November

15 cents

BLUE BOOK

An illustrated magazine of Adventure, Mystery and Humor

NRA CODE

SWORDS *of* MARS

by Edgar Rice Burroughs *who wrote* TARZAN

Wm. Makin, S. Andrew Wood, Beatrice Grimshaw

The Chariot of Escape

A MASTER story-teller returns to you in this issue with a new triumph and a new fascination.

Not only in science and discovery and mechanics does the world progress, but in the arts as well. So the fiction-writers of our day have at their command a skill unknown to the narrators of the Arabian Nights, and unparalleled among the ponderous Victorian novelists. Moreover the tremendous advances in knowledge of recent years have released man's imagination, and have made him realize that no matter how fantastic his idea of today, the facts of tomorrow may reduce it to the commonplace.

So Edgar Rice Burroughs, trained and skilled in his craft as only a modern writer can be, endowed with a splendid creative imagination and supplied with all the far-reaching knowledge of 1934, is enabled to offer you a story without precedent in its allurement—a vehicle of escape from the humdrum that enables you in fancy to ride the stars themselves.

We are confident that you will share our enthusiasm for "The Swords of Mars"—and the other stories of this issue. Next month of course it will continue; and another old Blue Book favorite, Warren Hastings Miller, will rejoin you with one of his best stories. Beatrice Grimshaw will contribute a third and even more colorful drama of far "New Barbary" and its tumultuous new gold-field. And there will be a wealth of other spirited stories by such writers as Robert Mill, Conrad Richter, Leland Jamieson, William Makin, Bigelow Neal and the like. . . . The vote in the matter of reprinting some of Clarence Herbert New's stories isn't yet all in; but we hope, in this connection, to have an interesting announcement to make soon.

—The Editor

"Fight Fire With Fire!"

Be sure to read (in our next issue) this swift-paced novelette of a New Deal diplomat's battle against the secret agents of Europe. . . .

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

BLUE BOOK

NOVEMBER, 1934 MAGAZINE VOL. 60, NO. 1

Two Remarkable Serials

Spirited Short Stories

A Fine Detective Novelette

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events.

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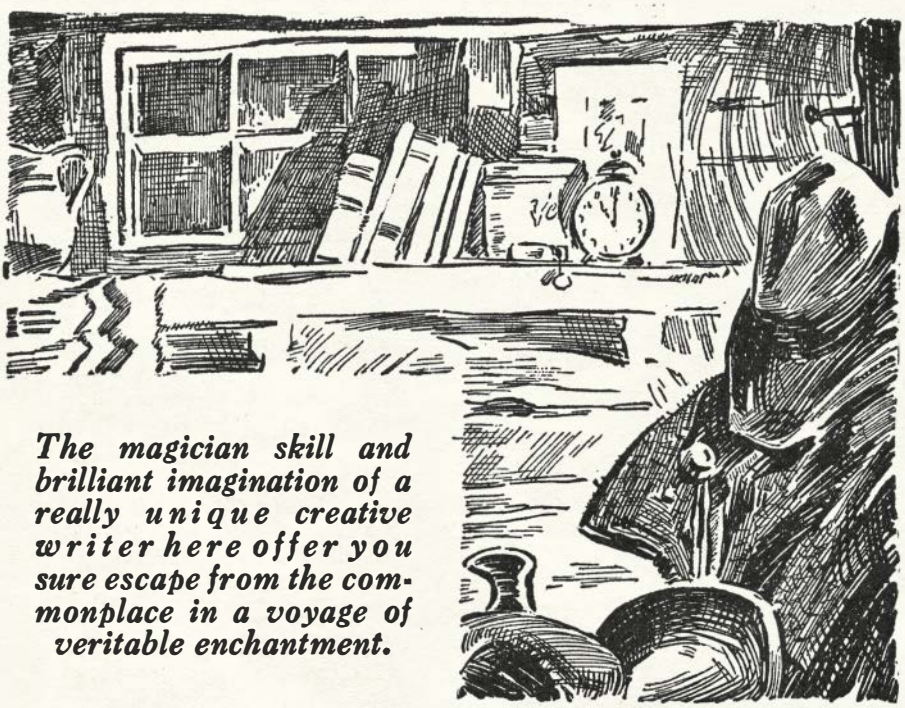
A PRIZE OFFER

THE truth that is stranger than fiction; the hour so crowded with excitement that it shines bright before all others in memory—these are tremendously interesting to everyone. For this reason The Blue Book Magazine prints each month in our Real Experience Department (beginning on Page 132 of this issue) a group of true stories contributed by our readers. And for this department we are glad to receive true stories of real experience, told in about 2,000 words; and for each of the five best of these we will pay fifty dollars.

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

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



The magician skill and brilliant imagination of a really unique creative writer here offer you sure escape from the commonplace in a voyage of veritable enchantment.

SWORDS of MARS

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Robert Fink

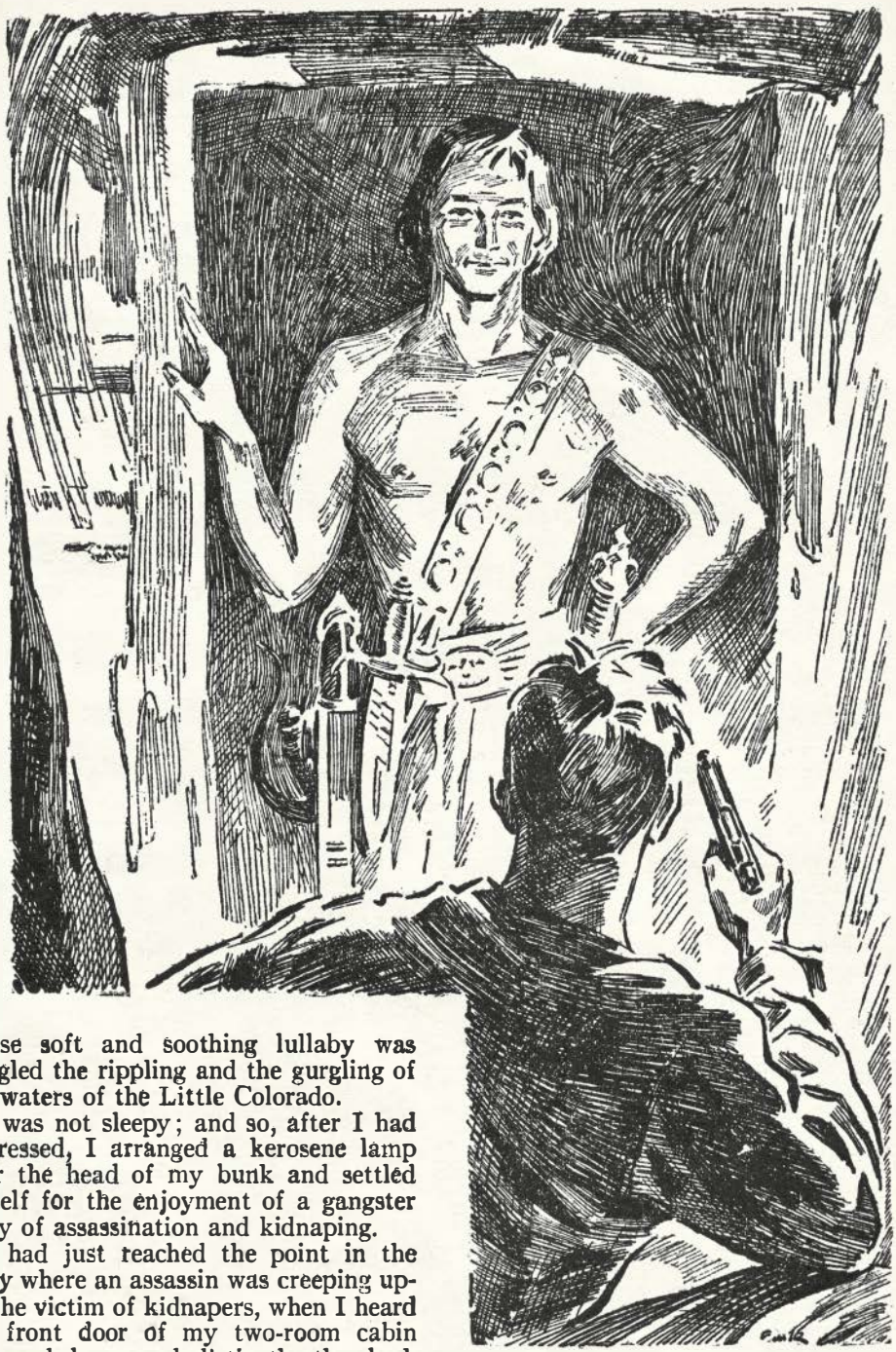
THE moon had risen above the rim of the cañon near the headwaters of the Little Colorado. It bathed in soft light the willows that line the bank of the little mountain torrent, and the cottonwood trees beneath which stood the tiny cabin where I had been camping for a few weeks in the White Mountains of Arizona.

I stood upon the little porch of the cabin enjoying the soft beauties of this Arizona night; and as I contemplated the peace and serenity of the scene, it did not seem possible that but a few years before the fierce and terrible Geronimo had stood in this same spot before this self-same cabin, or that generations before that, this seemingly deserted cañon had been peopled by a race now extinct.

I had been seeking in their ruined cities for the secret of their genesis and the even stranger secret of their extinction. How I wished that those crumbling lava cliffs might speak and tell me of all that they had witnessed since they poured out in a molten stream from the cold and silent cones that dot the mesa land beyond the cañon!

My thoughts returned again to Geronimo and his fierce Apache warriors; and these vagrant musings engendered memories of Captain John Carter of Virginia, whose dead body had lain for ten long years in some forgotten cave in the mountains not far south of this very spot —the cave in which he had sought shelter from pursuing Apaches.

My eyes, following the pathway of my thoughts, searched the heavens until they rested upon the red eye of Mars shining there in the blue-black void; and so it was that Mars was uppermost in my mind as I turned into my cabin and prepared for a good night's rest beneath the rustling leaves of the cottonwoods, with



whose soft and soothing lullaby was mingled the rippling and the gurgling of the waters of the Little Colorado.

I was not sleepy; and so, after I had undressed, I arranged a kerosene lamp near the head of my bunk and settled myself for the enjoyment of a gangster story of assassination and kidnaping.

I had just reached the point in the story where an assassin was creeping upon the victim of kidnapers, when I heard the front door of my two-room cabin open and close—and, distinctly, the clank of metal upon metal.

Now, in so far as I knew, there was no one other than myself camped upon the headwaters of the Little Colorado; and certainly no one who had the right to enter my cabin without knocking. I sat up in my bunk and reached under my pillow for the .45 automatic that I keep there.

The oil lamp faintly illuminated my bedroom, but its main strength was concentrated upon me. The outer room was in darkness.

"Who's there?" I demanded, releasing the safety-catch on my automatic and sliding my feet out of bed to the floor. Then, without waiting for a reply, I blew out the lamp.

A low laugh came from the adjoining room. "It is a good thing your wall is

full of cracks," said a deep voice, "or otherwise I might have stumbled into trouble. That's a mean-looking gun I saw before you blew out your lamp."

THE voice was familiar, but I could not definitely place it.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"Light your lamp and I'll come in," replied my nocturnal visitor. "If you're nervous, you can keep your gun on the doorway, but please don't squeeze the trigger until you have had a chance to recognize me."

"Damn!" I exclaimed under my breath, as I started to relight the lamp.

"Chimney still hot?" inquired the deep voice from the outer room.

"Plenty hot," I replied, as I succeeded at last in igniting the wick and replacing the hot chimney. "Come in."

I remained seated on the edge of the bunk, but I kept the doorway covered with my gun. I heard again the clanking of metal upon metal, and then a man stepped into the light of my feeble lamp and halted in the doorway. He was a tall man, apparently between twenty-five and thirty, with gray eyes and black hair. He was naked but for leather trappings that supported weapons of unearthly design—a short sword, a long sword, a dagger and a pistol; but my eyes did not need to inventory all these details before I recognized him. The instant that I saw him, I tossed my gun aside and sprang to my feet.

"John Carter!" I exclaimed.

"None other," he replied, with one of his rare smiles.

We grasped hands. "You haven't changed much," he said.

"Nor you at all," I replied.

He sighed, and then smiled again. "God alone knows how old I am. I can recall no childhood; nor have I ever looked other than I look tonight. But come!" he added, "You mustn't stand here in your bare feet. Hop back into bed again. These Arizona nights are none too warm."

He drew up a chair and sat down. "What were you reading?" he asked, as he picked up the magazine that had fallen to the floor, and glanced at the illustration. "It looks like a lurid tale."

"A pretty little bedtime story of assassination and kidnaping," I explained.

"Haven't you enough of that on earth without reading about it for entertainment?" he inquired. "We have on Mars."

"It is an expression of the normal morbid interest in the horrifying," I said. "There is really no justification, but the fact remains that I enjoy such tales. However, I have lost my interest now. I want to hear about you and Dejah Thoris and Carthoris, and what brought you here. It has been years since you have been back. I had given up all hope of ever seeing you again."

He shook his head—a little sadly, I thought. "It is a long story, a story of love and loyalty, of hate and crime, a story of dripping swords, of strange places and strange people upon a stranger world. The living of it might have driven a weaker man to madness. To have one you love taken from you, and not to know her fate!"

I did not have to ask whom he meant. It could be none other than the incomparable Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium, and consort of John Carter, Warlord of Mars—the woman for whose deathless beauty a million swords had been kept red with blood on the dying planet for many a long year.

For a long time John Carter sat in silence staring at the floor. I knew that his thoughts were forty-three million miles away, and I was loath to interrupt them.

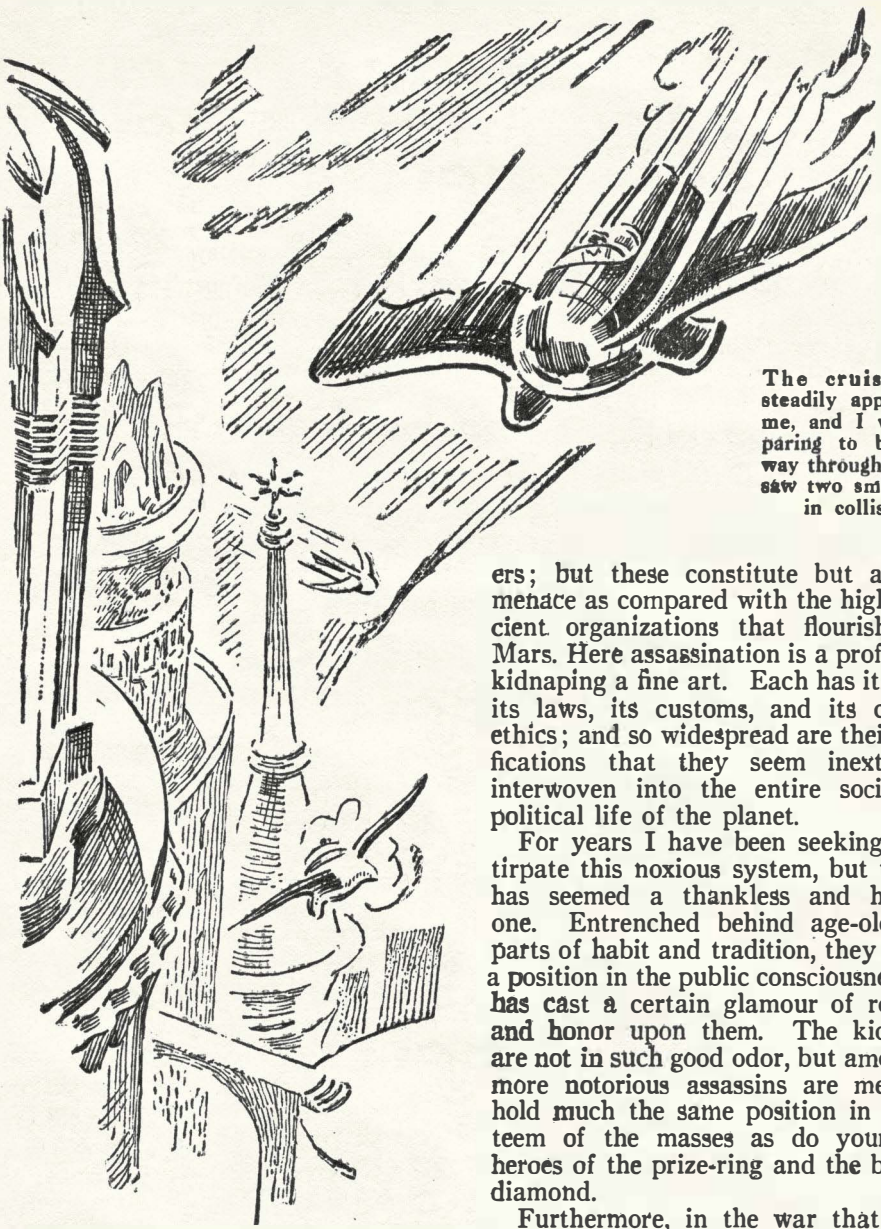
At last he spoke: "Human nature is alike everywhere," he said. He flicked the edge of the magazine lying on my bunk. "We think that we want to forget the tragedies of life, but we do not. If they momentarily pass us by and leave us in peace, we must conjure them again, either in our thoughts or through some such medium as you have adopted. As you find a grim pleasure in reading about them, so I find a grim pleasure in thinking about them.

"But my memories of that great tragedy are not all sad. There was high adventure; there was noble fighting; and in the end there was— But perhaps you would like to hear about it."

I told him that I would, so he told me the story that I have set down here, in his own words, as nearly as I can recall them.

OVER nineteen hundred miles east of the Twin Cities of Helium, at about Lat. 30° S., Lon. 172° E., lies Zodanga. It has ever been a hotbed of sedition since the day that I led the fierce green hordes of Thark against it and, reducing it, added it to the Empire of Helium.

Within its frowning walls lives many a Zodangan who feels no loyalty for



The cruiser was steadily approaching me, and I was preparing to bluff my way through, when I saw two small ships in collision.

Helium; and here, too, have gathered numbers of the malcontents of the great empire ruled over by Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Helium. To Zodanga have migrated not a few of the personal and political enemies of the house of Tardos Mors, and of his son-in-law John Carter, Prince of Helium.

I visited the city as seldom as possible, as I had little love either for it or its people; but my duties called me there occasionally, principally because it was the headquarters of one of the most powerful guilds of assassins on Mars.

The land of my birth is cursed with its gangsters, its killers, and its kidnapers; but these constitute but a slight menace as compared with the highly efficient organizations that flourish upon Mars. Here assassination is a profession; kidnaping a fine art. Each has its guild, its laws, its customs, and its code of ethics; and so widespread are their ramifications that they seem inextricably interwoven into the entire social and political life of the planet.

For years I have been seeking to extirpate this noxious system, but the job has seemed a thankless and hopeless one. Entrenched behind age-old ramparts of habit and tradition, they occupy a position in the public consciousness that has cast a certain glamour of romance and honor upon them. The kidnapers are not in such good odor, but among the more notorious assassins are men who hold much the same position in the esteem of the masses as do your great heroes of the prize-ring and the baseball diamond.

Furthermore, in the war that I was waging upon them, I was also handicapped by the fact that I must fight almost alone, for even those of the red men of Mars who felt as I did upon the subject, also believed that to take sides with me against the assassins would prove but another means for committing suicide. Yet I know that even this would not have deterred them, had they felt that there was any hope of eventual success. That I had for so long escaped the keen blade of the assassin, seemed little less than a miracle to them, and I presume that only my extreme self-confidence in my ability to take care of myself prevented me from holding the same view.

Dejah Thoris and my son, Carthoris, often counseled me to abandon the fight; but all my life I have been loath to admit defeat, nor ever have I willingly abandoned the chance for a good fight. Certain types of killings upon Mars are punishable by death, and most of the killings of the assassins fell in such categories. So far, this was the only weapon that I had been able to use against them, and then not always successfully, for it was usually difficult to prove their crime, since even eyewitnesses feared to testify against them. But I had gradually evolved and organized another means of combating them. This consisted of a secret organization of super-assassins. In other words, I had elected to fight the devil with fire.

When an assassination was reported, my organization acted in the rôle of detective to ferret out the murderer. Then it acted as judge and jury, and eventually as executioner. Its every move was made in secret, but over the heart of each of its victims an "*X*" was cut with the sharp point of a dagger.

We usually struck quickly, if we could strike at all; and soon the public and the assassins learned to connect that "*X*" over the heart as the mark of the hand of justice falling upon the guilty; and I know that in a number of the larger cities of Helium we greatly reduced the death-rate by assassination. Otherwise, however, we seemed as far from our goal as when we first started. Our poorest results had been gained in Zodanga; and the assassins of that city openly boasted that they were too smart for me, for although they did not know positively, they guessed that the *X's* upon the breasts of their dead comrades were made by an organization headed by me. . . .

I hope that I have not bored you with this exposition of these dry facts, but it seemed necessary to me that I do so as an introduction to the adventures that befell me, taking me to a strange world in an effort to thwart the malign forces that had brought tragedy into my life.

IN my fight against the assassins of Barsoom, I had never been able to enlist many agents to serve in Zodanga; and those stationed there worked only in a half-hearted manner, so that our enemies had good reason to taunt us with our failure. To say that such a condition annoyed me would be putting it mildly; and so I decided to go in person to Zodanga, not only for the purpose of making a thorough investigation, but to give the Zodangan assassins a lesson that could cause them to laugh out of the other side of their mouths.

I decided to go secretly and in disguise, for I knew that if I were to go there as John Carter, Warlord of Mars, I could learn nothing more than I already knew. Disguise for me is a relatively simple matter. My white skin and black hair have made me a marked man upon Mars, where only the auburn-haired Lotharians and the totally bald Therns have skin as light-colored as mine.

THOUGH I had every confidence in the loyalty of my retainers, one never knows when a spy may insinuate himself into the most carefully selected organization. For this reason, I kept my plans and preparations secret from even the most trusted members of my entourage.

In the hangars on the roof of my palace are flyers of various models, and I selected from among them a one-man scout flyer from which I surreptitiously removed the insignia of my house. Finding a pretext to send the hangar guard away for a short time early one evening, I smuggled aboard the flyer those articles that I needed to insure a satisfactory disguise. In addition to a red pigment for my own skin and paints for the body of the flyer, I included a complete set of Zodangan harness, metal and weapons.

That evening I spent alone with Dejah Thoris; and about twenty-five xats past the eighth zode, or at midnight earth time, I changed to a plain leather harness without insignia, and prepared to leave upon my adventure.

"I wish you were not going, my prince; I have a premonition that—well—that we are both going to regret it."

"The assassins must be taught a lesson," I replied, "or no one's life will be safe upon Barsoom. By their acts they have issued a definite challenge; and that I cannot permit to go unnoticed."

"I suppose not," she replied. "You won your high position here with your sword; and by your sword I suppose you must maintain it, but I wish it were otherwise."

I took her in my arms and kissed her and told her not to worry—that I would not be gone long. Then I went to the hangar on the roof.

The hangar guard may have thought that it was an unusual time of night for me to be going abroad, but he could

have had no suspicion as to my destination. I took off toward the west, and presently was cutting the thin air of Mars beneath the myriad stars and the two gorgeous satellites of the red planet.

The moons of Mars have always intrigued me; and tonight, as I gazed upon them, I felt the lure of the mystery that surrounds them: Thuria, the nearer moon, known to earth men as Phobos, is the larger; and as it circles Barsoom at a distance of only 5,800 miles, it presents a most gorgeous sight. Cluros, the farther moon, though only a little smaller in diameter than Thuria, appears to be much smaller because of the greater distance of its orbit from the planet, lying as it does, 14,500 miles away.

For ages, there was a Martian legend, which remained for me to explode, that the black race, the so-called First-born of Barsoom, lived upon Thuria, the nearer moon; but at the time I exposed the false gods of Mars, I demonstrated conclusively that the black race lived in the Valley Dor, near the south pole of the planet.

Thuria, seemingly hanging low above me, presented a gorgeous spectacle, which was rendered still more remarkable by the fact that she apparently moved through the heavens from west to east, due to the fact that her orbit is so near the planet that she performs a revolution in less than one-third of that of the diurnal rotation of Mars. But as I watched her this night in dreamy fascination, little could I guess the part that she was so soon to play in the thrilling adventures and the great tragedy that lay just beyond my horizon.

WHEN I was well beyond the Twin Cities of Helium, I cut off my running lights and circled south, gradually heading toward the east until I held a true course for Zodanga. Setting my destination compass, I was free to turn my attention to other matters, knowing that this clever invention would carry the ship safely to its destination.

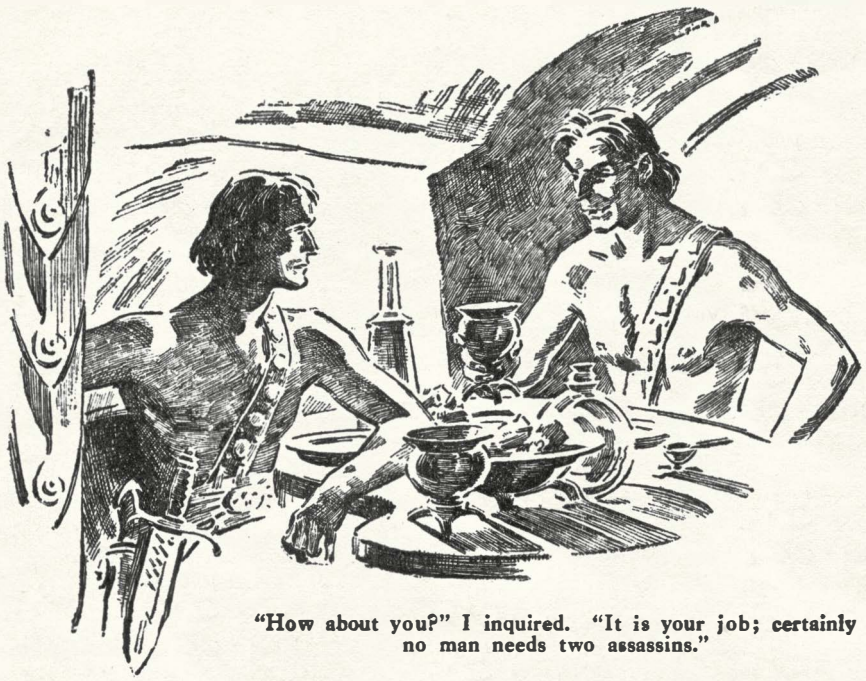
My first task was to repaint the hull of the flyer. I buckled straps onto my harness and onto rings in the gunwale of the craft; and then, lowering myself over the side, I proceeded to my task. It was slow work, for after painting as far as I could reach in all directions, I had to come on deck and change the position of the straps, so that I could cover another portion of the hull. But toward morning it was finally accomplished, though I cannot say that I looked with pride upon the result as anything of an artistic achievement. However, I had succeeded in covering the old paint and thus disguising the craft in so far as color was concerned. This accomplished, I threw my brush and the balance of the paint overboard, following them with the leather harness that I had worn from home.

As I had got almost as much paint upon myself as upon the hull of the boat, it took me some little time to erase the last vestige of this evidence that would acquaint a discerning observer with the fact that I had recently repainted my craft. This done, I applied the red pigment evenly to every square inch of my naked body, so that after I had finished, I could have passed anywhere on Mars as a member of the dominant red race of Martians; and when I had donned the Zodangan harness, metal and weapons, I felt that my disguise was complete. It was now mid-forenoon; and after eating, I lay down to snatch a few hours of sleep.

ENTERING a Martian city after dark is likely to be fraught with danger for one whose mission may not be readily explained. It was, of course, possible that I might sneak in without lights; but the chances of detection by one of the numerous patrol-boats was too great; and as I could not safely have explained my mission or revealed my identity, I should most certainly be sent to the pits, and doubtless receive the punishment that is meted to spies—long imprisonment in the pits, followed by death in the arena.

Were I to enter with lights, I should most certainly be apprehended; and as I should not be able to answer questions satisfactorily, and as there would be no one to sponsor me, my predicament would be almost equally difficult; so as I approached the city before dawn of the second day, I cut out my motor and drifted idly well out of range of the searchlights of the patrol-boats.

Even after daylight had come, I did not approach the city until the middle of the forenoon, at a time when other ships were moving freely back and forth across the walls. By day, and unless a city is actively at war, there are few restrictions placed upon the coming and going of small craft. Occasionally the patrol-boats stop and question one of



"How about you?" I inquired. "It is your job; certainly no man needs two assassins."

these; and as fines are heavy for operating without licenses, a semblance of regulation is maintained by the government. In my case, it was not a question of a license to fly a ship, but of my right to be in Zodanga at all; so my approach to the city was not without its spice of adventure.

At last the city wall lay almost directly beneath me; and I was congratulating myself upon my good fortune, as there was no patrol-boat in sight, but I had congratulated myself too soon, for almost immediately there appeared from behind a lofty tower one of those swift little cruisers that are commonly used in all Martian cities for patrol service, and it was headed directly toward me.

I was moving slowly, so as not to attract unfavorable attention; but I can assure you that my mind was working rapidly. The one-man scout flyer that I was using is very fast, and I might easily have turned and outdistanced the patrol-boat; however, there were two very important objections to such a plan. One was that, unquestionably, the patrol-boat would immediately open fire on me, with the chances excellent that they would bring me down. The other was, that should I escape, it would be practically impossible for me to enter the city again in this way, as my boat would be marked; and the entire patrol system would be on the lookout for it.

The cruiser was steadily approaching me, and I was preparing to bluff my way through with a cock-and-bull story of having been long absent from Zodanga and having lost my papers while I was away. The best that I could hope from this was that I should merely be fined for not having my papers, and as I was well supplied with money, such a solution of my difficulties would be a most welcome one.

This, however, was a very slim hope, as it was almost a foregone conclusion that they would insist upon knowing who my sponsor was at the time my lost papers were issued; and without a sponsor, I would be in a bad way.

Just as they got within hailing distance, and I was sure that they were about to order me to stop, I heard a loud crash above me; and glancing up, I saw two small ships in collision. I could see the officer in command of the patrol-boat plainly now; and as I glanced at him, I saw him looking up. He barked a short command; the nose of the patrol-boat was elevated; and it circled rapidly upward, its attention diverted from me by a matter of vastly greater importance. While it was thus engaged, I slipped quietly on into the city of Zodanga.

At the time, many years ago, that Zodanga was looted by the green hordes of Thark, it had been almost completely razed. It was the old city with which I had been most familiar, and I had visited the rebuilt Zodanga upon but one or two occasions since.

Cruising idly about, I finally found

that for which I sought—an unpretentious public hangar in a shabby quarter of the city. There are quarters in every city with which I am familiar where one may go without being subjected to curious questioning, so long as one does not run afoul of the officers of the law. This hangar and this quarter of Zodanga looked such a place to me. The hangar was located on the roof of a very old building that had evidently escaped the ravages of the Tharks. The landing-space was small, and the hangars themselves dingy and unkempt.

AS my craft settled to the roof, a fat man, well smeared with black grease, appeared from behind a flyer upon the engine of which he was evidently working.

He looked at me questioningly, and I thought with none too friendly expression. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"Is this a public hangar?"

"Yes."

"I want space for my craft."

"Have you got any money?" he demanded.

"I have a little. I will pay a month's rental in advance," I replied.

The frown melted from his face. "That hangar there is vacant," he said, pointing. "Run her in there."

Having housed my flyer and locked the controls, I returned to the man and paid him.

"Is there a good public house near by?" I asked. "One that is cheap and not too dirty."

"There is one right in this building," he replied, "—as good as any that you will find around here."

This suited me perfectly, as when one is on an adventure of this nature, one never knows how quickly a flyer may be required or how soon it may be all that stands between one and death.

Leaving the surly hangar proprietor, I descended the ramp that opened onto the roof.

The elevators ran only to the floor below the roof, and here I found one standing with its door open. The operator was a dissipated-looking young fellow in shabby harness.

"Ground floor?" he asked.

"I am looking for lodgings," I replied. "I want to go to the office of the public house in this building."

He nodded, and the elevator started down. The building appeared even older and more dilapidated from the inside than the out, and the upper floors seemed practically untenanted.

"Here you are," he said presently, stopping the elevator and opening the door.

In Martian cities, public houses such as this are merely places to sleep. There are usually but few, if any, private rooms. Along the side walls of long rooms are low platforms upon which each guest places his sleeping-silks and furs in a numbered space allotted to him.

Owing to the prevalence of assassination, these rooms are patrolled night and day by armed guards furnished by the proprietor; and it is largely because of this fact that private rooms are not in demand. In houses that cater to women, these guests are segregated; and there are more private rooms and no guards in their quarters, as the men of Barsoom seldom if ever kill a woman—or I may qualify that by saying that they do not ordinarily employ assassins to kill them.

The public house to which chance had led me catered only to men. There were no women in it. The proprietor, a burly man whom I later learned was formerly a famous panthan, or soldier of fortune, assigned me a sleeping-place and collected his fee for a day's lodging; and after directing me to an eating-place in response to my inquiries, left me.

Scarcely any of the other guests were in the house at this hour of the day. Their personal belongings, their sleeping-silks and furs, were in the spaces allotted to them; and even though there had been no guards patrolling the room, they would have been safe, as thievery is practically unknown upon Mars.

I HAD brought with me some old, very ordinary sleeping-silks and furs, and these I deposited upon the platform. Sprawled in the adjoining space was a shifty-eyed individual with an evil face. I had noticed that he had been eying me surreptitiously ever since I had entered. At last he spoke to me.

"Kaor!" he said, using the familiar form of Martian greeting.

I nodded and replied in kind.

"We are to be neighbors," he ventured.

"So it would seem," I replied.

"You are evidently a stranger, at least in this part of the city," he continued. "I overheard you asking the proprietor where you could find an eating-place. The one he directed you to is not as good as the one that I go to. I am going there

now; if you'd like to come along, I'll be glad to take you."

There was a furtiveness about the man which, in connection with his evil face, assured me that he was of the criminal class; and as it was among this class that I expected to work, his suggestion dovetailed nicely with my plans; so I quickly accepted.

"My name is Rapas," he said. "They call me Rapas the Ulsio," he added, not without a touch of pride.

Now I was sure that I had judged him correctly, for Ulsio means *rat*.

"My name is Vandor," I told him, giving him the alias I had selected for this adventure.

"By your metal, I see that you are a Zodangan," he said as we walked from the room to the elevators.

"Yes," I replied; "but I have been absent from the city for years. In fact, I have not been here since it was burned by the Tharks. There have been so many changes that it is like coming to a strange city."

"From your looks, I'd take you to be a fighting man by profession," he suggested.

I nodded. "I am a panthan. I have served for many years in another country, but recently I killed a man and had to leave." I knew that if he were a criminal, as I had guessed, this admission of a murder upon my part would make him freer with me.

His shifty eyes glanced quickly at me and then away; and I saw that he was impressed, one way or another, by my admission. On the way to the eating-place, which lay in another avenue a short distance from our public house, we carried on a desultory conversation. And when we had seated ourselves at a table, Rapas ordered drinks; immediately after he had downed the first one his tongue loosened.

"Are you going to remain in Zodanga?" he asked.

"That depends upon whether or not I can find a living here," I replied. "My money won't last long; and of course, leaving my last employer under the circumstances I did, I have no papers; so I may have trouble in finding a place."

WHILE we were eating our meal, Rapas continued to drink; and the more he drank, the more talkative he became.

"I have taken a liking to you, Vandor," he announced presently; "and if you are the right kind, as I think you are, I can find you employment." Finally he leaned close to me and whispered in my ear. "I am a gorthan," he said.

Here was an incredible piece of good fortune. I had hoped to contact the assassins, and the first man whose acquaintance I had made admitted that he was one.

I shrugged. "Not much money in that," I said.

"There is plenty, if you are well connected," he assured me.

"But I am not connected well, or otherwise, here in Zodanga," I argued. "I don't belong to the Zodangan guild; and as I told you, I had to come away without any papers."

He looked around him furtively to see if any were near who might overhear him. "The guild is not necessary," he whispered; "we do not all belong to the guild."

"A good way to commit suicide," I suggested.

"Not for a man with a good head on him. Look at me; I am an assassin, and I don't belong to the guild. I make good money too, and I don't have to divide up with anyone." He took another drink. "There are not many with as good heads on them as Rapas the Ulsio."

He leaned closer to me. "I like you, Vandor," he said; "you are a good fellow." His voice was getting thick from drink. "I have one very rich client; he has lots of work, and he pays well. I can get you an odd job with him now and again. Perhaps I can find steady employment for you. How would you like that?"

I shrugged. "A man must live," I said; "he can't be too particular about his job when he hasn't very much money."

"Well, you come along with me; I am going there tonight. While Fal Sivas talks to you, I will tell him that you are just the man that he needs.

"But how about you?" I inquired. "It is your job; certainly no man needs two assassins."

"Never mind about me," said Rapas; "I have other ideas in my head." He stopped suddenly and gave me a quick, suspicious look. It was almost as though what he had said had sobered him. He shook his head, evidently in an effort to clear it. "What did I say?" he demanded. "I must be getting drunk."

"You said that you had other plans. I suppose you mean that you have a better job in view."

"Is that all I said?" he demanded.

"You said that you would take me to a man called Fal Sivas who would give me employment."

Rapas seemed relieved. "Yes, I will take you to see him tonight."

CHAPTER II

Fal Sivas

FOR the balance of the day Rapas slept, while I occupied my time puttering around my flyer in the public hangar on the roof of the hostelry. This was a far more secluded spot than the public sleeping-room or the streets of the city, where some accident might pierce my disguise and reveal my identity.

As I worked over my motor, I recalled Rapas' sudden fear that he had revealed something to me in his drunken conversation; and I wondered idly what it might be. It had come following his statement that he had other plans. What plans? Whatever they were, they were evidently nefarious, or he would not have been so concerned when he feared that he had revealed them. My short acquaintance with Rapas had convinced me that my first appraisal of his character was correct and that his sobriquet of Rapas the Rat was well deserved.

I chafed under the enforced inactivity of the long day; but at last evening came, and Rapas the Ulsio and I left our quarters and made our way once more to the eating-place. Rapas was sober now; nor did he take but a single drink with his meal. "You've got to have a clear head when you talk to old Fal Sivas," he said. "By my first ancestor, no shrewder brain was ever hatched of a woman's egg."

After we had eaten, we went out into the night; and Rapas led me through broad avenues and down narrow alleyways until we came to a large building that stood near the eastern wall of Zodanga. It was a dark and gloomy pile, and the avenue that ran before it was unlighted. It stood in a district given over to warehouses, and at this time of night its surroundings were deserted. Rapas approached a small doorway hidden in an angle of a buttress. I saw him groping with his hands at one side of the door, and presently he stepped back and waited.

"Not everyone can gain admission to old Fal Sivas' place," he remarked, with a tinge of boastfulness. "You have to know the right signal, and that means that you have to be pretty well in the confidence of the old man."

We waited in silence then for perhaps two or three minutes. No sound came from beyond the door; but presently a very small round port in its surface opened; and in the dim light of the farther moon I saw an eye appraising us. Then a voice spoke.

"Ah, the noble Rapas!" The words were whispered; and following them, the door swung in.

The passage beyond was narrow, and the man who had opened the door flattened himself against the wall that we might pass. Then he closed the door behind us and followed us along a dark corridor, until we finally emerged into a small, dimly lighted room.

Here our guide halted. "The master did not say that you were bringing another with you," he said to Rapas.

"He did not know it," replied Rapas. "In fact, I did not know it myself until today; but it is all right. Your master will be glad to receive him when I have explained why I brought him."

"That is a matter that Fal Sivas will have to decide for himself," replied the slave. "Perhaps you had better go first and speak to him, leaving the stranger here with me."

"Very well, then," agreed my companion. "Remain here until I return, Vandor."

The slave unlocked the door in the far side of the anteroom; and after Rapas had passed through, he followed him and closed it.

IT occurred to me that his action was a little strange, as I had just heard him say that he would remain with me, but I would have thought nothing more of the matter had I not presently become impressed with the very definite sensation that I was being watched. I cannot explain this feeling that I occasionally have. Earth men who should know say that this form of telepathy is scientifically impossible, yet upon many occasions I have definitely sensed this secret surveillance, later to discover that I really was being watched.

As my eyes wandered casually about the room, they came to rest again upon the door beyond which Rapas and the slave had disappeared. They were held momentarily by a small round hole in the paneling, and the glint of something that might have been an eye shining in the darkness. I knew that it was an eye.

Just why I should be watched, I did not know; but if my observer hoped to discover anything suspicious about me, he was disappointed; for as soon as I realized that an eye was upon me, I walked to a bench at one side of the room and sat down, instantly determined not to reveal the slightest curiosity concerning my surroundings. Such surveillance probably meant little in itself, but taken in connection with the gloomy and forbidding appearance of the building and the great stealth and secrecy with which we had been admitted, it crystallized a most unpleasant impression of the place and its master that had already started to form in my mind.

FROM beyond the walls of the room there came no sound; nor did any of the night noises of the city penetrate to it. I sat in utter silence for about ten minutes; then the door opened, and the same slave beckoned to me.

"Follow me," he said. "The master will see you. I am to take you to join him."

I followed him along a gloomy corridor and up a winding ramp to the next higher level of the building. A moment later he ushered me into a softly lighted room furnished with Sybaritic luxury, where I saw Rapas standing before a couch on which a man reclined, or I should rather say, crouched. Somehow he reminded me of a great cat watching its prey, always ready to spring.

"This is Vandor, Fal Sivas," said Rapas, by way of introduction.

I inclined my head in acknowledgment, and stood before the man, waiting.

"Rapas has told me about you," said Fal Sivas. "Where are you from?"

"Originally I was from Zodanga," I replied; "but that was years ago, before the sacking of the city."

"And where have you been since?" he asked. "Whom have you served?"

"That," I replied, "is a matter of no consequence to anyone but myself. It is sufficient that I have not been in Zodanga, and that I cannot return to the country that I have just fled."

"You have no friends or acquaintances in Zodanga, then?" he asked.

"Of course, some of my acquaintances may still be living; that I do not know," I replied; "but my people and most of my friends were killed at the time that the green hordes overran the city."

"And you have had no intercourse with Zodanga since you left?" he asked.

"None whatsoever."

"Perhaps you are just the man I need. Rapas is sure of it, but I am never sure. No man can be trusted."

"Ah, but master," interrupted Rapas, "have I not always served you well and faithfully?"

I thought I saw a slight sneer curl the lip of Fal Sivas.

"You are a paragon, Rapas," he said, "the soul of honor."

Rapas swelled with importance. He was too egotistical to note the flavor of sarcasm in Fal Sivas' voice.

"And I may consider myself employed?" I asked.

"You understand that you may be called upon to use a dagger more often than a sword," he observed; "and that poisons are sometimes preferred to pistols?"

"I understand."

He looked at me intently.

"There may come a time," he continued, "when you may have to draw your long sword or your short sword in my defense. Are you a capable swordsman?"

"I am a panthan," I replied; "and as panthans live by the sword, the very fact that I am here answers your question."

"Not entirely. I must have a master swordsman. Rapas, here, is handy with the short sword. Let us see what you can do against him."

"To the death?" I asked.

Rapas guffawed loudly. "I did not bring you here to kill you," he said.

"No, not to the death, of course," said Fal Sivas. "Just a short passage. Let us see which one can scratch the other first."

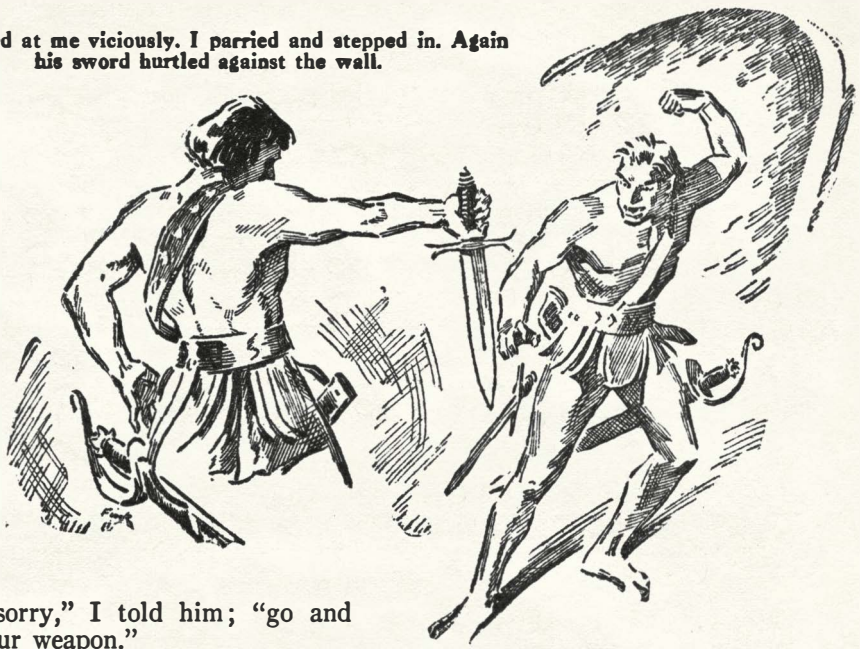
I DID not like the idea. I do not ordinarily draw my sword unless I intend to kill; but I realized that I was playing a part, and that before I got through I might have to do many things of which I did not approve; so I nodded my assent and waited for Rapas to draw.

His short sword flashed from its scabbard. "I shall not hurt you badly, Vandor," he said; "for I am fond of you."

I thanked him, and drew my own weapon.

Rapas stepped forward to engage me, a confident smile upon his lips. The next instant his weapon was flying across the room. I had disarmed him, and he was at my mercy. He backed away, a sickly grin upon his face. Fal Sivas laughed.

"It was an accident," said Rapas. "I was not ready."



He lunged at me viciously. I parried and stepped in. Again his sword hurtled against the wall.

"I am sorry," I told him; "go and recover your weapon."

He got it and came back, and this time he lunged at me viciously. There would have been no mere scratch that time if his thrust had succeeded; he would have spitted me straight through the heart. I parried and stepped in, and again his sword hurtled through the air and clanked against the opposite wall.

Fal Silvas laughed uproariously. Rapas was furious. "That is enough," said the former. "I am satisfied. Sheathe your swords."

I knew that I had made an enemy of Rapas; but that did not concern me greatly, since being forewarned I could always be watchful of him. Anyway, I had never trusted him.

"You are prepared to enter my service at once?" asked Fal Sivas.

"I am in your service now?" I replied.

He smiled. "I think you are going to make me a good man. Rapas wants to go away for a while to attend to business of his own. While he is away, you will remain here as my bodyguard. When he returns, I may still find use for you in one way or another. The fact that you are unknown in Zodanga may make you very valuable to me." He turned to Rapas. "You may go now, Rapas," he said, "and while you are away, you might take some lessons in swordsmanship."

As Fal Sivas said that, he grinned; but Rapas did not. He looked very sour, and he did not say good-by to me.

"I am afraid that you offended his dignity," said Fal Sivas after the door had closed behind the assassin.

"I shall lose no sleep over it," I replied; "and anyway, it was not my fault. It was his."

"What do you mean?" demanded Fal Sivas.

"Rapas is not a good swordsman."

"He is considered an excellent one," Fal Sivas assured me.

"I imagine that as a killer he is more adept with the dagger and poison."

"And how about you?" he asked.

"Naturally, as a fighting-man, I prefer the sword," I replied.

Fal Sivas shrugged. "That is a matter of small concern to me," he said. "If you prefer to kill my enemies with a sword, use a sword. All I ask is that you kill them."

"You have many enemies?" I asked.

"There are many who would like to see me put out of the way," he replied. "I am an inventor, and there are those who would steal my inventions. Many of these I have had to destroy. Their people suspect me and seek revenge; but there is one who, above all others, seeks to destroy me. He also is an inventor, and he has employed an agent of the assassins' guild to make away with me.

"This guild is headed by Ur Jan, and he personally has threatened my life because I have employed another than a member of his guild to do my killing."

We talked for a short time, and then Fal Sivas summoned a slave to show me to my quarters. "They are below mine," he said; "if I call, you are to come to me immediately. Good night."

The slave led me to another room on the same level—in fact, to a little suite of three rooms. They were plainly but comfortably furnished.

"Is there anything that you require, master?" the slave inquired, as he turned to leave me.

"Nothing," I replied.

"Tomorrow a slave will be assigned to serve you." With that he left me, and I listened to see if he locked the door from the outside; but he did not, though I would not have been surprised had he done so, so sinister and secretive seemed everything connected with this gloomy pile.

I occupied myself for a few moments inspecting my quarters. They consisted of a living-room, two small bedrooms, and a bath. A single door opened from the living-room onto the corridor. There were no windows in any of the rooms. There were small ventilators in the floors and in the ceilings, and draughts of air entering the former indicated that the apartment was ventilated mechanically. The rooms were lighted by radium bulbs similar to those generally used throughout Barsoom.

In the living-room was a table, a bench, and several chairs, and a shelf upon which were a number of books. Glancing at some of these, I discovered that they were all scientific works. There were books on medicine, on surgery, chemistry, mechanics, and electricity.

FROM time to time, I heard what appeared to be stealthy noises in the corridor; but I did not investigate, as I wanted to establish myself in the confidence of Fal Sivas and his people before I ventured to take it upon myself to learn any more than they desired me to know. I did not even know that I wanted to know anything more about the household of Fal Sivas; for after all, my business in Zodanga had nothing to do with him. I had come to undermine, and if possible overthrow the strength of Ur Jan and his guild of assassins; and all I needed was a base from which to work. I was, in fact, a little disappointed to find that fate had thrown me in with those opposed to Ur Jan. I would have preferred, and in fact had hoped, to be able to join Ur Jan's organization, as I felt that I could accomplish much more from the inside than from the outside.

If I could join the guild, I could soon learn the identity of its principal members; and that, above all other things, was what I wished to do, that I might either bring them to justice or put the cross upon their hearts with the point of my own sword. Occupied with these thoughts, I was about to remove my harness and turn into my sleeping-silks and furs, when I heard sounds of what might have been a scuffle on the level above, and then a thud, as of a body falling.

THE former preternatural silence of the house accentuated the significance of the sounds that I was hearing, imparting to them a mystery that I realized might be wholly out of proportion to their true importance. I smiled as I realized the effect that my surroundings seemed to be having upon my ordinarily steady nerves; and had resumed my preparations for the night when a shrill scream rang through the building.

I paused again and listened, and now I distinctly heard the sound of feet running rapidly. They seemed to be approaching, and I guessed that they were coming down the ramp from the level above to the corridor that ran before my quarters.

Perhaps what went on in the house of Fal Sivas was none of my affair, but I have never yet heard a woman scream without investigating; so now I stepped to the door of my living-room and threw it open; and as I did so, I saw a girl running rapidly toward me. Her hair was disheveled; and from her wide, frightened eyes she cast frequent glances backward over her shoulder.

She was almost upon me before she discovered me; and when she did, she paused for a moment with a gasp of astonishment or fear, I could not tell which; then she darted past me through the open door into my living-room.

"Close the door," she whispered, her voice tense with suppressed emotion. "Don't let him get me! Don't let him find me!"

No one seemed to be pursuing her, but I closed the door as she had requested, and turned toward her for an explanation.

"What is the matter?" I demanded. "From whom were you running?"

"From him," she shuddered. "Oh, he is horrible. Hide me; don't let him get me, please!"

"Whom do you mean? Who is horrible?"

She stood there trembling and wide-eyed, staring past me at the door, like one whom terror had demented.

"He is," she whispered. "Who else could it be?"

"You mean—"

She came close and started to speak; then she hesitated. "But why should I trust you? You are one of his creatures. You are all alike in this terrible place."

She was standing very close to me now, trembling like a leaf. "I cannot stand it!" she cried. "I will not let him!" And then, so quickly that I could not prevent her, she snatched the dagger from my harness and turned it upon herself.

But there I was too quick for her, seizing her wrist before she could carry out her designs.

She was a delicate-looking creature, but her appearance belied her strength. However, I had little difficulty in disarming her; and then I backed her toward the bench and forced her down upon it.

"Calm yourself," I said; "you have nothing to fear from me—nothing to fear from anybody while I am with you. Tell me what has happened. Tell me whom you fear."

SHE sat staring into my eyes for a long moment, and presently she commenced to regain control of herself. "Yes," she said presently, "perhaps I can trust you. You make me feel that way—your voice, your looks."

I laid my hand upon her shoulder as one might who would quiet a frightened child. "Do not be afraid," I said; "tell me something of yourself. What is your name?"

"Zanda," she replied.

"You live here?"

"I am a slave, a prisoner."

"What made you scream?" I asked.

"I did not scream," she replied; "that was another. He tried to get me, but I eluded him, and so he took another. My turn will come. He will get me. He gets us all."

"Who? Who will get you?"

She shuddered as she spoke the name. "Fal Sivas," she said, and there was horror in her tone.

I sat down on the bench beside her and laid my hand on hers. "Quiet yourself," I said; "tell me what all this means. I am a stranger here. I just entered the service of Fal Sivas tonight."

"You know nothing, then, about Fal Sivas?" she demanded.

"Only that he is a wealthy inventor and fears for his life."

"Yes, he is rich; and he is an inventor, but not so great an inventor as he is a murderer and a thief. He steals ideas from other inventors, and then has them murdered in order to safeguard what he has stolen. Those who learn too much of his inventions die. They never leave this house. He always has an assassin ready to do his bidding; sometimes here, sometimes out in the city; and he is always afraid of his life.

"Rapas the Ulsio is his assassin now; but they are both afraid of Ur Jan, chief of the guild of assassins; for Ur Jan has learned that Rapas is killing for Fal Sivas, for a price far lower than that charged by the guild."

"But what are these wonderful inventions that Fal Sivas works upon?" I asked.

"I do not know all of the things that he does, but there is the ship. That would be wonderful, were it not born of blood and treachery."

"What sort of a ship?" I asked.

"A ship that will travel safely through interplanetary space. He says that in a short time we shall be able to travel back and forth between the planets as easily as we travel now from one city to another."

"Interesting," I said; "and not so very horrible, that I can see."

"But he does other things—horrible things. One of them is a mechanical brain."

"A mechanical brain?"

"Yes, but of course I cannot explain it. I have so little learning. I have heard him speak of it often, but I do not understand. He says that all life, all matter, are the result of mechanical action, not primarily chemical action. He holds that all chemical action is mechanical.

"Oh, I am probably not explaining it right. It is all so confusing to me, because I do not understand it; but anyway, he is working on a mechanical brain, a brain that will think clearly and logically, absolutely uninfluenced by any of the extraneous media that affect human judgments."

"IT seems rather a weird idea," I said, "but I can see nothing so horrible about it."

"It is not the idea that is horrible," she said; "it is the method that he employs to perfect his invention. In his effort to duplicate the human brain, he must examine it. For this reason he needs many slaves. A few he buys, but most of them are kidnaped for him."

She commenced to tremble, and her voice came in little broken gasps. "I do

not know; I have not really seen it; but they say that he straps his victims so that they cannot move, and then removes the skull until he has exposed the brain; and so, by means of rays that penetrate the tissue, he watches the brain function."

"But his victims cannot suffer long," I said; "they would lose consciousness and die quickly."

She shook her head. "No, he has perfected drugs that he injects into their veins so that they remain alive and are conscious for a long time. For long hours he applies various stimuli and watches the reaction of the brain. Imagine, if you can, the suffering of his poor victims!

"Many slaves are brought here, but they do not remain long. There are only two doors leading from the building, and there are no windows in the outer walls. The slaves that disappear do not leave through either of the two doorways. I see them today; tomorrow they are gone, gone through the little doorway that leads into the room of horror next to Fal Sivas' sleeping quarters.

"Tonight Fal Sivas sent for two of us, another girl and myself. He purposed using but one of us. He always examines a couple and then selects the one that he thinks is the best specimen, but his selection is not determined wholly by scientific requirements. He always selects the more attractive of the girls that are summoned.

"He examined us, and then finally he selected me. I was terrified. I tried to fight him off. He chased me about the room, and then he slipped and fell; and before he could regain his feet, I opened the door and escaped. Then I heard the other girl scream, and I knew that he had seized her, but I have won only a reprieve. He will get me; there is no escape. Neither you nor I will ever leave this place alive."

"What makes you think that?" I inquired.

"No one ever does."

"How about Rapas?" I asked. "He comes and goes apparently as he wishes."

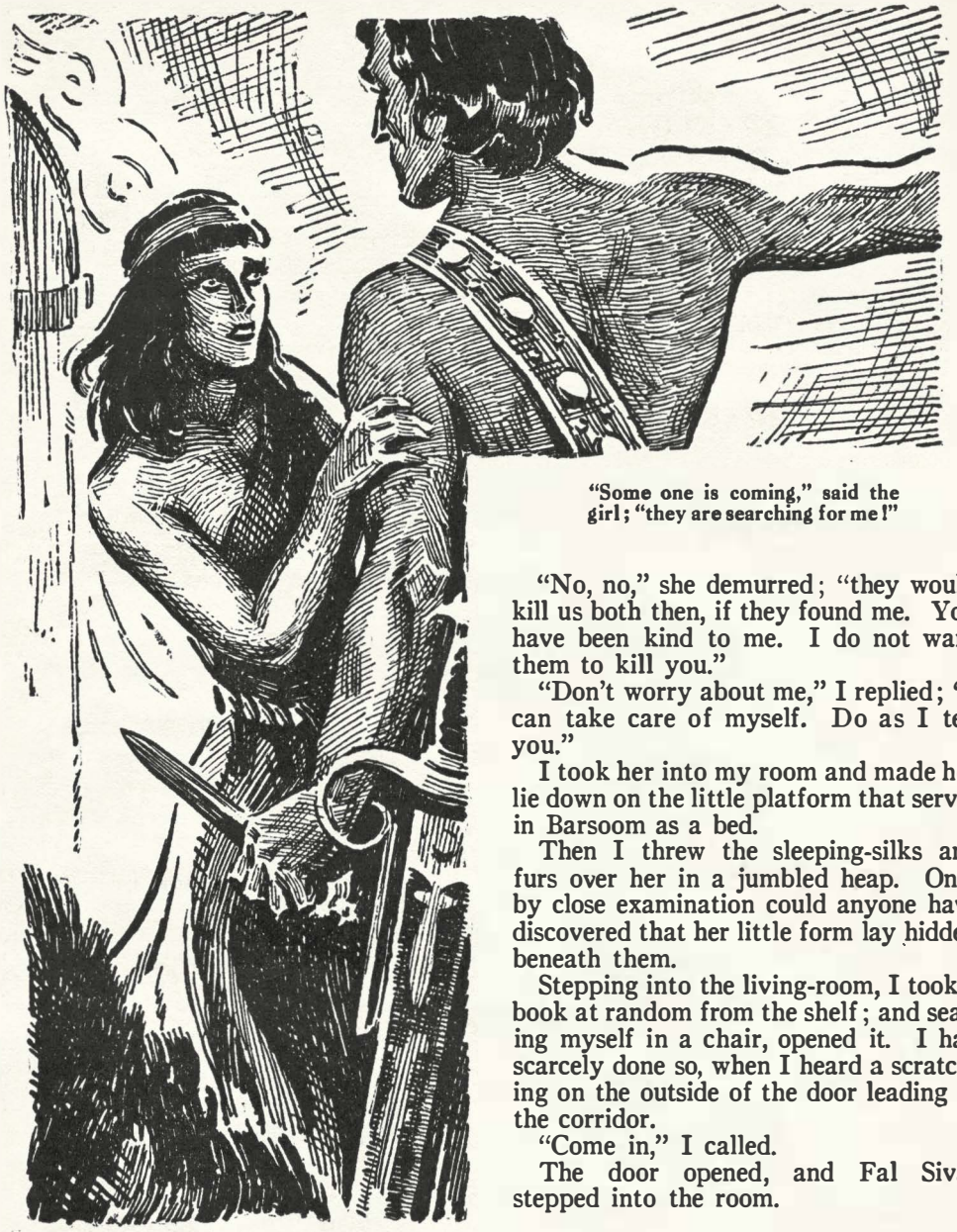
"Yes, Rapas comes and goes. He is Fal Sivas' assassin. He also aids in the kidnaping of new victims. Under the circumstances he would have to be free to leave the building. Then there are a few others, old and trusted retainers, really partners in crime, whose lives Fal Sivas holds in the palm of his hand; but you may rest assured that none of these

know too much about his inventions. The moment that one is taken into Sivas' confidence, his days are numbered.

"The man seems to have a mania for talking about his inventions. He must explain them to some one. I think that is because of his great egotism. He loves to boast. That is the reason he tells us who are doomed, much about his work. You may rest assured that Rapas knows nothing of importance. In fact, I have heard Fal Sivas say that one thing that endeared Rapas to him is the assassin's utter stupidity. Fal Sivas says that if he explained every detail of an invention to him, Rapas wouldn't have brains enough to understand it."

By this time the girl had regained control of herself; and as she ceased speaking, she started toward the doorway. "Thank you so much," she said, "for letting me come in here. I shall probably never see you again, but I should like to know who it is who has befriended me."

"My name is Vandor," I replied, "but what makes you think you will never see me again, and where are you going now?"



"Some one is coming," said the girl; "they are searching for me!"

"I am going back to my quarters to wait for the next summons. It may come tomorrow."

"You are going to stay right here," I replied; "we may find a way of getting you out of this, yet."

She looked at me in surprise and was about to reply when suddenly she cocked her head on one side and listened. "Some one is coming," she said; "they are searching for me!"

I took her by the hand and drew her toward the doorway to my sleeping-apartment. "Come in here," I said. "Let's see if we can't hide you."

"No, no," she demurred; "they would kill us both then, if they found me. You have been kind to me. I do not want them to kill you."

"Don't worry about me," I replied; "I can take care of myself. Do as I tell you."

I took her into my room and made her lie down on the little platform that serves in Barsoom as a bed.

Then I threw the sleeping-silks and furs over her in a jumbled heap. Only by close examination could anyone have discovered that her little form lay hidden beneath them.

