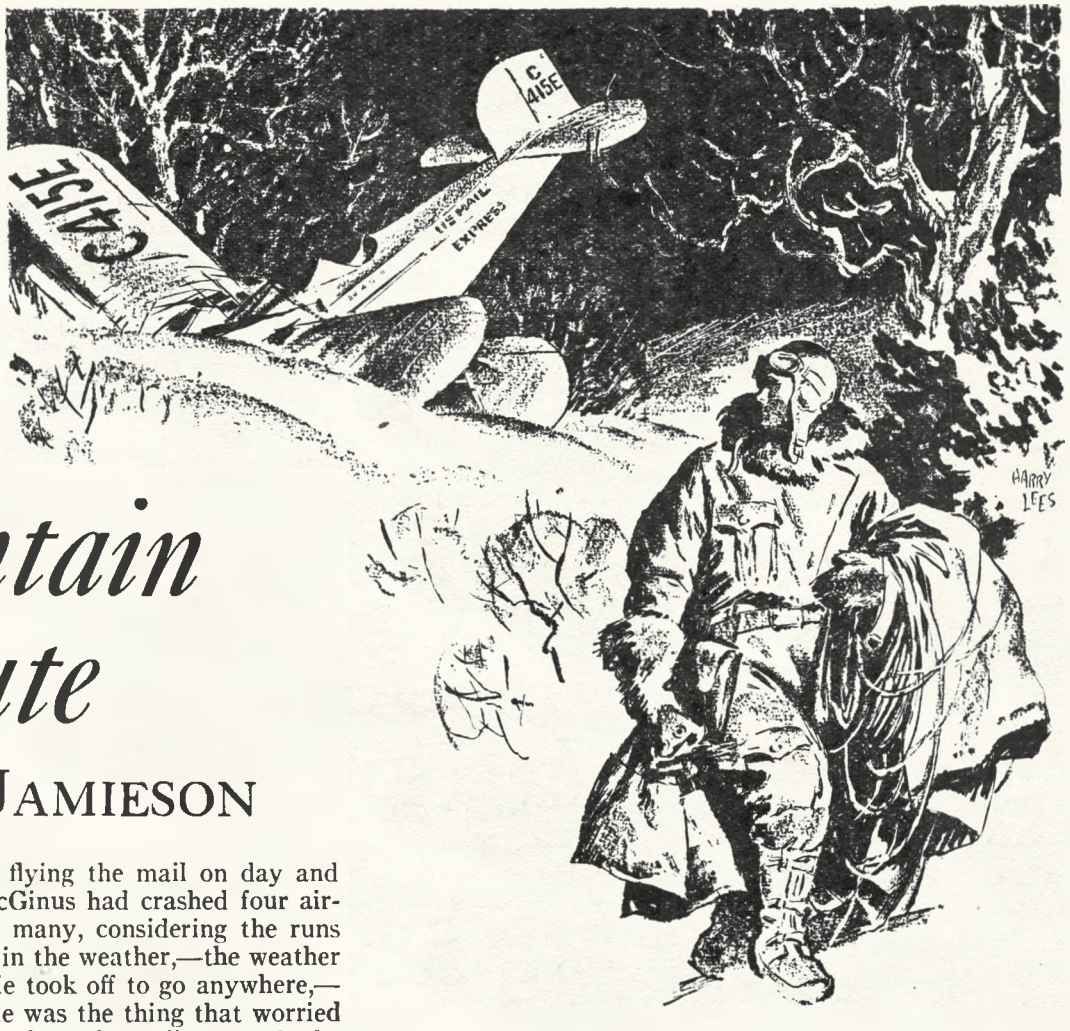
That night they slept in a great tree in the forest at the foot of the cliff. Tarzan constructed a rude couch for La between two branches, while he settled himself in a crotch of the tree a few feet below her.

It was dawn when Tarzan awoke. The sky was overcast and he sensed an approaching storm. No food had passed his lips for many hours and he knew that La had not eaten since the morning of the previous day. Food, therefore, was a prime essential; he must find it and return to La before the storm broke. Since it was meat he craved he knew he must be able to make a fire and cook it before La could eat it, though as for himself he still preferred it raw.

He looked into La's cot and saw that she was still asleep. Knowing she must be exhausted from all she had passed through the previous day, he let her sleep on,—and swinging to a near-by tree, he set out upon his search for food.

This absorbing story of adventure centering about fiction's foremost character brings us to even more thrilling situations in the next, the December, issue.

A graphic picture by a well-known author and aviator of some of the dangers that beset an air-mail flyer.



The Mountain Route

By LELAND JAMIESON

DURING three years of flying the mail on day and night runs, Collyer McGinus had crashed four airplanes. Which wasn't many, considering the runs he had had, the tough breaks in the weather,—the weather was always rotten when Collie took off to go anywhere,—and his attitude. His attitude was the thing that worried his operations-manager and the other pilots—and the bankers in New York, who owned the equipment he flew.

They all liked him after a fashion, each to his own taste. They liked his fearlessness, his way of talking—slow, deliberate, full of apparent importance. What they didn't like were the things he said; what they didn't like was his way of making them seem cowards, and novices with no knowledge of the business.

But what could they do with a man who deliberately started out on run after run with the expectation of jumping out and letting the plane crash to ruins somewhere in the darkness below? There wasn't anything to say—and Collyer made this plain.

"It's like this," he often said, openly and to anyone who was interested. "You go busting out on a helluva dark night an' you run into something tough. You sit up there an' argue with yourself about trying to make it through. You got U. S. mail in the pit, an' you got a damn' good performance percentage; you either got to do one thing or the other: you got to pull up into the stuff an' go blind in the fog, or you got to sit down. An' you guys know about how many times you can sit down between Hadley and Cleveland!"

"What do you care about a performance record?" Ollinger, reserve pilot from Cleveland, asked him once. "You get through ninety per cent of the time—which is my idea of a good way to get killed, especially this time of year. I'd rather be the oldest pilot in the world than the best one! And besides, how do you think the rest of us feel, when you're barging along blind—and we're sitting on the ground somewhere because of tough weather? You got every pilot on this run down on you now, just because of the way you go at this thing. When I sit down, it's because I think it's wise to do it. I'm not afraid to fly blind, but I'm not taking mail through for anybody when I think there's a chance of busting into a mountain because of weather. No, sir!"

Tonight Collie and Ollinger had almost come to blows about that same subject. Ollinger had added other things to what he usually had to say, had been hot in his denunciation. And when Ollinger was through, Collie McGinus smiled, that slow way of his. He lighted a cigarette, puffed easily. It was his night to go out, and as he answered Ollinger now, he fumbled in a preoccupied way with the throat-straps of his heavy winter flying-suit.

He was a big man, yet lithe in spite of his bulk; and there was about him that quality which produced respect and a sort of admiration even from those pilots most vicious in their condemnation of his flying ethics. But he cared nothing what anyone in the world thought of him, for he was single—as pilots over mountain runs at night should be. Caring nothing for these opinions, he was loud in declaring that sitting down somewhere along the route simply because some other pilot sat down, was weakness.

Perhaps it was weakness, but the boys who did it had warm friends and pals and buddies among the other pilots, while Collie hadn't, to any noticeable extent. Not that that mattered to him, either.

Tonight he was due out, going west into Cleveland. The east-bound plane from Cleveland had been canceled, for somewhere along the route a few hundred miles to the west a blustering wind had borne low clouds down upon the mountains. Bellefonte reported heavy snow and previously that day, before the clouds had shut off the sky

and prevented further balloon runs in the upper air, it had reported gales of thirty to forty miles per hour from the west, at ten thousand feet.

No wonder the east-bound trip was canceled! Collie should have been canceled too, but Collie had never been canceled—never yet.

Van Duyne, the operations-manager, had tried it twice. Collie quit both times, and he was so valuable a pilot that Van had hired him back again immediately and let him go out. And both times Collie got through.

BUT tonight it was tough, too tough for anyone to try to get there. Van called the pilots' room and asked for Collie.

"Can you come down to the office a minute, Col?" he queried.

Collie winked at Ollinger and shuffled out, like a great black hairless bear in his leather flying-suit.

"Argument!" he sniffed. "Van's got his wind up again—I guess he's going to cancel me tonight!" And he smiled, a way he had of smiling, so that little grin-wrinkles darted out and set themselves at the corners of his eyes.

Van Duyne was writing a report when Collie came in, and for a minute he did not lift his eyes, or speak. Collie, watching him disinterestedly, failed to note the tenseness of Van's mouth, the firm set of his jaw. He waited until Van finished writing; the other looked up and studied for a moment the barometer there in front of him upon the desk, and Collie saw that the barometer was falling, that the scrawling line descended rapidly. He was an old student of flying weather; he knew that this jagged line spelled danger.

Van Duyne pointed to it.

"I won't argue with you, Collie," he said, as one who, seeing an approaching tragedy, is powerless to prevent it. His voice was strained, but Collie didn't notice that.

"You better stay on the ground tonight," Van continued, fingering the yellow slip upon which he had written weather data collected from various points along the line. "It's within your judgment to make the decision; but I wouldn't try it." And then quickly, as if he thought Collie might believe him full of personal anxiety, he added: "Not that I give a damn about *you* particularly, because it doesn't do any good, and a long time ago I quit getting fond of my pilots—it's too hard on me when they go. It just isn't good for the morale of the others, Col. You know what they say and you *must* know what they think when they have to go galloping out on a night like this because there's another damn' fool in the world who's crazy enough to do it! Tonight we've got three sections going out, and that kid in there, Ollinger, is scheduled to go out right behind you. I'd like to cancel you, but I won't; and if I don't cancel you I can't very well cancel Ollinger—or Shea, who goes out last. Don't you see the position you put me in? You've *got* to cancel—for those kids!"

Collie was studying the floor in silence. He was tempted for a moment—but only for a moment—to agree with Van Duyne. He knew that he could go through, and he knew that storm or no storm, going through wouldn't worry him greatly. But he also knew that Ollinger and Shea were youngsters in flying and that they had been on the run only a few months. He knew they didn't like to fly blind, and he wasn't sure that they knew how to fly blind with any reasonable degree of safety. It worried him to think of them bucking the snow that lay to the west of Hadley.

He could not, however, quite bring himself to agree with Van and cancel out because two other pilots couldn't get through behind him. To his way of thinking, the decision lay entirely with them. If they thought it unsafe to go, why didn't they have the courage to go to Van Duyne and say so; why should they trail out behind him on a night like this if they had the least suspicion that they would get into trouble? Collie himself would have stayed if he had not been sure of getting through. And if he had been doubtful, he would have been man enough to stand up to anyone and declare himself.

That was Collie's reasoning, and from his viewpoint it was sound; it must be sound, for it had worked time after time in the past. The B-T Airlines had taken in many dollars which otherwise they would have lost, just because Collyer McGinus had gone through when other pilots wouldn't have. Why didn't they give him a bigger ship if they wanted one man to risk it and the others to sit and curse and wait for better weather? And he voiced these views to Van.

"It's the Christmas mail, Collie!" Van exclaimed, exasperated. "You've *got* the biggest ship in the outfit—and Ollinger and Shea have big ones too; but those three may not be big enough to handle all of it, as it is."

Collie smiled sardonically. "How many pounds is there to go—total poundage?"

"About three thousand—maybe thirty-five hundred."

"And it's all Christmas mail," Collie mused, as if confirming this knowledge in his mind, "all greeting-cards and gifts and love-letters—that people have paid a lot of extra money to have us get to Cleveland and Chicago and the West Coast sooner than trains could get it there. Most of those people don't know a snowstorm from a cloudburst—they think the air mail goes, regardless of weather—they're counting on these things being delivered. There'll be three or four or five thousand people in New York disappointed if we don't go through tonight—probably a lot more; and there'll be the same number at the other end."

"What's that got to do with whether you fly tough weather, or sit on the ground?" Van Duyne asked.

Collie laughed. "Plenty! If we don't go through, most of this mail won't be delivered until after Christmas!"

"That isn't any excuse for you to go out and kill yourself!"

"Hell, no!" Collie exclaimed disgustedly. "But I'm working for this company, whether you think I am or not; I'm working for the people who mail letters on this line. How many of those people who have air-mail letters in that truck out there are going to keep on mailing their stuff by air—if they find the railroads can make delivery quicker than we can? How many? Damn' few! That's what's the matter with this line now—we've fallen down on the people who support us!"

"Well and good," Van Duyne admitted. "If you were by yourself I wouldn't say a word. I'm thinking of Ollinger and Shea."

"All right! Why don't you do this: sort out the registers, and the stuff that's obviously Christmas presents. Let me take that part of the load, so there won't be a thousand disappointed kids on Christmas Day. I'll get through all right with the important stuff, and you can load the rest of it on the train. How about it?"

THE irregular, staccato rumble of an airplane motor, wavering on the gusty wind, sounded through the walls of the building. It was cold, and mechanics were warming the plane inside the hangar rather than taking it out into the sub-zero temperature where the oil would congeal and the engine wouldn't start. It was time to go.

"You're sure you want to?" Van Duyne asked at last.

"Of course!" Collie grinned. "If I can't get through I'll turn around an' come back—and there'll still be time

to put the stuff on the train. If the two kids don't want to come along behind me, they don't have to, just because *I* go out."

"No," said Van. "No, they don't. But the hell of it, Col, is that they *will*. And they're both scared—I talked with them this evening, and I could tell they were. Nothing in the world but pride is going to send them out across that run—if they go. And dammit, Col, it's rotten!"

"Cancel 'em!" Collie challenged quickly. "You're a helluva operations-manager if you haven't got the nerve to keep them on the ground if they aren't safe out there—keep them on the ground and still let *me* go! If you think there's a possibility of their getting into trouble, and you *don't* keep them down, you're a pretty poor stick!"

Van Duyne didn't lose his temper, as most men would have. He just said, simply, and with a little too much gruffness even for Collie not to notice that he was trying to hide his feelings:

"I guess I am, at that, Col. If I'd had any sense I'd have put you out of the organization the first time you tried to pull this stuff. Damn you, I ought to let you out right now! But I can't. You've got something I don't have—never will have. I admire your nerve—or maybe it's something else—I can't make it out. You go on—I guess I'll hold these other boys."

SOMETHING in his tone made Collyer McGinus, hard and unsympathetic as he was, feel sorry for Van Duyne. But he was not a man who could express such things readily, and he couldn't now. He stood there in front of Van, as if there were something he would like to say, or as if perhaps he expected more.

And Van Duyne added—grimly, now: "You've jumped two ships lately, Col, and they don't like it downtown. The insurance company has just put through a cancellation on any ship that's crashed without the pilot being in the cockpit. Naturally, if you jump again I'll get hell. And,"—he smiled faintly,—"I'm going to pass a little of it on to you!"

Collie shrugged. He had offers of jobs on every air-mail line in the country that amounted to anything; he didn't care what Van Duyne said or thought or told to other people. His job was to fly the mail, come hell or high water or sleet or wind, and he took a vast pride in fighting a nightly battle with the elements. He had never been defeated yet, although sometimes—a very few times—after he was in from his run and was looking back upon the narrow, fluctuating margin by which he escaped the odds of death, he wondered when or how his end would come.

Not that that worried him, either. "We enter this world alone," he used to say to his friend Streeter—before Streeter preceded him into the Unknown that vaguely intrigued him. "We enter it alone an' we leave it alone. This is a lone man's game, an' if you haven't got the nerve to die fighting, you better go out in an alley somewhere an' let a truck run over you, like a dog. An' you gotta cash in sometime, somehow; what's the odds to getting it out there in the mountains?" And he would laugh boisterously, and add: "Most people like to have company when they die!"

Which may or may not have been a comforting philosophy for Streeter when, six nights after such a talk with Collie, he crashed his ship near Jasper Falls, in Pennsylvania, and burned to death. But he died alone, and in doing that he left Collyer McGinus without a real friend in the world. It took Collie some time to get over it, to realize that Streeter had really gone; and then, instead of softening to his fellow pilots, and changing the way he had of handling men, he became even harder and more brittle, like quenched steel.

Tonight he was in a high good humor. He liked boys—children—although he had none and probably never would have. But it pleased his sense of his own importance to think that through him a thousand or more children would be happy on Christmas Day. He therefore had a purpose much stronger than usual in going out, in getting through tonight.

Before he turned and left the office he promised Van Duyne that he wouldn't jump—unless it became necessary to save his life.

"I don't bail out for pastime, Van!" And he grinned, pulling his cigarette from his lips and letting the smoke drift slowly from his mouth and up over his head in writhing threads. "I don't go out there looking for a thrill—you ought to know that by this time. Maybe I take my job too seriously; maybe I think it's more important to get through with the mail than it really is—I dunno. Anyhow, if I get in a jam I won't pile out until it's necessary—but if it's necessary all the assistant treasurers an' vice-presidents an' operations-managers in the world won't keep me in the cockpit! So long, Van."

He walked out, his heavy, fleece-lined moccasins padding softly on the cement floor, like the footsteps of a lion in a jungle. Darkness swallowed him for a moment as he passed the corner of the building; then he reappeared in the floodlight of the hangar, climbed into his ship and settled himself comfortably. The motor roared suddenly as he gunned it, and snow swirled into a million mirrors in the prop wash. He cut the throttle, waved his huge mitten to the men who shivered by the wings, turned quickly and was gone into the night. A blue spot marked the exhaust under the belly of the plane for only a moment before the silent, filtering flakes engulfed it.

There was a west wind aloft, increasing in intensity with altitude; Collie flew low to increase his ground speed. He checked his time carefully, for the land sloped gradually upward toward the mountains, then up abruptly. He had to start climbing in plenty of time to clear the hump, and yet he wanted to stay down until pulling up was necessitated by the rounded knobs below.

IT was snowing harder as he progressed westward, although the only way he had of knowing this was by the increasing whiteness of the infinite mat of ghoul-like shroud that extended on all sides around him. There were no lights visible upon the ground, for snow cuts down one's visibility even more than fog. From five hundred feet by his altimeter he could see nothing but a blankness below, or now and then an occasional dull red-amber glow as he passed above a large, well-lighted town.

But these few landmarks that he did check assured him that he was on his course and that all was well. He had flown this run for years, ever since the Post-office Department had operated it and had gone into the night schedule for quicker transcontinental service. He had been one of the first to object to flying nights, had been one of the loudest in his protests; but now he wouldn't have traded a night run for a day run with anyone, regardless of the hours or the country.

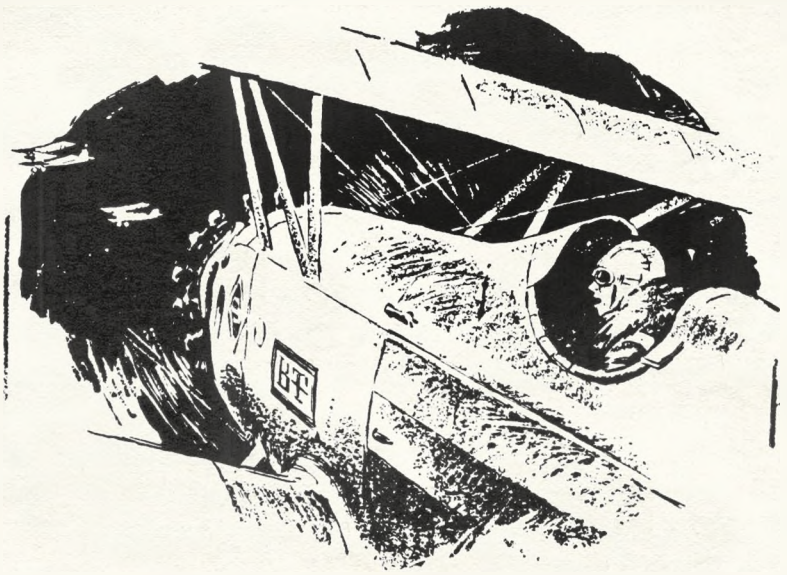
By the lapse of time he estimated that he had passed the Delaware River, that the ground below was rising slowly; and he pulled up to a safe altitude and plowed ahead into the fury of blank white snow. Occasionally, now, to get some idea of the quantity that fell, he withdrew his flashlight from the pocket of his flying-suit in which he carried it, and studied the hurrying train of flakes that seemed to be flung back in flat streamers on the wind.

This flashlight which he carried was indispensable. He always brought it with him, and there had been times, when ice had started to collect upon the ship, that he had detected it in time to pull up and climb into more frigid temperatures where the sleet pellets became hard and dry and slipped harmlessly over his wings without depositing themselves and sticking, adding untold weight and danger.

These periods of inspection, therefore, had become a habit with Collie. From time to time he shot the beam of light out upon the struts and wires; then he slipped the torch back into his pocket, crouched deeper into the cockpit for protection from the wind and cold, and hummed a tuneless, soundless song so that the vibrations of his throat mingled with the steady murmur of the roaring motor.

Collie McGinus was happy in his work; he never thought of danger as a thing which possibly could be directed toward him. Other men might go out—and some of them did, on a night like this—with fear in their hearts and a prayer on their lips that their runs might be made safely and with speed. But Collie neither prayed nor worried.

He had noticed, at irregular intervals since his take-off, that his compass light flickered, as if from a loose connection; and presently, when an hour out of Hadley it went out entirely and stayed out, he fumbled with the switch and failing to restore the light by that means, withdrew his clumsy mitten and worked with the light itself where it attached with a hook above the instrument. He got it burning once more, but in adjusting it before putting on his glove again, it went out again; and a moment later, in trying to replace it on its catch, he pulled out a connection. So he muttered to himself and let the bulb-case dangle on its cord below the instrument-board. He put on his glove again and folded his fingers into his palm inside of it, for the fingers were numb from the exposure.



Collie's heart leaped, and he thought joyously: "Some more damn' fools! I wonder if that's Ollinger and Shea?"

He was not, even through this carelessness, entirely unable to see the compass, for the dial was luminous. The finer graduations of the instrument, however, were obscure; and since in blind flying Collie was required to navigate with great exactness, he pulled out his flashlight and held it in his hand and flashed it occasionally upon the dial to determine more accurately his direction.

And as a result of holding the icy metal of the torch, Collie's hand grew colder until it throbbed with stabbing pains.

It may have been carelessness, it may have been a violent current of air, or it may have been this numbness of his hand that caused him to let his torch slip from his fingers. Collie, instantly cognizant of the danger of its fouling in the controls under his seat, reached for it even before it touched the floor. He reached so suddenly that he slapped it with his finger-ends—and he saw the full flash of light as the shining tube was hurled forward by this blow and struck the instrument-board.

What damage it did, if any, was not readily perceptible. Collie's main consideration was the recovery of the flashlight. To get it from where it rested on the floor he had to lean far over in his seat. With ordinary flying-clothing on this would have been simple, but with a winter flying-suit, and leather coats and heavy clothing beneath the suit, it was almost impossible. He turned in his seat, twisted forward, fought to get his hand down to where the flashlight lay; but always it eluded him. Finally he released the controls, unbuckled his belt, and, with a violent effort, recovered it.

This took perhaps two or three minutes of time, and during that interval the ship had wandered. Collie flashed his light upon the compass once again with a view to straightening out his path. And what he saw upon the board in front of him brought more of a shock of anger than of fear—and a great realization of his utter helplessness.

For in striking the torch he had knocked it forward into the glass of the compass! The glass was broken, and the fluid which had been inside the case to damp out oscillations and sudden movements of the card and needle, had drained out. The compass-card was bashed in on one side and hung now all askew, and as if in mockery the reading was due west—just as it had been when Collie had been on his path.

He sat there for perhaps a full minute, rigid, staring, while the full importance of the situation filtered through his brain. This could mean only one thing—he would have to jump, sooner or later. In blind flying the compass is perhaps the most important instrument, just as at sea when there is an overcast sky, a ship is dependent for its bearing upon its relation to the poles.

The thing maddened him. The stupidity, the idiocy of it! He *should* have to jump—jump, and land in a forest forty miles on every side of him, and have to walk out! And he'd probably do exactly that, and perhaps land in a tree again, as he had four months before. He hated to come walking in from nowhere, dragging and carrying his parachute and an armful of registered pouches.

Besides that, there was the matter of the concern expressed by Van Duyne and the bankers in the downtown office. Collie sniffed. Bankers! He wished he had one up here with him! He smiled, then broke into a laugh that died in the roar of the engine and the wind.

There was absolutely nothing he could do to determine his direction of flight; he had realized this instantly when he saw the compass broken. He might mill in a circle, following his bank-and-turn indicator from side to side, but never with even the approximate accuracy a compass provided. He could jump now and get it over; or he could

ride it out, hoping to run into a hole in the clouds and snow and to find a place to land. He had three hours of gasoline left in his tanks, and he was, he believed, two hundred miles from Cleveland. Besides that, he was supposed to land in Bellefonte—halfway between New York and the Western terminus.

That he would never get down at the Bellefonte field unless he got a lucky break, was clear to him; and he had no hope whatever of getting that. He was trapped; and although he was in no personal physical danger, he suffered tremendously from the humiliation. He would have been far better off had he accepted Van Duyne's advice and stayed at home. Still, if this thing had happened on almost any night when there had been a haze or a light fog or a heavy smoke condition that hid his beacons, he would have become lost eventually. A compass in an airplane at night is all-important.

Doubt has killed pilots when, had they been sure of what was taking place, they would have escaped all danger; and doubt assailed Collie now. A thousand thoughts rushed through his mind, and although there was no tendency toward panic or distraction, there was a thorough realization of his danger.

He might be flying northwest, he thought, and he knew that this, within the duration of his fuel supply, would put him over Lake Ontario in time for him to plunge into it after a parachute-jump down through the clouds. Or he might be going directly east, retracing the flight already made; and this, with a strong wind upon his tail, would place him over the Atlantic within an hour. He might be going in any direction whatsoever!

SINCE Collie was a man of definite decisions, he started an orderly checking of the straps and fittings of his parachute. He stuck his flashlight in his pocket—ready for use when he was drifting down into the blackness of whatever lay below him. He threw back the ends of his safety-belt, grasped his rip-cord with his left hand so that he could find it with his right when he was falling. Then he stood up in his seat, holding to the hand-grip on the right side of the windshield.

Through his mind passed thoughts of the criticism and ridicule he would receive from other pilots for this action, of the condemnation of the New York office—of the loss, perhaps, of his place with B-T Airlines. But these opinions, however bitter and harsh they might be, made no difference to him. There was another factor, however.

He had a thousand or twelve hundred pounds of mail in the pit in front of him. Christmas mail—mail for boys and girls and fathers and mothers and sweethearts. If he jumped and left it— Well, he didn't *have* to jump yet—he still had his motor; he still had his other instruments. A sudden idea came to him, and he slipped back into the cockpit.

He opened his throttle wider, climbed quickly. He had no idea of how high the top of the clouds might be, but he hoped his ship would climb above them. There were stars above those clouds, and a moon, perhaps. He couldn't remember whether or not this was the period of the month for the moon to be visible.

The plane rocketed up two thousand feet, climbing as straight as Collie could fly it. The snow was thinning now, and was more like ice or fine sleet than snow. The air grew terrifically cold, and Collie, holding the beam of his torch upon the strut thermometer, saw it was twenty-two degrees below. He wished he had a face-mask.

And then, while he could still see the particles of ice raining back behind him on the wind, he saw the stars above. He was at eight thousand feet by his altimeter. He climbed on through, found the thin, pale moon over his shoulder, looked out upon a marvelously beautiful expanse of billowing gray that stretched a mile or two in all directions and then merged imperceptibly with the blue-blackness of the starlight heavens. He was up—but not much better off than he had been down below; perhaps worse, for the wind was stronger here.

After a period spent in trying to orient himself, he located what he thought was the north star. It was almost behind him, and with all of his concentration, all his trying to make himself believe that he was right, he could not bring his mind to accept it as true north. The location of the moon was of no aid, for it was overhead.

In the end he fought himself into submission, obeyed his reasoning, and turned back until the north star was on his right—ninety degrees from the direction of his course. Then he settled down to the steady grind that would either bring him somewhere in the vicinity of Cleveland or would leave him, out of fuel, a derelict above the world.

He still clung to a savage hope of getting down somewhere, of finding a hole in the clouds; he didn't want to jump, with that load of mail in front of him.

Time raced by. An hour passed; still no sign of a break in the clouds below. There was not even a rift to indicate a ridge of hills or mountains on the ground—nothing but the gray-white infinity of frozen mist.

An hour and a half of gasoline remained in his tanks, and with a muttered curse Collie throttled his motor slightly and started down. He meant to drop on through to as low a level as possible, trusting to his altimeter to tell him when he was drawing dangerously near the elevation of the highest mountains in the range he crossed upon his course. It might be, he knew, that the storm had broken somewhere under him, that the snow had stopped, that he could see a light or find a town and kick out a flare and get down.

With his mind on this, he pulled the nose of the ship up, idled the motor as slowly as he could and yet keep its temperature at a safe degree, and started "mushing." He slipped out of the clear black air of the upper strata down into the clouds, and stuck his face around the corner of his windshield to see if he could feel ice or snow. His face was so cold that he could feel nothing. He flashed a beam with his light, and this showed him that the cutting pellets still persisted; as he mushed on down the ice turned gradually to snow again.

ON down, his eyes straining for a light, for a change in the color of the maddening white mass of stuff that brushed continually past him. There was no change, no lessening of the heavy flakes—rather, they increased.

So, when his altimeter reading gave him only a hundred feet above the highest of the peaks, and there was as yet no sign of a break anywhere about him, he gave up the struggle and started back. He had slid downward three thousand feet through ice and three more through snow, and he climbed back as rapidly as possible, thinking of the change in course he might have made without the stars to guide him.

And he had, in fact, made such a change. By the location of the star on which he guided, he was flying northeast. He muttered grimly at the futility of his efforts, turned around and started once more upon his westerly path. Going down and coming back had taken twenty minutes of his time; he still had an hour and ten to go before the motor sputtered and choked and died. And in that hour he had to get down or he had to jump—or rather, he decided, at the end of that hour he would have to jump. He wouldn't leave until all his efforts had been fruitless.

He flew on, watching the star occasionally, checking his instruments. He huddled low in the cockpit, for he was getting cold. He either was right about his direction—or he wasn't; he'd either find a hole in the clouds or he wouldn't. There was nothing to be gained by worrying, and yet he worried just the same.

He looked out upon the vast plain of mist just under him and wondered if it affected other airmen as it did him. Up here he was not afraid, regardless of his situation; up here he felt capable of handling anything that might arise. What about now? Well, he wasn't licked yet—and if the weather did beat him he still had his parachute to trust implicitly. He'd get home some—

Suddenly, almost ahead of him, crossing his course at a sharp angle, was a light—three lights—red and green and amber! And a few hundred feet behind the first group was another!

Collie's heart leaped, and he thought joyously: "Some more damn' fools! I wonder if that's Ollinger and Shea?"

He turned, opened his throttle wide and fell in place behind them as they passed. Apparently they didn't see him, for they held the straight, unwavering line on which they had approached. So Collie drew up alongside of the rearmost one, flew in close formation for a moment and shone his flashlight on the insignia on the fuselage. There it was—the emblem of the B-T Airlines! The pilot raised his mittened hand in greeting, went back to the serious business of flying on his compass-course.

So Collie trailed. He fell in behind and hoped his gas would last until they got where they were going. Yet he had no confidence in their line of flight. They were youngsters at the game, novices at this business—compared with him. He should have been up there ahead, leading the way for all of them—instead of trailing. Why, they weren't on the course at all! They were flying north instead of west, according to the stars! Didn't they know how to lay a course and fly it blind?

But even with his acrid doubts, even with his anger at the situation, Collyer McGinus trailed. He had been a derelict until they passed. They were going *somewhere,* and he meant to be there with them when they arrived.

And very suddenly, without the slightest warning, the clouds below dropped back behind them. Far beneath, dotted here and there in glistening clusters, were towns and hamlets. Somewhere down there was a traveled highway; lights moved in slow procession on it, winding like a snake from light-cluster to light-cluster. Far ahead was a bigger group; the visibility was now so good that in a minute more a solid line of lights took form and enclosed a blank place above which a beacon flicked its finger of white light around the rim of the invisible horizon.

Bellefonte!

They went down, and Collie, despite his shortage of fuel, despite the strain of nearly five endless hours in the air, felt constrained to let Ollinger and Shea land first. And when they were down, their wing-lights bobbing as they taxied slowly across the field, Collie came in, landed gently, and rolled up to the hangar that he had found so many times on stormy nights when other pilots sat upon the ground and cursed the weather.

He stopped his engine and climbed stiffly out, while shivering mechanics took the plane in hand. He didn't speak, as was his usual habit; instead he stalked woodenly into the office, pulled off his gloves and warmed his hands before the glowing stove.

No one spoke. Collie lit a cigarette, puffed slowly, then finally turned to where the younger pilots stood, huge and awkward in their parachutes and flying-clothes.

"How's the weather East?" he finally asked, grinning.

"Snow," said Ollinger.

"Why didn't you guys stay back there where you belonged?" Collie challenged. "You guys'll get bumped off, flying in weather like this!"

"Funny weather," Shea explained. "It was coming in from the south—we got a report after you left that it was clearing here. We went up on top of it—made it fine."

Collie waited, embarrassed, for the questions he thought were coming—questions that he dreaded more than the flight just passed. Yet neither of the other pilots seemed interested in the affair, and the older man, after a few minutes, grew slightly nettled by their attitude. The explanation must be made sooner or later.

But he didn't know how to proceed. He always had a hard time making men understand his views. He was about to make the effort, when a mechanic stepped into the office to write out a report. Collie called him.

"Got any new compasses here?" he asked. "Yeah? Well, put in a new one in my ship—mine's busted."

"Okay," said the mechanic. "Boy, it's cold out there!"

Collyer McGinus looked at Ollinger a moment, tried to grin. When he spoke there was a husk in his voice that made Shea look up from the floor quickly.

"You guys pulled me out of a helluva tight hole, tonight, if you don't already know it," Collie said. "Much obliged. I didn't care so much about myself, but I had that load of Christmas mail . . . . What say we shove on through to Cleveland together? And by the way—before we start, come outside and show me where the hell the north star is!"

"If I don't cancel you, I can't very well cancel Ollinger or Shea. You've got to cancel—for those kids!"

"Loose Change Jackson git he bill of d'vo'cement and dat sacks-of-phone de same week. Sho' is been playing havoc 'mongst de women ever since!"

Dying To Win

That desperate cases require desperate measures is an old adage never more convincingly illustrated than in this harrowing tale of overdue rent and endangered romance.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

IN bitterness Latham Hooper and Napoleon Nash, of color, stood upon the curb and watched the passing pageant of the local Leopards' Lodge putting on the full street ritual for a departed brother's funeral. When a Leopard died, Demopolis knew it. Lots of regalia, white plumes, two bands in the procession, and not a cook or butler in the white folks' kitchens until it was over.

The bitterness of Messrs. Hooper and Nash was not only personal but professional. Napoleon was Supreme Magnificent Commander, and Latham Tremendous Treasurer, of Demopolis Lodge Number Two-thirty-seven, Afro-American Sons of Temperance. And it was through just such spectacles as the two were unwillingly witnessing that the Leopards were so far winning out in the race for new members as to cause conversation among Temperance officials like their pageant had just interrupted between Napoleon and Latham.

"Say dat over ag'in," Napoleon again sought light on the Sons of Temperance situation as the tramp and blare of the Leopards faded down the street. "Whut you say de white gent'man say 'bout ouah lodge rent?"

"He aint say nothin', hahdly," gloomed Latham. "He jes' say is us aint pay hit by next Tuesday, us gwine find ol' padlock on de lodge do' when us gits ready to meet dat night. Den aft' dat he say he gwine levy on ev'y-thing us owns."

"De white man say dat?"

"He aint say nothin' else."

"Dat white man must want he rent," ruminated the pudgy Napoleon. He knitted practically his entire scalp in the intensity of thought which that conclusion next brought on. "An' look like us better pay hit."

"Wid whut?" Latham was like a lot of treasurers.

"How much money ouah lodge got in de treas'ry now?" asked Napoleon.

"Is us had fo' dollars an' fawty-three cents *more,* us would be busted."

Napoleon was thrown for a mental and mathematical loss of four yards, and penalized for offside play.

"Looks like us done busted a'ready—widout waitin' fo' de fo' fawty-three," was the best he was able to manage out of the circumstances.

"Means hit take dat much money to git us out de red ink," explained Latham technically.

"Aint no class to red ink," acquiesced Napoleon vaguely. A Supreme Commander didn't get anywhere appearing ignorant before a mere Tremendous Treasurer.

"An' if dat git out, hit jes' bring on mo' talk 'mongst de members," added Latham.

"Done been too much talk now," agreed Napoleon sadly. "Aint nobody talk louder'n a lodge brother whut think de off'cers aint totin' fair wid de kitty."

"An' us been losin' out to de Leopards' Lodge fo' new members ever since you gits be S'preme Magnif'cent Commander," continued Latham peevishly. "Yo' 'min'stration been a flop ev' since you steal dat dawg—"

"An' do de lodge no good when you lets dat other lodge's treas'rer win all ouah lodge's money off you in de crap game, is hit?" the pot hastened to divert the kettle by calling him black.

Latham changed the subject hurriedly.

"Whut us got do," he scrambled onto firmer ground, "is boost up de memb'ship an' git in some mo' dues befo' de rent come due."

"How we gwine boost up ouah memb'ship when de Leopards has all de fun'rals?" demanded Napoleon practically. "Ev'ybody know aint nothin' build up de memb'-ship like a good loud street fun'ral-procession—'specially mongst dem whut aint feelin' so good, nohow."

"Us aint even got nobody sick on ouah roll," deplored Latham.

"Sho' aint. Whar you gwine now?"

"Fixin' go off an' study up some way pay de rent. Cain't fo' git de way dat landlawd look when he say hit."

Which still left Latham free to pick his own place in which to do his pondering. And his choice naturally fell to the former circus-grounds in the Elmhurst area—for a reason.

In addition to his other troubles, Latham was in love. And if there is any troubadour blood in a boy, being in love brings it out. Which explained his Elmhurst complex. For there he came daily to look longingly at the steam calliope left behind when the last show to exhibit there had run practically a dead heat with the sheriff as far as the county line.

Latham was courting a widow with an ear for music and in a highly competitive field. Gladstone Smith, for instance, was effectively serenading her nightly with a mouth-organ so held in a yoke-like contrivance about his neck that both of his hands were left free for accompanying himself lustily at the same time on his bass drum. Not to speak of the boy who blew musically and soulfully, by the hour, into the neck of an empty jug.

Which was only serious, nevertheless, so long as Latham could not get hold of the calliope. For with it he could see his chance to run away with the field and the widow. Give him a two-days' start and a full head of steam, and Latham defied even symphony orchestras to woo her from him after that! In his mind's eye—and ears—he already saw and heard himself steaming impressively and deafeningly past the Widow Louella Cook's residence in Hogan's Alley, himself at the keyboard and the instrument emitting the stirring strains of "St. Louis Blues," or "Take Off Your Skin," at every pipe!

All of which but brought Latham sharply up against fresh realization that it was hell to be poor.

Today, in the doubled depths of gloom induced by the rent and the musical competition, he heard a familiar asthmatic puffing and wheezing behind him. Nor did he need to turn his head to identify the oncoming one. None other than Samson G. Bates, the leading colored financier and first-mortgage fancier of Baptist Hill, made all that fuss in getting about.

And Samson never went anywhere without there being a profit in it—for Samson—reflected Latham in additional bitterness.

"You look like you done had somebody skip a int'rest date on you, Mist' Hooper," Samson sympathetically mentioned the worst calamity he could imagine befalling anyone.

"All busted out wid trouble, dat's all," Latham indicated that he appreciated the sympathy, no matter how erroneous its basis.

"Collections *is* kind of bad," further condoned Samson. "Sales is pow'ful slow, too."

" 'Taint collections; hit's calliope." Latham was still verbally vague about the precise nature of his difficulties.

"I been feelin' bad about hit too—ever since I has to attach hit fo' whut dat show owed me," continued Samson. "Dem things sho' is hahd to sell."

Latham's mental ears pricked up. So it was Samson who owned his heart's desire? And far back in his mind something stirred feebly.

"Whut you want fo' hit?" he queried carelessly. A cat could *look* at a calliope—and price it.

"W-e-l-l," Samson deliberated, "on 'count de boll-weevil an' de drouth dis yeah, business aint so good. So I'd say anybody whut say sevumteem dollars, round whar I could heah 'em, is liable to wake up nex' mawnin' ownin' dat calliope."

Latham's net worth, after depreciation and Federal taxes, was approximately seventeen cents. The expression on his face indicated as much—also the depth of his longing, which last was not lost on Samson.

"—Co'se," therefore went on Mr. Bates shrewdly, "aint nobody hahdly want own a calliope pussonal—dey takes up too much room in de parlor. But a awg'nization now, like a lodge— De Leopards been talkin' to me—"

Suffering broke out on Latham's face like nettle-rash at Samson's last sentence.

In turn, Samson saw that it was time to set his loaf away to leaven. Let a prospect want anything badly enough, was his philosophy, and salesmanship merely resolved itself into a search on the prospect's part for ways and means. And Samson had implanted a potent germ.

Shuffling up Hogan's Alley in the dusk that evening, Napoleon came upon Samson's newest prospect, and the lodge's treasurer, mooning against a telephone pole, an unwilling audience while a new note—in fact, a whole set of new notes—was shattering the peace of the alley and the outlook for Latham as a lover.

"When' dat new boy gwine git tuned up an' staht playin'?" Napoleon inquired of Latham.

"Dat's one dem sacks-of-phones he's got," Latham enlightened him sourly. "Dey sounds dat way when dey's *in* tune."

"Well, whut you so fur down in yo' clo'es about, den? You aint have stay round an' listen to hit, is you?"

"Naw, but hit's plumb ruinin' me wid de Widder Cook. Women *likes* to heah dem things squallin'. Dat nigger's Loose Change Jackson. He git he d'vo'cement an' dat sacks-of-phone de same week. Sho' is been playin' double barr'lled havoc wid 'em 'mongst de women ever since! An' whut hit takes to outplay him befo' Louella is jes' 'xactly whut I aint got!"

"Boy, you better move yo' mind from widders to rent. When you say dat white gent'man say he gwine lock up an' levy?"

"Nex' Tuesday night, befo' de meetin'."

"You let dat happen, an' hit ruin de lodge."

"*I* let hit happen? Why, I's done wo' my tonsils off shawt now, tryin' study up some way sa'sfy dat white man! But he say he caint heah nothin' but money."

"How much you say he want?"

"Twenty dollars or he padlocks."

"Hmph!" muttered Napoleon. "An' dey aint nobody I knows of dat's even sick—'cep'n de King of dat

Again the disconsolate Sons of Temperance officials stood upon the curb and watched the rival lodge hog the public eye and ear.

Af'ican country, Ab—Ab—Abyssinia. An' I jes' reads 'bout *him* in de papers!"

"C'n see dat padlock now, wid my eyes shut," Latham lent no optimism to the discussion. "Me an' you bofe got to go back to work aft' dat, too."

Napoleon couldn't deny it.

"Seed Samson G. Bates 'while ago," he recollected. "He say, is I see you, tell you come on down to he place of business. He got prop'sition to lay befo' you."

"Heah whar I's fixin' lose a good shirt," commented Latham. "Why, a bird whut fly over de place whar-at Samson's finished tradin' has to carry he lunch wid him: aint even a w'um left lyin' round loose aft'wahds."

"Boy as busted as you is, *caint* lose nothin'," pointed out Napoleon comfortingly.

But Samson proved in a surprisingly mellow frame of mind when Latham at length shuffled into the room in the rear of a barbershop and speak-easy where Mr. Bates was wont to transact his dubious and various business.

"Done sprain both eyes lookin' fo' you, boy!" Samson greeted jovially. "How you feel 'bout dat calliope now?"

"Jes, like I always is. But aint nobody say yit whut us gwine use fo' money."

"When de buyer really wants de article, de money can always be arrange'," purred Samson, "—'less'n he got writer's cramp or somep'n."

"Wuz pipe-awgans two bits apiece, I couldn't buy de tissue paper to play on a comb wid," Latham filed his financial statement. "Aint nobody busteder dan me, 'cep'n de Sons of Temp'ance lodge."

"Buy de calliope fo' de lodge, den," outlined Mr. Bates. "Put you right on yo' feet den. Adv'tise, *'A calliope at ev'y fun'ral of a paid-up member'*—an' watch dem Leopahds sweat."

"Aint nobody even sick," demurred Latham, but less firmly. "An' how de lodge gwine pay you when hit cain't even pay de rent?"

"Git de calliope an' you aint eveh have no mo' trouble wid de rent. Ev'ybody'll flock to jine de Sons of Temp'ance so fast de li'l ones'll git step' on, de minute you puts on yo' firs' fun'ral wid dat calliope playin' in de procession. You be de calliope-player, of co'se."

Samson's last shot brought Latham to bag. All he could see was himself playing that calliope in the street, with the Widow Louella Cook standing admiringly on the curb!

"You done sol' yo'se'f dat calliope!" he closed the deal. "How you gwine git yo' money?"

"All you does," continued Mr. Bates, "is assign to me ha'f de 'nitiation fees fo' de new members de calliope brings you, twel I gits my money."

"Us pays you half of all de new dues twel you gits paid—sevumteem dollars?" repeated Latham.

