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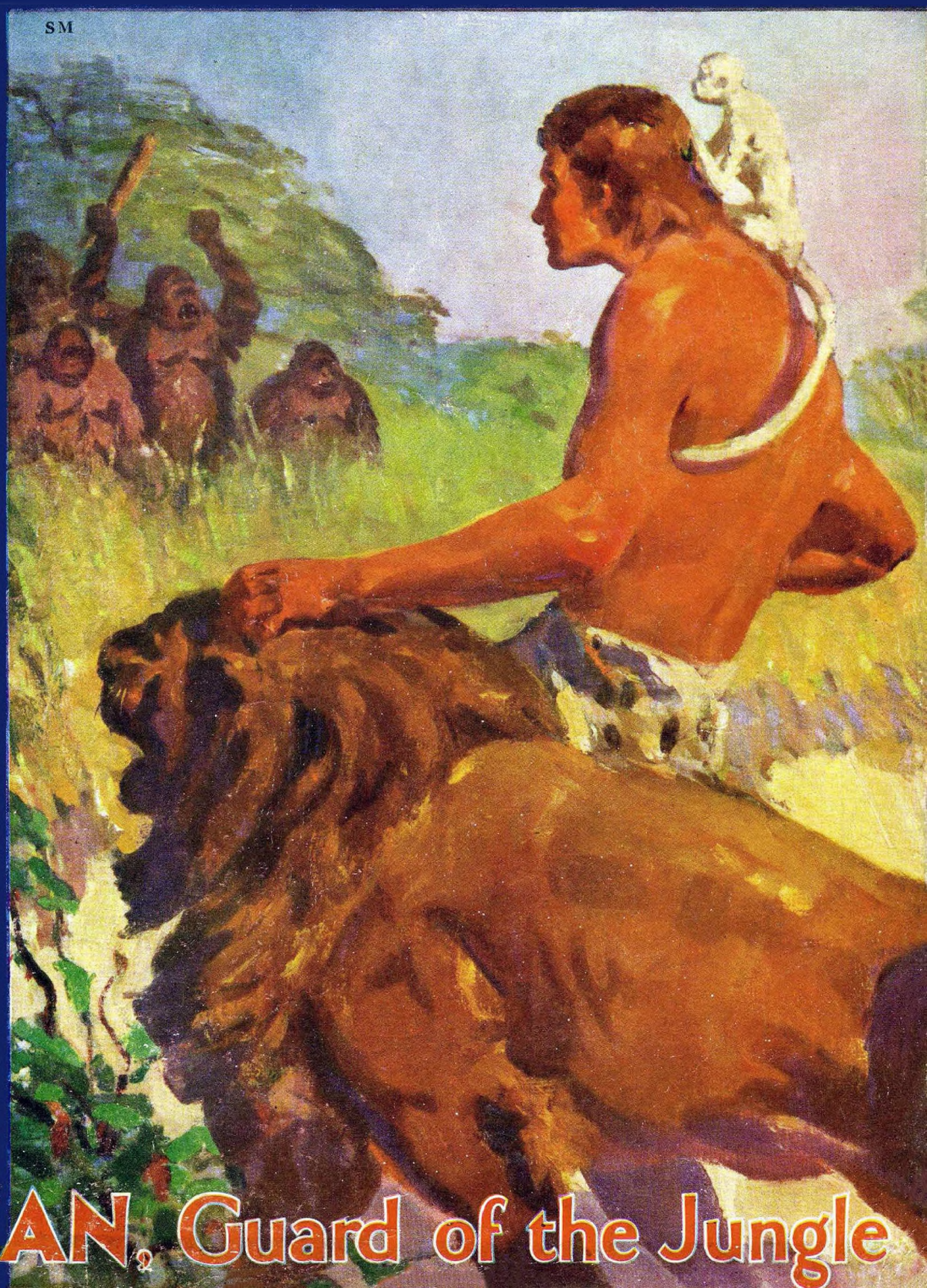

TARZAN, Guard of the Jungle

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TARZAN

Guard of the Jungle

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

I AM no historian, no chronicler of facts, and furthermore, I hold a very definite conviction that there are certain subjects which fiction writers should leave alone, foremost among which are politics and religion. However it seems to me not unethical to pirate an idea occasionally from one or the other, provided that the subject be handled in such a way as to impart a definite impression of fictionizing.

Had the story that I am about to tell you broken in the newspapers of two certain European powers, it might have precipitated another and a more terrible world war. But with that I am not particularly concerned. What interests me is that it is a good story that is particularly well adapted to my requirements through the fact that Tarzan of the Apes was intimately connected with many of its most thrilling episodes.

I am not going to bore you with dry political history, so do not tax your intellect needlessly by attempting to decode such fictitious names as I may use in describing certain people and places which, it seems to me, to the best interest of peace and disarmament, should remain incognito.

Doubtless very few of you saw and still fewer will remember having seen a news-dispatch that appeared inconspicuously in the papers some time since, reporting a rumor that French Colonial troops stationed in Somaliland, on the northeast coast of Africa, had invaded an Italian African colony. Back of that news item is a story of conspiracy, intrigue, adventure and love—a story of scoundrels and of fools, of brave men, of beautiful women, a story of the beasts of the forest and the jungle.

If there were few who saw the newspaper account of the invasion of Italian Somaliland upon the northeast coast of Africa, it is equally a fact that none of you saw a harrowing incident that occurred in the interior some time previous to this affair. That it could possibly have any connection whatsoever with European international intrigue, or with the fate of nations, seems not even remotely possible, for it was only a very little monkey fleeing through the tree-tops and screaming in terror. It was little Nkima, and pursuing him was a large, rude monkey —a much larger monkey than little Nkima.

Fortunately for the peace of Europe and the world, the speed of the pursuer was in no sense proportionate to his unpleasant disposition, and so Nkima escaped him, but for long after the larger monkey had given up the chase, the smaller one continued to flee through the tree-tops, screeching at the top of his shrill little voice, for terror and flight were the two major activities of little Nkima.

Perhaps it was fatigue, but more likely it was a caterpillar or a bird's nest that eventually terminated Nkima's flight and left him scolding and chattering upon a swaying bough, far above the floor of the jungle.

The world into which little Nkima had been born seemed a very terrible world indeed, and he spent most of his waking hours scolding about it, in which respect he was quite as human as he was simian. It seemed to little Nkima that the world was populated with large, fierce creatures who liked monkey meat. There were Numa the lion, and Sheeta the panther, and Histah the snake—a triumvirate that rendered unsafe his entire world from the loftiest tree-top to the ground. And then there were the great apes and the lesser apes and the baboons and countless species of monkeys, all of which God had made larger than He had made little Nkima, and all of which seemed to harbor a grudge against him.

Take, for example, the rude creature which had just been pursuing him. Little Nkima had done nothing more than throw a stick at him while he was asleep in the crotch of a tree, and just for that he had pursued little Nkima with unquestionable homicidal intent—I use the word without purposing any reflection upon Nkima. It had never occurred to Nkima, as it never seems to occur to some people, that a sense of humor, like beauty, may sometimes be fatal.

BROODING upon the injustices of life, little Nkima was very sad. But there was another and more poignant cause of sadness that depressed his little heart. Many, many moons ago his master had gone away and left him. True, he had been left in a nice, comfortable home with kind people who fed him, but little Nkima missed the great Tarmangani, whose naked shoulder was the one harbor of refuge from which he could with perfect impunity hurl insults at the world. For a long time now little Nkima had braved the dangers of the forest and the jungle in search of his beloved Tarzan.

Because hearts are measured by content of love and loyalty, rather than by diameters in inches, the heart of little Nkima was very large—so large that the average

human being could hide his own heart and himself, as well, behind it; and for a long time it had been just one great ache in his diminutive breast. But fortunately for the little Manu his mind was so ordered that it might easily be distracted even from a great sorrow. A butterfly or a luscious grub might suddenly claim his attention from the depths of brooding—which was well, since otherwise he might have grieved himself to death.

And now, therefore, as his melancholy thoughts returned to contemplation of his loss, their trend was suddenly altered by the shifting of a jungle breeze which brought to his keen ears a sound not primarily one of the jungle sounds that were a part of his hereditary instincts. It was a discord. And what is it that brings discords into the jungle as well as into every elsewhere that it enters? Man. They were the voices of men, which Nkima heard.

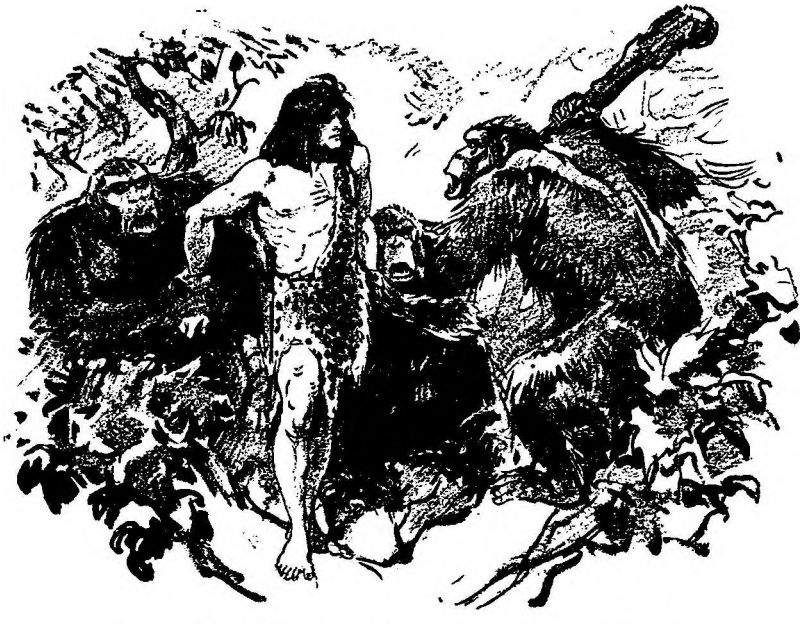
Silently the little monkey glided through the trees in the direction from which the sounds had come; and presently, as the sounds grew louder, there came also that which was the definite, final proof of the identity of the noise-makers, as far as Nkima, or for that matter, any other of the jungle folk might be concerned—the scent spoor.

You have seen a dog, perhaps your own dog, half recognize you by sight, but was he ever entirely satisfied until the evidence of his eyes had been tested and approved by his sensitive nostrils?

And so it was with Nkima. His ears had suggested the presence of man, and now his nostrils definitely assured him that men were near. He did not think of them as men, but as great apes. There were Gomangani, Great Black Apes, negroes, among them. This his nose told him. And there were Tarmangani, also. These, which to Nkima would be Great White Apes, were white men.

Eagerly his nostrils sought for the familiar scent-spoor of his beloved Tarzan, but it was not there—that he knew even before he came within sight of the strangers.

The camp upon which Nkima presently looked down from a near-by tree was well established. It had evidently been there for a matter of days and might be expected to remain still longer. It was no overnight affair. There were the tents of the white men and the *byut* of Arabs neatly arranged with almost military precision, and behind these the shelters of the negroes, lightly constructed of such materials as Nature had provided upon the spot.



"I am To-yat!" he growled. "I kill!" "I am Tarzan," replied the man. "I come in peace."

Within the open front of an Arab beyt sat several white burnoused Beduins drinking the inevitable coffee; in the shade of a great tree before another tent four white men were engrossed in a game of cards; among the native shelters a group of stalwart Galla warriors were playing at minkala. There were blacks of other tribes too—men of East Africa and Central Africa, with a sprinkling of West Coast negroes.

It might have puzzled an experienced African traveler or hunter to catalogue this motley aggregation of races and colors. There were far too many blacks to justify a belief that all were porters, for with all the impedimenta of the camp ready for transportation, there would not have been but a small fraction of the load for each of them, even after more than enough had been included among the askari, who do not carry any loads beside their rifles and ammunition.

Then too, there were more rifles than would have been needed to protect even a larger party. There seemed, indeed, to be a rifle for every man. But these were minor details which made no impression upon Nkima. All that impressed him was the fact that here were many strange Tarmangani and Gomangani in the country of his master, and as all strangers were, to Nkima, enemies, he was perturbed. Now, more than ever, he wished that he might find Tarzan.

A swarthy turbaned East Indian sat cross-legged upon the ground before a tent, apparently sunk in meditation, but could one have seen his dark, sensuous eyes, he would have discovered that their gaze was far from introspective—they were bent constantly upon another tent that stood a little apart from its fellows; and when a girl emerged from this tent, Raghunath Jafar arose and approached her. He smiled an oily smile as he spoke to her, but the girl did not smile as she replied. She spoke civilly, but she did not pause, continuing her way toward the four men at cards.

As she approached their table, they looked up, and upon the face of each was reflected some pleasurable emotion; but whether it was the same in each, the masks that we call faces, and which are trained to conceal our true thoughts, did not divulge. Evident it was, however, that the girl was popular.

"Hello, Zora!" cried a large, smooth-faced fellow. "Have a good nap?"

"Yes, comrade," replied the girl; "but I am tired of napping. This inactivity is getting on my nerves."

"Mine too," agreed the man.

"How much longer will you wait for the American, Comrade Zveri?" asked Raghunath Jafar.

The other shrugged. "I need him," he answered. "We might easily carry on without him, but for the moral effect upon the world of having a rich and high-born American identified actively with the affair, it is worth waiting."

"Are you quite sure of this gringo, Zveri?" asked a swarthy young Mexican sitting next to the big man, who was evidently the leader of the expedition.

"I met him in New York and again in San Francisco," replied Zveri. "He has been very carefully checked and favorably recommended."

"I am always suspicious of these fellows who owe everything they have to capitalism," insisted Romero. "It is in their blood—at heart they hate the proletariat, just as we hate them."

"This fellow is different, Miguel," insisted Zveri. "He

has been won over so completely that he would betray his own father for the good of the cause—and already he is betraying his country."

A slight involuntary sneer, that passed unnoticed by the others, curled the lip of Zora Drinov as she heard this description of the remaining member of the party, who had not yet reached the rendezvous.

Miguel Romero, the Mexican, was still unconvinced. "I myself have no use for gringoes of any sort," he said.

Zveri shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Our personal animosities are of no importance," he said, "as against the interests of the workers of the world. When Colt arrives, we must accept him as one of us; nor must we forget that however much we may detest America and all Americans, nothing of moment may be accomplished in the world of today without them and their filthy wealth."

Swinging through the forest, little Nkima held the fate of Europe in his little pink palm, but he did not know it.

"Wealth ground out of the blood and sweat of the working class!" growled Romero.

"Exactly," agreed Raghunath Jafar. "But how appropriate that this same wealth should be used to undermine and overthrow capitalistic America and bring the workers eventually into their own."

"That is precisely the way I feel about it," said Zveri. "I would rather use American gold in furthering the cause than any other—and after that British."

"But what do the puny resources of this single American mean to us?" demanded Zora. "A mere nothing compared to what America is already pouring into Soviet Russia. What is his treason compared with the treason of those others who are already doing more to hasten the day of world communism than the Third Internationale itself? It is nothing, not a drop in the bucket."

"What do you mean, Zora?" asked Miguel.

"I mean the bankers and manufacturers and engineers of America, who are selling their own country and the world to us in the hope of adding more gold to their already bursting coffers. Their manufacturers are vying with one another to furnish us with engines for countless thousands of airplanes; their engineers are selling us their brains and their skill to build a great modern manufacturing city—in which ammunition and engines of war may be produced. These are the traitors; these are the men who are hastening the day when Moscow shall dictate the policies of a world."

"You speak as though you regretted it," said a dry voice at her shoulder.

The girl turned quickly. "Oh, it is you, Sheik Abu Batu?" she said, as she recognized the swart Arab who had strolled over from his coffee. "Our own good fortune does not blind me to the perfidiousness of the enemy, nor cause me to admire treason in anyone, even though I profit by it."

"Does that include me?" demanded the young Mexican, Romero.

Zora laughed. "You know better than that, Miguel," she said. "You are of the working class; you are loyal to the workers of your own country; but these others are of the capitalistic class, their government is a capitalistic government that is so opposed to our beliefs that it has never recognized our government; yet, in their greed, these swine are selling out their own kind and their own country for a few more rotten dollars. I loathe them."

Zveri laughed. "You are a good Red, Zora," he cried; "you hate the enemy as much when he helps us as when he hinders."

"But hating and talking accomplish so little," said the girl. "I wish we might do something. Sitting here in idleness seems so futile."

"And what would you have us do?" demanded Zveri.

"We might at least make a try for the gold of Opar," she said. "If Kitembo is right, there should be enough there to finance a dozen expeditions such as you are planning; and we do not need this American —what do they call them, cake-eaters?—to assist us in that venture."

"I have been thinking along similar lines," said Raghunath Jafar.

Zveri scowled. "Perhaps some of the rest of you would like to run this expedition," he said crustily. "I know what I am doing, and I don't have to discuss all my plans with anyone. When I have orders to give, I'll give them. Kitembo has already received his, and preparations have been under way for several days for the expedition to Opar."

"The rest of us are as much interested and are risking as much as you, Zveri," snapped Romero. "We were to work together—not as master and slaves."

"You'll soon learn that I am master," snarled Zveri in an ugly tone.

"Yes," sneered Romero; "the Czar was master too—and Obregon. You know what happened to them?"

Zveri leaped to his feet and whipped out a revolver; and as he leveled it at Romero, the girl struck his arm up and stepped between them. "Are you mad, Zveri?" she cried.

"Do not interfere, Zora; this is my affair, and it might as well be settled now as later. I am chief here, and I am not going to have any traitors in my camp. Stand aside."

"No!" said the girl with finality. "Miguel was wrong, and so were you; but to shed blood—our own blood—now would utterly ruin any chance we have of success. It would sow the seed of fear and suspicion and cost us the respect of the blacks, for they would know that there was dissension among us. Furthermore Miguel is not armed—to shoot him would be cowardly murder that would lose you the respect of every decent man in the expedition."

She had spoken rapidly in Russian, a language that was understood by only Zveri and herself, of those who were present; then she turned again to Miguel and addressed him in English: "You were wrong, Miguel," she said gently. "There must be one responsible head, and Comrade Zveri was chosen for the responsibility. He regrets that he acted hastily. Tell him that you are sorry for what you said, and then the two of you shake hands and let us all forget the matter."

For an instant Romero hesitated; then he extended his hand toward Zveri. "I am sorry," he said.

The Russian took the proffered hand in his and bowed stiffly. "Let us forget it, Comrade," he said; but the scowl was still upon his face, though no darker than that which clouded the Mexican's.

. . . . . .

LITTLE NKIMA yawned and swung by his tail from a branch far overhead. His curiosity concerning these enemies was sated. They no longer afforded him entertainment, but he knew that his master should know about their presence and that thought, entering his little head, recalled his sorrow and his great yearning for Tarzan, to the end that he was again imbued with a grim determination to continue his search for the ape-man. Perhaps in half an hour some trivial occurrence might again distract his attention, but for the moment this was his life-work. Swinging through the forest, little Nkima held the fate of Europe in his pink palm, but he did not know it.

The afternoon was waning. In the distance a lion roared. An instinctive shiver ran up Nkima's spine. In reality, however, he was not much afraid, knowing, as he did, that no lion could reach him in the tree-tops.

A young man marching near the head of a safari cocked his head, listening. "Not very far away, Tony," he said.

"No sir; much too close," replied the Filipino.

"You'll have to learn to cut out that *sir* stuff, Tony, before we join the others," admonished the young man.

The Filipino grinned. "All right, Comrade," he assented. "I got so used calling everybody 'sir,' it hard for me to change."

"I'm afraid you're not a very good Red, then, Tony."

"Oh, yes, I am," insisted the Filipino emphatically. "Why else am I here? You think I like to come this God-forsaken country full of lion, ant, snake, fly, mosquito, just for the walk? No, I come lay down my life for Philippine independence."

"That's noble of you, all right, Tony," said the other; "but just how is it going to make the Philippines free?"

Antonio Mori scratched his head. "I don't know," he admitted; "but it make trouble for America."

High among the tree-tops a little monkey crossed their path. For a moment he paused and watched them; then he resumed his journey in the opposite direction.

A half hour later the lion roared again; and so disconcertingly close and unexpected rose the voice of thunder from the jungle beneath him that little Nkima nearly fell out of the tree through which he was passing. With a scream of terror he scampered as high aloft as he could go; and there he sat, scolding angrily.

The lion, a magnificent full-maned male, stepped into the open beneath the tree in which the trembling Nkima clung. Once again he raised his mighty voice until the ground itself trembled to the great, rolling volume of his challenge. Nkima looked down upon him, and suddenly ceased to scold. Instead he leaped about excitedly, chattering and grimacing. Numa the lion looked up, and then a strange thing occurred. The monkey ceased its chattering and voiced a low, peculiar sound. The eyes of the lion, that had been glaring balefully upward, took on a new and almost gentle expression. He arched his back and rubbed his side luxuriously against the bole of the tree, and from those savage jaws came a soft, purring sound. Then little Nkima dropped quickly downward through the foliage of the tree, gave a final nimble leap, and alighted upon the thick mane of the king of beasts.

CHAPTER II

The Hindu

WITH the coming of a new day came a new activity to the camp of the conspirators. Now were the Bedauwy drinking no coffee in the muk'aad; the cards of the whites were put away, and the Galla warriors played no longer at minkala.

Zveri sat behind his folding camp-table directing his aides, and with the assistance of Zora and Raghunath Jafar issued ammunition to the file of armed men marching past them. Miguel Romero and the two remaining whites were supervising the distribution of loads among the porters. Savage black Kitembo moved constantly among his men, hastening laggards from belated breakfast fires and forming those who had received their ammunition into companies. Abu Batu the sheik squatted aloof with his sun-bitten warriors. They, always ready, now watched with contempt the disorderly preparations of their companions.

"How many are you leaving to guard the camp?" asked Zora.

"You and Comrade Jafar will remain in charge here," replied Zveri. "Your boys and ten askaris also will remain as camp guard."

"That will be plenty," she agreed. "There is no danger."

"No," agreed Zveri, "not now; but if that Tarzan were here, it would be different. I took pains to assure myself as to that before I chose this region for our base camp, and I have learned that he has been absent for a great while—went on some fool dirigible expedition that has never been heard from. It is almost certain he is dead."

When the last of the blacks had received his issue of ammunition, Kitembo assembled his tribesmen at a little distance from the balance of the expedition and harangued them in a low voice. They were Basembos; and Kitembo, their chief, spoke to them in the dialect of their people.

KITEMBO hated all whites. The British had occupied the land that had been the home of his people since before the memory of man; and because Kitembo, hereditary chief, had been irreconcilable to the domination of the invaders, they had deposed him, elevating a puppet to the chieftaincy.

To Kitembo the chief, savage, cruel and treacherous, all whites were anathema; but he saw in his connection with Zveri an opportunity to be avenged upon the British, and so he had gathered about him many of his tribesmen and enlisted in the expedition that Zveri promised him would rid the land forever of the British, and restore Kitembo to even greater power and glory than had formerly been the lot of Basembo chiefs.

It was not, however, always easy for Kitembo to hold the interest of his people in this undertaking. The British had greatly undermined his power and influence, so that warriors, who formerly might have been as subservient to his will as slaves, now dared openly to question his authority. There had been no demur so long as the expedition entailed no greater hardships than short marches, pleasant camps and plenty of food—with West Coast blacks, and members of other tribes less warlike than the Basembos, to act as porters, carry the loads and do all the heavy work. But now, with fighting looming ahead, some of his people had desired to know just what they were going to get out of it—having, apparently, little stomach for risking their hides for the gratification of the ambitions or hatreds of either the white Zveri or the black Kitembo.

It was for the purpose of mollifying these malcontents that Kitembo was now haranguing his warriors, promising them loot on the one hand and ruthless punishment on the other as a choice between obedience and mutiny. Some of the rewards he dangled before their imaginations might have caused Zveri and the other white members of the expedition considerable perturbation could they have understood the Basembo dialect; but perhaps a greater argument for obedience to his commands was the genuine fear that most of his followers still entertained for their pitiless chieftain.

Zveri whipped out a revolver and leveled it at Romero. The girl struck up his arm.

Among the other blacks of the expedition were outlaw members of several tribes and a considerable number of porters hired in the ordinary manner to accompany what was officially described as a scientific expedition.

Abu Batu and his warriors were animated to temporary loyalty to Zveri by two motives—a lust for loot, and a hatred for all Nasrany as represented by the British influence in Egypt and out into the desert, which they considered their hereditary domain.

The members of other races accompanying Zveri were assumed to be motivated by noble humanitarian aspirations, but it was, nevertheless, true that their leader spoke to them more often of the acquisition of personal riches and power than of the advancement of the brotherhood of man.

It was, then, such a loosely knit but none the less formidable expedition that set forth this lovely morning upon the sack of the treasure vaults of mysterious Opar.

AS Zora Drinov watched them depart, her beautiful, inscrutable eyes remained fixed steadfastly upon the person of Peter Zveri until he had disappeared from view along the river trail that led into the dark forest.

Was it a maid watching in trepidation the departure of her lover upon a mission fraught with danger, or—

"Perhaps he will not return," said an oily voice at her shoulder.

The girl turned her head to look into the half-closed eyes of Raghunath Jafar.

"He will return, Comrade," she said. "Peter Zveri always returns to—me."

"You are very sure of him," said the man.

"It is written," replied the girl as she started to move toward her tent.

"Wait," said Jafar, stretching forth a hand.

She stopped and turned toward him. "What do you want?" she asked.

"You," he replied. "What do you see in that uncouth swine, Zora? What does he know of love or beauty? I can appreciate you, beautiful flower of the morning. With me you may attain the transcendent bliss of perfect love, for I am an adept in love. A beast like Zveri would only degrade you."

The sickening disgust which the girl felt she hid from the eyes of the man, for she realized that the expedition might be gone for days, and that during that time she and Jafar would be practically alone together, except for a handful of savage black warriors whose attitude toward a matter of this nature between an alien woman and an alien man she could not anticipate; but she was none the less determined to put a definite end to his advances.

"You are playing with death, Jafar," she said quietly. "I am here upon no mission of love, and if Zveri should learn of what you have said to me, he would kill you. Do not speak to me again on this subject."

"It will not be necessary," replied the Hindu enigmatically. His half-closed eyes were fixed steadily upon those of the girl. For perhaps less than half a minute the two stood thus, while there crept through Zora Drinov a sense of growing weakness, a realization of approaching capitulation. She fought against it, pitting her will against that of the man. Suddenly she tore her eyes from his. She had won, but victory left her weak and trembling as might be one who had but just experienced a stubbornly contested physical encounter. Turning quickly away, she moved swiftly toward her tent, not daring to look back for fear that she might again encounter those twin pools of vicious and malignant power that were the eyes of Raghunath Jafar—and so she did not see the oily smile of

satisfaction that twisted the sensuous lips of the Hindu, nor did she hear his whispered repetition:

"It will not be necessary."

AS the expedition wound along the trail that leads to the foot of the barrier cliffs that hem the lower frontier of the arid plateau beyond which stands the ancient ruins that are Opar, Wayne Colt, far to the west, pushed on toward the base camp of the conspirators.

To the south, a little monkey rode upon the back of a great lion, shrilling insults now with perfect impunity at every other jungle creature that crossed their path, while with equal contempt for all lesser creatures, the mighty carnivore strode haughtily down-wind, secure in the knowledge of his unquestioned might. A herd of antelope, grazing in his path, caught the acrid scent of the cat and moved nervously about, but when he came within sight of them, they trotted only a short distance to one side, making a path for him, and while he was still in sight, they resumed their feeding. For Numa the lion had fed well, and the herbivores knew, as creatures of the wild know many things that are beyond the dull sensibilities of man, and felt no fear of Numa with a full belly.

To others, yet far off, came the scent of the lion; and they too moved nervously, though their fear was less than had been the first fear of the antelopes. These others were the great apes of the tribe of To-yat, whose mighty bulls had little cause to fear even Numa himself, though their shes and their balus might well tremble.

As the cat approached, the Mangani became more restless and more irritable. To-yat, the king ape, beat his breast and bared his great fighting fangs. Ga-yat, his powerful shoulders hunched, moved to the edge of the herd nearest the approaching danger. Zu-tho thumped a warning menace with his calloused feet. The shes called their balus to them, and many took to the lower branches of the larger trees or sought positions close to an arboreal avenue of escape.

It was at this moment that an almost naked white man dropped from the dense foliage of a tree and alighted in their midst. Taut nerves and short tempers snapped. Roaring and snarling, the herd rushed upon the rash and hated man-thing. The king ape was in the lead.

"To-yat has a short memory," said the newcomer in the tongue of the Mangani.

For an instant the ape paused, perhaps surprised to hear the language of his kind issuing from the lips of a man-thing. "I am To-yat!" he growled. "I kill."

"I am Tarzan," replied the man, "mighty hunter, mighty fighter. I come in peace."

"Kill! Kill!" roared To-yat, and the other great bulls advanced, bare-fanged, menacingly.

"Zu-tho! Ga-yat!" snapped the man. "It is I, Tarzan of the Apes!" But the scent of Numa was strong in their nostrils, and the shock of Tarzan's sudden appearance had plunged them into a panic.

"Kill! Kill!" they bellowed, though as yet they did not charge, but advanced slowly, working themselves into the necessary frenzy of rage that would terminate in a sudden blood-mad rush no living creature might withstand, and which would leave naught but torn and bloody fragments of the object of their wrath.

And then a shrill scream broke from the lips of a great hairy mother with a tiny balu on her back. "Numa!" she shrieked, and turning, fled into the safety of the foliage of a near-by tree.

Instantly the shes and balus remaining upon the ground took to the trees. The bulls turned their attention for a moment from the man to the new menace. What they saw upset what little equanimity remained to them. Advancing straight toward them, his round, yellow-green eyes blazing in ferocity, was a mighty yellow lion, and upon his back perched a little monkey, screaming insults at them. The sight was too much for the apes of To-yat, and the king was the first to break before it. With a roar, the ferocity of which may have salved his self-esteem, he leaped for the nearest tree, and instantly the others broke and fled, leaving the white giant to face the angry lion alone.

With blazing eyes the king of beasts advanced upon the man, his head lowered and flattened, his tail extended, the brush flicking. The man spoke a single word in a low tone that might have carried but a few yards. Instantly the head of the lion came up, the horrid glare died in his eyes, and at the same instant the little monkey, voicing a shrill scream of recognition and delight, leaped over Numa's head and in three prodigious bounds was upon the shoulder of the man, his little arms encircling the bronzed neck.

"Little Nkima!" whispered Tarzan, the soft cheek of the monkey pressed against his own.

The lion strode majestically forward. He sniffed the bare legs of the man, rubbed his head against his side and lay down at his feet.

"Jad-bal-ja!" greeted the ape-man.

A little monkey rode on the back of a great lion, shrilling insults at every other jungle creature.

The great apes of the tribe of To-yat watched from the safety of the trees. Their panic and their anger had subsided. "It is Tarzan," said Zu-tho.

"Yes, it is Tarzan," echoed Ga-yat.

To-yat grumbled. He did not like Tarzan, but he feared him; and now, with this new evidence of the power of the great Tarmangani, he feared him even more.

For a time Tarzan listened to the glib chattering of little Nkima. He learned of the strange Tarmangani and the many Gomangani warriors who had invaded the domain of the Lord of the Jungle.

The great apes moved restlessly in the trees, wishing to descend; but they feared Numa, and the great bulls were too heavy to travel in safety upon the high-flung leafy trails along which the lesser apes might pass with safety, and so could not depart until Numa had gone.

"Go away!" cried To-yat the king. "Go away, and leave the Mangani in peace.

"We are going," replied the ape-man, "but you need not fear either Tarzan or the Golden Lion. We are your friends. I have told Jad-bal-ja that he is never to harm you. You may descend."

"We shall stay in the trees until he has gone," said To-yat; "he might forget."

"You are afraid," said Tarzan contemptuously. "Zu-tho or Ga-yat would not be afraid."

"Zu-tho is afraid of nothing," boasted that great bull.

Without a word Ga-yat climbed ponderously from the tree in which he had taken refuge, and if not with enthusiasm, at least with slight hesitation, advanced toward Tarzan and Jad-bal-ja the big Golden Lion. His fellows eyed him intently, momentarily expecting to see him charged and mauled by the yellow-eyed destroyer that lay at Tarzan's feet watching every move of the shaggy bull. The Lord of the Jungle also watched great Numa, for none knew better than he, that a lion, however accustomed to obey his master, is still a lion. The years of their companionship, since Jad-bal-ja had been a little spotted fluffy ball, had never given him reason to doubt the loyalty of the carnivore, though there had been times when he had found it both difficult and dangerous to thwart some of the beast's more ferocious hereditary instincts.

Ga-yat approached, while little Nkima scolded and chattered from the safety of his master's shoulder, and the lion, blinking lazily, finally looked away. The danger, if there had been any, was over—it is the fixed, intent gaze of the lion that bodes ill.

Tarzan advanced and laid a friendly hand upon the shoulder of the ape. "This is Ga-yat," he said, addressing Jad-bal-ja, "friend of Tarzan; do not harm him." He did not speak in any language of man. Perhaps the medium of communication that he used might not properly be called a language at all, but the lion and the great ape and the little Manu understood him.

"Tell the Mangani that Tarzan is the friend of little Nkima," shrilled the monkey. "He must not harm little Nkima."

"It is as Nkima has said," the ape-man assured Ga-yat.

"The friends of Tarzan are the friends of Ga-yat," replied the great ape.

"It is well," said Tarzan; "and now I go. Tell To-yat and the others what we have said, and tell them also that there are strange men in this country which is Tarzan's. Let them watch them, but do not let the men see them, for these are bad men, perhaps, who carry the thunder-sticks that hurl death with smoke and fire and a great noise. Tarzan goes now to see why these men are in his country."

ZORA DRINOV had avoided Jafar since the departure of the expedition to Opar. Scarcely had she left her tent, feigning a headache as an excuse; nor had the Hindu made any attempt to invade her privacy. Thus passed the first day. Upon the morning of the second Jafar summoned the head man of the askaris that had been left to guard them and to procure meat.

"Today," said Raghunath Jafar, "would be a good day to hunt. The signs are propitious. Go, therefore, into the forest, taking all your men, and do not return until the sun is low in the west. If you do this, there will be presents for you, besides all the meat you can eat from the carcasses of your kills. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Bwana," replied the black.

"Take with you the boy of the woman. He will not be needed here. My boy will remain to cook for us."

"Perhaps he will not come," suggested the negro.

"You are many; he is only one; but do not let the woman know that you are taking him."

"What are the presents?" demanded the head man.

"A piece of cloth and cartridges," replied Jafar.

"And the curved sword that you carry when we are on the march."

"No," said Jafar.

"This is not a good day to hunt," replied the black, turning away.

"Two pieces of cloth and fifty cartridges," suggested Jafar.

"And the curved sword!" And thus, after much haggling, the bargain was made.

The head man gathered his askaris and bade them prepare for the hunt, saying that the brown bwana had so ordered, but he said nothing about any presents. When they were ready, he dispatched one to summon the white woman's servant.

"You are to accompany us on the hunt," he said to the boy.

"Who said so?" demanded Wamala.

"The brown bwana," replied Kahiya, the head man.

Wamala laughed. "I take my orders from my mistress, not from the brown bwana."

Kahiya leaped upon him and clapped a rough palm across his mouth as two of his men seized Wamala upon either side. "You take your orders from Kahiya," he said. Hunting spears were pressed against the boy's trembling body. "Will you go upon the hunt with us?" demanded Kahiya.

"I go," replied Wamala. "I did but joke."

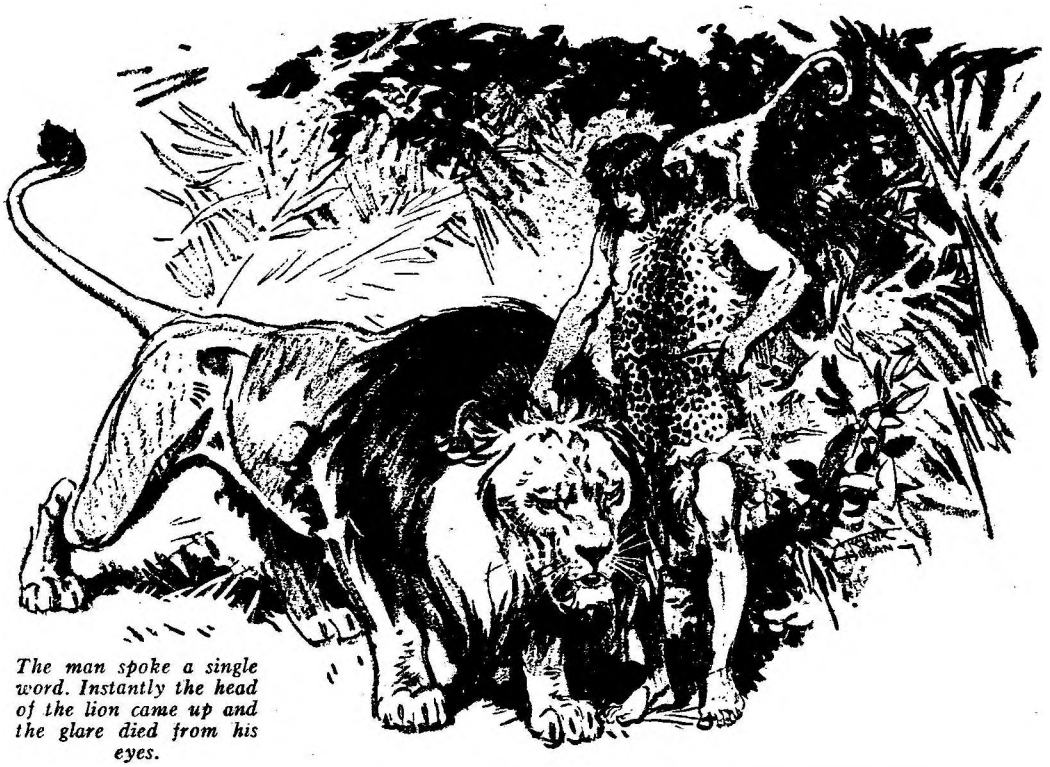
AS Zveri led his expedition toward Opar, Wayne Colt, impatient to join the main body of the conspirators, urged his men to greater speed in their search for the camp. The principal conspirators had entered Africa at different points, that they might not arouse too much attention by their numbers. Pursuant to this plan, Colt had landed on the west coast and had traveled inland a short distance by train to the railhead, from which point he had had a long and arduous journey on foot, so that now, with his destination almost in sight, he was anxious to put a period to this phase of his adventure. Then too, he was curious to meet the other principals in this hazardous undertaking, Peter Zveri being the only one with whom he was acquainted.

The young American was not unmindful of the great risks he was inviting in affiliating himself with an expedition which aimed at the peace of Europe and at the

ultimate control of a large section of northeastern Africa through the disaffection, by propaganda, of large and warlike native tribes—especially in view of the fact that much of their operation must be carried on within British territory, where British power was considerably more than a mere gesture.

But since Colt was young and enthusiastic, though misguided, these contingencies did not weigh heavily upon his spirits, which, far from being depressed, were upon the contrary eager and restless for action.

The tedium of the journey from the coast had been unrelieved by pleasurable or adequate companionship, since the childish mentality of Tony could not rise above a muddy conception of Philippine independence and a consideration of the fine clothes he was going to buy when, by some vaguely visualized economic process, he was to obtain his share of the capitalists' fortunes.



The man spoke a single word. Instantly the head of the lion came up and the glare died from his eyes.

However, notwithstanding Tony's mental shortcomings, Colt was genuinely fond of the youth, and as between the companionship of the Filipino or Zveri, he would have chosen the former, his brief acquaintance with the Russian in New York and San Francisco having convinced him that as a playfellow he left everything to be desired; nor had he any reason to anticipate that he would find any more congenial associates among the conspirators.

Plodding doggedly onward, Colt was only vaguely aware of the now familiar sights and sounds of the jungle, both of which by this time, it must be admitted, had considerably palled upon him. Even had he taken particular note of the latter, it is to be doubted that his untrained ear would have caught the persistent chatter of a little monkey that followed in the trees behind him; nor would this have particularly impressed him, unless he had been able to know that this particular little monkey rode upon the shoulder of a bronzed Apollo of the forest, who moved silently in his wake along a leafy highway of the lower terraces.

Tarzan had guessed that perhaps this white man, upon whose trail he had come unexpectedly, was making his way toward the main camp of the party of strangers for which the Lord of the Jungle was searching; and so, with the persistence and patience of the savage stalker of the jungle, he followed Wayne Colt; while little Nkima, riding upon his shoulder, berated his master for not immediately destroying the Tarmangani and all his party; for little Nkima was a bloodthirsty soul when the spilling of blood was to be accomplished by some one else.

CHAPTER III

Out of the Grave

WHILE Colt impatiently urged his men to greater speed, and Tarzan followed, and Nkima scolded, Raghunath Jafar approached the tent of Zora Drinov. As his figure darkened the entrance, casting a shadow across the book she was reading, the girl looked up from the cot upon which she was lying.

The Hindu smiled his oily, ingratiating smile. "I came to see if your headache was better," he said.

"Thank you, no," said the girl coldly. "But perhaps with undisturbed rest I may be better soon."

Ignoring the suggestion, Jafar entered the tent and seated himself in a camp-chair. "I find it lonely," he said, "since the others have gone. Do you not also?"

"No," replied Zora. "I am quite content to be alone and resting."

"Your headache developed very suddenly," said Jafar. "A short time ago you seemed quite well and animated."

The girl made no reply. She was wondering what had become of her boy Wamala, and why he had disregarded her explicit instructions to permit no one to disturb her. Perhaps Raghunath Jafar read her thoughts, for to East Indians are often attributed uncanny powers, however little warranted such a belief may be. However that may be, his next words suggested the possibility.

"Wamala has gone hunting with the askaris," he said.

"I gave him no such permission," said Zora.

"I took the liberty of doing so," said Jafar.

"You had no right," said the girl angrily, sitting up upon the edge of her cot. "You have presumed altogether too far, Comrade Jafar!"

"Wait a moment, my dear," said the Hindu soothingly. "Let us not quarrel! As you know, I love you; and love does not find confirmation in crowds. Perhaps I have presumed, but it was only for the purpose of giving me an opportunity to plead my cause without interruption. And then too, as you know, all is fair in love and war."

"Then we may consider this as war," said the girl, "for it certainly is not love, either upon your side or upon mine. There is another word to describe what animates you, Comrade Jafar; and that which animates me now is loathing. I could not abide you if you were the last man on earth; and when Zveri returns, I promise you that there shall be an accounting."

"Long before Zveri returns, I shall have taught you to love me," said the Hindu passionately. He arose and came toward her. The girl leaped to her feet, looking

about quickly for a weapon of defense. Her cartridge-belt and revolver hung over the chair in which Jafar had been sitting, and her rifle was upon the opposite side of the tent.

"You are quite unarmed," said the Hindu: "I took particular note of that when I entered the tent; nor will it do you any good to call for help, for there is no one in camp but you and I and my boy; and he knows that if he values his life, he is not to come here unless I call him."

"You are a beast," said the girl.

"Why not be reasonable, Zora?" demanded Jafar. "It would not harm you any to be kind to me, and it will make it very much easier for you. Zveri need know nothing of it, and once we are back in civilization again, if you still feel that you do not wish to remain with me, I shall not try to hold you; but I am sure I can teach you to love me, and that we shall be very happy together."

"Get out!" ordered the girl. There was neither fear nor hysteria in her voice. It was very calm and level and controlled. To a man not entirely blinded by passion, that might have meant something—it might have meant a grim determination to carry self-defense to the very length of death; but Raghunath Jafar saw only the woman of his desire, and stepping quickly forward, he seized her.

Zora Drinov was young and lithe and strong; yet she was no match for the burly Hindu, whose layers of greasy fat belied the great physical strength beneath them. She tried to wrench herself free and escape from the tent, but he held her and dragged her back. She turned upon him in a fury and struck him repeatedly in the face, but he only held her more closely in his embrace. . . .

Wayne Colt's guide, who had been slightly in advance of the American, stopped suddenly and looked back with a broad smile.

Then he pointed ahead. "The camp, Bwana!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Colt with a sigh of relief.

"It is deserted," said the guide.

"It does look that way, doesn't it?" agreed Colt. "Let's have a look around." And followed by his men, Colt moved in among the tents. His tired porters threw down their loads and with the askaris, sprawled at full length beneath the shade of the trees; while Colt, followed by Tony, commenced an investigation of the camp.

Almost immediately the young American's attention was attracted by the violent shaking of one of the tents. "There is some one or something in there," he said to Tony, as he walked briskly toward the entrance.

The sight that met his eyes within brought a sharp ejaculation to his lips—a man and woman struggling, the former choking the bare throat of his victim, while the girl struck feebly at his face with clenched fists.

So engrossed was Jafar in his unsuccessful attempt to subdue the girl that he was unaware of Colt's presence until a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, and he was jerked violently aside.

Consumed by maniacal fury, he leaped to his feet and struck at the American, only to be met with a blow that sent him reeling backward. Again he charged, and again he was struck heavily upon the face. This time he went to the ground; and as he staggered to his feet, Colt seized him, wheeled him around and hurled him through the entrance of the tent, accelerating his departure with a well-timed kick. "If he tries to come back, Tony, shoot him," he snapped at the Filipino, and then turned to assist the girl to her feet. Half carrying her, he laid her on the cot, and then, finding water in a bucket, bathed her forehead, her throat and her wrists.

Outside the tent, Raghunath Jafar saw the porters and the askaris lying in the shade of a tree. He also saw Antonio Mori with a determined scowl upon his face and a revolver in his hand; and with an angry imprecation Jafar turned and made his way toward his own tent.

Presently Zora Drinov opened her eyes and looked up into the solicitous face of Wayne Colt.

From the leafy seclusion of a tree above the camp, Tarzan of the Apes overlooked the scene below. A single whispered syllable had silenced Nkima's scolding. Tarzan had noted the violent shaking of the tent that had attracted Colt's attention, and he had seen the precipitate ejection of the Hindu from its interior and the menacing attitude of the Filipino preventing Jafar's return to the conflict. These matters were of little interest to the ape-man. The quarrelings and defections of these people did not even arouse his curiosity. What he wished to learn was the reason for their presence here; and for the purpose of obtaining this information he had two plans. One was to keep them under constant surveillance until their acts divulged that which he wished to know. The other was to determine definitely the head of the expedition and then to enter the camp and demand the information desired. But this he would not do until he had obtained sufficient knowledge to give him an advantage. What was going on within the tent he did not know; nor did he care.

For several seconds after she opened her eyes, Zora Drinov gazed intently into those of the man bent upon her.

"You must be the American," she said finally.

"I am Wayne Colt," he replied, "and I take it from the fact that you guessed my identity that this is Comrade Zveri's camp."

She nodded. "You came just in time, Comrade Colt," she said.

"Thank God for that!" he said.

"There is no God," she reminded him.

Colt flushed. "We are creatures of heredity and habit," he explained.

Zora Drinov smiled. "That is true," she said; "but it

is our business to break a great many bad habits not only for ourselves, but for the entire world."

Since he had laid her upon the cot, Colt had been quietly appraising the girl. He had not known that there was a white woman in Zveri's camp, but had he it is certain that he would not have anticipated one at all like this girl. He would rather have visualized a female agitator, capable of accompanying a band of men to the heart of Africa, as a coarse and unkempt peasant woman of middle age; but this girl, from her head of glorious, wavy hair to her small well-shaped foot, suggested the antithesis of a peasant origin, and far from being unkempt, she was as neat and smart as it was possible for woman to be under such circumstances.

"Comrade Zveri is absent from camp?" he asked.

"Yes, he is away on a short expedition."

"And there is no one to introduce us to one another?" he asked with a smile.

"Oh, pardon me," she said. "I am Zora Drinov."

"I had not anticipated such a pleasant surprise," said Colt. "And who was the fellow I interrupted?"

"That was Raghunath Jafar, a Hindu."

"He is one of us?" asked Colt.

"Yes," replied the girl, "but not for long—not after Peter Zveri returns."

"You mean—"

"I mean that Peter will kill him."

Colt shrugged. "It is what he deserves," he said. "Perhaps I should have done it."

"No," said the girl; "leave that for Peter."

"Were you left alone here in this camp without any protection?" demanded Colt.

"No. Peter left my boy and ten askaris, but in some way Jafar got them all out of camp."

"You will be safe now," he said. "I shall see to that until Comrade Zveri returns. I am going now to make my camp, and I shall send two of my askaris to stand guard before your tent."

"That is good of you," she said, "but I think now that you are here it will not be necessary."

"I shall do it anyway," he said. "I shall feel safer."

"And when you have made camp, will you come and have supper with me?" she asked, and then: "Oh, I forgot; Jafar has sent my boy away, too. There is no one to cook for me."

"Then perhaps, you will dine with me," he said. "My boy is a fairly good cook."

"I shall be delighted, Comrade Colt," she replied.

AS the American left the tent, Zora Drinov lay back upon the cot with half-closed eyes. How different the man had been from what she had expected! Recalling his features, and especially his eyes, it was difficult to believe that such a man could be a traitor to his father or to his country; but then, she realized, many a man has turned against his own for a principle. With her own people it was different. They had never had a chance. They had always been ground beneath the heel of one tyrant or another. What they were doing they believed implicitly to be for their own and for their country. Among those of them who were motivated by honest conviction, there could not fairly be brought any charge of treason, and yet, Russian though she was to the core, she could not help but look with contempt upon the citizens of other countries who turned against their governments to aid the ambitions of a foreign power. We may be willing to profit by the acts of foreign mercenaries and traitors, but we cannot admire them.

As Colt crossed from Zora's tent to where his men lay, to give the necessary instruction for the making of his

"You need not fear either Tarzan or the Golden Lion; we are your friends." Ga-yat climbed from the tree and advanced.

camp, Raghunath Jafar watched him from the interior of his own tent. A malignant scowl clouded the countenance of the Hindu, and hatred smoldered in his eyes.

Tarzan, watching from above, saw the young American issuing instructions to his men. The personality of this young stranger had impressed Tarzan favorably. He liked him as well as he could like any stranger, for deeply ingrained in the fiber of the ape-man was the wild beast suspicion of all strangers, and especially of all white strangers. As he watched him now, nothing else within the range of his vision escaped him. It was thus that he saw Raghunath Jafar emerge from his tent, carrying a rifle. Only Tarzan and little Nkima saw this, and only Tarzan placed any sinister interpretation upon it.

Raghunath Jafar walked directly away from camp and entered the jungle. Swinging silently through the trees, Tarzan of the Apes followed him. Jafar made a half-circle of the camp just within the concealing verdure of the jungle, and then he halted. From where he stood, the entire camp was visible to him, but his own position was concealed by foliage.

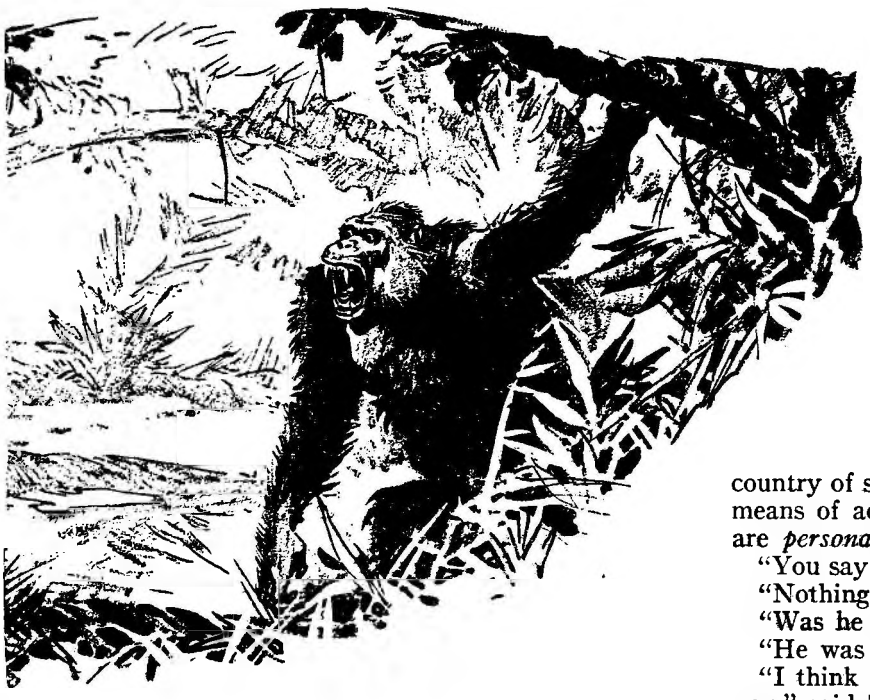
Colt was watching the disposition of his loads and the pitching of his tent. His men were busy with the various duties assigned to them by their headman. They were tired, and there was little talking. For the most part they worked in silence, and an unusual quiet pervaded the scene—a quiet that was suddenly and unexpectedly shattered by an anguished scream and the report of a rifle, blending so closely that it was impossible to say which had preceded the other. A bullet whizzed by Colt's head and nipped the lobe off the ear of one of his men standing behind him.

Instantly the peaceful activities of the camp were supplanted by pandemonium. For a moment there was a difference of opinion as to the direction from which the shot and the scream had come; then Colt saw a wisp of smoke rising from the jungle just beyond the edge of camp.

"There it is," he said, and started toward the point.

The headman of the askaris stopped him. "Do not go, Bwana," he said. "Perhaps it is an enemy. Let us fire into the jungle first."

"No," said Colt, "we will investigate first. Take some



of your men in from the right, and I'll take the rest in from the left. We'll work around slowly through the jungle until we meet."

"Yes, Bwana," said the headman; and calling his men, he gave the necessary instructions.

No sound of flight or any suggestion of a living presence greeted the two parties as they entered the jungle; nor had they discovered any signs of a marauder when, a few moments later, they made contact with one another. They were now formed in a half-circle that bent back into the jungle, and at a word from Colt, they advanced toward the camp.

It was Colt who found Raghunath Jafar lying dead just at the edge of camp. His right hand grasped his rifle. Protruding from his chest was the shaft of a sturdy arrow.

The negroes gathering around the corpse looked at one another questioningly and then back into the jungle and up into the trees. One of them examined the arrow. "It is not like any arrow I have ever seen," he said. "It was not made by the hand of man."

Immediately the blacks were filled with superstitious fears. "The shot was meant for the bwana," said one; "therefore the demon who fired the shot is a friend of our bwana. We need not be afraid."

THIS explanation satisfied the blacks, but it did not satisfy Wayne Colt. He was puzzling over it as he went back into camp, after giving orders that the Hindu be buried.

Zora Drinov was standing in the entrance of her tent and as she saw him she came to meet him. "What was it?" she asked. "What happened?"

"Comrade Zveri will not kill Raghunath Jafar," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because Raghunath Jafar is already dead."

"Who could have shot the arrow?" she asked, after he had told her of the manner of the Hindu's death.

"I haven't the remotest idea," he admitted. "It is an absolute mystery, but it means that the camp is being watched, and that we must be very careful not to go into the jungle alone. The men believe that the arrow was fired to save me from an assassin's bullet, and while it is entirely possible that Jafar may have been intending to kill me, I believe that if I had gone into the jungle alone instead of him, it would have been I who would be lying out there dead now. Have you been bothered at all by natives since you made camp here, or have you had any unpleasant experiences with them at all?"

"We have not seen a native since we entered this camp. We have often commented upon the fact that the country seems to be entirely deserted and uninhabited, notwithstanding the fact that it is filled with game."

"This thing may help to account for the fact that it is uninhabited," suggested Colt, "or rather apparently uninhabited. We may have unintentionally invaded the country of some unusually ferocious tribe which takes this means of acquainting newcomers with the fact that they are *persona non grata*."

"You say one of our men was wounded?" asked Zora.

"Nothing serious. He just had his ear nicked a little."

"Was he near you?"

"He was standing right behind me," replied Colt.

"I think there is no doubt but that Jafar meant to kill you," said Zora.

"Perhaps," said Colt, "but he did not succeed. He did not even kill my appetite—and now if I can calm the excitement of my boy, we shall have supper presently."

FROM a distance Tarzan and Nkima watched the burial of Raghunath Jafar, and a little later saw the return of Kahiya and his askaris, with Zora's boy Wamala, who had been sent out of camp by Jafar.

"Where," said Tarzan to Nkima, "are all the many Tarmangani and Gomangani that you told me were in this camp?"

"They have taken their thundersticks and gone away," replied the little Manu. "They are hunting for Nkima."

Tarzan of the Apes smiled one of his rare smiles. "We shall have to hunt them down and find out what they are about, Nkima," he said.

"But it grows dark in the jungle soon," pleaded Nkima, "and then will Sabor and Sheeta and Numa and Histah be abroad, and they too search for little Nkima."

Darkness had fallen before Colt's boy announced supper, and in the meantime Tarzan, changing his plans, had returned to the trees above the camp. He was convinced that there was something irregular in the aims of the expedition whose base he had discovered. He knew from the size of the camp that it had contained many men. Where they had gone, and for what purpose, were matters that he must ascertain. Feeling that this expedition, whatever its purpose, might naturally be a principal topic of conversation in the camp, he sought a point of vantage wherefrom he might overhear the conversations that passed between the two white members of the party beneath him; and so it was that as Zora Drinov and Wayne Colt seated themselves at the supper table, Tarzan of the Apes crouched amid the foliage of a great tree just above them.

"You have passed through a rather trying ordeal today," said Colt, "but you do not appear to be any the worse for it. I should think that your nerves would be shaken."

"I have passed through too much already in my life, Comrade Colt, to have any nerves left at all," replied the girl.

"I suppose so," said Colt. "You must have passed through the revolution in Russia."

"I was only a little girl at the time," she explained, "but I remember it quite distinctly."

Colt was gazing at her intently. "From your appearance," he ventured, "I imagine that you were not by birth of the proletariat."

"My father was a laborer. He died in exile under the Czarist régime. That was how I learned to hate everything monarchistic and capitalistic. And when I was offered this opportunity to join Comrade Zveri, I saw another field in which to encompass my revenge, while at the same time advancing the interests of my class throughout the world."

"WHEN I last saw Zveri in the United States," said Colt, "he evidently had not formulated the plans he is now carrying out, as he never mentioned any expedition of this sort. When I received orders to join him here, none of the details were imparted to me, and so I am rather in the dark as to what his purpose is."

"It is only for good soldiers to obey," the girl reminded him.

"Yes, I know that," agreed Colt, "but at the same time, even a poor soldier may act more intelligently sometimes if he knows the objective."

"The general plan, of course, is no secret to any of us here," said Zora, "and I shall betray no confidence in explaining it to you. It is a part of a larger plan to embroil the capitalistic powers in wars and revolutions to such an extent that they will be helpless to unite against us.

"Our emissaries have been laboring for a long while toward a culmination of the revolution in India that will distract the attention and the armed forces of Great Britain. We are not succeeding so well in Mexico as we had planned, but there is still hope, while our prospects in the Philippines are very bright. The conditions in China you well know. She is absolutely helpless, and we have hope that with our assistance she will eventually constitute a real menace to Japan. Italy is a very dangerous enemy, and it is largely for the purpose of embroiling her in war with France that we are here."

"But just how can that be accomplished in Africa?" asked Colt.

"Comrade Zveri believes that it will be simple," said the girl. "The suspicion and jealousy that exist between France and Italy are well known. Their race for naval supremacy amounts almost to a scandal, and at the first overt act of either against the other, war might easily result; and a war between Italy and France would embroil all of Europe."

"But just how can Zveri, operating in the wilds of Africa, embroil Italy and France in war?" demanded the American.

"There are now in Rome a delegation of French and of Italian Reds engaged in this very business. The poor men know only a part of the plan, and unfortunately for them, it will be necessary to martyrize them in the cause for the advancement of our world plan. They have been furnished with papers outlining a plan for the invasion of Italian Somaliland by French troops. At the proper time, one of Comrade Zveri's secret agents in Rome will reveal the plot to the Fascist Government, and almost simultaneously a considerable number of our own blacks, disguised in the uniforms of French native troops, led by the white men of our expedition, uniformed as French officers, will invade Italian Somaliland.

"In the meantime our agents are carrying on in Egypt and Abyssinia and among the native tribes of North Africa, and already we have definite assurance that with the attention of France and Italy distracted by war, and Great Britain embarrassed by a revolution in India, the natives of North Africa will arise in what will amount almost to a holy war for the purpose of throwing off the yoke of foreign domination, and the establishment of autonomous Soviet states throughout the entire area."

"A daring and stupendous undertaking!" exclaimed Colt. "And it is one that will require enormous resources in money as well as men."

"It is Comrade Zveri's pet scheme," said the girl. "I do not know, of course, all the details of his organization and backing, but I do know that while he is already well financed for the initial operations, he is depending to a considerable extent upon this district for furnishing most of the necessary gold to carry on the tremendous operations that will be necessary to insure final success."

"Then I am afraid he is foredoomed to failure," said Colt, "for he surely cannot find enough wealth in this savage country to carry on any such stupendous program."

"Comrade Zveri believes to the contrary," said Zora; "in fact, the expedition that he is now engaged upon is for the purpose of obtaining the treasure he seeks."

Above them, in the darkness, the silent figure of the ape-man lay stretched at ease upon a great branch, his keen ears absorbing all that passed between them, while curled in sleep upon his bronzed back lay little Nkima, entirely oblivious of the fact that he might have listened to words well calculated to shake the foundations of organized government throughout the world.

"And where," demanded Colt, "if it is no secret, does Comrade Zveri expect to find such a great store of gold?"

"In the famous treasure vaults of Opar," replied the girl. "You certainly must have heard of them."

"Yes," replied Colt, "but I never considered them other than purely legendary. The folk-lore of the entire world is filled with these mythical treasure vaults."

"But Opar is no myth," replied Zora.

IF the startling information divulged to him affected Tarzan, it induced no outward manifestation. Listening in silence, imperturbable trained to the utmost refinement of self-control, he might have been part and parcel of the great branch upon which he lay, or of the shadowy foliage which hid him from view.

For a time Colt sat in silence, contemplating the stupendous possibilities of the plan that he had just heard unfolded. It seemed to him little short of the dream of a madman, and he did not believe that it had the slightest chance for success. What he did realize was the jeopardy in which it placed the members of the expedition, for he believed that there would be no escape for any of them once Great Britain, France and Italy were apprised of their activities; and without conscious volition, his fears seemed centered upon the safety of the girl.

He knew the type of people with whom he was working, and so he knew that it would be dangerous to voice a doubt as to the practicability of the plan—for scarcely without exception the agitators whom he had met had fallen naturally into two separate categories, the impractical visionary, who believed everything that he wanted to believe, and the shrewd knave, actuated by motives of avarice, who hoped to profit either in power or riches by any change that he might be instrumental in bringing about in the established order of things. It seemed horrible that a young and beautiful girl should have been enticed into such a desperate situation. She seemed far too intelligent to be merely a brainless tool and even his brief association with her made it most difficult for him to believe that she was a knave.

"The undertaking is certainly fraught with grave dangers," he said, "and as it is primarily a job for men, I cannot understand why you were permitted to face the dan-

It was Colt who found Jafar lying dead. Protruding from his chest was the shaft of an arrow.

gers and hardships that must of necessity be entailed by the carrying out of such a perilous campaign."

"The life of a woman is of no more value than that of a man," she said, "and I was needed. There is always a great deal of important and confidential clerical work to be done which Comrade Zveri can only entrust to one in whom he has implicit confidence. He reposes such trust in me and, in addition, I am a trained typist and stenographer. Those reasons in themselves are sufficient to explain why I am here, but another very important one is that I desire to be with Comrade Zveri."

In the girl's words Colt saw the admission of a romance, but to his American mind this was all the greater reason why the girl should not have been brought along for he could not conceive of a man exposing the girl he loved to such dangers.