Stepping into the living-room, I took a book at random from the shelf; and seating myself in a chair, opened it. I had scarcely done so, when I heard a scratching on the outside of the door leading to the corridor.

"Come in," I called.

The door opened, and Fal Sivas stepped into the room.

CHAPTER III

Trapped

LOWERING my book, I looked up as Fal Sivas entered. He glanced quickly and suspiciously about the apartment. I had purposely left open the door to my sleeping-room, so as not to arouse suspicion should anyone come in to investigate. The doors to the other sleeping-room and bath were also open. Fal Sivas glanced at the book in my hand. "Rather heavy reading for a panthan," he remarked.

I smiled. "I recently read his 'Theo-

retical Mechanics.' This is an earlier work, I believe, and not quite so authoritative. I was merely glancing through it."

Fal Sivas studied me intently for a moment. "Are you not a little too well educated for your calling?" he asked.

"One may never know too much," I replied.

"One may know too much here," he said, and I recalled what the girl had told me.

FAL SIVAS' tone changed. "I stopped in to see if everything was all right with you, if you were comfortable."

"Very," I replied.

"You have not been disturbed? No one has been here?"

"The house seems very quiet," I replied. "I heard some one laughing a short time ago, but that was all. It did not disturb me."

"Has anyone come to your quarters?" he asked.

"Why—was some one supposed to come?"

"No one, of course," he said shortly, and then he commenced to question me in an evident effort to ascertain the extent of my mechanical and chemical knowledge.

"I really know little of either subject," I told him. 'I am a fighting-man by profession, not a scientist. Of course, familiarity with flyers connotes some mechanical knowledge, but after all I am only a tyro."

He was studying me quizzically. "I wish that I knew you better," he said at last; "I wish that I knew that I could trust you. You are an intelligent man. In the matter of brains, I am entirely alone here. I need an assistant. I need such a man as you." He shook his head, rather disgustedly. "But what is the use? I can trust no one."

"You employed me as your bodyguard. For that work I am fitted. Let it go at that."

"You are right," he agreed. "Time will tell what else you are fitted for."

"And if I am to protect you," I continued, "I must know more about your enemies. I must know who they are, and I must learn their plans."

"There are many who would like to see me destroyed, or destroy me themselves; but there is one who, above all others, would profit by my death. He is Gar Nal, the inventor." He looked up at me questioningly.

"I have never heard of him," I said. "You must remember that I have been absent from Zodanga for many years."

He nodded. "I am perfecting a ship that will traverse space. So is Gar Nal. He would like not only to have me destroyed, but also to steal the secrets of my invention that would permit him to perfect his; but Ur Jan is the one I most fear, because Gar Nal has employed him to destroy me."

"I am unknown in Zodanga. I will hunt out this Ur Jan and see what I can learn."

There was one thing that I wanted to learn right then, and that was whether or not Fal Sivas would permit me to leave his house on any pretext.

"You could learn nothing," he said; "their meetings are secret. Even if you could gain admission, which is doubtful, you would be killed before you could get out again."

"Perhaps not," I said; "it is worth trying, anyway. Do you know where they hold their meetings?"

"Yes, but if you want to try that, I will have Rapas guide you to the building."

"If I am to go, I do not want Rapas to know anything about it," I said.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because I do not trust him," I replied. "I would not trust anyone with knowledge of my plans."

"You are quite right. When you are ready to go, I can give you directions so that you can find their meeting-place."

"I will go tomorrow," I said, "after dark."

He nodded his approval. He was standing where he could look directly into the bedroom where the girl was hidden. "Have you plenty of sleeping-silks and furs?" he asked.

"Plenty," I replied; "but I will bring my own tomorrow."

"That will not be necessary. I will furnish you all that you require."

HE still stood staring into that other room. I wondered if he suspected the truth, or if the girl had moved or her breathing were noticeable under the pile of materials beneath which she was hidden. I did not dare to turn and look for myself, for fear of arousing his suspicions further. I just sat there waiting, my hands close to the hilt of my short sword. Perhaps the girl was near discovery, but if so, Fal Sivas was also near death that moment.

At last he turned toward the outer doorway. "I will give you directions tomorrow for reaching the headquarters of the gorthans, and also tomorrow I will send you a slave. Do you wish a man or a woman?"

I preferred a man, but I thought that I detected here a possible opportunity for protecting the girl. "A woman," I said.

He smiled. "And a pretty one, eh?"

"I should like to select her myself, if I may."

"As you wish," he replied. "I shall let you look them over tomorrow. May you sleep well."

He left the room and closed the door behind him; but I knew that he stood outside for a long time, listening.

I PICKED up the book once more and began to read it; but not a word registered on my consciousness, for all my faculties were centered on listening. After what seemed a long time, I heard him move away; and shortly after, I distinctly heard a door close on the level above me. Not until then did I move, but now I arose and went to the door. It was equipped with a heavy bar on the inside, and this I slid silently into its keeper.

Crossing the room, I entered the chamber where the girl lay, and threw back the covers that concealed her. She had not moved. As she looked up at me, I placed a finger across my lips.

"You heard?" I asked in a low whisper.

She nodded.

"Tomorrow I will select you as my slave. Perhaps later I shall find a way to liberate you."

"You are kind," she said.

I reached down and took her by the hand. "Come," I said, "into the other room. You can sleep there safely tonight, and in the morning we will plan how we may carry out the rest of our scheme."

"I think that will not be difficult," she said. "Early in the morning everyone but Fal Sivas goes to a large dining-room on this level. Many of them will pass along this corridor. I can slip out, unseen, and join them. At breakfast you will have an opportunity of seeing all the slaves. Then you may select me if you still wish to do so."

There were sleeping-silks and furs in the room that I had assigned to her, and I knew that she would be comfortable; so I left her, and returning to my own room completed my preparations for the night that had been so interrupted. . . .

Early next morning Zanda awoke me. "It will soon be time for them to go to breakfast," she said. "You must go before I do, leaving the door open. Then when there is no one in the corridor, I will slip out."

As I left my quarters, I saw two or three people moving along the corridor in the direction that Zanda had told me the dining-room lay; and so I followed them, finally entering a large room in which there was a table that would seat about twenty. It was already over half filled. Most of the slaves were women—young women, and many of them were beautiful. With the exception of two men, one sitting at either end of the table, all the occupants of the room were without weapons.

The man sitting at the head of the table was the same who had admitted Rapas and me the evening before. I learned later that his name was Hamas, and that he was the major-domo of the establishment. The other armed man was Phystal. He was in charge of the slaves in the establishment. He also, as I was to learn later, attended to the procuring of many of them, usually by bribery or abduction.

AS I entered the room, Hamas discovered me and motioned me to him. "You will sit here, next to me, Vandor," he said.

I could not but note the difference in his manner from the night before, when he had seemed more or less an obsequious slave. I gathered that he played two rôles for purposes known best to himself or his master. In his present rôle, he was obviously a person of importance.

"You slept well?" he asked.

"Quite," I replied; "the house seems very quiet and peaceful at night."

He grunted. "If you should hear any unusual sounds at night," he said, "you will not investigate, unless the master or I call you." And then, as though he felt that he needed some explanation, he added: "Fal Sivas sometimes works late upon his experiments. You must not disturb him, no matter what you may hear."

Some more slaves were entering the room now, and just behind them came Zanda. I glanced at Hamas and saw his eyes narrow as they alighted upon her.

"Here she is now, Phystal," he said.

The man at the far end of the table turned in his seat and looked at the girl approaching from behind him. He was scowling angrily.

"Where were you last night, Zanda?" he demanded, as the girl approached.

"I was frightened, and I hid," she replied.

"Where did you hide?" demanded Phystal.

"Ask Hamas," she replied.

Phystal glanced at Hamas. "How should I know where you were?" demanded the latter.

Zanda elevated her arched brows. "Oh, I am sorry," she exclaimed. "I did not know that you cared who knew."

Hamas scowled angrily.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "What are you driving at?"

"Oh," she said, "I wouldn't have said anything about it at all but I thought, of course, that Fal Sivas knew."

Phystal was eying Hamas suspiciously. All the slaves were looking at him, and you could almost read their thoughts in the expressions on their faces.

Hamas was furious, Phystal suspicious; and all the time the girl stood there with a most innocent and angelic expression on her face.

"What do you mean by saying such a thing?" shouted Hamas.

"I just said, 'Ask Hamas.' Is there anything wrong in that?"

"But what do I know about it?" demanded the major-domo.

Zanda shrugged her slim shoulders. "I am afraid to say anything more. I do not want to get you in trouble."

"Perhaps the less said about it, the better," said Phystal.

Hamas started to speak, but evidently thought better of it. He glowered at Zanda for a moment and then fell to eating his breakfast.

JUST before the meal was over, I told Hamas that Fal Sivas had instructed me to select a slave.

"Yes, he told me," replied the major-domo. "See Phystal about it; he is in charge of the slaves."

"But does he know that Fal Sivas gave me permission to select anyone that I chose?"

"I will tell him."

A moment later he finished his breakfast; and as he was leaving the dining-room, he paused and spoke to Phystal.

Seeing that Phystal also was about ready to leave the table, I went to him and told him that I would like to select a slave.

"Which one do you want?" he asked.

I glanced around the table, apparently examining each of the slaves carefully until at last my eyes rested upon Zanda.

"I will take this one," I said.

Phystal's brows contracted, and he hesitated.

"Fal Sivas said that I might select whomever I wished," I reminded him.

"But why do you want this one?" he demanded.

"She seems intelligent, and she is good-looking," I replied. "She will do as well as another until I am better acquainted here." And so it was that Zanda was appointed to serve me. Her duties would consist of keeping my apartment clean, running errands for me, cleaning my harness, shining my metal, sharpening my swords and daggers, and otherwise making herself useful.

I WOULD much rather have had a man slave, but events had so ordered themselves that I had been forced into the rôle of the girl's protector, and this seemed the only plan by which I could accomplish anything along that line; but whether or not Fal Sivas would permit me to keep her, I did not know.

I took Zanda back to my quarters; and while she was busying herself with her duties there, I received a call summoning me to Fal Sivas.

A slave led me to the same room in which Fal Sivas had received Rapas and me the night before, and as I entered the old inventor greeted me with a nod. I expected him immediately to question me concerning Zanda, for both Hamas and Phystal were with him; and I had no doubt but that they had reported all that had occurred at the breakfast-table.

However, I was agreeably disappointed, for he did not mention the incident at all, but merely gave me instructions as to my tasks. I was to remain on duty in the corridor outside his door and accompany him when he left the room. I was to permit no one to enter the room, other than Hamas or Phystal, without obtaining permission from Fal Sivas. When he left the room, I was to accompany him. Under no circumstances was I ever to go to the level above, except with his permission or by his express command. He was very insistent in impressing this point upon my mind; and though I am not overly curious, I must admit that now that I had been forbidden to go to any of the levels above, I wanted to do so.

"When you have been in my service longer and I know you etter," explained

Fal Sivas, "I hope to be able to trust you; but for the present you are on probation."

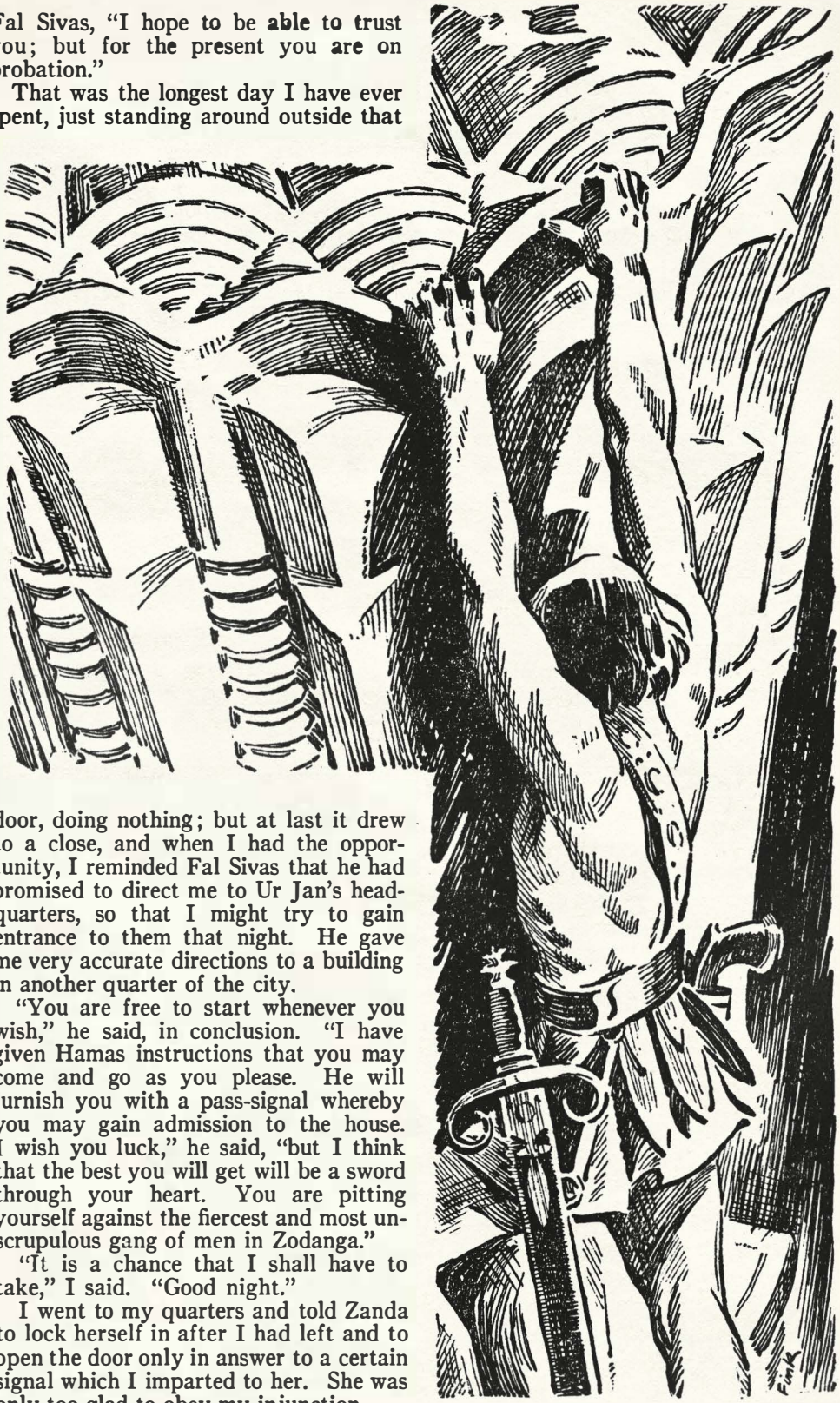
That was the longest day I have ever spent, just standing around outside that door, doing nothing; but at last it drew to a close, and when I had the opportunity, I reminded Fal Sivas that he had promised to direct me to Ur Jan's headquarters, so that I might try to gain entrance to them that night. He gave me very accurate directions to a building in another quarter of the city.

"You are free to start whenever you wish," he said, in conclusion. "I have given Hamas instructions that you may come and go as you please. He will furnish you with a pass-signal whereby you may gain admission to the house. I wish you luck," he said, "but I think that the best you will get will be a sword through your heart. You are pitting yourself against the fiercest and most unscrupulous gang of men in Zodanga."

"It is a chance that I shall have to take," I said. "Good night."

I went to my quarters and told Zanda to lock herself in after I had left and to open the door only in answer to a certain signal which I imparted to her. She was only too glad to obey my injunction.

When I was ready to leave the building, Hamas conducted me to the outer



The carved ornamentation offered handholds and footholds; very slowly and carefully, I descended to the balcony.

doorway. Here he showed me a hidden button set in the masonry and explained to me how I might use it to announce my return.

I had gone but a short distance from the house of Fal Sivas when I met Rapas the Ulsio. He seemed to have forgotten his anger toward me, or else he was dissimulating, for he greeted me cordially.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Off for the evening," I replied.

"Where are you going, and what are you going to do?"

"I am going to the public house to get my things and store them; then I shall look around for a little entertainment."

"Suppose we get together later in the evening," he suggested.

"All right," I replied; "when and where?"

"I will be through with my business about half after the eighth zode. Suppose we meet at the eating-place I took you to yesterday."

"All right," I said, "but do not wait long for me. I may get tired of looking for pleasure and return to my quarters long before that."

After leaving Rapas, I went to the public house where I had left my things; and gathering them up I took them to the hangar on the roof and stored them in my flyer. This done, I returned to the street and made my way toward the address that Fal Sivas had given me.

The way led me through a brilliantly lighted shopping district and into a gloomy section of the old town. It was a residential district, but of the meaner sort. Some of the houses still rested upon the ground, but most of them were elevated on their steel shafts twenty or thirty feet above the pavement.

I heard laughter and song and occasional brawling—the sounds of the night life of a great Martian city, and then I passed on into another and seemingly deserted quarter.

I was approaching the headquarters of the assassins. I kept in the shadows of the buildings, and I avoided the few people that were upon the avenue by slipping into doorways and alleys. I did not wish anyone to see me here who might be able afterward to recognize or identify me. I was playing a game with Death; I must give him no advantage.

When finally I reached the building for which I was seeking, I found a doorway on the opposite side of the avenue from which I could observe my goal without being seen.

The farther moon cast a faint light upon the face of the building but revealed to me nothing of importance.

At first, I could discern no lights in the building; but after closer observation I saw a dim reflection behind the windows of the upper floor. There, doubtless, was the meeting-place of the assassins; but how was I to reach it?

That the doors to the building would be securely locked and every approach to the meeting-place well guarded, seemed a foregone conclusion. There were balconies before the windows at several levels, and I noticed particularly that there were three of these in front of windows on the upper story. These balconies offered me a means of ingress to the upper floor if I could but reach them.

The great strength and agility which the lesser gravitation of Mars imparts to my earthly muscles might have sufficed to permit me to climb the exterior of the building, except for the fact that this particular building seemed to offer no foothold up to the fifth story, above which its carved ornamentation commenced. By a process of elimination, I was forced to conclude that my best approach would be by way of the roof.

However, I determined to investigate the possibilities of the main entrance on the ground floor; and was about to cross the avenue for that purpose when I saw two men approaching. Stepping back into the shadows of my hiding-place, I waited for them to pass; but instead of doing so they stopped before the entrance to the building I was watching. They were there but a moment when I saw the door open and the men admitted. This incident convinced me that some one was on guard at the main entrance to the building, and that it would be futile for me to attempt to enter there.

There now remained to me only the roof as a means of entrance to the building, and I quickly decided upon a plan to accomplish my design.

LEAVING my hiding-place, I quickly returned to the public house in which I had been lodging, and went immediately to the hangar on the roof. The place was deserted, and I was soon at the controls of my flyer. I had now to run the chance of being stopped by a patrol-boat, but this was a more or less remote contingency; as, except in cases of public emergency, little attention is paid to private flyers within the walls of the city.

However, to be on the safe side, I flew low, following dark avenues below the level of the roof tops; and in a short time I reached the vicinity of the building that was my goal. Here I rose above the level of the roofs, and having located the building, settled gently to its roof. The building had not been intended for this purpose, and there was neither hangar nor mooring-rings; but there are seldom high winds on Mars, and this was a particularly quiet and windless night.

Leaving the deck of the flyer, I searched the roof for some means of ingress to the building. I found a single small scuttle, but it was strongly secured from within, and I could not budge it without making far too much noise.

Going to the edge of the building, overlooking the avenue, I looked down upon one of the balconies directly below me. I could have lowered myself from the eaves and, hanging by my hands, dropped directly onto it; but here again I faced the danger of attracting attention by the noise that I must make in alighting.

I examined the face of the building just below me and discovered that, in common with most Martian buildings, the carved ornamentation offered handholds and footholds sufficient to my need. Slipping quietly over the eaves, I felt around with my toes until I found a projection that would support me. Then, releasing one hand, I felt for a new hold; and so, very slowly and carefully, I descended to the balcony.

I had selected the place of my descent so that I was opposite an unlighted window. For a moment I stood there listening. Somewhere within the interior of the building I heard subdued voices. Then I threw a leg over the sill and entered the darkness of the apartment beyond.

Slowly I groped my way to a wall and then followed along it until I came to a door at the end of the room opposite the window. Stealthily I felt for the latch and lifted it. I pulled gently; the door was not locked; it swung in toward me without noise.

Beyond the door was a corridor. It was very faintly illuminated, as though by reflected light from an open doorway or from another corridor. Now the sound of voices was more distinct. Silently I crept in the direction whence they came.

Presently I came to another corridor running at right angles to the one I was following. The light was stronger here, and I saw that it came from an open doorway farther along the corridor which I was about to enter. I was sure, however, that the voices did not come from this room that I could see.

MY position was precarious: I knew nothing at all about the interior arrangements of the building. I did not know along which corridor its inmates came and went. If I were to approach the open doorway, I might place myself in a position where discovery would be certain.

I knew that I was dealing with killers, expert swordsmen all; and I did not try to deceive myself into believing that I would be any match for a dozen or more of them. However, men who live by the sword are not unaccustomed to taking chances, sometimes far more desperate chances than their mission may seem to warrant. Perhaps such was the case now, but I had come to Zodanga to learn what I could about the guild of assassins headed by the notorious Ur Jan; and now that fortune had placed me in a position where I might gain a great deal of useful information, I had no thought of retreating because of danger.

Stealthily I crept forward, and at last I reached the door. Very cautiously I surveyed the interior of the room beyond, as I moved inch by inch across the doorway. It was a small room, evidently an anteroom; and it was untenanted. There was some furniture in it—a table, some benches; and I noticed particularly an old-fashioned cupboard that stood diagonally across one corner of the room, one of its sides about a foot from the wall.

From where I stood in the doorway, I could not hear the voices quite distinctly; and I was confident that the men I sought were in the adjoining room just beyond. I crept into the anteroom and approached the door at the opposite end. Just to the left of the door was the cupboard that I have mentioned.

I placed my ear close to the panels of the door in an effort to overhear what was being said in the room beyond, but the words came to me indistinctly.

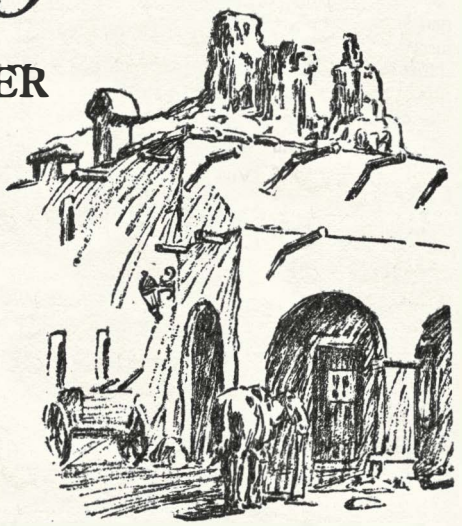
I decided that I must find some other point of approach, and was turning to leave the room when I heard footsteps approaching along the corridor: I was trapped.

Even more exciting events follow swiftly in the next installment of this, the most brilliantly imagined of all Mr. Burroughs' unique novels—in our forthcoming December issue.

The Hands of

By CONRAD RICHTER

Illustrated by Monte Crews



A STIRRING tale of old days and wild ways in Texas, by the gifted author of "The Bells of Ichicalli," "Early Marriage" and other noted stories.

THE news had reached Packsaddle in the morning, and all day an atmosphere of tension had been growing in the town. Women stayed indoors. Men clustered in store and saloon, talking in sober groups. The day was without air and even the cottonwoods stood motionless on the street.

So still and strained had it grown by four o'clock that it came as a shock to hear some one singing in the town. Going to their doors, the people glimpsed a shabby stranger riding into view on a stiff-legged, fleabitten gray. His homely young face looked humorous. A bobbing guitar was slung over his back. As he jogged down the only street of Packsaddle, he was singing in a husky tenor:

I come to the desert and couldn't get across.
I paid five dollars for an ol' stiff hoss.
Oh, a ki-yi-yippy-yippy-ay!

His eyes kept shut like a new-born pup.
He leaned against the fence while I saddled him up.
Oh, a ki-yi yippy-yippy-ay!

I got in the saddle and scratched him shore;
And found he'd died about a week before!
Oh, a ki-yi-yippy-yippy-ay! *Yippy-ay!*

A Texan would have told you at once that here was a native son of the Lone Star State. His eyes had the shade of the Davis Mountains across the plains at sunset; the hair that pushed out from under his dusty hat curled like native Texas buffalo grass; his young face had the puckered look of a boy who had just finished a border persimmon; and his old leather chaps had been so scratched by the chaparral that they carried a map of all Texas.

He left the stiff-legged gray already sleeping on the hoof in front of Plummet's trading-post.

"Now don't you run off, you ornery cuss!" he warned him, and strolled through the open doorway.

He found himself in a long dim storeroom. Barrels of molasses, flour, sugar and crackers stood about. Bacon, cheese, boxes of cartridges, pearl- and black-handled revolvers, hats, pants and miscellaneous hardware helped to litter the shelves. In an old clouded showcase were tobacco and cigars. Ropes and saddles hung from pegs, and bright new buckets from the ceiling.

A dozen men sat around on soap-boxes and nail-kegs. They scrutinized him for a moment, then went on earnestly talking. The shabby stranger waddled up to the counter with the gait of a man who has just crawled out of a long session in the saddle, and beamed at the sundry provisions.

"Bein' one o' these desert rats," he confided to the Mexican clerk, "I want about two-bits' wuth of crackers and cheese."

When the last crumb had vanished, the shabby stranger dug deeply into a pocket. The smile on his face faded. He dug into three pockets of his breeches, two pockets in his chaps and sundry small pockets in his old unbuttoned vest.

Minstrel Jim

All his hand could bring up were a thin tobacco-bag, a pocket-knife and a piggin' string.

"Well, I swanee!" he apologized. "Looks like I'm plumb barefoot. Reckon I'll have to sing to pay for my grub." He started pulling around in front of him his dusty guitar. In the wood had been lightly carved the words, *"Minstrel Jim—his mouth-organ."*

The face of the clerk had turned cold.

"Señor Plummet!" he called. "Thees *hombre* ees broke and he want to seeng for his grub!"

An active little man with white rafter mustaches looked up from the group.

"Don't give him any!" he replied briefly.

The clerk made an eloquently helpless gesture with his shoulders.

"Already they are geeve!"

The shabby stranger turned ingratiatingly to the trader.

"I can sing you 'Bow-legged Ike,' 'Sam Bass,' or any of them old ones, Mister! Or I can trot you out some new ones I caught and broke myself."

"Not today, you can't!" snapped the trader. His manner revealed that whatever the excitement in Packsaddle, it had wiped out his taste for music.

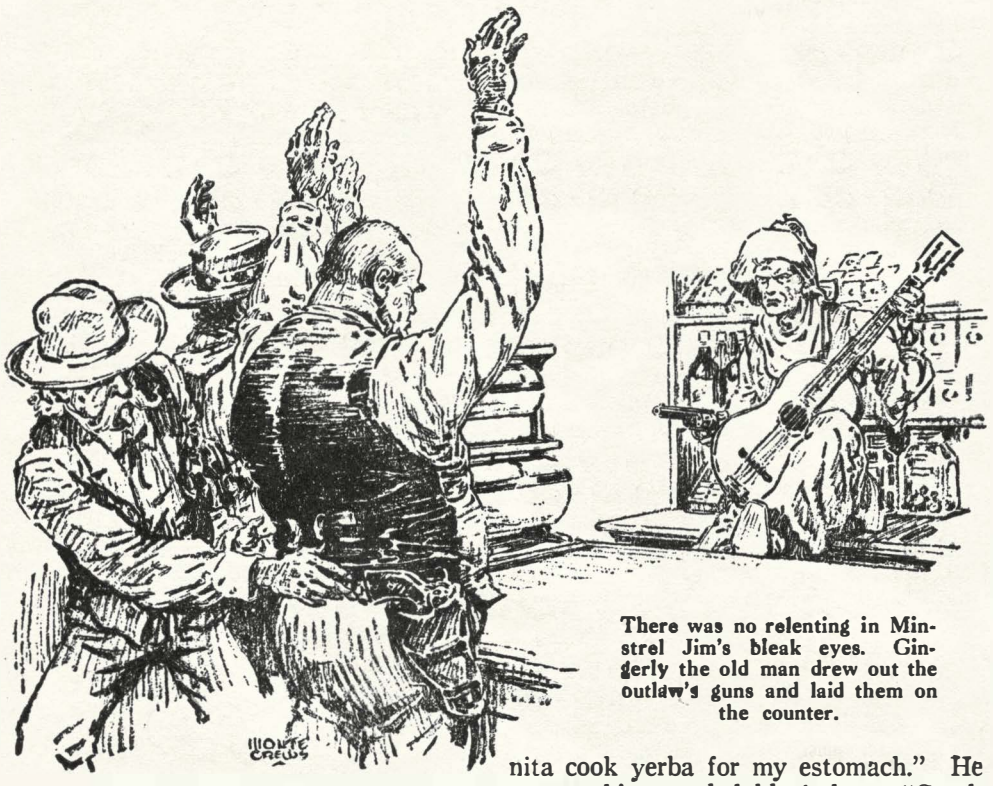
Minstrel Jim looked regretful.

"Reckon I gotta work, then," he mourned. "Any you gents need a top hand? I can do most anything—chouse cattle, wrangle hosses, break bronc's, wrastle Dutch ovens—"

The white-mustached trader was not listening. A lathered sorrel had been ridden up almost to the door. His rider, a tall cowhand, came into the trading-post two jumps at a time.

"It's plumb true, boys!" he announced. "Mace Childers broke out o' jail at Santa Fe the night before they were hangin' him. The Gila Bull got him out. They're ridin' this way for the border now!"

The shabby stranger saw the tense knot of men throw furtive glances toward the door. An old buffalo-hunter



There was no relenting in Minstrel Jim's bleak eyes. Gingerly the old man drew out the outlaw's guns and laid them on the counter.

spat profoundly into the cold fireplace and wiped his whiskers.

"I tol' you stone walls could never hol' Mace Childers!" he said in a cracked voice. "Now he'll stop here and teach a lesson to them witnesses who swore against him in court for killin' that Houtz family!"

The face of the proprietor of the trading-post had gone white. He looked appealingly at a big man with a star on his shirt. The latter pulled out a gold watch the size of a potato.

"I got to be goin', men!" he coughed. "I promised Andy White I'd hunt up that Mexican who stole one of his bridles." He started bulkily for the door. "Mebbe I'll run into Mace and the Bull out Andy's way," he called back. "If I do, I'll shore put 'em where they don't get out so easy this time!" Then he lumbered out of the post.

When the Sheriff was gone, the remaining men eyed each other silently. A noise from behind the counter made them turn. It was the Mexican clerk. He was slipping into his short jacket, and his face was the shade of saccaton grass in September.

"All day, Señor Plummet, my estomach fill seeck," he groaned. "Now all over I fill seeck. I think to go home and Juanita cook yerba for my estomach." He put on his steepled black hat. "Good-by!" he said humbly, and slipped out of the back door.

A cattleman with red-veined cheeks against thick white hair edged toward the square.

"Wait a minute, Walt!" George Plummet's voice shook slightly. "*You've* done nothin' to get Childers down on you. But I was the star witness against him. I've got to dust. And I've got to find somebody to run the post till it's safe to get back."

"I don't savvy a dang' thing about the tradin'-post business, George!" the red-cheeked cattleman protested. "I'd lock up the place, if I was you."

"And let 'em break in and burn up what they can't pack off?" the trader retorted bitterly. He appealed to the little crowd. "Men, I'm offerin' big money to the *hombre* who'll take care of my place till I get back."

To Minstrel Jim's surprise not a man volunteered. George Plummet grew haggard-eyed. His gaze roamed around the room until it rested with a last hope on the shabby guitar-player.

"You ever tend store for anybody, stranger?" he asked desperately.

"Nope." Jim shook his head with regret. "Once down in Carter, Texas, I helped to tend livery-stable."

The sound of distant approaching hoofs filtered into the trading-post. The lips of the proprietor grew ashy.

"You said you were lookin' for a job, stranger," Plummet decided hurriedly. "Well, I'm hirin' you! All you have to do is keep the place open till I get back. Any man who wants to trade or get credit, tell him to wait till I get back. If he has the cash, you'll find the prices in the little brown book on the counter."

Minstrel Jim didn't say anything. The trader hurried behind the counter, jerked open the cash drawer and stuffed several handfuls of gold and silver coins into his pocket. Out of the safe he took a steel box; then he closed the iron door and locked it.

"Don't you reckon I might need a little change?" Minstrel Jim ventured, but Plummet had plunged out of the back door and was gone.

The little crowd of loafers waited tensely until the hoofbeats had passed. It was only a boy on a barebacked mule. Then one by one they started to leave.

"Come back again, gents!" the new clerk called to each politely.

The old buffalo-hunter was the last to leave.

"If I was you, stranger," he croaked, "I'd lock up this outfit and chuck the key down somebody's well. Them outlaws'll break down the door anyways. And if George Plummet aint here, they'll take it out on you!" He spat emphatically and disappeared into the square.

FOR several hours the new clerk waited for customers. But no one visited the trading-post. The silence grew depressing.

At dusk he made himself a meal of samples from several barrels. Having dined, he lighted a cigar from the showcase. When that luxury had been smoked, he lighted the lamps and pulled a chair near the open door. For a time he hummed to himself peacefully as he tuned his guitar.

Had there been anyone in the post at this moment, they could not have failed to notice the new clerk's hands. His nose was stubby, and in a crowd of men he might have been lost to view. But his hands would have stood out anywhere. Long and lean, with slender powerful fingers, they were the hands of a musician who gave them lots of practice. When he cuddled the guitar against his vest and began to strum a lively accompaniment, the fingers of his right hand moved almost too fast to follow with the eye.

A moment afterward his tenor voice rang out cheerfully in the empty trading-post, and through the open door to the dim square of Packsaddle.

Climb down and listen, all you boys
That knows the Lone Star yell:
I'm goin' to turn loose Martin Barr
And how he went to hell—

He gave a whipsaw flourish to the strings and listened. The footsteps of a passing man had halted. The singer's voice rang out a little louder than before:

Ol' Martin worked the Texas brush
For steers that tried to hide.
He worked till he was ninety-two
And then the ol' wolf died.
The neighbors come to hol' the wake
And drink around his bed.
Ol' Martin sat up, took a drink,
And this is what he said—

More footsteps sounded and three men drifted in. Minstrel Jim waved them to empty kegs, leaned back further in his chair, and went on with the song.

I been to see the devil, boys.
He said, "Aint hell plumb hot?"
I tol' him 'twas a little cool
Beside what Texas got.
He asked me what I wouldn't give
For jes' one drop of rain.
I said I hadn't seen the stuff
Since Texas was a plain.

The devil got a little mad;
His pitchfork jabbed my head.
I tol' him it felt mild beside
A Texas cactus-bed.
He dipped a pan of red-hot coals
And made me drink plumb that;
But after Texas *chile*, boys,
It tasted kinda flat.

He sang several horseback airs after that, and more men came in. Some sat down. Some stood up to the counter and said there were a few things they wanted to buy. Jim drawled that he reckoned Plummet didn't want to do much business till he got back, but the old buffalo-hunter among others refused to be put off.

"I got the cash!" he declared. "And they's a saddle and a couple things I want for my boy before them outlaws take 'em."

That seemed to put others in a thoughtful mood. Before the buying epidemic was over, well over a hundred dollars rested in the cash drawer.

"Boys," the toothless buffalo-hunter announced significantly, "I'm a-goin' to get my plunder home."

He went for his new saddle, but he didn't lift it. A Mexican standing near the door had suddenly flattened against the wall. Not a word was spoken, but an invisible wave ran through the Plummet trading-post. Men stopped talking. For a moment you could hear the stamp of horses outside and the jingle of a saddle-rig as a restless animal shook himself. Then two horses stopped in the shadows.

Steps sounded on the gravel sidewalk, and a thick, powerful figure pushed by the motionless Mexican at the door. The newcomer had a heavy calloused mouth. All you could see of his eyes were the lower half of the pupils and a rim of white beneath. This, with his hunched shoulders, gave him the look of an immense human frog.

The swollen red veins in his face showed he had been drinking. His belt was of extraordinary length to go around so huge a waist. The bulging eyes jerked around the trading-post and came to rest on the shabby figure standing behind the counter.

"Tell Plummet somebody outside wants to see him!" he leered.

"He aint here," said Jim.

"Where's he at?"

"Didn't say." Minstrel Jim picked up the guitar from the counter, threw the strap over his head and strummed out a few soft chords. "He had a little trouble with his heart. Might 'a' gone to the sawbones—or mebbe to the vet'inary. Struck me he was a mite particular of his company."

The dark blood rushed into the Gila Bull's face. He started heavily for the counter.

"Who are you?" he snarled. "Whoever you are, I don't like you. I don't like anybody workin' for George Plummet. Especially I don't like guitar-players."

"I aint much of a player," said Jim.

The big man gave his belt a significant hitch. His gun danced in its yellow scabbard.

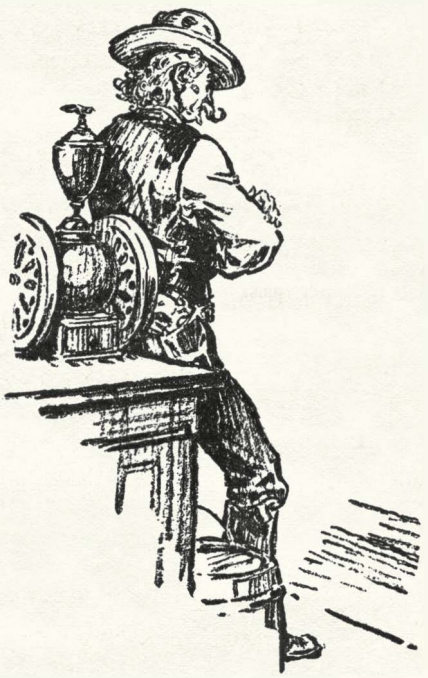
"Well, we're a-goin' to hear some of it! If it's no good, you won't have to do nothin'—*I'll* do the stoppin'!"

It had grown very still in the Plummet trading-post. The dark eyes of the Mexican at the door seemed hypnotized. But the shabby figure behind the counter didn't seem to realize his danger. He acted as if it were a compliment to be asked to play. Striking a few slow chords, he lifted back his head, half-closed his eyes and his drawling tenor voice rang out huskily:

My name, it's Jim Kelly;
  My business my own.
And them that don't like me
  Can leave me alone.

They's men in the valley,
  They's men on the hill.
And them that don't like me
  Can ride where they will.

The loafers in the trading-post had become petrified. An insane glare was bulging the eyes of the huge figure before the counter, and the jaws of the old buffalo-hunter had frozen on his cud of tobacco. But the shabby singer didn't



appear to notice anything. He sang on blandly:

They's frogs in the dam, boys.
They's frogs in the chutes.
But I aint before seed
A froggy in boots!

The great hand of the Gila Bull had been twitching. Now it slapped murderously toward his scabbard, whence protruded a butt with the head of a girl carved on one plate. But before it had gone halfway it stopped. The long fingers of the guitar-player had flashed faster than they had ever moved over the strings. A small round muzzle, considerably darker than the blue eyes above it, was gazing across the counter. Back near the door the fascinated Mexican's lips moved with the single word, *"Cas-*

The trader backed away. "If you took that money off those outlaws," he shouted, "I wouldn't have it for all the cattle in the territory."

pita!" and the buffalo-hunter's jaws started working again.

"Somethin' you wanted?" Jim asked.

The Gila Bull stood motionless until the homely clerk had holstered his gun. Then with hate in his eyes, the big figure started backing toward the door. Before he reached it a step sounded on the gravel sidewalk. It was a peculiar step —stealthy, almost like that of a panther.

A figure slipped silently into the trading-post. It was of a man who once seen could not easily be forgotten. Hatless, his black hair was cropped short on his skull. A black stubble covered his face; from out of this dark background his eyes stared like a cat's, a sort of greenish-yellow, utterly without expression or feeling. From the instant fear on half a dozen faces, Jim knew it was Mace Childers.

"Where's Plummet, Bull?" The outlaw's voice was soft.

"Look out! Plummet aint here, but the guitar-player's hellish fast!"

No emotion crossed Childers' face except that his teeth showed for a moment as he looked over the shabby clerk.

"Fast? That *hombre?*" His laugh was unpleasant.

The Gila Bull closed his heavy lips noncommittally. Jim kept strumming softly on his guitar. Childers moved lightly toward the counter.

"So you're workin' for George Plummet? My pardner and I are buyin' a few things—on credit!" he announced.

"You got no credit here," Minstrel Jim said.

"Hear him, Bull!" the outlaw jeered. "He says we have no credit with our old friend, George Plummet! Maybe you better get the name of his kinfolk before we pull out our letters of reference."

His meaning wasn't lost on the rigid loafers. Hastily the Mexican at the door left the trading-post. At the sound, the outlaw's eyes darted behind him. When they flashed back to the counter, they found a gun in the long fingers of the clerk. Mace Childers' pupils grew small and hard. Then both outlaws raised their arms.

Minstrel Jim beamed with approval. Fingering the fretted neck of his guitar with his left hand, his right began strumming the strings roughly with the gun-butt. He squinted one eye at the pair, and his voice rang out more drawling and provocative than ever.

An afternoon like this it was
  In tough ol' Cherokee.
An outlaw come a-hornin' in
  And asked who I might be.
He spun around his finger-joint
  A six-gun primed with lead.
He yelled, "By Judas, answer quick!"
  And this is what I said—

My Uncle Jess was Jesse James,
  My maw was Choctaw Sade.
Black Jack Ketchum was my paw.
  Sam Bass my cradle made.
They fed me fust on she-wolf's milk,
  And while my teeth was cuttin',
My rattle was a diamond-back
  With twenty-seven button.

Mace Childers' face had become a mask. One of his hands had begun to droop. The shabby clerk didn't seem to notice it. He sang on blandly.

I learned to bark before I talked,
  Before I talked, to swear.
I allus use tarantulas
  To comb my shinin' hair.
Where'er I make my bed at night
  The grass it fades and dies.
And when I'm ridin' in the rain
  The fearful lightnin' shies.

There was silence for nearly a minute when he finished.

Then Mace Childers spoke.

"You win, Jesse James! We'll pay cash."

"If it was me," Minstrel Jim reflected, "I wouldn't sell you a comb to scratch the fleas out o' yore hair. But bein' I'm working' for somebody else, I reckon I gotta treat the public all the same."

Mace Childers started toward the counter.

"Hol' on!" the shabby clerk's voice came bleakly. "Don't you reckon we'd be more sociable if that buffalo-hunter pulled yore teeth?"

THE outlaw's eyes held knifelike lights.

"I give you my word of honor," he purred.

"Yep, a hoss-trader give me that once," Minstrel Jim said. "The hoss died halfway across the desert and I had to pack my saddle forty miles."

Mace Childers exchanged a glance with the Gila Bull.

"I'm willin'," he announced.

The old buffalo-hunter glared at the homely clerk and looked longingly at the door, but there was no relenting in Minstrel Jim's bleak eyes. Gingerly the old man drew out the outlaws' guns and laid them in a corner, whereupon Jim holstered his own.

"Come on up to the counter, gents, and pick yore stuff!"

With considerable hefting, each outlaw selected a pair of blankets and a new double-action forty-five which Minstrel Jim first examined for cartridges.

"How much'll that come to?" Childers asked.

The shabby trading-post clerk looked up the prices in the little brown book. With a stubby pencil he toiled over a piece of brown wrapping-paper. Deep in the intricacies of addition, he became aware of a stealthy movement by Mace Childers. At the same moment he noticed that one of the guns was missing from the counter. Jerking back, he dropped the stubby pencil and whipped for his holster.

Before he could reach it, the kick of a gun-butt reached the top of his head where a twist of his buffalo-grass hair curled. His fingers dropped limply away from his holster. For a second he saw the plains of West Texas clearly as he had ever seen them in his life, the cedar brakes on the ridges, the red cattle feeding in the wide draws. He remembered nothing more. . . .

It was broad daylight when Minstrel Jim opened his eyes. He saw a huge shape in front of him. He struggled to sit up. Then he recognized the voice of the old buffalo-hunter:

"Dead man comin' to life, Doc! He figgers the sugar-barrel is the Gila Bull."

Several men laughed. Minstrel Jim sat up. Something galloped around in his head like a troop of horses. He saw he was in Plummet's trading-post, on a pallet in a corner. Doc Collier, gambler by night and physician by day, sat on the counter lighting a cigar.

"You'd be a little lame in the head yourself if you had what he's got," he remarked.

"He was a little lame in the head before," somebody said and again the men laughed.

"His Uncle Jess was Jesse James, his maw was Choctaw Sade!" the old buffalo-hunter sang in a cracked voice. *"Where'er he makes his bed at night, the grass it fades and dies; and when he goes out in the rain, the fearful lightnin' shies.* —George, yore clerk's ready to tend store!"

A small active man with white rafter mustaches came from behind the counter, and Jim saw it was George Plummet.

"He's not workin' for me any more." He scowled down at the bleary figure on the floor. "Two or three guns those outlaws took into Mexico, six boxes of cartridges, a thirty-dollar hat, a roll of blankets and the hundred and twenty dollars I figured you must have had in the cash drawer!"

Painfully holding to the sugar-barrel, Minstrel Jim got to his feet. He felt his holster. His gun was still there.

"My guitar all right?" he asked.

WITH a disgusted expression, Plummet gave it to him. Minstrel Jim slung it over his back.

"I reckon I'll be goin'," he mentioned.

"What do I owe you for takin' care of the post for me?" Plummet asked sarcastically.

Jim made no reply, but his ears burned.

"See you later, gents," he said.

"If you're lookin' for your horse," Plummet called meaningly, "he's in my corral."

The shabby figure went unsteadily around the side of the trading-post. Near the long shed filled with barb wire, shingles, lumber and sheep-dip, he found a corral. His gray whinnied at his step. Minstrel Jim found his bridle and saddle on a post. Unsteadily he led the horse outside the corral to mount.

The loafers at the trading-post had swarmed out to see him ride off.

"So long, she-wolf's milk!" called the cracked voice of the buffalo-hunter.

At the roar of laughter, Minstrel Jim turned his face the other way. When he reached the other end of town, he headed his gray due south. The trail ran endlessly before his eyes over red and yellow sand-hills.

IT had grown terrifically hot. By the time he crossed the international boundary, the horn of his aged saddle felt like a branding-iron. Several hours afterward he glimpsed ahead the welcome green of cottonwoods. Some miles closer he saw the brown adobe walls of a little Chihuahua town.

He watered the thirsty gray in the village and wet the inside of his hat. In the sunbaked plaza he found dark-faced peons regarding him with sullen eyes. A portly brown native sat in the shade of a cottonwood, smoking. Minstrel Jim rode up and addressed him in Spanish.

"Por favór, señor! You see perhaps two *Americanos* pass this way, yes?"

The Mexican ignored him and went on smoking. Minstrel Jim thanked him ironically and moved his gray into the shade of the same cottonwood. Drawing around his guitar, he cuddled it against his vest and started a difficult running bass accompaniment which Mexicans admire. Putting back his head, he half-closed his eyes and his voice rang out cheerfully in the inimitable air of *"El Piojo y la Pulga*—The Louse and the Flea." By the time he was halfway through, half the population of the unfriendly village had surrounded him. At the close there were cries of *"Bueno!"* and *"Mas! Mas!"*

Minstrel Jim beamed.

"Amigos, I look for two *Americano* friends. Last night they gave me a present; tonight I wish to return the favor. Maybe you see them? One is lean like a hungry tiger-cat. The other is big as a bull—like this!"

The faces of the crowd brightened. A dozen spoke at once. The two *Americanos* had come to the village in the middle of the night. They had routed out the *cantinero* to serve them drinks. Then they had slept drunkenly till noon. They were gone now, riding south.

The strings of the guitar rang out like a drum. . . . His dusty boots pointed straight across the square to where a crouching figure with a gun on each hip awaited him.

Minstrel Jim beamed his thanks. He sang a gay little Mexican ballad about kissing your sweetheart under a broad-brimmed hat, waved sarcastically to the native who had ignored him and pushed his gray on in the late border sunlight.

It was dark before he had ridden two hours. The trail grew rougher. He could make out the black outline of jagged Chihuahua hills closing in about him. Finally ahead in the darkness gleamed a sprinkle of yellow lights.

"Shore's a natural place to find rattlesnakes!" he reflected. "Kinda depressin', too." He pulled the guitar around in front of him and softly sang to himself:

Oh, some like the fiddle,
And some the guitar.
And some a girl singin'
If she's off purty far.
A few like pianos.
And some likes a snore.
But give me the bass notes
Of an ol' forty-four!

"Feelin' better already," he told himself. "Still a little caved-in under the belt, but the hosses is plumb wrangled outa my head."

He rode up the dim native street. Sounds of revelry came from an adobe building on the crude plaza. Through the open door he glimpsed a rude bar, a single burning lamp with a broken chimney, and the huge bulk of the Gila Bull. To his ears came the chink of glasses, and the whine of a border *copla* to a weak accompaniment on the guitar.

The shabby rider listened.

"Some *hombre* oughta go in and tune it," he soliloquized. Pulling his gun, he stepped off the saddle into the lighted doorway of the village *cantina.*

"Hup!" he sang out with frigid eyes. *"Arriba con las manos!"*

Five or six unarmed peons gazed at him stupidly. The eyes of the Gila Bull bulged with astonishment while virulent yellow lights blazed in Childers' cat-like eyes. For a moment Minstrel Jim thought the outlaw was going to draw. Then he raised his arms. In a moment the smoky air of the *cantina* was filled with lifted hands, brown and white, some empty, some clutching playing-cards or glasses in their fingers.

"So a tap on the head didn't satisfy you?" Childers purred.

Minstrel Jim's eyes were blue ice.

"Keep yore right hand pointin' at the place yo're never goin' to!" he ordered. "With yore left you open yore belt and chuck the whole shebang out the door!"

CHILDERS' skin flattened against his skull.

"Remember, Bull, the guitar-player's my meat!" he snarled. But belt and guns went jangling into the dark street.

"Now, Bull, yore left hoof!" the lone figure drawled. And when the glowering bulk had obeyed— "Reach in yore pockets, both o' you, and throw out what money you got!"

Breathing hard, Mace Childers threw down a new deerskin pouch evidently acquired in the Plummet trading-post. It chinked as it struck the floor. Pressing his huge lips tightly together, the Gila Bull tossed out a knotted bandana. Dropping to a knee for a second, Minstrel Jim picked them up. Without taking his gun from the two Americans, he counted the contents.

"Little more'n a hundred." His eyes grew a trifle bluer. "You boys are short-cardin' me. Throw in with the rest."

"It's in a wallet in my blankets," Childers snarled.

Minstrel Jim glanced at the blanket-roll on a monte table.

"Get the money and let's count it!" he ordered. To himself he added that he would take the blankets along.

With apparent reluctance the killer crossed the earthen floor to the table. One hand fumbled deep in the roll. On the other side of the room the Gila Bull made a sudden scraping noise with his foot. Minstrel Jim whirled on him and instantly regretted it. Devilish triumph was in the huge outlaw's face. Through a corner of his eye, Minstrel Jim saw big Mace Childers whirling around from the monte table. Instantly he understood. The outlaws had been cunning enough to leave a stolen and probably loaded gun in the blanket-roll. And now Mace Childers had it in his hand.

In that fraction of a split-second Jim knew that his own gun had swung too far aside. He wouldn't be able to twist it back on Childers in time. The outlaw's barrel was only inches out of range now and coming like the wind.

But one chance remained to him, and he took it. His sights already pointed in the general direction of the smoking lamp with the broken chimney. Blazing at the burning wick, he leaped direct for the line of men standing with upraised arms between him and the doorway.

Behind him a second shot rang out in the closing darkness. He felt the wind from a bullet. He heard the peons scattering from his path. In the moment of intense blackness that follows the sudden extinguishing of a light, he hurled himself out into the cool night air. His hands found the familiar old hull of his saddle.

Bedlam had broken out in the saloon. Men shouted and cursed in two languages. Some one, evidently Mace Childers, came running into the street and five shots raked the darkness. Looking back, the untouched fugitive saw matches flare as both outlaws hunted for belts and guns. . . .

For an hour Minstrel Jim rode hard. Then he gave the gray his wind in a slow, rocking lope.

ALL night Minstrel Jim rode the weary gray on the trail back to the States. When the sun came up he glimpsed a pursuing dust-cloud. It drew closer; it had crawled up mile by mile by the time he crossed the international boundary, and black specks were near enough to count and coming fast, as the shabby guitar-player climbed off the exhausted gray in front of the Plummet trading-

post. Stiff from his long ride, he limped into the store.

The familiar bunch of loafers looked up and grinned. The old buffalo-hunter called:

"Hey, Plummet! Sam Bass' cradle rocked itself back!"

The trader came in the back door with a roll of wire. He greeted his returned clerk coldly.

Minstrel Jim reached into a pocket.

"I didn't get yore guns back yet—nor yore blankets," he apologized. "But here's around a hundred dollars, till I get the rest."

George Plummet was staring at the deerskin pouch and the knotted bandana.

"What in thunder's that?" he demanded.

"Childers give me the pouch," Minstrel Jim explained. "The money in the bandana come from the Gila Bull. I'd 'a' got more, but Childers got hol' of a gun and started shootin'."

The white-mustached trader backed suddenly away.

"Keep it!" he waved violently. "Take it away somewheres."

The shabby guitar-player gazed at him in astonishment.

"It's yore money—don't you want it?"

George Plummet's face turned purple.

"It was mine once, you crazy fool!" he shouted. "It's yours now. If you took that money off those outlaws, I wouldn't have it for all the cattle in the territory."

Minstrel Jim appealed to the staring loafers.

"One o' you gents better keep it for him till mawnin'. I never knowed a man to refuse money longer'n overnight." He held out the sagging pouch and bandana to the old buffalo-hunter. The latter scrambled from his keg as if he had been presented with a pair of rattlesnakes.

"I wouldn't touch it with a forty-foot rope!" he sputtered.

Minstrel Jim shook his head. This was beyond him! He stowed pouch and handkerchief in his pockets. Then he ambled to the counter.

"If I'm wuth a hundred dollars, mebbe you'd give me about four bits of crackers and cheese on credit?"

HASTILY the trader served him. Minstrel Jim was still eating when a citizen slipped warily into the store.

"Mace Childers and the Gila Bull just rode into town, Plummet!"

His words created instant excitement in the Plummet trading-post. Plummet's cheeks went as white as his rafter mustaches. The old buffalo-hunter spat and wiped his quivering whiskers.

"I tol' you he was plumb crazy! Them two outlaws was safe and peaceable in Mexico, and he had to go down and rile 'em up so they come back!"

A clatter of hoofs sounded from the street.

"There goes the guitar-player's horse!" some one called from the front window. "Mace Childers picked him up and is runnin' him around the square."

Minstrel Jim didn't follow the others to the front of the store.

"I kinda figgered they'd be officers down here from Santa Fe for them *orphans* by this time," he observed.

"The officers come as far as Roswell!" the old buffalo-hunter told him triumphantly. "When they heard Childers was across the border, they went back."

THE trader returned from the front window. His nervous hands shook.

"You got to get out of here with that money, guitar-player!" he urged.

Minstrel Jim brushed the crumbs from his loose vest. The old trading-post had never looked so good. He gave a last caressing look around it.

"If you don't want me, Mr. Plummet, I reckon I got to dust," he agreed soberly. His feet dragged as he moved to the rear door and opened it a few inches. For a moment he stood there motionless. Over the tall adobe wall of the corral his blue eyes caught a glimpse of a rifle and the top of the Gila Bull's black hat. He watched it for a moment; then softly he closed the door.

The others heard his gun cock as his ancient boots creaked back across the length of the trading-post floor. The front door was set in a short adobe vestibule, and he had to step over the threshold to get a view of the street. It was surprising how bare of horses and people the square had suddenly become. Except for the faces pressed dramatically to window-panes, the town might have been deserted. The low tamarisks in the center of the square stood motionless in the border heat.

Minstrel Jim had already glimpsed his gray. It stood tied to the hitching-rack almost directly across the square, beside a saddled dun. Behind the horses he saw the Sheepshead Saloon, and in the doorway a crouching figure. Even

at this distance he could see the cold triumphant face. The sunlight glinted on the nickel-and-pearl butts turned outward from the holsters on his belt.

A soft thud sounded at Minstrel Jim's heels. He heard the click of a shot bolt. His lean cheeks grew a trifle leaner. George Plummet had locked the door to the trading-post behind him.

His eyes had never been quite so blue as at this moment. With his gaze fixed on the outlaw waiting across the square, he grimly considered. If he started to run up or down the street, Mace Childers would get him. If he dodged around the side of the post, the Gila Bull's rifle would catch him in the face. If he started across the square for his horse, the Gila Bull could nail him in the back.

"Looks like three kings got my checker hog-tied on the board," he muttered. Then he remembered what Mace Childers had said in the little *cantina* across the border. The words came back to him significantly: "Remember, Bull, the guitar-player's my meat!"

"It's jes' a chance," he reminded himself. "But you gotta die sometime, boy. And right now you got the whole town lookin' at you. Give 'em their money's wuth!"

His eyes had lighted with new emotion. Still watching across the square like a hawk, he pulled his guitar around in front. Without moving from the vestibule, his feet started swinging into the old shuffling rebel step. Under his strumming fingers, the strings of the guitar rang out like a marching drum. At the militant note, a score of men and women at windows in the square felt the hair tingle at the base of their skulls.

Thrum! Thrum! Thrum! Thrum!

At the last note Jim started out into the street. His dusty cowboots pointed straight across the square where a crouching figure with a gun on each hip awaited him. His voice rang out clear and unforgetable in the silent little New Mexican town.

I can see the plains of Texas
Rollin' green beneath the sun.
I can see the fat steers grazin';
I can hear the hosses run.
I can smell the sweet bluebonnets
Growin' everywhere around. . . .
Oh, I want to die in Texas
And be laid in Texas ground!

It was a moment that for years was talked of in Packsaddle. Under the spell of that singing figure striding across the square, Mace Childers in the doorway of the Sheepshead Saloon had not yet thrown a hand to his guns. At every step the singer half-expected lead from the Gila Bull in his back. He reached the center of the square, brushed by the clump of tamarisk, then abruptly leaped to the left to put its friendly green screen between him and the rifle behind him.

As he leaped, he saw Mace Childers' right hand galvanized into action. It was the signal he had been waiting for. His hand forsook the strings of his guitar. And now his fingers moved with more speed than they had ever picked out a fast-moving accompaniment.

There sounded a crash of gunpowder. The horses jumped. Somewhere near by a woman screamed. The roar of guns echoed and reëchoed up and down the dusty square. Minstrel Jim saw a terrible expression distort Mace Childers' face. Still harsh and unbending in death as in life, he fell forward on his face in the doorway of the Sheepshead Saloon.

Behind the green screen of tamarisk, gun in hand, Minstrel Jim waited tensely for the first evidence of the Gila Bull. His ears caught the drum of a galloping horse. Up the square he noticed men coming from their houses. Moving out into the open, he understood. The huge outlaw had seen his partner fall. He had taken to the saddle and was spurring for the international boundary.

IN a few moments the square, so deserted shortly before, swarmed with people. One was George Plummet.

"You sure rid the country of a bad *hombre*," he coughed. "How about a drink? Then maybe you want to pay me that money you collected from those outlaws."

"Money?" Minstrel Jim puzzled. "I thought you said—" He glanced around at some of the loafers from the trading-post. "Boys, I reckon this shootin' got the brands mixed in my head. What did he tell me to do with that money I took off those men?"

The old buffalo-hunter closed his toothless jaws; but three or four of the others answered in an admiring chorus:

"He told you to keep it!"

"Nope, boys!" Jim reproved solemnly. "That wouldn't be honest. I gotta give it back. I'm a-goin' to give it back right now—for a new hat, a saddle nobody ever rode yet, and a pair of shiny boots I can plumb see myself in to comb my shinin' hair of a mawnin'!"

Gold Is Where You

This second story of the New Barbary Gold series deals with the fabulously rich Claim of the Golden Head, the beautiful girl who owned it—and with an adventurer who risked his life in the Papuan jungles to find its equal.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

PERSIS CAMERON was coming up from her claim.

Every evening she came like this, when the swift cool evening of the high peaks began to fall—came walking slowly, slowly, up the thousand feet that separated the gold-bearing bed of the river from her home; slowly, not because she was old or feeble,—she was in her early twenties, and as limber as a deer, —but because each night she carried a bag of gold.

There are not many alluvial fields in the world where a girl may, in one day, gather gold enough to make her halt and stagger in the carrying of it; and even on such fields there are few claims as rich as that of Persis. On Finch's Field, high up the Laurie River, none of the miners—men, and tough, experienced men, all of them—had had such luck as this little slender girl.

They called it luck; and perhaps it was pure luck that had originally thrown the claim in her way. What people in general knew about it, after two or three years, was simply that Persis Cameron had quarreled with her lover Mark M'Cracken—best and most adventurous air-man of all the daring pilots who risked their lives in the New Barbary service—over the division of a find they had made together. That Mark, in the course of the quarrel, had pulled up his datum pegs, thrown them at Persis' feet, and told her to go to bed with her gold, since she seemed to love it better than anything else. Afterward he had gone back to the New Barbary Airways, and Persis remained on her claim, augmented by that of Mark. He had sent her a transfer, making her the richest miner on the field, but he sent her nothing else, not a letter, or a message, even; he had literally flown out of her life.

It was not supposed that Persis cared very much. She had her gold, her house —a marvelous thing, on that field where everything had to be transported by plane from the far-off burning coasts, where mirrors, chairs and tables, windows of real glass, represented each a separate miracle. She had her friends; most of the men were more or less in love with her, and all quite hopelessly. She had the best of everything that gold could buy, and she kept a Chinese cook, a Siamese cat, an Alsatian dog and a chaperon; the last quite wonderful, with gray silk frock of the fashion of nineteen ten, gray hair worn pompadour, knitting-bag and plate-armor corsets.