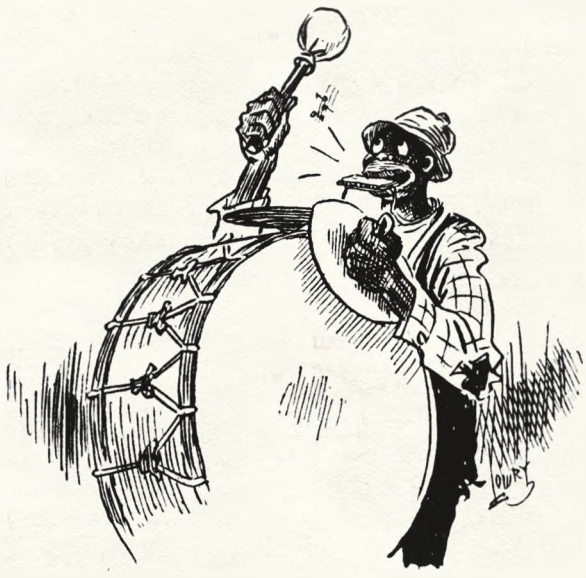
"Hundred an' sevumteem," corrected Samson. "Sevumteem wuz de *cash* price."

Latham blinked and grunted. "S'pose de new members aint come in fast enough?" he held back.

Samson cast his mental eye over the public health. With no one on the Sons of Temperance prospect-lists even ill, he could afford to seem to take a chance. Besides, calliopes were a hard piece of merchandise to move. A seeming concession was in order.

"Jes' to show how strawng I is fo' de Sons of Temp'ance," he conceded, "I's gwine do somep'n to sweeten de sale, den: I's gwine pay de lodge twenty-five dollars, cash money, fo' de first fun'ral you has durin' de time you's payin' fo' de calliope! Dat show you I means well."

"Shows me you think aint gwine be no fun'rals," muttered Latham under his breath. But, aloud, "Whar-at c'n git pa'r mules haul dat inst'ment to de lodge lot?" he inquired happily.



Gladstone Smith was effectively serenading the widow nightly.

Napoleon Nash, Supreme Magnificent Commander, met his treasurer in Rock Cut, and caught his breath at the change in him; Latham was now all fire and vinegar.

"Whut ol' lodge needs is business man'gement!" Latham was putting out on sight. "Git in a jam, hit's de treas'rer whut git hit out!"

"You must paid de rent?" hopefully hazarded Napoleon.

"Not yit. But sees whar de memb'ship gwine pick up so fast us'll have to git a bigger hall nohow."

"You better lay off dis Rock Cut drinkin'-gin."

"Aint no gin. Done bought de lodge a calliope."

Napoleon rubbed his ears. Something must be wrong with the way they functioned.

"You says," he recited thickly, "dat us lacks fo' dollars an' fawty-three cents of havin' 'nough money in de lodge-treas'ry to be busted? An' you buys a calliope? —*Wid whut?*"

"Makes business deal wid Samson. Assigns half all de dues us gits in to him, twel pays him hund'ed an sevumteem dollars. Den de calliope's ourn."

"Is you remember dat all de dues us took in fo' 'nitiation all las' yeah wuz twenty-six dollars? An' two dollars of dat wuz in bad checks!" Napoleon grew grim with his treasurer. " 'Sides, how 'bout de rent?"

But the optimism of lovers is incurable.

"Done fix de rent paht," rejoined Latham. Every time Napoleon spoke it kept him from hearing himself in fancy, playing that calliope up Baptist Hill. "Puts one over on Samson: he pay us twenty-five dollars cash money fo' de firs' fun'ral, while us payin' fo' de calliope."

"Dat means Samson done look over the list an' see aint nobody even sick," Napoleon refused to drop pessimism. "Nobody aint never put nothin' over on Samson yit —let 'lone a halfwit wid de heaves, like you."

No optimism could be proof against too clear a memory of Samson as a business strategist.

"Hit takes dyin' to win, is de deal you done messed yo'se'f up in," Mr. Nash was recapitulating painfully. "An' who gwine die? Not fo'gittin' dat de rent's done due an' de white folks done through foolin' wid you 'bout hit. An' when de landlawd levy on ev'ything de lodge own, aint he gwine git dat calliope too?"

Latham stood around with his jaw ajar, and watched himself disintegrate as a business genius. Also as the successful suitor for the Widow Louella. Whatever happened, he wasn't going to play any calliope up the hill before her

after all! Everything, including the rent-money and winning the widow, hung on playing that calliope in public.

No calliope, no funerals; no funerals, no twenty-five dollars for the rent; no rent-money paid, no calliope kept—that was the vicious circle. —And nobody even sick, this side of Abyssinia!

Dully Latham dropped to the curb. But even there his pain was made the more bitter as there drifted to him from afar the strains of Loose Change's saxophone, weaving a spell for the Widow Cook with the stirring melody, "Take Off Your Skin."

For all of which, it has been noted that it never rains but it pours. Even with public health practically perfect, luck continued to dog the steps of the Leopards and to desert the arid area of the Sons of Temperance. Scarcely had the echoes of their most recent two-band, four-drill-team pageant given a respected member died away, when Latham and Napoleon had fresh proofs thrust upon them that the breaks were still strictly in the Leopards' favor, in the shape of a miscalculation on the part of a fully paid-up Leopard in his flivver. By a narrow but important margin he had failed to beat a freight-train to a crossing.

So again the disconsolate Temperance officials stood upon the curb and watched the rival lodge hog the public eye and ear with a pageant that dimmed and dwarfed even their own previous efforts.

But only when the lugubrious Latham suddenly swayed and thudded to the sidewalk like a stricken ox was it seen that the Leopards had gone too far.

For, stepping proudly in the parade, his divorce-decree protruding prominently from his pocket while his saxophone tootled and screamed to the stars, strode Loose Change Jackson—and admiringly behind him, in the white-robed ranks of the Leopardesses' Auxiliary, marched the Widow Louella Cook, in her eyes the light that leads to "Lohengrin," if a rival suitor doesn't do something about it!

But what could a boy do?

Even in Hogan's Alley, all Latham could hear was the saxophone of Mr. Jackson, and the low laughter of the Widow Louella as she drank in its stirring strains.

It was Saturday that Latham, seated in a Strawberry Street barbecue-stand hopefully scanning the obituary column of the just-issued Demopolis paper, suddenly dashed that journal to the floor and tore a door of the stand loose from its hinges in his haste to gain the street.

Thereafter a slight haze of dust hung in his wake as he hung up an enviable record for the four-block dash from the barbecue-stand to where Napoleon Nash had parked himself for the forenoon.

Shortly after which, smaller clouds of dust could be seen arising on Baptist Hill, converging into one as the members of the executive committee of the Sons of Temperance followed sundry hastily dispatched messengers toward a meeting-place.

"Tells you dey aint no *if* an' *but* about hit!" Treasurer Latham Hooper was shortly laying down the law to the committee-members. "Hit's de first sign of luck de Sons of Temp'ance Lodge is had since 'Poleon wuz a pup!"

"I votes fo' hit," Commander Nash expressed his views slightly later as the ballot was taken, "—but I resuhves de right to say hit wuz all Latham's idea, an' to take to de woods is de members git rough."

"Gangway fo' de p'rade!" Latham overruled his fears. "Luck done change!"

Long Demopolis remembered it: Foremost came the Temperance trombone band. Behind them rolled Sim Silver's hearse. Then the Sons of Temperance, lugubriously liquored for the occasion, wearing cheesecloth robes and bearing spears at various angles.

In a solid body behind the paid-up membership marched the applicants for membership.

And behind the applicants came Latham—Latham in all his glory; Latham, behind two mules driven by Gladstone Smith, and seated before the keyboard of the Calliope—while Frisco Johnson shoveled mightily beside him in the interests of a full head of steam!

Above the roar of the calliope's pop-valve, music swelled the breeze. "St. Louis Blues," "Moanin' Low," and a version of "Take Off Your Skin" that made Loose Change's rendition of that classic sound like a small wind blowing through a knot-hole in a board fence.

Behind the calliope, rode—not walked—the Widow Louella Cook. And if a question arose here and there along the sidewalks as to whose was the funeral, it was set aside for later answering.

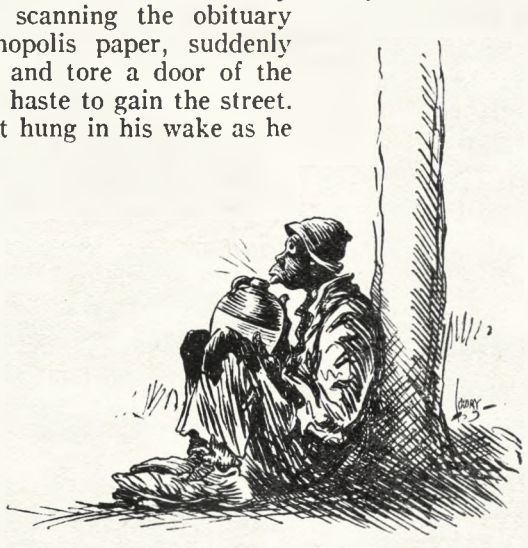
"Little David, Come Play on Yo' Harp!" toot-toot-tootled Latham, and small darkies rolled in the gutters in ecstasy. "Sing, You Sinners!" was flung tunefully to the sky. And none saw Loose Change Jackson, up a side street in resigned endeavor to pawn his saxophone.

"Who us buryin'?" whispered a marching Temperancer of his slightly alcoholized fellow-ranker amid the dust.

"How I know, boy? An' whut you keer, nohow? All I's skeered of is de music stop."

THE tender breezes of Tuesday night toyed with the honeysuckle vines that clung to the porch of the Widow Cook. Behind them sat the widow—and Latham.

Across the street shone the lights of an un-padlocked lodge-room, filled with gathering applicants for membership. On the curb below stood Samson G. Bates, keeping tally of them as they went in.



The boy who blew musically and soulfully, by the hour, into the neck of an empty jug.

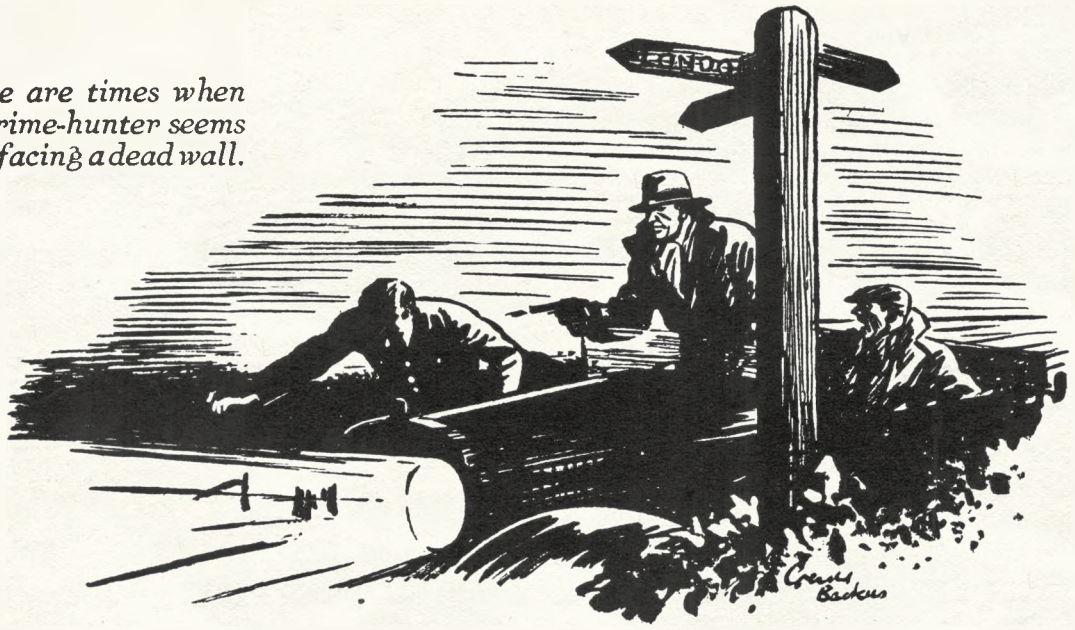
"Whut dat Samson Bates hangin' round de foot dem steps fo', honey?" cooed the widow.

"He's jes' tryin' see aint nobody do him out he half of de new memb'-ship dues, sugar," chuckled Latham largely. "He been skeerier dan a tawmcat in de dawg's yard, ever since us puts on de big fun'ral t'other day an' he has to make good on dat twenty-five-dollar offer of his'n to de lodge fo' de firs' fun'ral procession de lodge has, while hit's buyin' dat calliope from him. Dat *one* time dat big nigger slip up an' cawst hisse'f somep'n!"

"You sho' is smaht man, Mist' Hooper!" breathed the Widow Cook lovingly. "An' you sho' plays a mean calliope! By de way, who wuz de fun'ral for dat y'all put on so grand? What you say he name?"

"Dat? Aw, dat wuz fo' a non-res'dent member whut us took into de lodge on 'count de rent bein' so near overdue dat us 'bleeged to git Samson's twenty-five dollars fo' hit befo' de new members begins comin' in. I didn't notice he name, honey—de paper jes' called him *'de King of Ab'ssinia!'*"

There are times when the crime-hunter seems to be facing a dead wall.



The Mills of God

III—The Door of Chance

By George Barton

Illustrated by Gerald Backus

IN the cold gray dawn of September 27, 1927, the dead body of a man was found on a country road near Stapleford Abbots in Essex, England. His uniform indicated that he was connected with the metropolitan police force, and soon thereafter the remains were identified as those of Police Constable Gutteridge, one of the best-known and most popular members of that particular district.

He had been shot through the head four times and the position of the wounds suggested that they had been inflicted by some one standing over him. His helmet and an open note-book were near the body, and his lifeless hand was clutching a pencil. They were grim reminders of a faithful officer who had been stricken in the performance of his duty.

The discovery created a profound sensation, particularly among his fellow constables—who were filled with a burning desire to avenge his death and bring the murderer or murderess to justice. The London police, who are noted for their efficiency in hunting down criminals, have a regular method of procedure when such crimes occur, but in this instance Chief Detective Inspector Berrett determined to take personal charge of the investigation.

Almost at once he came to the conclusion that Constable Gutteridge had been shot down in the act of halting an automobile whose occupants he had reason to believe were engaged in some unlawful enterprise. There was an autopsy; the bullets were removed and subjected to expert examination. One of the first things demonstrated was that they had been fired with the aid of black powder. Also, the marks of the firing-pin were found on each cartridge that had been fired. These marks are just as individual as fingerprints. The investigators were convinced that the weapon with which poor Gutteridge had been killed was a Webley pistol. These were slight clues, to be sure, but they gave the police something to work with.

In the meantime news of the murder had been spread broadcast, and two hours after the finding of the body a most important discovery was made. A clerk in Brixton, a suburb of London, found a Morris-Cowley car parked in the yard back of his house. Being, like most Britishers, a methodical person, he immediately notified the authorities of the find. The police were there in record time. They found that the radiator of the machine was still warm; that was proof conclusive that it had not been there many hours. The clerk had never seen the car before and was certain that it did not belong to any of his family or friends. The left fender was bent, indicating that it had been in an accident. There was blood on the running-board on the right side of the machine. Under the driver's seat they found an empty cartridge-case, marked "R. L-4."

The sight of this gave the police a thrill—and for a very good reason: It corresponded precisely with the caliber of the bullets which had killed the policeman!

While this was going on the detectives at Scotland Yard were losing no time. The search not only took the police into every part of London but also into all of its suburbs. Whitechapel was literally fine-tooth-combed; and the same was done to all other disreputable sections of the English metropolis.

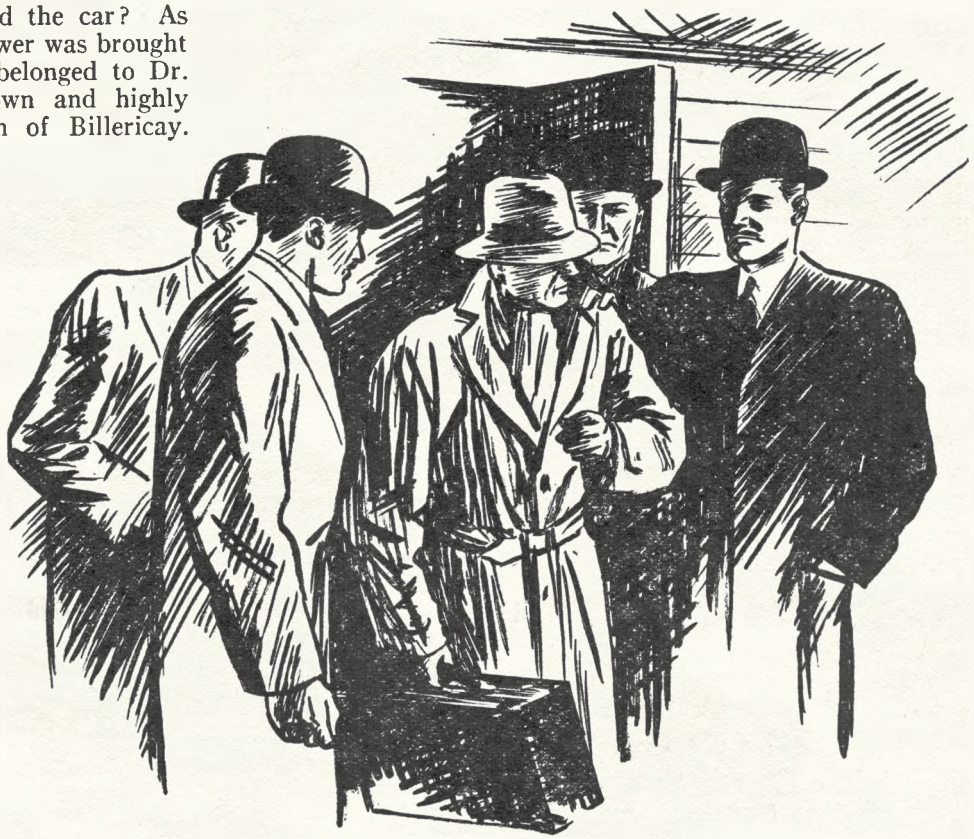
In the midst of all this the cartridge that had been found in the back of the mystery-car was being subjected to a scientific examination. It was discovered that it was the kind of cartridge that had been withdrawn from the Army soon after the beginning of the War in 1914. Inspector Berrett recalled this very vividly because it was used with a flat-topped bullet.

Several days went by and the murderer was still at large, but the authorities felt they were making progress. Chief Detective Inspector Berrett sat in his office in Scotland Yard gathering up the loose ends of the investigation. He was constantly in touch with the men who were

on the case, and at intervals he went out on it himself. This sturdy, dogged, day-by-day worker held the theory that there was always one detail about a crime which would eventually lead to the arrest of the criminal—it was the clue that would finally bring him into the dock. And in this case the thing he could not banish from his mind was the picture of the unfortunate policeman lying on the ground, his cold hand clutching his pencil, and his note-book only a few feet away. There were a few scrawls on the note-book, but nothing that was complete enough to aid the investigators. In all probability he had been shot down as he was about to write a name and number in the book; the meaningless scrawl in it was the scrawl of death.

Chief Berrett decided that when the ownership of the mystery car had been determined it would be the first real step toward the solution of the crime. Who owned the car? As if by magic the answer was brought to him. The car belonged to Dr. Lovell, a well-known and highly respected physician of Billericay. He had visited police headquarters and identified the machine as one that had been stolen from the garage of his house on the night of the crime. He had notified the local authorities as soon as he learned of his loss—but of course it was some time before the complaint reached Scotland Yard.

Dr. Lovell said that he had left a number of medical instruments and a few packages of bandages in the car when he put it in the garage after making a sick-call on the night before the murder. These articles had been taken away with the car.



Browne turned pale and managed to say: "Well, what is it all about? What do you want?"

Detective Inspector Berrett received the information with outward calmness, but he had an instinctive feeling that these tell-tale articles would play an important part in the investigation that was going on.

He was right, for in precisely two weeks after the murder the unexpected happened. There are times when crime-hunters seem to be up against a dead wall in their investigation; then the god of Chance opens a door for them.

This is what happened in the Gutteridge case. It was the undefined or unknown cause of events not subject to calculation. The incident or accident that led two men straight to the gallows, was a motor-collision in a part of London far removed from the scene of the Gutteridge murder. To all intents and purposes it was one of those routine things undeserving of serious consideration. The constable on the beat strolled over to the offending car and called for the customary information.

The driver showed him a license with the name of Sidney Rhoades. The car was numbered XK-2508. But it was found there was no such name, and the address given did not exist.

Mr. Sidney Rhoades, so-called, was under immediate suspicion. That was the first surprise, but there was another yet to come. It was that license Number XK-2508 belonged to a taxicab that had never been out of London. The cabby was able to demonstrate this to the entire satisfaction of the police. Here were two startling discrepancies that called for further investigation. But the suspected man was not told of these discoveries; instead, he was permitted to go about his business and informed that there would be a further hearing in his case later in the week. But Scotland Yard was on the job at once—Sidney Rhoades was followed to Clapham Junction; it did not take long to learn that his real name was Frederick Guy Browne and that he was a garage-keeper on the Northcote Road; later it was found that he had an employee by the name of W. H. Kennedy. They were busy men — Browne and Kennedy. They would leave their place of business early in the morning and return late at night. Indeed, much of their work seemed to be done under cover of night.

Browne was overbearing and brusque in his manner, while Kennedy was submissive.

They were followed day and night, and soon the police made an important discovery. The two men were engaged in the stolen-car business!

With the evidence he had in hand, coupled with intuition, Detective Inspector Berrett was now convinced that these men were responsible for the murder of Constable Gutteridge. But his common sense told him that a false or premature move would ruin his case, so he adopted a waiting policy. The business of shadowing the men was continued without interruption and a close watch kept on their garage. At dusk one evening Guy Browne was seen coming out of the garage carrying a suit-case. He was about to get in his car when the signal was given; four plain-clothes men appeared instantly and told him that he was under arrest.

There was nothing timid about Browne, but this unexpected assault disconcerted him. He turned pale under his coat of tan and managed to say:

"Well, what is it all about? What do you want?"

He was told that he would have to be searched; and as the odds were against him, he submitted as gracefully as possible. After that the police went into the garage and discovered several things. Finally they went through

the car—and when they had completed their work, this is what they had found:

A gray mask.
Twelve revolver cartridges.
A jimmy and a flashlight.
A fully loaded Webley revolver.
A bag containing seventeen skeleton keys.
A pair of Spencer-Wells forceps.
A six-chambered revolver.

The last-named revolver was loaded with flat-topped cartridges marked R.L-4. This, it will be recalled, corresponded exactly with the kind supposed to belong to the empty cartridge-case found in the car that had been stolen from Dr. Lovell of Billericay.

This loot was not precisely the kind of stuff that is carried around by law-abiding citizens—and the sight of it piled in a heap seemed to weaken Browne's iron nerve.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you've got the stuff—and now I suppose you're going to get me!"

It was a slip of the tongue; he recovered himself almost instantly and became the typical crook defying the law. While two of the policemen were taking Browne into custody the others made a more detailed search of the garage. They were rewarded by finding another pair of forceps, a tube of ethyl-chloride, a metal case containing scalpels, a package of boric lint and a roll of soft cloth used for making bandages.

These were some of the articles which Dr. Lovell had left in his car. Thus the police had linked Browne with that car, and had linked the car with the murder of Constable Gutteridge. One of the officers said quizzically:

"What's the idea of all the medical supplies? Are you running a hospital?"

"Certainly not," was the quick reply. "That is part of the garage equipment."

But the police did not accuse him. Although they were confident of his guilt, they adopted another method of proving it. Under the instructions of their chief, Browne was simply arrested on the charge of stealing an automobile, he was placed in a cell.

The next move on the part of the police was to get Kennedy, the partner, employee and possible accomplice of Frederick Guy Browne.

Kennedy seems to have been a singularly simple-minded person. He had fled the moment the officers got on the track of Browne. That in itself was a confession of guilt —we have high authority for saying that "the guilty flee when no man pursueth!" His next mistake was in the manner of his flight; he went to Liverpool and seemingly made no secret of the fact. The investigators learned this when they went to his lodgings. Two Scotland Yard men were sent after him and at once got in touch with the local police officials. The news of the Gutteridge murder had spread all over England and the Liverpool police were not only willing but eager to join in the hunt for a man concerned in the murder of one of the force.

They had a description of their man, but their task was not entirely devoid of difficulties. Liverpool is not London; but it is a populous city, the second seaport in the United Kingdom and it has its rough quarters. They traced Kennedy to the address at which he proposed to stop, but he had left there to take lodgings down near the docks. This was finally located and was guarded front and rear. Then the pursuers settled down to wait.

The hoped-for moment came sooner than they expected. One morning Kennedy opened the door of the house and jauntily walked forth. As he reached the sidewalk one of the detectives touched him on the arm.

"Good morning, Mr. Kennedy!"

He smiled amiably at the salutation.

"Good morning!" he replied. "But you have the advantage of me. I don't think I know you."

"Possibly not, but we might as well get acquainted. I am from Scotland Yard and Chief Inspector Berrett wants to see you down there."

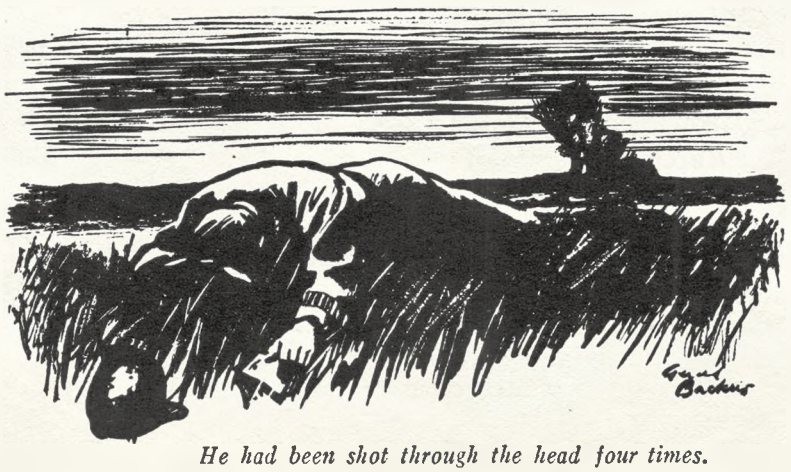
"Very well," he answered. "I'm ready to go with you."

That very morning they returned to London. Kennedy was turned over to Berrett and the other officials interested in the Gutteridge murder. He was informed that he could make a statement if he wished, but was warned that anything he might say would probably be used against him at the trial. Without any ceremony, and to their amazement, he proceeded to make a complete confession of the part he had taken in the tragedy.

He told all about his relations with Browne and said that they were engaged in the business of stealing and selling cars. They had met with a fair degree of success and gradually they relaxed their caution. They had never been caught, and they went on the assumption that they never would be. On the occasion in question they had been watching the movements of Dr. Lovell and found he was in the habit of parking his car in his garage so carelessly that almost anybody could get into the building. Late on the night before the murder they had entered and secured the automobile without any difficulty. Then they started in the direction of Clapham Junction.

Browne was the driver and he went at a speed defied by all of the motor regulations. Just as they approached Stapleford Abbots in Essex, the form of a man appeared in the country road and commanded them to stop. Browne put on the brakes; as he did so, Police Constable Gutteridge appeared at the side of the car and asked them where they were going at such break-neck speed. He got no satisfactory reply to his question, and adjusting his lantern, he pulled out his note-book and pencil for the purpose of taking down the license number.

At that instant Browne suddenly drew his Webley pistol and fired at the officer's head. Gutteridge swayed for a moment and fell to the ground. As he partly arose, Browne took aim and fired at him a second time. This time Gutteridge dropped to the ground unconscious. In spite of the fact that the policeman had been fatally stricken the assassin deliberately fired two more shots into his prostrate body. Then he calmly took the wheel and the car sped away in the darkness. When they reached Brixton they ran the car into the back yard of a little house there and abandoned it. They proceeded on foot to Clapham Junction, where both went to bed and to sleep. Browne did not show the least re- *(Please turn to page 136)*



He had been shot through the head four times.

Illustrated by Harry Lees

"It wasn't your fault you're behind," said Vail; "it's your coaching—it was my fault!"

The Coach

By

W. F. G. THACHER

Shall he remain true to his code? A stirring story of the locker-room and football field.

"THERE'S no doubt about it at all, Mr. Vail—Chester Sprague broke training and violated a university rule last Saturday night. He and another student—a boy by the name of Spencer—drove two girls out to a notorious road-house on the Murray Hills highway."

Coach Vail sighed, and his big body slumped farther in the chair behind the desk in his office.

"Were they—had Sprague been drinking, Professor? Was he drunk?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that any one of the party was actually intoxicated. My informant used the expression 'oiled', I believe. Spencer had a flask, and they ordered ginger-ale."

"The girls—"

"They were not students, fortunately—but two chorus-girls from the city. Our investigators have questioned both of them, and neither one denies it. For that matter, Spencer himself admits it, but he refuses to implicate the others. You know how college students are. They won't tell on each other. I have evidence enough, however. The whole affair will be laid before the disciplinary committee at once. The only reason I've come to you with this information is because of Sprague's position on the team. I'm a great football fan, you know."

"Well, thank you, Professor—thank you." If there was a hint of irony in Vail's voice, it passed unnoticed. "That was good of you, I'm sure."

"Don't mention it. I'm always glad to be of service. And I hope that Sprague's absence won't hurt the chances of our team with Corinth next Saturday."

Left alone, Coach Vail scratched a match, applied the flame to his half-smoked cigar, and sat drumming on the desk with his thick fingers. That meant that Sprague was out, of course—if what Professor Abby said was correct. If only Abby hadn't been so self-righteous about it! If he hadn't taken such obvious pleasure in his role of self-appointed tale-bearer!

It was just another problem—and Vail was tired of problems. A wave of weariness swept over him. He felt old—and alone.

The door opened and his secretary, young Molly Kennedy, came in.

"Mornin', Coach," she greeted him, in the throaty drawl reminiscent of her Southern childhood.

"Good morning, Molly," Vail replied. "How's Red this morning?"

"Fine, thank you. Fit to gallop. That boy of mine sure gave me a scare, though. But he put up a fight. He's a fightin' kid—just like his daddy was before him. But he won't be playin' any football for a while."

"That's just as well," Vail answered. "I suppose eight-year-old boys have no business playing football, anyway. Mustn't let anything happen to Red, you know; what would the Spartan team do without their mascot next Saturday? Believe me, they'll need one, too."

The woman caught the note of discouragement in his voice, and came quickly toward him.

"Anything gone wrong, Coach?" she asked him.

The man gazed out of the window for a moment—then turned toward her.

"Sit down, Molly," he said. "I've got to tell somebody—and—"

"And it might as well be me," she finished, with a little laugh. "Sure, why not?"

In a few words, but with a bitterness that he couldn't

quite keep out of his voice, he told her what had happened.

"That's sure a bad break—I'm tellin' you," the young woman said, tapping her white teeth with her pencil. "The big game comin' up, too. Who will you put in—Fletcher?"

"I suppose so. He's really the only end we've got left, since Moran broke his ankle. Fletch is good enough on defense—but he's slow getting down the field—and when it comes to catching passes—"

"How about Shrimp Phillips—too light?"

"By about twenty-five pounds. He's got everything else, though—that kid! But what can a hundred-and-fifty-pounder do against those Corinth tackles and backs?"

"He's a better man than Fletcher, at that."

Vail laughed. "You may be right, Molly. I'd back your judgment against most men—when it comes to football."

She made him a little mocking bow.

"I haven't been Coach Vail's secretary for four years for nothin'! And I learned a lot from Red's daddy too, before—"

"Sure you did. I haven't forgotten. Red gets his football instinct by inheritance, all right. His dad was one of the greatest tackles I ever saw."

The telephone rang sharply; Vail picked up the receiver.

"Vail speaking. The president wants to see me? All right—I can come now as well as any other time."

"Prexy prob'ly wants to see you about this Sprague mess," Molly said. "Watch your step, Coach!"

Vail picked up his shapeless old cap and started for the door.

When he had gone, Molly stood for a moment behind the chair he had left vacant. Unconsciously her hands played caressingly across the back. Her eyes were luminous, and a little smile lifted the corners of her mouth.

THE president received his caller graciously, and motioned him to a seat. This was President Du Pree's first year at Sparta. He was a youngish man, with small, near-sighted eyes, and a high, thin nose. After chatting a few minutes about irrelevant matters, he cleared his throat, and asked how the team was coming on.

"Why, not bad, Mr. President—not bad. Could be a lot worse."

"That's good, Mr. Vail. I'm glad to hear you say so. I'm a great believer in football, you know—as a developer of character. Coöperation—team-work—'a sound mind in a sound body.' Now, the game with Corinth this week, Mr. Vail—a victory is very important. We haven't been very—ah—successful this season, so far, have we?"

"We've won three games, lost one, and tied two. In the percentages, we're tied with Corinth for first place. The teams are all very evenly matched this year."

"Yes—exactly—exactly! I had lost track of the exact standing. But the alumni—Sparta's supporters, you know—they're unreasonable in their expectations, no doubt—"

"They want a championship every year, Mr. President. No team can win all the time. Up to last year, Sparta had won three championships in succession."

"Of course. I understand exactly. But this year—it's a critical year, you know. A new administration—and Sparta taking her place among the great universities of the land. A championship would be greatly—appreciated. The—ah—material is all right, isn't it?"

"I've got no fault to find with the boys. We're doing our best."

"And the staff—your assistants? I've heard excellent reports of the work of Mr. Heitmuller."

"I've got no fault to find."

President Du Pree got up and paced about the room. Then he halted.

"Vail," he said abruptly, "I'm going to speak frankly to you. We're both men of the world. More depends on this game than just a football championship. You know as well as I that the public—among them certain very influential individuals—measure the prestige of a college by the success of its athletic teams. Especially football. Now, I have the best of reasons for believing that a very wealthy man—not an alumnus, but who has a son in college—has practically decided to give a magnificent gift to Sparta for the building of a great stadium. I'm not saying that this gift depends upon our winning the championship. But I am told that Mr. Sprague—ah—that this man is a great football enthusiast, and that a victory on Saturday would clinch the decision."

VAIL said nothing for a moment. His voice, when he spoke, sounded tired. "The man you're talking about is Mr. Chester Sprague, isn't it?"

"Well, yes—the name slipped out. I wasn't supposed to disclose his identity."

"That's a bad break, Mr. President."

"'Break'? What do you mean?"

"His boy—Chester Sprague, Junior—is in trouble. Professor Abby tells me he broke training-rules. He—"

"Oh, that!" Du Pree interrupted with evident relief. "Unfortunate, of course—but only a boyish escapade, after all. The case will be dealt with by the disciplinary committee this afternoon."

"Yes—but Sprague broke training-rules. He can't play."

"But, Vail—this is a disciplinary matter for the proper authorities to handle. You're assuming too much—"

Vail had risen, and stood facing the other man. A dull red had crept into his face.

"Mr. President," he said slowly, "I don't care what you do with a student for breaking the rules of the school. That's your job. But I'm running the team. I make the rules—and I decide when they're broken."

The two men confronted each other for a moment. Then Du Pree turned away, and lighted a cigarette. When he spoke again his face had cleared.

"Of course, Mr. Vail. I understand your position. Only—I'm asking you, as man to man, to be as lenient as possible with the boy. A first offense, you know—"

"It's a week before the big game. If I let this go, my authority would be ended."

"I'm sure you look at it too seriously, Coach. Let's see—how long have you been at Sparta?"

"This is my fifth year."

"And you've made a splendid record, too—especially during the first three. You—ah—have a contract, I suppose?"

"It runs out this year."

"I see—I see. . . . . Of course, we should be glad to have you remain with us—especially if we should win next Saturday."

He had risen as he spoke, and the interview was obviously nearing an end.

"Well, thank you for calling, Mr. Vail. Just don't do anything hastily. Remember that there are large issues at stake."

Heavily Coach Vail left the building, and walked back to his office. He found Heitmuller awaiting him. Heitmuller, the first assistant coach, was a brisk, efficient young man, a Spartan alumnus, whose actual playing experience had been slight, but who had developed a great capacity for system and organization. He drew from his pocket a set of carefully prepared diagrams.

"We've got every play that Corinth has used this season.

The scouts have done a thorough piece of work. And here are the defensive formations for our team."

"It looks as if you had covered everything," commented Vail, with a gleam of ironic humor in his eyes as he glanced through the charts. "I don't see where Corinth has a chance to make a first down against us."

"They'll outweigh us four pounds to the man—that is, if Mogenson starts the line-up that I'm counting on. Brown, their full-back, is a powerful line plunger. Their tackles are big and fast. But their passes are poorly screened, their timing is bad, and their kicking is way below par. If Sparta will wait—play percentage football—we ought to win by at least one touchdown."

"Sprague is out, you know," Vail said quietly.

"*Out!* How's that? I didn't know action had been taken so soon."

"You mean the disciplinary committee? I didn't wait for them. Sprague broke training-rules; he can't play."

"But, Vail," Heitmuller remonstrated hotly, "that will weaken the team twenty per cent! He's the best end we have. It will ruin our passing attack. Of course I know that discipline is discipline. But the case hasn't been proved yet. And if the university is satisfied, I don't see why we—and with less than a week to work in a new man—"

"I know." Vail's voice was flat. "But Sprague is out just the same."

Alone once more, Vail walked to the window that looked over a sweep of lawn, with the bleak pile of the old grandstand and bleachers rising in the distance, and chewed on the end of his dead cigar. He ought to feel himself fortunate, he told himself, to have so capable an assistant as Heitmuller; but instead he was irritated by the man's very efficiency.

The mood of depression swept over him again, and a thought crept insidiously into his mind—a thought that had come more than once of late, but one he had hitherto repelled as a sort of treachery. He would quit—retire—settle down somewhere, where he could fish, hunt, play a little golf, and take life easy!

What was it the President had said? "Especially if we should win next Saturday." If they didn't win perhaps he wouldn't have to quit, he thought. He wished he had saved more of his salary. But there had been his wife's long illness—and the operation. It might have been different if Dora had lived. There was no one to care any more. . . . .

Molly Kennedy came in with a batch of letters and laid them on his desk.

"How'd you make out with the President?" she asked.

He turned to her eagerly.

"All right, I guess. He wanted to know about the team—and all."

He didn't see the tenderness that lay in her eyes.

"Int'rested, was he? Well, he ought to be. Did he say anythin' about Sprague?"

"You broke training, didn't you? A rule's a rule. You'll have to turn in your suit."

"Why—yes. He thought the disciplinary committee ought to handle it. But I— Well, Sprague is out."

"You stood by your guns, then? That don't make me feel bad any at all! Sometimes, Mister Richard L. Vail—if you don't mind my sayin' so—you seem to fo'get that you're head coach aroun' this plantation."

The man had sunk into his chair.

"I suppose you're right, Molly," he said after a minute. "But I—I don't seem to be much good any more. Getting old, I guess. Why, here it is the week of the big game—and I haven't got much to do. Everything's been taken over by the organization; Heitmuller—and the rest. What am I here for, anyway?"

"You're still Dick Vail, aren't you—and head coach?" Molly asked sharply.

"Yes—I'm still Dick Vail. By George, you're right, Molly; only I don't believe you meant it in just the way I do. I'm Dick Vail; it's the name that counts—not *me;* it's the name that fills the stands, and brings in the prep school athletes! That's all I am these days—a name. Dick Vail—recruiting officer—a box-office attraction!"

"My goodness! Why, that's more words one after another than I ever heard from Dick Vail in my life. You're all steamed up, aren't you? I 'most believe you're a-feelin' sorry for yourself, Coach."

If he had looked at Molly as she spoke, he might have seen the compassion that dimmed her eyes.

"Maybe I am, at that," he said ruefully.

"It's a universal human failin'. We all get that way at times."

"You've been a brick, Molly—all these years. Let's see—how long has it been?"

"I came back here the year after Sammy died; that was six years ago. You came two years after. Red and I have been here ever since."

"You've been a great mother to Red too, Molly. I don't see how you've stuck it, though—taking orders from grouchy old hard-shells like me—"

The young woman's eyes flashed as she replied: "Well, if you aren't ol' Mister Cheerful himself this mornin'! Why, you'll be havin' me cryin' over myself next. Then what'll you do? But you're all wrong, anyway. It's the details that count, in the long run—and you know it. Take your coachin' job, now. Don't you spend weeks and weeks out there just teachin' those boys details—how to block and tackle and use their hands, and all the fine points of position-play? And isn't that just what goes to make a winnin' team? Besides—"

There was a knock at the door. Molly opened it, and passed out of the room. Chester Sprague, Jr., came in, greeted Vail and took the chair at the other side of the desk.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Vail?"

"I sent for you, Sprague—yes. I suppose you know what for."

"Oh, I suppose it's about that little party we pulled the other night. Well, what of it?"

"You ought to know that too. You broke training, didn't you? You know what the rules are?"

The boy shifted in his seat, but his voice was hard:

"Oh, I did it! Training-rules are the bunk, anyway. The whole team is stale; we'd all be better off for a good bender."

"That's not the point. A rule's a rule. You'll have to turn in your suit."

Young Sprague rose slowly from his seat, and his hands gripped the edge of the desk. Beneath the deep bronze gained on the football field, his face turned white.

"You mean I'm kicked off the team, Coach? That I can't play against Corinth?"

"That's about it."

"But you can't get away with that! You can't kick me off the team! You're a has-been—and everybody knows it. You're through here, right now. Heitmuller will be coach next year. Why, I—my dad—why, I can bust your team all to pieces!"

He stared incredulously at the implacable figure across the desk. Then he collapsed into his chair, trembling.

"Please, Mr. Vail—please," he begged. "You don't know what it means! I can't stand it if I don't make my letter! They can fire me from school if they want to, but I've got to make my letter. I'm sorry I said what I did. I'll apologize. Only let me play—*let me play!*"

He waited a moment—then rushed from the room.

For a long minute Coach Vail sat motionless. Finally he put his finger on a buzzer on his desk, and Molly came in.

"Get word to Heitmuller that I won't be on the field this afternoon," he said.

His eye caught the heading of a letter that Molly had brought to him earlier. It bore the name of a great university. He scanned the contents—then sat for a moment thinking. Turning, he handed the letter to Molly Kennedy, who had not yet left the room.

"You might read that, Molly," he said.

As soon as she had caught the purport of the letter, she came toward him, and made a little curtsy.

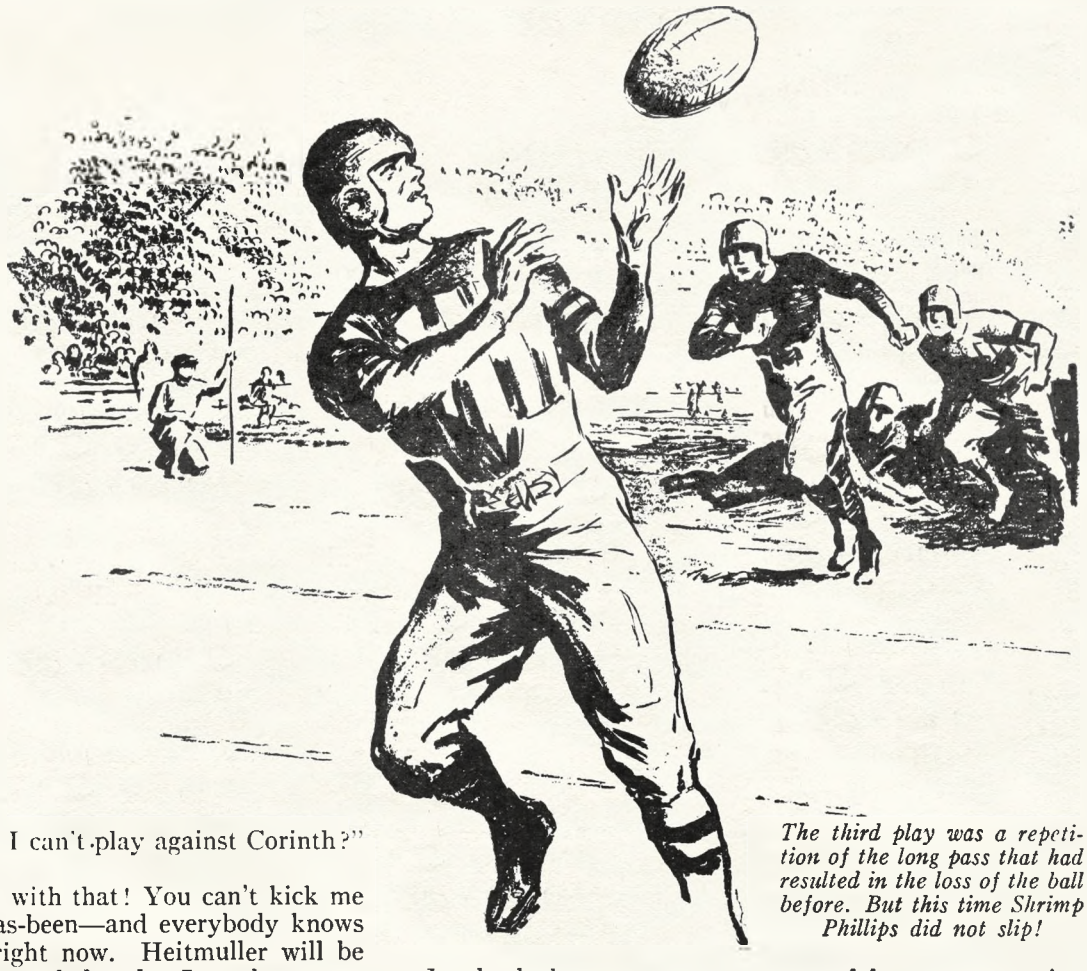
"Congratulations, Mr. Vail, on the great honor that has come to you! You'll accept the offer, I suppose? We—we'll be missin' you here at Sparta."

"I don't know yet, Molly. I've got to think it over. But this certainly puts a new light—on things."

THE big game—Sparta *versus* Corinth—for the championship of the Conference!

All that morning special trains had discharged their load of alumni and visitors upon the little town. All day long the highways were choked with automobiles. The campus fairly seethed with people.