ABOVE them, Tarzan of the Apes moved silently. First he reached over his shoulder and lifted little Nkima from his back. Nkima would have objected, but the veriest shadow of a whisper silenced him. The ape-man had various methods of dealing with enemies—methods that he had learned and practiced long before he had been cognizant of the fact that he was not an ape. Long before he had ever seen another white man, he had terrorized the Gomangani, the black men of the forest and the jungle, and had learned that a long step toward defeating an enemy may be taken by first demoralizing its morale. He knew now that these people were not only the invaders of his own domain and, therefore, his own personal enemies, but that they threatened the peace of Great Britain, which was dear to him, and of the rest of the civilized world with which, at least, Tarzan had no quarrels. It is true that he held civilization in general in considerable contempt, but in even greater contempt he held those who interfered with the rights of others, or with the established order of jungle or city.

As Tarzan left the tree in which he had been hiding, the two below him were no more aware of his departure than they had been of his presence. Colt found himself attempting to fathom the mystery of love. He knew Zveri and it appeared inconceivable to him that a girl of Zora Drinov's type could be attracted by a man of Zveri's stamp. Of course, it was none of his affair, but it bothered him nevertheless because it seemed to constitute a reflection upon the girl and to lower her in his estimation. He was disappointed in her, and Colt did not like to be disappointed in people to whom he had been attracted.

"You knew Comrade Zveri in America?" asked Zora.

"Yes."

"What do you think of him?" she demanded.

"I found him a very forceful character," replied Colt. "I believe him to be a man who would carry on to a conclusion anything that he attempted. Perhaps no better man could have been selected for this mission."

If the girl had hoped to surprise Colt into an expression of personal like or dislike for Zveri, she had failed, and if such was the fact she was too wise to pursue the subject further. She realized that she was dealing with a man from whom she would get little information that he did not wish her to have; but on the other hand a man who might easily wrest information from others, for he was that type which seemed to invite confidences.

Their conversation drifted to various subjects—to their lives and experiences in their native lands—to the happenings that had befallen them since they had entered Africa, and finally, to the experiences of the day. And while they talked, Tarzan of the Apes returned to the tree above them, but this time he did not come alone.

"I wonder if we shall ever know," she said, "who killed Jafar."

"It is a mystery that is not lessened by the fact that none of the askaris could recognize the type of arrow with which he was slain, though that might be accounted for by the fact that none of them are of this district."

"It has considerably shaken the nerves of the men," said Zora, "and I sincerely hope that nothing similar occurs again. I have found that it does not take much to upset these natives; while most of them are brave in the face of known dangers, they are apt to be entirely demoralized by anything bordering on the supernatural."

"I think they felt better when they got the Hindu planted under ground," said Colt, "though some of them were not at all sure but what he might return anyway."

"There is not much chance of that," said the girl, laughing.

She had scarcely ceased speaking when the branches above them rustled, and a heavy body plunged downward to the table-top between them, crushing the flimsy piece of furniture to earth.

. . . . . .

The two sprang to their feet, Colt whipping out his revolver, and the girl stifling a cry as she stepped back. Colt felt the hairs rise upon his head and gooseflesh form upon his arms and back—for there between them lay the dead body of Raghunath Jafar upon its back, the eyes rolled backward, staring up into the night!

CHAPTER IV

Into the Lion's Den

NKIMA was angry. He had been awakened from the depth of a sound sleep, which was bad enough, but now his master had set out upon foolish errands.

While Tarzan remained in the vicinity of the camp, Nkima had not been particularly perturbed; and when he had returned to the tree with his burden, the little Manu was sure that he was going to remain there for the balance of the night; but instead he had departed immediately, and now was swinging through the black forest with a determination that evidenced fixity of purpose.

Where Zveri and his party had started slowly along winding jungle trails, Tarzan moved almost in an air-line through the jungle toward his destination, which was the same as that of Zveri, with the result that before Zveri reached the almost perpendicular crag which formed the last and greatest natural barrier to the forbidden valley of Opar, Tarzan and Nkima had disappeared beyond the summit and were crossing the desolate valley, upon the far side of which loomed the great walls and lofty spires and turrents of ancient Opar.

No evidence of ruin was apparent at this great distance; and once again, in imagination, he beheld a city of magnificent beauty, its streets and temples thronged with people; and once again his mind toyed with the mystery of the city's origin, when back somewhere in the dim vista of antiquity a race of rich and powerful people had conceived and built this enduring monument to a vanished civilization.

That its few inhabitants were direct descendants of its once powerful builders seemed not unlikely, in view of the rites and ceremonies of the ancient religion which they practiced as well as by the fact that by scarcely any other hypothesis could the presence of a white-skinned people be accounted for in this remote and inaccessible African fastness.

The peculiar laws of heredity, which seemed operative in Opar as in no other portion of the world, suggested an origin differing materially from that of other men; for it is a peculiar fact that the men of Opar bear little or no resemblance to the females of their kind. The former are short, heavy-set, hairy, almost ape-like in their conformation and appearance; while the women are slender, smooth-skinned and often beautiful.

There were certain physical and mental attributes of the men that had suggested to Tarzan the possibility that at some time in the past the colonists had, either by choice or necessity, interbred with the great apes of the district, and he also was aware that owing to the scarcity of victims for the human sacrifice which their rigid worship demanded it was the accepted practice among them to use for this purpose either males or females who deviated considerably from the standard time had established for each sex, with the result that through the law of natural selection an overwhelming majority of the males would be grotesque and the females normal and beautiful.

It was with such reveries that the mind of the ape-man was occupied as he crossed the desolate valley of Opar which lay shimmering in the bright sunlight that was relieved only by the shade of an occasional gnarled and stunted tree. Ahead of him and to his right was the small rocky hillock, upon the summit of which was located the outer entrance to the treasure vaults of Opar. But with this he was not now interested, his sole object being to forewarn La of the approach of the invaders, that she might prepare her defense.

It had been long since Tarzan had visited Opar, but upon that last occasion, when he had restored La to her loyal people and reëstablished her supremacy following the defeat of the forces of Cadj, the high priest, and the death of the latter beneath the fangs and talons of Jad-bal-ja, he had carried away with him for the first time a conviction of the friendliness of all of the people of Opar. He had for years known that La was secretly his friend, but her savage, grotesque retainers always heretofore had feared and hated him, and so it was now that he approached Opar as one might approach any citadel of one's friends, without stealth and without any doubt but that he would be received in friendship.

Nkima, however, was not so sure. The gloomy ruins terrified him. He scolded and pleaded, but all to no avail, and at last terror overcame his love and loyalty so that, as they were approaching the outer wall, which loomed high above them, he leaped from his master's shoulder and scampered away from the ruins that confronted him.

As Tarzan approached the narrow fissure which alone gave entrance through the massive outer walls of Opar, he was conscious, as he had been years before on the occasion of his first approach to the city, of unseen eyes upon him, and momentarily he expected to hear a greeting when the watchers recognized him.

Without hesitation, therefore, and with no apprehensiveness, Tarzan entered the narrow cleft and descended a flight of concrete steps that led to the winding passage through the thick outer wall. The narrow court, beyond which loomed the inner wall, was silent and deserted; nor was the silence broken as he crossed it to another narrow passage which led through it; at the end of this he came to a broad avenue upon the opposite side of which stood the crumbling ruins of the great temple of Opar.

IN silence and solitude he entered the frowning portal, flanked by rows of stately pillars, from the capitals of which grotesque birds stared down upon him as they had stared through all the countless ages since forgotten hands had carved them from the solid rock of the monoliths.

On through the temple toward the inner courtyard, where he knew the activities of the city were carried on, Tarzan made his way in silence. He had not sought to approach Opar stealthily and he knew he had not arrived unseen. Why a greeting was delayed he did not know, unless it was that they were waiting, after carrying word of his coming to, La for her instructions.

Through the main corridor Tarzan made his way, noting again the tablets of gold with their ancient and long undeciphered hieroglyphics. Through the chamber of the seven golden pillars he passed and across the golden floor of an adjoining room—and still only silence and emptiness, yet with vague suggestions of figures moving in the galleries that overlooked the apartment through which he was passing; then at last he came to a heavy door beyond which he was sure he would find either priests or priestesses of this great temple of the Flaming God.

Fearlessly he pushed it open and stepped across the threshold—and at that instant a knotted club descended heavily upon his head, felling him senseless to the floor.

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The Clue of La Mano Nera

By LEMUEL DE BRA

"THE matter," said Luk Fang in his cool, precise English, "is of the utmost secrecy. Should it become known to this *La Mano Nera* that I came here to detective headquarters and told what I know, my life wouldn't be worth—"

A smile on his dark face and in his slant bronze eyes, Luk Fang flung up one slender hand in a quick, graceful gesture, and snapped thumb and finger.

In that quick, businesslike way habitual with him, Detective Joe Manning flipped his cigar at the cuspidor. His dark face alight with keen interest, he leaned over his desk.

"Don't be afraid of me spilling anything, Fang. I need your help. And you wouldn't be worth anything to me if the Black Hand cut your throat. So go ahead with what you know."

"Unfortunately I don't know much, Mr. Manning; and I need your help far more than you need mine. I came direct to you because, though you are still a young man, you have a splendid reputation for honesty and detective ability. Also, you're a fighter. And in this case—"

"Omit flowers!" Manning cut in. "What's this talk of the Black Hand? You been threatened?"

Luk Fang's lean intelligent face showed no resentment over the detective's sharp tone. Thrusting a hand inside his coat, he drew out a sheet of paper and passed it across the desk.

The note was a small sheet of ordinary white paper folded once. Manning unfolded the note and bent over it expectantly. As he studied it, his dark eyes narrowed with a curiously intent expression.

"Where's the envelope?" he asked, looking up.

"My uncle says he mislaid it at the time. I searched for it, but in vain."

"Then this was sent to your uncle—not to you?"

"That's right. My uncle, Tom Leong, is quite wealthy—as you know. While I—" Luk Fang spread his slim, dark hands and smiled deprecatingly.

Detective Manning looked down at the note again. "This is dated almost two months ago, Fang. Why didn't you bring this to me at once?"

"I didn't know anything about it until last night. You see, that is the first one my uncle received. Last night he got a second. It made him so furious he threw it into the stove. But on thinking the matter over more calmly, he decided to tell me. When he did so, he found that first note in his desk. Do you understand Italian, Mr. Manning?"

"A little. Have to pick up all sorts of knowledge in this work. Besides, I've seen these messages before."

Manning picked up the note and read aloud: "'*Preparati per la tua morte—Prima e Ultima.*'

"'Prepare for your death! First and Last!' It's the usual Black Hand warning, and generally it is the last. Queer! Sending a warning note in Italian to a Chinese who can't even read English! Who translated it for you?"

"The clerk who handles my uncle's Italian trade. We have built up a fair business in fish and meats with the Italian quarter."

Manning reached for a pencil. "What's the clerk's name?"

"Tony Sartorio."

Detective Manning started to write, but halted. He looked up at Luk Fang.

"Tony Sartorio? Little pockmarked wop with a long scar across the palm of his left hand?"

"That's the one, Mr. Manning. So you know him?"

"Yes. Have you heard of any one else getting Black Hand notes?"

"No, I have not. And I have been wondering about that. Has my uncle been singled out by some one—for some reason? Or have others been made to pay money under threat of death? Have you had any other complaints?"

FOR just an instant Manning hesitated. He did not know Luk Fang very well, but felt that he could be trusted. He laid down the note, opened the middle drawer of his desk, and got out two sheets of paper. One he laid on the desk, face-up, beside the note that Luk Fang had brought.

The two notes appeared to be identical. There was the same rough scrawl mixed with samples of fair penmanship—plain evidence that the writer had attempted to disguise his handwriting. And on each bit of paper, in addition to the warning to prepare for death, were a crudely drawn dagger and the usual black hand.

"This came to us in the mail the other day," Manning explained. "With it was this anonymous letter."

Manning passed over the other sheet of paper. It was a typewritten message, unsigned. Luk Fang read aloud:

" 'I have paid these robbers too much already. What are the police for, anyway? Now they threaten me with death. I am going to hide until you do something to protect honest citizens.' "

"I was in hopes," said Manning, "that you knew of others who have been threatened, so I could possibly find the writer of that anonymous letter. He might be able to tell something that would help. It's a tough proposition working in the dark."

Luk Fang handed back the message, and nodded. "I realize that; and I want to help all I can. Have you any suggestions?"

"Yes," replied Manning, rising. "I want to talk with your uncle. Can you slip me into the house without the world and his wife seeing us?"

"I can and I will," answered Luk Fang, gliding to his feet. "Uncle is afraid to have you come to the house, of course; and you know there is danger in it for me. But I was hoping you would talk with him. I don't know why, Mr. Manning, but I have a suspicion that this matter is something more than a mere Black Hand extortion. Now that you are on the job I feel better already."

Manning had turned toward the door to the assembly room. Now he stopped short, his narrowed gaze on Luk Fang's face.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Luk Fang hesitated. "Well," he said slowly, "if my uncle doesn't tell you, Mr. Manning, I will. Is that satisfactory?"

"I suppose it has to be," Manning growled and went on into the assembly-room, closing the door behind him.

HE walked quickly to where Detective Pete Martina was hunched over his desk, his sleek black head cocked sidewise and his tongue thrust in his cheek while he struggled with a report.

"Listen, you little greaseball," said Manning quietly; "chuck that report. We got another lead on that Black Hand business. I'll tell you all about it later. Just now I want you to do some snappy work. In about a minute, go into my office and get the two Black Hand notes you'll find in the middle drawer. Take them up to the Bureau of Identification. Remember Tony Sartorio?"

"Sure I remember that wop!" smiled Martina. "The dirty little Black-hander! Done a stretch—"

"Tell Murph to photograph those two Black Hand notes and check the writing with the sample he has of Tony's. Then you beat it over to Chinatown and see what you can find out about him. Works for old Tom Leong. Be back here, or phone, in an hour. Then, old side-kick, you and I will—"

Manning broke off, and both men turned quickly as the door behind them was abruptly flung open. Into the room strode Chief Petersen.

"On the job, Manning! Murder in Chinatown! Old Tom Leong dead in bed with a knife in him!"

Manning, hardened officer though he was, started violently. For an instant he stared at the door the Chief had closed behind him; then he turned to Martina:

"Pete, take those letters upstairs as I said. Then you go to Chinatown, get Tony Sartorio, and bring him to Tom Leong's home—but *don't tell him a thing!*"

Back in his office, Manning was his old cool self again. He got his hat, spoke to Luk Fang, and went to the hall door, wondering how he would break the tragic news to old Tom Leong's only nephew.

Out in the hall that problem was lifted from Manning's shoulders. Chief Petersen, fussy and officious, hastened up to Manning.

"We've got to work fast on this, Manning! No telling what this killing may lead to! Tong war, maybe. I'm going up there and— Oh, hello, Luk Fang! I'm sorry. How'd you get here so soon?"

"Sorry?" echoed Luk Fang while his deep bronze eyes grew slowly wider. "What—do you mean?"

"He means," spoke up Manning, laying a hand on Luk Fang's shoulder, "that even while you were in my office telling me of your uncle's danger, the worst has come."

Luk Fang stiffened. His eyes flew wide; his jaw dropped.

"You mean—he's dead? They've killed him?"

Manning nodded.

"*Aih-yah!*" cried the Chinese. "*K'u wo shan lok!* He is—dead!"

For a moment Luk Fang stood motionless as a statue; then his eyes closed, a deep sigh shook him. . . . He looked at Manning.

"Let us hurry," he said, once more the cool, emotionless Oriental. "Mr. Manning, can you go with me at once in my car?"

"Just what I was going to suggest. I want to ask you a few more questions."

THEY hastened out to where Luk Fang had parked his car, a glistening sport model of expensive make.

"The note you gave me," began Manning as Luk Fang headed for Chinatown, "is the sort sent by the Black Hand after their demand for money has been refused. The first message always demands money. Why didn't you bring me that?"

"My uncle couldn't find it. At least that is what he said. I suspect that he burned it to prevent me finding it. You see, this has been going on for at least six months; but last night is the first time my uncle took me into his confidence."

"Then he has been paying the Black Hand?"

"He has been paying some one. He told me last night that he has made four cash payments of five hundred dollars each. About two months ago he told the extortioners he would pay no more; and they sent him that note I gave you. He made another payment, then again refused. And again they sent him a warning note, the one he threw in the stove last night."

. . . . . .

To his surprise, Sartorio offered no resistance. Then Manning understood—too late.

"One more question," said Manning quietly as Luk Fang slowed down before a modern brick dwelling. "You told me you suspected that there was something more behind this than the Black Hand and that you would tell me if your uncle didn't. Now that—"

"Now that my honorable uncle is dead," Luk Fang cut in in his cool, precise voice, "I will never tell. His secret will be buried with him."

Manning said no more. On the sidewalk, a group of excited Chinese had gathered. Over their heads, Manning saw the broad shoulders of Policeman O'Neil standing on guard in the doorway.

"Know anything about it, O'Neil?" Detective Manning asked.

Officer O'Neil shook his head. "You know how they do. Chink comes to the door an' yells his head off. Squadman Hansen hears him an' whistles for me. Hansen is inside now."

They went on in. The hall was gloomy. There was a teakwood stand on the left, an ornate hat tree on the right, the usual odor of stale incense. On the deep Cantonese rug their feet made no sound as they hurried down the hall.

This hall, Manning noted, ran the full length of the house, ending at a blank wall against which stood a large, richly decorated vase. On each side of the hall were several doors, all closed but one. This was the second door on the right.

From this door now stepped a stockily built man with hard gray eyes and a face so weather-beaten that it was hard to tell where his leathery neck left off and his brown wool shirt began. This was Hansen, of the Chinatown plainclothes squad.

"Bad mess, Manning!" grunted Hansen. "Luk Fang, you better wait a while."

Luk Fang said nothing. He passed Hansen into the room, followed by Manning.

The room was obviously a combined living-room and library. The left wall was lined with books. The right wall, through which a door opened into an adjoining room, was hung with Chinese paintings. In the center of the room was a large teakwood table on which were books, writing materials, a telephone and a long-stemmed Chinese pipe. Beyond this table was a window, heavily barred.

Against the right wall, near this barred window, was a leather couch. On this couch, flat on his back, lay the body of old Tom Leong. It was a powerfully built body, Manning noted, even though the face showed the passing of many years. And that face, even in death, was a hard face, bitter, cunning, rapacious, and cruel.

Tom Leong, as Manning learned later was his daily custom, had risen late, and had read for an hour. Then, still clad in his blue silk pajamas, he had lain down on the couch to wait until the usual time when the servant brought in his tea.

Now, protruding from the old man's abdomen, pressed hard against the blood-soaked pajamas, was the big handle of what was obviously a long-bladed knife. The slant of the knife showed that the point of the blade had been aimed at the heart. Blood had poured over the pajamas, the edge of the couch, and dripped to the blue Cantonese rug on the floor.

It was, as Hansen had said, a "bad mess."

For just a moment Luk Fang stared at the gruesome sight; then, without a word, he turned, groped his way to the table, sat down, and bowed his head on his arms.

There was a moment of awed silence—broken by the sound of heavy, hurrying steps in the hall. Into the room, as Manning had expected, came Chief Petersen, followed by a slight, dark man wearing glasses and carrying a black bag. This was Dr. Grierson, medical examiner and autopsy surgeon.

Chief Petersen was a recent political appointee; but before that he had been head of a large detective agency.

"Get busy, Doc!" snapped Petersen after a glance at the dead man. Then he turned to Squadman Hansen. "Who found this?"

"The servant, Ah Lee," answered Hansen.

"Where is he?"

Hansen looked chagrined. "I had him here, but he slipped out."

"Get him! Manning, you go through the house and see what you find. Note the windows, doors, everything. And don't be all day about it! Doc, how long's he been dead?"

"Less than half an hour," Manning heard the medical examiner say as he followed Hansen down the hall.

"Damn that Chink!" growled Hansen over his shoulder. "I told him to stay there, but while I was taking a look at the dead man he skipped out. Wonder—"

"That is his room—on your left," came a quiet voice, and Manning turned quickly, to find Luk Fang just behind him. "I came to show you through the house," the Chinese explained. "Let us begin at the front. Mr. Hansen, just go right in. You'll probably find Ah Lee burning punk and mumbling prayers."

HANSEN tried the knob, found the door unlocked, and went in. Manning followed Luk Fang back to the front door.

"This door, Mr. Manning, is always kept locked during the day, and at night it is both locked and barred. Now," —Luk Fang turned and faced the rear—"this first door on the right is—was, Uncle's bedroom. It is always locked and barred. The only way to get in is through the door

to the library. That door is always locked at night, but is usually open during the day. Now this door—"

"Did your uncle stay here in the house all the time?" asked Manning.

"He hasn't left it for many months—not since he got the first threatening letter. Now this door on the left is my room. Shall we go in?"

"It isn't necessary. Are all the windows in the house barred—like that one in the library?"

Luk Fang nodded. "Uncle had them barred just after receiving that first warning. The only way that any one can get into the house is for some one to unlock either the front door or the rear door. Since no one was in the house at the time except Uncle and Ah Lee—"

A sharp yell rose suddenly at the rear of the hall, and into the hallway stumbled a disheveled Chinese, with Hansen behind him holding to the Oriental's blouse collar.

"Found him hiding under the bed!" growled Hansen.

"Which means nothing except that he was badly frightened," explained Luk Fang. "Ah Lee has the mind of a child."

They went on down the hall. Luk Fang pointed out the dining-room, then turned into a room on the left that was obviously a kitchen. The bathroom, he explained, was between the kitchen and Ah Lee's quarters.

"You will notice, Mr. Manning, that these two kitchen windows are barred; also that the kitchen door, the only door in the house except the front door, is also fitted with bars. During the day it is kept locked. Ah Lee has practically no need to open it, as he goes out for all our supplies. And he never opens it without first notifying Uncle so he could lock the library door. Understand?"

"Certainly. But didn't Ah Lee ever forget to lock the kitchen door?"

Luk Fang shook his head emphatically. "Never! Ah Lee, for some reason, hated my uncle; but he is a faithful and dependable servant. Don't you think it best to examine all the windows?"

Manning nodded.

"I'll ask Hansen to do that. I'm anxious to hear what Ah Lee has to say."

"He won't say much until I get there. He understands very little English, and speaks practically none at all. There's Chief Petersen now, signaling to me!"

They proceeded back to the library. Manning asked Hansen to examine all the windows; then he turned his attention to what Ah Lee had to say.

Ah Lee had been placed in a chair where he had to avert his head to keep from looking at the ghastly sight on the couch. He was trembling violently, his face twitching.

"Don't be afraid, Fang. You wouldn't be worth anything to me if the Black Hand cut your throat."

"I can't get a thing out of him except his eternal, 'No savvy,'" growled Chief Petersen. "Luk Fang, ask him just how he came to discover that your uncle had been killed."

Luk Fang spoke in swift, clacking Cantonese. To Manning it seemed like a very long speech for such a simple question. Ah Lee, apparently calmed by Luk Fang's presence, burst out at last in a long answering volley of singsong syllables.

"He says,"—Luk Fang turned to address Petersen,—"that at the usual hour, ten o'clock, he came in here to ask my uncle if he wanted rice cakes and crab's-eye tea, or if he preferred almond cakes and water-fairy tea. He says that the hall door was open, and that he saw my uncle—as you see him now. Ah Lee then ran to the front door, opened it, and shouted for help."

"Was anyone else in the house at the time?" Petersen asked.

There was no one—so Ah Lee declared, as interpreted by Luk Fang. In answer to Petersen's further questioning, Ah Lee stated that there had been no callers that morning, that he had heard no cries, no sounds whatever, and he was positive that both the front door and the rear door had been kept locked.

At that juncture Squadman Hansen stepped into the room. He reported that he had made a careful examination of all the windows from the outside. None of them had been tampered with. Neither had the rear door been forced.

Chief Petersen frowned. He took a few steps across the room, and back. Suddenly he turned to Luk Fang:

"Ask that bird when he last saw your uncle alive!"

"I'll ask him," Luk Fang agreed; "but I'm sure he hadn't seen him since last night. He never disturbed my uncle in the mornings until ten o'clock."

Ah Lee, as interpreted through Luk Fang, confirmed that statement.

"Well, then," barked Petersen, facing Luk Fang, "when did you last see him alive?"

"At nine o'clock," Luk Fang answered promptly.

"How do you know it was nine o'clock?"

"Because," replied Luk Fang with quiet dignity, "my uncle maintained a very orderly household. Everything was done—as you Americans would say—by the clock. So I was called by Ah Lee at the usual hour — eight o'clock. I had breakfast, as always, promptly at half-past eight. And promptly at nine, I said good-by to Uncle, unbarred the front door, and left."

There was another moment of silence. Chief Petersen, frowning, took another turn across the room.

Then Dr. Grierson spoke up:

"A very mysterious situation, Chief, very mysterious! Luk Fang leaves at nine o'clock. From then on there was no one in the house until we came except Ah Lee and the deceased. . . . Yet, during that time, Tom Leong was killed. With all windows barred, and all doors locked, with nobody in the house *except Ah Lee*, a ghastly murder was committed."

The inference in Dr. Grierson's tone was unmistakable. Chief Petersen turned to Luk Fang.

"Ask Ah Lee if he ever saw that knife before."

Ah Lee turned from Luk Fang to stare at the long

handle, and Manning noted for the first time that the handle had been wrapped with black adhesive tape. That in itself might be of no significance; yet instantly the words *"Black Hand"* flashed into Manning's mind.

Ah Lee burst suddenly into vehement Cantonese. In the midst of it, Luk Fang spoke to Chief Petersen.

"He says he never saw that thing before. I believe that, but I'm sure he has been lying about other matters. Now if you will pardon me, I have a suggestion. This mysterious situation puts both Ah Lee and myself in a very embarrassing position. I can account for every minute of my time this morning and have witnesses to prove my statements. But I'd like to ask Ah Lee a few questions myself and to have some one else interpret his answers. No doubt, Mr. Petersen, you can find some Chinese in front of the house whom you can trust."

Chief Petersen nodded to Hansen. "Go get some one. Make it snappy." As Hansen left, he turned to Luk Fang. "Do you think Ah Lee did this?"

Luk Fang glanced at Manning. Manning expected him to tell about the Black Hand letter, but he didn't. Manning, himself, was hoping that the Chief would clear up everything else first. Time enough to bring up the Black Hand business when Detective Martina came in with Tony Sartorio. He was wondering why Martina did not come.

"Mr. Manning," said the amazing Oriental, "you are hurting my neck."

"I don't believe he did it, Mr. Petersen," Luk Fang replied; "but I think he is holding back something—through fear. If we—"

Luk Fang broke off as Hansen ushered another Chinese into the room. He was a corpulent, moon-faced Oriental with intelligent eyes and a shock of stiff black hair. He wore American clothes. Manning knew him—Big Jim Toy, proprietor of a Chinese restaurant, and absolutely trustworthy.

Chief Petersen explained what was wanted. Luk Fang and Ah Lee then exchanged half a dozen volleys of sing-song syllables.

Gradually the fear in Ah Lee's face died out; into Luk Fang's usually impassive countenance came a satisfied, exultant look.

Presently Luk Fang nodded to Big Jim Toy. Big Jim turned to Chief Petersen. He spoke in brisk, businesslike tones.

"Luk Fang say to Ah Lee: 'If you don't tell the truth, you go to prison for murder. If you tell the truth, nothing will happen. No matter what you done, tell us the truth.'

"Then Ah Lee say to Luk Fang: 'I was afraid, so I lied. Several times when doing my morning work I leave kitchen door unlocked for few minutes. This morning I left it unlocked when I went into dining-room. While in dining-room I looked out window and saw a man go to kitchen door. I heard him come in. He was in house mebbe five minutes, then he left in a hurry. Then I go out and lock kitchen door and go back to dining-room work.' That's all Ah Lee say."

"Well, that's a start, anyway!" exclaimed Chief Petersen. "Did he know the man?"

Big Jim asked Ah Lee this.

Ah Lee glanced questioningly at Luk Fang, then answered.

"He says he doesn't know the man's name," Big Jim told Petersen; "but he knows that the man works at Tom Leong's store. He comes here frequently with meat. And he has a long scar on the palm of his left hand."

"Tony Sartorio," spoke up Manning as Chief Petersen turned to him, frowning. "I sent Detective Martina after him. They should be here any minute."

"The devil you say!" exploded the Chief. "Why didn't you tell me that in the first place? Why waste all this time?"

"It hasn't been wasted, Chief," Manning answered courteously. "It was best to clear away everything else in the businesslike way you have done it."

The Chief was mollified by that touch of flattery. Manning then went on to tell about Luk Fang's visit and the Black Hand note he had brought.

"The note he brought is precisely like the one I showed you—the one that was mailed us with an anonymous letter. We were up against a blank wall with that one; but now it looks like we are going to get somewhere. And now when Martina—"

THE phone on the table rang. Luk Fang glanced questioningly at Chief Petersen, who nodded. Luk Fang hastened to answer.

"It's for you, Mr. Manning," he said.

Manning took the receiver. "Hello!" he said; "this is Manning."

"Listen, you big mick," came the voice of Martina, "this is Greaseball. I been hanging around Tom Leong's joint waiting for him. He left here at about half-past nine.

Didn't tell anyone where he was going but said he'd be back in a few minutes. I thought I'd better let you know."

"Glad you did," Manning replied. "Do you know where he lives?"

"Nope. And no one here does. Clerk says mebbe Luk Fang knows, as he does all the hiring."

"Wait a minute!" said Manning.

He turned to Luk Fang and told him what Martina had said. Luk Fang got out a small black book, found Tony Sartorio's page, and gave Manning the Italian's address.

Manning repeated it to Martina. "Go get him, Martina!" he directed. "And make it snappy! We're waiting for you."

Manning then called the station, got the Bureau of Identification and talked with Murphy.

"Murphy is certain the two notes were written by the same person," he told Petersen when he had hung up. "Of course, that doesn't help much. And he found no fingerprints. Only useless smudges."

"Well, since you already suspected Tony Sartorio," spoke up Petersen, "why didn't you have Murphy compare the notes with his specimen of Sartorio's handwriting?"

For just an instant Manning hesitated. "I did that, Chief," he replied slowly. "And Murphy says there is a similarity but it is not conclusive. The sample he has of Sartorio's penmanship is three years old; and there is not enough on the Black Hand notes to make a conclusive comparison. We can attend to that matter when we get hold of Sartorio."

"Wish he'd hurry!" growled the chief. "Maybe he should have help."

"Not that little wildcat," smiled Manning. "And he has a better chance of slipping up on Sartorio alone."

"Then let's get out of this room while Doc removes that knife. I've seen enough already. Wish I had a drink."

"I prescribe two ounces *spirits frumenti* for each of you," smiled Dr. Grierson. "Maybe Luk Fang can accommodate you."

"Let us go to the dining-room," said Luk Fang quietly, and added something in Chinese to Ah Lee.

The point of the blade had been aimed at the heart. . . . . For a moment Luk Fang stared at the gruesome sight.

A MOMENT later they were sitting at the table with glasses and a bottle of excellent American whisky. Dr. Grierson joined them.

The talk shifted around to the mystery, the menace, of the Black Hand.

"This your first experience with it?" Manning asked Luk Fang.

Luk Fang nodded. "Never knew a thing about it and don't know now. Just what is it, anyway? A blackmail organization?"

Manning carefully lit a cigarette. "Not exactly, Luk Fang. Blackmailing is where you get something on some one and make your victim pay to keep still about it. The Black Handers are extortioners—like the racketeers. They have nothing on their victims, but they force them to pay under threat of bombing or death by way of the knife. Most people believe it is a gigantic organization with headquarters in Sicily, but that's all the bunk. Any Italian criminal who is hard up can start a little Black Hand organization of his own—and frequently does. Now Sartorio, for instance, may be an agent of a Black Hand ring; or he may be the whole cheese himself. When we get him—"

The phone in the library rang. Luk Fang hastened to answer and called back that it was for Manning.

"Hey, Joe!" came the voice of Martina. "Tony's woman says he left for work this morning and hasn't been back. I thanked her and beat it, but I got a hunch that little wop was hiding in the house. You'd better—"

"I'll be right down," Manning broke in. "Where are you?"

Martina told him. Manning reported back to Petersen, then called a taxi and broke the speed limit toward the Italian quarter.

Tony Sartorio lived on the second floor of a cheap apartment-house. Manning got the proprietor, a slatternly woman who both hated and feared the police, and told her what he wanted her to do. She agreed, and he and Martina followed her down the hall to the door of the Sartorio apartment.

The landlady rang the bell.

Inside there was a silence; then a woman's voice called out: "Who it it?"

The landlady answered: "This is me. Got a special-delivery letter for you."

The door was opened. Manning, followed by Martina, slipped in. The landlady lost no time getting out of the way.

Manning found a young woman staring at him with more anger than surprise. She was a faded blonde who had once been pretty.

"So you came back, eh?" she snarled, looking at Martina. "Well, he's here. An' he done it. Go get him. I'll be damned glad to get rid of the dirty double-crossing wop."

Manning regarded the woman in silence; then suddenly his ears caught the sound of a window being stealthily raised.

"Come on, Martina!" he cried instantly, and sprang past the woman, down the hall into the living-room. There he saw a door on his right, made for it, threw it open and found himself in a bedroom. By the open window a stocky man with swarthy face and oily black hair was scrambling for the fire-escape.

In two jumps Manning had Sartorio by the collar. To his surprise, Sartorio offered no resistance as Manning dragged him back through the window; then he understood—too late.

With both feet on the floor, his hands free, Sartorio braced himself against the window-sill and hurled himself back against Manning. Manning was thrown with stunning force against Martina. The three men went to the floor. Sartorio twisted loose from Manning's grasp, sprang up, and grabbed a chair.

Manning, in the act of rising, saw the heavy chair

swinging down at his head. There was no time to fend it off with his hands, no time to leap aside; so he did the only thing possible—hurled himself straight at Sartorio's legs.

The chair crashed on the floor—and Sartorio's face smashed down on the broken chair.

But rough-and-tumble fighting was nothing new to Tony Sartorio. His face bleeding, he rolled over just in time to dodge Martina's hands, sprang up, and snatched an automatic from beneath his coat.

But he did not fire. Even as his finger tightened on the trigger, Manning's fist struck him a terrific blow on the jaw—sent him crashing against the wall. He crumpled to the floor and lay there—motionless.

"A helluva good fight!" said a voice from the doorway. "Wish I could sock him one like that, myself!"

Manning looked around. The woman stood in the doorway coolly smoking a cigarette. Telling Martina to take care of Sartorio, Manning followed the woman out into the living-room.

"Just what did Tony tell you when he came in?" Manning asked.

"You go to hell!" she flung back. "I'm no snitch!"

"What's your name?"

"Mrs. Al Jolson," the woman replied airily.

"Cut the comedy or I'll run you in!" snapped Manning. "Tell me—"

"All right, big boy, run me in! I been collared by better cops than you!"

Manning looked hard at the woman, then past her to where a whisky-bottle, half full, stood on the table. For a silent moment he regarded the bottle thoughtfully.

"Sure you can have a snorter!" the woman spoke up, and turned toward the table.

MANNING ignored her. With a word to Martina to watch things, he hastened out.

When he returned sometime later, the woman was sitting by the table pouring another drink. Martina was in the bedroom smoking a cigarette. Tony Sartorio, in handcuffs, lay on the bed, still unconscious.

"Where in heck you been, you big mick?" demanded Martina. "Getting a haircut, or something?"

"I been getting something," Manning answered enigmatically. "Wagon's downstairs, Greaseball; but we're not going to the station. We're going back to Tom Leong's and get a confession right on the spot."

A little whisky poured down Sartorio's throat, a few slaps with a wet towel, and the prisoner was able to walk downstairs. The woman was obviously surprised that Manning did not take her too. Sartorio himself said nothing, asked no questions.

When they arrived at Tom Leong's, they found all except Luk Fang back in the library. The body of old Leong had been covered with a sheet. At Petersen's orders, Tony Sartorio was seated where Ah Lee had been—in a chair facing the couch. The sheet was removed. Chief Petersen pointed an accusing finger at Sartorio and shouted:

"So you did that, eh?"

Just as the Chief finished speaking, and before Sartorio had any chance to reply, Luk Fang glided quietly into the room—and Manning sprang at him!

Quick as Manning was, Luk Fang was not taken by surprise. Dropping beneath Manning's outstretched arms, Luk Fang whirled, dived through the doorway, and raced for the rear of the house.

"Quick, Martina!" shouted Manning, and tumbled down the hall after the Chinese.

Manning was no dub sprinter; but Luk Fang had the start. Manning was three yards behind when Luk Fang vanished through the kitchen door.

"Careful, Joe!" cried Martina as Manning struck the door open.

But Manning was on his guard. Ducking low, he leaped far out into the room—just as a gun roared. The bullet passed just behind Manning. As Manning whirled, he saw Luk Fang by the rear door, a smoking automatic in his hand.

At the same instant, Luk Fang turned and aimed point blank at the detective.

Manning had drawn his police .38; but it was a matter of pride with him that even at the risk of his own life he bring his man in alive. So, quick as a cat, he dropped full length on the floor. As Luk Fang's gun roared again, Manning grabbed the legs of a chair, whirled and threw the chair at Luk Fang's gun. There was another explosion as the chair struck Luk Fang and dropped to the floor.

WITH a savage curse, Luk Fang turned to jerk open the door.

As Manning leaped up, he saw Martina pull down on their quarry.

"Don't!" he shouted, and made a jump for the Chinese. With his left arm he caught Luk Fang around the neck; with his right he brought his police gun smashing down on the Chinaman's wrist.

A gasp of pain burst from Luk Fang's lips. The gun fell to the floor. And then—

"Mr. Manning," said the amazing Oriental in his calm, precise English, "you are hurting my neck."

"I beg a thousand pardons!" Manning said as he slapped on the bracelets. "But you're damned lucky I didn't break it! If you—"

Manning broke off as the kitchen door was flung open. Into the room tumbled Chief Petersen with Dr. Grierson and Squadman Hansen at his heels.

"What—what the devil!" gasped Petersen, staring at the handcuffs on Luk Fang. "Explain this, Manning!" he ordered sharply.

At Manning's suggestion they went back to the library.

"Chief," began Manning, while all eyes were on him, "I want to explain first that the reason I did not take you into my confidence as I went along was that you were constantly with Luk Fang, and also because I was working more or less in the dark.

"When we came into this room a short time ago I noticed two things that seemed worth considering. In the first place, the way that knife had been shoved into Tom Leong's abdomen was typically Chinese. I've never seen a Black-hander leave work like that.

"In the second place, Tom Leong was a powerful man. Even if taken by surprise, it would take a strong man to hold him down, hold his mouth shut, and ram that knife into him in that way. Either that—or he had been drugged.

"So, while I was in the Italian quarter I telephoned Dr. Grierson and asked him to make an examination and tell me what he found without letting any one know what he was doing. Doctor, please repeat what you told me over the phone."

Dr. Grierson cleared his throat. "Well, it's a bit difficult, after death, to be positive without examining the contents of the stomach; but from the examination I could make I'm almost positive that the deceased, about a half hour before he met his death, had drunk a quantity of whisky containing some drug, probably chloral."

"Otherwise known as 'knockout drops,'" explained Manning, taking a small brown vial from his pocket and placing it on the library table. "Very careless of you,

. . . . . .

Luk Fang," he remarked, turning to the Oriental, "to leave that in your desk at the store!"

Luk Fang blinked, but made no comment.

"Nevertheless, Ah Lee's story of Tony Sartorio having been here this morning had to be investigated," Manning continued. "When Tony Sartorio's woman told us he 'had done it,' I knew right away that she knew nothing of the killing of Tom Leong. She didn't talk nor act like a woman whose man had just confessed to murder. And when I found that Tony was pretty drunk, and that his woman was drinking from a bottle of Old Hermitage just like Luk Fang served us, I suspected that all Tony had done was to swipe a few bottles of Luk Fang's whisky. —Eh, Tony?"

"That's all, Mr. Manning!" declared Tony with obvious truth. *"Sapristi!* I didn't even know—"

"You put up a pretty tough fight over a little thing like that, but that's your way. Well, when I left Martina there with Tony, I didn't at once call the station. After phoning Dr. Grierson I went to Luk Fang's store. There, at Luk Fang's typewriter, I typed off from memory a copy of that anonymous letter we got with that first Black Hand warning. Rather an elaborate scheme to try to make it appear that there was a Black Hand campaign on!"

"That, Mr. Manning," spoke up Luk Fang, smiling, "is precisely what I had planned at first. I was going to get even with some of these Chink pigs for the way they have treated me. And I did get two thousand dollars out of my uncle."

Manning shook his head.

"But you should have been more careful. I took my copy of the letter, then searched your desk, got samples of your penmanship, and found that vial of chloral hydrate. The assistant manager down there didn't appear to have much love for you and gladly agreed not to notify you that I had been searching your desk. And when I got to the station, Murphy established beyond doubt that you had written both those Black Hand warnings, and that the anonymous letter had been typed on your machine.

"So there you are, Chief," concluded Manning. "At nine o'clock, Luk Fang gives his uncle a glass of whisky with chloral. He goes to the store as usual. At about nine-thirty he slips over here—it's only a three-minute walk from the store—and gets in with his own key. Easy for him to do that without Ah Lee seeing him.

"Then he went into his room where he had hidden that knife, gets it, goes into the library where his uncle is dead to the world—and does his dirty work. Three minutes later he's back at the store—and no one has missed him. Soon afterward he's at my office with that Black Hand note. —Very clever, Luk Fang; yet in many ways you were careless. Did you kill your uncle for his money?"

"I killed him because I hated him!" Luk Fang burst out with sudden vehemence. "Money, yes! I wanted it! But I wanted freedom from his tyranny more. And I planned it all so carefully, even to the notes written in Italian. And that story of some dark secret in my uncle's past which I thought would be a good second card. And I didn't think I'd ever be suspected. What started you thinking of *me,* anyway? The way I used that knife pointed as much to Ah Lee as to me. What—"

"La Mano Nera!" Manning broke in sharply. "Luk Fang, aside from the Italians, hardly one person in fifty thousand knows the Italian name for the Black Hand. Yet you, a Chinese, claiming to know nothing of that organization, came into my office this morning and rolled that *La Mano Nera* off your tongue as glibly as Martina does it. So I knew—"

"You know too damned much," cut in the amazing Luk Fang, smiling. "Take me to jail!"

A Minute to Go

A stirring story of football and of another great game, by the man who gave us "Under Fire."

By HERBERT L. McNARY

IT pleased Loring K. Rand that the girl beside him should rival him for attention as they sought their seats near the fifty-yard line—Lorry Rand always received fifty-yard line seats for the Hanover-State gridiron classic. He stole a glance at his daughter and saw a girl slender and supple, in a rather tight-fitting squirrel coat that harmonized with the clear gray eyes. The gray eyes were from her mother; but that air of individuality—that was his. Wisps of silver blonde hair showed beneath the green hat. Again, that hair was her mother's; but the green hat—Hanover green—that was worn in respect to him. But was it? Dale Thorndike and Carl Dexter were on the Hanover team. Rand had often seen them both around the house. Children yesterday—like Gloria.

In the confusion of thousands seeking their treasured seats, Rand saw the nods and nudges as he passed with Gloria. In that babel of voices he caught snatches of conversation.

"There's Lorry Rand. . . . Who's that with him? Must be his daughter. . . . Oh, boy—a pip!" And from the girls: *"Isn't* she cute? . . . Oh, I like *him,* so tall and aristocratic-looking."

Neither Rand nor his daughter gave indication of hearing. But as they stood in the aisle waiting for a slight mix-up of seating to adjust itself, they unintentionally eavesdropped on a bit of conversation between undergraduates.

"Think Dexter will start?"

"In place of Thorndike? Not a chance. Fowler's down on Dex and sweet on Thorndike. That's the trouble with Fowler—he plays favorites."

"About time Hanover got a new coach. Maybe Rand will drop him this year."

"He ought to. Fowler's too autocratic."

Grandstand coaching! But color mounted in Gloria's cheeks.

When they were finally seated, Gloria turned to her father, her eyes clouded with trouble.

"Dad, you heard what they said. Is it true that the coach is showing favoritism in starting Dale instead of Carl?"

Rand scowled slightly. More than twenty years ago he had captained a sensational football team at Hanover

"Dad, you heard what they said. Is it true the coach is showing favoritism in starting Dale instead of Carl?"

Illustrated by
J. Fleming Gould

that had completed a season's schedule without being scored on. Over the span of twenty years, the mellowing legend had built this team into eleven supermen; and Loring K. Rand of the business world had always been Lorry Rand, football's greatest guard, to Hanover. According to tradition, he ran things football at Hanover; actually, he could scarcely steal time from his affairs to attend the annual Hanover-State classic and one Athletic Council meeting a year. And now his daughter appealed to him as an authority on a situation that had already stirred up a tempest.

"It isn't a pleasant charge to bring against a coach, Gloria," propounded Rand; "but—the fact remains that Carl has proved himself a better player than Dale. Perhaps Fowler has been saving Dexter for today; so let's reserve judgment. . . . Here they come."

The State players came onto the field first—the whole squad ran across the gridiron in close order, garbed in red helmets and wearing red jerseys with blue shield-pads and red-and-blue striped sleeves. Across the way, State's cheer-leaders leaped into the air to lead the welcoming cheer. It had scarcely finished before Hanover's squad charged across the field, to be greeted with a royal welcome that rolled back from the hills. Three Hanover squads formed for a brief signal-drill. Backs and ends wore white helmets, and were without stockings, to make them more conspicuous as pass-receivers.

The cheering gave way to a rustling of programs as the spectators sought to check the starting line-up of the first team. A murmur of dissatisfaction rose from around the choice fifty-yard section of the Hanover side.

"What do you know about that? Fowler's starting Thorndike instead of Dexter. If that isn't bull-headed favoritism, then I'm a sleepwalker! Something ought to be done about Fowler."

The voice came from just in back of Rand and his daughter. It was obviously raised for Rand's benefit. A troubled pucker creased Gloria's brow as she looked at her father. His jaw had hardened after a fashion she well remembered from days of childhood indiscretions, but whether the resentment was directed against the speaker or against the coach, Fowler, she couldn't tell. . . . A whistle blew.

The Hanover and State captains met with the officials at midfield. The coin snapped into the air and fell. Hanover chose to receive. The players ran out. Thorndike, wearing 11, trotted to the far corner. Dexter, wearing 17, sat on the bench. Audible groans could be heard in the cheering. Or at least, Dale Thorndike fancied he heard them. He frowned uneasily as he adjusted the helmet-straps about a rather scholarly dark face. He knew all about the unfortunate situation that made him and Carl rivals for the same part in Fowler's complicated machine. He thought much more about the controversy that had arisen from the situation than did Carl. Carl Dexter was impulsive and susceptible to influence. First it had been his influence, dating back to their toddling days. And now all this talk that threatened to end a friendship—"rivals for captaincy," "Fowler's favorite," "rivals for Gloria," the whistle again; he mustn't think of such things.

The ball soared into the air and came low to the left of Kingsley on Thorndike's right. It was Kingsley's ball, but Thorndike saw his nervous uncertainty and made an attempt to switch from interferer to receiver. His hands reached the ball, but he failed to get a good grasp on it, and the ball got away. Thorndike had to play safe, and he fell on the bounding ball inside the ten yard line. A cheer went up from the State side of the stadium, a groan from Hanover.

Thorndike scowled bitterly as he rose. He *would* have to get a break like that. Who in all those many thousands had seen that the mistake was Kingsley's? Fowler, perhaps—for Fowler saw everything that happened on the gridiron.

Hanover played sluggishly; State with the inspired conviction of a quick and certain victory. State forwards leaped into action on the passing signal. Interference formed quickly, and backs went slithering through the jumble of players, spreading the plays across the gridiron with a breath-taking assortment of criss-crosses, forward and lateral passes. When Hanover had the ball, it moved ponderously and without brilliance. To the average spectator without the capacity of solving the intricacies of the game, it seemed that Hanover would never get anywhere, and that in a moment or two State would surely cross the goal-line. But repeatedly State's threatening drives were bridled, and the Green stopped its rivals short of the goal-line whenever a touchdown threatened.

Taking his cue from that break on the initial play that had provoked a groan of despair from Hanover's alumni, Dale Thorndike played with a grim determination. He failed to play brilliantly. That is, he evoked no spontaneous cheers. Dexter would or should do that when he entered the game. But Thorndike played perfectly. Once, in a moment of impatience when an alumnus called to Fowler's attention that Dexter had scored seven touchdowns to Thorndike's one, that coach had retorted angrily:

"Yes; and I have seen Dexter make as many as a dozen mistakes in one game, and I have yet to see Thorndike make his first gridiron error."

Thorndike made no errors today. Twenty-one uniformed men were on that striped greensward in addition to Thorndike, and to him all were what units were to a master strategist in battle—to be shifted, to be warned or to be capitalized as weaknesses. Any spectator—Gloria, for example—could have seen him shifting about the backfield, moving up to whisper a soft-spoken bit of advice to an end or tackle. He anticipated and called the plays of State. In a huddle he named whatever weakness his keen eyes discerned; and all the while from the stands: "Put in Dexter! We want Dexter! Give us Dexter!"

Thorndike would flush slightly. His dark eyes would steal a look towards the side-lines. In plain view of the dissatisfied alumni Fowler walked slowly up and down, his eyes fixed on the play, his hat pushed back on his head, his cigarettes lighted nervously, one from the other.

"Put in Dexter. . . . Fowler, don't you want Hanover to win? . . . We want Dexter!"

Once more Hanover took the ball within the shadow of the goal. First down on the seven-yard line, and State hadn't scored. Kingsley went back to kick. Instead, Loft slashed off right tackle. State's left end had been dazed in that last effort to force through a touchdown. Thorndike had noticed that. No one else had, save possibly the coaches. With State's secondary spread for the kick, and Hanover interference forming quickly, Loft got down the field with a screen of protection, and only a fine tackle by the safety spilled him on State's forty-five-yard line.

What a cheer went up—for Loft!

The game had started with Hanover depressed and State's spirit in the ascendancy. Now, well along in the second period, the score remained blank. State's spirit and confidence began to run down, Hanover's to pick up. And it was Thorndike who had quietly and surely held Hanover together.

Fowler turned to the bench:

"Dexter—in for Thorndike."

CARL DEXTER bounded to his feet, flinging off his helmet and his green robe in his excitement as he raced out to the scrimmage line, exposing his curly blond head. A wild cheer arose from the Hanover side of the stadium as Dexter swept out to the scene of action, colorfully, but impulsively rather than deliberately ostentatious. In his own way he was no more crowd-conscious than Thorndike.

This forty-yard run, made possible by Thorndike's judgment, following as it did State's failure to score an almost certain touchdown, had staggered the red and blue. State's eleven was collectively like a boxer who sways a glassy-eyed invitation for the knockout punch, and Fowler had thrown that knockout punch in the person of Dexter. Fowler hadn't even stayed Dexter long enough to give him instruction. He was psychologist enough to capitalize that tense excitement of Dexter's at a moment like this.

Thorndike came off the field as he saw Dexter run out. Dexter always relieved him. Fowler's machine was made of such intricate parts that his system couldn't make use of the two at the same time. Thorndike slumped into a seat beside Gene Lally, the trainer, almost before the spectators in their excitement over Dexter's entrance realized Thorndike had come out. The cheer-leaders did call for a "Hanover-Thorndike," but it was abortive.

Dexter hopped around as if on springs, waiting for the play. The whistle blew; two lines crouched face to face. State's secondary shifted about uncertainly.

"Twenty-six, thirty-nine, seventeen, eight. Twenty-six, thirty-nine, seventeen, eight—" The quarterback barked

the signals. *Thirty-nine* was the check-number calling for Number Five play. Dexter was supposed to carry the ball on a sweep around right end, behind interference that, if it formed correctly, theoretically made a touchdown a certainty. This time it did form and function correctly; but State's end was pulled out of the play in a fortunate—for State—mental lapse, and the impulsive Dexter saw only the large hole the end left. He darted through it. Hanover alumni cheered wildly as Dexter dodged in and out, weaving laterally across the field, and finally forced outside after advancing the ball twenty yards. But Fowler crushed a cigarette impatiently as he saw that all his interferences had carried through their assignments, and had Dexter followed them, a touchdown would have been a certainty.

Thorndike had leaped to his feet along with his teammates and Hanover rooters.

"Go it, Dex! Leg it—leg it!"

Gene Lally, the weather-beaten trainer who had seen too many broken-field dashes to grow unduly excited, looked quizzically at Thorndike as the latter dropped back into his seat and pulled the robe over his shoulders.

"You certainly gave Dexter moral encouragement."

"Yes." Then suddenly as if he had just caught the significance of words and look, Thorndike turned on the trainer.

"Why not? Why shouldn't I cheer him?"

"Why, nothing, only—"

"Only you're thinking what everybody is thinking, that bad blood is coming between Carl and me over all this favoritism talk—"

"Now, wait a minute, kid," protested Lally. "I wasn't thinkin' about your end so much as Dexter. He hasn't got the bean like you. I don't mean only in football, but in other ways. You're more serious-like. Him—well, with all these boots feedin' him dope about his bein' discriminated against in favor of you, it might break things up from his end."

Thorndike frowned. "Carl's too good-natured, too easy-going, ever to break a lifelong friendship with me."

"Yeah," grunted the trainer a bit cynically; "but he might let it cool down a bit."

Thorndike's frown deepened. "I wish people wouldn't talk so. This situation means more to us than appears here at Hanover."

By Herbert L. McNary

This time Dexter stuck to his interference—and swept across the line for the first score of the game.

A cursory inspection of one of the State players resulted in time being called. Lally ran out with water to the cluster of Hanover players. Thorndike was left to his own thoughts. Gloria must have heard all this talk about Carl and himself. He turned his head slowly. He had a general idea of where she was sitting, but in that sea of faces he scarcely dared find hers. He did, though—and she was looking in his direction. She smiled and waved to him. He waved back—conservatively. Carl would have waved with perfectly natural conspicuousness. They differed in that respect. Carl was theatrical; he was conservative. Which of the two qualities did Gloria prefer? Which of the two—

"Is one of those deeper reasons you were speakin' about up there?"

Thorndike turned quickly. Lally was back with his pails. He had probably caught Thorndike waving. He didn't miss much; like Fowler in that respect.

"Gene," growled Thorndike, "you go to hell."

Thorndike hunched down to watch the game. Hanover waited, with Dexter nervously tensed in the backfield. But the brief respite had given State time to come out of its daze. The defense spread effectively. Even so, Dexter tested it to the limit. He weaved in and out among the State players like a frightened rabbit. But the distance he covered was more between the sidelines than in a forward direction. He thrilled the Hanover rooters to the utmost. It appeared certain that he must break away for a touchdown. In the wild excitement of his ball-carrying, only the most critical had time to note his mistakes, that he deserted his interference, and that in his efforts to skirt an end, he ran back yards in the direction of his own goal. Twice he brought the ball down to the shadow of State's goal. A third time he seemed certain of getting that score, but the whistle blew.

Groans from Hanover. Why hadn't Dexter been put in sooner? That was Fowler for you.

The squads trooped like sullen bands of Indians toward the locker buildings.

Tired Hanover athletes dropped onto the benches and the floor of the locker building, and forgot the moral satisfaction of having held State scoreless, and thought only of the score denied them by the ending of the half. Fowler was attempting to restore the proper frame of mind when Loring Rand entered. Fowler made it a point to bar grads from the locker-room between halves, but one could hardly bar Rand. This very locker-building was his donation.

A big man socially and financially as well as physically, Rand immediately commanded attention. The liniment-reeking atmosphere seemed impregnated with impending drama.

"Fowler," Rand said, "you showed bad judgment keeping Dexter on the bench, so long."

Thorndike, sitting somewhat aloof at one end of a bench, paled slightly and looked at Dexter. But Dexter was watching the coach expectantly.

Fowler's jaw stiffened, but he exercised perfect control when he responded.

"There were many mistakes made, Mr. Rand; but my withholding Dexter was not one of them."

The calm assurance of the coach disconcerted Rand. He was not only the man who controlled directors' meetings; he was Hanover's greatest football player, with a reputation to maintain.

"But you saw that we almost scored when Dexter went into the game."

"I saw many things." Fowler's eyes seemed to click. "Games can be won on luck, but a coach is expected to bank on something else."

Rand flushed a bit.

"I suppose it was luck that Dexter got away for thirty yards on his first play."

The coach exploded. It was as much as if he had shouted: "You can keep your damned job and to hell with you."

"Exactly," was what he said. "Any time a man makes the wrong play and gains instead of losing, he's lucky. I've kept my tongue until now, and most of all I've kept my thoughts from the men concerned by all this favoritism rubbish—Thorndike and Dexter; but let me tell you something, Mr. Rand: You're Hanover's greatest football player. You played your last football game twenty years ago. In those twenty years, with all the changes that have taken place in football, you've probably seen but one game a year. You know football, do you? I'll show you how much you know.

"You saw Dexter make thirty yards on his first play. I'll tell you what you *didn't* see—you didn't see State's right end fail to follow around. If he had, he would have nailed Dexter behind the line when he reversed without

protection." On that play, our left end was to hit the right half and go after the safety. You didn't see that State half go down and stay down because he thought he was out of the play. You didn't see State's tackle come through and take a wild shot at Dexter instead of crowding and slowing him up. You didn't see Dexter cut away from his interference. You didn't see Thorndike make that play possible by taking advantage of a situation to call for a running play instead of a kick—"

"Mr. Fowler," interrupted Rand, "I think you're a bit excited—"

"Excited? I'll say I am. But my excitement is nothing compared to my disgust. I'm using Dexter and Thorndike the way I do because I know it is the best way to use them. It's my business to know. And so long as I am in charge, I'll use them as I see fit. I'll tear up my contract tonight —I'll tear it up right now if you say so; but so long as I'm coach, I'll direct this team the way I see fit, and no one else is going to tell me how."

Phew, talking that way to Loring K.! Rand's face went white. Veins throbbed in Fowler's temples.

Lally slipped up beside Thorndike. "Well, I guess Fowler and me will be looking for new jobs next year."

"Oh, leave me alone," groaned Thorndike. "It's just today with you, but I've got to live with it all year—and every year."

"If you don't mind," stated Fowler to Rand grimly, "I'd like to talk to my players."

Rand bowed coldly and withdrew. Fowler never noticed him. Those hard eyes set in a grim severe face swept the circle of uneasy players.

"What I said to him about thinking he could tell me how the game should be played goes for you. There isn't one among you that's played twenty games of varsity football; I've played and been actively concerned with hundreds of games. Yet you think you can tell me what to do. You listen to a lot of guff, and you start the game like eleven—no, ten, straw men. You come in here dragging your tails because the score is nothing to nothing, when if it wasn't for one man—Thorndike—State would be leading by three touchdowns. Yet Thorndike made it possible for us to be leading seven to nothing. No, six to nothing. I've made mistakes; and my biggest one was my failure to develop a reliable drop-kicker to replace Olney when he broke his ankle."

He paused. "It's time to go out again. You've heard a lot of talk I never intended you to hear. How it's going to affect you I don't know. That's up to you."

THE teams appeared for the second half, and wild cheering burst forth from the opposing sections. The word had grapevined through the stadium that Lorry Rand had gone into Hanover's dressing-room and had laid down the law to Fowler and had insisted on Dexter starting. The spectators waited impatiently to see. Fowler added to the suspense by sending ten men onto the field. Then he called both Dexter and Thorndike to him, and they listened to a new Fowler, one who rested a kindly hand on a shoulder of each, and spoke in a fatherly tone.

"This is the big game, the big moment; and yet next week the game'll be forgotten. It is the eternal things like the friendships we make and the lessons we learn that count. You're two fine boys, and you've been splendid through all this. Don't let what happened in the dressing-room just now come between you. Don't let anything come between you—ever. You're two splendid football-players. I've seen you, Thorndike, do the right thing and fail to score. I've seen you, Dexter, do the wrong thing and win games. That's football. It's the combination of you two that I have tried to use to bring us victory. The same plan holds: Thorndike, play for the break; and then, Dexter, I'll send you in to capitalize it."

He gave Thorndike a gentle shove across the sideline.

"Hold the team together!"

Thorndike heard the murmur of dissent behind him as he instead of Dexter ran out. Hold the team together! He was in a fine mood for that. Fowler didn't know about Rand and Gloria. Thorndike vividly recalled Rand's face as he had listened to Fowler's retort. Thorndike felt certain that Rand would never forgive or forget, and that he would suffer in consequence. Hold the team together! He couldn't hold himself together.

HANOVER kicked off, and State sifted through to its thirty-five-yard line. State played with spirit again. The players came out of a huddle with a peppy lockstep. Suddenly Thorndike forgot all else but the game. The position of the backfield and right end recalled to mind a State play that had gained in the first half. He looked toward State's left guard. If Thorndike had guessed the play, this guard would come out as running interferer. Thorndike had discovered that because this guard was slightly hard of hearing, he had the habit of turning his head as if afraid to miss the check-signal on these plays in which he had to get a running start. Yes, his head was turned. Thorndike warned his end and tackle. He crept up, and on the signal slashed into the backfield and tackled the runner for a two-yard loss. Thorndike rose flushed and content. The game was again that engrossing contest of strength and strategy that he loved.

Another play, and State's initial drive gave way to a forced kick; and the Hanover players, who might have been thrown into the dumps, were at ease again. But a splendid machine like State's refused to be denied. On the next exchange State started another drive that carried steadily down to the ten-yard line. State picked up but a couple of yards on two tries. Thorndike watched Nieland as State came out of a huddle. Nieland was right end, and one of the best forward receivers in the game. Thorndike had consistently tried to read his mind for pass plays. Now a slight nervous tension on the part of Nieland made him suspicious. He covered him extra carefully. Nieland dashed for the corner of the end zone like a flash. The ball shot toward him. He turned as most of the spectators were fooled by a fake buck. But Thorndike's upstretched hand knocked down the ball. . . .

Hanover put the ball in play on the twenty-yard line, and with State's safety-men back for a kick, Thorndike's suggestion of a flat forward worked. Kingsley received and got away for fifty yards, and aroused the Hanover fans to wild excitement.

Fowler studied the State players shrewdly, and then turned suddenly to the bench.

"Dexter—in for Thorndike."

Thorndike came slowly off the field. He was through for the year. It was up to Dexter now.

Dexter's first play was the same as his first play the previous half. But this time he stuck to his interference, which functioned the way Fowler made it do on the blackboard—and Dexter swept across the line for the first score of the game. Hanover went wild. Thorndike, too, stood up and cheered hoarsely. But when he sat down, his eyes were a bit misty and a lump came into his throat. Would it always be like this?

Hanover lined up for the extra point and missed. Well, never mind. What did one point matter? And then Thorndike recalled Fowler's admission, forgotten because of the other things said. He had made his mistake when he failed to develop a reliable drop-kicker to replace Olney.

Some coaches prefer no score at all to one of six if a

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"Excited? I'll say I am! But my excitement is nothing compared to my disgust."

good part of the time is left. Six frequently fires the opposition with the knowledge a seven will win. The situation worked this way with State. Shaking fists at each other, State received and started a drive that was interrupted three times, but in the end carried the ball over. State kicked the extra point.

In the remaining minutes of play Dexter tried desperately to score another touchdown, but State managed to hold the ball most of the time and consumed the precious minutes with straight line-bucking. The gathering shadows of the late November afternoon shrouded the final play on State's ten-yard line. State won 7 to 6.

IT was a year to the next Hanover-State game; and yet the two games were so coupled for Thorndike that the year passed swiftly. Hanover felt certain that Fowler's act in keeping Dexter out of the game so long had caused defeat; and on the strength of that Dexter was elected captain. Fowler was slated to go. Everybody knew that, although he had friends in the Graduate Athletic Council. Loring K. Rand came on to the meeting by plane. Some said he called the meeting. The session resulted in Fowler being tendered a three-year contract at a new salary. None was more surprised than Fowler. Rand had obviously been dethroned in the council session, although not a word of that meeting leaked out.

When Dexter was elected captain, all Hanover took it for granted that there would be a new coach with new ideas, but now Fowler would be back, with practically the same backfield. Once again Thorndike and Dexter would be alternates for the same cog in the intricate machine, but this year Dexter would be captain.