Jane Pieman was perhaps a little more than a chaperon; she considered herself the conscience of Persis Cameron, and the benefactress, in a welfare-working sort of way, of various women and girls to whom a chaperon would have been as strange an appendage as a tail to a guinea pig.

On this especial evening, this evening of drifting mock-pearl cloud among the pines, of the mock-English coolness on the nights of Laurie and Koroni, of dews that lay mock-frosty upon the strawberries and raspberries and violets of the mining track—those scentless, flavorless mock-lovely things—Miss Pieman was enjoying all together the pleasures of chaperonage, welfare work, and high counsel.

The last of the evening light fell on a marvelous mass of raw clean gold that Persis emptied on the table of the dining-hall as she came in. "Scales, please, Miss Pie," she said curtly, and then perceived that the chaperon was not alone.

There was a man in the hall, and a woman. The woman she knew; all the goldfield, all New Barbary, and a good

Find It

Illustrated by
Paul De Leslie

part of the Pacific world, knew Sandra, commonly called Sandy—Sandy of no known surname, of beauty unrivaled, Sandy without fear, without care, without morals, and (in spite of the last) very often without money.

The man Persis knew by name only: Phil Sargent. Not common Phil; the Honorable Philip was his correct title, and an earl, deceased, and ruined before that, was his father. Philip Sargent had come to her with a letter of introduction in hand, and another in the post. Belonging to Persis Cameron, orphan, there were fine relations somewhere "down south," and they had handed the young Englishman to her, recommending her to "put him on to a good thing."

This horrible ignorance of goldfields etiquette and custom on the part of her relations had almost decided Persis not to see the fellow at all; but he had arrived unexpectedly by plane, bouncing down on the little dangerous 'drome that lay like a drop of jade in the heart of the Laurie and Koroni gorges; and when Persis saw him, she forgot to think of him as a "fellow." Philip Sargent was extremely good to look at, and more than that, he had the stamp of breeding such as is seldom seen in the backwaters of the world.

A tall man, with a small head, well set; with a merry gray eye, and a young bright mouth that could laugh as merrily as the eyes, cause given. With a certain steadiness, nevertheless, that shone out through the laughing eyes and the kindly lips. That made you feel—if you were a woman, and young, yet no man's fool—that you could trust him.

All that Persis said, however, was the orthodox, "How do you do?" And almost immediately she turned to Sandy, who was hanging around, somewhat doubtful (it seemed) of her welcome, and told her to take a chair while she, Persis, weighed out. "Always glad to see you," she said, "but business first."

Miss Pieman, needles flashing, said that Mrs. Sands (for so she would call Sandy) must be tired, and would like tea. That she hoped Mr. Sargent had not had a trying trip.

"Rather have a spot of whisky," Sandra said, yawning, and taking a good look at the newcomer. Persis poured a handful of gold into her scales, and began weighing.

"I banked twelve hundred and fifty last week," she told Miss Pieman.

"And you've two hundred there, I suppose?" There was an implied reproach in the tone.

"Good Lord," said the Honorable Philip, "you don't mean that you get two hundred pounds a day?"

"No," replied Persis, carefully pouring gold from the bag. "Ounces," she added, as she filled the scale.

"How much is an ounce?"

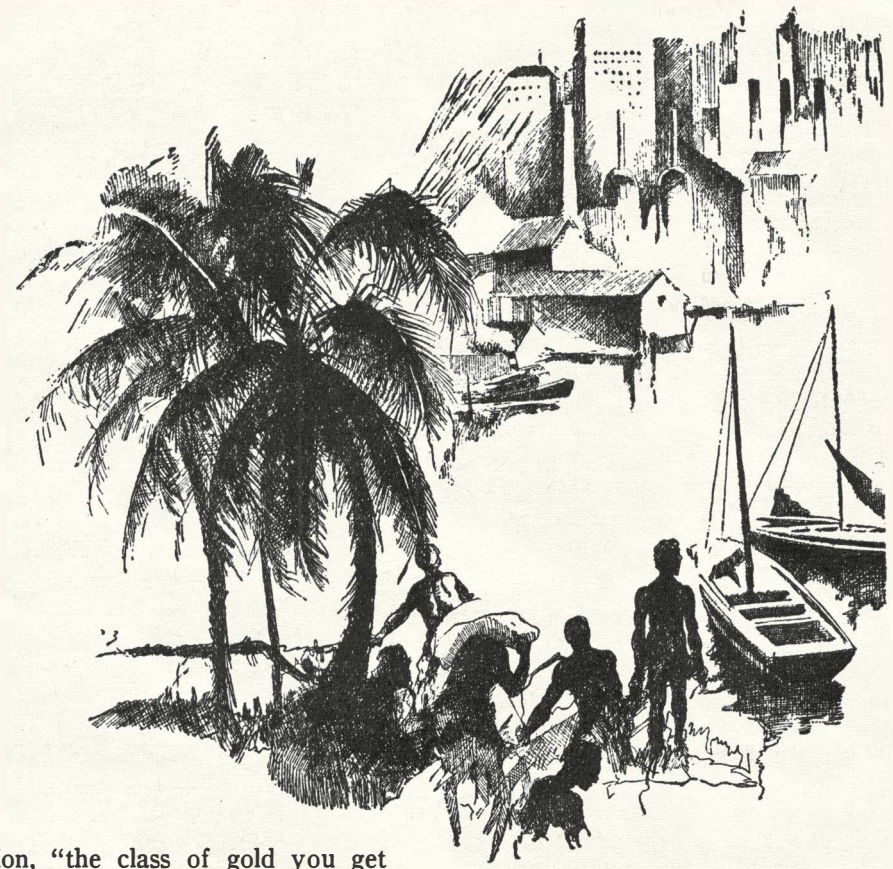
"At present prices, and allowing for the silver, about five pounds nine."

Phil said, "My God!" and laughed. No other comment seemed possible.

"Do you think," he said presently, "I'll have such luck?"

IT was not Persis who replied; it was Sandra. "Not unless you run across something like the Golden Head," she said. "The big company has a grant of most of the good stuff about here, now."

"The Golden Head," Persis said, "was found, some months ago, by a miner called Cotter, who went prospecting up the Oro and Laurie rivers. He didn't come back. The natives sent his head down the river, with the mouth tied up, full of gold. It wasn't," she said with



animation, "the class of gold you get here, mixed with silver. It was practically pure."

A man who had drifted in from nowhere in particular, an aged man with silver beard, thick silver hair, and limbs like the boughs of trees, remarked: "Six pounds ten an ounce."

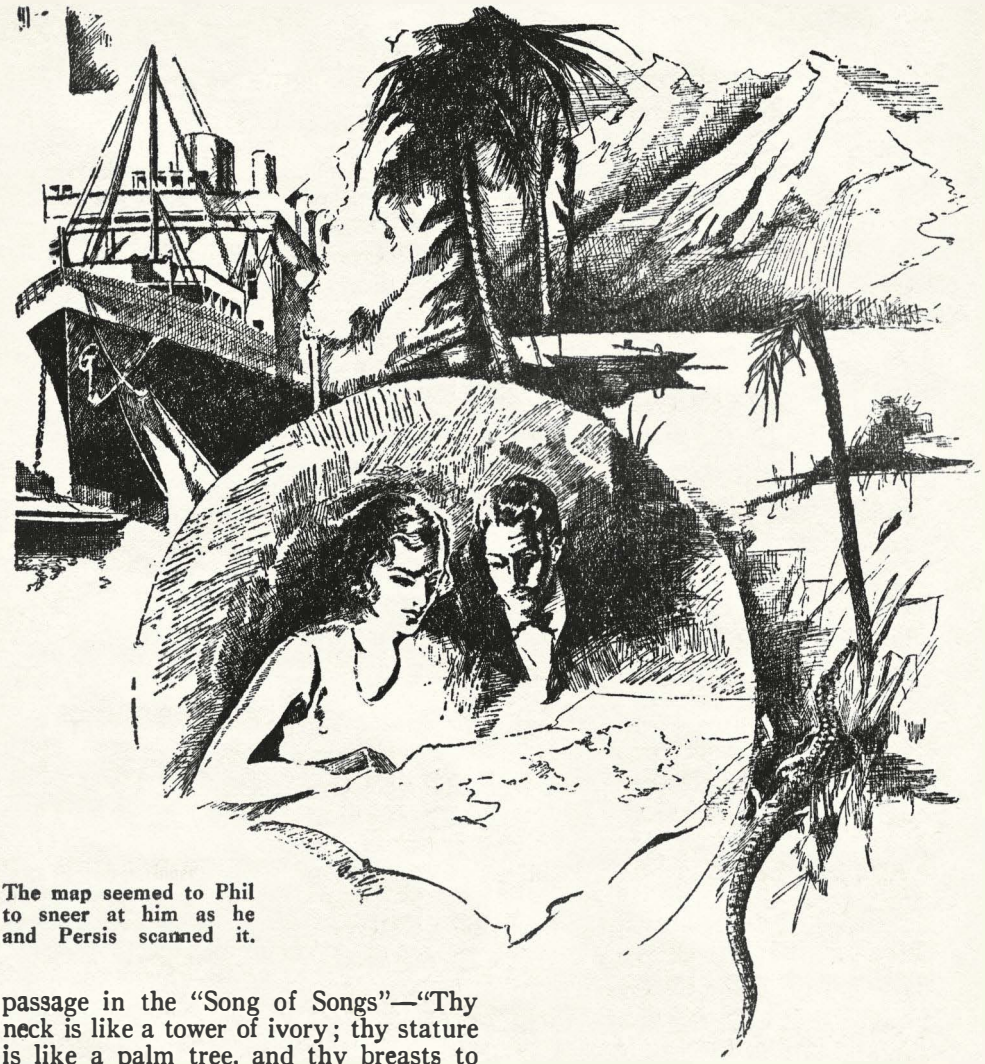
Sandra said nothing and Persis went on weighing gold.

Phil Sargent, who was blessed, or cursed, with imagination, told himself that he must have somehow slipped over the edge of the known world, and fallen into another. . . .

Flying up from the shining seacoast of New Barbary, that was bright as a painted snake, that like a snake would strike its poison into you, if you stayed long enough; up across the forests and the rivers, and the peaks ten thousand feet high, into the heart of the great island continent of New Barbary, that had been on the map of the South Seas for near four hundred years, but that was still in large degree untamed—flying over cannibal villages, gorges where giant crocodiles lurked and bellowed, straight to a house like the houses one had seen in Sydney town; finding in it a Victorian chaperon, a miner very like the miners of the stage, and two supremely beautiful girls, who weighed out gold by the handful, and spoke casually of people having their heads cut off!

This Persis Cameron, of whom he had heard so much, was certainly wonderful. She intrigued him, with her strange wax-candle beauty; eyes that were golden flames, beneath dark curling hair; narrow face, colored like ivory; slim body, that one knew, somehow, to be as white and firm, beneath the rough mining dress, as a new candle set in an altar-sconce. They said she didn't care about men, had refused half the field; meant to be an old maid all her days. . . . Old maid! As soon apply the term to Sandra, sitting there on the corner of the table—Sandra, who was so very different, yet so like; since women loved of men are in essentials the same the world over.

This Sandy was not slim; she was big-boned, handsomely made; she was, to look at, strong as a mule; she wore a single garment of rich silk that draped itself caressingly over arms and legs smooth with muscle, shoulders near as wide as Sargent's own. Her neck—of what did it remind him? Surely that



The map seemed to Phil to sneer at him as he and Persis scanned it.

passage in the "Song of Songs"—"Thy neck is like a tower of ivory; thy stature is like a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes." . . . Yes, and the rest of the passage, candid, forcible—it fitted Sandra as the calyx fits the flower. The girl—she was perhaps six or seven and twenty, perhaps more; one could not tell —had red-brown eyes, and amber hair so thick that its short masses stood out like a halo round her head. Her face, seen there in the half-dusk of the mountain house, seemed calm as the water in the pools of the Laurie River; but like that still water, it had known storms.

Phil looked at her, and she looked at Phil, and as she did so, all expression went out of her eyes, and her mouth set itself in a hard line. "Doesn't she like me?" he thought, with mortification. Persis, behind the table, weighing gold, sent him a glance that was criticizing and thoughtful. He had the idea that while she weighed the gold with her hands, her mind was busy weighing, valuing him.

The gold was finished, put away in small chamois bags, locked in the safe that stood in one corner of the room. Tomorrow's plane would carry it to the coast. The planes, from the Laurie and the Koroni, went daily loaded with gold —and sometimes with death. They had crashed in air-pockets over the whirling gorges; they had crashed in mists that hid the sides of mountains; they had crashed when the single engines that were all they dared use, on the tiny 'dromes, conked out, and sent them thousands of feet to flaming hell. And they went on; and the people of the field went with them—for gold.

Work was over on the claims in the river below; the sound of clinking picks, the rustle of water through the races, was silenced. New Barbary laborers, naked, fierce-eyed, came pouring up the pathway to their camps. A long way

off, one last shot from a distant claim tore the air.

"The Company's blasting," some one said. Three or four men in khaki clothing and thick boots had drifted on to the veranda of Persis' house—were sitting there drinking champagne and beer, served by Chinese boys, and talking gold.

"Blast the Company!" said another.

Pidgin, the old man with the silver beard, said: "That's right, if you could; but the law's there—the law gave 'em the ground, and what're ye going to do?"

"Go out and get more," Phil Sargent suggested. He had been introduced; the men had looked him over, sized him up; nodded to him, lifted their glasses, said: "Here's luck."

"There's dozens after it now," Pidgin informed him. "All up the Oro and the Karaloi, and some of them's getting it, and some of them the natives are getting, maybe, same as they got Jim Cotter."

"I reckon Jim Cotter struck it on the Karaloi—"

"I reckon he got it on some of those creeks that run into—"

"There's gold everywhere in this country. We haven't begun to—"

"If you go right up the range, and follow the run of the big valley, I swear you'd get it in cartloads."

Everyone seemed to be talking at once; the room was thick with smoke of pipes, of good cigars; the tinkle of glasses, as the boys passed to and fro, was like the sound of wind-bells in a Chinese temple. Miss Pieman's flashing needles seemed by their emphatic twitter to cry out against the cost of all this hospitality.

"Persis doesn't touch liquor," Sargent, through the clatter of talk, heard her say. "She throws away her money on it. She's extravagant. She'll die poor, and so will Mrs. Sands. If they'd only keep a savings bank-book—like me!" She patted a lump, in her Victorian pocket.

"CLAIMS don't last forever," came the whispering, penetrating voice again. "And she worships gold. Can't have too much. Loves it. She ought to marry; that'd fill her head with something else. Eh? What do you think?" Miss Pieman was staring hard at Sargent. It all seemed part of the absurd fairy tale. This woman was actually hinting to him, before he had been an hour in the house of the richest woman on the field, that he might make her beauty and her riches his own.

Well, she was a gentlewoman. She would not find it easy to mate among these fine rough fellows—all right as friends, fellow-prospectors, but as husbands, for all the rest of life, no.

He wondered if she had really been fond of the fellow who had, virtually, spat in her face and left her. He wondered if some one else couldn't show her, successfully, that every man was not such a mug as M'Cracken. It would not be hard to fall in love with that wax-candle beauty of hers, if one could swallow the humiliation of being prince-consort to her queen.

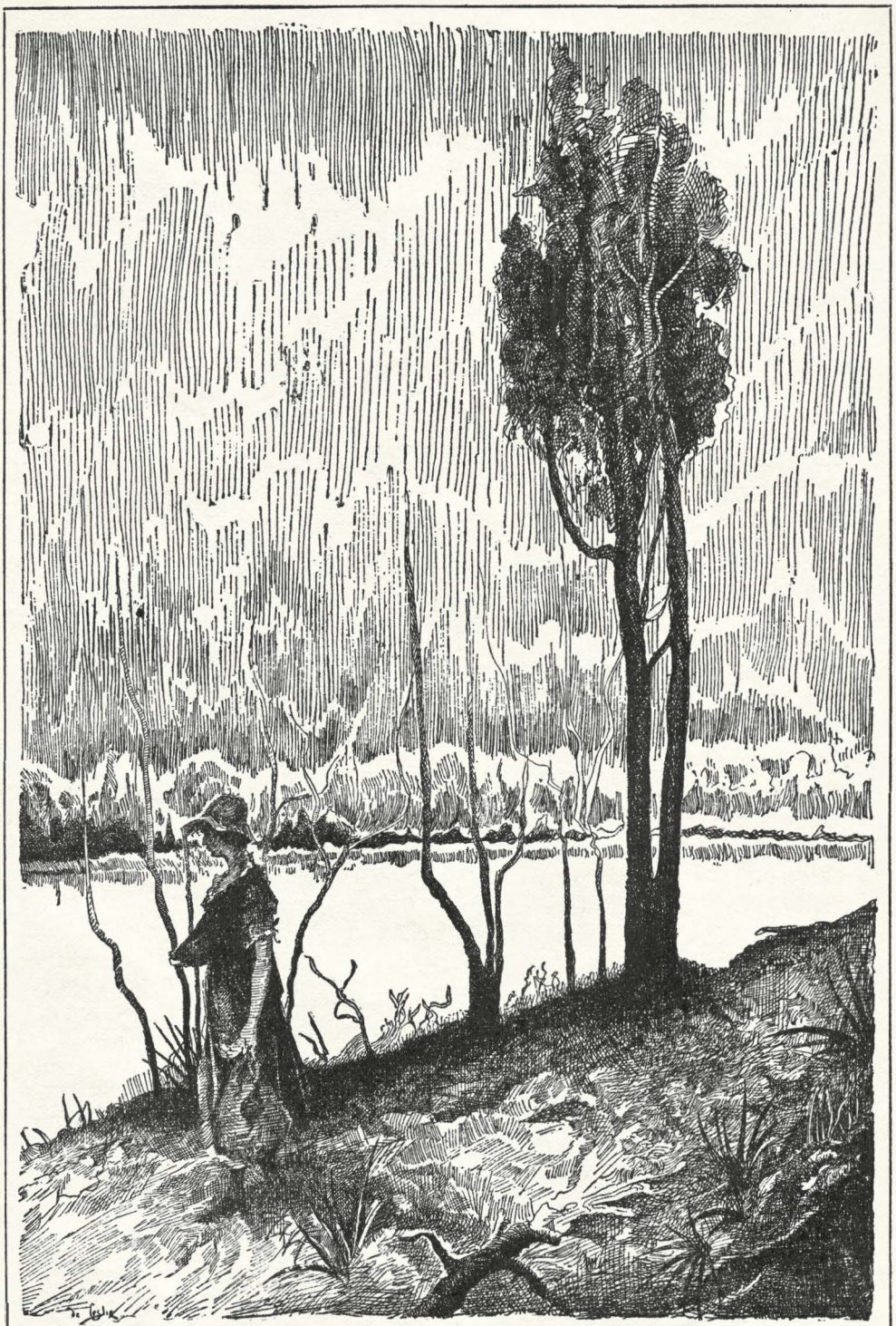
MOVING aside to let a Chinese waiter pass, he became conscious that some one was staring at him—Sandra.

She had been drinking; her red-brown eyes were misted with wine, and her fingers carelessly played with the cigarette that she couldn't keep between her lips any longer. She seemed to be half in a dream; not to know that the man who was sitting beside her—a better groomed, livelier and less weather-beaten figure than most of the others—had his arm around her waist. She was watching Sargent, looking at him in a kind of incredulous wonder. As if she had just found him, as if she had been looking for him, much and long.

Phil, boldly returning her gaze (for why should one mind manners with notorious Sandy?) found himself wondering what she might have been like, two or three or five years past, before she threw caps over windmills and came to the goldfields of New Barbary. If he had met her then, when she was, no doubt, the rebellious, unsatisfied wife of some uncomprehending fellow who didn't half deserve her,—if she had taken a fancy to him,—he could imagine that he would have been very ready to run away with her, make the fellow set her free. Yes. If she had taken a fancy. . . . One could well imagine that Sandra's fancies, to another woman's love, would be as "sunlight unto moonlight,"—or as flaming torch to the light of pale pure candle.

But he had come here to the perilous remote goldfields of New Barbary to make his fortune, not to make love. . . .

Miss Pieman saw everything, it seemed. When you have no life left of your own, when you are nothing but the husk and ashes of what you were, you sit in corners, knit and knit and watch. Miss Pieman said: "That Mrs. Sandy—I do wish Persis wouldn't have her here; she's beyond reforming, if it ever was possible. That Mrs. Sandy would kill



Every evening Persis came like this from her claim, when the swift cool evening of the high peaks began to fall—came walking slowly up the thousand feet that separated the gold-bearing bed of the river from her home; slowly, not because she was old or feeble, but because each night she carried a bag of gold.

herself for a new thrill. Imagine what she's up to now."

Phil couldn't imagine.

"She and Linnhay, that man with her, are going off on a prospecting trip together. Among the cannibals! And the snakes. And the crocodiles. Out back. Madness!"

"Who," asked Phil, "is Linnhay?"

"Hmph," said Miss Pieman; "he's a Company man." She stared at the Company man as if she could have stabbed him with her needles.

"I don't suppose he can help it," Phil temporized. But he felt, nevertheless, that it was like the cheek of a Company man—no true miner—to monopolize lovely Sandra. He didn't like Linnhay—and he didn't dislike him. The man was a big beefy sensual-looking fellow, but somehow he looked honest. And he had drunk less wine than anyone else in the room, save Persis and Jane Pieman.

It occurred to Sargent that he himself had had enough, and he waved back the advances of the China boys. By and by the room cleared; the men went off to their camps; Sandra and Linnhay seemed to melt away; and there was no one there but himself, Miss Pieman, and the rich young miner Persis Cameron. Persis had gone off and come back again, dressed in a white evening frock, and he supposed he'd better tidy up, since he was, for a few days, to be her guest.

IT was a week later. Phil Sargent was in the lounge of Persis' house, bending over a map. He had carried that map for long; poor as it was, and known to be incorrect, it was the only guide to the Laurie fields and the peaks of untamed Koroni. The difficulties of prospecting in this terrible country were known to him now, as they had not been known before.

And the map had taken on a new face; it seemed to sneer at him, as he and Persis scanned it. What was behind the Koroni range? Where did the upper tributaries of the golden Laurie lead? "Find out," said the scrap of paper, that had lured so many to their death. "Find out—if you dare!"

Persis laid one hand on the map (it was a beautiful hand, if brown) and said: "Here, and here, is where you will go." She spoke with perfect confidence; and that was odd, for during the whole week, when men came up to her veranda after working-hours, little had been talked of but the gold to be won "out back," and no two men had been in agreement as to where it should be sought.

There was a moment's silence, while Persis' hand moved, while her pointed nails left tiny marks on the paper.

"There," she said, "or near it, is where Jim Cotter went."

Sargent did not ask her how she knew. He understood he was about to be told.

"Cotter," she went on, "was a friend of mine. I mean, he asked me to marry him, but I—"

"Yes, I understand."

"He told me what he thought about the upper Laurie. He said he believed the good gold was right on the summits of Koroni. He said they weren't the original summits, that it had all been much higher, once, and that the top of the big ridge now held the gold that had been washed down; and that all we get here, a long way off, came from that place. I don't know that I was much taken by the idea—but nothing's impossible about gold: gold's where you find it. And I grubstaked him. And I asked him if he'd told anyone else his idea. And he said no; there was only one person he would have told, and she was dead. So he went to look, and everyone knew he found it; but no one knew where."

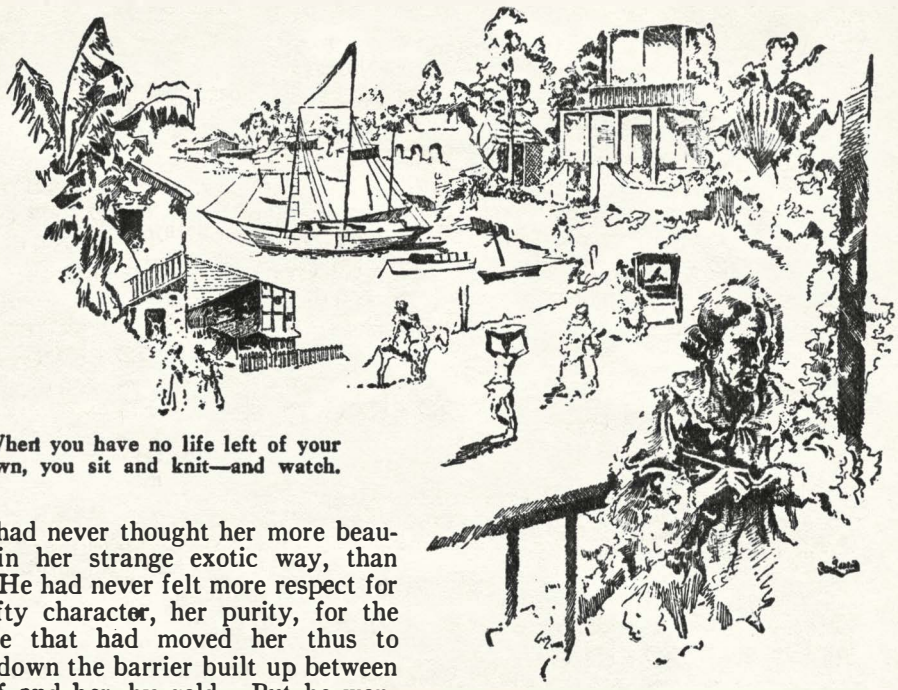
"Carriers?"

"They couldn't tell; the Koroni tribes got them all. No one knows, but myself. And now you."

Silence again. A long way down, in the gorge of the Laurie, picks and shovels made little noises like the ticking of clocks. The pines of Koroni whispered: "Why trouble? Life is so brief, brief, b-r-i-e-f!"

PHIL SARGENT had never felt stronger, more like living. He understood, in a flash of excited comprehension, that he was being offered a fortune—two fortunes—if he could find and bring back the title to the best, which was the first, of the Golden Head. And he was being offered more.

Persis, at that moment, lowered her eyes, which had been looking from the map to the face of Phil and back again. Instinctively he followed their downward glance, saw her take a bit of lace and cambric from the belt of her dress, and slowly, deliberately, let it fall from her fingers. It dropped across the instep of Sargent's shooting-boot, and lay there like a strayed flake of snow. The princess had thrown the handkerchief. . . .



When you have no life left of your own, you sit and knit—and watch.

He had never thought her more beautiful, in her strange exotic way, than now. He had never felt more respect for her lofty character, her purity, for the courage that had moved her thus to break down the barrier built up between himself and her, by gold. But he wondered, if she loved him at all, if he was not merely a convenience to her, a consort she was selecting on the advice of Jane Pieman. And he wondered if he—

Nonsense! Of course he did. After a week spent in the company of the most wonderful girl—

Halt there! What about the night when he and Sandra—Sandra who was now gone away with Linnhay—had stood together under the cedars at the rim of the Laurie Valley, and talked, for the first time? What about the strange thing she had said, when after few and insignificant words, she was leaving him, to go back to a drinking party in the camp of a man who had newly struck it rich?

"If I'd known," she said, "I'd have waited!" Then she put her arms about him, kissed him slowly and without passion, stood for a moment while he kissed her back (he was shaken to the soul, if she was not) and left him.

Sandy, Sandy, of no known surname, Sandy who had flung her cap over countless windmills; Sandy with the neck like a tower of ivory, and the stature like a palm tree; Sandy who would never make a wife to any man; Sandy irresistible, yet to be resisted—the most wonderful girl in the world. But if she was, Persis was the next most wonderful; and—

He bent down; he had hesitated but the fraction of a minute. He picked up the handkerchief, and laid it in her hand, looking straight into those bright, courageous eyes of hers. "You may," they seemed to tell him. So he did.

SANDRA, in boots and breeches; Sandra grown thin, sallow; Sandra untidy, almost ragged—sat on the corner of Persis' table, while Persis made up, as usual, the evening's gold. You might have thought, had you looked only at one of the girls, that time, for many weeks, had stood still. That today was the day when Phil Sargent had arrived at the Laurie field; that Jane Pieman, knitting in the corner, had not moved since then; that Persis, like the princess in some fairy tale, had not ceased to sit there, counting out her gold.

But there was the mark of long hardship, fierce adventure, on Sandra; she seemed an older woman than the one who had left, gayly, to seek new thrills in the company of her latest lover.

Persis asked politely: "Have an interesting time?"

Sandra tucked her cigarette into the corner of her mouth. "We were chased for two days by a head-hunting party, but we got away," she said.

"Evidently."

"We were nearly caught in a river-bed by a cloudburst. You know."

Persis nodded. She did know. Lives had been lost that way, before.

"Lin found a big crocodile right under his bunk, when we were camping on the edge of a swamp."

"A swamp isn't—"

"Yes, I know; but it was convenient. And Lin asked me to marry him."

Crocodiles, cloudbursts, head-hunters, paled before the interest of this. Persis looked up quickly. Jane Pieman said:

"You should be down on your knees, Mrs. Sands, thanking heaven fasting for a good man's—"

"Bunk," said Sandra. "Lin isn't a good man. But he's a damn' good prospector."

"When are you going to marry him?" asked Persis.

"When hell freezes over," Sandra said. "Give me some more cigarettes; mine are done."

Persis was silent for quite a minute; you might have thought her busy counting her gold, and perhaps she was. Presently she said to Miss Pieman: "Cigarettes, please, Pie." She made no comment regarding Sandra's statement.

BUT Sandra had more to say. "There's a rumor among the natives that Sargent's boys have deserted."

Everyone, on the Laurie, knew that that meant almost certain death. Persis looked up again; her face was a trifle paler, but not much. "You can't believe all the native gossip you hear."

"Isn't he due back?"

"Just about. Not time for anyone to worry—yet." The whole history of the Laurie was in those words; but neither of the women noticed it.

"Are you sending out?"

"What have I to do with it? And if I had, it isn't necessary. No one would say—"

Sandra laughed, not pleasantly. "I didn't know the bush before," she said. "But I do now. And I believe in—native gossip."

"What does Linnhay think?"

"He doesn't know. He went down to the coast yesterday, to see his chief about something."

Persis rose, opened the safe, put away her gold, and closed the steel door with a clang. "What do you propose to do?" she said. And in tone, if not in words, there was another query: "What business is it of yours?"

Sandra was standing erect, with her pith helmet in her hand. She placed it on her head, and said: "I'm going to look. Old Pidgin won't believe anything, but he'll go too."

Persis was busy with the lock of the safe; she did not turn around.

"Lock up," said Sandra, "and be careful how you do it, for you've shut your soul inside!"

Then she was gone, and for a little while after, the *pat-pat* of her boots echoed on the track below the house—sounded, and faded, and died away.

VERY far off, in the places where no white man went, where not even the planes, piloted by Australia's most daring air-men, ventured their wings among drowning gorges and mist-covered pinnacles, the golden river of the Laurie seemed to die. Smaller and smaller it grew, till it was only a thread that dropped and failed, and rose and failed again, among the enormous masses of green brush and fern. Here the gold failed too; it might exist beneath the terraces and benches of the valley; but that, nobody knew, for nobody had ever been so far, save the man who died with his mouth stuffed with gold.

Phil Sargent had followed him, and like him, had been deserted by his carriers. He knew enough of New Barbary, now, to be fairly certain that that meant death, unless he could find the gold, and hurry back again before he starved. There was no food in these high wildernesses, in the wet jungles of bamboo and fern, where no butterfly floated, no bird ever sang. There was solitude, rain and rain and the chill of a fever country, mists, mosses fathom-deep. There were waterfalls, streams, precipices, fearful to climb. There was, at last, the stream and precipice that Persis had drawn out upon her map; and maybe Cotter had halted here, and maybe he hadn't. The map was half imagination—had to be.

But on the evening when he found the little cave, with ashes in it, and a metal matchbox, empty, he knew he was on Cotter's track at last. How far the man had gone to right or left he did not know. He was at the very top of the Koroni peaks, in a place where no one except Cotter had thought to find anything. If gold had been discovered, it might be anywhere in a range of miles.

And he was hungry, with only a biscuit or so between him and starvation. And for the last day or two his limbs had known a strange weakness; he had shivered and sweated alternately. It was the climate, he told himself repeatedly—nothing more. . . .

On the top of the range, near Cotter's cave, he looked about him, tossed a coin, and followed it.

His pick, struck in where the coin fell, came out with gold upon the point. Tearing away the soil, he saw the roots of the grass all shining. To right, to left, every stroke of the pick brought gold.

He had won. The summit of the Koroni, as Cotter, that luckless fellow, wise for everyone but himself, had known, was gold-bearing all over.

After he had rested, he took out the pegs he had brought with him, and the notices—pegged what he judged to represent two claims in the heart of the best of it, and spent the rest of the day furiously working. Night found him chilled but sweating, cramped over a pocket of grainy gold like wheat, filling his own pockets from it. His nails were torn, his hands bleeding.

With dark, he crept into the cave, and wrapped his coat about him. All night he burned and shivered. There was water trickling in a corner of the cave. He crept near and drank from it. It was day now—and immediately it was night again. He stayed in the cave. He could hear the sound of waterfalls, as they went splashing down the long flanks of Koroni. He could hear the hill winds raving in the trees. And by and by he ceased to hear at all, for a long time. . . .

He was dreaming, talking to some one. There was something he had to say, as quickly as possible, before waking.

"You know," he told the tall figure, amber-haired, that had come from nowhere, and was there, hanging over him in the dusk of the cave. "You know, it was really *you*. Not—not—"

The figure moved a little; he thought it nodded, silently.

"Pegs," he said then, "I put them in. I found it. Gold. Good gold."

"Yes, that's right, you did." It seemed to him now that he must speak quickly, for he was very near waking up, and then the dream would surely vanish.

"You didn't wait for me," he said. "But I'll do the waiting."

That was right; that was what a gentleman—a man—should do. He felt the hand of Sandy closing round his own; it was very warm; he tried to clasp it with cold fingers, and in the trying, woke.

A white-bearded man came into the cave, in answer to Sandra's sudden call.

"Come away, Sandy," he said.

"I found him—I found him," she cried.

"You did. Now leave him to me."

WHEN Pidgin got back, he was in no hurry to visit Persis. He was not one of the girl's admirers. "She's plenty without me," he thought. "And my news can keep."

But in a day or two he looked her up on her claim. She was there as usual, toiling up and down the slopes of the gorge, directing, ordering, watching every runnel of the sluices, every stroke of pick and shovel. No one, on the Laurie, worked harder for gold than the richest woman there.

"Ye've heard about Sargent," Pidgin began.

"I have. It was most unfortunate, that he should have gone down to fever like that. Nobody could have—"

"He found the gold. And I saw where he pegged out a claim in the thick of it—two claims, for himself and you."

"Yes?" said the girl, standing straight up. Her eyes looked very bright.

"I b'lieve he made a will before he left, in consideration of your giving him the tip?" Pidgin hurried on.

"He did."

"Well, I wish ye luck of the will. I think y'll find a gold watch in his swag, maybe a bit old-fashioned, an' some cuff-links—and there was a pair or two of good English boots that could be sold."

"What do you mean?"

"Ask Linnhay."

"Linnhay and—Sandra?"

He saw she understood, and he said:

"That's right. They were on it days ahead of him, and he never knew. and

they never knew he was about; it's a big country, and a wild one. The claims that Sargent pegged was inside the big claim that Linnhay pegged for the Company. Y'know the mining laws: they give the blasted companies every—"

"Yes, I know."

"There's plenty left, for them that come by and by, but Linnhay has the eyes of it. He's what she called him; he's a damn' good prospector."

Pidgin tramped away, without waiting for further talk. But Persis wanted more, and she hurried off at once to the little bush hut that was Sandra's.

SHE found Sandra lying indolently in a long bush armchair, with the eternal cigarette in her mouth. Sandy was dressed, painted, coiffed, perfumed to perfection. Sandy looked, in that environment, every inch a light woman.

But Persis, shrewdly reading her, knew that she was changed. It was as if a flame that once had burned furiously, leaping and flaring, now began to fail in the socket, threatened to go out.

Bodily there was nothing the matter with Sandy, she was sure. The woman was as strong as a mule; she could (Persis thought) have picked her up and carried her to the top of the Laurie gorge and back again, without losing breath. Nevertheless—

"Are you well?" she suddenly asked.

"Good-o," said Sandy. "Dream too much, that's all. What do you want?"

"I want to know," Persis said, "why you went with Linnhay."

"Because," replied Sandy, making wreaths of smoke, "I thought Phil Sargent a bit too good for you. And I knew he wouldn't be good enough, if he came back empty."

Persis was known as a shrewd guesser. She said: "How did you know—what you told Linnhay?"

"I had a husband, once upon a time," Sandra said. "'I had a little husband, no bigger than my thumb, I put him in a pint pot and there I bade him—'" She had been drinking, Persis saw. She sang the nursery rhyme in a sweet husky voice, laughing at the other woman, and waving her cigarette.

Persis waited; she was good at waiting.

Sandra, suddenly falling grave, said: "I was Mrs. Jim Cotter—once. Followed him here, to annoy him. He hated me. Said I was dead to him. But before he ever came to the field, he'd doped it out about the Koroni. He told me, then."

Silence in the little hut, that contrasted so evilly, in its rough untidiness, with Sandy's dainty person. Koroni, high in heaven, began to grumble out its evening thunderstorm.

Sandra said presently: "I feel sleepy all the time, now. That's because I dream. Always the same. Looking and looking, traveling through all the bush of New Barbary, over mountains and gorges and rivers bigger and eviller than any in the real world. It's New Barbary, and—not. It's the soul of the country, if you understand, and it's a wicked soul. I keep looking for some one, and I never find him. If I did—" She paused.

Persis could not speak.

"D'you remember that bonzer story of Kipling's, about a man who didn't dare to go to sleep, because 'They' came and chased him every night, and he was afraid they'd catch him up? That's it. But it's different. I do the chasing. And one night," she said, staring out of the hut door, up at the brooding peaks of Koroni, "one night I'll—catch up."

"I should have been angry," Persis thought. "I should have been hating her." But she was not angry; she did not hate. There was a heaviness in her heart as she thought of the Koroni gold, not hers; a chilliness when the vision of Phil Sargent's face crossed her mind. What was it that was heavy and cold? What rhymed to that last word?

"Shut the door tight, for you've shut your soul inside."

The thought of Sandra's careless words went with her, as she climbed the hill.

"DO you know," said Jane Pieman, a day or two later, "that they've found that poor Mrs. Sands dead in her bed? It must have been heart or something. They say she looked just lovely, and as innocent as a child, and she was actually smiling."

"So she did catch up, after all."

"I don't understand you, Persis. I very often don't."

Persis looked at the old woman, sitting in the dusky corner that she usually affected, and clicking her eternal needles. When life is over, when love is laid behind, what is there for an old maid to do but knit and knit?

"Give me your needles, Pie," the girl said. "I think I'd better learn."

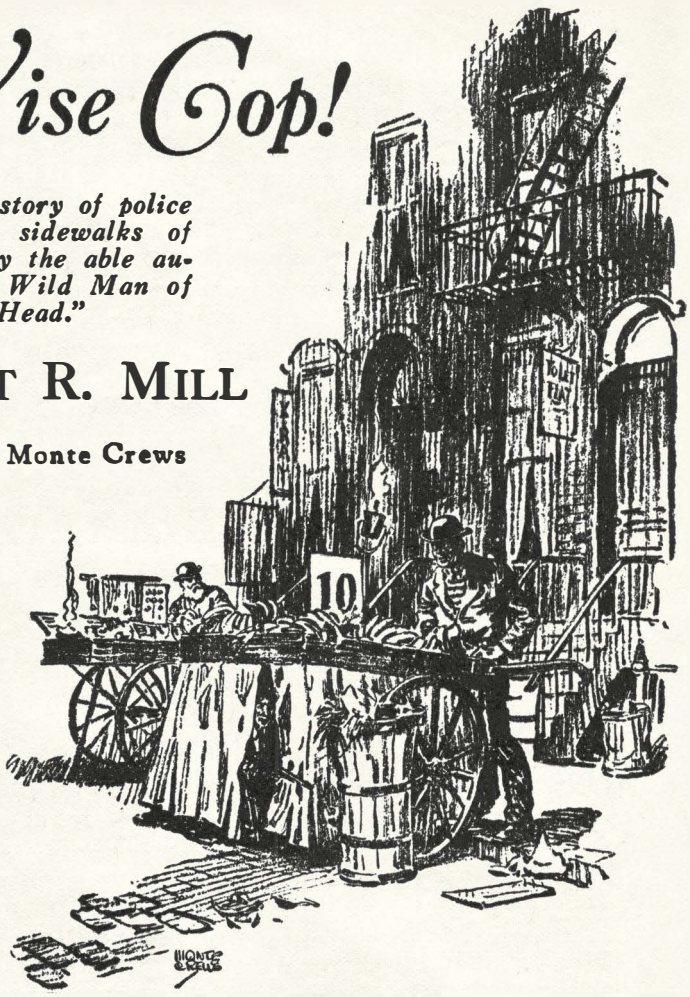
Another colorful story of New Barbary Gold will be Beatrice Grimshaw's contribution to the next (the December) issue.

A Wise Cop!

A fascinating story of police work on the sidewalks of New York—by the able author of "The Wild Man of Wolf Head."

By ROBERT R. MILL

Illustrated by Monte Crews



Ukulele Sam crouched behind the oilcloth, coked to the ears, his trained fingers itching to play a symphony of death. "Steady, Sam!" hissed the man tending the pushcart. . . . "Here they come!"

NEW YORK CITY, the wise boys will tell you, is a collection of villages. The inhabitants of the villages, in many instances, are as insular as the residents of the remotest town. Take the case of Captain Patrick Moran.

Moran is not his real name, for he was a police captain, and as such, a power in the city. He was in charge of a Tenderloin precinct. He was a wise cop. He had to be. Broadway and its cross streets, with their sham and tinsel, had no secrets from him. He knew his New York, he often said. But *his* New York was just one of the many villages. So, smart as he was, he was in a foreign land when he left the bright lights and landed in the seething East Side.

It happened this way:

An investigation—one of the periodical investigations—was under way. The police department was under fire. The bright young men attached to the investigation concentrated on bank accounts. Their subpœnas went out to every banking institution in the city. They drew in much chaff and not a little wheat. Captain Moran, with a nominal salary and five substantial bank accounts, was listed among the wheat.

An accountant placed a slip before one of the bright young men.

"He banked $89,000 the first year. His salary was the same the second year, but he was more thrifty; he was able to bank $112,000. The third year he did some serious saving and socked away $146,000. It just goes to show that honesty and thrift are appreciated in this man's town."

The bright young man groaned.

"Kick me," he begged the accountant. "Why did I waste three years in law school? I should have become a cop."

Then he smiled. Here was fertile ground—the stuff from which headlines were built. Headlines have been known to build up bright young men.

Death was waiting in the square. . . . Nicky darted on to an alley, climbed a fence, entered a rear door.

And soon the headline appeared:

TENDERLOIN COP BANKS $347,000!

The headline served as a visiting-card for the district leader, who hastened to call upon Captain Moran.

"This," said the district leader, "is bad stuff."

Captain Moran smiled.

"It'll blow over," was his verdict. "It always does."

"Maybe," his caller agreed, "but we can't take a chance just now."

Captain Moran stiffened.

"Nominated for a fall guy, am I?" His fists were clenched. "Well, I won't take the ride alone."

The district leader raised a hand.

"Nothing like that." His voice was bland. "We stick with you. But you have to get out of here. You have made yours. You made it in real estate. We know your story is true." One eyelid dropped slightly. "In fact, I happen to know it is true because I advised you on some of the deals. You aren't taking any ride. The Commissioner is just going to make a number of routine transfers. They will have nothing to do with the investigation, of course. That will quiet things here."

Captain Moran issued an ultimatum.

"I don't go out with any goats!"

"Who said anything about goats?" demanded the district leader. "You are going over on the East Side. It isn't the bright lights—but it isn't to be sneezed at."

Captain Moran's good humor was restored.

"I never sneezed at anything that looked like money," he declared.

THAT was why a wise Broadway cop went to a precinct of gas-houses, tenements and pushcarts. It was only a short ride from his old territory. And wasn't it part of his New York?

"Captain Moran," said the bright young man, when reporters informed him of the transfer, "should feel at home in his new station. Judging from his bank accounts, he was very fond of the Broadway babies. He will find lots of babies on the East Side."

That was good enough as a wise-crack, but not so clever as a prophecy. Captain Moran, with all his Broadway wisdom, found himself a stranger in a strange world.

He had a superior air when he entered the station-house the first morning. This, his bearing and manner indicated, was a long way from Broadway. The sergeant at the desk saluted smartly. Captain Moran entered the room that was to serve as his office. There were the usual floral tributes. One bouquet came from the men of his old precinct. Another was from the men of his new command. There were offerings from politicians, small and great.

He read the cards with interest. The right names were there. The change, apparently, had not affected his prestige. He squared his shoulders. Now, he decided, he would hunt up Lieutenant Monello and get organized.

Captain Moran had known Monello in the Tenderloin precinct. A smart cop. The Captain never had understood why Monello had applied for a transfer to the East Side. Clannish people, these Wops. Probably wanted to be among his own kind. Maybe the picking was better here, at that. His face brightened as he opened the door of the assembly-room. He was greeted with a babel of sound. It came from a host of children. There were white and black children, Jewish and Italian children, Irish and

Greek children. Almost every nationality was represented. Shoeboxes were piled along the wall. A dirty urchin sat enthroned upon a chair. Lieutenant Monello knelt before him, a shoe in his hand.

"Now these shoes, Isidore," the Lieutenant was saying, "are swell kicks. Just the thing for you to wear when school opens next month."

Captain Moran growled. Lieutenant Monello turned. He smiled.

"Hello, Captain. Glad to have you with us. I was coming in to pay my respects just as soon as I got Isidore fixed up. You see, Isidore got a tough break last year. Some flatfoot fitted him out with a pair of shoes intended for a girl. I know how he felt." The smile illuminated the olive-skinned face again. "I went to school for two years with shoes I was ashamed of. How's that, Isidore? Good! —Sergeant Bresla, will you carry on here?"

The two men walked to the office. Captain Moran closed the door.

"Give me," he ordered, "a list of speak's in the precinct."

Lieutenant Monello returned with a typewritten list. The Captain counted the names. He placed the figure upon a piece of paper. He proceeded to multiply by twenty-five. He multiplied that result by twelve. Then he surveyed the total with satisfaction.

"You can't do it, Captain."

The quiet voice of Monello caused him to glance up.

"Why not?" he demanded.

LIEUTENANT MONELLO pointed to the list.

"Start with Nate Aaronstein, who runs a restaurant on Second Avenue. He sells a little sacramental wine. He has an old mother with T. B. I doubt if he takes in ten bucks a day. Nate tries to be regular. Every election he kicks in with a contribution. When Donovan, one of our patrolmen, was killed, Nate closed his place up and went around taking up a collection for the widow. But you can't put the screws on him, Captain; Nate couldn't raise twenty-five dollars a month."

Captain Moran was thinking.

"That's a good one," was his verdict. "Imagine the owner of a speak' closing up and going around collecting for a dead copper's family. I'm trying to get a picture of Dutch Hertz closing up for that."

"This isn't Broadway, Captain."

Captain Moran snorted.

"This is Sliver Greco's territory, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the Lieutenant, "it is."

A heavy fist pounded the desk.

"I want to talk to him."

"Very well, sir. I'll have him brought in."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," ordered Captain Moran.

"HELLO, Sol," the Lieutenant greeted the newcomer. "Meet Captain Moran. Captain, this is Sol Levy, president of the Gas-house Boys' Club."

The two men shook hands.

"Pleased to meetcha, Captain. The club gives its yearly dinner tonight, and the boys wants it that you should be there."

"Too busy," snapped the Captain. "Lieutenant Monello will be there."

The civilian's smile was an entreaty.

"One thousand boys I got, Captain, and for two years not one of them has been arrested. They all like the Lieutenant, but to them the Captain is the big shot. The boys wants it that you both should come."

"Sorry," came the gruff answer. "Too busy."

Lieutenant Monello closed the door after the retreating figure.

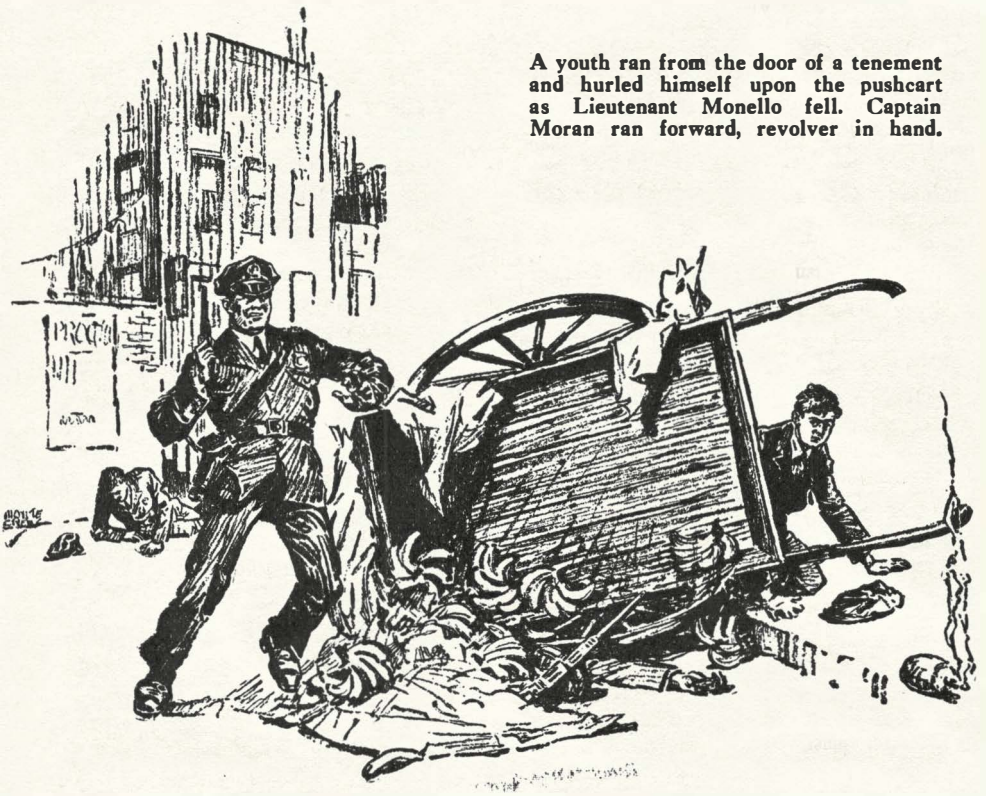
"What's the racket?" demanded Captain Moran.

"No racket," was the reply. "You better think it over. Sol's outfit has saved us a lot of trouble over here. And you'll get a kick out of it, at that. Last year I sat next to Nickie Costello—two years ago he was the toughest kid in the district. It was a real feed, oysters, soup and everything. When the fish came, Nickie leaned over to me and whispered, 'There is meat coming later.' So I thanked him for the tip and said that I would save room for it."

Lieutenant Monello was grinning at the recollection.

"Say," inquired Captain Moran, "just what the hell is this? Am I running a police station or a welfare league? I'll change all this. When I get through with this place it will be a police station. The men around me will be real coppers, including the lieutenants. Do you get me, Monello?"

"Yes, sir, I get you." Lieutenant Monello glanced out the window, and north and west. "But this is the East Side, Captain. You can drive over to Broad-



A youth ran from the door of a tenement and hurled himself upon the pushcart as Lieutenant Monello fell. Captain Moran ran forward, revolver in hand.

way in twenty minutes. But in those twenty minutes you cover twenty years."

He studied the pushcarts and the bleak tenements.

"They aren't bad people here, when you get to know them. They are my people. They aren't Broadway people. Even a police captain can't make them that."

He saluted and walked from the room.

Sliver Greco came in, by request, that afternoon. His clothes were loud. His dark hair was sleek. His manner was confident. He studied Captain Moran through dark, impudent eyes.

"Greco," began Moran, "you run the rackets in this district. I run the cops. I thought maybe we better talk things over."

"Yeah?" The racketeer's voice was noncommittal.

Captain Moran smiled. He felt at home now. He was speaking a language common to Broadway and the East Side.

"Yeah." He repeated the word used by the gang chief, and gave it more emphasis. Then he relaxed, leaning back in the arm-chair, with his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his vest, and waited. His glance traveled out the open window and rested upon the tenement directly across the street.

Greco fidgeted in his chair. He knew this man by reputation, knew him to be on the make, but willing to keep a bargain. He knew Moran could be a relentless enemy. He knew, also, that the terms would be of the Captain's making. Quickly deciding surrender would accomplish more than resistance, the racketeer leaned forward, ready to offer terms.

"All right, Cap," he began. "You write the ticket. I'll play—"

"Wait a minute." The deep voice of the Captain halted him. The police official was staring at the wall of a tenement across the street as if fascinated. "Wait a minute," he repeated. "You sit here. I'll be back."

He darted from the office, closing the door behind him.

"Monello!" His voice boomed in the hallway. The Lieutenant appeared almost at once. Captain Moran led him to the front door of the station-house.

There, standing beneath one of the green lights, Moran's hand pointed to the wall of a tenement across the street. A glass square was fastened to the wall of the building a short distance above the sidewalk. One side of the square was pointed directly toward the Captain's office, and it resembled a huge glass eye. There was a second square above the

first. It was fastened above a second-floor window.

"What in hell are them gadgets?" demanded Captain Moran.

Lieutenant Monello smiled.

"There is a girl in bed on the second floor. She'll never get up, I guess. She was a dancer in a Broadway show. She slipped and fell out over the footlights. Now she's crippled. Those mirrors bring the street up to her room. The lower one catches the image of every person who passes and flashes it to the upper one. The girl holds up her mirror and catches the image in the glass above her window. Most of the people here smile and wave as they go by. Sergeant Fabian, of our emergency squad, rigged up the stunt. Clever, isn't it?"

"Yeah." Captain Moran studied the speaker's face. The thought of investigating committees lurked in the back of his mind. Lieutenants who were seeking promotion frequently played with committees. He felt a dull rage surge over him. He had worked hard and risked his life. Why should he be forced into a position where investigations were a terror? He banished that thought and squared his shoulders. Well, he was a wise Broadway cop. If they thought they were going to get anything on him with trick gadgets that took photographs or recorded conversations they had another guess.

"This Broadway doll," he asked then, "—what was her name?"

"Betsy Coleman," answered the Lieutenant.

Captain Moran's eyes narrowed.

"Betsy Coleman?" he repeated. "Why, she was a headliner! I remember when she had the accident. They played a benefit for her that must have been good for three or four grand. What is she doing in a tenement here?"

Lieutenant Monello still was smiling.

"THE benefit, if you remember, was three years ago. A year in a hospital ate up a lot of the money. Then there was an operation. It didn't help any, but it did account for the rest of the benefit money."

Lieutenant Monello's smile vanished.

"Maybe the show people would have come through again, but a year and a half is a long time on Broadway. Anyway, the girl was too proud to ask. She came here, thinking that what money she had would last longer. When it was gone, the boys passed the hat. We all kicked in, and the people here gave what they could. We have been doing it ever since. She lives on what would be cigarette-money for you or me."

Lieutenant Monello's eyes narrowed. He jerked a thumb toward the Captain's office.

"Sliver Greco tried to muscle in on the deal. He wanted to give her an apartment and a nurse. He was ready to put up the jack for a second operation. The girl turned it down. She wouldn't take Greco's money. We didn't want her to take it, either. She meant no more to him than a load of coal; all that rat wanted was to pull a *Robin Hood.* He would have rushed to the papers with it. Publicity was the last thing the girl wanted. We felt the same way about it."

The Lieutenant's jaw was firm.

"So, when Greco got nasty, I threw him out, and I threw him out hard. He'll stay out, because he wants to live. We are proud people over here, Captain, and the East Side takes care of its own."

CAPTAIN MORAN shot a question at his subordinate: "Sweet on that skirt, aren't you?"

Lieutenant Monello's fists doubled. Then he regained his composure.

"I have a wife and two kids, Captain. That girl is part of my job, just as young Isidore and his shoes are. I like my job. I'm one of the fools in the police department, and there are a lot of us. We are just as honest as the men above us will let us be. We'll never be rich. You'll never read about our bank-accounts. We'll never have any luck in—well, let's say real estate.

"But we fools have something no investigating committee can find. I couldn't find mine over on Broadway, where they didn't need me, but I've found it here. These people come to me with their problems. They let me in on their grief. Why, I'm almost a god to them. I'm sap enough to get a kick out of it. It is a bigger kick than I got when I stepped out on the platform at line-up while the Commissioner pinned a medal on me and said, 'The City of New York is proud of you, sir.' Over here, I can be proud of myself."

The dull flush that had mounted Captain Moran's face at the mention of real estate was subsiding.

"Maybe there's something in that, Monello. I've often thought—" He shrugged his shoulders. "But we're just cops, and part of a system. You take

your pride and go in there and keep Greco until I get back. I want to talk to that bird. Meanwhile, I'll drift over and get the lowdown on that neediest-case yarn of yours."

Lieutenant Monello's smile had returned.

"Swell idea, Captain. You'll get a kick out of Miss Coleman, and she'll be glad to talk to you. She has been watching you in her mirrors all day."

Captain Moran elbowed his way through the little group at the entrance to the tenement. He climbed stairs scented with the cooking of five families of as many nationalities. His mind was working rapidly. This was still New York, but here everything was strange.

Owners of speak's, who closed up and collected for dead cops. . . . Lieutenants who turned down good pickings, and played shoe-clerk for Yiddish kids. . . . Tough kids proud of the fact that none of them had been arrested. . . . A crippled girl, living her life through mirrors, but too proud to beg and too proud to take Greco's money.

His thoughts flashed back to the first days when he had joined the force. He had been proud of the uniform, and determined to fight crime and evil. Just what had brought about the change? He found himself at the door leading to the front room on the second floor before he could even attempt to answer that question. So he knocked, and prepared to find out if this one of the strange things confronting him was on the level.

"Come in," called a cheery voice.

ON the bed was a girl. She had a beautiful face. He noticed that, as he noticed the wasted limbs, the shape of which was revealed beneath the thin covering. In the girl's hand was a mirror. Moran's quick glance saw that the glasses were what the Lieutenant had said they were. He gave a little gasp of relief as he removed his cap.

"I'm—"

A gay laugh interrupted him.

"You don't need an introduction any more than Lindbergh did. . . . You are Captain Moran, of course. The whole district has been waiting for you. My mirrors gave me a grandstand seat when you arrived today. I liked the way you walked in there, strong and confident, and went right to work. I have been keeping tabs on you all day. I liked it even better when you had that beast of a Greco brought in—and then walked out and left him. Greco thinks he runs everything over here."

She twisted the mirror in her hand.

"Oh, look, Captain Moran!"

He walked to her side and looked over her shoulder. The interior of his office was reflected in the tiny glass. In the largest chair sat Greco. His feet were propped upon the desk. He was puffing on a huge cigar. He was completely at ease.

"I hate that arrogant beast," murmured the girl.

BEFORE Captain Moran could speak action showed in the mirror. Lieutenant Monello had stepped through the open door. The man at the desk did not move. The movement of the Lieutenant's lips showed he was speaking. The racketeer sneered. His lips twisted as he hurled a taunt at the officer.

Then Lieutenant Monello hurled himself upon Greco. There was a short struggle for the possession of a revolver Greco had drawn. The policeman won. He tossed the weapon aside. The two men fought back and forth across the office.

"Oh!" breathed the girl.

Captain Moran's face was a study. All that part of him that was cop urged him to go to the aid of his lieutenant. All that other part of him, the wise, Broadway part, cried out against this useless taking of blood from a man who might far more easily be made to yield profit. Then, as he hesitated, he knew that in his heart he envied Monello. He knew that all these years his fists had been yearning for the jaws of the Dutch Hertzs, the Sliver Grecos and other rat . Why had he bargained with them? Again, before he could answer the question, there was an interruption.

The fight shifted to the hall and beyond the range of the mirrors. It soon reappeared on the front steps. Captain Moran needed the mirrors no longer. But the girl, helpless on the bed, continued to peer into the glass.

"Good!" she cried.

Lieutenant Monello was easily the master. His right hand flashed through the air. It landed upon Greco's chin. That worthy landed in the center of the street. Policemen ran forward.

"Back!" ordered Monello.

He stood over the fallen gangster. His voice carried to the window.

"Get up, you rat, and get moving! If you don't, I'll kill you!"

Greco attempted to rise. Captain Moran started toward the door.

"Don't," begged the girl. She put the mirror aside. "Let Lieutenant Monello finish his own fight. Please, Captain!"

Captain Moran smiled wryly. Habit—it really was instinct—had prompted him to rush down and save the thousands of dollars the Lieutenant was about to boot down the street. Now, as the girl spoke, some submerged part of him came to the surface. He fought it back, trying to assure himself that it was sympathy for this helpless girl. He saluted her mockingly.

"You win, Miss Coleman. Monello finishes his own fight."

But the fight was over. Greco climbed to his feet and slunk down the street. The younger and more daring residents yelled in derision. The older and more prudent ones averted their eyes.

Lieutenant Monello entered the station-house.

"Oh," said the girl, "that was splendid, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Captain Moran rather weakly, "it was."

The girl's eyes clouded.

"But they'll get him for that, won't they?"

Something snapped in Captain Moran's mind. He was all policeman at that moment. His words were clipped.

"They'll get him, all right, unless we get them first!" He wheeled toward the door. "Good-by, Miss Coleman. I'll see you soon. If there is anything we can do for you, just let me know."

LIEUTENANT MONELLO met him as he entered the station-house. All signs of conflict were erased. He saluted.

"Greco is gone, Captain. Something came up that made it a matter of life or death for him to get away at once. I didn't have the heart to detain him."

Captain Moran waved this aside.

"Still planning on going to that kids' racket tonight?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll be with you." Then Broadway sophistication caused him to offer an explanation. "Your number is up right now. No rat of a gangster is going to rub out a lieutenant of mine."