Early in the afternoon the currents of activity and excitement flowed and eddied out toward the football field, where the stands were already filling with people. The crash of bands sounded through the crisp November air.



The third play was a repetition of the long pass that had resulted in the loss of the ball before. But this time Shrimp Phillips did not slip!

In the locker-rooms, two groups of boys were getting into uniforms. Coaches and trainers were busy with last-minute instructions and ministrations. In the camp of Sparta, Heitmuller was everywhere—nervously issuing orders, and checking off details in his notebook. Coach Vail, a dead cigar between his teeth, was talking quietly to Wade McAlpin, captain of the Sparta team.

In the press-box, a score of men were writing furiously. There was the stutter of typewriters, and the syncopated chatter of telegraph instruments.

Near by, another young man was preparing to tell the wide world of radio listeners just what was happening out on Sparta's field that bright November afternoon.

Seated with President Du Pree and Mrs. Du Pree in their box, was a tall grayish man, enveloped in a fur coat, and a much younger man—his son, probably.

As the Spartans trotted out on the field, there came the rocking rhythm of cheers from the gridiron. Right behind Captain McAlpin, and clad in the full panoply of the Spartan uniform, was a small boy, conspicuous by his crown of ruddy hair. Just before he took his place on the bench, he turned and scanned the banks of seats behind him. Discovering the object of his search, he waved at Molly Kennedy, who rose and waved back at him.

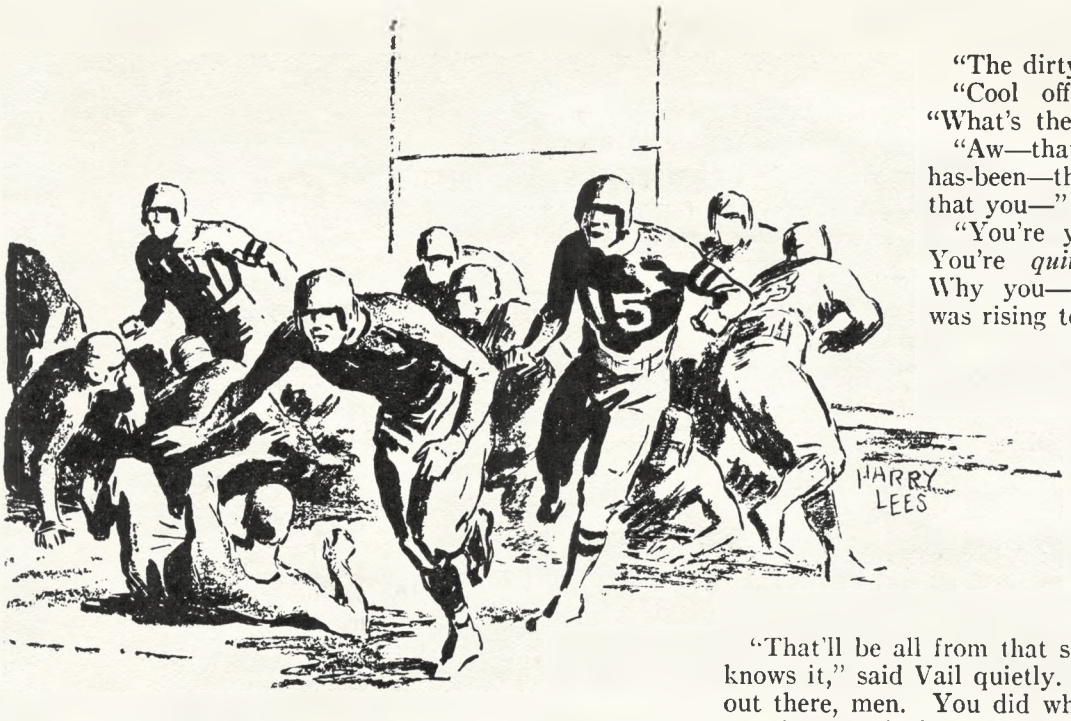
In the center of the great arena, two boys stood nervously by the side of the referee as he tossed a coin in the air. Then they trotted back to their respective teams, who scattered to their places on the field.

A moment that seemed an age of intolerable waiting, and the silence was shattered by the blast of a whistle. From behind the long line of Corinth's warriors a figure moved swiftly forward—the ball rose in a high parabola and the great game was on.

Receiving the ball from the kick-off, Sparta kicked on the first down.

Starting from their forty-yard line, Corinth attacked at once. Through guard for four yards; again for three; off right tackle for a first down. In two more attempts,

By W. F. G. Thacher



they made yardage again, and the line was moved forward. Billows of cheers swept up from the Corinthian supporters.

Here Sparta held, and Corinth punted. But Sparta's offensive failed to function, and on the kick, the Corinthian safety ran the ball back twenty yards. By short, sure gains, with Brown doing most of the work, Corinth moved down the field. Thirty-five yards to go—then twenty. They were within scoring distance now. From the Spartan stands came the imploring chorus:

"Hold 'em, Sparta—hold 'em!"

Off tackle for three yards; two more at center. Then, with the Spartan secondary defense drawn in to meet the consistent line attack, a nicely screened criss-cross that resulted in a forward pass. The rangy end who took the toss found himself in the clear, and darted across the line without opposition.

A moment later, Corinth, kicked goal, and the score stood, Sparta, 0—Corinth, 7.

For the remainder of the first quarter, and well into the second, the game was a humdrum affair, with no scoring threats. Brown, Corinth's backfield ace, had been taken out, and their attack lost its edge. But even when Sparta had the ball, they seemed unable to launch a consistent offensive, and continued to kick on the second or third down.

"Percentage football," the wise boys up in the press-box commented, and laughed cynically.

Along toward the end of the half, Sparta was forced to kick from behind their own goal line. The pass was high; a big Corinth forward came tearing in and blocked the kick. As the ball bounded away, he leaped after it, fell on it, and another touchdown was added to Corinth's advantage. With the resulting goal, the score read, Sparta, 0—Corinth, 14. And there it remained at the end of the half.

As the two teams, followed by substitutes, coaches and trainers, made their way across the cinder track toward the entrance to the locker-rooms, there was a sudden commotion—the sound of cries, blows, and scuffling feet.

Coach Vail, at the end of the procession, turned to see a fiery-haired boy, clad in full football regalia, held off at arm's-length by a huge rubber from the Corinth camp-followers. With his free hand the man was feeling gingerly of his nose, from which the blood was streaming. Red was flailing at him with both fists—ineffectually but enthusiastically. Vail collared the boy and led him away.

"The dirty bum!" Red was crying.

"Cool off, Red," Vail admonished. "What's the matter, anyway?"

"Aw—that big bum said you were a has-been—that you'd lost your punch—that you—" Red became incoherent.

"You're yellow, I tell you—*yellow!* You're *quitters*—every one of you! Why you—you—" Heitmuller's voice was rising to a shriek of invective as he harangued the group of Spartan players in the between-halves intermission.

"You're nothing but a pack of yellow—"

Vail's heavy hand caught Heitmuller by the shoulder and sent him reeling against the wall of the locker-room.

"That'll be all from that skunk! That's a lie, and he knows it," said Vail quietly. "You played good football out there, men. You did what you were told to do. It wasn't your fault you're behind—it's the fault of your coaching—it was *my* fault. I'm taking the blame—get that? Every bit of it! I've been making the same mistake you have—letting some one else take the play away from me. I can see it now. But, by God, it isn't too late to correct it! You've got thirty minutes to do it in."

Vail stepped closer to the players, and looked into their eyes. When he spoke, his voice dropped to a lower pitch. But there was something in it that vibrated. The players caught it; they lifted their heads, squared their shoulders.

"This is probably the last time I'll talk to you fellows—the last time you'll ever play for me. I've been a rotten coach, this year. And I've got no right to ask you to do anything for me—personally. But for Sparta's sake—for your sake as men—get out there and fight! Take the ball away from them. When you get it, fight like hell! Forget that percentage stuff—you're out to score! Make a touchdown. And when you've done that, make another. You can do it—you've *got* to do it! If you don't, I'll tell the whole world whose fault it was—mine. But I won't have to. You're going to win. I'm making just one substitution. Phillips goes in at right end. Now, let's go."

ON the kick-off, Corinth got away with a long return that brought the ball back to Sparta's forty-five-yard line. A completed pass earned fifteen more, and a penalty against Corinth, another ten. To the spectators, it looked like a repetition of the disaster of the first half. Then Sparta broke up a couple of line plays, and batted down a pass. The punt rolled over the goal line.

What happened after that will never be forgotten by anyone who sat in the stands that November afternoon. The eleven men who up to that moment had seemed beaten, cowed, and humiliated, suddenly fused into a fury of flaming power. In eight successive plays, they carried the ball thirty-five yards. They lost it on a penalty. They recovered a Corinth fumble, and started all over again. This time they reached Corinth's twenty-five-yard line before an intercepted pass gave the ball to their opponents. But Corinth's kick was partially blocked, and again Sparta started her drive. Straight through the line, and around the ends; off-tackle slants, and cross-bucks; rifle-shot passes and perfectly timed deception plays—the Sparta men threw everything they had against Corinth, and—just after the turn of the quarter—they scored a touchdown.

The try for goal was a failure. But nobody cared. They had found themselves. Irresistibly they attacked once more. A forty-yard pass, with Shrimp Phillips on the receiving end, covered half the distance; and inside of five minutes they had scored again, and converted the goal.

The score; Sparta, 13—Corinth, 14.

The ranks of Sparta's rooters rocked in a madness of joy. Up in the press-box, the young men wrote frantically in a desperate attempt to chronicle this miraculous thing they had seen, while the man behind the microphone, entirely forgetful of his rôle of impartial announcer, galvanized his unseen but multitudinous audience by yelling wildly when Sparta carried the ball over the line.

But Sparta was still one point behind. Could they repeat? Could they achieve a third time what twice before had seemed impossible?

GRIMLY the Spartan players set themselves to their task. From the nine-yard line they started. On the second play, McAlpin tried a long forward pass. Shrimp Phillips had the pass timed to a nicety. The Corinth safety came tearing across the field. Just as Shrimp whirled to make the catch, he slipped and fell sprawling. The safety, leaping high, caught the ball, and made fifteen yards before a Sparta tackle dragged him down.

Now the whole picture had changed. It was Corinth's ball on Sparta's thirty-five-yard line. And the precious minutes were passing.

Slowly Corinth went into a huddle. Two yards through center. Again that exasperating delay. Another yard at tackle. This time their tactics cost Corinth a penalty. But their full-back stepped back, and kicked the ball out of bounds at Sparta's ten-yard line.

Less than four minutes of playing time—and nearly the length of the field to cover! Sparta took time out—and the entire body of students, friends, and alumni stood, bareheaded, and sang the Spartan battle-song.

When play was resumed, the rays of the November sun lay almost level across the field. The first play gained a yard; the second was good for four. The third was a repetition of the long pass that had resulted in the loss of the ball before. But this time Shrimp Phillips did not slip —and one-third of the distance had been covered!

On the first play of the new down, McAlpin found an opening off-tackle—knifed through—then cut back—and wove his way for fifteen yards before he was stopped. Another short pass, and two plunges straight through the line earned another first down. They were well past the center of the field now, and it was the adherents of Corinth who were praying their team to "hold 'em!"

On the first play, the full-back blasted his way through guard for a first down. An end run lost five yards. But on a lateral pass, the runner got loose, and twisted his way through half the Corinth team before he was downed within the twenty-yard line.

It was drama—it was war! So taut was the suspense that a curious hush fell over the crowds in the stands. Twenty yards—and little more than a minute left.

Three yards on a slide off-tackle; two more through center; one more at end. Then a daring pass that Shrimp snared out of the air—to be downed just two yards from the goal line. Two yards to make, and four downs to do it in! Sparta's huddle was but a pretense. The ball was snapped, and McAlpin dynamited into the mass of players. Again the shock of hurtling bodies as the two teams crashed together. The officials dived into the pile and burrowed after the ball.

The whistle—and an instant's pause, as the men set themselves for the last charge. Then the silence was split by the report of the timer's gun.

The game was over. Corinth had won—14 to 13!

Out of the crowd that flowed across the field, one of the first to reach Vail's side, was Mogenson, Corinth's veteran coach.

"By golly, Dick," he boomed, in a voice that could be heard above the vast confusion that filled the air, "I want to tell you that was one of the greatest things I ever saw on a football field! We won—but your boys out-played us—and tell 'em I said so!"

Vail went on into his office, and a few moments later there came President Du Pree—and just behind him a good-looking young fellow and a tall man in a fur coat.

"My congratulations, Mr. Vail," the President said, "on a defeat that was at least a moral victory. And I want to introduce a man who, I understand, is a great admirer of yours—Mr. Chester Sprague."

Mr. Sprague came forward and shook Vail's hand. His thin face lighted up with a smile of singular warmth.

"I want to congratulate you too, Coach, on the showing of your team—*our* team! It was wonderful. And I want to say something to you right now. You fired my son, here, off the team the week of the big game. I know the circumstances—all of them. You did the right thing, Mr. Vail. Not many men would have had the courage to do what you did."

Chester Sprague, Junior, pressed forward.

"Dad's right about that," he said, his face flushing. "I had it coming to me. But I'm coming back next year, believe me—and earn my letter. That is, if they'll let me."

"I think that—ah—can be arranged," said President Du Pree. "And you'll be glad to learn, Mr. Vail," he went on, "that Mr. Sprague has offered to build us a great stadium—"

"On one condition," Sprague interrupted; "that is that Mr. Vail will agree to remain as head coach at Sparta for at least five more years."

"Well, we take that for granted, of course," President Du Pree said.

Coach Vail turned and gazed out across the field, now deserted, where long shadows were falling. From some distance came the strains of the Spartan battle-song—and the last echo of a cheer.

INTO the room there came proudly a boyish figure, armored in the full panoply of the football paladin. With him was a young woman, smiling—but a little hesitant, when she saw who was there.

Dick Vail took the hand she held out to him, and looked into her eyes so full of generous feeling. And as he looked, there came to him a realization—a discovery of something for which he had been searching, but which had up to this moment eluded him. He drew the hand under his arm, and dropped the other over Red's shoulder.

"I don't deserve any credit for that game here today," he said. "It was Red, here—or Molly—or both—"

He considered a moment.

"I'd sort of like to talk it over with these two," he said. "You see, they— Well, that is, I hope they're going to be interested a lot in—what I do from now on."

President Du Pree and the Spragues turned and looked at Molly Kennedy. Her eyes were misty, but she faced them gallantly.

"I call it just a little unsportsmanlike of Coach Vail, here," she said, with a little laugh, and a tinge of the old mockery in her voice, "to put it all up to me—and right here in public, too! But if I gather his meanin', why—I guess you can go ahead with your stadium any time you want to. The only thing I'm worryin' about is where Dick's goin' to find a secretary that can take the place of the one he's castin' off!"

The Rustler of Sentinel Knob

This story of daring cattle-thieves has an unexpected finish.

By HAL G. EVARTS

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

"I saw some one go over the rim here, and—I thought it was some one else," he explained lamely.

ON the ridge that formed the backbone of Sentinel Knob, a man peered from behind a clump of sagebrush. In the small shallow basin before him a saddled horse, reins trailing, sidled from one tuft of bunch grass to another.

Lest the horse sight him and whistle a warning of his presence, he circled the basin and cautiously approached the rim that formed the east end of the Knob. He estimated fifty feet to the left of a lone stunted spruce on the rim as his objective, and was painstakingly careful to make no sound as he neared the edge.

There was, he knew, a little bench some six feet below the first rim at this particular point—and he was desirous of inspecting that bench without being himself observed.

When within a few feet of the rim his spur caught in a tiny shrub and jingled loudly. Whoever was there would have heard that. With an exclamation of disgust, he pulled the gun at his hip and cleared the rim at a bound, landing on the ledge below.

A young girl sitting with her back against a rock, gazed at this grim apparition with startled eyes.

Instinctively, he thrust the gun behind him; then realizing that he must have the appearance of a guilty schoolboy trying, too late, to conceal an apple from the teacher, a flush deepened the tan of his cheeks.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She looked at him without a word.

"I—I saw some one go over the rim here, and—I rather thought it—it was some one else," he explained lamely. "I must have looked right ridiculous."

The girl noted his confusion. Whatever sinister purpose he had in mind it was evidently not directed at her—and her courage rose accordingly.

She found nothing offensive in this level-eyed young man, but he had startled her outrageously and she resented it.

"Let me pass, please," she said frigidly, and immediately realized that this first chance remark which had occurred to her, instead of furthering his confusion, had been distinctly unfortunate.

He stood with his back to the second rim; behind him there was a sheer drop of some hundreds of feet, while all other points of the compass were open for her departure.

The little sun-wrinkles at the corners of his eyes deepened as he glanced behind him and when he turned again to her, he was frankly amused.

"Couldn't think of it," he laughed.

He had a nice laugh; she rigidly suppressed a rising desire to laugh with him.

"Would it be trespassing too far upon your good nature to ask you not to mention having seen anyone on the Knob?" he inquired. "I am making my home up here temporarily and have perfectly good reasons for not wanting it known."

"No doubt," she observed. "It is an ideal hiding-place!"

This was true. In the midst of a rolling grass country, Sentinel Knob reared its two miles of length five hundred feet above the surrounding territory, affording an unobstructed view for twenty miles. The few springs scattered along its sides would supply water for but a half dozen head of stock, so that it was never visited by riders in search of cows.

"The virtues of any hiding-place are somewhat negative after it becomes known as such," he said.

"I shall report to the sheriff that you are hiding here and that you threatened me with a revolver," she told him.

"It won't matter if you only tell the sheriff," the young man laughed. "He'd never let it go any farther, for fear he'd have to climb the Knob and look for me. As far as personal recklessness goes the sheriff is real harmless. I don't blame you the least little bit for feeling that you should start the sheriff on my trail after that play I made," he added ruefully. "Whatever you decide to do I want you to know that I'm sure sorry I startled you."

Before the girl could formulate a reply he had mounted a break in the rim—and she was alone on the ledge.

It suddenly occurred to her that her sarcastic remark about a hiding-place, intended only to repay him for the fright he had given her, had been a center-shot.

She wondered what this young man had done to cause

him to hide on Sentinel Knob. In spite of his well-worn Western apparel, his deep tan and his occasional lapse into local expression, his speech and bearing showed evidence of former advantages. He had not always been a fugitive in the hills. . . .

The next afternoon she left her horse in the little basin on the ridge and walked to the bench under the rim.

The young man was there before her, smoking a cigarette and looking out over the country below him.

"I didn't mention having seen you here," she said. "But this is my favorite nook; I ride here for an hour or two almost every afternoon. Are you going to appropriate it and make it impossible for me to come here?"

"Thanks for not telling," he answered. "And I'm certainly not going to keep you from your nook. I don't suppose there's a chance that you'd take pity on me and let me stay just this once if I'll be real quiet and not interrupt your reading, is there? You have no idea what a lonesome hole the top of the Knob is, day after day alone."

Unconsciously, he had touched the one weak spot in her defenses. In the few months she had spent in her brother's three-room homestead shack she had sounded the depths of loneliness. Bob rode away in the early morning hours and she was left to her own devices until he returned, tired out, only to tumble into bed as soon as he had finished the evening meal. She could think of nothing more terrible than lonesomeness.

She felt a sudden thrill of pity for this man who had nothing in life to look forward to but day after day of emptiness.

"Loneliness is horrible," she said. "Stay if you care to."

"You've saved my life, Miss Heath," he assured her. "You see I knew that Bob Heath's sister had come out and I recognized you from the descriptions," he explained. "If I told you my own name you'd reverse your decision and send me away, I'm afraid; but my friends call me Hop."

Without waiting for a reply, he dropped down upon a rock and resumed his viewing of the lower country through a pair of powerful binoculars. True to his word, he talked but little.

It became a daily habit for him to be there on the ledge when she arrived. His pinto horse Calico grazed each afternoon in the little basin with her own. He was always careful that his horse did not appear on the skyline and she noticed that he never outlined himself against the sky as he neared the rim-rock, but merged himself among the rocks as he kept up his interminable scanning of the country through his glasses.

IN the background of her mind there was always the picture of his grim preparedness of the first day. It piqued her curiosity enormously as she speculated as to what he had done that forced him to evade the society of men and secrete himself in the hills.

"What do you look for all day long?" she asked him one day, indicating the glasses.

"Oh, it helps pass the time," he laughed. "When I get real lonesome I pick out people down there and hold a one-sided conversation with them. Sometimes I quarrel with 'em and then again, if I think I might like them real well, I can tell them all sorts of nice things I think about them. These are twelve-power binoculars and things show up pretty plain at a distance." He smiled engagingly. "You'd be surprised."

She turned suddenly scarlet. Her brother's house was on the south side of the Knob, only a short mile from the base. She wondered how intimate an image those glasses revealed at that distance.

She reached for the glasses. To the north there was unbroken range. Fifteen miles away she could see the buildings and corrals of the Three-C ranch. To the southeast, homestead shacks were dotted at intervals of three or four miles. It surprised her to discover with what ease she could make out details at a distance. Her brother's place was across the Knob and she wanted desperately to cross over and look at it.

"I have another pair that I'll lend you," he said. "I'll bring them tomorrow."

HE waved his arm toward the south and east, indicating white spots that were settlers' shacks.

"The day of the big outfit is passing—almost past, in fact," he said. "The squatters are taking the range. It's being cut up. The Three-C is the only big outfit left in these parts."

"It will go too," said the girl. "The big outfits can't survive. Bob says that the only reason the Three-C has held on is because Jones saw the handwriting on the wall years back. He began to change from an open-range proposition to owned land, putting up hay for winter feed and having his hands homestead places where there was water, so that he'd largely control the adjacent range. They didn't fight the squatters and lose out, the Three-C people. They played the same game—took up land."

"But now the squatters are fighting the Three-C," Hop said.

"Fighting? Not actively, from what Bob tells me; but of course they resent the fact that the Three-C owns so much land, and owns land at points where the water controls the near-by range. Still, they admit that the Three-C didn't throw in with the concerted campaign waged by the other big outfits a dozen years ago to drive the small settlers out—though that was foresight, not magnanimity, Bob says. But the Three-C will go under too."

"Why?" Hop asked.

"Old man Jones died a few years back. The son used to be a real cow-hand when he was only a youngster. Jones wanted him to have the best the world afforded, so he went East to school. Then the war came on and he went to that. Distinguished himself, it's said. But when he came back he didn't return to the ranch, but took a job with the packing interests in Chicago. The father died and the son kept on with the packers; ranch life didn't appeal to him, some say. The Three-C has been run by a foreman ever since—and the war's three years past."

"Bless our wild hearts!" Hop said, showing his teeth in a grin. "You've been here five months and you have all the local gossip hog-tied and ear-marked."

"Haven't I?" she agreed. "Well, we have a party-line in Bob's shack!"

After a week there came a day when he did not appear and she wondered if he had left the Knob. She read but little and amused herself by looking off at distant objects with the borrowed glasses.

Far in the north she could see a moving speck. Even at that distance she could see the spots on a pinto horse. His rider had dismounted beside a dark spot in the brush. She could not tell whether it was a peculiar rock or a shadow. The man mounted and rode away.

The next day too he was missing and she decided that he would not be back. She realized then that in charitably helping him to bear his loneliness she had also immeasurably lessened her own.

That night her brother slumped despondently into a chair, upon his arrival.

"Three-C rider found another dead cow of mine a few miles north of the Knob," he said. "She had been shot through the head and the calf run off."

She remembered the man she had seen the day before, riding a pinto horse—and the dark, still object he had left behind in the brush. But she felt sure that it couldn't have been Hop.

The next afternoon she found Calico in the little basin ahead of her, and the sudden rush of gladness brought home to her for the first time just how much she had depended on the visits to break the deadening monotony of her existence. She told Hop of the dead cow. "That's over twenty so far this spring."

"H'm," he said. "That's the worst feature of modern rustling. In the old days they simply run off a bunch of stock. Later, they'd run off a bunch of cows with new calves for maybe fifty miles; then when the calves were weaned, haze the cows back toward their home range. Only at round-up time would anything be noticed; and before that the calves'd be short yearlings with a brand run on 'em. But in these days of scattered squatters' shacks and party-telephone lines,—small outfits that keep tab on their stock all the while instead of once a year,—the old methods don't work so good. Riders trail-herding a bunch of cows and calves are certain to be noticed and the brands checked off. A cow will bawl for days, wandering broadcast across the range a-hunting for its offspring—while a dead cow don't go round bawling for her calf; and she's not so apt to be discovered. So these tin-horn rustlers round here kill a full-grown critter in order to steal a spindling calf. It's wasteful. I'm getting all out of patience with such methods. But mostly the rustling hereabouts has been aimed at the Three-C. The small settlers don't mind that so much. I'm surprised to hear that Bob has lost so many."

"It means so much," she said. "When Bob started out here two years ago we looked on it more in the light of an adventure. Now it is all we have."

"Probably the man who killed Bob's cows didn't know his brand," he said. "I don't believe any self-respecting rustler would knowingly steal from you."

"Is there such a thing as a self-respecting cattle-thief?" she asked.

"Lots of 'em!" And he smiled. "On the whole they're not such a bad lot. Some of the biggest men in the country started that way. When a rustler's herd grows to a respectable size he quits. That's the way the game has always been played."

"Bob reported it to the sheriff," she said. "I hope he catches him."

"He won't," Hop replied. "As an officer the sheriff is a minus quantity. He's a pretty clever little politician, at that. He'll post a placard and forget it."

The girl grew increasingly self-conscious as she moved about the ranch-house yard in the mornings, feeling that perhaps Hop was peering over the rim of the Knob with his glasses. He had told her that he treasured up his nicest small talk and lavished in on her at long range when he was lonesome—and she often wondered what he was saying to her from the rim above.

There were three days during the next week when he failed to come to the ledge. Each time she had that feeling of uncertainty as to whether or not he would ever return; but he always did.

She enjoyed the visits and frankly missed him when he didn't come. When she was with him she forgot that he was a fugitive. At other times she wondered who he had expected to find on the ledge the first day. Possibly the sheriff—although he had said that the sheriff would be afraid to climb the Knob in search of him. She wondered too what his real name was, and why he was afraid that if she heard it she would banish him from the ledge.

After an absence of several days she found him waiting there.

"I had a nice long talk with you this morning," he told her as they were walking back to their horses. "Told you lots of nice things."

"Tell me," she said thoughtlessly.

"I will," he said; and he took her in his arms. "But first I must hold you like this. I always do, you know, in my long-distance talks with you. Then I always do this — " And he kissed her.

She was filled with a sudden definite knowledge that she wanted to stay in his arms; but through this there ran a vague, disturbing undercurrent.

He was a fugitive; he would always be wanted by the law. It did not matter that she wished above all else to listen—it simply could not be. She pushed him away.

"No," she said. "No."

"I wanted you to know. Shall I tell you what I started to say?"

"No," she said again. "You'd better go now. We can't see each other again. I mean it." She thought she did mean it.

"I'm sorry," he said. He turned, and climbed the break in the rim. . . .

Each day she rather expected to find him waiting on the ledge and each time she felt a sickening sense of disappointment when he did not come. She knew that it was only

Hop suddenly threw his hands above his head and crumpled limply to the ground.

her isolation and her daily companionship with a man of similar tastes that had brought it about. But no matter what the cause, the effect was that she missed him—and her loneliness returned with an added ache.

For the first time it occurred to her to wonder how he had lived while on the Knob. He must have cooked at night—monotonous fare, prepared over a guarded midnight blaze.

She mounted her pony and rode along the ridge to the west, examining every irregularity in its expanse. Presently she came to a well-worn trail dipping down into a ravine which dropped away to the north.

In a little dip stood a tepee, its top rope suspended from the limb of a lone tree. There was a tiny scooped-out place in a spring; dead ashes between two blackened rocks. In the tepee there were a few battered cooking utensils and a grub box, a neat bed-roll in a canvas tarp and a war-bag full of extra clothing.

She walked over to the northern rim, a few hundred yards from the camp. As she stood on the edge the sound of a rifle-shot drifted up to her. She could see moving specks in the direction from which it came, but could not make them out. She trained her field-glasses on them.

THE first object she saw in the lower country was Calico. Even at that distance she could recognize Hop's easy swing as he walked from his horse to a calf that lay at the end of a taut rope. A few yards away lay a dead cow.

Hop gathered dry sage and built a little blaze; in it he placed something that he took from his saddle-pocket. She knew it was the running-iron every rider carried.

The grim truth came to her in a flood. She thought of the man on a pinto horse, as he had ridden away from the dark shape in the brush. Hop had asked Bob's brand and since then Bob had not lost another cow; she remembered Hop's casual defense of rustlers.

This accounted for his hiding on the Knob and his absences and his constant scouring of the country with his glasses—watching a safe opportunity for a raid!

Something else moved in the field of her glasses and she centered her gaze upon it. Two men had dismounted and were moving to the top of a ridge that commanded a view of the draw. She could see them plainly, but they were out of sight of the man by the fire. They sprawled flat on the ridge and peered at him from behind a clump of sage. She saw an occasional sparkle and knew it was glint of the sun on their rifle-barrels.

Hop suddenly threw his hands high above his head and crumpled limply to the ground beside a rock; an instant later the sound of the shot reached her.

She could not tear her gaze from the distant scene. It seemed hours before anything made a move. The calf finally struggled to its feet and Calico stepped just enough to keep the rope drawn taut. Then the two men went back to their horses and rode away to the east.

The girl turned away. It was all over; and she felt shaken and ill. Hop had been a rustler!

But she couldn't leave him down there like that; he might only be wounded. She must ride down and see if there was anything she could do! She forced herself once more to focus her glasses on the spot. Hop was crouching behind a patch of brush, looking after the other two as they rode over a distant ridge.

He leaped to his horse, loosed the calf and headed Calico swiftly in the direction the two men had taken.

The next morning her brother rode away at daylight. An hour later, after a steady series of rings, the telephone jangled out Heath's number—two long, three short. "Yes?" she answered the call; from the buzzing undertone she knew that receivers were down all along the line.

"Bob there?" inquired a voice.

"No," she replied. "Anything I can tell him when he comes back?"

"Yes. Tell him to keep his eye peeled for a man on a pinto horse. He shot two deputies, Wilson and Smith, last night. They caught him rustlin' a calf and thought they'd downed him. He followed 'em up and they shot it out. Smith was killed, but Wilson got to a telephone. The rustler is shot up pretty bad too; can't go far, Wilson said. Sheriff's orders are for every man to shoot on sight."

"Yes," she heard her own voice reply faintly.

She walked to the window and looked out toward Sentinel Knob; then stared incredulously. A half-mile up the slope, Calico, saddled but riderless, was grazing round. She turned her glasses on a dark motionless form lying on the ground fifty yards from Calico. Then she ran to the horse that Bob had saddled for her before he left, and rode him from the corral.

When she drew alongside, she could see blood caked on Hop's gray flannel shirt. He was dead, she thought. But as she dismounted he stirred.

"It was a terrible thing to do—to shoot those two men!" she sobbed as she knelt beside him. "Why did you do such a thing?"

"Case of necessity," he answered weakly. He opened his eyes and smiled.

"Good to see you again," he said. "There's a flask in my saddle-pocket."

The girl caught Calico and brought him the flask; he gulped eagerly.

"Feel a lot better now," he stated. "Only dented in the shoulder a little. Tried to make your place last night. Fell off, I guess. Lost too much blood."

He climbed on Calico without much difficulty and she walked beside him, leading her own horse. She took him to Bob's room and he fell across the bed. She put Calico out of sight in the barn; when she went back to the house and asked him if there was anything she could do he shook his head.

"It's a clear hole; goes straight through," he told her. "I'll be around all O. K. after a few minutes' rest."

"Why did you shoot them?" she demanded distractedly. "I didn't think you could do such a terrible thing."

"Too bad," he agreed. "I was sorry about it myself. Only way out, though. They tried to pot me, an' I followed 'em up to arbitrate it. One of 'em opened up on me on sight and bored me through the shoulder. I had to get him. Gave the other one a chance to ride away, but he tried a couple of shots at me, so I got him too. Tough luck, wasn't it?"

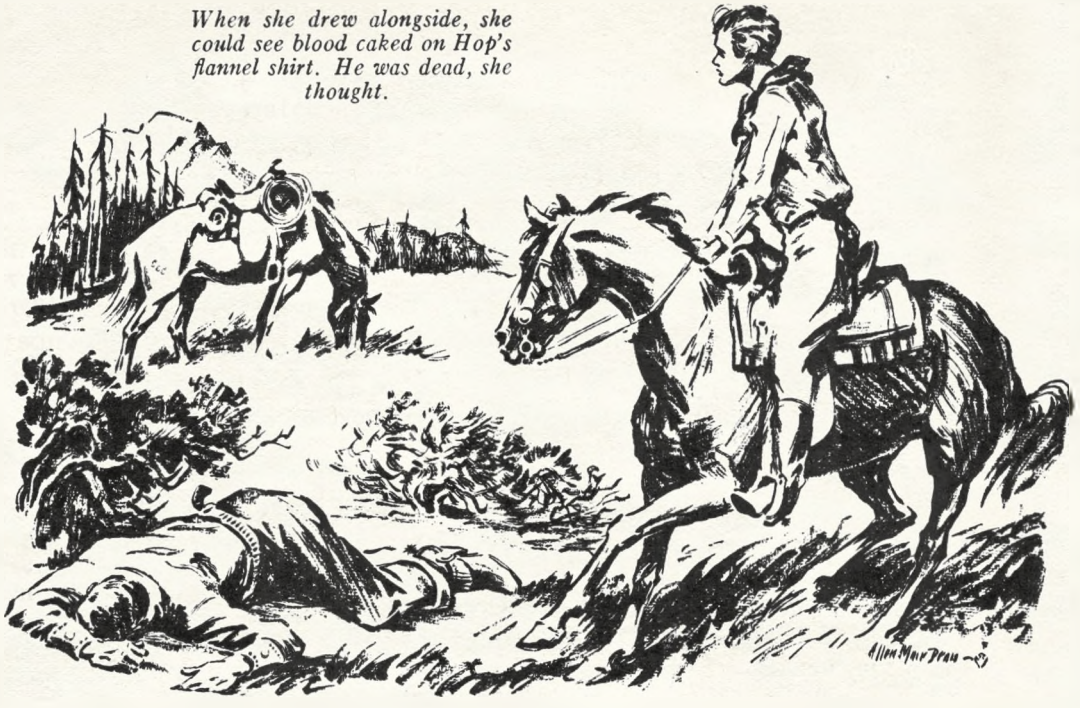
His voice trailed away and she knew he was asleep.

POSSIBLY if Bob met some one who told him the news, he would come back, she thought. He could tell her what to do.

She looked out to see if she could see Bob coming. Two horsemen were riding along the same way she had traveled a few minutes before. A mile away a half-dozen more riders swept around the shoulder of the Knob. The man-hunt was on! The orders were to shoot on sight. She listened in again on the telephone, watching the two riders from the window.

One of the two leaned from his saddle as they crossed a bare spot; they headed swiftly for the house. One of them straightened in his stirrups and waved his hat to the distant group of men.

The girl's mind whirled wildly as she sought some avenue of conduct that would accord with her conflicting thoughts. "Dead or alive," the sheriff had decreed.



When she drew alongside, she could see blood caked on Hop's flannel shirt. He was dead, she thought.

She had often heard talk of lynching on the spot if ever the thief or thieves were apprehended. She was overcome by faintness and a hint of nausea as she recalled that she too had hoped fervently that the party who was grinding Bob down by thievery would be caught and summarily executed.

But somehow Hop did not seem to fit in with her preconceived idea of dangerous enemies of society. What could she do? Those inexorable horsemen were coming swiftly closer, two of them scanning the trail she had left when bringing Hop to the cabin. The half-dozen others swept on a mile behind.

Then suddenly the two foremost riders had dismounted in the ranch-yard and were confronting her. Both seemed greatly pleased. She recognized them as Johnny Hardaker, foreman of the Three-C, and a youth who rode for that outfit.

"Good work, Miss Heath!" said Hardaker. "We'd been working out his trail. We see where you'd salvaged him and brought him here. Is he hard hit?"

She shook her head.

"Good. He'll be able to face what's comin'!" Hardaker beamed.

And Miss Heath thought of Hop, the helpless, facing a hanging with himself as the principal. "I don't know what you mean," she declared with swift intensity.

The two men regarded her blankly.

"Hop's here, aint he?" Hardaker demanded.

Slowly she shook her head. "No. He rode on."

The two men regarded one another amazedly. "Why, he's gotta be here!" Hardaker said. "Didn't we work out his trail?" Just then Calico came from the log stable and moved to the water-trough. "Now!" Hardaker said. "You still mean to tell us Hop aint here?"

Involuntarily, she spread both arms wide across the door, locking her fingers on either side. "You can't come in here," she said. "The sheriff will be here any minute."

The middle-aged foreman of the Three-C regarded her sternly. His gray eyes were hard.

"I didn't think that of Bob Heath's sister," he said quietly. "Well,"—with a glance toward the six riders who, less than a mile away now, were moving swiftly across the flats toward the homestead cabin,—"the sheriff won't get Hop before the Three-C gets him. That's flat."

The girl recalled the fact that the Three-C had been the heaviest loser at the hands of the rustlers. But these men could not have the wounded man whom she had just brought in. He must have a fair trial. He could go away somewhere and start again; he was not all bad. She had visions of herself joining him in some remote spot. . . . .

"You can't have him," she said flatly. "The sheriff will be here soon." Her listening in on the party-line had apprised her of the fact that the sheriff's car was headed along the road that ran before Bob's place. Even now the hum of the motor reached her ears. The car came over the rise and snorted up to the ranch. The sheriff glanced at the pinto horse near the barn.

"Got him, eh?" he said grimly. "Bring him out—I'll take charge of him," he declared to the two deputies who rode with him in the car.

"Not so fast," Hardaker advised quietly. "The Three-C men will take charge of him."

The half-dozen riders swept into the ranch-yard. The sheriff noted the Three-C brand on every horse. He sighed resignedly. "I don't hold with lynchings," he said half-heartedly. "But you boys outnumber us. Remember, I protest against lynching without trial."

"Sure you do," Hardaker agreed. "So do we. That's why we decided to take charge of him instead of turning him over to you. I've heard of prisoners being killed on the way to jail, on the grounds that they'd tried to escape. He won't try to escape from us."

It dawned gradually in the sheriff's mind that instead of lynching the prisoner, which he had been led to hope was the intention, the Three-C men were protecting him.

"What's this?" he demanded. "You turn this miscreant over to me!"

Miss Heath nodded encouragement, not having sensed the protective nature of Hardaker's interest in her wounded prisoner.

"Wilson and Smith, two of my deputies, came up on this party, with a dead cow and about to run a brand on the calf," the sheriff continued. "They had a fight with him and believed they'd got him, but didn't want to expose themselves to see. He might be playing possum. So they rode off for help. He followed and shot them down in cold blood. Smith is dead, but Wilson managed to get away and turn in the report. He's not bad hit. He's starting East tomorrow for medical attention."

"Wilson's too tough a customer to need medical attention for just a little bullet-hole through him," Hardaker said. "I reckon, Sheriff, you'd better advise Wilson to stay round here until the man inside gives his version."

"What other version can there be?" the sheriff demanded uneasily. "It's cut and dried."

The girl moved inside to her prisoner. He seemed to sleep. She dropped to her knees beside him. "I could have stood it if it was only rustling," she murmured. "But I can't ever forgive you for shooting down two men. Anything but that!"

He nodded drowsily, signifying that he understood.

She returned to the door as Hardaker informed the sheriff of another version.

"It was the other way round! Hop came up on two men with a dead cow, and they high-tailed it when his horse nickered. He stopped to run Bob Heath's brand on the calf. The two men slipped back and tried to bushwhack him. Hop pitched down as if he was hit. They was afraid to show themselves, and rode off. He followed and tried to halt them. Smith shot him through the shoulder and Hop downed Smith. He called out to Wilson to stand steady, but Wilson tried for him a couple of times; so Hop put one through Wilson too. Then Wilson managed to crawl his horse and Hop let him ride off, having marked him plenty for purposes of identification. Course he didn't know their names—but *we* do."

"What kind of a wild yarn is this, anyway—and how is it you happen to know all about it?" the sheriff demanded.

"Hop wrote a note to that effect and left it where he always leaves a note for some Three-C rider to pick up. Then he headed for the Three-C, but loss o' blood weakened him, likely, and he cut toward Heath's cabin—but fainted and fell off his horse. Smith and Wilson was the rustlers—not Hop!"

"Nothing to it. His word against Wilson's!" the sheriff growled. "He goes with me."

"He stays here," Hardaker returned.

"The countryside won't stand for the Three-C protecting a rustler and a killer," the sheriff said.

"The country won't stand for *you*, if you let Wilson leave for the East in quest of alleged medical attention," Hardaker countered. "You appointed four deputies, who work without pay. Each one of 'em has a brand of his own. There's been some talk as to how fast their little herds was increasing. And with rustling going on rampant, there aint been a single cow-thief apprehended since you took office. O' course, all we got against you, Sheriff—up to now—is that you used damn' poor judgment in selecting deputies. See?"

"You threatenin' me?" the sheriff blustered. "Who is this Hop, anyway? That name don't mean nothing to me."

"I hate to tell it on him," Hardaker grinned. "But his full title is Hopkinson Rutherford Jones, wished on him by his ma and pruned to 'Hop' by the ol' man after his ma had crossed the Great Divide. He's owner of the Three-C. His dad wanted him to learn the marketing end of the game, so he stuck and learned it. Now he's back home."

"Well, his word's no better'n Wilson's," the sheriff insisted.

"Maybe not. Anyway, you better keep Wilson here so's each one can relate his own yarn before a cattleman's jury," Hardaker advised. "Better go pick him up, Sheriff. I'm telling you."

"Likely that would be the best plan," the sheriff conceded. " 'Twon't do no harm to hear both sides of it. I'll dangle on back and see to it that Wilson stays put to testify." He was quite aware of the fact that Wilson had departed at dawn and was now well out of the country. "Yes, I'll do that," he agreed. Anyway, he mused—with Wilson gone, nobody would have anything on him! "All right. I'll pick him up."

His car rolled away. The girl returned to her captive.

"I'm so glad to know that you're not a cow-thief," she whispered. "I couldn't have stood that."

HE nodded, recalling that only a few minutes past she had declared that she could forgive a cow-thief but never a killer. Women were queer about such things—squeamish. Likely she'd never forgive him for killing Smith and wounding Wilson.

"Too bad about shooting those two sports," he said.

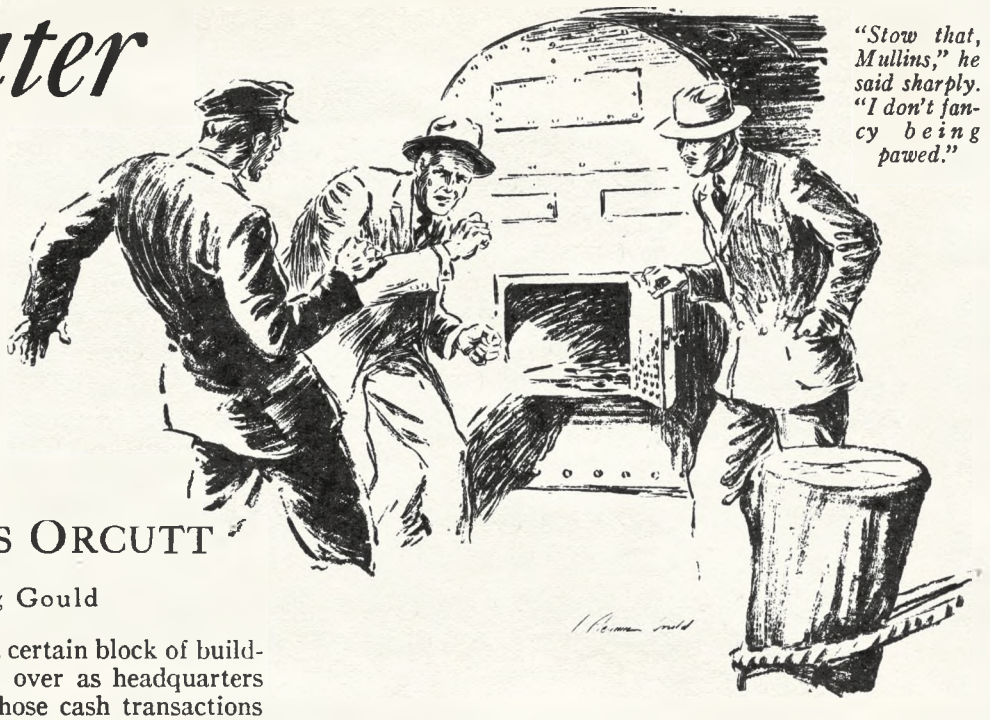
And then Hopkinson Rutherford Jones decided that he would never live long enough to learn anything about the devious channels of a woman's mental processes; for the girl dropped to her knees beside the bed and took his head in her arms.

"Oh, *that!*" she crooned. "You don't know how glad I am that it was nothing more than that!"

"One of 'em opened up on me on sight; I had to get him. The other tried a couple of shots at me."

Deep Water Men

Unsuspected dangers of the merchant marine are graphically set forth in this swiftly moving story of modern sea life.



"Stow that, Mullins," he said sharply. "I don't fancy being pawed."

By

STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

IN the old city of London, there is a certain block of buildings which is famous the world over as headquarters of an underwriting association whose cash transactions are colossal. In a quiet room on the second floor, two fine-looking men were seated one afternoon recently for an after-luncheon cigar. The older one, Francis Yelverton, was one of Lloyd's managers; the other was Sir Edward Coffin, who had commanded steamers of the Brock Line before settling ashore upon his inherited money and title.