Thorndike, however, had learned a lesson from last year's game. Hanover lost that game because of the lack of a reliable drop-kicker. Olney had been graduated. Thorndike spent many summer hours practicing drop-kicking in secret—that is, he told no one, not even Dexter —or Gloria. He felt a bit self-conscious about it. Drop-kickers were supposed to be born and not made; and if he failed, he didn't want anyone to know. Carl might "ride" him during those swimming- or tennis-parties—not cruelly; it would be merely his idea of fun, and Dexter was always looking for fun; the butterfly, the life of the party, a legion of friends and never an enemy, brilliant in everything and utterly unstable. Thorndike used to watch him by the hour, lying on the beach —just the same way he watched Gloria. What did she think of Carl? She laughed at his antics; she appropriated him when she desired. But did she love him? Thorndike thought not. She seemed to him not ready to fall in love. And he had as much chance as anyone—as Dexter. If she chose him, he could picture Carl slapping him on the back resoundingly and meaning every inch of his grin. Could he do the same for Carl? He thought not.

The football season began again. As captain, Dexter had preference over Thorndike in the early games. It was only when Hanover went to pieces against the supposedly weak Brighton team, and only managed to tie, that radical changes became necessary. Hanover had been lucky to tie. Hanover missed all three extra points, while Brighton missed one and lost two on offside penalties.

On Monday, Fowler sought out Thorndike, and passed him a telegram.

"Here's something funny I got today," said Fowler.

Thorndike read it:

THORNDIKE PRACTISED DROP KICKING THIS SUMMER STOP WHY NOT USE HIM?

JOHN DOE

Thorndike read the telegram twice in amazement.

"Why—why, I did practice; but I didn't think anyone knew about it."

Fowler looked away. "Practice drop-kicking. I may have to change my plans."

Hanover went down to play Haven the following Saturday. The Haven game was annually Hanover's jinx game. Games were repeatedly won or tied by Haven through flukes. This year seemed destined to be no exception. Ostensibly superior, Hanover gummed up several chances to score in the first half. Hanover scored, and a forward-pass play netted the extra point. A few minutes later Hanover threw a wild forward into the hands of a Haven back, who raced seventy yards for a touchdown. With the score 7 to 7, Hanover faltered around Haven's twenty-yard line. Fowler sent in Thorndike to kick; he booted a field goal from inside the thirty-yard line. Haven received, and with less than a minute of play left, fumbled, and Hanover recovered. Thorndike hurriedly called for another drop kick, and sent the ball sailing above the cross-bar.

Well into the second half, it appeared that the score

would end Hanover 13 to Haven 7; but Haven opened up with forwards that tied the score at 13 all. A few minutes later another forward caught a Hanover back out of his zone, and Haven scored again. Hanover blocked the extra point, but it looked for all the world as if Hanover had run true to form and blown its Haven game.

Hanover fought desperately to get back that touchdown. Dexter was tired from his exertions, but Fowler kept him in. All he could bank on in these closing minutes was one of those mad dashes Dexter sometimes uncorked. And this time Dexter came through. He broke through the line and cut back swiftly, whirling, pivoting and shedding tacklers. He zig-zagged across the field and then darted past the last man for a wild race to the goal-line. The score was tied, and Hanover lined up for the extra point. The Haven jinx. The point - after - touch - down jinx.

"Thorndike in for Dexter," barked Fowler.

Thorndike raced across the field and reported. Dexter slapped him on the back as he went out.

"You can do it, Dale."

Calmly Thorndike studied the ground and the goal. The grim, determined Haven players he ignored. Timing and direction formed his end of the job. The ball came back. He dropped it and kicked it. The ball split the proper space in dead center, with less than a minute to go.

Thorndike, who had never been sensational, now became at least individual by his sureness of kicking toe in the remaining games. All were close, and his drop-kicks played important parts in Hanover victories. Hanover went down to State for the final classic boasting six victories and a tie. State had seven victories and one defeat. The teams were evenly matched.

Fowler had to take his team to a leading hotel—alumni arrangements: but he retired to a private suite with his assistants. But the morning of the game Fowler looked up from a coaching conference and found Loring K. Rand in the room.

"I think you remember me," said Rand.

"I think I have reason to," stated Fowler grimly.

"I wonder if you knew that a movement in the Athletic Council to get a new coach was blocked."

"I made no inquiries. Something of that nature was intimated to me."

"And one man insisted on your reappointment—with increased salary." Rand sat down, uninvited. "The pledge of secrecy he imposed is now broken—I was the man."

Fowler looked a bit skeptical, but showed less surprise than others in the room.

"I will concede," went on Rand lightly, "that after that charge you delivered against me a year ago, I could have cheerfully contributed a floral piece to your obsequies. Later I decided that I wasn't a very big man if I couldn't look at matters from your viewpoint. May I speak to you alone on a personal matter?"

The others withdrew immediately.

"I realized rather tardily," stated Rand when he and the coach were alone, "that you must have had a good reason for employing Thorndike and Dexter as you did. I am vitally interested in those two. I have but one child, a daughter. When she makes her choice of a husband, I believe it will be one of these two. They graduate this year, and I want to take one of them into my business. I believe the one I choose may become my son-in-law."

"Are you asking me to choose for you?" protested Fowler in dismay.

"No—but I watched the two closely this summer — it was I who sent that telegram about Thorndike's drop-kicking. I wasn't ready to reveal my hand. As football players, you found Dexter and Thorndike distinct types."

"Very distinct. Opposite, I'd say."

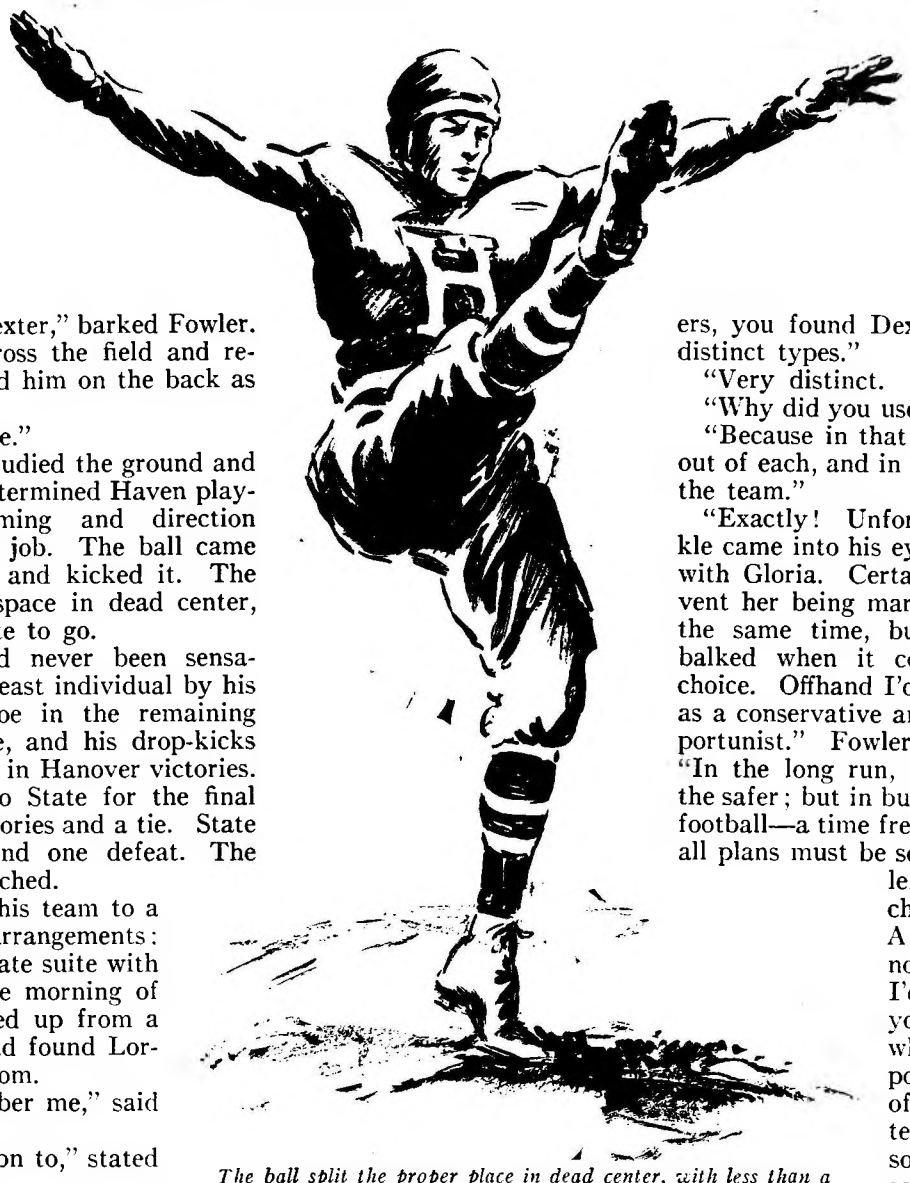
"Why did you use them as you did?"

"Because in that way I got the best out of each, and in the end the best for the team."

"Exactly! Unfortunately,"—a twinkle came into his eyes, "I can't do that with Gloria. Certain conventions prevent her being married to two men at the same time, but I confess I am balked when it comes to making a choice. Offhand I'd classify Thorndike as a conservative and Dexter as an opportunist." Fowler nodded agreement. "In the long run, conservatism seems the safer; but in business and life—and football—a time frequently comes when all plans must be scrapped and success left dependent on a chance, a gamble." Again the coach nodded assent. "What I'd like to learn from you, Mr. Fowler, is which of these two possess the qualities of the other. Is Dexter a chap who gives some promise of absorbing and following the rules of the game, or does Thorndike suggest a chap who would scrap his plans and take a chance?"

"I'm sorry," answered the coach after considerable reflection, "but I can't give an opinion. Dexter is young and might tame down. Thorndike can size up an opportunity as quick as any player I've known; but as to his gambling, taking a chance, I can't say."

"Well," said Rand with a smile, "I may find out in today's game."



The ball split the proper place in dead center, with less than a minute to go.

CARL DEXTER went out to midfield to meet State's captain that afternoon, and he also went to left halfback when the game started. That was to be ex-

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pected. Thorndike, as he sat on the bench for the last game of his football career, granted that. He guessed that Fowler intended to make the most of Dexter's ability at the start in the hope of getting an early lead, send him in to relieve Dexter, and then late in the second half send Dexter in fresh against tired State forwards or subs.

State kicked off to Hanover. The ball traveled low and bounded crazily. State and Hanover players swarmed on it. The ball changed hands several times, and when the officials finally peeled the players off the ball, State was found to be in possession on Hanover's ten-yard line. A break like that on the first play! No wonder Hanover was disheartened. State went over in two plays.

THAT misfortune ruined Fowler's plans. Instead of Hanover forcing the issue in the early moments of the game, State had the jump. The Green played dejectedly, and consistently on the defensive. Dexter tried valiantly to get away, but his interference formed sluggishly, and the confident State forwards sifted through the depressed green line to smother Dexter. Yet with the score 7 to 0, Fowler had to trust to Dexter breaking loose for the equalizing touchdown. Instead, State belted through for another score and lifted the count to 14.

Hanover tried a desperate forward, and State intercepted. State made fifteen yards through the line on the next play, and another first down on the succeeding play. Hanover had cracked.

"Thorndike, in for Dexter!" Fowler sent him out, and called three new linesmen from the bench.

Thorndike and his new men resuscitated the Green. With their backs to the goal, Hanover forced State to relinquish the ball on downs. Hanover had to kick from behind the goal-line; State received on the forty-yard line, and ran it back to the twenty-five. State essayed forwards to gain another score before the half ended, but Thorndike blocked two and then sifted back to knock one out of the hands of a State receiver in the end zone.

This steadying in the closing minutes of the half gave Fowler something to work on in the dressing-room. His charges were far from discouraged. He whipped them into a frenzy of enthusiasm as they poured out of the locker building for the second half. But Thorndike, who had been the turning-point, had to go to the bench. Fowler still had to gamble on Dexter's ball-carrying.

Hanover kicked off, but State was stopped dead and forced to kick. The ball traveled low and swiftly to Dexter, and he got a great start on the ends. He sifted back through the players with a beautiful change of pace, reversed and nearly got away for a touchdown. Two plays later, he swung the end and crossed the line for Hanover's first score.

Fowler might have sent in Thorndike to kick, but decided that it was too early in the half to substitute him. Dexter kicked, and the ball went wide. State felt encouraged. They still had more than a single touchdown advantage. The teams fought aggressively.

The Hanover right end broke through on a lateral and caught the ball in midair. He legged to the twenty-yard line before being pulled down. Dexter brought the ball to the one-yard-line on four plays, and Kingsley took it over. Dexter attempted a forward for the extra point—and it failed.

The final quarter found the score State 14 to Hanover's 12. Dexter tired rapidly from his exertions, but he carried on valiantly. Time after time he was smacked to the ground, but he rose unaided. And his fine cut-back led to a thirty-yard run that put Hanover in a scoring position. Three downs failed to move the stakes ahead; but Hanover still had the ball on the State eighteen-yard line.

"Thorndike!" called Fowler. "In for Dexter and drop kick."

Dexter got his deservedly great hand as he left the field, and then the spectators settled down to watch Thorndike's efforts. Would his toe bring victory now?

Calmly as if alone on the field Thorndike studied the situation and then raised his hands. The center, waiting nervously, put everything he had behind the ball—and it sailed over Thorndike's head.

Players and spectators alike seemed stunned. But Thorndike kept his head! He raced back for the ball, though State's right end had the jump on him. It was a race between the two. Thorndike took a quick glance over his shoulder. Norton, his quarterback, was nearest behind him. Thorndike leaped through the air and rolled his body. He caught the State end on the hip and bowled him over. Norton recovered—but it was State's ball on fourth down. Maybe State didn't take advantage of it!

The State coach rushed in fresh players eager to give a right eye or arm for old State. They slashed through the discouraged Hanover line while Thorndike stalled to give his men time to collect themselves, and took penalties for extra time out. The tactics served, for gradually State's enthusiasm waned and Hanover put up a stone-wall defensive inside its five-yard line, Hanover finally took the ball on its one-foot line.

Gloria Rand pressed her father's hand where the two sat in the fifty-yard section.

"What will Hanover do now, Dad?"

"Kick, I suppose. Too bad Fowler can't put Dexter back into the game. It is time to forget straight football and try the unorthodox. Dale isn't a gambler—there, see. He is going back to kick."

Thorndike dropped back into kicking position. With Kingsley out, punting devolved on him. He raised his hands as he stood almost on the white stripe of the end zone. This time the center passed true. The ball thudded into Thorndike's hands. State's forwards charged through to block the kick. Thorndike lowered his hands and then suddenly he raised them. Far down the field where he raced toward the punt receiver, Eddie Blair, Hanover's left end, cut suddenly toward the sideline. Thorndike pulled back his arm and threw the ball. A pass from behind his own goal line!

Eddie Blair glanced over his shoulder and altered his direction slightly. His hands went up. The ball struck fair into them as he took it over his shoulder. Tucking it under his arm, he raced like the wind for the distant goal-line. . . . State's safety made a desperate dive and struck Blair a slashing blow. Blair swung around, stumbled, and then recovered his balance to run the rest of the distance to the goal-line.

HANOVER went wild. Hats sailed into the air. Grads slapped and punched each other gleefully. Players on the bench threw their blankets into the air and started a war-dance. Gene Lally lost his head completely. He threw his arms about Fowler.

"Did you see that pass? From behind his own goal-line! When did Thorndike learn to throw a pass?"

"I never saw him throw one before," stated Fowler in a choked voice. "He took a chance. He gambled!" He glanced toward the Hanover stands, toward the fifty-yard line. Rand would be there somewhere. . . .

Gloria, her eyes bright, tugged at her father's sleeve.

"Dad! I thought you said Dale wouldn't gamble!"

Rand smiled. "And does it please you to learn that Dale is willing to risk everything in an emergency?"

Gloria didn't answer, but her eyes softened a bit. Rand's smile broadened, and he patted her hand assuringly.

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Outside the Reef

The glamour and the terror of the South Seas are here brilliantly depicted by a writer who lives in far Papua and knows well whereof she writes.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

IN those days Los Pinos was the quietest place in the world. It belonged to Spain, but Spain had forgotten it—had forgotten many things far more important than a little island at the end of nowhere. There was nothing worth having on Los Pinos; only a handful of curious stiff pine trees, and a high center of windy grasses, fine as mermaid hair. Lagoons and reefs all round, miraculous blue spilled into splendid green; mauve lights flickering, vivid, incredible; the cloud-packs of half heaven, so it seemed, tossed down and left afloat and crumbling, white as wool, on the verge of the wild reefs. That was Los Pinos. And never was there a place—even in the immense Pacific, insouciant of humanity—that wanted man so little.

I thought this when I went there. I could feel it fending me off. It was such an extraordinarily happy place, alone in the eternal sunlight, among its shouting seas. And in a happy place there is no room for man, long since turned out of Paradise.

But I said to myself that I would go there some day again, and buy it—build on it—realize the island dream that is dreamed by half the world, and grasped, in the end, by almost none.

You cannot have an island for the mere wanting. I had passed Los Pinos in a little cargo steamer that had been obliged to leave her course for water. There was little on Los Pinos, but if you wanted to make the Corrientes group, you ran quite near the smaller island. That was how I saw the place. I had hoped to make my home there within six months or so, but it was nearer six years before I had saved enough money to take out a lease from the Spanish Consul in Auckland, arrange my passage on a trading-schooner, and sail away to Los Pinos.

I was afraid that I might have exaggerated the charm of the place to myself; but when at last we made our landfall, and saw the stately dreaming pines stand high above their still reflections in the lagoon, the beach, bone-white, with wimpling grasses behind it, the wonder of those shallows, chrysoprase and lilac, spreading for miles and miles through the fleecy tumble of tangled reefs, I knew that I had made no mistake. Here was the island of my dream—and here, God willing, I meant to live and die.

We came up on the windward side, and ran cautiously round to leeward, where the only anchorage was. I remember that the foresail slatted a bit as we came round, and through its noise and the noise of the crew trampling about the deck, and the Captain shouting orders, there came, in brief intervals of silence, a curious, stirring sound—the multitudinous murmur of the long reef, white as wool, that ran far out beyond the rest. I thought that it talked, said strange and fateful things. Yet I do not remember that I thought or dreamed how much that reef was to mean in the lives of myself and others. . . .

There was a surprise waiting for me on the leeward side of Los Pinos. Six years before, the island had been deserted; there was not so much as a palm-leaf hut on it. Now, as we rounded the point and came in sight of the anchorage, I saw with amazement and also with the indignation of a landed proprietor, that some one was living there. Behind the beach, in the shelter of the pines, a shack had been put up—a kind of log hut with sheets of iron for roof. Grass had been cleared off a space on the top of the island, and garden stuff planted. A large native canoe was drawn up on the beach. Mullet were drying on a string stretched between two posts.

"Some of them damned natives from the Corrientes," said the Captain, spitting overboard. "I'd bump them out quick and lively; tell them to go back in their canoe, if they come in it. See, I'll come ashore and talk to them for you. Never seen a writing-chap yet that could sling his tongue what you would call free and effective."

I do not know why I refused; but the fact remains that I felt more than reluctant to have the Captain mixed up in the business at all. It was my island, wasn't it? If there was any trouble, it was my trouble.

YES, but that was hardly the real reason. I can only say, at this distance of time (for you must know that these things took place not yesterday) that I felt it wouldn't be lucky. That is as near as I can go.

Of course I did not say this, or anything like it, to the Captain. He was inclined, as it was, to be rather contemptuous of poetry-writing chaps, who lost their money speculating, and therefore were obliged to bury themselves on a reef at the back of nowhere. That I should have buried myself on the reef a good deal quicker, and a good deal more permanently if I had still owned the few thousands that went down the greedy maw of the Sydney stock exchange, he wouldn't have believed.

I told him I could not be responsible for delaying his ship at that late hour of the afternoon, among the notorious reefs of Los Pinos; and if he would be good enough

Marie took up the diving work with me out on the reefs fishing for trochus shell—just coming into use as mother-of-pearl.

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

to have my stuff dumped on the beach as quickly as possible, he might yet get away before dark. I did not expect serious trouble with my Corrientes native; the people of that far, barren group were a spiritless race, unlikely to disobey the orders of white men.

So I told him, and all the time—

I wonder, now, how much I really guessed. I shall never know. It is difficult to be honest with oneself about these matters. I can't even say, after these years, whether it was before, or after, my talk with the Captain that I noticed through the glass, as we ran nearer and nearer, a line of footsteps sculpturing the sand. Prints of bare feet—small feet. Children's feet? Perhaps—but I thought not.

I did not say anything about it to him. To myself I said, "It will be one of the natives." Just as you say to yourself, when you are waiting anxiously for a letter, and the post comes up the street: "It will bring me nothing."

The Captain, busy letting go anchor, made no reply for the moment. Presently, as the crew were lowering away the boat, he said, with his pipe tucked into the corner of his mouth:

"Have it your own way; maybe you can make them useful, and you're the blanky landlord anyhow. Well, I'll go; no shipmaster would want to hang about the Pinos reefs, not if he could get clear of them before sundown. —Get Mr. Fisher's dunnage ashore, quick and lively! Hurry up with them tents; put the cases in first. —Well, Mr. Fisher, you've enough to last you there for six months, easy, and I'll be calling then, as per agreement. There's water just below the top of the island; it's mentioned in the sailing directions. That's the last; if you set on it all you can go with it. Good-by, Mr. Fisher, and good luck —and I'm damned glad it isn't me."

"So am I," I thought, as we shoved off from the side through water colored like a tub of washing-blue. "If there's romance on this island, you wouldn't fit in." I did not believe there was romance, yet I was hungry for it. Thirty-two, taller than most men, perhaps a trifle better-looking than many—but didn't value it—unmarried, and not likely to marry, I had gone a bit short of romance; it might be through a certain inner fastidiousness that follows the poetical temperament, or it might be simply because I had not been lucky. At all events, I had little temptation to boast of my good fortunes, and I was always looking hungrily for something that so far had kept away. Did I expect to find it on a desert island, when I took the lease of Los Pinos, intending to make a living out of snailshell- and trochus-fishing? . . . . I don't know what I expected. Perhaps there was the romantic two-on-an-island vision tucked somewhere away in a corner of my brain; but where the other was to come from, or how I was to keep her when she came—that was not in the vision. If you think me illogical, look within yourself, and then think again.

The crew, a bunch of half-caste New Zealand Maoris, rowed, singing as only Maoris sing, through the blue water into the green where it was like melted emerald, up to the beach, so white and so lonely—despite those significant footmarks—and held the bow of the whaleboat for each other, while my goods and myself were dumped ashore.

All this time there was not a sign of any inhabitant, white or brown. The stark pines stood above us motionless to the tearing wind; below them, flexible-leaved, twisted pandanus rattled and blew; little dry nuts and blades of grass went flying down the sand. Nothing else moved, nothing sounded but the castanets of the pandanus, and the tinkle of blown twigs of sea-bleached coral—and a long way out, the low, unending murmur of the reef.

I was glad when the boat was gone, and the schooner, long and white, had rounded the point of the island, sailing away into the splendid gold of afternoon. For now, I said to myself, I should know.

THE first thing was to find out where these trespassers had hidden themselves. Clearly they felt themselves guilty, else they would have come down on the beach to meet me. Not thus, in the outer islands, do solitary people receive a calling boat. Tramping industriously round the long white beach, from lee side up to windward, I said to myself that I wouldn't much like to be in their position. They couldn't know I was a decent sort of chap. They must be alarmed, considering what they'd done.

Then a thought came to me that stopped me dead, in the middle of the leeward beach. I stood for quite a minute, staring at the toes of my brown boots, half buried in sand. A sea-hawk, planing high above me, seemed to circle closer and look. A diamond-fish, far out, leaped and fell back with a flop.

These people did not know what they had done—that was the thought that stopped me. They could not possibly be aware that I was the lessee of Los Pinos, because there was no conceivable way in which the news could have reached them. I had got my lease, and started from Auckland straight away. Even supposing that some stray boat had recently called, the people on board of her could not have known Los Pinos was let. Why, nobody even in Auckland knew, except the Captain of the schooner. It wasn't a matter of interest to anyone but myself.

In that case, why were they hiding, and who, or what, were they?

A fire of curiosity waked up in me at this point. Clearly, there was going to be more fun about Los Pinos and my occupancy of it than I had imagined. Mystery—romance, perhaps. I had not counted on all that, when I took the loneliest spot in mid-Pacific for myself.

. . .

Again I resumed my tramp round the island, came to the windward side, and felt the southeast breeze strike my face. There was no sign of life. If people were on the island, they must be cleverly hidden, I told myself, staring at the belt of pines, and at the little space of cleared grass and sweet potato above and behind it. In that moment, I felt that some one was staring back.

I could see nobody, but I have always been sensitive to the invisible rays of the human eye, and some such rays were fairly burning into me now. So sure was I, that I made a sudden, quick dash into the pines, aiming myself like a projectile for the point from which those invisible rays were proceeding.

I have always been a fast runner, especially at a hundred yards. It was not more than fifty to the pines. I went into them full speed, crashing like a bull, and tumbled right over two people who had been watching from behind a depression in the ground, and were trying frantically to get out of my way. They hadn't calculated on my turn of speed; they were all over each other, and me, in an instant, and one of them, if I did not mistake, was cursing with singular fluency, and one was crying. . . . .

I found that I had got hold of the cursing one, and gripped him by both shoulders. I had an adventurous time since I left Sydney University; it was second nature with me to grab in such a struggle. Nevertheless, the man put up a fight. He was old—I could see that, even in the gloom of the pines and of the waning afternoon. But he was well-preserved, and clearly did not want to be made prisoner.

I got him in a minute or two, however. I had him lying under me, with my hands on his throat, squeezing just enough, in half a minute or less—and in about the same space of time, I had the girl on my back, with her hands on my throat, squeezing a little more than enough! She was still crying; she had breath enough to do that, and to sob queer things like, "You shan't, not while I'm alive! Devil, devil!" in the midst of her murderous attack, to which she was putting the utmost good will of hands and brain. She was choking me; the world began to go black. The position became ridiculous. I let the old man go—I didn't want him anyway, if he didn't want me—and flung the girl off, tearing her hands away.

"You young vixen!" I said, panting as I stood up again. "What did you do that for?"

"You won't make me say anything," she answered fixing me with a frightened stare.

THE man was on his feet by this time. In the gloom of the pines we all stood together, panting, excited, considerably tumbled. I don't know what they thought of me. I know that I thought the old man rather a fine-looking specimen, with his thick gray beard and patriarchal locks, his black eyes, small and bright, and the sturdy, well-set-up figure of him. He had good clothes for an island castaway, and so, for the matter of that, had the girl. I noticed that almost as soon as I noticed her eyes, dark, like the man's, but larger and softer, with curling lashes, and her hair, black with red-gold lights in it, massed on the top of her head, and her mouth, which was small and full and sweet. Her skin was a splendid color, and was considerably tanned. She did not wear shoes or stockings; her feet were extremely pretty.

I don't know how much of all this I saw at the time, and how much I am remembering, out of the days that came after. But I do know that she struck me as surprisingly attractive and interesting. Her age appeared to be about twenty.

"What do you think I am?" I asked her, addressing the man, whom I guessed to be her father, at the same time. "Did you know I had got a lease?"

Instead of answering me, the two looked at each other. It was getting late now; the light came low among the pines, staining the carpet of reddish needles upon which we stood to the color of spilled blood. The "trade" was blowing up for sunset, as it does in the cool season; out on the reef the tumbling of breakers sounded louder and nearer.

After a minute, the old man answered.

"We didn't know; we are doing no harm." He still kept looking at me.

"My father," said the girl, "has been very ill, and they said this place, with the—the pines and all that—would cure him. We hadn't money for sanatoriums, and we didn't think anyone would ever want—"

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

I SUPPOSE something of the proprietor's air had crept into my manner, for the girl answered meekly:

"Oh, a long time—nearly a year. He's ever so much better. Will you let us stay?"

"Why did you try to choke me just now?" I asked her, replying to one question with another.

"We thought you were the quarantine," she answered. "He's had consumption."

She said it so pat, with such a matter-of-fact air, that it was not until afterward I realized the answer was absurd.

"Well," I told her, "I certainly did not expect to find I had tenants on this place, but if you want to stay on, you may, so far as I'm concerned. I hope to do a bit of shelling here, and you may help me, and share profits, if you like."

"I must say you're very kind—I'm greatly obliged," said the man. "May I ask your name?"

"Fisher, Jack Fisher," I told him. "And yours?"

"Williams," he said, "James Williams. My daughter's name is the good old one of Marie." He stared at me with unwinking eyes while he spoke.

They showed me their house, rough but decent; two rooms and a little lean-to kitchen outside. No furniture except home-made stuff. There was a shot-gun, and a good deal of fishing gear. I knew the islands; I knew you could live on a place like this pretty well, without outside communications, provided you were satisfied with simple food: pigeon and duck, fish and sea-birds' eggs, vegetables of your own growing, a row of coffee-bushes, a belt of sugar-cane. The Williamses were clearly in no danger of want.

Their clothes continued to perplex me for a little, being so good, much better than anything I had been able to allow myself since I had turned prodigal, and ran away from viceregal tailors.

But I concluded they had seen some sort of a "come-down" like many others—and before long forgot about it, falling into the quiet way of island life, where the past counts for little, and the future not at all. Nowhere on earth is the illusion of eternity, of changelessness in a changing world, more complete and perfect than in the South Sea Islands. . . .

Marie took up the diving work with me, as one born to it, and we spent day after day together, out on the reefs, fishing for trochus-shell. It was only just coming into use as a source of mother-o'-pearl; you could find thick beds of it all over the reefs, where now there is not so much as an egg-case left. Marie had made

herself a bathing-suit out of one of her silk frocks; bright green it was, I remember, and I remember too—I am never likely to forget—the mermaid beauty of her, swimming below water, with long ivory arms and legs flickering, and the green dress aglow like fire, in the deeper green of the sea.

One day we were sailing back to shore, the big canoe loaded down with dove-and-crimson shells, for we had had a very good morning. It was now coming on toward noon. Crossing the wide lagoon, we seemed to swim in a daze of molten gold. There was that in the emptiness and the glory of the place, and our own light, effortless motion, that well-nigh abolished consciousness of mortal body, as though we floated in some strange golden ecstasy, outside the limits of the actual world. I think we were drunk with sun and sea, and the exquisite loneliness that haunts these far-away places; I think, too, that another, sweeter intoxication, nearer to common earth, had us embraced that day.

I went into the pines at full speed—and tumbled right over two people trying to get out of my way.

There will never be a day like it, while I—who am old now—still wander in a cold and ashen world.

Love blossoms quickly in lonely places. There is truth, after all, in the old, thousand-times-told tales of two on an island. We were three, but the third hardly counted, to us. And just because there was no obstacle between us, because old Williams—sleeping, reading and smoking his time away—never seemed to take any notice, nothing had been said between us; it was enough for us to know. . . .

We grounded, pulled up the canoe, and began unloading the shells. This brought us face to the sea. In the same instant, both of us saw, away beyond the reef, a boat.

It was like the shattering of a beautiful window through which we had been looking out upon an enchanted world. Immediately things took on a colder, commoner tone. Our solitude was threatened, destroyed. It must be now or never, for Marie and me.

Neither of us said a word about the boat. Marie turned a little away from it, toward myself. There were silver reflections from the lagoon in her eyes; her lips, a little apart, half smiled. I took her hands; they were very cool and salt when I kissed them, and held them to my breast, that was all hot with the sun.

"Do you know I love you?" was what I said hurriedly, as if the boat were already there at my elbow. She did not answer in words, but she drew her hands free, laced her sun-gilded arms about my neck, and held her lips to mine.

Dizzy with that kiss, still holding her, wet and salt and sweet, in my arms, I saw that the boat was making rapid way, was almost through the passage of the inner reef. I was for holding her all the tighter, through some strange, possessive instinct, but Marie, slipping away, fled like a sandpiper toward the clump of trees where she had left her clothes. In those days—strange though it may seem—young women were reluctant to appear half-clothed before total strangers.

SO it came about that I faced the newcomer alone; saw him skillfully sail his half-decked cutter through the reef opening, run before the wind to shore, and drop anchor barely fifty yards from where we stood.

Marie was dressed by now; she came out from behind the trees and ran barefoot swift, down the beach to where I stood. Never had I seen her look more beautiful; that moment of love had lit her like a lamp. Yet she seemed alarmed, too; she looked at the cutter almost with dismay.

"Who is he?" she said, clutching my arm. "What does he want?"

We could see a white man on the boat, and a couple of Corrientes Island natives, lowering away a little dinghy.

"I'm sure I don't know," I answered her. "Looks like a yachtsman, rather. He must know his way about, to come in like that. Los Pinos seems to be growing quite popular."

She answered nothing to that, but I felt her little nails dig into my flesh.

"He'll spoil our solitude for us, won't he?" I said, watching the dinghy cut through the celadon-green shallows of the lagoon. I was flattered by her emotion. "She must be very fond of me to take it like that," I thought. Girls had been fond of me, but never one like this; never one as beautiful, or as loving. "My luck has turned at last," I thought with pride.

The stranger had landed. In the same instant, I became conscious that Marie had loosened her grip, was gone. "Shy," I thought. Then, to the man before me, I said: "This is Los Pinos Island; private property."

"I'm aware of that," he answered. "I hope you won't mind my landing for a little wood and water."

"No," I said, without stressing any special welcome. "Where are you from?"

"The Corrientes. Got there by the Fiji steamer some weeks ago, and hired this jolly little boat for a cruise. That's the way to see the islands, they tell me. I'm going back in a few days; this is as far as one ought to venture in a half-decked craft." He stood on the beach looking about him, and smiling, a pleasant, simple smile.

I judged him to be a man of good breeding; a little weak, perhaps, not clever, but eminently agreeable; his age seemed to be about twenty-seven.

"Do you mind awfully if I anchor inside your reef?" he asked, his smile widening into a pleasant grin. "It does seem such a capital sort of place, and I shan't be in your way."

"I don't mind, and it isn't my reef anyhow," I said.

"Bit more than three miles out, if one wants to be particular; that makes it anybody's. Can you put yourself up on your boat?"

"Oh, yes—Lord, yes! I can put up in worse places than that. May I come along and look at the island? It is a jolly place, though it's not what I'd call exactly home-like, if you understand me."

I did understand; I was, moreover, a little amazed that so commonplace a type should have grasped, before well ashore, the odd, hostile significance of Los Pinos, that happy place that didn't want man, would'nt have had him if it could have helped itself. I wondered, too, whether he was speaking the truth in saying that he could rough it anywhere and anyhow. He didn't look like that.

"We shan't keep him long enough to find out," was my thought—my intention, rather. And then, recollecting the duties of hospitality, I asked him if he wouldn't like to come round to our camp.

"It isn't half a mile away," I said. "Just round the other side of the island." I was pulling on my clothes as I talked. "Did you see Miss Williams?"

"Miss who? The little thing that was running away through the trees?"

"Yes; she has a habit of doing that when strangers come. She didn't exactly welcome me when I arrived."

"No?"

"Thought I was the quarantine come for her invalid father. I can't imagine why she should think they'd bother about him. Spanish quarantine doesn't amount to much at any time, and for an ordinary T. B.—practically well—"

"Oh, he's T. B., is he?"

"Well, she said so; but doctors make mistakes, and I don't think he can have had much the matter with him. Certainly, there's no infection likely now; you needn't be uneasy." For I saw that his attention was caught.

"Thanks," he said cheerfully.

I was clothed now; we were striding together towards the camp. "My name's Fisher," I told him, and significantly paused.

"I'm Barrett, Richard Barrett," he answered promptly. "Law student, Melbourne. Having fun in my long vacation. It is fun, too—never thought there were such places in the world."

The sun was lower; he took off his hat, and walked bareheaded, with side-glances, as we went. I took stock of this unwanted newcomer. Very clean-skinned and pink, looking somehow, as if he scrubbed all over with a nail-brush twice a day. Hair black, satiny, smartly trimmed and perfectly brushed. Long eyes, deep-set. An engaging way with him of throwing back his head and laughing, with his eyes crinkled up, and their long lashes shaking like reeds in a windy pool. Rather jolly, rather dull, very self-possessed and poised. A man belonging—I thought—to society's limited circle.

That troubled me a little, when I thought of Marie. Long since, I had given up my own claim to be one of the elect; nor had I ever valued such privileges highly. Marie and her father, I guessed, had never belonged to the inner circles; I liked her none the less on that account, but I knew she would almost certainly feel the glamour of Barrett's manner and position.

"Well, he needn't stay," I thought. "He can be gone tomorrow."

BUT he was not gone tomorrow, nor for many days after. When it came to the point, I found myself unable to turn him out. He was so gayly stupid, so merrily sure of everybody's liking, such a good companion, out shelling on the reefs, or through the long evenings, when we sat by lantern-light beneath the pines, telling tales and playing on Marie's mandolin, that I could not find it in my heart to drive him out of our little paradise.

And paradise it was, by now. We all got on well together; old Williams was much stronger in health, even to the point of going for walks round the island. The weather had settled down into the silver southeast season, the kind, delightful winter of Pacific isles. We could relish a fire of nights, now, under the pine trees, though by day we all still went cotton-clad and barefoot. And with the camp-fire, came the inevitable camp-fire story. And one night, I remember,—I am not likely to forget it,—somebody proposed that everyone else should tell the tale of his life. I thought at the time that the idea was mine; I have doubted that, since.

MARIE wanted to hear me first. She had been very ready to take up the idea, in a laughing, almost hysterical way. "Yes, yes," she said quickly, "why not? A capital notion." And then, as I said, she laughed wildly.

Barrett jovially teased her. "Don't faint," he begged. "We sha'n't ask you to incriminate yourself. We know the record you've run up—heart-stealer!"

She steadied herself then, and asked me to begin. So I told them very briefly how I had been a wanderer for years, the black sheep—harmless enough—of a conventional family—how my people had lured the prodigal home, and given him his "portion" with the recommendation that he buy a sheep-station and settle down; how I had been wise in my own conceit, and not loving the idea of a sheep-station, had speculated with the money, lost it, and again found myself a prodigal, and a fairly contented one. "But I'm not quite such an ass as all that sounds," I told them. "Lots of better men than I were taken in at the same time. It was the Mount Melleray frauds; everyone remembers them."

"You were taken in by that?" said old Williams, shaking his head and his long beard together. "Really, really, Fisher! And I had thought you a sensible man! The scheme was rotten from the start; it stuck right out. I lost my money too, or most of it—but I lost it decently, through some one else's treachery. Solicitor, family-man stable as a rock—till he was found out."

"What were the Mount Melleray frauds, old chappie?" asked Barrett, sucking his amber cigarette-holder thoughtfully, as if he could almost, but not quite, remember.

"It's about a year ago. Case of a salted mine—very cleverly salted; shares boomed, right people got out from under before it collapsed, wrong people got caught. I'm astonished you don't remember," said Williams.

"Oh, *that*," said Barrett casually. "Yes, I remember now being bored with it—people talking of nothing else, and the club so full of it that you couldn't get a chap to give you a tip for the Cup. Yes. . . . Well, if you want my bally history, here it is. Cattle-station in Queensland; Sydney Grammar School; Oxford. Didn't get sent down; deserved it lots of times, but I was always one of the lucky ones, never found out. Less said about the degree I took the better. But I don't mind telling you, with loud cheers, that I rode the winner of the Grand National the year after I went down, and was promising so nicely as an amateur, that my people took fright, being Presbyterian and pi, and yanked me home. Said I must work, quoted the jolly Bible at me. Put me into the law—and then they went and died on me, as the old man said of his cow."

He stopped. I had a queer idea that there was more to come. "And then?" I prompted.

"Why, then I went on with the law," he said easily. "And also I found I had two great talents, and took 'em out of their napkin."

By Beatrice Grimshaw

"I know what one of them is," interrupted Marie.

Barrett was a heaven-born cook; the labors of Marie and of Williams had been considerably lightened since his arrival.

"What's the other?" I asked.

"It's a secret," said Barrett. "It would make me hated, especially on a little island, if it became known."

"Violin or cornet?" asked Williams shrewdly. These days he seemed to be enjoying his improved health; he was almost gay at times.

"Anything I say may be taken down and used as evidence against me," quoted Barrett lightheartedly, "so I'll say nothing."

"Brackenbury, I arrest you on the charge of conspiracy and fraud!"

Silence followed, lasting a little longer than such intervals usually last, even among outdoor, unhurried people. Marie broke it.

"Am I to tell my story?" she said, with that hysterical giggle appearing again. I had not known till now that she could giggle.

Barrett answered: "You wouldn't tell the truth. You won't tell people, a year from this, that you snared two innocent fellows on Los Pinos, and broke their silly hearts." And a lighter tone took possession of the talk.

But I remembered after that Williams had taken almost no part in any of it until, quite soon, we separated for bed.

Then he came up to me and said, a little apart: "How long is that blighter going to stop?"

"I thought you liked him!"

"If I wanted my daughter to marry," he said, "it wouldn't be a giddy ox like that! I don't know why, Fisher, but I hate the sight of him."

"Who's talking of marrying?" I countered sharply.

"Use your eyes, young man," he told me with some impatience. "Can't you see he's in love with her?"

IT was true that I had seen, or guessed, at something of the kind, but troubled little about it, because Marie, of her own sweet self, had taken pains to show whom she did prefer. Every night now, after we had all separated, she would come stealing back again alone in the starry dusk, silent and barefoot, to the little glade we knew among the pines; she would lace her arms round my neck, as she had done that day when the boat was sighted, and often I would lift her easily in my arms, like a child, while we said good-night in our own lovers' fashion. She adored my strength, she told me—no other man could lift her and hold her so. "Crusoe," she used to call me; or "My primitive man," she called me sometimes, and I liked it well enough. I never had the best head-piece in the world, but I understood what Marie thought of me, as well as if there had been a window in her breast.

At least, I supposed so. And I made short work of old Williams' discontent that night. "Don't worry," I told him, "if she ever marries anyone, it won't be him."

"Oh," he said, and again: "Oh — that's the way of it, eh? Well, I don't know what anyone wants with marrying in a nice peaceful place like this, and anyhow there's no parson to say the words. But if ever I get away—"

"Why shouldn't you?" I asked.

"Of course, of course. Why shouldn't I? It might be in six months, and it might be more. But if you want her then, I—I have a very high opinion of you—I have really. I should not mind. You would have my consent, freely given. No fortune, Fisher, nothing but the fortune—ahem—in her pretty face, eh?"

I had never loved the queer, futile old man very much, and I liked him less now; it seemed clear that he only wanted his daughter for just so long as his health compelled him to live on Los Pinos. I felt the selfishness of him, as the foot feels hard rock beneath a skin of flowering turf. Marie, that heart of gold, loved him with all that was in her, and he—once the need of her services should be past—was clearly ready to hand her over to the first comer. I didn't deceive myself about his opinion of my manifold virtues; I knew that was just the caress of the cat that rubs itself against your legs, when there's fish on the table. He ought, I thought, to have rubbed himself against Barrett, rather than me, but somehow he seemed to have taken a queer, cat-like dislike to that innocent, and would have no more to do with him than he could help.

We parted, and I went to my tryst with Marie. Long that night I held her cradled in my arms, in the way she loved, under the pines, where the white face of the moon, that had seen so much love and sorrow through so many thousand years, looked silently upon us, and the reef, far out at sea, whispered innumerable rumors to the stars.

The spirit of Los Pinos was upon me tonight, but I did not give it words; I feared—

Marie spoke at last. "Aren't you tired, Crusoe? Set me down."

"I'd never be tired."

"I believe that. But set me down; I want to talk."

I put her little pale feet on the sand that had grown chilly under the creeping night breeze. She stood against me, her hand touching mine.

"Crusoe," she said, "I'm afraid."

"What of?"

She hesitated. "Of things I don't understand—and things I do."

"Suppose you tell me, and begin with things you do understand?"

"Oh, I can't—I can't. Not even you, Crusoe. But the other things— Do you like him?"

"Why, yes," I answered, not misunderstanding. "As

much as there is of him to like. I don't think very much about him. He'll be gone soon."

"He wants something," she said, half below her breath. "I wish I knew—"

"But of course—he wants you!"

"Yes," she said, as if that did not cover everything. "I sometimes wonder—"

"What?"

"Oh, I don't know! Take care of me, dear Crusoe; you're so strong."

"In life, and death, and in the next world, if I may," I told her, and on that we parted. . . .

It was about this time, I think, that Barrett began to take an interest in our fishing. He came out several times to the reef with us, asked a lot of more or less silly questions, and declared he thought there wasn't a better way in the world of earning one's living. "So jolly independent, so healthy," he said, going back again and again to the note of health.

"You needn't talk as if we were a party of invalids," I told him irritably. "Marie's as fit as a racing filly, and I've never been anything but well in my life."

"Yes, but the old boy," he said gravely. "You know, he does make a mistake in hanging about those damp pine trees. Nobody in these days thinks pine-needles can cure T. B.'s."

It sounded such a sensible remark, for once, that I turned and stared at him, from where I was sitting, wet but warm with sun, upon the platform of the canoe. Marie—just "come up from below," like an anchor—was hanging on the gunwale, her long black hair fanning out in the blue-green water. I saw Barrett look at her; heard him catch his breath short. . . . . .

"Much you care about Williams," was my thought. "Trying to make up to her, are you? Well, you're too late in the day to gain anything by that." Aloud I said, "Probably he knows his own business."

"Yes, but," Barrett went on again—and I saw him making a play with those absurd long eyelashes of his toward Marie as he spoke—"everyone knows nowadays that sun and sea are the real cures. If you could get him to stop fugging in there, and take a morning or so with us out on the reef, he'd have twice the chance of becoming really fit again. How long is it since he had any bacilli?"

Marie seemed to sink lower down in the water, slacking the hold of her hands on the gunwale. "I don't know," she answered briefly, her lips and chin almost awash. You could not see what her expression was.

There was a pause; the canoe rocked a little on the oily water, breaking it into bright rings that melted and interlaced. A long way off, the land, vivid and small, looked at us like a picture in a stained-glass window. "It's waiting," I thought, "waiting till we are done and gone—for ever." The burden of our mortality pressed on me like a weight of lead. How many lovers—wanderers, fugitives perhaps—had that aloof, bright island seen in centuries past? Where were they now, and what did it care?

Then I awoke to see that Barrett was waiting for Marie's reply. "Why is he so anxious?" I wondered. "And why doesn't she say something?"

It was Barrett who spoke first. "I say, you know," he began, with one of his usual idiotic prefaces, "are you sure he ever did have any of the bally things at all? People do fancy themselves sick."

"My good girl, you're asking me to give up my job." To this she answered nothing—she knew that her strength lay not in argument.

She answered now, pulling herself up out of the water, and throwing one leg over the gunwale; her hair half hid her face.

"I don't know how far he's really better," she said, "but I daresay you're right. I daresay he ought to come out more. Yes, I'll try to persuade him."

"Persuade him?"

"He hates going out on the water. But there's no reason why he shouldn't," she said. "I'll talk to him."

THIS was the beginning of another period, which lasted, as well as I remember, about ten days. Old Williams, with his venerable beard and his long prophetic hair, came out, persuaded by Marie and, I must allow, by myself. I thought that Barrett, fool as he was, had struck good sense for once. If Williams was an imaginary invalid, as I had begun to suppose, why, there was no better cure than air and sun. And we had plenty of both. Barrett helped in the diving, as well as he could, which was not well at all; Marie and I kept up our steady work, and our steady piling up of the tons of trochus I meant to have all ready and rotted out clean for the return of the schooner. Williams had the job of tallyman; we made him count the shells, knowing by this time about how many went to a ton. He took some interest in his task, he grew less tallowy in face, less queer and secretive in manner—in fine, more like a natural ordinary man.

But something, I thought, must have broken his nerve in the not remote past, for he still showed a curious dislike of rough water, never venturing beyond the spumy reef to where immense Pacific rollers lifted, glittering like hills of glass in the silver sun. Marie and I loved these rollers; when diving was done, we used to take the canoe outside the reef, and drive it, shooting skyward and tobogganing down among the watery mountains, the while we yelled and sang with glee. We would come back, all wet and scorched and merry, to find old Williams floating with Barrett in the dinghy, smoking, yarning, a little stupid, the pair of them, we thought, and one of them clearly bored.

So it went on for eight or nine days, I remember. On the tenth, a shoal of mullet made its appearance in deep water, and I dropped the trochus-fishing at once.

"We'll dynamite those beggars, and get hundreds," I told Marie. "We can smoke all we don't eat. Come on."

We paddled over to the dinghy, got the little tin box of dynamite, caps and fuse, which I kept ready, and went off outside.

The first shot killed dozens of the fish and sent dozens more flopping and jumping helplessly to the surface.

"Oh, this is prime—this is fishing!" shouted Barrett from inside. "Oh, I say, Williams, don't let us miss it; there's hardly any sea on—come along out!"

I don't know what the old man said, but he nodded assentingly, and took the tiller in his hand. I think his covetous instincts (always the strongest part of him) were aroused by the sight of all that wealth of fish, flapping and floating under the midday sun. At any rate, he steered while Barrett, with great strokes, pulled the dinghy through the reef passage, into open sea.

They caught us up and passed us; I did not think that Barrett seemed very keen on the fish after all, for he made no attempt to pick any up. Twenty or thirty yards ahead of us, he paused. It was noon now, and the light was very brilliant; from above and below, flames of fiery crystal seemed to lick the boat, the oars, the figures and faces of the two men. And in one stabbing moment I knew that something had happened. . . .

Barrett's face was changed. It was no silly Government House hanger-on who sat there in the dinghy—no giddy, lazy law student, wasting a vacation. It was a man strong and purposeful, smooth as the glittering sea on which we floated, ruthless as that sea. I saw him take something from underneath the thwart; a stick, four or five feet long, with a flag rolled about it. I saw him, swiftly, reach behind Williams to place it in the flag-socket at the stern. Out on the breeze floated the Union Jack, and at the same moment Barrett, laying his hand on Williams' shoulder, said, in clear tones that carried plainly to the canoe:

"Isaiah Brackenbury, I arrest you on the charge of conspiracy and fraud!"

ISAIAH BRACKENBURY! The Mount Melleray scandals, that had beggared towns full of people, driven scores to suicide, taken the bread out of the mouths of countless widows and orphans! I had good cause to remember Brackenbury's name; it had been the bait that deprived me of my own prodigal's share, and flung me, empty, on the world. There was a reward of two thousand out for his apprehension; but he had got away so early and so cleverly that no news had been heard of him for nearly a year. Even if he had been sooner discovered, one could not at that time arrest a criminal in a Spanish colony; but one could arrest him beyond the three-mile limit, out at sea, if you could lure him there. You could take him back then, and hold him prisoner safely. Williams' hiding and doubling, his daughter's sacrifice and love, were useless. The thing was done now. He would go down to prison, and to hell.

"He meant to get away by the *Almirante Diaz* when she calls at Corrientes," was my thought. The *Almirante* ran once yearly, from the port of Corrientes to Iquique. "I suppose they'll take him away on the schooner. My God! Who would have thought that giddy ox—in the law, he said, he didn't tell a lie about it. And his two talents. And his— Oh, this will break Marie's heart!"

Marie, I realized now, was struggling within the circle of my arm, which I had mechanically clasped about her to prevent her from diving overboard and swimming to the dinghy—an act that would have meant instant death, in that shark-haunted stretch of open sea. She was not crying yet, but she was panting as if she had just run a race, and her eyes were like swords.

. . . . . .

"The sneak—the scoundrel!" I heard her say. "Oh, if I'd only believed myself! I knew there was something that didn't ring true! Oh, Dad—oh, Dad!"

THERE must have been good in the villain of Mount Melleray; I have thought and said so, since that day. No man wholly bad could have inspired the burst of anger, love and sorrow that swept over Marie like a tropic thunderstorm; shook her, wrecked her, and left her at last half-insensible, resting in my arms. She was not so weak, however, that she could not rouse herself when the dinghy approached, with Barrett at the oars, and the British flag, emblem of freedom, mockingly afloat from the stern. Williams seemed struck, stunned; he sat with his head in his hands, not moving. The detective, coolly rowing, turned his head over his shoulder to look at us.

"I'm damned sorry about all this," he said, "but a man must do his duty."

"Duty!" cried Marie. "To sneak and pretend, and take him off his guard—an old man—oh, you honorable gentleman!"

The boat was alongside now. I could see Barrett's expression more clearly; I wondered that we had ever been taken in by his sham character. I did not know then, what I heard afterward, that he had really left a good home and an assured position, to develop his amazing talents as a detective; that he was, then, the most famous of his class. No one else could play the silly society youth like Barrett—could take criminals off their guard with a clever simulation of the brand of folly known and cultivated among rich, idle folk—because to no one else did it come natural.

I hope I shall never spend another night like the one that followed. Our little Eden was blasted. Old Williams—who was not Williams—kept walking endlessly, miserably, alone, up and down the beautiful beach that we had defiled with our foolish and sordid affairs. It was white moonlight; the sands were like warm snow; the curious, sad pines threw shadows stiff as armies of black soldiers on parade, and, more than ever, they seemed to me to be waiting. . . .

In our little glade among the pines, where sea-grass grew thick and sweet, I found not Marie alone, but Marie and Barrett. It was as if a cold wind blew over me when I saw them there together. I knew Marie to the core of her sweet heart; I knew her to be utterly faithful—and yet, I feared.

She was standing face to face with Barrett. The moon, pouring like a waterfall through the break in the pines, lighted up her face, leaving his half in shadow. I caught the profile of it—fine and noble in its way. I understood well the lure that such a man—a type of Colonial aristocracy—might have for a girl of doubtful position and ordinary birth. But it was not this that turned my heart cold in my breast—it was the look on Marie's face. Just so, the daughter of Jephtha might have looked, centuries ago, when she stood bound before the altar, in payment of her father's vow, ready to save his honor at the cost of her virgin life.

If I stood still and listened, who could blame me?

"I suppose you know how much you are asking?" came gravely the voice of the man we had known as the "giddy ox," the fool, the court jester.

"I know," she answered. "I'm asking you to give up just one of your victims—"

"Victims! What about his?"

She waved that aside. "He's my father. He never intended—I'm asking you to say nothing till the *Almirante Diaz* calls; she's coming soon. He thought it would be safe—then."

"You're asking a lot more than that, my good girl. You're asking me to give up my job."

To this she answered nothing; she knew that her strength lay not in argument. She looked—with that Jephtha's-daughter expression in her eyes. . . . There are men who would rather have an unwilling bride than one who comes too easily. Barrett, I think, was such a man. Silently he accepted her silent offer, laid his hands on either side of her face, and passionately kissed her.

AT that I broke into the glade, tore her out of his hold, and said I don't know what. I adjured him to come out on the beach and stand up to me like a man.

"I'll stand up to you as long as you like, though that mightn't be long," he said, cool as snow. "But before we begin, let Marie tell you something. Are you engaged to him or not, Marie?"

"No," she said, her face flower-pale in the moon.

"Are you going to marry me, as soon as I can run you to the Corrientes?"

"Yes."

"Did I suggest this, or you? I want Fisher here to understand I've played the game, as far as he is concerned."

"I suggested it."

"Well, I accept, and I take the conditions. My people will be deuced glad, anyhow. They never—I'll give you a darn' sight better life than he could have done, Marie. You're worth a man's career; you're worth anything. Now Fisher, if you'd like to come out on the beach—"

"Unnecessary," I told him with a mocking bow. "I'm so far from agreeing with your estimate, that I don't think her worth a single blow, or even a single thought. Congratulations, and all the happiness you both—deserve."

"Crusoe," she said in a low tone, as I brushed past her, "won't you hear me?"

But even the "little name" did not touch me. I would not talk to her. I knew all about it—just what she had done, and why she had done it. She had bought her father's freedom at the cost of her happiness and mine. Not holding the view of Mr. Isaiah Brackenbury that she held, I could not see myself in the light of a willing sacrifice. As for Barrett, I hated him, but I did not blame him for taking what was simply flung at his head.

I am not going to tell how I spent the night that followed. I did not commit suicide, or murder. But I have known ever since why men, in like case, do one or other, or even both. . . .

In the morning, the schooner was outside the reef. Yesterday that would have meant old Brackenbury's forcible conveyance on board, the beginning of a long term of misery and jail for him who had brought so much misery upon others; but today it meant that he was to stay behind and await the call of the *Almirante Diaz*, which would convey him safely to Iquique and the criminals' Alsatia of Chile. I had seen him; he looked ten years younger; he was almost swaggering. What was it to him whom his daughter loved or married, so long as he went free?

Barrett and Marie, I understood without asking, were to travel in the yacht. As for myself, I resolved to leave by the schooner, and never see the cursed place again.

The Captain was not surprised to see me come on board with my goods packed.

"I thought you wouldn't stick it longer," he said. "Glad them other people aren't coming too; they'd've kept me waiting, and I don't care to 'ang about Los Pinos no longer than I can help. Been too many wrecks about here. Time they got the charts corrected—which has just been done, by the way."

"What, the Admiralty chart?"

"The Admiralty isn't infallible, never to make mistakes. They do correct them, when they know, but they don't 'urry about it. This hisland's been charted near half a mile too far to the suth'ard, and the reef passage has been all wrong for years." He leaned out over the rail and spat contemptuously into the sapphire water.

"Captain," I said, "I'm extremely sorry to delay you, but I must look at your new chart before we leave." Something like a wild bird was leaping and throbbing in the place where my heart should have been. I don't know what I hoped, expected—but—

"That won't take long," he said good-naturedly enough, and led me to his cabin. The chart was spread out. My eyes went instantly to the reef and the passage through it.

"How far is that from land? I asked him. I felt my mouth go dry as I spoke.

"How far? Two miles and an eighth, puttin' it roughly."

"Will you swear to that?"

"Swear? I'll measure it off for you. This is the corrected chart, which I just brought up from Sydney this trip—Admiralty. They do make errors sometimes, but when they correct them, they are corrected, you can take your bloomin' 'davy of that. What's it all about?"

I told him, briefly. I supposed Heaven will forgive me for suggesting that "Williams" had been arrested on a false charge. But I need not have troubled. The Captain, like all master mariners, loathed every variety of police.

"You send him to me," he said knowingly. "I'll anchor for the night, if necess'ry, and see it out. I can't do more than that. You send him. Three-mile limit! 'Igh seas! I'll learn him something—a bloomin' landsman and all!"

"As long as Williams stays on this island—" I began.

"I understand, I understand! Listen here—I'll tell you something, but don't you tell 'em. The *Almirante* is due Corrientes today, here day after tomorrow. And me wonderin' who chartered her to call! You get the flamin' policeman off of the island, and let 'im do what 'e likes. The old boy's safe."

I took the chart with me ashore—and never, I think, has a chart done better work in saving lives from wreck. Barrett gave in to my proofs at once, taking his defeat, and his loss, like the man he really was. I have often wondered since, whether he was not glad to have been saved, after all, from the necessity of giving up the profession which was his very life to him. He saw Marie alone for a little while, and what he said to her I have never asked. But in half an hour his yacht was under way, and in an hour she was hull down on the horizon, making for Corrientes.

"He means to try again—somehow," I thought. "He doesn't know about the *Almirante*." But Barrett, and even Brackenbury himself, bulked very small in my mind.

I FOUND her where I knew I should find her, in the little glade among the pines. I had meant to ask her forgiveness, and she was only waiting to ask mine, and between us—well, the reconciliation was worth all that went before.

Going aboard the schooner again to get my traps, I found the Captain highly interested, and very well pleased with his own part in our romance.

"How long do you reckon to stay there?" he asked.

"Not long," I said, for indeed Los Pinos had had her will of me at last, and I knew I should soon give her back the solitude that should never have been taken away.

He put his mouth to my ear. "I've got a present for you," he said. "I'll send it ashore by and by. Only lent, you know."

"That's a queer kind of a present," I told him. "What is it?"

The Captain chuckled. "It's a parson," he said.

You Can't Argue with the Evidence

Wherein Columbus Collins, the foremost colored private detective in Alabama, deals with an amazing case.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

NEVER in all the six weeks that he had been a sleuth had a more baffling case been presented to Demopolis' sole and leading colored private detective than that which confronted Columbus Collins now.

Samson G. Bates' law library had been stolen.

That the library consisted of a single volume, intended for the safe legal guidance of Alabama justices of the peace, did not lessen the gravity of the crime. One book or a thousand, a hundred per cent loss was a hundred per cent loss, the way Samson looked at it, for it left him commercially crippled. Not that Mr. Bates, who was large, pompous, asthmatic, and approximately the color of a nine-year-old saddle, was a member of either bar or judiciary. He was, rather, that which is admiringly known on Baptist Hill as "a big nigger." In his case, the phrase combined title with description. It covered his social, financial, and lodge standing—indicated in three words that he kept a profitable finger in every lodge, legal, or lucrative operation on the Hill, and entitled him to two kinds of interest—public, and forty per cent.

Samson never practised law or lending without first looking impressively in his book, as Bugwine Breck had found to his sorrow.

Indeed, it was through Bugwine—christened Burgoyne—a small fast darky who came splattering the dust in haste between the barber-shop whose rear room sheltered Samson and the speak-easy at which Columbus Collins, representative of law and order, took his meals when he was affluent enough to eat, that word of the crime first came to Columbus.

Yet Bugwine seemed reluctant to report the disaster. He panted disconsolately in a chair across the table from the eminent sleuth, and more or less suffered the facts to be drawn from him.

"Who you runnin' from, boy?" Columbus asked.

"Aint runnin' from nobody," denied Mr. Breck without heat, glancing hastily back over his shoulder. "Jes' Samson sont me to tell you somep'n—"

"Never hurry an' never worry," advised Columbus easily. "Look at me."

"Dat jes' mean you aint never borrered four dollars from Samson," rejoined Bugwine mournfully. "I aint do nothin' but hurry an' worry ever since: Hurry wid de int'rest an' worry wid de princ'pal."

"Huh! Fo' dollars aint much!" deprecated Columbus.

"Naw—not twel you borrers hit from Samson, it aint," returned Bugwine morosely. "Den hit grow like a milk-fed hawg. Borrered fo' dollars from Samson las' spring, an' been workin hit out ever since. Heah 'tis August, an' I still owes him sevumteen dollars on de four, not countin' de int'rest."

"Why aint you pay him back sooner?"

"Done *paid* him back nine dollars; now I's been workin' fo' him fo' four months an' applyin' dat on de debt too. Ev'y time I come to settle up, he'd look in dat big book of his'n whut's gone, an' read out some mo' int'rest whut he say I owes him. Dat book wuz jes' fixin' to ruin me."

"Whut you rushin' in heah in sich a swivet fo', den?" Columbus interrupted the flow of language from Mr. Breck. "Don't take up no mo' *my* time wid yo' fo-dollar troubles! I's busy, an' a high-price' man. All dat's matter wid you is dat Samson und'stand compound int'rest, an' you aint."

"Sho' aint! But Samson say fo' you come round to he place, an' step on hit."

At the last three words Columbus looked at his feet and winced. For speed and the gifts of the white folks from whom he acquired his shoes didn't mix. All the current mixing was in the shoes themselves, in that Columbus had emerged from the last private shoe-shower tendered him with two lefts, while his feet were the conventional assortment of one right and one left.

"Whut Samson want?" he now stalled. Anything to keep him off his feet.

"He got a job of dee-tectin' fo' you, he say. He wants you to find out who stole he law book."

Bugwine was nervous, which Columbus took as a graceful tribute to himself. It might be expected in his first real contact with a great criminal investigator. With which maganimous thought Mr. Collins reached for his lenseless magnifying-glass, a yardstick, and his diploma from the Cosmogenic Barber College and Correspondence Detective School of Birmingham. As indicated by its name, mergers had been as prominent in the educational as the financial field just prior to his matriculation on a combination rate.

"Come on, den—le's git de clues an' cotch de crim'nal befo' dinner-time," Columbus further upset the palpitant Mr. Breck with his efficiency. "You fotch 'long my detectin'-book. Chapter Two say be prepare' fo' whichever way de cat jump, at all times."

THE limping Columbus and the uneasy Mr. Breck found the barber-shop—in the rear room of which Samson conducted his various and nefarious businesses—the center of a dusky crowd of milling curiosity-seekers. What had added to their interest was the awed repetition among them of Samson's slogan for all debtors, criminal and otherwise—"I collects or cripples." In which lay the first clue: only a newcomer or a desperate character would have the ignorance or temerity to steal anything belonging to Samson!