Lieutenant Monello in turn ignored this explanation.

"Very well, sir," he answered.

The dinner, which was held in one of those huge halls which house weddings, funerals, church bazaars and gangster functions on alternate nights, was in full swing when the two men entered. The thousand members, scrubbed and beaming, were seated about almost countless tables. Scattered among them were visiting dignitaries and more or less proud parents. The orchestra of the Pastime Social Club committed assault and other crimes of violence upon various popular airs. The service, if not faultless, was at least enthusiastic, and went about like this:

"What's dat, Moe—youse aint got no clams? Well, youse has got a mouth, aint youse?" A pause. "Heads up, gents. Clams coming for Moe."

CAPTAIN MORAN and Lieutenant Monello were escorted to places of honor at the speakers' table. Sol Levy, beaming because his invitation had been accepted sat on the Captain's right. Nicky Costello, the erstwhile terror of the district, was on his left.

Captain Moran adjusted his napkin and surveyed the crowded room. His upper lip curled with scorn.

Just a bunch of roughnecks, going through a lot of bunk. What was he, a wise Broadway cop, doing here? The way to handle these cattle was with a night-stick. What a sap he had been to show up here! Well, it wouldn't happen again. This first day had been a total loss, anyway. Something had gone wrong right at the start. A lot of strange things happened. Reminded him of the feeling he had when he first joined the force. But that was hooey. Tomorrow he would settle down and do some serious police business.

Some Greek kid was making a speech. It appeared that he was head of what was called the Roving Patrol. He told of "persuading" storekeepers near schools to remove slot-machines from their places of business. Captain Moran stiffened to attention. Butting in on the slot-machine racket, were they? It was one of the best. The Shapiro brothers, over in Brooklyn, controlled it, and they were always ready to play ball. Well, he would get that straightened out in the morning!

There were a lot of other things that needed his attention, too. They were crazy as sewer rats it they thought he was going to let any crippled dame gape at him all day long in trick mirrors. He would have the damned things pulled down. No, he reflected, he couldn't do that. She was a game kid, and the mirrors were all she had. The very thought

of her rekindled that feeling he experienced when he saw Monello swing at Greco, and which reminded him of the early days pounding a pavement.

He hadn't had that feeling on Broadway. He had lost it years ago. What had killed it? It was the same question, in different form, that had been confronting him all day. He leaned back to consider it.

He remembered the first tribute-money he had collected. A politician had sent him to the resort with instructions as to the exact amount to be obtained. His mind was functioning smoothly now. There was the answer to the question. Politicians! *They* were the sore on the body politic. Not cops. Cops were honest at heart. Monello was right—they were as honest as the men above them would let them be.

He studied the eager faces about him with new eyes. These were the sort of people the politicians exploited. They weren't bad people, either. Not Broadway people, of course, but good in their own way.

A waiter, whose other occupation was fighting in preliminaries at the Garden, aroused him to the present by spinning a slice of ice-cream before him with a motion of the arm that had all the precision of an uppercut. Then Nicky Costello, on his left, was standing up. The polyglot crowd was silent as it faced him.

"Folks," Nicky began, "we got a new police captain, and I'm here to tell you that he's a regular guy. Tonight, on my way to this feed, I stops off to see our mirror lady. She tells me that his very first day on the job Captain Moran finds time to run up and ask her if there is anything he can do."

Nicky paused, and the East Side caught its cue. The applause thundered through the huge hall. Shrill whistles sounded above it. A babble of voices arose.

Captain Moran sat staring straight ahead. Dully he heard Nicky's voice:

"First day on the job. . . Thought he would be too busy to get here, but he made it. . . Just like Lieutenant Monello, a regular guy."

Again the East Side caught its cue, and Captain Moran sat looking out over the applauding throng. Now he was seeing these people for the first time. These faces that emerged from rough clothing were as varied as the colors of the rainbow, but they all had one quality in common—courage. He recognized it, and the fighting heart that had carried him from patrolman to captain thrilled to it.

It was courage of the sort that had survived through years of adversity and persecution. It had caused men, women and children to descend into the bowels of huge ships for a voyage across a fearsome ocean to a strange land. Here, in the rabbit-warrens of the East Side, that courage had survived.

It was a courage, he knew, to match the courage of a real policeman. The real policemen, men like Monello, who hated gangsters and fought them relentlessly. How many politicians possessed courage of that sort? His heavy upper lip contracted as he recalled the district leader, who was ready to make him a sacrifice at the first sign of danger. Yet he, Moran

the cop, had helped to put that district leader where he was!

Men like that district leader sent cops out to die at the hands of men like Greco, who were protected by the politicians. Crooked prosecutors, crooked judges, fixed juries—Moran knew them all. He was thinking clearly for the first time since he had landed in the Broadway precinct, a wise cop.

"A wise cop." He repeated the phrase. How wise? For every penny he had collected, these leeches above had taken ten. In return, they had allowed him to assume the danger, and had placed him in the rôle of the fall guy.

Wise? Dumb! He, and every other member of the department, had been exploited just as these people here were exploited. By God, from this on he was with these people! He would be a square-shooter, a cop like Monello. He was a Captain now. He wouldn't go any higher.

He felt a great calm. This was what had been in the back of his mind for years. This was no one-day conversion. These things had always been there, but Broadway wouldn't let them out. The East Side would. It wasn't the honesty of the thing that bothered him, though down in his heart he admitted that played some part. But he was through with being a sap!

Then he was aware that Nicky had stopped speaking, and that he was standing before the crowd. The thick, blunt fingers of his heavy left hand rested upon the youth's shoulder.

"Folks," he borrowed Nicky's form of address, "I came here from Broadway. That street does something to a man. I thought I was a wise guy. One day here has taught me I was a sap."

He groped for words, fighting down the natural reticence that is the heritage of a policeman, as he tried to meet these people—his people now—on a common ground. But words failed him. He said:

"All I can tell you is that I will try to make a good cop."

So engrossed had he been that he had not seen a pasty-faced youth tiptoe his way toward Nicky Costello and whisper in his ear.

NICKY, after hearing the whispered message of the pasty-faced youth, had darted from the hall, roundly cursing his informant. He was glad to have received the information, but he objected to the place and manner in which it had been given. To have communicated with either the Captain or the Lieutenant after receiving it, would have meant death. Even now, there were only a few places on the East Side where he could go, and stay alive.

It was Nicky who realized that a miracle had been performed. "The mirror lady!" he gasped. "She walked!"

Habit, rather than reason, caused him to hasten to the street where the police station was located. But at the corner he paused. Death, sure and inevitable, was waiting in that square with its crowds, its pushcarts and its kerosene flares. And he had only a little time.

He darted on to an alley and turned down it. He climbed a fence, entered a rear door and mounted to the second floor of a tenement house. There he knocked on the door of the front room.

"Come in," called a girl's voice.

Nicky closed the door. The girl snapped on the lights.

"Oh, I am so glad you came, Nicky," she said. "I have been watching the street with my mirrors. There is something wrong down there. What is it?"

"Douse those lights, Miss Coleman," he ordered. "Sliver Greco is out to get Captain Moran and Lieutenant Monello. They have Ukulele Sam full of coke. He's down there under one of the pushcarts. He has his uke with him. He's going to turn it on the cops when they come back from the dinner."

"Uke," repeated the girl. "What do you mean?"

"Machine-gun," replied Nicky. "It's a fool layout, but they have Sam coked up so he thinks he can get away with it. The cops will get him, but that is what Sliver wants. There won't be nobody to talk."

The girl was studying the street in her mirror.

"Oh, Nicky!" she gasped. "It's that pushcart right under the window, the one with the oilcloth hanging around the bottom of it. I thought there was something funny about it. All the other pushcart men backed away from it. Then a man came along and ordered them back into their places. They have been acting scared ever since. We have to do something quick, Nicky! Why don't you run across the street and tell the Sergeant?"

The youth's lips were pressed tight.

"Because I want to live, Miss Coleman. The quickest way out I know is to walk in that door. I dassent even chance a phone-call. Might get through to some cop that is in with Greco."

The girl sobbed.

"It's mad, Nicky! It just can't happen. And right here in front of a police station."

The boy laughed.

"That's what Sliver Greco is counting on. It *will* happen, and happen quick—unless we stop it."

The girl glanced in her mirror.

"Oh, Nicky, it's too late! The Captain and the Lieutenant just came around the corner!"

Then she was alone in the room. Nicky Costello had darted out the door.

UKULELE SAM crouched behind the oilcloth about a dilapidated pushcart. The first dose of narcotics he had taken had worn off now, but he drew on the liberal supply in his pockets. So he was coked to the ears, and he was glad of it. Clutched in his hands was the death-dealing instrument that had given him his name. Something in his twisted nature reacted to that weapon. He loved a machine-gun, loved it as a great musician might love a fine violin. His trained fingers were itching to play a symphony of death.

"Steady, Sam!" hissed the man who supposedly was tending the pushcart. "Here they come!"

Ukulele Sam pushed aside one corner of the oilcloth. He smiled. He wetted his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. He fingered the trigger experimentally. This was a grand symphony he was about to play—worthy of a master-player. The cocaine was stinging in his nostrils. He, Ukulele Sam, was a master-player. There must be no mistake.

He fired an experimental volley of bullets against the stone wall of the building opposite him, much as a pianist strikes an opening chord. Perfect! It was less than a split second later that he swung the weapon around on his quarry.

But the deadly cough of the machine-gun had just begun when a youth ran from the door of a tenement house and hurled himself upon the pushcart. The gun spoke again.

Lieutenant Monello fell.

CAPTAIN MORAN ran forward, revolver in hand, charging into almost certain death. He was all cop at that moment; his fighting heart was singing. He fired. Now, in action, all his doubts had vanished. A furious rage surged through him. It was a rage directed against the men who had dared this and against the men who made it possible for them to beso daring. He knew at that moment that he would be forever the enemy of the rackets and the men who sponsored them.

He raised his revolver to fire again. Then the hurried memory of the youth who had thrown himself upon the pushcart restrained him. He knew who that youth was. He prayed, that police captain, for the first time in years.

"God," he murmured, "make it that I didn't croak the kid!"

He ran forward again.

Sergeant Fabian was at the head of the men who charged from the station-house. They saw their captain between them and their quarry, so they held their fire and ran to their officer's side.

Then the scream of a girl sounded above the turmoil of the street. They looked up and saw her standing in the second-floor window.

"Nicky!" she called. "For God's sake, men, don't shoot! Nicky went under there to get the man with the gun!"

"Steady now, Miss Coleman—we'll get him out," the voice of Captain Moran boomed up to her.

Blue-coated forms threw themselves upon the pushcart. They emerged with a begrimed youth—and a corpse. Captain Moran's bullet had ended Ukulele Sam's career.

It was Nicky who realized that a miracle had been performed.

"The mirror lady!" he gasped. "She walked!"

They looked up at the window. The girl was gone.

There was the crack of a revolver. Lieutenant Monello, lying wounded in the street, had dropped the man who had been tending the pushcart. More blue-clad forms piled upon him. He was beyond escape.

Gongs were sounding, whistles were blowing and ambulances clanged their way into the block.

A white-coated interne bent over Lieutenant Monello and snipped away at a blue trouser leg. Captain Moran stood beside the two, the revolver in his right hand, while his left clasped the coat collar of a smiling youth.

The interne looked up. "Just a flesh wound," was his verdict.

"Never mind it," snapped Lieutenant Monello. "There is a girl in the second floor front of that tenement. She has been crippled for years. She walked to the window to shout to us. Get up to her."

A second interne bent over the lieutenant. The first doctor charged up the stairs, followed by Captain Moran, Nicky and a dozen policemen. They found the girl in a heap on the floor near the window. The doctor lifted her to her feet. He stepped away from her, supporting her gently with his hands on her shoulders.

"Walk," he commanded. "Walk as you did when you went to the window."

The girl was trembling, but her eyes were shining. She took two steps forward. The interne caught her, and carried her to the bed. Then he turned.

"Nature, gentlemen," he said, "is a greater physician than any of us. She did her part, but we were too stupid to realize that she had effected a cure. It took this great excitement to bring this about. Exercise and massage are all that is needed to make it permanent. I'll have Dr. Hillcrit down here tomorrow. But I am sure he will verify what I say."

THEY made their way back to the street. The inhabitants of the district were surging about Captain Moran, who stood with one arm across Nicky's shoulder. There was peace in Moran's heart. A load he had carried for years had been lifted from him.

Reporters pressed forward. Photographers were touching off flashlight lamps. A reporter spied a hole in Captain Moran's cap.

"Hold that cap and point to the bullet-hole," he ordered.

Captain Moran shook his head.

"What do you think I am, a movie actor?" he demanded. "Take a picture of this kid. He's the gamest kid on the East Side, and that means the city."

The lights flashed. He heard voices in the crowd, his people, speaking in a dozen dialects. He was speaking their language now. He was at home. And something tugged at his heart as he heard a rich Italian voice say in broken English:

"Takea dat Capitaine Moran wid Nick. He one game cop."

"We got 'em both, Tony," said a grinning photographer, as he tugged furiously at his slides.

A CAR pulled up, and the Commissioner stepped out. His practised eye took in the scene almost at one glance.

"Good work, men—Ukulele Sam and Bozo Burns both dead! We won't miss them." His smile was directed at a cheerful man in an ambulance. "And Lieutenant Monello the healthiest-looking wounded man I ever have seen."

He turned to Captain Moran. He spoke in a low tone, but his voice carried to the crowd.

"Hello, gang-buster!"

Captain Moran retained his hold on Nicky as he saluted.

"This is my assistant, sir. He saved our lives."

The Commissioner gravely saluted the abashed youth.

"Bring him down to the line-up with you tomorrow, Captain. You can't tell me anything about these East Side boys. I knew 'em when I pounded a beat on the waterfront. And what are we going to do for you, Captain? I never knew a cop who didn't want something."

Captain Moran glanced at the milling circle of faces about him. He hesitated just a moment. Again his natural reticence hampered him, but he did his best.

"Yes, sir," he answered, "I do want something. If it pleases the Commissioner, I want to stay here. I've found something here that I have been hunting for years. I didn't find it until today, and I don't want to take any chance of losing it."

It was a crude attempt to express what was welling in his heart. But the little ripple of approval that went up from the crowd showed that this group of unlettered people, somehow, had been able to understand. And the Commissioner, strange to say, needed no additional explanation.

"I get you," he said. "Keep that something. You are big enough to hold it now. Don't let anything or anybody take it away from you. If they try to, come to me." He extended his hand. "You're a wise cop, Captain Moran!"

The Merchant of Mocha

An Intelligence officer plays a lone hand and takes a desperate chance in this fine story by the author of "Death in the Desert."

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN

"THEY say you are the richest coffee-merchant east of Suez, Bei Kem?"

Dressed in the tussore-silk suit of a European in the tropics, Paul Rodgers, —an Anglo-American Intelligence officer whose activities had caused him to be known as the Red Wolf of Arabia—posed the question to the stout, bespectacled figure seated opposite.

Bei Kem smiled. At least, his mouth curved. It was impossible to see what was happening to his eyes behind the tinted spectacles.

"I have been fortunate, Rodgers," he admitted. "The world wants coffee, and particularly Mocha coffee. Much of it passes through my hands, as you see."

And a plump palm was turned toward the many heaps of bluish-green beans heaped in little hills on the floor of the old warehouse in which they sat. A few Arab hags, with a sprinkling of black Nubian slave-girls, squatted by the heaps, sorting the avalanche of blue beans as they were emptied from sacks.

"And the war between Ibn Saud and the Imam of the Yemen—has it not affected your trade?" asked Paul Rodgers.

Bei Kem, who was a Russian from the Ukraine, hunched his shoulders so the Mongolian cheek-bones were prominent.

"True, the camel caravans from the mountains are not so frequent," he admitted. "The men are fighting, and so are the camels. *Insh'allah!* The coffee comes into my hands, just the same."

"But not from Arabia, eh?" smiled the Intelligence officer, smoothing his fiery crop of hair with a characteristic gesture of his hand. "I noticed today in the roadstead of Mocha a freight-steamer that has come all the way from São Paulo in Brazil. And your dhows are busy carrying sacks from that steamer to the wharf here."

"*Aiee!* And dumping the coffee beans on the floor, as you see," chuckled Bei Kem, as another sack was slit, and a cloud of dust rose from the bluish-green avalanche. "You are very observant, Mr. Rodgers?"

"A vice, I am afraid."

"Then, of course, you know that of the Mocha coffee drunk all over the world, very little is pure Arabian. Oh, yes," went on the Russian hastily, "most of it passes through Mocha, and through my hands. But a little clever screening to sort out the smaller of the Brazilian, the Indian, and the Abyssinian beans, a little wise blending, my Mocha mark on the sacks—and the connoisseurs in Cairo, Paris, London and New York sip the result appreciatively."

As though applauding his own cleverness, Bei Kem clapped his fat palms explosively. Simultaneously an Arab slave-girl of singular beauty materialized. She was carrying an exquisitely inlaid brass tray upon which was a coffee-pot and two cups and saucers. Her own features, coffee-colored, possessed an almost aristocratic aloofness, as she placed the tray on an Arabian stool between the two men. Then with a little bow she silently withdrew.

"Now I would like you to taste this coffee, Rodgers," murmured the Russian as he stretched out a fat paw to the pot. "They tell me that you have drunk much coffee among the Bedouins of the desert. Perhaps you will give me your considered opinion on this."

In Arab fashion he tasted from his own cup before handing the other cup to his guest. Rodgers sipped it appreciatively.

"Excellent," he nodded. "I have rarely tasted better."

"Quite right," agreed the Russian with a fat smile. "You are drinking pure Mocha, a coffee I reserve only for distinguished guests. I have but two sacks left. They are to be served to the Imam when he honors my poor house with a visit two days hence."

"Let us hope that the Imam will be truly appreciative," murmured Rodgers.

That forthcoming visit to Mocha of the ruler of the Yemen was the real object behind this apparently casual call by the Intelligence officer upon the man who was nown throughout the Red Sea regions as the Coffee King. Among the white-painted ruins and the abandoned mosques of this port, the warehouse of Bei Kem, coffee merchant, was the only one where life really stirred. A large, lofty stone structure, it had miraculously escaped the bombardment during the Great War. The remainder of the inhabitants, some six thousand Arabs, Somalis, and Jews, lived in tents without the walls. A temporary truce between Ibn Saud and the Imam had decided the ruler of the Yemen to visit this coffee port, where there had been rumors of disloyalty and disaffection. It was only natural that the most prominent of all men in Mocha—Bei Kem, the Russian, should offer his house as an abode for the Imam during the visit.

"Another cup, my friend," insisted Bei Kem, pouring forth the black, treacly liquid. "Remember that inspired hymn of coffee sung by the Sheik Abd al-Kader, some four hundred years ago." In the singsong intonation of Arabic, and with appropriate gestures of his fat hands, the Russian declaimed the poem: "O coffee, thou dost disperse cares and sorrows; thou art the drink of the friends of God; thou givest health to those who labor to obtain wisdom! Only the reasonable man, he who drinks coffee, knows the truth. Coffee is our gold; where it is offered us, we enjoy the company of the best people. God grant that the obstinate despisers of the beverage may never taste its pleasures!"

Several unopened sacks were dumped haphazardly on the floor by black slaves during this declamation.

"I see you are a philosopher as well as a merchant of coffee," nodded Rodgers.

"Has it not been written of the holy prophet, Mahomet—peace be upon his name—that when he was sick, the Archangel Gabriel brought him coffee in which was a miraculous cure for ills of mankind?"

"So it is said," agreed Rodgers, putting down his cup and fumbling in his pocket. "But I like to think of another gift that has come to mankind, and goes so well with coffee."

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

A slim, proud shadow passed him, the beautiful Arab girl. The Yemeni warrior laughed. It was sufficient. He strode boldly after her.

"What is that?"

The Intelligence officer displayed in his slim fingers a cigarette and a box of matches.

"Tobacco."

It might have been a conjuring trick, so startling was its effect upon the Russian. He leaped to his feet, almost upsetting the brass tray in his agitation. His plump hands seized those of Rodgers.

"Rodgers, I beg of you!" he cried.

The Intelligence officer sat tense with astonishment.

"But I don't understand!"

Behind those tinted spectacles, eyes were glaring at him.

"I am a true Moslem," said Bei Kem sternly. "*Allah O Akbar!* I neither drink wine nor smoke tobacco. Both are forbidden by the Holy Koran."

RODGERS replaced the cigarette in his case. His gray eyes narrowed in thoughtful fashion. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"I bow to your religious susceptibilities, Bei Kem," he murmured ironically. "I had always imagined that the Wahabis, the brethren of the black tents who are even now invading the Yemen, were the only followers of Mahomet who refused the consolation of tobacco."

"All true believers hate the accursed drug," said the Russian, failing to repress a sigh of relief as the cigarette-case and matches were replaced in a pocket of the tussore-silk suit.

The secret agent rose to his feet, and bowed.

"I must thank you, then, for the excellent coffee and a most interesting talk. I understand I am to enjoy even more of your hospitality, for I am invited to attend the entertainment you are giving three nights hence on the roof of your house."

The Russian bowed in his turn.

"A humble effort of mine to amuse His Majesty the Imam, during his stay with us. I have ventured to invite all the distinguished foreigners in Mocha. I trust that you will be able to accept, my dear Rodgers."

And the tinted spectacles caught the gleam of the sun as they were raised quickly.

"I shall not fail to be present," replied Rodgers quietly, and with a casual nod he strolled forth into the stone- and sand-strewn streets of Mocha.

Five minutes later, with a grunt of satisfaction. he sank into a chair at an Arab coffee-house overlooking the harbor. Mechanically he drew forth a cigarette and lighted it.

"Join me in a cup of coffee, my friend," said a voice at his elbow.

The Intelligence officer looked up. A fezzed Turk, the port-officer of Mocha and one of the many foreigners employed by the Imam of the Yemen, had seated himself at his side. With this slim, sallow-faced adventurer, one of the men left behind by the retreating Turks during the Great War, Red Rodgers had made friends since his arrival in Mocha. Moreover, Mustapha Rach possessed a piano, sand-clogged and broken-keyed, but nevertheless a piano. Rodgers had spent several evenings bent over that piano, playing his favorite Chopin and Debussy within the walls of Mustapha Rach's house.

"Thank you, Mustapha; but I've just had several cups of coffee in the company of Bei Kem." He blew a cloud of smoke into the air, wafting away a swarm of flies. "A cigarette contents me at the moment."

"I also," nodded the Turk. "But I prefer a Turkish cigarette. That delicate aroma, you understand."

But with the cigarette between his fingers, he sniffed the air disdainfully. The aroma of a rank cigar was being wafted in their direction. Instinctively Mustapha Rach swiveled round. A few yards away sat a man with a huge cigar stuck in his mouth—a swarthy Spanish individual in the white garb of a ship's officer.

"That's queer!" muttered the Turk.

THE Intelligence officer wafted the cloud of smoke away.

"What is it that is queer, Mustapha?"

The Turk jerked his head in the direction of the ship's officer.

"That is the captain of the freight-steamer, the coffee-ship from São Paulo now in the roadstead."

Rodgers nodded.

"With coffee for our friend Bei Kem," he murmured. "What of it?"

"But, by Allah, he sits there calmly smoking a cigar," protested the Turk, the sallow of his cheeks tinged with red.

"And why shouldn't he? He's a South American, and no doubt likes his cigars as rank as that one seems to be."

"That is, as you say, natural," nodded the Turk. "Yet this morning, in my capacity of port-officer, I boarded his steamer."

The Intelligence officer displayed a cigarette and matches. It might have been a conjuring trick, so startling was its effect upon the Russian. "Rodgers, I beg of you!" he cried.

"Yes?"

"And, as is again natural, the captain took me to his cabin and offered me a glass of wine. I accepted, and was just about to light a cigarette, when he almost jumped at my throat. 'I don't allow any man to smoke in my ship,' he yelled. 'I don't like it, and I won't have it!' That was all. I apologized, and half an hour later left the ship. But it's strange to see him sitting there now, smoking a cigar as though he's been doing it for years."

"And he *has* been doing it for years," said the Intelligence officer, his eyes narrowing in the direction of the Spanish captain. "The cargo he had was Brazilian coffee, eh?"

"Two hundred sacks," replied the Turk. "All consigned to Bei Kem. . . . But must you go, my friend?"

Paul Rodgers had risen from his chair.

"I'll see you later," he said abruptly, and walked away in the direction of the old Arab house where he had installed himself. On the way he lit another cigarette, and pondered the problem. Then he laughed softly, and disappeared into the doorway of the house.

An hour later a young Yemeni warrior, an indigo skirt swathing his waist, and a gay turban covering his head, came forth from that house. A golden-hilted dagger was tucked into the skirt at his waist.

He made his way, a swaggering bravado in his walk, through the streets of Mocha, and toward the warehouse of Bei Kem, coffee merchant. He lounged toward the back of the warehouse; and there, a handsome insolence in his bearing, he watched the old hags and the black slave-women grubbing among the coffee-beans.

A slim, proud shadow passed him. It was the beautiful Arab girl, her coffee-colored skin gleaming in the sunshine. She carried a brass-inlaid tray on which were two empty coffee-cups. For a moment her eyes caught the bold stare of this Yemeni warrior. He smiled encouragingly. A flush suffused her light coffee-colored face. The long lashes of her eyes drooped shyly. Then she flitted away.

The Yemeni warrior laughed. It was sufficient. He hitched the indigo skirt with a touch of his brown fingers, and strode boldly after her. . . .

"*Donnerwetter noch einmal!*" snarled Colonel von Barwitz, "but I will smash the town if any attempt is made on the life of the Imam."

And to add force to his remarks, he

ground a cigarette-butt to obliteration with his spurred heel.

"There is very little left of the town of Mocha to smash, Colonel," mildly pointed out Red Rodgers. "That was done effectively during the last—er—war."

COLONEL VON BARWITZ snorted. This former officer of the Uhlans, a modern *Othello* whose occupation was gone, had found work after his own iron heart in the service of the Imam of Yemen. Not only had he organized a smart and well-disciplined camel corps, but he had recently taken charge of the somewhat primitive arsenal owned by the ruler of Arabia Felix. His munitions-factory, situated in a desert town, was now turning out a thousand cartridges a day.

"There is one *verdammte* desert rat somewhere in this vicinity," went on the Colonel. "I have reason to believe that he is somewhere in Mocha. If I lay hands on him, I'll string him up in the marketplace."

"Who is the fellow?" asked Rodgers.

"The Sheik Musa, an Arab with the touch of a Jew in him. He went over to the enemy with a thousand men. My camel corps smashed him badly in the last battle, but Sheik Musa escaped and was last seen riding for the coast."

Rodgers sipped his coffee, reflectively.

"But you do not imagine, Colonel, even if Sheik Musa is hiding in Mocha that he could raise sufficient men to stage a revolt against the Imam here?"

"Anything is possible with that *verdammte* desert rat," repeated the Colonel. "I shall not be easy in my mind until I see him dangling at the end of a rope and thereby denied the Moslem paradise. As it is,"—he drained his coffee at a gulp,—"I have taken my precautions to safeguard the Imam."

"May I ask what those precautions are, Colonel?"

They were finishing dinner in the stone house of Paul Rodgers, overlooking the Red Sea. Colonel von Barwitz had dined well, and also drunk lavishly of the wines and liqueurs thoughtfully supplied by Red Rodgers.

He chuckled at Rodgers' question.

"No secrets from you, Rodgers. I have four hundred picked men surrounding the house where the Imam is to be entertained this evening. And hidden among these cursed white ruins are a further thousand warriors."

"An army," smiled Rodgers. "But is that quite wise, Colonel?"

"*Pfui Deubel!*" spluttered the German. "And why not?"

"Because in crowding men into Mocha you may be crowding them into a trap."

"Exactly," chuckled the Colonel. "A rat trap, to catch a desert rat, the Sheik Musa. I am taking no chances, Herr Rodgers. If the Arab Jew rides into this town with a hundred men, he will not find it easy to escape."

"I see," nodded Rodgers thoughtfully. "And the cheese bait is a considerable one. Besides the Imam of Yemen there is his heir Ahmed Seif, the Grand Vizier, and five leading sheiks."

"And myself," puffed Colonel von Barwitz importantly.

"And I," added Rodgers quietly. "Also two British naval officers, an Italian consul—and last, but not least, the coffee king of the East, Bei Kem. Quite an imposing array."

"A fine fellow, Bei Kem," growled the Colonel, helping himself to another liqueur. "Entertains like a prince, damned Muscovite coffee-seller though he is."

"I'm sure you've lacked for nothing in his house," smiled the Intelligence man.

"Plenty of liquor there," agreed the Colonel. "And you need it, with that cursed coffee reek following you all over the place. Isn't it time we were going along to the show?"

"It is," nodded Rodgers, rising. "Shall we stroll along there, Colonel?"

Together they walked through the streets of Mocha. It was dark, and the ruined houses stood silent and jagged. But as they approached the warehouse of Bei Kem, there was a challenge in the night. Indigo-skirted warriors with rifles barred their approach.

GRUNTING satisfiedly, Colonel von Barwitz gave the password. Rifles grounded on the cobbles, and they were permitted to proceed. But a few yards further on, more Arab soldiers challenged them. Rodgers saw that the narrow streets surrounding the house of the coffee merchant were packed with men.

"Did you say five hundred men were guarding the Imam in this house tonight?" asked Red Rodgers. "I should say that there were at least a thousand in this vicinity, Colonel."

The German grinned, and let his hand slip to his belt, where an automatic pistol was strapped.

"I told you, Rodgers, I was taking no risks," he said. . . .

Colonel von Barwitz plunged through

the dark doorway of that lofty storehouse, the residence of Bei Kem, coffee merchant. Once again the senses were assailed by the tang of coffee. Ignoring the warehouse, however, the Colonel jangled with his spurs up a narrow stone staircase leading to the roof. Slaves, wrapped in their dirty white garments, huddled against the walls on each floor. Eventually, with a gasp of relief, the Colonel entered upon the wide flat roof. Red Rodgers followed him.

IT was an astonishing scene that revealed itself beneath the black tent of the night sky. A string of colored electric lamps stretched between poles at the four corners of the roof, bathed the scene in a blood-red glow. A cluster of richly dressed Arabs, many of them wearing colored silk turbans of such a size that they threatened to topple from their heads, grouped themselves against one portion of the walls of the roof. A tent-like structure, of embroidered white and pale blue silk, stretched above them. This was the sacred umbrella; and the Intelligence officer judged the Imam would be sitting beneath it.

But already the two new arrivals were confronted with the smirking Bei Kem, the red glow of the lamps emphasizing the high Mongolian cheek-bones.

"Good evening, Colonel," he murmured in correct German. "I hope my poor efforts to entertain you this evening will be to your liking."

Colonel von Barwitz clicked his heels in Prussian fashion and bowed stiffly.

"The Imam never forgets a friend, Bei Kem," he replied.

"Ah, and my friend, Paul Rodgers," smiled the Russian, seeing the slim, athletic form of the secret agent. "I trust you too will be amused."

"I expect to be lavishly entertained this evening," said Rodgers enigmatically. "I see, Bei Kem, that you have added an electric plant to your up-to-date warehouse."

The smiling face of the Russian stretched.

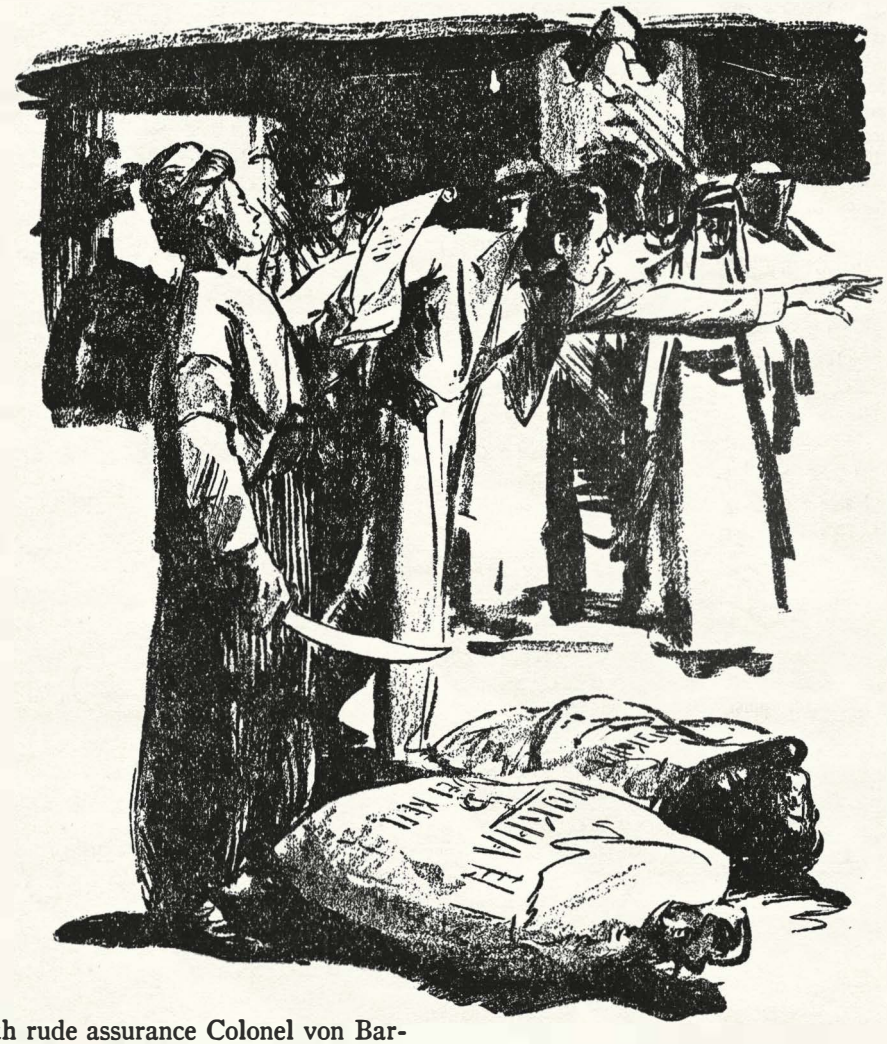
"It was brought ashore only the other day from the freight-steamer from São Paulo," he explained. "Maybe you heard it working as you came into the house. Excellent, is it not?"

"Very useful," nodded Paul Rodgers. "Lamps and torches are so dangerous."

And with a smile he passed Bei Kem, leaving the Russian gazing thoughtfully after him.

Together they strolled through the streets of Mocha, past ruined houses silent and jagged. As they approached the warehouse of Bei Kem, there was a challenge in the night. Indigo-skirted warriors with rifles barred their approach. Von Barwitz gave the password.

"Stop, you fools!" The cry came in Arabic from Paul Rodgers. "If you fire,



With rude assurance Colonel von Barwitz pushed his way through the group of Arab sheiks; and with Red Rodgers at his side bowed stiffly to the silken-clad figure squatting beneath the sacred umbrella.

"I present to Your Royal Highness a man well known in Arabia. His name, O mighty Imam, has even been whispered in the byways of Sana, our capital. He is Paul Rodgers, known sometimes as the Red Wolf of Arabia."

With this eloquent introduction in Arabic by the Colonel, Rodgers lifted his head. He saw a little old man with a pointed beard, lounging carelessly on a black covered mattress—the royal mattress—and whose dark eyes like two live sparks glinted in his direction. A thin brown hand was extended.

"We have heard much of your prowess, Paul Rodgers. The *Inglezi* have much to thank you for. *Walhamdulillah!* Would that you were in our service."

Rodgers bent and kissed the extended hand.

"It is impossible, Your Royal Highness, for a man to serve many masters," he replied.

There was a slight hiss from the squatting figure.

"The *Inglezi* pay you well, O adventurer?"

Rodgers shrugged.

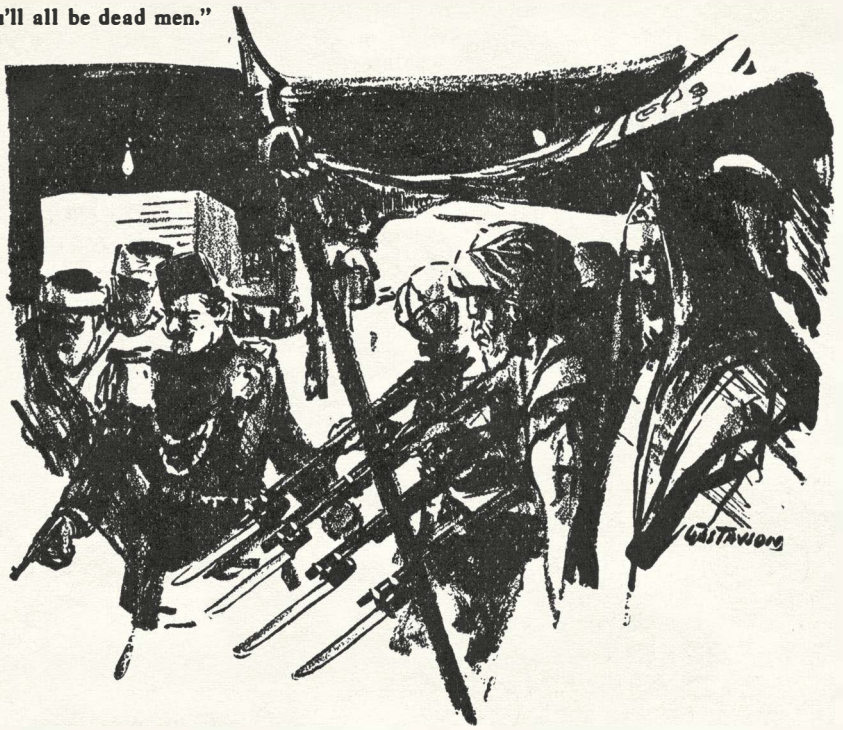
"I am a poor man, O mighty Imam," he replied diplomatically.

"And I am very rich," added the Imam pointedly.

"Yet I am a bad servant," laughed Rodgers.

For a moment the two men stared at each other. The Intelligence man, in his white evening dress and with a cummer-

you'll all be dead men."



bund swathing his waist, held his body tense like Toledo steel. The old man squatting on the black mattress seemed the embodiment of Arab guile, as his hand stroked the pointed beard. A mouth, soft and cunning in action, twisted a smile from his swarthy features.

"Inshallah!" he grunted, and with a quick gesture of the hand, dismissed Paul Rodgers.

The secret agent was relieved at the dismissal. He suspected that the Imam knew of his real reasons for being in Mocha, an observer of the warring factions, a man whose coded reports were being read carefully at Aden by the British military authorities. The Imam believed that every white man had his price. . . . A wry smile was on Rodgers' sunburnt face as he stepped back and nearly stumbled over two white sacks that had been dumped on the floor facing the Imam.

A hand caught him as he stumbled. The smiling face of Mustapha Rach, beneath the inevitable fez, confronted him.

"A surprise prepared by our friend the coffee merchant," said the Turk, indicating the sacks. "They are to be opened soon."

Rodgers glanced at the sacks. The white sides, marked with the special sign of Bei Kem, bulged in queer fashion. But each was securely tied at the neck.

"A queer sort of surprise," murmured Rodgers.

Mustapha Rach shrugged his shoulders.

"Bei Kem is a queer sort of fellow," he retorted. "But come and drink some coffee, my friend. Pure Mocha is being served."

He led the way to the huge copper urn, where slaves filled coffee-cups for the rich gathering. Rodgers observed that the coffee-colored slave-girl appeared at moments, staggering beneath a heavy bowl of freshly brewed liquid. She replenished the urn. Never for a moment did she lose her proud bearing.

Rodgers sipped from a little cup and slanted his eyes at the gathering.

"It is a great night for Bei Kem," observed Mustapha Rach.

The secret agent nodded.

"It is too great to be entirely comfortable," he murmured.

HE was greeted by many in that assembly beneath the night sky. British naval officers in full-dress uniform laughed and chattered aimlessly. The Italian consul, wearing a black shirt, rubbed his newly shaven face and moved about excitedly. For the most part of the Europeans were ignored by the Arab sheiks, who gathered with grave brown faces around the sacred umbrella and the squatting Imam.

The ruler of the Yemen was in a jovial mood. A wad of *ghat* was stuck in his

cheek, and he chewed and spat incessantly. Standing by the black mattress was his heir Ahmed Seif, a handsome, sulky young Arab. Beside him was also the Grand Vizier, his bleary eyes fixed with adoration on his reclining master.

IN the midst of the chatter a gong sounded brassily and all stood tense. Then in the distance, rose the chanting voice of an Arab. Bowing in servile fashion, there came toward the squatting Imam a figure in a blue *kuftan*.

"A tale-teller!" whispered a voice in Arabic.

The whisper was taken up.

"A tale-teller. . . . We are to be told a story. . . . *Aiee!* A true teller of tales."

Spontaneously, hands clapped. Voices shrilled. No Arab can resist listening to tales told while the coffee and *ghat* circulate. And as though in a mosque, all the figures sank to the floor at a gesture from the Imam.

The Arab in the blue *kuftan* drew himself up and stood by the two white sacks. All eyes were upon him—except Red Rodgers'.

"Where is Bei Kem?" asked Rodgers.

"Casting up his account-books, I expect," chuckled Mustapha Rach.

Once again the lilting chant of the story-teller sounded in the night air. He unrolled a paper scrawled with Arabic and began:

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionating, the Compassionate. Praise be to Allah, the Beneficent King. The Creator of the Universe, Lord of the Three Worlds. Who set up the firmament without pillars in its stead, and who stretched out the earth even as a bed. And grace, and prayer—blessing be upon our Lord Mohammed. Lord of Apostolic Men. And upon his family and companion-train. Prayer and blessings enduring, and grace which unto the Day of Doom shall remain. Amen! O Thou of the Three Worlds Sovereign—"

He paused. Stuffing another wad of *ghat* into his mouth, the Imam gave the gesture to continue.

"Once upon a time, O mighty Imam, there stumbled into the streets of Mocha, a sheik who was grievously wounded. He had dared to challenge the majesty of the throne. But the sword of majesty was far-reaching, and in the desperate ride across the desert, the sheik had felt its thrust into his body. In Mocha he hoped to find shelter and sanctuary. It was said that there were men in Mocha who were enemies of the majesty of the throne—"

(Spurred and booted, Colonel von Barwitz, who had remained standing by the black mattress, clenched his teeth. "It is the tale of a desert rat, Sheik Musa," he muttered.)

"And so, weary and wounded, the sheik crawled into Mocha, entered a house, and rolled himself in a sack," went on the story-teller, reading from his scroll. "He moved warily, fearing for the little life that was left him. But even so, he had been heard. The house which he had entered belonged to a merchant of coffee, a faithful subject of majesty, O mighty Imam."

(A mutter of astonishment went round the squatting Arabs. What next?)

"And the merchant of coffee remembered the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves from the Book of a Thousand and One Nights. In the night he took a sharp sword and went down to his warehouse, where the coffee lay in many sacks. And two white sacks came to his notice. As he gazed upon them, one of the sacks moved, and a groan came forth. Without hesitation the coffee-merchant plunged his sword into the sack again and again, even as I use this sword—"

From within his blue burnous the story-teller brought forth a short sword, and slashed at the fastenings of one of the white sacks. The canvas fell away, and to the hissing of many astonished Arabs, the body of a stabbed and gashed sheik was revealed.

"*Pfui Deubel!*" snarled Colonel von Barwitz. "It is the Sheik Musa!"

WITH a gesture of alarm the old man on the mattress scrambled to his feet. Instinctively the sheiks gathered protectingly around him. And the rest of the assembly rose to their feet. All stared apprehensively at that miserable mutilated brown corpse that lay before them in its wrappings of white sacking.

The story-teller fully appreciated his dramatic effect. With outstretched sword in his hand, his lilting voice rose to a shriek.

"O mighty Imam, you see before you the miserable carcass of one who dared to challenge majesty. But my tale is not yet finished. That enemy, crawling the streets of Mocha, was not the only one. It has been whispered that another was at his side—a more powerful, a more determined enemy. He also hid himself in a white sack. No sword could kill him.

He lives. He waits. Ready to spring, O mighty Imam, from the other sack!"

And the tale-teller pointed with long finger at the second sack.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" shouted Colonel von Barwitz, drawing his automatic pistol. "He won't live for another ten seconds."

"Only the bullet can kill that other!" shrieked the story-teller. "The sword is powerless."

A group of indigo-skirted soldiers suddenly appeared. They lined themselves defensively in front of the Imam, and leveled their rifles at the white sack. At their side stood Colonel von Barwitz, pointing his automatic pistol. The rest of the assembly stared apprehensively at the unmoving white sack.

"Stop, you fools!"

THE cry came in Arabic from Paul Rodgers. He struggled through the surrounding sheiks and went toward the Imam. He was confronted by Colonel von Barwitz.

"Get out of the way, Rodgers. I'm going to riddle that sack with lead. Then we'll open it."

"If you fire at that sack, you'll all be dead men!" He turned and made obeisance to the Imam.

"Your Royal Highness: The story-teller intrigues me. But I also have read the story of Ali Baba, and know that it was the cunning of a slave-girl who saved Ali Baba from the Forty Thieves."

"*Aiee!* It is so," muttered the crowd.

"And a slave-girl will end this pretty plot in the manner of the Thousand and One Nights," went on the Intelligence officer. He signaled to the slave-girl, who had just staggered to the roof with a huge bowl of scalding black coffee. She came toward him. "Empty the contents of your bowl over that sack!" he commanded.

Unhesitatingly, the girl obeyed. The black liquid smoked and streaked the white sacking.

The Arabs looked on wonderingly.

"And now," nodded Red Rodgers to the tale-teller, "slash at the white sack with your sword!"

"But the tale, as written, says that a bullet must be fired into the sack," protested the Arab in the blue *kuftan*.

"The tale, as written by your master Bei Kem?" asked Rodgers.

"That is so," murmured the Arab. "I have but spoken as it is written."

"Stand aside, Rodgers, and let me put a bullet into the sack," shouted the German.

But the secret agent took the sword from the hand of the story-teller and slashed viciously at the white sack. It burst. A grayish powder spilled upon the roof, beside the corpse of the Sheik Musa.

"What the devil is it?" asked the German, striding forward.

"You ought to know," replied Rodgers laconically. "Smokeless powder!"

Colonel von Barwitz' red face went white. Hurriedly he thrust his automatic back. At the same time he gestured the Arabs with their rifles away. All, in fact, shrank from that spilled sack.

Comprehension, horror, dawned on the German. He glanced round quickly.

"Where is that damned Muscovite, Bei Kem?" he demanded.

"He slipped away, half an hour ago," explained Rodgers. "At the moment, I should say he is waiting on the hills outside the town for a grand explosion which will tell him and his followers that the Imam of Yemen and the rest of us are no more, and that the best part of your army is lying mangled in the streets. It might interest you to know, Colonel, that you've been living on top of a powder-factory for two days."

"*Gott!* And I nearly sent us all sky-high with a bullet from my automatic."

Rodgers nodded.

"You *were* a little impulsive, Colonel. But then I valued my own carcass. Moreover, I suspected the plot."

"How?" demanded von Barwitz.

RODGERS smiled slightly as he said: "A little talk with a slave-girl after Bei Kem had showed excitement when I wanted to light a cigarette in his warehouse. The slave-girl told me that the Sheik Musa had crawled into Mocha badly wounded. He made for this place, because Bei Kem had ambitions. Bei Kem wanted not only to be the biggest coffee-merchant in the Red Sea, but also ruler of Arabia Felix, the Yemen. And the sheik knew of those ambitions.

"But when he pleaded for help, the sheik realized he had come into worse hands than those of the Imam's soldiery. Bei Kem ruthlessly murdered the sheik and appointed himself the leader of the little army hidden among the mountains. With that army he hoped to conquer a kingdom. At the same time he had been landing munitions, and particularly gunpowder from freighters from South Amer-

ica. With every sack of coffee from São Paulo carried into this warehouse, there was also a sack of gunpowder.

"It seemed that fate was playing into his hands," went on Rodgers evenly. "The Imam was to visit Mocha. His Royal Highness was to be accompanied by his heir, the Grand Vizier and a considerable army. A plot, worthy of *Macbeth,* stirred in the mind of Bei Kem."

"Who is *Macbeth?*" asked the Imam.

"A character in a story told by one of our greatest tale-tellers," said Rodgers. "Bei Kem determined to annihilate you all in one great explosion. So he arranged the big white sacks for this party. He wrote a tale, and engaged a tale-teller to recite as he had written. He judged that after the disclosure of the body of the Sheik Musa, there would be no hesitation in shooting lead into the other sack. So you would conveniently annihilate yourselves. In the meantime, the clever coffee-merchant slipped away, and is probably wondering whether the tale-teller is now prolonging his story with too much artistry."

Colonel von Barwitz did not wait to hear more. He snapped out orders and sent men scurrying from the roof. In a few moments a little army was moving out of the streets of Mocha toward the distant mountains.

The Imam had risen from his black mattress and approached the slim figure in white evening dress.

"Royalty is deeply indebted to you, Paul Rodgers," he murmured. "You have saved my life. In return, I will promise that you will be a rich man if you enter my service."

Rodgers shook his head.

"I have given my word," he said. "I cannot change my masters."

"Then demand what you will," said the little man with the pointed beard. "It shall be granted to you."

Red Rodgers beckoned to the slave-girl.

"I ask only that freedom be given to this girl. She threw much light upon my darkness in this affair."

The mobile mouth of the Imam twisted again in a smile.

"I will complete the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," he said. "I have not forgotten it." He beckoned to his heir Ahmed Seif. "My son, Allah has given you a clever wife. Take her unto you."

The girl silently and proudly faced her royal master.

Prima Donna

What happened when the alumni attempted to introduce "Hollywood football."

By HERBERT DALMAS

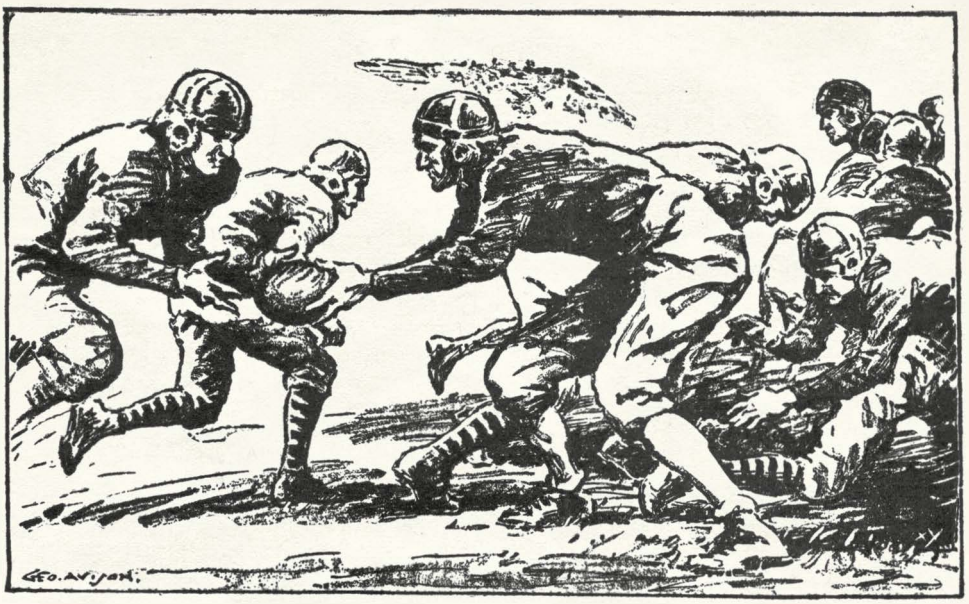
Illustrated by George Avison

DOC TAYLOR, gray-haired, hunched dejectedly in his ancient overcoat, sat on the Sheridan bench watching his team warm up for the Augusta game, and wondering where he would be when the same teams played next year. For when the game started in a half hour or so, there would still be gaps of concrete showing through the crowd, gaps worth about two dollars apiece to the Athletic Association, gaps that wouldn't be there if he were young—like Bailey Richfield.

Bailey Richfield would be packing them in down at Metropolitan about now; the customers clamored to part with their money to see the shows Bailey put on. Next week, when Metropolitan came up to Sheridan for the last game of the season, a lot of those customers would come along. But there wouldn't be enough; there would still be some of those stretches of bare concrete, because Doc was old, because he insisted that a football team ought to play football and not put on a pageant.

He sighed and glanced at his wrist watch. Time to go in and give the boys their starting line-up. He rose wearily and on the field Captain Shaw, watching him, signaled his team to go in too.

In the dressing-room, with its smells of liniment, steam and old togs, with the team around him, Doc forgot a little of his age. The memory of his bitter, losing fight with Arthur Munson, the college press representative, faded. It didn't matter now that Munson was putting him on the spot for failing to provide color and drama with his teams, for



stubbornly refusing to butcher his carefully built up machine to provide a sports writers' holiday.

He read the line-up and sent the team out.

THE fourth quarter was drawing to a close, and the thirty thousand or so people in the stadium were on their feet, their mouths stretched desperately in indistinguishable sound. About twenty thousand of them were jumping up and down in a distracted manner, begging the Sheridan team in voices which they strove to make audible in the adjoining states to score just one more touchdown. The other ten thousand, jumping just as frenziedly and in voices just as loud, implored the Augusta team not to permit this.

Augusta led by one slim point, which grew steadily stouter as the seconds ticked toward the end of the game. At the beginning of the period they had begun a goalward march which had ended only by Sheridan's supreme stand on the ten yard line. Sheridan at this point had taken the ball and started out on a hike of its own. And now, clicking like a metronome, they were moving the ball up, three yards at a clip, as irresistibly as a small army tank.

Hank Shaw, Tramp Devoe, Bill Hobart and Jerry Howe took the ball in turn and ripped off their three yards apiece. Blocking or running, they looked the same; you couldn't have told them apart except for the numbers on their backs. That was the beauty of Doc's system. There were no stars, but every man in the backfield could run or block or function as a small triple threat in a crisis.

Suddenly Hank Shaw, the quarterback, straightened up and called to the field judge for the time. Three minutes!

There were thirty yards to go for a score; the angle was too great to risk a drop kick, and three minutes wasn't long enough to make the goal line the way they were going. Hank faced his backfield and began his monotonous singsong.

"81—44—16—27—"

Now Doc Taylor, in spite of his stubborn contention that he had no stars on his team and would have none, harbored something of a guilty secret. That secret was Bill Hobart and Jerry Howe. As far as anybody could see, they were just like the other two men in the backfield, but in reality each had a special genius.

Bill Hobart could drop a football point-down on a dime even in a wind and not think anything of it. And Jerry Howe seemed to have a sort of mysterious magnetism which attracted footballs in flight to him like pigeons in a trained animal act. He could catch them with one or two hands, over his shoulder or running backward, on or off the ground —and make it look easy.

Bill and Jerry roomed together and were so inseparable as to have earned the title of the Twins. At sometime during their friendship, which dated back to prep school, they had evolved the not very complex theory that if a passer

throws at a mark known to the receiver, and if the receiver's speed is timed to fit the speed of the ball, the ball and receiver will very likely arrive at the same point at the same time. They had fooled around with the idea during summers as well as football seasons, and now when they worked it, using the huge exit signs in the stands to throw at, it was so perfectly timed that it looked like an accident.

That was the 16 play, and it was never used until everything else had failed. Doc Taylor lived in constant fear that some publicity expert like Arthur Munson would discover it and ruin the best passing combination in the game by making it famous.

JERRY HOWE started when the ball did. He jogged unobtrusively toward a point to the right of the sign over one of the end exits. No one bothered to cover him more than perfunctorily, because he didn't seem to be in the play. As he ran, he counted in a cadence that he and Bill had practiced endlessly together; Bill would be counting too. When he got to four, he began to increase his speed. At eight Bill would throw the ball; at nine Jerry would look up, and the ball would be spiraling down to be taken in his stride.

At six he stepped on the lacing of a shoe that had come untied and was jerked forward heavily. He landed from force of long habit on his shoulder and rolled over, but he knew even before he bobbed to his feet, before he heard the sudden thunder from the stands, that the play was ruined.

Bill had too much sense to throw the ball away. When Jerry looked back, he was running in a wide curve toward his own goal and the sidelines. Three Augustans piled at him at once, and Bill squirmed loose, moving into an open space that gave him a chance to pick up speed.

It took Jerry a split second to see that only one Augusta man had a chance of making the tackle. Blaine, the defensive fullback, was bearing down at an angle it would be almost impossible to avoid.

Blaine might have survived two other men, but Bill and Jerry had been working together too long. They maneuvered now as smoothly as if they had conferred on the matter beforehand. Bill bore slightly back toward the center of the field to keep Blaine in range till Jerry could get back; then he spurted suddenly for the sidelines.

Jerry, keeping his feet wide apart to clear the whipping shoelace, cut Blaine down like a scythe. Then he rolled over to see the rest of it. The safety man was Augusta's last hope, and he did a brilliant piece of work. But it wasn't quite brilliant enough. Just as he took off for his tackle, Bill made an inspired backward leap in mid-stride, and the safety man hit only one leg. Bill whirled in the air and came down on the other foot, ran sideways a few steps like a dancer, stumbled again, regained his footing, and crossed the line standing up.

Up in the stands Arthur Munson, press representative for Sheridan college, suddenly realized that fate had dropped into his lap what Doc Taylor had refused to give him for the past two years: a personality, a star about which a smart press agent might build up enough ballyhoo not only to fill the stands for the Metropolitan game but to last over till next season. The final whistle had hardly been drowned in the tidal wave of Sheridan cheers, before he had whispered an instruction to a newspaper man sitting next to him, and was out of the stands and onto the field.

He plowed his way through the crowd to where the joyous Sheridan squad was still slapping the grinning and embarrassed Bill Hobart on the back. He grabbed Bill's hand and wrung it.

"Hobart," he said handsomely, "that was the most magnificent run I have ever seen. Look here, can you spare a minute? There's somebody else over here wants to congratulate you."

BILL, protesting futilely, allowed himself to be dragged through the smiling mob, out across the cinder track to where the more sedate spectators were making their slow departure. Here the newspaper man, obeying orders, had detained Dr. Westcott, the gray-haired President of the college on the pretext of getting information on the endowment drive.

"Well, Hobart," Dr. Westcott said, extending his hand, "it seems Sheridan has you to thank for the day's victory, eh?"

They shook hands. Then, because neither realized that the meeting had been staged merely so that a press agent could say in his story that "even the venerable President of Sheridan College rushed onto the field to hail the new hero," they fell silent. Bill got red and shuffled his feet.

"It really wasn't anything, sir," he managed to say finally. "It was an accident. A play went wrong."

Arthur Munson laughed loudly.

"In that case," he said, "I guess what Sheridan needs is more plays that go wrong."

ON Sunday morning every sports page had a streamer about Bill's last-minute run to turn defeat into victory. The stories dwelt expertly on the finer technicalities of the thing, the manner in which a born broken-field runner works his way into the open, the way a really great player can break his stride and pick it up again in a part of a second.

Jerry went over to the village to get the papers, and as he ran over them on the way back, he found it difficult to realize that the Olympian being who flashed through these paragraphs like Jovian lightning through a darkened mortal world was just Bill Hobart, his roommate.

When he got to the room, his effort to open the door was disconcertingly cut short. It developed upon brief investigation that Mr. Arthur Munson's foot, judiciously placed on the inside, permitted it to open only a few inches. Mr. Munson stuck out his head.

"What do you want?" he said.

"I want to get into my room," Jerry answered, nettled. "What the devil do you think I want?"

"You can't come in now," Mr. Munson told him. "Bill's busy."

"Busy?" This was a silly remark to make at ten o'clock on a Sunday morning.

"Being interviewed," Arthur Munson explained.

Jerry walked away, marveling.

Monday morning Doc Taylor received a request to appear at once at Arthur Munson's office. Mr. Munson, as one might expect of a busy man, began without preliminary.

"Mr. Taylor," he said, "we are planning to feature Bill Hobart for the game with Metropolitan, and we would like to have you coöperate by having a number of plays designed to show him off. Wide end sweeps, trick cross bucks and all that. You'd better have him catch a few passes too. Something that will appeal to the crowd. Unfortunately the season ends with the Metropolitan game, but I think we can build Hobart up enough to carry over to next year."

"You might put ballet skirts on him," Doc suggested gravely. "That ought to appeal to the crowd."

Arthur Munson did not smile.

"I am acting on orders from the Athletic Association," he said. "I knew, of course, that you would not coöperate willingly in putting a little color into the team, but fortunately the matter has been taken out of your hands. Hobart's winning the game single-handed did that."

Doc's face began to get an angry red.

"Hobart couldn't have made that run if Jerry Howe hadn't taken out Blaine," he said. "The whole thing was an accident, anyway. A play went wrong."

Mr. Munson laughed.

"And a good thing for Sheridan it did," he said. "But I'm afraid that doesn't change the matter any. We appreciate Howe's work, but the run is the thing we want to emphasize. Now that we've got a personality, we're going to keep him out in front."

Doc held himself in check with an effort. The temptation to make the gesture and walk out was strong. But, after all, he had held his job for twenty years. He looked at Mr. Munson steadily for a moment.

"All right," he said finally. "I'll stay. I'll stay and put on your circus for you. I'll make Hobart look like a combination of *Frank Merriwell* and the whole four *Rover Boys*. I'll have him running around out there like the last five minutes of a Hollywood football movie. I'll give you your star."

"That," said Mr. Munson, "is precisely what we have been trying to get you to do ever since I have come to Sheridan."