Yelverton, in the swivel-chair at his desk, ran through the pages of a *Shipping Gazette* supplement until he came to the half-tone of a handsome new boat which had just returned from a trial-trip to Rio and back, via Las Palmas. This he passed across the desk to Sir Edward.

"Know anything about that boat, Coffin?" he queried.

"Only what I read in the illustrated gazettes," Coffin replied. "I remember being struck by the fact of an almost-unknown shipbuilding concern turning out as fine a looking craft as that. Of course I've not seen her in the water, but I'd say from her lines that she might be, in some weathers, a little crank."

"Well—I've no definite knowledge that's so, but I fancy it *may* be. Everything we know about that boat is just a bit peculiar—when one comes to analyze it. Tooner an' Smithson have been running small cargo and limited accommodation boats out to the rice ports and to Singapore for several years—not heavily capitalized, but on the whole making a living out of their tonnage, an' a bit more. Recently, they seem to have gotten the idea that two or three good passenger-liners to the less-frequented East Indian ports would pay—running out by way of Rio, Buenos Aires, the Magellan an' across the South Pacific, stopping at some of the island groups—combination tourist-business, d'ye see. They got bids from two or three shipbuilding comp'nies running from three to four hundred thousand pounds for a ten-thousand-ton passenger-boat with first-class fittings. This little Foy an' Kammermann comp'ny at Hartlepool had been building small coasters an' cargo-boats—never anything over three thousand tons. A designer had come to them from one of the Clyde comp'nies—some vague rumor about a mistake in his figures an' a forced resignation, up there; but he had designed three or four boats for 'em. Well—Foy an' Kammermann put in a bid for a hundred an' ninety thousand pounds on this *Salwin*. Tooner an' Smithson accepted the bid—half of which was cash on delivery, and that nowhere near covered her cost when she was turned over. When we surveyed her, she looked like a fairly good piece of work. They sent her out to Rio on a trial-trip to get her bearings smoothed down. And when she comes back—full passenger-list both ways, an' full cargo—they turn about an' charter her for four months to Jones an' Alworthy—to run on their Singapore-Eastern Line. What do you make of that?"

"Bit off a little more than they could chew, I fancy—thought they'd get back something on the interest account while completing payments on her, possibly—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they had the unexpected luck to unload her on Jones and Alworthy at a stiff profit—and gave out the statement that they were chartering her when the cash they received was actually a first payment on the boat herself."

"Rather fancied that would occur to you, Sir Edward! And we've had an unconfirmed hint that it may be so."

"Naturally, they wouldn't pass title to the boat or turn over the insurance-policy on her until they were paid in full. If anything happens to her while under the Singapore-Eastern flag, Tooner and Smithson would get the insurance just the same?"

"Precisely! . . . An' that's one of the points I mentioned to you as peculiar—"

"Wait a minute! Let's see if I can guess why. For how much did you underwrite her?"

"A hundred an' forty thousand, sterling."

"How much more can Jones and Alworthy get on her?"

"Not a penny—from us. Possibly a few thousand from smaller underwriters, who are willing to take a chance."

"But in case of total loss, wouldn't Jones and Alworthy deduct the insurance from the total amount they were to pay for her?"

"Could they—and get away with it? That's the point! Tooner an' Smithson sell the boat in good faith for a certain sum—retaining their policy as security until it is fully paid. We'll say the purchasers lose her—probably postponing their final payments for some time. Tooner an' Smithson get the insurance and the payments already in hand. Purchaser has still the obligation of completing his purchase-payments."

"Yes, but—dammit—the seller has made it impossible for him to get any protective insurance!"

"The seller takes the ground that he is entitled to the insurance—upon which he alone had paid the premiums—as security or profit."

"But when the final payments are made, he's not en-

titled to keep *both* the purchase-money and the insurance paid to him!"

"Why not? His policy is a separate contract between him and Lloyd's. Nobody else has anything whatever to say about it. He's paid his premiums for protection on that boat until the expiration of the policy. The purchaser very likely could get half-value on her from one of the owners' coöperative insurance comp'nies—which doesn't interest the seller in the least."

"But—when a boat has passed from the possession of one owner into that of another can't you cancel the first one's policy?"

"He has the insurance on her until the expiration of his policy—his premiums cover exactly that. Very good! Well—these little unusual points are what led to my going over this with you. I've no evidence that Tooner an' Smithson have really sold the *Salwin* to Jones an' Alworthy instead of chartering her—merely a bit of unconfirmed suggestion that they might have done so. I can't see why they should wish to sell her at all unless they found her too much of a burden for their working capital."

"Or perhaps she developed some weakness on that trial trip which made them wish to get rid of her as soon as possible—eh?"

"Well, that had occurred to me—but there's nothing at all to indicate it."

"But if she goes down, you're stung for a hundred and forty thousand pounds, no matter who owns her—unless you can prove 'conspiracy with intent to destroy.' Eh? That would let you out—wouldn't it?"

"Not much question as to that, old chap! Now—there's another matter which may or may not have some bearing on the *Salwin*. You probably read some of the news-sheet accounts of that big jewel-robbery at Chillingdean Towers in Somerset, did you not? The famous ruby known as the Begum—the Jägersfontein Ranee, a ninety-carat pink diamond—and the Damiala pearls, a matched and graded string of a hundred and twenty stones, with a big 'pear' for a pendant. All of these were given to the Marchioness shortly after her marriage—and were stolen during a fancy-dress ball given at Chillingdean Towers twelve days ago. We are carrying a hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds insurance on those three items alone. Scotland Yard puts it down as the work of a jewel-gang supposed to be responsible for a number of robberies, an' three murders, during the past six months; but three days ago a new bit of evidence came to us anonymously—this unmounted photograph of a Portuguese whom nobody seemed to know when the guests unmasked at midnight, down in Somerset. The Marchioness supposed him to be some relative of an intimate friend, invited for courtesy's sake. His manners were charming—he made a most agreeable impression. The Marchioness was going to wear the jewels at supper after the unmasking, but when she went to her own suite she found her maid chloroformed, and the jewels missing. At half-past three in the morning, the Portuguese had left—presumably gone home; it wasn't until the next day that they began to have difficulty in identifying him.

"NOW—here's where the *Salwin* comes into it. One of the guests, who came up from Rio on that trial trip, got this snapshot of a Brazilian saloon-passenger without his knowing it—and swears positively that the Portuguese at the Marchioness' fancy-dress ball is the same man. For obvious reasons, she doesn't give her name; we can check up on that from the passenger-list, anyhow. She gives us permission to pass this along to Scotland Yard if we consider it advisable—but I haven't shown it to them yet. Don't know why I fancied there might be anything in it—but I took this snap down to the passenger-agent of the Singapore-Eastern Line—old pal of mine. Didn't say anything about the jewels, but asked him if there were any way of ascertaining whether the fellow ever had booked on one of their boats. Well—there's a clerk in that office who spotted the chap at first glance—said he was booked to Singapore on the *Salwin*, this trip, under the name Joao de Figuera, and had been most particular about gettin' private cabin Number 92, if it possibly could be arranged, for himself and his valet. Seems he's usually a wretched sailor, for the first few days out at least, but that he had come up from Rio in that cabin—it's just about amidships, where there's the least motion—and had a better trip than he'd had in years—fancies it's a lucky room. The booking on the *Salwin* didn't pick up much until a week ago—so they were able to accommodate the fellow with no diffic'lty at all. He's going out on her from Tilbury, Saturday. The Marchioness has offered a reward of five thousand pounds—we're adding another five. Now there's no evidence to implicate this fellow in that jewel-robbery beyond the purely circumstantial fact of his not bein' recognized by anybody at that ball. Doubtless somebody will remember in a day or two that he came with some well-known guest who had a telephone-call and left very early. He was apparently a gentleman—possibly a man of title—"

"Wonder why he was so particular about Cabin 92 and no other? That rather intrigues me. Wonder if there really is anything wrong with that boat? Confound you, Yelverton—I know what you're hinting at! Like to have me go out East on the *Salwin*—wouldn't you?"

YELVERTON hesitated; then he said thoughtfully: "I'm not forgetting, Sir Edward, that our understanding with you has been a pretty wide-open one—it being always entirely optional whether you act upon any suggestions of ours or not. But you've conducted successfully such valuable and even dangerous investigations for us that it's certainly a temptation to ask for your assistance in a case like this."

"A case which has nothing more tangible than a couple of apparently groundless 'hunches' in it—a case in which, if your vague suspicions prove well-founded, I may easily go to the bottom with the *Salwin!*"

"If you're on board, Coffin, she'll not go to the bottom! You happen to be an exceptional seaman—that's why I want you aboard!"

"How much authority will you give me?"

"Unlimited! I'll have a letter here from the management of the Singapore-Eastern Line, within half an hour, giving you command of the boat in case of emergency—superseding the chief operator with the wireless, and putting the chief engineer under you. They'll give it to me! It isn't a question of this boat alone, you know—we underwrite their whole fleet, and all I've to do is suggest that we've turned up something which looks fishy an' dangerous. They're carrying mails and passengers, y'know."

"Better have 'em make the letter tactful. But have 'em say this authority of mine takes effect at once."

"Certainly—if you wish. But why?"

"I'll go down to Tilbury in my car as soon as I get the letter. (Have 'em telephone a confirmation to the Master, by the way.) If we are right—and there *is* something wrong with the boat—it's quite on the cards that there may be some attempt to stow cargo in a dangerous way. Who's the Lloyd's man in authority at Tilbury?"

"Harry Martinson—one of our most reliable surveyors and a level-headed executive, besides."

"Get word to him on the wire. Have him meet me on the *Salwin* when I reach there!"

Yelverton chuckled.

"Philip Fernshaw told us years ago that you were a 'self-

starter', Coffin!" he said. "And I feel under strong personal obligations for your tackling this job—I'll admit it's dangerous!"

When Sir Edward reached Tilbury, Mr. Martinson stood waiting for him on the wharf alongside of the *Salwin,* and greeted him with evident pleasure.

Just beyond the steamer's bow was a gigantic naval derrick capable of slinging a locomotive to her decks with ease—and near its base were four shell-boilers, twenty feet long by eight in diameter, with fire-box doors at one end and flue-openings at the other. They had recently been painted black and had stenciled in white upon their sides: *McWhitty Engineering Co.—Colombo.* The fire-box and ash-doors had been wired so that they couldn't come unlatched in transit. No steamer-hatch was big enough to permit of their being lowered into the holds and then turned to lie upon their sides.

"Know whether Cap'n Williams is aboard, Mr. Martinson?" Coffin asked.

"He's not. He went up to town—wont be back until morning."

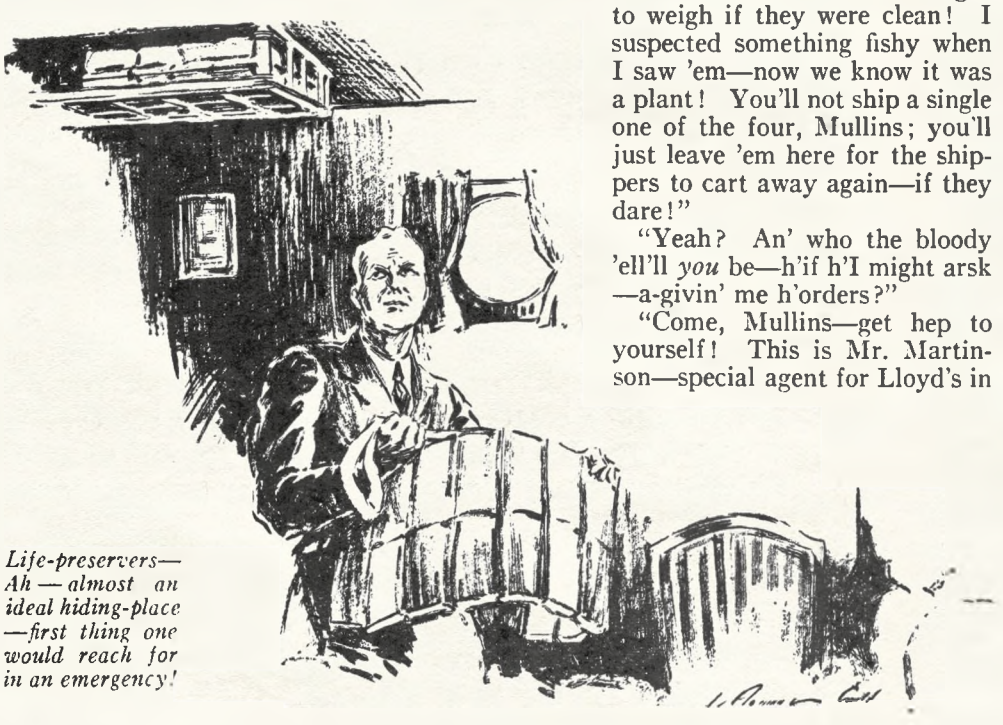
"They'll be loading all night, of course. That'll be the mate on the bridge, I suppose?"

"Aye—Mullins. Rather the old type, I fancy—but not so bad unless he's crossed. Used to be in the West African trade—rather out of place on an Oriental boat. Cap'n Williams has been with this Line three years—he was second on a Union Castle boat, before that. Quiet chap, but a good seaman—you'll like him, I think."

"I say! Looks from here as if she had a bit of a list!"

"I've been glancin' at that all day. Either the officer stowing that cargo hasn't put in much time at sea, or else—"

"I'd say a partly empty fuel-tank on the port side—with possibly a bit of fool stowing to make it worse. Eh?"



Life-preservers—Ah — almost an ideal hiding-place—first thing one would reach for in an emergency!

"Hmph! Fancy you're not so far out, Sir Edward. I'd not figured on the fuel-tanks; they're big enough for a round-trip supply—out and home."

"But you know as well as I do, Martinson, that very few companies will carry a round-trip supply; it means that much less cargo-tonnage—and cargo means pounds, shillings and pence. Without having a look at her manifest, I'd say those four boilers have been accepted as freight to go on her—and the only way they can ship 'em is as 'deck-cargo' in the 'wells'—two for'ard—two aft. Eh?"

"Faith—I don't see how else they can handle 'em!"

"And with that list she's got—in a Mediterranean squall or a Sea of Arabia hurricane—she'll turn turtle sure—if ever she's allowed to go out that way! Dammit! I doubt if she'd make Finisterre! Martinson, there's something damned fishy about those boilers as a deck-load—all that weight at the very top part of the leverage, well above the center of gravity—and a smooth flat bottom. What'll you bet they're not a good bit heavier than such boilers should be? Eh?"

"You mean—"

"I mean I'm going to have a squint at those tubes inside—right now!" And Coffin began to untwist the wire from the latch of the big fire-box door on one of the boilers.

An angry bellow came from the bridge: "Belay, there! . . . . Leave that wire alone! Who in 'ell d'ye farncy ye are, anyway! Lay off them b'ilers, will ye! Wait till I come down there, Mister—then mebbe ye'll listen to me!"

Coffin didn't even turn around to look at the man; he had the wire loose, the heavy door swung out, wide open, by the time the mate had come lumbering down the gangplank to the wharf and grabbed his shoulder with one beefy hand.

Coffin reached up and slung the hand off his shoulder with a force which whirled Mullins partly around.

"Stow that, Mullins!" he said sharply. "I don't fancy being pawed! I say! Look here, you—is this the sort of deck-cargo you were figuring on shipping for a long voyage on your boat? Look at the inside of those tubes! Scale three-quarters of an inch thick around the inside of every one! Each of these boilers weighing twice or three times what the shell and tubes ought to weigh if they were clean! I suspected something fishy when I saw 'em—now we know it was a plant! You'll not ship a single one of the four, Mullins; you'll just leave 'em here for the shippers to cart away again—if they dare!"

"Yeah? An' who the bloody 'ell'll *you* be—h'if h'I might arsk—a-givin' me h'orders?"

"Come, Mullins—get hep to yourself! This is Mr. Martinson—special agent for Lloyd's in this district. He's already condemned those boilers as cargo—without a second look. And what he says goes, concerning the loading of your boat. You ought to know that by this time."

"Wot h'authority 'as 'e got h'over me?"

"Just this! Put those boilers aboard and he'll cancel every penny of insurance on the boat."

"An' wot'll we be carin' abaht that? We're tikin' h'out no h'insurance on 'er!"

"Oh, very good—then he'll cancel every other policy on the rest of your fleet! If you think your owners will care about that, go ahead and ship the boilers—but you'll never pass Margate with 'em on your decks. —Perhaps the easiest way to stop the argument, Martinson, will be to give the boss-stevedore a hint; then he'll see that the derrick-falls aren't even lowered away to them. —Now, Mullins, I want to see the chief engineer. Is he on board?"

Coffin drew from his pocket a letter from the managing director of the Singapore-Eastern Line—opening it so that Mullins could see the heading and signature.

"I'm sorry that Cap'n Williams isn't here so that I can hand him this before taking it upon myself to give you any orders," he added. "He'd have condemned these boilers at the first glance inside—and will be mighty interested to

know who shipped them. You understand, of course, that I'm not interfering with the Master's authority in the least—but if I hadn't stopped you, those things might have been hoisted aboard when neither of us were here. You see the point, of course? Now—where will we find the chief—in his own room, off the second grating?"

Mullins really did know, of course, that an accredited agent of the underwriters could do pretty much what he pleased in the way of condemning unsafe cargo— and he'd glimpsed enough of the letter to grasp the fact that the manager had given a good deal of authority to this smiling baronet. So he rather grouchily pointed out the main-deck gangway which led to the engine-room door; then he went back to the bridge.

IT developed that, contrary to time-honored precedent, the chief engineer—Philip Norrey—was not a Scotsman but a Londoner who had learned his trade on the Clyde after graduating from the technical schools in his own city.

Coffin introduced Martinson as the Lloyd's agent—asking Norrey if they'd ever met.

"I've seen him about Tilbury, sir, a number of times but we've ne'er happened to speak," Norrey replied. "I wonder, now, if I couldn't make a guess at yourself? Are ye not the Cap'n Coffin who sailed the *Chilean Liberator* for the Brocks, some years? I was havin' tiffin with our old man at the Raffles in Singapore when you came in with a Mr. Fernshaw—who'd sailed with us—an' we made it a party of four."

"By jove!. . . . I knew your name was familiar. You're Phil Norrey who was first assistant on one of the British India boats! Of course! We'll be doing a good bit of yarning in the next few weeks, Phil; I'm going out with you—possibly as far as the Straits. But right now, there is something to go over which may be a bit more serious. How long have you been aboard this boat?"

"Eight days, Cap'n. We're taking her over on a sort of trial trip, as I understand it—under charter—and I wanted to see what new kinks the Barrow people might have put into her machines. Man, they're as sweet a pair of quadruple-expansions as ever I ran my hands over! They wanted to put in Parsons turbines, but the contract wouldn't run to it, an' the owners didn't need turbine speed."

"Then you've never sailed on her yet?" Coffin asked.

"No, I've not."

"Know anybody who was on her that first trip?"

"No, not one. Our people rarely see the Tooner and Smithson lot—diff'rent sort of trade altogether."

"Norrey, how does this boat *feel* to you—now that you've been aboard several days?"

"Hmph! . . . . Deuced odd, your asking me that question! . . . . As far as one can see from general appearances, she's a fine boat—well-turned-out, well-found—and yet—well, once in a while it gets on the edge of my nerves a bit that she's an undertaker's boat. I take no stock in ghosts or ha'nts—but there's a feeling about her that she's not dependable. Whether it's something wrong in her designing—or she was built too far below cost an' skimped, somewhere, I'm blessed if I know—but there's something that's not right! And I fancy Cap'n Williams feels the same way, though he's not long on board."

"How do you account for the list?"

"I blamed it first on the stevedores and second mate—but after going down into the holds, I couldn't see much wrong with the stowage. Then I fancied there might be water in the starboard ballast-tanks an' none in the port—pumped until the limbers sucked. But the list is still there. So I'm wondering if it can be—"

"The fuel-tanks, of course. Are there gauges for each tank, in the boiler-room?"

"No; this system is a new one—can't say I like it much until I see it working. There's a long tank on each side, with a pressure-tank between them. The two large tanks feed into a pressure-pump, with cocks on the connecting-pipes, and that maintains even pressure in the smaller feed-tank which supplies the sprays. There is of course a gauge from the pressure feed-tank—no amount of rolling or pitching can interfere with the stabilized pressure in that. I mean to sound that big port tank within an hour or two, from the intake at the top."

"And if you find it nearly empty—then what?"

"Equalize the two tanks—by pumping over."

"Now—wait a bit! In the first place, I've a letter here from the managing director of the Line, asking Captain Williams to consult with me upon any complications which may come up, this voyage. Doubtless he isn't looking for any complications—but I am. There are four boilers out on the bulkhead to be shipped aboard this boat as deck-cargo—and we've just found that they're loaded up to three times the normal weight with scale. Somebody figured upon having that mass of weight high enough up to make her turn turtle in any sort of a sea. But we've nailed that risk; Martinson has forbidden their being taken aboard.

"Now some other joker has been monkeying with your fuel-tanks when they were filled. I'd suspect Mullins, except for the fact that he probably doesn't want to drown. I don't know what your orders were about going out with the fuel-tanks half-full and loading oil *en route,* in order to accommodate a bit more dead-weight cargo. But I do know we're all going to feel a lot more comfortable if we have the weight of those tanks, plumb full, down below the center of gravity, where they'll do a lot toward keeping her right-side-up in a heavy sea. So I'll take the responsibility for ordering you to warp alongside the oil wharves in the morning and fill all of your tanks up to the top. Confidentially, Lloyd's will stand the extra charges if the owners insist—but they wont. Understood?"

"If Martinson backs that order as coming from Lloyd's in Captain Williams' absence, I'll do it—be jolly well glad to! My word, Cap'n Coffin—you gave me a bit of a turn when you said those boilers had been shipped as deck-cargo for us!"

"You'll go out with ballast-tanks empty, I suppose?"

"Well—ballast pays no freights. I fancy the charterers wish to find out just how good or how bad a commercial proposition this boat really is."

CAPTAIN WILLIAMS' manner when he came below for dinner, just after the *Salwin* had passed the Goodwin Sands on Saturday, was entirely courteous to the few passengers who had turned up at his table—there were vacant seats below Coffin on both sides—but he was the type which doesn't joke or yarn to his guests until fairly well acquainted with them. After exchanging a few civilities with the baronet, he presently asked:

"Haven't you a letter for me, Sir Edward? There was something said about one in the manager's office."

Coffin took it from his pocket.

"I intended fetching it up to your cabin when you had a bit more leisure, Captain—knowing from experience how much a Master has on his mind when leaving port."

"Aye—one recalls that you were sailing for the Brocks a few years ago. Will you excuse me a moment while I glance through this?"

It didn't take long for Williams to grasp the general intent of the letter; but he read it a second time. Then he said: "You'll find me ready to cooperate with you in every way, Sir Edward. But—would you mind giving me some idea as to what it's all about? This practically puts you in command of the boat if you wish to insist upon it, y'know!"

The young baronet smiled disarmingly.

"I think nothing was further from the manager's intentions, Captain. What he's trying to convey in that letter is that there is some suspicion of rather serious conditions on this boat—conditions affecting her safety and her insurance—and that my experience might supplement yours in the event of possible emergency, as much or more on the underwriting side as the navigating, inasmuch as I'm confidentially representing the Lloyd's. For example—" Coffin ran over the details concerning the boilers and the fuel-tanks, and the way he had handled them in the Captain's absence. "As far as I know," he added, "the stowage was fairly shipshape—but I've a hunch, which keeps coming back to bother me, that the cargo for Singapore in the lower holds —where it naturally would be stowed—weighs out a good bit lighter than the case-goods for Colombo, which are stowed in the 'tween-deck space. —Wait a bit; we're just beginning to get a fairly heavy Channel sea. How does the boat feel to you, now?"

"Hmph! Since you mention it—she really doesn't feel right!" Captain Williams admitted.

"Exactly! Yet if I had not put it in so many words, you mightn't have thought that for some time—merely had a vague sense of uneasiness."

"Then you and the underwriters knew there was something wrong before we left port, did you?"

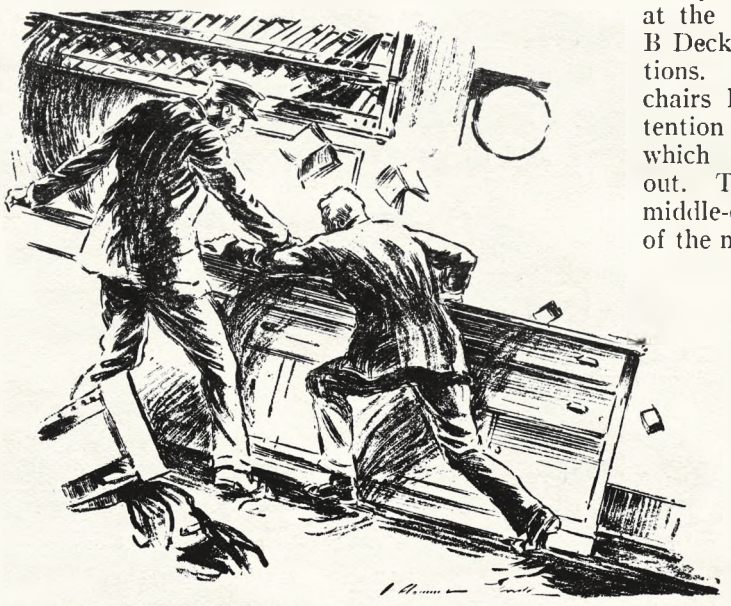
"No—nothing as definite as that to begin with. Just a few facts which seemed rather unusual. The boilers and empty fuel-tank corroborated them—but we knew nothing of those details at the start. With average weather, the boat trimmed as she is now, ought to make the passage, even if a bit uncomfortably. I rather doubt her really going over if we strike heavy weather—as she is now—but she *might*. There's something wrong somewhere with the design and figures. You've more than two hundred passengers aboard —a good-sized crew, including stewards—and His Majesty's mails. I've no intention of butting in unless conditions get pretty bad—if they do, I might be able to offer some helpful suggestions. No objections, I hope, Captain?"

"My word, no! Considering the force of this letter, I appreciate the courteous way you're conferring with me, Sir Edward!"

"There's another little matter to keep us from being bored, this trip," said Coffin frankly. "It's possible that you have on board a jewel-robber who recently got away with gems insured for a hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds. No proof whatever, you understand—just another hunch that one of your passengers might be the man. I picked one of the private cabins which happens to be close to another private cabin occupied by that man—and it's possible I may get a chance to search his room. But naturally, you'll prefer to know nothing of that—because without some evidence to warrant it, I'll be committing a thoroughly unlawful act. Er—by the way—I've had short chats with McKinnon, the purser—Bailey, the chief steward—Fletcher, the 'second'—and Burns, the chief operator. Norrey I've known for some years—he understands what we're up against. I figure Mullins as an enemy whenever it's safe for him to act that way. As for the others, it probably will insure better teamwork if you let it be understood that I'm a friend of the owners who has been given the run of the boat. Eh?"

As there was nothing further to be done in regard to the boat until some emergency arose, Coffin spent the evening making acquaintances among the passengers—a proceeding which required no effort upon his part, inasmuch as he was the friendly type of unmistakable gentleman to whom a man or woman will speak without a second thought. Not more than half the saloon-list were in evidence, as there was a fairly heavy sea running and the *Salwin* was building a reputation as a "roller."

Three attractive girls traveling together, found opportunity for ranging alongside Coffin at the rail of the lee gangway on B Deck and smilingly asking questions. A certain couple in deck-chairs had attracted the girls' attention as a puzzling combination which they couldn't quite make out. The man appeared to be a middle-class Englishman from one of the manufacturing districts. His wife — presumably, as they occupied the same cabin — was a black-haired woman a bit over the average size, and spoke with a marked Latin accent. Her English was quite understandable, but she was unquestionably an educated Latin of some sort —French, Spanish, Italian, or Portuguese—it was difficult to place her. Apparently, both she and her husband were excellent sailors.



"Hope nobody went over the rail!" Hold fast—here she goes again!"

"Have you happened to hear her talking in her own language, Sir Edward?" asked one of the girls, in discussing the passengers in general, and this couple in particular. "They have one of the private cabins—Number 92. That's right next to you, isn't it?"

"Why, it must be, I guess. I've not been in my cabin more than a few minutes, as yet. Possibly I may hear 'em talking when I'm in my tub—fancy the bathrooms of the two suites are next to each other."

Presently Coffin went below, and finding the purser in his office, was cordially invited to come in and have a cigar.

"I say, McKinnon! . . . Some of the women aboard are rather interested in the couple—an Englishman and his foreign wife—who have the next cabin to mine. Know who they are?"

"Nothin' beyond the fact that they're old travelers—good sailors—seem to have all the brass they need."

"When I booked my cabin, there was a chap down for Cabin 92, traveling with his valet—some sort of foreigner —don't recall the name."

"Figuera—aye. Came up from Rio on this boat, last trip—so they said in the office. But he gave up the room yesterday morning, a few hours before sailing—delayed by his business affairs a couple of weeks, as I understand. Man standing alongside of him at the counter had just been told that there was no accommodation left on the boat—an' when he heard Figuera givin' up the room, he nabbed it for

himself and wife. Name of 'Leaming'—wife's foreign, though her English is good enough."

"H-m-m—so that's how it happened, eh? I wonder—"

"Wonder what, Sir Edward?"

"Did Mr. Leaming or his wife give you any valuable package to be put in the strong-room?"

"No. Fancy they're the sort who'd carry their gold, passport an' letter-of-credit in a chamois-bag, next to the skin. Some people always seem afraid of shipwreck or foundering, you know—can't stand the idea of their valuables goin' to the bottom while their lives may be saved in the boats, d'ye see."

THE circumstance of a passenger and his wife hoping to book on that particular boat, and asking for accommodation before Figuera came in to cancel his reservation, had every appearance of being a bona-fide transaction such as occurs any day in every steamship booking-office . . . . unless—Leaming happened to be Figuera's valet! In that case, where did Leaming's wife come in? Could she be one of the gang of jewel-thieves? No reason whatever to suspect anything of the sort. Certainly, if Figuera actually were the man who had made away with the Pandrith jewels, it was extremely unlikely he would have intrusted them to Leaming and his wife for transportation to India while he himself remained behind in London. It began to look like a washout as far as establishing any connection between Figuera and the Leamings—and yet the one place on the globe to realize the greatest sum for those stolen gems, with no questions asked, was the Chandni Chowk at Delhi. And the *Salwin* stopped at Colombo—only a three- or four-day journey from Delhi. . . .

Coffin nodded pleasantly to Leaming as he came into the smoking room. Just then the boat rolled over to port, almost on her beam-ends. The Midlander was catapulted from his chair at a table on the other side of the room and would have struck a table by the baronet with force enough to break a rib if that gentleman hadn't caught him as he came and eased the collision.

"My word! . . . Thanks a lot, sir! She does roll a bit, doesn't she? One would have said this sea is scarcely heavy enough to make her act up like that! Astonishing, how any deep-sea boat will almost stand on her head—then right herself an' go on about her business. What?" Another man who had been pitched across the room agreed with him—but with reservations.

"You're right enough, sir, as a rule—but that was what I call a pretty stiff angle for a boat of this size an' weight! If she'll do that in the Channel, we'll get a bit of what-for, crossin' the Bay tomorrow! We'll be taking our meals from swinging racks instead of the fiddles!"

The next hour or two brought puzzled expressions into the faces of officers and crew. Rolling and pitching were all in the day's work to them—but a boat *can* roll at an angle which doesn't leave much margin for recovery! This one seemed a bit sluggish on the up-swing. If any of the cargo happened to shift . . . . Well—no point in borrowing trouble.

Leaming was noticeably cultivating Sir Edward's acquaintance—one might have pictured him as basking in an aura of respectability. In the morning Coffin met Mrs. Leaming—talked in Spanish with her. She claimed to be a Barcelona woman, but she knew English much better than one would expect—which she explained by a reference to the English courses she had taken. Upon the subject of jewels, her interest was mild—she knew old china and Venetian glass much better.

In the afternoon, they turned, and started across the Bay of Biscay.

After dinner, Coffin went below with the chief and sat down in his room for a smoke. He commented upon the boat keeping a more even keel—though the expression is merely figurative in these days when steamers have smooth, flat bottoms and no keels at all except the fins along the bilges. Keels are now but a memory of windjamming days.

"I rather fancied we'd be crossing the Bay on our beam, from the way she acted last night, Phil!" he remarked.

Norrey nodded.

"Looked for that myself—but we may be in for a streak of luck until we pass Finisterre. I doubt if the Bay is going to be as bad as the Channel was—sometimes it isn't. By the way, I've another bit of data for you. We had to leave a few cases of that heavy machinery on the bulkhead because we were full-up. One of those cases swung against an iron bollard and smashed in the corner—Martinson condemned it. Just for curiosity, I got down and looked inside through that corner. The stuff inside may have been parts of a new machine—crated up separately to save space—but they were eaten through with rust in spots and looked to me like scrap-iron."

"Well—that doesn't surprise me," said Coffin slowly. "All of that heavy-case stuff for Colombo is in the 'tween-deck space, isn't it—where it naturally would be if it's going to be unloaded first. Singapore and China stuff is in the lower holds—unloaded last of all. According to the manifest, all of that lower-hold stuff is much lighter weight. And you've got a bubble of air along the bottom in those empty ballast-tanks. Yet in spite of that, there's enough cargo-weight to fetch her down within an inch of her Plimsoll-mark. Now that heavy stuff in the 'tween-decks is, if anything, above the center of gravity—a lot of weight to swing back after it's once gone way over! If most of it is nothing but junk—and I'm ready to bet a hundred pounds on that, now—of course we are perfectly justified in jettisoning the lot of it. That's one remedy we have in reserve."

GOING on deck again, Coffin found the three girls in the starboard gangway waiting to have a constitutional with him.

For some reason they appeared to be still intrigued with the Leamings. The man, they had no use for—he was a stick—tongue-tied and ill-at-ease with women, though the men seemed to find him good company in the smoking-room. But the woman, they said, had a lot to talk about—spicy remarks, one inferred, from the queer way the girls looked at each other. They thought she must sing contralto—her voice, at times, was as deep as a man's.

Coffin's ears stiffened at this remark—again, he began to wonder if—

"I say, girls!" he began. "Is there anything you've noticed about Mrs. Leaming—anything a bit different from other women? Look here! . . . If you think you've discovered anything odd about her at any time, promise you'll not say a word to anyone else about it—will you? There's a jolly good reason for that request! Now—I'm going below to the chief steward's office after chocolates for you. Wait right here, please!"

In a few minutes, he was back again with four boxes of chocolates which he handed to them with rather odd instructions.

"Here's a box for each of you—with another one for Mrs. Leaming. It would scarcely do for me to be giving her presents—but quite all right from one of you. She's sitting up straight in her deck-chair down in that gangway-bay. I want you to run aft along the gangway, as if you were playing some game or skylarking—and, as you pass Mrs. Leaming, toss this box into her lap from a distance of, say, three or four feet. Don't hand it to her—just toss it as you run by! I'll be hurrying along after you. Got it?

Never mind why—you'll know all about it before we get ashore! You're just doing this as a lark!"

The girls were mystified; but did exactly as they were told, and ran merrily past Mrs. Leaming. As she saw the package sailing toward her when the girl tossed it, her knees instinctively came together, to catch it on her lap if it missed her hand. A good tennis or ball-player would have caught it easily with one hand, but she was neither.

When the girls came around the circle by way of the weather gangway and forward deck, they found Sir Edward leaning against the rail in the same place they had left him. He thanked them, and cautioning them not to say a word to Mrs. Leaming as to the donor of the candy, he went into the music-room with them and sang chanteys.

For the next twenty-four hours, the baronet kept a close watch upon Mrs. Leaming without her being aware of it. . . . When you toss a package into a woman's lap, she instinctively spreads her knees apart, to catch it on her skirt or apron; but when you toss it into a *man's* lap, he unconsciously jams his knees together—to keep the package from falling through between!

ON steamers fitted with cabin-and-bath suites, two adjoining bathrooms frequently are equipped with a communicating door which may be locked and bolted—the bolts usually being on one side and the key on the other. If the occupants are strangers, the door is of course securely fastened. As it happened, the bolts of this communicating door were on Coffin's side—the key, on Leaming's.

Choosing a time when Leaming was playing poker in the smoking-room after tiffin and Mrs. Leaming was napping in her deck chair, Coffin pushed the key through with a wire until it fell upon the mat, then opened the door with a skeleton-key. Stepping through into the cabin, he glanced about to see what hiding-places might occur to him if he wished to conceal anything, yet get at it instantly in case of emergency. The steamer-trunks under the bed? Obviously no; too much trouble unstrapping and unlocking them. Hand-luggage? . . . No—one doesn't take hand-luggage in a ship's boat when leaving a sinking steamer. Some crevice between overhead deck-beams and woodwork? No. The steamer's motion would roll or shake them out. On the floor, a sharp-eyed room-steward would probably spot them. Mattress? Yes—if the little rip were very carefully sewed up again. Pillows? Room-steward handles them too much and too often. Life-preservers—in the ceiling-racks? Ah—almost an ideal place—first thing one would reach for in an emergency!

Coffin pulled down the first life-preserver. There was no trace of any cut or stitching on it. The second, however, was something else again. On the inside the canvas had been slit, the big chunk of cork neatly cut in half—he could feel the joint through the covering on the opposite edge—and the canvas neatly sewed up again. Fixing the exact appearance of this in mind, he replaced the life-preserver in the rack just as it had been before—put the key back in the door, which he quietly closed and bolted, leaving no trace that any intruder had been in the cabin. Whether he were right or wrong as to what might be inside of that cork block, he had no idea of leaving any evidence that it had been meddled with, and thus alarming the Leamings, who might easily suspect him before they would anyone else.

Back in his own cabin, he took down one of his life-preservers—slit the canvas in exactly the same place the other one had been cut—took out the big cork block and split it neatly in two halves with a sharp clasp-knife—sliced out a recess in one of them—put the halves together and back into their canvas covering, which he neatly sewed up along the slit with a needle and cotton yarn borrowed from the chief. The next day he waited until the same hour after tiffin. Then he let himself into the Leamings' bathroom—exchanged the life-preserver for theirs, taking care to get everything exactly back in place and leave no smudge-marks which might attract their attention. With the key on their side of the door, he closed and bolted it, grasped the small projecting part of the key on his side of the lock with a pair of wire-nippers, and turned the lock over.

Then he hurriedly ripped open the life-preserver,—took out the slab of cork, and found, somewhat to his amazement, what he had hoped to find, but hadn't really believed he would: the Begum ruby, a flaming thing which lay in his palm like a pool of fire—the Ranee pink diamond—and the Damiala pearls!

Sewing up the canvas covering as it had been before, he stepped across the little side-passage upon which both rooms opened, and into the stateroom occupied by a German and an Italian—who were playing cards in the smoking-room. He took one of their life-preservers, replacing

Leaming scrambled up the steps and out upon the gangway—his wife after him, firing.

it with the one from which he had obtained the jewels. This unmarked life-preserver he shoved into his own rack to replace the one now in the Leamings' room. If the latter discovered their loss within the next week or two—which he thought rather doubtful—and managed to search the near-by staterooms without being caught, their suspicions would fall upon the two foreigners in Room 88—not upon him. For a few minutes he debated whether to put the jewels in the *Salwin's* strong-room, in a package addressed to Lloyd's—on the probability that if the boat did go to the bottom he would go with her—or carry them about in his money-belt next to his skin. He finally decided upon the money-belt—sewing the jewels up in it so that nothing could shake them out. And from that moment, he carried a small but heavy-caliber automatic in one of his pockets.

ALTHOUGH rolling more than a boat of her type should have done, the *Salwin* made Gibraltar without noticeable trouble. From the day after she left the Rock behind, however, she ran into heavy seas which took her just forward of the beam. Coffin was up in the Master's cabin when the first real taste of it came—a great sweeping roll which laid her over to starboard on her beam-ends with a retching sort of a quiver and seemed to hold her there. Everything loose in the cabin smashed to leeward, pelting them as they sat by Captain Williams' transom-desk.

The two men glanced at each other, understanding perfectly from the way she went over just how little margin of safety there was in her balance of equilibrium. They knew she'd come back—but there wasn't much resiliency in it. A chorus of screams mixed with nervous laughter came echoing up from the lee gangways. Coffin got up and hauled himself over to the barometer, which was swinging in its gimbals on the for'ard bulkhead.

"I'm betting there's been a norther sweeping across here from the Alps within the last week—always kicks up this kind of a sea after it! And we're running into another within twelve hours, Williams—the glass is twenty-nine-and-a-half! Question is whether she can stand it. It isn't more than fifty-fifty, if as good as that! I'm betting the main-deck scuppers were under water—and the C Deck not more than a foot or so above. Hope nobody went over the rail! . . . Here she goes again! Well—what's your idea, Cap'n?"

Williams hauled himself along to the door and into the wheel-house, where he gave an order, shoved over the engine-room telegraph lever to "Half-speed"—and got back into his cabin again. The bow sluggishly swung around to the south and she began to pitch instead of roll, with occasional seas breaking over the turtle-back at the stern.

"That'll give us a few minutes' breathing-space to figure this proposition out!" he said grimly. "We're a good hundred miles from the African coast. I never sailed one of these blasted 'tender' boats before!" He verified their position on the chart—and sat down. "I've to make a decision within the next ten minutes, Coffin! If I try to back-an'-fill—carry-on an' trust to luck—it'll be the *Vestris* over again. Wireless no use whatever! If we go over, we'll all be down with Davy Jones long before any assistance could reach us! Won't do, you know—must decide at once."

"Worse than the *Vestris,* old chap," Coffin agreed; "it'll be the *Waratah* all over again! Fine new boat—maiden voyage—packed with Australians going home to England. Left Albany, Western Australia, bound for Durban. Never so much as a bit of floating wreckage from her ever seen! At the Board of Trade inquiry, it was shown that she was a 'tender' boat, with some deck-cargo that she wasn't built to carry."

"I remember her well. We should have more weight below in our ballast-tanks—but we're down to our Plimsoll, now. Go below that, an' we lose our safety margin of buoyancy—dead-log that'll go down with any heavy pounding! Well, it'll be running up a bill against the owners which'll cost me my berth, I fancy—but I'm going to break out that heavy-case stuff in the 'tween-decks' an' jettison it—nothing else to do! Break it out now—while she's riding before the seas—while I can! In a few hours it'll be impossible!"

"Stout fella! Absolutely right!" said Coffin heartily. "And you'll not lose by it, either, Cap'n. When you get the first case above the hatch I want it smashed open so that we can see what's inside. If it's not scrap-iron junk, I'll personally pay full damages on that case—no fooling! If it *is* junk—then that, and those boilers they were going to ship, will cancel the insurance! When all that stuff is overboard, Norrey can fill his ballast-tanks—and then I think she'll ride out anything that comes along!"

Williams knowing he had no time to waste, called the off-watch out of their bunks and put the crew working at both wells, rigging the derricks, casting off the tarpaulins and hatches, and breaking out the heavy-case cargo. The first case proved to be junk, as Sir Edward had supposed. Some crated machinery that was unquestionably what the manifest indicated, they set aside, and afterward stowed below again. As the junk was dumped over the side, Norrey slowly ran the water into his ballast-tanks, keeping fairly close to the Plimsoll-mark. Finally the hatches were battened down again, blocks and gear unshipped from the derricks, and the boat was laid on her proper course, cross-bearings having been obtained from three D/F wireless stations, ashore. And then the boat began to wallow.

It was an ugly sea for any steamer—worse than one usually strikes in the Mediterranean. The boat was thrown over on her beam-ends time after time—but now there wasn't so much of that retching shudder which meant a teetering on the very edge of her equilibrium. The weight was where it should be—Williams and Sir Edward both felt that she might now bull her way through pretty much anything except a China Sea typhoon and felt thankful that the dry monsoon would be setting in by the time she left Singapore.

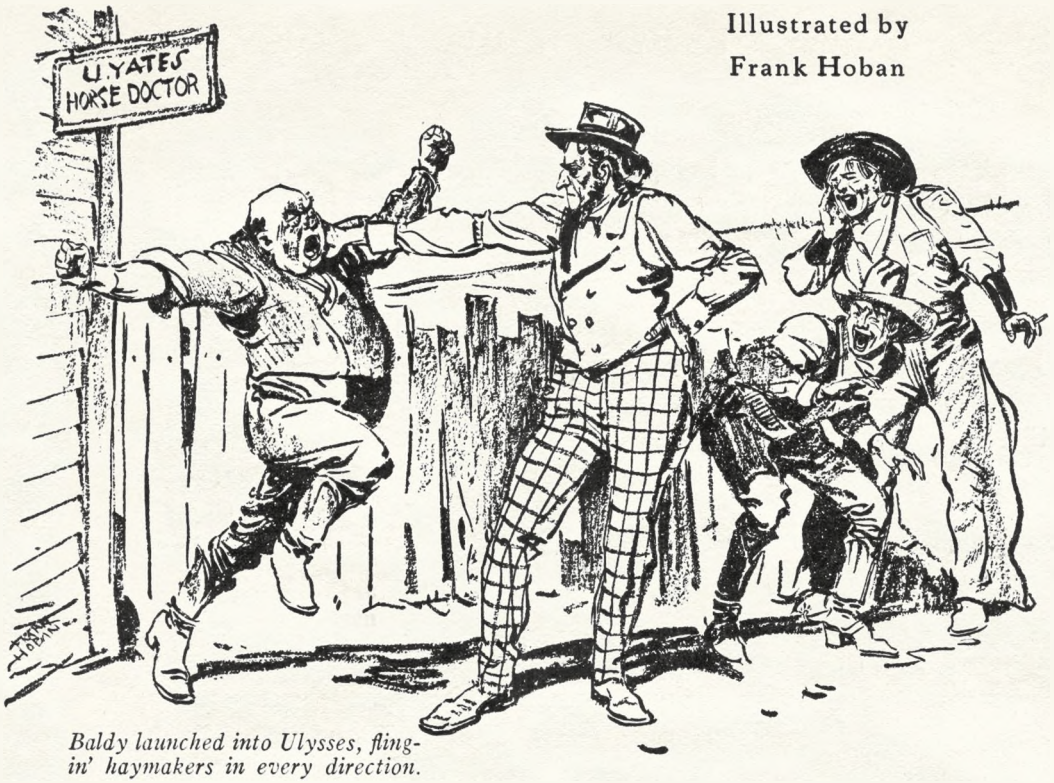
But as the Captain said:

"The Singapore-Eastern Line wants no boat like this in their fleet—they'll get rid of her at any cost when my report goes in! If you carry water-ballast an' full oil-tanks—put nothing but light stuff in the 'tween-decks—she'll mebbe stay on top of the water. But that means that instead of carryin' nine thousand ton of payin', dead-weight cargo, it'll not be over five or six with any safety!"