Columbus, trailed by Bugwine with the detective text-

book, shouldered his way importantly through the crowd to an instant audience with the bereft Samson, a Samson unmistakably shorn of his strength, handicapped and crippled at every commercial turn by loss of the law and interest-tables that he had so long sustained him.

Seating himself, for the benefit of his feet, Mr. Collins fetched forth his best professional manner and the empty frame he used in lieu of a magnifying-glass, and endeavored to recall the gist of what Chapter Nine of his textbook had said in reference to, "How to Put the Client at His Ease and Inspire Confidence."

"So you is de dee-tective, is you?" questioned Mr. Bates distrustfully. Columbus resembled something he had seen around a circus once, but he couldn't remember on which side of the bars.

"Heah de d'ploma whut say so," Columbus replied, planking down the documentary evidence in his favor on the table before his prospective client. Columbus had been doubted before. Nothing helped to settle arguments as much as having the papers along.

"Humph!" grunted Samson. "Some nigger done stole de law-book whut I gits de int'rest-rates an' writes contracts out of. Whut you charges me to find out who done hit?"

Columbus screwed up his face and his courage. Fees were a delicate, not to say private, matter. Never be afraid to charge all you are worth, the textbook in the temporary custody of the perspiring Bugwine had said. But neither it nor he had contemplated that a case should be taken so publicly as this. The room was packed with admiring onlookers, come to watch a couple of great minds operate—which made it all the more no time for a new man in his field to go on record as a small-money man.

"Fifty cents," he therefore stated unequivocally.

"I can git me a new book fo' less'n dat," haggled Samson on principle.

"De college takes de detective diploma 'way from me an' gimme one as barber, is I git below de price of a hair-cut," Columbus stood firm.

"De missin' law-book wuz layin' right on de table heah when I leaves last night," Samson let the dickering go by default. "Dis mawnin' when I opens up, aint no book heah. I recovers or cripples, dat's all. You take de case?"

Bugwine swallowed hard and looked dumbly at Columbus. Clearly it was Columbus' move.

"Is dey no blood-mahks on de table?" the newly engaged *Sherlock* confused his chapters momentarily.

"Look fo' yo'se'f," indicated Samson. "Case in yo' hands. All I wants is jestice an' de book back."

Mr. Breck gulped and looked at Columbus some more. Interest would be due Samson again if he didn't look out!

Columbus, for his part, swelled and looked at no one. He was too busy pitying coal-miners and deep-sea drivers, who had to work where nobody could watch them. Detectives, now, were different: everybody looked at them if they worked it right. Whole room-full was hanging around watching him now.

"Needs a 'sistant," he further enlarged the occasion and opportunity. A big man always had somebody along to carry the tools.

"Who pays him?" inquired Samson cannily.

"You does. But, co'se, he aint cawst so much as a sho' 'nough detective like *me* does."

"Yeah, but how much?" Samson was beginning to be impressed in spite of himself.

Columbus sensed it—and added thirty-three-and-a-third per cent to his originally contemplated figure.

"Fifteem cents," he stated positively.

Seven open-mouthed bystanders were run over in the forward surge of volunteers as Samson nodded reluctant acquiescence. It wasn't the contract price, recited Mr. Bates ruefully to himself as he did it—it was the extras that ran the cost of everything up so!

Columbus passed over the eager aspirants, to select the most shrinking violet in the room for the highly important post.

"App'ints Mist' Bugwine Breck fo' de job of 'sistin' me," he honored that startled young man. "He already carryin' de detectin'-book fo' me, nohow."

Columbus liked Bugwine's evident modesty and self-effacingness. For one thing, it indicated less likelihood of his pushing forward when the crime should be solved, and endeavoring to hog all the credit.

Bugwine had not half finished rallying from the impact of this public office, and public trust on Columbus' part, when his duties started off with a rush.

"Heah, boy, carry de yahdstick fo' me," harshly instructed the flower of Demopolis' nearest approach to Scotland Yard, "while I 'xamines de scene of de crime wid dis mazdafyin'-glass."

More breaths than Bugwine's were held while the great sleuth went over the table and adjoining floor with the empty frame of his glass. Not a detail escaped him. Bugwine gripped the yardstick grimly and looked on.

"It sho' has been stole'," Columbus at length made impressive announcement.

Before his very eyes—two unmeasured footprints!

The gallery glanced at each other admiringly. These big boys never missed! Columbus hadn't been on the case ten minutes, but already he had confirmed, single-handed, the most important fact in the whole mystery: the *corpus delicti* had been established!

Now Mr. Collins seemed for the first time to be aware that he had spectators. A stern look spread over his features at the discovery.

"An' now," he continued loudly to his frog-eyed and sweating assistant, "gimme de yahdstick an' I shows you how de book say to measure de surroundin' footprints. Us got to 'semble de ev'dence. Cain't argue wid de ev'dence."

Right here a lot of onlookers went away—promptly. This eagle-eyed boy with the yardstick and diploma might measure the wrong tracks! Bugwine, for his part, began to take on an increasing resemblance to a boy who had swallowed a coconut by mistake.

"Measure dat 'ar pa'r of tracks in de dust of de floor—right 'cross by dat chair yonder," Columbus further instructed his *Doctor Watson* brusquely.

Bugwine looked distressed and hesitant in a fresh place. He displayed signals calling for a conference—in private.

"Dem aint no feetprints," he confided hoarsely to his chief, when he had achieved the great man's ear.

"Dey's just whar Samson set down a couple of suitcases in heah yest'day. —An' quit hollerin' at me, too."

"Thought all time dey wuz kind of narrer," sidestepped Columbus gracefully. In case of disagreement, it was an assistant's place to be wrong. And, "Hired you to holler at," he further outlined his helper's duties. "You ought known better all de time than to think dem suitcase tracks wuz footprints. But, den, if you had dat much sense, you'd be de fifty-cent man round heah, 'stead of jes' de fifteen-cent boy wid de shawt britches on, carryin' de tools fo' me. You cain't argue wid de ev'dence, ol' detective-book say."

Bugwine's jaw dropped sullenly ajar. This boy with the two left shoes was about-facing on him faster than a weathervane in a cyclone, and high-hatting him more than the thirty-five cent difference in their honorariums really justified.

"You is de dee-tective, is you?" questioned Mr. Bates distrustfully. "Heah de d'ploma whut say so!"

Bugwine began to get sore.

"Git on outside now, an' quit killin' time!" Columbus snapped testily at him. "Staht in measurin' de footprints round de door. An' watch out fo' one print bein' deeper'n de other, 'count de weight of de law-book pullin' de crook down on one side."

"Aint nothin' out front *but* footprints," objected Bugwine gloomily. "All dem niggers crowdin' round heah makes 'em when dey goes 'way jes' now."

This head-detective was getting harder to get along with all the time!

"How 'bout out under dat side-winder?" countered Columbus, again thinking up orders to give his assistant. "Aint nobody been round hit, is dey? Hit's too high to look in."

BUGWINE went out; thereafter little could be heard in that part of Demopolis but the angry *slap-slap* of his yardstick being laid alongside suspicious footprints, hiding-places, and a length of rusty stovepipe. That and the labored breathing of this assistant *Sherlock* as he entered the resulting figures on a large piece of brown wrapping-paper which he was using for a note-book.

"All swoll' up like red balloon at de circus!" grumbled Mr. Breck of his superior while he noted and measured. "Wasn't fo' dat—an' Samson—I'd tell him somep'n! . . . . Sho' wish I wuz gittin' int'rest on my fifteem cents: be five dollars fo' me in no time, den. An' aint no sense in measurin' round dis side-winder nohow; I knows whut I's talkin' 'bout."

"Nigger, aint you finish' yit?" his master's voice interrupted him rudely. "Is I got to light a fire under you ev'y time I wants you to move?"

Columbus limped irritatedly around the corner of the barber-shop toward Bugwine, stepping as gingerly as possible on his tortured right foot encased in a left shoe. Pausing for effect beneath the side-window in question, he reached up and drew himself to a level with its sill where he could see within Samson's sanctum.

"Jes' to show you again dat you's all wet between de ears," he explained to his puzzled assistant. "Never overlook a clue—dey's all impawtant—"

Columbus' lecture was interrupted by an illustration of the very thing of which he spoke: A clue. It was borne by a small messenger with a big message, to the effect that Gladstone Smith—tall, dark, and practically numb north of the adenoids—was reported doing a suspicious and unprecedented thing: he was sitting back of the old freight-depot reading a book.

Columbus' unerring instinct leaped the gulf from rumor to proof, while Bugwine's resemblance to a cat trying to understand the other cat back of a mirror increased. A distinctly stumped-but-startled look settled on his dusky features. Things apparently were getting thicker than Bugwine was mentally equipped to handle.

"Make 'aste, Bugwine!" his master ordered domineeringly. "Hunt up one of dis Gladstone's old footprints an' measure hit. Us got to see if hit fits de crime. Dat's de way you finds an' convicts de crim'nal. Old book say so! And you cain't argue wid de evidence; dat's reason you got to git de evidence first."

"How I know a footprint's Gladstone's when I sees hit?" demurred the fifteen-cent man. "Why aint us jes look at he book Gladstone got, instead?"

"Brains, whar *is* you?"" mourned Baptist Hill's big clue-and foot-print man at this. "Ign'ant, if hit wuz *dat* simple—whut de use of bein' a detective? Whut you tryin' do—kill de goose dat lays de golden spoon?"

Bugwine knew when to shut up. He also knew when to seize an opportunity to get off and gain some perspective on this thing. Instructions to measure Gladstone's footprints on the sands of the town was as good an excuse for this as any. And something plausible to give color to a slight absence in the interests of the new aspect of the case occurred to him.

"Cain't measure Gladstone's footprints wid no yahdstick," he explained. "Got to go down by de river an' borrer one dem suhveyor's chains from de white folks."

"Make 'aste, den," Columbus for once fell in line with his helper's ideas. "An' remember you cain't never argue wid de ev'dence—you nor Gladstone neither."

Bugwine made haste—to where Gladstone was poring over a bulky volume.

"Keep on readin' dat book so hahd," Mr. Breck hailed him, "an' aint gwine be nothin' left fo' de next boy whut git hold of hit to read! Whut's in it, nohow?"

"Aint know," admitted Gladstone, who had quit in disgust after four years in the First Grade. "Finds hit back of de post office. Aint no pictures in hit."

"Aint Samson's book, nohow, either," commented Bugwine. "But dat aint do you no good now."

"Whut you mean, aint do me no good?" Gladstone displayed alarm.

"Mean de human bloodhound, Columbus Collins, done on yo' trail. He heah you wuz readin' a book. Samson had done lost a book—an' yo' cain't argue wid de evidence. Dat de way he mind works. He stahted measurin' yo' tracks now."

Gladstone looked increasingly nervous. When it came to footprints, he was in a class by himself—when bigger tracks were made in the Demopolis dust, Gladstone would make them.

"Whut ail dat detectin'-boy, nohow?" he grumbled.

No detective is a hero to his fifteen-cent assistant. Bugwine leaped for the opening that Gladstone had left for him. Boring from within started in the Collins agency.

"Whut de matter wid him, you says?" Bugwine squared to his task of derogation. "Ev'ything! Even he shoes aint right—both of em's lefts. Makes him even walk crooked—heavy on one side, light on de other. All swell' up, too, thinkin' whut a big man he is! Ev'y time I thinks up somep'n, he grab all de credit fo' hit. Jes' to listen to him, you'd think both of us wasn't nobody but him!"

Gladstone looked sympathetic as well as apprehensive. To be found reading a book right after one had been stolen, with Columbus on the trail, gave one a right to feel frightened. But he could also appreciate Bugwine's position.

Bugwine, for his part, was feeling increasingly the need for some one with whom he could advise. And while it was true that looking to Gladstone for suggestions was like looking to the Sahara for swimming-pools—yet even the Sahara had oases, Gladstone at intervals an idea. . . .

Bugwine took a chance. And in ten minutes Gladstone was batting his eyes under the recital of Bugwine's wrongs and aspirations in respect to Columbus.

Gladstone could understand up to half of any simple subject, provided he was approached early in the day while his brain was yet fresh. Now, with the day and his mental powers at the zenith, he was even able to contribute one gem to the symposium. "Dis heah Columbus Collins," he slowly delivered himself of it, "aint got no sense, hahdly."

"Dat's right too," corroborated Bugwine. "He believe ev'ything de evidence say—aint matter who hit ruin. All time sayin' you cain't argue wid de evidence, an' lookin' in the book. Sho' hates see somebody lookin' in ol' book."

"An' books," continued Gladstone in a further intellectual burst, "aint de only place whar-at dey is sense."

"Sho aint!" Bugwine's tone was tinged with sadness. "Heaps of books got int'rest in 'em. Dat whar-at Samson ruin me—"

Gladstone interrupted this by vociferously giving birth to the Idea of the Month—more or less in self-defense, at that.

"You say," he questioned preliminarily, "dat Columbus believes ev'ything he see in de detectin'-book? An' den tell you to measure *my* feetprints?"

"Sho' is. An' dat boy believes ev'ything de yahdstick say too—so fur. Hit jes' aint say nothin' yit. But hit liable to; dat whut pesterin' me—cain't never tell whut he gwine measure next."

"Maybe you cain't, but *I* can," interposed Gladstone cryptically. "Look heah, now. I—"

GLADSTONE and Bugwine emerged from their huddle with a look in their eyes that resembled the dawn of a new intelligence. For Gladstone's idea, admitted the relieved Bugwine, certainly did stand up under scrutiny—and furnish him with something that he had been badly needing from the very outset.

Through it, he would kill two birds with one stone: revenge himself upon Columbus, and solve the mystery—solve it himself, in his own way and ahead of his egotistical chief.

Cheered by which thoughts, Bugwine returned forthwith with new zest to a survey of the dust about Samson's office for footprints. The more likely looking ones he again fell to measuring with his yardstick. All he needed now, he saw, were the right footprints. Once fasten them upon the proper person, and the great law-library crime would be solved—and by Bugwine!

Nothing could be truer than the adage that justice will prevail. Bugwine Breck leaped aside, startled at fresh proof of this as it came suddenly before his very eyes—proof in the shape of two hitherto unmeasured footprints under Samson's side-window.

"Looks like el'phant tracks—only bigger. Whar-at you git 'em?"

Feverish study of them merely improved their appearance, so far as Bugwine was concerned. He could not see how he had overlooked them before, but there they were—as though the guilty one had returned to the scene. Regardless of whys and wherefores, the criminal was found; the rest was bound to be easy!

With the old-style razor which he carried for social purposes, suspended by a string beneath his shirt, Bugwine carefully hacked from the brown wrapping paper that he used for a note-book, two rough but faithful replicas of the new-found footprints in the dust which were about to put a whole new face on the law-library loss.

Then, wrapping them carefully in his remaining paper, Bugwine straightened up and went to meet the world, a great load off his mind.

"Whar-at de great detective, Columbus Collins?" he made ironic inquiry of a loafer drowsing in front of Samson's looted place.

"Comin' now," accommodated the loafer—as indeed Columbus was; and he proved in no less peeve than before.

"So dar you is, is you!" he gave tongue to his wrath against his assistant, as he dropped into a chair to ease his feet. "I sends you to measure de tracks an' find de crim'nal, an' you goes off an' sleeps somewhars! Heah 'tis

dawggone near twelve o'clock, an' you aint find de suspect yit! Cut yo' sal'ry down to a dime, an' you'd still be gittin' double-pay fo' whut you's wuth! Thought I sont you to git de goods on Gladstone!"

Under this storm Bugwine remained suspiciously calm.

"Gladstone's feets didn't fit. But whut you call dese?" he produced his paper patterns.

"Looks like el'phant tracks—only bigger," Columbus deprecated Bugwine's patterns and all his works. "Whar-at you git 'em?"

"Made 'em! Come on 'round heah under de side-winder, an' I shows you whut from. —An' some-p'n else besides."

Beneath the side-window under which he had found the copied footprints, Bugwine pointed dramatically upward to palm-marks on the sill; and downward to the footprints in the dust.

"Heah whar-at de crim-'nal stood," he outlined to his superior; "an' heah whar-at he drew hisse'f up an' climb in de winder after Samson's book. You cain't argue wid de evidence. Dar 'tis. Now all us got to do is find de feets whut fits dese patterns I makes—an' de crim'nal done found!"

"H-m-m!" pondered Columbus irresolutely. Nothing was wrong with his assistant's hypothesis — except that it was not Columbus' own: solutions should come from the head, not from the fifteen-cent assistant, in a well-conducted detective agency.

And, clearly, with the solution so near, so well-backed by concrete evidence, it was time to call this upstart assistant off; to assume charge in person for the final portion of the pursuit, the portion where the glory was to be.

"Er—I'll 'tend to de clues myse'f from now on," he instructed Bugwine importantly. "Hit's gittin' too complicated fo' you: you li'ble slip up an' ball ev'thing up. You see I smells 'em out, whar others jes' sniffs about."

Columbus even grew magnanimous, despite the way his feet hurt in their mismatched shoes, as he thought of how far he should outshine Bugwine directly, with Bugwine's own light!

"Hit sho' will he'p you a lot," he therefore patronized the scowling Bugwine, "havin' folks know dat you carried de yahdstick fo' me while I wuz solvin' de gre't law-book myst'ry. Gimme back dem patterns now: I never stops twel I finds de feet dey fits."

"Hunt up one of Gladstone's old footprints an' measure hit!"

WITH breakfast over the following morning, the *Doctor Watson* of Demopolis sleuthdom who had been so rudely cut off short of glory by his superior, drifted into the speak-easy used as professional headquarters by Columbus.

"Whar-at Columbus?" he inquired of the proprietor. "Craves to knock he block off."

"*Columbus?*" The proprietor seemed amazed.

"Yeah, Columbus—dat big-mouth' nigger wid de badge."

"Aint you *know?*" The proprietor gaped.

"Aint know nothin'—yet."

"Dawg-gone! Why, dat Columbus boy run in heah yest'-day evenin' wid couple pieces brown paper in he hand an' he eyes stickin out like doorknobs, he wuz in sich a swivet! Say he 'bout to find de crim'nal. Den he lope back to de scene of de crime wid 'em. Den he gallop back heah to he room wid de yahdstick, and de sweat pourin' off him. . . . After dat, I aint see nothin' but de blur whar he go by—jes' in time to grab de back flatfawm of de Selma train leavin' Rock Cut. He must been gwine off to detect somep'n in a hurry!"

"Naw!" Bugwine seemed thoughtful — somehow relieved, although not surprised. "He aint *gwine* detect: de trouble wid him wuz dat he done detected! He'd jes' *finished* solvin' de big law-book myst'ry when you seen him pass."

"Solved hit? Huccome?" The speak-easy proprietor was visibly impressed. "I knowed all time," he added, "dat somep'n gwine come of all dat measurin'-round he done."

"Yeah? Well, Columbus' trouble wuz he measure jes' one set of tracks too many, wuz all."

Perplexity returned to the proprietor.

"Whut you mean, one set too many, boy?"

"Means I give him dem brown paper patterns—an' he cotch de first train out heah after he match de right feets to 'em."

"Match *whose* feet?"

"*His* feet! I made dem patterns from Columbus' own footprints under dat side-winder! He fo'git' bout dat—an' so den he prove to hisse'f wid he own yahdstick dat it couldn't been *nobody else but him* dat stole Samson's law-book! Even he tracks in de dust wuz like he say de crim-'nals 'd be—one light an' one heavy: but dat wuzn't from law-book—hit wuz from w'arin' two left shoes! An' when he try dem patterns on he own feet den, de cotch de train —beca'ze he say hisse'f *you cain't argue wid de evidence!*"

Again, later on that gladsome morning, two master-minds met back of the freight depot to discuss whatever might properly come before the house.

"Wonder who *did* steal Samson's book?" queried Gladstone idly over a cigarette retrieved recently fresh from the sidewalk.

"Well, now, *dat,*" divulged Bugwine illuminatingly, "wuz whut kept me pestered all de time I wuz hired out helpin' Columbus find de crim'nal. I done took hit back las' night—but, you see, whut made me steal dat law-book in de firs' place, wuz I couldn't figure out no other way to stop hit pilin' up int'rest on me ev'y time Samson'd look in hit 'bout my four dollars!"

A Seven Year Gamble

A boy and a dog, thoroughbreds both, fight to freedom from the clutches of a modern Fagin—by the author of "The Beavertooth Battle."

By REG DINSMORE

Illustrated by Lee Townsend

SOMETHING had gone wrong. The ferry that docked within sight of my basement window had made its last trip for the night, and the lights aboard the boat had been turned off. That meant that it was far past midnight, and as yet Steve had not come.

Always before, by the time the big whistle on the mill across the river had boomed its hoarse twelve-o'clock blast, my young master had returned, taken a cuffing from Yutzy, the terrible man who lived upstairs, and had come down to me with the bone or bottle of milk that he always managed to smuggle in under his ragged red sweater.

Of course I knew nothing of the trade of pocket-picking, for at that time I had never been outside that foul-smelling, dimly lighted basement. But even though Steve did come home occasionally with but one or two watches and a handful of small change, Yutzy shouldn't have beaten him for not bringing more, for Yutzy was a big man and Steve just a little fellow—only twelve years old.

There were two reasons why Steve had never run away from Yutzy: One was because he had no other place to go, and the other—well, Steve and I were the best of pals and perhaps the little fellow couldn't bear to go and leave me.

When, one by one, my mother, brothers and sisters had sickened and died, partly because of the damp, foul air of the cellar and partly because Yutzy would not give us enough to eat, Steve's heart had nearly burst with grief. I alone remained, and once, because I missed the warmth of the other puppies' soft bodies in the long, cold nights, and lifted up my voice in shrill lament, Yutzy beat me cruelly. Each night after that Steve came down to sleep with me; together we curled up on the soiled excelsior in the old packing-case beneath the cellar stairs and found solace in each other's company.

And so this night, although Steve did not come at his accustomed time and the muscles of my throat quivered with the longing to voice my grief and hunger, I made not a sound, for I knew it would but mean another beating from Yutzy, moving about upstairs.

AT LAST came the light tread of my young master on the back steps, the slam of a door, and the sullen growl of Yutzy's voice.

"Home, are yer? Well, kid, it's time! What'd I tell yer erbout stallin' around Monahan's poolroom when yer ought ter be out on de street doin' yer stuff? Jest fer dat I'm goin' ter lace the devil outa yer!"

My heart turned sick within me as I listened to the scrape of Yutzy's big feet as he crossed the floor to give Steve a beating. I found the hair along my spine prickling, rising; my lips twisted away from my puppy teeth in a snarl of hate. But what could I do—a four-months-old pup? Nothing! So padding to my old nest-box, I cowered in its darkest corner until poor Steve's punishment should be over.

But my little master was no coward.

"Back up, yer big bum!" I heard his thin voice pipe at Yutzy. "Wot makes me late is 'cause I gypped de ferry fer a ride across de river an' woiked de fight crowd when dey wuz comin' outa de Armory after de scrap. I missed de last boat an' had ter pike down-river an' cross on de railroad trestle ter git home. Lookit—lamp dis swag, an' fergit yer grouch!"

I heard the clink of coins, the soft thump of what I now know was a roll of bank-notes that Steve tossed upon the table. Yutzy whistled softly, delightedly, and stepped closer to gloat over the haul, while Steve slipped through the cellar door.

I MET him on the stairs, leaped upon him in joy, and licked his thin face. Steve leaned over and put his arms around my neck. The old cap he was wearing fell off and his tousled yellow curls tickled my nose.

"Mike," he whispered, "we aint always goin' ter stay in dis dump an' be a dip fer Yutzy! When we grows up it's us fer a regular room in a swell apartment an' a fine kit er tools like Sandpaper Feeney's got. Them boxmen are de birds wot pulls down de coin!"

In a patch of sickly light that a street lamp cast through the single grimy window, Steve unrolled a package which he took from somewhere beneath his sweater, and together we made our supper on frankfurters. The rolls and sausages were warm and good; although I ate three and Steve only one I could have eaten as many more, for I was growing fast then and it seemed as though my stomach continually cried for food I could not get. After supper we curled up in the old packing-case. Steve's arms were about me and with the warmth of his body creeping into my bones, I dropped asleep.

Sometime later I awoke. Steve was sitting up, listening intently to voices upstairs. Some one had come in and was talking to Yutzy. Through the shaky old floor their

voices came down to us plainly enough. The stranger was speaking.

"If you can satisfy that guy that this pup's mother was the pure-blooded English setter you say she was, he'll pay you a long price for the little mutt, Yutzy."

"Yer don't t'ink Colonel Grimshaw would be likely ter have any mongrels around him, do yer? Well, I took the pup's mother offen the Colonel's yacht that wuz anchored down-river here last spring—erlong wit' six-seven hundred dollars' worth of other swag. Wot a night it wuz fer a job! Fog so thick you could cut it wid a knife, an' everybody ashore but one sailor—an' he never knew wot hit him."

"Well, if you'll take forty bucks for that pup I'll be around and get him in the morning. What d'ye say, Yutzy?"

"It's a go, Sandpaper!"

Steve clutched me tight and listened breathlessly until he heard Sandpaper Feeney and Yutzy leave—no doubt on some shady mission—then he jumped up and began searching through an old barrel for something. As he pawed out old newspapers, discarded shoes and other rubbish, he talked to me.

"So Sandpaper Feeney's buyin' you for some one, is he, Mike? Banana oil, he is! Watch him git yer, pup! Termorrer mornin' you an' I will be so far from dis shack dat dey'll have to call on de bulls if dey ever find us. An' I don't guess Sandpaper an' Yutzy'll bother de harness-bulls much—'twouldn't be healthy fer 'em!"

In the bottom of the barrel my young master unearthed a length of heavy cord. This he tied about my neck; then together we crept up the cellar stairs in the dark, and sneaked out of the house.

I had never had a collar on before; the feel of the string about my neck was something new. I hung back and fought it for a while, but Steve talked soothingly to me and dragged me firmly along, and soon I became used to the leash and trotted contentedly at my young master's heels.

We traversed the river-front for a long way, skulking in the shadows, keeping out of sight of the blue-coated, brass-buttoned men that Steve called "harness-bulls." Then we turned toward the lights and roar of the city itself. Everything was strange to me and I trembled as the automobiles and electric cars with their blinding lights and whizzing wheels passed; but Steve, seeming not at all afraid of these speeding monsters, trudged steadily on.

We must have traveled miles, for the first gray light of dawn was showing pale in the eastern sky and an occasional night-hawk taxi about the only cars remaining on the streets, when we came to a place where trees and shrubs grew, and where green grass under my feet soothed my pavement-worn pads. Something about the smell of the place seemed to fire my blood with a strange excitement. I had the feeling that I had been in that kind of place before, and the urge to race away into the distance and to explore those shadowy nooks beneath the shrubs was almost uncontrollable. This I could not do, however, for my little master had other plans.

Near a kind of long, green seat he found an old newspaper. With it in his hands he and I crawled well back out of sight beneath the low-hanging limbs of a huge rhododendron shrub. There Steve tied the end of my lead-rope to his grimy wrist and spreading the newspaper upon the ground lay down upon it to get the sleep he needed so badly.

As for myself, I could not sleep. The electrifying odor of the clean, fresh earth beneath me, the smell of growing things all about were so insistent in my nose that sleep would not come. For perhaps an hour I lay beside Steve while he slept, and then, as the morning light grew stronger and the birds in the trees above began to move about and sing, I could stand the inactivity no longer. I arose quietly and moved away the length of my rope to investigate a goggle-eyed toad who had suddenly appeared from nowhere to gaze in unwinking surprise upon the intruders in his shadowy domain. The toad hopped clumsily away, and forgetting my rope, I pounced excitedly after him.

The pull of the rope on Steve's wrist awoke him instantly. He sat up, rubbed his sleepy eyes and got to his feet.

"Forget de toad, Mike!" he commanded, pulling me gently away. "It's us fer de eats. Boy, I'm hungrier dan an alley cat! Let's go!"

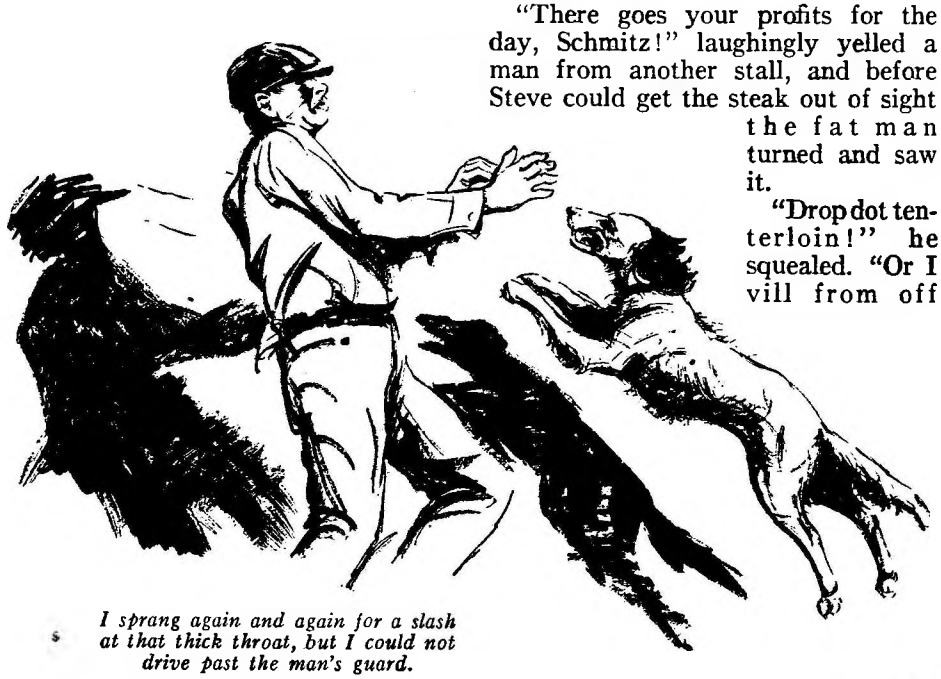
DOWN across the big, dew-drenched park and again into the smelly city. Block after block through quiet streets, past unopened stores whose windowed fronts displayed many things of which I knew nothing—and then we turned a corner into a narrow street where everything was hustle and bustle.

On the far side of the street was a long building of many doors. In the street, before the doors, were trucks and carts drawn up to the curb. Men were hurrying about, carrying things from the trucks into the building. Within the building were other men. Many of these men wore white coats and aprons and were busy arranging baskets of earthy-smelling roots, boxes of red-cheeked apples, cuts of juicy meats about their small stalls. Since then I have learned that the place was a public market where the city dwellers go to buy their food.

Everyone was so busy that little attention was paid to Steve and me, and Steve had little difficulty in pocketing two or three big apples. I could not eat apples, however, and Steve, knowing this, wandered about until he discovered a fat man who was cutting thick steaks from a huge piece of beef lying on his block. When the fat one's back was turned, Steve attempted to slip one of the steaks under his sweater.

"There goes your profits for the day, Schmitz!" laughingly yelled a man from another stall, and before Steve could get the steak out of sight the fat man turned and saw it.

"Drop dot tenterloin!" he squealed. "Or I vill from off



I sprang again and again for a slash at that thick throat, but I could not drive past the man's guard.

your head trim your ears, und your dog make into wienies!"

Other men laughed. The fat one reached for Steve. Steve, still gripping the meat and dragging me at the end of the string, ran. The fat man, his round paunch jiggling ludicrously, a two-foot steak-knife gripped in his pudgy fist, gave chase.

Out into the street and up the sidewalk toward the corner of the block we streaked. Behind us panted the fat one. As he ran he wheezed a high-pitched lament, and yelled for the officer of the beat.

Since childhood my young master had been trained to avoid policemen at any cost, and so when we scuttled around the corner of the block and far up the side street caught the blue of a uniform and the gleam of brass buttons, Steve knew that he was between the devil and the deep sea and did the only thing left for him to do—he scooped me up in his arms, tossed me into the body of a truck that was parked by the curb, and clambered in himself; when the outraged butcher came pounding around the corner the street was as destitute of boys and dogs as if no such things existed, while we, snugly hidden beneath the tarpaulin that covered the boxes and barrels in the truck, had the taste of crisp apples and juicy steak in our mouths.

A moment later other footsteps came around the corner and we heard a man laugh heartily at the perplexity of the fat butcher who now stood staring blankly at the empty street.

"Ha, ha, ho! Don't feel bad about that tough steak, Schmitz! Probably the kid wanted it for his pup—and to look at the scrawny little cuss I'd say he needed it."

"A-agh! But vhy did you not shtop the poy when he dodged petween your laigs, back there in the doorway, Mr. Clark? It is not I who can afford to see a seventy-five-cent steak from my shtall run away!"

"I was laughing too hard to stop anyone, Schmitz. Come now, forget the meat and tell me, can you handle five bushels of good table beets if I bring them in to you next week?"

"Ya, next veek—if they pe nize goot ones, Mr. Clark."

The man who had laughed climbed into the driving-seat of our truck and as he started the motor we heard the fat butcher trudge slowly back around the corner, still muttering as he went.

FOR an hour we bumped over paving, the truck weaving and swaying as it headed its way among the growing traffic. Then the roar of other motors grew gradually less and less and finally the jolt and rattle of paving gave way to a smooth glide over a macadam roadbed.

Now I missed the smoky stench of the city, and in under the tarpaulin there gushed a fragrance like that of the park where Steve and I had slept. I could feel the sting of that delightful air in my nostrils. Perhaps Steve smelled the change too, although his nose is not nearly as keen as mine, for he wriggled around and cautiously lifted a side of the tarpaulin. I too squirmed about until we lay side by side, gazing wonderingly out at the beautiful picture rolling past us.

There were green fields that seemed to stretch away and away; strips and squares of wonderful woodland; rolling, side-hill pastures, on which grazed strange black, white and red animals that later on I was to learn were cattle. An occasional white house and big red barn beside the road, on the green lawns of which children played in the restful shade of great trees. It was all very strange and wonderful to me and I knew not what to make of it; but although Steve had never seen anything of the like before, he knew what it meant and hugging me tight, he whispered: "Mike! Mike, boy, that's the *country!* Ain't it wonderful? Why, I feels like I did onct when I sneaked into de big church up on Paxton Street an' heard de announcer, er whatever yer call him, tellin' erbout a guy he called 'God.'"

We rolled over miles more of the macadam; then the truck swerved into an unpaved side road and we rode for an hour beside a little river that chuckled peacefully down a beautiful narrow valley. At the upper end of the valley, in the very shadow of great pine and hemlock ridges, the truck turned into a farm-yard, entered a garage, and stopped.

Steve had pulled down the edge of the tarpaulin again and as we lay there wondering what would happen to us next, I think that my master's stout little heart faltered for just a moment. Although he had the courage to fight a great city single-handed the strangeness of this situation must have frightened him a little. I could feel him tremble as he clutched me tight and listened to Mr. Clark climb out of the driving-seat.

Light footsteps came hurrying in the gravel of the driveway and a woman's voice called cheerily:

"Back early, aren't you, Jim? Did you bring out the brown sugar for my pickles?"

"Sure did, Bess. It's up front there, under the tarpaulin. I'll get it for you as soon as I get the driving cramp out of my bones."

"Those poor old bones of yours!" laughed the woman. Then we heard her climb nimbly in over a mudguard.

She worked her way to the front of the truck body, laid hold of a corner of the tarpaulin, threw it back with one brisk flip, and Steve and I looked straight up into her surprised face.

She was young, perhaps twenty-five, with corn-colored hair that crinkled and waved about her warm face—hair for all the world like Steve's curly mop—and eyes that in her excitement and surprise were so dark blue they were almost black. She wore a short-sleeved dress and her smooth, rounded arms had been tanned by the clean sunlight until they gleamed with the wholesome brown of goldenrod honey. I had seen but few women then, and never one like this goddess of the fields and sun. I liked her at once and involuntarily my tail thumped the floor of the truck in friendly greeting.

Though Steve did come home occasionally with but one or two watches, and a handful of change, Yutzy shouldn't have beaten him.

Steve got slowly to his feet, awkwardly dragged off his old cap and steadily returned her wide-eyed gaze.

"Jim Clark!"

Something in the tone of his wife's voice brought Mr. Clark on the jump from where he was puttering at the front of the truck. He took one look, made a funny noise in his throat and muttered:

"Holy mackerel—and I laughed at Schmitz!"

"You laughed at who?" inquired the puzzled woman. "What does this mean, Jim Clark?"

Jim reached over the sideboard of the truck and lifted Steve to the ground. "It means, Bess," he remarked dryly, "that we've got company for over the week-end. Hand me out that pup, and then run to the house and build up the biggest dinner ever!"

BUT Steve and I didn't go back to the city when the week-end was over. After the Clarks had heard Steve's story, or part of it—for some reason he did not tell them about the pocket-picking that Yutzy had forced him to do—they held a consultation. Steve was playing in the barn at the time, but I was dozing by the kitchen stove and so overheard the talk.

Jim Clark came in from the barn with a couple of pails of milk and placed them in the sink for his wife to strain and care for. Then instead of hurrying back to the rest of his chores he hesitated, took a turn or two about the kitchen, and finally blurted:

"Bess, what are we going to do about that boy? I don't suppose it's just according to Hoyle to take a child, even a waif like Steve, and keep him indefinitely without notifying the authorities, is it?"

Mrs. Clark turned to her husband, her blue-black eyes sparkling in her earnestness. "Maybe not, Jim Clark—but the authorities have never troubled themselves about Steve, evidently!"

Jim Clark's lean, tanned face split in a grin. "So that's the way you feel about it, is it, Bess? The little lad's got a hold on your heart too, has he?"

"Yes, he has!" she admitted frankly. "Any boy who can love a dog as he loves that awkward puppy there has got the making of a good man in him. I'd hate to see him go back to that brute of a Yutzy he tells us about; no knowing what might become of him! We've got no children of our own, Jim; why can't we keep Steve? I'll be just as good to him as if he belonged to us."

Jim Clark crossed the kitchen and took his wife gently by the shoulders. He was very grave now.

"Listen, Bess! Supposin' we keep Steve, make him one of the family, let him grow into our hearts—which the little shaver's sure to do. And then supposin' that when he gets older and the lure of the world takes hold of him and he gets out among people—mind you I'm not sayin' this would happen, but it *might*—supposin' the old life gets him again and he turns bad; how are you going to feel?"

Mrs. Clark gazed long and searchingly up into her husband's eyes; then she replied:

"I'd feel—I'd feel as though I'd fallen down on the biggest job that the Almighty ever gave me, Jim Clark!"

And so for my young master and myself began a new life, a life the like of which we had never dreamed. Each glorious day brought discoveries of new pleasures, each pleasure brought fuller understanding of what life could really mean—and a greater love for these kind young people.

With the good food and outdoor living Steve's pinched cheeks filled out and tanned to a healthy brown; his thin legs rounded to fine stubby props; the furtive slouch of his young shoulders disappeared to give place to an honest squareness that was good to look upon. He tackled his school-work with the same enthusiasm with which he played, advancing, within the year—for all his early neglect—to a grade compatible with his age. I was as proud of my young master as were the Clarks themselves.

As for myself—well, anyone who understands dogs can understand the joy that a young setter could extract from such a life as mine. I missed Steve when he was away at school during the day, but there was always Jim Clark for me to pal around with; and Jim Clark is one of those rare men who understands dogs.

He it was who took me into the alder runs and back to the side-hill grouse coverts and taught me the joy of searching out and pointing the long-billed, russet-breasted woodcock and the wary, thunder-winged grouse. It was then that I understood why he had taken such pains with my yard-breaking, why he had been so patient in teaching me what *"whoa"* meant, and the reason I had been trained so thoroughly in retrieving. Those long hours of tiresome drilling had been but to prepare me for the real object of a bird-dog's existence.

Nor was Jim Clark disappointed in my performance in the coverts. Yutzy must have known what he was talking about when he said that my parentage was pure setter, for the pointing instinct was so strong within me that the strong body-scent of a bird would freeze me in my fastest stride to the immobility of a dog of stone. And when, on our first day's hunt, I pointed an unscattered brood of grouse and though they roared up out of the frost-bitten ferns from under my very nose, and the gun barked, and the air was speckled with drifting, shot-cut feathers, and wing-tipped birds were fluttering out in front of me, I continued to stand like a rock until it was all over, Jim Clark laid down his smoking gun, dropped to his knees and threw an arm around me.

"Mike," he said softly, "you're the coolest-headed little duffer I was ever in the woods with! Why, a lot of old dogs would have broke shot and gone all to pieces in a mix-up like that! —Now, boy, dead bird! *Fetch!*"

As I laid the fourth and last grouse in his hand he patted me again and said: "Tomorrow's Saturday, Mike. Steve doesn't have to go to school. Let's you and I take him out and show him what kind of a dog he's got!"

Steve killed his first bird over me the next day—and went daffy over bird-hunting. Every hour he could steal away the rest of the fall, we spent together in the red-and-russet fairyland of the surrounding coverts. Steve became one of the best wing-shots of the section. I once overheard Jim Clark talking with another bird-hunter at the cross-roads store.

"Yes, sir," said Jim, "that boy and dog are the greatest meat-getting combination in four counties! They work together like a smooth-running machine. They love and understand each other, that's why."

SEVEN happy years followed, during which Steve grew from a ragged, half-starved waif of the streets into a clean-limbed, clear-eyed lad. He was the pride of the

Clarks, the idol of his school, and the terror of the opposing baseball and football teams with which his school team clashed.

Those seven years began to silver big Jim Clark's temples with gray, and changed me from a gangling underfed pup to a heavy-shouldered, fully developed dog; but the years seemed to change the loving, sacrificing, great-hearted Bess Clark not a particle. She alone of the four of us apparently escaped the march of time, and her song, as she busied herself about the house or with her poultry, rang as buoyantly of youth and hope as when Steve and I first came to live with her and Jim.

Steve worshiped the woman; he could have given a real mother no greater love. Many times when he and I had been resting for a few moments during a day's hunt he spoke to me of her.

"Mike," he told me, "she's the best woman in the world! After all she's done for us, we will never live long enough to repay her. Just think, boy, if it hadn't been for her and Jim we would have never known what all this meant!" And he would sweep an arm in a wide gesture toward the rolling, forested ridges and green farm-land that spread itself before us.

"But, Mike," he would add, "there is one thing she must not know—never, never, must she find out that I once picked pockets for a living. She wouldn't understand, and it would break her heart."

A friendly wave of the tail or a comforting nudge with my nose was the best I could do for Steve when he talked to me of his foolish fear. I had not missed the light of proud love that shone in Bess Clark's eyes as she watched Steve at his work or play. I knew she would understand and forgive all. . . .

It was in the spring of his nineteenth year that Steve finished high-school and proudly laid his diploma in Bess Clark's hands. Jim Clark, who had just seated himself at the breakfast-table, grinned indulgently at the two as he said:

"Sit down here, folks, and let's talk over the next stage of the game."

Bess Clark, smiling knowingly, seated herself, and somewhat wonderingly Steve did likewise.

"Now, Steve," Jim continued, "Bess and I have been talkin' this thing over for two-three years and we think it wouldn't be quite right for you to neglect that natural knack you've got for building things. How'd you like to go to a good technical school and take a course in structural engineering?"

Steve's eyes popped wide open. He looked first at Bess Clark's smiling face, and then back at Jim.

"Gee, I'd love to!" he cried delightedly. "But,"—and his face clouded with the realization of what it all meant,—"I—I couldn't! Why, those schools are mighty high-priced! It would take—it would cost perhaps a thousand dollars a year for me to get by in one of those colleges, and I haven't got—"

"Nobody's askin' you what you've got, Steve," interrupted Jim Clark quietly. "Bess and I have watched you grow up, and we're willin' to gamble a little. Stud poker's a piker's game compared to the gamble a farmer enters into every season—figurin' floods, drouths, frosts, markets and everything. We've gambled along those same old lines for years, and now we're ready to take a crack at a side bet. We're willin' to bet the price of the course with any good university or college that you've got the stuff in you to make good in the structural-engineering game. Now, how much of a sport are you, Steve?"

I didn't hear the rest of the conversation, for just then I had to bounce off the porch to drive some hens out of one of Bess' flower-beds but in a few moments Steve came out and found me, and I knew that he was happy, for he held his head up and walked like a young king. He grabbed me, tipped me off my feet and roughed me around on the grass, the same as he used to when I was a pup.

"Mike," he told me, "we've got to work like *hell* this summer to help Jim and Bess earn a lot of money! The three of us have got a big bet on—a bet I've simply got to win!"

And so the big hustle started. A larger acreage of crops was put into the ground on the Clark farm that spring than ever before. Three more cows were added to the small dairy, and Bess Clark's incubators began to turn out downy chickens by the hundreds.

Bess herself was the hardest-working one of the trio. It was her cheery voice that routed Jim and Steve from their well-earned slumbers each morning; and it was she who mended and cooked long after they had wearily climbed the stairs to their beds at night. Occasionally she found her own work caught up for an hour or two; then she forthwith donned old gloves and overalls and hurried to the fields to help the men.

Both Steve and Jim tried to talk her out of helping with the field work, urging her to rest when she found time; but she shook her short curls at them and laughed their objections away. Although Jim shook his head in mock sadness and grumbled about "gettin' tired of being bossed around by a good-lookin' farmhand," Bess always won the argument and had her own way. Perhaps they could see as well as I that the hours she was with them seemed to pass more quickly and with less effort. It was her abundant cheer that did it.

Twice each week the truck made a trip to the city market. Because Jim did not like to make the long drive—he would rather stay with his hoeing, weeding, or haying—it was Steve who hauled the produce. Always he took me with him. Perched beside my master on the seat, I enjoyed those bi-weekly rides. I don't mean that I was glad to see the city again, for its noises and smells always brought back faint remembrances of unpleasant things; but it was nice to whirl along through the dew-drenched grayness of early dawn and bark a challenge at the farm dogs that rushed out at our speeding truck. And then the ride home through the growing heat of the forenoon, and the welcome Bess Clark always gave me was something good to look ahead to.

It was upon one of these trips that Yutzy came again into our lives.

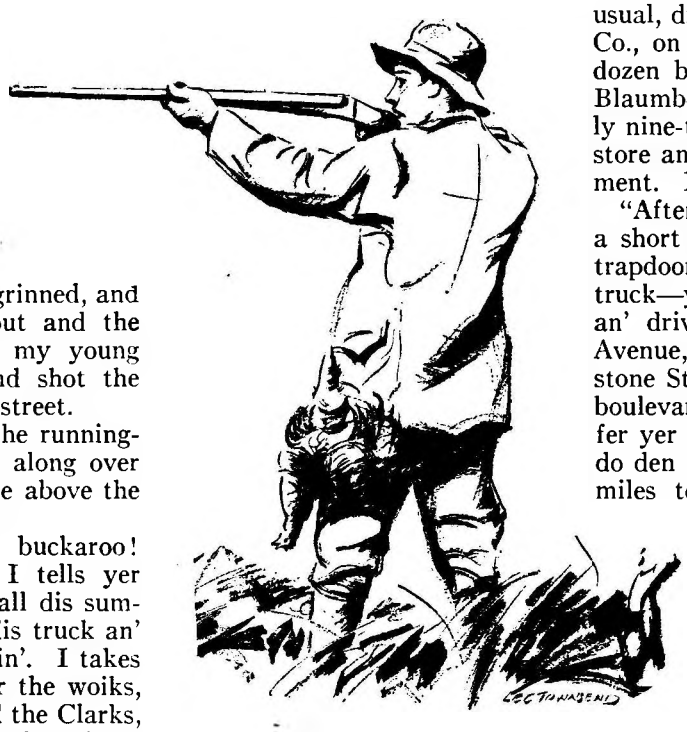
WE had delivered our produce and were working our way out through the traffic to the open country again. Steve had halted the truck at a cross-street, waiting for the green light to give him the signal to go, when a big man made a shambling run from the curb and sprang upon the running-board of our truck.

Something about the scent of the man sent a strange chill over me. The hair along my back stood up, and in spite of the warning hand that Steve dropped upon my head a growl rumbled in my throat. I glanced up at my master.

Steve's face had become very white and I could feel the hand on my head tremble slightly; but his voice was steady enough when he spoke.

"Well, Yutzy, what do you want?" he asked.

Yutzy grinned evilly. "So yer knows me, do yer, kid? Seven years is a long time to remember."



"Not too long to remember such a mug as yours," Steve said coolly. "Get off that running-board!"

"Aw, go chase yerself, kid! Lookit—I gotta talk wit yer. Drive up the side-street there an' park."

"Watch me do it!" Steve grinned, and as the red light snapped out and the green one glowed into life my young master let in the clutch and shot the truck straight past the side-street.

But Yutzy still clung to the running-board, and as we thundered along over the paving he yelled at Steve above the roar of a hundred exhausts:

"Not so fast, me proud buckaroo! Perhaps yer'll listen when I tells yer that I've been watchin' yer all dis summer. I got the number er dis truck an' found out where yer wuz livin'. I takes a run up dere an' looks over the woiks, found out how yer stan's wid the Clarks, 'n' everything. Fine people, dem, hey? How'd yer like it ter have 'em put wise dat yer used ter lift leathers fer a livin', kid?"

Steve started as if a bullet had torn into his body. The truck swerved, nearly colliding with an electric car; but my master got control of it again, swung it into the next side-street and with shaking hands drew it to a stop beside the curb.

"Dat's better!" grinned Yutzy. "An' now let's us get right down ter biz'. Yer knows dat I kin queer yer wid the Clarks by spillin' erbout a dozen woids, so I guess it's safe ter shoot th' woiks ter yer. Listen!

"We gotta a job planned, I an' Sandpaper—yer remembers Sandpaper—an' we needs a man wit' a truck ter pull the deal right. Yer've got the truck; yer know the town; an' yer aint gonna talk. Fine! Yer *it*, dat's all!"

"Yutzy," began Steve, almost pleadingly, "I'm all through with that stuff. I don't want anything to do with it. Get off the truck now and let me go home."

I could see Yutzy's coarse face harden. Into his deep-set eyes sprang the old cruel light I had seen there when he had beaten me back in those long-gone days.

"Dat's *out*, kid!" he snapped. "Yer elected ter help I an' Sandpaper pull dis job! If yer don't— Well, do yer t'ink fer a minute dat the Clarks would be crazy erbout payin' a dip's way t'rough college?"

MY master's shoulders slumped forward. He laid his head on his arms that were crossed on the steering-wheel.

Yutzy watched him a moment, smiled nastily, and continued:

"It's the little jewelry-store, kid—out on the corner er Hackett Street an' Maple Avenue. Old Blaumberg is due ter have erbout a hatful o' fine rocks in his safe next Thursday—if Sandpaper's got the dope right, an' I guess he has. Jest now the back wall of the basement o' old Blaumberg's store is all ripped out, for he's havin' a new vault put into his cellar. Sandpaper's found out that the vault won't be shipped to Blaumberg for over a week yet, an' in the meantime the fat old rabbit is keepin' his valuables in a small safe upstairs.

"Now Thursday is yer regular day ter come in wit' a load o' produce. Git rid o' yer load as usual, drive over to the Builders' Supply Co., on Commercial Street, buy half a dozen bags o' cement an' drive out ter Blaumberg's. Plan ter git dere at exactly nine-thirty. Drive around behind the store and back yer truck inter the basement. I an' Sandpaper'll do the rest.

"After the box is loaded—which'll be a short job for we'll lower it t'rough a trapdoor in the floor right inter the truck—yer covers it wit' yer tarpaulin an' drives out wit' it. Go up Maple Avenue, cross the bridge, an' take Blackstone Street down ter where she hits the boulevard. I an' Sandpaper'll be waitin' fer yer there in a car. All yer have ter do den is ter foller us out erbout fifteen miles ter an old house in the Rocky Hills district, where we'll use the soup on the box an' collect the swag."

Yutzy paused and pushed a thick forefinger against my master's shoulder to emphasize his next words.

"Remember, kid—back yer truck under Blaumberg's store at exactly nine-thirty next Thursday mornin'! Drive dat box outa town according ter instructions, an' there's a coupla grand in the deal fer yer. Otherwise—" He paused significantly, dropped off the running-board, and melted into the hurrying throng on the sidewalk.

Steve remained with his face in his arms for so long I nudged him with my nose. He raised his head and glanced wildly about. His face looked drawn, pinched. I sensed that he was unhappy, and wriggled my head in under his elbow to show him I was sorry he felt that way—but he seemed not to notice me at all. Instead, he started the truck and drove slowly out of the city toward home. . . . .

The next few days were gray days indeed for me. My best tricks, my most flattering caresses, could get no attention from my young master. He seemed to go about his work in a daze. He hardly spoke to anyone, and when spoken to he started nervously and made the shortest possible answer. His eyes refused to look straight at Bess or Jim Clark when they talked with him. He ate little.

Nights when he should have been sleeping he was restless and uneasy. Two or three times he tiptoed downstairs and went out into the darkness, to be gone an hour. Once I followed and found him down by the bank of the little brook that wound its way through the pasture, sitting with his cheek against the rough bark of a big elm and moodily watching the moon-silvered current slip past.

The Clarks were worried. "Steve, you're sick!" Bess Clark fretted. "You've been working too hard. You've got to take it easier, or you won't be able to go away to school next month."

"Oh, I'm all right!" Steve assured her, with a sorry

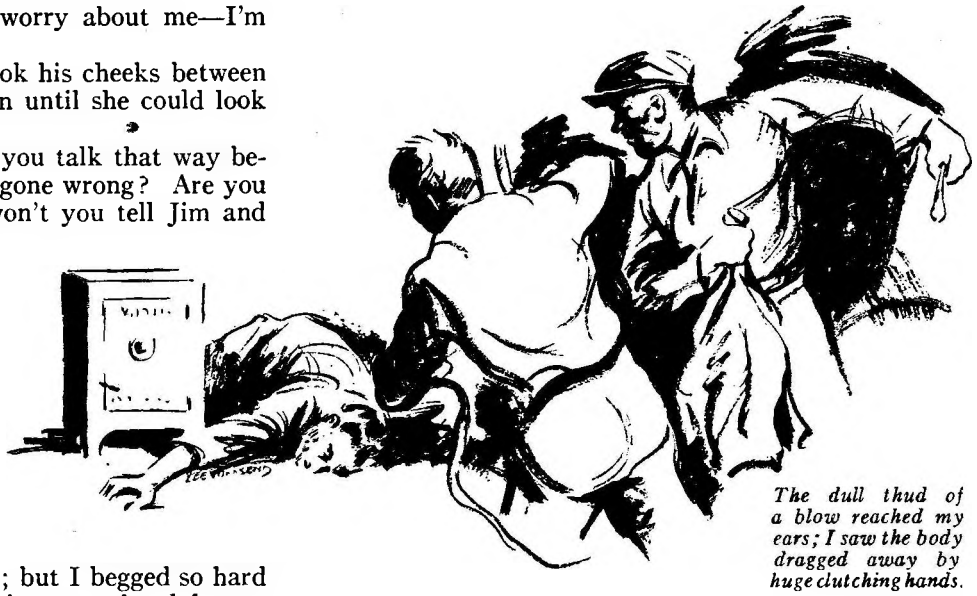
. . . . . .

attempt at his old smile. "Don't worry about me—I'm not worth it!"

Going over to him, Bess Clark took his cheeks between her palms and tipped his head down until she could look straight into his eyes.

"Steve," she said, "I never heard you talk that way before. You frighten me! What has gone wrong? Are you in trouble, or what? If you are, won't you tell Jim and me about it, so we can help you?"

For a long moment Steve looked down into her anxious eyes, then he suddenly twisted his head, kissed one of her work-roughened palms, and went out.



The dull thud of a blow reached my ears; I saw the body dragged away by huge clutching hands.

THURSDAY morning came and Steve and I were on our way to the city again. At first I thought he wasn't going to let me go, for he ordered me out of the truck when I climbed up beside him; but I begged so hard that he relented and patted the cushion as a signal for me to climb aboard. Just one pat and I was up!

We reached town at the usual time, got rid of our load and turned about for the homeward trip. But instead of driving straight out as he usually did my master swung the truck into a side-street and for a long time drove through a strange part of the city. Slower and slower the truck moved; then Steve drew in to the curb and shut off the motor.

For a long time we sat there, while a river of clanking, roaring truck traffic poured past us. Finally, arousing himself with a shiver, Steve threw an arm about me.

"Mike, boy," he whispered, "we've got to chance it—just this once! I don't want their filthy money, but if it will only keep Yutzy's dirty mouth closed, I'll—"

He straightened up, started the motor, and driving the truck around the corner of a long, low building, backed it to a door. We loaded on a number of heavy bags of material; then Steve resumed his seat and we drove away.

Up long streets that I had never seen before, around corners, and in and out through the grinding, rushing traffic, Steve piloted the truck. At last he wheeled around a corner, drove in behind a store building, and backed the truck into the basement through the torn-down wall.

As he began unloading the heavy, dusty bags, a trapdoor in the floor above opened and a fat, middle-aged face appeared in the opening. A nasal voice spoke.

"*Oi,* the ce-ment is ut? Ferry glad I am to see ut! I vill pe right down und show you vhare I vish ut placed."

Something flashed through the air behind the speaker's head. The dull thud of a blow reached my ears, and I saw the falling body caught and dragged away from the trapdoor by huge, hairy, clutching hands.

Again more noises from upstairs—the soft scuff of rapidly moving feet, the low rumble of some heavy object being trundled across the floor; then the opening was darkened by a burlap-masked, cube-shaped thing that was being lowered through it by ropes.

The box-like shape landed in the truck with hardly a sound. Steve untied the ropes and they were drawn up, the trapdoor closed silently, and Steve, hurriedly covering the box with the tarpaulin, climbed aboard the truck.

As he slid into his seat, something small and soft fell to the basement floor. In his hurry and excitement Steve did not see it—but I did, and springing down I picked it up and climbed back beside my master.

Without a glance at me Steve started the motor and we were on the move again. More strange streets, more corners; but now the traffic was less congested and by some doggish sense I knew that we were working out of the city. Steve was driving steadily enough, but his face was flushed, and his breath came sharp and jerky.

"Five minutes more, Mike," he whispered; "and we'll be at the corner of Blackstone and the boulevard. Then straight away into the country behind Yutzy's car!"

I reached over and laid my head on his arm.

He glanced carelessly down at me out of the corner of his eye, saw that I carried something in my jaws and looked again, more sharply this time. I felt the brakes take as he slowed the truck.

"What have you got there, boy?" He took a hand from the wheel and held it under my jaws. "Drop it!" he commanded.

I opened my mouth, and into his hand fell a worn, crumpled, work-stained glove—the glove of Bess Clark.

THE truck slowed to a mere crawl as Steve held that old glove in his hand and stared at it. The flush of excitement faded swiftly from his face. He groaned aloud.

"And she wore out that glove—working for me!" he muttered. "She and Jim have been betting on me all these years, and I—the dumb idiot that I am—didn't know enough to realize it! And now—now it's too late!" he ended bitterly.

The truck crawled along for another block, while Steve sat there with that old glove in his hand, driving automatically, but plunged in what I knew by his face must have been bitter thoughts. Ahead, three blocks away, the boulevard crossed the end of the street we were on. As I looked a long, closed car rolled along the boulevard across the mouth of our street, and I knew by its decreasing speed that it must have stopped just around the corner, on the opposite side of the boulevard.

Our motor roared into sudden life. Steve pressed the glove against his cheek, shoved it in the pocket of his shirt, and yelled at me over his shoulder:

"*Is* it too late, Mike, boy? *Is* it? Hang tight—and we'll darned soon find out!"

Steve clamped his jaw and sent the truck hurtling down the street with wide-open throttle. The red light was against him at the next cross-street, but with clamoring horn we zoomed straight through.

An astonished motor-cop was just dismounting from his machine by the curb near the corner. Steve saw him, shook a fist in his face, and yelled a shrill "*Ya-h-h-h!*"

Glancing back, I saw the outraged cop wheel his machine about and mount. The sharp drum-fire of his motor

reached my ears as he started in pursuit of us. Steve heard it too, and grinned.

There was no stopping now. We beat the next stoplight by a good ten seconds and with little traffic in front of us the truck shot down the last block at express-train speed and onto the broad boulevard. Diagonally across was the long car parked by the curb. From its rear window peered a coarse, cruel face, the face of Yutzy.

Without slackening speed in the least, Steve ducked past a moving car, missing it by the breadth of an eyelash, and bore straight down upon Yutzy's car. At a distance of twenty feet from it, he grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and threw me from the truck.

As I was skittering and bumping along on the hard asphalt, first on my head and then on my back, I heard a terrific crash. When I got my feet under me and found that all my bones were whole, I trotted back to where the truck and the car lay in a tangle of torn rubber, splintered wood, and bent metal. One of Steve's legs was caught under the body of the capsized truck and from the cruel way it was twisted I knew it must be broken—but he was propped on one elbow grinning cheerfully up into the face of the motor-cop bending over him.

"Those men in that car forced me into helping them rob Blaumberg's jewelry-store, on Hackett Street," he told the officer. "That's Blaumberg's safe there and the man that's pinned under it is Sandpaper Feeney."

As the officer, with the help of some men in the crowd that had gathered, were attempting to lift the truck from Steve's leg I saw Yutzy's frowzy head appear on the far side of the wreckage. In some miraculous manner he had escaped injury. He glanced wildly about, dug his way out of the tangle, and made off across the boulevard at a surprisingly swift run. Steve saw him too and gave an imploring yell:

"Get him, Mike, boy! Get him!"

The hate that Yutzy had put into me seven years before sprang up in my brain and burned like a hot flame. My throat vibrated with a hound-like cry as I sprang away after Yutzy's hulking form.

HE was halfway across the boulevard when Steve yelled for me to go, but I overtook him on the farther side and sprang upon him as he entered the mouth of a narrow alley beside an apartment house. Down this alley we fought; I sprang again and again for a slash at that thick throat, but strive as I might I could not drive my jaws past the man's guard. He was too strong and quick.

Part way down the alley two workmen were busy near a mortar-pan of slaking lime. Huge clouds of steam arose from the white mud within the low-sided box—mud that hissed and bubbled with the heat of its slaking.

Yutzy, running backward and beating at me with his hands as he ran, did not see the mortar-pan, and as I sprang again at his throat his heels caught against its side. Half-turning to save himself, he sprawled face downward into the seething whiteness.

He screeched as the hot stuff burned into his eyes—it was a bubbly sort of screech, for his mouth was also filled with the boiling mud—and the two workmen grabbed him and hauled him out. I set my teeth deep into the only part of Yutzy's anatomy that was not covered with lime—one shin—and tugged with all my seventy pounds of bone and muscle. He gave another sputtering screech and kicked at me blindly with his other lime-covered foot, so I let go and stood aside while one of the workmen turned a stream of water from a hose onto him.

Then as Yutzy sat there, flat on the paving of the alley, temporarily blinded by the hot caustic that still ate at his eyes, he turned loose the most terrible language I ever heard come from a man's mouth. He cursed Sandpaper Feeney for getting him into the mess; he cursed the fat jeweler he had robbed; he cursed himself for forcing Steve to haul the safe; and over and above all he cursed me for the burning calamity I had brought upon him.

A kindly hand dropped upon my head and I looked up to find the motorcycle-cop standing beside me.

"That will be plenty, Yutzy," he said quietly. "You've already said enough to convict yourself and to clear the boy that you tried to do dirt. Now get up and come along quietly with me—if you know what's good for you!"

STEVE wouldn't let them take him to the hospital. "Doc" Wilson, out home, can patch up that leg as well as anyone," he told them. Some one brought a car; they lifted my master gently into it and I climbed in beside him.

All the way out Steve's fingers were twisted tightly into my coat—a trick he used to have when we slept together in Yutzy's basement. His leg must have been hurting him frightfully, but every time I'd look at him his face would light with his old, white-toothed grin, and I knew he was happy.

That afternoon, after the doctor had done his work and gone, and only Bess and Jim and I were in the little bedroom with Steve, he told the Clarks his story.