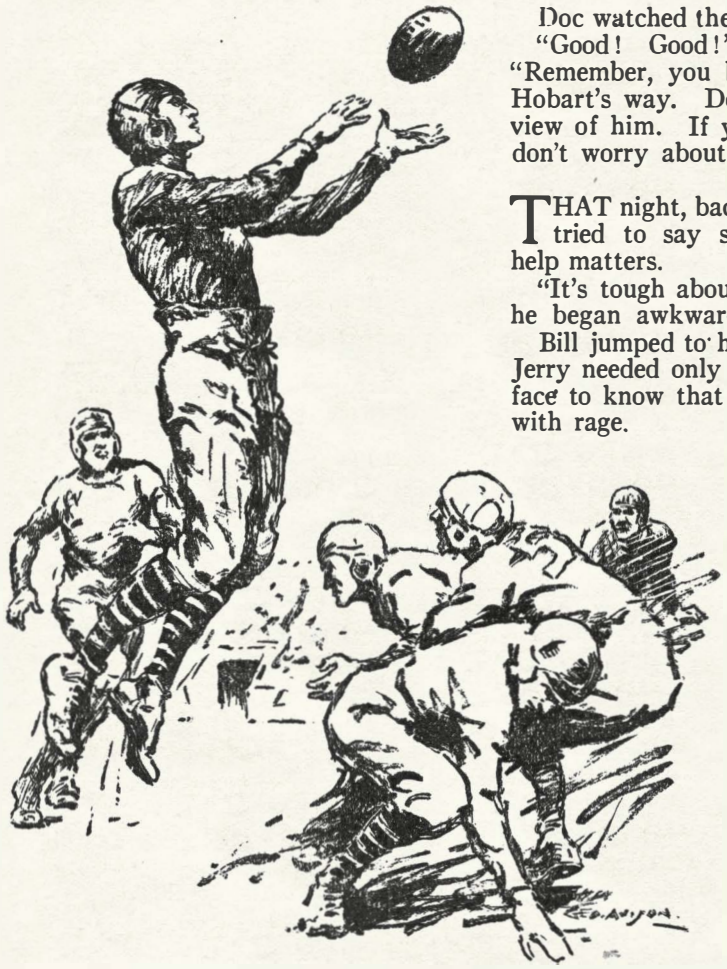
"But it won't be football," Doc said. "We won't win."

Arthur Munson shrugged his shoulders.

"The crowd will naturally be expecting a very close contest when Sheridan and Metropolitan play," he said. "In this case, I think the color is more important than the victory."

DOC TAYLOR went back to his rooms and spent the rest of the day until practice working out his series of new plays. When he had finished and was looking them over, he confessed bitterly to himself that they were fantastic enough. Bill Hobart would run miles in those plays, but any gain he made would be either accident or literally by his individual efforts.

In the afternoon he called the squad



He had misjudged; the ball was ahead of him. He sprinted desperately and leaped with every ounce of power he could muster.

about him and outlined the new formations. Several times during the process somebody started to laugh and stopped as suddenly as he had begun.

When he had finished, Doc said: "Well, there they are. You know and I know that they're a bunch of movie plays, but the matter has been taken out of our hands. They're not supposed to gain ground—just to bring the customers screaming out of their seats. They're one-man plays." He turned to Hank Shaw. "You'll use Hobart on all of them, Hank," he said.

He turned away, and the team straggled after him, looking at one another and at Bill.

Bill turned away ostensibly to pick up a helmet; his face was flushing darkly, and his lips were tight.

The practice went on—just formation practice to get set on the new plays. The team went through the motions half-heartedly, feeling self-conscious at the silliness of it all.

Doc watched them with a bitter smile.

"Good! Good!" he encouraged them. "Remember, you blockers, keep out of Hobart's way. Don't block the stand's view of him. If you can't get defence, don't worry about it."

THAT night, back in their room, Jerry tried to say something that would help matters.

"It's tough about those plays, Bill—" he began awkwardly.

Bill jumped to his feet and faced him. Jerry needed only one quick look at his face to know that he was close to tears with rage.

"I didn't want to make that damn' run Saturday," he burst out, choking on the words. "And Doc knows it, and you know it. I told Munson I didn't want his lousy plays, either—yesterday. But"—his anger almost stopped him—"if Doc wants to act like that, it's all right with me. He can go to hell!"

With this slightly incoherent speech, he tore open the door and slammed blindly out of the room. Jerry followed him with troubled eyes. Bill had touched on a point that puzzled him too. He couldn't understand why Doc was acting that way.

Bill slept at the Inn that night and every night afterward until Saturday. He went about the campus alone, avoiding everyone. The team gave up trying to talk to him after a day or so, and the word went around that Bill Hobart had gone prima donna.

On Wednesday there was a scrimmage to try the new show plays by fire. The result was quite as bad as Doc had

expected; the scrubs sifted through at will and nailed the helpless star for constant losses.

"Come on! Come on!" Doc barked angrily through his megaphone. "For heaven's sake get some life into it, Hobart."

"I'll get some life into it," Bill snapped back at him, "if some of these guys'll block for me."

"Never mind the blocking," Doc began.

"Just a minute!" This was Arthur Munson's voice interrupting from the sidelines. "Taylor, why don't you get that team into action? The line's letting the scrubs come through like a sieve."

It was true enough, and everybody knew it. The point was that the team didn't care. They turned wearily to their places again, but Mr. Munson stopped the play.

"Wait a second," he said. "Have you got tape on your wrists, Bill?" He walked out onto the field. "I thought not. Manager! Manager! My God! Do you want to cripple the boy just before the most important game of his career?"

A laugh rippled through the players. Arthur Munson affected not to hear, and Bill bent over the adhesive tape, the veins suddenly standing out in a knot in his temple.

EARLY on the day of the Metropolitan game, the little town of Sheridan started to fill with the crowds. Metropolitan had a couple of ends, Lane and Shanley, and a pair of backs, Hulbergh and Peet, who had been dividing Bailey Richfield's publicity between them all season. But the nation's football fans had been assured repeatedly during the past week that Sheridan had, in the lately discovered Hobart, a man who could take a team of All-Americans in his stride. Sixty thousand people were in the stands for the opening whistle, and most of them had read expert analyses of the technique of a really great back as exemplified in Bill's last-minute run the previous Saturday.

Arthur Munson did not allow even the entrance of the Sheridan team to pass without its artistic touch. At the curve of the track, in full view of several thousand people, four young ladies stood waiting, as beautiful young ladies as Mr. Munson had been able to find at the best agency for artists' models in town. When the team came jogging out, they pressed in on Bill Hobart, and laughing with charming insistence, refused to let him go until he had written in their autograph books. When Bill finally followed the team, a scattering of applause went with him along the stands.

DOC sat on the bench among his subs and looked across the field. There were no gaps of bare concrete in the crowd today, and it wasn't because he had become miraculously young—like Bailey Richfield. Arthur Munson was young; Doc was still old. Next year at this game there would be a young man on the bench in his place. Doc knew how these things worked; he knew the signs. He wondered who the young man would be.

At last there was that exciting pause which just precedes the game. Bailey Richfield always waited for this moment to frame the entrance of his team.

Then, to a great shout, they came. In golden jerseys and helmets, in snug-fitting pants of black airplane silk, they trotted onto the field and rolled about on the thick green turf like a bunch of puppies, lying on their backs and kicking, going through strange calisthenics that limbered them up and made the crowd smile. The Sheridan team, huddled somewhat awkwardly on the sideline, was out of the picture.

Sheridan kicked off—and the sixty thousand people saw the slippery-hipped halfback named Peet zigzag his way through the whole demoralized Sheridan team for a touchdown. On the bench Doc Taylor buried his head wearily in his hands, while the subs looked at the ground, somehow not wanting to face one another. The fact that the try for the extra high point failed didn't make any difference.

It was disaster, but as a matter of fact it was the best thing in the world for the Sheridan team after its week of comic-opera football practice. It was like a shower of icy water on a half-stunned man. It brought them up gasping.

They received, and Hank Shaw, acting on instructions, began calling the show plays for Bill Hobart. On the first one Bill, behind furiously racing interference, tore across the entire width of the field, while the stands surged to their feet and yelled themselves hoarse. The ball ended up exactly where it had started as far as any gain was concerned.

but it had been very spectacular. Then Bill was featured on a sweep to the other side in which he took the ball on a short lateral which picked the stands up again. This play gained two yards.

Bill kicked on the next down, but the kick left the crowd cold. It was low and end over end, instead of spiraling gracefully into the air—disappointing to watch. Bill could kick the spiraling kind when it was necessary, but he wanted this one to bounce in an empty space over on the other side of the field and then roll like a frightened rabbit out of bounds on the fifteen-yard line or so. It was low for speed—to keep the Metropolitan backs away from it, and it was end over end so it would skitter when it landed.

It did just about what Bill had planned, and the greater part of the stands said wasn't it too bad Hobart had got off such a poor kick after such a marvelous run. On the bench Doc Taylor suddenly hated himself for having helped nullify such football talent. . . .

Aside from his genius as a showman, Bailey Richfield knew football, and he had taught a great deal of it to his team. The first half was a series of marches down the field by the golden cohorts of Metropolitan, marches which were always stopped in time for Bill Hobart to kick out of danger. For, while their offense was crippled, that touchdown from kick-off had made them savage on the defense. And curiously enough, it was Bill, the featured attack man, who was the buttress of this stone wall. He was everywhere, tireless and deadly, and every time he made one of his crashing, jarring tackles, he put into it all the anger and hate for the world that had been stored up in him during the past week. The half ended with the score still 6-0 against Sheridan.

The Sheridan dressing-room was a strange place between the halves. Doc Taylor didn't come in, and the squad just sat around in silence, not even wanting to look at each other. They knew they were playing football when they didn't have the ball, and they knew they might have been playing it when they did, if it hadn't been for the star on their team. Just before the time warning was called, Arthur Munson came in and took Bill out with him.

BILL came onto the field after the rest of the team, a dazed look in his eyes, like a man who has just been awakened from a deep sleep. He kept looking at the bench and then at his team-mates, and finally the dazed look died, and one of savage grimness took its place.

IT was well into the third quarter before Sheridan got possession of the ball again—on its own thirty-yard line. Then, while Hank Shaw was calling one of the show pieces for the first play, while the team hopelessly lined up for the futile routine it had come to hate, Bill suddenly called "Signals!"

The team relaxed and looked around, prepared for anything. Bill strode over to Jerry, who was the first man in the tandem.

"Listen, Count," Bill said in a voice weighty with sarcasm. "What do you think you're doing, looking for your lost ancestors or something? You're supposed to be over there."

He placed a smart kick on the seat of Jerry's pants, which brought Jerry whirling round, his eyes flaming. Roommate or no roommate, friend or no friend—and then, with his arm drawn back, he stopped, frozen by something in Bill's face.

"Any more of your dumbness," Bill said, "and you'll leave this game. As a matter of fact," he added crushingly, "the way you've been playing, I could choose a pretty good exit for you. NG just about expresses it."

He turned away, every line of his body expressing contempt. The Metropolitan team laughed; the Sheridan team lined up without a sound. But there was something different about the way they did it, some mysterious power that ran through them all, uniting them without their knowing it.

Jerry, his heart pounding, heard Hank call the 16 play. He fixed his eyes on the NG sign over that exit gate at the end of the field. It was a longer pass than they usually tried; it would mean a different speed, a speed that he would have to gauge without having timed it in practice.

So when he started, he went faster than the play normally called for. He counted to himself, knowing that he would have to intercept the line of the ball by the count of nine; Bill couldn't possibly delay his pass for more than eight counts.

At nine he looked up and back, and his heart sank. The ball was coming, but he had misjudged; it was ahead of him. He sprinted desperately, and finally

leaped with every ounce of power he could muster to his legs and stuck out his left hand. The ball hit his fingers, and even in that moment his mind, working independently, warned him not to grasp too hard. He managed another leap off the other foot and got two hands on the ball.

As he came to the ground, he sidestepped a golden jersey which slithered past his knees like a flash of light. He had twenty yards to go, and they looked like twenty thousand. He had used about all the energy he had getting down the field and getting two hands on the ball, and there were two Metropolitan backs bearing down on him together from the right. He might have got past one by a miracle, but to get past two was out of the question.

He gathered himself to see if he couldn't squeeze out another atom of power and headed for them. As he did so, a voice came from about fifteen yards of the rear.

"Easy, Jerry, easy! Slow! Take it to the left." It was Bill, covering his own pass.

He slowed a little, glad of a chance to ease on pressure and bore slightly to the left. When he could see Bill from the corner of his eye, he turned sharply back and let Bill go ahead of him.

Bill and the first Metropolitan man went down together at his feet, partially blocking the other gold helmet's attempt to turn toward him. He jumped awkwardly over the two bodies—and was pushed over the line by the Metropolitan tackler who finally caught up with him.

And then for the first time since the play had begun, he heard the noise. It rolled down from the stands in waves that met other waves and made the stadium a riotous sea of pure sound. About the only person on the field who was not vocally insane was Doc Taylor, who sat hunched in his overcoat, a tattered cigar between his teeth, frowning sternly at two large tears that slid down each side of his nose.

For the point after touchdown they worked the 16 play again. After that the Sheridan team came together with a joyous surge, and Metropolitan never entered the picture again. The game ended as Sheridan made a first down on Metropolitan's four-yard line.

AFTER dinner Jerry Howe was walking slowly across the campus, a wad of football extras under his arm, reading about himself. He hadn't seen Bill to talk to, because Bill had dressed like a fireman and departed on a gallop. There was a sound of running, and a breathless hail behind him. It was Bill.

"You wouldn't want to kick me again, would you?" he said to Bill as the latter came panting up.

"Huh?" said Bill.

"Skip it," Jerry said. "You've got something on your mind."

"Gosh, I'll say," said Bill. "Look here, do you know what Munson did when he came in and got me, just before the second half? He took me out and introduced me to the new coach for next year."

"He—*what?*" demanded Jerry.

"The new coach. Oh, he didn't say right out that he was going to be the new coach—but he gave me a long line about how they'd treat me right next year—"

"But Doc?"

"Out, I guess. Behind the times."

Jerry stood open-mouthed. Finally he said, "Why, it was Doc's football that won for us today—"

"You're telling me?" Bill said feelingly. "Lord!"

Suddenly Jerry said, "Come on."

"It's no use," Bill told him hopelessly. "I tried to talk to Munson."

"Come on," Jerry repeated over his shoulder.

THEY found Dr. Westcott just leaving his dinner-table. Forgetting he was talking to the august president of the college, Jerry poured out a torrent of indignant protest against injustice in general and Arthur Munson in particular. Bill, visibly impressed by his friend's eloquence, put in an occasional word of support. After it was over, Dr. Westcott smiled.

"You're quite right," he said. "I've been investigating this past week—that little stunt of bringing you up to shake hands with me for the benefit of the newspapers, Hobart—that got me thinking. It seemed so pointless. So I have already arranged for Mr. Munson to be free in case some other position is offered him. I think that will be likely; I understand they think highly of him down at Metropolitan. And—Doc Taylor is going to stay here as long as I can persuade him to." Dr. Westcott smiled. "I was on the Princeton squad in '91, you know," he said, "and I see every game Sheridan plays. I think I'd get awfully tired of Hollywood football."

Weird House

Death struck twice in this old Southern mansion —and gave Detective Fitzgerald his most exciting case.

By FRANCIS M. COCKRELL

THE bell rang, harsh and loud and jarring in the peaceful darkness, and kept ringing, rude and insistent. Presently, in the next room, springs squeaked. Then shuffling footsteps sounded, a chair tipped over, there was a muttered curse.

The light from a bridge-lamp clicked on, and the man blinked once and drew his thick black eyebrows down so that his eyes were dark gray and smoky as he scowled at the phone.

It rang again. He shrugged and moved across the room to it in two long steps. He was a tall man, an angular man. He had wide shoulders, thin hips and long lean legs. Long fingers now curled about the French phone, lifting it.

"Hello."

"I want to speak to Mr. Fitzgerald." The voice was imperious and assured, at the same time nervous. It was a woman's voice, high, rather thin, and with the somewhat creaking uncertainty of control which often comes with age.

"Speaking."

"This is Mrs. Pierre D'Abourde. I want you to come here immediately. Do you understand? Immediately."

"Why?"

"Because I say so!" Her voice was sharp, impatient. "Right away, do you hear?"

"Of course I hear," he said rather shortly. "But I have no intention of going out at three in the morning without some excellent reason."

"Oh, do you think I'd call without a good reason? I'm afraid. I'm all alone and I'm afraid."

"Of what?"

"Are you a fool? Of death, of course. What else is there to fear? You *must* come. Right away."

"Because you wake up in the middle of the night," he said rather wearily, "and find yourself afraid of death, does not—"

"Wake up!" Her voice cracked slightly with emotion. "I haven't been to sleep. They're going to kill me. I know it. They're going to kill me, and I can't do—oh, come on. Please come on. Now." Her tone suddenly was abject, pleading.

The man frowned uneasily, for there was an odd conviction in her tone.

"*They?* Who?"

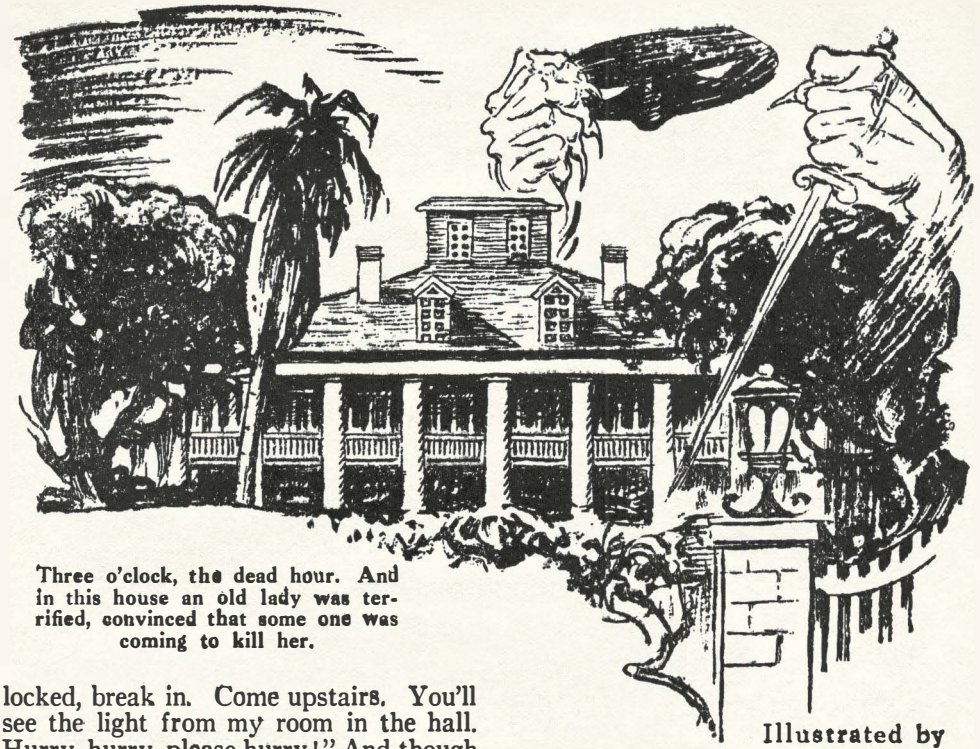
"I don't know. I don't know. Some of them. Don't stand there talking—delaying. Come on, I tell you. Hurry."

"But the police can reach you much more quickly."

"Oh, please come. The police would —laugh at me. I know. They'd think me crazy. Perhaps I am. But I know, I tell you. I *know*. They'll kill me. I feel it. I will pay your fee—anything you ask, *anything!* But come now. I'm a helpless old woman, and I'm all alone. All alone in this house, and they're coming to kill me! Please come. *Now.*"

"All right," he said with abrupt decision.

"Thank God! Hurry. Number One Magnolia Place. If the gate or door is



Three o'clock, the dead hour. And in this house an old lady was terrified, convinced that some one was coming to kill her.

Illustrated by Alfred Simpkin

locked, break in. Come upstairs. You'll see the light from my room in the hall. Hurry, hurry, please hurry!" And though her words ceased then, there still came over the phone little sounds of a nervous, nameless fear. The man dropped the phone on its stand, and moved toward the bedroom, yanking at his pajama-coat as he went.

He pulled on trunks and a shirt; he stepped through trousers and slipped into shoes and coat.

He was out in front of the apartment, at his little coupé parked there against the curb. The motor roared. Presently the tires sang against the macadam, and there was the rush of soft warm air. It was late spring. Stars shone, and street-lamps winked in a moonless night: New Orleans was asleep. On South Claiborne an all-night lunch-stand was deserted; ahead of him the bright light from Canal Street swelled into the sky and hung there like a misty opalescent cloud.

Three o'clock, the dead hour. On Canal, men ran street-cleaners, and street-cars stood in the neutral ground in the center, or departed lazily and nearly empty on the hourly runs of early morning. The dead hour—and twelve blocks distant, an old lady was huddled in her room, terrified, convinced that some one was coming to kill her.

Swinging off Canal Street, the little coupé darted through narrow streets of the old French Quarter, past a long, brightly lighted building from which came music and the sounds of gayety, on across the Esplanade; a few blocks farther on, the driver braked suddenly, and had the ignition off and the door open as the car slammed to a halt.

Rapidly, with long silent steps, he crossed the streets to enter the little cobblestoned dead end which was Magnolia Place.

BEHIND the high brick wall, magnolia trees dripped a curtain of Spanish moss, secret and concealing. Above, only the ghostly bulk of the roof showed in dim outline against more trees behind this house. High against the blue-black of the sky, two palm trees rose like somber sentinels—grim and dour, as though they shared a knowledge of what was beneath them now, and what had been beneath them before tonight, as though this knowledge was a heavy thing.

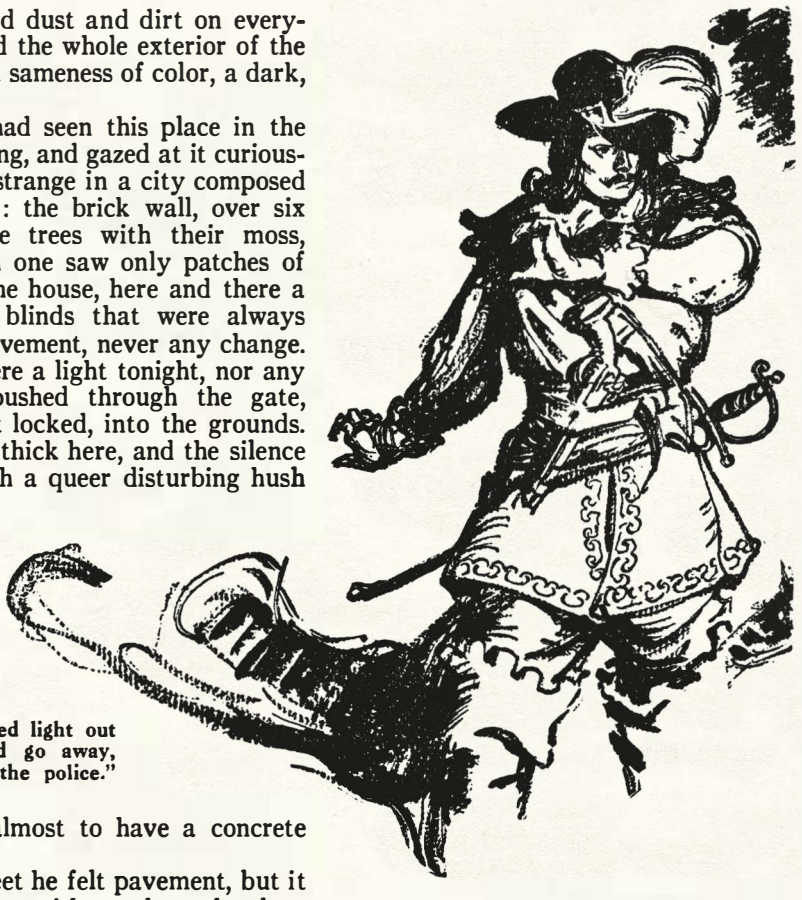
No. 1 Magnolia Place *was* Magnolia Place; for there were no other numbers here. It was not a street, only this little dead end. Like life, the streets had gone around this house behind the high brick wall, parting to avoid it, meeting again on the other side, and going on.

On all sides had been change, decay and reconstruction; but only time made changes in Magnolia Place—cracked the

brick wall, laid dust and dirt on everything, bleached the whole exterior of the house to a dull sameness of color, a dark, grayish red.

Fitzgerald had seen this place in the daytime, passing, and gazed at it curiously, for it was strange in a city composed of strangeness: the brick wall, over six feet high; the trees with their moss, through which one saw only patches of the walls of the house, here and there a window with blinds that were always drawn. No movement, never any change.

Nor was there a light tonight, nor any sound. He pushed through the gate, which was not locked, into the grounds. Darkness was thick here, and the silence was thick, with a queer disturbing hush



"Put your damned light out of my eyes and go away, or I shall call the police."

that seemed almost to have a concrete density.

Under his feet he felt pavement, but it was thick-grown with weeds, and only a narrow path led through them toward the house. He carried a flash in his hand, but left it dark, and moved forward quietly, oddly alert. There was no sound; there was no movement but his own.

Then close before him there was a muffled noise, and the movement of a gray shape in the darkness, coming toward him. . . .

Fitzgerald's light came on, outlining the man glaringly. He was a slender young man, with a thin, sharp face that had a skin the color of yellowed ivory and as smooth as ivory; his eyes were very black, and glittered in the light from the flash; his eyebrows and mustache were black too, and almost glossy. He was extremely handsome in a completely satanic way; and standing there in the path he was a most astonishing figure, for he wore the costume of an old-time pirate, with velvet jacket, and breeches tucked loosely into floppy boots, with a large velvet hat, and with a bright red sash wound round his waist.

He spoke immediately and sharply: "Who is it? What are you doing here?"

"I am Michael Fitzgerald. I am here because Mrs. D'Abourde asked me to come. Who are you?"

"Go away. She doesn't want to see you. There's nothing wrong."

Fitzgerald repeated quietly: "Who are you?"

"I'm Pierre D'Abourde, Third. Put your damned light out of my eyes and go away. I tell you there is nothing—"

"You are very insistent. Perhaps you had best come in with me."

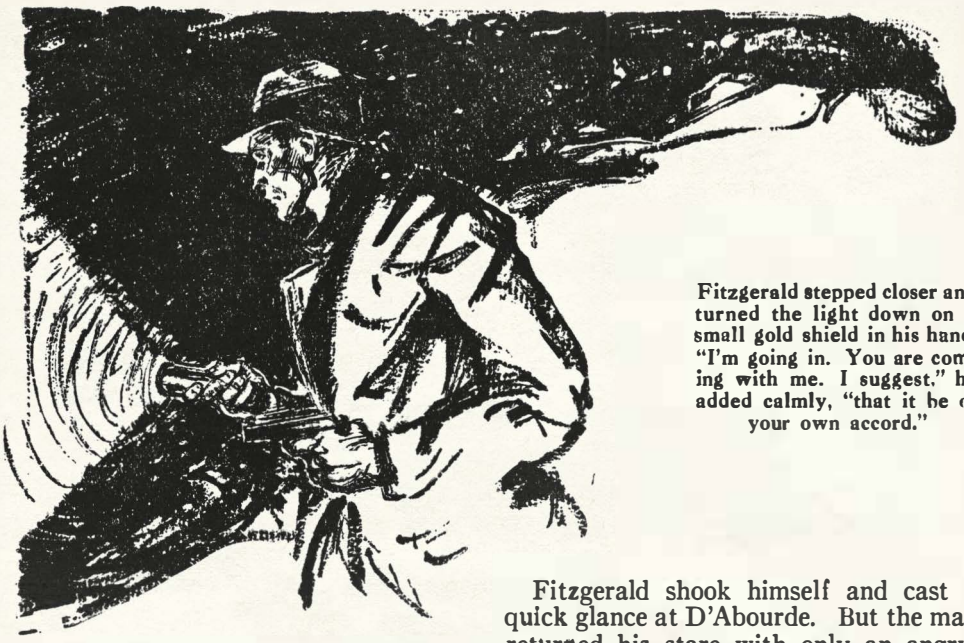
The black eyes flashed angrily. "You're both insane and impudent. If you don't leave immediately, I shall call the police."

Fitzgerald stepped closer and turned the light down on a small gold shield in his hand.

"I'm going in. You are coming with me. I suggest," he added calmly, "that it be of your own accord."

D'Abourde seemed not so sure of himself now.

"All right. Come then." He turned toward the house. "But I warn you," he flung over his shoulder, "if this is useless, you will be very sorry of it. You will see."



Fitzgerald stepped closer and turned the light down on a small gold shield in his hand. "I'm going in. You are coming with me. I suggest," he added calmly, "that it be of your own accord."

Fitzgerald, without answering, followed him up onto the dark porch and through a heavy door into a room where the beam of his flash bit into the blackness and displayed that which brought him to an uncertain, puzzled halt.

D'Abourde stepped to one side, struck a match, and then flame grew in a kerosene lamp, to light the room with a feeble flickering glow.

It was a large room; it was a graceful, delicate room, from which, at the far end, a graceful staircase curved upward to the second floor. It whispered of other days, brought back the people who had trod those steps, gathered in this room: gracious ladies with thin waists, long, flowing skirts and dainty ways; courtly gentlemen, straight-backed and slim, in faultless evening clothes.

It was a painful and pathetic room. For now only a few rickety chairs and a shabby table furnished it. Cheap and mean, this scant furniture seemed almost lost in the long room. And the wallpaper, dingy and colorless for the most part, showed elsewhere sharply outlined patches where pictures had for many years protected it from the light. But they were gone now, as was the large oval mirror which had once hung above the exquisite marble mantel and fireplace.

It had been a proud room, and now it seemed ashamed—stripped and gutted, in its ignominy it seemed to shrink from the touch of eyes.

Fitzgerald shook himself and cast a quick glance at D'Abourde. But the man returned his stare with only an angry, unyielding pride that made no apologies for the room, simply resented strange eyes beholding it.

Fitzgerald moved on to the stairs and ascended quietly, his flash playing before him, D'Abourde moving silently in soft shoes at his side.

Almost at the top they halted, and stood for a long moment gazing at the woman lying there.

She had thick golden hair, somewhat awry; her chin was softly rounded, her mouth somewhat petulant, but full-lipped and red. She wore a gown which belonged to this house in other days, with those gracious ladies and gallant gentlemen; very tight in the waist, with full sleeves and a long full skirt. It was of white satin, which had turned that creamy color which comes with age, and it was crinkly and stiff, as though if you wrinkled it, it might break. And she wrinkled it now. In it the one spot of color was dominating, magnetic.

She was a tall woman, with smooth white arms and smooth shapely hands.

She lay half on her back, half on her side, one leg bent at the knee, folded under the other, with one arm falling across her body below the red blotch which was spreading slowly toward it. A candle lay extinguished, where it had fallen from her nerveless dead hand.

Fitzgerald bent over the girl—sought for pulse of wrist and throat. But he had seen death too often to be mistaken now. He rose from his knees and turned toward the man who stood beside him.

D'Abourde's eyes were wide and staring, fixed on the girl before them as though hypnotized. Now the tip of his tongue, intensely red against the background of his face, turned bloodless, came out and touched his lips and then withdrew. Even white teeth bit for a moment into his upper lip, and without moving his eyes, he whispered:

"Audrienne. It's Audrienne!"

Fitzgerald took the two remaining steps, but down the long hall was darkness, and no light broke from any doorway, as he had been told it would.

Abruptly D'Abourde's head snapped up, and he stared past Fitzgerald an instant, then said *"Grandmother!"* not to Fitzgerald but to himself, and suddenly brushed past to hurry down the hall.

"Wait!" But in the light of the flash, D'Abourde showed no sign of hearing, and Fitzgerald moved after him in long, rushing steps, nearly caught him, stooped to scoop something from the floor, and as D'Abourde yanked open a door, came up with him again.

The room glowed softly in the yellow light from graceful candelabra on the table by the bed, and the two men's shoulders touched as they went in.

Pierre D'Abourde moved slowly forward to stop with his hands resting on the foot of the bed, and stand there not moving or saying anything.

Fitzgerald went around the bed to the left. He did not hurry; no more was there need to hurry. She had been stabbed, and after a moment's examination, he knew that she too was dead.

SHE was very old and wrinkled and quite thin. Her hair was almost as white as the linen of the bed, and this was spotless except for the blood which spread out and down from above her stilled heart.

Fitzgerald's shoulders seemed to sag a little, and his face lost all expression.

He said tonelessly: "She knew." Then: "She *did* know."

D'Abourde said: "She always knew—things." He took a deep, shuddering breath and was otherwise immobile.

Deliberately Fitzgerald let his eyes sweep once around this room, so different from the hall and the room below. Here all was as it should be; the dull sheen of beautiful old wood in the high four-poster bed, the wardrobe, washstand and dainty chairs; the soft gleam of polished silver in the candelabra; the blending of quiet color in the rugs.

Then he turned heavily to the table by the bed and took up the phone. He called a number, talked for several minutes, then put it down. Perhaps it had been because D'Abourde stood like a man who was frozen there; perhaps the feeling that if he had agreed to come with less delay he might have been in time weighed heavily enough to dull him for a moment, make him careless. Perhaps—but that doesn't matter; whatever it was, when he talked on the phone, his back was toward D'Abourde.

AND now when Fitzgerald turned to face him again, D'Abourde was no longer there.

Nor, when he had lunged into the hall, did his light show anything but emptiness, and his voice was savage, calling:

"D'Abourde!"

The answer was not vocal. From somewhere to his right, at the back of the house, there was splintering of wood, a crash; and then, as he raced down the hall, silence again, so complete and abrupt as to give him the uneasy sensation that the sound had been only a fantastic trick of his mind.

Then Fitzgerald was at the end of the hall, and the room on the left showed only a mussed iron bed and a chair from which the back had long been lacking; the blinds were down, and the atmosphere was stuffy. But opposite, in a room as bare as the hall, a blind was up, and fresh sweet air stirred in through the open window.

From this window his flash revealed below him only the broken shutter, torn from a window below, and a little circle of ground quite empty. Beyond this vision was blocked by the low-hanging Spanish moss.

Quickly he estimated the drop, swung his feet over the sill, turned, let himself down, and released his grip on the window-ledge. He fell loose-kneed, rolling backward in a somersault to come to his feet almost immediately again as his light snapped on once more and pried through the trees and shrubs. But there was nothing, there was no one there.

Then great, grotesque shadows swelled and darted, shriveled, disappeared and came again in new places as he ran, and the light bobbed in his hands. The back gate gave to his pressure, and the flash beam swung in a wide arc; but there was nothing here. Only back yards of other houses, and an alley. That was enough, for there was cover there for a dozen

men; so he turned back into the court, rage at himself growing within him.

But suddenly he broke into a swift run toward the house, toward the phone, and a grunt of satisfaction came from his throat; for it wouldn't matter: already, because of his report, patrol cars were near; in three minutes he could have a dozen or ten dozen men scouring this section. And while a man, an ordinary man, might possibly elude them, a man in a pirate's suit would have little chance.

Again he crossed the front porch into that despoiled and still faintly lighted drawing-room, heading for the stairs. Instantly, though, he stopped in his tracks, listening, and then as instantly, but with no sound, he was moving across the room, through wide, open double doors, into an empty dining-room, across it and into a little hall leading on toward the back of the house whence he had heard the muffled sound.

Around a corner in the hall, faint light showed under a door, and he stopped outside. From within no sound came now. His flash went to his left hand; a revolver came into his right.

He crashed the door abruptly open with his shoulder, stepping quickly in and to one side.

Pierre D'Abourde, standing at one end of a paintless table looked at him over his shoulder, and without saying anything turned back and went on with pouring from a bottle to a glass.

Fitzgerald leaned back against a wall and waited, grimly silent. It was a large kitchen. There were more of the cheap chairs, a large sink, a range, the big table covered with empty bottles, dirty dishes and glasses. That was all.

D'Abourde turned, a tumbler half full of whisky in his hand. Fitzgerald said nothing, staring at him. D'Abourde gulped his drink hastily, nervously.

"What—what was the noise?" He sounded hoarse.

FITZGERALD laughed mirthlessly and said: "You're clever—you think quickly! Climb out the window, making a noise, and then duck in here. I'm to think some one else was up there." He laughed again, unpleasantly. "It grieves me to disappoint you."

D'Abourde stared at him blankly. "What are you talking about? *Who* jumped out the window?"

"You."

"You're mad. I came down the front stairs."

"Why?"

"I wanted a drink. I—had to have it. It was—" He didn't finish. Involuntarily his eyes lifted toward the room above.

BUT Fitzgerald pointed to the bottle, from which not more than one drink was gone. "And it took you all this time to pour it, I suppose?"

"No. No—I had to go to the cellar for it. I had to light the lamp. In the cellar I stumbled and fell, and had to find my candle and light it again. I had trouble with the cork." He exhibited it, broken.

"I see," was the dry answer. "That explains the dirt on your clothes too. Very neat. What were you doing out there in the yard, anyhow, D'Abourde?"

"I was going back to the ball. The Beaux Arts Ball."

"Why had you come home?"

"I came to bring—Audrienne. She wanted to come home. I—didn't come in. I was going back when I met you."

"Audrienne?"

"She is—" He paused, changing tenses without emphasis: "She was my sister-in-law. André's wife."

"And André? Where is he?"

"At the ball. All of them are."

"And you didn't come in?"

"No. No, I left her at the door."

Fitzgerald was silent now, looking at D'Abourde with cool amusement in his eyes, as his left hand slowly went to his coat pocket and returned.

He didn't look at it himself, or say anything—just held it out and watched D'Abourde's eyes as they glazed, and his face as it paled, while his hand jerked to his sash, where hung the mate to the glove in Fitzgerald's hand.

"Where—where did you get that?" It was no more than a whisper.

"In the hall upstairs," Fitzgerald told him amiably, "and it did *not* fall when you were there with me; for I saw it on the floor before you came to it."

D'Abourde had turned to pour another drink. He took it quickly, and the hand that set the empty glass on the table was not steady. His smooth, dark forehead had a little sheen of perspiration now.

"But—I didn't have it," he said, "I didn't have it." He was still whispering. "I—you see, I gave it—I lost it. Over an hour ago. At the ball. I—haven't seen it since then—until now. You—see?"

"Yes. I've seen drowning men snatch at straws before."

Sound came from the front, and Fitzgerald said shortly, "Come on," motioning D'Abourde through the kitchen door.

Lieutenant Bates, with Morgan, who always worked with him, were there. McKee and others from the lab' were coming in behind them. Bates was standing in the center of the room, looking around him with an uncertain frown.

"You have the detail turning over this neighborhood?" Fitzgerald asked without preliminary.

Nodding, Bates asked: "Why? Anything new?"

"I'm not sure." Fitzgerald sounded worried. "You—might triple it."

"Where's the phone?"

Moving toward the stairs, Fitzgerald pointed to D'Abourde.

"Have some one keep an eye on him."

Bates said, "You," to Morgan, and followed up the steps.

LATER they stood in the hall, while flash-bulbs were blinding now and then through the open door as men worked within.

Fitzgerald, finishing his story, lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall. After a moment Bates shrugged.

"I don't get it," he said. "It looks open and shut to me, with the glove—especially if that's blood on it. Funny," he added, "her being so sure, like you say. Queer."

Fitzgerald nodded absently, his eyes on McKee, who was coming down the hall from the room at the end.

"Finished?"

"Yeah. Nothing but smudges."

"I don't see the catch," Bates repeated. "I don't get it."

"There may not be one." But Fitzgerald did not sound as though he believed this, and moved off down the hall, Bates coming with him. He went into the room and closed the window, which was stiff and old. He came out, closing the door, which creaked loudly on its hinges. Glancing at his watch, he now opened the door, and then the window slowly enough that there was very little sound.

He glanced again at his watch and murmured, "Damn!" for it had taken him nearly four minutes.

"I get it," Bates said. "There wasn't time."

"I didn't talk two minutes," Fitzgerald said. "He *might* have done it, but I doubt it. He would have to be very lucky and very, very good."

Walking back down the hall, Bates said impersonally: "He's got my sympathy if he did lose that glove and can't prove it. It's liable to hang him."

"Have you sent for the rest of them?"

"Yeah. They'll be along in a minute. I said to bring them over without saying why." They stopped in the open door.

McKee looked up from where he was dusting powder over a corner of the bedside table. "All over the place," he said.

The two men only nodded and moved on, to reach the foot of the stairs as other people came in the front door.

The two policemen in uniform, stepped one to each side, and the others paused just inside the door, standing there in a little haphazard group, as ill-assorted as five people well could be.

Three men: the oldest possibly thirty, solid-looking, with emotionless dark eyes, and dark hair that was thinning at the temples, was very immaculate in precise evening clothes; the youngest, barely in his twenties, tall, with a soft round face, pale eyes and a soft mouth loose at the corners, looked somewhat silly in the costume of a clown; the other, who was quite small, with very soft blond hair, with soft white hands and a thin-lipped selfish mouth, seemed incongruous in his toreador's costume.

Two girls: one of them was darkly beautiful in the costume of a Spanish dancer, slender, with long, slender hands, red lips and sullen eyes; the other's loveliness was quieter, less obtrusive, and in her Red Cross uniform, she was tall and lithe and young; but her gray eyes were too tired and old for her, and the set of her mouth too sad.

IT was the thick-set man who, seeing Pierre D'Abourde, spoke sharply but without excitement.

"Pierre! What is this nonsense? What—"

"Be quiet, please," Fitzgerald said to them, and then to the man he had interrupted: "André D'Abourde?"

"Yes, I am André D'Abourde. May I ask—"

"Your wife is dead," Fitzgerald stated flatly.

The other's eyebrows rose only slightly. "Indeed?" He said the word precisely and without emotion.

"Your grandmother is also dead."

The eyebrows went a little higher. "It's high time she was," he stated.

The clown had been staring at Fitzgerald, and now his lower lip trembled,

They halted and stood for a long moment gazing at the woman lying there. . . . D'Abourde's eyes were fixed and staring as though hypnotized. Now he whispered: "Audrienne! It's Audrienne!"

his eyes widening; then their lids were drawn closer together, making crinkles at the corners, and a large tear appeared in each. His whole soft face began to work uncontrollably, and he turned tremblingly, sobbing, to the gray-eyed girl.

Fitzgerald looked away from him, back to André D'Abourde.

"You do not seem unduly distressed."

"Why should I be? My grandmother was a cruel, inconveniently insane old lady who had lived too long. My wife was a dipsomaniac to whom life was a constantly morbid and unhappy state. I am glad."

"Your grandmother was insane?"

"To a certain degree." He shrugged. "Possibly no more than the rest of us," he added matter-of-factly, "though that is beside the point. I—"

"Not entirely," Fitzgerald corrected him. "They were murdered."

"Eh? You are sure?" His eyes narrowed. "That is very different. You—are you in charge of the—investigation?"

"I am a private detective. Your grandmother called and asked me to come here." His eyes traveled watchfully from one to another. "She was afraid that some one was coming to kill her, convinced of it. She was right. She had been killed before I arrived." He nodded toward Bates, beside him. "This is Detective-lieutenant Bates, in charge of the investigation."

BATES asked: "Are you—quitting, Fitz?"

"If you don't mind—no. I feel a sort of—responsibility."

"That's nonsense, of course; but—"

André D'Abourde said: "Are you Michael Fitzgerald, by any chance?"

"Yes."

"Did my grandmother agree to pay you a certain fee?"

"She said she would pay what I asked."

"I see. I should like to assume that obligation now if you will agree to continue with this until you have proof of the murderer's identity. I assume you will not be unreasonable, of course."

"You understand," Fitzgerald said solemnly, "that it is most probably one of your family—or you?"

"It is possible," the other said dispassionately, "that a D'Abourde might murder. But not one of his own name. You will not understand the certainty of that; but it is true. I speak for myself and my brothers and my sister. As for Nancy and Jean—" He shrugged. "But that is all your affair, if you accept."

Fitzgerald looked at Bates, who said: "Sure. By all means."

"I accept."

"Good," D'Abourde said.

"Will you tell me, please, how it happens that you are so sure, without being told, that these murders require—investigation?" His voice was mild, but his eyes searched D'Abourde's face intently.

"Eh? Why—why, I simply assumed it, of course. Naturally if you already know—"

"Never mind. I see. I should like to know the others, please."

"Certainly. This is my sister Lucille, and her husband Jean Laval,"—indicating the dark-eyed dancer and the blond toreador. "This is my brother Guy, and his wife Nancy." This was the sobbing boy who did not look up, and the girl with the tired gray eyes, who only looked away from her husband long enough to nod impersonally.

Fitzgerald said slowly: "This is and will be an uncomfortable thing for all of you. Please understand that the things I shall ask and require are directed only to one end—learning and *proving* who has done this thing—and give me what help you can. I have some questions."

Fitzgerald turned and walked back to the staircase, where he seated himself on the third step.

"Was your grandmother unusually sensitive to things in the minds of others? Could she *feel* things, that is, that others were thinking?"

André nodded emphatically. "Very definitely, on occasion. For all of us, and in fact for anyone she had known a length of time. Even servants we had had a year or so."

"You have no servants now?"

Pierre laughed harshly.

"You said she was cruel?"

"She was a fiend." It was the first word Lucille Laval had said. Her voice was husky and stirring and full of hate. "She lay up there paralyzed from the waist down, a useless old hag, clinging to life simply to keep us from having our money."

"*Your* money?"

PIERRE surged to his feet, from the chair he occupied by the mantel. "Yes, our money!" he flared hotly. "The money our grandfather left. Do you know how old she was?" His voice was bitter. "Ninety-seven! Oh, it amused her. She

would taunt us. She gave us only enough for food. It's fortunate it wasn't hers outright; she would have left it to charity or something. It infuriated her," he added maliciously, "that she couldn't."

SOME things were clearer now, and the detective looked at these people wonderingly as the picture of their lives rose and took form in his mind. He saw them staying here, waiting for her to die; and gradually, a piece at a time, selling the furniture and pictures, gutting this house and living in shabbiness and shiftlessness, while she lay there not knowing what was done. Turning old silver and fine furniture into money for clothes, and the keeping up of their position in the eyes of the world and their friends; zealously guarding the house from outside eyes, entertaining elsewhere on one pretext or another.

"Perhaps she was cruel," he said. Contempt edged into his tone. "Perhaps she was not—craven. There was no more to sell, and still she lived. You have no money now, have you?"

No one answered. Only André's eyes would meet his own, still calm and completely assured.

"It occurred to no one to go to work?"

André asked coldly: "Are you trying to make a joke? D'Abourdes do not work." His tone carried a blind acceptance of the rightness of that attitude that was not answerable. "And may I ask how that has any bearing—"

But Fitzgerald had turned to Pierre D'Abourde, and his questions rattled at the man like a handful of pebbles tossed in his face.

"You say you lost the glove at the ball. How did you lose it? Where? When? Explain."

"I lost it, that's all."

"How?"

"I—dropped it. I don't know where?"

"When?"

"I tell you I don't know. I—"

The gray-eyed girl interrupted. "Never mind, Pierre. Thank you." She looked at Fitzgerald. Her voice was weary. "You see, I lost the glove. Or rather, I borrowed them and gave back only one." She offered no explanation.

"The murderer dropped the glove in the hall."

Fitzgerald's words seemed to hang there in the air while stares converged on Nancy D'Abourde. She looked around at them all with grave questions in her eyes; but she did not speak.

André D'Abourde said coldly: "I want it understood that I wish this investigation pursued regardless of whom it may involve." He was looking at Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald made no reply, turning to Bates. "Anything else you'd like to ask now?"

"No." Bates instructed Morgan: "Put 'em all in separate rooms, and don't let 'em talk to each other at all, see?"

"Hokay," Morgan said.

"See here!" André was indignant. "There is no necessity of that. You—"

"That's not up to you to decide, Napoleon," Bates said mildly. "Take 'em away, Morgan."

"Very well," André said stiffly. "Have a bottle of cognac brought me, please. It will be dull."

"I'll take whisky," Pierre said.

There were other requests.

"Sure," Bates said sarcastically, "—just name it, and we'll run out and buy it for you. Make you a present of it. The Department's always doin' little tricks like that."

André smiled patiently and without warmth. "Our cellar was stocked twenty years ahead, and each year replenished. It is not yet exhausted, by any means."

Bates shrugged. "Doesn't matter to me. Get 'em whatever they want, then, Morgan."

"Personally," Morgan assured him.

"No touches," Bates said firmly.

Morgan looked downcast as he and the uniformed police escorted their charges up the stairs.

NOW McKee came down the steps to say that eight sets of fingerprints had been found in the room—those of old Mrs. D'Abourde only on things which could be reached from the bed, or were movable, and seven others. That was the right number, for there had been seven others in the family, and Bates told him to take impressions from each of those here now.

Coming in from outside, another man reported that there was pavement below the window, and though it had some earth on it, Fitzgerald's own footprints and the shutter had made useless the ones left by his predecessor; also that there was such a layer of dry grass and leaves in the yard as to leave no footprints.

From above them, at the head of the stairs, a voice called: "The lab' just phoned. That was blood on the glove."

Fitzgerald, nodding at this, sighed a little and murmured, "I thought it would

JEAN

LUCILLE

be," as though the information did not please him greatly.

Morgan came through the room carrying bottles, and went past them up the stairs, looking like a man convinced of the injustice of this world.

Two men who had been waiting on the porch came in, and one of them asked: "Can we cart the stiffs off yet, Lieutenant?"

Bates said they could, and they went up the stairs to return presently with a stretcher burdened and shrouded, as Bates was saying:

"Anyhow, it looks like Pierre is out. She says he did lose the glove, and you say he couldn't have got out the window; and anyhow, he wouldn't have brought this other girl along if he was out for murder."

Fitzgerald shrugged. "We don't *know* he brought her; we don't know he didn't find the glove after Nancy D'Abourde lost it. He *might* have got out the window."

"Well, hell, I guess there's no use sittin' here spinnin' theories. Want to start now, or go home and get some sleep?"

"The longer one has to build a story, the more plausible it will be, the fewer its loopholes, and especially will it be harder to shake."

"Yeah. Any special one you want to start with?"

"André, I think, if you have no preference."

They went upstairs then, stepping aside to let the men from the morgue pass on their second trip, and at the top McKee met them to report:

"Only the family's. No others."

Bates grunted. Then: "Finished with the room?"

"Uh-huh."

"You all can scram, then," Bates said, and McKee left with the other men.

FITZGERALD and Bates moved on down the hall and took chairs in the one intact room, while Morgan was sent to fetch André D'Abourde.

He came, his expression as cool as it had ever been, and his voice as calm and assured. For the most part Fitzgerald did the questioning, Bates contenting himself with listening, only now and then inserting a remark or query of his own.

André answered their questions almost without hesitation. He was frankly indefinite as to most of his answers, and there seemed to be little or nothing he would swear to. He had gone, he said, to the ball about eleven. With the others. He was there from three-five until three-thirty, but was not, he admitted calmly, at all sure he could prove it. He had been dancing, he believed, and did not remember with whom. Everyone had still been masked. Further, he did not have a watch.

As to his wife, she had asked him to take her home, but he had refused. For one thing, he had been enjoying himself; and besides that, she would probably no sooner have got here than she would have wanted to come back, for she was always changeable and restless, not knowing what she wanted. And she was drunk; but then, he added, she had been always drunk the last few years. He could not be sure when he had last seen Pierre, except it was certainly before three o'clock.

In regard to Nancy, he could say only that he had not *seen* her leave, or been sure of her leaving, though there had been one period during which he did not remember seeing her.

"Could that have been from about three till three-thirty?"

"It could. I can't say certainly. But in all fairness I must add that I cannot vouch for any of the others being there

throughout the ball, and I dare say no one can for me. It is only that Nancy's costume stood out enough that I remember definitely not seeing her for a time, though—"

"Never mind," Fitzgerald told him. "You remember her having the gloves? Giving Pierre back only one?"

D'Abourde nodded. "I happened to be there."

"Now that your grandmother is dead, to whom does the money go? Is there much of it?"

"A fortune. I'm not sure exactly. Over two millions, I think. It goes to us equally, I believe. The executor has handled it entirely. I have not actually seen the will, but it is my understanding that we are the sole heirs, sharing alike."

"Who is this executor, please?"

"Louis Marsac. He is also attorney for the estate."

After a moment Fitzgerald looked at Bates, who shrugged, and André was told that he could go.

When Morgan had left with him, Fitzgerald said thoughtfully: "I think we might talk to Louis Marsac, don't you?"

"Yeah. Now?"

"Might as well call him now. Ask him to bring a copy of the will."

Bates moved to the phone, and in a moment got his connection. After several minutes he hung up. "He squawked, but he's coming. Can't blame him; it *is* a hell of a time to have to get up."

WHILE waiting, they continued an individual questioning of the others. From Lucille Laval and her husband little else was learned. Their stories were much the same as André's, and as vague. They did, however, also recall an interval during which they could not remember seeing Nancy D'Abourde. However, though they had all had a table together, they had returned to it infrequently and spasmodically from dancing and visiting at other tables, and they could not say definitely that she had been absent.

They gave all their answers rather sullenly; and grudgingly, somewhat offendedly, they admitted they were not sure they could produce certain evidence that they themselves had been at the ball the entire evening.

From Guy D'Abourde came the first point of conflict. He insisted that his wife had been at the dance the whole time, and that he had danced with her himself at intervals never greater than fifteen minutes.

"You loved your grandmother?" Fitzgerald asked gently.

His hands worked together nervously, as he stood there; but he seemed sincerely trying to phrase his answer truthfully.

"I—yes, I loved her sometimes. I love everyone—sometimes. Grandmother was cruel, and hard; but perhaps it was not her fault. I hated her sometimes too, but not as much, I think. I hated her because of Nancy—because I love Nancy so—much."

"I don't see the connection."

"Because—because, you see, Nancy had to do everything for her—and she was mean to her, when we were married."

THERE was something depressingly pathetic about this man, as though the spirit of a frail and tender-hearted girl who believed fervently in fairies had been transplanted to his large, well-formed body. He was obviously rather stupid, and as much the helpless slave of his emotions as his brother André was the cold master of his; but there was, nevertheless, a suggestion of some unwavering force within him that could not be reconciled with his face, or with his actions.

Fitzgerald frowned uncomfortably. Bates said, "I don't want him any more," and they nodded that he could leave.

The next was Nancy D'Abourde, who came into the room quietly when Morgan had brought her, and stood leaning back against the door without saying anything, the weariness still in her eyes, and in the sag of her shoulders.

For a moment they looked at her closely, and then Bates said: "Would you like to sit down? We have a good deal to ask you."

"No, thank you." Her voice was listless—not uninterested, only tired and somewhat despondent.

Bates shrugged. "Suit yourself."

"Answer us as accurately as you can, please," Fitzgerald requested, "and stick to the truth. If you are unsure of an answer merely say so." He paused, but she was silent. "Did you this evening dance with your husband at intervals of never more than fifteen minutes?"

"No."

"*He* said you did."

Compassion touched her face. "Foolish Guy! He was trying to shield me, of course. He loves me so." She did not sound very happy as she stated this fact.

"Will you explain how and at what time you lost the glove?"

"I—I'm not sure." She looked help-

less. "I just borrowed them. I was playing—I mean—" She stopped and bit her lip. "I had been drinking," she said. "I felt light-hearted. I don't often drink anything. It seemed at the time very amusing to take Pierre's gloves and wear them, make gestures with them. It was rather ludicrous. I—don't know why."

"How did you lose the one?"

"It was when a number of us were at our table. Perhaps two o'clock or earlier. I wore them once while I danced, but they were hot, and I laid them on the table then. I didn't notice them especially when we came back. Later, about half an hour, I picked them up to give to Pierre, but only one was there. That's all I know about them." She sighed.

Fitzgerald asked, not roughly: "You say there *were* periods of more than fifteen minutes when you did not dance with Guy?"

"Yes,"—slowly,—"there was one."

"You were at the ball? Where others could see you?"

Her voice was very quiet, restrained.

"No—not where they could see me."

"Where?"

"I was out on a balcony, in a dark corner—alone."

"You sat there for thirty minutes?"

"Longer than that, I think."

FITZGERALD was frowning, puzzled. "Tell us why, please."

She did not answer for a moment; when she did, her words came slowly.

"I—wanted to be alone. You see, the drinks—they were for escape, of course. They made things bright for a while; then they wore off, and it was worse than before. It has all been so—terrible. Hopeless and futile, and nothing I could do to—change it. Everything seemed too clear tonight—and horribly depressing. André and his wife—all of them—Guy and myself. I have kept it in the back of my mind somehow, usually. But—but tonight it got too strong. I saw us all too well. I went out there to—cry. And I did; and then I just sat there and looked off into the darkness at some lights, and I don't know how long it was. I had only come in when we were brought here."

"May I see your hands, please?"

She held them out. They were strong hands, not small, but well-shaped. They were not as smooth as Lucille's; they were not, in fact, as smooth as Pierre's.

"I see. You do what work is done here, do you not?"

She nodded.

"How did you meet—and marry—Guy, Mrs. D'Abourde?"

"I was his grandmother's nurse. That's how I met him. I married him because—because I loved him." This was said softly, almost despondently.

"Why did you take this job?"

"She paid me twice what I could have made otherwise—or I wouldn't have stayed. No one would. Then, when I married Guy, she was furious. She said—horrible things. She wouldn't pay me then. She gave us a little money for food; that was all. She would rather do that than pay another nurse, no matter how she hated me. Partly *because* she hated me, I guess, because she knew that staying was torture for me—and that I couldn't leave."

She said wearily: "Even if they could do anything, they wouldn't. They would simply sit there and starve in their own damned aristocratic way. That's why she was so hateful when I married Guy—I don't have the coats-of-arms for all my ancestors back to the Crusades. I don't have the blood of the kings of France in my veins!" Her voice had strengthened, become bitter. "The hateful, vicious old—I shouldn't be, but I'm glad. I'm glad she's dead. I am! I *am!*"

She stopped abruptly; her chin trembled just a little; her voice dropped again. She let her breath out in a long sigh and finished dully: "So I stayed because some one had to do a little work; and Guy—needed me. He will always need me; but he is not like the others. He is fine and tender. Oh, I know what you think; but he is not like that. He just can't control his emotions, and he is a child in many ways. But he—I love him. I was sorry; I still am sometimes, because I love him. It is so difficult. But I love him anyway. I can't help that. And he is—great. You will see. Now that we can go away and be alone, and he can have time and peace to work, and I can give all my time to him, you will see. His music will still live when we are long dead and forgotten. He is a genius." Her head had risen a little, and as she finished and stared at them defiantly, there was something in both her eyes and her bearing that held her two listeners silent for several moments.

BUT presently Fitzgerald went on: "You are quite strong, for a girl?"

"I—yes, I am."

"Did it ever occur to you to kill her?"

"Yes." It was a whisper. "Yes, it did. So many times. And I could have, I suppose. I—wanted to, sometimes. I don't know why—I didn't."

"Did you know," Fitzgerald asked softly, "that the glove which was dropped in the hall had blood on it, and that both women had been stabbed?"

She gazed at him with wide round eyes before she answered; and then her voice barely audible, and with no hope in it.

"No—no, I—didn't know that."

"You might think about it," Fitzgerald said woodenly. "You may go now."

Bates called Morgan. The girl's lips parted slightly as if to say something, then closed again; and silently, her shoulders drooping, she turned and preceded Morgan out of the room.

There was heavy silence behind her.

"Damn it," Bates burst out, "I don't blame her. Poor kid! I hope she beats it. I swear I do."

The footsteps died away down the hall, and the house grew quiet again. They did not talk. They could hear plainly the soft ticking of a frail old clock on the mantel, and each other's breathing.

Time passed reluctantly, unwillingly, and the candles burned down low. Once Fitzgerald walked to the windows and raised their blinds and opened them.

The candles flickered out; the room was dark, and the men did not move.

Then dawn came hesitatingly, filtering mistily through the trees, settling on the house in waves. Black became gray, and shapes assumed vague outlines.

Then footfalls sounded, nearing, and Morgan stood in the door.

"Man named Marsac downstairs. Said you sent for him."

"Bring him up," Bates said, and Morgan's receding steps answered him hollowly from down the hall.

LOUIS MARSAC was a tall man. He was old, but there was that about him which, not defying time, seemed simply to disregard it, as though he had been born this old, and as though he would never grow older. His face was long, with a long, thin nose, a high narrow forehead, clear contemplative blue eyes and a square-pointed chin.

He wore good clothes, but like himself, they were quiet and mild; and he stood now in the doorway a moment without stiffness, but still not relaxed. It could not be imagined that he was ever relaxed; he would sleep like this.

Bates rose. "Mr. Marsac? Come in."

He entered, and at Bates' gesture seated himself in a chair between them. His movements were easy and unhurried.

"You have brought the will?"

"Yes, indeed. That is, I have brought a copy."

Fitzgerald asked: "Is it complicated?"

"Oh, no, not at all."

"For the present, then, would you give us a résumé of its essentials?"

"Certainly," Marsac agreed amiably. He leaned back in the chair, placing his finger-tips together, and spoke slowly but without hesitation.

"THE will, made by Pierre D'Abourde, Senior, provides: that his wife receive the entire income of the estate until her death, but without title or right of disposal to any property; that on her death the estate be divided between his two sons, Pierre, Junior, and Henri; that in the event of the death of either, before her death, that his share, at her death, be divided equally between his descendants; that if either die without issue, his share revert to his brother or his brother's descendants; that if both die without issue the entire estate go to certain charities; that Louis Marsac be executor of and attorney for the estate; that he provide for a successor in the event of his death; that he or his successor receive for this an annual fee of three thousand dollars, and a final fee of fifteen thousand dollars on the will's execution; that the estate be handled by an appointee of the board of directors of the Planters' Bank and Trust Company, under their supervision; that in event of dissolution of that bank, some similar board of directors be chosen by them; that the institution thus serving receive as remuneration twenty per cent of all earnings of the estate. I believe there is little else of importance."

"How long has Pierre D'Abourde, Senior, been dead?"

Marsac gazed at the ceiling. "Over—yes, over fifty years."

"You were his attorney?" Fitzgerald was puzzled.

Marsac smiled. "I am Louis Marsac, Junior," he said. "I wasn't ten years old when Pierre, Senior, died. My father, naturally, turned this over to me."