WHEN Coffin went below the gangways were deserted. The more venturesome of the passengers had been badly scared when some of them were nearly hurled over the lee-rail. Jettisoning part of the cargo had almost thrown them into stark panic. But the grimly smiling faces of the stewards and the somewhat forced joking of the officers had partly reassured them. When Sir Edward came down the companion in his rubber coat and hood, they crowded about him for information—which he gave:

"We're running into a spell of dirty weather that's blowing down from the Alps—that's why we chucked that heavy stuff overboard. There'll be a bit more rolling and pitching—wind's going to howl like the devil—but we'll be through the worst of it by tomorrow night and have smoother weather in a couple of days. Just keep inside until we hit it—there is too much serious risk along the gangways. Fortunately, you can get into the smoking-room by that little after-companion."

About two o'clock in the *(Please turn to page 136)*



Illustrated by
Frank Hoban

Baldy launched into Ulysses, flingin' haymakers in every direction.

The Lost Note

This joyous tale of "tune twisters" is one of the best we have ever published—

By
BUD LA MAR

IF you was to ride through Celestial City,—which aint likely on account it's an out-of-the-way, God-forsaken village forty miles from nowhere and right on the edge of the jumpin'-off place,—you would never think that musical talent was loose among us. And by this statement I (Phil Fuller as I am called) don't mean vest-pocket-instrument players like jew's-harps and mouth-organs. No sir, not at all! I mean sure enough, man-size, awe-inspirin' tune-twisters, in the playin' of which no he-man need to feel ashamed.

And as long as Ulysses Yates, the horse-doctor, was, as you might say, the only tune-buster of note in C. C., everything was fine and dandy. But when another star began twinklin' on the musical sky of our fair city, the dark spirit of jealousy started cavortin' around like a hydrophoby skunk, and the murderous sounds of the six-shooter and the double-barreled shotgun joined the symphony.

In Celestial City competition is met with gunfire—which accounts for the fact that we have only one saloon, one grocery, one hardware store, one preacher, and so on, so forth and etcetery.

Ulysses Yates was a bull-fiddle artist; and although he was well known all over the country as an A No. 1 bullet-extractor, tooth-puller and horse-and-cow healer, his real fame came of his playin' on the bull fiddle. With that instrument clutched between his knees he could imitate a thunderstorm to a fare-you-well, or the bayin' of a pack of hounds trailin' a coon, till you could almost see the coon scuttlin' up a tree! His tune-playin' wasn't quite up to his imitation work, but you will have to admit that a bull fiddle aint an instrument much suited for tune-playin', for the same reasons that an elephant aint ever likely to become a ballet-dancer. As far as I know, he only rendered two tunes which could be recognized in this neck of the woods, and they were "Johnny Went A-Courtin'" and "Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie." And even then you had to listen close to make 'em out, what with all the gruntin' noises and bear-like sounds which issued from the instrument.

But if you had ever seen Ulysses renderin' a selection on his overgrown fiddle, you would never forget the sight. He was a tall, bony man, thin as a rail, and very dignified. Never cracked a smile in all his life. His hair was long and curled up behind, and he wore the most luxuriant set of side-wheel whiskers ever encountered on the face of man. When givin' a concert at Caribou Calkins' saloon, which he was wont to do every Saturday night, he was always decked out in his yellow plush vest, pink silk shirt and beflowered sleeve-holders, with a pair of checkered pants which ballooned out at the waist and tapered down to almost nothin' at the ankles. The drinkin' and hell-raisin' would stop, so that you could've heard the buzzin' of a fly. Ulysses would cough a couple of times, brandish his bow like a sword, and open up with "Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie."

Pom-pom, pom-pom, roooom! echoed the bull fiddle and every man in the room strained both ears and squinted his eyes, tryin' hard to follow the tune—while Ulysses bent over his instrument, his elbows stickin' up like the wings of a buzzard in flight, sawin' away till he had exhausted his whole repertory. Then everybody would cheer and holler. Caribou would treat the house, and the place would settle down to normal drinkin', card-playin' and whatever wranglin' had been interrupted by the recital.

Ulysses Yates was a stiff-minded man and he took his playin' pretty serious. Nobody ever thought of makin' fun of him. He just wasn't the kind of man that anybody cared to rile. As Damsite Davis, my partner, said to me: "So long as that long-legged horse-doctor is let alone, everything will be all right. But just let another man butt in on his game and we'll see a musical war in Celestial City!"

Well, one day the both of us are sittin' on the porch of Caribou's saloon when Baldy Boyles, who runs the butcher-shop, comes up to us and he says: "Boys I just got a letter from a lawyer, which says that my old uncle died in Sacramento and left everything he had to me. I'm takin' a wagon and goin' after the stuff. I ought to be back in a week or so."

NOW there was nothin' that you might call portentous about that—which only goes to show that catastrophes aint always to be prophesied. And it would've been better for all concerned if Baldy's uncle had lived another ten years or so, or willed his belongin's to some one livin' a long ways from Celestial City.

Sure enough, Baldy Boyles comes back about a week later, drivin' his wagon up Main Street to his place. In the back of the wagon is a tall, narrow package wrapped in canvas, and tied down to the box with ropes. There aint nothin' else in that wagon that we can see. A bunch of us, drawn by curiosity, amble down the street to help Baldy unload his legacy.

"Believe me," says Baldy, "I would never have left my business if I'd known what I was goin' to fall heir to!"

"What you got in there?" asks Shirt-tail Sykes.

"Huh!" grunts Baldy. "You could never guess it. Lord knows I was surprised when I found out!"

The ropes are all untied and the package is dumped on to the sidewalk. Baldy unwraps the canvas from around it and unfolds to view the queerest piece of machinery ever displayed in C. C. The dang' thing consists of a big wooden frame, carved with fancy designs and polished like Caribou's mahogany bar. And in that frame forty to fifty strings are stretched; some long, where the frame is the highest and others short where the outfit comes to a peak. The whole thing is about seven foot tall and nobody present can make out any use for it.

"Looks like a new-fangled b'ar-trap," declares Dynamite Dobbs.

"Well, it aint!" says Baldy. "It's a harp!"

The news of the harp's arrival traveled across country like wild fire. People came from every corner of the county to gape at the dang' thing. Baldy set it in his window where it could be viewed from the street, and folks stood there from daylight till dark, gazin' at the instrument in awed astonishment.

"Baldy," says Windbag Wilson one afternoon, "why don't you play the dang' thing? I'll bet you could get some pretty fine music from it!"

"Who, me?" asks Baldy. "I don't even know how to hold it! Why, it takes three men to pack it around. I could never carry the damn' thing, let alone play it."

"Maybe you aint supposed to hold it," suggested Sundog Sawyer. "You could stand in front of it, or even set up on top and plink the strings!"

It had never occurred to the butcher to become a harp-player, but now the idea sorta grew upon him and we began to hear funny plinkin' noises issuin' from his store at night after he locked the place up and pulled down the blinds.

One night he comes up to the bar where a bunch of us is leanin' our elbows and he says, discouraged-like:

"Boys, it aint no use—I cain't learn to play that harp. I been practisin' on 'Annie Laurie' and I can get up to the fourth note, but I cain't find the fifth to save my life. Why, I plunked every dang' one of the things ten times and nary a sign of it. By golly, I give up!"

"Why don't you take lessons?" asks Dry-hole Riley.

"There aint nobody in this wide spot in the road as ever seen a harp before, that's why!" replies Baldy.

"Well, for goodness sakes!" says Dry-hole. "You can send off to New York for 'em. I was just readin' in a magazine where they'll teach you to play the piano with ten letters through the mails. If they can show you how to play a piano by correspondence, they can teach the harp. First thing you know they'll be learnin' to ride broncs by mail!"

"You still got that magazine?" asks Baldy, lookin' interested.

"Shore! I had it since Christmas and I aint likely to throw it away till I finish readin' it."

About two weeks later, Damsite and me went to pay a visit to Baldy and we found him in the back of his store settin' on a stool behind his harp and peerin' at a big piece of paper with Chinese writin' all over it. He was in his shirt-sleeves and the sweat run down from his bald head in streams.

"How you comin' with your playin'?" asks Damsite.

"I'll tell you, boys," says Baldy, "this is a mighty hard instrument to master. My arms aint long enough to reach them front strings, and I don't make much sense from all these marks. All I can make out is that them people in New York want me to play this here 'Arpeggio' and 'Pizzicato' and 'Obbligato'. I don't care nothin' about them Italian tunes; what I want to find out is how to play 'Annie Laurie' or 'Darlin' Nellie Gray.' I think I'll write 'em a letter to that effect."

Then he plunked a few notes to show us how it listened, and by gosh, that harp shore did wring out some sweet-soundin' music! I was surprised.

I said to him, "Baldy, you ought to learn to play by ear. I never heard a chin fiddle-player which was any 'count readin' his tunes from paper. If you got 'em in your head, they're yours!"

"That's right," put in Damsite. "And if you ever manage to play a whole tune from snout to tail on that thing you'll have everybody in C. C. lookin' up to you."

"By golly,

The smile faded from his face. His arms still held out, he paused and stared at the harp.

boys," says Baldy, "I'll play 'er or bust an arm. Bear that in mind!"

Damsite and me ambled back to Caribou Calkins' saloon and disclosed the fact that Baldy Boyles was sure enough engaged in mortal combat with his harp, and that he would wring a tune from it if he had to go at it with a meat-cleaver. And then it come to me that Ulysses Yates was standin' at the other end of the bar, takin' in every word and not lookin' much pleased. He had been gone from town a month on one of his professional tours, and had just come back that same day.

Skinner Thompson, Peavine Pritchett and Limestone Lawson were drinkin' with him, and them three old renegades make up the orneriest set of human polecats which has ever congregated on the face of the earth.

"Now it seems to me," says Peavine,—talkin' to nobody in perticular,—"that we already have a purty good musician in these parts."

"Well," put in Limestone, "now I don't know. Some people might prefer a harp to a bull-fiddle. I'm an open-minded man myself, and I wouldn't care to make any statements till I heard both."

"That there is my sentiments," added Skinner. "You cain't make any snap judgments on a thing like that."

DOC YATES had listened to this talk without sayin' a word—just pullin' at his side-wheel whiskers.

"The thing to do," suggested Caribou Calkins, "would be to bring each man here with his instrument and let the people decide which one they like best."

At this point Ulysses joined in. "I'll have you know, sir," he declared, "that I won't be compared to an amateur! I am an artist, gentlemen! Let there be no more talk about debasing myself to a harp-playing butcher. This is too much!" He stamped out of the place, glarin' straight ahead and blowin' fire.

"It looks like we will have a storm," said Damsite. "The clouds are gatherin'!"

"Well, now," spoke up Dry-hole Riley, "if Baldy can twist anythin' beside plinks out of his harp, I'd admire to hear it. I'm getting tired of them damn' rumblin's on that bull-fiddle."

And the words were hardly out of his mouth when Baldy himself come dashin' in through the swingin' doors. He's pantin' with excitement, and there is a light of triumph in his eyes. He runs up to the bar and says, "Caribou, mix up a round of your Gila Monster cocktails. I'm buyin' everybody a drink. Step up, boys! I got 'er—she's mine!"

"What you got?" asks Peavine. "The D. T.'s?"

"'Annie Laurie!'" shouts Baldy. "I got her! I found that fifth string and marked it with chalk; the rest come easy. I can play 'er all the way through! You ought to hear it."

"You better look out!" warned Limestone. "The Doc is likely to go gunnin' for you!"

Baldy looked surprised. "Who, me?" he said. "I never done him no harm!"

"He is pretty sore," added Limestone. "He said he wouldn't be seen with a dang' harp-playin' butcher!"

"The hell he did!" exclaimed Baldy. "Well, I don't know as I would be proud of his company."

"He said you was an amatoor."

"Me? He's a liar! You can tell him I said he was a carrion-eatin' buzzard out of hell, a blue-bottle spawned in a p'isoned yallow dog!"

"Why don't you tell him yoreself? He might not like it, comin' from me."

"By gad, I will! I'll bust him in the nose. I'll put my foot through his damned gruntin' box. The dang' thing sounds like a sick cow. It would be a blessin' to kick it from here to Glory Hole!"

"He also stated that you debased him," continued Limestone.

"I which?" sputtered Baldy. "I never done it! I—er—Where is he?" Baldy rushed out of the saloon swingin' his little short arms and mutterin' what he was goin' to do to Ulysses Yates.

We all took after him and Damsite nudged me in the ribs, whisperin': "What'd I tell you? You just wait! We'll all be in on this and it'll make the Civil War look like a shivaree!"

Baldy Boyles caught up with Ulysses just as he was enterin' his office.

"Come hyar!" bellowed Baldy. "You old back-bitin' scorpion!"

Ulysses turned and gave the butcher a cold look. "What can I do for you, Mr. Boyles?" he asked, very dignified.

"You can take back them lyin' statements you made about me—that's what!" answered Baldy.

"If I were to waste my time discussing your puny existence, Mr. Boyles, I would not have to exaggerate; the facts alone would be sufficiently illuminating in themselves!"

"What's that?" choked Baldy, lookin' kind of puzzled. "You better look out now. I'm liable to get pretty sore. Don't push me too far!"

"I shore wouldn't stand for anybody callin' me them kinda names," said Peavine Pritchett from behind Baldy.

"By gad, I won't!" said Baldy; and he launched into Ulysses, flingin' haymakers in every direction. The horse-doctor backed a couple of steps; then he grasped Baldy by the collar and held him at arm's-length so that the butcher couldn't reach him with his flyin' fists.

Everybody present began howlin' with joy and shoutin' advice to the combatants. Quincy Shotwell, the Marshal, come runnin' up and he said: "Cut it out now, you boys! Aint you ashamed o' yourselves, actin' up this way? I'll have to lock you both up!"

"You stay out of this!" called Dynamite Dobbs. "There wasn't nobody sent for you!"

"And you better mind yore own business, you old hellion!" replied Quincy. "I'll lock you up too."

"There aint room for three people in your jail," put in Chaw-bacon Jones. "You better go build an annex and come back next week"

Arguments started here and there through the crowd and first thing you know Quincy Shotwell took a swing at Dynamite. Dynamite pulled his gun and went to shootin' from the hip and yellin' war-whoops. Everybody scattered, and scuttled for cover, bringin' to an end the fight between Baldy and Ulysses without decidin' which one of the two was the best man.

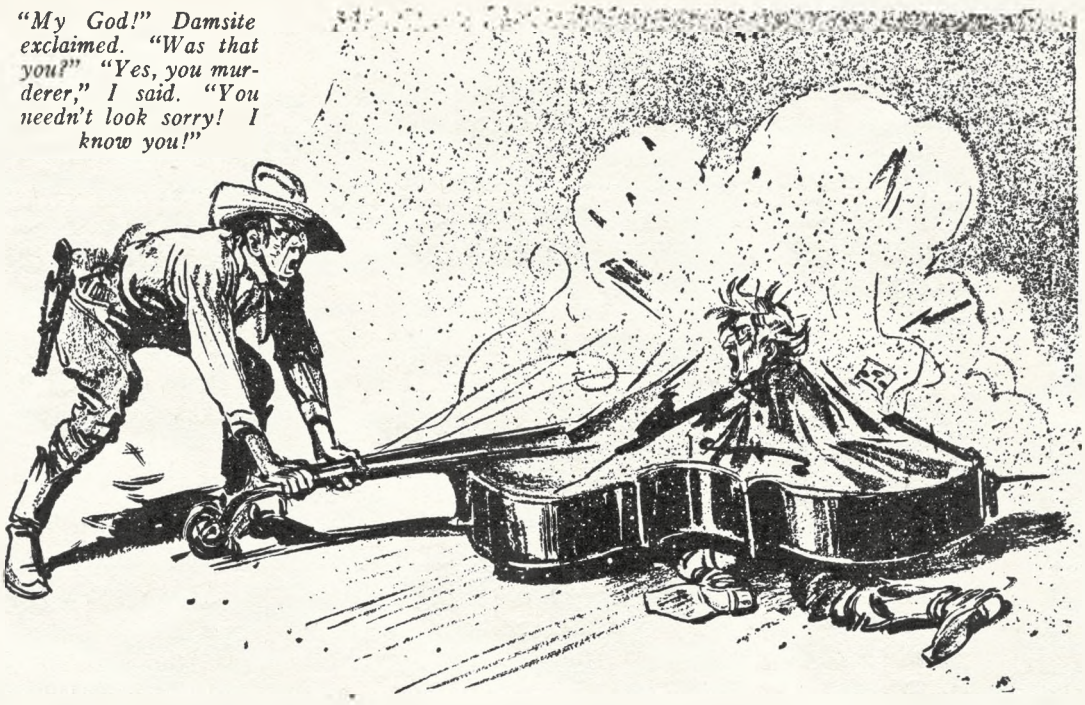
BUT the seeds of dissension were scattered and Celestial City began takin' sides.

"I aint gonna have nothin' to do with this," said Damsite Davis. "I don't care who's the best musician. I don't care if I never get to hear neither one of 'em again!"

"Neither do I," I agreed. "I'm a neutral man in this business."

That night we noticed that every man in C. C. was bearin' arms, and groups of people began formin' here and there discussin' the merits of the bull-fiddle *versus* the harp. Skinner Thompson, Peavine Pritchett and Limestone Lawson ambled from one group to the other, droppin' a few words and stirrin' up the pot to a boil.

Glad Tidings Tucker, the preacher, come into Caribou Calkins' saloon and had a few drinks with us. He said, "Boys, something'll have to be done or our fair city will



"My God!" Damsite exclaimed. "Was that you?" "Yes, you murderer," I said. "You needn't look sorry! I know you!"

suffer an epidemic of lead-poisoning."

"Anything you do now," said Damsite, "will only cause a showdown. Feelin' is runnin' high!"

"I have an idea," replied the preacher, "and I think that the affair can be brought to a peaceful climax."

Well, I had my doubts about that, because if anything was ever settled peaceful in this town, it must of took place before we come here, and I've never heard anything about it.

Glad Tidings' notion was to put on a big church supper which would be topped off by a musical contest between Ulysses Yates and Baldy Boyles. Baldy agreed to it right away. Since he had discovered that fifth note, he was plumb shore that he had the world by the tail on a downhill pull.

"Bring him on!" he shouted. "I'll show the dang' buzzard music what is somethin' else than rumblin's."

The way things stood there was only two things that Ulysses could do—fiddle or get out of town. He let it be known that he would be present on the appointed night a week later and that he would beat Baldy so bad as to make him the laughin'-stock of Celestial City.

Things had been pretty quiet that season with only a couple of shootings and seven or eight fist-fights, so Celestial City went hog-wild over the contest. You could see men shakin' their fingers in one another's faces at every hour of the day and night. Money was bet without thought of caution and the town became divided into two hostile camps, armed to the teeth and watchin' each other like hawks.

Damsite Davis and me managed to remain neutral and all the thanks we got for it was to be made judges of the approachin' contest. The responsibility of decidin' the most accomplished musician was put upon our shoulders by an overwhelming vote, disregardin' the fact that we had decided to go to bed early that night and lock our door and bar our window.

"All right," said Damsite to me, takin' his shotgun from its hook and reachin' for a can of oil. "She'll be judged, by gad!" He put two caps in the instrument and stamped in a couple loads of powder and filled both barrels to the brim with old nails, staples, chunks of old iron, and two or three broken bottles. "This," he said, tappin' his weapon, "will back any decision which I might choose to make."

"Say!" I put in. "How about me? I'm a judge too and don't you forget it, you old slew-footed horsefly! What do you know about fine music? An old iggerant sand-flea like you!"

"I know as much as you—and you'd better look out how you speak to me, you old satchel-seat!" Damsite snarled.

Glad Tidings Tucker's church was never before so well attended as it was the next Saturday night. Even Caribou Calkins had closed up his saloon, put on a hard-boiled shirt and honored the proceedings with his presence. Fried chicken was served at a dollar a throw by Mrs. Tucker, assisted by several other ladies. It was kind of a silent meal, everybody eying each other with distrust and not sayin' much outside of what speech was necessary for the passin' of the heaped plates of grub. No weapon was openly displayed, but every man present looked sorta bulky in spots. Damsite had laid his shotgun behind the pulpit, near which the contest was to take place. Ulysses and Baldy had not yet appeared, but their instruments were on a built-up platform ready for use.

After supper the dishes were cleared away, benches set out, and everybody got seated for the contest. Glad Tidings stepped up on the platform and addressed the crowd.

"My dear friends," he said, "we are gathered here tonight in this holy place in a spirit of love and for a peaceful purpose. Let not the kindness of your hearts be overwhelmed by the bile of jealousy and suspicion. Let not your hands stray for the six-shooters in your shirts, for the Lord hath said 'Peace on earth, good will to men!'"

"There better be no flummery!" spoke a voice from the audience.

Glad Tidings glared at the speaker, who was none other than Limestone Lawson. "The decision will rest with two gentlemen of high standing whom you have yourselves appointed," continued the preacher, "—Messrs. Damsite Davis and Phil Fuller."

We got up from our chairs on the stage and bowed to the people. There was a loud clapping of hands and a loud bellow from the back of the house: "Hang the two old horse-thieves!"

Damsite straightened up and grabbed his shotgun. "Who said that?" he yelled. "By gad, let the yellow skunk step up here and say that to my face!"

But nobody said a word, and Damsite went on to explain the rules we had decided on. "There will be only one tune from each man," he said. "And the winner will be allowed to destroy his competitor's instrument by whatever means he sees fit. Them is the rules, and I aim to enforce 'em! One hostile move from any one of you and I'll blow this damn' gathering of outlaws to hell and gone!"

A silence followed this speech, and Damsite sat down with his shotgun across his lap. Ulysses Yates and Baldy

Boyles came out of a back room and went to their places without a word. The horse-doctor had on his yellow plush vest and balloon pants, and Baldy wore a long Prince Albert coat and a high collar split in the middle. They cut cards for turns and Ulysses drew first place.

He clutched his bull-fiddle between his knees, cast a grave look at the audience and made a flourish with his bow. A couple of loud scraping sounds issued from the instrument; then he settled down to earnest playin'. His reputation was at stake and he took no chances with any unfamiliar tune. After the first minute of groans everybody was certain that he was renderin' "Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie." Baldy sat on the other side of the stage behind his harp, a sneerin' look on his fat red face.

For ten minutes by my watch Ulysses played that tune. He was only allowed one tune—but nothin' had been said about how many times he was to play that tune! Baldy began dartin' nervous looks around and some of his backers passed gruff remarks. Damsite glared over his shotgun and allowed the horse-doctor to proceed, which he did, with a determined look on his long face.

At the first note of the third rendition Baldy commenced to get mad. He had not figured on any endurance contest. He began pluckin' at my sleeve and remonstratin' with me that he wasn't gettin' a square deal. I didn't know what to make of it myself, so I told him to keep still or I would bend the barrel of my six-shooter over his bald head. So he shut up right quick and went to makin' faces at the audience, wavin' his arms and pointin' at his adversary, tryin' to indicate that he was bein' foxed. His backers weren't long in catchin' the meanin' of this sign language. Wing-ding Gillis began conferrin' in whispers with some of his neighbors; then he rose from his seat, pulled a .44 gun, and took careful aim at the bull-fiddle. But before he could press the trigger, Dynamite Dobbs jumped up from his bench and hit Wing-ding a smashin' blow over the head with a brandin'-iron which he had had concealed in his pants.

Wing-ding collapsed, like a busted balloon, among his friends—which turned onto Dynamite like a pack of snappin' coyotes. But Dynamite had the drop on 'em and before they could claw him down he made two wild swings with the brandin'-iron and floored two more of Baldy's partisans. Yells and war-whoops resounded from every corner of the house. Benches were overturned and women screamed like treed cougars. Glad Tidings Tucker began runnin' up and down the hall, wavin' his arms and yellin', "Remember where you are, gentlemen! Remember where you are!" But somebody tripped him, and he fell to the floor, still mutterin', "Remember where you are! Remember where you are!"

ULYSSES YATES paid no mind to all this hell-raisin'. He went right on sawin' at the same tune, although the sounds of his playin' were drowned by loud cursings and the sounds of blows.

And then Damsite Davis took a hand. He brought his shotgun to his shoulder and took aim at the strugglin' mob.

"Squat!" he howled. "Damn yore wild souls, *squat!*"

Under these circumstances everybody figured it would be better to sit down and see what happened, but you could see they wasn't pacified. The injured were all carried out and the crowd resumed its listenin' with only a few grumblin's here and there.

"All right," said Damsite to Ulysses, "I heard enough from you. Now, Baldy, it's yore turn. Go to it and don't forget the rules! Only one tune!" This was unnecessary advice, because the butcher only knew one tune anyhow.

Baldy reared back on his little short legs, smiled at his audience, and got seated behind his harp. He held out both arms, one on each side of the instrument, and sat poised there for a few seconds, a silly grin on his face, lookin' like a butterfly about to take off. Then with delicate little gestures he started plinkin' at the strings. He plunked 'er four times and then the smile faded from his face. His arms still held out, he paused and stared at the harp. You could of heard a pin drop, everything was so still. A puzzled look on his features, Baldy got up and inspected every inch of his instrument. He sighted at it from all angles, and his eyes became boggy and wild. Then he regarded Ulysses Yates, who sat calm and unsmilin' at his end of the platform.

"You dang' crook!" uttered Baldy, reachin' back and drawin' forth a big meat-cleaver from his coat tails. "You low-down snake in the grass!"

"Here, here!" put in Damsite. "What the hell is bitin' you, Baldy Boyles?"

"I been fouled!" replied the butcher. "By gad, I claim to win on a foul! There's been dirty work at the crossroads and I'm callin' everybody's attention to it!"

THE crowd stretched their necks and stared, not knowin' what to make of this new wrinkle.

"I allus had trouble findin' that fifth string in playin' 'Annie Laurie,' and so I had it marked with blue chalk," continued Baldy. "And now the mark is gone! Some dirty skunk rubbed it out. Look it up yoreselves. I been fouled! And I think I know who done it!"

Damsite and me was taken aback at this disclosure. "There wasn't nothin' said about no foul," said Damsite. "Looks to me like you quit, Baldy."

Baldy flourished his meat-cleaver and shouted: "What kind of a contest is this here supposed to be? Who the hell are you to tell me I've quit, when I been fouled?"

I put in an objection, but only drew fire on my own head. "Shet yore trap and keep it shet, you old ranny!" yelled Baldy. "Who the hell told you you was a judge, Phil Fuller? What do you know about music? You're nothin' but a lousy retired horse-thief! You old—"

Baldy became sorta personal here and Damsite tried to shut him up, while I clawed for my six-shooter.

"You aint a damn' bit better!" roared Baldy—and he fetched Damsite a wild punch on the nose.

"Yow-w-w-w!" squalled Damsite, pickin' himself up from the floor and tryin' to bring his shotgun into play.

"Remember where you are!" bawled Glad Tidings Tucker.

"I don't care a hoot in hell where I am!" shrieked Damsite. "Nobody can hit me and—"

The building rocked from the force of the explosion and Baldy Boyles was blowed off the platform into the crowd, yellin' bloody murder, and with staples, nails, and broken glass stickin' from his back. The place was turned into a shambles. All who had not taken sides or bet any money jumped in on general principles.

Baldy's friends stormed the platform, but with great presence of mind I gave the harp a kick and the dang' thing fell onto the heads of our attackers. They cussed, bit, kicked and scratched, but only managed to git all tangled up in the strings like a bunch of wasps in a spider's web.

"Make for the door!" yelled Damsite. Which was a pretty good idea, only we were surrounded by a mob of dang' fanatics engaged in mortal combat and it didn't look to me like we would ever make it alive. I was crouchin' behind the pulpit, tryin' to figure a way out, when somebody lit on top of me, yellin': "There's the damn' crook; there he is, boys! Bring a rope!"

This was a fine state of affairs! There I was sittin' in

The Lost Note

This was a fine state of affairs! There I was sittin' in peace, doin' nobody harm and not sayin' a word and they wanted to string me up! I got sorta het up and mad. I grabbed this *hombre* around the neck, beat his head against the pulpit seven or eight times, give him a few kicks in the ribs for good measure, then I said to him: "Who's gonna hang who?" But I guess he never heard me because he did not say one word in answer.

I had now decided to get out of this madhouse; but before I could leap clear of the stage, I got a glimpse of a big dark shadow swingin' over my head. Something crashed over my skull, and I thought I had been hit with a safe; but it turned out to be Ulysses Yates' bull-fiddle, and I was tied up in the darn' thing like an ox in a yoke. My eyes were all that stuck out of the top piece and I saw Damsite Davis starin' at me.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Was that you?"

"Yes, you old murderer!" I said. "It was me—but you needn't to look like you're sorry. I know you!"

"Wait," he put in; "I'll take this collar off'n you!" Sayin' which, he grasped a firm hold of the handle and went to jerkin' and twistin' till I thought my head would be jerked loose from my shoulders.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Quit that! Hey, wait! Oh, my gosh, I'm kilt!" And there is no tellin' how much damage I would of suffered had not Ulysses Yates set upon Damsite, screamin' curses and fightin', tooth and claw.

But if he aimed to save his instrument he was too late, because it was already busted beyond repair and I set upon the task of demolishin' it complete in order to be free of it. Rammin' both hands through the hole, I tore big slabs out of it and flung 'em in every direction. I heard a loud yelp of distress and saw Ulysses stretched out full length and lookin' white as a sheet.

"He fainted," said Damsite, "when he saw you rippin' up his fiddle."

Damsite had got hold of his shotgun again and we set out across the hall, floorin' everybody which got in our way. But before we could get to the door we lost dang' near all our clothes and quite a bit of our hides. I never was in such a hullabaloo in all my life. Finally we stood outside, breathin' the night air and listenin' to the hell-raisin' we had left behind.

I noticed a human figure settin' propped up against the wall, mumblin'. I lit a match and bent to take a look. It was Glad Tidings Tucker, lookin' like a herd of steers had stampeded over his carcass.

He looked up at me with a sad look in his eyes and held up one hand. "Remember where you are, gentlemen," he said. "Remember where you are."

Damsite Davis and me turned and made for home to bandage our wounds. There wasn't nothin' else to do.

EVEN to this day, there are people in Celestial City who will tell you that Baldy Boyles was cheated and that we were bought off by his opposition. But the truth of it was,—and this here is the first time I ever told it,—that on the day of the contest, before anybody much had appeared, I was standin' on the platform sorta admirin' that dang' harp standin' there so shiny and all, when I noticed a kind of a smudge on the wood of the frame. Now, I thought, it was a shame, the rest of it bein' so purty and polished like a brass spittoon—so I took out a handkerchief and rubbed the smudge off very careful. Then I backed up a couple of steps, squinted one eye and gazed at the instrument. She was perfect, now.

But what I had rubbed out was Baldy's mark indicatin' the fifth note of "Annie Laurie." How was I to know it had took the darn' fool two weeks to find it?

REAL Squadron 13

The stunt-man frequently takes great risks—and sometimes with tragic results.

By **Norman Donald Morse**

OUT in Hollywood, California, a little band of daredevils hold forth. They are the stunt- men and women who put the thrills in the movies. Originally, I believe, they were known as the "Black Cats," but now "Squadron 13" includes them all.

Some two years ago I was serving my apprenticeship on the scenario staff of a company which for obvious reasons I'll call "Blue Sky Films." The company was then engaged in producing an air-war drama of first magnitude; the film action was almost one continuous thriller.

This morning where my story begins, some of the most dangerous stunts of the air sequences were scheduled for shooting. I was one of the script clerks assigned to take notes and record the action as it progressed. Four planes were assigned to the directors, camera-men and still photographers.

Ted Long and Jake Dwyer, a highly successful stunt team, were handling the acrobatics. They furnished all their own equipment, including four planes, a balloon and operating personnel.

A brief review of the action as called for in the script is necessary here. This is it:

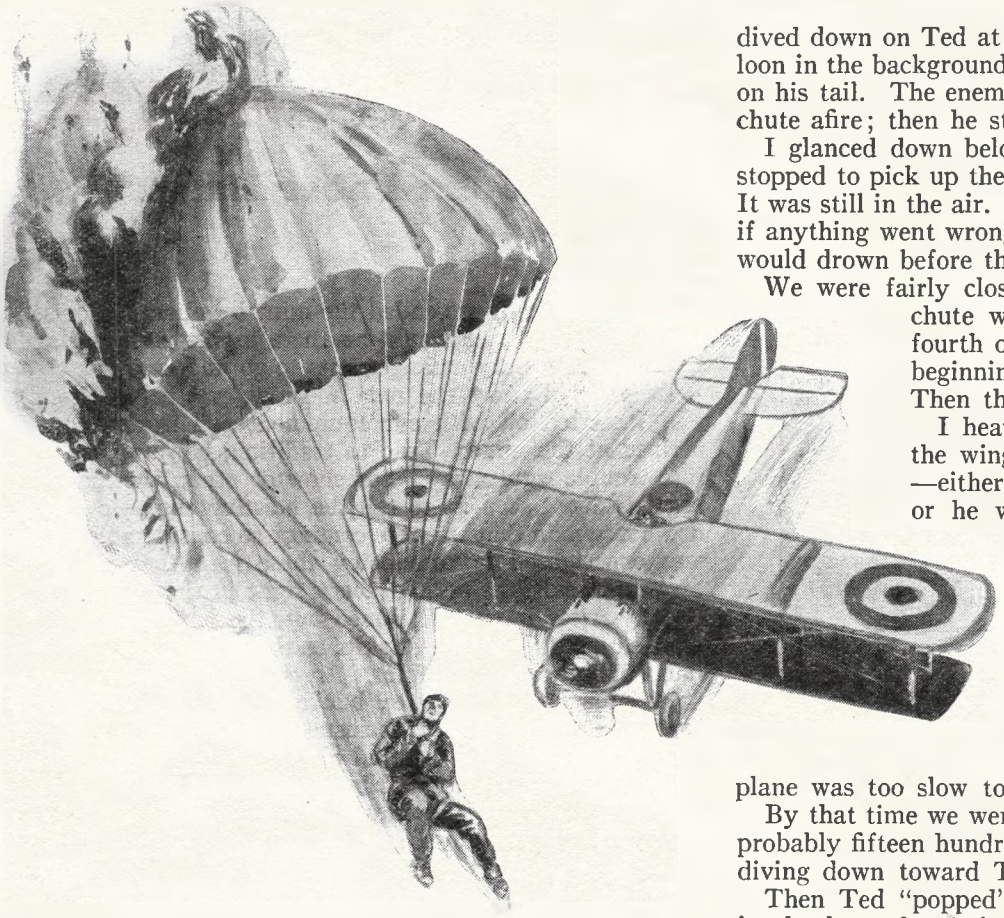
"The hero, adrift in a captive observation balloon, awaits the attack of enemy aircraft. Mounted in the balloon's basket are two machine-guns for use on any hostile plane that dares to attack. Far above in the clouds, two of the hero's buddies wait for the enemy to prey on the decoy.

"Four enemy planes swoop down on the defenseless balloon. Out of the sky dive the two buddies to the rescue. The hero shoots down two of the enemy before his buddies arrive, so the score is evened up. The enemy planes climb above the balloon intending to dive again and fire the balloon, but the two buddies of the hero intercept them and in the ensuing dog-fight, shoot one down. It falls onto the balloon. The airplane engine sets the balloon on fire and the hero jumps in his parachute, just in time to keep from being cremated. The remaining enemy, finding the odds two to one, dives for home. In the dive, however, he fires a burst of incendiary bullets at the hero, setting hero's parachute on fire.

"The burning hole in the silk widens. Death is only a matter of seconds. The parachute has burned to the point where it is letting the hero fall faster and faster to certain doom. Then one of his buddies flies under him, catching him on the wing of the plane and effecting his rescue. Again Death is cheated—"

While this piece of action may look fairly simple, dozens of unforeseen hazards are present. A miscalculation of

EXPERIENCES



the tenth of a second in timing can spell disaster where men's lives hang by a single thread.

Our eight ships made quite a showing as we took off from the airport for our rendezvous with the balloon, over the blue waters of Santa Monica Bay.

We cruised around for several minutes until everything was set and ready for action. Then the balloon was turned loose below. But some one had made a bad error. The balloon rose more than a thousand feet above us.

An offshore wind was fast drifting the balloon toward the open sea. To make matters worse, the air was getting bumpy. The balloon was adrift now and that much of the action would have to be taken *pronto,* if ever.

Several precious minutes elapsed before we were again assembled at the higher altitude. The balloon was drifting swiftly. In fact, so fast were we all moving out to sea that the rescue-boat was left far behind.

Ted was doubling for the hero in the balloon. Jake was piloting the ship to be crashed; the rest of their gang went about the business at hand as only experts can.

Everything progressed according to schedule. All of the cameras seemed to be getting excellent shooting. The dog-fight was a wow. The burning and disabled plane crashed the balloon just as Ted, the hero, "popped" his parachute below.

Jake had "bailed out" just clear of camera range and one of their ships picked him up in the air. The instant the wing touched him he cut the 'chute loose and let it fall while he crawled over the wing and into a cockpit.

The burning plane and balloon blazed down dangerously close to Ted. He must have had visions of Hell as its fiery breath scorched past him.

The dog-fight ended abruptly and the enemy plane dived down on Ted at an angle that put the burning balloon in the background. The two Allied planes were hard on his tail. The enemy's incendiary bullets set the parachute afire; then he streaked for home.

I glanced down below for the rescue-boat. They had stopped to pick up the parachute that Jake had cut loose. It was still in the air. I was nervous because I knew that if anything went wrong an unconscious man in the water would drown before they could reach him.

We were fairly close to Ted. The hole in his parachute was fast growing larger. About a fourth of the surface was gone and he was beginning to drop at a pretty good clip. Then the rescue-ship glided under him.

I heaved a sigh of relief as his legs hit the wing. Then my heart almost stopped —either they had picked him up too soon, or he was unable to cut loose from the 'chute—for he was jerked off that wing in a trice.

The parachute was so badly burned by that time that Ted was dropping like a plummet. Still he didn't cut loose the burning 'chute and use the other one that had been placed on his chest for just such an emergency. The rescue-plane was too slow to maneuver again to pick him up.

By that time we were getting pretty close to the water, probably fifteen hundred feet. Jake, in a faster ship, was diving down toward Ted.

Then Ted "popped" his extra 'chute. But it tangled in the burned remains of the first, and failed to open.

I held my breath, fascinated. There was nothing we could do; it was up to Jake and his gang now. Both Jake and the rescue-plane dived for Ted. They missed a collision by inches and both veered away.

Ted was trying desperately to untangle his parachute.

Jake's plane cut a half roll and dived; Jake was out on the wing in an instant. Our ship was following them down, the camera-man trying to get shots of the rescue.

The diving ship closed in on Ted's streaming 'chute, but it was too late and they couldn't catch him. There was no possible way to save Ted now. The thought sickened me, but I was powerless to take my eyes from the scene. We were close enough to see Ted smile grimly. The iron nerve of him!

Jake's ship half-rolled again and dropped off on the wing. Jake went hurtling through the air like a cannon-ball, straight for Ted. He intended to catch that tangled silk in his arms and drop them both to safety with his parachute! A thrill surged through me. Could he do it?

Jake was closing the gap. He was going to make it!

The camera-man stopped grinding. . . . I groaned aloud.

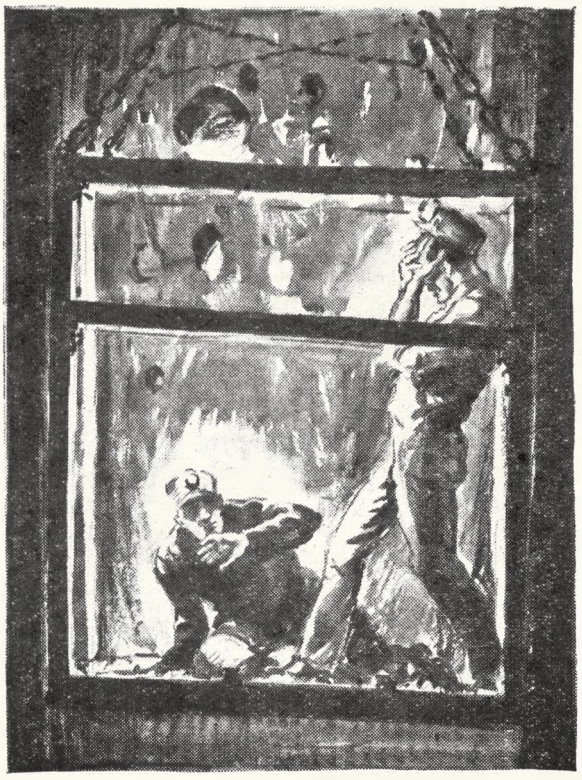
Jake had missed by less than ten feet!

Ted waved to Jake—it was good-by. Jake knew he'd played and lost. He "popped" his 'chute just in time; the ocean was hardly a hundred feet below.

I turned my eyes away as Ted's body hit the water. . . .

The rescue-boat picked Jake up—but Ted's body was never recovered. The heavy current probably dragged it far down the coast to Mexico.

One by one the ships fell into the funeral-line and headed home. Work was over for that day! Relentless Fate had checked another name from the roll-call of Squadron Thirteen.



The Hoodoo Mine

This mining engineer has an almost miraculous escape from serious injury far below the earth's surface.

By **John Faber Hanst**

DID it ever strike you that a mine may have a personality? Well, maybe that isn't just the way to describe it, but ask any hard-rock man about it, and he'll tell you that such-and-such a mine is a man-killer; another one is as safe as a church; and still another may be just a hole in the ground, with nothing to recommend it either way.

Up in Northern Michigan are many different minerals, and a multitude of mines to extract them, the most prominent being, of course, mines of iron and copper. It is of the iron-mines that I will tell you, and in particular, of a "man-killer" type of mine on the Marquette Range, the oldest and possibly most famous of all the iron ranges. The largest operator on this range for many years past has been the See-see Eye Company. This isn't exactly the name of it, but anyone familiar with the iron-mines of Michigan will recognize it at once.

To this company, I came as a cub engineer. Finally, when I had had sufficient experience underground and in the engineering practice of the company, I was intrusted with a transit and given charge of engineering work at one of the largest and most important of the mines, a "hard-ore" mine with great open stopes, a very complicated geologic structure, and with many interesting problems.

This mine was in no sense a "man-killer." True, we had our accidents—and some of them were fatal—but that is one of the hazards of mining.

At a point some miles to the west of this mine, another company had been struggling along for years with a rather difficult job of mining. The ore was narrow and steeply pitching. The mine was wet, and underground conditions were not good, so it was hard to keep a competent force of miners at work there. Besides, the mine had a bad reputation as a killer.

The eastern half of this mine was owned by one company, and the western half by another, using a common shaft. No regular engineer was employed by either company, and on occasion they borrowed an engineer from our company to make the necessary monthly surveys.

One evening the Chief called me into his office and gave instructions that I was to take a helper and go out next morning to make the regular monthly survey at this property. Accordingly we called the mine by phone, informed the management we would be there in the morning, and made the necessary arrangements to go underground.

Bright and early the next morning my helper Henry and I started off with our equipment and in due course arrived at the mine. True to tradition, however, we ran into trouble right away. Somehow or other, the management had not seen fit to tell the hoisting engineer or the dry-house man that we were coming; so considerable delay was experienced in convincing these men that we were expected, and that we had every right in the world to go down. After it was all ironed out, the hoisting engineer advised us to ride the east skip, as the west skip had a bad habit of jumping the guides. An ore skip, you know, is a great square or oblong steel bucket, holding in some cases up to ten tons of ore. It is suspended in the shaft from a steel wire rope about one and one-quarter to one and one-half inches in diameter and in a vertical shaft, running on either wooden or steel guides which hold it in position. In an inclined shaft, the skip will have wheels on the lower side and sometimes on both upper and lower sides. The skip itself hangs from a "bail" or cross-head, and in most well-equipped mines, for the protection of men having to ride the skip, there is a bonnet overhead to protect them from falling ore, rock or other material dropping down the shaft. Skips are usually operated in balance, that is, the empty skip going down helps the loaded skip coming up by its own weight, so that in the end, only ore is hoisted.

At this particular mine, the shaft started off at the collar on an angle of eighty-five degrees from the horizontal, or in other words, at five degrees from the vertical, and continued that way for approximately one thousand feet in depth. At the thousand-foot level, there was a knuckle, and from there the shaft dropped vertically to the sixteen hundred level, where we expected to work. Naturally the skip was equipped with wheels, as well as with side-guides, and a large sheave-wheel was located at the knuckle to take care of the change in direction, and over which the hoisting rope had to pass.

The bail was narrow, and the skip had no bonnet; but no matter—we had to get underground whether we liked it or not, so we grabbed hold of the hoisting rope, swung onto the bail and gave the hoisting engineer the signal.