"And I was—I was afraid," he faltered, "that if you ever found out that I had been a pickpocket it would be the end of everything between us. Yutzy threatened to tell you—and I—I was foolish to help him rather than have him do it. But Mike there—well, when he passed me that glove it—kind of knocked my senses right again, I guess!"

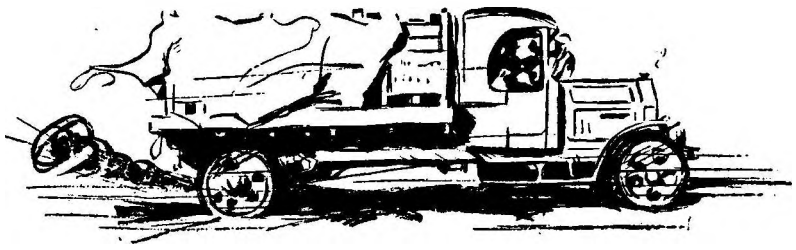
"Silly boy!" Bess Clark smiled and patted Steve's pain-whitened cheek. "Jim and I knew all about that before you had been with us two weeks! You see, Jim had a friend in the police department in the city that knew Yutzy's record—and about you too."

Steve turned his head and grinned at Jim Clark.

"So you *have* gambled a little before, outside the farming line, have you, Jim?" he asked.

Jim Clark turned his back upon us and strode to the window. He hauled a huge red bandanna from the hip pocket of his overalls and blew his nose loudly. Then blusteringly to cover the catch in his voice, he swung fiercely upon Steve and blurted:

"Yes, you young rascal, I have! Bess and I gambled seven years of hard work that you would come clean; and, by golly, if it hadn't been for old Mike there I dunno but what we'd've lost at that! But we didn't lose! We won, boy!" he shouted, his voice ringing with joy. "And now you get that leg well quick as you can, Steve, so we can go after that college bet like a hawk after a chicken; for I'm going to be a gambler from now on—and I'm playin' the limit while I'm havin' a winning streak!"



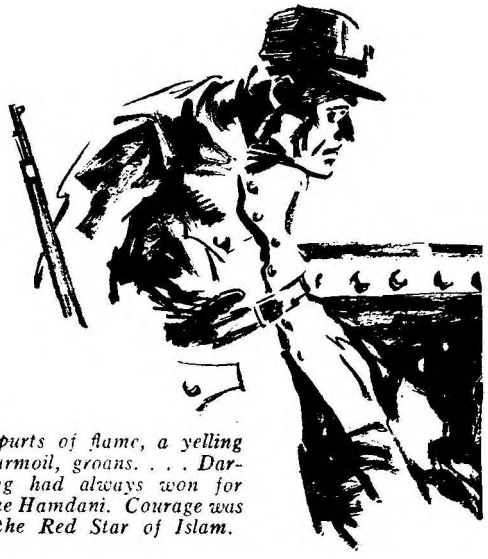
Out in the next room, with the door of Steve's bedroom closed behind us, Bess Clark did a surprising thing. She went down on her knees, put her warm arms around my neck and kissed me—me just an old setter dog!

. . . . . .

The Red Star of Islam

The stirring climax of this splendid story of an American sergeant of the Foreign Legion and his great adventure in the Sahara.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER



Spurts of flame, a yelling turmoil, groans. . . . Daring had always won for the Hamdani. Courage was the Red Star of Islam.

The Story So Far:

IT all really began when Joyce Tiverton, an American sergeant of the Foreign Legion, met his old buddy of the Great War, Yusuf Hamdani, on a steamer off Oran. Yusuf had become a rug-buyer for a New York dealer, but now he'd undertaken a big adventure.

"Eet is special rug I go after this time," Hamdani explained. "El Ribat, my own family rug. She is made three centuries ago. She is written in de Book of Rugs, dat one of my fam'ly. Was lost in a *rezzou*" (raid) "by the Anizeh on the Mountain. The Anizeh sell him in Nejd. Ibn Saud, he own dat rug some time. He geev him to de head sheik of the Senussi. Eet is now in Murzuk."

"How do you know all that?" asked Joyce curiously.

"I am expert in rugs, my frien'," said Hamdani simply. He went on to say: "My girl—ees cousin. Iréna Hamdani!" His eyes glowed as he thought upon this honey of delight, this burner of hearts. Joyce knew that there was generally some degree of consanguinity in every marriage, so close knit was each desert tribe. "She is verrie proud—my gazelle from the gardens of Paradise! Each time there is marriage among the Hamdani, an Anizeh he come. 'Where is El Ribat?' he say, sly; and it is 'Swords out!' among my people. Is always so. But Iréna say: 'If in de tent is not El Ribat for carpet, I no marry you, Yusuf! For too long have we endured the shame!' Next time Anizeh, he come, *he* drink shame! We can no keel, for he is guest. But he die for shame, *mashallah!* So I go to Murzuk."

And how would he reach Murzuk? Down as far as Gabés he could go by rail. Then it would be on a racing mehari camel, a lone desert raid to Ghadames, to Ghat, then on into the heart of the Tuareg and Senussi country to Murzuk. Approximately fourteen hundred kilometers, a thousand miles! And, arrived at that hostile town in the Fezzan, there would be the citadel of Murzuk to enter by some strategy. And in it, in the rooms of the Khalif himself, would be kept El Ribat. No money could buy it back, so Joyce gathered that it was Yusuf's intention to—er—return it, to its original home among the Hamdani, back in the Syrian deserts around Palmyra. . . .

Joyce said good-by to Yusuf, reported to his new commander Van Diemen, and learned that he was to have a big adventure of his own—the campaign against Boubekir. And that night Joyce slipped out to warn his friend Yusuf.

"I got news for you, Joe," Joyce told him.

"Yusuf now," corrected the Syrian. "I make Sinaoun by morning. It is peace there?"

"That's just it," said Joyce. "The place is being attacked by a bunch of Tuareg under Boubekir. So I went A. W. O. L. tonight, so I could find and warn you, old string-bean."

"My friend!" said Yusuf appreciatively; then he laughed hardily: "Maybe I join dem Tuareg! Dey was friends of the Senussi, so I come easy by my rug."

Leaving Hamdani, Joyce had started back to camp when he was set upon suddenly by two Tuareg and knifed. Hours later, when he recovered consciousness, he found himself slung bound on a Tuareg camel, traveling swiftly across the Sahara. The raiding Tuareg came upon Hamdani's lone camp out on the desert and tried to gather him in also, and this gave Joyce his chance. Both Joyce and Joe acted swiftly—and that was the end of the two Tuareg.

Next day, disguised in the robes and masks of their defeated foes, Joyce and Hamdani ran off the camels of the Tuareg force besieging Sinaoun. Then the two parted company again, Hamdani to pursue his quest to Murzuk, and Joyce to report at the nearest French post, Fort Pervinquière. He found this little French outpost a hell-hole in charge of a Lieutenant Quervel—and found himself cast into an underground dungeon as a deserter from the Légion.

But that dungeon couldn't hold Joyce: he escaped, and at last, half-naked and exhausted, contrived to join Van Diemen's column. And he was with his comrades of the Légion in their hard battle to rescue the survivors of Quervel's command from the Arab ambush into which they had fallen.

Meanwhile Yusuf had fallen in with a salt caravan on its way to Murzuk; while traveling with them had saved the life of the sheik's daughter, and she had fallen in love with him. . . . A fast worker in love and war, this Joe Hamdani! *(The story continues in detail:)*

AT an Arab Café on the outskirts of Mizdah, Yusuf parked his mehari, sat on the mats under a grape-arbor before a small taboret, and ordered himself coffee and a bowl of *couscous*. His green turban and Syrian accent immediately attracted respectful attention from all the squatting burnouses playing chess, sipping coffee, and smoking narghiles all about. There were whispers, wise nods. A *hadji* from some far country, this! And so

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

young! *Aiwa,* in politics, please God, for look at the Tuareg mehari!

Yusuf knew he would draw a crowd wherever he went, so waited till after dark. Boldness was his plan. Leaving his camel in charge of the inn-keeper, he would walk down the lane to the military encampment of the Khalif, walk right into his tent and, he hoped, walk out with El Ribat under his *gandourah.* It was not a large rug, about seven by four. His green turban would give him entry where no man else could go.

Soon he was out of the mud city and into the palmeries to the south. Lanes of mud walls crowned with acacia thorns; luxuriant figs making a green shrubbery above them. The ceaseless purl of water running in channels and ditches along the lane. Overhead the black canopy of palm-leaves slatting in the wind. It soon became alive with military doings. Squads of *fantassins,* foot-soldiers, returning from the town to their encampments. Arab cavalry riding past with long guns slung over-shoulder. Great sheiks with their guards who did him a reverence as their eyes noted the green turban.

Yusuf kept his eyes ahead. The palmery was thinning out, and acres of young trees with low mud walls around them dwindled out to fields of millet and barley, and beyond them the desert. A group of large marquees centered by an immense one showed up among the last of the big palms. Headquarters, without a doubt! Yusuf stopped at a gate with sentries, and the tent of the captain of the guards just inside.

"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" he raised his voice. "I am sent for, O sentries. May Allah approve ye!"

"Pass, *hadji!*" they murmured, salaaming low. Yusuf felt the well-known tug at his robe as he swept by. One of them was acquiring virtue by that furtive kiss. He crossed the dark yard that was filled with sheiks of high degree coming and going. They stopped to look at him, saw he was headed straight for the Khalif's marquee, murmured, called out, "The Power of God be upon thee, O Hadji!" went their ways.

At the marquee door, Yusuf was stopped by giant black slaves who crossed bared swords against him uncompromisingly. Yusuf put them down, grasping the bared steel. "Nay, eunuchs! I am sent for. It is a matter of state."

They knew nothing about his green turban or his reverence! He was gripped in gorilla paws as he attempted to pass. Yusuf remained passive, but he felt that he was stopped right here by these blacks who respected nothing but a military order. "Your permit of entry, you!" growled one of them, holding his arm like a vise.

Alas, for the reverend *hadji!* But just then one of the watching sheiks called out reassuringly, and they let him go, like a pair of watchdogs chirped at by their master. On—into a long corridor of striped canvas lit up by torches. It was lined with guards, Arabs this time, and they lowered weapons before the green turban. To their lieutenant, Yusuf gave his formula that he had been sent for. The young fellow eyed him gravely, suspiciously, a green turban being no passport to him. The Khalif was in excellent health, he told Yusuf wonderingly. Come again in the morning! No messenger had left the Khalif's tent this night; therefore how could he have been sent for?

Yusuf winked. "Nay, a messenger that reached me in the Nejd!" he said. The lieutenant's eyes brightened at that. Politics, eh? Something to do with Ibn Saud, that great king in Arabia, if this man came from the Nejd! And his Syrian accent agreed with that. Decidedly affairs of state that he had better not meddle with! Who knew?

"Jiddah—Tripoli—and Sinaoun," said Yusuf as if those words connoted a deal that was mysterious, particularly the last town.

The lieutenant was eager to share in the mystery, be in the know, if he could. But he had his instructions. "The Khalif sleeps, O Hadji," he objected.

"Let be," agreed Yusuf. "It is urgent, but I will wait a decorous while in the anteroom. If he awakes not, then I must ask you to—"

A suave motion of shaking. The lieutenant decided to let him go that far. "Nay, enter, Hadji, and I will wait *with* thee," he said finally, and lifted the curtains. Yusuf entered with him into the great audience tent, a huge cavern of gorgeous red, orange and green stripes lighted by a European kerosene lamp on a taboret. There was a profusion of priceless Oriental rugs covering deep the sands. Intricate Khorosans, red and black Daghestans, Rabats from Morocco, Khairouans from Tunis, green and red checkers from Algeria, pale yellow and blue Shirvans, prizes from every land of Islam.

El Ribat was blue in tone, lavender and buff in its figuring, as legend had it. Yusuf glanced over the Moorish furniture in walnut and mother-of-pearl, the great chair that was the Khalif's audience throne, the folding taborets with immense brass trays holding silver-and-copper coffee-sets, narghiles, divans, draperies, a small curtained door at

the end that led to the Khalif's sleeping-quarters. In there would be two more giant black slaves—and a ruler who would be worse to deal with than any of them if he should happen to wake up and call for something! It would be the lieutenant's cue. . . .

But Yusuf's eyes were spotting blue rugs in the layers of them. There were four, but there was no mistaking the size of El Ribat. Four by seven. Yusuf picked out that one, trod softly over to it, and sat down. He raised both hands to his breasts with palms outward in the Hanefi rite, and began whispering prayers. The lieutenant stood waiting patiently.

YUSUF'S eyes were bent on the rug beneath him. A small plaque in blue border was woven into the design at the head of the rug, its characters in flowing Arabic script. First the great capital *H*, like a gaping bird-mouth. Then the round circle of the *M*, topped by an accent. A *D* like a crooked boomerang came next, then the dotted *N*, followed by the long flourish of the *Y*. Hamdani! Two centuries ago the women of his clan had woven that tribal signature into El Ribat. Rejoicings, then shame to the Djebel Druse, when a successful raid of the enemy of the plains had carried it off. Since then exasperation, a shooting out of the lip whenever there was a marriage among the Beni Hamdani. The Anizeh never let them forget!

"*Wallah!* And now I make an end!" thought Yusuf. If it was the last thing he did! But how to get out of here with that suspicious lieutenant watching him was not apparent. Yusuf thought over one plan, then another. It would take about twenty seconds to snatch up El Ribat, fold it, conceal it under his *gandourah*. Then more waiting, till an opportunity to escape presented itself. He could decide to come back in the morning. . . .

But first to get rid of this lieutenant for a brief moment. Yusuf stopped his prayers with a discreet cough and said: "I thirst, *ya Khem*. A gourd of water?"

"A thousand pardons, Hadji!" whispered the lieutenant, with an ear to the regular snores coming from within the Khalif's room. "In one moment!"

He put his head through the audience-room curtains to give orders. Yusuf, with an eye on his shoulders, snatched up El Ribat, folded it lengthwise, stowed it around his waist under his *gandourah*. His elbows were hugging it tight. Remained but to sit there and then make his excuses with regrets that the Khalif had not wakened, and protestations of not considering disturbing his slumbers for any matter, however pressing. Tomorrow would have to do!

But just then the snores stopped, and there came a murmur in a deep bass voice from with the Khalif's room. Instantly Yusuf was electrified, tense, his hand flying to the knife in his belt. The Khalif was awake, wanted something, would send out one of the eunuchs in a moment. And the lieutenant would turn around at the first call. . . . He had to do something, and do it quick! In one jump he had reached the tent wall, slit it with his knife and was gone out into the dark. Muffled shouts, voices. He ran slap-bang into a guard at the rear of the marquee, knocked up his gun, lammed a haymaker to his jaw. The gun missed fire in a shower of priming-powder sparks that lit up briefly the enclosure. It was full of armed guards, a ring of them around the tent. The lieutenant had poked his head through the slit and was screaming at them: "The *hadji!* Kill! Take him!"

Yusuf did not wait! He vaulted over the palmery wall, dashed along it to a corner and climbed that through the dense greenery of a fig bush. Behind him all the encampment was in an uproar, random shots fired over the wall at anything that moved, excited yells.

"The *hadji!* Assassin! This way, brothers!"

Yusuf laughed caustically as he cast the green turban farther on into another garden and rammed El Ribat down under the cinch of his belt so it would stay put. Then he ran along the wall, flung himself over into the next garden and cut across at right angles. Torches were moving everywhere now, all the palmery aroused and searching. Like wildfire the rumor that a *hadji* had tried to assassinate the Khalif had flown from shout to shout.

Yusuf's situation was becoming desperate, he realized. Any and every fugitive would be seized and held now! His only safety was in joining the searchers. That gave him his cue—in the next garden where a torch was moving. Its owner was turning out, mainly to be in the excitement and acquire merit by a show of loyalty to the Khalif. Yusuf hid behind a palm trunk as the torch neared, then sprang out and lunged a smacking right for behind its bearer's ear. The man fell with a muffled groan in his beard. Yusuf picked up his torch, put on the man's turban, and went over the wall with it, in the forefront now of the searchers.

His course was leading back toward the town. He expected that his mehari would be already seized, but hoped to get charge of it again through some boldness. At least he was no longer bareheaded—sure give-away for anyone this night! But he needed badly some insignia of authority to back him up in claiming the camel in the name of the Khalif Zaoui. He would have to waylay some captain of the *fantassins* next, Yusuf decided. But just then he came to a wall giving on the main lane into town and stood looking down it. Hopeless! Lights and torches glared in front of the café. His mehari rose like a tall tower amid a group of soldiery. They were telling them there all they knew about this strange Syrian *hadji* who had ridden into town on that Tuareg animal. To show up there under any pretext at all would be to be recognized and arrested at once!

There was nothing left for it but to make for the desert and hide. Yusuf decided glumly. He crossed the lane and climbed into the gardens on the other side. His torch saved him from challenge. There were other torches moving about. The hunt for the *hadji* was still combing all the village. And down the lane he could hear a crier singing out:

"Five thousand piasters reward for him who finds the *hadji* assassin! Turn out, in the name of the Khalif!"

The cry went on down the lane. Yusuf headed for the *fonduks* on the outskirts of the town. It might be possible to buy or steal a camel there; if not, he would have to waylay on some belated traveler on the road.

BEFORE he had passed the last wall the moon was shining silvery through the palm tops. It was an added menace, that moonlight, but it reminded him of his tryst with Fatima. He needed her now! She and he together, with a little gold passed, could persuade the keeper of her *fonduk* to let them have one of the caravan camels. Then out into the desert. Once there, Yusuf felt he would be at home. He still had that pistol taken from the sleeping tirailleur corporal at Bir Nazra. There would be opportunities to get a better mount. . . . It was the way out, Yusuf decided joyously.

He came out at last around her *fonduk's* wall. A glance down the road to town. There were squads of soldiers coming out to picket all the *fonduk* gates now, so he had not much time. That crier could be heard lifting his voice in his distant brief chant of words. He had passed the café while Yusuf was working through the gardens and was now coming out to proclaim his reward before all the *fonduk* gates.

Fatima was waiting for him behind a crack in the great oak doors of her *fonduk*. She had drawn the bars, was ready to slip out and ride away with him. But a cry of alarm and disappointment came from within her veil as Yusuf put his lips to the crack and called her name softly.

"Nay, is it thou, Hadji?" she asked, not opening the gate. "Fie, that my lover would come in the turban of the common people! And is thy *mehari* outside?"

She had noticed the absence of the fascinating green turban first-off, was suspicious and disillusioned! No galloping beast panting at the gate, no cry to rush out and be caught up in his arms into the saddle, as she had pictured in her dreams!

"Nay, Fatima," said Yusuf. "One has tried to assassinate the Khalif, and all the town is in arms. They have seized my mehari —yea, I a stranger, had to cast aside my turban and put on one of the people lest I be taken. By stealth I had to come to thee through the gardens. Hasten, beloved, for soldiers come to guard all the gates. We must bribe the *fonduk* keeper to let us have a camel from thy father's flock."

Yusuf put them down, grasping the bared steel. "Nay, eunuchs, I am sent for." But—"your permit, you!" growled one, holding his arms.

He made to come in, but she held her foot against the doors. "On a burden camel!" she shrilled. "Nay, I go not! Fie upon thee, Hadji! It is death! Before we are gone a field's-length, we are taken! *Ptah!*"

She was disgusted with him and had now closed the iron latch. Yusuf glanced over-shoulder. A group of soldiers was coming up the road not two hundred yards off. "Open, woman!" he commanded. "I—it is not meet for me to be found outside! They arrest all strangers tonight. Make haste!" He shook at the doors.

She laughed. "What is that to thee, O reverend hadji? Nay, I go not! Fare thee well! I go back to bed, lest men come to open to the soldiers and find *me* here!"

Yusuf was desperate. To be found here outside the *fonduk* gate was sure arrest. He could not even run now. "Courage, my Moon of the World!" he pleaded. "Fie, a daughter of the desert, yet fears to take the chance when it means her freedom from an old ape! Is not courage the red star of Islam? And Allah will smile. Come! Open in haste!"

She hesitated. He might have won, but just then the crier's chant rose faint and clear in the desert night: *"Five thousand piasters to him who finds the hadji assassin!"*

Yusuf heard her murmur within. *"Hadji* assassin? *Mashallah,* it is he! And five thousand piasters—oh, *yu-yu-yu!* Now I can buy my freedom! Wait, O Hadji," she called out. "I open!"

Yusuf turned to run, but it was too late. A challenge, long guns leveled on him not fifty feet off. It was death to move. And then the gate opened, and Fatima came out.

"I claim the five thousand piasters, O soldiers!" she shrilled out. "Lo, this is he whom ye seek!"

Betrayed! Yusuf made her a mocking salaam. "Charmed to have been of such service to thee, Ya Sitt! Particularly in the matter of the Arrow of the Sun," he reminded her softly.

"Ptu!" She spat at him. *"Budmash!"* (Scoundrel!) May you enjoy your Iréna! Yea, in Gehennum! But I—I sell thee like a cow!"

Rage, jealousy, greed, these were all she had room for now.

Yusuf knew that he would not have possession of El Ribat and his automatic ten seconds after the soldiers came up. He was tense and ready as he bowed again sardonically at Fatima. The *fonduk* door was within ten feet of him, and his hand gripped the stock of his automatic under his *gandourah*. All it needed was courage, that quality which the Red Star of Islam stood for above all else. The resolution to dare, to take the chance, to hazard all on some bold and unexpected move that would paralyze the wits of dull men, upset all the advantages of superior force. . . . Courage! Without it you just got taken and dealt with. But the Hamdani were noted for their daring. "A people who, when evil bares its teeth against them, fly out to meet it in companies or alone," sang Kureit ibn Uneif, the Arabian poet, of them.

His air of hopeless resignation was a bluff for Fatima's benefit. She might cry out a warning if he made the least defensive movement now. He did her a low reverence as the squad of soldiers came up with guns in hand and arms stretched out to seize him. Then he whirled swiftly.

A punch at the jaw of the nearest, his automatic blazing in their faces. Men recoiled, fell, those in the rear shoved forward their muzzles through the smoke and confusion. But in one jump Yusuf had reached the gate, treated Fatima to a mocking laugh, slammed and barred it against them all.

Shouts, pounding of gun-butts outside, the officer's command, "Open, in the name of the Khalif!" Yusuf walked unconcernedly across the muddy yard filled with camels. All the *fonduk* was stirring. Men would come out of all the doors of the leantos that were built around its walls. Yusuf took position beside the door of one of them. They all had trap-doors and ladders leading to the flat roof, so it was simple to get out of here. Presently the door opened, and three men came out, stumbling over camel-

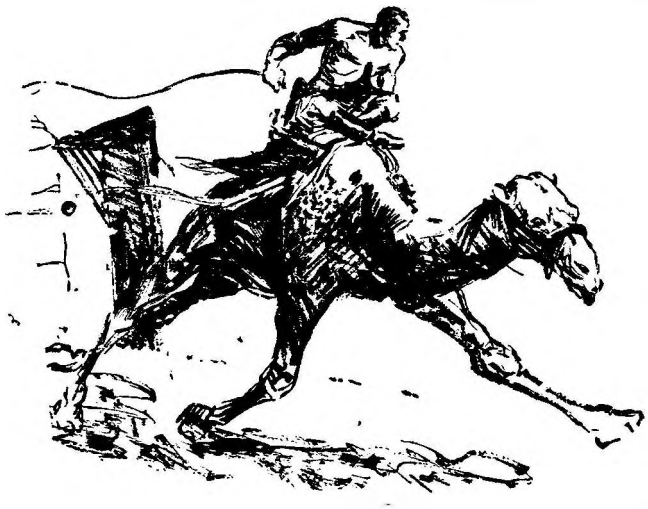
saddles and rubbing their eyes. Yusuf remained behind the screen of its hinged boards, then slipped around it when they were gone on and entered the room. Up the ladder, a creep across the flat roof-tiles, prone, and he had dropped over the wall parapet and was free.

He darted into the nearest palmery, for soldiers would come running around the *fonduk* in no time, looking for any fugitive escaping that way. This business was getting rather thick, Yusuf thought with a grin! It reminded him of desperate forays on the Anizeh in the Syrian desert, with every other living soul an enemy, and a man needing his wits every instant. His spirits were never higher, and he was excited as a boy, and pleased.

"*When danger fell upon them, they remembered the maker of their sword and the lineage of their horse.*" Thus the Arabian singer, Lebid. Yusuf needed a horse of proved lineage about now! But he needed still more his mehari, for a horse took days and days, and he had to travel far. Where was his camel now? Being taken to the Khalif's military encampment probably, up that lane. And on it was his blue serge suit, his passport, traveler's checks, all those essentials for getting back to Syria—and then marriage and home to New York.

The populace of Mizdah had quieted down and gone back to bed. Yusuf had heard the news called that the soldiers had the *hadji* now out in a *fonduk* to the west, Praise be to God! He smiled mischievously as his eyes searched the lane. And then they glowed with hope and daring. His mehari was still down in front of that café! They were holding it there, so as to bring the *hadji* back bound ignominiously on it for the Khalif's disposal. The news of his capture had gone back from mouth to mouth. Let be! In a little while the soldiers would be returning with the miscreant!

Yusuf studied the possibilities. The glare of the torches showed the wall of a house opposite the café and the camel standing in the middle of the lane with a chattering crowd of idlers around it. Like all the houses, it was one-story and had the usual flat roof with parapet. Up there, first! A leap down into the saddle was possible. Yusuf was not worried about the crowd. They would scatter, dart into the cafe and into every door at his first shots.



He worked along the wall, reached the first house. A climb up its corner from the wall top when no one was passing. The rest was easy. Tiptoeing along a bit back from the street, he stepped over one low parapet after another till a glow over the wall told him he was opposite the café. A cautious reconnoitering over the parapet. Big crowd of men and boys down below, all talking about the mysterious Syrian hadji. The mehari's hump was not four feet below him, so tall was it, and about six feet away. A vault over the parapet and a good shove with his hands would land him on the hump all right. The camel would nearly go over, bite and kick everyone in its astonishment. Good start! They would all spring clear, start to run. The automatic would do the rest.

Now! Automatic in his teeth, Yusuf vaulted over the parapet, his heels feeling for the fur. The impact brought a roar from the camel, a terrific stumbling of his hoofs as he tried to regain balance, a sweep of his head that knocked down men in swatches around him. Yusuf hung onto the cantle, his legs forking the hump and knees gripping tight. He did not need to do a thing just yet! Bodies squirming in the mud below, yells of consternation, men pushing back and away frantically, the grape-arbor posts cracking as the camel lurched against them—then Yusuf had hopped into the saddle.

"Upon thee! Upon thee!" he roared menacingly at those in front and swung down the automatic. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* A lane ahead cleared through the smoke, men rushing for shelter, stumbling and falling all over each other. The mehari roared and charged. Yusuf turned in his saddle and shot down those who had recovered enough to cock their long flintlocks at him. Spurts of red flame in the night, smoke in clouds, a yelling, shrieking turmoil, groans. Out of it he fled, the mehari wanting nothing but to gallop on in wild fright.

Fields of millet stubble, low ditch-banks, then abruptly a rise of the ground and he had reached stony desert. From a jolting gallop Yusuf gradually got the mehari down to a pace again. Freedom! And El Ribat still tight around his waist!

Yusuf looked back, content. Daring had always won for the Hamdani! And who gave the daring, but Allah? The Red Star of the Faith, whose giver and mainspring was Allah, el Akbar, the Great! Mizdah was in a state of uproar and was sending high-angle slugs after him as Yusuf looked back, but he raised his voice in a chant of praise, and burst forth into the First Sura of the Koran, those inspired words of Mahomet of old: "*El Hamdu Illahi, Rabi Alameen!*—Praise be to God, Lord of Heaven and Earth! *Maliki yaoumi ed-Deen!*—Sovereign of the spirit of the Faith! Guide us in the straight way, guide us in the narrow way—"

Yusuf wept as he chanted. How true, how true it all was! The straight and narrow way, the only way, of courage and honor and the square deal among men! And Allah was lord of that Way. He took hold of a man's soul and enabled him to perform prodigies of valor, lifted him high above all ignoble meannesses, all trucklings with circumstance, to be a man among men. Mahomet had the true insight. Milder, more compromising faiths for others, but the Red Star of Islam for *him!* Never had Yusuf's religious ideals filled him with more exaltation than now!

CHAPTER X

"MY God, it's an army, a horde! Lotta Tuareg with them too, Joyce! That means they are Senussi hostiles, maybe the Khalif Zaoui with them himself." Lieutenant Van Diemen lowered his field-glasses and looked eye to eye with his sergeant, as men will when a serious situation develops and everyone's brains are needed. They were standing in the watch-tower of Sinaoun's citadel. To Joyce the desert horizon to the south was just the same old flat line dividing the yellow from the blue in the morning sun. But an eruption of tiny black points had broken the rim at one point and was visible even without glasses.

"Gosh! Don't look too good, Sergeant!" said Van Diemen. His tones were filled with perplexity as to his

duty as the responsible commander of this Légion platoon. Every French officer knew just how much Italy's "conquest" of Tripolitania amounted to. They had seized Tripoli itself under the guns of warships. They had established a rule of peace and order and commerce in outlying towns like Djado and Zentan within a hundred miles of Tripoli. But it was a mere bite. The whole of the Fezzan, all of Cyrenaica, Murzuk, even Mizdah —they had at that time never been anywhere near those places! Ghadames and Ghat were garrisoned, with the help of the French; it was proposed to garrison Sinaoun too. But the interior! It was still in a state of civil war, great war chiefs like Sif-en-Nacuer heading one party, the Khalif trying to keep his throne against one rebel after another. His capital, Murzuk, changed hands constantly.

This large force on the horizon might be either faction. Van Diemen did not know. It was the same force that Yusuf had seen at El Alga, and as a matter of fact, had been sent by the Khalif to hold Sinaoun against the Italians. Well, the Légion had settled with Boubekir! There had been feasting and rejoicing in the citadel, fraternizing with its Arab defenders, who were nominally Italian citizens. The old men had told Van Diemen that a great military convoy from Tripoli was on its way down here, hundreds of camels and wagons guarded by several battalions of infantry. They were bringing cement, tools, machinery. A great *bordj* was to be built here, making Sinaoun a garrisoned outpost like Ghadames and Ghat. Both Van Diemen and Joyce felt by that news that they were butting into the great game of Tripolitan politics here, for Boubekir had been sent by the Khalif to seize Sinaoun and hold it till his main force arrived. Ordinary common sense would have told him to fraternize with its Arabian inhabitants, it would seem. But the Tuareg propensity for looting, together with the Arab hatred of all Tuareg, had brought on a fight instead. The rest had been Quervel and his desire for glory, the friendly gesture of relieving the place and holding it till the Italians came.

"I don't like this at all, Joyce!" said Van Diemen. "We've done our job, gone to Quervel's relief and beaten up Boubekir besides. Of course those Italian officers will thank us for holding this town for them—maybe! They're an edgy lot where France is concerned! Anyhow, give 'em the benefit of the doubt. But it will be damned risky to try to hold it, at that. These Arabs—" He looked around cautiously over-shoulder to see that none of the townsfolk were hanging around. "They'll see their own Khalif's people comin'. . . . They're all for us now, but get me? You'll see a change of heart in about half an hour! Thinks I, we'd better clear out!"

Joyce said nothing. He was watching that mob grow over the horizon. To the naked eye there were hundreds of Arab horsemen coming, and all the left flank was solid dark blue, riding higher as if suspended in air over thin moving legs. "Try and do it!" he laughed. "Look at that blue patch to the right. Tuareg, more'n a hundred of them! What chance have our horses to beat them to Fort Pervinquière?"

They had little or none, Van Diemen admitted. The minute they rode out, that force of Tuareg would be detached, start in pursuit.

Yusuf ran slam-bang into a guard . . . lammed a haymaker to his jaw. The gun missed fire.

Within ten miles they would overhaul the platoon, swing around between them and the fort. It would be any man's game to break through! And the command could not stand a siege in the open desert. Their horses would all die on them within the first day for lack of water.

"You can take my plan for what it is worth, Skipper," said Joyce, "but my idea would be for you to stay here and hold the citadel, shutting these Arabs out if you can't trust 'em. And I know how to run a mehari. If I start off now, those guys out there will never catch me. I'll take your orders to the fort and see that they are wirelessed north. You hang on here in the citadel. Either the Italians will come, or the colonel up at Bordj Tatahouine will send a couple of battalions to your relief. It won't be more than a matter of three or four days either way. The old fellows said that Italian convoy was up at Djado right now."

"Looks like sense to me!" agreed Van Diemen. "Get going, Joyce. I can't tell you how the command appreciates it! I'll have the orders for you in a jiff."

"Write something so I won't be arrested again for being A. W. O. L., too, if you don't mind," laughed Joyce. "These tirailleur officers seem to think every loose Légion man is a deserter unless he has something to show to the contrary. Fat reputation we got!"

Van Diemen nodded, and was busy with his order pad. Down below, the town and the palmery were now full of excited shouts, Arabs running out to look. That force on the horizon had been discovered.

"My cue to close the citadel gates!" Van Diemen grinned as he handed Joyce two slips of official order paper. "This mob will come back all of two minds. That's the Khalif's flag out there." They both could see a note of red amid the green and white tribal banners centering the long line of chestnut and gray cavalry, now well within the horizon rim out there. The red, white and green of Italy was conspicuous by its absence. That meant a complete change of heart in the populace of Sinaoun,

a prompt veering to the side of the largest force immediately visible.

"Don't let this one get found on you in case of capture," said Van Diemen, tapping his order to the colonel at Tatahouine. "Chew it up and swallow it."

"Captured?" echoed Joyce. "Not a chance! But I better get moving, though."

"Sure, but watch out, Sergeant. If I know Tuareg, they'll have vedettes out between here and the fort. That we don't see them now means nothing. You keep in the *oued* bottom as long as you can, and have your eye peeled over the rim. But you're on your own now. Only take care of yourself."

Good advice; Van Diemen was a wow of an officer. He thought of everything but did not tie up his man. Joyce went down into the palmery to look over the captured mehara. Already he was meeting hostile stares instead of the *"Barik Allah!"* with which every Légionnaire had been greeted with the night before. He found his own mehari presently, that gray one he had ridden first in a net bag, clear back at Bordj Tatahouine. It roared and bubbled as Joyce got into the saddle and crossed his thighs around the high Tuareg pommel shaped like a curved cross. With his heels on its neck, Joyce whacked it with the goad, and the brute pitched and tossed him on high. A growl of protest rose from the bystanders; several muttered curses, but Joyce rode off through the palmery, heading west.

Out on the stubble he was immediately seen by that force out in the desert. They were still some three miles out, galloping, yelling, setting off powder-play, and greetings being waved at them by half the inhabitants of Sinaoun massed on the south palmery walls. Joyce hoped that its citadel gates had already clanged shut! In doing that, Van Diemen had taken an irrevocable decision, shut himself up here. For all his horses had to be abandoned to the enemy. It was up to Joyce to get through before he could move again.

A squad of Tuareg *meharistes* detached itself from their wing and moved out in pursuit. Joyce applied his goad behind the mehari's ears and kept up a steady, prolonged, *"Udrrrrrr!"* It had its effect. Out stretched the beast's long neck; faster quickened his pace; longer became his strides. Over the burnt stubble and into the *oued*. This would not do, Joyce perceived very soon. The *oued* turned and twisted in aimless bends; its pebbles made his mehari slip and stumble. And they were gaining out there. They had three miles to close in, but at this rate—

He rode out of the *oued* at the first convenient bank and settled down for a steady bee-line race. Wavings and yells greeted his appearance. They were sloping in on a long diagonal, dipping and rising to the long pace. Joyce's own beast took up the challenge and sped on.

The situation remained unchanged for five miles. They had not gained a yard. They were at least two miles out and would lose with every foot of diagonal they tried to make up. Joyce sang exultantly. This camel thing was easy, once you knew how! He was as good as any of them out there at it! Unless something came up, he would win through to the fort.

Ten miles. Over to his right lay their old battlefield of the day before. Vultures were feasting there now, groups of them around each body, black dots on the sands that were the emblem of this deadly country. Tirailleur, Tuareg and Légionnaire alike, it was all one to these ghouls of the Sahara! One group of vultures seemed uneasy, kept flying up and circling back as Joyce watched, cursing them. He could not get his eyes off them because of the implications of that uneasy rising and settling. And then he knew, and it shocked him with horror. There was a wounded man left over there! That Tirailleur corporal and his gang of survivors had been in such a hurry to get away when the platoon rode off in pursuit of Boubekir that they had not searched thoroughly over the wounded. As Joyce looked, an arm rose and threw something. The vultures rose and flapped off, then wheeled back.

Yusuf turned and shot down those who had recovered enough to cock their flintlocks at him. . . . . Out of it he fled.

God! Joyce had heard what they did to wounded soldiers. No matter who this guy was, he had to ride over and pick him up. "Time out!" he muttered grimly. Yes, it would be time out. To a fare-ye-well! Riding double-burdened, he could not hope to beat that squad of Tuareg out there to the fort if he did this thing! The boys back at Sinaoun? Well, they would have to hold out; this wounded man was being pecked at by vultures right now. Lord knew what it was costing him to throw what he could reach at them! And the end was inevitable in a few hours—a hideous end!

Joyce swerved the mehari over, slid and floundered down the bank of the *oued*, climbed out on the other side. He was surrounded by wheeling and screaming vultures now, all of them scared up. Straight over he rode to where the wounded man lay. Over his right shoulder he could see his pursuers. They were heading to get between him and the fort now. All right, they were asking for it, thought Joyce grimly. One man, with this *oued* to ma-

neuver in, could make things interesting for even those five out there. And perhaps the wounded man could help. It was fight it out right here before he could hope to go on!

He was another young Tirailleur, that wounded boy. Joyce saw the one leg stuck out at an unnatural angle as he rode up—the breeches a mass of gore, the kid's face pale and drawn, eyes feverish with fright. He had been left for dead and had come back to consciousness sometime during the night, only to find enemies worse than even Tuareg all around him after dawn. Pitifully he croaked a welcome as Joyce dismounted. Then his will to live gave out, then and there, and he fainted.

Joyce got at the leg with vigor, straightened it out, put on the tourniquet of his first-aid. The boy had lost about all the blood he had. The sands were caked with it, were mired and scarred where he had crawled to reach rocks to throw at those vultures. Five minutes. . . . The only place for him was in the rope bag formed of the camel's canopy on the near side, but there was no time for it now. Those Tuareg were not a mile out and coming in fast. Joyce gave him a gulp from his canteen, made the mehari kneel, and took saddle with the man across his lap. The brink of the *oued* was not far off, and it was his one refuge now. The camel ambled over to it, picked his way down into the bottom, and once more Joyce headed him west.

His enemies saw that, and their answer was to ride on and get between him and the fort first. Joyce saw three of them ride down into the *oued* while two remained above on each side watching him. "Not so good, bozos!" he jeered. "The Jerries used to try that, back in the Argonne. Surprise you, what *we* did!"

What they did was rather simple—just dug into some good hide and let them feel around! They usually stepped into something that had a sting to it! Joyce looked around; then parked his camel in a cut-out and moved the boy into a tiny gully made by a water-spill off the plain during some cloudburst that dated perhaps ten years back. It was a rough, ragged crevice, but would hold two men. Cautiously he raised his head to the eyes out of it for a look-see. The Tuareg were moving slowly up the *oued,* their two scouts pacing in time with the advance of the three in the bottom. Like flushing out a rabbit!

The rabbit ducked down and shook his young Tirailleur. "Can you shoot, bud?" he asked, applying another sip from the canteen.

The blue eyes opened, uncomprehending, wild. "Mother!" he gasped. Pathetic! They always said that, whether it was "*Mère!*" "Mother!" or "*Mutter!*" He was in bad shape.

"Snap out of it, son!" said Joyce sharply. "Take this gun." He had pressed his automatic into the youth's hand. The touch of its steel seemed to revive him, for his fingers gripped it, and a stiffening came into all his muscles.

"Fine business, old scout!" Joyce cheered him. "Don't move. Just keep your eyes open and pull the trigger. I'll guide your arm."

The wounded young Tirailleur lay doubled up in the tiny gully with Joyce crouching low over him. He straightened the kid's arm out, with the pistol gripped so it lay resting on the soil and all he had to do was to shoot. With that ally ready, Joyce was about to venture another look, when he heard the sharp exclamation; "*Ugrrrrh!*" not far off and above him. It was the scout on this side. He had seen their notch in the rim and was warning his fellows down in the bottom. A tense silence followed—not a sound of a foot crunching pebbles.

Joyce thought rapidly. It was all up if he waited! The other scout across the *oued* would come abreast their position presently, and could shoot right into the gully. He would raise a yell, fire, all of them would pounce together. . . . But, if he shot this bird on this side, all of them would turn for a moment to look at him. A precious moment for the second shot. . . . With rifle to shoulder, he rose suddenly and shot the scout out of his saddle.

Harsh, biting curses, a rush of stamping feet. Joyce snapped the bolt as he ducked down, swung his muzzle out of the gully swiftly. The automatic crashed as he fired his rifle point-blank at a masked Targui aiming at him across the *oued.* It crashed again, then dropped out of the Tirailleur's hand with its own recoil. Joyce leaped out with rifle ready. *Thud!* A bullet smacked earth back of him as his own rifle spat. He saw the other scout reeling as their shots exchanged, worked his bolt fiercely and stood glaring down the *oued.*

"Did I get one?" called the boy from his lair.

"Man, you did!" exulted Joyce. That Targui lay at his feet. There were two more, but they had vanished. Joyce seized the moment to grab up his Tirailleur and carry him back to the camel. Immediately he began tying him up in the net bag. It was risky work with two of them yet gunning for him; his eyes were everywhere and rifle leaning against his shoulder every minute. Twice he dropped a tassel to grab for the weapon as some sound came to his ears, but they did not venture into his bend.

He was ready to mount again. That would be when they got in their fine work, shooting at him from over the rim when he was tossed up by the camel's mount and unable to shoot! Joyce dared not risk it.

He climbed up to the rim, had a look. Nothing. They were in the *oued* yet, and laying for him.

Well, two could play at that! Not mounting, he whacked the camel to its feet and then led him cautiously down the *oued* by his nose-rope, rifle ready, eyes ahead into every bend. Nothing. He paused a moment at the Targui the kid had shot—and got the shock of his life.

On the brown outstretched hand there was a ring. It was gold and had a flat green stone with a monogram carved on it. Remarkably like his own, Joyce thought for a moment, then almost a yell escaped him as certainty came to him. . . . Had he shot Yusuf by mistake?

His stomach went empty and sick at the thought. The damned Sahara's little ironies! Shaking violently, his hand went down to the mask, but even then hardly dared to unveil him. God! If it *was* Yusuf! He would never forgive himself.

And then came a gasp of relief, the promptings of reason that this man *couldn't* have been Yusuf, anyhow. No, he was a proper Targui, looked like a brown Dane in feature as Joyce pulled down the mask.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Joyce, perplexity at once taking the place of relief. How did he come by the ring? It meant that Yusuf was in trouble somewhere, needed his help. This man was a friend of his, a member of a Tuareg band that Yusuf had got in with, Joyce conjectured. No, that didn't make sense either. More likely

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Warren Hastings Miller is at work on a new group of stories about his famous Hell's Angels squad of the Foreign Legion . . . . Watch for the first of these in an early issue.

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they had found out he was a Syrian and had promptly done him in. This bird had got the ring as his share of the loot. Ghastly, that conclusion! Joyce hoped it wasn't the truth, but had no time for more now. The dead man could tell him nothing. And there were two more like him to take care of yet. Sadly Joyce returned the ring to his own fourth finger and went on.

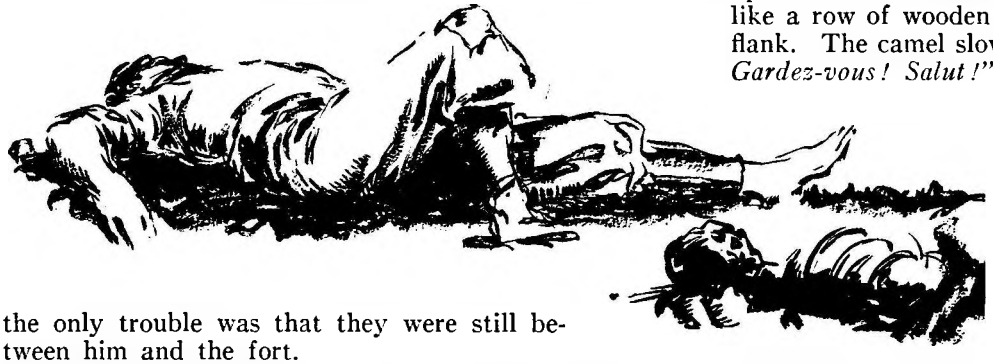
A curve lay ahead. The instant he came into it—*Grooo-ah-rah-raw-wow!* greeted him—the familiar complaining song of a camel. Three clubby gray necks were raised down there, three sardonic faces with long pendant lips and little furry round ears that made them look stupid. Joyce drew back hastily. They had given the alarm and had busted the ambush all right, durn them! Those two knew where he was now! What they would do about it was any man's guess. Joyce listened to hear if anyone was moving about. He thought he heard some stones falling; something doing, but what?

A hunch told him he'd better scout up the rim again. They might be crawling over the sands toward him up there now. . . . Presently he was up the bank and had taken off his kepi, slid the rifle cautiously over the rim. And the first sight showed a head across the bend that instantly popped down.

Joyce moved rapidly. Now was his time to get out! He jumped for the mehari's back from where he was, turned him around, urged him up the first practicable slope. Out, and in command of the *oued,* at last! He rode off south at right angles to it, rifle ready, expecting shots in pursuit. He was a fine mark now till he got a bit of distance!

He wondered why he wasn't fired at; then it came to him that they were just as worried about him as he had been about them. They were probably busy moving their camels out of that bend. He could easily have shot all three of them down, only it had never occurred to him as the real way out of this. But the Tuareg psychology would have done that first. Joyce kept on increasing distance southward. Three hundred yards—four hundred. Then bullets began to buzz past him, and he prayed for—his mehari. It was big as a cow, and no Légion man could have missed it at that range!

Five hundred yards. He felt safer now, and began turning west again. And then both Tuareg popped up out of the *oued* on their camels and started in pursuit. A shot came from them now and then, harmless and wild; the only trouble was that they were still between him and the fort.



It began to loom up as a serious trouble, presently. He dared not let them get any nearer, but westing immediately decreased the range where their two random shots to his one had too much chance in it. Joyce tried firing at them in his turn as the one way to end this. The first sight showed its utter futility. Up and down rose the front sight in great arcs as the mehari swayed left and right. A speck touched the front bar now and then in a lucky pass—a camel and rider, that speck, but it was a mere waste of ammunition to pull trigger!

They seemed to get that too, for it settled down to another race, with them on the fort side and letting go at him only when he tried to edge over westward. A whizz that missed his chest by mere inches one time told Joyce that he was asking for it!

South, then. It kept up for an hour. The sun was well over in the west, and it must have been about four o'clock and hotter than ever, when Joyce decided he'd better stop at the first convenient rock outcropping and dig in. He could get around them in the dark somehow—if he still had his camel! A nick in the horizon miles ahead had brought that thought. It remained persistent in the shimmering heat, and was no mirage, he hoped. And it was to his left, so they could not beat him to it.

Joyce relaxed and was settled in mind for a time. Then he was amazed to note that the nick now bore dead ahead. Was he seeing things? The camel must have altered its course a trifle, he concluded, for rocks did not move. The nick was flat, irregular, yet compact, evidently a collection of ragged boulders, perhaps an ancient Tuareg tomb of upright stones with its roof fallen in. . . .

It was about five miles off and well within the horizon rim when Joyce was astonished by a faint yell from his Tuareg flankers and a burst of bullets that whizzed all around him as they reined in. It was their farewell to him—an unpleasantly close one for a time!—but he was free of them at last, he gathered, as his camel sped on. Just why, he wondered. Had they given it up because of that shelter waiting for him on ahead? Joyce was about to turn west and get around them, letting all thoughts of shelter go, when he looked at the nick again. The Tuareg were looking at it too, were shaking their fists and shouting imprecations. Their eyes were protected by masks and had far better vision than his. But even Joyce saw, then. That nick was a squad of infantry plodding across the sands!

Joyce let out a whoop of triumph. What they were doing out here he could not imagine, but they were headed for the fort and would get there some time tonight. They had about ten miles to go, he figured.

They were waving at him as his camel raced toward them. They were convinced that he was an officer of the Camel Corps, and Joyce laughed to see the corporal line up his men at attention with barked orders till they stood like a row of wooden dummies with himself on the right flank. The camel slowed down jolted to a halt. *"Houp! Gardez-vous! Salut!"* yelped the corporal, and a line of forearms crossed rifle barrels horizontally. Very pretty—also very French. Then they saw that Joyce's kepi was *not* horizon blue with gold stripes on it but plain Légion red and black—and the corporal recognized him.

"Ah, bah! It's the *desert-eur!"* he cried, mortified and exasperated that they had wasted a salute on him. "Is it that you have escaped yet again, Légionnaire?" he inquired insolently. "Squad—*prenez garde!"*

A row of rifles leveled on him as snappily as they had come to salute. Joyce sat looking down at them with growing ire. He had put up with about all the indignities he was going to with this garrison of Fort Pervinquière!

"Attention!" he roared. "Pigs! Mackerels! Cabbages! Listen to these orders!" He was drawing out Van Diemen's as he lashed them with the familiar French invec-

tive. "'Sergeant Joyce Tiverton, Second Platoon, Cavalry Brigade, Légion Etrangère, is hereby placed on detached duty. All units are required to give him such assistance as may be necessary. Commanding officers will report to Commandant Thomas such aid as has been rendered following his directions. (Signed) W. Van Diemen, Lieutenant.'"

It was a scout's field order, and as such, it was honored by the officers of any unit he might meet. He represented Commandant Thomas himself when on detached duty, and bore that high officer's authority.

"You guys!" said Joyce severely. "I am not a deserter and never was. That was Quervel's mistake—but he's dead now." A sigh of relief interrupted him. They were all grinning happily—the best of luck, the best news he could have told them! Friendliness came in their eyes at sound of it. They loved that martinet—nix!

"He and nearly all his command got shot up back there," Joyce went on with a wave over the empty desert that now contained but one living thing, that pair of retreating Tuareg. "I have one surviving man here," he added, and tapped the net bag along his camel's side.

They broke ranks to crowd around and look at the young Tirailleur, who was in a state of torpor. Meanwhile the corporal was reporting to Joyce on his squad's

An arm rose and threw something. The vultures flapped off, then wheeled back.

movements and intentions. "We were sent out to Bir Nazra to arrest a civilian, *mon sergeant. Peste!* A cruel march for men on foot! A friend of yours, not so?"

"Did you get him?" Joyce asked quickly.

"No." The corporal grinned shamefacedly. *"Voilà, un malin,* that one! He slept the night within a mile of us. And he came and took my automatic, while that rabbit of a sentry snored on post, *morbleu!"* He indicated one of his men, who at once looked becomingly repentant.

"We followed his tracks next morning. Hopeless! He had ridden off south on a great mehari. So we were returning to the fort when you appeared. We thought you were one of the Camel Corps at first—"

Joyce did not hear the rest of it. Tracks! Why, of course! And they were still there; they lasted several days before the wind washed them out. He could follow Yusuf! He could not be far off, that ring argued. He had met up with that Arab horde and its Tuareg allies somewhere beyond Bir Nazra, evidently. And he must be a prisoner with them now, if still alive. That, of course, was conjecture. But the tracks were sure. They would lead him to where Yusuf was now, tell the story of what had happened to him. And it looked inviting, that lone scout in the rear of the Arab force. It would bring him back to Sinaoun, most likely. He could pull off a rescue there and bring Yusuf in with him when rejoining the platoon in the citadel. He made up his mind at once.

"Alors," he interrupted the corporal's gabble, "who commands now at the fort?"

"Sous-lieutenant Baranés, *mon sergéant.* A good youth, sensible and able—"

"Bien! You will take him these orders of my lieutenant's. See that they are put on the wireless at once." Joyce's mind was made up now. He did not have to take time out or the long trek to Fort Pervinquière. He could rejoin the command immediately. He proposed to manage that by a night scout in behind the enemy, following Yusuf's tracks as far as he could. If there was a chance to rescue him—that ring had not been discovered on the Targui's finger in vain!

"We had a battle with Boubekir's people about halfway between Sinaoun and the Fort," Joyce went on to the corporal. "Saved a remnant of Quervel's command and then chased Boubekir to Sinaoun, where we finally finished him up."

"Tiens! Tiens!" said the squad at that, with interest.

"But the Légion is shut up in Sinaoun itself," Joyce went on. "Get this straight, corporal: This morning a large force of hostiles appeared from the south, Arabs and Tuareg. Too many for us to retreat to the Fort, see? So I was sent on detached duty to telegraph for a relief. Baranés will know what to do."

The corporal nodded; the squad made a stretcher of coats and rifles and lowered the young Tirailleur into it.

"Adieu! Good luck!" called Joyce after them as the squad plodded off in the direction of Fort Pervinquière. For himself he followed their back-tracks on the mehari. They had come from Bir Nazra, so their tracks would lead him there. At the well he would pick up Yusuf's.

CHAPTER XI

THE mighty Sahara! Great seas of sand dunes five hundred miles across in any direction; Flat pebbly *ergs* where for days and days the horizon is always the same; ranges and ridges of bare red and purple mountains, sometimes rising to nine thousand feet and covering immense areas; *hammadas,* very like our own Arizona plains, dotted with miles and miles of creosote and cactus; oases of millions of date palms watered by incredible labor, *foggaras* or underground conduits dug for sixty miles under one oasis alone, wells sunk to subterranean rivers whose waters are raised by donkey and bucket, irrigation ditches miles long, ingenious water-wheels of bamboo that raise water their own diameter automatically. But for the most part the Sahara is dry, empty desert.

Yusuf was fed up with it. He had made two days of northing and was now crossing the Plateau de Tinghert some fifty miles east of Bir Nazra.

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North of him just visible over the far horizon were ragged red escarpments in the morning sun. They were the cliffs of the Tahar, an immense high mesa that lay between him and his objective, the Italian town of Djado. The mehari under him was making queer bubbling noises like a pump and his tongue hung out like a great black sausage. It was a sign that he needed rest, feed and water after the long night run. Yusuf had hoped to camp on El Tahar instead of on this flat plain where no man dared sleep lest some enemy come upon him unawares, but he gave it up resignedly. The sun's heat felt good now; in an hour it would be intolerable, and he would still be far out from the mesa. Better face the last of the run with a fresh beast! Any Tuareg vidette could easily run him down now.

Yusuf stopped the mehari, made him kneel, gave him a prodigious drink from the pigskin, and spread a feed of oats on a black mat. Then he had his own meal of dates, cheese and hard bread, and curled up in his burnous to doze.

One day's run more to Djado! He was dreaming upon Iréna and that week of feasting and celebration in Damascus, to be followed by a notable wedding in the tents of the Hamdani out beyond the Mountains.

He roused out for a look around the horizon for perhaps the third time during the morning, and this time gave a low whistle of dismay and the exclamation: *"Mashallah!*

Some one was coming! There was a lone point on the western rim. Yusuf sat watching it with distaste.

"May Allah curse you and destroy your father's house!" said Yusuf fervently. It was run or fight with this customer—most likely run, for he had only his automatic, and it was no match for a rifle.

Not a horse, and not a camel, Yusuf decided later as the point rose steadily. No blob above the line with moving legs under it. And then it developed into the most astonishing sight in all the Sahara, a lone soldier out here on foot!

A tall line now, with a glint of steel from a bayonet over shoulder. What was *any* soldier doing out here, Yusuf was asking himself in wonderment. Sand-blind? No, he was heading for this dot of camel and rider. He could see. Thirst, then? Probably! He was coming from the direction of Bir Nazra, so Yusuf decided it was one of that squad of Tirailleurs sent there to arrest him. They had been attacked by some patrol of that Arab force and scattered. This must be a survivor lost on the desert out here. Well, let be! Thirst had him now. This Tirailleur would give himself up, gladly, for one drink from his leather *guerba!*

But would he? Having a rifle, he would command that drink if he was any man at all. Yusuf could ride off now and be perfectly safe, but his chivalry would not hear of this soldier being left to perish with thirst. No, he had to see it out with this stranger. As a precautionary measure, he went out from his mehari some distance toward the oncomer and dug himself in. The automatic was good for only about seventy-five yards, but Yusuf, cursing, could think of nothing else to do. Only one day to Djado and civilization—and *this* had to come along!

Rifle to shoulder, Joyce rose suddenly and shot the scout out of his saddle.

And then the man came near enough to distinguish his uniform more clearly. The first thing Yusuf registered was that this soldier had not a red fez of the Tirailleurs but a Légion kepi. That flat-vizored cap with the white nape-cloth. . . . Immediately his mind leaped from the squad-at-Bir-Nazra theory to another. Joyce Tiverton! *Could* it be the Sergeant? And where was his horse? There was no Légion foot in this region. The ring sprang into Yusuf's mind at once. Joyce had come upon it in some battle with that Arab force and was out here seeking him. What had happened was a mystery, but it was all within the bounds of chance.

"You ol' dumb-bell!" laughed Yusuf as this theory came to him. "So dey steal your horse, hey? How you like that, eh? You was hell of a fine scout!"

The Légionnaire plodded on indomitably. At five hundred yards he stopped and poised his rifle in both hands, his eyes searching the flat plain of sands where Yusuf's head was but an irregularity in the landscape. Yusuf grabbed for ideas nimbly. Something to stop this bird from shooting first and asking the questions afterward. . . . *English!* That speech would make him different from just another hostile Arab, right off. He raised an arm in the old high-sign of the A. E. F. and yelled: *"Hey, guy!"*

The Légionnaire swung his rifle. *"Who the hell are you?"* his distant shout demanded.

It was Joyce, all right! Yusuf knew those truculent tones well!" "Ah, g'wan!" he cackled uproariously. "Me name is Fritz, you ol' fathead!" He sat up on the sands. Joyce lowered his gun and came running in. *"Joe*—by God!" he ripped out, his face working. "You old sand-rat! Gimme a drink or I'll smack you pink—"

They were together again, having abandoned words and taken to mauling, as men will. The war-dance ended in a clutch at Yusuf's leather *guerba* and nearly a dizzy faint on Joyce's part. The rattle of his empty canteen told Yusuf most of the story while he supported his chum and

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held the *guerba* steady to his lips. A brief swig, no more. For a time they were engaged in nothing else than that revival, as little by little the water took hold. Then:

"Happened last night, it did!" said Joyce. "Bir Nazra. I was sleeping out on your old tracks near it, when my mehari ups and roars—"

"*Your* mehari?" broke in Yusuf, astonished.

"Yep. Tell you about that later. What *I* want to know is how you muzzle 'em so they can't sing! He brought in a whole Tuareg patrol, the damn' brute! I lit out, but they got him. Was playin' hide and seek with them all night. Dassent shoot, dassent do nothin'! Just creep, and run when the running was good. See a camel over against the stars and lay low. *Gosh!* Bad as No Man's Land, I'm tellin' *you!* But I got away from 'em, with the help of God and no marines—"

"*Good* boy!" put in Yusuf. "And *den* you aint nowhere!"

"Yup. Nowhere is right! By sunup I had the whole world to myself. Not a damn' thing, anywhere I looked. I headed northeast, aiming to get around back of Sinaoun. I knew I hadn't a chance on foot, but might as well keep going. Canteen gave out within five hours and believe me, I only took a thimbleful at a time. Then I saw you. Thinks I, he'll just mount and ride off, if he has any sense, but I might as well try—"

Yusuf grinned. "You was good loot, if I was a Senussi and had a rifle How *you* know I didn't hey? All I gotta do is stick around till you was drop. De Arab no ride off! Not when iss good rifle and cartridges from dead man. . . . Coom!" He changed from his bantering tone. "We ride double till we reach de Tahar. You camp on a mesa up there,"—he pointed north toward those distant ragged red escarpments. "I leave you food and water. By night you can march for Sinaoun. You can do thirty mile?"

Joyce allowed that he could if he had to. You could nearly see Sinaoun from the tops of those mesas, Yusuf pointed out, so you could watch your chance to get in.

Good scheme all around, Joyce agreed. They went back to the mehari and got going. All afternoon the escarpments rose steadily while they told each other all that had happened since they had parted. A long yarn on both sides—adventure, battle, raid, love, betrayal. "So I have El Ribat here, *el Mamdu Allah!*" said Yusuf, tapping his waist in concluding. "Tomorrow I make Djado and then, good-by Sahara! I was be respectable rug-merchant, and was get dronk at de cafe!"

They camped that night under the foot of the cliffs. They were now about forty miles to the northeast of Sinaoun, but over to the west were isolated mesas broken off from this formation of the Tahar by water action through the centuries. It was Yusuf's idea to ride over to the most westerly of those and leave Joyce there.

"Wish you could be my best man, ol' son!" he said regretfully. "Why you no take a li'l vacation an' go wis me? I got mooney. I let you pay *nozzing!* Den you take steamer from Beirut an' report back to de Legion at Sousse. Coom, Habibi!"

Tempting—but Joyce shook his head. He was on detached duty. The boys had been shut up in Sinaoun when he had last seen the command and they expected some treachery from its Arab inhabitants. He had fulfilled his mission in sending those orders north for a relief column and had found Yusuf besides—providentially for himself. His job now was to report back to Van Diemen, so that officer could use his judgment on what to do next. It might make a big difference to the boys if they knew positively that help was on its way.

Yusuf demurred solemnly. "It iss dangerous, what you go to do, Habibi! You was baby on de desert. I should go wiss you to Sinaoun! Den, on my way!"

Joyce would not hear of that. "You ol' fool!" he said affectionately. "You've done enough! Just put me on that mesa. I ought to manage thirty miles and a bit of scouting on my own legs. Besides, that Italian convoy ought to be along from Djado any day now. I could join them and come in to Sinaoun with them. They'd only arrest you, or something, just like the French, if you were found with me. A civilian guy's just got to have an *autorization militaire* in these parts!"

That lack did not seem to bother Yusuf. "*Aiwa!*" he said. "'Today I know, and the days that were, but for tomorrow mine eyes are sightless,'" he quoted. "Perhaps tomorrow there will be a sign from Allah what we mus' do. Good night, Habibi!"

They curled up together back to back while the mehari champed alongside endlessly and the Sahara stars moved overhead in their luminous procession. By dawn they were up and moving. But at the foot of the farthest mesa west, Yusuf insisted on climbing up too with Joyce. He was loath to part. "It iss nothing!" he said to Joyce's remonstrances. "Mebbe was be a sign."

There was! Scarcely had they reached the top and stood looking south toward Sinaoun when Yusuf gave a sharp exclamation. "The Sign!" he cried. "Look, Habibi! *Now* I know what we mus' do!"

Down there between them and Sinaoun there was coming their way a compact body of horse. It was covered with a haze of white smoke and was being harassed by troops and squadrons of Arabs and Tuareg. Joyce saw what was up at a glance. Van Diemen had been forced out of Sinaoun by some Arab treachery and was now making his way north to join the Italians as a last resort. They did not have to see more! In two minutes he and Yusuf were sliding together down the mesa slopes and galloping furiously north. They alone could reach that Italian column quickly and send it post-haste to Van Diemen's rescue! Up and up the valley they raced. Creosote bushes and desert growth were covering the *hammada* plain now as it slowly grew more fertile. And an hour later, they ran into something that looked welcome at first but later presaged disaster. It was an Italian-*mehariste* patrol, fifty tame Arabs and a sergeant, coming down the valley!

An exclamation from Yusuf checked Joyce's first whoops of delight. Yusuf was changing rapidly into cits at sight of that patrol! Off came his burnous. By a miracle the blue trousers were hauled on while seated in the narrow saddle with Joyce on the hump behind him. Yusuf struggled into the blue coat as the distance closed up. "I was American citizen now. Call me Joe again, Habibi! No good if dey catch me as an Arab!"

He was grinning happily over the transformation, but Joyce was beginning to worry. This patrol sergeant would not speak a word of either French or English. He had hoped to run into the main body of the convoy, not such an underling as this! He was in for a difficult time with this sergeant.