"Naturally." Fitzgerald lit a cigarette, leaned back in his chair. "It is an odd family, Mr. Marsac."

"The strangest I have ever seen," he agreed solemnly.

"And the old lady outlived both her sons. That is strange too. Is this correct? There are four children. Suppose one is Henri's, the other three Pierre's. Then half the estate goes to the one, and the other half is divided between the three?"

"That is right. But they are all Pierre's children."

"Oh. Henri had no children? Did he marry?"

"Henri D'Abourde," Marsac said slowly, "quarreled with his mother violently one night, and walked from the house, never to be seen again. That was thirty years ago. Later she made efforts to locate him, but was unsuccessful."

"Then what will be the disposal of his share of the estate? Will it go to these children of Pierre?"

"I presume so. The natural thing to do is have him declared dead, legally, which will be simple enough."

"If he, or a child, should turn up later, though?"

Marsac shrugged. "He could recover, of course, in court, though I think the others would not try to prevent that, once satisfied of his identity. Whatever else the D'Abourdes are, they are very clannish, they stick together. Family means more to them than all the money in the world. You—you don't think one of them might have killed her?"

Bates burst out: "No, damn it! I wish to hell we did."

"Eh? I don't understand. Do you—"

BEFORE Bates could go on, Fitzgerald had asked idly: "Mr. Marsac, you weren't at the Beaux Arts Ball last night by any chance?"

"Why, yes, I was. Very pleasant. Though I can't say it helps one get out of bed at dawn," he added wryly. "I had barely got to sleep. But it's quite all right. I understand."

"Thank you. When did you leave the ball?"

"About four or four-thirty, I should say."

"You were at the D'Abourdes' table now and then, during the evening?"

"Oh, yes, several times. They seemed to be enjoying themselves; they were gay company last night."

"Were you there when Mrs. Guy D'Abourde borrowed Pierre's gloves?"

"Yes. She was very amusing with them."

"When she returned them, were you there then?"

"No, I think not. I remember nothing of it, at any rate."

"Did you see her lay the gloves on the table?"

"Yes."

"You didn't see anyone pick one up?"

"No. They were lying there where anyone *could* have picked one up, though why anyone would want to is—"

"Of course. Do you remember seeing her between three and three-thirty? Or even five minutes before or after that?"

"Why—why, not distinctly. But then, I wasn't looking for her. I imagine she was there. There was a large crowd." He frowned suddenly. "See here, man, surely you don't think—"

FITZGERALD raised a hand slightly to interrupt.

"Consider the facts that we have," he said dispassionately. "Motive confines us to the family, for it would be difficult to think of anyone else having a reason to kill an old lady who had been paralyzed for years."

"But it might have been any of them. Thev all had the same motive. Though I can't believe any of them *would*—"

"Confined to the family," Fitz went on, "we discover that no one can remember seeing her at the time the murder was committed, and she admits she was not in sight at the time. She is strong enough to have done it; she would benefit as fully as any of them from the money; and stronger than all, her hate for the grandmother had been accumulating for some time. Added to that is the love for Guy, and her desire to free him, which the money would do. She had no blood tie to dissuade her. And finally we have the glove, the possession of which we cannot trace beyond her. It was found in the hall here, and it has blood on it. I am not glad of these facts; but neither am I able to overlook them. So what else can I think?"

Marsac shook his head resignedly. "I suppose you are right. It's—hard to believe, though. I'll tell you one thing, you'll have a hell of a time convicting her, with no more than you've told me."

"I hope you're right," Bates said emphatically.

"I think we won't need you any further, Mr. Marsac," Fitzgerald said. "We thank you very much, and apologize for having had to rout you out at such an unearthly hour."

Marsac nodded. "Don't mention it." He rose, and walked to the door, where

he turned. "If—if you arrest her," he said, "would you let me know? I should like to see if I can arrange for bond."

"You can make your arrangements, then," Fitzgerald said bluntly.

Marsac nodded and left. Scowling thoughtfully, Bates turned to Fitzgerald.

"No one is going off and leave a glove at the scene of a murder when he knows it can be connected with him," he said. "He'd be an idiot."

"He would," Fitzgerald said noncommittally.

"And a glove don't fall off," Bates argued. "You have to take a glove off. Her hand is nearly as big as Pierre's."

Fitzgerald shook his head. "The glove is quite a bit too big for Pierre himself," he said. "Still bigger for her." . . .

It was perhaps five minutes later, after some further conversation, that Fitzgerald and Bates came from that room and walked together down the musty hall, gray and dim in the light from windows at each end, their footfalls resounding hollowly.

"Detail all the men you can," Fitzgerald was saying, "and find it, if it takes a week. And get the other completely."

"Don't worry," Bates said solemnly. "We'll get it."

They had come to the head of the stairs, and Fitzgerald looked at Bates expectantly. Bates looked down, moved a hand uneasily.

"Look," he said hesitantly, "you do it. Would you mind? I—Fitz, honest, I thought I was tough—but hell, that kid—" His voice trailed off.

"All right," Fitz said gravely. "I'll do it." He beckoned to Morgan. He took a deep breath and hitched his shoulders. Then he moved with long strides down the hall toward a door near the front of the house.

Opening it, he stood framed there for a moment, his face wooden, impassive. When he spoke, his voice sounded mechanical, without tone.

"Mrs. D'Abourde, you are under arrest, charged with the murder of Mrs. Pierre and Mrs. André D'Abourde."

THE gray-eyed girl sucked in a long breath and half-rose from her chair. Then her body went lax, and she dropped back, her head dropping forward, and she sat there without animation, staring down at the floor, dully and unseeingly, while Fitzgerald said to Morgan:

"You will escort her to Headquarters. I think handcuffs will not be necessary."

During that day neither Bates nor Fitzgerald returned to No. 1 Magnolia Place. Others came: men who raked and mowed and dug and planted; men with machines who sanded floors; men who swept and scrubbed; painters who scraped and made estimates; plasterers and plumbers and electricians.

Life, which had been dormant here for all these years, woke once again.

As yet without cash, the D'Abourde credit was not limited. Activity was everywhere, but the D'Abourdes did not move out of the house.

Nor did Nancy D'Abourde remain in jail. Louis Marsac was waiting for her when she was brought to Headquarters, and bond was arranged. Hardly more than two hours after she had been taken away, she was back at Magnolia Place. But the next day she and Guy moved from the house and took rooms at a hotel.

Also that day Fitzgerald and Bates returned to Magnolia Place. They talked with all members of the family; sometimes singly, sometimes in groups. They went over and over everything until André D'Abourde became coldly insulting to them, and Pierre openly disgusted, for some of their questions seemed most pointless and foolish indeed.

But they stayed on; and for the next few days one of them was always at the house. He would sit, for the most part, in the drawing-room, idly surveying the activities about him; but always one of them—usually Fitzgerald—was there.

Old furniture, which looked as though it belonged there, began coming into the house. André explained this.

"When we sold anything, it was always with the written agreement that we could at any time reclaim it for not more than double what was paid us for it."

It was a heartening thing to watch this house coming back to itself. It was not heartening, though, to think of that gray-eyed girl; for daily from these other D'Abourdes little things were brought out which gradually accumulated a damning total of hate between Nancy and her husband's grandmother—a hate fostered by her blind, unchangeable love for her husband.

As the days passed, Fitzgerald seemed to grow quieter and more somber still, and to draw into himself. On occasion Marsac called to consult with the D'Abourdes, and one of these times he asked Fitzgerald: "Anything new?"

"Some. Very little. After checking everyone at the ball, especially attendants, we can find no one who can swear to having seen her leave at any time."

Marsac nodded with a certain satisfaction. "That will make your job difficult, I think." He had gone on out the door, shaking his head, and Fitzgerald had returned to his idle contemplation.

Once had he been called to the phone, and Bates had told him from the other end of the line: "We've got it. It had been washed."

Fitzgerald said, "I see," and his mouth tightened so that his face set rather like a mask, as he went back to his chair.

SO eight days went by. And then, one very pleasant afternoon, a taxicab swung into Magnolia Place and a man alighted who bade the taxi wait, and then came into the yard and up the walk.

He wore well-cut linens; and as he walked, he removed his panama hat to mop his brow, for it was warm this afternoon. He was an elderly man, tall and dignified. His face was aristocratic, with mild dark eyes; his hair was graying.

He came up the walk, gazing with some interest at the men who worked in the yard. He came onto the porch, stood a moment, and then reached for the old-fashioned brass knocker beside the door.

But as he did so Fitzgerald was standing in the doorway, looking at him with his great black brows slightly raised, and his eyes calmly speculative.

"Oh—oh, hello," the man said. "Are —any of the family at home? You—you aren't one of the D'Abourdes, are you?"

"No. Whom did you wish to see?"

"Why—why, any of them. I mean all of them, of course. You see,"—he smiled a little, slightly embarrassed,—"I am their uncle, Henri D'Abourde."

"Yes," Fitzgerald said softly. "Come in, Mr. D'Abourde." He opened the door, stepping back. "You are expected."

"Eh!" The other looked at him quickly. "Expected? But no one knew. I don't understand."

Fitzgerald offered no explanation. "I will call the family," he said, and went through a door and back to the kitchen.

An electric ice-box was being installed. André was there.

"A MAN who says he is your uncle Henri D'Abourde is here," Fitzgerald announced to him calmly.

"What! Henri—you mean, he is here? Now?"

"You will know him?"

"I—never saw him. He left before I was born. I've seen only a picture taken when he was ten. My father had it. Grandmother destroyed all the others."

"You have—no way of identifying him? No one who could tell?"

"But of course—Marsac. He knew my father all his life. He would know Henri, I am sure. I will call him."

Instructing a negro servant to call his sister and brother, he went into the hall, where a phone had been installed. Fitzgerald returned to the drawing-room.

Presently André came in, advanced slowly to meet the man.

"Uncle—Henri?" he said hesitantly.

The man's face spread in a large smile. "Yes. And you are—"

"André. I am glad to see you, sir."

"Thank you." Pierre had come in. "Ah, there is no question here. You are exactly like Pierre."

"I am Pierre," was the reply.

"Eh? Oh. Of course. Pierre the Third. Yes. And this—" He was looking at Lucille, coming down the steps.

"Our sister Lucille."

He walked over to meet her, and took her hands. "You are beautiful, my dear. But then, all the D'Abourde women have been beautiful."

She smiled at him slowly, questioningly. Some of the sulkiness had gone from her mouth these last few days; money can do many things. He looked at her, then back to Pierre.

"I am your Uncle Henri."

Their poise was admirable. A little ripple of polite surprise, that was all.

"Not really!" Lucille murmured. "Oh, how nice!"

"Uncle Henri!" Pierre exclaimed. "This is—splendid."

"It is," André agreed. "We must hear all about you, right away; but first let's get you settled. Where are you stopping?"

"Now, don't bother about me. I've spent my life in hotels."

"Nonsense. Where is your luggage? We'll send for it. We're still a little unsettled, but I'm sure you'd rather be in your own home than a hotel."

"My own home!" he murmured softly. "You children are very gracious. Well, if you are sure it will be no inconvenience, as a matter of fact, my luggage is outside in a taxi. I arrived only awhile ago, from New York."

He and the others went out then, with a negro servant following, and Henri D'Abourde paid the taxi. The servant unloaded several suitcases and a steamer trunk, all liberally plastered with stickers from many countries.

They came back, and André showed him to a room which was livable, and came back downstairs, leaving Henri to give the negro directions as to unpacking for him.

IT was then Louis Marsac, having hurried from his office only a few blocks away, came quickly up the steps and across the porch.

"Good Lord, André, surely you were joking! You don't really mean Henri is *here?*"

"He is upstairs. He will be down in a moment. I will hurry and tell you why we called. You see—none of us know him."

"Yes, I know. He left before you were born."

"Well, of course it is probably he—and we're very glad to see him. But—but if it weren't, we would have no way of knowing. Some one who had known him—something of that sort—"

"Never mind," the lawyer interrupted. "I see what you mean. Of course. But don't worry. I knew Henri even better than your father. We played together as children. If it is not he, I will know it right away."

Lucille held up her hand then, admonishingly, and they heard the footsteps of the man come down the hall, and then they could see him as he made his way down the stairs.

Fitzgerald had withdrawn to a corner, apparently taking no more than a casual interest in the situation.

THE man came to the foot of the steps, saying: "It is all so familiar, like something out of a dream. It brings back many things to me, children. We had some very fine times here. Though I suppose—" He had caught sight of Marsac and stopped. He came toward him slowly, his mild eyes studying the lawyer, a smile beginning to spread on his face.

"Louis?" he said. "Louis." He was holding out his hands. "Louis, I swear you have hardly changed. But then you were always a solemn-looking fellow. Once you looked too old; now you look too young. It—it *is* good to see you."

Louis Marsac's face broke in a smile.

"Henri! After all these years. A long time, man."

D'Abourde's eyes clouded a little. "Yes. Thirty years and three months, Louis. Always my foolish, unreasonable pride held me back. And now—it is too late."

Marsac put a hand on his shoulder. "Perhaps it is just as well," he said. "Your mother was very old, Henri. She was not entirely—herself. But now you can remember her only as the charming lady she was for so many years."

"Perhaps that is best," D'Abourde agreed soberly.

Marsac nodded. "Thirty years!" he murmured. "Do you remember the times we had, Henri? The balls? The time we were to be seconds for Jules Berger? How we all slipped out to Spanish Fort at dawn, but some one had found out about it, and the police came? How we ran, and it was Roger Du Valle who carried Jules, when he fell and sprained his ankle, not knowing in that twilight who it was? And then when we had escaped, they decided they would have a drink together, instead of a duel?"

Henri's eyes were misted with laughter. "That was very gay, wasn't it? We were young then, Louis."

"And the time we were fishing on Ponchartrain and the storm capsized us," Marsac went on. "We would have drowned if—"

"Louis," D'Abourde said gravely, "Louis! Are you testing me? You know we never fished together. I did not fish. We used to hunt together, never fished." He paused and glanced around at the others, who guiltily avoided his eyes.

Then he smiled. "I understand," he said generously. "You were quite right. After all, I suppose there is some estate left. I had not thought of that. You were quite right, all of you. You had no way to know who I was."

Now he turned back to Marsac, his eyes crinkling at the corners a little. "Louis," he said, "do you remember two adventurous young men who decided to run away to sea, who got jobs as roustabouts on that dirty little tramp, the *Annette?* Do you remember, Louis, after they had been shown their filthy bunks, and the mate had knocked one of them twenty feet along the deck for no special reason, how they slipped ashore, in the thick rain, and—"

"Sneaked home," Marsac finished for him, laughing. He rubbed his jaw reminiscently. "What a blow that man could hit!"

As they had been talking, Fitzgerald had unobtrusively edged into the hall, where the phone was, and now he came back into the room. For several minutes he stood in the doorway, while Marsac and Henri D'Abourde talked of old times, and Henri answered scattered questions as to what he had been doing these thirty years, and asked questions about the town, and the people he had known—few of whom were left, of course.

AFTER a little, two men came up the walk, onto the porch, and entered the room without ceremony; seeing Fitzgerald, with a word of apology they crossed the room to him, and the three of them disappeared into another room.

Henri raised his eyebrows in question; Louis Marsac said:

"They are—detectives. You knew, of course—"

"Oh. Yes. I read in the papers. It—"

The door through which they had gone opened now, and Fitzgerald said politely:

"Mr. Henri D'Abourde, could I talk with you a moment, if you please?" It was evident enough that the request amounted to an order.

D'Abourde looked at him blankly.

"Why, certainly. Go ahead, Mr.—"

"Fitzgerald. I would like to see you alone, please."

"Well—if it's urgent. I can't imagine what—"

"It will take only a moment," Fitzgerald assured him.

"Very well." He went with Fitzgerald, who closed the door behind them.

On the other side he nodded to Morgan, who then went back into the other room and took a chair in a corner.

DOWN a short hall and into a small room, Fitzgerald escorted Henri D'Abourde.

"This is Detective-lieutenant Bates, Mr. D'Abourde," he said. "Won't you sit down, sir?"

D'Abourde sat down by a table, looking from one to the other uncomprehendingly.

"As you seem to know," Fitzgerald began, "your mother was murdered—also your nephew's wife. Lieutenant Bates has charge of this case for the police; I am working independently. We should like to ask you a few questions."

"I'm quite at sea as to what help I can be," D'Abourde said blankly; "but I assure you anything I can do is—"

"Thank you. You arrived in town just now, you say?"

"Yes. This afternoon, from New York. I came directly here."

Fitzgerald was thoughtful. "That seems about right," he said musingly. "Eight days altogether."

D'Abourde was frowning. "I don't quite understand all this, sir. Didn't you tell me I was expected? How did you—" He stopped. He looked quickly from one to the other with growing suspicion and amazement. "Surely you don't believe I—had anything to do with—Or do you think I may not be Henri D'Abourde? If so," he finished severely, "I *demand* that you now submit me to any tests you may conceive to prove my identity."

"All right," Fitzgerald agreed amiably. He leaned back in his chair, eying D'Abourde with a sleepy, impersonal amusement until the man broke out with:

"See here, let's get on! I wish to get back—"

"Don't become excited," Fitzgerald advised calmly. He paused a moment, and then asked almost casually:

"Mr. D'Abourde, are you right- or left-handed?"

D'Abourde froze.

Then he said immediately, hastily: "Eh? Why, I—I'm right-handed, of course. Certainly."

Fitzgerald chuckled unfeelingly, malevolently, looking at Bates.

"Well, there we are." There was a very evident satisfaction in the way he said it. "I guess that does it."

The man called D'Abourde had paled. "What—what do you mean?"

"I mean," Fitzgerald told him deliberately, "that Henri D'Abourde was left-handed."

"I don't believe—I mean I'm not," the man said quickly. "I—at one time had a tendency in that direction, yes. But I have overcome it. I am wholly right-handed now."

Fitzgerald laughed derisively, harshly. "Perhaps you had better consider a little more carefully before you speak. You don't *believe* he was left-handed, eh? Would you like to confess?" he asked blandly. "It is good for the soul, one hears," he added.

The man had regained his composure; he was righteously indignant now. "This is ridiculous! I will have—"

"You think so?" Fitzgerald broke in. "Then you don't care to get off as easily as possible, I take it? You would rather we check back over your past, making you account for thirty years, and finding somewhere people who know you are *not* Henri D'Abourde? You would prefer that we produce his shoemaker, who can swear his shoes were size seven—and yours are easily nines? A man's feet do not keep on growing, you know. You would like us to bring people who knew him well to swear that he was definitely left-handed? All right. We can. It will not be pleasant; conviction as an accessory to murder is not a trivial thing. It will mean many years—the rest of your life—or possibly it will mean death."

As he had talked, the man who called himself Henri D'Abourde had seemed to lose size, somehow, seemed to shrink in the chair. Now his breath was coming in audible gasps, and his face had turned pale as milk. Suddenly his head dropped forward on the table, resting on his arms, and Fitzgerald asked:

"You have changed your mind, perhaps? It would be wise. There will be no promises; but I think a full confession might lessen your sentence considerably."

The man nodded his head, in his arms, without looking up.

"Yes." His voice was muffled. "Yes. I—I will. I—"

It was ten minutes later.

Lucille D'Abourde had left the room. Pierre and André were seated together

on a sofa, chatting with Marsac, whose chair was near them.

Fitzgerald came in and beckoned to Morgan, who rose.

Fitzgerald spoke with a grim, cold satisfaction.

"Place Louis Marsac under arrest for the murder of Mrs. Pierre and Mrs. André D'Abourde, will you, Morgan?"

"I sure will," Morgan said. "I never did like his face." He took handcuffs from his pockets, snapped them open.

Marsac shot to his feet, blustering, furious.

"Here! What's this? Are you mad? Why, I'll—"

"Your man confessed," Fitzgerald told him, with a little chuckle. "He couldn't seem quite to make up his mind whether he was right- or left-handed. The confession is in writing."

Marsac paled a little, but said doggedly: "I don't know what you are talking about. You'll convict me of nothing."

Fitzgerald said easily: "Oh, I dare say when the Henri D'Abourde you made has finished, and we have introduced a number of other little things we have, there will not be much question as to whether you die or not, Marsac. Take him to Headquarters, Morgan, and we recommend there be no bond."

FITZGERALD and Bates walked down a red-carpeted hall. They passed a number of doors on either side; then stopped before one, where they knocked.

Nancy D'Abourde opened it. Her eyes grew wide; she shrank back.

"Oh—"

Fitzgerald and Bates followed her into the room.

"We wanted to come ourselves," Fitzgerald said soberly, "to let you know you are free, and to apologize for having had to arrest you, and to explain why it was necessary."

"You—mean it? I really am? Oh—"

She backed up a little, found a chair, and sank into it.

"Yes. It worked out quite as we had expected."

"You knew—all the time—I didn't do it?"

"Hell, yes!" Bates broke in. "You couldn't do anything like that. You aren't the—type."

Fitzgerald smiled. "That is true; if you had wanted to kill her, you would have found some other way, which would not have been difficult, in your situation, and with her age and weakness. But there are a number of other things which precluded your having done it. You would not have left the glove; you would not have admitted you hated her; you would not have used a knife in the first place; if you had used one, there would almost certainly have been some small bloodstains on your uniform, for there was blood on the knife and the glove; you would never have set out to steal through darkness and kill in an entirely white uniform; you would not have been the one, if you took the glove, to call to attention that it was missing. You see?"

SHE nodded. Guy crossed the room to kneel by her chair, putting his head against her shoulder. She patted his hand.

"There now. Don't cry."

He looked up at her happily. "I—I'm not. Really."

"Who—did do it?" she asked softly.

"Louis Marsac."

"What? The lawyer? I—I don't understand. How did he—"

Fitzgerald nodded. "We want to tell you," he said, "so you will see why you were arrested. Believe us, it was a very unpleasant thing to have to do. I will tell you *how* he committed these murders, first, and then we will explain why he did it, and you can ask questions, if you have any. May I sit down?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Of course. Please do."

Fitzgerald and Bates moved to chairs.

"Louis Marsac," Fitzgerald explained, "had planned this carefully before he came to the Beaux Arts Ball, for he rather expected all of you to be there. He had brought with him a knife, easily concealed in his black clown suit, a costume which was perfect for his purposes, of course. Finding an opportunity to acquire one of Pierre's gloves was a piece of luck, though he did not know you would be the one on whom it threw suspicion. He knew that a man in a black clown suit would be anything but conspicuous at this ball, would not be missed for twenty or thirty minutes. He slipped out, the few blocks to the house, went in and upstairs, and killed Mrs. D'Abourde.

"That he used a knife was unusual, in one way, but quite natural in another, for he was not sure but what he might have to drop or throw the knife away. A gun can often be traced to its owner; but there are millions of knives for every pistol, and their sure tracing is almost impossible. He started to come out again, as he had gone in, but Pierre had brought Audrienne home, and she met him at the head of the stairs. He had to kill her, for she recognized him in the light of her candle. Then, almost immediately, he heard Pierre and me coming onto the porch.

"He hurried down the hall," continued Fitzgerald, "and slowly opened the door of that room. Inside, it took him minutes to get the window up without sound; and then as he was climbing down, the shutter on which he had rested his foot broke under his weight. When I got into the garden, he had already escaped through the back gate. His black clown suit made him almost invisible. He returned to the ball, the slight bloodstains on his black suit showing hardly at all. Later he had this washed before sending it back to the costumer from which he had rented it. He had probably worn gloves of his own, to avoid fingerprints, but Pierre's glove was no handicap to him, and was an excellent false scent. That is the commission."

Fitzgerald was silent a moment.

"I—I see that," said Nancy D'Abourde. "But how did you know—how did you find out these things?"

"IN the first place, by a process of elimination," Fitzgerald said. "You see, though any one of the family or you might have done it, all were unlikely. Chiefly because Pierre, I was fairly sure, couldn't have done it, and none of the others would have been likely to try to throw suspicion on him. Further, they are quite proud of their name, and would not want that sort of publicity connected with it. If they should have killed her, it would have been in a way to seem a natural death.

"Consequently, when we learned of Henri's share in the will, it was evident that he would have by far the most

motive, for half the entire estate would go to him. However, it was not likely that he was alive, or that he would do this if he were. On the other hand, an impostor would meet many difficulties, for it was nearly certain there would be people who could unmask him. Since it would have to be some one to benefit from the will, and some one close enough to the old lady for her to get the feeling by her oddly high degree of sensitiveness that some one was coming to kill her, we were led inevitably to Marsac. From there on, it was rather simple."

"But I don't understand," Nancy said, "how he would benefit—what good would it do him?"

"Ostensibly," Fitzgerald said, "none at all. Only the collection of a fifteen-thousand-dollar fee, which he would fully earn. And he would not kill for such a sum. But, you see, if some one who said he was Henri D'Abourde should turn up, and Marsac should identify him definitely, there would in all likelihood be no further question. He had a wonderful chance to construct a false Henri D'Abourde. Having known the real one, he could school his impostor thoroughly in the other's early life. So we began checking on him. We found through confidential reports that he was in desperate need of money. We found, too, that his clown suit had been washed before it was returned to the costumer, which was not natural. We found that a man in a black clown suit had left the ball, a little before three, though the attendant who said this could remember little else about him, except that he was masked."

"But," she put in, "I don't see why you had to arrest me, if you knew he—"

"It was a blind," Bates said.

Fitzgerald nodded. "You see, though what we had convinced us to a certain extent, it would be useless in court. In other words, we had to have him produce his false Henri; and by appearing certain of your guilt and appearing also to do all we could to prove that guilt, we hoped to make him feel secure enough to bring his spurious heir into light. We did. A man calling himself Henri D'Abourde showed up today."

"WHAT—what happened?"

"Marsac was called to identify him, as he had expected to be. If he hadn't been called, he would have shown up anyhow on some other excuse. He identified him positively, with questions about their early days together." Fitzgerald paused. "Then we poked a hole in that."

"How—could you? I don't see how you could prove—"

FITZGERALD smiled. "We're rather proud of that," he said frankly. "We simply asked him whether he was right- or left-handed. Naturally he didn't know, for since Henri *was* right-handed Marsac hadn't thought to mention it at all. But this man was alone with us, and he couldn't be sure; he said right, but when we told him left, he was up in the air. Of course it was entirely bluff, but his transition from perfect sureness on all the things Marsac had told him to this *one* thing he *couldn't* be sure of was so sudden it broke his confidence. Enough, so that when we added some more to our bluff, he gave in. He confessed completely. It worked—beautifully."

"Yes," she said, "I can see how it would. It—but wasn't it all a very silly thing for Marsac to do? How could he think he could get away with it?"

Fitzgerald shook his head. "He nearly did get away with it. If the old lady had not called me, if Pierre had not brought Audrienne home, if the shutter had not broken, either you or Pierre would likely have been convicted of the crime. As to the false Henri, the family was quite convinced he was the right man. He would come into contact with few people who had known the real Henri, and thirty years is a long time. Memories dim. He would have aroused no suspicion, for you do not see little things easily unless you are looking for them. Nor would anyone have suspected Marsac; he would seem to have no motive. Originally, Marsac planned simply to wait until she died; but he had to have money quickly. So he killed her." Fitzgerald rose. "We'll go now. We're sorry you had to be subjected to this—but we had to have the false Henri, of course, for any proof. Is there anything you're not clear on?"

"No. No, it is all clear." She smiled a little, as she moved toward the door with them. "And the—the other, I don't mind it now—I don't blame you—if it helped. The newspapers—and everything—it was rather awful. But I'm glad you did it, now. Good night."

They stepped in the hall and pulled the door shut after them.

THE END

Board and Dodging

Wherein Justice and birdshot overtake a dark trombone-player.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

SO long had the wolf been camped on the doorstep of the Columbus Collins Detective Agency (for Colored) that even the bear-trap used for handcuffs had fleas.

"Boy," mourned Mr. Collins' five-foot assistant Bugwine Breck, as he slackened his labors at the business-end of a battered trombone, "us ought to have had a picture took of that client us had last winter, so us could remember what one looks like. —*Stomach, lay down!*"

"How you 'spect to do no business," retorted his lanky superior, "when you is all time brayin' yourself through dat horn?"

"Courtin' a gal what maybe craves music," explained Mr. Breck—his chief's first intimation that Cupid was making the wolf move over. "Also, dey is a boy round gittin' up a band. Gwine wear yeller unifawms. Maybe he gimme a audition—"

But Columbus had quit listening and gone to leaping—toward the agency's lenseless magnifying-glass on the table. Bugwine looked, and his trombone clattered unnoticed to the floor as he leaped too—for his plaid duck-hunting helmet, employed to heighten his resemblance to *Sherlock Holmes* seen in a movie. For the doorway was suddenly framing a large fat darky whose appearance suggested that whoever had wrecked him ought to be locked up for vandalism.

A bandaged head, an arm in a sling, and recent heavy repairs to the rear of a pair of imitation rattlesnake-skin trousers were major features of the ruin wrought. But Mr. Breck's gaze strayed farther, to a familiar-shaped black case clutched in one bandaged paw; and a fellow-feeling began to burn in his breast, for the victim and further reference.

"Comes round to git a job of detectin' did," outlined the caller lugubriously.

Simultaneously Mr. Breck caught from Columbus the international signal for inferiors to scram, even as his chief kicked forward the soap-box seat reserved for clients. And promptly Bugwine scrammed: The time Mr. Collins wasted in finding out that this boy didn't have any money, Mr. Breck needed in his new courtship, anyway.

"Set down," invited Columbus as Bugwine's plaid plus-fours disappeared down the alley.

"Aint set down since it happened: dat how-come I is here." The caller ruefully shed some light, but not enough.

"Stand *up* and spill it den!"

"Name's Debit Hitchens—from out Spocari way," explained the ruin, "and cravin' to find out who shot me last night."

"Pro-ceed wid de details," urged Columbus instantly. "No matter how bad dey hurts. How it happen? How much money is you got?"

"Details aint hurt like de top half my hind-legs is!" Debit surveyed his havoc bitterly. "I was serenadin' a widow-woman, noble, wid my trombone, here, when somebody shot into de bushes whar at I was. Sho is let a mess of birdshot into de back of my vest and pants, before I could git to gwine good. Now I's scared to go back and finish, till you locks up who shot me."

"He's lookin' through de bars now: jest aint know it yit." Mr. Collins imitated a detective recently seen in the movies while Bugwine had waited outside. "How long you knowed de widow-woman?"

"W-e-l-l, *she* aint know *me* so good—yit," admitted Mr. Hitchens unhappily. "But everybody say gals craves hear music, so I was jest buildin' myself up good wid her wid 'Decatur Street Papa' on de trombone, when old cannon go off and spray me."

"Every crime got to have a motive." Columbus resumed impressing a client. "Find de cause, and you is got de crook."

"Sho is!" agreed Mr. Hitchens.

"So maybe de clue's right in your case dar. How about openin' it up, and blowin' me what you blowed for de widow-woman?"

Resembling a dusky composite of all three immortal musicians in the painting *"The Spirit of '76,"* Debit complied. In mid-tune, however, Mr. Collins leaped aloft with a strangled cry. *"Dat's it!"* he yelped.

"Dat's what?" puzzled Mr. Hitchens complacently.

"How-come you gits shot! Sour note in dar what cain't *no* neighbor stand—"

"But houses on both sides de widow's is empty," protested the client.

"Den boys'll come from de next block over to put a trombone-player like you out of his sufferin'," persisted Columbus. "Why, dey's a boy here in town now gittin' up a band what would pour gas over you and sot you afire, is *he* hear dat note! How much money you got?"

"Two bucks—"

"Our fee is two bucks, in advance—"

"I sees your results, den you sees my two dollars," countered Mr. Hitchens hesitantly.

"When a case is took by de Columbus Collins detectin'-agency," its head drew himself indignantly erect, "you is jest de same as already *got* results. Also, payin' in advance keeps a client from lookin' cheap. And always gits our man, or you gits your money back."

"All right—you makes good or you makes refund." Debit dubiously surrendered his two dollars. "Elsewise, *my* white-folks mixes copious in *your* business."

With two dollars already in hand, Columbus couldn't worry about another boy's white-folks now! "What dat widow-woman's name? Whar at she live?" he re-plunged into the case.

"Name Callie Conway. Lives in de alley round back of de white-folks' house, over at Washin'ton and Strawberry street. Hern's de middle one of dem three houses dar. Other two is empty."

"Reconnoiters de *corpus delicti,*" Columbus put a client in his place, now that he had his money. "You calls later in de day for de solution."

Approaching his destination, Mr. Collins' first impression of something dark and fast passing hurriedly over the widow Conway's side fence was swiftly blotted out by the sound of singing, and smell of ham frying. "Mawnin', Miz Callie!" he unlimbered his manners at first sight of her and of the huge pile of white-folks' clothes on the kitchen floor alongside her tubs. When a woman not

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

"Comes round to git a job of detectin' did," outlined the caller lugubriously.

"Gittin' mulish about a little thing like gittin' shot in de bushes— I gwine fix it so you'll be *glad* to git in dem bushes!"

only looked and cooked like this, but took in washings—Columbus went down without firing a shot, before this first volley of a new Cupid who promised a successful suitor here not only love, but board and lodging!

Callie unlimbered her caution: this long lean kind generally had two feet firmly under a widow's dinner-table before the conversation got well past the weather.

"Columbus Collins, de big detective!" he ingratiated himself as he inched toward the ham. "Sniffin' on a important case, but always got time to stop and pass de time of day wid a good-lookin' young gal!"

At thirty, the widow Conway was fortified on that side too. So: "Looks more like you's sniffin' *skillets* to me!" she announced, and did a bit of sniffing herself.

"I's on de trail of a big crime—pract'cally murder. All time cotchin' crooks." Mr. Collins' gaze continued to stray approvingly about: a husband would do well here, with not only that wash and cookery, but even a fishing-pole and a rabbit-gun leaning handily in a corner awaiting him—

The widow moved the ham to the back of the stove. "Liable lock *yourself* up some day, is you git to sniffin' too hard!" she snapped, unimpressed.

Mr. Collins saw that he was going to have to extend himself—or keep on rustling his own board and lodging. Besides, there had been that swift shadowy figure pouring itself over the widow's fence, outbound, as he came. A rival? "Aint nobody git shot round here lately, was dey?" He started new search for her blind side.

"Not unless de shots overtook 'em, dey aint."

Columbus noted speculatively the vacant houses commanding her backyard on its either side. Who knew who might have hidden in one of them? He used words to conceal thought: " 'Xamines de surroundin's. Who tore down your back fence?"

Which touched a spring. "*Yeah!* Who *is* tore down my fence?" Callie launched heatedly forth. "Also dem four fine fig-trees and my best chicken-house! I never *is* see *no* boy make such a blur from whar he was to whar he craved to be, after dat shot! One minute, he's hid-out wrastlin' wid old slide-horn in dem bushes; next he's jest passin' Memphis like he had bees in his britches!"

Mr. Collins uttered a short "Hah!" borrowed from the cinema—and saw that his case was not only nearing a conclusion, but showing signs of branching-out. All that was left was the locating and locking-up of Debit's undoubted assailant. And since he already had Debit's two dollars, why not let Bugwine do the rest? Thus keeping Debit's white-folks out of Columbus' business, while Mr. Collins strayed in a pleasurable direction.

"How-come you aint in de movies, gal?" he inquired.

Callie's response, however, proved that she had been flattered before—by experts: "Nigger, dey *aint* no way for you to talk yourself into my ham! I's seen 'em like you plenty of times: mouth full of honey and pockets full of fresh air."

SO *that* was it! Columbus' brain moved to make room for an inspiration: a way to invest Debit's two dollars toward ultimate board and lodging for himself was showing up at last! Before its allure, his memory of that fast dark figure swarming over Callie's fence as he came up gave him less concern—

"Sends my 'sistant round to measure up de footsteps next door and lock up de crook," he decided, easing out of the picture temporarily. "See you again."

"And next time you comes, come *bringin'*."

Callie's final shot coincided with Mr. Collins' inspiration. A corner drug-store near by seemed providentially placed. Columbus entered it with his mind still enthralled by her looks and estimated

earning-power at those tubs. "Craves myself a swell box of candy—for a lady," he announced, flashing both of Debit's greenbacks.

The store's oldest stock moved swiftly. . . .

"Couple more boxes like dis, and you'd be a detective," was the best it did for him. But in her eye was something that made Mr. Collins' retreat more strategic than permanent.

LATER, entering his agency to transfer the heavy work to Bugwine, Columbus found Mr. Breck gone but his client waiting. "How 'bout solvin dat case so I can serenade dat gal some more before she forgit me?" worried Debit.

"'Spectin' important developments inside forty-eight hours," stalled a sleuth.

"Got to git 'em sooner, or my two bucks back." Mr. Hitchens couldn't get his mind off of refunds, it seemed. "Found a boy here dat's gittin' up a band—needs a good trombone-player like me to wear a yeller unifawm in parades, if audition I gives him tomorrer suits him. So I needs service, before you wakes up wid *my* white-folks right smack in *your* business! . . . Payin' in *advance*—"

Columbus sickened before these twin reminders: that Debit was his rival for Callie's heart and hearth—it might have been *he* perfidiously piling over Callie's fence as Columbus came up!—and that he had invested Debit's two dollars in his own courtship of her. Crime-discovery was now imperative, because refund was now impossible: Callie had eaten that two dollars!

"*Bugwine!*" Mr. Collins loosed lusty summons for the head of the agency's dirty-work department, in this *impasse.*

"Craves results, or my two bucks back, prompt," Mr. Hitchens summed up in ultimatum as he departed. . . .

But it was only after the fatted and unsatisfactory client had disappeared into Fish Alley that Columbus finally heard, faint and far, subterranean sounds of musical anguish. Ears and instinct led him unerringly to an ancient ice-house off Franklin Street—where, far down in its straw-strewn depths he distinguished his stunted aide, practicing dolorously on his trombone and an empty stomach. "Boy, come up out dat ice-house!" blared his chief into its chill interior.

"Got to play old trombone in bullet-proof vest, or else under de ground, way things is around here," gloomed Mr. Breck as he emerged blinking into the light. "Shinin' myself up for audition dat band boy maybe gwine gimme tomorrer."

"Well, craves you to sniff out quick who shot Debit now. Else, he's one dem kind what craves his money back or sicks his white-folks on you. So, detective, *detect!* And don't git to drappin' your wing round dat gal, neither!"

"Round what gal?" Mr. Breck's eyes were half whites.

"Gal what Debit serenadin' when he gits shot." Mr. Collins continued covering his own trail cannily.

"Got a gal of my own now," rebutted Mr. Breck. "Aint in'sted in no more."

"Who'd fall for *you?*" scoffed his superior bitingly.

"Tell you, and you'd be right dar tryin' to cut me out." Experience had made a short sleuth distrustful too.

"Tells you git on out and detect," his chief cut him short. "Grab off who shot Debit, so us can shet him up about dem two bucks back."

"Slip me de clues, den," Bugwine held out stubbornly for fuller equipment.

"Slips you a boost in de pants, is you aint make haste, git on out and make dem bushes safe for trombone-players. And also—"

BUT just here Columbus paused in midtirade, and Bugwine looked around quickly, to find his chief's eyes shining, his jaw half-ajar and quivering. Mr. Breck squirmed uneasily.

Then, "Boy, I *got* it!" Columbus cast his hat aloft in a familiar, dreaded way.

"Got what?" Bugwine's heart sank as his fears rose, seesaw-like.

"A way to clue and cotch who shot Debit! Cops de crook and keeps de fee! Shet Debit up, and aint even have to measure no footsteps next door to find him, neither! Runt, wid my brains—and your britches—us cain't miss it!"

"How-come my britches?" Mr. Breck's misgivings mounted. "Besides, I was aimin' to give dat boy what's gittin' up de band a chance to hear and hire me—"

"*He will!*" interposed Mr. Collins meaningly. "Besides you gittin' plenty time to practice afterwards—in de hospital—"

Bugwine's attempted dash for freedom proved anticipated: Columbus was standing on the front ends of both his shoes.

"How-come hospital?" Mr. Breck's eyes threatened to cross the bridge of his nose.

"I been seein' in a movie, how, over in India, when dey craves to cotch a tiger—"

"Aint crave to cotch no tigers!" Mr. Breck's falsetto protest rang.

"—dey ties a goat out in de bushes whar old tiger liable to come," Columbus ignored it. "So us puts *you* in dat gal's bushes tonight, playin' on your trombone, for bait—"

"Bait?"

"—So whoever shot Debit will think he's back again, and shoot *you*. Den—"

THIS time Bugwine left his shoes behind him. It was four full blocks later that an exasperated superior overhauled him. "All time gwine off half-cocked!" berated the panting Columbus as he gripped the scruff of his aide's shirt. "Aint got you no gratitude? Look what shootin' you'd do for de agency—"

"Look what it do for *me!*"

"I takes all de risk—"

"You? All de *risk?"* Skepticism stuck out suddenly on Mr. Breck like a red shirt at a funeral.

"Sure. When I jumps out de bushes from one side, den, and grabs whoever shot you. *Dat's* de big idea. You be de bait, but de agency gits its man. I cotches de crook, and keeps Debit's two bucks, so he cain't squawk no more. Makes *everybody* happy!"

Bugwine looked unsuccessfully for himself among these merry-makers.

"Aint gwine *git* shot," he balked.

"Says *what?"* Mr. Collins' jaw set resolutely.

"Says I aint gwine git shot so some gal can see you be de hero while I be's de heel! Besides,"—and a new cause for rebellion blazed stubbornly over Mr. Breck,—"is my new gal hear dat I gits shot serenadin' some other woman, she gwine be off of me longer'n a couple of elephants can remember."

Columbus sensed, from its feminine angle, that this was no minor revolt of the proletariat—and moved accordingly. "All right; you begged for it; now you gwine git it!" he promised grimly if obscurely. "Gittin' mulish about a little thing like gittin' shot in de bushes—"

"In de pants," corrected Mr. Breck obstinately.

"So I gwine fix it so you'll be *glad* to git in dem bushes tonight! You'll git in 'em *and—like—it,* you hear me!"

Bugwine's eyes had not resumed their normal size after watching his chief take purposeful departure toward the town square, before there was a knock at the agency's door, and fearfully Mr. Breck answered it. But at the gladsome sight of who stood there even Columbus was forgotten.

"Been gittin' me up a band here in Demopolis," divulged the rotund caller as Bugwine effusively welcomed him within. "To wear yeller unifawms and hire out for dances and parades. Needs one more boy to play de trombone."

Bugwine saw not only his new girl but all Demopolis looking on as he went by, maintaining the upper hand of a trombone! "Turn me loose on old slide-horn, and pipe-organs gits peevish!" he endorsed himself musically.

"Lemme hear you play once, and knows more about dat dan jest listenin' to you brag," estimated the caller thoughtfully. "And when I craves *fortissimo* out of a trombone, boy I mean I aint crave no squeak, neither!"

"Furniture, stand back and give old slide-horn room to wrastle!" Bugwine began clearing an instant circle for his art.

But, "Aint got time now," demurred the musician. "Jest lookin' 'em over and gittin' me a line on de raw material now, is all. Besides, I got engagement to hear a boy tonight, and he—"

"Who he?" Mr. Breck's stomach passed him, going down.

"Debit Hitchens—"

Bugwine's digestive descent accelerated. Give in to Columbus now about those bushes, he perceived, and Debit would be getting into the band while Bugwine was getting shot.

"But I looks you up tomorrer, is Debit flop," completed the bandsman unsatisfactorily in leaving.

AS the darkness deepened outside, the door opened to admit Mr. Collins—a new and unaccountably assured Mr. Collins, carrying an odd-shaped bundle, carefully wrapped in heavy brown paper. "Done brung you somethin'." He thrust the parcel into Bugwine's hesitant hands.

"Says *huh?"* But curiosity floored caution, and Bugwine unwrapped the paper and with both hands lifted out its content. Whereupon his perplexity increased. "Says *huh?"* he puzzled over the used motorcycle tire he found himself bewilderedly holding.

"Says *dat's* de reason you is gwine play your trombone in de bushes tonight and *like* it!" Mr. Collins pocketed two dusty handkerchiefs evidently used in connection with the gift.

"How-come I is?" Obstinacy rejoined the perplexity on Bugwine's brow.

"Becaze it would be jest *too bad* if de cop what lost dat tire off his cycle while it was parked on de dark side of de Square awhile ago was to git tipped off dat *you had it*—wid *your fingerprints all over it* too—dat's what!"

In time the trapped Mr. Breck's outcries died down from panther- to house-cat-sized caterwaulings; gradually it sunk in that choice had thus been effectively removed from him: he would either be in the bushes or in the jail-house!

But as he calmed, something else occurred to him, overlooked amid previous shocks: "In *whose* bushes?"

"Why, in de widow Callie Conway's—"

Apparently just here, however, Mr. Breck inadvertently swallowed an overdose of cockleburs: in no other way could the startled Mr. Collins account for his unprecedented symptoms, mental and physical. Like a pendulum they swung back and forth between resemblances to St. Vitus' Dance and *rigor mortis*. Swollen, spluttering, suffering, Bugwine fought for and then with the air. Between spasms he shook from stem to stern, until final loss of some unrevealed internal debate ultimately set him to honking and whistling like a fogbound ferryboat with fits.

"And you be in dem bushes wid dat horn at eight tonight," concluded Columbus.

"I be dar—at eight," choked Bugwine. But the look in his eyes was one his chief had seen before—in the eyes of sheep *en route* to slaughter. . . .

Lower at last than the bottommost barnacle on a battleship's keel, Bugwine, as his zero-hour drew on, dragged himself punctually if painfully toward his doom, and Columbus' imminent triumph. Columbus did not like to be kept waiting when he was about to become a hero before a lady, either.

Nor was there comfort for Mr. Breck in glimpsing, under a street-light ahead, the hurrying form of the bandmaster, on his evident errand to give Debit that audition that he had mentioned and that Bugwine yearned for.

Then arrival at the scene of coming carnage took Mr. Breck's mind off bandmasters. A blur on either side of Callie's house the adjoining structures stood, empty and eerie in the darkness—and with no indication whence the forthcoming fusillade would be loosed.

"Nigger, dey aint no way for you to talk yourself into my ham!" responded Callie. "I's seen 'em like you plenty of times!"

In the widow Conway's kitchen he could see her form passing back and forth between him and the open door, the kitchen stove aglow at its every crack as she prepared a supper whose odors ordinarily would have ravished him. But now Bugwine's appetite was far away, for undivulged circumstances roweled and ravaged him.

Columbus interrupted Mr. Breck's picking his pall-bearers by appearing disconcertingly at his elbow in the dark. "Right over dar, between dem two fig trees," he pointed into the menacing darkness. "You parks yourself in de clear and steps on dat trombone noble. Bear down on dat 'Decatur Street Papa' tune while I plants myself between you and de house, ready to jump left or right and grab de boy what shot you, soon as I see whar de flash come from. *Always* gits our man!"

Mr. Breck's ague grew worse. Aggravated by the imminence of things, it would appear, as he glimpsed the widow in her doorway peering fruitlessly forth into the blackness before turning again to her stove.

"And aint nobody gwine tell your gal *whar* you gits shot, nohow," Columbus answered an old argument in conclusion. "So wait till I gits over here toward de widow's house, den strut yourself down 'Decatur Street'."

"B-b-bears down hard on 'Decatur Street'!" mourned Mr. Breck in a farewell to arms of his unrevealed newest love.

"*Now!*" hissed Mr. Collins from the night.

Weak, unpromising preliminary sounds issued at first from Mr. Breck, immolated knob-eyed and ashen-gilled upon the altar of duty, and hog-tied to it by the chains of one stolen motorcycle tire with his fingerprints all over it.

"Romp on it!" urged Columbus hoarsely, implacably, from his hiding.

AND through the dark and sinister shrubbery there rang agonizingly at last the trombone of Bugwine Breck, in solo and in mortal fear. Horridly, endlessly, the anguished strains of "Decatur Street Papa" shattered the night and lingered noxiously beneath the stars.

Somewhere a window went angrily up. Voices arose. Bugwine heard, and hung horrified on a final inhuman brazen bray. Any second now— But still nothing happened. On him goose-flesh emulated Alps.

"Blow another verse! And step on it—git your back under it!" rasped Columbus from his safety-zone.

Cringing through centuries of unshot waiting, Mr. Breck's teeth beat tattoo against a mouthpiece that chilled him to his marrow. Despairingly he bade farewell to love, health and his plaid pants. After which he filled his ravaged lungs with one vast sobbing breath—and night and neighborhood grew hideous as he poured his tortured soul's whole frustrate anguish into a "Decatur Street Papa" that was indescribable: a "Decatur Street" that was *fortissimo, vox humana, tremolo,* and closely resemblant in tone and timbre to the more musical outcries of a hog caught in a culvert—building up note on saw-edged note until wild and awful across the hidden stars rang in its final fanfare: *"—dat Decatur Stree-ee-ee-ee-eet Pop-pa!"*

Then it came!

Suddenly and without slightest warning, as nature shuddered back to normal after Mr. Breck's master effort, the very night was rocked, and blasted reeling to its core, as roar and flame seemed to fill the yard! Every dog and echo for miles about leaped resentful to life, while through every leaf and shrub of the widow Conway's yard tore and stung the scattering blast of birdshot.

Yet all to be followed and climaxed by phenomena so amazing that Bugwine could only cower aghast before it. For on the stricken, silent instant after, there arose between him and the widow's kitchen such awful crashings, such incredible squallings and canine-like *ki-yi-ings* amid the undergrowth that Mr. Breck froze with horror. And then, as speculation and uproar mounted, the answer came: not Bugwine but *Columbus* had been shot!

Naught else, for the addled Mr. Breck, could account for the four times his frantic superior blindly circled him in the darkness, colliding with trees, necking clotheslines, all the while giving tongue to outcries worthy of a fire in an oil-refinery.

Somehow, groped Bugwine, Columbus must have misfigured the line of fire, been caught in his own trap, and received at the very base of his being the full charge so brilliantly planned for his lowly assistant!

In the midst of this surmise, however, the shrieking Mr. Collins clamored earsplittingly through a barbecue-pit, an *al fresco* laundry and a cactus bed, and was gone at last and in a tangent, like a locomotive with hydrophobia, in the cooling direction of the river. While, if the houses on either side still remained perplexingly dark and unrevealingly silent, from hers there now grimly issued, lamp in one hand and rabbit-gun in the other, the widow Callie Conway, bent on investigation and headed straight for a Bugwine too petrified now to do aught to save himself, except to cast an incriminating trombone far, far into the surrounding darkness—before she was upon him.

FOUR full days later it was, when the lanky figure of Mr. Collins limped again into the purlieu of Hogan's Alley, his garments broken out with safety-pins in their rear like a rash. But as he painfully neared the agency that bore his name, sounds issuing from it seemed to cause some birdshot-born bitterness within him to well geyser-like and overflow.

"Y-you little sawed-off runt!" his opening bellow cut through the gladsome bray of a trombone there. "What you doin' wid dat yeller unifawm spread all over you? Looks like bumblebee in de butter!"

Mr. Breck merely loosed further fanfare; then: "Gits hired in de band, after I solved who shot Debit—and you," he let his chief have both barrels.

"After you solved de shootin's? After *you* solved—" Mr. Collins choked on a bitter pill—to bring up suddenly short and thinking: if Debit's case *was* solved, necessity for refund was lifted! And if the agency succeeded, it was *his* agency

Every dog and echo leaped to life, while through every leaf and shrub of the widow's yard tore and stung the scattering blast of birdshot.

—and what made a hit with a woman like success on the part of her suitor? Sunshine broke through the shadows for Columbus Collins. Already he could see himself trampling across Mr. Breck's loathsome yellow form, on his way to start in right where he had left off with the widow, Callie Conway! After all, brains—

"Band-boy hears dat *fortissimo* of mine in dem bushes four blocks off, he say, and hire me *widout* no audition," Complacency re-covered Bugwine like a cloak.

"Hell wid de band-boy! Got to convict who shot Debit, and git on wid de case. Whar your witness? You got no witness?"

"One. What was confessed to—"

"Swell! Have dat witness in court when I say so! Always gits my—"

"Aint have nobody in court!" Mr. Breck was unaccountably rearing back like an embattled sand-crab. "Husband aint have to testify against his wife—"

"Whose wife?" Columbus couldn't be annoyed now.

"Mine—after tomorrow!"

"Yourn?" Mr. Collins' brows drew into a puzzled knot.

"Yeah! Mine!" blared back a worm full-turned. "Callie Conway—"

"Callie *Conway? Callie—"* Again a dark fast figure blurred across Mr. Collins' memory and a widow's fence. . . . *Bugwine?* Dark horse in the race of Debit and Columbus for her favor? *Bugwine!*

"Uh-huh!" the swollen Mr. Breck was interrupting, covering several questions with one devastating answer: "Callie: what shot Debit for dem sour notes—and *you* when she see you sneakin' up through her bushes durin' my music, she say, to swipe her ham, after all—"

"Her *ham?"* Mr. Collins' anguish-indefeat jarred the rafters. "Why, I was aimin' to marry de gal—git board and lodgin'—"

"Yeah," rang Bugwine's pæan. "But you *aint!* After tomorrow *I* gits de board dar—all *you* gits is de *dodgin'!"*

The Man Who Bombed the World

"I am a murderer," says the hero of this story. "But I had a purpose: I used your weapons; I showed you what war would be if you let it come. I showed you that the Creator has made it a thing too terrible, too futile for man, whom He made in His own image, ever to use again." Do not fail to read this, the climax of one of the most impressive stories any magazine has ever printed.

By S. ANDREW WOOD

The Story Thus Far:

THE most powerful man in Europe, and the least known: John Kingdom, the great arms-manufacturer —merchant prince of death.

He became known well indeed, and strangely: For in growing revolt against his own ghastly business, he worked out an amazing and ruthless plan that fought fire with fire.... Probably he was partly or wholly mad: he still carried in his skull a splinter of steel received in an air-raid over London during the Great War. In that same raid his sweetheart had been killed, with all her family except her baby sister Crystal, whom Kingdom had adopted....

Kingdom pretended suicide; and the body of his rascally cousin Brian, who resembled him (whose life he had previously saved, and then purchased at the price of another year's riotous living for Brian), was at first accepted as his. (The bullet-wound looked suicidal enough, though in fact it had been inflicted by Kingdom's Hindu servant Chundra Dah when Brian tried to shoot his way out of the grisly bargain.) Kingdom also pretended defalcations and bankruptcy, with the result that his supposed suicide brought about the failure of the great munitions firm of Kingdom and Anderthal.

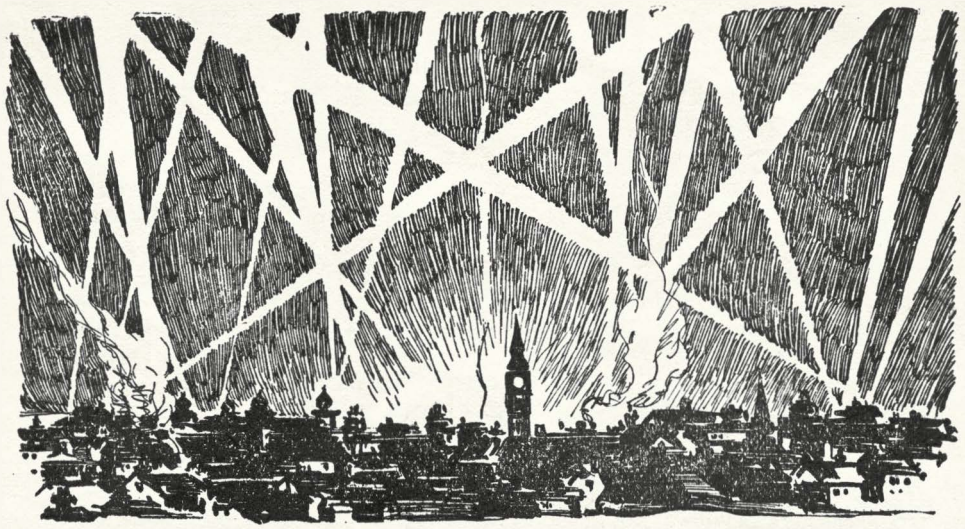
Far greater news followed: for London, Paris, Rome and Berlin were mysteriously bombed from the upper air with nitrous-oxide gas, rendering thousands of people temporarily unconscious. Equally mysterious radio messages explained this harmless gas attack as merely a foretaste of what another real war would be like.

Only to Crystal Templeton, living in London, and to her suitor Larry Raeburn of the British Secret Service, was the secret revealed: Bidden by a provision in Kingdom's will, Crystal made her way, accompanied by Larry, to the tiny island of Martos in the Ægean, purchased in the name of James Van Horn, supposedly an American—and there Crystal and Larry found John Kingdom living!

He explained his plan. The island had been equipped as fortress, a powerful broadcasting station, a naval base; more important, its hangars housed a number of planes invented in one of his munitions factories—planes capable of navigating the stratosphere. He proposed by their aid to threaten and if necessary to force Europe into a real disarmament. He invited Larry to join the staff of young men helping him.

Larry declined, but was detained by force. He escaped, however, and returned to Geneva with his secret. And there he was decoyed by a ruse of Anderthal's mistress the Countess Anna, captured and imprisoned in a cave. For Anderthal had reason to suspect that Kingdom was still living, and that Larry knew his whereabouts; and so now Raeburn was put to the torture to make him tell what he knew.... He was rescued at the point of unconsciousness by the newspaper woman Sally Allison and his friend Dick Challis....

Rumors of war grew apace. Kingdom renewed his bombing attacks and radio demands for disarmament.... And in



Illustrated by R. F. James

spite of these war came—a minor war in Eastern Europe, provoked by a political assassination: a minor war, but very deadly, and wholly dreadful in its threat again to involve the whole world. And because of this Kingdom carried his mad campaign a step farther: from his stratosphere planes he bombed restricted areas in Paris, London, Berlin and Rome—bombed them in earnest this time, so that the loss of life was severe. (His old partner Anderthal was beaten to death in a riot following the attack on Berlin.) And once more Kingdom's radio broadcast a demand upon the nations of Europe to stop this war, to enforce peace, to disarm. . . . The object lesson he had provided was written in the blood of those bombed areas for their consideration. *(The story continues in detail:)*

IT was long after midnight before a train for Marseilles and the Orient started. Chundra retrieved his only luggage from his hotel—the portmanteau containing the periscope-mirror—after cuirassiers had ridden among the crowd outside the white building, and a bomb or two of tear-gas had been thrown.

His little holiday was over. The body-servant had seen the work of his master.

Chundra lit a cheroot. He wanted to unpack the periscope-mirror, place it between his knees and read the future in it, as presently he would be doing in some valley of the eternal Himalayas, where the people would keep a holy man with such a mirror, till he died of old age.

"It would look ridiculous in sensible Western world," he murmured.

Chundra sat, looking now rather like a brown idol in European clothes—as though, even in the Orient train, he changed slowly. He had loved John Kingdom, and was content. Chundra's love could accept the end, before the end came: That taut, small body which now needed no servant! That brain which would never sleep again, driven by some gigantic force no other man had ever known. Chundra saw only a gray face and gray eyes bidding him farewell, as the train began slowly to move.

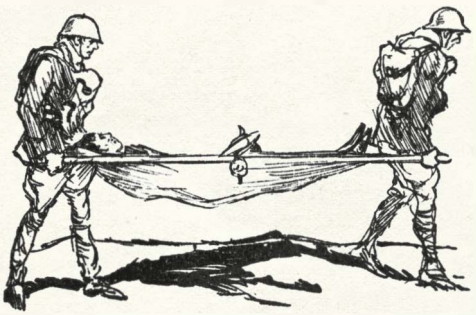
MR. AND MRS. RICHARD CHALLIS were in Rome.

Room D3 had sent Dick Challis from Geneva into Italy, and he had stolidly obeyed orders. At Milan he and Sally Allison, ex-newspaper woman, had been married by a fat and smiling Italian priest.

"Not that it's usual in wartime, so the historians say," remarked Sally dryly; "but you always were unconventional, Dick."

They sat in the sunshine in a vineyard on one of the seven hills around Rome. They were both haggard-white, and older-looking than they had ever been. The hill-slopes were given over to hospital tents, and shelters where silent people sat. The new Rome, which had been built by the new Italy, lay in parts more ruined than the ancient Rome by its side. Battered to dust by successive blows!

"Three nights," said Challis, dropping his face into his hands. "It's a grim honeymoon, Sally." Then he looked up.



"No man has a right to do it. No man who hopes to keep his soul."

"Perhaps he's willing to lose it," said Sally in a low voice.

"Why?"

"Multiply this hundreds of times. He uses nothing that won't be used tomorrow if the thing starts, that isn't being used in the Little Entente at this moment. He wants to stop it for good."

Dick knuckled his eyes. "War's different. There's patriotism and love of country—" He broke off. Even Dick Challis knew that the old clean-cut emotions of war were no more—sunk under irresistible carnage from the sky. He said: "When they get him—"

"When they get him, it'll either be the end of the world, or else the—the new beginning."

"I'd like to get him."

"Hunter!" said Sally tremulously.

She was tough, but the strain was terrible. Sally tried to shut out the fine lean face of John Kingdom that haunted her. He was not inhuman. He was terrifically human, and if the strain was much greater, she would begin to think of him as a human being possessed by some god. She went into one of the tents for two hours' spell with the wounded, and came out thinking of Martos. How far to Martos, and could she get there to pray him to make his hand less heavy?

BUT she knew how wild that was. She slung her gas-mask viciously out of the way.

She had not been in Rome for two days. Dick had been, and returned to tell of the chaos and fear that was down there, and of riots and shootings in other cities. The Latin mind did not stand the strain well, even in the new Italy.

"What's happened in London, Dick?"

"Shieling died in the second raid—walked into the gas. I'm marooned here. No news of Raeburn and Crystal."

"We're all marooned," said Sally. She looked at her husband's gaunt face, and suddenly kissed it. "I guess I'll love you soon, Dick," she said, "now that you've no duty to perform."

"Except get Kingdom. It's any man's duty. God, the world can't be so big, Sally. You and Crystal and Larry have a lot to answer for, my girl."