He gave us a good ride, lowering slowly and carefully, especially when we reached the knuckle, where we had to let go of the rope to avoid having our fingers cut off; and down still farther we went into the blackness, our only light being that furnished by our acetylene cap-lamps. At the fourteen-hundred-foot level, still two hundred feet from the bottom, and fourteen hundred feet below the collar, for some reason the skip stopped dead. Henry and I looked at each other and wondered what had happened in the engine-room to cause a stop. Scarcely had we said a word when, with a terrible crash from somewhere overhead, suddenly a perfect rain of rock descended on us! Imagine the situation, if you can: There we were, Henry and I, on the bail of an unprotected skip, in a compart-

ment approximately four and one half to five feet square, nothing over us but space, and two hundred feet from the bottom, with rock whizzing past us at rifle-bullet speed, to end up with a clang in the bottom of the skip, or else go crashing its way past us to the bottom of the shaft.

Our first thought was that some one on the surface had accidentally dropped a carload of rock down the shaft. We didn't dare look up to see if we could detect anything unusual. Henry jumped off the skip onto the dividers between the two compartments, where he hung on for dear life—and with considerable difficulty, for, as he jumped, a chunk the size of one's fist came bounding down from timber to timber, struck him on the shoulder, and fell with a bang into the skip.

As for me, I stayed where I was, one hand on the rope, the other by my side, and with my head hunched as far into my shoulders as possible, hoping against hope that the next chunk to fall would miss me instead of cracking my skull like a coconut. Neither of us was wearing a "hard hat,"—something which has since become obligatory as a safety precaution in a hard-ore mine,—and naturally I was rather apprehensive. I had only been married a few months, and all I could think of in our extremity was —what would my young wife do now?

IN the midst of these thoughts, a chunk the size of a walnut hit the hand which I had clasped around the hoisting rope, cracking one of the bones in the hand and bruising it so that in a moment my hand was swollen with blood under the skin which, curiously enough, was not badly torn. I still carry the mark of that stone.

When we had about resigned ourselves to our fate, the skip started slowly down again and Henry jumped back on the bail. We made the bottom without further mishap, crawled off on the level, and met the superintendent, who took one look at us and yelled: "My God! What's happened to you two birds?"

We took him over to the shaft, showed him the skip, and believe it or not, as Ripley says, that skip was filled to a depth of a foot with chunks of loose rock, some of them as large as half a brick! How they missed us, I don't know; surely nothing but a miracle of some kind could have saved us. Thoroughly alarmed, the super sent two husky Finlanders up the ladder-way to find out where the trouble was, and after climbing to the nine hundred level, they reported that the lagging on the hanging-wall side of the shaft had broken under the weight of the loose rock behind it and consequently all these pieces had spilled into the shaft. The two Finns spent most of the afternoon repairing the break. As soon as Henry and I could settle ourselves, we went in and did our work, came back to the shaft, and at five o'clock that afternoon we rode to the surface on the same skip which had nearly been our doom.

The skip went back to the bottom. As we were dressing, we heard a yell and another crash. This is what had happened: When the skip deposited us at the surface, it went again down to the bottom level and was loaded. The engineer got the signal and hoisted away as usual. Just about as the skip reached the collar and was on its way up into the dump-plate, the rope let go, breaking off about twenty feet above the skip, and *whang!* away went the skip, falling sixteen hundred feet to the bottom, tearing out guides, timbers, wall-plates, end-plates, and everything, finally to pancake itself so hard into the bottom that it had to be cut out with torches!

Henry and I made a solemn resolution right there, and that was—never would we go down that mine again! And we never did. The county mine inspector closed it down the next day, on our report, until such time as it could be made safe for men to work in.

A Spark of War

The story of a few stark moments of which the author says in an accompanying letter: "It is impossible to overrate their tenseness."

By **H. Emerson**

A WAR between great nations could scarcely result from a lesser cause than the incident I shall relate. That it did not so result was due to the negligence of a rookie doughboy—and to Fate.

The city of Vladivostok, Siberia, in 1918 had a population of over one million souls and this was being rapidly swollen by the daily influx of thousands of refugees as well as the more orderly arrival of detachments of Czech soldiers. The quick collapse of the Kerensky government and the chaotic conditions under Bolshevist rule had convinced the Allies that Russia, as an offensive aid against the Entente, was done. Thousands of Czech soldiers who had refused to fight against the Allies were making the long journey via the Trans-Siberian Railway to enlist with the Allies where most needed.

It was to hasten their safe arrival that a small expeditionary force of Americans, English, French and Japanese was formed. The Russian railway service corps, composed of expert railway men from the United States, had been distributed by contingents at major division-points for several thousand miles, and were introducing efficiency methods. My contingent, in which I was a first lieutenant,

was stationed at Vladivostok and my duties necessitated frequent trips to Habarovsk and intermediate stations.

A decided spirit of friendship was evident in all the Allied troops except when in contact with the Japanese; a singular lack of military courtesy was manifested by the Japanese.

Their privates saluted no one from other armies—not even a general. As parties of Japanese privates roamed the crowded streets with linked arms, other pedestrians were forced to step aside and were frequently jostled into the ditch. But a very definite change took place after the arrival of American and Canadian forces. Then it was: "Say, you! Who in 'ell do you think you are?" And *Biff! Biff! Bang!* as big fists landed.

The puny defense of the Bolshevik forces evaporated before the Japanese advance on the line between Vladivostok and Habarovsk; soon trains were running on regular schedule, and the policing of this line was efficiently performed by the Japanese.

At Yevgenevka a few hundred British were quartered under the command of a major who was impatiently awaiting orders to ship for home, for it was evident to all of us that our mission was nearly accomplished. The weather, which had been like summer, suddenly changed, and during the early days of November the temperature dropped to zero. For lack of proper shelter and suitable clothing, the suffering of the Japanese soldiers was intense. Soon a supply of cars appeared, and as fast as locomotives were available the Japanese soldiers were rushed to Vladivostok for shipment home.

ON the day the following occurred, I was returning from Habarovsk and alighted from the train as it stopped at Yevgenevka. As I walked to the large hot-water tank maintained at all large stations in Russia, I was greeted by several American soldiers, who informed me that the Japs had left and they had taken over the police work. At the big tank I filled a large thermos bottle and put in it a few pinches of tea. It is essential in that portion of Russia, that all drinking water be boiled, which may account in a measure for the universal tea-drinking.

Practically all the passengers from our train had secured their supply of hot water when a Jap troop-train came in from the north and stopped opposite the depot on the sidetrack. Dozens of the Japanese soldiers hastened to the tank building, which was guarded by one American soldier. Each Jap soldier had a rice can or pail, that they could fill at the faucet and depart. But no—they climbed to the platform used when filling the big copper tank, and plunged their cans in the boiling water to clean them!

The American let out a roar, and motioned them away with his rifle. They paid no attention to the order.

Whether what next occurred was the result of an accident or frenzied rage, I could never determine; but at that moment the Japanese started to jump down and one was met point-on by a menacing bayonet-tip which passed through his neck. The doughboy jerked it out and for a moment looked appalled; then he quickly jumped back and his thumb shoved over the safety-catch on his rifle. The stricken Jap emitted a fearful screech and was grasped by his comrades and supported through the door. The remainder instantly pulled their bayonets and started for the American, their eyes glittering with hatred. The guard slowly raised his gun and it steadied in resolve. The red bayonet seemed to infuriate the Japanese and they moved on with a sinister, menacing crouch.

Suddenly I shouted, "Corporal of the Guard!" and with my automatic I gestured the Japs back and out. They hesitated, but finally shuffled out slowly and sullenly. I breathed a sigh of relief—but not for long. Armed Jap soldiers began rushing from their cars and the Americans were coming from the guardroom. Insolently they stalked in the face of the oncoming Japs. The chatter was by this time deafening and as several doughboys arrived, I seized one and shouted in his ear: "Go out that way and get the English major and his men!"

As he disappeared through the back door of the tank-house, the sergeant lined up his men and stood waiting. Quickly I told the Americans what had happened and the sergeant ordered his men to stand quiet and make no move unless attacked. As we stood facing the rapidly increasing force, I felt that we were seated on the proverbial powder-keg. The Japs crowded closer and closer; malignant hatred was evident in their every gesture.

Bayoneted rifles were suggestively thrust. Cartridges were shoved into magazines and bolts snapped home. Bayonets were waved and in further suggestion drawn across throats. The black beady eyes of the Japs seemed literally emitting sparks.

The American doughboys stood tense but quiet, with fixed bayonets extended; soon the wall of Japs were at their points. Vile epithets were doubtless the gist of their expressions and now they began to spit on the Americans. Pale faces went utterly white at this and in spite of the sergeant's "Steady, men!" knuckles whitened from the increased grip on rifles. The shrill taunting voices had crystalized hatred to the killing point. But a glance from the sergeant was more eloquent than words, and the rigid tenseness in the twenty Americans told a vivid story. My palm was rigidly pressing the safety on my automatic and in imagination I could feel the slamming of the big pistol as I pulled the trigger. Just one act more—and we would be selling our lives as dearly as possible!

Suddenly a bugle sounded as a Japanese officer plunged, shouting orders, through the mob. He stopped short and speechless; his men went suddenly silent, watching him with beady eyes. Another bugle call—and the Jap officer looked around. Coming down the slightly sloping hillside were hundreds of "limeys" fully armed and with two machine-guns on the flanks. The British major halted his men, then stalked unconcernedly through the mob of Japanese. When he stood face to face with the Jap officer he gave him a cold stare. Then with a wave of the hand he indicated to the Jap to disperse his men, and a similar gesture to the sergeant indicated the same. Without another look at either he turned to me and asked casually:

"My word, Lieutenant, what's going on here?"

The major looked slightly astonished when I stepped inside the tank-house and sat down on a bench. The day was bitterly cold, but I was wet with perspiration and my knees were strangely weak. While I was telling the major, a Japanese officer who could speak English appeared and to him the accident was explained.

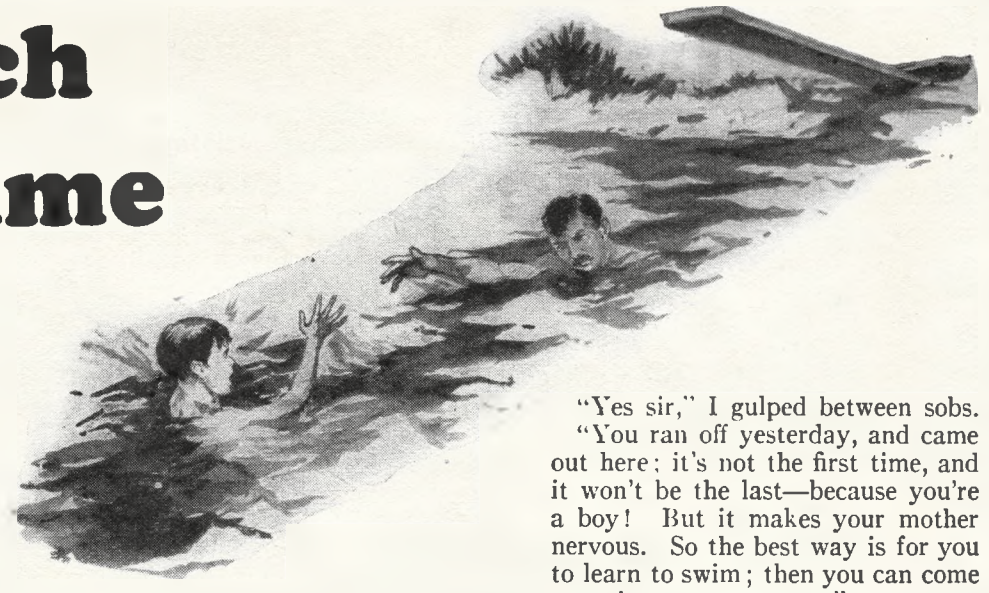
WHILE we were conversing with the Japanese officer, the sergeant approached and stood at attention, and as the Japanese walked away he requested that I go to the guardroom. I noticed a strange expression on his countenance, but was somewhat mystified as he stalked to the gun-rack and abruptly opened a lock. Every gun on the rack was the same—not one was loaded!

"You and I were the only armed men in the outfit!" he said. "Lieutenant, I made a rookie clean those rifles for extra duty and he forgot to reload them. When those Japs started to spit on us, I saw—though I couldn't hear for the chatter—a lot of bolts snap. There were seven; I counted them. . . . God bless that rookie, Lieutenant!"

Fortunately the Japanese soldier was not seriously injured, and to the best of my knowledge no official investigation was held.

A Switch In Time

By **Lew Warren**



Boyhood days are more amusing to look back upon than to experience.

I LAY on my little bed, my ears pricked like a fox-terrier's, listening to voices in the adjoining room. My mother spoke with disquieting earnestness.

"You'd better go in right now and give him a good switching! He slipped off again this afternoon, and went swimming with the big boys."

My six-year-old heart stopped beating as I listened.

Then came my father's voice, as he turned the pages of his evening paper:

"All right, my dear; I'll fix the little rascal tomorrow."

I gave one sigh of vast relief, turned over and went to sleep. Tomorrow—well, tomorrow—was another day.

At breakfast everything was serene; the dove of peace was served on toast. By noon the matter had faded from my memory, and when Father phoned Timberlake's stable for black Fanny and the rubber-tired rig, I was alert.

"Where you going, Daddy?" I questioned eagerly.

"Just going for a little ride. Want to come along?"

I climbed into the carriage; Fanny paced slowly down High Street, and turned out on Fourth Street. It was the same road my truant feet had followed the day before. Voices, shrill with youthful merriment, sounded in the distance and through the thinning woods I could see shining white bodies, as the boys splashed into the water.

"Ever been out here before?" Father asked casually.

"Yes sir."

Steadily we drove along the road which led beside the ponds—the little pond where we small boys disported ourselves in the shallow waters, and the big pond where the larger boys and grown men went swimming.

We reached the big pond. Father got out and tied Fanny; then he swung me to the ground, and said:

"Shuck off! Let's see who can get undressed first."

That was no game at all. I merely unbuttoned two places, and stepped out. Then he said:

"Walk out on that spring-board and jump off!"

"Who, Daddy—me? I aint goin' in that deep water!" And off I started, like a shot, away from there.

My father reached me in a bound, seized me and tossed me up, out and over the horrid depths of the big pond!

I hit the water with my mouth open. After eons of time I stopped going down, and began to rise slowly. I reached the surface, gave one gurgle, disappeared again.

My father dived in, brought me out, hung me up by the heels, beat me on the back, and then said cheerfully:

"Well, how'd you like it?"

"I aint goin' back in that deep pond no more!" I wept.

Father sat down on the edge of the pond, and took my shaking little body on his knee.

"Listen, boy," he began gently. "Look me in the eye!"

"Yes sir," I gulped between sobs.

"You ran off yesterday, and came out here; it's not the first time, and it won't be the last—because you're a boy! But it makes your mother nervous. So the best way is for you to learn to swim; then you can come any time you want to."

"Yes sir. Lemme go learn in that there li'l pond."

"Nothin' doing. It'd take you all summer to learn in shallow water; but you'll learn here in the next five minutes. Now, listen! Ever see a dog swim? Know how he just digs his feet in? Like *this*. Do your hands this way. . . . That's good an' your feet—remember how you kick 'em out behind, when Mother puts the peach-switch to you? Do it that way—dig in and kick out! And keep your mouth shut. Now here we go again."

He skidded me over the surface, as a lad skips a stone. I was digging and kicking desperately all the time.

"That's fine," he praised me. "Keep digging, keep kicking! Your Daddy's proud of you!" He drew me to the bank. I had come in on my own—at least a dozen feet!

Then he swam out a few feet, and said:

"Push off from the bank and come to me."

He was only a dozen feet away, so I pushed off bravely.

"Fine!" he applauded. "Keep comin'; keep comin'!"

I kept on digging and kicking. Then all of a sudden he seemed to step aside, and right there in front of me was the "box"—the box the men dived off in the very middle of the pond. I had made it halfway across!

Daddy helped me up on it, and I lay there panting like a lizard. "What you standin' on?" I asked. "You standin' on bottom way out here?"

"No, I'm treadin' water. I'll teach you that next time. Now, if you're rested, splash off and let's go to shore."

"When we get home, I'll tell Mother that you are a dandy swimmer, and can come with the boys whenever you want to," Daddy said as we were dressing.

As Fanny paced by the little pond, where my humble associates were disporting themselves in the shallows, I made modest announcement of my achievement.

"Yah!" I gloated. "I c'n swim! I swimmed clear out to the box in the big pond, an' back again! I don't have to go in no li'l pond! I c'n swim; Daddy says I—"

But Fanny was going faster, and my modest phrases could no longer reach their ears.

Daddy told Mother all about it, and next day she said:

"It's so hot this afternoon that you mustn't leave the house until three o'clock—not until the hands of the dining-room clock point to three. Understand?"

"Yessum," I agreed cheerfully; then at two o'clock I advanced the hands to three, and beat it to join the boys and demonstrate my stuff.

When I returned, the hands of the clock had not done what I expected of them. They were still sixty minutes fast. . . . Then a switch from the peach-tree in the back yard found place on the program. That peach-tree never did grow peaches—it just grew switches!

Through an Arctic Gale

Few men have gone through any worse experience than this man did; yet he survived without serious injury.

By

Frank Dufresne

IN the seventeen thousand miles that I have mushed dogs over Alaska's windblown tundras and glaciered creek bottoms there have been plenty of times when the creeping black shadow of freezing death hovered near. Such things are always a part of the severe Arctic winter. Every musher experiences them if he travels much in that hostile bleakness, and you hear tales of horror too often substantiated by corpses frozen stiff as blocks of ice. Some sections of the north are worse than others, but to me Seward Peninsula will always epitomize all that is unfriendly in Alaskan winters. First and foremost is the bitter, searing, driving cold—and brittle-crusted snow, sharp as glass when you break through. Lonely stretches of tornado-swept glare ice lie open on all sides to the fury of the elements.

There is not a tree in the country—only dwarf willow bushes, twisted and contorted in their fierce struggle to survive. You burrow deep into the snow after them when you need fuel for your little sheet-iron camp stove, and you cram them in, twigs and all, to warm your tent enough so you can pull off your big reindeer mitts long enough to brew a pot of tea and throw some frozen beans in the skillet.

Yes, it's a great life—if you come through!

On a dim red morning in December, I left Kruzgamepa Springs with a fine young string of thirteen dogs, headed for Iron Creek Roadhouse, seventeen miles away. It was thirty-six below zero. To the southward a mauve-colored strip along the jagged horizon of the Sawtooth Range lit a fairy pathway up along the slope where lay the dog trail. Frost spangles, like shimmering rubies, hung suspended in the still air. The dogs yelped eagerly, reveling in the crisp dawn. They were away like a pack of wolves when I pulled the snubbing-line loose.

Through the tangled willow tops the trail wove, gradually working out into the open about halfway up the mountain side, which level it held until it came to the forks at a narrow defile known as Golden Gate Pass. In fair weather a dog-musher could take the trail through this Pass to the south side of Sawtooth Mountains, joining the staked mail trail at Salmon Lake, cutting three or four miles off the day's run.

But unfortunately the weather very seldom was good in the cañon, the gap being so situated that a terrific wind drew through it from one side or the other most of the time during the winter months. Golden Gate was a "blowhole" famous in Nome history, for many an unlucky traveler had perished in that narrow gorge. Derelict dog-sleds stuck up here and there through the drifted snow where their owners had abandoned them, or had been blown from the handlebars, and wandered, crazed with cold, off to their death.

It was strangely quiet down in the willow-grown valley behind me, but around Golden Gate a heavy gray curtain shrouded the mountain-tops. I knew what this meant—that the Pass was seething with drifting snow too thick for any dog-team to face, although there was nothing particularly alarming in this. There were mighty few days when it was otherwise—I knew that. But where I fooled myself was in thinking the windstorm would confine itself to the Pass. How was I to know that the worst gale in a decade was to be spawned in that dangerous spot just in time to catch me full in its frigid sweep?

SUDDENLY the leaden gray cloud in Golden Gate Pass puffed itself out on all sides from the narrow orifice between the mountains.

In but an instant, it had assumed monstrous proportions. Fingers like those of a titanic wraith shot out from it and stretched with incredible speed down the mountain. For a matter of seconds, perhaps, my position was between the tips of two thin fingers of whirling gray, and I was conscious of being in a horrifying vacuum where neither motion nor sound was apparent. Then came a bolt of twisting, fog-colored substance—seemingly straight for the team.

Jack Frost, my white Siberian leader, crouching flat on his belly at the head of the team, was struck first. I saw him lifted into the air with the first wisp of gray and flung straight back toward the loaded sled. The other dogs followed.

For a split second I saw the whole team all tangled in a heap at the bow of the sled. Then a shrieking, tearing cyclone grasped us all and sent us whirling down the mountain-side, slipping and sliding, ripping through the sharp crust, rolling end over end. Like an elemental demon gone berserk, the frigid gale ripped at the team, screaming, seething with unrepressed fury. My mittened

hands locked around the handlebars with every atom of strength I possessed.

For what seemed an eternity of time I forgot all else except that my grip must not be loosened; that my one slim chance for life depended on staying with the outfit. Once separated, even for a second, they would be lost to me for all time.

So I held on grimly, desperately, even though I felt consciousness oozing away from me with every jar, and with every blast of the screeching cold wind tearing the very breath from my lungs. Fine cutting snow, sharp as emery dust, drove relentlessly into my face every time a turn of the sled brought me heading into the storm. Warm blood filled one of my eyes. After one vicious thump, excruciating pains shot through my back. Through a blur I saw one of the dogs caught under the sled and dragged to a howling death. I wondered how many more had been killed. Perhaps they were all dead. I was too far gone, myself, to know, or even to care very much.

My arms were becoming numb. Insistently I felt a cowardly impulse to release my grip and go slithering off into space, regardless of consequences. Fiercely I repulsed this craven desire, only to have it return again with almost overpowering force. End this useless torture. . . . Let go!

As we swept along before the wind I found time to indulge in the awful thought that my will to live, which I had always believed to be all-powerful, was in reality weak and might desert me at any instant. But instinct triumphed over a vacillating will. I hung on. And after a time it seemed that we traveled with less speed, although continuing to slide and plow down the hillside. Suddenly there came a dizzy fall through space. A ripping crash—an abrupt stop.

PAINFULLY I lifted my head and saw the sled and dogs close by, all snarled in willow bushes. I realized it was the stinging slap of brush in my face that had brought me to my senses. Two or three dogs whined. The others lay still.

By forcing myself to endure the agony, I crawled like a wounded animal to the sled and started working on the stout lashings that held my sleeping-bag in place. A hand-ax, still in its scabbard, saved me then. Fumbling with it between dizzy spells, I managed to hack the lashings apart and roll the bag out on the snow. I struggled into it, somehow—and lapsed into coma. . . .

Hours later I awoke, in utter misery, my right knee throbbing with pain, and prickling sensations shooting through both hands and both feet. This same feeling was present in my face. It was the frost coming out. I had been badly frozen, I knew. One of my eyes was sealed shut with clotted blood. I felt myself over for broken bones.

Luckily there were none. Courage came to me then; I threw back the flap of the sleeping-bag, determined to crawl out and make a fight for life. The gale was over, the day bright and clear. Snow had sifted down upon us until everything was covered six inches deep with it. Looking over my shoulder I saw where we had fallen into the head of a steep gully, a drop of about fifteen feet. On the other side the gully led downward to a bare stretch of gleaming blue ice. Pilgrim River! Somewhere along its banks lay Iron Creek Roadhouse. Patch things up—get down on the river—easy going, there. It was my only chance.

NOT a dog was in sight, but at my low call five heads came thrusting out of the snow. Sorely they dragged themselves to their feet, tails wagging gamely. Eight more to be accounted for. I hobbled over to investigate, tracing the tow line by beginning at the sled and pulling it up out of the snow. Seven dogs were stiff in death; one other, whose body was still soft and warm, stirred slightly to the touch.

I cut this live furry body loose and put it in the sleeping-bag; then, gritting my teeth against the torture every move cost me, gathered the remnants of the team together and started off down the gully. At this juncture I discovered the sled was smashed; all the stanchions on one side snapped off, runner broken in three places. This was bad enough, but if I held to the glare ice on the river the load would slide along somehow.

UP Pilgrim River we toiled, past a landmark or two I recognized, Jack Frost striking out boldly as though he sensed the deadly seriousness of the situation. The broken sled dragged hard, even on the windswept ice. I tried to help by pushing on the handlebars, but at the first jolting step became faint with pain and threw myself across the bulky load barely in time to escape being left behind, groveling on the ice.

Since I was quite unable to exercise the bitterly cold air stabbed at me mercilessly. Torturing cramps came to twist at my stomach until I stiffened out on the sled in almost unendurable paroxysms of anguish. Next a sort of delirium set in, and I was aware, dimly, of mumbling nonsensical words of praise to the five limping dogs ahead, while the vitality steadily ebbed from my body before the advancing cold.

The sled jerked and stopped. Jack Frost had swung at right angles from the icy river and started up a steep bank, but could not drag the broken sled up the incline. In desperation the brave leader threw himself into the harness again and again in frenzied efforts to reach the source of the acrid wood-smoke that came to his nostrils. The meaning of all this came to me slowly as I sprawled, more dead than alive, on the sled. Iron Creek Roadhouse lay just beyond the steep river bank! My voice sounded miles away when I got a grip on my waning senses and hoarsely urged the dogs to make the climb. But it was too much—the broken sled-runner snagged like a brake.

The white Siberian leader came swinging back to me; he licked my cold stiff hands, whimpering nervously as though beseeching me to action in this crisis. An idea came. One last card in the deck to play. If the roadhouse wasn't there, God help me! I struggled to the bow of the sled, unsnapped the tow line, and belted it around my waist.

"Mush, Jack!" I shouted with all my strength. "Mush on, old fellow!"

INSTANTLY Jack Frost shot up the bank. All five dogs hit the collar—hit it hard! Up the hill they went, dragging me, stumbling drunkenly, behind them, straight to the roadhouse door. A pause, then the door swung open from within. Jack Frost darted through, a swirl of steam behind him, into a big room where a number of men sat playing cards around a table. As though in a dream I looked into the faces of the men and noted blank astonishment written on them. But my gaze was only momentary; suddenly everything became a meaningless blur to me as I swayed dizzily on my stumps, then slumped to the floor.

This all occurred five winters ago. I survived with only minor injuries to remind me of the wrath of that Arctic gale. Of all the dogs only Jack Frost, the white leader, is now alive. He has developed into one of the greatest racing leaders in all Alaska.

The Bright Face of Danger

Johnny Shenton's idea of pleasure was looking for trouble—this gave him several thrill-crammed hours when chance brought him into contact with the so-called "Northwest Phantom."

By LEE PECK

WHEN Johnny Shenton's cruiser ran afoul of a waterlogged stick of timber in the lower reach of Knight Inlet and dropped her propeller in forty fathoms of salt chuck, Johnny accepted the misfortune with characteristic philosophy. It was just another difficulty to overcome. He had food aboard, everything needed for comfort, and a spell at the oars would bring him to a protected anchorage. Sooner or later a logger or a fisherman would pass, answer his hail and give him a tow.

When the flood tide began its push through the archipelago before he could tow the disabled cruiser to a sheltered bay of one of the islands, he accepted this second stroke of adversity calmly enough, with no more comment than the terse phrase, "Double trouble!"

But when a sudden fog rolled in from Queen Charlotte Sound, swallowed up the islands, masked the high mainland ridges, obscured the sun and wrapped the rower about with a heavy gray blanket, it was a little too much for his patience. Robbed of power, the choice of direction, and the ability to see more than a few yards, he frowned into the thickly swirling mist, and voiced a brusque imprecation.

He could not foresee, of course, that these apparently random setbacks were but three instruments manipulated by Fate to provide him with the very thing he had started out to find. Had he suspected this his acceptance of them would have been different.

For Johnny Shenton's idea of pleasure was looking for trouble—which is another word for adventure. He sought it as a hunter seeks game, by going where it is most likely to be found. And when he found it, he looked into the bright face of danger with a laugh and a bantering taunt for the threatening hazards to do their worst.

In his blithe young career as an amateur adventurer he had encountered enough hardships and escaped enough disasters to provide thrills for a score of less footloose men; luck, good judgment and a first-rate physical ability had always carried him safely through. Adventures had never come too fast or too thick for Johnny.

This eventful June day, however, along the wilderness coast of British Columbia, was to establish a new record. For once he was scheduled to have enough, and more than enough, of the thrills he spent time and money looking for: having rendered him helpless, the treacherous log delivered him over to the flooding tide, which, aided and abetted by the blinding fog, proceeded to carry the lone voyager into the most stupendous adventure of his life. . . .

Swept by the tide, with the visibility never more than a few yards, using his oars to quarter the current so as eventually to fetch the mainland shore, Johnny was soon as effectively lost as if he were blindfolded.

Nevertheless, he continued to row obliquely across the current. The tide had quickened to at least a four-knot speed, and his work was not easy. Once the dinghy ground ominously on a submerged rock, but scraped off. Johnny breathed freer when the cruiser missed the snag.

He was beginning to weary of the long pull, when a bold rocky shore loomed out of the mist close ahead. The tide and his oars swung him to starboard; the dinghy and its tow slipped along the indistinct shore with welcome ease.

For what seemed an interminable time the steep formation continued unbroken; then it abruptly receded into the fog. Johnny rowed sturdily to follow it and found himself in almost motionless water. Vaguely, across a span perhaps five fathoms wide, he made out another rocky eminence.

He dipped the blades with renewed vigor. "A harbor—for the tide doesn't run through. Here's where we hole up."

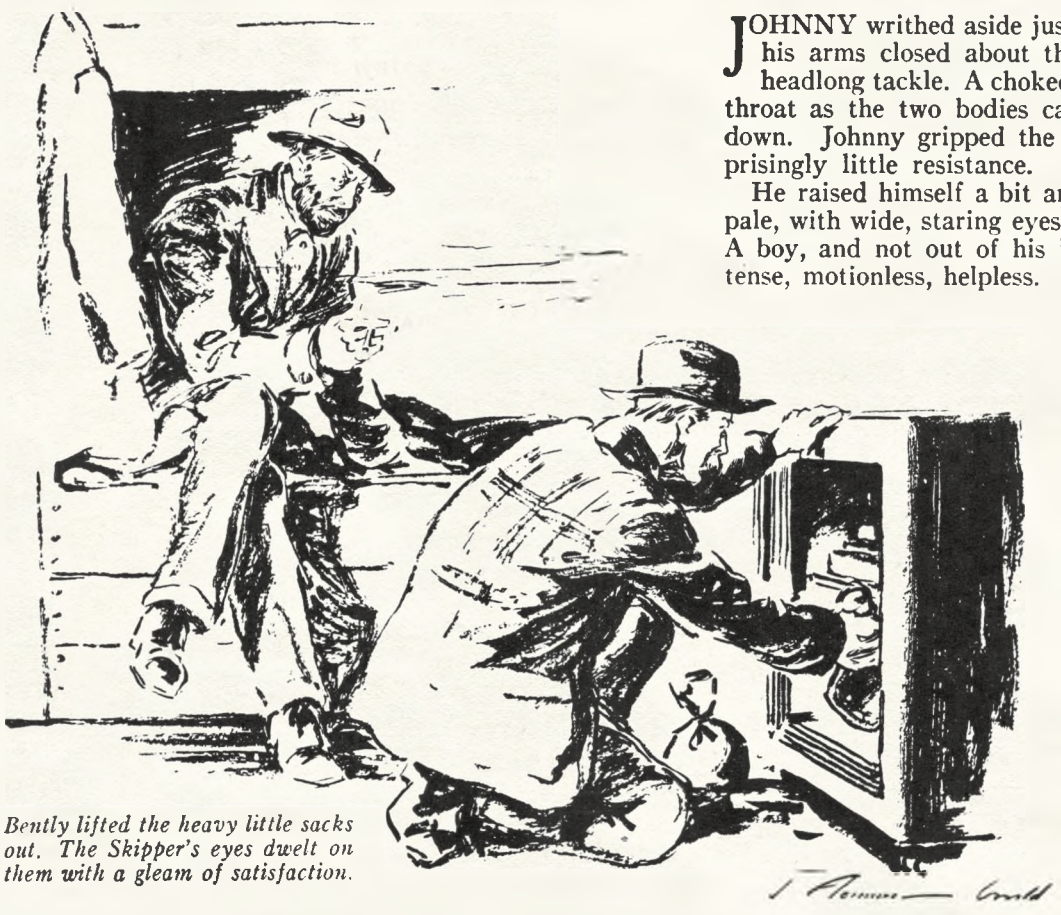
He had no idea where he was, nor did he care. He had left the menace of the reefs behind. He was ready to eat and rest.

He climbed aboard the *Scarab,* and sounded. No bottom at twenty fathoms. Not so good! He descended with the lead-line to the dinghy and rowed for perhaps a minute. No bottom at twenty. He rowed on, and without much hope, heaved the lead again. His lead-line equaled his anchor-line in length. No bottom.

Johnny was not so cheerful now. The mist-veiled shore was almost as regular as a wall, offering no chance for a boat to be moored from two sides. And that, or a bottom he could get the hook down to, was essential. He knew what a restless tide could do to a boat moored to a rocky shore with one line.

He took up the oars again. If the harbor was all like

Illustrated by
J. Fleming Gould



Bently lifted the heavy little sacks out. The Skipper's eyes dwelt on them with a gleam of satisfaction.

this he would either have to put out again and take chances with the tide, or stand watch with the boat-hook to keep fended off the granite.

Neither prospect was a pleasant one. His long task at the oars, on top of four hours of lost sleep the night before owing to the necessity of catching a tide, had dulled the edge of his enthusiasm for seeking trouble in its own territory. He was tired and hungry. After a rest and some food he would tackle the problem with a new spirit. In the meantime, what to do?

As if in answer to his thought, a dark stern of a boat took form, was veiled by the coiling mist, then appeared again. It was but a few dinghy-lengths away, yet he had almost passed without seeing it. On either side of the hull the granite rose sheer and damp; mooring-lines went to right and left to the rock; the trim cabin cruiser lay cradled in a little niche in the harbor wall, almost filling it.

"*Janet,* Vancouver," Johnny read the lettering on the boat's stern, and grinned happily. "I like the name," he murmured, and raised a low hail:

"*Janet,* ahoy!"

Echoes were bandied back and forth, followed by a deep silence broken only by the licking of water under the cruiser's counter and against the rocks as the tide encroached.

"Nobody home! Probably caught out in this smother in a small boat. I can't envy them any."

He pulled up under the stern, climbed aboard and took his dinghy's painter about a cleat.

"Have a look," he said, and crossed the deck to the closed companion hatch.

A slight shuffling sound brought him about—in time to see an oar descending on him!

CHAPTER II

JOHNNY writhed aside just in time, and an instant later his arms closed about the body of his assailant in a headlong tackle. A choked cry came from the stranger's throat as the two bodies caromed off the rail and went down. Johnny gripped the flailing arms and found surprisingly little resistance.

He raised himself a bit and looked into a face deathly pale, with wide, staring eyes under a tangled mop of hair. A boy, and not out of his 'teens! He lay on his back, tense, motionless, helpless. He seemed to realize the futility of further resistance, but the eyes in the haggard face blazed defiance. Johnny freed the lad's wrists and rose.

"Don't you—" began the young fellow.

"I'll not hurt you," said Johnny quietly, "although you did try to brain me. But I'll say it's a queer reception."

The slim youth got to his knees. "You keep away!" he cried shrilly. His voice failed, and he sank back to the deck.

Johnny's eyes fell on a frayed strand of rope looped about the lad's ankle. From this his gaze quickened on red abrasions on the boy's wrists.

"What's happened here?" he asked sharply.

But the boy seemed to have sunk into a coma. Why, he was on the verge of collapse! "A game little rooster," Johnny said to himself. "He connects me with somebody who mistreated him. He's in no condition to think straight—he's all in."

And so he appeared to be. But when Johnny turned to the closed hatch, bent on sounding this strange affair, the boy struggled up and weakly launched himself forward. His arms encircled Johnny's legs, clung, slipped, and closed again, while broken phrases fell from his lips.

Gently, compassionately, Johnny loosened the frail grip, and the youth sank on his face with an agonized cry that expressed a final hopelessness.

Johnny glanced at the closed hatch. It was latched, and a padlock was snapped through the staple. The boy was trying to protect something locked below! Under different circumstances Johnny would have respected his desire; but there was that wisp of rope, and those harsh marks of a strand about his wrists. The affair had an off-color, and Johnny was not constituted to retreat from a challenge of this sort.

He looked down at the sprawled youth, and gasped. The hair at the back of the boy's head was matted with blood. His neck was streaked with it. His shirt between the shoulders showed a dark, sinister stain.

"Out on his feet, but he did his best to stop me!" Johnny breathed, admiration mingled with his pity.

Should he force that lock and find the necessary ma-

terials to dress the wound, or should he go aboard his own cruiser for his medicine-kit? The challenge of that closed entry decided him.

With a strong steel gaff from a pile of gear atop the cabin he uprooted the staple. He slid back the hatch, pushed open the two doors. Only then did he hesitate; but no sound or movement was evident in the dim region below, and he went down the ladder.

He stopped in the center of the cabin, peered about. His eyes had not adjusted themselves to the gloomy interior when a jet of flame leaped at him. The roar of the explosion filled the restricted space; glass crashed behind him.

Instantly his lifelong instinct to meet danger going forward took command of Johnny. He sprang aside and dived low, straight for the indistinct figure crouched on a berth. A second shot stung his cheek; then the next instant he had closed with the shooter.

That impact shook the boat. It also shook a cry, almost a shriek, from the struggling form Johnny held pinioned to the berth. The cry was repeated as he wrenched the weapon free and raised it for a smashing blow at the cowering head.

He did not strike. Something—a combination of several things—checked his swing in midair. That scream, the size of the straining body, of the hand that had held the pistol, the slenderness and softness of the throat his big fingers had closed on, told him that here was no fit opponent for a strong man.

AGHAST at thought of how near he had come to cracking that skull, he drew back and his fingers released the slim throat. In spite of the fact that two deadly bullets had narrowly missed him, he felt ashamed of his rough tactics.

His vision, growing accustomed to the twilight of the cabin, centered on an oval face. A feminine voice, shaken but defiant, filled with a hatred that fairly seared him, brought Johnny to his feet, staring down at the close-cropped head, blazing eyes, lips curled in scorn.

"You low beast!" the voice repeated. "I prayed not to miss—but I did. . . . What have you done to him?"

Johnny gulped. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't mean to—I hope I didn't hurt you. But when you shot—"

The young woman stared, doubt crinkling her brow. "But you—I heard you knock him down! If you've—"

"Listen here," said Johnny hurriedly. "You're wrong about this. I don't know what it all means. I came aboard, and he attacked me without warning. I was a little rough with him at first—before I knew he was—in no condition to fight. What is it you are afraid of—and who?"

"You're not—one of them?" she quavered. A new light was dawning in her eyes; hope struggling up from a dark morass.

"I don't know who you mean, so I'm not one of them. I'm alone and in trouble, and chanced by here. That young fellow out there mistook me, too. He tried his best to protect you. I didn't hurt him."

"He is my brother," said the girl. "And if—if you're not—why, then—" Her voice trembled, failed, hushed by an excess of emotion. "Then you'll help us!" she burst out.

"Of course I will," he promised, and in a sentence told her his name and outlined the circumstances that had brought him there. "If there is time," he continued, "we'd better dress your brother's head. He's been hit—scalp-wound—"

The girl leaped past him, up the companion steps and went on her knees beside the unconscious youth. Johnny shoved the pistol into a pocket, found iodine and gauze in a cabinet and took them on deck. The wound was dressed, and Johnny carried the wan boy to a berth below.

"He's not seriously hurt," he assured the girl.

The color was returning to her face. She had mastered her emotions and now looked up at Johnny with steady eyes.

"Tell me how I can help you," he suggested.

"I don't know! They took Father with them—I thought they'd taken Bob too, but—"

"They knocked him out and tied him up. He must have worked free just before I appeared. Who are they?"

"Four men," said the girl a little breathlessly. "We saw two at first. We were going to Alert Bay and they hailed us from a rowboat and came alongside. Said they'd had engine-trouble, and asked for help. Dad agreed, naturally, to do what he could. We brought them aboard the *Janet*—this cruiser, named after me; I'm Janet Bently—and tied up to their cruiser's stern. Then two more men appeared. Without a word they all drew pistols and kept us on deck while they searched our boat."

"The treacherous dogs!" muttered Johnny.

"They didn't find what they were looking for," the girl added. "I thought the leader would shoot us—I never saw a man with such an evil face. Then he dragged me down here and locked me in." Her dark eyes flashed. "He made some insulting remarks, too. I could have shot him, but I was afraid if I did we'd all be killed. Those men wouldn't stop at murder—the look in their eyes made me shudder."

"What is their game, Miss Bently?"

"Robbery. They took Dad along—they'll force him to open his safe for them. If he does, he'll not be hurt—I hope—unless they take out on Dad the slap I gave their leader. I hit him pretty hard. He laughed and said to wait till he came back—it was a worse threat than if he'd flared up. I thanked my stars I had my pistol and he didn't know it. If he touched me when he came back I was going to shoot him. When I heard you struggling with Bob I lost control—I shot too soon—didn't wait to see who you were." Her voice slipped down to a lower register. "I'm not given to hysterics, but when I think how close I came to killing you—"

Johnny laughed reassuringly.

"You *didn't* kill me," he said. "We'll forget that and think what's to be done now. Tell me what else happened."

"I'm not sure what happened for a while after they left. I was so frightened and worried that I guess I—fainted. I saw them go with their cruiser—I thought I was alone until I heard Bob warn you away." She touched the unconscious boy's arm tenderly.

"We'll figure out something," Johnny said confidently. He had yet to learn what the ruffians were after and where they had gone, but if they were coming back there were more urgent things to consider. Four desperate criminals, armed, against one man with a pocket automatic, a girl and a wounded, helpless boy. It needed planning.

"YOU really think they'll come back?" he asked.

"That man said so. They'll have Dad's platinum—"

"Platinum?" Johnny echoed incredulously.

She nodded.

"You mean it came from around here? I didn't know—"

"Dad found a deposit. They've piled up about forty pounds of it in two years. Those thieves are after that."

"How many men work at the mine?"

"Only four. The engineer, two miners and the cook."

Johnny asked suddenly: "The fog hadn't come in when their boat left here, had it?"

"It was clear. They hadn't figured on the fog, for the leader said they'd be back in a few hours."

"They won't," said Johnny flatly, "unless the mine is close."

"It's in Sloane Bay, around Knob Point—about opposite here; but it's twenty-five miles or so by water."

"Do you remember what time they started?"

"It was about eight o'clock."

Johnny looked at his strap watch. "Two hours ago—it's ten now. The fog caught me at eight-thirty. It caught them soon after that."

He began to pace the cabin. A school of ideas swam across his mind, but he could not fix on a feasible plan. Action, instead of waiting, was his dominant notion, and he was helpless. Damn the fog! No, he'd take that back. The coming of the gray pall had served a useful purpose. It would delay their return—delay their arrival at the mine—

He stopped short and studied his watch dial. "Six or eight miles, say, before the fog closed in. After that they'd have to throttle down to half-speed at most." He spoke his thoughts aloud. "That would mean they're hardly more than ten or twelve miles from here now. Twelve or thirteen miles to go—they may get lost—"

"I'm afraid not," said the girl. "They'll follow the shoreline right around.

Her words focused his thoughts on a possibility.

"There is a chance, a slim chance. You said the mine was around a point. I may be way off, but it's worth checking up. Will you show me where the mine is on the chart?"

The engine compartment was locked, so they went up the after companion and along the deck. Johnny retrieved the gaff he had used to force the hatch lock. The deck was wet, the air heavy with mist. The steep granite slopes on either side of the cruiser were shrouded in the clinging vapor, lost to view above the height of the cruiser's mast.

As he expected, the pilot house was also locked, but a few moments of exertion remedied that. They bent over the chart beside the wheel.

The girl indicated Knob Point, and Johnny grunted in satisfaction. His long-chance idea was not so preposterous after all! For the point was named for its physical shape: a knobby bold headland at the end of a long slim neck of land. Behind it lay Sloane Bay, a narrow body of water formed by the peninsula.

"The mine?" he asked eagerly.

Her finger pointed to a little cove on the shore of the bay where the peninsula began.

"And where are we?"

She traced along the outer shore and stopped at a tiny indentation, too small to be named on the chart. "Box Harbor," she said.

Johnny felt a wild stirring of his pulse. He could do something—unless—

He seized a pair of dividers and "walked" the distance around Knob Point's shoreline from Box Harbor to the mine cove. Then he spanned the narrowest part of the peninsula.

"Twenty-five miles around, and only about two miles across!" he cried. "See what I mean? With this fog they'll crawl along—it isn't reasonable that they'll reach the mine for three hours yet!"

The girl's lips parted, but before she could speak he rushed on:

"I can row from here to that narrow place in ten minutes, with the tide as it is. Peaks are shown here up to twenty-five hundred feet, but most of the elevations are less. From the looks of this,"—his finger touched the slim connecting link—"I could cross here, if the going isn't too steep, in less than two hours. Be at the mine an hour ahead of them!"

"What would you do?"

"Plenty! Prepare some kind of a trap! Trick 'em somehow!"

Her face lost some of its color.

"Those men are hard—cruel," she said. "They wouldn't hesitate to shoot."

"They won't get a chance! I'll get there in time to figure out some scheme with the men. If it can't be done safely—any danger to your father—of course we won't try it. But if we can give 'em a surprise party just when they think everything's going their way, we'll do it!"