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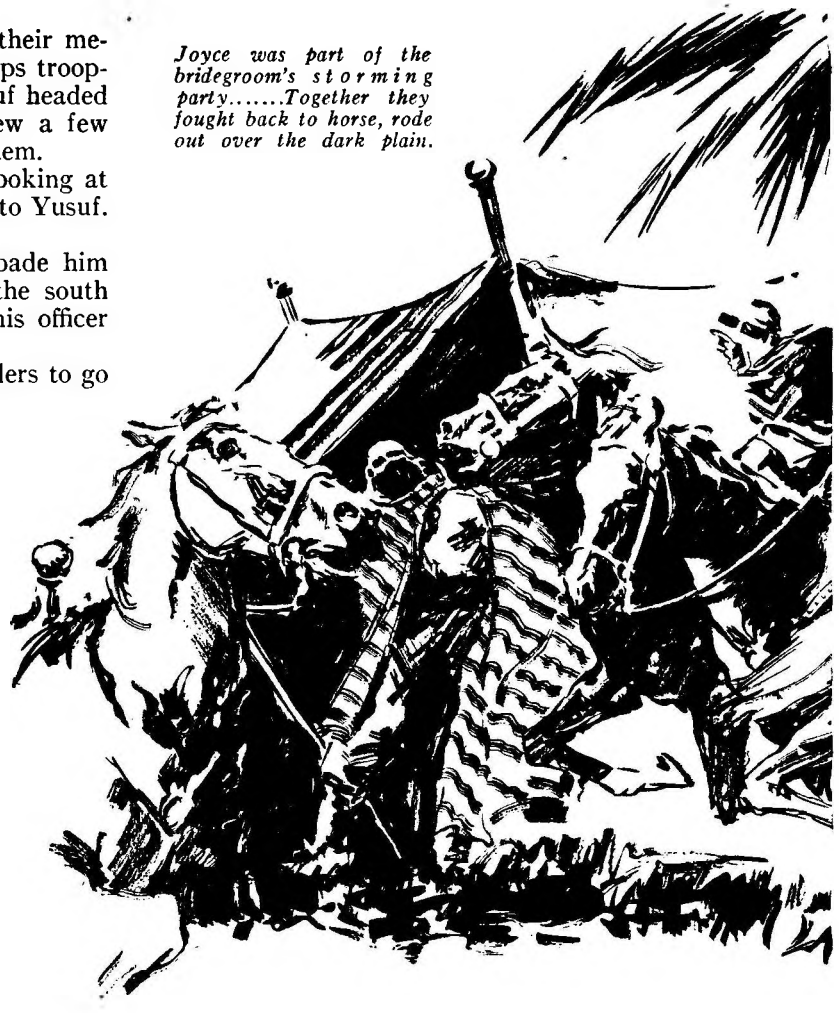

Joyce was part of the bridegroom's storming party.....Together they fought back to horse, rode out over the dark plain.

He was. *"Halte!"* rang out the command as their mehari rode up to the long line of Italian camel corps troopers. Wild-looking Arab riders, all of them. Yusuf headed for the sergeant, waving his passport. He knew a few words of Italian and was making the most of them.

"Ha! Légion Etrangère!" said the sergeant, looking at Joyce suspiciously and paying no attention at all to Yusuf. "Deserter?"

Joyce had out his detached-duty order and bade him look at it. He made vigorous pantomime to the south and tried to explain in signs and French that his officer was in a bad way back there.

A grunt and a shrug. The sergeant had no orders to go near Sinaoun, Joyce gathered. A big hostile force there! He pointed over at the Djebel Nefusa. His beat lay that way, he was emphasizing with gestures.

Joyce raved, stormed. Even fifty men would be a help now, and they had the speed and endurance! Hurry! For God's sake!

More shrugs. Explosions of voluble Italian. Finally the sergeant called two troopers and ordered them to accompany these strangers back to Djado. They were under an arrest of sorts, Joyce gathered, fuming. They were not to be allowed to go where they wished!

Sputtering with indignation, Joyce rode on between the two troopers. Yusuf began a conversation with them in Arabic and presently reported that they were being taken to the commandant of the convoy. It had started out from Djado, was up the valley some five miles. Joyce's spirits rose. He had escaped that sergeant, anyhow; perhaps this commandant was a human being and he would get action! Confidently they rode on.

The convoy came in sight. A vast procession of brown burden camels moving along at fifteen miles a day. Flanking it two columns of infantry plodding under the sun. Joyce looked in vain for cavalry; there was only a small group of horse heading the advance guard, another bringing up the rear, a few videttes thrown out.

The officer was a fat lieutenant whose black eyes lit up as he saw these two being brought in by the *méharists*.

"Légion deserters? Well, we know what to do with them!" he snarled out at their guards. It was all lost on Joyce except that first word. Dammit, how they took every Légionnaire at large for a deserter on sight here!

"Sir, anyone here speaks English or French?" Joyce asked. "It's important!"

The lieutenant knew a little French. He heard Joyce out and shrugged his shoulders. "A likely story!" he commented. "What are the French doing on our soil, I demand? Serves them right!"

It was a long story how Van Diemen came to be at Sinaoun, and it began with Quervel and his ambition for a Croix de Guerre, but patiently Joyce tried to give him the outlines of it. "And I must urge, sir, that you send on the *méharistes* and all your cavalry you can spare!"

The officer eyed him cynically. "It grows more and more remarkable, your story. You have invention! Such a pity you could not steal an outfit of citizen clothes, such as the other deserter has!"

Joyce flared out. "I demand, sir, to see the commandant!" he said stiffly and whipped out his identification card. There was no mistaking that. He *was* Sergeant Joyce Tiverton, and the photo tallied with his features.

The officer returned it. "That is for me, not you, Sergeant," he said. "You will remain here with the advance guard."

He rode off down the long column of camels. The command kept moving on at a snail's pace, Joyce and Yusuf with them. He saw that *méhariste* patrol crossing their advance far ahead at the loping camel trot. They would soon be out of reach in the mountains. *Damn!* An hour lost already, and the boys dropping one by one!

Joyce fumed for ten minutes more before the officer returned. He was brief and sharp.

"Take these two back to barracks and turn them over to the provost," he ordered two of his troopers.

Joyce saw red. Damn them! Weren't they going to do anything at all? "But sir!" he cried.

"Enough!" interrupted the officer. "We have your report. You and this other man will be held at barracks till we can find out more about you from the French authorities. Perhaps, in a few days of cabling—"

Dejectedly Joyce rode down the convoy escorted by the troopers. Futility, all those dreams of a smashing climax to his detached-duty service! There would not be but a remnant of Van's command left to reach Djado!

CHAPTER XII

YUSUF was saying nothing as he rode in front guiding the camel listlessly. His time to chirp would be when they reached Djado, when he could produce his passport and claim protection of the American consul. There would be no consul, save at Tripoli, but there would be a *chargé des affaires*.

Joyce was thinking hard. He still had one string left to his bow, and that was to interview the French *chargé des affaires* in Djado—at once. *He* would make strong representations, get something done by the military here!

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He revolved the idea, told Yusuf about it. "You can help me, Joe. Make the mehari do something when we pass the French flag, so I can drop off and skip. Once in that doorway, I'm on French soil and they can't touch me. And so long, old man, as I'll be leaving you rather sudden. Good luck to you in Syria!"

Yusuf nodded, then turned to grin at him. "You was be my bes' man, ol' son," he said. "I buy two tickets on de Malta boat. I get you clo'. You was find me waiting at the consulate door. Den we hit for the boat."

Deserter? Startling was Yusuf's idea—but Joyce was free if he cared to go. And everyone took a Légionnaire for a deserter down here—might as well. . . . . No. But when he had reported to the French consul, he would have done everything possible for good old Van and the boys. No leading the rescue force back to them and all that. And what would be done with him after he *had* reported to the consul? Joyce knew French officialdom! He would be sent back to Sousse, on the next steamer leaving Tripoli for Tunis. This campaign was over, for him. . . . No, he was not going to be a deserter. He was not through with the Légion yet. But he *might* extend his leave of absence. He could write Van Diemen about it. And get back to Sousse, anyhow, as quick as if he hung around here till some one back in Sidi bel Abbes got busy on his case. Detached duty left him free to join his command as circumstances dictated!

"All right," he said, after thinking it over. "If the consul turns out a regular feller, I'll be with you, Joe. If not, damned if I don't cable Sousse myself!"

Djado looked like any other Arab town—palmeries, mud walls, one-story mud houses with flat roofs. But up the lane appeared a small European quarter around a great dusty square. Arabs, donkeys, camels, filled it; a few Europeans in white suits and sun helmets. As they entered the milling throng, Joyce saw the Italian flag flying over a great barracks up the street beyond the square. He looked anxiously for any consular flags, then spied the French one hanging from the second-story window above a store fronting on the square. His heart began to beat rapidly. "Do your stuff, Joe!" he warned.

There were the usual cries of, *"Beluk! Beluk!* Upon thee, O boy! Have a care for my cart, brothers!" All around them milled and squalled the native throng, and it made the mehari uneasy and frightened. It pranced and sprawled out its padded feet, roared, swung its head with nipping teeth. Arabs dodged and yelled. Then a bark of rage exploded from the trooper guard on the consulate side. The mehari had nipped his knee, and he was nursing it and howling. In the halt and confusion Joyce suddenly slipped down off the hump and bolted head-down through the press. Behind him an astonished, *"Halte!"* the slam of hoofs on dirt. They dared not fire! In ten seconds Joyce was through the consular door and jumping up the stairs two at a time. He barged into an office and paused, saluting, before a young Frenchman who sat there behind a desk. Excitedly, bitterly, Joyce told him his story.

"Mon Dieu! What a treatment, Sergeant! *Alors,* we will talk to them. *Attendez!"*

Soon some one was on the phone. Suave Italian poured from the young fellow at first, then more force to it, menace, threats.

"Bien!" he snapped as he hung up the receiver. "They are sending a staff officer to take charge. You'll get your *méharistes,* my sergeant! Also a squadron of cavalry. It is being ordered out now. And thanks, in the name of France, for coming to me! You will be my guest here tonight, of course."

Joyce laughed happily. "Charmed, sir! But I'm on detached duty and must rejoin the command as soon as may be."

The *chargé des affaires* reached for the telephone again. "An escort?" he asked.

Joyce made a wry face. "Prefer not, sir. My lieutenant has given me wide discretion. I'd rather rejoin him on my own."

M. Colin—that was the consul's name on the door—looked worried.

"As you will. I've done my military service myself. A sergeant of the Légion at large in Djado?" He puffed out his lips. "Better take my card! Show it, in case some Italian officer challenges you. And don't go far from the consular door! There is a café just down the square."

He smiled and held out his hand. "I'll hang around," said Joyce. "Get some news from you later how they made out, I hope! Van Diemen may come back here with this Italian relief force, or they may keep on to Sinaoun. I notified Fort Pervinquière to call for a relief force too."

"Most excellent! I hope you get a fine citation!" murmured M. Colin, and rose to see him out. Joyce went down into the square and sought a table at that café They were after him still, for making that dash when under guard, but the consul's card would scare off any corporal's squad, and give him a hearing with any higher officer.

AN hour later Yusuf came along looking for the French consulate. He bore a paper package under his arm —just a plain citizen in a blue suit, on business in Djado, he looked like.

"I've sold the mehari," he said when seated beside Joyce at the small trefoil table. "The bus for Tripoli leaves at two. You comin', Habibi? You got twenty minutes." He pulled out a watch and looked at it.

Twenty minutes! Joyce gave the dope on getting back

to Van Diemen a final once-over and did not find it too good. With this Italian cavalry squadron to help, what would they do? Beat off the Senussi, retake Sinaoun, and hold it till the convoy arrived. Then there would be polite partings, international amity and all that, and back would go the platoon to Fort Pervinquière. Nice distance from here! Only two hundred and thirty kilos—about a hundred and eighty miles! A weary business without a camel. In fact, impossible.

But it was that watch that did it, a cheap American timepiece, but the gesture of a free man who was master of his own movements. God! To get out of this uniform, for once, where everyone seemed to have a say on what he could do and what he could not do! To be free, in cits, able to go where he liked for a while! It was now or never. If he stayed, he'd have to hang around in this dump for weeks and weeks till he got more orders and transportation from some one in authority. He'd be reporting back at Sousse on his own before that—with Syria thrown in! He could write Van Diemen about it, one letter in care of this consul, one addressed to him at Fort Pervinquière.

"By the Lord, I'll do it, Joe!" he declared after this brief spell of thought. "Gimme that package!"

FIVE minutes in the washroom of the café. Emerged a gentleman in a blue suit, with a package under his arm. He and Yusuf crossed the square and hopped into the bus. Leather seats, comfort, swarms of Arabs crowding all the rear seats and the roof. The front seat beside the driver was reserved for Europeans, a soldier or two, a Levantine merchant, one vast and wealthy Arab shiek in voluminous clothes that were spotlessly clean. El Ribat, Yusuf answered Joyce's query, was already on the roof, in a new suitcase containing also a dozen silk shirts.

Brrrrmp! The motor started up. Off went the bus, out of Djado, whirling up the military road to Tripoli under the auspices of a demon driver. Delicious, this freedom! He was free as air, Joyce gloated. They were two citizen travelers, and it was no one's business where they were going or what they were doing!

The Compagni Navigazione steamer at Tripoli, where Joyce presented his passport, which was stamped on board without question. He had already posted two letters to Van Diemen. Then Malta, where Yusuf bought out all the English shops for presents. He had a hundred and ten relatives in Syria, none of whom could be forgotten! Fountain pens and phonographs for the men, embroideries and silk stockings for the women. He would have to hire a whole hotel in Damascus and entertain the hundred and ten for a week before the wedding! "It ees custom in my country when you come back from America," Yusuf explained. "I spent a thousand dollar—but what can I do?"

Beirut, where they were rowed ashore to the *douane* and were back in France again. The rack-rail up through the mountains, nine hours to Damascus. All the Mountain was there to receive Yusuf, it seemed to Joyce. All those Druses were Hamdani, though. He liked them right off, fine, independent, upstanding men who wore silk. And proud! The Druse had held their mountain inviolate for more than a thousand years and let all Arabs know it! Yusuf appeared in silk presently too, a blue silk *gandourah* woven with silver arrows, the square Syrian *keffieh* on his head in place of the domed North African turban. He insisted on buying Joyce a costume too, and with reason, for after a week of feasting in "Damashk," horses appeared and they all rode out to the Mountain.

Then tents, camels, steeds of ancient lineage. The Hamdani was a small clan occupying only some fifty miles of pasturage, but their striped tents dotted the plain in hundreds. Joyce added to his Arabic, made friends, took part in a raid on the Anizeh that was sheer light-heartedness in celebration of Yusuf's return.

BUT the cream of it was Yusuf's wedding. Joyce had not had so much fun since old days in Texas. He was part of the bridegroom's storming-party which would storm the bride's tent defended by all her male relatives. . . . Night, torches, furiously ridden horses. Powder-play. Everyone lit up. The cortege glittered with silk and gold. It rode priceless animals with gold-embroidered saddles and bridles. They whirled over the plain, were met by similar torches, and there was battle, shouting, heads battered, gandourahs torn, violent falls as one was yanked out of the saddle—a glorious melée! Yusuf bore a small ornamental club with which he was to tap the bride on the forehead before carrying her off and flinging her on his horse, a survival of the big marriage-club with which they still knocked the bride senseless down in south Tunis. He sought out Joyce at the climax of the tumult.

"Coom, Habibi! Dismount!" he urged. "You shall enter my girl's tent with me. No man can do greater for his friend than *that*, in Syria!"

It was a very special privilege, Joyce gathered. Holding his wrist, Yusuf dragged him through the tent-flaps. Iréna sat there, alone, while the mob raged outside. A proud and regal beauty, sparkling with ten thousand dollars' worth of jewelry and mighty good to look at. She greeted Yusuf with a glowing admiration in her eyes—her knight, her red star of Islam—and received the tap on her white forehead. Then Yusuf had whirled her up in his arms and thrown her over-shoulder.

Together they fought back to horse, rode out over the dark plain to a lone tent, far out. No one was there but the two fathers and an old Imam. And on the floor was the intricate pattern of blue and buff and lavender that was El Ribat, token of all that Yusuf had been through for the honor of the Hamdani and the winning of his bride! There were scrolls of Arabic to sign—the marriage contract according to the Koran; and then the Imam pronounced the words, while Yusuf and Iréna stood before him hand in hand.

TWO weeks later Joyce was back in Sousse. Once more he pushed his way through the bazaar and up the hill to the rear gate of the town and the barracks highroad. There was the neat compound, the familiar tall sentry. Joyce was conducted at once to the Commandant's office.

"Reporting for duty, sir," said Joyce briefly, when ushered into the presence of the Old Man.

Commandant Thomas was most urbane. *"Félicitations, mon sergéant!"* he opened up. "It was well done, all of it. I have the report from Lieutenant Van Diemen. And your Syrian friend who is an American citizen, he is happily married, no?" he asked slyly.

So the Old Man knew! "I was his best man, sir." And Joyce smiled. "What with steamer connections and having to make Beirut anyhow to get a French boat, I thought I might take a little time out—"

"Pouf!" interrupted the Commandant. "You earned it, *mon brave!* You shall go down with the next platoon to Pervinquière—Van Diemen is there now—but you must dine with me tonight and tell me all about it. And afterwards—I have not too many *sous-lieutenants* who are so capable on detached duty, *hein?*"

Joyce went out on air. A shavetail in the Légion! Well, a sergeant got his chance in this organization, if he did things that the staff could note with the naked eye!

THE END.

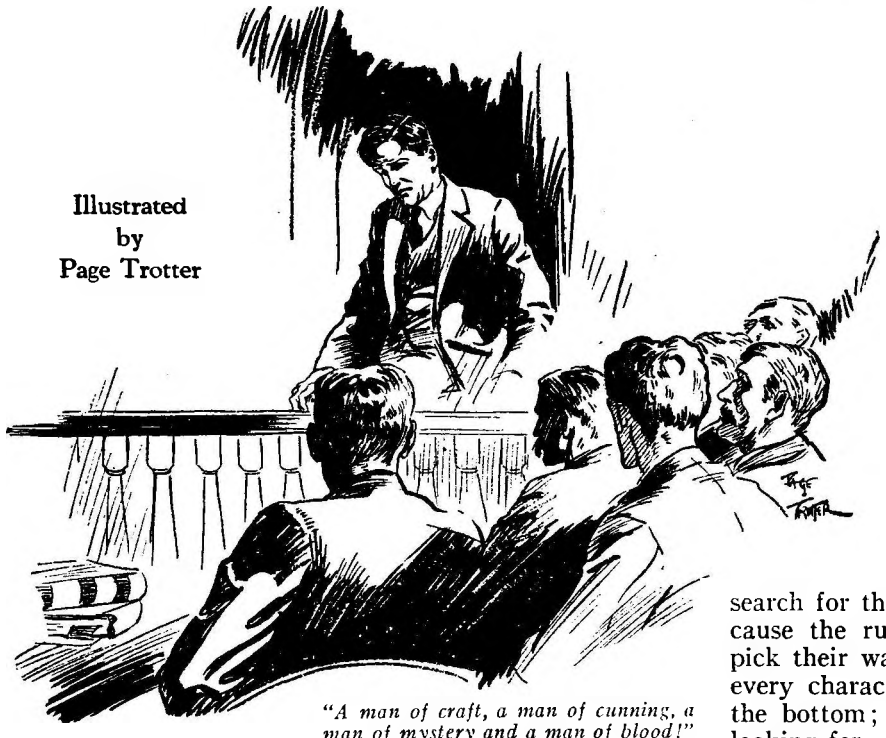
The Mills of God

II—The House on the Hillside

By George Barton

Are detectives of fact and detectives of fiction so different? Here is a specially interesting fact story of detective work.

Illustrated by Page Trotter



"A man of craft, a man of cunning, a man of mystery and a man of blood!"

VERY late on the night of September 28th, 1916, there was a great illumination in the village of Mountainview, New Hampshire. This place is on the south shore of Lake Ossipee and the reflection could be seen on the water with a vivid distinctness that was startling. It was a windy night and the wailing sound of the trees was carried on the air like the cry of lost souls. Some of the residents, startled out of their sleep, looked out of the windows and beheld flying sparks fluttering in every direction.

The house on the hillside was on fire!

It was doomed from the first moment the column of flame shot out of the wooden roof. The fire department of the village was practically worthless so far as saving the property was concerned. The house was owned and occupied by Frederick Small, and the neighbors remembered that he had gone to Boston that morning. But it was known that Mrs. Small was alone in the place and they were filled with horror at the thought of what her fate might be. The house was isolated and the family mixed very little with the residents of Mountainview. What if the poor woman should perish before they reached her?

Like the people of all small communities the residents of this place were very neighborly and almost instinctively they turned out in the hope of saving the place and, if possible, the life of its sole occupant. But it was a hopeless effort. Water was scarce and the crude fire-fighting apparatus that was brought into play was totally inadequate for the purpose. The small house was burned to the ground. The people poked about in the ruins, but without result.

In the meantime Frederick Small was reached on the long-distance telephone and notified that his house had been destroyed. He was much agitated and said he would start for home at once.

At daylight the next morning the authorities of the village made their way up the hillside and began the search for the missing woman. It was a difficult job because the ruins were still smoldering and they had to pick their way over charred beams and soaked débris of every character. By degrees they worked their way to the bottom; still there was no sign of what they were looking for. They decided to halt to get some hot coffee and a bite of breakfast.

IN order to present this tale in its proper sequence we must go back twenty-four hours. On the day before the fire Frederick Small had informed several persons that he intended to go to Boston on the late afternoon train. One of the few friends he had in the village was Edwin Connor, the principal of the school at Center Ossipee. Small asked that gentleman to accompany him on his trip to the city. At first Connor declined on the ground that it would not be convenient for him to leave his work at that time. But Small showed such disappointment that the teacher told him he would let him know later if it were possible to get away from Mountainview. Connor's life was rather humdrum and the thought of a little diversion appealed to himvery strongely. So on the day in question he got into communication with Small and said that after all he could go to Boston with him.

Small was delighted, and told Connor to meet him at the station in time to catch the four o'clock train to the city. At three o'clock Small called up Mr. Kennett at the Central House and asked him to come up with his wagon to take him to the station. This was a service Kennett had performed before and he responded quickly. It was not quite half-past three when he reached the house and found Small waiting on the back porch, fully dressed, with his overcoat on and his suitcase packed.

Frederick Small was a man slightly below medium height. He had iron-gray hair, gray eyes and dull skin. He was slightly crippled and in walking dragged one foot after the other, but he was a smart dresser and had a winning voice. All in all, when at his best, he presented a distinguished appearance. On this occasion he was in a jovial mood and seemed as happy as a schoolboy about to start on a vacation. And who shall say that a trip to the city of culture was not a vacation to a man who had been existing amid the dullness of Mountainview?

As Mr. Kennett drove up on the afternoon of this eventful day, Small gave him a cheery salutation. The driver responded in kind and handed in the mail he had brought from the post office. Small gave it a brief glance and thrust it into his overcoat pocket. Then he opened the back door of his house slightly and called out in a loud but caressing voice:

"Good-by, dear—I'm going now."

He listened attentively for a moment and then said, as he closed the door.

"All right; I won't forget."

These seemingly trivial details are given because of the importance which they afterward assumed in the investigation of this unusual case.

At the station Small was joined by Connor and the two men took the four o'clock train to Boston according to schedule. Connor is authority for the statement that the trip to the city was highly enjoyable. They had dinner in the dining-car and a might fine dinner it was. As this was in 1916, the two travelers from Mountainview also enjoyed the luxury of a drink.

Arriving in Boston, they went to Young's Hotel and were assigned a room. Coming downstairs, Small said he must send a picture postal-card to his wife. He said she always looked for that when he went on a journey, no matter how brief or how near home it might be. Connor, impressed by this marital devotion, said he would do likewise. Small wrote on his card: *"Fair weather. At Young's. September 28, 1916.—8:40 p.m."*

They decided to go out and see the lights of the big city. The crowds, the excitement and the general hum of life had a stimulating effect upon the two men from the country. They were attracted by the lights of a moving-picture house and went in to see one of the latest films. It was a melodrama filled with action and was thoroughly enjoyed. After that they partook of a late supper at a prominent Washington Street restaurant, then walked slowly to the hotel.

As they entered the hotel, the clerk at the desk beckoned to Small.

"They want you on the long-distance telephone—they have been calling for some time."

Something in the tone of the clerk's voice affected Small strangely. He went into the telephone-booth and getting the long-distance operator, made the connection. He left the door ajar and Connor stood outside the booth wonderingly. He noticed that his friend was agitated. Presently Small turned from the instrument for a moment and said in a trembling voice:

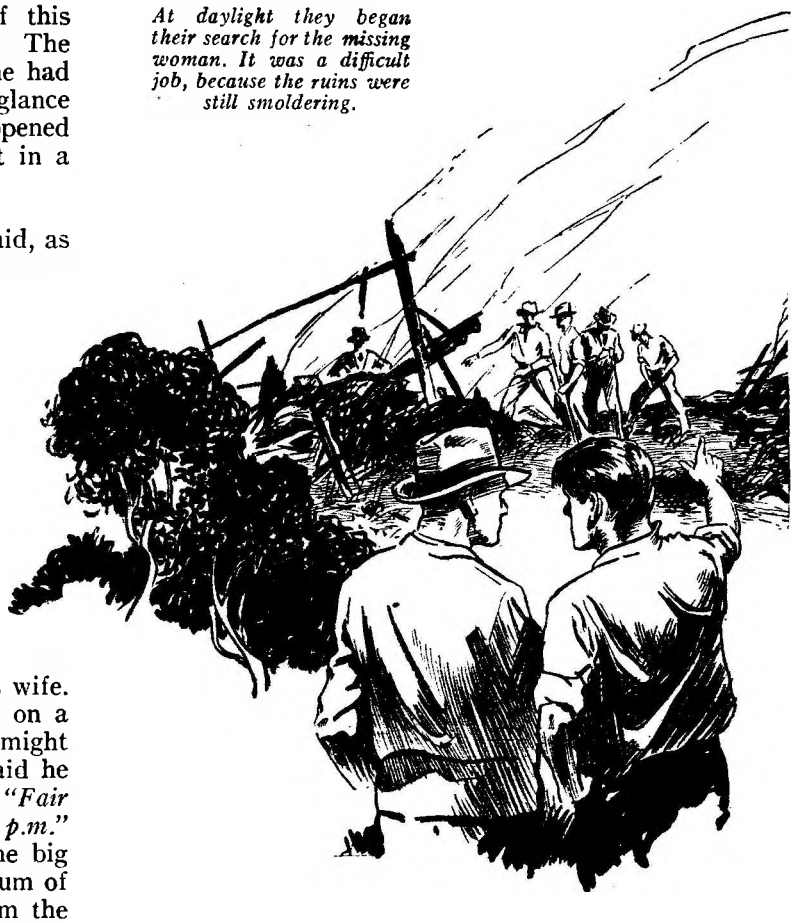
"My God, my home's burned! My pet's gone. I'm alone in the world!" His face was a picture of agony; the sweat came out on his brow. Finally he thrust the receiver into Connor's hand.

"Take this, Ed, for God's sake, and see what you make of it."

Connor did so and found himself talking to the Chief of Police of Mountainview. When he had finished, he hung up and turned to Small, with sympathy and sorrow in his voice:

"It's only too true, old man,—and they want you to come home at once."

THE two sat on a couch in the lobby while Small made an effort to pull himself together. He appeared to be as helpless as a child. He asked Connor to help him in his hour of trial. The friend did what any man would do in the circumstance. He tried to comfort him with the meaningless phrases which are customary on such occasions. They discussed ways and means of getting back



At daylight they began their search for the missing woman. It was a difficult job, because the ruins were still smoldering.

to Mountainview. Small declared he could not wait until morning. He said the uncertainty would set him crazy. It was finally decided that they should get an automobile and drive home. While they were waiting for the machine Small roved around the hotel as if he had taken leave of his senses. At intervals he sat down and sobbed like a child. Every few minutes he dragged his way into the bar to get a drink. He was engaged in the business of drowning his sorrow. But, as is usually the case, sorrow persisted in coming to the surface.

"Ed," he cried, "you don't know what a blow this is to me; you can't understand how much I thought of that little woman."

He cried until the tears ran down his cheeks. Connor afterward testified that never in his life had he seen such an exhibition of grief. When the automobile was ready they got into it, Small first taking the precaution to see that a bottle of whisky was placed in the machine. Connor was beginning to be disturbed over Small's condition. He was afraid the man would collapse before they got to Mountainview. It was a difficult journey.

Small raved like a madman. When he was not weeping he was drinking and it is easy to understand that Connor's job was not to be envied. He could understand how any man would be unnerved by such news, but he could not comprehend the intensity of Small's grief for his wife. He was only slightly acquainted with Mrs. Small, but he did not believe their married life had been particularly happy. Connor kept his nerve and his senses. His inclination was to take the bottle from Small, but he felt that in the circumstances it was not wise to do so. Once during the long drive Small turned to him and said anxiously:

"Ed, do you suppose there will be any question with Merritt?"

Merritt was the insurance agent at Mountainview and the query had to do with the insurance on the life of Mrs. Small. Connor thought this was a strange question

to come from a husband who only a few moments before had been plunged in the depths of despair. But he answered reassuringly.

The two men reached Mountainview at half-past four in the morning and the first suggestion from Small was that they go to the Central House and have breakfast. The bereaved man ate ravenously—which, perhaps, was natural enough for a man who had been up all night and had been consuming large quantities of liquor. They sat around for a while and then, shortly after daybreak, Small, Connor and another friend visited the ruins. They found no trace of the body. This caused Small's grief to break out afresh, but he calmed down somewhat after his return to the hotel. "I suppose I've got to make the best of it," he said dejectedly.

NEWS that he was at the hotel spread through the community and the neighbors dropped in singly and in groups to express their sympathy. He seemed to get a melancholy pleasure out of his position. Repeatedly he said he cared nothing about the destruction of his house, but that he would never get over the loss of his dear wife.

"The body will probably never be found," he moaned, shaking his head in the manner of one who has given up all hope.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps in the hallway leading to his room, and three men burst into the room.

"They've found it!" cried the first one breathlessly.

"Found what?" asked Small.

"Why, the body of Mrs. Small—it was discovered in the cellar of the house!"

Frederick Small rose to his feet with an effort. When he spoke it was almost in a whisper.

"Are—are you sure?" he asked in trembling tones.

"Positive—they are taking the body to the coroner's office now."

Small turned to his friends and said he would have to go and see the body. They tried to persuade him to wait a while, but he said there was no use in postponing the inevitable—he would go through the ordeal at once. There was a pathetic scene when he looked at the remains; he shook like a leaf and the tears coursed down his face. Some of those in the room said afterward he really did not see the remains and that he averted his gaze while he gave way to his lamentations. In any event he went back to his hotel a broken man. . . . .

In the meantime the authorities were making some startling discoveries which they were keeping to themselves for the time being. The first of these was the fact that when they found the body in the water of the cellar it had a heavy cord tied around the neck. When this was removed it left a heavy crease in the flesh, proving that it had been drawn together very tightly. The conclusion was inevitable.

Mrs. Small had been strangled to death!

But that was not all. A bullet was found lodged in her brain. That was sufficient to kill her. And there were other wounds on the head and body, making it plain that she had been beaten by some heavy instrument. The fiend or fiends responsible for this brutal murder evidently hoped to conceal the facts by burning down the house.

One of the first theories was that she had been assailed and killed by a tramp and that he had taken this means of covering up the crime. But by a singular chance the carefully planned scheme had failed of its purpose. The floor boards of the living-room had fallen through and the body dropped into the pool of water in the cellar. The expected holocaust had been averted.

In a search of the grounds around the site of the house they found something that helped to confirm the theory of murder by a tramp. One of these was a blood-stained towel in a boat near the water. That clue was full of possibilities, but a little later along came a fisherman to say that he had cut his hand the day before and had wiped it on the towel that was in the boat. That demolished the tramp theory. But before nightfall of that day other discoveries were made that were fraught with significance.

Frederick Small was placed under arrest!

His indignation knew no bounds. He said it was bad enough to lose his house and his wife, but it was infinitely worse to be suspected of destroying them both. Feverishly and yet with eloquence he called attention to the fact that he was in Boston when the fire occurred; how could a man who was in a restaurant in that city set fire to a house in Mountainview? He called upon Edwin Connor to prove that he had been with him at the very moment the murder and fire occurred. He reminded them of the postcard he had mailed to his wife and which was dated in Boston at 8:40 o'clock the night before. He threatened the authorities with dire vengeance for the outrage they had perpetrated upon him. But the local police were dogged in their determination to hold him until the matter had been fully cleared up.

One of the first things they did was to make an investigation into the past life of Frederick Small. He had come into their midst unknown. Who was he, and what had his reputation been? They discovered it was not very good. He had been married three times. His last wife was Florence Arlene Curry. They had not lived together happily. But early that year he had insured himself and his wife for twenty thousand dollars each. It was claimed that this was natural enough. Many husbands and wives do the same thing. He argued that if he had designs on her he would not have gone to the expense of insuring his own life. If he had died first she would have profited to the extent of twenty thousand dollars.

The police took possession of all of his property and this gave them an opportunity of following up their investigation while he was under lock and key.

A DOCTOR had been called in to visit Mrs. Small on several occasions. He now testified that Small had frequently beaten her. It was no exaggeration, he said, to say Small was guilty of cruel and barbarous treatment. A number of the neighbors confirmed this statement. Small

was far from being a loving husband, and his violent outbursts of grief on being informed of her death did not seem reasonable in view of the treatment he had accorded her in life. Yet some of the people at Mountainview suggested that this very fact might have caused him to carry on as he did; it might have been the reaction of a troubled conscience.

But the hard-headed police were not very much concerned with his conscience. What they wanted was evidence bearing on the death of the woman. And they found it in overflowing measure. Much of it was in the suitcase he carried to Boston. In that bag they found a memorandum-book; all of the legal papers relating to the divorce from his second wife; the deed of his cottage and a carefully prepared inventory of all the furniture and articles in his cottage. These were just the things that would be needed when it came to the business of collecting his insurance. Why had he made out this list, and why had he taken it to Boston with him? Why had he gathered together all of his most prized possessions? The question-marks following these queries grew to gigantic proportions.

But these things, while highly suspicious in themselves, did not constitute legal evidence. Small had managed to make his isolation in this neck of the woods bearable by enjoying the diversions which are possible in the country. He frequently went hunting and fishing, and seemed to get a lot of pleasure out of his motor-boat. They examined this craft with unusual care and all of the articles in it were subjected to a minute scrutiny. One of them was a fragment of cord that was used to fasten the boat to the wharf. But the officer who found this let out a cry of joy.

And well he might—for it was part of the cord that had been used to strangle Mrs. Small to death!

Once again they went back to the ruins of the house. Poking through cinders and débris they discovered an automatic pistol. And it proved to be a weapon that was owned by Frederick Small.

One bullet was missing—the bullet that was found imbedded in the brain of the unfortunate woman.

EVIDENCE was piling up rapidly. First, the fact that he had carried all of his valuable papers to Boston with him. Second, the cord that was used to strangle her to death, and third, the pistol from which the bullet was shot into her head. That would seem to be enough to prove that he was the murderer of his wife. But the investigators were not through. They wanted to demonstrate that a deliberate attempt had been made to destroy the body of the victim.

So the experts and the chemists and scientists were called into action. In many modern detective fiction stories, real detectives are often held up to ridicule as a lot of blundering chaps who never solve murder mysteries unless they call upon some amazing amateur who goes around with a magnifying-glass discovering unimagined clues in the most unlikely places. Not being professionals they go into the business merely for the love of the game and for the purpose of making the actual policeman look like a boob. There have been such instances, but they are rare indeed. As a matter of fact, the average detective of today is a very intelligent person who combines common sense with whatever aid he is able to get from science and modern invention.

These experts made a careful examination of the remains of Mrs. Small, and they discovered that her face had been plastered with rosin which was held in place by a cloth. Thermite had also been used. When this is ignited by magnesium it produces the intense heat of a blast furnace. It was proven that these properties were easy to get in the neighborhood. One of the experts testified that such a fire could destroy everything—including a human body. But it had not consumed this particular body for the simple reason that the corpse had providentially fallen into the cellar into six feet of water.

Thus it was demonstrated that elaborate preparations had been made for concealing the crime by completely destroying all of the evidence.

But, it may be asked, how could Frederick Small start such a conflagration at a time when he was miles away enjoying himself in the city of Boston? That brings up another phase of the business which is quite as ingenious as anything to be found in the pages of fiction.

The investigators found a number of dry batteries, wire spark-plugs and quantities of kerosene. And last, but by no means least, they discovered the wreck of an alarm-clock. Now, alarm-clocks are common enough, and usually innocent enough—even if they do murder sleep—but this particular timepiece had a gruesome significance. It could be timed to release a certain mechanism which would set fire to a house ten hours after it had been set!

Frederick Small, as we know, had left his home in Mountainview at about three o'clock in the afternoon. Between midnight and one o'clock the next morning he was washing down a hearty meal with a pitcher of ale. What were his thoughts at that moment?

Whatever they might have been the chain of evidence was now surely closing in on him, just as the instruments of death had closed in on his unfortunate wife.

But he continued to struggle against his fate. His mind reverted to the alibi which he had so carefully built up to protect him in his hour of need. He insisted that his wife was alive and well when he left the house on that tragic day. If he could prove that point, all might yet be well. It was like a drowning man clinging to a straw. He called on Mr. Kennett of the Central House to confirm what he said. He cried out hysterically:

"Kennett knows that my wife was alive when I left home. He saw me kiss her good-by and heard her say, 'Don't forget the lace.' You know that is true, Kennett! Say it's true!"

The man from the Central House listened to this outburst in silence. When he spoke, it was in a low voice. He said, slowly:

"All I heard was your own 'good-by' spoken into the hallway."

Kennett had not seen Mrs. Small that day and his brief statement to that effect sounded the death-knell of Frederick Small.

AT the trial the accused man presented a pitiable spectacle. If his appearance reflected his feelings, he must have been suffering the tortures of the damned. As he sat cringing in the dock, he realized that his house of cards had collapsed. Edmund Pearson, in his fine study of the case, says:

"This undersized, pallid cripple was the most unfortunate, unhappy-looking individual who ever faced the charge of wife-murder!"

No one—except his counsel—had a good word to say for him. Attorney-General Tuttle in his address to the jury denounced Small unsparingly. He pictured him as a monster and held him up to the scorn of the world. He drew his portrait in one fervent all-compelling sentence:

"A man of craft, a man of cunning, a man of mystery and a man of blood!"

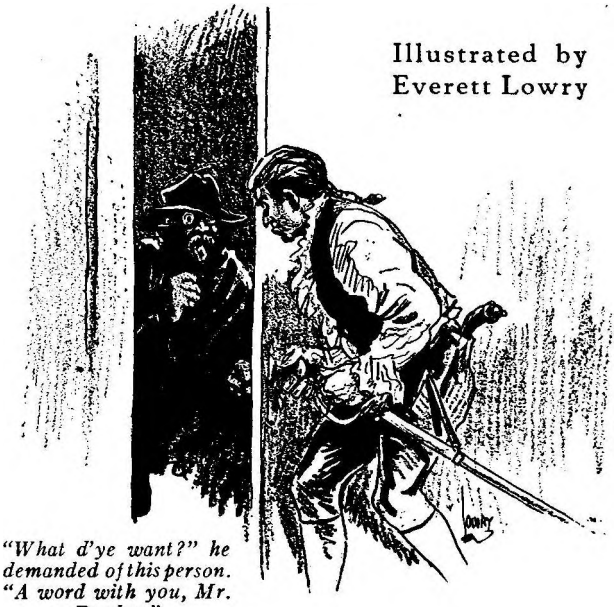
The jury brought in a verdict of murder in the first degree—and Frederick Small paid the penalty of the law in the State Prison at Concord on January 15, 1918.

The Fifth of November

Wherein a modern gentleman miraculously leaps back across the ages to become none other than—Guy Fawkes!

By BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Everett Lowry



"What d'ye want?" he demanded of this person. "A word with you, Mr. Fawkes."

WHILE traveling in India Mr. Hobart Honey of London happened to save the life of an important Tibetan lama; and in gratitude the reverend gentleman bestowed upon him a remarkable gift—namely, a bottle, itself a rare and most valuable example of Chinese glassware, containing certain pellets possessing the singular power of temporarily reinstating the swallower of any one of them in one of his previous existences.

Mr. Honey—unmarried, middle-aged—had taken some months to screw himself up to the point of an experiment. Nothing but an insatiable curiosity and a very good opinion of himself would have driven him to it. If he could swallow a pill and be certain of finding himself back in the days when he was, possibly, King Solomon, Julius Cæsar, Richard the First, or some such notable man, that would be quite satisfactory. But there seemed to be a certain risk that he might select a pill which would land him back on some prehistoric prairie in the form of a two-toed jackass, or on the keel of an ancient galley in the form of a barnacle, or something wet and uncomfortable of that kind.

At length Mr. Honey made the experiment—and found himself the court chiropodist to Queen Semiramis! He had a hard time in Babylon, and rejoiced when it was over; but curiosity drove him to further ventures—in which he found himself, successively, a singularly miserable cave-man, an unsuccessful and sorely bedeviled pirate, an anthropoid ape condemned to fight a lion in a Roman amphitheater, a charcoal-burner who happened to save the life of William the Conqueror, and the private assassin in the service of Queen Cleopatra.

MR. HOBART HONEY had made an alarming discovery. Namely, that he was a pill-slave, or a pill-fiend—a victim, that is to say, of the vice of taking pills. Not, of course, the usual variety, but those extraordinary pellets presented to him by the lama.

He made his discovery some three days after his arrival at Rye, whither, it will be remembered, he had rushed for a month's golf, in hope that the trench-digging involved thereby would help to efface the bitter memory of his impalement by order of the Roman noble Tullius Superbus, at the request of Cleopatra's Antony. Hitherto his experience had been that golf was the grand panacea for all ills, whether mental or physical. But on the evening of his third day at Rye he felt that Rye was dull, and golf still duller. There was no vim, no snap in life at Rye. It was too tame, insipid, dead-and-alive. There had been a time when to do one of the short holes in a scrambling three had raised his spirits to the zenith of human delight, and had caused him to feel for the remainder of the day so light-hearted and happy that he might have been wearing upon his neck a new-laid balloon filled with laughing-gas, instead of an ordinary bone head.

But that was a thing of the past. What conceivable pleasure could holing in three strokes a small warty ball of foolish, expressionless appearance, possess for a man who had once been private assassin to Queen Cleopatra? None, obviously.

Mr. Honey was quite frank with himself. His craving for further adventures in the gulfs of the by-gone was not to be slaked with mere golf. And he did not attempt so to slake it. He had something like two hundred and forty pills left, and in his heart he knew now that he would never be satisfied until he had used the last of those pills.

He did not hesitate; he merely packed his bag, paid his bill, and when the next up-train to town pulled out of the station Hobart Honey was aboard it, looking forward to his next pill with something of the rabid eagerness of a "coke-sniffer" looking forward to his next sniff.

By nine o'clock that evening Mr. Honey was sitting comfortably in his study with the pill-bottle in his hand a glass of sherry at his elbow, and Peter, his white-eared black cat, on the hearth-rug before him.

The author did not linger. There was nothing to linger for, and he would not be delaying his work, for in any case he would lose no time. That was the one great advantage the pills possessed. If he swallowed one and "went off" at nine, he "came to" again at nine. The time used up on

any adventure in any reincarnation was time which belonged to the period of that adventure, and consequently was time which Mr. Honey could very well spare. It belonged to some other existence. This was very satisfactory.

Rather wistfully expressing a *sotto-voce* desire to awake as a person of some importance, Mr. Honey swallowed a pill, and as usual, leaned restfully back. He had an odd fancy as he leaned back that the electric light on his table suddenly went out—probably the filament had parted, he thought—so, not wishing to find himself in the dark when he returned to the Twentieth Century, he rose with the intention of switching on one of the others.

HE barked his shin rather abruptly against something that felt like the edge of a cask, and then perceived that he need not bother any more about the electric light. He seemed to be getting on very nicely with a lanthorn which he appeared to be holding.

He glanced round, still a little dizzy from the swift transition from one existence to another,* and perceived that he was standing in a cellar. It was in complete darkness save for the feeble light of his lanthorn, which nevertheless was sufficient to give him an excellent idea of the contents of the cellars—mostly casks and dry wood.

"Clearly," mused Mr. Honey, "I am in some one's beer and firewood cellar! I wonder whom it belongs to?"

He had not to wonder very long. Almost immediately he experienced that curious mental handspring which invariably followed each of his transitions. The Twentieth Century, as usual, slid away into the mists of the future, leaving him with merely a dim memory of it, and at the same instant he knew whom he was.

He had hoped to prove a person of some importance. Although he was hardly that, certainly he had become a gentleman who was hoping to make some little noise in the world, being indeed none other than Mr. Guido Faukes —or, as we of today prefer it, Guy Fawkes, recently of the Spanish Army in Flanders, but now engaged in carrying out a contract which he had recently made with a gentleman named Mr. Robert Catesby.

Resting tranquilly upon a barrel containing perhaps as much as a couple of hundredweight or so of gunpowder, he was quietly thinking things over. He had been very highly recommended to Mr. Catesby and that individual's friends, and he was anxious not to disappoint them, especially as he knew that practically all Mr. Catesby's future domestic happiness depended upon him. Puffing reflectively at his pipe—a clay churchwarden, broken off short—Mr. Honey, or perhaps one should say Mr. Fawkes, allowed his mind to roam back to his original interview with Catesby.

"Let me put the thing to you quite clearly, Mr. Fawkes," Catesby had said frankly—though in rather more out-of-date phraseology. "I have heard, upon good authority, that under your military exterior you are a very sentimental man, and it is for that reason that I have urged my fellow-conspirators to acquiesce in the selection of yourself as the ideal man to carry out our little—er—enterprise. Briefly, then, the situation is as follows: I am deeply in love with a lady whose name you, as a gentleman, will not expect me—also a gentleman, Mr. Fawkes—to mention. Suffice it to say that she is very rich, and that the portrait of her, recently painted by a rising painter, depicts a by no means bad-looking woman, broadly speaking. I have asked her hand in marriage, Mr. Fawkes, and she has been so gracious as to bestow it upon me, upon one condition—upon one condition."

"What is the condition?" asked the sentimental Mr. Fawkes.

"Briefly, my dear sir, it is that I must become a member of Parliament. She has a passion for members of Parliament. Odd, isn't it?"

"Very," agreed Mr. Fawkes, who, like the large majority of military men, had no use whatever for members of Parliament.

"The position is a little difficult," resumed Catesby. "You see, there are no vacancies in Parliament at the moment."

"They can, however, be created, I imagine," suggested Guy Fawkes.

Catesby smiled.

"Yes, indeed; we are coming to that in a moment," he replied. "There are at present no vacancies, nor does any member seem likely to relinquish his seat; nor—the present Government being apparently screwed down—are there any signs of there being a general election. So you see the difficulty I am in?"

"Yes," said Guy Fawkes, "I do. The Government won't rise."

"Well, yes—in a way, that is it," said Catesby.

Guy stroked his chin.

"And you want me to give them a rise, Mr. Catesby? Is that the idea?" he inquired.

"Exactly."

"Nothing easier," said Mr. Fawkes, "to an old soldier. Now, about the price— It will be an expensive matter to do it really well."

Catesby held up his hand.

"Don't let money hinder you, my dear Guy—for so, I trust I may call you. Don't give the expense a thought. My friend Sir Thomas Percy has already rented a house adjoining the Parliament House, and I have plenty of other rich friends, though personally I happen to be a little—er—short. But the money is there. Let me see, now—"

And the conversation had become strictly businesslike.

IT was of these things that Mr. Honey, as Guy Fawkes, found himself thinking as he quietly puffed his pipe in the cool seclusion of the cellar. He sympathized heartily with Catesby—the more so since his own love-affairs were in a somewhat similar state as those of his principal.

He too loved a lady—a buxom and experienced widow, named Maynechants—who though she had by no means declined him, had made it a condition of her acceptance of him that he should be, if not rich, at least well-to-do.

She liked him very much, she had said, but she was a practical woman, and she had conveyed to him that she had another offer under consideration. This offer was from no less a person than the editor of a weekly newspaper, the Sunday *News-Wallet*, which had recently been established and was about to "turn the corner."

"He will then be a wealthy man, Mr. Fawkes," she had said. "And though I confess to you that he has not so high a place in my affections as yourself, at the same time a woman, in these parlous times, must be practical."

With a sigh, Guy had admitted that she was right, and merely asking her to wait a little before deciding, had thrown himself heart and soul into the task of giving the limpet-like Government such a "rise" as would assure ample room for a seat in the next Parliament, and cause him, in common decency, to add a handsome *douceur* to the arranged fee. He was determined to stand at nothing in his effort to win the hand of Mrs. Maynechants. He had very little fear in the rivalry of Master James Pincheparr, the editor; for, like many a dashing old soldier, Guy firmly believed that buxom widows with comfortable in-

* The pills were very quick in their work. Mr. Honey never got used to the swift change. It always made him feel rather like a conjurer's rabbit.—AUTHOR.

comes were meant by Nature for the military, not for the press. Nevertheless, he cherished a hope that Pincheparr might be in the reporters' gallery at about six-thirty two evenings hence. . . .

His reflections were disturbed by the entry of a stout, anxious-looking man bowed down under the weight of a small sack of gunpowder. This was a person named Thomas Bates, a manservant of Mr. Catesby, lent for the occasion to Guy Fawkes.

"Ha, Thomas, my lad, there you are!" said Guy. "What's that—the last sack?"

"There's one more to come, sir," said Bates.

Fawkes nodded cheerfully.

"Good lad! Prithee, clip into it and bring it down—and then we'll close up for tonight."

"Very good, sir," replied the perspiring Bates; and hurried out, while Mr. Honey carefully put away his pipe, and inserting a big funnel in the bung-hole of the cask on which he had been sitting, proceeded to pour the sack of powder into the cask.

He then sounded it with a cane.

"It will just about take one more sack, and leave a fistful over for the touch-hole," he said, and yawned. "I'll lay the trains tomorrow, I think. We've had a busy day, and I consider that we've well earned an honest stoup or two of ale."

"How came you here?" snapped Mr. Honey-Fawkes. "Very simmle—simple—matter," replied the other. "Simmle matter—hic!"

Bates reappeared with the last sack, which he deposited for Guy's handling, and was given a few hours off, which he promptly took. He was not so keen on handling gunpowder as the more experienced Fawkes.

Unlike the agitated Bates, Mr. Honey lingered, putting a few last loving touches to his preparations, and it was while he lingered that the incident occurred which set in train the series of events which undoubtedly saved Parliament—or at any rate, a goodly portion thereof.

He was taking a last look round, when suddenly an extraordinary scrambling, thudding sound—as of a person falling or sliding down the steps leading to the cellar—broke upon the silence.

Mr. Honey looked up with a startled oath, just in time to witness the arrival at the bottom of the steps of an individual, who struck the floor on an elbow, an ear, and the small of his back. Evidently he had fallen.

"How now?" snarled Guy, hastily snatching up a bung-starter.

"How do?" croaked the person feebly—or words to that effect—sitting up and staring rather dazedly about him. He seemed to have broken no bones, for he rose laboriously to his feet.

Mr. Honey held his lanthorn high, so that its light fell full upon the man, revealing a very threadbare, wild-haired, slightly intoxicated person, who looked as though he might be a newspaper reporter "on space."*

The newcomer was a palish, haggard person, but not without a gleam of humor in his somewhat hard-boiled eye.

"Who are you?" snapped Mr. Guy Honey-Fawkes. "What do you want? How came you here?"

He menaced the man with the bung-starter.

"Very simmle—simple—matter," replied the reporter. "Qui' easy to explain—one gentleman to 'nother. Simmle matter—*hic!*"

He smiled wanly and swiftly added "*jacet*" to the hiccough. "*Hic jacet*—practically speaking! Good idea, sir—to add a little Latin to a little hiccup—prevents misunderstanding. Lemme—let me, that is—explain." He appeared to pull himself together. "I am a reporter—er—unattached—but with the prospect of a salaried opening on that great weekly the Sunday *News-Wallet*. On my way to the offices of that paper this evening I suddenly discovered that I was being pursued by bailiffs representing several of my more importunate creditors. I began to run, but was being rapidly overhauled, when, passing this house, I perceived a person—a manservant, I imagine—in the act of leaving the house.

"He perceived me running furiously: 'What's the matter?" he asked in a rather agitated manner. 'They're coming!' I gasped; and to my amazement the fellow, with an ejaculation of terror, promptly took to his heels and vanished at a gallop down the street, leaving the door open. I nipped inside, in the hope that the bailiffs would pursue the man instead of myself. Groping in the darkness of the ground floor, I tripped over a rug and crashed against a door, which yielded, precipitating me swiftly down a flight of steps ending near the entry to this cellar. That, sir, is the true circumstantial account of the misfortunes which led to my somewhat abrupt appearance before you."

He finished, smiling, and permitted himself to glance at the contents of the cellar, with the gaze of a reporter who is keenly on the lookout for anything worth having. Unseen by Mr. Honey, a sudden change flitted over his face as his eyes fell upon the gunpowder piled round the bung-hole of the cask nearest to him, but he made no remark upon what he saw.

"And now, sir, if you will pardon an intrusion which nothing but the direst need could have induced me to inflict upon you, I will proceed upon my way."

Mr. Honey-Fawkes hesitated. Should he let the man

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*"On space," a technical term which, loosely, may be interpreted as meaning that a reporter is not paid a regular salary, but—like a short-story writer—is paid only for such of his work as is used by his editor. Plenty of mediocre reporters have starved "on space." Plenty more will. It has its advantages, nevertheless, one of which is that these reporters are very rarely bothered by the necessity of superintending their investments.—AUTHOR.

go or should he bung-start him? If he had guessed the contents of the cellar the risk of letting him go free was tremendous. On the other hand, if he felled him, and failed to make a clean job of it, there would certainly follow such an outcry as might attract the attention of those in the House of Parliament, immediately overhead, and lead to investigation. That, of course, would mean instant ruin.

Mr. Honey made up his mind.

"Very well; you may go," he said. "I am glad to have been of service, though you have seriously inconvenienced me in my task of taking an inventory of the wine in this cellar. But I understand. Say no more, my dear sir, say no more."

And taking the reporter by the arm, he guided him upstairs and out into the street, returning to curse the bolting Bates.

"The dolt might have ruined the whole affair," he snarled, fetching himself a stoup of ale, and filling his pipe as he settled down to muse over how the affair was progressing. "I wonder if that half-soused ruffian noticed anything? I think not—though it makes one uneasy!"

But he would have been considerably uneasier if he could have seen whither, and to whom, the reporter, now quite sober and with rather startled eyes, promptly made his way upon leaving the house. For it was straight to the office of the Sunday *News-Wallet* and the editor thereof, Master James Pincheparr, that the space-man went.

"Chief," said he, in thrilling tones, "do you want the biggest scoop in the whole history of the press? Because if you do, I've got it!"

"Bah!" snarled Master Pincheparr, who was experienced in scoops and rumors of scoops. "What is it?"

There was weary disbelief in his voice; nevertheless, he cocked an inquiring eye at the space-man, for it had not escaped his attention that the fellow was unusually sober.

The reporter, with his eyes starting out of his head, slipped a clove into his mouth, leaned forward, and began to whisper to the editor.

An hour later the sentimental Mr. Guy Fawkes-Honey, sitting cozily over his third stoup, dreaming of the attractive Mrs. Maynechants, was disturbed by a violent knocking upon the front door.

The agile and speedy Bates not having returned, and there being, for obvious reasons, no other servants in the house, Guy finished his stoup, slung his sword round into a handy position, loosened his dagger, slipped a pistol in his pocket, and proceeded truculently to the door.

"What d'ye want?" he demanded of the heavily cloaked, slouch-hatted person waiting on the doorstep.

"A word with you, Mr. Fawkes," was the muffled reply.

Guy peered under the slouch hat.

"Why, Master Pincheparr!" he exclaimed in surprise; for his rival was quite the last man he expected to call.

Affecting a friendliness he was very far from feeling, he invited the editor in. He decided Pincheparr could only wish to discuss matters touching upon Mrs. Maynechants, and was curious to know what the editor had to say.

"Surely, surely! Enter and drink a stoup or two, good Master Pincheparr," he continued, with a cordiality he was far from feeling. "Mayhap it will enliven the leading article in the *News-Wallet* somewhat," he added jokingly.

"What's the matter?' he asked. 'They're coming!' I gasped."

Pincheparr, a smallish person with wiry red whiskers, a tenacious chin, and sharp eyes, did so—looking curiously meanwhile at Mr. Honey.

"Hah! Say you so, good Master Fawkes? Believe me, I am anticipating shortly a big jump in circulation, to say naught of the increased advertisement revenue which will accrue therefrom," replied the editor as he followed Fawkes into the dining-room.

For a few moments he chatted on unimportant matters, then abruptly came to the point.

"Tell me, good Master Fawkes, how fares your suit for the hand of that sweet lady, Mrs. Maynechants?" he asked rather anxiously.

"Right willingly," said Guy, only too glad to seize this chance of convincing his rival that he—Pincheparr—was quite hopelessly out of the running. "Right willingly. The lady has accepted me, and in three days' time the news will be published, though not in the *News-Wallet*, I'll warrant. I ought not to reveal our sweet secret, but I never cared to see anyone suffer, for I am a very tender-hearted man—and it seems to me to be kindest to put you out of your misery, good Master Pincheparr. Mayhap you will be my best man."

It was quite untrue—lamentably so—but this was much too good an opportunity of discouraging the matrimonial ambitions of Pincheparr to be neglected for sake of a falsehood or so.

But the statement had an effect upon Mr. Pincheparr which was somewhat different from that which the tender-hearted gunpowder expert had anticipated. The editor, it is true, seemed to believe it. But also he unmistakably resented it.

He flushed so darkly that his red whiskers seemed almost pink against the flamed background of his face.

"Hah!" he gasped. "Say you so, you Flanders cutpurse!" He was shaking with rage. "Well, let me tell you that you talk too soon! Best man, eh? By Caxton, you've over-reached yourself this time, Mr. Guy Fawkes! You've fallen foul of the wrong man! Listen to me!"

Mr. Honey hitched his dagger into a slightly more convenient position.

"I am listening," he said.

"Read that," said Pincheparr. "And sign it."

Guy read it. It was a formal renunciation of the hand of Mrs. Maynechants, and an admission that he already possessed a wife in Flanders.

"You see, I've been making a few inquiries about you," sneered Pincheparr. "How many wives d'ye want, anyway?"

"That is a lie!" said Guy coolly. "I am not a married man, and I refuse emphatically to sign."

Mr. Pincheparr nodded, and took out a larger sheet of paper with the air—very natural in a newspaper editor—of one whose proved and trustworthy weapons are pieces of paper. He unfolded it, and it proved to be an enormous poster, upon which the ink was still clammy.

"Refuse, eh?" he said sardonically. "W e l l, read that—it is the poster for next Sunday's issue."

Guy Fawkes-H o n e y read. And the whole of his c o m p l e x internal mechanism s e e m e d to throw a somersault as he read as follows:

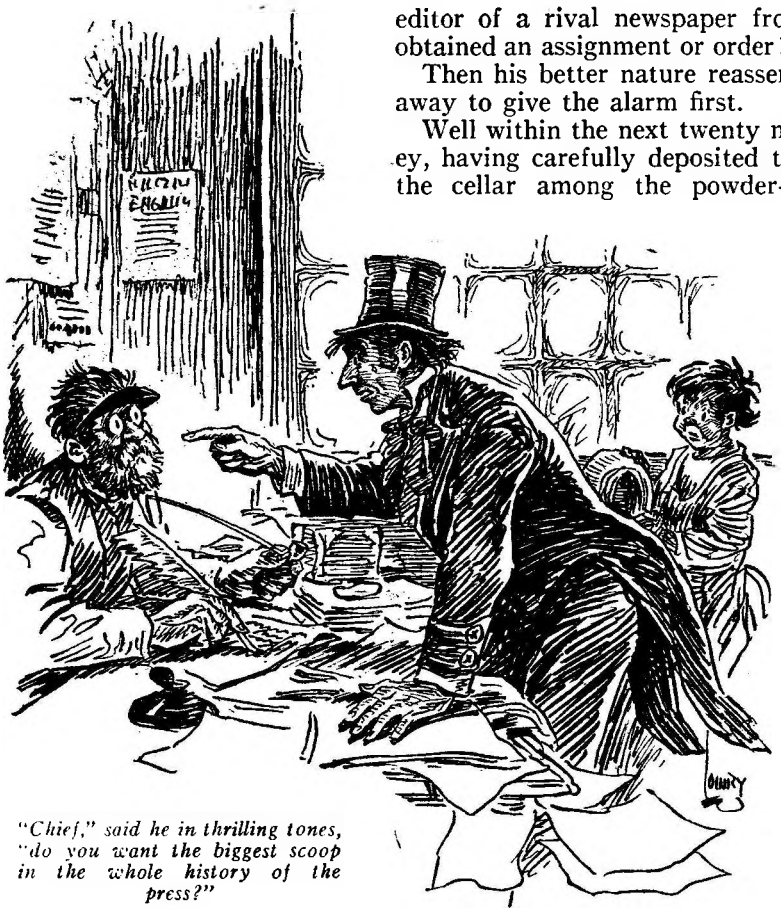
TERRIBLE PLOT TO BLOW UP PARLIAMENT

ASSASSIN FOUND IN CELLAR UNDER PALACE OF WESTMINSTER, SURROUNDED BY TONS OF GUNPOWDER

AMAZING CRIME! HORRIBLE DETAILS

Full Exclusive Story Illustrated with Special Woodcuts in *THE SUNDAY NEWSWALLET.*

"How's that?" hissed Master Pincheparr to the completely dumfounded Fawkes. "D'ye deny that? That bill is going to give the billposters a full sixteen-hour day tomorrow!"



"Chief," said he in thrilling tones, "do you want the biggest scoop in the whole history of the press?"

Guy believed him, but he was too petrified to say so. So stunned was he at the unexpectedness of it, that it never occurred to him to question why Pincheparr had troubled to come round and interview him when it would have been simpler, and would have cleared his way to winning Mrs. Maynechants equally well, to have quietly informed the authorities.

Had Mr. Honey been in a state to think it over quietly for a moment, he would have realized that Pincheparr was "bluffing" him, that the editor had not really credited the reporter's story of his chance discovery, but had had the poster set up especially with a view to startling his rival into making an admission which would help corroborate the reporter's incredible story.

And he had nearly succeeded—indeed, he might have quite succeeded, had not Fawkes swiftly pulled himself together, leaped to his feet, and with extraordinay deftness daggered the editor as he sat.

Master Pincheparr slid gently out of his chair without even a groan.

For a moment Mr. Honey surveyed his handiwork. Then, with furious energy, he fell to work to conceal all traces of it. He lifted the body, and disappeared down the steps leading to the cellar, where he purposed hiding it.

As he disappeared a face peered out from behind a huge carved oak settle in the hall; it was the face of the reporter, who evidently had followed Mr. Pincheparr into the house, and remained hidden in the hall within call of his chief—uselessly, as far as the unfortunate Pincheparr was concerned.

For a moment the reporter stared white-faced, down the flight of cellar steps; then he turned and left the house as swiftly as his feet could carry him.

He hung in an agony of indecision outside the door for a few seconds. Should he inform the watch, or should he hasten with news of the now augmented "scoop" to the editor of a rival newspaper from whom he occasionally obtained an assignment or order?

Then his better nature reasserted itself, and he hurried away to give the alarm first.

Well within the next twenty minutes Guy Fawkes-Honey, having carefully deposited the body of Pincheparr in the cellar among the powder-casks and collected his papers, walked swiftly from the house—whither he purposed never to return.

But he was too late. He walked straight into the arms of a powerful body of men awaiting him.