Sally sat silent after that for a long while. The blue sky of Rome was like every other sky in Europe—dark with airplanes. Fires were still burning and smoke drifting. . . . A loud-speaker somewhere—a resonant and passionate voice telling the ether that new Italy only wanted peace, even now. Sincerity in the voice. Telling John Kingdom too, perhaps. . . .

"If only it were!" whispered Sally chokingly.

SHE and Dick ate bread and garlic. Food-supplies were breaking down. The sunshine gave one enough vitamins, thought Sally, in her grim way; and too many vitamins might send Dick on the hunting trail. She only prayed that when they were wrapped in their blankets, after each night of fear, she would not talk in her sleep and betray something.

Two men with a stretcher were coming up the hill-road. Sally flexed herself for it. An airplane had crashed, down in the valley. She and Dick had watched it almost detachedly, as one watches such incidents on a battlefield.

"We picked him up, signora. It was a long-distance machine with two aboard. This was the only one alive."

"Find one of the doctors, Dick."

Sally knelt. She could be cold-bloodedly efficient about this case. He was a dark and handsome young Abruzzi, by the look of him, but he had been trained to destroy as ruthlessly as John Kingdom. It was pretty bad. He could not live long.

The dark-blue eyes opened. The lips moved. "The chart! In my pocket! See if it is there."

Sally's Italian was good. "It is. But keep quiet till the doctor comes."

"No—listen. It was bad luck that I crashed. I never stopped—never stopped. All the way from the Ægean, from near the coast of Greece. I wished to bring the news to headquarters. Fabricio, my mechanic, must have gone to sleep—"

"Be quiet. Excitement makes you—"

Excitement was making him bleed terribly. Sally was bandaging him, but

he thrust at her. She wanted to stop his mouth.

"Not that. It is no use. You must believe me. I lost my squadron. We were over the southern Ægean, and there was a mist. Madonna, what does it matter how it happened? I skimmed so low over a little island that I nearly crashed —and I saw something. Hangars and workshops—antennæ. Only for a moment. But there it was. There was not even time to use the camera, for it was too misty. But I took all the bearings. Take the chart to Headquarters, kind signorina. It was Kingdom's lair, I swear, and one squadron could bomb it to pieces. Or better, they could go quietly and perhaps get those stratosphere planes. *Dio*, how I would have loved to use one for Italy!"

"No!" breathed Sally involuntarily, but so low that the airman did not hear it.

The chart stained Sally's hand a little as she held it. A sense of overwhelming destiny made her calm. She looked straight into the glazing young eyes and said:

"Rest assured. It shall be done, Lieutenant."

"Not that that Kingdom is not a noble sort of madman," murmured the young airman. "One thinks about it, up there, flying for hundreds of miles. Our Duce did much, and was thought a monster of cruelty, as well as a madman, by many. . . . Do not forget the chart, charming foreign lady. And let them know who had the honor to make the discovery."

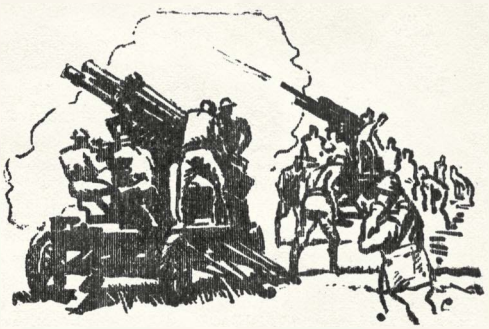
He squeezed Sally's hand, and his dying grasp hung on to it. He was probably a young gallant who could strut in his dress-uniform and do much damage to feminine hearts in Rome; but now he was dead, he looked like a sleeping child.

The white-overalled doctor came, looked, shrugged, and then went away again. Dick Challis bent to close the open eyes with a gentle finger.

"What was he saying?" he asked of Sally.

"It was a message to his sweetheart. A girl called Concetta, who lives near the Corso. It'll be hard to find her."

AS she met her husband's gaze with tears on her lashes, Sally told herself she was being no hypocrite. A compassion for him, and the young airman, and all the world, blinded her. The chart, in its leather case, lay in her



pocket, and Dick had not seen it. It was all so destined, in a world that was charged with destiny at that moment of history, that she scarcely experienced wonder. The unknown air lieutenant might have died in any of a million other arms; but he had died in hers, and that was all there was to it.

So Sally walked away to a little hollow where the hanging grapes were so thick that they stained her clothes as she went through them. No huddled, silent people were there at the moment—they kept out in the sunshine, to look down on their changed Rome. Sally kindled a little fire of sticks and dry leaves. Then she took out the linen chart and threw away the case.

"Give me that, Sally dear," said Dick's voice behind her. They stood gazing at each other. It was hard to say which was the whiter.

"Will you go away, Dick darlingest?" said Sally, in weary tones. "These are love-letters that poor boy gave me. From Concetta. He asked me to burn them."

Dick Challis shook his head. He slowly pinned Sally's arms to her sides. She felt his breath on her face; his breath that she was beginning to love, with the rest of him. Somewhere, out of the hollow where they stood alone, a *bambino* wailed, as feebly as a hurt kitten.

"You'll not give it me, of your own free will, I know," said Dick; and if there was any agony on the earth at that moment, he had his share. "I saw your face when the boy was telling you something—"

"You're breaking my arm. That doesn't matter much. But it's the end of everything, Dick Challis, if you don't leave me. I'm not ugly, am I? Not really. And I love you. I was going to be a magnificent wife to you, if we came through this—"

He had it. It was crushed in his hand, and Sally was on the ground with her face buried on her arm, and little green

grasshoppers jumping on her crumpled overall.

"Sally! It's Kingdom, isn't it? Oh, God, you've a kind of look on you when anything concerning Kingdom happens. . . . And you'll see him batter up the world—"

Sally lay as still as if she had been unconscious, though he knew she was not. He looked at her for what seemed a long time. Then he went up blindly into the sunlight again. In the hot glare he opened the chart and looked at it with burning eyes. He hoped there was nothing on it, hoped this was some nerve-storm between Sally and himself that they would laugh over when they hugged each other in their tent that night. He prayed that that was it.

But there it was. The dead boy had drawn a circle round an unnamed spot on the chart, and had written in the margin with a triumphant pencil: *"Hangars and broadcasting antennæ visible in large amphitheater. Kingdom's lair!"*

The sun was hot. Dick Challis, now a grass-widower after four days' married life, dripped sweat as he strode down the dusty road into Rome.

There were machine-guns in Rome too. But with no more than a short, sullen stutter to them now. It was all but a deserted city of the dead that Challis passed through. A bayonet-point swung to his breast, and he thrust it aside impatiently. His credentials were in his pocket. He took them out with that fatal, that damnable chart.

THE four men were in a magnificent salon above the Quirinal, far enough away from the still reeking gases of John Kingdom's pit. The still wore resplendent uniforms. They were dapper and well-groomed. The gas-masks on the big Tuscan table looked incongruous. These were the Military Council.

"He sends his invitation to the American President tomorrow, if nothing happens about this Kingdom before then. Even so, he is for a conference. A real one this time. It is to be in some big liner, in neutral waters."

One of them moved his spurred boots noiselessly on the carpet.

"He is for peace with honor. Naturally, we all are. But what a chance for any nation that could move first, in spite of this Kingdom!"

"He has decided."

It was always "He" now. The old formal salutations had gone. They resented

him a little, if one could resent a demi-god. They had dreamed, like their counterparts in every other country, of a war of eagles and happy young warriors, and conquered countries. In spite of his own flamboyant presence, their Duce had been a little sardonic about it all. Even before John Kingdom appeared.

A secretary entered. He carried something in his hand. It was an airman's chart, and there was a streak of dried blood on it. He bowed stiffly, though his eyes were dark with excitement.

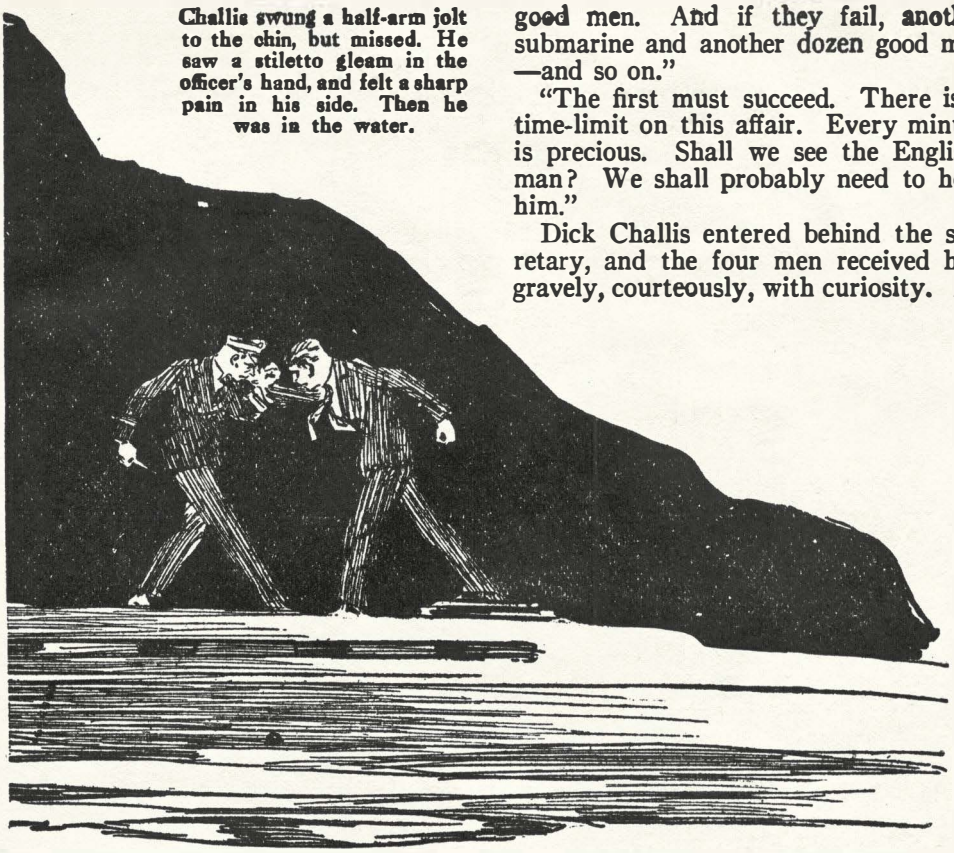
"An airman of one of the Ægean squadrons. He crashed, and handed the chart to an Englishman—of the English diplomatic service, I believe; and he brings it here. Shall he come in?"

"Not yet."

They were Latins, and supposedly emotional. But they were of a fine military caste, with their own sort of outward control, as they bent over the chart.

"One must not be too credulous. But a dying man would not play a hoax."

"And in war, one follows the wild goose, how many times, to find a fat, tame one?"



Challis swung a half-arm jolt to the chin, but missed. He saw a stiletto gleam in the officer's hand, and felt a sharp pain in his side. Then he was in the water.

"Let us dream it is so, for one moment. He must be bombed out from the air, doubtless? Destroyed completely?"

There was a strange pregnant silence. The one who had spoken, struck a match and lit a cigarette. He dropped the stub very delicately into a jade tray, and the others followed his every movement. He said:

"I will keep on dreaming. What would happen to any nation who came, by any means, into possession of those stratosphere machines?"

The answer came, precise, plangent.

"There would be no war. Because that nation would hold the world in the palm of its hand for the time being. *Per Dio,* what a dream!"

The fingers that smoothed the chart were trembling now. A fingernail scratched the bloodmark to see if it concealed any further penciled note. There was none. Only *"Hangars and broadcasting antennæ visible in large amphitheater.... Kingdom's lair!"*

"A landing party?"

"He must be taken quietly. No doubt he has a lookout. From the sea, I suggest. A submarine, perhaps. A dozen good men. And if they fail, another submarine and another dozen good men —and so on."

"The first must succeed. There is a time-limit on this affair. Every minute is precious. Shall we see the Englishman? We shall probably need to hold him."

Dick Challis entered behind the secretary, and the four men received him gravely, courteously, with curiosity. An Englishman of their own caste and type. Possibly a spy, or alternately, an agent ready to work hand-in-glove with their own services. For in a day or two England might be a dear ally—or a deadly enemy. Only the Creator knew which.

"I should like to go with the squadron that bombs him out," said Dick.

When he had spoken, he became aware of the atmosphere of suavity, of purposes behind the veil. Something ran through him and jarred alive the wits of a mere desperate man who had thrown away his personal happiness and cared very little whether he lived or died. He sensed the deep excitement in the room. He had faced men who were keeping things smoothly hidden, yet knew their own power, before this.

"I knew Kingdom," he said. "It was from my hands that he escaped in Switzerland. I want to see he—doesn't escape this time. I ask permission. But for me you would have never got the chart."

They had heard, dimly, of the episode at Geneva. Through the clangor of approaching war, it had reached them. Undoubtedly they must keep this man.

They told him at length that there might be no objection. The necessity of secrecy made them consider his request. He would understand that he must put himself into their hands from that moment. It might not be an air-expedition, they said. It might not even be Kingdom's lair.

"So that it would be absurd to communicate with your own headquarters yet," said one of them. "This is our affair. It was one of our airmen who made the observation. The Ægean is within the province of the Italian navy. One may even say that this island—or its contents—are earmarked for us, if only we can get them into our hands."

Challis nodded to the four pairs of carelessly scrutinizing eyes. One of the quartet touched a bell-push. The back of his throat felt dry, and he seemed to hear Sally's voice mocking him, laughing shrilly in her dear, hateful way at what he had done. He understood clearly now. They did not mean to destroy Kingdom's island. They meant to take it intact for themselves, if they could, just as any other of the nations would have done.

He gave no sign of having understood. He was good at hiding his feelings, looking stupid and well-drilled, like these men themselves. For a moment he could shut off the part of his brain which howled at him that in one hour he had destroyed himself twice—lost Sally, and wrought a treachery to his own country and traditions which, if it came to fruition, was too big for any man to face and remain alive.

TEN o'clock, and the white flood-searchlights that lit up the night-clouds as though they had been a billowy ceiling over London. A host of aircraft shimmering in and out of it. An electric ray, newly brought out of the laboratories, stabbing upward through it.

Midnight. Big Ben did not strike now. The river frontage of the Houses of Parliament was a battered ruin, and Big Ben had been shocked silent. The river-bridges were down. For half a mile round Westminster there was nothing but a pounded wilderness, reeking gases; a No Man's Land in a great city that was not at war.

Three o'clock, and the summer dawn not far away. A few masked figures and gas-protected cars in the streets. But by night, London was empty now. The civilians left it by night to John Kingdom and the air hosts that tried in vain to catch his machines—as, only a few years before, the Wright brothers might have tried to catch a modern bomber. . . .

Dawn. And no raid.

No bulletin from John Kingdom.

SLOWLY life began to stir. The danger-zone was well guarded by troops. In one of Kingdom's laconic messages he had told them of drifting gases which every government had in its laboratories, but he had not used them. He kept his destruction to one focus. He had told them, too, how by this time he could have pulped all their city; but they knew that. So could any air-raider have done! They knew that much from the Little Entente, where civilians, dying in their thousands, had the satisfaction, such as it was, of knowing that their enemies' civilians were doing likewise.

The newspapers were out. *"Kingdom Lays Off. . . . Kingdom Gives the Nations a Spell to Think. . . . Has Kingdom Been Captured? . . . Kingdom Gives the Cabinet a Chance. . . . Kingdom Is Dead!"*

There was no government. It had toppled. There was an Emergency Council. Not a War Cabinet. People called it the Kingdom Cabinet. The troops, mobilized for the war which hung fire, were out in their encampments—safe. The safest place was the army. The navy, which John Kingdom had daubed with yellow gas, was somewhere in the Channel. In London, people began to march soon after dawn. No machine-guns checked or menaced them. There were so many women—women from the great industrial centers, women from the slums, women from Mayfair. By noon, after the night of no raid, London was crepitating.

"They're not howling with joy because he's stayed away. They take it just as a breathing-space he's given them, to think things over."

Larry Raeburn felt himself awed. It was strange to think of Crystal and himself among those people, and how much the two of them knew about John Kingdom. What if they had guessed that Crystal was Kingdom's wife? They would not believe it. They had come to think of John Kingdom as something different from a human being. Neither god nor devil. Just John Kingdom!

The smooth threads of a million lives had been cut in those past few days, and Larry's and Crystal's among them. Shiel-

ing, who might have made them speak, had walked into the gas, and died. Nobody knew where Dick Challis was. There were new faces in Room D3.

"How much longer, Larry?" Crystal asked.

"It was a sign of something that he didn't come last night." Larry paused. "A sign of anything."

He felt exhausted. He and Crystal had worked hard in that fantastic London. So too had thousands of others. John Kingdom, like war itself before now, had shown the angel greater than the ape. Larry saw Crystal's thin cheeks and bright eyes.

"We'll go out into the country for the day. Otherwise you'll break. It's hard for you."

She knew what Larry meant. To carry John Kingdom's secret was sometimes unbearable, but they seldom spoke of it now. Larry got his car, and slowly they shook free of London. It was à summer day of blue sky and summer sunshine. The huge immemorial oaks flung their shadows, the cattle were knee-deep in the wayside pools. The little sturdy villages smiled at them as they passed.

"This is it, Crystal my dear. This is what God meant."

"I know."

DIFFICULT to keep the voice steady, now that the strain had slackened for a few hours! She saw where Larry was going. Deep in the Chiltern hills he had bought a tiny farm a year before. John Kingdom had made it possible, as he had made nearly everything else in Larry's life possible. It gleamed there, deep in hornbeams and slender poplars, an old timbered house. As Crystal passed across the threshold, he caught her, and they held together for more than an instant.

"It's dangerous perhaps, this. We love each other so, Crystal. I never want to go back, I never want to take you back."

"And I never want to go back."

That sunny room with its low ceiling and black polished floor, and great inglenook fireplace took Crystal and made her look as though she had always belonged to it. The blue of the country sky was in her eyes when she looked out of the window at the busy farmyard. She looked a woman made for a man.

"Princess of Armageddon!" said Larry. "You're through with that, anyhow."

He looked at her with a greater hunger than he knew. It was as if they had passed together out of a place of intolerable noise and excitement to be in a quiet room together and to see each other. The woman of the farm brought in scones and cream and coffee. A black spaniel came and thumped his tail on the floor for them.

"You're dead beat. You ought to stay here."

"I want to. I want to stay here for ever. But it can't be done."

"Listen," said Larry, and took her hand firmly and gently. "We shall never see him again. If he—if he brings it off, he could never show himself. If he doesn't, it may be the end. Where are we, Crystal dear?"

"In a place I already love. We'll live here for a while after we're married, Larry." A gleam of the old straight, steady smile. She bent and brushed his lips, suddenly knelt and put her arms round his neck.

"There's no barrier," she said. "Something greater than us came to him. He finished with everything save that; and he left us to each other. But all the same we're going back to London. Later. And we shall see him again. . . . I'd like to sleep here, right in the sun. I'd like not to talk about him any more for a while."

She curled up on the couch and sank into a deep and motionless sleep, even while Larry looked at her. He took her up and carried her to the lavender-scented bedroom upstairs.

He went out. A plane or two droned over the wooded hills, but the Jersey cows went on cropping the grass. Dipple, his farm-manager, approached him with the phlegmatic calm of a man of the soil, who only knew death as Mother Nature dealt it out; sometimes brutally, but always with a rough, clean justice. He spoke of Kingdom as some tremendous squire, who chastened with his own fists a pothouse full of drunken yokels.

"And maybe they'll come to their senses, sir—the politicians. But when they've set their house in order, they'll try to trap him into their hands, I wouldn't wonder. 'Hang Kingdom' will be their motto again. And certainly, he be a killer. Puzzling, it is. But I'm a Kingdom man. I'd let him off."

IT was nearly evening before Crystal awoke. Larry's pulse leaped wildly as she came into the low-ceilinged room, and he felt his heart cry out in rebellion at the destiny that kept them in twain, and concerned itself with them when it had such bigger things to hand.

"I'm not letting you leave here," he said, almost sullenly.

Crystal said nothing. There was a radio-cabinet in the room, and Larry opened it in silence. Every hour now, the Emergency Council made its statement.

"I dreamed it was all over," said Crystal. "What if it is?"

. . . the first definite suggestion for an International meeting to reconsider the whole question of peace and disarmament in Europe came from Rome this afternoon, through the American President. This is to include steps to end the present disastrous conflict in the Little Entente. Great Britain has cabled her immediate agreement to such a meeting.

There was much more, in the suave language of diplomacy that still persisted, chastened as it was. But Larry shut off the radio.

"There'll be no war," he said on a long breath. "No war, Crystal!"

A WARM wind blew in at the open window. The setting sun put bright gleams into Crystal's hair. Big-uddered cattle were passing through the farmyard on their way to the cow-shed.

"You'll be wearing a print frock and sitting on a three-legged stool to milk them before long, lady," said Larry with a touch of huskiness.

"And you'll go about kicking the pigs with hobnailed boots—"

Crystal's eyes were dry. She sat for a long time looking unseeingly out of the window. Neither mentioned John Kingdom. It was too big, too big. And there was no certainty in the world yet. And neither wanted to go back to it.

The sound of a car, as it came lurching through the gate that opened in the mellow walls of the farmyard, made them look quickly. A girl stepped from it and came striding toward the door. It was Crystal who flew to open it.

"Sally!"

"It's I. . . . They told me at Larry's garage that you'd come here. I was in Rome thirty hours ago. Managed a special plane. Let me sit down."

Sally fended off Crystal, as she fell into a chair, and demanded slowly: "What are you so happy about?"

Crystal found herself looking at Sally's hollow cheeks and bitter mouth. Something had happened to this Sally, who had appeared out of the blue. There was no joy in her, no courage.

"I know. It's because you think it's nearly the end. They think that down in London yonder, too. Some of them are putting out flags. They think he's laid off, just to give everybody a chance to get together." Sally turned a frigid deadly calm. "They're wrong. He's done —washed out. The Italians have his stratosphere planes by now, I expect. It'll be all to do over again. As though he'd never lived!"

And Sally added in a dead voice: "It was my husband who did it."

"Who?"

"My husband—Dick Challis. The blood-and-iron boy. I'll tell you about it presently. He went with the Italians, I expect. Dick thought they'd just destroy Martos. Of course they wouldn't. Not likely, if they could get those stratosphere planes first. . . . I ought to tell that precious Emergency Council, oughtn't I? Ought to cable it to all the other people and let them know, instead of keeping it private and confidential like this. Get 'em all to start smashing Italy before they out-Kingdom Kingdom. Before they—

"Oh, they'd all do it!" she cried out. "They'd all do it if they got a chance. Dick would snaffle them for his own country if he could—"

"Steady, Sally!" said Larry.

Sally's head drooped.

THE motors of the submarine made a soft singing sound that lulled; the noise of the water against the steel hull swished a sort of silky accompaniment. There was bright light everywhere, save around the three periscope-screens in the control-room. In the officers' big cabin wine was being served. Moving at periscope-depth, the new submarine *Calabria,* just launched at Spezia, hardly felt the long swell of the Ægean.

Standing stiffly in the crowded cabin, everybody drank the toast of the Italian navy. Dick Challis drained his glass with the rest, and smashed it as exuberantly as any of them when it was empty. But first he clinked it ceremoniously with that of Commondatore de Conti. In his gray cloak with scarlet epaulettes, Commondatore de Conti, who had been one of the four men in the room above the Quirinal, made an arresting figure.

"May your country and mine be always on the same side, Signor Challis," said de Conti. There was a little spark in his eyes that might have been laughter.

"Rather!" agreed Challis.

"Who's there?" he said. Dick Challis told himself he must shoot, or be lost forever. His slippery hand was on the butt of the revolver. But—he was no murderer. Not even to save himself.

"That was the last drink, gentlemen," said the submarine-commander. "We are near. We crawl now, with only the periscopes above water, you understand."

They knew all about Martos. The Intelligence had had every islet in the Ægean charted and photographed, years before. Martos had been taken out of the dockets and *dossiers,* because a dead airman had, by chance, skimmed its crater. . . .

"It is permitted that I go ashore with the party?" asked Challis.

Commondatore de Conti coughed. . . . There was gray in his beard. In the last war he had performed many valiant and flashing actions. Since then he had languished. But this was adventure.

"I fear not, Signor Challis. It is an expedition of some peril and cunning. If he resists, it will be a running fight, understand. Guerrilla warfare on an island-rock. Searchlights, and our big guns trained. He may be sensible. I am here to offer him life and freedom if he surrenders peaceably. The plenipotentiary of my nation! But he is a madman, remember. It is no work for civilians."

"But the man is my particular meat."

"Not now, signor. He is the Italian navy's meat."

Challis shrugged. He knew himself a prisoner. He had been a prisoner from the moment he entered the room above the Quirinal. . . .

The motors died to a whisper. There was a harbor-cleft, the commander had said. Once in that, they would rise to the surface.

The blowers were emptying the tanks softly, almost silently. The *Calabria* was rising. The great hatches slipped open with barely a sound. Along the lighted tunnel of the submarine every man was at his station.

"Silence!"

They were going to go ashore under cover of darkness in two small-boats.

Challis, boots covered with felt like the rest of them, accompanied them on deck. Eight men with bomb-cases and gas-grenades. Masks were slung. On the wet deck under the stars their eyes shone luminously. They would get ashore ready for action, before the searchlight streamed and the party began. One tackled a madman that way. . . .

The sea was inky-black in the harbor-cleft. From the high loom of rock that was dimly to be seen almost overhead, the submarine must be utterly invisible.

"Do not get in the way, Signor Inglese, if you please." That was one of the lieutenants of the submarine, a mere boy. A faint insolence was in his manner.

The low black craft still moved slowly. Dick Challis believed that only his own nation produced born seamen; but these Italians were very good. Forward, the searchlight apparatus was ready; and the two big mortars that could throw giant shells into the crater of Martos, if Kingdom refused to surrender, were already manned.

Challis padded along the steel deck. His intention was quite simple. He believed himself unobserved and he was crouching hastily for a leap, when he heard the young lieutenant's sharp low voice, *"No!"* He swung and sent a half-arm jolt to the boy's chin, but missed. No doubt the boy had had his instructions. Challis saw a small stiletto gleam in his hand, and felt a sharp, sickly pain in his side. Then he was in the water.

HE swam strongly. If they saw him from the submarine, they did not shoot. But it was unlikely they saw him.

His brain was clear. He knew how wild his venture was, how desperate his purpose. It was nothing more or less than to find some means to destroy the stratosphere planes, whether Kingdom surrendered or not.

As long as his body was alive,—and that might not be long,—Challis knew that he must conserve it. Now that his eyes were accustomed to the darkness, he saw a white lacing of small breakers, and a moment afterward his fingers wound into the rough samphire which grew on a small rock. He was ashore an instant after that.

He looked back into the harbor-cleft. Pitch, purple darkness. The submarine soaked up in it.

That was one moment. The next, a bluish radiance spread blindingly into the cleft, lighting up every bush and every fissure of rock, and the lean sea-beast that rode there. Stark and clear, the men on deck and the two small-boats, already lowered for the landing-party, stood out like things found out in some tremendous guilt.

DICK CHALLIS crouched in a crevice above the quietly whispering breakers. He had to hide from that pitiless light, for one thing. But there was some other reason, an animal instinct of self-preservation. A bubble of electric fire seemed to travel along the underwater-depths of the cleft. It spread under the submarine, turned livid yellow and then smashed into sound. The bluish light went. The *Calabria* was a fire-encompassed snout of steel, pointing high her bows, and seeming to open like a pea-shell.

The searing air-convulsion which Challis crouched from, did not come. With all her live explosives, by some whimsy of chance untouched, the submarine had gone, and the first expedition against John Kingdom was over.

Dick Challis stayed quite motionless against the dark rock. A mine? Or perhaps some sort of electric ray. Room D3 had such things pigeonholed, though just short of perfection, most of them.

He had drained himself of all emotions. Obstinacy, his strong suit, was his driving force—that and the utter futility of staying in a world without Sally Allison. There had been patriotism and duty, too; but the need for those had gone with the *Calabria.*

"They'll send another—and another—"

The miracle of his own escape so far, and even that brief, destroying flame which might once again have shifted the destinies of Europe, left him unmoved. He began to crawl cautiously through the bushes. From where the blue light had sprayed, he thought he heard men's voices for a moment, but it was probably imagination—like the sound of Sally softly laughing at his folly, which the wind resembled now and again. The weight of his body squeezed the scent of wild thyme from the ground; small, night-hunting creatures scuttled from his path, from the marooned man, the sole survivor from His Italian Majesty's submarine *Calabria.* . . .

"Hullo!" There was a disgusting wet stickiness on his hand. When he put it under his shirt, he found himself bleeding steadily. The lieutenant's stiletto must have gone deep.

A piece of dislodged rock went clattering down from his feet, and stopped him dead. There was some way into the crater of Martos, he knew. But to scramble in the dark— Then over his shoulder a crescent moon rose. Presently it gave a little light. Straining his ears, it seemed to Challis that he heard some sound—the clang of metal, now and then.

He had an electric torch and an Italian service revolver, both of which he had managed to find on the submarine, and that was all. Not much to blow up Kingdom's lair with. His chief hope was in laying hands on some of Kingdom's own explosives. Three or four hours of darkness lay ahead yet, he guessed, though his watch had stopped. Daylight would be the end of him, unless he found a cave or something to give him hiding. He cursed softly. He was still bleeding; the wound in his side would not stop.

There were several caves by the water's edge. Challis peered into one. It tunneled far into the cliff-face. A tunnel!

Good to be underground. He found now that the sight he had witnessed in the harbor-cleft was printed on the retina of his eye. Oddly enough, he thought of those four trimly uniformed men in the room above the Quirinal, whose quick and secret action had ended in quick and secret fire.

THE tunnel was long. A rat-gnawed piece of goatskin, a few match-stubs—Larry Raeburn's matches, had he known it—and then an abrupt rise. One horn of the young moon was visible. The end of the tunnel was steep as an escalator, but Challis climbed it—climbed it, and lay panting at the top, unable to move. The sea-water had nearly dried on him, but the other wet warmth was still there. His head spun.

He crouched in the bushes among the dancing fire-flies. He was quite near the white side of a house, a villa. A suffused glow came from a big French window, which was uncurtained, and open to the warm night. The room within was visible, likewise the man who sat alone there: John Kingdom. . . .

He looked up. The face, gray and alert, calm but burning eyes, thin, gentle mouth, turned toward the window. To Challis' own knowledge, he had made no sound. He had been too magnetized.

"Who's there?"

Dick Challis told himself he must shoot, or be lost for ever. His slippery hand was on the butt of the revolver—when he saw Sally Allison's jade-green eyes. Defying him to shoot! He was not imaginative, but they were there, all right. And a great weariness, a sickness of the cunning and stupidity and death that were tormenting the world at that moment, made him lower his hand. He was no murderer. Not even to save himself. Murderers were not as kitten-weak as he was beginning to feel.

"Challis?" said Kingdom. "It's Challis, isn't it?"

He did not move. Leonine gray head and carved gray face looked at Dick Challis, scarcely in curiosity. Something seemed to incase the man.

"How did you get here?"

"I was with the Italian submarine. But I got ashore first."

An impassive nod. "We used Thorensen's electric ray. You have the formula in that room of yours at Scotland Yard, Challis, but not in efficiency ratios."

"It was efficient, sure," said Challis.

Kingdom tapped his fingers on the table thoughtfully, pointing to a divan.

"Sit down. You're exhausted. You seem to have been lucky. Was I lucky too, because you didn't shoot me just now? That's what you came ashore for, I guess."

"Not exactly. Your stratoplanes. They meant to bargain with you for them. They were going to open up negotiations when—" Challis was answering jerkily. Where he sat, there was blood dripping on the carpet. He felt stupidly ashamed of it. He must have lost pints out in the darkness there. There seemed no need to answer. The unblinking eyes took his brain and read it.

"—when Thorensen got them? Thorensen himself is actually working for the Italians, I believe; but we raced him by a head. Perhaps you wanted the planes for your own country? You yourself may have some offer to make?"

"I wanted to destroy them."

KINGDOM sat like a piece of rock. His voice held no color, no emotion.

"Thanks. They'll be destroyed in good time, without your help. It chances that for the first time they're all in their hangars at this moment. There were no raids tonight. I've given them the war atmosphere, the war stupor. Now I'm giving them time to realize everything. A chance to parley with each other. A rest."

"From murder?" said Challis, waves of blackness bumping over him.

"From murder."

His expression did not change. His skin was like gray wax, the line of his jaw bonier than it had been. He had lost count of the days and night without sleep. Sometimes it was all like purgatory, and sometimes he heard bright trumpets blowing. That was his old arrogance, which would never completely leave him. And his madness, of course. . . . The world outside him had faded. He knew only himself. He was a Purpose.

BUT suddenly this white-faced boy stirred something.

"Crystal's in London—unless you've killed her with one of your damned machines. She and Larry. And Sally Allison, that was, I mean my wife that was—" Challis stumbled. He began to feel fearfully drunk. "She's in Rome. And for all I know, you'll get her as well. It's poor payment for what they did for you. I understood Crystal was your wife."

"Crystal?"

A tiny spasm passed through Kingdom and brought a dull flush to his forehead. But he caught himself. He was an instrument, as pitiless as war itself. All such human bondage as love and gratitude was thrown off, even the ideals which had built him into the machine he was now.

"I've no answer, Challis."

"You're done, man!" Challis made what he meant to be a gesture of triumph, but it went wrong. "It's only a matter of hours with you, now. Those Italians have you taped. They'll try bargaining with you, for a day or two perhaps, and after that they'll blow you to smithereens. Have you got any sort of defence?"

"Not much," said Kingdom. "What you saw tonight was nearly the extent of it. There's no defence anywhere just now. Before long, defence may grow stronger than attack—for a year or two. After that, the tables will turn. And so, *ad infinitum.*"

"More peace sermons," muttered Challis thickly.

Kingdom saw that the boy's curly black head was hanging, and stood up sharply to look at him. Then he saw the blood for the first time. His hard eyes narrowed at the sight of it. Death by the thousandfold, and this was the first blood he had seen since it began.

Dick Challis had sagged to the couch where he sat, drained and senseless. Kingdom caught him as he slipped to the floor. . . .

Latour, of the laboratory, had his doctor's degree from the Paris Lycée. He went over Challis with skillful fingers, then shrugged at the small but deep wound in the boy's white side, under the hasty bandage and ligature which Kingdom had applied.

"It has all but emptied him," he said. "He must have been losing it steadily for the past hour."

"You can save him?"

"It will be hard. A bullock wouldn't stand all that loss. . . . That is a very big revolver he carries in his pocket. Why give him back the strength to use it?"

"He won't. Kindly allow me to judge, Latour. Take him to the sick-bay and attend to him. You're not too busy?"

"Fairly busy. On those new carbon dioxide sequences. And on the Thorensen ray for the next attack."

Latour's eyes were red-rimmed and tired. He watched Kingdom curiously, and the other turned from him abruptly. There was something slightly sardonic in Latour's regard that touched him to the quick for an instant. Latour's thoughts were easy to read: He slew thousands, and wished to salve his conscience by saving one who fell into his hands. That was what Latour, scientist and logician, thought. Perhaps it was true.

"Look after him, Latour. My orders."

His hand was trembling, where he rested it on the table, after they had carried Challis out. That had not happened for a long time.

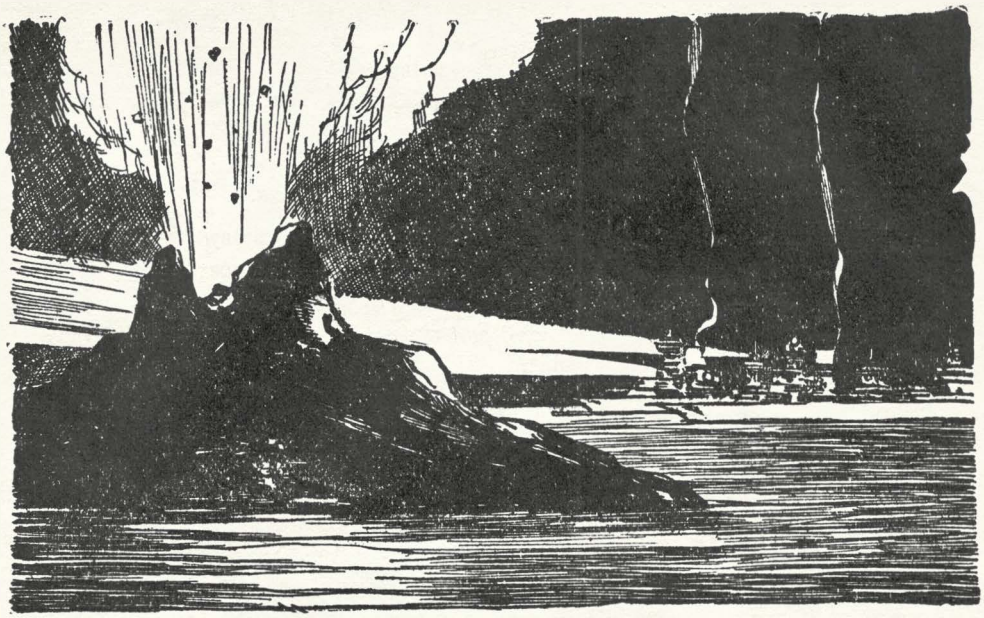
IT was not far from dawn. The amphitheater, as Kingdom gained it, held the perfume of wild citron which always blew into it an hour or so before day.

Bates, the Englishman, approached him, his face a tried mask. The rest of his airmen stiffened to attention at his approach. They did it mechanically. He saw that they were jaded, sleepless, old young men.

"It's the reaction, sir," said Bates in a low voice. "They're not used to doing nothing, at this hour—thinking too damn' much. There's something up there that makes them crave after it, like some men crave after drink. And that submarine business just now—"

"They're not afraid?" asked Kingdom icily.

Bates himself stiffened like a pole, stood silent, said nothing. There was only Bates for a stratosphere-leader now. Leontov, a morning or two before, had



Kingdom's lair was afire. The bolts of Jove were falling on it. Bright as daylight, the white light rested on Martos and the wheeling squadrons above it.

walked off the cliff. And Bates was like a steel spring, on the edge of snapping.

"Sorry, boy," said Kingdom, his head averted. He passed the radio cabin, without going in, though he heard the instruments chirping, and saw Ludwig bending over them, scribbling. . . .

The sky turned saffron. As though it lit up the secret of Martos for the whole world to know, and to destroy like a wasp's nest now! But first, he thought, they would try to capture that greatest international criminal ever known, John Kingdom. Peace or war, the governments would plan to save their faces that way. They would never admit that that buccaneer, that lunatic, had helped them to their decisions. He smiled grimly.

"Well, Latour?" The scientist came out of the sick-bay. It was small but perfectly equipped, for Kingdom had not neglected that. Latour wore his white surgical jacket. His usual costume was rubber overalls and a mask, and his ultimate object, death wholesale.

"He has collapsed. If the fool had stopped for a moment, he could have prevented it."

"Transfusion?"

"That might give him a chance. But then—"

"I'll come along."

"You! But listen. One always feels it, even the strongest. There is the state of your brain. That old wound of yours. Somebody else—"

John Kingdom stood for a perceptible minute gazing at Raymond Latour, who but for his sickness at modern civilization, might have been either a very fine surgeon or worn a decoration as a distinguished investigator, for his country, into weapons for the next war.

Kingdom laughed softly, and Latour started a little at the unfamiliar sound. He had not heard it from John Kingdom for many days and nights.

"I'm as strong as a lion, Latour," he said. "It might make an interesting psychological experiment. Here is a young man with the very best traditions of patriotism and duty to his country, whose hands are clean; and here is an oldish man with very different traditions, whose hands—"

Latour stepped a little closer to Kingdom. Though Kingdom was his master, he was also his patient.

"You feel no need of sleep yet?"

Kingdom brushed his hand across his forehead. "Not yet, Latour. Visions—a few. Hallucinations, if you like. But I think—everything is nearly over."

His rocklike immobility had gone completely just then. A fearful reaction was upon him.

"I've been lonely, Latour—oh, God, how lonely! It was necessary. But I want to live just a little longer."

"Steady, my dear master! It is sleep you require. No man can do without it and live. Not even you."

"I want to save that boy."

"Strange," said Latour musingly. "He might save you—for that little longer."

VIENNA: The war in the Little Entente has come to a standstill, and a three-day truce has been arranged, because neither side is able to continue. In the first real air-war, the destruction has been of such magnitude that both countries concerned are laid in ruins. Famine and death have made of one tenth of Europe a Golgotha which has never been known in previous history.

(Berlin:) While one of the fiercest of the many Kingdom riots which have torn Berlin was in progress, the mystery of the disappearance of Mr. Jacob Anderthal was solved in dramatic fashion. The body of a man, discovered in a Berlin park, so badly beaten as to be almost unrecognizable, was identified as that of Mr. Anderthal.

For transmission to Washington, and in all languages by radio, and news-agency:

THE DUCE IS PREPARED TO DISCUSS ALL INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AS THEY AFFECT ITALY, AND TO JOIN AN IMMEDIATE PEACE AND DISARMAMENT MEETING.

MEETING OF ALL NATIONS PROPOSED.
PEACE AND REAL DISARMAMENT.
FRANCE AND BRITAIN SIGNIFY WILLINGNESS TO JOIN.

GERMANY COMES IN.
NEW DICTATORSHIP PROCLAIMED.

(Rome:) It is stated positively here that the Italian Government is fully aware of the position of Kingdom's retreat, which, it is rumored, has been discovered to be on an island in the Mediterranean within a few hours' flying-distance of Rome. Until the approaching conference becomes concrete, Italy will take no steps to deal with Kingdom, deeming his fate to be an international affair.

KINGDOM RAIDS CEASE ALL OVER EUROPE.
REPORTED DEATH OF KINGDOM.

(London:) The Prime Minister, in an official statement today, said: "To give credit for the approaching meeting of the nations to an outlaw who has the blood-guilt of thousands of human beings, and the destruction of millions of pounds' worth of property, on his soul, would be to share his crime. The sentimental hero-worship of Kingdom observable in some quarters is wicked and gravely wrong. In due course Kingdom, if he still lives, must be arraigned at the bar of all the nations."

(Berlin:) The new Leader, addressing a giant meeting, said Germany would go forward in peace and concord. The good German god was still there, in peace as in war. But that god was not John Kingdom. Kingdom must pay for his crimes when the nations receive him into their hands.

(Paris:) The Premier, in the House of Deputies, today asked the French people if they had already forgotten the havoc which Kingdom had wrought on their beloved Paris. Because the terrible example of the Little Entente had shown the nations the doubtful utility of modern warfare and brought them to see the folly of a race for armaments, that was no reason why Kingdom should be pardoned. The nations would deal with him, inflexibly.

Commander, S. S. Berengaria,
Southampton:
Please proceed as arranged to neutral waters ten miles S. W. Balearic Isles and prepare for Meeting of Nations.

THE *Elvira,* private yacht of the late Mr. James Van Horn, an American who had liked to make the Mediterranean his playground, lay moored a mile out of the harbor of Brindisi.

When a small launch shot out from shore to the *Elvira,* as evening fell, it was almost unnoticed. The naval pinnaces had gone from Brindisi; the smoke of the Italian Ægean fleet showed only occasionally on the horizon. There was to be no war.

Almost immediately the *Elvira* put out to sea in the early darkness. A small gunboat nosed curiously round her for a few minutes, but vanished again without challenge or inquiry.

"It's a bit marvelous," muttered Sally Allison to her two companions.

She went up to the bridge to try to sound McLintock, the young Scotch captain. He regarded her gently from underneath brows that were already growing penthouse-like and thick, young as he was.

"Maybe we're followed, and maybe no, miss," he said. "They didna worry me when I lay in harbor. Not even after they claimed to know where he is. Maybe

they have na connected Van Horn with him."

"And maybe they have," muttered Sally to herself.

Larry and Crystal made two dark shadows on the deck. Both were rather too silent for real happiness. Sally Allison thought of her husband—lost or dead; or, she mused bitterly, wandering somewhere looking for some noble duty to perform for his country.

"McLintock says 'maybe, and maybe no.'"

They had flown by special plane to Brindisi. The airways of Europe were open again, more or less. The ambassadors were returning. The water-tight compartments of nationality which the threat of war had closed were opening once more. There were still Frenchmen and Germans and Englishmen, still all complexly different. But all alike in that one clamor which had toppled the government of every country—*no war*.

Nothing had hindered their quick journey to Brindisi. Yet all three had a fatalistic certainty that they were watched. At times, Larry Raeburn thought their progress had even been facilitated. . . .

"We could never have stayed away, Larry," said Crystal.

"I know. But we sha'n't get him clear. It's impossible."

"He won't want to get clear. He'll be just waiting. He never planned to get away, or even thought of it, for himself."

"You'll try to persuade him."

"So will you."

Low on the dark horizon, bright searchlights glimmered furtively, and were gone. Larry pointed to them, and said nothing. But presently, without looking at Crystal, he said:

"If he goes, you'll go with him."

"Yes. But—I don't think they'll let him go."

Both of them went down to their cabins presently. Only Sally Allison remained on deck, her thin, hard face lit by her cigarette. Dick! Where was he now? The world was coming out of the shadows. The *Berengaria* was already anchored in neutral waters for the Meeting of the Nations. Sally Allison, as big a peace-maniac as John Kingdom, like all women, ought to have been happy. But her cheeks were wet.

MARTOS, and the harbor cleft the *Elvira* had first carried them into, that night not so very long before.

Seaward, the darkness. No beat of engines up in the night sky. No dogging searchlights. A mere glint, low down over the rim, might have been summer-lightning. No challenge from the islet as the yacht slowly drew in. And no low dynamo-hum or clang of metal. Silence.

"HE'S there," said Larry Raeburn in a low voice. "How did he know we were coming?"

Crystal felt that she stumbled a little, as she stepped from the launch. It was Larry who caught her, held her jealously, even a little desperately, before he released her. The small figure came forward.

"It's good to see you," Kingdom said. "Good. I was lonely. We'll go up to the villa."

"There isn't time," demurred Crystal. "We've come to take you away."

He looked at both of them, and then at Sally Allison with an odd special smile for her that lit him in the old way, even in the faint moonlight. Crystal realized that he had not touched her.

"There's time for everything," he said.

"They've got that police force together again," said Larry.

"So I believe," he said; and then; "They mean to destroy this place. They'll find it a tough nut."

A touch of the old arrogance. In the darkness it brought back his old boyishness too, as he went ahead. He looked trim and fresh. But he stopped, and turned to Sally Allison, who had caught up rather pantingly with him, and demanded sobbingly: "Do you know anything about Dick?"

"I do. He's at the villa, my dear. Too weak to move much, but getting better."

A queer choking sound from Sally. It was she who ran ahead through the garden of the villa, when they reached it.

"Happy ending," said Kingdom, "for them."

He gave another long look at Crystal, and then turned away. The clock over the fireplace chimed the half-hour.

"They give me an hour," he said, "so we'll not eat. Besides, I haven't Chundra now."

"We don't quite understand." Larry found that he had put an arm round Crystal.

"You look haggard, Larry, and a bit concerned. My head's all right. I was wide awake for days and days. I don't remember much of that time, now. . . . I gave Challis a transfusion; and when it

was over, we both slept like dead men. Sane now, Larry and Crystal. Tremendously sane. Still Kingdom, though. I walk alone."

There was a silence. All Martos seemed very silent. But in the garden a bird cheeped sleepily, and up on the rock-side, one of the lilac-colored goats of Martos bleated.

"A gunboat came into the harbor last evening," said Kingdom. "It flew four separate ensigns, and a flag of truce—odd thing to see. It didn't stay long. It came with an ultimatum. Secret diplomacy is evidently not dead yet. They knew you were coming, of course. You were the solution. They cleared the roads for you. You're to take me away, and I'm never to be heard of again."

Crystal did not look at Larry.

"They will say you escaped. They daren't take the risk of—bringing you to justice. They're frightened. That's it. We shall go to America. I still believe in that surgeon I spoke to you about."

"Do you?"

He scarcely seemed to notice what Crystal said. As Sally Allison and her husband entered the room, he moved quietly to the door. He felt the young creatures shut him out, with their youth and their certainty of life, little as they meant to. They had done so much for him, and he so little—

HE looked at the clock again, and went out, through the tunnel and into the amphitheater. It was empty now.

They had all gone—evacuated according to the plan he had made long before. The stratoplanes had taken them and landed them in far places. In ten years such machines would carry men as they had carried away those young men who bore the print of a great adventure on their hearts forever, who would move among the workaday world and perhaps speak of John Kingdom, perhaps not. The guilt of it was on his own soul, not theirs. . . . But for a short time longer the stratosphere would remain inviolate. There were no stratoplanes now. Somewhere, they were all reduced to dust.

The poisons and the explosives were still there, the iron shard and the reeking tube, the unimaginable forces of destruction which man had brought out of the womb of the earth since the last war. Not one that was not known to the steel-masters and chemists of the nations a madman had tried to chasten. But they were cold in their retorts. They would leap to one last convulsion under the bombs that would fall soon.

His time was nearly up. He stood outside the window of the villa, watching the young things inside, unseen. How he loved them! All, all.

"LOOK!" Kingdom said abruptly.

The yacht cut steadily through the wine-dark swell, three miles out from Martos. The island-rock was a shadow against the stars behind. But now something happened.

First a silver finger quivering up from the flat shield of the sea, then a score of others. Converging and creeping until the islet stood clear and white under the steady glare. Then a low, droning sound, and a great arrow-like formation that hurtled like a single projectile through the steady light. A bombing-squadron. Another and yet two more.

A red flash came up out of the crater of Martos, turning it for an instant into the volcano it had been centuries before. Three more followed, and the flame of them lapped like liquor over its rim. John Kingdom leaned against the rail and watched.

He stood apart, alone. The distant glare lit his carven features. Four squadrons, one for each power. The nations had already got together for something. Kingdom's lair was afire. The bolts of Jove were falling on it. The thunder of them came rolling over the water.

Bright as daylight, the white light rested on Martos and the wheeling squadrons above it. But it did not turn to the *Elvira*, where she drummed out with John Kingdom, the arch-criminal of the world, aboard it. It kept steadily away.

Kingdom turned and saw Larry Raeburn by his side.

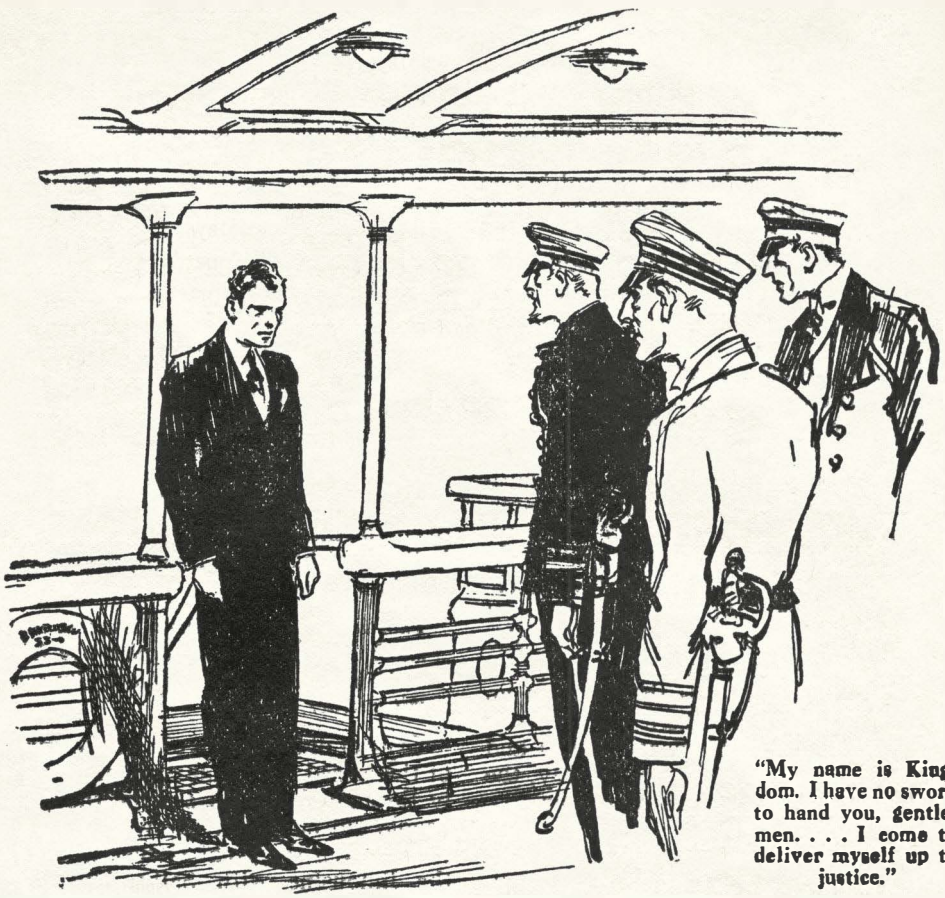
"We could make one of the African ports soon after daybreak."

"So we could. Good places for a fugitive from justice. Crystal, what do you think?"

"Anywhere," said Crystal. Her voice was low, but she lifted her head to him. He had given her everything, and he was the greatest man in the world.

"Challis and Sally and I could easily make our way back home," said Larry. "You could start for anywhere from a place like Tunis."

KINGDOM looked past Larry's hard cheek-bone at the smoldering fires of Martos, then up at the bridge of the *Elvira*. There was in his face the old im-



"My name is Kingdom. I have no sword to hand you, gentlemen. . . . I come to deliver myself up to justice."

pregnable mixture of gentleness and strength that left them silent.

"Don't worry. I have given McLintock our course," he said.

THE pen passed from hand to hand. It was no gold-embossed pen for men to look at ironically under a glass case in future years. This was only the first bond of the good-will of the nations, but it signed away suspicion and intrigue and the sick foreboding of years.

The big stateroom of the liner held the dozen men, in morning dress, comfortably. The radio microphones were hidden, but there; sensitive tympani of the millions who had proved themselves the masters of these dozen men.

Battleships round the spick-and-span liner, arrayed in ornamental dignity; gun-muzzles stoppered. Plain naval uniforms on the deck. Not one aircraft in the whole blue dome of the sky.

The new Prime Minister of Great Britain rose to his feet.

"Our first pact is signed, gentlemen. The race for armaments is already finished. I shall speak no rhetoric. We saw the abyss opening, and we have stopped at its brink. We lose no nationality, no love of country. We gain both a thousandfold. We shall fight each other often, but with the weapons of sanity. . . . I rise to make a statement."

He looked at the microphones. There was the glint of an eyeglass or two along the table, a second's tension.

"Last night an international police-force destroyed from the air the headquarters of John Kingdom on the isle of Martos, off the coast of Greece. It was reduced to fragments. There is reason to believe that Kingdom escaped. If this is so, I state, on behalf of the governments of the countries he has outraged, that steps must still be taken to bring the miscreant to justice."

A murmur of approval—for the microphones. No one smiled. The Prime Minister had done it well. The tradition was still maintained that a British statesman was good at that sort of thing. Perhaps he flushed a little, but the microphone did not register that.

"The Powers are extending their immediate assistance to help the dev-

astation which has overwhelmed the countries of the Little Entente."

The cool Atlantic wind blew softly through the open ports. The Prime Minister had finished. The microphones were switched off. The statesmen relaxed a little. Not in one day, not in one week, would the goal be reached. But the road was set at last.

"One must save one's face," said some one to his neighbor. "That is common sense. And common sense has brought us here."

"And Kingdom. A great madman."

"A murderer, monsieur. Thank heaven, it isn't our task to hang him."

THE great liner and its lines of guardian craft seemed rooted in the water. A yellow-funneled yacht had been approaching from the horizon for some time. While the statesmen sat at lunch, it drew nearer. At quarter speed, it entered the ring of battleships. A pinnace shot from one of the flagships to intercept it. There was the rattle of an anchor-chain. Right there in the lee of the liner, closed in by floating steel and muzzled guns, the yacht rode lightly, the golden lettering of her name visible.

Elvira.

Seagulls mewed. A steam-pipe blew softly. On the deck of the yacht a small, neat figure stood alone. A launch came down from its davit-falls, and he stepped into it. . . .

He stood on the promenade deck of the *Berengaria* a minute later—lean and aquiline, well-groomed, bareheaded. The knot of naval officers closed round him. He smiled faintly.

"My name is Kingdom. I have no sword to hand you, gentlemen."

He turned for a moment to look down at the deck of the yacht where four people now stood.

"John Kingdom?" It was a bronzed admiral standing stiffly.

"The same."

He stood in the stateroom, again with the same faint smile at the transfixed faces which looked at him, and the great silence that fell at the sound of his name.

"I come to deliver myself up to justice," said John Kingdom.

ON that August morning the sun lay strong upon the great stone figure of Justice, which stands blindfolded with sword and scales high above Old Bailey, the central criminal court of London.

Since dawn the populace had been gathering, as the rabble had gathered a century before to see thieves and horse-stealers hanged at Tyburn tree. But this was no rabble. It stretched as far as the eye could see. Quiet, patient. London waited. Paris waited. And Berlin and Rome.

There was a fanfare of trumpeters. From their carriages the judges moved in colorful procession up the gray steps. The whole glittering panoply of English Law was there: scarlet gown and slate-colored silk and full-bottomed wig. The ambassadors of the powers had already entered the court. But as mere spectators.

It was the day of the trial of John Kingdom. The nations had handed him over to the law of his country. The indictment had been issued, engrossed on parchment, sealed.

> *That he did commit High Treason, inasmuch as he levied War against the King in his realm. That he did willfully commit murder. . . .*

Crystal did not look out of the window of the closed limousine as it moved slowly through the sunlit streets, though the people did not know she was Kingdom's wife. Even the great lawyer who sat in the limousine with Sally Allison and herself did not know that. Perhaps, as he had been at more than one of John Kingdom's dinner-parties, he had heard her called Princess of Armageddon.

"He will be judged insane," said the lawyer, "and detained during His Majesty's pleasure. Which, my dear lady, will not be long."

He said nothing more. There was to be no defending counsel. Kingdom had refused to have any. The Lord Chief Justice, and four other judges, were to conduct this, the most famous trial in history. John Kingdom was in the hands of the English law, the most incorruptible in the world. But he would not be hanged.

"I don't think Larry is here," said Sally in a low voice.

"He isn't," said Crystal; and then, with the great composure which had come over her: "How could he be?"

"What about you?"

"I'm different. I must go to him, as soon as—"

"—as soon as they've finished this jamboree," said Sally, in very low tones. "He doesn't want you, Crystal. He wants nobody. He's too big. He's gone from us—from all these little people too."

A quiver passed through Sally, and she dared to say no more.

Crystal kept herself outwardly firm. She had, hours before, steadied herself against the ordeal. That morning she had seen John Kingdom. They kept him in the Tower of London, because one of his crimes was high treason. Within a stone's throw of the arquebuses and old cannon, the late chief partner in Kingdom and Anderthal, and master of the stratosphere, had been lodged.

"If you ever travel East with Larry, keep a lookout on one of the P. and O. boats for Chundra Dah, Crystal. He went to be a holy man in the Himalayas, with an old periscope-mirror; but he can't keep away from serving white men," Kingdom had said.

"When you married me—" she began; but he stopped her, took both her hands, tou hed her almost for the first time.

"It was selfish, Crystal. Wrong. He was an egotistical brute, that John Kingdom. But he never meant any harm, and you can forgive him now. It's all over."

"You think they'll—"

"Hang me? No. I'm told I could claim a royal warrant to be beheaded here." He laughed, but not arrogantly. Something came and went out of his eyes. He looked under the dark hair at the tiny mark on her temple.

"Everything I have is yours and Larry's. Remember that. I've made sure. I saved it for you."

"You'll be free in a few hours," she told him. "The people don't want anything to happen to you. They're stronger than the governments just now."

"They always are—if they only knew. Good-by, child!"

SHE remembered his eyes, the moment's anguish in them now, as she and Sally entered the court and saw him.

He stood to his feet between his two warders as the court rose, and the procession of scarlet and ermine came in. The tipstaff attended the Lord Chief Justice. It was he who fetched the piece of cloth which was called the black cap, when it was required. A bunch of sweet herbs hung before the dais to protect the judges from a pestilence which had swept Europe three hundred years before. . . . The Grand Jury sat in their box. T ey scanned John Kingdom eagerly. Their faces were flushed.

"The charge against John Kingdom."

A hot bar of sunlight came through the window and touched the crisp hair of his leonine head. His eyes looked boyish, though grave enough. The line of his mouth was gentle.

"That you did commit High Treason, inasmuch as you levied War against the King in his realm. That you did willfully commit murder—

"Do you plead guilty, or not guilty?"

"Guilty," said John Kingdom.

Foreign Office,
London.

(Urgent telegrams received and decoded).

CONFIDENTLY AWAIT NEWS OF KINGDOM'S ACQUITTAL STOP VERY IMPORTANT STOP.

DE FLEURY.

URGE YOU TO MAKE SURE KINGDOM IS NOT CONDEMNED STOP WOULD GREATLY COMPLICATE MATTERS HERE STOP.

BOHM

REFER YOU TO PROMISE ABOUT KINGDOM STOP.

FERONDO

There was a deep silence in the court. Through it came the sound of the people who lined the street outside, and the drone of a police airplane, which kept them observed.

"You understand the plea?" That was the Lord Chief Justice, a little deliberately.

"Perfectly."

The Attorney-General was speaking. His face was a fine, grave mask. The gilded minute-hand of the clock crept, under the rhythm of his mellow voice.

"Such unprecedented crimes as John Kingdom has been guilty of, such patient preparation, and such overwhelming success as attended the blows of this single human being upon all Europe, denotes either a superman or a mind unhinged. It may be that he is both. To everything, he pleads guilty."

One of the judges leaned forward.