"But that ridge—I've heard people say it can't be crossed."

"I'm a pretty good climber," said Johnny confidently. "And there must be a saddle. I'll get across somehow."

"You're taking a lot of trouble—you're awfully good to—"

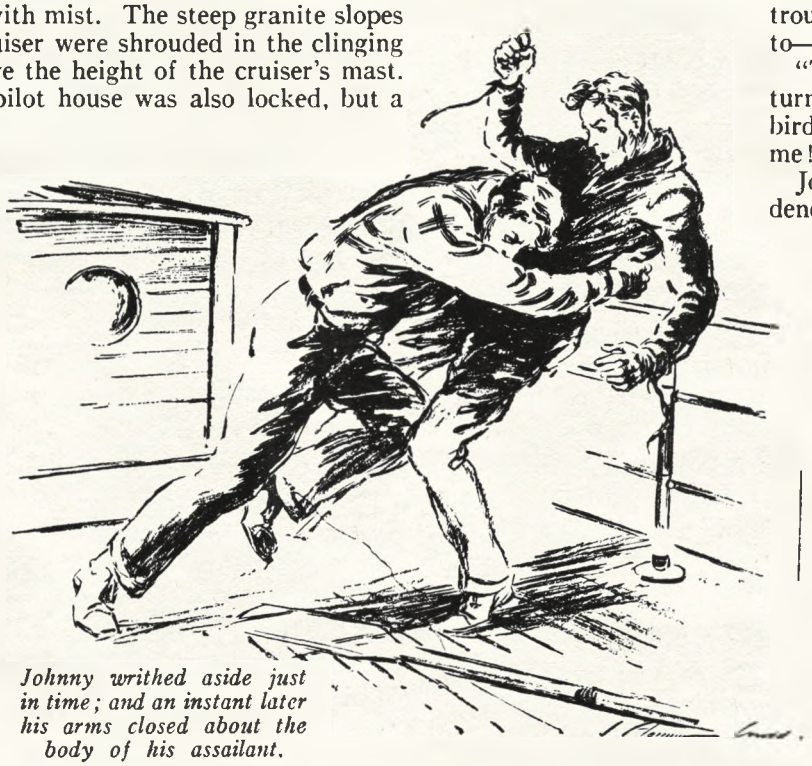
"Trouble? It'll be fun to turn the tables on those birds! Don't worry about me!"

Johnny assumed a confidence stronger than he actually felt. That granite barrier might well prove impassable, or require too much time to cross; but he was not the one to allow such a possibility to affect him. If it could be done, he'd do it!

Action! Meet trouble more than halfway! Better than sitting back waiting for it to come to you.

"We'll fix their clocks for them!" he promised the girl exultantly. "Kidnaping, robbery, and manhandling you two—they can't get away with such stuff! This is a wild country, but there's law here. Until the law gets a chance at them, I'll take a hand personally. I have a hunch they'll wish they'd never heard of your father's platinum!" Somehow the words did not sound boastful.

Johnny Shenton strode out of the pilot house with his head high, a smile on his lips and a look of eager expectancy in his eyes. Here was the sort of situation he loved—the bright face of danger!



Johnny writhed aside just in time; and an instant later his arms closed about the body of his assailant.

Rapidly he outlined his campaign with an infectious enthusiasm that swept Janet Bently along with it. The girl's eyes shone with confidence; color bloomed in her cheeks.

When they stepped into the main cabin they found the injured boy conscious. Janet explained the situation, and the lad held out his hand to Johnny with a look that expressed gratitude and relief. He was less wan, but still listless and heavy-eyed.

"Sorry," he muttered. "I thought you were one of those—"

"No apology necessary," said Johnny. "Feel strong enough to move? You and your sister are going ashore until I come back—on the long chance that they might get here first."

The girl said haltingly: "If we're gone—won't they take their feelings out on Dad? They might—kill him."

"More likely they won't bring him back with them—if they come, which is doubtful. But even if they do, they'll have the stuff they're after and they'll be satisfied to turn your father loose and run for it. Don't think about that possibility, though. If I can't head 'em off at the other end, I'll come back here before they can. I'll tow my cruiser across the harbor now and be right back. You two be ready to row ashore. Then I'll head off those four men—"

"Three," said the boy. "I drowned one of them."

"Bob!" cried his sister, gripping his arm.

"Good for you!" said Johnny, resolved to humor the vagary of an upset mind. "Served him right! And now pull yourself together—"

The youth caught his arm.

"I did, though," he insisted, realizing that he was not believed. "They left him to watch—"

Johnny bent over the speaker, read in his burning eyes that the boy was rational. They would leave a man to watch—it was the logical thing to do. Then they *were* coming back—no doubt about it now!

"Tell us what happened, Bob," he said evenly.

"They tied my hands and feet," said the boy, "and tied me to the rail. After they went I worked one hand loose and got my knife and cut the rope. I didn't see him at first. I was trying to open the companion hatch when he came round the corner. I jumped toward him and he hit me with something—knocked me out. When I came to he had dragged me back and was untangling the rope from the rail. My knife was gone. I got up and took an oar from the cabin top. I was pretty weak and shaky, but when he turned I let him have it as hard as I could over the head. He fell across the rail—and I boosted him over. I watched, but he didn't come up. I had to sit down then—everything went black." He smiled weakly and a little proudly. "But I got rid of one of them anyway."

"You certainly did!" Johnny exclaimed approvingly. "That will help a lot."

"I didn't hear it—that silly fainting affair," the girl said unevenly. "But it won't happen again. Things looked so hopeless—oh, Bob! Mr. Shenton is going to get us out of this, and save Dad's platinum, and—isn't it wonderful?"

"I'm called Johnny, Miss Bently," said Mr. Shenton.

"And I'm called Janet, Johnny," retorted Miss Bently.

THE fact that a man had been stunned and drowned seemed not to affect her spirits. Under other circumstances, Johnny told himself, her brother's act would fill her with horror. Now it was accepted as a part of the drama in which she was playing such a central rôle. A brave, level-headed girl—and a decidedly pretty one too! Reluctantly he turned his eyes from her face; there were more pressing, if less pleasant things to be done.

"Back soon, Janet," he said. "Raid the galley and collect some food while I'm gone. I'm half-starved; I'll eat a bite after I start across the point, and you'll want some while you're waiting ashore. Take a bottle of drinking-water too, and a blanket apiece; it will be cold and damp."

He ran up the steps, cast off and rowed vigorously into the fog, towing the helpless *Scarab*. He landed with difficulty on the opposite shore and carried the tow-line up the steep cliff.

"It'll have to do," he admitted as he made the line fast to a jut of granite. "She'll scuff herself up, or worse, but I can't help it."

From his precarious footing on the rocks he could see nothing beyond the cruiser. The cottony mist enveloped everything. "If the fog will only hold!" he said fervently, and shoved off.

A FEW minutes later the three stepped ashore about midway between the two cruisers. They climbed the moist steep, and found a cranny that would serve. It was perhaps twenty yards above the water, a niche large enough to permit them to sit in reasonable comfort and be entirely shielded from view below even should the fog lift.

"Nobody can find you up here," said Johnny. "Lie low until I get back. Here is your gun, Janet. Use it if necessary—and shoot straight! But don't worry; you may not be comfortable, but you're safe."

He took a share of the food, stuffed it into a pocket, and left the blanket-wrapped girl and boy with the cheery assurance that everything would be well.

And everything would be, he promised himself as he descended the slope, if it were humanly possible. He did not let his enthusiasm blind him to the fact that he had a big job ahead of him, but neither did he admit a doubt of accomplishing it. To go armed would have pleased him better, but he couldn't take Janet's weapon. Surely, he reflected, there were guns at the mine.

CHAPTER III

JOHNNY rowed through the harbor entrance, turned to the east and, keeping within sight of the fog-draped shore, sent the little boat ahead with powerful strokes. A dip in the shoreline had indicated on the chart the narrowest part of the peninsula, about a mile from Box Harbor.

The granite bluff looked sheer and uninviting for as much of its height as the mist revealed. He scanned it keenly as he dipped the oars, and as he neared what he judged to be the region where he would land, found little to indicate that a man could scale it.

His time-estimate coincided with a slight break in the shoreline, and he swung in to investigate the bight. A tiny rock-strewn beach materialized from the gray pall, and Johnny breathed a sigh of relief. For here the sheer granite wall was broken by a cleft. Some ancient cataclysm, some tremendous earth-force, had split the face of the rock ridge as if a huge wedge had been driven into it.

The narrow V began practically at water level, diverging gradually until its edges melted into the fog. Broken granite choked its constricted floor, and damp moss and lichens covered these fragments and clung to the lower walls. There was evidence that in the rainy season the place held a small waterway; its bed, never touched by the sun, was still wet and soggy.

From experience Johnny knew how difficult the footing

was in such a gorge; how treacherous the moss carpet was; how sharp and lacerating the splintered granite could be when a man's foot slipped from under him. But with all its disadvantages, this dank and gloomy fissure offered better possibilities for speed than the bold face of the cliff—provided it finally topped out on the ridge.

He made his boat fast and figured the time. Ten-thirty now. Unless his estimate was all wrong, he had considerably less than three hours in which to reach the mine ahead of the robbers. But he would have to do it in two hours to allow for errors in his calculation and to give time to set the stage.

He looked into the dark gorge, at the frowning cliff lifting so abruptly into the fog; almost he allowed a doubt to whisper discouragement. The task looked tremendous—worse because the fog masked the heights. And the time limit was so short! He could never scale that slope in two hours—two thousand feet at the least, and the most likely pass hidden—pure luck if he hit it. The cleft was the better of two discouraging choices.

He plunged into the opening, staking everything on the gamble that it would not end in a cul-de-sac which would force him to retrace his steps.

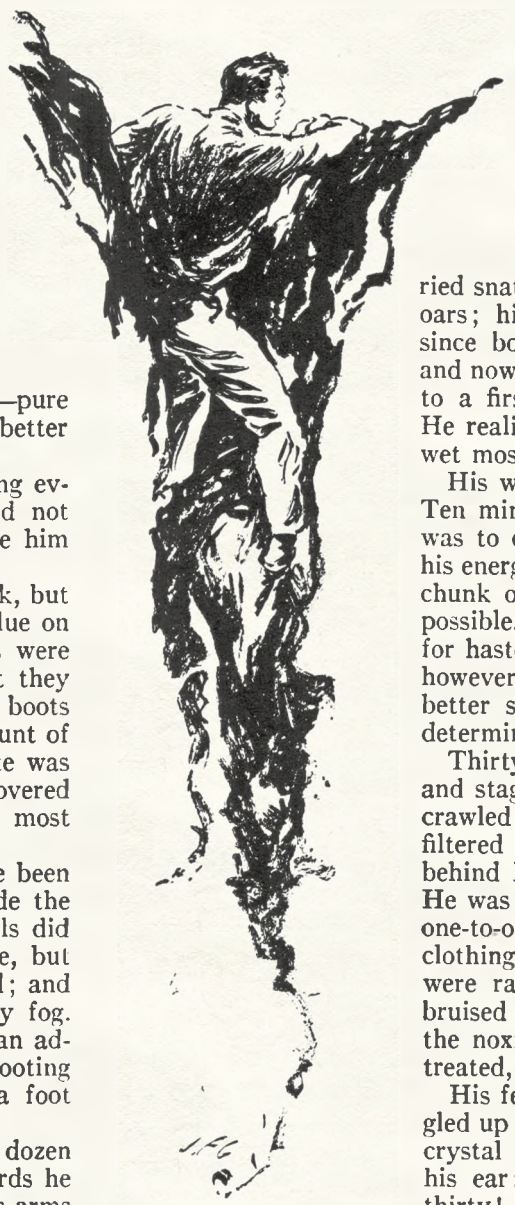
Now rubber soles are ideal on a deck, but they cannot be credited with much value on wet and slimy moss. Johnny's soles were thick enough and sturdy enough, but they were of rubber; he had not changed to boots because he had visioned a certain amount of climbing on bare granite. This granite was not bare; next to certain seaweed-covered rocks at stream mouths, it was the most dangerous footing to be found.

On a clear day progress would have been difficult enough, but now the fog made the cleft a dim, twilight region. The walls did not seem to continue their divergence, but appeared almost parallel as they lifted; and the far opening above was choked by fog. Every step in the gloomy place was an adventure; what seemed to be a secure footing too often was deceptive; and once a foot slipped, there was no recovery.

Before Johnny had penetrated a dozen feet he had fallen; within a dozen yards he had gone down several times. Soon his arms and legs were scraped raw, his clothing smeared with black loam and crushed, water-laden vegetation. Stumbling, slipping, balancing precariously, he struggled on, climbing over knife-edged rock slabs sheathed in moss, sloshing in wet silt, leaping from insecure hummocks to others as treacherous, driven by his time-limit to take bone-breaking risks.

The way led constantly upward; the going became increasingly difficult. He panted with exertion; in spite of the chill air of this clammy region, his skin was moist with perspiration. He could see but a few yards ahead. Behind him the cleft was a narrow mist-filled chasm, steep and discouragingly dark. How far he had come he could not tell; a hundred, two hundred yards, perhaps, with the expenditure of enough energy to take him many times that distance of ordinary going. Such light as filtered to him came from above; he had the feeling of being in a well, and although he thrust aside the panicky thought, he could not entirely get rid of the sensation that he was trapped in the heart of a granite range.

The noisome odors of decayed vegetation, the feel and sound of crushed fungus growth underfoot, the unwholesome chill of the gloomy place, combined with the sting of his wounds and the weariness of his body to cast discouragement over him.



With tremendous exertion, he emerged from the crevasse into the chill mist of the range top.

Undisciplined thoughts rose, suggesting that his toil was in vain. This long struggle would be wasted; he would come to an impasse and be forced back, in which event he would be too late to try to climb the ridge. He had slept but four hours the previous night; he had skipped meals and eaten small and hurried snatches of food; he had labored at the oars; his nerves had been at high tension since boarding the cruiser in Box Harbor; and now he was putting the finishing touches to a first-rate case of physical exhaustion. He realized it, and sat down on a patch of wet moss.

His watch dial shone coldly in the gloom. Ten minutes to eleven already! Yet if he was to carry out his plan he must keep up his energy. He ate the bread and cheese and chunk of corned beef, relaxing as much as possible. But he could not rest; the need for haste nagged at him. He felt refreshed, however, and advanced up the defile with better speed, a prey to doubts but grimly determined to win through.

Thirty minutes passed. Still he sloshed and staggered, slipped and fell, climbed and crawled up that nightmare passage. The filtered light overhead seemed no stronger; behind him the cleft seemed tightly closed. He was advancing inward, upward—about a one-to-one slope—but where did it lead? His clothing was sodden, dripping. His fingers were rasped raw; his legs and arms were bruised and lacerated. He gasped for breath; the noxious air choked him. Hope had retreated, yet he scrambled on.

His feet slued from under him. He struggled up and viewed with dismay the smashed crystal of his watch. He put his wrist to his ear: the watch was stopped. Eleven-thirty! Only a half-hour of his two hours left! The prospect was hopeless. Two miles on the chart—but what miles they were! What part of them had he crossed? He could not even guess. And this deep gut in the rock showed no indication of ending.

His worst fears were realized a few minutes later. The damp walls were closing in! He could touch them with outstretched arms. Without hope, stubbornly he went on. The walls continued to converge; his shoulders now filled the space between them. The end!

He leaned heavily against the stone and contemplated the harshness of fate and the fickleness of his proverbial good luck. This gash had lured him on, caused him to waste time and strength. He would have to return to Box Harbor and make new plans—and how he hated to turn back!

Johnny Shenton, who had always faced difficulties with

a laugh and a bantering taunt for misfortune to do its worst, seemed beaten in spirit as well as physically. He ground his teeth and his lips shaped bitter words. But the habits of a lifetime are not so easily vanquished. One phase of his personal creed, that a laugh in the face of trouble was worth more than all the cursing in the world, rose uppermost, as it usually did when trouble seemed most overwhelming.

" 'My head is bloody but unbowed,' " he quoted, and his dare-devil laugh filled the dim passageway with echoes.

He felt better. He could not change the situation, so why use energy in useless rage? He glanced up. The diffused light seemed stronger. Was the fog lifting, or was he closer to the summit than he thought? The mist, which during all his struggling progress had billowed down into the cleft from above, masking its true height, seemed thinner. He became conscious of a current of air; like the draft in a chimney, it drew up the rift behind him and rose here at the end, rolling back the encroaching fog. For the first time he caught a glimpse of the rim of his imprisoning walls. The top! Perhaps a hundred feet overhead! Beaten? Not by a long shot!

Without questioning the hazards, he wedged himself between the walls and began to inch his body upward.

The surfaces were overlaid with tenuous lichens that released their feeble grip under every pressure. Beneath, the face of the granite was like coarse sandpaper; it demolished the cloth at knees and elbows quickly and thoroughly, and continued its rasping work on the exposed skin. Johnny's arms, shoulders and legs were braced tensely to support his hundred and seventy pounds, and upward progress called for additional straining effort. Gains were partly offset by painful losses as the treacherous growths gave way.

Slowly hunching upward, without hand- or foot-holds, with every advance costing tremendous exertion, he finally passed the growth-covered surfaces and for the first time his rubber soles became effective on the bare rock. Now he advanced faster, relatively; but it was still discouragingly slow. The light grew better. The rim appeared closer. He was going to make it!

He did make it—but at what a cost!

He emerged from the crevasse into the chill mist of the range top, drenched with sweat, his clothing frayed, smirched with dirt and blood, finger-tips raw, arms and legs bruised and lacerated, his entire body one vast discomfort. Every muscle cried out for rest, but they cried in vain. There would be no rest for some time to come.

His view was restricted by the fog to a vague circle which included a treeless, bleak granite landscape, rough and uninviting, studded by a few dwarfed and struggling shrubs. But he had crossed the summit. The slope led gradually downward in the right direction: toward the unseen water.

JOHNNY realized that without the fog he could have looked for miles down the long bay, somewhere on the surface of which rode a cruiser carrying three desperate men and a prisoner. Was that boat still miles away, or was it already drawing near to the cove where the mine lay? He could not answer. No sound broke the stillness. How much of his precious time was left? He did not know, nor did he stop to wonder.

He raced down the slope, gradual here, with long strides, joying in the freedom of action after so much painfully slow travel. The radius of his vision moved with him; features of the landscape emerged from the mist as he advanced, were swallowed up behind. He breathed words of gratitude for the fog; if he succeeded in his efforts he could thank the fog for it.

But his elation was short-lived. He was not to be let off so easily; a new trouble lurked behind the curtain of mist.

The slope, pitching downward more and more sharply, checked his pace. And suddenly the granite footing ended at a sheer cliff-face down which no climber could go. All below and beyond the rim under his feet was filled with writhing vapor. It might be a deep chasm, or it might be the slope that dropped straight to the bay. Johnny was as uncertain of what lay below as he had been of what was above when he looked up from the beach.

Despair closed on him. Where was his boasted good luck? Of what use had all his toil and struggle been? He was beaten.

For a time he allowed his drooping spirit and his weary, pain-stabbed body to dominate him. "What's the use?" they whispered. "You've done your best; you'll never make it; you'll fall and be killed." The temptation to rest, and then turn back, was strong. But not as strong as his will to go on.

"Meet trouble going forward," he muttered, and turned to follow the rim of the cliff. There must be a way down!

CHAPTER IV

MUFFLED slow throbs of a gas engine, telling of retarded speed, pulsed across the fog-screened water of Sloane Bay. A woodsman, working alone on his tiny timber limit that edged the rocky peninsula, paused to listen. He peered in the direction of the sound, but only through habit. From his position on the only wooded ledge on that side of the bay he could not even make out the shoreline below him, although the cedar he was getting ready to fall would crash directly into the unseen water.

"That's not Bently," the logger said, as though addressing a companion. The sound of the *Janet's* engine was as distinctive to his trained ears as the well-known footsteps of a friend. "Hope he found a snug harbor. It sure is thick." Bently and his two children, comparatively recent arrivals in the district, were well liked by the scattered dwellers of that vast territory lying between Glendale and Cormorant Island. Bently employed local men; neither he nor the younger Bentlys felt superior to their hard-working neighbors.

The invisible cruiser crept closer, crept past, receded slowly toward the head of the bay, hugging the stern shore. The hand-logger followed the sound of its exhaust with the curiosity of a man who sees but few visitors. He thought regretfully of the blinding fog and turned back to his work.

If the lone woodsman could have seen the boat that passed so close he might not have suspected that anything was wrong. But had he been able to hear what was being said on her afterdeck he probably would have gone for his rifle and hurried along the rough shore in an attempt to beat the cruiser to the Bently float. For affairs were far from well aboard that craft.

Seated in a canvas chair with one long leg thrown indolently over its arm was a thin dark man on whose hollow-cheeked face was a month's growth of beard. The Skipper was the name he went by. He was the directing head of the expedition; brain, not brawn, served him. He looked far from strong.

Close by, with his hands on the spokes of the wheel, stood a short, wiry figure, likewise bearded, who gazed ahead and to port as the craft nosed slowly through the heavy mist. This man the leader had addressed as Bull, although he resembled more a rat. His face was lined, burned a dark brown; his small eyes were alert.

In the bow, almost fog-hidden from the others, crouched a third bewhiskered man with a boat-hook, acting as lookout, peering into the damp gloom, ready to call back a warning of danger. He was known as Chink, perhaps because of the yellowish cast of his tanned skin. His body was strong and his face was weak; he had the look of a subordinate who could be depended on to follow orders without question or delay.

A close observer, unaware of the felonious intent of these three, would nevertheless have classed them as members of a predatory band. The stamp was on them, indefinable, but unmistakable. They were in appearance woodsmen, but certain traits not of the wilderness betrayed them. The manner of city gunmen or waterfront pirates discounted their rough clothing and bearded cheeks; studying them, one would say that they were not habitual wearers of beards; that their unshaven faces were in the nature of a disguise; and that once their present mission was concluded they would lose no time resuming their normal appearance.

There was one who studied them: the fourth man aboard—Bently. He stood against the rail facing the seated man, and while the developments of the last few hours lay heavy on him, he displayed little emotion. He was in early middle-age, an active, forceful figure with well-cut features and steady eyes. He watched without show of fear the idle toying of the leader's hands with a heavy black automatic pistol which lay in his lap.

The Skipper was speaking in a languid, indolent voice. But his eyes belied him—they were seldom still; they shifted under the drooping lids with a feral glint that spoke clearly of their owner's capacity for swift violence.

"I don't fail," he said, in answer to a statement by Bently. "I plan my moves in advance, as you perhaps surmise. I play for big stakes—and I play to win."

" 'The best-laid plans,' " murmured the other, to sound the man's temper.

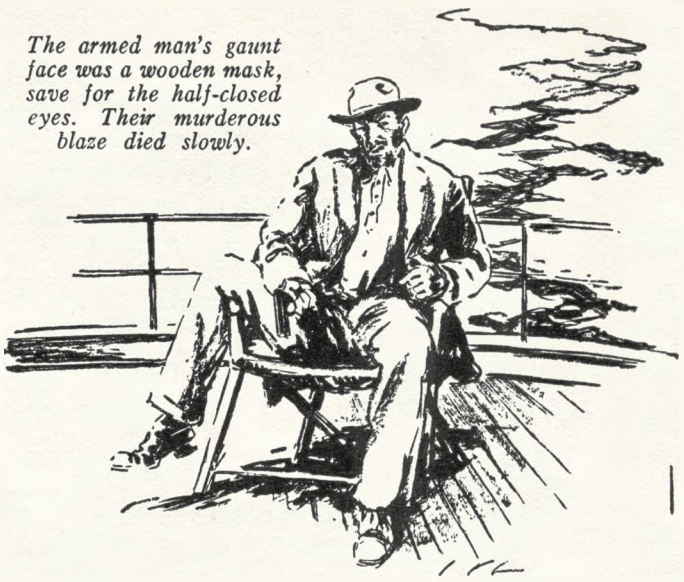
"Of mice, yes, but not of *me*," the Skipper retorted. He seemed to enjoy this casual boasting, as if it fed some deep-buried need of his twisted nature. In mental stature, Bently reflected, he was far above the average of the common criminal; an educated man fallen into ways of darkness.

He talked as if holding an intellectual conversation with a friend, but behind the smooth, well-chosen words and the calm manner his true character peeped out. He was schooling himself to this easy pose; consciously playing a part; dramatizing himself. The fingers that so idly moved the weapon displayed now and then a nervous tenseness; the muscles of his sunken face revealed the occasional tightening of his jaw; his hands were not quite steady as he lit his frequent cigarettes.

BENTLY glanced from him to the man at the wheel and to the lookout, debating, as he had since the start of this trip, the chances of overcoming his captors by strategy or sudden attack. Two possibilities had occurred to him. One was to dive overboard and escape in the fog—it could be done—then make his way alongshore to the mine before they could reach it. This plan he had rejected because of the almost certain impossibility of traversing the shore in time. He knew the rough terrain too well. If he failed, lives would pay for the failure. The risk was too great. That chance was out, then.

The other possibility he had not yet relinquished: a surprise attack. If he could secure that pistol—and have a few seconds of freedom—he could account for all three men!

The Skipper had fallen into a reverie; he seemed oblivious of his surroundings. Bently took a tentative step forward; then stepped back again. He edged aside, seemingly intent on the veiled shore. The thin man in the chair continued to gaze into space. Emboldened, Bently moved forward again; two steps more would put him within snatching distance of the gun. Dare he attempt it?



The armed man's gaunt face was a wooden mask, save for the half-closed eyes. Their murderous blaze died slowly.

The decision was made for him. His eyes, which had been everywhere but on the weapon, now came slowly to it—the pistol's ugly muzzle was directed straight at his breast. He flashed a look to the Skipper's face to read his intention, and was struck cold by the ferocity of those pale eyes. He backed against the rail again without a word, and the weapon was slowly lowered.

The armed man's gaunt face was a wooden mask, save for the half-closed eyes. Their murderous blaze died slowly, and Bently lounged against the rail, simulating an ease he did not feel. The cards were all in his captor's hands, he had to admit. Well, one way to insure safety to himself and his men was to agree to everything the thieves asked. That was the logical thing to do—except that it would not protect his daughter.

He did not at present greatly fear for his children, left in Box Harbor. The Skipper had given definite orders to the man left to guard them that they were not to be molested unless they tried to escape, in which case he was to act without too much violence. Particularly in the case of Janet—and a deep smoldering hatred burned in Bently's breast for the man who had given the order. The Skipper was a man to be obeyed; the danger to the girl would come later, when this soft-spoken, malignant crook should return to Box Harbor.

It was for his daughter's sake more than anything else that Bently sought a way to circumvent the thieves. He was resigned to the loss of his two-year accumulation of platinum, if in losing it he could insure safety to the others involved. But would turning it over to the Skipper guarantee anything? The man was as cruel and cold as a serpent; would his promise, should he give one, be worth anything?

He had, also, to think of the men at the mine. Brand, his engineer, was hot-headed; he was not one to submit to robbery without resistance. He had a revolver, but he wouldn't be carrying it. The others were loyal, too, and it was this trait that threw the shadow of death over them all. In their outraged feelings some of them, even though unarmed, might rebel—and be answered by a hot bullet.

Bently's throat was dry and his brow moist at the thought. If he knew what this monstrous man planned to do when the cruiser reached the float, tragedy might

be averted. He would wait no longer; he would ask a direct question.

"What are your plans, if I may ask?" he said without too much interest.

The other flicked his hard eyes to Bently's face.

"A natural question," he admitted, "the answer to which you hope to profit by. I'll not relieve your curiosity by telling you now. You'll learn in due time."

He closed his thin hand about the automatic caressingly, as though he liked the feel of it.

"I didn't put on this show to have it crabbed by an unwilling actor," he stated after a moment. "We'll run it off like clock-work; it wasn't planned

"I'm going to hide there and wait for the boat. You lie low here until I come back."

in a minute nor in a day. How do you think I knew you were to take your boat out today?"

"You thought I had the platinum aboard," ventured Bently.

"If you didn't, I had this move all mapped out. I knew everything essential to—"

"And about the fog?" Bently asked, taking the risk.

The other dismissed it with an impatient gesture.

"It isn't stopping me, is it? I'm not in the habit of being stopped. A little delay, yes, but its effect on the day's transaction—none."

"I'm thinking of my men," said Bently. "If I can be sure they won't be harmed—"

"That depends," interrupted the Skipper coldly, "on you. When we go ashore every step you take, every word you speak, will be according to instructions from me. On how well you play your part depends the safety of your men and yourself. Get this, Bently! In all my undertakings I overlook nothing that might jeopardize the accomplishment of my purpose. Conditions beyond my control have to be met less subtly than I might choose, but I meet them decisively. I succeed because I allow nothing to stop me—nothing. A false move, an ill-advised word, a glance of the eye, even, and you—and the others if necessary—will die suddenly."

The killer again peered out through his pale eyes. Bently was convinced; this man and his lieutenants would shoot quickly and without compunction. The platinum was as good as gone; he accepted that. If it could be taken without any fatalities, the purchase price for safety would not be too high. He would play the part assigned to him, whatever it might be.

"I'll agree to anything you say," he said, "if you will promise not to touch my daughter or my son."

"Are you in a position to exact promises from me?" sneered the outlaw. "Hardly! I make no promises unless it pleases me—and it does not please me now. I go and come as I choose. I always have and I always will. I am a free agent who makes free with the world and its conventions because it amuses me to do so—and is profitable besides. I play a game of wits, and I win for the reason that my wits are keener than other men's. And if a pretty face attracts me, I'm no different from others, save that I get what I desire."

This statement was delivered with intention to impress—the words of a supreme egotist, certain of himself and of his works.

"I am not exactly unknown along this coast," he went on with the air of listening with approval to his own statement. "Perhaps you have heard of the famous Northwest Phantom."

Bently stared. The Northwest Phantom! The fanciful, romantic name used by the newspapers in referring to the elusive criminal who, with a small band of followers, had accomplished two spectacular robberies—a gold shipment and a cannery pay-roll—within less than a year, along some six hundred miles of wild coast waters; each crime different in method, but both particularly daring. And after each the robbers had vanished without a trace. If this man was the so-called Phantom, he had some reason to feel confident. And now he was going to add another major robbery to his record.

If that would only be all! Bently recalled with a sinking heart that three killings had accompanied those two previous crimes. His girl at the mercy of such a creature! Despondently Bently looked about.

The cruiser, kicked along by a half-speed propeller, nosed through the fog. The quartermaster's eyes were on the fog-shrouded shore; he had stood almost silent at the wheel throughout the trip, but he had heard every word that passed between the Skipper and Bently. His lined face gave no indication of his thoughts.

The lookout crouched unmoving in the bow, peering ahead. His long muscular hands held the boat-hook with a suggestion of a simian grip—or a strangler's.

Thus Bently summarized his captors, eying them with

a hopelessness verging on despair. The leader could not be swayed by words; his confederates were blind followers of his orders.

A familiar granite eminence loomed out of the fog. Bently swallowed with difficulty. The cruiser was almost to the float.

He broke the silence urgently. "Let me tell my men what you are after as soon as we arrive. I'll hand it over and you can go."

"Not a word!" snapped the Skipper. "I'm directing this! A word, or even a gesture, beyond what I tell you, and—"

The lookout called back a warning. The helmsman cut the engine to slow. A rough log float came drifting toward the boat through the mist.

"Listen carefully, Bently," said the Skipper. "Here are your instructions—and remember, it will pay not to forget any part of them!"

CHAPTER V

THE Bently mine was a small-scale placer working; the tiny steel-gray granules of platinum lay in the alluvial deposits of a fan-shaped flat at the head of Sloane Bay. Steep slopes enclosed this area; a small stream, rising far back in the heights, ran through it. Here the miners worked their hand-dredges.

Bently had proceeded with a minimum of expense and help; two years of seasonal work had slowly built up an accumulation of treasure that was to pay for more pretentious equipment.

A group of four small buildings perched on a rocky shelf perhaps two hundred yards from the damp and insect-infested workings. Behind these log structures rose the granite ridge which formed the peninsula. A hundred feet or so from the cabins, down a rough slope, the landing-stage was moored; a rowboat was drawn up on the logs. Aside from these marks of human occupation, the broad landscape was as unchanged as when Vancouver explored this wilderness.

Now, however, the landscape was enveloped in a gray shroud so thick that the buildings were lost to vision from the cabin cruiser which crept out of the fog and nosed against the float. It was close to one o'clock, yet a gloomy half-light lay over the world.

The lookout and the helmsman made the boat fast; then fell in behind their waiting leader and Bently, who stepped down and walked abreast up the trail. The Skipper's hands were empty; he and his hostage climbed the slope like two friends.

The cabins emerged from the mist. The door of one was open. Three figures were framed in it. They stepped forward to greet the newcomers.

"Well, boss," said a tall red-haired man, "we didn't expect you back so soon! Fog too much for you, eh?" He looked with curiosity at the man at his employer's elbow and at the two other strangers. The latter pair had stopped several paces back of Bently. The two miners remained silent.

"Hello, Brand," said Bently. "I turned back when I met my friend. This is Mr. Swift, who is interested in platinum. I have decided to take my stuff to Alert Bay and catch the morning steamer south. The market is particularly high now, Mr. Swift tells me."

His tone was even. He was playing his part carefully, aware of the tragic possibilities should he fumble his lines.

Brand looked disturbed. "You mean you're going back today?"

Bently nodded. "This fog ought to lift soon—if it doesn't, there'll be a breeze up George Passage that will clear it out. I know the course pretty well, anyway." He looked worn and tired, but his expression was cheerful.

The Skipper, announced as Mr. Swift, took up the conversation.

"I was coming here to see Mr. Bently when our boats met. I prevailed on him to turn back, owing to the sudden demand for platinum." His smooth voice, playing with words with double meanings, was not one to arouse suspicion. "I suggested, and Mr. Bently agreed, to make a quick round trip. At a time like this delays might be costly."

"Where are Miss Janet and Bob?" the engineer asked Bently.

"They stayed aboard my cruiser."

"Anchored off Midsummer Island," the Skipper added, naming an island perhaps five miles from Box Harbor.

Brand seemed anxious about his employer's comfort.

"Have you had your dinner?" he asked. "We just finished ours."

The Skipper answered the question.

"We expect to eat aboard my boat. And the sooner we start the better, don't you think, Mr. Bently?"

"Yes, at once," the mine-owner agreed. "I'll open the safe."

"Mr. Bently kindly suggested a cup of coffee, if the cook had some already made," said the Skipper—more interested in the whereabouts of the cook than in the beverage. Bently merely nodded agreement.

Brand called, and the cook appeared from an adjoining building. To Bently's question he replied that there was a pot of coffee on the stove, and turned back to set out the cups.

Bently preceded the Skipper into the first cabin; the engineer and the miners hesitated, but the two silent strangers stood aside expectantly, and the mine men entered. The strangers stopped in the doorway, their hands carelessly in their pockets. The owner knelt before the sturdy safe that stood against the far wall between two bunks. The Skipper sat down on one of the bunks and lit a cigarette.

The silence in the room was broken only by the whirring sound as the dial was turned—right, left, right. Bently's fingers were busy; if they shook, their tremor was hidden in the larger movements. He grasped the handle; there was a click of disengaging bolts, and the heavy door swung open.

Two canvas ore-sacks occupied the lower compartment of the safe; they were small and only partly filled, their throats tied with heavy cord. But insignificant as they appeared, they represented a value out of all proportion to their size. They stood for many months of privation and labor, their store growing day by day, sometimes by the addition of only a fraction of an ounce, until the time should come to take them away.

That time had come. . . . Bently lifted the heavy little sacks out and put them on the floor. The Skipper's eyes dwelt on them with a gleam of satisfaction. His position was such that the others could not see his face; he depended on his two confederates to see that no untoward action took place.

BRAND looked at the sacks and at his employer, and there was a hint of concern in his expression. He seemed worried; perhaps these roughly dressed, bearded strangers stirred a suspicion in him; perhaps the dangers of the fog-bound journey were in his mind. But he remained silent and hid his disquietude, as Bently rose to his feet.

The two miners' eyes were on the sacks; were they thinking of the long days of toil that had slowly wrested

the rare metal from the ground? They seemed more than normally interested in the sacks; had suspicion crossed their minds too?

Lounging side by side just within the open door, behind all the others in the room, Bull and Chink gloated over the treasure, but their glances constantly darted here and there, alert for a sign of distrust or the furtive passing of a signal. They were following their instructions; their hands touched ready weapons in their pockets.

The gray world beyond the door was silent, as if muffled by the fog. Only the sound of condensed moisture falling from the roof was heard, a desolate *drip-drip* that seemed to Bently the slow toll of doom to cherished hopes.

He stood for a moment looking down at the squat, chunky sacks at his feet. Almost forty pounds of platinum, worth not less than sixty thousand dollars—to be surrendered without a struggle, without so much as expression of regret! A slip of the tongue, the slightest incautious glance, would provoke questions, arouse suspicion—and death would strike without warning. Already he felt an uneasiness among his men. They must be protected! He must get the treasure aboard the boat at once if he was to avert tragedy, for the strain of his present pose was too great to hold long.

In a tone carefully steady he said to the Skipper, "We ought to start, to catch the ebb tide." He lifted the sacks, one in each hand, and the Skipper stood up.

"One of my men will carry those," he said. A gesture brought Bull forward. "Fetch them along while we have our coffee. A hot drink will be welcome—eh, Bently?" He did not smile, but his voice was elated, triumphant.

Bently forced a short laugh and agreed with simulated enthusiasm.

Bull carried the sacks out, followed by the others. The Skipper was again at Bently's elbow. Chink emerged last. They crossed to the cook-house, where four cups had been placed on the oil-cloth-covered table. The cook brought a big steaming pot, filled the cups and passed the sugar and canned milk.

The Skipper raised his cup.

"A toast!" he cried gayly. Bently and the two ruffians raised their cups. "To the strong demand for platinum!" he added sardonically.

It was not politeness, but a native caution, that caused the maker of this cruel jest to wait until Bently had taken a drink. Then he and his confederates drained their cups, while the miners looked on.

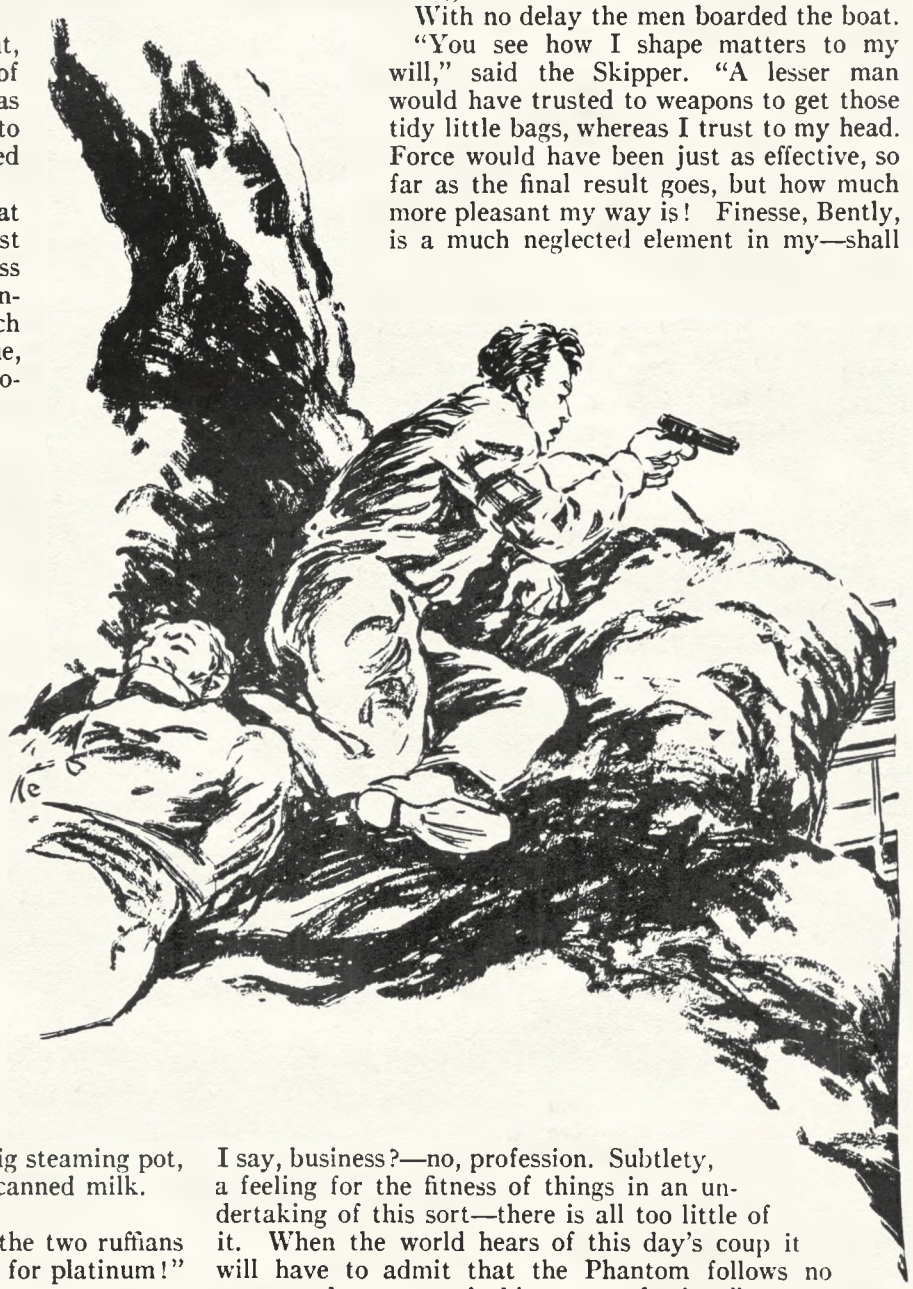
Brand seemed to be hesitant, on the verge of speaking. To forestall this, Bently said hurriedly, "We must be getting along." They walked out, the Skipper close beside the mine-owner. Chink, his hands pocketed, brought up the rear.

WHATEVER Brand was trying to put words to remained unsaid. Evidently he had decided not to speak, although it cost him an effort. Bently caught a glimpse of his worried face, and abruptly turned away.

"So long, boys," he said casually. "I'll be back, with the children, in a few days. You needn't come down to the float."

The Skipper bowed slightly to Brand, and the four men started down the rocky trail.

The engineer, the two miners and the cook watched them fade into the fog, then turned uneasy eyes to one another. Something, they were certain, was decidedly wrong about this affair!



With no delay the men boarded the boat.

"You see how I shape matters to my will," said the Skipper. "A lesser man would have trusted to weapons to get those tidy little bags, whereas I trust to my head. Force would have been just as effective, so far as the final result goes, but how much more pleasant my way is! Finesse, Bently, is a much neglected element in my—shall I say, business?—no, profession. Subtlety, a feeling for the fitness of things in an undertaking of this sort—there is all too little of it. When the world hears of this day's coup it will have to admit that the Phantom follows no commonplace course in his career of crime."

He was in fine fettle, energized by success. He sat again in his canvas chair on the afterdeck; the two sacks stood beside the trunk cabin where he could feast his eyes on their rounded sides. His prisoner sat dejectedly on a folding stool. The two silent members of the criminal band had put the cruiser about, and she was moving back along the misty shore of the peninsula.

Bently did not speak; the Skipper's boasting words were in the nature of a monologue, adroitly phrased declarations that called for no retorts.

"You quoted the 'best-laid plans' to me, Bently," the outlaw went on, evidently determined to wring the last drop of satisfaction from his subject. "I told you I didn't fail. My plans don't go 'agley'—because I consider every

angle. It's a game with me, and I play according to rules, one of which is to overlook nothing."

"You are perhaps thinking that I did not use force back there because I feared the outcome. If so, you do me an injustice. I am without fear. Even if your men knew you were being robbed—which they didn't, thanks to your care in following orders—I would not fear pursuit. I happen to know there is no other power-boat in this bay, or within miles. I also know that they could not cross the ridge; those cliffs are my allies. Furthermore, you will recall that I gave a slightly wrong location of your boat, a minor touch that was not really needed, yet it helped in its small way to round out a program that called for attention to details."

He stopped to light a cigarette, and a new gleam of pride shone in his pale eyes.

"I even left them their boat. I could have taken it, but that would have set them wondering. As it is they'll sit back and wait—and be among the last to learn the significance of your visit to the safe. Such an effect is worth the effort."

He swung a long leg across a bony knee; the ugly automatic in his lap gleamed dully.

"Can't you imagine how the newspapers will handle this when you spread the report? They'll call it 'one of the boldest and most spectacular robberies in the history of the Northwest." The reporters know how to write it! They'll say it is another stroke of the 'master mind.' And they'll be right! The whole world will be talking about the clever, elusive Northwest Phantom, who strikes unexpectedly and vanishes completely, taking rich spoils with him."

Bently was amazed at the supreme vanity of the man. Part of his returns from the crime would be this gratification to his abnormal ego. His companions would be satisfied with their share of the booty; but he demanded additional compensation.

"How much simpler it would have been, from the standpoint of the ordinary man," the boaster proceeded, "to drop in at the mine during your absence and blow the safe by the common yegg method. Of course I had nitroglycerin along, in case the door could not be opened more artistically; it would have been a trifling job for Bull, who understands the technique of such things. But how crude that would be, Bently! You can appreciate, I'm sure, the thought that impelled me to give it a touch of art, and thereby raise it out of the class of sordid transactions."

Bently's amazement grew; all this expenditure of time, all the risk of error offered by such an intricate plan, for the childish satisfaction of putting on a theatrical act!