"Ha! Well met—and well taken!" the leader snapped, one Sir Thomas Knyvet. "To the Tower with him! Instantly!

Mr. Honey, gripped by a dozen hands, perceived that the game was decidedly up.

"This comes of mixing love-affairs with politics!" he snarled. "I wish you had arrested me downstairs!"

"Why so, ruffian?" demanded the commander.

"Why? Why?" growled the gunpowder expert sourly. "Because I would have touched her off, and lifted you and me—and the Government too—pretty well up to the Milky Way, that's why!"*

Two hours later he was on the rack, with the Captain of the Tower and others standing by ready to take down the list of names of his fellow-conspirators.

"For the last time, fellow, name these men!" demanded the captain.

Guy shook his head, and the captain signaled to the torturers, who threw themselves on their levers.

A SUDDEN dire pain shot into Mr. Honey's knees; he came to with a frantic start, to find himself again in his Twentieth Century flat, with Peter, the white-eared black cat, clawing furiously at his master's knees in an endeavor to keep his balance. Evidently Peter, leaping possibly at a venturesome mouse, had misjudged his distance. But Mr. Honey did not mind. He was too much relieved to be home again. He had had enough of the Seventeenth Century—enough and to spare. Once again the power of the pill had waned only just in time to save him from an experience which he had not the least desire to undergo. For a time he sat glowering at the fire; then finally he rose, shaking his head, and put the pills away.

"Awful, awful!" he said sadly. "What a past! Shocking! I should never have suspected it. If this continues, I shall be ashamed to look myself in the face!"

Then he made himself a stiff whisky-and-soda, and resolutely set himself to think of cheerier things. It required all his resolution.

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* "When Fawkes saw his treason discovered" (says Stow), "he instantly confessed his own guiltiness, saying: If he had been within the house when they first layed hands upon him, he would have blown up them, himself and all. . . ." It will be seen that Stow was about right.—AUTHOR.

The Man in the Yellow Cab

The distinguished author of "The Hazardous Highway" and "Sindbad of Oakland Creek" here contributes a deeply engrossing mystery story.

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

A LONELY road, this highway down the coast—it wound along the California hillsides with the ocean chafing at the rocks on its right hand. The afternoon was waning; the fog came drifting in. Tom Lane's big eight-cylinder car stole through it as cautiously as a thief going down a dark hallway.

"If the County don't widen these turns somebody's going to pile up in the ocean one of these days," he told himself gloomily.

He sat bolt upright at the steering-wheel, with his wide-rimmed black hat pulled down over his eyes, as was his habit, looking very much like a thrifty cattleman and not at all like the largest landholder in a community where property was selling by the front foot. In these days, when his money was working hard for him in many places, he sorrowed for the saddle-horse and the simplicity of by-gone decades.

As he drove out from Monterey, nearing the tract of oak-dotted hillside which had but recently been indifferent pasture-land and was now beginning to sell to wealthy newcomers as villa sites, his big blunt features were heavy with foreboding.

The car whined down the grade beside a deep inlet and at its landward end came to a stop before a row of mournful eucalyptus trees. A one-story cottage, colored gray by the sea winds of many years, crouched behind them. It had been a farmhouse in its day; now the sales-agent Frank Drury lived here.

Before Lane had shut off the motor the front door opened and young Drury's wife came running to the gate. She had the tawny hair and wide gray eyes, the splendor of figure and the proud carriage which seem to belong with the California wild-oat hills. But the light in her eyes was obscured now by a shadow as of fear and there was a tenseness in her haste that told of dread. And when she spoke, Lane saw her lip was quivering.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came!" she cried.

"Frank here?" His voice was unperturbed and his expression showed no worry.

She shook her head.

"He's gone to Malabar's." She stepped upon the running-board and he saw she was gripping the car door so tightly that the blood was driven from her fingers. His brows drew together as she made that statement, but he offered no comment and she went on: "It was more than four hours ago he went—and he promised he'd be right back."

He looked at her steadily and his big features softened; his voice grew gentle.

"What is it you're afraid of, Marian?"

"They had some trouble." She hesitated and then her words came rapidly: "There's something about Malabar that turns me cold—something poisonous. And Frank was very angry when he left."

"What was the trouble?" Lane asked quietly.

She flushed. "They'd been good friends. Every night or so Malabar used to drive over. But one evening last week—I think he'd been drinking more than usual—he acted horribly with me and Frank ordered him out of the house."

"Ever act that way before?" Lane interrupted.

"It was the first time he ever seemed to recognize that I was in the room," she replied frankly. "This noon he sent word to Frank by the down-stage that he wanted to explain, and Frank drove over there at two o'clock; he was still furious."

"Well," Lane said easily, "chances are there's nothing happened. And if Frank would beat up Malabar a little, it wouldn't hurt."

"It's what *Malabar* might do!" she cried. "I tell you, Tom—that man, with his smooth white face—he's like a snake!"

"There, there," Lane soothed her. "I'll drive over to Malabar's myself." With the words he pressed the starter button. While she was still thanking him, he let in the clutch and the car plunged once more into the fog. Now that he was away from her Lane allowed himself to cease his masquerading; his face became even more troubled than before.

"This," he said aloud, "is starting to look serious."

HIS motor purred almost inaudibly; the dull roar of the surf came from beneath. Sometimes Lane had a glimpse of the inlet at his right hand, walled in by granite cliffs; more often he saw only a narrow circle of wild-oat hillside, and a few rods of road. The car climbed a long grade to the headland at the bay's seaward end.

At the nose of the promontory, where the road took a hairpin turn, Lane threw out the clutch and shoved on the footbrake with a suddenness that slid the locked wheels.

A car was parked in the narrow strip of grass-land between the road's edge and the brink of the cliff. Beside it a man was standing, his right arm upraised. Lane recognized that thick-set form before the face was visible. In the good old days when the eight-horse teams, with the chimes of bells on the collars of the leaders, were hauling tanbark out of these hills, Lane and this man had joined forces in more than one timber purchase. Now, when the beauty of these outlands was becoming a tangible asset, their names were still linked in corporation- and bank-directorates. And, because Daulton was above all else dependable, it was with a feeling of relief that Lane brought his car to a grinding halt, with the feeling that

here stood a man in whom he could confide with safety. . . . . But with his first good look at the other's ruddy face, he read ill tidings.

"What is it, Ed?" he asked.

By way of answer Daulton pointed toward the line of surf below. Lane shut off the motor and stepped out to peer over the edge. The granite cliff descended almost sheer, for nearly one hundred feet. Several enormous boulders rose from the turmoil of waters at its base.

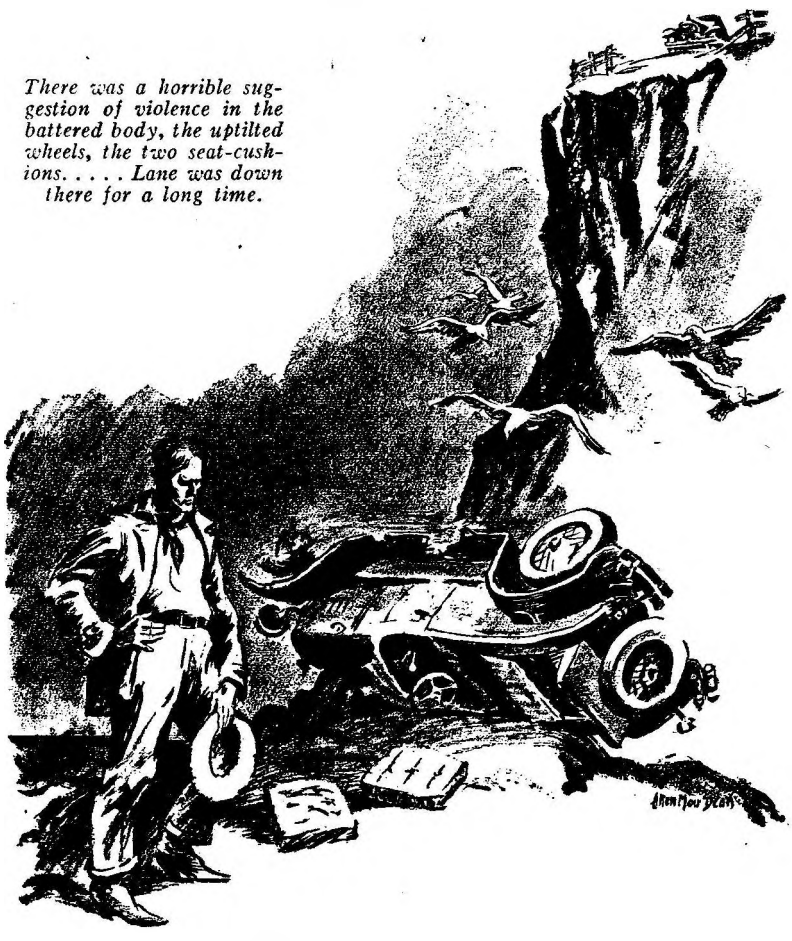
On one of the boulders a car hung poised. Both men stood staring at it.

"Frank Drury's car!" Lane exclaimed.

The breakers licked at it with tongues of gleaming white; wisps of gray vapor drifted by it; some sea-gulls hovered over it; their strident voices floated upward with the dull boom of the surges.

There was a horrible suggestion of violence in the battered body, in the uptilted wheels and the shattered windshield, in the two seat-cushions clinging to projections of the rock, which gave the impression that the stillness of these objects was an illusion, that the catastrophe was in progress at this moment.

Lane was thinking of Frank Drury's wife, and the shadow of dread in her gray eyes. It came to him that they had been married less than three months. He remembered—as men remember irrelevant trifles in moments of tragedy—how he had kissed her that wedding morning, and she had pinned in his buttonhole a blossom from the cluster which she carried.



There was a horrible suggestion of violence in the battered body, the uptilted wheels, the two seat-cushions. . . . . Lane was down there for a long time.

"I've been down there," Daulton was saying, "and there's no sign of him."

"Thrown into the ocean," Lane answered dully.

The other came closer as if to impart a confidence.

"There's something queer about this, Tom! He passed me on the road, not twenty minutes ago—down there this side of the next turn, it was. He came up from behind me. He was going"—Daulton paused, groping for expression—"like a bat out of hell. I didn't hear him till he was beside me. He'd got on by before I more than saw him."

"You're sure 'twas Frank?" Lane asked.

"Dead sure. You know that sheepskin coat he always wears when it's foggy? He had it on; the collar was drawn up, and his gray hat was pulled down over his eyes. I saw that much, and then he was out of sight. I'd killed my engine, heading into the bank. I got her started and backed out. Before I'd gone two hundred yards I heard the smash. So I hurried on and—"

He pointed over the brink.

"I wish," he said after a moment's silence, "that you'd go down and have a look for yourself. There's some—"

"Sure—I'll go," Tom Lane replied and with the words he started.

Dalton stood watching him descend slowly, hugging the face of the promontory, testing every new foothold before he trusted his weight upon it.

He was down there for a long time and the light was waning fast. When he had climbed back, he silently studied the wheel-tracks beside the road. Finally he spoke.

"First that car stopped; then it backed a ways and headed for the cliff," he said slowly. "The gear lever is set in low. The door on the driver's side is open."

"Exactly," Daulton replied quietly.

"It wasn't any accident — that's plain." Lane climbed into his auto. "Come on with me to Malabar's, Ed. There may be more to this."

"How about telling Drury's wife?" the other demurred.

"Get in," Lane bade him sharply. While he was speaking he started the motor. "Better to find out what we've got to tell her first, Ed!"

Daulton climbed in and they shot away into the fog.

WITH one hand upon the steering-wheel Lane groped into an inside pocket of his coat and brought forth a letter.

"Read that," he growled. His companion unfolded the sheet and bent forward, holding it beneath the dash lamp. It read:

Dear Lane:

I want you to keep this letter in case anything happens to me. My life has been threatened. If I should be killed, I leave this in your hands as an ante-mortem statement, accusing Frank Drury of my murder.

Jesse Malabar.

"I got it this afternoon," Lane said. "What do you think?"

"How did Malabar come to write to you, Tom?"

"I'd like to know that myself," Lane answered dryly. "We never were good friends. The only business dealings we've had were when I went on his bond as administrator of the Martin estate. And I did that only as a favor to his lawyers—after they put up good security."

Daulton smiled at the last statement.

"Malabar's sharp," said he, "and a sharp man don't write letters like that for the fun of it! But why didn't he send for the sheriff if he was afraid? What's his object in telling you?"

"If it comes to that," Lane retorted, "what's his object in living down the coast these last three months? Malabar likes comfort, and good wine, and the stock-market reports

. . . .

every morning. But he holes up in that house in Redwood cañon with Pete Romirez to do his chores and cooking—twenty miles from his office in Monterey!"

"If Malabar had named anybody else," Daulton said reflectively, "it might be easier to understand. But Frank Drury! I've known him since he was a kid. He hasn't an enemy the length of the coast road. And yet, what made him drive over the cliff? He was coming from Malabar's—"

"Look!" Lane interrupted sharply.

Here, where the road turned from the coast to climb a redwood cañon toward a distant summit, they saw the thick folds of the fog turning to the color of fresh blood. A sullen glow rose toward the hidden sky.

"Malabar's house—on fire," Tom Lane said quietly.

THE car roared up the winding grade. The light grew fiercer in the faces of the two men. They swung around a curve and saw Malabar's house—but it was now merely an incandescent shell spouting flames from a thousand glowing crevices. In its day it had been an ugly structure of split shakes—a glaring flimsy outrage two stories in height—but in this hour of dissolution it attained a strange, terrible beauty. The wavering light revealed what had once been a formal garden; it showed Malabar's green closed car standing beneath a shed; and the man-of-all-work, Pete Romirez, swinging a long-handled shovel, smothering flames which were creeping up the slope among the undergrowth. He turned at the sound of the motor and came to meet them.

"Where's Malabar?" Lane demanded. Pete Romirez made a single brief gesture, as graceful as it was indifferent, toward the blazing house.

"In there," he replied, and added with calm finality; "What's left of him!" He wiped his brow with his sleeve and leaned with both hands upon the shovel. "I dunno; thees is funny business—"

"Start at the beginning," Daulton bade him.

"Well, then; Malabar he's send me up the hill to mend some fence and I have been gone all afternoon. The fog is come down thick w'en I ride back. Mebbe ees pretty near an hour ago. I can joost see Frank Drury's car a-starting op the road. He goes lak hell. Then I ride by the house, on my way to the barn, an' look in the window. An' there is Malabar, a-laying on his face on the floor. And I theenk mebbe then he has been drinking too moch wine with Frank Drury; I don't bother my head no more about it. So I onsaddle my horse an' put up the saddle on the rack, an' turn the horse out; an' mebbe that takes me ten minutes; I dunno—mebbe more. W'en I am come back from the pasture-bars, here is the whole damn' house going up in smoke. Like a bunch of gunpowder. She's so hot I can't get near. That's all I know. But it looks funny!"

He took the shovel and dashed some dirt on a smoldering fence paling.

"Good theeng there aint no wind now," he remarked. "Mebbe somebody better tell the sheriff, hey?"

"It'll be morning before anybody can look through the ashes," Lane was saying to Daulton. "There's nothing more to be done here."

Darkness had come; the headlights were almost impotent in the fog and they took the winding road slowly. Lane was thinking of Marian Drury's face looking up into his, with dread in her eyes. And, like an answer to his thoughts, he heard Daulton ask:

"What are we going to tell her, Tom?"

"There's some things I'd like to find out first," Lane answered doggedly.

"Well, one of two things is plain enough." Daulton spoke slowly as one who weighs his words. "Either Frank Drury's body is in the ocean or else he has tried to make folks believe it is."

Lane was silent for a long time.

"We're not going to talk to Marian just yet," he announced finally when they reached the scene of the wreck and drew up beside the road. "I'm going to have another look." He took the flashlight from the door-pocket.

He had been searching the ground near by for nearly half an hour when he heard Daulton call out and hurried back to the car. His friend was standing on the grassy hillside above the highway.

"I'm sure I saw some one up here."

Daulton's voice was eloquent of perplexity. "But when I called they went right on. And I couldn't find a trace of 'em!" He swore at the fog. "A man could be within six feet of you and you'd never know where he was!" He started to get into his car. "Unless you've found something definite we better be getting on, Tom."

"Not a thing," Lane said wearily. "And yet—" He broke off abruptly. "Car coming down the road. Let's wait till it gets by." The headlights showed, blurred by the mist; the two men watched the dull gleam following the windings of the highway; now they could hear the low whine of the motor climbing the grade beside the inlet; it seemed the driver was unfamiliar with this route, for he was taking it with caution. They saw his face in the glow of the little dash-lamp as he reached the turn; then he went on by, and the tail-light glimmered out of sight.

Lane spoke sharply; a change had come into his voice.

"You saw it?"

"Scotty Allen's yellow cab," Daulton answered. "I was the first passenger, the day he got it. What's he doing down here, nearly twenty miles from town?"

"I've an idea he'll be coming back directly." Lane's voice was hard and eager now. "I want to see his fare, Ed. We can turn your car around and bring it out into the road beside mine."

This took but a few minutes. After it was done, Lane ordered: "Switch off the lights and when he comes around the bend, throw 'em on again. I'll hop on his running-board."

By Frederick Bechdolt

"Well, what's the idea?" The prisoner's voice was cold. "I'm taking you to the sheriff for the murder of Frank Drury," Lane replied sternly.

IT seemed a long time that they were waiting in the darkness with the dull roar of the surf in their ears. At last the headlights showed once more. It was evident the driver was making better time now. Daulton sat with his finger on the switch, wondering what his lamps were going to disclose; fearful that he knew already. The humming of the motor became audible. Now it was growing louder; the faint glow of the headlights showed, although the lights themselves were still hidden by the highway's abrupt turning. Suddenly they shot into view. He heard the shriek of brakes and threw on the switch.

The glare revealed Tom Lane.

"It's me—Tom Lane—Scotty!" Lane called. While he was speaking, the door of the cab swung open. Daulton saw the passenger leap out into the road; he saw the sheepskin coat, the soft hat drawn over the eyes. He also saw Lane holding a leveled revolver.

The man halted.

"I thought it would be you!" As Lane spoke Daulton got his first look at the passenger's face—turned toward him for an instant—all twisted with little lines of fear. And Daulton swore aloud. For this man was Malabar.

"Well—what's the idea?" The prisoner's voice was cold and level.

"I'm taking you to the sheriff for the murder of Frank Drury," Lane replied sternly. . . .

On their way to Monterey they stopped at Frank Drury's and Lane went in to tell Marian.

"This is one job I do not like," he said as he left the others. The fog was clearing now and the lamp-light from the cottage showed him walking slowly up the path; it showed his shoulders, bowed beneath the weight of the tidings which he bore. The door opened to his knock; it closed behind him. . . . .

Late the next morning Tom Lane was sitting in the sheriff's office. His back was toward the door; Malabar was sitting face to face with him. There were several others present, including a stenographer, who alone was unable to watch the changing emotions of the faces of the actors in this last scene of the drama—being too occupied with his pencils and shorthand-pad.

"When you made up your mind to clear out of the country," Lane was saying, "you picked that house in Redwood cañon because it would burn fast and there was no neighbor near. You looked about for a man of your size and build and you found Frank Drury. You staged a quarrel with him. You drew what money you could get your hands on from the bank. You telephoned Scotty Allen to come down the coast and to pick you up at the mouth of Redwood cañon; you gave the name of Frank Drury. You couldn't drive your own car, for it might be recognized."

Lane paused, fixing his gaze on Malabar.

"I don't know when you bought the poison," he said abruptly, "nor what it was. Likely choral."

Malabar laughed harshly. "You're crazy, man!"

Lane went on as if he had not spoken.

"You wrote me the letter which was to have gone on record as an ante-mortem statement accusing Drury of your murder. You sent for Drury, telling him that you wanted to apologize. You sent Pete Romirez away, and were in the house alone when Drury came. He believed your words. You drank a glass of wine with him. But his wine was drugged."

Lane paused again. Malabar was silent, rigid.

"It had all gone as smooth as clockwork. Drury's wife and me for witnesses to prove he was the murderer. You took off his sheepskin coat and hat and put them on. But the weather played a trick on you—the fog was late coming in and you had to wait. By the time it was getting thick enough for you to go out on the road, Pete Romirez came riding down the hill. You just managed to set fire to the house and drive off without his seeing you."

Lane's voice became like sharpened steel.

"After you left—while you were sending Drury's car over the cliff, while you were hiding in the fog waiting for Scotty's cab—something happened. You had waited too long, Malabar!"

As if the words had been a signal—as indeed they were—the door behind Lane was flung open. Malabar saw Frank Drury standing on the threshold.

His eyebrows were scorched away; his hands and arms were bandaged. The flames, which had revived him barely in time to save him from being consumed, had left their marks upon his face.

It was then that the prisoner broke down and confessed.

LEAVING the sheriff's office together, while the stenographer was still taking down the formal statement, Lane and Daulton fell to discussing the strange ways of chance, forever playing havoc with the plans of men.

"If the fog had been on time," the latter was saying, "we'd probably be identifying Drury's burned bones now as Malabar's."

His companion shook his head, but Daulton did not see it and went on:

"And then—if I'd caught Frank last evening when he was slipping past me on the hill, crazy from those knock-out drops, we'd never have waited there for Malabar."

"I would," Lane answered quietly. "But that was luck too. It happened that just before I got that letter yesterday afternoon, I was talking with the district attorney. He told me he had evidence that Malabar had been plunging on Anglo-Swiss Bank stock with the Martin estate money. So when I started down the coast, I had a suspicion that he was figuring on getting out from under. The more I saw, the surer I became."

He drew a deep breath of relief.

"And I never saw a sight so welcome as when I went into Frank Drury's house last evening and found him, still half-dazed, with his wife attending to his burns!"

The Road to the Stars

A brilliant story of great courage, cool thinking and extreme hazard above the blazing guns of the Western Front—by a writer new to these pages.

By MARK SEVEN

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

"CENTURIES of sporting gentry," snorted Major Leslie Thresher, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., "are required to breed a scout pilot. You want a fellow with the hands and the balance of a steeplechase rider, with the self-reliance of a swordsman, with a distaste for the mental effort of reckoning risks, and with the point of view which makes a sporting try a damn' sight more important than good judgment!" He submerged into an eight-inch whisky-and-soda.

The old fire-eater had been my company commander in the "bow and arrow" days of the Contemptibles and had figured with much distinction at First Ypres. However, when trench warfare became *de rigeur* on the whole Front, he announced that we might stick to our sewer-digging if we fancied it, but he was shoving-off to another job where a sportsman could get a little action for his money. So he got himself attached to the air service; and here he was, in the spring of '17, commanding the famous squadron which was equally the terror of the Germans and of the Royal Flying Corps.

I had stuck it out with the infantry, and was taking my battalion into rest billets in the rear areas of the Arras sector when we passed his drome near Avesnes-le-Comte. He heard his old regimental quickstep and drove down to the Roman Road in a tender to watch the Buffs go by, and his roar of "Halt, that party!" on recognizing me, almost shied my faithful Foxcatcher into the big drum. It ended up by my agreeing to spend a couple of days at his toyshop, despite certain qualms about the battalion-training schedule I'd planned on arriving at rest billets.

We dug ourselves in by the fireside in the anteroom of the deserted squadron mess—it was about eleven-thirty in the morning and his patrols were still in the air. After some reminiscences of forgotten fights and faces we got down to discussing things in general, and I provoked his outburst by criticizing the British policy of sending the fighting-planes to meet the Germans in their own territory instead of exploiting the tactical advantage in luring them over to our side of the lines as the French did. It appeared obvious that by so doing we should increase the number of enemy casualties enormously, and decrease our own in the same ratio.

It seemed I was quite wrong! The whole idea in aërial warfare was to convince the enemy that if he raised his nose from the ground it would be promptly smacked off his fuselage. But in order to induce this degree of conviction on the Germans, it was necessary to have pilots of the type the Major had described so succinctly.

"I'm only an old foot-slogger who still has to shave with cold water quite frequently," I told him, "and I can't claim to know much about your particular pidgin. You're probably right. But in view of the fact that these tin angels of yours are run by something that resembles the bowels of a taxicab, I should think you would find more of the resource needed in this game if you looked for it among fellows of mechanical inclination and training rather than among those from a class which can have no instinct in that direction. A horse may be relied upon to recognize a gentleman when he sees one, and to conduct himself accordingly—but I doubt that the brightest of your busses would respond from a mere sense of social consciousness. Surely flying makes greater demands on individual resource than on the qualities of command."

It did not seem to be my day to back a winner. The trouble with the sort of fellow I had in mind was that he thought and fought in terms of his machine—wanted to outfly his man, not to outfight him. "In the air or on the ground, it's determination that counts; determination and aggression—not tactical acrobatics," the Major declared. I could have my plumbers and boilermakers; his choice was a youngster with a bit of blood in him.

HE caught me frowning into my Scotch. "Oh, damn it all, old man," he relented, "I'm sorry. Talking to you as though you were still a one-piper! Fact is, I was a bit miffed—just before you showed up—by the very matter we've been discussing. Let's have another peg and I'll tell you."

We had another peg—and he began: "The commander of my A Flight is a chap called Crossett—a lowland-Scotch fellow—dour egg with absolutely no spark to him. Now he's exactly the type you mentioned as being likely to produce the sort of resource we might use to advantage: his people have manufactured machinery for generations, and the fellow himself did a good bit of amateur motor-bike racing before the war. But the result is that all he relies on is his motor, never on himself and never on his guns; doesn't hesitate to drop out of formation if he can't get maximum revolutions or has trouble holding height. Moral ascendancy means only altitude to him, and it would never occur to the blighter to take on the enemy unless he was situated to exploit some superior ability of his bus over the other fellow's. His planes are constantly in the hands of the air mechanics for tuning or tinkering, and he's consequently on the ground when his pals are flying. It was only with the greatest possible reluctance that I recommended him for the D.S.O.—he'd got his M.C. before he came here."

"Then he must have quite a few victories to his credit?" I asked with some surprise.

"Twenty-two," said the old berserker. "But he's been flying twice as long as any one I ever had in my squadron. Would you believe it, he actually passed up the chance of a go with Von Kresting—the Rittmeister himself?"

"The Circus fellow?" I asked. Even in the infantry we had heard of the Death-head Hussar in the magpie plane.

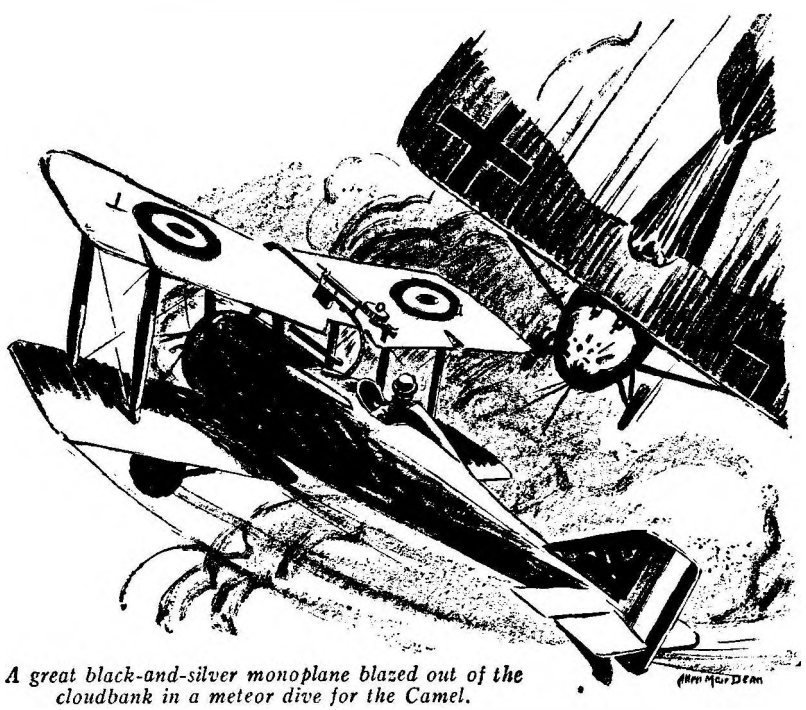
"Same bloke," nodded the Major. "Claimed he was at his ceiling and Von Kresting still had two thousand feet. Understand what that means, Colonel?"

"I think so—he was as high as his plane could climb: the German could go that much farther. Anything in it?"

"Oh, no doubt it was so. But any of the other fellows would have been willing to take on the Rittmeister—and I'm very keen that my squadron should get Von Kresting before some of those damn' poachers from Forty-seven bowl him out. Be quite a feather in our caps—even if Von Kresting has made his reputation by shooting down photographic busses."

"At least your man Crossett is still here to meet him lower down. I'd like to see it when it happens."

"Well, it won't be this afternoon," growled the Major. "I've grounded Crossett for being a damned insubordinate morale-breaker."



A great black-and-silver monoplane blazed out of the cloudbank in a meteor dive for the Camel.

"I hope you're right about it, Thresher. This fellow sounds like a pretty useful man to me. If he hasn't got the stuff you want for a commander, why not give him a lone hand?"

"Just hold on for a minute and you'll change your mind. For the past week A Flight has been training with an entirely new bus which has never been over the line till today. Only a few of them were available at the distributing base, so B and C Flights have to stick to their Nieuports a bit longer. The new plane is called the Camel, because there's a hump in the fuselage behind the cockpit—and it's the last word in a single-seater scout, a magnificent fighting-machine!

"Well, after I had revised flight tactics to conform to the requirements of the new bus and had got the brave lads a bit bucked with the idea that it would make Albatross strafing seem like pigeon-shooting, what do you suppose this Crossett gave vent to in the mess last night—on the eve of his own flight's first offensive patrol?"

"Can't imagine."

"The port had circulated, and everybody was drinking to 'The King and the Camels,' when the blighter chimed in with, 'God save them both!'

"Of course I got furious and demanded to know what he had to grouse about. 'The damn' thing banks like a tank,' he announced calmly. According to him, it would be a bloody sight easier to enter the Kingdom of Heaven in a Camel than it would be for a profiteer to pass through the eye of a needle. Just like a damned Scotsman, to quote Scripture when he wants to be disagreeable!

"I had to do something about it instantly, so I turned to Barrie Bowen—plucky little beggar just out of Lansing; never been over the line—and asked him, 'How about it, infant? Are you funked to fly a Camel in A Flight till I can get one of the new Fokkers for Captain Crossett?' The kid's eyes sparkled. 'I've been afraid some one might pot Von Kresting before you let me go up, sir!' And he grinned, keen as mustard. So I told Crossett he could turn his command over to Rodgers and consider himself grounded as acting equipment officer until we could get him a German plane."

"That was a damn' stupid remark of his under the circumstances," I admitted, "but was there any merit in it—conceding it should not have been made?"

"Well, you see, you can't build a plane on the basis of a compromise. If you were to make a bus with the best average of all good qualities, you would have one that'd be at the mercy of everything on the Front, for it'd have no adequate margin of superiority anywhere. It would be just a little better than the others at all points except one, and in that one it would be hopelessly outclassed. You must give a machine some special ability upon which it can rely, and this advantage must be paid for by lessened effectiveness in another direction—speed at the cost of strength, climbing power at the price of diving ability, and so on, in just the way a battleship has to sacrifice guns for armor, or armor for knots.

"Now the Camel was designed to exploit a new type of very light and tremendously powerful motor which enables it to outfly anything at high altitudes. You know enough about flying to appreciate what a vital advantage this is in aerial action. Besides that, it can dive, climb, or travel with the best of them at any level. But for some reason—which I suspect is in the balancing of the motor—it can bank to the right only in a wide slow arc and will lose height in making the maneuver. As both fellows in an air-fight are circling one another continuously, this is a bit of a disadvantage—especially in a single-seater where the guns are fixed and can fire only straight ahead of the plane."

"I see," said I. "It lets the other chap get on to one's tail and one can't shoot back at him while he's there. That's a bit thick, isn't it?"

"Well, perhaps it is—if one isn't keeping him too busy for that sort of thing. But on the other hand, the Camel can bank to the left like a flash."

"Evens it up," I remarked.

"Quite so," said the Major, reassured, "What you lose on the roundabouts you make up on the swings."

AT this instant an orderly came up to Thresher and saluted. "B and C Flights are back, sir, and A Flight is just coming in," he reported.

"Right!" said my host. "Let's toddle down and watch them land."

We left the mess and strolled through the lines of pilots' quarters onto the big flying-field flanked by its squat, arch-roofed hangars. A group of "ack emmas"—air mechanics—were at their landing stations; and a solitary officer—conspicuous because he wore the black-and-white-diced beret of the Scottish Horse instead of the R.F.C's unmentionable headgear—was watching five planes circle into the wind preparatory to landing. He saluted as we came up to him.

"Well, Crossett," said the Major, "they seem to be coming in one short!"

The first Camel roared onto the field and taxied toward us, followed by four others in spiral succession. It was my first intimate view of a scout machine, and I was appalled at the tremendous speed with which they met the ground—even after Thresher protested they had the lowest landing rate of any fighting-bus. Doll-like pilots in their goggled helmets, teddy-bear Sidcup suits, and boxing-glove mittens clambered out of the cockpits and ambled toward us while the ack emmas commenced to wheel the planes into the hangars.

"He kens he has to watch a Camel when it comes over to the left an' that it can no bank right without suicide."

"And how about it, Rodgers?" said the Major.

The flight commander saluted. "Sorry, sir; there's absolutely nothing to report. We patrolled the whole sector and never saw a Hun. The Circus doesn't seem to be in the air today—can't understand it at all, sir."

"What's become of the infant?"

"Oh, he lost contact with us after we crossed the lines on our way back—it's a bit thick overhead. He'll be along presently; be good experience for him to find the way home on his own."

"That'll be his engine now," said Crossett quietly.

He was standing beside me with his hands in his breeches pockets, legs spread apart and shoulders relaxed; his head was cocked sideways and the diced beret drooped over an ear as he watched the sky.

We turned and followed his gaze as the sixth Camel came into view, about a mile away and at considerable altitude. Bowen was evidently following the line of the Roman Road till he could pick up some familiar local landmark.

"Good God, sir!" gasped Rodgers as five fish-tailed planes swooped from a cloudbank onto the solitary lad.

BONG! An N.C.O. had picked up a spanner and swung it against a suspended shell-casing. Canvas hangings flew back from hangar entrances and planes began to roll out into the open; ack emmas were scuttling to stations; the A Flight pilots around us broke and ran for their cockpits while B and C came charging out of quarters, buckling on helmets as they sprinted over the turf. The enemy planes had circled the Camel; its escape westward was blocked.

"Spin!" howled the Major. "Bring them down into machine-gun range. Right over my damned drome—what bloody cheek!"

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! An unseen anti-aircraft gun was going into action near by. *Ah-a-a-ah—tat-tat-tat-tat. Ah-a-a-ah!* shrieked a Vickers traversing from its high-angle mounting. The Front began to rage; white balls of cotton-wool were spotting the sky.

Captain Crossett still stood beside me, looking upward. I noticed that his relaxed posture was unchanged in the midst of the panic around us. "Followed them over," he murmured. "Poor wee devil—on his first day up!"

As though it were the staged finale of a melodrama, a great black-and-silver monoplane blazed out of the cloudbank with roaring engine and screaming struts in a meteor dive for the doomed Camel—bayed for the kill by the ring of circling planes.

Where the guns before had been a chattering angry snarl, they seemed instantly to beat themselves into a howling crescendo of fury. In twenty square miles around us, overeager, raging, cursing men were ripping shells into smoking bores, straining the hopping cartridge-belts, or slamming magazine-drums onto loading-posts to speak the words Thresher's lips could only frame: "Von Kresting! The Rittmeister!"

The monoplane swept down past its prey and rocketed back over it. There was too much gunfire to hear the stutter of its spandaus, and I waited for the wisp of smoke from the English plane's fuel-tank that would spell the end.

"He didna fire," said Crossett, without turning his head.

"Guns jammed, by God!" bellowed Thresher.

"I'm thinkin' no, sir," said the Scotsman.

And then occurred something I have never been able to remember without a choking throat. Two miles up in the sky, ringed in by foes, alone—and God, how much alone he must have been!—with his one faint chance to avoid a blazing death by diving earthward, that little English schoolboy braced his feet against the rudder-bar, opened the throttle, and pushed the joystick forward to send the Camel racing down with Von Kresting close behind; then he drew it straight back to his breast and looped—looped right on to the tail of Germany's greatest ace—looped, and with roaring guns drove in to ram!

"Blood," said the Major proudly.

"Had him taped," muttered Crossett sadly, "and got into the backwash. Poor wee devil—how could he remember?"

In his eagerness and inexperience, Bowen had come too straight at the tail of the German plane and its backwash sent the Camel reeling for an instant in which his Vickers sprayed the heavens. It was just the fraction of a second, but it saved Von Kresting and he evaded Bowen's rush with the contemptuous ease of a matador.

Then followed a game of cat-and-mouse with a significance beyond me. The other five Huns were taking no part in the fight and were either protecting their leader or else blocking Bowen's escape. Time and time again the Rittmeister came at the Camel and laid it open for a burst from his silent spandaus without once giving Bowen

a chance to see him through the ring-sights. It was dazzling flying. From above, from below, from front, from rear, in every possible variation of attack, he lanced in, till one grew sick to think of the poor youngster fluttering, twisting, and writhing in space in a vain, brave effort to meet elusive death face-to-face!

Finally the Rittmeister dived in from the right rear and the English plane banked left to avoid him: the Camel winged over like a whiplash, and Bowen caught him with a burst that sent the splinters flying from the windshield and brought a yell from the ack emmas. It was a close call; but back came Von Kresting on the reverse line, and forced the Camel into a long, lumbering right bank that left him sitting on its tail. He hovered, deliberately repeated the maneuver; again the Camel sailed out in a slow, falling arc to the right.

Crossett nodded his head—two slow, satisfied nods. "He kens it all the noo. This'll be the end o' Bowen."

"Not all, Captain Crossett," said the Major in an icy tone. "He has yet to find out if a Camel can dive!"

But it wasn't the end of Bowen. The black-and-silver wings waggled twice; the circling planes dropped into familiar wedge-formation about the monoplane; and as they sped off into the east, Von Kresting's arm appeared from his cockpit to wave a cheery salute.

It was a gesture worthy of the great ace. He had undoubtedly spared the youngster because already he had inflicted the anguish of half a dozen deaths on him.

The Major signaled to an ack emma and gave him an order. "At the double to my quarters, Perkins, and get here before he comes in." The air-mechanic bunked off.

A FEW minutes later Bowen led A Flight back to the airdrome. They had met him on his way back—it takes considerably more time to make ten thousand feet of altitude than it does to describe an action fought at the speed of a hundred miles per hour. He made a somewhat bumpy landing and taxied up to where we were waiting, switched off his engine, and sank back in his seat.

"Stand fast!" ordered the Major to the eager group of pilots and mechanics. "Come on, old man, help me give him a hand out of his bus."

Bowen was slumped in the seat, his arms dangling between his legs like a marionette's. The goggles of his helmet had been raised to the leather brow-piece—I suspected tears had dimmed the glasses till he could no longer see through them. His eyes were downcast, and he seemed to have collapsed from the ghastly tension to which he had been subjected. No bloody wonder—I'd rather have gone through the entire Somme show again than take what he'd had in the last half hour! It was only when I saw the Major suppress the smile at the corners of his mouth that I realized how totally wrong I was. The kid was crying because he thought he'd been shamed before his squadron, before an entire army corps; he was sick with humiliation because, instead of killing him, Von Kresting had sent him home to swallow his disgrace!

"Get out, Mr. Bowen." The Major's voice had the old parade-ground rasp in it.

"Yes, sir." Bowen rose slowly and started to clamber from the cockpit. The Major stretched up his hand; the boy's closed over it to steady himself. He jumped down—then he stood transfixed, staring at the palm of his gauntlet.

"It didn't seem necessary to keep you waiting till it came through orders, infant," said Thresher, waving his hat to the spectators. Against the black leather of the glove gleamed the long-stemmed silver cross on its purple-and-white ribbon—the Major's own M.C.!

THEN they howled behind us; and the pilots of all three flights swarmed round the bewildered boy, smacking him on the shoulder-blades, greeting him with that weird, all-embracing, unprintable accolade of the Royal Flying Corps, till a spontaneous impulse headed the whole riot in the direction of the mess bar. As we left the field I looked back; Captain Crossett was standing by the propeller of Bowen's plane and pointing to the engine, talking slowly and deliberately to the sergeant-mechanic and the entire force of ack emmas. They seemed intensely interested in what he had to say. . . .

When we sat down to lunch in the mess, the Major set Bowen on his left in honor of the occasion and waved me to the chair on his right. I asked him if he minded my finding a seat among the pilots, as I wished to improve the opportunity of getting some insight to the air service at first hand. This was quite all right so far as he was concerned, and I managed to bag the place I wanted, next to Crossett. In spite of being a damned unresponsive sort of egg, he sensed my sympathetic interest.

After disposing of the custard and tinned apricots, the Major announced there would be a change in the afternoon's program. Von Kresting and his Circus clowns had had the bloody effrontery that morning to come over their drome in what was evidently intended to be an attack on the squadron's morale.

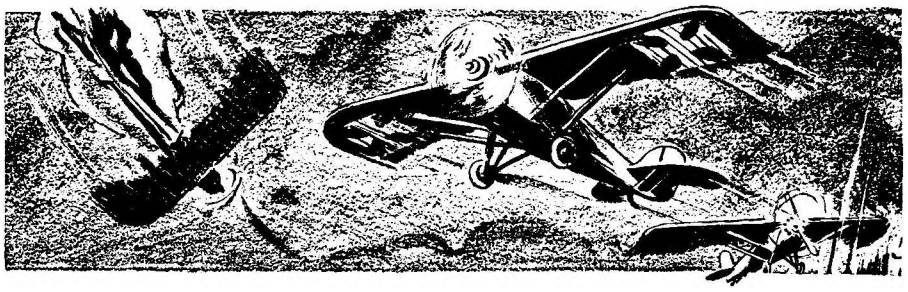
It had not come off—a novice pilot of the Camel flight had met him at odds of six-to-one without the slightest hesitation, and the Rittmeister had twice escaped being shot down only by sheer luck.

The squadron was proud of Mr. Bowen because he had repelled the attack on its morale single-handed, and also because he had repelled it with the courage and offensive audacity which the R.F.C. knew damn' well to be the best—the only possible—aerial defense. Mr. Bowen had done his part, but that was not to be enough for the rest of them.

Von Kresting and the Circus had never been known to cross the line before today, so his coming could only be considered as a defiance to the squadron—a defiance flung to them in front of the entire Third Army! Very well; they would accept the challenge; they would show the Rittmeister how much he had shaken their morale: A Flight Camels, B and C Flight Nieuports, with two flights of D.H.9's from Major Sliter's squadron, would proceed to Douai that afternoon and blow the Circus drome there to hell! The bombers were to take the air at four pip emma, the scout flights to join them as they crossed the line—taking stations at their designated altitudes.

"It'll be a dog-fight," said Crossett.

"Flight commanders will confer immediately," continued the Major; then he added something casually which chilled my spine: "You're coming along with me, Colonel, in my two-seater. Headquarters won't allow a squadron commander to cross



the Front—but if anything happens to Von Kresting this afternoon, you'll have a seat in the stalls!"

"Sir," interposed Crossett, "I gave an order for a wee bit of work on Mr. Bowen's bus; I'm afraid he'll no be able to take it up this afternoon."

"But it was quite all right when I landed!" protested the lad.

He had now begun to have visions of a bar to his cross.

"Doesn't matter," said Thresher curtly to Crossett. "I meant to tell him he had done his job for the day and he could keep you company till we got back." Then he slapped Bowen on the shoulder. "Chance to write and tell the pater there's an M.C. in the family, my lad!"

The youth smiled instantly. "By Jove, sir, I'd forgotten about that. Rather!"

"Carry on, gentlemen," nodded the Major, and everyone got up from the table and swarmed into the anteroom. I cornered Crossett.

"Look here—I want to ask you something."

"Verra well, sir."

"Just what was the black-and-white Hun playing at this morning? The 'morale' explanation I've just heard, fails to carry conviction."

Crossett smiled. "I'm thinkin', sir, that yon Von Kresting ducked A Flight the day, because he saw them up with a new machine. He would no be wantin' to attack them till he kenned what it could do and, maybe, what it could no be doing. I'm thinkin' that he followed them back over our Front hopin' maybe one of them would lose contact and give him a chance to be findin' out—and Bowen did that verra thing. When he saw the kid was no much o' a flyer, he made him put the Camel through everything in the box—ye saw him do it yersel', sir. He kens the noo that he must watch a Camel when it comes over to the left, and that it can no bank right without committin' suicide."

One of the Nieuports was going down in a blazing spin, tangled with an enemy plane it had rammed in its death effort. . . . A Camel was diving earthward with two Albatrosses on its tail, dodging four spandau bullet-streams.

"My God! Aren't you going to say anything to the others about it?"

"What for, sir? They're all kennin' it, and the Major's kennin' it too. But it would no be good for their morale to talk about it. I found that out last night. But you'll no shoot down Von Kresting with morale!"

"Mr. Bowen almost did, this morning."

"Aye sir, and that's the hell o' it! If he'd dived away from them like a sensible man he might have been dead the noo; but he didna, so he gets the M.C. and the Circus will napoo the whole of A Flight before the end of the week—unless—"

"Unless what, Captain Crossett?"

"Unless there's one thing yon Von Kresting doesna ken about a Camel."

"Meaning?" I asked.

"That I ken he kens," said Captain Crossett, as he turned away. . . .

I should have been able to describe that dog-fight over Douai airdrome with much more accuracy of detail had I not spent half of the time looking backward over my shoulder instead of watching the battle. Do what I would, the specter of that black-and-silver monoplane haunted me there in midair, ten thousand feet above the Scarpe and the crumpled honeycomb that was Arras cathedral, and only when Von Kresting appeared in the action raging far to the northeast did I relax sufficiently to have any coherent idea of what was happening. Therefore it has been necessary to add to my own observations details gleaned from participants—though lacking the full flavor of the jargon in which they were told to me.

To begin with, we had luck. Our eight bombers, the D.H.9s, crossed the line into the enemy areas with a thick carpet of fleecy cloud hiding them from the sausage balloons and the hostile anti-aircraft fire; they were followed by two flights of six Nieuports at thousand-foot intervals of altitude, and then came the five Camels high over all. The whole formation was echeloned to the right to keep the dazzling light of the afternoon sun straight in rear so as to hide its visible approach from the enemy as long as possible; though of course the noise of the motors would be picked up by the ground stations, the course plotted, and warnings relayed to rear areas before the objective was reached.

Last of all came the Major in his two-seater, with this gallant observer in the rear cockpit clinging to the mounting of a stripped Lewis gun and trying to snap his head off-shoulder every five seconds to see if Von Kresting was diving on to our tail. The whole business was a horrid sensation, and I had a suspicion that the only decent thing for me to do would be to return my medals to the War Office immediately on landing.

As we were not going any farther, the Major announced through the earphones that we'd pop down and have a look at the line for my entertainment. We did, and my first childish reaction was to note its astounding resemblance to the map. There was Railroad Triangle, the Hertz Redoubt, Island Post, and the Crow's Nest; and there was my late battalion front with the crater in it made by a flying pig yesterday morning. Then some swine let go at us with an anti-aircraft gun!

Now, it's a nerve-wracking experience to have to walk through the barrage in an attack on the ground—anybody will admit that. On the other hand, it has the merit of being quite an impersonal affair—no one is shooting at you in particular; you're just an inconspicuous, unidentifiable member of a mob, and there's the decency of some little opportunity for emotional privacy. The whole idea is simply to get through a curtain of shells at times and

places when or where they're not bursting. A mere matter of good or bad luck—and no hard feelings anywhere. But sitting in an orange-crate at five thousand feet in the sky is quite another story! You feel a dull thud on the floorboards from the concussion of a bursting shell—a possibility you'd overlooked—and there's the instant realization that it came from a gun which was ranged and sighted on you personally; you take a stiff-necked glance over the side hurriedly and see the whole Western Front looking up critically. The sensation is indescribable: there's the flesh-cringing dream-feeling of appearing stark naked in the middle of Piccadilly Circus —some sort of a cross between *Lady Godiva* and *Sydney Carton*—as well as being funked to death! More bursts arrived in our vicinity—balls of white curling smoke.

"You needn't get the wind up," said the Major. "No chance of their hitting anything!"

To my temporary relief we climbed back through the dissolving clouds, and by the time we reached ten thousand feet it was obvious there was dirty work at the crossroads in the vicinity of Douai airdrome. . . .

The Germans knew enough about Major Leslie Thresher to expect trouble that afternoon and were in the air to await it. They had about twenty Albatri to meet our seventeen scouts, but they hadn't anticipated the bombers and were handicapped by failing to see their approach through the sun-glare till they were within striking distance of the objective. The D.H.9s started down in the wheel formation that would enable them to protect each other's tails and to be headed for home as soon as they had dropped their eggs. They were two-seaters, carrying an officer-gunner in the rear cockpit, but they were clumsy in maneuver when compared to a scout plane and were extremely vulnerable from certain angles—particularly from below. Hell started popping from the drome, and the whistling shriek of the first bomb was followed by a rumbling explosion and a volcano of wooden framework. Down came a flock of enemy planes—God knows from where; I hadn't seen one of them a second previously, though the Major had counted them for my benefit —but the first flight of Nieuports dived into them before they could reach the circling De Havilands; another flock of fish-tails swooped into the fight and the second Nieuport flight piled into them right handsomely. Everyone mulled about taking a burst at anything that came in line with his sights; there was no formation left on either side except where the bombers were plunking their T.N.T. with metronomic detonations.

Three German planes were sent down with no loss to us—the Nieuports were excellent machines at their own altitude; getting a bit antedated in terms of speed, perhaps, but that did not matter so much on this occasion, for the enemy had to carry the fight to them to get at the bombers.

"Good man, Rodgers," said Thresher, as five more Albatri dived into the battle. "He's outguessed them!" Then A Flight whizzed down in splendid style, having exploited their high ceiling successfully.

"What in hell's this?" barked Thresher. "There seem to be six Camels there! You don't suppose Bowen came along? No, by gad—it's Crossett—tell him by his flying, anywhere! Broken arrest, has he? See about that later! Well, why the devil don't you hack into it?"

Above the barking, spitting dog-fight, the pilot of the sixth plane had checked his dive, straightened out, and was circling the battle about five hundred feet overhead, seeming to be in search of an easy opening. We saw the tracers fly as he fired a burst to warm his guns. One of the Nieuports was going down in a blazing spin, tangled with an enemy plane it had opportunely rammed in its death-effort. A Camel was diving earthward with two Albatrosses on its tail, dodging four spandau bullet-streams of some two thousand machine-gun rounds per minute—enough to stop a battalion of infantry. A tailless Albatross was reeling drunkenly through the fight, flopping its dead pilot on his belt from side to side of the cockpit.

"Damn you, get into it!" howled the Major against my eardrums.

In the cockpit of the poised Camel, Captain Crossett felt his controls lightly with feet and fingers, and the plane answered each touch with the response of a bridled thoroughbred to the hands of a horseman. He was not watching the fight—where the circling, tail-swishing sharks of the sky were battling below in the deafening silence of his engine-roar—he was watching the air above him from the mirror clipped to his instrument-board. There was nothing visible in the glass and he grinned grimly, throttled down, and glanced at the scrap.

Underneath him, Rodgers had got on to the tail of an Albatross and was pasting it into splinters; the frantic pilot dodged somehow out of the line of fire and tried to wipe the streaming blood from his goggles. Crossett nosed down slightly as though he were going to dive on the helpless plane: and then, in the mirror, he saw what he had been waiting for—the black-and-silver monoplane was dropping toward him like a plummet!

CROSSETT was the only pilot in the squadron who used a mirror; and while he usually relied on it only in a casual manner, today it was to serve him in a double purpose. It had warned him of the Rittmeister's dive,

and it was now deceiving the German into thinking that his attack was unobserved since he had not seen Crossett turn in the cockpit to look behind him. The Scotsman had staked everything on being able to finish the duel with a minimum of flying.

The timing was perfection—before the surprised attacker could check his dive, the Camel's nose pulled up against a wide-open throttle and it shot past him like an arrow, Immelmanned, and as the monoplane flattened into a climbing turn they were on even terms—circling each other at a hundred yards range. Crossett made no move.

"Attack!" crashed the Major. "Don't let him get the jump on you!"

But the German waited only long enough to make sure his opponent was a Camel; then he rose in an almost vertical zoom and dived at Crossett's left rear struts to force him into the fatal bank. The Rittmeister's thumbs found the triggers and he peered through his spandau sights. It would be all over in an instant.

In our plane, miles away, I heard the Major's yelp of astonishment. The Camel—that should have banked to the right like a tank—was whipping over onto a wing tip like a jacksnipe!

Through his ring-sights the waiting Rittmeister saw only the sky. Something, like the blow of a sledgehammer, jarred him between the shoulder-blades. The glass of his windshield was splattering and the propeller blades were screaming in a buzz-saw agony. He tried to reach for the stick, but his arm slid past his knees in a pendulum swing. Then his airdrome came into view at a slanting angle—burning hangars, shattered huts, with ant-like figures running madly about. It commenced to revolve—buildings, field, fences, and figures began to rotate slowly like a merry-go-round; then faster and faster into a widening, whirling pin-wheel it spun—racing up to meet him through the choking black smoke from his flaming tank, through the raging drench of lead from Crossett's Vickers that was shattering the black-and-silver pride of an empire into a tangled, flapping mass of blazing raffle.

WE neither saw the rest of the scrap nor got back to the airdrome in time for the squadron's return because at this precise moment the Major's motor elected to conk out, and we made the most blasphemous forced landing ever recorded on the Western Front in the rolling meadow between the ramparts and the Saint Pol road near the Baudimont Gate. Think of it! Seven hundred hours in his logbook without so much as a missing cylinder—and a Heaven-hated, misbegotten Beardmore goes *phut* under him, with the Rittmeister to claim for his squadron and half the bloody Circus being smacked down into a hole in the ground that had been their airdrome!

He was as impossible as a hedgehog as we clambered on to the tailboard of an A.S.C. lorry and crawled along the Roman Road through the steady counter-currents of guns, troops, and transport that were eddying in and out of Arras. We got off at a second-line Balloon Company station and were informed there that four of our planes had been downed in the fight while the Germans had lost eight—eight and the Rittmeister, brought down in flames by a Camel. Then it was only a matter of phoning the drome—"Captain Crossett, 'e got Von Kresting, sir!"—for a lorry to pick up our plane, and a dash for home in the Balloon Section's tender.

It was about eight o'clock by the time we reached the drome and found that mess had been set back for our return. The bar was jammed, and it seemed half the R. F. C. had come over to assist Thresher's lot in getting riotously tight, though as a matter of fact the guests were limited to the De Haviland pilots and an envious group of beribboned aces from the famous squadron which took its name—and sacrificed immortality thereby—from three of the greatest pilots that ever flew. A row of chubby-faced youngsters lined the bar; Rodgers was at the piano pounding out, "If you were the only girl in the world," and a Rugby scrum of alcoholics around him sang the chorus over swaying glasses. Captain Crossett, with the black-and-white-diced beret of the Scottish Horse still drooping over one ear, leaned lazily over a swarming table and explained the proper method of keeping clear of a backwash, while Second Lieutenant Bowen clung hopefully to a Scotch-and-soda and nodded with difficulty at regular intervals. At another crowded table Major Gordon-Cummings of Forty-seven, a tall slender Blues type with a rimless monocle impaled into an eye-socket, was inhaling a cocktail and proclaiming that while Hawker, Bishop, and McCudden might have been pretty good, no man had ever met Stanley Ball in single combat and come back to tell of it—shot down five of the enemy his first fight; got over fifty of 'em all told; dived alone into the whole bloody Circus to get Richthofen and died—but died in good company! A tear from his uncorked eye splashed into the Martini.

THE whole assembly rose and cheered the Major furiously as we entered, and he beamed on all of them and shouted for a case of the '04 Cordon Rouge. He went over to welcome Gordon-Cummings and collected a sheaf of orders, confirmations, and congratulations *en route* from an orderly-room runner. Somebody brought me a drink, a vile concoction of port and cognac known as a "stinger," but I drank the stuff and almost enjoyed it.

While this hectic revel was in progress, four youngsters who had clinked glasses over that same bar at noon were lying mangled underneath their engines, or were black, shapeless embers behind the German lines. I'd never have tolerated it in my own mess, but I'd seen enough of the furious tempo of aërial warfare to understand.

It was not out of place here. In the infantry we did not rise to face the unrelenting lightnings every morning of our lives. Far from it; there were months of the boredom and discomfort of tours of trench-duty for every day of risk comparable to fighting in the air.

But these schoolboys flew out to mortal combat at every sunrise, so there was no time to mourn pals who had gone west in the afternoon when the certain span of their own existence was limited by tomorrow's dawn patrol. Especially as there was always the sickening suspicion that one might be in reality grieving for a visioned corpse with a much more familiar asbestos identification-disc on its charred wrist! They lived at a peak of nerve tension that had to be sustained in the relaxing moments of security by some equally virulent stimulant of excitement.

Sooner or later every one of them would crack, but it would be all crescendo till the strings snapped—there was no turning back on the road to the stars! *"Ad Astra"*—they wore the winged words of doom on their foreheads, and it is neither a boast nor a lie to say that no service in any other arm or army fought with their unquenchable aggression. Let the score-sheet—in black ink or red—witness alone to that.

Out of battle, they were only kids with a frenzy for the things in life they hadn't experienced but wanted to touch and taste, the things out of which they feared the sunrise might cheat them—champagne, glory, and girls, with the bars down. Bensted, Brewer, Pelam, and Duncan had gone out today. What of it? You'd probably be following them tomorrow yourself! *"Ad Astra,"* pledged Major Gordon-Cummings and you clinked glasses with him—

you'd signed on for that trip and the bus left at dawn. But tonight you'd drink, *"Ad Split-Astra!"* since one of the best of them—old man Crossett of your own lot, with the Rittmeister's scalp at his belt—was at the bar beside you. "Have one with me, Skipper!"

I managed to make my way through the mob to the end of the bar where Captain Crossett was lounging against the wall.

"Look here, Crossett, that was a splendid show of yours this afternoon and I want to hear the inside story of it; but if I drink another of these 'stinger' things, it's going to be Last Post for me. So you'd better get on with it now, before it's too late."

"There's no such a lot to be tellin', sir," said the Scotsman, swirling the whisky-and-soda in his glass. "Ye ken yersel' how that Von Kresting tried out the Camel this mornin' and found that it could no make a bank to the right. Well, I got to thinkin' how I could use his kennin' that against him, and verra soon I got the idea. Ye see, sir, the reason a Camel can no bank to the right is because it's a light bus with a verra powerful rotary engine. Are ye kennin' what a rotary engine will be, sir?"

"I'm afraid not, Captain," I answered.

"Well, sir," Crossett explained, "in a rotary engine the cylinders spin round the crankshaft when the motor is runnin'."

"Oh, quite so! Now that you explain, I did notice that, this morning."

"Well, this rotation of the cylinders sets up a centrifugal pull in the same direction as they turn; in the Camel, that makes for a verra fast bank to the left where the pull is with the plane, and a verra hard bank to the right with the pull against it. They tried to compensate for this by offsettin' the alignment of the rudder so that she'd steer against the pull—ye'll see what I mean if ye'll take a look along a fuselage—but it's no' verra successful. So this afternoon I got the sergeant-mechanic to reverse the whole engine-block on Bowen's bus, and—"

"My God! You mean you reversed the direction of the rotation of the cylinders?"

"Aye sir—just that verra thing. The Camel could then bank right but could no' bank left. Mind sir, that would no' have made any verra great difference if yon Von Kresting had no' kenned what he kenned."

"Hot stuff, Crossett!" I shouted. "The Huns don't know now on which bank a Camel is slow!"

"Aye, sir. But I didna think o' that till I got back. The ack emmas are reversin' half the squadron's engine-blocks the noo—"

"And the other half remain as they are!" I finished. Crossett nodded.

The raging lead from Crossett's Vickers was shattering the pride of an empire into a tangled mass of blazing raffle.

"I was watchin' Von Kresting every chance I got, and I kenned he always lay above his own flight so they could cut some one out for him to make the kill. It was no bad flight tactics either, since he was the best machine-gun shot in the German army and counted on gettin' his man at the first burst every time. So I didna get into the dog-fight because when I saw his flight come down I kenned well he was waitin' above, and I didna want to do any flyin' before I met him. At that, I had to let on I was divin' on a cripple before I got him started down. He was no' takin' any chances—ye canna have taken many chances if ye've got over seventy planes to yer credit! All I was askin' was to have him on the same level with me, because I kenned damned well he'd force me into a right bank—him thinkin' I could no make it without lettin' him onto my tail. Well, he came down and tried it, just as I thought he would. I'm thinkin' because he kenned what was goin' to happen he was no' watchin' what really did—the way he'd have been watchin' if he'd no have kenned. It's a great mistake, sir, to take anything for granted—I got him below the neck with my first tracer."

THE Major and Gordon-Cummings of Forty-seven came barging over with fizz glasses and a red-collared magnum.

"Crossett, my lad," bellowed Thresher, "I'm proud of you—even if you're a bloody, insubordinate, stiff-necked Scotsman who's defied me before my own squadron! I ought to break you for deliberate disobedience of orders. You're still grounded for fourteen days—discipline will be maintained at any cost; but you can serve out your time in Paris. While you're there, I'll see what can be done about another ribbon for that sloppy-looking tunic you're wearing—and button it up properly at once, sir!" He handed Crossett a glass, and Gordon-Cummings filled it full.

"Drink to the squadron!" said the Major.

"The squadron, sir!" said the Scotsman, coming to attention.

"Right!" said Thresher. "First and last, the squadron; right or wrong, the squadron!"

"I ken well what you mean, Major."

"And you're a damn' fine pilot, Crossett. With a little more dash and a little less sense, you'd be the best of them all; better than Hawker, better than McCudden, better than,"—he looked squarely at Gordon-Cummings, —"better than Ball!"

The Scotsman set down the empty champagne goblet. "That's verra good of you, Major—verra handsome." He smiled slowly into the glass. "But I'm thinkin' Hawker and McCudden and Stanley Ball are dead!" said Captain Crossett.

The Hot Trail

An engrossing detective story by the able author of "Murder for Sale."

By SEVEN ANDERTON

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

"IF I had been on the scene of the theft before all the police, servants and guests made a complete mess of it," growled Saxon Young, "I would have saved weeks of work in recovering Mrs. Seymour's jewels and capturing the thief."

"Well," I soothed him, "you got the jewels back and put one clever thief where he will not pilfer for some time. So why worry?"

"It makes me mad," answered my friend, "because it happens constantly. I went to the mat with Captain Blackmer about it this morning.

"I told Blackmer that I could track down any criminal within twenty-four hours, provided I could be first, or among the first, on the scene of the crime and be there within an hour after it was committed."

"What did Blackmer say?" I inquired.

"Promised to give me a chance at the first opportunity," answered Young, starting to set up his chess men again. "I hope he keeps his word. . . . One more game and we'll call it a night," he said.

WE had been playing for three hours and it was nearing midnight. Suddenly the sound of a shot echoed through the building. Then there came the scream of a woman in mortal terror. Both Young and myself leaped to our feet. A second shot crashed on our ears. A couple of long strides carried Young to the door of his apartment. I was at his shoulder when he opened it and stepped into the hall.

All along the long hall, other doors were opening. Women were asking questions in excited voices. Half a dozen men in dressing-gowns or bathrobes and house slippers were in the hall. From somewhere near came moans of anguish that gradually grew fainter until they ceased abruptly.

Saxon Young strode across the hall to a door on which was the figure 11 in brass numerals. "It's in here," he said to the gathering tenants, as he tried the door.

The stout door was locked. It resisted stubbornly as Saxon Young flung his gaunt, but powerful frame against it. Others gathered to aid him.

"Call the police, Hawley," Young snapped at me as he turned for a new attack on the door. "Get Captain Blackmer if he's at headquarters and tell him I'm on the job."