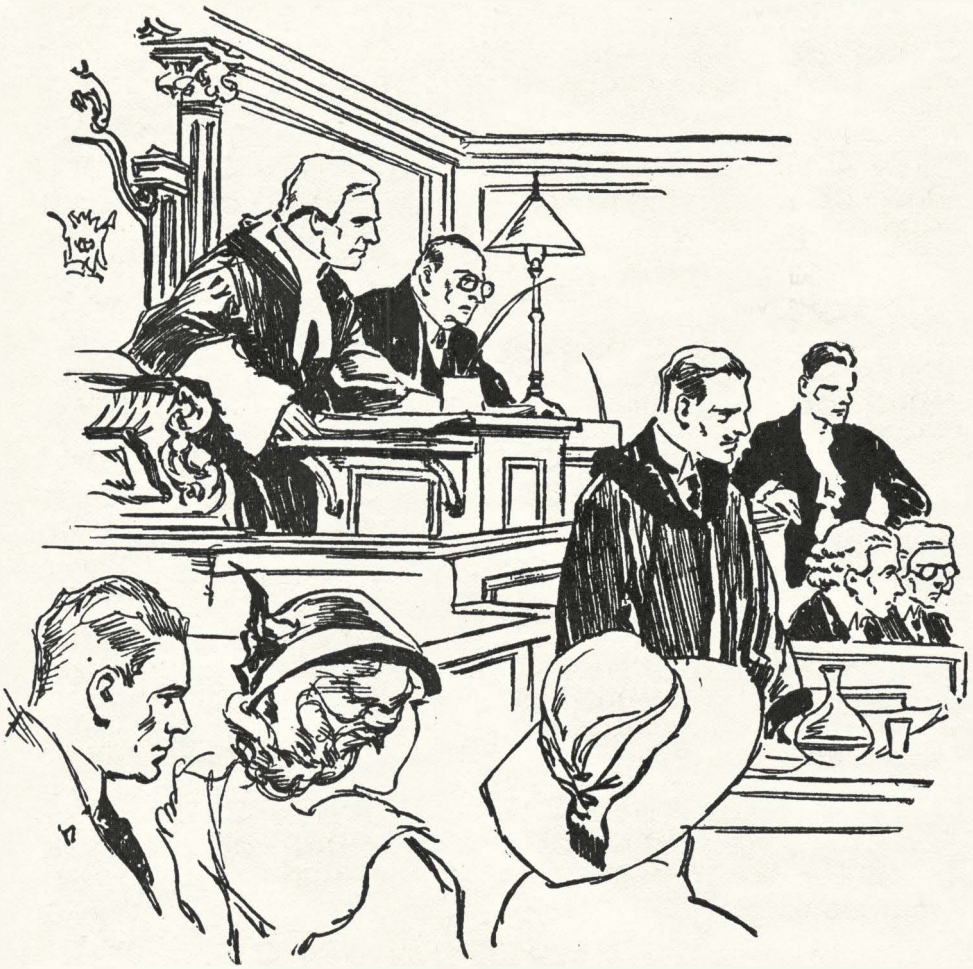
"Has he been examined? Some injury to his head has been mentioned."

"There is a medical report, My Lord."

The tension was telling. It seemed to come into the court, sharp and intolerable. Not pity, but something more awestruck, more shamed. It shattered all the grave and solemn ceremonial of the law. John Kingdom alone seemed unaware of it. He stood up, with that fleeting, inscrutable smile.

"I am fit to plead, My Lord. I plead guilty."

He saw their purpose. It amused him. They were old men, mostly, certainly as old as himself—those keen, serious fig-



ures on the dais. Cunningly, they were determined to find him insane.

He began to feel tired all at once. His head ached. If the people of the nations believed him insane, then he was defeated, and Jacob Anderthal, in his grave, had won. It was mad to reason that way. He heard a shout outside the open windows of the court. Heard his own name. No. They knew. . . .

The jury, John Kingdom perceived, had left the box. The court rose to its feet as the gray and scarlet filed from the bench. But there was none of the subdued hum of relaxed tension which usually came. There were one or two women there—ambassadors' wives perhaps—and one of them watched him with eyes that were lustrous because she was weeping quietly at what, to her, was intolerable cruelty.

It made him turn, with quick concern, to look at Crystal. She smiled. How brave she was!

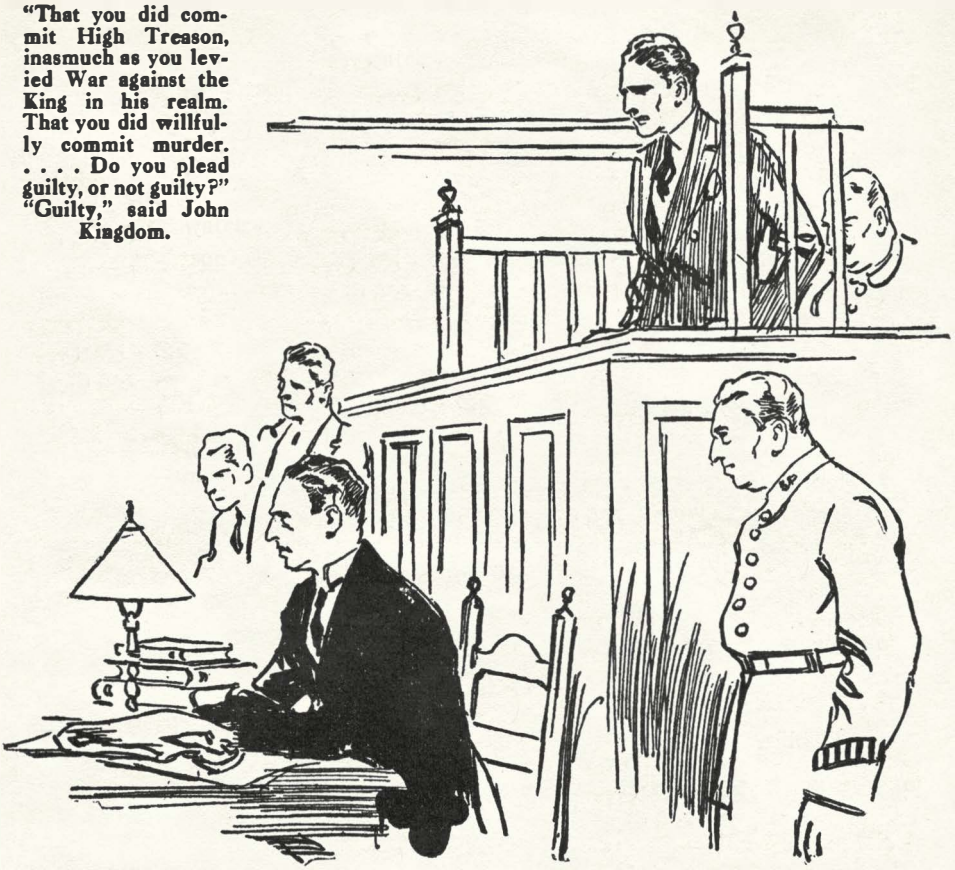
Kingdom asked for pencil and paper and wrote: *"Why is Raeburn not with you? You need him."* He gave it to one of his warders. He sat quietly, though his head throbbed now. It was so near to the end.

The jury was returning. He knew they wanted to save him. So did the judges. So did the statesmen. To save him, and save their faces. . . . Suddenly, John Kingdom pitied them. Men always tried to save their faces. They had been doing it for years, piling up their arms without hatred, but only in fear. Because the other man did likewise. . . .

"What is your verdict?"

"Guilty, but insane."

John Kingdom threw his glance over them. They were everyday Englishmen. They were men he had saved from horrors which had been unimagined till he showed them. And they knew it. On their way that morning some of them had passed the shattered and poisoned area he had created as their warning. They wanted to save him.



"That you did commit High Treason, inasmuch as you levied War against the King in his realm. That you did willfully commit murder. . . . . Do you plead guilty, or not guilty?" "Guilty," said John Kingdom.

A long sigh seemed to pass through the court. The tipstaff was moving forward with the judge's black cap. The solemn ritual must go on to its end. A woman cried out, and crushed the sound with her handkerchief.

John Kingdom lifted his head. He threw it back with the old arrogant gesture that yet had something infinitely moving in it.

"I am a murderer," he said. "Every man who kills his fellow human-beings is a murderer. But I had a purpose. I used your weapons. I showed you what war would be if you let it come. I showed you that the Creator has made it a thing too terrible, too futile for man, whom He made in His own image, ever to use again. I have left you with your country, your patriotism, unsoiled. The strongest and best among you will still keep power. You will be alive, not dead. I showed you!"

"Look to him!" said the judge sharply.

His head had fallen. One of the warders almost caught him. But the sound of his fall went through the court.

Sally Allison knelt lightly, and touched the stiffening hand with her lips. The doctor, mistaking her action, dropped a gentle hand to her.

"It's no use, I'm afraid," he said. "He's passed away."

"He hasn't," said Sally softly, "and he never will."

LARRY R EBURN and Dick Challis had come into the quiet room below the courts, whither John Kingdom was carried. Crystal did not need the warm grip of Larry's hand, though it was comforting. The four of them looked down at him. It was a very noble smile that lay about the lips of the dead madman. Perhaps he saw them all, those who were there and those who were not.

The crowd outside waited patiently. An airplane droned sleepily over. They did not look up. They were safe. Death had gone back into his shadows. They waited to see John Kingdom come forth a free man.

Larry touched Crystal and they went out into the sunshine.

THE END

Mr. Whimple Kidnaped

A plain citizen turns homicidal and deals with a gang of thugs.

By WILLIAM C. FORD

THE kidnaping industry in Mr. Whimple's town did not suffer by reason of the Deep Hollow humorously referred to as the Depression.

In fact, it prospered.

Of course, the boys had to use their heads. They didn't take folks like bankers or cloak-and-suit manufacturers any more. But they took prosperous people like red-ink manufacturers and auctioneers, so they always had money to go to the night-clubs, and enough to keep ahead of the sheriff.

Mr. Whimple was the sort of man who didn't like to read about people being kidnaped. He was more likely to turn to the inner pages, and read the deaths and financial news. He didn't like to learn of a gang of snatchers getting fifty grand just for letting a public-works commissioner or a chairman of the licensing board go. He didn't like the methods, and he didn't like the results. He was getting mad.

And then they went and took Mr. Whimple's rich Uncle Charley, the lottery-ticket printer, and kept him four days. They promised to deliver him back as good as new, and his folks took him and paid for him. But Uncle Charley never was the same man again. He seemed to have been kind of scared or something. And after that, sometimes when Uncle Charley was selling his lottery tickets on the street, he used to stop and give a kind of a jump as if he was startled or uneasy. Some folks thought it might possibly be because he was afraid of the police, but that of course was nonsense.

No, Uncle Charley had had the fear of the Lord put into him by being trussed up in a barn for twenty-four hours of his four days with adhesive tape over his eyes and mouth, and (by mistake) over half of his nose.

Always after that Uncle Charley pretended to be very poor, and never lent any of his relatives, including Mr. Whimple, so much as a thousand dollars, even. So Mr. Whimple was mad.

When Mr. Whimple gets mad, something generally comes of it; and this time it was plenty. Mr. Whimple had a plan to stop things. He made up his mind to let the kidnapers take him. And he determined at the same time to be so much of a Tartar that they'd be more or less sorry.

So he first went to a bank and hired a safety-deposit box, and fixed it so that when a man should come later with Mr. Whimple's key, and an order from him to get at the box, the clerk could step on a button which would ring a little bell in another room, and warn a man there to call the police.

Mr. Whimple selected a bank for all this that was just opposite a police-station, so it would be quite convenient for the officers. And he put a few things like pennies and Confederate money in the deposit-box, because he didn't want the gangsters to get much if the clerk didn't step on the button, or the police went to the wrong bank, or anything. He didn't have much else, anyway.

Then he hid the safety-deposit key in his shoe. It hurt a little, but the kidnapers would be sure to find it there sooner or later, and he always was willing to suffer a little in a good cause.

Mr. Whimple then gave out to all and sundry that he had come into money. To give it plausibility, he said he had been in secret partnership with a rum-runner, and had been the shore man who showed the necessary lights, and had the necessary interviews with the authorities. People would believe a simple story like that, when they wouldn't believe a tale of somebody dying, and leaving any money to anybody. Mr. Whimple displayed a roll made up of pieces of newspaper wrapped in a dollar bill, and he bought—on installments—an expensive foreign-make car which was formerly the property of an optimist. Then he waited. He didn't have long to wait. . . .

When they kidnaped Mr. Whimple, it was back of his house, at his garage, while he was putting up his car. They

were quite humane about it, and only hit him once when he didn't step lively.

They put the customary adhesive tape on him, and took him out in the country to a house owned by a man who never was any good.

Well, they searched Mr. Whimple, after they all got comfortably settled in the house—all but Mr. Whimple, that is. And the third time over, they found the key.

Then they removed the tape from his mouth for a few minutes while they had a little business talk. It seems they thought Mr. Whimple ought to be worth about twenty grand, which is twenty thousand dollars to those who can find time to say so many words. And Mr. Whimple didn't feel he was worth half that. And it ended up, as most arguments with Mr. Whimple end, by all agreeing on his figure of ten thousand; and Mr. Whimple told them the name of the bank where the key fitted, and arranged to write out an order giving Bugzy Butts, a gang member, the right to get at it. Mr. Whimple explained at the same time that he kept his entire fortune of twelve thousand dollars in the safety-deposit box, because he felt his creditors would get it if he put it in the bank in the ordinary way. And the boys told him the bankers would get it if the creditors didn't. That's just about what they would say, but it wasn't so. And the gang intended to get the extra two thousand too, and not mention it to Mr. Whimple.

The gang agreed to release him when Bugzy came back, and to shoot him all full of holes, if for any reason whatever Bugzy did not come back. Mr. Whimple felt Bugzy was more likely to come back under the present arrangement than he would be if the money was really there. But he didn't mention that point.

So bright and early that afternoon Mr. Butts sauntered into the bank. The clerks were all at work wetting their fingers and counting bills; and the customers were there in line explaining when they thought they might be able to pay something on their notes; and the president was in his little office telling a man that he couldn't lend him any money: everything was going just as usual.

Bugzy Butts stepped casually over to the safety-deposit department and presented his order and fidgeted round a bit; and the clerk stepped on his own foot a couple of times, and then stepped on the button; and the police across the street got into the wagon and blew the siren horn a bit and rode over. And the first thing Bugzy knew, just as he was starting to count the Confederate money in the box, a plain-clothes man hit up against him and stuck a gun in his ribs, and told him to stick 'em up high, and searched him, and took his two gats, and the knife, and the blackjack and everything.

And there were a lot of policemen and clerks and customers standing round, and the girl bookkeepers were screaming, and the president himself was running round in a circle asking everybody what the matter was. And if Bugzy had only waited till then, he could have walked right in and taken all the money behind the counter, and nobody would have noticed him at all. But he hadn't waited; and by coming early, he had been too late for that, so it was no use to think about it. And besides, he had other things to think about, because the police invited him across the street to the police-station, to get booked.

NOW we all know Bugzy had to be considered innocent until convicted. And this in spite of one look at his face. The police knew this, and they were trained to practice it. They knew that there is a tradition running something like, "Better a hundred guilty men should escape, than that one innocent

man should be convicted." There was also something about Santa Claus, and the Stork, in it; but I have forgotten that.

It seems also that a hundred kidnap victims should die rather than that a kidnaper should be roughly handled. But anyway, the police knew about the rule.

So they took Bugzy downstairs and worked on him for five or ten minutes, and then he suggested that they stop while he had a little chat with them.

And he talked. He mentioned names and places, and told them what and whom they could find, to feel sure of his truthfulness. And they all got in the wagon again, and got the horn going again to warn everybody, and started for the house where Mr. Butts assured them Mr. Whimple and the boys were waiting.

The boys heard the horn in plenty of time—it must have been a couple of blocks away; and they'd have got out all right too, only they got jammed in the door. And the police captured them all but their gallant leader, Killer Jake, who led everybody to the door, and got through before the jam, and got out in the yard—and then partly slowed up a bullet that went through his perivisceral cavity. So they got Jake too.

And as luck would have it, Killer Jake's bullet in the stomach proved fatal. But before he was gathered to his fathers and uncles, in the place where they were, he had a few days to sample the pangs that some of his victims had suffered during his long and successful career.

This was tough; however, it would have been tougher if the Killer had survived. Anyway, it gave him a chance to get used to what was coming in that other World which we all fondly trust awaited him. . . .

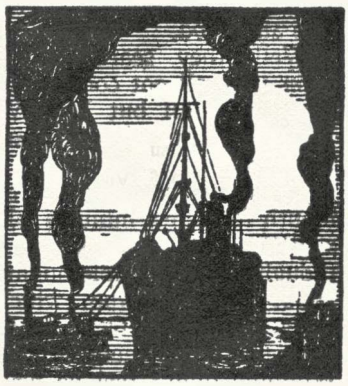
The police saved Mr. Whimple from the closet where the kidnapers had stored him for safekeeping, and they untied him; and Officer Flaherty took the tape off his face—and both eyebrows with it. Mr. Whimple thanked him and the other officers.

And the gang all got good long terms, and could thank no one but themselves.

Mr. Whimple now habitually carries firearms, and keeps his fingers crossed pretty carefully. Maybe the snatcher boys will tackle him again. And yet perhaps they will decide not to do so.

For Mr. Whimple is the original Rough on Rats.

REAL



MY story starts in New York in April, 1912. It is raining hard and a raw wind rips up the bay, so that the group huddled outside the barge office at the southern tip of Manhattan flings its arms and stamps to keep out the bite of the cold.

But I am not cold. I am glowing with excitement; for I am eighteen; and I have recently been graduated from copy boy to cub reporter ("leg man," in the trade) and the *Titanic* has sunk!

The *Titanic* has sunk; and somewhere off Ambrose Light the Cunarder *Carpathia* is coming in with the pitifully few survivors. Rumors, reports, contradictions thicken the storm-laden air that swirls about us: One officer was drinking champagne in the grand salon when she struck. . . . A famous passenger escaped in woman's clothes. . . . Astor, Frohman, Strauss, are dead.

This has been going on for three days. Now the *Carpathia* is due, and we are waiting for her. Four of us pull away and stand together: two photographers, another leg man and myself. We are working for the American Press Association, engaged at that moment in a struggle with a well-known news service for control of the photographic news business in New York—and the nation.

Over against the Battery sea-wall near the Aquarium two tug-boats are getting up steam.

We have engaged one of them; the opposition has engaged the other. But ours is the *John Dalzell*, flagship of the Dalzell Towing Company fleet, the fastest tug in New York Harbor; and she is costing us one hundred dollars an hour.

EXPERIENCES

Truth may not be stranger than fiction, but frequently it is fully as interesting. In this belief we offer each month prizes for the best five stories of Real Experience submitted. (For details of this prize contest, see page 3.) First an old-time newspaper man tells of his first exciting assignment—the arrival of the Titanic *survivors.*

Pictures of Disaster

By ODGERS GURNEE

Suddenly the dark door of the barge office breaks open and a flood of yellow light stabs into the unnatural gloom of the spring night. Fred Toombs, the man who beat the town on the assassination of McKinley, and who is in charge of us, comes out and walks slowly down the path of light. He talks out of the side of his mouth.

"Come on," he says. "She is hove to outside the light and won't come in until morning. We are to lie at Quarantine and grab her then."

The International men look at us calculatingly, but we affect nonchalance and stroll away. As we board the *John Dalzell,* we see them still looking at us, then back to the barge office, waiting for their own word to go.

The plan as Toombs outlines it as the tug rides slowly down the bay is for us to stand by in the narrows in the lee of the Staten Island shore just west of Quarantine. When the *Carpathia* stops to take on the Health Officer, we are to board her—and get the story. It is only a little after eight at night, so we settle down for a twelve-hour wait in the rain.

But we didn't wait long.

I was in the galley just about to begin work on two large pork-chops, when the captain raced down the companionway:

"Something's coming up the Narrows like a bat out of hell," he bellowed. "A Cunarder, by the look of her. It must be your boat."

Out we piled, slipping and sliding on the metal-plated companionways. From the pitching bow we strained to look into the curtain of rain. Something certainly was coming like a bat out of hell. It was a ghost-ship. Not a light showed save the hooded red and green at port and starboard, and high above them one white riding light. Every cabin, every port, was a void of deeper blackness against the smoky gray sweep of her hull and superstructure. White water curled away from her sharp prow.

"She'll never stop. She's going through," the captain bellowed again. He jerked a signal on his telegraph, and the engines below us grumbled into action.

One of the photographers gripped my elbow and yelled at me. "Up on the bridge!" We scrambled up the ladder-like way to the pilot-house door. Then we swung about and squatted there, peering up at the looming bulk of the racing mercy ship. The photographer handed me a flashlight gun, loaded. The rain beat against it, and I held my hat (it was a derby) above the powder.

FROM below a voice came up to us, charged with tension:

"My God, they'll run us down!"

From the pilot-house came the metallic clang of the telegraph again, and we gathered steerage way. The *Carpathia* burst suddenly out of the murk directly above us and the photographer screamed:

"Now!"

I pulled the flash. In the bright puff of light I saw the white letters on her quarter. It was the *Carpathia.* Then she had passed and was gone. My left hand hurt and I looked at it. There was an angry red welt below the thumb, and a white blister was beginning to pouch

out. I had burned myself with the flash-powder. I looked at my hat. There was nothing left of it but the rim.

We discovered later, of course, that Cunard officials had received permission to run directly to the dock on the plea that immediate medical attention was necessary for many of the rescued. I believe the *Carpathia* was the first and only passenger-ship to pass Quarantine, in the history of the port. But we had no time for conjecture as she vanished up channel on that rainy April night. The *John Dalzell*, heeled far over in the wash from the liner's wake, fought about and set out to catch her.

Toombs handed me a customhouse pass and one hundred dollars in bills.

"Get aboard her," he directed, "and buy pictures. Somebody must have made snapshots of the rescues."

We caught the *Carpathia* somewhere off Pier 10 as she slowed for the tugs to warp her into the Cunard docks at Fourteenth Street. On her starboard side several of the *Titanic's* lifeboats hung overside, and one of them was near a newly opened cargo port.

"Get up to that," Toombs told the captain. To me he said:

"Get set."

The river was swarming with small craft. The duly commissioned tugs which would snub the liner into her berth were puffing up. We ran for it. Some strong-armed unknown of the crew boosted me toward the gunwale of the *Titanic* lifeboat. I grabbed and swung up. I landed, praise be, inside, and scrambling to the stern sheets, was able to make the open port. I was the first newspaper man on board the *Carpathia!*

THE corridors on the upper decks were jammed with people, most of them definitely and hurriedly going somewhere. It was next to impossible to speak with them without fear of detection. I tried the decks.

For the next thirty minutes I must have buttonholed six hundred members of the *Carpathia* passenger-list. We were in the dock by that time. Other newsmen probably were aboard. And worst of all, the rescued were being rounded up for brief examination and disembarkation—either to hospitals or into the hands of waiting friends and relatives.

But in that darkest hour I found the little old lady. She was comfortably plump, with graying hair and a sparkle in her eye. She spoke with a slow drawl.

Yes, she said complacently, she had taken some lovely pictures. Thrilling pictures.

I almost swooned. My voice trembled as I offered her sixty dollars in cash for the films and promised forty more if they turned out right. My heart skipped more than one beat as I waited for her answer.

"They're in my bag," she said, and my heart turned completely over. "I think it's still in my cabin."

It was. We broke some sort of record getting there. She stripped open the camera, and I sealed the roll of films. I gave her sixty dollars, my name and address. She gave me hers. There was no time lost on the amenities. I raced for the gangplank, and a plain-clothes man grabbed me.

I had the films in one hand and the customhouse pass in the other. I waved both at him. "Press," I snapped.

"Get the hell outa here," he growled. But I didn't need any advice. I was running like a taxicab.

OUR office was a bedlam. Only a few sets of plates had come in and most of them were blanks. The only one that looked like anything at all was the stark side of the *Carpathia* with the white letters of her name that had caused me to lose my first derby hat.

I laid my treasure on the photo-manager's desk.

"Here's the only roll of film taken aboard the *Carpathia,*" I said; and try as I might, I couldn't keep my voice from breaking and going off toward the zodiac in a soprano squeak.

A waiting dark-room man grabbed the roll and sped away. The manager looked at my hand. "Hurt?" he asked.

I had expected him to fall on my neck. "No," I said stiffly. He grinned. "Okay. Beat it back and try to get some good human-interest stuff for captions. Pick up Duff and Jackson in the saloon on the corner right in front of the Cunard pier. They'll be coming in and out."

It was no task to find the saloon. As I recall it now, it was shaped like a flatiron with entrances at either side of the tip, and it blared with light and comfort, an oasis in a desert of wet cobblestones and drab curtains of rain. Inside, it was as jammed as a subway train at rush hour.

I saw a fine-looking old man with both hands bandaged from fingertip to elbow. He was a Philadelphia millionaire, and

he had no money and couldn't write a check. Somebody bought him a drink. Some one else rushed in and carried out a glass of brandy. It was for a seventeen-year-old Irish girl who had started over third-class with seven of her family. She was the only one left.

SOON I found Toombs and reported to him. I wanted to tell him of my great luck. But he cut me short and signaled to one of our photographers.

"Just got a tip," he said, "that they are taking the most seriously injured off from a pier at the south end of this string and loading them on Wanamaker and Gimbel trucks to get 'em to hospitals. But be careful; they won't allow any flashlights taken inside the piers."

We reconnoitered the south pier. Department-store trucks were taking out loads of injured—and a large policeman was guarding the door. The camera-man halted me in a convenient shadow.

"I've got a little one in my inside coat pocket," he said. He handed me a can of flashlight powder and a flash-pan.

"Hide these," he said. "We can get by the cop with our passes. But—we can only get one shot before we are thrown out."

We got past the cop. Inside the pier we found a huddle of miscellaneous cargo—boxes, bags, cartons. Along the right wall ran a series of steam-pipes like an organ on its side. Ten feet from the door, and back in the shadows, we were out of the policeman's line of vision.

We clambered up on a pile of boxes and squatted against the steam pipes—fortunately, cold. The electric bulbs cast a greenish light overhead.

The camera-man whispered hoarsely over his shoulder: "I've got it set for guess focus at fifteen feet. Don't pull that flash till I say so."

I started to answer—and stopped. The policeman had moved. He was standing directly in the wide doorway, but his back was toward us. He had taken off the heavy raincoat and was holding it in the crook of one arm. We crouched lower, afraid to breathe.

And then the camera-man choked, and I looked away from the cop and down the long tunnel of the pier shed.

Twenty, perhaps thirty yards away, three people were walking slowly toward us, two women and a tall, slim youth—Vincent Astor, Mrs. John Jacob Astor and her sister Katherine Force!

It was the one big picture of the whole story—this greatest news-story of its time. That was all the camera-man and I could think of then. It never occurred to us what consequences a totally unexpected flash of powder might mean just then. Dimly, in the back of our minds, we knew that Mrs. Astor had just lost her gallant husband at the end of a long European honeymoon. We knew an heir to the Astor fortunes was soon to be born. But all of that was blotted out in the fever of journalism's first commandment: "Get the story."

They came closer. I had my eyes riveted on a spot fifteen feet ahead of us. I half raised the flash-pan. Almost there—three more steps, two more—

Something incredibly wet and cold and heavy lashed against my face and wrapped around my head. I felt the camera-man's body slide forward, overbalance and fall. I crashed after him. A thick hand twisted into my collar and whirled me, breathless, against the boxes.

I heard a woman gasp, another woman speak reassuringly—and then I heard the cop. He had seen us in time to hurl his raincoat at us and knock us flat. Then he kicked us—literally—into the street.

When we picked ourselves up, Mrs. Astor was gone.

I HAD still my great triumph of the *Carpathia* films, and so though I was dog-tired, I was in high spirits when we were relieved and ordered back to the office. I grinned happily when I faced the boss at the photo desk.

He grinned too.

"Who sold you those films?" he asked.

I began to fumble through my pockets.

"Her name begins with a *W*," I said, "and she lives somewhere in Cleveland, Ohio. But it doesn't matter, because I only gave her sixty bucks, and she'll be in tomorrow for forty more."

He cocked an eyebrow. "Yeah?" he said. "Look!"

He was holding out a series of limp prints. I riffled them eagerly. They were lovely pictures—one might even have called them thrilling. But they made me sick. They were winter scenes in Switzerland.

The final installment of "The Voyage of the Monarch," announced for this issue, has been postponed.

Death Rides the

The vividly told story of a desperate race to save a man bent on suicide.

I FIRST met the man whom I will call Jim Kenny through Dick Strathmore, who was one of his oldest friends. Jim was at his financial peak at that time, and was making big money almost hourly. For fifteen years he had been a bond salesman for a good firm; and for the last ten years of his employment with them had covered the territory of the District and surrounding country, where he had developed a tremendous following. He was a "plunger" by nature, and ultimately left his firm to open an office of his own and operate independently. When Dick introduced me to him, Jim had been in business for two years.

At this time I was a junior officer of one of the local banks. My rise to executive capacity had been due to a discovery I had made to the effect that "the best way to sell is to listen." Following this policy, I lent an attentive ear to everyone, and gathered hundreds of thousands of dollars in new deposits for my bank.

The minute I met Jim, I sized him up as a good prospect and went into action. The net result was that Jim became one of our star depositors as well as an enthusiastic booster. We saw a good deal of each other, and I visited his home on many occasions, since his wife and children took quite a liking to me, and I to them. They were a happy family.

Jim managed to get wind of the first market crash in 1929, but the second break caught him badly. One car vanished from the Kenny garage.

During the following year he lost his joviality and his clothes became a little threadbare.

The summer of 1931 found him constantly morose and a thorough pessimist. He seemed to have lost his grip completely, and on three occasions I had to phone him on overdrafts. He made them good promptly, but in September our loan department had to sell his collateral to save their skins.

Two weeks later he came into my office looking emaciated and beaten, and announced to me that he had sold everything he possessed except his remaining car, had cleared his debts and closed his office, and was facing the future with a little over one hundred dollars and no job.

During the next two months he tried diligently to locate a position, but black panic had settled everywhere and openings seemed to be non-existent. I did my best to obtain something for him, and failing that, dug into my meager bank balance in an effort to keep his head above water. Daily he grew more haggard in appearance, and developed such an air of bitterness that his friends began to dodge him.

It was in the early part of November that my secretary announced him one morning. He walked in like an old man in a daze, and his hand was cold and lifeless when I shook it. He dropped into a chair and stared fixedly at me while he talked in a weary monotone.

"Dugald, boy, I want you to listen to me for a few minutes." He spoke slowly and seemed to have trouble in picking his words. "I'm coming to you because you're the only one of my so-called friends who hasn't changed since I lost out. I know I can trust you."

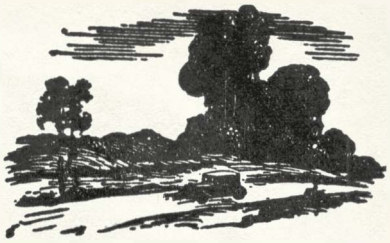
"Shoot, old man," I told him. "What's the trouble?"

"I'm through, Dugald, I'm through.... There's no use for me to try to fight the times any longer, and I'm not going to borrow any more money when I doubt if I can ever pay it back. Times are going to be even worse than this for a long time to come—so where do I fit into the picture?" He leaned forward tensely, and his voice dropped to a lower key. "Listen, Dugald: I love my family; they aren't going to suffer—I'm insured for one hundred thousand dollars!"

"Well?" I queried.

His rigid eyes remained focused on me as he continued: "I'm trusting you to keep quiet, Dugald. There's no suicide clause in that insurance policy, and I've got to thinking about that little country place I still have up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. With the car in the garage and the motor running, it would all end

Running-board



By DUGALD MACUISDEAN

peacefully, and at the same time look like an accident. I've planned it all out carefully, and I want to tell you about it so you'll respect my reasons, and at the same time ask you to look out for Dorothy and the kids and see that the insurance money is put into Government bonds only."

"You're crazy, Jim," I told him bluntly. "You know darn' well I'd do all I could for your family, but it isn't going to be necessary. In the first place, you can borrow on your insurance and also sell the Blue Ridge cottage."

He shook his head wearily. "I've got a mortgage on the cottage greater than the present value of the property, and I borrowed on the policies up to the limit when I settled my business."

I did my utmost to change his attitude of surrender, and finally he began to smile a bit and agreed to think things over again. To play safe, I made him promise to take no action whatever until he had talked to me again. After a moment's hesitation he gave me his promise, and I knew he would keep his word. With that he left, and I plunged into the routine of a busy day.

I remember distinctly noticing that it was thirteen minutes past three when I answered my phone that afternoon to hear Jim's voice.

"I'm keeping my promise, Dugald, but I am sorry I have to trick you. I said I'd let you know before I took any action, and I'm keeping my word. But I know there isn't any other way out, so I just want to say good-by to you."

"Now, wait a minute, Jim—" I started to argue, but he cut in quickly:

"It's too late, Dugald; you can't stop me. Good luck to you, and thanks!"

"But listen—" And then I stopped, for Jim had hung up.

It was sixteen minutes past three now, and I thought feverishly. What was to be done? One just *can't* let a man proceed with self-destruction without committing a moral crime. I decided on pursuit, and realized I would need help. Because of his dependability and mutual friendship, Dick Strathmore came into my mind, so I grabbed the receiver.

"Trace that call I just received," I ordered. "I'm pretty certain it was long distance, and I want to know what town it came from. And get me Mr. Strathmore of Lowndes and Willis."

I called my secretary and gave her rapid-fire instructions about cleaning up my desk for the afternoon. Then I dashed into the chief's office and blurted a hurried request to leave, saying that I would explain in the morning. He grinned and waved me out.

Back in my office the phone was ringing, and I found Dick on the line.

"Meet me outside your office in ten minutes," I told him. "I'll be driving, and don't let anything at all stop you. I'll explain later."

"Okay," Dick said, and rang off.

I pulled on my coat; the phone rang again as I grabbed my hat.

"That call came from Blankburg," said the operator.

"Thanks," I yelled, and dashed for the door with a groan. Blankburg was *sixty-eight* miles from Washington, and only *fourteen* miles from Jim's cottage!

AS I barged out of the bank door, the clock hands pointed to twenty-four minutes past three. Eight minutes had passed since Jim had hung up!

I reached the garage at a trot and had my car down the ramp and headed for Dick's office in record time. He was waiting for me, and showed his caliber by not asking for any explanation while we ducked through the city traffic. Once out on the open road, I slapped the accelerator to the floor-board and the car tore along with motor snarling.

I checked the dash and saw that we'd have to stop in Frederick for gas. Otherwise everything seemed to be in order, so I settled down behind the wheel and told Dick the whole story.

"Can we possibly get there in time?" he asked when I was through.

"There's a chance," I answered. "Jim left the phone at Blankburg at three-

sixteen. He probably left the town immediately, so we can figure his car getting under way by three-twenty. It's about seven miles along the road from there to where the dirt road branches off to the cottage. He'd take ten minutes to cover the seven miles, so that makes it three-thirty. The cottage road from there on is a pretty bad one, and the seven miles he has to cover on it would take around a half-hour. That makes it four o'clock, and even driving like blazes we can't get there before five-thirty. We still have a chance in spite of all that, however.

"Remember that Jim has no idea of our acting so quickly. He knows that his cottage is remote and isolated. He knows that it would be useless for me to attempt to get the Blankburg police to stop him, for there are twenty some cottages like his that are reached by the same dirt road, and they would have a real job finding him in time. He also knows that the neighboring cottages are used only in summer just like his. Consequently I can get no help by phoning neighbors. So I figure that he will be in no hurry, and will probably go into the house before finishing things in the garage. A man who is about to rub out his life completely will linger over the last minutes, for he is leaving things that are certain for things of which none of us are really sure. Then, after Jim has prepared the scene in the garage, the carbon monoxide would take about a half-hour to be effective."

"So we do have a chance," said Dick.

"Some," I grunted—and nearly killed both of us as I skinned between two cars.

From then on neither of us said a word. I drove as never before or since, and kept the needle averaging over sixty. The road seemed to stretch ahead endlessly, and Death did seem to be riding on the running-board. But the snarl of the motor was as sweet as the sound of a battle-cry to warriors, and the gods were clearing the way for us.

THE pause for gas gave us a moment to stretch our legs. I looked at my watch fearfully, but was pleasantly surprised to see it was only four twenty-seven. We had come through Washington traffic and covered the forty-four miles in fifty-seven minutes!

The dusk was gathering slowly when we left the town seven minutes later. A cold, empty feeling centered in my stomach and stayed there. The problem of darkness was worrying me, for I had been to Jim's place only twice, and wasn't at all sure about recognizing the little dirt road to his house. So once again the accelerator found the floor, and we covered the twenty-four miles to Blankburg in twenty-six minutes! My watch showed five o'clock exactly, when we reached the town line.

Since I was worried about spotting the dirt road, the next seven miles along the highway seemed like seventy miles. Throwing caution to the winds, we took the ruts and gullies of the narrow road at top speed. The dusk was deepening quickly now, and the nearness of the impending scene enveloped us with a clammy touch. Then Jim's house appeared, and we swung up the drive with screaming tires, coming to a stop fifty feet from the garage. I switched off the motor.

The unaccustomed silence swooped down on us and for a moment neither of us moved. Then as our ears grew attuned to the quiet, a deadly sound came throbbing through the silence from the garage:

It was the muffled sound of a roaring motor!

Running to the garage doors, we found the lock to be on the outside. The doors held tight, however, for Jim had evidently slipped a catch lock inside. We combined our strength and pulled furiously—and just when muscles seemed ready to break, the door burst open and we staggered back. Dick ran to the other door, unlatched it and threw it open, and then reeled back, coughing.

"Hold your breath when you go in," I cautioned him. "I'm going to run in and shut off the motor and release the brake. You follow on the other side of the car and push for all you're worth. The car's on a slight incline and should roll out."

We both went into immediate action, and the plan worked smoothly. I found a flashlight in the pocket of the car and turned it on Jim's face. He looked ghastly—*but he was breathing.*

We straightened him up and hauled him out of the car. Holding him between us, we walked through the gloaming up and down the driveway. Within ten minutes he was conscious and began to fret and protest like a little child awakened from a dream-thronged sleep.

We had arrived in time. . . .

Jim's struggle back to health and sanity is another story, but it has a happy ending. With his wife and children he now has his home in another city, where he is branch manager for his old firm.

The Waterspout

He was in an observation balloon towed by a cruiser when the waterspout hit them.

By FLIGHT LIEUT. MELVILLE STAPLES

ON the morning of April 7th, 1918, I was seated at my desk filling in report sheets in a suburb of Alexandria, Egypt, at the headquarters of the Royal Flying Corps, 55th Balloon Section, to which I was attached.

Our chief task was escorting allied convoys on Mediterranean waters.

Strangely, it was easy—from the air—to spot planted mines of the enemy.

A sharp knock at the door announced my batman. "Message from Headquarters, sir." I read the message hurriedly: *"Proceed to sea at once. Escort large British convoy to harbor."*

Dressing as I ran, I soon arrived at the balloon-field where men were already assembled, with the bag untoggled from its moorings. The observation balloon, the Avion, had been deflated, tested with air, then reinflated with fresh gas, and tightened up with extra "juice" from the nursery balloons. The boys ran the balloon to the wharf, where the fast, light cruiser H. M. S. *Ladybird* was waiting. The towing cable was quickly attached to the gas bag.

My companion, Captain Boyle, and I climbed into the observer's basket, and the order, "Hand over hand let up," was given. The balloon was soon a hundred feet clear of the ship's funnels, and ready for the ascent. We had contact by telephone with the ship below, where the operator sat in an observation-turret on the bridge.

We ascended to one thousand feet, but visibility was only fair. At two thousand feet visibility was better. I phoned the O.K. down to the bridge. The captain of the *Ladybird*, below, gave the order, "Full speed ahead." With a few jerks of the swaying basket, the balloon turned, became stabilized, and was soon being dragged through the air, headed for the open sea at a twenty-two-knot clip.

All was going fine when suddenly Boyle clutched my arm and pointed out to sea. A dark, rough patch appeared on the surface of the water, and in a twinkling, a huge area became turbulent and white-capped. A sigh escaped the Avion as a sharp gust of wind whistled through the metal rings of the handling guys. A loose halyard lashed out at the big sausage-shaped bag overhead with an ominous crackle. We decided to try a three-thousand-foot altitude, in hope of getting away from the unsettled level.

The white-capped area out to sea was fast approaching. The wind overhead dropped, and a deathlike stillness settled about us.

The *Ladybird* looked like a toy motorboat from our lofty perch, as she steamed full speed ahead, dragging us behind at nearly twenty-five knots. A moment later a white streak leaped from the rough patch of water, straight up, and high into the blue vault of the sky. Only then did we realize that we were being sucked into the vortex of a tremendous waterspout! Fully three thousand feet in the air, and tethered to the mother ship by a thin strand of wire cable, we were helpless.

A heavy lurch of the balloon flung Boyle and me to the floor of the wicker basket. Half stunned, I staggered to my feet. Boyle, lying on the floor, was struggling to free himself from a tangle of parachute and harness. In some manner the rip-cord of his 'chute had caught in the basket rigging and tripped the packed parachute on his back. Our

predicament was serious; telephone communication was impossible through the roar about us. Driven by a ninety-mile gale, the stinging spray beat an eerie tattoo upon the flimsy bag overhead.

Boyle kicked partly free of the tangled parachute, and gained his feet beside me. Drawing his knife, he slashed the parachute free of his legs. He turned to shout something, but his cheeks bulged as the air-blast entered his mouth. No human sound reached me. The frenzied gyrations of the basket were sickening. Suddenly the bottom seemed to fall out of our flimsy craft, and she nosed straight toward the foaming water below. We lay face down, bruised from head to foot, clinging for life itself to the guys.

We whirled around the *Ladybird* in a hurricane of flight. The funnels of the ship loomed through the driving mist.

A moment later a hot blast seared my face. Choking fumes clogged my lungs. By a miracle we missed funnels and super-structure. Then a heavy lurch swept the basket on past the *Ladybird,* and the ninety-foot bag hit the waves in a cloud of spray. Above the din of rending fabric I heard Boyle yell at me to jump. The basket was swinging clear, about ten feet from the waves. Grasping the rip-cord, I bailed out head-first.

From the seething water, I saw Boyle trying to get clear of the basket. Tugging at the rip-cord, I tried desperately to tear the panel out of the bag, but the effort was futile. The balloon whirled in the outer edge of the waterspout, dragging me through the water. Half drowned, I looked up to see Boyle climb to the top of the basket. As he mounted the edge, the nose of the big bag flipped out of the water, and began to rise. Boyle jumped when about twenty feet from the water.

AS the bag rose I was spun around in the water. After seeming ages, I dropped clear, and I felt the last thread of cord slip through my numbed fingers. The balloon sailed over my head. With a whiplike crack the steel cable which tethered her to the *Ladybird* broke. The sudden jerk of the cable pulled rigging, and basket which we had just vacated, free of the gas-bag. It fell with a mighty splash beside me. Freed of her burden, the Avion mounted high, and sailed rapidly out of sight.

I struggled to the basket bobbing on the waves and grasped a trailing halyard. If I could only hang on till help came!

I looked over the choppy whitecaps. Boyle was nowhere in sight.

Suddenly a sound wafted to my ears; surely that was a human voice. I turned my head. Through the fog of near-unconsciousness I saw a small-boat. The boat approached rapidly. Husky arms knotted and strained at the flashing oars. My grasp relaxed—I slumped deeper.

MY next sensation was of delicious comfort. I could feel the vibration of powerful motors throbbing in the ship's engine-room below. Lying flat on the deck of the *Ladybird,* my eyes opened to gaze into anxious friendly faces.

I tried to speak. "Where—Boyle?" The words came between sobbing gasps as starved lungs sucked in deep drafts of life-giving air. "Never mind just now, old man," some one said. "We picked him up too; he's fine!" I heaved a sigh; Boyle, my comrade of many a flight, was safe. A mug of rum was pressed to my lips, and the stuff slid down my throat like liquid fire.

More rum followed at intervals. In a short time I was on my feet, and feeling fine with revived energy. I changed into dry clothes, and hunted up Boyle. He was up on the bridge with Captain Hanning-Lee, commander of the *Ladybird.*

We scanned the horizon for the Avion, but she was nowhere in sight; we felt that we had lost a faithful friend. At the dock, however, our hopes for the Avion were revived. It had been reported that she had sailed high over Alexandria, and had come to rest on a fresh-water lake about four miles away.

Later that evening an officer and two men were dispatched to deflate the Avion, and retrieve the envelope. The officer found her riding on the calm surface of the lake. A rowboat was pushed out to her. The officer, Lieutenant Bullock, slashed her bulging sides with a heavy knife, and let out the remaining gas. But while he was busy, one of the natives lighted a cigarette. In a moment the officer and natives were enveloped in a sheet of flame; the highly inflammable hydrogen gas had been ignited. In a twinkling the Avion was no more.

Bullock dived from the boat, and swam some distance under water. He managed to escape with severe burns. Both natives died in the Alexandria Hospital two days later.

So the old Avion went out with a villainous back-lash, after her tribulations in the waterspout.

Spearing A Jaguar

The adventures of a man who has made a hobby of fighting the South American tiger with primitive weapons.

By SASCHA SIEMEL

IT is a long way from the shores of the Baltic to Buenos Aires, but I had stowed away on a tramp and found a job in that South American city before I was twenty. In a few years I found myself traveling about in Paraguay and Bolivia on horseback, repairing pistols, rifles, sewing-machines, and the sugar-cane presses of the ranchers for a living; and hunting the South American tiger—Americans call it the jaguar—for sport.

The ranchers always made me welcome—for two reasons: I put all their machinery in good working order, and afterward killed off a few of the big cats, which devour in a year between sixty and seventy cattle apiece. The South American *tigre* is as large as a medium-sized Bengal tiger, and almost as strong. He thinks nothing of leaping upon a steer, clamping his powerful jaws onto the back of the neck, gripping the animal's nostrils with one fore-paw, bending the head back until the steer falls, cutting the jugular vein, and dragging the carcass a couple of hundred yards. The jaguar, as powerful as he is quick, is the most dreaded animal of the jungle. So far as I can learn, I am the only white man who has mastered the art of killing the jaguar single-handed with a spear. In all, I have destroyed 119 of the big cats, ninety-five of them with a rifle, seventeen with the spear, and seven with bow-and-arrow and spear combined. The largest measured nine feet in length, and weighed three hundred and fifty pounds; many weighed more than three hundred pounds. It is the most exciting form of hunting you can imagine.

An Indian who later lost his life, Joaquim, of the Guató tribe, taught me how to use the spear. He killed thirty-nine jaguars with this primitive weapon; the fortieth got him. On my first hunt with this Indian, we paddled up the Paraguay River early one morning in a dug-out canoe, while the dogs tried on shore to pick up the trail of a *tigre.* (They usually come down to drink during the night.) Soon my six dogs rushed off, pell-mell, on a fresh scent. Joaquim and I ran the canoe ashore, leaped out and followed the pack at a run.

The dogs, we found, had cornered His Majesty in a clump of trees on the opposite side of a clearing.

Grasping his seven-foot spear, Joaquim approached the clump of small trees; I stood off to one side, taking in the details. The Indian made no sound, spoke no word of encouragement to the dogs. At a distance of perhaps a dozen feet from his quarry he halted; it was then the jaguar's move. When he did not make it, Joaquim's foot shot out, and a flutter of leaves and earth were catapulted into the animal's face. This was an insult which no self-respecting jaguar could overlook. With a quick, spitting cough, he leaped for the Indian's throat.

Joaquim was not at all disconcerted; in fact, this was exactly the move he wanted the jaguar to make. He stood there, feet planted firmly, knees slightly bent to take up the shock of the three-hundred-pound beast. His right foot was thrust a little forward, left foot back, left hand gripping the spear-shaft back toward the end, right hand three feet

below the spear point—far enough back to escape the slashing forepaws. With a calmness born of long practice, he pointed the spear toward the jaguar's breast.

The aim was a little high, and it caught the jungle beast in the windpipe. Immediately the rear end of the spear shaft was grounded to check the momentum of the heavy body. At the same instant the *tigre,* wheezing and snarling, reached for the cause of his suffering, and tried to pull it out of his burning chest. He reared backward, and at that instant the Indian followed up his advantage, thrust the spear deeper, and literally pushed the jaguar over on his back. The wounded animal's four feet, equipped with claws as sharp as knives, continued to swish through the air, but the Indian kept out of reach. For half a minute they wrestled and swayed. Then, with the quickness of lightning, the spearmaster withdrew his weapon and plunged it into the jaguar's heart. As a final gesture, Joaquim withdrew the spear, leaped upon the vanquished beast, struck himself on the bare chest with an open palm, and gave vent to a full-throated cry of victory.

By that time the reaction, so far as I was concerned, had set in, and I was trembling with the excitement and nearness of it all. Moreover, I was thrilled as I had never been thrilled before. Here was a new sport! If an Indian could kill a *tigre* with a spear, why couldn't a white man? I was as strong and as agile as Joaquim; my courage had stood the test on other occasions. All I needed was practice—and the Indian proceeded to supply plenty of that. For six weeks we hunted the jaguar with spears, together. On two occasions Joaquim had to come to my assistance. At last came the day when he pronounced me ready to fight the jaguar alone.

It would be foolish, Joaquim explained, to jab at a crouching *tigre* with a spear; he would be too quick for me, brush it aside as he would a bush, and leap at my throat. Nor could I hurl the spear, as I would a javelin; unless it penetrated a vital spot, the jaguar would be upon me before I could launch a second lance. Moreover, no two animals could be expected to act the same; seven out of ten would climb a tree when pursued by the dogs; the other three would make a stand on the ground. The hunter's problem is to guess from his actions what line of attack a jaguar is going to take, and to raise his spear in a fraction of a second to meet the spring of one, or lower it to stop the rush of another.

I shall never forget the first jaguar I encountered, single-handed, with only a spear for a weapon. I heard him calling his mate at night along the upper reaches of the Paraguay River. He was within half a mile of my house-boat. In the morning the dogs soon picked up his trail, and I started running at top speed in their direction. For it is essential that the hunter get to the spot before a young and reckless dog is killed by the jaguar. It was impossible to see more than ten feet in any direction; thorn bushes tore at my clothing. I heard the beast roar, and praying that the dogs would keep out of reach of his claws, I advanced as speedily as the dense underbrush would permit. From the farther side of a clearing came a low-pitched growl. The vibrations seemed to fill the forest near by, and to come from several directions at once. I peered into the underbrush, but a jaguar with the sun shining on his black-and-gold spots cannot readily be distinguished from any other spots made by the sun shining through the trees.

Meanwhile, the jaguar did not seem to be worried; apparently he thought the dogs were a new species of wild pig. For the *tigre* doesn't differentiate between the grunt of his only real enemy, the wild pig (peccary), and the fierce barking of a hound. He does not realize that a man with a spear is dangerous.

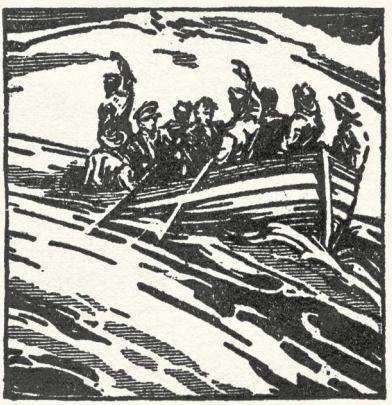
AT this stage I must admit there was a curious hollow feeling at the pit of my stomach. For after all I was alone in the jungle, with only a new and comparatively untried weapon for protection. But I couldn't delay matters; he might kill one of the dogs. So I drew close, until I could actually hear our quarry pant, like a tired or overheated dog. Carefully I parted the bushes with my spear; the jaguar snarled. He was not more than ten or twelve feet away, according to the sound. The dogs surrounded him, and their barking increased as I came on the scene. Then their tone changed, and they began to whimper eagerly, like 'coon dogs when the treed animal seems about to make some desperate move. For some unknown reason—instinct, perhaps—I stood firm. And it was well that I did. For the next instant the arched back of the jungle beast came tearing through the foliage, accompanied by a hoarse cough. He was

so close that his breath was blown directly in my face.

He was on me almost before I knew it. There was a thud and a jar as he impaled himself on my spear. His claws scraped upon the shaft. His weight (almost three hundred pounds) and the momentum of his spring brought me to one knee. Luckily for me there were no small trees against which he could obtain a foothold. He reared back, trying to disengage the weapon.

This was my opportunity, and I gave him a shove that toppled him over. Jerking the spear free, I ran farther back into the clearing, and turned to face the charging brute. Maddened by pain, he sprang in a high, graceful arc. I met him with the spear, held firmly, and the end of the shaft was driven into the ground by the impact. I wheeled, slipped, and struggled for a footing; by some miracle I kept out of the way of those murderous claws. In a last desperate effort, I pinned him to the ground and held him there until a final quiver passed through the huge cat's frame. I leaped upon the carcass and gave a yell of triumph that would have startled an Apache Indian. I had proved, not only that I was an apt pupil, but that Joaquim, of the Guató tribe, was an excellent teacher.

A Flag of Distress



A noted sailor-author's weird experience on a lonely island.

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

TRISTAN D' ACUNHA lies remote from shipping routes, in the South Atlantic, and until a great steamship line comparatively recently undertook to have a vessel pass that way at half-yearly intervals, the islanders rarely had contact with the outside world.

It was after a succession of foul winds which had driven us out of our course, bound home around Cape Horn, that we sighted the bleak islands while threshing stubbornly against a persistent headwind that had already lengthened our passage to perilously near the unprofitable point, and the captain was surly.

Then the islands, and we regarded them indifferently—until the mate declared that he saw flying from a peak a signal of distress. It takes a hard-bitten mariner to ignore a signal of distress at any time, and particularly when flown from a rock in midocean whose people may starve or die of disease, and the world be none the wiser—or perhaps the sorrier.

Our skipper was not especially hard-bitten, though his voyage promised to bring him small nourishment; and what was more to the point, our supply of potatoes was long finished, and Tristan grew potatoes.

"All right, Mister, we'll tack ship and stand up for the island," said the skipper.

Anybody who has sailed in deep-water ships knows what beating means. We tacked ship, and when the islands were dim on the horizon we tacked again. Then it was dark. No seaman in his senses approaches Tristan in the dark if he knows it. We hove-to until dawn, then beat all day, reached near enough to see an ancient boat putting out to us, saw her turn and run back as a squall hurtled down and forced us off, and ran up a flag to show the boatmen that we would stand by. They waved frantically.

"Something serious, sir!" the mate remarked as the skipper lowered his telescope and gave the order to heave-to again.

Through another night we lay-to, and through another day we thrashed stubbornly toward the island. Toward night, the boat put out again, and when darkness enveloped the sea, she was still head-

ing for us, her people gesticulating imploringly.

"Prepare surgical gear and medicines," the skipper told the steward; and to the second mate he said: "Mister, we'll not wait for their boat. Lower away our best lifeboat, and man it with our best men. I'll go myself. Put a bottle of brandy in, steward."

"There may be a medal in this for you, sir," remarked the second mate.

"Rats!" quoth the skipper, bundling himself up warm against the night chill.

Before the boat was away, another hard squall struck down and off we drove before it. Heaving-to is all right if your gear is sound, but when gear is old and squalls are fierce it is safer to run; so another dawn came before our boat was launched. By that time we were all keyed up—the skipper had kept his hard-weather gear on all night, and had not slept, looking as if about to face the supreme adventure. His two terriers were in the boat before him.

I KNOW what that adventure was, for I rowed bow oar in that boat; and twice she filled, twice we bailed her out, and twice we looked to the skipper for orders to return to the ship. Then out came the islanders' boat again, her people waving desperately, their hoarse voices flying raggedly downwind to us as we strove to reach them. The terriers whimpered, wet and cold, but they sprang up full of challenge at those hoarse voices. There was an atmosphere of dread pervading our boat as we followed the other boat to a precarious landing. We were welcomed as no rescue ship was ever welcomed by castaways.

"What is the trouble?" shouted the skipper. "If it's broken limbs, I'm not much of a hand at that. If it's—"

A breaker rolled us out, the boat on top of us in the surf. The skipper was upset and dumped into the sea. Like two black-and-tan shots from catapults, the two terriers streaked off toward the little settlement, and the islanders stood grinning after them. They were not at all like men standing in desperate need of succor. We rescued our Old Man's medicine chest and righted him. He clung to the bottle of brandy, however, and irritably demanded to be taken to the scene of trouble.

"Them dogs is found it, Captain," answered a tall, dour man who introduced himself as Tom Cotton.

"Found what?" snapped the skipper, who had lost three days in beating up to this miserable spot under an urge to help suffering humanity.

"Rats. We been et alive with 'em. They et the taters, and et the babies' food. Dum nigh et the babies too. We'll get shut of 'em now, Captain. Wait till we git some sticks, though. Your boat-stretchers'll do fine."

Coolly the islanders snatched the stretchers from our boat and ran off after the terriers. Our skipper was raging, but we lads smelled fun and were after the islanders. Then for a whole day we chased rats! The terriers flushed them, and we killed them with sticks and stones, and burned thousands of them in heaps when dead. When we could find no sign of living rats, we caught the panting terriers and reported to the skipper, who had stood aloof most of the time threatening to shove off for his ship again. But he would never leave his dogs, and we saw that he could never catch them while a rat lived; in the end he chased rats as yellingly as anybody.

When at last we entered the boat, the islanders hesitantly offered a basketful of poor rat-eaten potatoes.

"Them's all we got left, Captain," said Cotton. "Sorry we be, but we be poor folk and them rats most et us out. You be welcome, howsomedever, for wi'out you we'd ha' been et alive."

"Keep them, for seed!" grunted the skipper, and gruffly ordered us to push off.

We rowed to our ship, satisfied with the sport, unworried by lost time.

"Didn't they even offer us any spuds, sir?" the mate called out as we ran alongside.

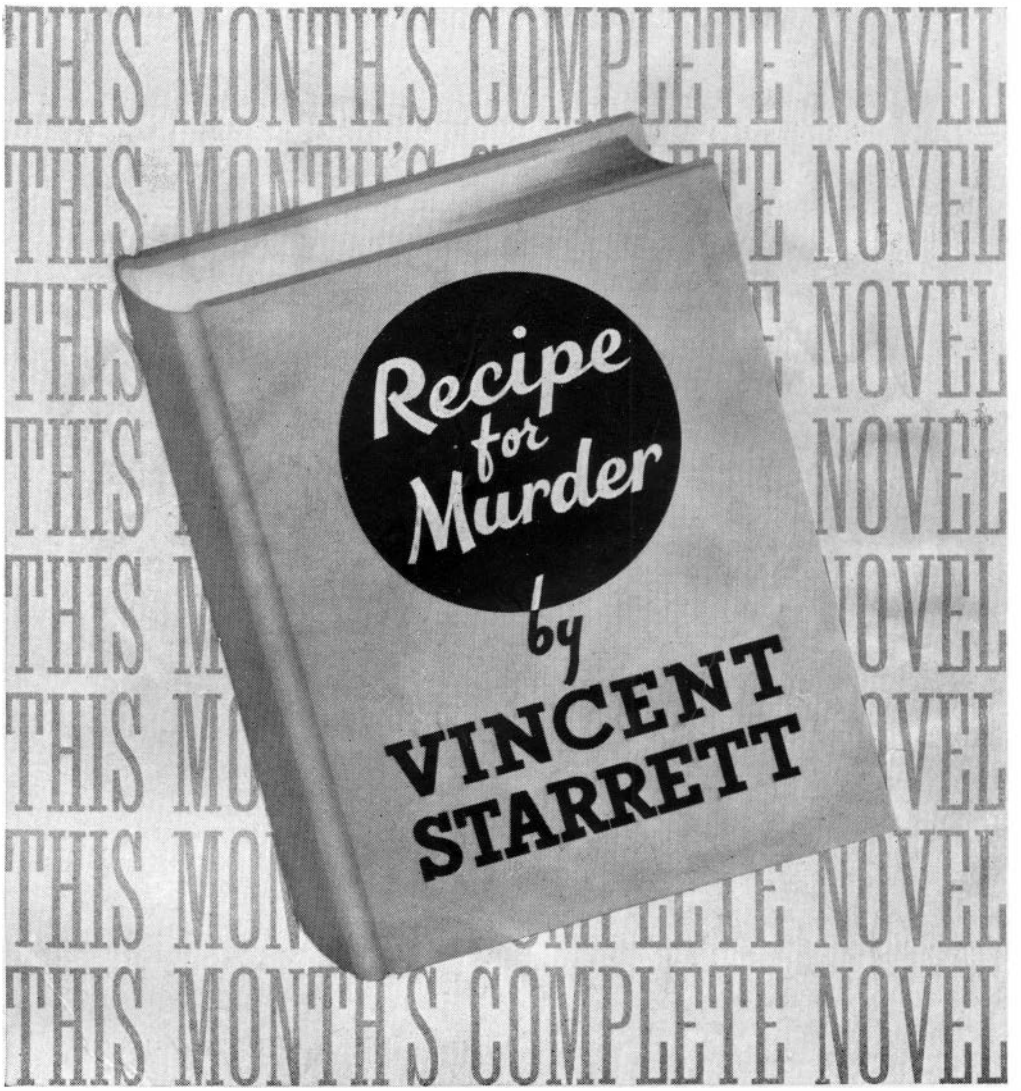
"Rats!" said the skipper, a deliriously happy terrier under each arm.

TO round out this yarn properly, and in a manner point a moral, it should have happened that the wind came fair for home that evening, and our skipper found in a fast passage compensation for time lost in performing his good deed.

At risk of being accused of "pulling a bender," I am bound to state that is just what happened. When brother skippers congratulated our skipper on his judgment in seeking for a fair wind as far afield as Tristan d'Acunha, he swelled with pride and said never a word.

But whenever *he* risked telling the yarn somebody there was sure to be, who knew the truth, who answered:

"Rats!"



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