Under the silent, watchful care of the helmsman and lookout the cruiser felt her way steadily down the bay toward Knob Point. Visibility was no better than during the inbound trip; it did not exceed fifty feet, but Bull had gained confidence and had opened the throttle to turn up a five-knot speed. The pitch of the granite shore was so abrupt that there was little danger of going aground so long as he held the boat just within sight of the fog-hazed rocks. Bently recognized that these men knew boats and that they had scouted the country carefully in advance.

At his sharp command three heads jerked up. "Get your hands up, and keep them up!" Johnny grated.

Musing over a cigarette, the Skipper had fallen silent, and into this silence, cutting through the even beat of the engine, came the spaced sound of an ax, its slow strokes ringing across the water with a distinctness that made the unseen wielder seem close at hand. The ax-blows ceased; it was easy to picture the woodsman pausing to listen to the invisible craft.

"If Tom Button only knew!" said Bently to himself. But the hope was useless. Brand and his men could tell him—did they really suspect what had taken place? Even if they did suspect, and rowed alongside to their nearest neighbor, Tom had no gas boat.

Bently's hopeless thoughts were interrupted by the Skipper's complacent voice, now somewhat taunting.

"Yonder stalwart woodsman is interested to know who is abroad on a day like this. At least, I take it he is stalwart—a hewer of wood with a strong back and a weak

head. Otherwise he'd not be laboring for a few sweat-stained dollars, but would put his brain to work to save his energy—as I do, for example."

"He is honest," retorted Bently hotly, aroused by this gratuitous comment about a man who was his friend. "He'll not die in prison or on the gallows!"

"In the poorhouse, rather," said the Skipper calmly, "after a lifetime of toil. As for prison or gallows, and your inference, brains properly applied can steer a man safely around such unpleasant things, as exemplified by your present company." He settled back lazily in his chair and proceeded to enlarge on the theme.

"A man controls his own life, Bently. He either makes it or foozles it, depending on his mental equipment. Take this brawny laborer and you and me, for instance. You are a distinct cut above him, for you hire others of his class to pile up profits for you. Then what happens? Along comes a man as superior mentally to you as you are to the wood-chopper—who calmly appropriates in a few hours of easy effort the results of your years of work. I'll pass out of your life as quickly as I came into it, vanish completely so far as you and the clumsy police are concerned—until I spread my net for some other victim in an unexpected quarter."

He paused, immersed in his own words, disregarding the feelings of the man he had stripped of a fortune. The sound of the ax came again across the water, now somewhat astern.

"The yokel resumes his toil," said the Skipper. "His curiosity is short-lived—a mark of his class. Why, the rewards offered by certain interests for me, dead or alive, would be a stupendous fortune for him—and he swings his ax as if I were not within a few hundred feet of him. But it is just as well; better men than he'll ever be, and better men than you, have tried. I'm still at large, master of my fate, and able to laugh at the stuffy world that makes conventions which I take pleasure in smashing."

Not a word for his companions in crime, upon whom he must depend for success in any undertaking. His hold on them, their unwavering loyalty, were as evident as they were incomprehensible. Bently set his teeth, longing for a chance to scupper this vainglorious blackguard. His criminal cunning surely must relax sometime! But so far it had not done so. The wicked black pistol lay across his thin lap, a silent threat.

"Hungry," said the Skipper abruptly. He stood up. "Come along. You watch me eat and I'll watch you—it may be the last meal you'll have for some time."

BENTLY cast a quick glance to catch his meaning, but the sunken face told him nothing. He preceded the other below.

Later they emerged on deck with food for the other two. Still later the Skipper studied his watch and relapsed into silence. The curtain of fog was thinning slightly. Features of the shore became more distinct, yet visibility was not over a hundred feet. Bently recognized characteristics ashore and knew they were within a few miles of Knob Point.

He was shocked by the order the Skipper suddenly gave.

"We'll drop our passenger here," he said to Bull.

The latter closed the throttle, disengaged the clutch. He put the helm to starboard; the momentum carried the craft gently against the steep shore.

"Lively, Bently!" the Skipper snapped. His tone was as cold and unfeeling as the weapon in his hand.

"Take me to my boat!" Bently pleaded, agony in his voice and face. "My children—"

"Jump," grated the armed man harshly, "while there's something solid to jump to!" The deadly look in his pale eyes curbed further pleas. Bently sprang to the steep damp shore, and clung there while the boat swung away, again under power.

"You'll be picked up by somebody, sooner or later," the Skipper informed him across the widening space. "By that time I'll be beyond following. Shall I carry your regards to anyone? No? Well, make yourself comfortable—the walking isn't very good." He turned his back.

The cruiser melted into the mist, leaving behind a broken-spirited man in whose wretched brain were pictures of his girl and his boy, pawns in those ruthless hands.

"All I ask is a chance!" he cried brokenly, his face turned upward and twisted with agony, staring into the slowly twisting fog. "But if I can't have it, then God send some one else to protect them!"

CHAPTER VI

STUMBLING along the uneven rim of the cliff, his heart heavy and failure riding his shoulders like an Old Man of the Sea, Johnny Shenton came nearer to cursing his luck than ever before in his life. Close-girt by the fog, unable to judge which direction offered the best chance of a chimney or a slide down which he might climb, he had chosen to go west along the ridge. This blind choice proved, after a half-hour of difficult progress, to be hopeless. As he advanced toward the mainland of the island the granite took an upward slant, the cliff edge became more broken, the gray void below offered less and less possibility for descent. And as he paused to ease his straining lungs before turning back, the distant throb of an engine-exhaust shattered his stubborn hope, and brought disparaging thoughts for his proverbial good fortune.

That throbbing engine could belong to but one boat. The criminals would accomplish their purpose while he staggered about above them, wasting valuable time. The cliff had balked him; he had hurt and exhausted himself for nothing; even should he find a way down now he could not reach the mine ahead of the cruiser.

Yet, with this conviction firmly fixed, Johnny did not give up. He turned and scrambled back the way he had come.

He reached at last the rock monument he had set up, his guide for finding the crevice on his return trip. The exhaust sounded clearer below; it was now almost abreast of him. Suddenly the pulse slowed. He listened, staring futilely into the mist. The sound of the engine ceased.

"They're at the mine," he muttered bitterly. "And here I am, stalled by a few hundred feet of rock!" His failure overwhelmed him. He pictured what would take place down there: one man forced to open his own safe; four other men forced to stand by and permit the outrage. The crooks would get away with their haul, but— If he could find a way down he could bring the mine employees back with him—get to Box Harbor ahead of them. He was not beaten yet!

He turned doggedly to the east and went at a staggering run along the cliff rim, frequently forced to climb over great juts of granite, constantly peering into the chill gray mist for a slope that was less like a wall.

Again the beat of the engine came up the ridge to him. The job had been completed! Twenty minutes to half an hour, he estimated, to rob Bently of his platinum. No shots had been fired; he was grateful for that. And in five hours—half that if the fog lifted—they'd be back in Box Harbor. A rope from the mine—greater speed recrossing the ridge—there was time—if he could get down!

He hurried on. A new sound came to him as he rounded

a huge projection: the bite of an ax in a tree-trunk. There were woods below, then—and help. The woodsman would know how to get down.

Johnny raced on with new energy, grateful to find his footing sloping downward to the east—a good sign, although the cliff was as sheer as ever. He came to a dip in the ridge and scrambled to the lower level with fresh hope. But the bottom of the dip showed a dry water-course, a snow stream, which in season dropped abruptly over the rim as a waterfall. Beyond the stream-bed the granite rose almost straight into the mist. This was the lowest point he would find, Johnny decided with sinking spirits, and threw himself down to study the cliff face.

Hopeless! No man could descend it or climb it without a rope—a hundred feet or so straight down to a talus of broken granite which sloped gradually away toward what must be a bench or a flat beyond. Dimly through the vapor he saw the outlines of fir or cedar tree-tops, and realized that the fog was thinning. The strokes of the ax sounded steadily, and the beat of the engine, almost opposite. The ax fell silent; the engine went on. The woodsman, then, was listening to the passing boat.

Johnny waited impatiently for the boat to draw away before he called out. The ax-man returned to his chopping, perhaps a hundred yards away. The exhaust of the cruiser dwindled into distance and Johnny filled his lungs and sent a lusty shout into the fog.

The ax was silent. He shouted again, and was answered. Guided by repeated calls, at last the woodsman appeared, climbing the pile of broken granite, staring up to locate the man who called from a spot so wholly inaccessible. Johnny waved his arm.

"How'n hell d'you get up *there?*" the woodsman bellowed, staring in astonishment.

"From the other side."

"You couldn't."

"Did, though! How can I get down?"

The other shook his head. "Can't. Nor up, either, without a rope."

"Where is the Bently mine?"

"About a mile." He gestured to the west.

"Listen, then," called Johnny. "It's been robbed!" And as briefly as possible he shouted the story.

THE tall man listened carefully, and shouted approval when he learned that the young Bentlys were safe.

"You done well, son. I'll do all I can. I heard them passin' both ways. There aint a gas boat closer'n ten-twelve miles, but I'll get the men an' we'll row—maybe meet somebody. Can't cross the ridge—I tried lots o' times. You go on back an' take care o' them two kids; hold them crooks if you can—we'll come along quick as God'll let us." He looked toward the trees. "Fog's liftin' some. Don't waste no time—we won't!"

He turned and leaped down the pitch and was lost in the mist.

"There's a man to tie to!" Johnny told himself. "They'll never make it in time, but they'll try. I'll have to play a lone hand—and a weak one—against three."

With his brain alive with possible and impossible projects, he struggled back to his monument, turned toward the crest, located the fissure. He had failed in his main purpose, but affairs could be a lot worse. Help would come eventually. His return trip would be easier. Two hours should put him in Box Harbor, at least an hour ahead of the crooks if the fog lifted, two hours or more if it didn't. In spite of his long physical strain, his weariness and his bruises, he felt almost cheerful.

"Hang on, fog!" he exhorted as he lowered himself into the dark depths. "We need you for a few hours more!"

CHAPTER VII

JOHNNY limped out of the cleft into daylight still diffused by mist. The sun irradiated the haze more than it had two thousand feet above; the fog was thinning, but it still masked all but near-by objects. If it would only hold long enough, he thought, stumbling down the little beach. He was even more soiled, still more bruised; he was consumed by thirst, weary to the point where his whole being cried for rest—but he would not stop. Instinct told him that he was back to water-level in good time, yet his will drove his exhausted body into the boat and to the oars. The ebb tide swept him onward and his labor was not great.

The narrow entrance to Box Harbor opened before him, wreathed in mist. He could see neither of the cruisers, and was greatly relieved. The fog would hang longer in this rocky pocket, cut off from the channel by towering heights. There was no sound.

Johnny rowed silently to the *Janet,* climbed aboard to look at the clock and to get a drink. Three-thirty; time to lay a plan—if he could decide on one.

He drank from the water-tank, snatched up some food and went on deck, his brain busy with the problem. The falling tide, he noticed, was stretching the mooring-lines too tight for safety. He would ease them off, then go tell Janet and Bob the result of his trip and decide what to do.

He bent over the line that slanted up from the stern, loosened the hitch—and a great weight dropped on his back, crushed him flat on his face. His breath went out in a gust; his forehead rapped the deck. Before he could stiffen his muscles, a hand in his hair raised his head and banged it down again. Fingers now clawed at his throat—cold fingers that fumbled, then lost their hold.

The instinct of self-preservation drove the grogginess from Johnny's head, gave him new strength. He grasped his assailant's wrists and heaved mightily. The attacker's body described a half-turn over Johnny's shoulder and crashed to the deck on its back. Instantly Johnny pounced, pinioning the man's arms. Swiftly he glanced about, was reassured. This bearded stranger was alone.

The man struggled desperately, but his efforts were feeble. Johnny released one wrist, seized the mop of tangled hair, jerked the head up and banged it violently against the planks.

"See how *you* like it!" he grated viciously.

The victim did not like it. He relaxed with a groan, his muscles jerking. His eyes rolled up with a frenzied appeal; unintelligible words came from his strangely blue lips. He was beaten and knew it.

Johnny peered into the hairy face with sudden comprehension. The man's clothes were damp; he was chilled through, his strength drained—he was the guard whom young Bently had disabled and pushed overboard!

He had taken a desperate chance, with the last of his energy, to serve his absent leader—or was it more personal? Johnny studied him closely, and read the truth. The thin cheeks, the yellowish skin, the glittering eyes, all flashed their message; the twitching muscles corroborated it. He was unmistakably a drug addict, a dangerous, conscienceless degenerate, a potential killer lacking only the strength to accomplish his purpose.

A surge of revulsion swept over Johnny. He was tempted to put the man beyond all chance of hurting any one, but wisdom dictated otherwise. There were things to be learned, and he intended to learn them.

With the free end of the mooring-line Johnny cast a double hitch about the weakly resisting wrists. Then, securing a lighter line, he bound the prisoner hand and foot.

The man was evidently close to collapse—wretched in mind and body; but allegiance to his confederates still

held power over his tongue. Stubbornly he refused to speak. Johnny tried several questions; then he asked a different, more effective one.

"What do you use—coke?"

The words shook the suffering prisoner out of his silence.

"Yes!" he cried, his face working. "Get it for me! Get it!"

"Get it where? I haven't any."

"On the cabin roof—tin box—it's there—it's right there!" The pleading voice broke.

Johnny found the little box and returned. The prisoner's eyes were fixed on it with such intense craving that Johnny felt a stab of pity. But it was no time for compassion. He put the box into his pocket and said coldly: "I'll give you time to think it over."

Then he looked about for the spot whence the man had dropped down on him. The granite wall that rose so sheer into the fog was notched by a shelf about a dozen feet above the deck. Johnny climbed to it, found a level space where a man, crouched low, would be completely hidden. He came to a quick decision.

Returning to the deck, he tied a manila line under the prisoner's armpits, climbed to the ledge and managed to draw the man up.

"I'll be back," he said. "If you want this stuff, be ready to talk."

The fog was moving in slow convolutions, but it still screened the *Scarab*. The robbers' cruiser could not arrive for at least a half-hour, perhaps an hour. But he would not risk that. With a gag made of the prisoner's handkerchief and his own he cut short the appeals of the man.

ROWING off into the fog, he located Janet and Bob Bently by low, guarded calls. Their long wait had been a chilling and anxious one; now the state of Johnny's clothes, his evident weariness, and his many abrasions gave them a fresh fear, until he explained. They were keenly disappointed that he had no word of their father, but he lightened their worry by the assurance that no shot had been fired during the robbery. The girl's concern over his own discomfort sent a pleasant glow through him.

"You will have to stay here a while longer," he told them. "I've got the man you thought you drowned, Bob—he got ashore, nearly dead. I tied him up and hid him among the rocks. I'm going to hide there too, and wait for the boat. If your father does come back with them, I'll be close enough to lend a hand in an emergency."

"But when they find us gone, and the guard, they'll look—and find you," said Janet anxiously.

"I'll be safe if I keep out of sight. They will never suspect any one to be so close. And I want to borrow your little gun. One man could hold that ledge against three. Anyway, I don't think they will stop long enough to look around—they're going to be worried about saving their own skins. They'll imagine all sorts of things, with nobody aboard your cruiser. I'll listen and watch; maybe I can find out what they've done. You lie low here until I come back. When you hear the other cruiser come in—no matter *what* you hear after that—don't move or make a sound!"

Janet promised, but still demurred against what she considered a dangerous risk for him to take.

"I like danger," he laughed. "But I'll watch my step. I want to interview my prisoner before the others come, so I'll buck along now."

HE took Janet's automatic and with a reassuring smile left them. He did his dinghy out of sight of the cruiser, edged along the difficult shore and climbed aboard. He secured more food, picked up the heavy gaff for possible close-quarter use, and drew himself up to the ledge.

The wall back of the niche sloped away slightly, he noted with satisfaction. It would not deflect a bullet downward. Shots fired from below, should a siege occur, would be wasted unless they made a direct hit. And the slightly raised, irregular parapet of the shelf would afford perfect protection.

The prisoner's tortured eyes begged for relief, and Johnny removed the gag.

"Will you talk now?"

The last remnant of the man's loyalty to his leader had been stripped away by his great desire.

"I'll tell—everything—if you'll give me a shot!"

"If you lie—"

"I won't! Give me—"

"Talk first," said Johnny bluntly. "And talk fast. There are other things to be done. And if you yell, or give any warning to your friends, I'll crack your skull with this gaff!"

But the prisoner needed no urging. Prompted by questions, a disjointed account of the day's affairs came out.

The man, who was known as Rick, had been left to guard the girl and boy. He was on the point of taking some "coke" when the boy got free. He had put the tin box on the cabin roof, gone to recapture his prisoner, and the latter had put him overboard. A current must have carried him; he crawled ashore half-drowned. With the last of his strength he climbed to the shelf above the stern of the cruiser and collapsed there, sick from the blow he had received and from the salt water he had swallowed.

He roused soon after, intending to go aboard again, when Johnny appeared out of the fog, towing his cruiser. Overcome by weakness, he lay shivering for what seemed like hours; he lost track of time. Half-conscious, he thought he heard two shots. When he roused himself and looked down, the *Janet* seemed deserted, but he feared to show himself—was certain of a trap. His gun had been lost in the water. He decided to wait for his pals to return and warn them of the ambush. His need for the drug was on him, though not yet insistent enough to rob him of caution. He waited.

But the craving increased, became too strong for resistance. It was when he was driven to the point of descending for the box, regardless of the risk, that Johnny came aboard the second time, looking worn and injured. Would it be possible to overcome this tattered stranger? Still Rick had hesitated, knowing his own weakened state. But when Johnny stooped over the mooring-line, the watcher became desperate, thinking the cruiser—and his drug—were to be taken away. Desperation made him drop from the ledge—to find the tattered stranger stronger than he appeared.

And having told his story, the suffering man begged for his reward.

"First," commanded Johnny, "who is your leader—the dog that locked up that girl and threatened her?"

"I don't know his name. He calls himself the Skipper. Now give—"

"How many men in his gang?"

"Three of us besides him. You promised—"

"What other job have you birds pulled?"

"Two. The Phantom plans 'em and—"

"Who's he?"

"The Skipper. The papers call him that—he likes it. He's a murdering dog. I've told you enough—I gotta have—"

An eager light suddenly glowed in Johnny's eyes—a light his friends would have recognized. Here was bigger game than he'd thought—a cold and deadly antagonist, according to popular report. The Northwest Phantom! That name had been flashed round the world in dispatches; the press had spread the stories of his two spectacular crimes across front pages. A sordid glamour had been thrown over the unknown trickster and killer by tagging him with the romantic sobriquet.

Johnny forgot his weariness and his discomfort. Here was a chance to match wits with a notoriously daring criminal who had baffled all pursuit. The bright face of danger—brighter than ever!

"He's dangerous as hell!" croaked Rick, suddenly terrified. "He'll kill me for squealing—nothing'll stop him!"

"I'll stop him," said Johnny tersely. "He won't get a chance at you if you do what I say."

"You don't know him—he's a killer! I've seen him shoot three men."

"You hate him and fear him," said Johnny. "Why did you stick to him?"

RICK rolled agonized eyes. "He's got the snow—keeps us supplied—"

"Oh-h—that's it!" Johnny exclaimed, aghast at this sinister means of binding men. "Does he use it himself?"

"No—he's sick—half-crazy, too! Damn him!" the wretched man cried in a burst of fury. "He started me on dope. Bull and Chink, too! I'd kill him if—" His voice wavered, broke; he could not finish. "Keep him away from me," he begged. "And for God's sake give me that stuff! I can't stand it any longer."

"One thing more—in case they get away. Where do you hide out between jobs?"

"Chadburne Sound—up near the head."

"Don't lie! It's not charted—too shoaly and too rocky for a rowboat, even. Nobody goes in there."

"We found a channel—at high tide—"

Johnny took the tin from his pocket, and the prisoner fell silent. Under the twitching and unstrung man's direction, Johnny administered the cocaine. The effect was immediate. It relaxed the wracked body; relief from agony smoothed the harrowed yellowish face. Johnny pocketed the tin and gagged his prisoner again. He wasn't sure what effect the drug might have on Rick's judgment or courage, and there must be no warning cry when those three desperate men appeared.

For Johnny had determined on a daring move, if conditions were right.

CHAPTER VIII

FAINTLY the beat of a gas engine, throttled down, came through the mist. Faintly, less faintly, closer and louder, the sound told of a boat feeling a way along a hazardous shore.

Johnny, flat on the granite ledge, felt his heart thump. He could not see the harbor entrance, nor his own cruiser, although in another half-hour or so, at the rate the fog was lifting, they would be revealed. Luck was holding, he told himself as he threw off the safety of the pistol and put the weapon handily near by. The next few minutes would shape his actions —or determine whether he should remain inactive. His heart thumped, but his hands were steady.

Beside him, behind the shielding parapet, lay Rick, his prisoner, wide-eyed, the sweat of fear rolling into the gag that covered his mouth.

The approaching boat found the entrance, slipped through it, crept into sight. A bearded man crouched in the bow—Chink, evidently. A second stood beside the trunk cabin, a thin man,—tense, watchful, eager, with a pistol in his hand. —the Phantom-Skipper, without doubt. Partly hidden by the cabin, the third man stood at the wheel—Bull, by Rick's description.

"Hi—Rick!" the armed man called, searching the deck of the *Janet* across some fifty yards of water.

Swiftly Johnny whipped away the gag, raised a piece of granite threateningly above Rick's face.

"All right, Skipper!" the man called, obedient to his instruction. Johnny secured the gag in place again.

The helmsman threw out the clutch; the cruiser drove slowly ahead. The lookout went aft; as the boat nosed past he grappled the *Janet's* rail and quickly made fast. Bull stopped the engine. Their boat lay across the *Janet's* stern in the form of a lop-sided T. Peering through a chink in the rim of his shelf, Johnny looked almost straight down on its afterdeck.

The Skipper vaulted the rails, pistol still in hand, and stopped, staring at the shattered lock of the companion doors. A quick anger rose within him; his voice carried its note.

"What are you doing down there?" he called harshly. "I told you to stay away from that girl. She's mine!"

When no answer came he strode to the companionway, peered into the gloom below.

"Come up out of there, you dog!" he cried. "Step, when I speak!"

Silence. He stepped back a pace, peered into the gloom below. "Where are you, Rick?" His voice was sharp, now edged with suspicion and doubt. "What's happened here? Answer, you fool, wherever you are!"

His two companions had followed him. They stopped close at his back.

"Now!" whispered Johnny, and took a deep breath.

THREE heads jerked up at his sharp command, to face a pistol, a steady hand holding it, part of a grimed face topped with tousled hair, not more than six feet above them.

"Throw that gun overboard!" Johnny grated. "And get your hands up and keep 'em up!"

Chink and Bull raised their arms, cringing, automatically following orders in their shock of surprise. The Skipper was of different metal. Like a streak his pistol flipped up, spat flame and sound. It was surprisingly good shooting under the circumstances; the bullet fairly touched Johnny's arm, narrowly missed his head, and was deflected upward by the wall beyond.

Johnny's finger pressed the trigger a fraction of a second later. As close as it was, the Skipper's body was foreshortened by Johnny's position and offered a restricted target even for a trained shot—as Johnny was. In addition, the Skipper was already in motion, and the weapon was strange. . . . Johnny missed.

"Cast off—start the engine!" the Skipper barked, leaping backward and bumping the two. Jarred out of their trance, they turned to run. Their leader, perhaps to cover their retreat, but more likely to vent his feeling against this upset of a carefully planned day, paused to shoot. His bullet and Johnny's passed each other; the two reports were as one. And this time Johnny did not miss. The slug struck the Skipper's right shoulder. As he staggered, Johnny fired again, a lucky shot that disabled his leg. He went down with a curse. His gun clattered to the deck beyond his reach.

"Stop," cried Johnny sharply, "or I'll kill you both!"

Bull and Chink seemed to believe him. Their leader was down; the safety of their cabin was too many steps away. They stopped and their arms came up.

"Sit down against that rail," Johnny ordered. "Over there, away from your boat." Apprehensively, their eyes on the pointing weapon, they obeyed.

JOHNNY almost laughed aloud. Four desperadoes subdued by one man! It was almost too easy! But Rick's tale helped him to understand the submission of this last pair. Their drug-weakened wills had too long been subject to their leader's will; they were creatures of his making, and following orders had become a habit.

"Now," Johnny told them, "chuck your guns overboard—you first and then you." He indicated graphically with his weapon. "No tricks or I'll plug you sure!" He realized how melodramatic he sounded, and gloried in it.

One after the other the cowed men took pistols from their pockets and tossed them into the water. Hope seemed to have abandoned them entirely. They sat humped, abject, their tanned faces tinged a sickly yellow as they looked at their sprawled leader who still lay silent; two trickles of red showed on the planks.

Johnny looked covetously at the Skipper's pistol; he could use it, and it was too close to his prisoners for complete safety. He was on the point of descending for it when he thought of the gaff and the rope that had hoisted Rick. Why risk close quarters? Those two might get up nerve enough to rush him.

He tied the rope to the steel shank, ran half-hitches up the wooden handle, and with the pride of a ten-year-old boy lowered the improvised tackle. At his order Bull crawled over and hung the weapon

on the hook; slowly Johnny drew it up. The cards were all in his hands now; it became a waiting game. All he had to do was to keep the present status until help came. That woodsman wouldn't fail him.

"Where is Bently?" he asked.

"Left him ashore," said Bull sullenly.

"Did you harm him?"

"No—we didn't harm nobody."

Johnny watched vigilantly, the Skipper's pistol in his hand, but the men seemed resigned. Minutes passed—many of them. The fog continued to thin. It had served its purpose—had led the criminals into his hands.

The Skipper moved, turned slowly on his side with a suppressed groan. His eyes opened; he studied the situation in silence—the pointed pistol above and the seated men. Realization of their plight came to him; in spite of his evident pain and the hopelessness of his position, a vivid anger darkened his face.

"You quit?" he grated. "Without fighting? Where're your guns?"

"Overboard," mumbled Bull.

"Where's mine?" His eyes darted about the deck. "Must be here—find it and I'll show you how to—"

"He's got it," Bull told him with a helpless gesture.

Johnny saw the wounded man's eyes narrow, gaze into space. That fertile brain was seeking a loophole.

WHEN next he spoke it was in a low, hurried voice. Johnny could not hear the words, but the tone had the bite of authority. Bull and Chink listened with worried, frightened faces, not daring to object, still not daring to comply with whatever he demanded.

"Cut out that talk!" Johnny ordered. The Skipper paid no attention; he continued to give swift orders. And such was his power to control the two that suddenly, before Johnny could enforce quiet, they sprang up and leaped for their boat.

Prepared, as he thought, for anything, Johnny pressed the trigger, not too hastily, holding for the body of the larger man first, he being in the lead. He tugged, jerked—and snapped out an oath. The safety was on—somehow jarred when the Skipper dropped the pistol. He snapped it off, but that moment of lost time was enough to permit the fleeing men to leap the two rails. Johnny fired as together they dived headlong round the corner of the cabin and into the open companionway. He heard a cry—a hit, but he knew it was only in one of their legs.

He ground his teeth and almost cursed his luck, but checked the impulse. They hadn't got away by a long shot! Their boat was still fast to the *Janet*; he could pot any one who tried to cast off. They might have other weapons aboard, but he could stand a siege much better than they could. And he had the famous Phantom, the brains of the gang, unarmed and effectively crippled. Time would be his ally; the men from the mine would come ultimately.

Watching for the next sign from the cruiser, Johnny shifted his eyes. The Skipper had drawn himself a few inches toward his boat.

"Don't move!" Johnny called.

The wounded man turned a slow face upward. His eyes burned fiercely in their deep sockets; they held the look of defiance of a trapped wolf. His hairy lips were drawn back in a wolflike snarl. Slowly, deliberately, he drew himself another six inches along the deck, and Johnny had to credit the cold nerve of the man. But nerve or not, he must be stopped.

Johnny thrust the pistol out and voiced his ultimatum: "Lie still—or I'll shoot!"

Once more the Skipper turned his malevolent slate-colored eyes upward, bared his teeth ferociously, and hunched his body forward again. Johnny could not bring himself to shoot—and surmised that that was in the mind of the iron-willed man. Or was he trying to draw attention to himself, and away from the others?

Pain seemed to halt the wounded man; he bore it silently.

"Bull!" he cried suddenly.

An answering hail came from the cabin, but no one appeared.

"The soup!" the Skipper called violently. "What the hell—"

"In a minute," the other answered.

"Soup—soup?" thought Johnny anxiously. "What does he mean?"

His thoughts were broken by the sputtering of a gas engine being started, and the question was put aside unanswered. They were going to try to run for it—but Johnny determined grimly that no man would live to cast off that line. He was pretty certain now that there were no other weapons aboard. Just the same, he wormed along the ledge to a new position, more directly over the cruiser and out of range of the windows.

And peering over, his gaze fell on two squat little sacks side by side on the deck, round the corner of the cabin from the companion. The loot—no question about it!

The wounded man was quiet now, whether from pain or a willingness to wait the next move of his confederates Johnny was not sure. But he was sure of one thing: if they *did* manage to get away, they'd go without the platinum.

A moment later he had the rope and gaff. The Skipper watched him lower the hook, and realized what it meant. And he was silent no longer.

He cursed Johnny, and he cursed Bull's slowness in doing whatever he was about. He had faced with the cool control of a gambler the prospect of a violent death; the pain of his wounds he had borne without a sound; but to lie there helpless and see the spoils of his venture slip out of his possession touched a hidden spring in his warped nature, releasing his pent-up control. His voice rose in shrieks of impotent rage as he called on Bull and Chink to do something to prevent this act, the final stroke of misfortune to a daring exploit that had seemed so perfectly planned.

His frenzied words were wasted; Johnny was not interrupted.

IT really wasn't much of a job. He simply angled the hook across one of the bags, gave the line a smart jerk. The keen point pierced the rounded canvas as it had the head of many a salmon, and Johnny pulled the heavy little burden up hand-over-hand. The second sack followed with no interference other than the vociferous words of the Skipper, and Johnny was well pleased with himself.

His complacence was jarred by the appearance of a head above the corner of the cabin—the saffron-faced Chink. It was Bull, then, who had received the bullet. Johnny gripped his weapon, waiting for the expected dash across the deck to the mooring-line and to rescue the wounded man.

Chink did not emerge, but his arm swung up. A light-colored object the size of a fist arched through the air. A faint trail of smoke followed it.

CHAPTER IX

DURING the tiny interval of time the small object was sailing toward him, Johnny comprehended many things, such is the instantaneous action of the brain under stress. "Soup" was nitro-glycerin, in the jargon of the safe-blower—bottled to prevent explosion by percussion. This was such a bottle, with a cap and burning fuse inserted, swathed in cloth to keep it from breaking against the rock.

In addition to these thoughts, another side of his brain registered the fact that the Skipper was writhing toward his craft with all possible speed; that Chink had leaped toward the rail; that Bull had taken his place before the controls and was ready to let in the clutch. All this Johnny knew without conscious thought. Their plan was obvious: Occupy him with the bomb so he would not shoot; in the interval of confusion before the explosion took place, drag the Skipper over the rails, cast off and get under way.

Fascinated, Johnny watched the deadly smoking object curving up toward him, and almost calmly figured his chances. For as it revolved slowly, he saw that the fuse was two or three inches long, and his first impulse—to leap down from the ledge—was forgotten. He would have time to pull out the fuse or to throw the bomb into the water—a safe distance—before it could explode.

He even had time to wonder why Chink had allowed so much fuse—panic, probably; he was doing Bull's job and had lost his nerve—couldn't hold the bomb until the fire was close.

But Chink—perhaps because of this nervousness—saved Johnny the necessity of touching the thing.

The hasty toss was too strong. The object struck the granite above Johnny, who was now on his feet crouching like a ball-player; then it bounced back, touched the rim of the ledge, dropped over, and fell to the *Janet's* deck several feet from the Skipper, who was squirming toward his boat.

The wounded man's eyes had followed the throw; now they gazed at the deadly explosive so close, yet too far to reach without a painful struggle. The hissing fuse spat a stream of smoke as the fire ate its way toward the detonator.

Chink had leaped across the rails; but when his bomb fell in his own path, he reversed himself in the midst of a stride and fled.

Once more the Skipper's iron nerve asserted itself. The imminence of death seemed not to affect him. He cursed the cowardice of Chink, who was now safe in the cabin, but he did it in a low, searing tone. And changing his course, he began painfully to hunch himself toward the sputtering death.

Johnny watched with a fascination that

held him frozen, the desperate advance of the crippled man across the deck. The fuse was consumed within an inch of the cloth wrapping, before the Skipper's hand reached it.

He held the deadly thing a moment, evidently judging the distance the fire had still to go, and turned an evilly triumphant face up to Johnny. A horrible gloating smile appeared on his thin bearded lips.

Johnny held his breath, staring down on the most dramatic scene he had ever witnessed. The next few seconds would decide—

"Whoever you are," the Skipper said rapidly but in a surprisingly controlled voice, "you're a blundering fool! Did you think you could take the Phantom alive?" He looked at the mere stub of hissing fuse and his voice rose. "Nobody—*nobody*—can beat me! Luck is still with me—I'm too clever for you or any one else. I'll die as I've lived, a free man. The famous Phantom will go out with a laugh—when his time comes. *But not now!*"

A wild, exultant laugh broke from his throat. "*Ha, ha, ha, ha!* You puny fool! I talked you into it!"

His body twisted suddenly. His left arm twitched. The fuming rag-wrapped bomb rose straight toward Johnny. As it left his hand, the Skipper shrieked mockingly, "Now *you* laugh! *Ha, ha, ha, ha*—ugh!"

His laughter ended in a gasping groan. Either from lack of strength or the awkwardness of his left arm, the toss fell short. The bomb, its fuse now eaten away, bumped the cliff a foot below the ledge, dropped back.

Johnny, petrified by the suddenness of the events, recovered the use of his faculties, threw himself away from the edge of the shelf and covered his ears. As he clapped his hands to his head, a maniacal peal of laughter reached him—the final gesture of bravado: "*Ha, ha, ha*—"

A shattering crash seemed to shake the world. The air in the little pocket surged upward; dislodged fragments of granite plunged down the slopes; the tinkle of broken glass sounded.

Shaking in every limb, Johnny scrambled to the parapet and stared through the fumes at the havoc created by a few ounces of high explosive.

The Skipper had vanished. Where he had lain there now yawned a ragged, splintery hole in the deck. He had made good his boast, gone out with a laugh.

And yet the damage was localized. The charge of nitro had not been so great after all; ample for its intended purpose, insufficient to damage greatly beyond a circle of a few yards. The *Janet's* rails were twisted, the cabin scarred, the windows broken, whereas Johnny expected to see the cruiser's stern torn away. He drew his first full breath since the Skipper's last desperate cast of the die with Fate.

The slow panting of the outlaws' idling engine still sounded. And Johnny became aware that the two cruisers had drawn apart. The gap between them widened as the ebbing tide drew toward the harbor entrance, now visible through the last of the rising mist. The explosion had cast off the mooring-line.

Two drawn faces appeared at the broken ports of the cabin, to disappear when they saw the craft was free. A frenzied activity followed; hope of escape was miraculously returned to Chink and Bull. The screw churned the placid water, and the idle panting of the exhaust quickened to a sharp staccato as the cruiser rapidly got under way.

CHAPTER X

WITH complete indifference Johnny watched them go. He had not enough energy left to fire a shot at the arm that emerged from the companionway to put the wheel hard over and bring the cruiser about. A sudden lassitude had settled over him. He felt drained, utterly fagged. Reaction from fatigue and nervous tension now made him tremble; he sank back beside his frightened prisoner.

Heavy-eyed, he watched the craft as it circled for the open channel; he was glad it was going. They'd be caught—he knew where they'd head for—by some one else. Thank God, his strain was over!

He shook himself out of his lethargy. The strain was not over for Janet and her brother! They must be terrified over the shots and the explosion, and at seeing the escaping boat. He forced his exhausted body into action and climbed down to his dinghy.

"Janet!" he called. And hearing her tremulous hail and the boy's whoop, he shouted: "It's all right! I've got the platinum! I'm coming over!" He saw them scrambling down to the water, and dipped his oars.

He was within a dozen strokes of them, when a cry from Janet focused his gaze on the harbor entrance. In through its narrow portal drove a sturdy tugboat, to slow quickly and block the passage with the outlaw craft still a dozen lengths from it. The latter swerved aside, then lost its momentum; the fugitives were cornered; it was plain that they had given up their brief hope of escape.

The tug churned ahead; a voice called; Chink and Bull, the latter limping, appeared on deck with their hands raised. The two crafts drew together; several figures stepped into sight on the tug, one bearing a rifle—the gaunt woodsman.

Janet uttered a cry of happy relief.

"Dad! Dad's there! Brand and the others! And Tom Button—good old Tom! The tug—it must have come for his logs— Oh, thank God!"

Johnny's dinghy grounded. He stepped ashore, a caricature of the man he had been that morning. His face and hands were grimed and blood-streaked, his clothes hung in muddy tatters, his shoulders sagged from weariness. But Janet Bently saw only the man who had risked his life and struggled against disheartening odds, for them—and for her.

Her glowing eyes looked deep into his; she held out her hands.

"You did it—you did it! Oh, Johnny!"

He took her extended hands in both of his. That expression in her soft eyes meant more than relief from suspense. It carried a promise that made Johnny's weary heart thump. The bright face of danger—almost too bright this time—but how he loved it! And Janet's bright face—he loved it, too!

THE END.

THE MILLS OF GOD

(Continued from page 84)

morse over his crime, but was at his garage the next morning doing business as usual. Kennedy assured the police that he had nothing whatever to do with the killing of the policeman.

Upon being asked why he had not interfered when the murder was being committed, he said that he was so taken by surprise that he hardly realized what was going on. He said that Browne was in a terrible frenzy and acted like a madman. Even when it was certain his victim was dead he had continued to pump lead into the man's helpless body. Kennedy intimated, although he did not put it in so many words, that if he had made the slightest protest he too would have been slain by the infuriated man.

The day after the crime he suggested to Browne that they both should flee from England. But Browne laughed and told him that there wasn't a chance in the world of their being discovered. Kennedy defended his later flight by saying that while he was innocent, the fact that he had been in company with Browne would place him in a compromising position.

Within twenty-four hours Browne and Kennedy had been formally charged with the murder of Constable Gutteridge and shortly after were placed on trial. Both men pleaded not guilty. What told heavily against them was the gray mask, the searchlight, the jimmy and the stolen car. It was demonstrated that the car could have made the trip from the scene of the murder to Clapham Junction in the time recorded by the speedometer.

When Dr. Lovell took the stand he said that the various medical articles found in the car were precisely like the instruments and supplies he had left in his automobile the night before it was stolen. But naturally he would not swear that they were the identical articles. There was some haggling over this point, but the Chief Justice who presided over the trial assured the jury that the mathematical probabilities were a million to one that they were the same.

There was much speculation regarding what distinction the jury or the court might make between Browne and Kennedy, but when they had agreed upon their verdict, it was to announce that they had found both of the defendants guilty. Thereupon the judge formally sentenced them to hang by the neck until dead.

"I'm not whining for mercy to either God or man," exclaimed Browne to his warders. "What I have done I did deliberately. I did not kill that policeman, but the law will have it that I did, and there you are! All the tears that were ever shed won't alter it. I am ready and fearless; you'll see that Guy Browne will die like a man!"

It is rather difficult to reconcile this attitude with the brutal murder of a constable who was merely performing his duty; and the general opinion was that Browne richly deserved his fate, though sentiment was divided regarding the degree of Kennedy's guilt.

DEEP WATER MEN

(Continued from page 104)

morning, passengers along that gangway heard a violent quarrel in Cabin 92—then it grew louder, punctuated by yells of mortal fear. The door slammed open and Leaming came running out into the saloon—where a dozen passengers were camping on the transoms, too nervous to remain in their rooms—followed by his wife, who was brandishing a pistol and cursing frightfully in Portuguese. Leaming scrambled and clawed up the brass-bound steps of the companion, slid open the door and jumped out upon B Deck gangway—his wife after him, firing shot after shot as she came. As she went through the door a terrific roll hurled her across to the rail and over it into the sea. Leaming was weakly hanging to a stanchion, apparently hit in several places—and he slowly sagged over the rail until he dropped outside.

One of the passengers slowly closed the companion-door. He knew that nothing could be done—launching a boat was impossible in that sea—but he and the other passengers were stunned. This was stark tragedy before their eyes—and there was enough to upset their nerves without that.

At breakfast in the morning, there was a general atmosphere of gloom in the saloon—and considerable surprise that Sir Edward should be laughing and joking with the Captain as usual. The girls expressed something of this—and Coffin thereupon explained, so that practically everyone could hear:

"As soon as the weather quieted down, both of the Leamings would have been ironed and put in the brig until we reached Colombo—where they would have been shipped back to London by first boat to stand trial for several country-house burglaries and at least two murders. Mrs. Leaming was a Portuguese by the name of Figuera—not a woman at all! It was he who stole the Marchioness of Pandrith's jewels—which, by the way, have been recovered. There is no doubt whatever that both of them would have been executed by law. On the whole, I think they should be very well satisfied to be decently drowned while trying to kill each other in a quarrel over the loot!"

Some weeks later, Sir Edward having left the *Salwin* at Port Said and gone home via Brindisi, on the ground that there was no longer any need for his remaining aboard, the rewards offered for the Pandrith jewels were paid over to him. Out of these, he gave Captain Williams a thousand pounds—and two hundred each to Norrey, McKinnon and the three girls—saying they'd all taken a hand either in proving conspiracy, saving the steamer from going to the bottom, or recovering the jewels.

SINCE Tooner & Smithson were circumstantially implicated in "conspiracy to destroy"—a clerk in their employ having shipped the junk in the name of a firm which didn't exist—Lloyd's promptly canceled their policy on the boat. As the Singapore-Eastern Line wouldn't have kept the boat as a gift after Captain Williams' report came in, they returned her to Tooner & Smithson's hands—canceling the ninety-day note for eighty thousand pounds which they had given as a first payment on her. At last accounts the *Salwin* lay rusting in the mud at Hartlepool. Her designer had disappeared.

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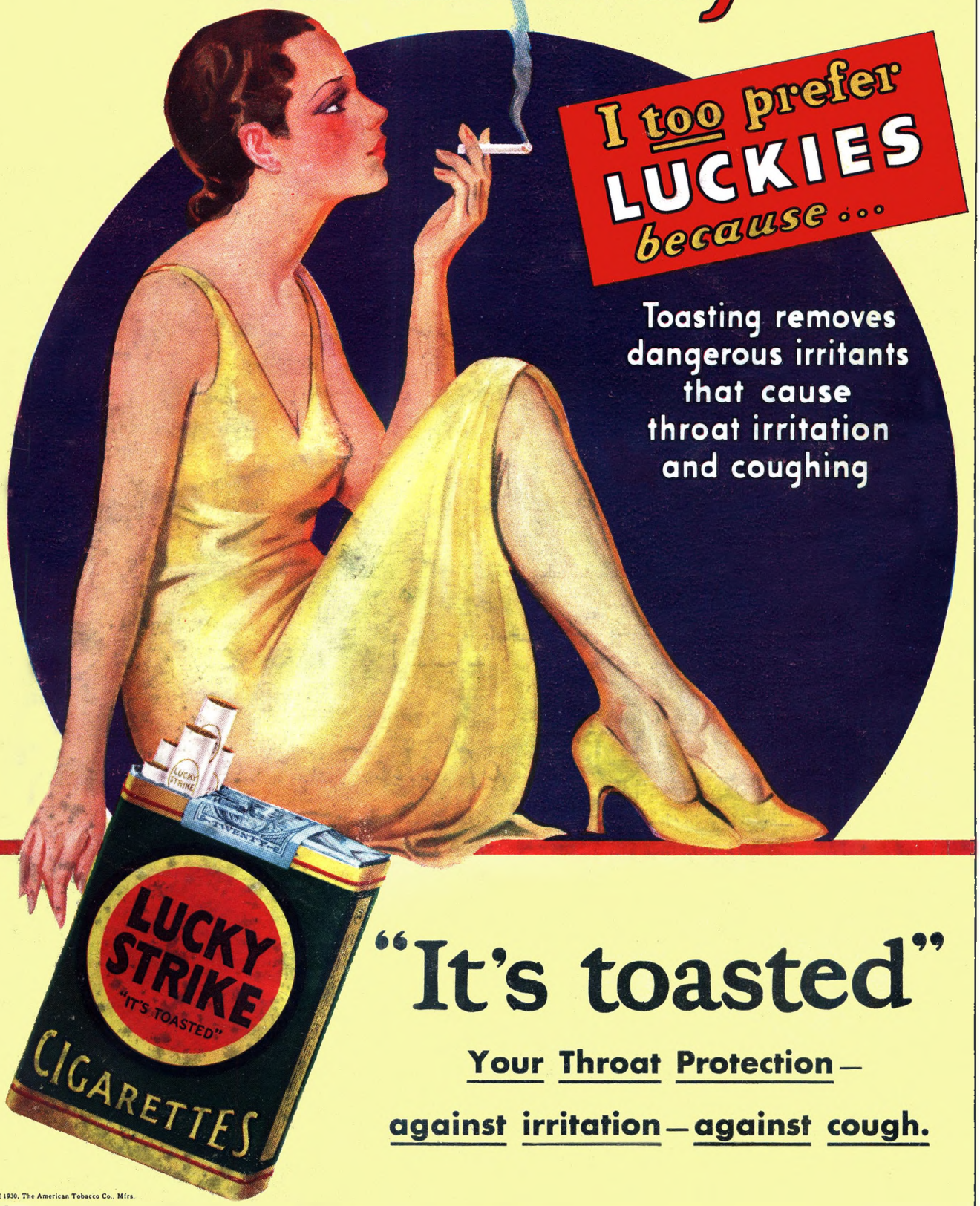

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