When I returned from the telephone in Young's apartment, the door of Apartment Eleven had yielded to the combined attack of Young and two other men. The lights in the apartment were burning. My friend stood in the open door. Beyond him I could see floating wisps of smoke, and the faint odor of burned powder had floated into the hall.

"Did you get Blackmer?" demanded Young.

"Yes," I answered. "He said he'd be right over with a couple of men."

"All right," nodded Young. "You stand in this door. Let nobody else in until the police get here."

I took up my position as Young had ordered. My dynamic friend moved across the living-room of the apartment and disappeared through a door that evidently led to a bedroom. The crowd of curious tenants had now increased to more than a score of persons. Most of them knew Saxon Young by sight as well as by reputation.

In less than ten minutes, Captain Blackmer and a couple of detectives appeared. Blackmer nodded to me and told his men to guard the door. I followed the captain into the apartment.

We found Saxon Young in the bedroom which opened off the luxurious living-room. He was standing between two bodies that lay crumpled on the floor beside the bed. In his hands he held a thirty-eight-caliber revolver. He held the weapon by the tip and was studying the walnut grips of the butt.

Captain Blackmer looked down at the two faces, whitening in death. "Wilda Westcott and Arnold Gill!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," nodded Young, still studying the gun.

"Both dead?"

"Quite."

"Huh," observed Blackmer, a grin coming to his face. "Looks like this isn't going to be the mystery on which you get to show your speed. Gill evidently couldn't get her back from Marshall Grossman, so he bumped her off and then killed himself. When did it happen?"

"Not more than fifteen minutes ago," answered Young.

"You live right across the hall," continued Blackmer. "I suppose you heard the shots?"

"Yes," replied Young.

"How long was it after the last shot until you opened your door?"

"Just a few seconds."

"The door to this apartment was locked?"

"Yes," nodded Young. "I broke it in with the aid of two other tenants."

"Then nobody left the apartment after the shots were fired? There is no other door?"

"That's the only door. The ice box is equipped with electricity and refuse is sent down a chute near the kitchen sink."

Blackmer turned and began a tour of the windows in the apartment. Presently he halted again beside Young.

"All the windows locked on the inside," the captain announced. "Nothing left to do but call the coroner and take the names of some witnesses for the coroner's jury."

"Just the same," said Young. "I want you to me a favor. Call the coroner—so we can move these bodies—but let everything in here alone and don't let anybody else come in. I want to take a look around while the scent is warm."

"Scent of what?" demanded Blackmer. "There aint a thing here but plain murder and suicide. It will only take the coroner and the autopsy to prove that."

"Hm-m-m," was Young's only answer. He was still frowning at the gun butt.

"Too bad," grinned Blackmer. "It darned near breaks your heart when a good chance to do some sleuthing flops, don't it? If there are any fingerprints on that gun, they are Arnold Gill's. By the way, what is the serial number of that gun? All guns are supposed to be registered with the police. Gill was a fairly law-abiding citizen. That gun is probably on the list."

"The number is B7179," answered Young, glancing at the frame of the weapon.

Captain Blackmer went to a telephone that stood on the mantel in the living-room. Five minutes later he turned triumphantly from the instrument to announce that the murder weapon was registered in the name of Arnold Gill.

"Now are you convinced?" demanded Blackmer.

"Go ahead and call the coroner," was Young's answer.

Blackmer smiled and returned to the telephone. While he was busy at the phone, Saxon Young walked over to the window of the bedroom and stood gazing for some moments at the lock. Then he walked back to a dresser near the head of the bed and carefully laid the revolver down on the smooth top.

Half an hour later the coroner had finished his task. Blackmer, Saxon Young and myself stood watching. Blackmer's two men were still guarding the door. The coroner laid the two bullets extracted from the bodies in Captain Blackmer's outstretched palm.

"It will take a very little while to prove that these bits of lead were fired from this gun," said Blackmer, reaching for the weapon.

"Just a minute," said Saxon Young, stretching out a detaining hand. "Don't touch that gun yet. The rest of you may be willing to accept this as murder and suicide committed by Arnold Gill. I'm not ready yet to accept that theory."

"My God, Young!" cried Blackmer. "What could be plainer? We all know you are a whiz at solving mysteries, but there isn't any mystery here. Why try to make one?"

"There *is* a mystery here," said Young quietly, "and I didn't make it. If you will outline for me the facts upon which you depend to prove your contention, I'll give you a few more things to think about."

"All right," growled Blackmer, "but we're only wasting time. Wilda Westcott and Arnold Gill were killed by two bullets, fired from Gill's gun. The two shots were heard by dozens of people who investigated so quickly that we know nobody left the apartment by the door. The windows are all locked on the inside. So, nobody left the apartment—and nobody was here when Young and the others broke in. It is common knowledge that Wilda lived with Gill here in this apartment until about two months ago. Then she got a new sucker. She grabbed off Marshall Grossman. Grossman is a millionaire and Wilda has been living in his nifty apartment uptown. He is the angel who took her out of the chorus and put her in as star of the musical comedy that opened at the Palace a couple of weeks ago.

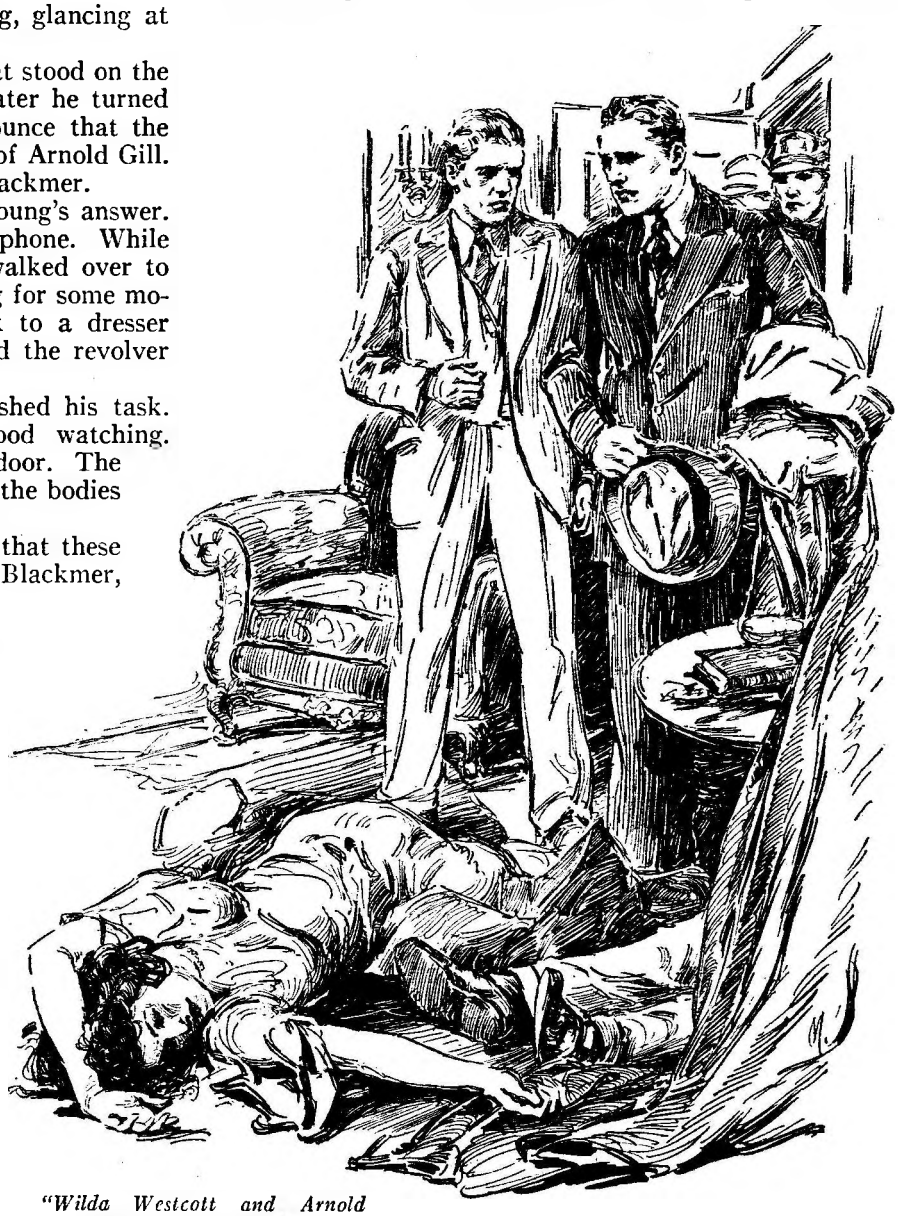
"Everybody knows how crazy this Gill was about Wilda. They say he hasn't done a lick of work since Wilda quit him. He used to use her as his model for all the pictures he made for the magazines. In fact that's how he got famous as an artist—by painting her pictures. He probably got her here tonight in some way and tried to coax her to come back to him. She refused and he opened up with the gun. It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"That's your case?" asked Young quietly.

"Yes," nodded Blackmer.

The rest of us had been listening intently. It seemed to me that Saxon Young was trying to create a mystery where one did not exist. It was apparent that Blackmer and the coroner shared my conviction.

"A neat open-and-shut case," nodded Young. "It would



"Wilda Westcott and Arnold Gill!" he exclaimed.

. . .

probably be accepted by the coroner's jury—and the case would be closed—except for a few little things that I have been able to note, because I was on the scene while the scent was warm. The first of those little things was a woman's scream—Wilda Westcott's scream."

"Well, what about it?" demanded Blackmer, as Young paused to light his pipe.

"Miss Westcott screamed several seconds after the first shot was fired," answered Young. He turned his eyes toward me. "Isn't that true, Hawley?"

"Yes," I replied, after thinking a moment.

"As you all know," continued Young, "the bullet that killed Miss Westcott was fired at such close range that the powder from the gun burned her dress and even the flesh. She couldn't have screamed several moments after that shot had been fired."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Blackmer.

"You hold that Arnold Gill shot Miss Westcott and then turned the gun on himself," answered Young. "I'm trying to show you that the first shot that was fired killed Arnold Gill. That's why Wilda Westcott was able to scream before the second shot was fired."

"Well," put in Blackmer, "maybe she shot Gill and then killed herself."

"Have some judgment," chuckled Young. "A woman who just killed a man and is preparing to kill herself does not scream as a prelude to her suicide."

"Go ahead," growled Blackmer. "What's next?"

"Next," answered Young, "is that gun yonder. *There are no finger-marks on it.*"

"And what does that prove?" asked Blackmer.

"You will notice that both Miss Westcott and Gill are bare-handed," answered Young. "The grips on that gun are of walnut. They would retain fingerprints easily. The fact that there are no fingerprints on the gun proves that the person who fired it wore gloves of some sort. If either of these two who are dead fired the fatal shots, the hand that fired them would now be gloved."

"Aw, hell!" snorted Blackmer. "What next? Go on."

"Next," smiled Young, "are the windows. If you will look at them you will notice that there are no screens on them and that the catches are of the spring variety that lock themselves whenever the window is closed. So, the man who murdered Miss Westcott and Arnold Gill could have easily escaped by a window and have closed it behind him. It would lock automatically."

"Say," cried Blackmer, "are you going to prove that these two people were murdered?"

"I am," answered Saxon Young. "And I'm going to find their murderer within twenty-four hours—as I promised."

"Well," retorted Blackmer. "I'm not convinced yet that they were murdered."

"That's tough," smiled Young. "Excuse me for a few moments. I want to search the bodies."

WHILE the rest of us watched breathlessly, Young knelt beside the bodies. He emptied all the pockets of Gill's garments. Then he turned and searched a woman's purse that lay on the dresser. He piled all the articles he had discovered in plain sight on the dresser top.

"See anything wrong?" he demanded.

We all looked at the collection of articles. It was just such an assortment as might have been expected.

"Well, what's wrong?" demanded Blackmer.

"Do you miss anything?" inquired Young.

"No."

"There isn't a key among Gill's effects," purred Young. "And I'll bet that none of the keys on the ring I took from Miss Westcott's bag will fit the lock on the door of this apartment."

"What does that spell?" snapped Blackmer.

"Use your brain," smiled Young. "These two people did not get into this apartment without a key. Where is it?"

"Probably somewhere about the apartment," answered Blackmer.

"Let's comb the place for it," suggested Young. "If we don't find it, you should need no further proof that these two people have been murdered."

Fifteen minutes later the search was over. We had found no key that would fit the door of the apartment.

"Now," said Saxon Young, "we have wasted enough time. The man who killed these two people left by way of a window. I'll go farther and say that he left by way of this bedroom window. I say that because it is the nearest window to the scene of the crime and because it opens onto a court, through which he might easily have escaped without detection. Let's take the trail."

Young walked to the bedroom's single window and freed the catch. He pushed up the window. The rest of us were close on his heels.

"This being the first floor," said Young, "it is only a drop of some five feet to the floor of the court that runs between this and the next building. Follow me."

My astonishing friend dropped out of the window and alighted on the concrete that floored the court.

"Has anybody a flashlight?" he called up to us.

"I have one," answered Blackmer.

"Good. Come on down."

TWO minutes later we all stood in the court beside Saxon Young. Blackmer handed Young a flashlight. Young shot the pencil of light about us. The court opened into an alley and was empty except for garbage cans.

"You will notice," said Saxon Young, "that there are no windows below the first floor in this side of the apartment house. Also there are no windows in the building on the opposite side of the court, which is a garage. That makes it plain that the murderer could have dropped from the same window from which we just dropped and have made his way to the alley without being observed."

Nobody answered, and Young continued to inspect the floor of the court with the aid of the flashlight.

"What are you looking for?" spoke up Blackmer at last. "The floor of this court is concrete. Do you expect to find tracks on it?"

"I guess not," answered Young. "But it is certain that the murderer had to leave the court by way of the alley. Let's go."

With Young leading the way, we all walked down the court to the alley. There Young halted.

"Come here, Hawley," said my enigmatic friend. "Hold up one of your feet. I want to look at your shoe-soles."

I raised a foot. Young trained the beam from his flashlight on the sole of my shoe. The others gathered about.

"Hm-m-m," nodded Young. "Notice that the bottom of Hawley's shoes are spotted with tar. The court that we just left is spattered with the roofing solution that has recently been placed on the roof of the garage next door. Let's see the soles of the rest of your shoes."

The inspection which followed proved that numerous spots of the sticky roofing material adhered to the soles of everyone's shoes.

"One could walk a good number of blocks before those spots would be entirely worn off," observed Saxon Young. "I am of the opinion that our murderer will have done a little walking—and his shoe-soles will have a tale to tell when we find him."

"Where are we going to find him?" asked Blackmer.

"I am afraid the physical trail ends here," answered

"We are from police headquarters," answered Young. "And we came to find out when you last saw Wilda Westcott."

Young. "Now we must use our heads. I believe you said, Blackmer, that Wilda Westcott had been living with Marshall Grossman lately. Let's check up on Grossman."

"That's crazy," objected Blackmer. "Grossman's a millionaire and—"

"Since when have millionaires become immune to the natural weaknesses of humanity?" snapped Young. "Do you want to check up on Grossman, or not?"

"Go ahead, go ahead," growled Blackmer. "I'll see this thing through, now."

Saxon Young led the way to the street where he hailed a taxicab and gave an address. We all piled in.

After a half-hour's ride the cab stopped before a pretentious apartment building in an elite uptown neighborhood. Saxon Young told the cab to wait and we all followed him into the building. A haughty clerk at the desk informed us that Mr. Grossman was in, but that the hour was too late to call him.

"You'd better call him, anyway," said Young. "Tell him Saxon Young is calling. I'll take the consequences."

The speed with which the request was obeyed was testimony that the name of Saxon Young was not unknown to the clerk. Four or five minutes later our party was being admitted to the elegant living quarters of Marshall Grossman. The millionaire, in a dressing-gown and slippers, his hair tousled, greeted us sleepily.

"What is the occasion of this honor, Mr. Young?" he inquired, addressing my famous friend.

"We are calling to check up on some points concerning the murder of Wilda Westcott and Arnold Gill," answered Young bluntly.

"Wilda and Arnold Gill murdered!" cried our host. It seemed to me that his astonishment was genuine.

"Yes." Young nodded. "They were murdered an hour ago in Gill's apartment."

"My God!" cried Grossman hoarsely, sinking onto the edge of his rumpled bed.

"How long since you last saw them?" demanded Young.

"About two hours ago," answered Grossman. "They were both at the Artists' ball at the auditorium. I was there too. They both left half an hour or more before I did."

"Pardon a personal question, Grossman," said Young; "haven't you been keeping Wilda Westcott?"

"Not since over a week ago," answered Grossman, frankly. "She was too damned expensive. I stopped her charge accounts and told her I was going to withdraw my support from her show which has cost me plenty of money. She had a tantrum. Then she cooled down and asked me if I would sell the show to somebody else if she would bring me the buyer. I told her I would. That night she moved out of my apartment. The next day she brought me a buyer. I sold him the show. I understood that the charming Wilda was included in the bargain."

"Who was the buyer?" asked Young.

"That would be telling, would it not?"

"We can find out anyhow," retorted Young.

"Well," answered Grossman, reluctantly, "it was Dago Mike Baglivi. It pricks my vanity to make this admission, but Baglivi undoubtedly has more money than I have—and that seems to be what counts with women like Wilda Westcott."

At the mention of Baglivi we all gasped in unison. Dago Mike was acknowledged chieftain of the city's gangland.

"Was Baglivi at the ball?" inquired Saxon Young.

"Yes," answered Grossman. "I think he brought Wilda. I saw Wilda dancing with Arnold Gill. Right after their dance she left the auditorium. Shortly after that, I missed Gill. I looked around for Baglivi, but couldn't locate him."

"Thanks," said Young. "And now pardon me if I seem in a hurry, but speed is vital. How long have you been home from the ball?"

"I had just crawled into bed when you called," answered Grossman.

"Where are the shoes that you wore to the ball?"

"In the closet yonder," answered Grossman, puzzled.

"May I see them?"

Grossman rose and went to the closet. He returned with a pair of patent leather dancing pumps.

Young thrust his hand into the pumps. He held the bottoms up to the light. I saw that the bottoms were smooth and clean.

"These shoes have not been off the wearer's feet very long," said Young. "They are still slightly warm—and they are damp inside. There is no tar on the bottoms. I think Mr. Grossman is absolved of suspicion. Let's look up Baglivi. Do you know where he lives, Mr. Grossman?"

"Two blocks up the boulevard," answered Grossman, giving a number. "He owns the hotel he lives in."

FIVE minutes later our party was in the apartment of the gangster, Baglivi. Here, as before, we found our host in dishabille. Baglivi openly resented our call, but he was accustomed to calls from the police.

"Where were you tonight?" demanded Saxon Young.

"I was at the Artists' ball."

"Whom did you take to the ball?"

"I took Wilda Westcott."

"Did you bring her home?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Say," growled the gangster, "that's my own business. What's this all about anyhow? If it's a pinch, you aint told me that anything I say can be used against me. Come clean or quit asking me questions and get out of here."

I wondered if the man's arrogance was a cover for inward fright. A faint flush came to Saxon Young's cheeks.

"Perhaps you don't know that Wilda Westcott is dead," continued Young, crisply.

"Wilda—is—dead?" said Baglivi slowly. "Well, what of it? Am I supposed to cry?"

"You've been much interested in Wilda lately, haven't you?" asked Young.

"What if I have?" answered the racketeer. "That's some more of my own business. Are you guys quizzing me because you think I croaked Wilda Westcott? Well, I didn't. And I can prove it plenty. After Wilda sneaked away from that fandango at the auditorium, I called up another girl friend of mine and she and I and another girl and Tony Sartor came up here and put on a party in a private dining-room. The party only broke up fifteen minutes ago. If you're going to pinch me, do it—and I'll produce the alibi. Then I'll make it hot for somebody."

"Would you mind answering a few questions that might help us find Miss Westcott's murderer?" persisted Young.

"I'll answer nothing more, unless I'm made to in court," snarled Baglivi. "If that dame has been bumped off, she had it coming to her. I don't wish the guy that done it any bad luck. Now you guys clear out of here—I want to sleep."

"Thanks for the courteous hospitality," said Saxon Young softly, moving toward the door.

I wondered at my friend's control of his temper in the face of the man's insolence. The rest of us followed Young and not a word was spoken among us until we were back in the taxicab and Young had ordered the driver to take us back to Marshall Grossman's apartment.

"What now?" demanded Captain Blackmer. "I thought you had given Grossman a clean slate?"

"Grossman is at least a gentleman," answered Young. "He is also observant. I want another talk with him."

We were received by Grossman, still in his dressing-gown, but now wide awake. He offered us chairs and served us with whisky and soda.

"I couldn't sleep for thinking about Wilda," he said as he served us. "I'm glad you came back."

"Would you mind telling me just what you noticed tonight at the ball?" asked Saxon Young. "I mean concerning Miss Westcott, Arnold Gill and Baglivi."

"I saw Wilda come in with Baglivi," answered Grossman. "Later I noticed that she was dancing very frequently with Gill and that Baglivi was in a bad humor with her. During one dance, I think it was their last, I saw Gill slip something into Wilda's hand. My guess is that it was the key to his apartment—those little things are done, you know. Shortly afterward Wilda slipped out of the hall. I was rather amused and I looked around for Baglivi. He was dancing with a blonde I had not noticed on the floor before. I watched Gill, who danced a couple more times and then left. Shortly after that, I noticed that Baglivi and the blonde were gone."

"Had Miss Westcott any other close friends—men friends?" asked Saxon Young.

"Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green," quoted Grossman.

"If you're going to check over the list of that dame's boy friends," chuckled Blackmer, "you'll need twenty-four months instead of twenty-four hours."

"Did you know the blonde girl whom you last saw with Baglivi?" asked Young, ignoring Blackmer's sally.

"I don't know her name," answered Grossman, "but she's in the chorus of Wilda's show. She lives at the Kline hotel. I can find out her name. I know the night clerk."

"Could you get the girl to come over here?" asked Young.

"I think so."

Grossman presently turned from the telephone to inform us that the girl, whose name was Kitty Golden, would be over immediately. She had just come in when Grossman called the hotel. He had told her that he had some information which vitally concerned the show and probably her job.

THE girl arrived promptly. She was of the show-girl type—an abundance of looks and not enough brains to be a burden. She was just a little drunk. She was plainly puzzled when Grossman introduced us all.

"What was this you had to tell me about the show?" she asked Grossman.

"I'm afraid the show is going to close," said Grossman. "Wilda Westcott and Baglivi have had a fuss."

"Yes, I know they fell out," answered the girl. "But the show aint going to close. I'm going to begin understudying Wilda tomorrow—but what have all these gentlemen to do with this? Are they show-folks?"

"No," answered Grossman. "They are police."

"Cops!" cried the girl. "What—"

"Miss Westcott is dead, Miss Golden," announced Young quietly.

"Dead!"

"Yes. Murdered."

"Wilda Westcott, murdered!" muttered the girl. "Murdered! Say what did you have me come over here for?

"We want to ask you some questions," said Young. "You may know something that will help us."

"What could I know?"

"That's what I'm going to try to find out," said Young. "Did you see her at the Artists' ball tonight?"

"I saw her leaving the auditorium just as I arrived," answered the girl. "I never saw her come back. I think she sneaked out to keep a date with Maurice Montague."

"Who is Maurice Montague?"

"Her dancing partner in the show."

"What makes you think that she was sneaking out to keep a date with him?"

"Say—" began the girl then paused and turned to Grossman. "Must I answer all these questions?"

"I would, if I were you," replied the millionaire. "I've answered quite a few myself."

"Well," said the girl, turning back to Young. "She'd had a row with Mr. Baglivi. She probably had no other date handy—so she slipped out and went somewhere with Maurice."

"Was Montague waiting for her?"

"No. He followed her out of the auditorium. I met him just inside the door."

"Was Montague fond of Miss Westcott?"

"Fond!" cried the girl. "He was crazy about her, but she didn't care anything about him—just strung him along. She couldn't see any guy that didn't have a lot of money—except Arnold Gill. She has always been in love with him, but he couldn't make money enough to keep her."

"I see," nodded Saxon Young, shooting a quick glance at Blackmer. "So you never saw Miss Westcott again?"

"No."

"Why were you so late arriving at the ball?"

"I hadn't intended to go, but Mr. Baglivi called me on the telephone and asked me to come. He said he had had a scrap with Wilda. He wanted me to join him and two other friends on a party."

"Who were the others?"

"Tony Sartor and his girl."

"And the four of you were together from the time you arrived at the auditorium until after midnight?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Miss Golden," said Young. "Do you know where Mr. Montague lives?"

"Sure—he lives at the same hotel as I do. His room is two doors from mine. There was a light in his room when I left to come over here."

"That's all," nodded Young. "We are going to call on Mr. Montague. We will take you back to your hotel, if you wish."

There was light shining over the transom of Maurice Montague's room when Kitty Golden tapped on the panel. Young and the rest of us were close behind her.

Next moment he had whirled and was covering us with a revolver. "Don't move, any of you!" he growled.

"Who is it?" came a husky voice from inside the room.

"Kitty," answered the girl.

The key grated in the lock and then the door opened. The face of the rather handsome youth who stood in the opening turned slightly pale. He seemed nervous.

" 'Lo, Kitty," he said in a hoarse voice. "Come in. Who are your friends?"

"We are from police headquarters," answered Young as we pushed into the room. "We came to find out when you last saw Wilda Westcott."

"At the Artists' ball tonight," answered Montague. "Why? What's the matter?"

"Miss Westcott has been murdered," answered Young.

"Murdered!" cried the youth.

"Yes," declared Young. "What time was it when you left the auditorium?"

"About half-past eleven, replied Montague. "I met Kitty, there, as I was leaving."

"Did you come right home?"

"No. I went for a walk and got a bite to eat first."

"Where are the shoes that you wore tonight?"

"In that closet," answered the youth, pointing.

"Let me see them."

As Saxon Young took the shoes and held them to the light, I saw that the soles of them were innocent of tar spots.

"Where is the suit you wore to the dance?" asked Young, handing the shoes back to Montague. The dancer put the shoes back in the closet and produced a dress suit. Young run his hands over the suit and felt of the pockets.

"Where is the stuff you took out of the pockets when you hung it up?" demanded Young. "Your money, cigarette-lighter, keys and such?"

"Under my pillow," Montague replied, turning toward the bed. He reached under a pillow—and the next moment he had whirled and was covering us with a revolver.

"Don't move—any of you!" he growled. "I'll kill myself, if I have to—but I'm going to run for it first!"

Saxon Young, standing nearest Montague, was gazing at the defiant youth holding the killer's eyes. Suddenly Young's right foot flashed up. The toe struck Montague's wrist, and the gun flew from the numbed hand to fall behind the bed. The next moment Montague was struggling vainly in the long, powerful arms of Saxon Young.

An hour later, Montague had signed the confession that was to send him to the gallows—and was safe under lock and key. He had followed Wilda Westcott from the ball and overtaken her just as she was preparing to open the door of Arnold Gill's apartment. Taking the key from her hand he had opened the door and pulled the girl into the apartment. There he had begged her to give up Gill and her other lovers. He had told her that he would kill Gill unless she did as he asked. She begged him to go before Gill arrived. He refused. She ran into the bedroom and he followed, to find her covering him with Gill's gun. He ignored her threats and took the gun away from her. Then Gill rapped at the door and Montague pocketed the gun and told Wilda to admit the artist. The girl opened the door and tried to warn Gill that the actor was armed and waiting for him. Gill pushed into the apartment and brushed into the bedroom declaring that he would make short work of the dancer. Miss Westcott followed Gill and saw the jealous Montague shoot him down. She screamed and Montague fired point-blank at her heart. Then he fled by way of the window, forgetting that he had dropped the key to the apartment among the other keys that he always carried loose. He realized that he was cornered when Saxon Young asked where his keys were. The shoes, however, had been freed from tar-spots because of the slayer's walking for more than an hour after fleeing from the scene of the crime.

IT was just breaking daylight when Captain Blackmer, the coroner, Saxon Young and myself stopped at Young's apartment for a bracer before disbanding.

"Here's to a fresh trail!" proposed Saxon Young.

"Drink hearty," growled Blackmer.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"Trouble in the Balkans" is a colorful, dramatic story, and it again reveals Mr. New's remarkable inside knowledge of European international crises.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

ALL the way through Hungary, customs and army officials had glanced admiringly at the clean strong lines of the touring-landaulet, particularly at the length and size of the hood—most of them guessing eight cylinders and missing the fact by four. There were twelve under that hood—working as smoothly and quietly as the purring of a kitten half asleep. Indeed, the car had done a hundred and twenty when there was occasion.

Their approach to the Transylvanian Alps up the valley of the Maros had been so smoothly rapid that they were approaching the ridge of the Carpathians before they realized it. Then they were over the Red Tower Pass and running down the eastern slopes to Tirloschi, where they decided to dine at the old Inn du Moldau before going on to Carmanstadt.

In the wide, low-ceilinged "lounge" of the Sixteenth Century hostelry adjoining the dining-room, with its long center table and alcoves against two of the walls, they found two ladies traveling by car like themselves—one, a striking-looking woman of forty, and the other a woman perhaps ten years younger, whose features seemed more intelligent than handsome—until she smiled.

His Lordship of St. Ives had cultivated a marvelous ability in sizing up with one or two keen glances any person he happened to notice. Inside of ten seconds he knew that he had seen one or both of the women before—and, as he couldn't immediately recall the time or place, was certain they must be disguised. In another moment, he nodded, with a smile of final recognition.

They'd all drifted into the easy, unconventional chat of old travelers who consider nobody met by the way a stranger, unless an occasional confirmed and suspicious grouch will have none of their courteous advances. The younger woman, assuming that she and her companion were perfectly safe in their disguises, had been studying the Marquess' face casually. Presently she remarked:

"Are we really being inexcusably rude, sir? Should we recognize you gentlemen at once as persons very well known? Your faces seem vaguely familiar—as though one were constantly seeing them in the gazettes and other illustrated periodicals."

Trevor smiled, for he had caught the expression of recognition in the Earl's face.

"Ma'm'selle, we don't consider ourselves famous, or even well known, though I suppose we have a large number of acquaintances. My name is Trevor—this is His Lordship of St. Ives, and our friend is a Prince in his own country—Afridistan. So—if you've happened upon stray news-sheet halftones of us, we shall have to acknowledge the identity. Had we considered it advisable to avoid recognition in Carmania, doubtless a few slight changes in appearance—quite a common practice—would have prevented it."

Both women shot startled glances at him when he mentioned "changes in appearance"—but his expression was bland.

"We really should have recognized you gentlemen at once—everyone knows you're likely to appear in the most impossible places! This is Lady Flora Darnelton—I am Agatha Ffrench, of Coltswold, Herts."

"Visiting friends in Carmanstadt, of course, Miss Agatha? (One assumes the 'Honorable' in the case of most Hertfordshire Ffrenches.)"

"Why, yes—though we've been motoring all over the place on our own, for mere idle pleasure. I fancy Carmania, at the present moment, isn't precisely a place one would go unless to visit friends. We're told that affairs are a bit unsettled here—"

Prince Abdool had slipped out to see that Achmet was having no trouble in securing the gasoline he needed—and the chauffeur—his second cousin—repeated in Pushtu a bit of talk he'd overheard between the landlord of the inn and his garage mechanic.

"Look, O kinsman—cousin of my father's son! There be happenings in the air which may concern us. There comes one from the Place of the Emirs—the city—with a guard of armed men—to watch for and arrest two women who come this way from far countries with a chit for certain ones in high places. They will speak of this matter and that concerning which they went out from this place at the full of the last moon—and he who now calls himself King will not permit this chit to reach those others. So these women who come, suspecting no danger at this inn, will be taken by this Agha and his soldiers—this General Maurescu, who comes bearing authority (a *Ferik-alai*)—and cast into foul cells until he who is now King considers the matter of slitting their throats or permitting them life as prisoners of his Raj."

"Thou didst well to speak of this, Achmet," Abdool commended him. "Doubtless these women are those now inside with the Thakurs Bahadur. Thou wilt overhaul their car as well as ours—see that it is in order for instant leaving. If anything has been done to it, make a quick repair—saying, if thou art questioned, that the women are of our own party."

PRINCE ABDOOL hunted up the landlord, and asked him if he had taken the ladies' order for their dinner—saying, as if it were an afterthought:

"You understand, of course, that we are all one party—dining together? We had to stop a few minutes from tire-trouble, and the ladies got a bit ahead of us on the road. Don't keep us waiting too long—we must reach our friends' house tonight."

Sauntering back into the lounge as if he hadn't a thing on his mind, he seated himself close to the other four,

General Maurescu asked if he might glance at their passports. "These ladies are of your party?" he inquired.

and for two or three minutes kept up his end of the lively conversation—which could be heard by the inn people in the adjoining rooms. Then Prince Abdool remarked, his voice dropping to a pleasant confidential murmur, interspersed with occasional chuckles: "Have you ladies any reason to be apprehensive about General Maurescu and his cavalrymen? He's expected here within an hour or two—intending to arrest two women who are motoring over the mountains with messages or information for certain personages connected with the Governm'nt, as I understand it. I've instructed our chauffeur to go over your car with your man and repair any damage that may have been done to put it out of working order, and to see that there is plenty of fuel in the tanks. They'll tell the inn people we're all of one party, but that you got in a bit ahead because we had to stop for tire-trouble. I've ordered a table set for five. Now—point is: Will your passports bear out these statem'nts—or must we think up something else to agree with 'em?"

"But—but—I fancy we don't quite understand, Prince! Why do you take this risk and trouble for strangers you never saw before? Without admitting that Maurescu has the slightest legal right to arrest or detain us, there's no doubt of his doing it once he's sure as to our identity. Under the surface, today, Carmania is a seething pot of intrigue in which perfectly frightful things may be done! Our passports are right enough—both from Downing Street—properly viséed by the Quai d'Orsay, the Austrian and Hungarian Foreign Offices. As far as passports go they agree with the supposition of our traveling in one party, perfectly—and I doubt very much if Maurescu will be in the least positive as to our identity. But if he decides upon taking no chances, he'll simply arrest the lot of us! Once in one of the Carmanstadt prisons, he'll find out in some way who we are!"

The Marquess considered a moment, then said:

"H-m-m—there's a telephone-connection with this inn—I've used it before upon occasion. Governm'nt-controlled, of course—but they would scarcely dare interfere with a Legation message. I'll just have a word or two with our envoy, Sir Henry Seaton—while we're waiting for dinner. Then if there are complications, there'll be ructions from Downing Street."

After some delay, Trevor heard the envoy's well-known voice over the wire—told him they were dining with Lady Flora Darnelton and the Honorable Agatha Ffrench, at Tirloschi, on their way down to the Capital—asked if there was any truth in the rumors that they might have trouble getting into the city.

Sir Henry admitted that affairs were considerably unsettled since Prince Jon's *coup d'etat*—returning by airplane and declaring himself king in place of his young son Georges—but didn't see why anybody as prominent and as widely known as the Marquess and his companions should be interfered with; however, it might be just as well for him to phone His Majesty's secretary that the party were arriving. Trevor returned to the dining-room just as the others were sitting down at the table prepared for them in one of the alcoves. Assuring himself that there was nobody in either of the adjoining alcoves, Trevor asked the Honorable Agatha if she were positive as to her chauffeur's loyalty.

"Well," she replied confidentially, " he came to me with a personal recommendation from Queen Claire. His father was a retainer of the Duke of Edinburgh, his ancestors served the Royal Dukes for upward of five hundred years, and he's quite well aware of our status in England."

"Would he be recognized by Maurescu or his men?".

"Fancy not. He's been wearing a beard since he came to Carmania—and at present he hasn't any."

At this point there was a sound of motor-horns outside, and the voices of half a dozen men; then into the dining-room came an officer in the glittering uniform of a Carmanian Major General—orders and service-stripes on his tunic. Also a Captain and four cavalrymen. They selected a table, ordered their dinner, and asked the landlord if rooms or meals had been reserved by two women motoring over through the Pass. The innkeeper looked doubtful; then he glanced at the party across the room, and whispered that the two ladies had arrived alone, half an hour ahead of the three men, but had sent no message in advance and apparently were all in one party, according to their chauffeurs.

General Maurescu nodded—considered this a moment—then sauntered across to the alcove, where he bowed and asked courteously if he might glance at their passports. As Trevor was smilingly reaching into his pocket, the General recognized him, and raised a protesting hand.

"Pardon, Marquess—I didn't see who you were at first! There is certainly no question as to passports in *your* case, and I think I recognize the other gentleman also. The ladies are of your party?" he inquired.

"Er—quite so, General. This is very pleasant—meeting you again! We've not been here since last year. Aye—we've been motoring down from London an' Paris. Had a bit of tire-trouble on t'other side of the mountains—so Miss Agatha an' Lady Flora beat us over the Pass. Er—we shall doubtless see you again in the city before we leave?"

"Oh, undoubtedly—you'll be having an audience with His Majesty, of course. A friend of the Royal Family for many years, I understand?"

THE women drew quiet breaths of relief when Maurescu so promptly recognized the Marquess—but they were not banking too much upon it. With no appearance of haste the party finished their dinner and lighted cigarettes; then they settled with the innkeeper, stopped for a pleasant word or two with the officers on the way out, and ordered their cars fetched around.

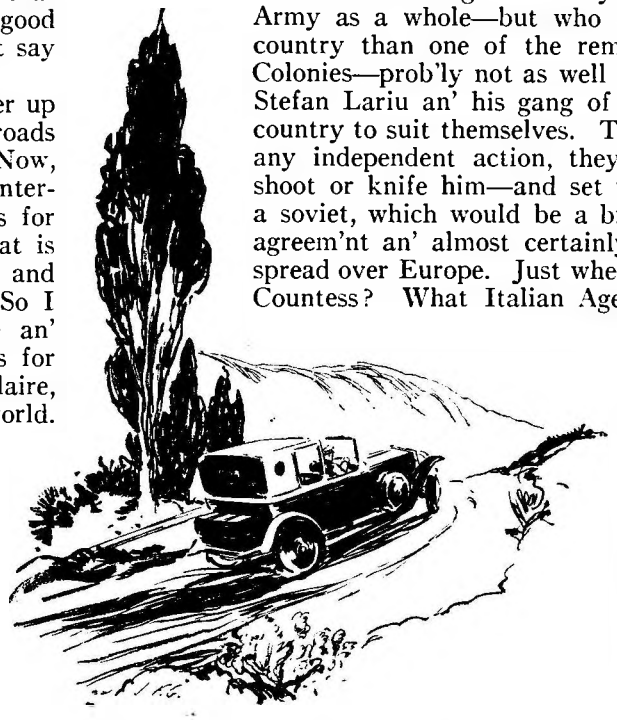
In response to the unspoken question in Prince Abdool's face, Achmet nodded. To the best of his knowledge, the cars were in perfect condition, with gasoline enough for several hours' run in their tanks. The Marquess got into the ladies' car with the Honorable Agatha and took the wheel, with her by his side on the front seat. Their chauffeur, Jennings, sat behind them. Lammerford and Prince Abdool took Lady Flora in the Trevor car—after a murmured conference between the Marquess and Achmet, each of whom had driven over nearly every practicable road in the Balkans and knew certain time-saving detours which never are even mentioned in the automobile guide-books.

As they dropped out of sight down the grade from Tirloschi, Trevor said:

"When no other women turn up at that inn, it's just possible that Maurescu may decide you lost your nerve and concluded to wait on the other side of the Hungarian border for a better occasion—particularly, if you'd managed to get word into Carmanstadt an' receive an answer to it. But my impression is he's too intelligent for that. He'll wake up, presently, and telephone into the city for three or four motor-cars to run out from Army Headquarters an' catch us on the road. So we'll go only six miles down this turnpike. —How much rough going will the car stand, Jennings?" he asked, addressing the chauffeur in the back seat.

"I fancy she'll take a good bit of it, sir. Your man an' I tightened 'er up snug, before startin'. She's been over stretches in Hungary an' Austria that were a cryin' disgrace. An' she'll do a good eighty if she 'as to, sir—though I'll not say it's good for 'er gears or brakes."

"Aye—that's about the way I sized her up—good serviceable machine for takin' roads as they come—no nons'nse about her. Now, Miss Agatha—barring unforeseen interruptions, we'll have two or three hours for comparing notes. There's a lot of what is going on here which you can tell me and which we three men ought to know. So I fancy we'd best drop the camouflage an' avoid wasting our time. You know us for about as good friends as Queen Claire, Mariana and Nikolas have in the world. 'Lady Flora' is the Baroness Eva Wellingford, who came to Carmania with Queen Claire when she married Bertrand, who was then Crown Prince and succeeded to the throne shortly afterward. You are Countess Jane of Rondymount—daughter of Countess Mary who was a playmate of Claire's, though a few years older, when she was a Princess in England. I was fairly certain we'd met, in spite of your disguises—but Lammerford placed you almost immediately. The two of you have been Her Majesty's closest confidants, her most trusted friends. You've been in England—presumably for consultation with the King—on some errand for Claire which the politicians who are backing Jon as a puppet King fancy may be dangerous to their plans. So you ladies are to be removed and detained as prisoners, if nothing worse than that, in order that Claire shall not get whatever information you went after. That much at least is fairly clear. But what's the real situation here? What's going to happen—as you see it?"



"Frankly, Marquess," replied the pseudo-Agatha relievedly, "I'm almost terrified! Seven months ago, General Vitoski, who had more influence than any other man in the Carmanian Parliament, though not himself a Member, hatched up the same scheme that Stefan Lariu has now pulled off—bringing Jon back from his dallying in Paris and making him a puppet King in place of little Georges while Lariu pulls all the strings in the background. It was said Vitoski actually got the Prince as far as that little inn where we've just dined—after which he mysteriously disappeared, while the General had the Army posted at strategic points and was about to declare him King. A rumor got about that Vitoski had had the Prince assassinated. Then the General himself disappeared, and that gave color to it. Vitoski turned up in Carmanstadt a week later, but the feeling was then so high against him that he was removed by a firing-squad. From some unknown source, a most amazing rumor crept about—that Prince Jon had been in the city but was captured by men who performed a surgical operation on his face so that he was afterward unrecognizable. According to this rumor, Jon afterward went to the most famous anatomical specialist in Vienna—who opened his cheeks, found the ends of the severed ligaments and drew them together again with fine silver wire, restoring his face almost to its original appearance—the only noticeable differences being a few scars and a certain amount of aging, which naturally would be expected."

"Then, to all intents, this weakling philanderer is just about where Vitoski would have started him seven months ago, had he been successful?" Trevor queried. "Carmania has an adult King who always has been popular with the Army as a whole—but who is no more fit to rule any country than one of the remittance-men in the British Colonies—prob'ly not as well fitted! In the background, Stefan Lariu an' his gang of politicians are running the country to suit themselves. The minute Jon tries to show any independent action, they'll simply eliminate him—shoot or knife him—and set up either a Dictatorship or a soviet, which would be a breach of the Little Entente agreem'nt an' almost certainly start a war which might spread over Europe. Just where does Italy come into this, Countess? What Italian Agents do you know of, hobnobbin' with Lariu?"

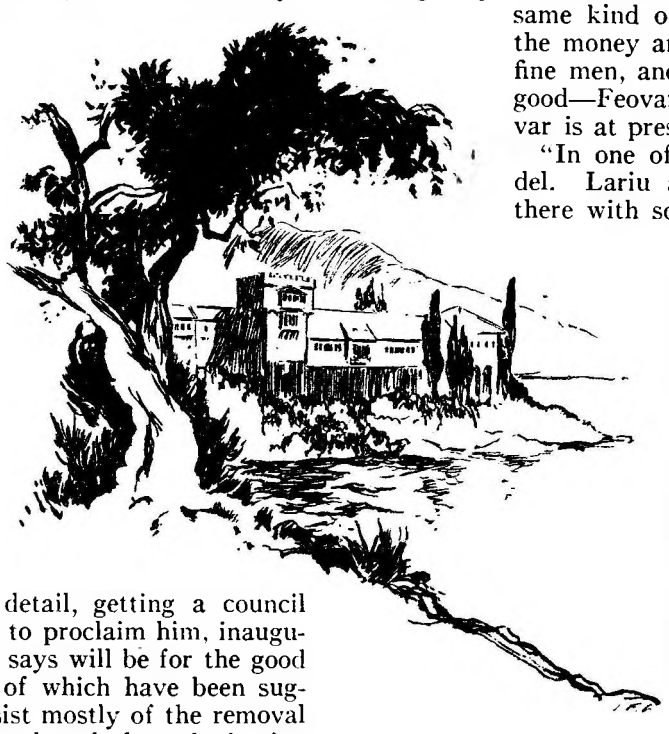
"There is a Count Guaranti visiting relatives in Carmanstadt—"

"Any of those relatives Members of the Carmanian Parliam'nt?"

"Why, yes, there are! One of his cousins—and a friend, of Italian descent. They're of Larius' party, too!"

"Precisely! There you are! Guaranti is very close to Il Duce. Have you any idea what is going on at the other side of these mountains, Countess—in Hungary? There are more Italians in Hungary, today, than ever were seen there before. It is reported to Downing Street that arms, munitions, machine-guns, bombing-planes and lethal gas are being shipped into Hungary and hidden along the northern and southern borders. Prince Otto comes of age in the fall.

He is the legal, hereditary heir to the old Kingdom of Hungary. Italy would like very much to seat him on the throne. There is a defensive Treaty between France and the Little Entente—Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Jugoslavia. Carmania is tacitly a member of the same alliance—but seems in a fair way to be controlled by Italy, which is natural enough racially, since Carmania was originally a Roman colony and the people always have considered themselves of Roman blood, ever since the days of the Byzantine Empire at Stamboul. Now, with Italy backing Hungary and Carmania—trying, politically, to guard against the menaces of Jugoslavia across the Adriatic, with France backing the Little Entente against soviet aggression and Italian domination, there seems to be an unholy lot of dynamite-sticks lying about the Balkans for somebody to step on and touch off the whole works!"



"That is precisely as Her Majesty sees it, Marquess. We were with her in Oberammergau when she first heard of Jon's *coup*—and all came back at once to Carmanstadt. Jon only came to see her once—said he was simply swamped with detail, getting a council together, getting the Parliament to proclaim him, inaugurating various changes which he says will be for the good of the country—but every one of which have been suggested by Stefan Lariu, and consist mostly of the removal of every man the Regency trusted and the substitution of Lariu's tools."

"The Carmanian people are fools in not putting *her* at the head of the Governm'nt as Regent, at least, until little Georges grows up!" Trevor exclaimed. "But they let a weakling—the mere catspaw of a political ring—shove her into obscurity—start the whole country on the toboggan of vassalage to a southern or eastern Power. With no intention of being indiscreet, I assume that she sent you out to see if it were possible to obtain a show of diplomatic backing from Britain and France with the view of stamping out any sparks which might be kindled here and spread to a general conflagration."

"Yes—you're quite right. But though the King realizes the situation fully, at present he is hampered by a Labor Governm'nt which is not giving the F. O. much backing. At the Quai d'Orsay, they've sense enough to see that the situation may become acute at any moment. Il Duce has been rattling the scabbard somewhat, of late, in some of his public speeches. The French Governm'nt know it is ninety per cent bluff for home consumption; Italy is in no position as a belligerent to attack France on her own. But he's bluffing with potential explosives which might go off."

"Er—quite so. And if France or England should be drawn into the mess against all existing treaties, they'd back Carmania—not Italy! Point is—a weak spot in this combination of circumstances must be found and dealt with inside of the next few weeks, so that whatever explosion may occur will be confined to Carmania alone. It looks to me as though Guaranti is heavily bribing a lot of the Carmanian politicals. I happen to know that Ferdinand's permission to return and live in Sofia came about through Guaranti's influence, and that several members of the Bulgarian *Sobranje* may be in his pay. Question is—if Guaranti could be removed from this sphere of influence without anything so crude as assassination, how far would it go in disorganizing Lariu's schemes for exploiting King Jon? Suppose one went a bit further than that? Serge Tatianu formed the first Governm'nt under the Regency after Bertrand's death. He died, and his brother Valdai became Premier. But the peasants' party assassinated him an' set up Lariu as Premier, with the backing of Jon Sebasco and Virile Lodiani, who are the same kind of unscrupulous birds—out for the money an' power. The Tatianus were fine men, and left a nephew just about as good—Feovar Tatianu. Know where Feovar is at present?"

"In one of the cells under the old citadel. Lariu arrested and chucked him in there with some other mighty decent men three months ago."

"Hadn't they been winning a certain amount of popularity among the better element in that same peasants' party who were against the Tatianus?"

"That's prob'ly why they were thrown into prison—Lariu fancied they were getting too strong among his own supporting crowd."

"Very good! Then here's a proposition which may change the whole complexion of things in a very short time: if it can be managed, somehow, Guaranti is suddenly recalled to Rome in disgrace. Nobody else whom they send out can possibly pick up all the tangled threads where he drops 'em, and carry on as he is now doing. Then Lariu, Sebasco and Lodiani are put out of business one way or another. Feovar Tatianu and his friends are put at the head of things with a quiet hint to King Jon that they'll support him as long as he consults with them and does nothing too bally idiotic—also, with the proviso that Queen Claire is invited to occupy her old suite in the Moldaucini Palace and has the unrestricted run of the building as she always did before this latest political move."

"But—but—Marquess! . . . . How is it humanly possible to bring about anything like that?"

"Faith—I'm sure I don't know, Countess! But the first point lay in workin' out the possibility an' its probable effect—the visualizing just where pressure might be applied. And I'll wager that none of you thought of this particular possibility—eh? What?"

"We certainly didn't! It seems altogether too fantastic!"

"Precisely! . . . . Yet it's the utterly fantastic proposition which often succeeds. Next step will be for me to find out just what Sir Henry knows, at the Legation—and how much more than that my good friend John Wakeman, Editor-in-Chief of the big news-sheet *Resboiul,* happens to know. I own a few shares in the great news syndicate of which his sheet is a member—though you'll remember that information is strictly confidential. Daresay ideas will occur to us when we get all the data together. Has Queen Claire ever told you how General Vitoski happened to disappear from among his officers in the dining-room of the biggest hotel in Carmanstadt—when we were here seven months ago? Most pressing point at this moment, however, is how to reach Her

Majesty without being stopped. Where is she now—if you know?"

"If she hasn't been watched too closely to prevent her getting away—which I very much doubt—she was to have motored out of the city a night or two ago and driven to a villa she owns on the shore of the Black Sea in the suburbs of Mamaia, a hundred and thirty miles east of Carmanstadt. The Earl and Countess of Wannerly—connections of hers—with Lord Framworth and his two daughters—are to be her guests there for a week or two. And the big Wannerly yacht will be anchored directly off the villa. In fact, it will stay there as long as Her Majesty remains in that neighborhood. (I fancy I may take the credit for that little detail.) She'd never have consented to go there if she hadn't seen that the situation in Carmanstadt was hopeless as far as she was concerned. If you can give her any confidence in this possibility you've suggested, we'll have no diffic'lty keeping her there for a bit."

"THEN—if you hadn't met up with us, you really had no intention of driving into or through Carmanstadt, tonight?" Trevor asked.

"No—we make a wide detour around toward the river. We've confidential agents from the British Legation in two of the towns *en route* who'll be waiting for us on the road with fresh supplies of fuel and a basket of food. After once getting over the Pass, we were taking no chances in stopping at any inn for meals. What I'm anxious about at this moment is how we're to get in touch with your friends and the Baroness before they drive too near the city! Your car is much faster than this one."

"Fancy you may set your mind at rest upon that point. First place—the Baroness would tell 'em where you were heading when they asked where she wished to be taken. But I had it understood with Achmet, anyhow, that he was to wait for us ten miles down this right-hand road we've just turned into, d'ye see; Lammy an' Prince Abdool know quite well that Maurescu will be spreading a net for us in the course of an hour or so, an' will want a confab to decide the best way of avoidin' it. We could get into the city from the south or east side and be in our beds at the hotel before any of the Governm'nt crowd knew we were in town—but this Black Sea rendezvous is a cinch. The Danube takes a right-angled turn to the north about thirty miles this side of Kustandji. All we need do is cross the river into Bulgaria at one of the towns directly south of here—and run along the right bank until we cross the Carmanian border again near the little town of Ciller—then make for Mamaia."

AT the spot agreed upon, the other car stood at the side of the road waiting for them—its occupants thoroughly posted as to their objective but in doubt as to which way Trevor would take. When he spoke of running straight down to the river Lammerford thought that if Maurescu happened to send out a sufficiently detailed alarm, the ferryman wouldn't dare take them across. But the Marquess reminded them that in any circumstances, Maurescu couldn't be certain that it wouldn't be a serious blunder to arrest three friends and countrymen of the Queen Dowager—so there was slight chance of his imagining them as heading into Bulgaria at the Islatz ferry. Lammerford said that while they had been waiting, two fast cars had raced up the main road in the direction of Tirloschi, probably a mile east of them, but of course seeing nothing of their car, with its lights out.

From Tirloschi down to Islatz by the roads as they found them, was a hundred and thirty English miles. They managed without difficulty to maintain an average of better than forty miles—so, leaving the inn shortly after eight in the evening, they were approaching the Danube town by eleven-thirty. The Earl's old friend kept an unpretentious inn which was celebrated among a certain class of discriminating patrons for the excellence of its food and cooking—but, better than that, the innkeeper was an old chef of the royal kitchen, devotedly attached to Queen Claire and likely to know if any orders had come through in that direction. So they made a detour, entering the town through one of the poorer quarters and running through an arched passage into the secluded inn yard, where they were concealed from anyone in the narrow street. While the innkeeper was having two baskets of food put up for them, he chatted with his old friend the Earl. Yes, to be sure—there had been telephoning to the military Commandant about a party of three men and two women in English cars. If the license-numbers on the cars were the same as those mentioned, the ferrymen were to detain them until they could be examined by an officer. If the plates did not correspond the motorists were permitted to proceed as they pleased without question. As the innkeeper understood it, there was no actual order for arrest—it seemed to be merely a plan to check up on all cars traveling through the night and possibly detaining those bearing the specified licenses until the itinerary of the owners could be ascertained. Confidentially, François was of the opinion that if the suspected cars did appear, they would be quietly ordered to proceed in the direction of the Capital with military cars on the road ahead of and behind them.

LAMMERFORD smilingly took his old friend out to the cars in the yard and showed him the English license-plates which were mentioned in their passports—chuckling over the fact that examination of the passports had been waived at Tirloschi.

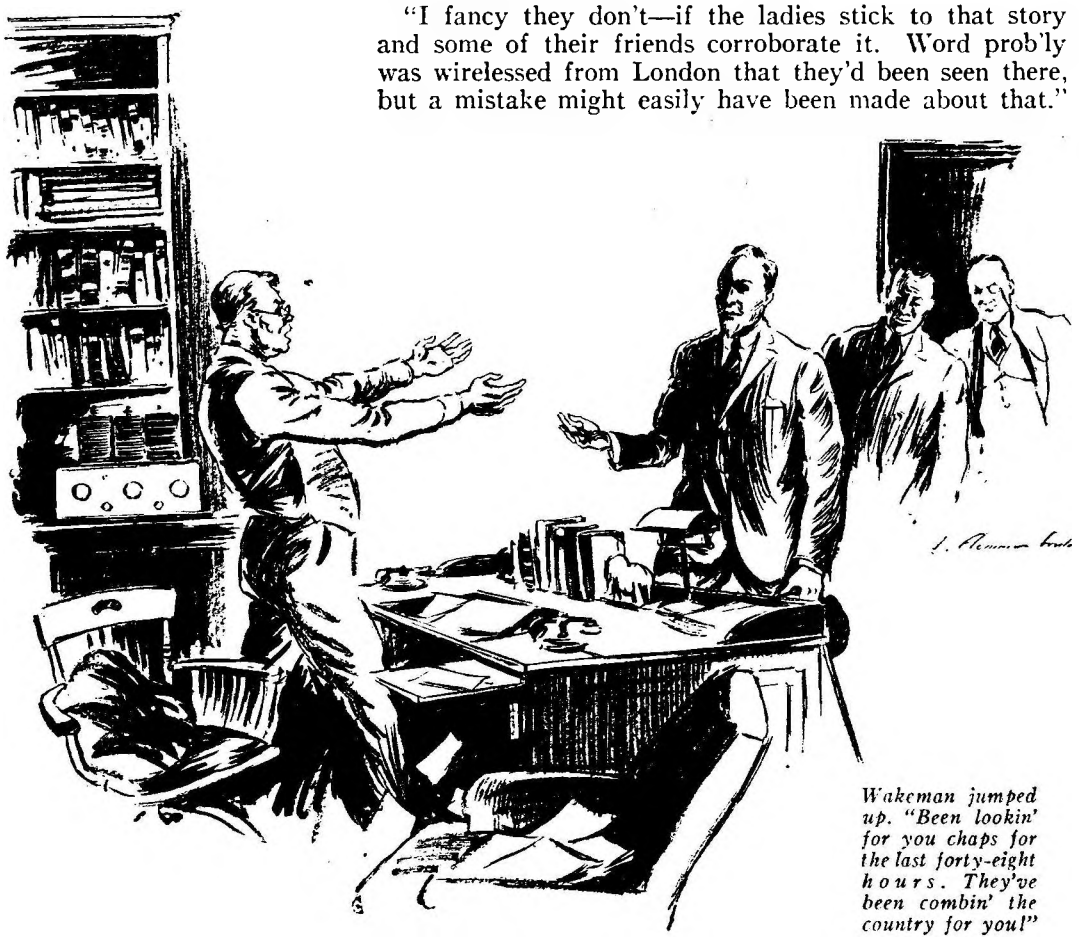
"As a matter of fact, *mon vieux*—neither of these plates were on the cars when they came down Red Tower Pass! Do you know the ferrymen well?"

"One is my son, M'sieur Comte—the other married my daughter. I have already sent the girl down to them. They will let us know, presently, when there are no soldiers or officers about the ferry enclosure—then you may run your cars down aboard their float in perfect safety—be on the Bulgarian side before any of the military know you have crossed. They will write down the numbers of these licenses to show if questions are asked—but there will not be any. I think none of the authorities expected you to come this way."

With excellent food and several extra tins of gasoline to obviate any necessity for stopping in the towns they passed through, they made the remaining two hundred miles shortly after breakfast-time in the morning and were given a most appetizing meal by Queen Claire's chef when they appeared. She had been very anxious for the safety of her two friends and was delighted to see their escorts again. As far as she knew, her absence from the Capital had not yet been discovered by Lariu and his confederates or her weakly adventurous son. While they unquestionably controlled the country for the time being and had a large enough following among the people to give them absolute power, Her Majesty was the best-loved woman in the State among the decent, conservative class—with friends everywhere who would protect her interests with their lives. Her drawing-room that evening, after dinner had a distinctly peaceful English atmosphere which rather blinded most of them to the fact that, if soviet influence ever did get the upper hand in the State and Lariu's crowd happened to switch over that way for what there was in it, the Queen and her entire family might be butchered without a moment's hesitation. When a collection

of insane experimenters in government announce in their leading newspaper that they have carried out one million two hundred eighty thousand official executions—mostly among the former aristocracy and upper middle-classes—in the fourteen years since their revolution, one realizes that such a population is absolutely devoid of the equipment understood by the terms "civilized brains and instincts!" And that sort of an outfit happened to be close neighbors along one stretch of the Carmanian border.

There was frank discussion of the existing situation in Carmania and her two sister States—with the sidelights of national ambitions and policies among the dominant Powers—during which Countess Jane of Rondymount (a much more forcible character than the Baroness) mentioned to them the Marquess' suggestion for dealing with it. After a moment of stupefied amazement, they all laughed—it seemed too utterly ridiculous for serious consideration. But Her Majesty had seen these three men pull off propositions which at the time had seemed equally fantastic. So she rather hopefully and very interestedly gave them as accurate data as she had in regard to men then prominent in all the parties—particularly, such scandals as underground gossip was hinting about this or that one. In the morning, Trevor and his friends left for Carmanstadt, driving into the city from the south side and going directly to the British Legation where Sir Henry Seaton, who had been the envoy for several years, was immensely relieved to see them and insisted upon putting them up rather than risk their espionage or arrest at one of the big hotels.



Wakeman jumped up. "Been lookin' for you chaps for the last forty-eight hours. They've been combin' the country for you!"

"If they do interfere with you chaps in any way, we'll at least know of it at once an' start the wireless buzzing into the F. O. There have been several telephone inquiries concernin' you three an' the ladies since yesterday morning—most of them from the Moldaucini Palace. So I fancy you'd best go up with me for an audience as soon as possible. They'll want to know where the ladies are—no question as to that!"

"Hmph! . . . . They'll not get it from us, Sir Henry! The ladies' whereabouts is strictly their own affair!"

"But—I say, Marquess! Frankly, you know—that's a bit dangerous line to take! What?"

"Nons'nse, man—nons'nse! You know who they were as well as we do—know we must have escorted 'em safely to Her Majesty! Well—are you tellin' this gang of political bounders an' Judases where she is—or they? We drove the ladies to the home of friends they were to visit, some miles from here—were naturally invited to stay the night—and then came on into Carmanstadt to see a few of our old friends. Anything wrong with that story—which happens to be a hundred per cent truth?"

"Why, I fancy not—if the ladies actually were who they claimed to be—"

"They were not—and you know it. Well? Does Maurescu or any of Lariu's crowd absolutely know that Countess Jane and the Baroness have been outside of Carmania during the past month—not visiting friends in some of the smaller towns?"

"I fancy they don't—if the ladies stick to that story and some of their friends corroborate it. Word prob'ly was wirelessed from London that they'd been seen there, but a mistake might easily have been made about that."

"Precisely! Do you fancy Lariu considers himself strong enough to hunt out the Dowager Queen of Carmania, wherever she may be, and arrest her two most intimate friends?"

"Not unless he considers the time ripe to spring some unexpected coup in which he'd feel safer with the royal family an' their supporters in the cells. I'm a bit doubtful as to that. There's a deal of Roman influence here—one is by no means sure how far it may have spread or what may be simmering. If one could accurately spot the extent of that influence, now—"

"Guaranti, of course. And—who else?"

"My word! . . . . I hadn't happened to get that slant on it until you mentioned it, Marquess! Why—Guaranti naturally includes his cousin, Silvio Brantomini—and their friend, Pietro Scaldini—both Members of the Carmanian Parliam'nt. Yet—outside of those three—I'm blessed if I know anyone who is really menacing in the way of Italian propaganda!"

"Suppose it were possible effectually to handle Guaranti, Lariu, Jon Sebasco, and Lodiani? Are there others you think of who might hurriedly replace them an' carry on with whatever devilm'nt they're now up to?"

"Upon my soul, I doubt it! Those four aren't fools enough to train understudies who might step on their necks to climb over them! These bounders aren't statesmen, you know—they're gangsters—playing chess for all they can personally get out of it. Consequ'ntly—they

build up an unquestioningly obedient machine, rewarded on a spoils basis, to do most of the filthy work while the four at the top do the planning."

"How about the other—in Rome?"

"Well, d'ye see, he must find a most particular sort of tool for this sort of work—one who has a very wide acquaintance an' much personal influence in the Balkans. Such men—with anything like Guaranti's talents—aren't easily come by. Another man, with a more blundering touch, might easily involve Rome in diplomatic complications before he could perfect a serviceable underground system. Withdraw Guaranti, an' it might be some years before Rome could find another of just the proper caliber."

"You're checking up, Sir Henry, upon exactly my own beliefs in regard to present conditions here. H-m-m—I fancy Lammy and I had best go around for a bit of a pow-wow with John Wakeman, on the quiet. If inquiries are made, you don't know where we are, but expect us back very shortly—eh?"

The great daily newspaper *Resboiul,* circulating throughout the Balkan States, was then occupying a large building in the Elizabeta—but the private office of the English editor-in-chief and part-owner of the sheet would have had about the same atmosphere had it been in a wing of the Palace: A room fifteen feet square, lined to the ceiling with book and newspaper shelving—containing a broad, flat-topped desk with a leather swivel-chair behind it—a long leather divan upon which the editor snatched cat-naps during nights of stress—three other comfortable chairs usually stacked with periodicals which he hospitably swept to the floor when visitors came in—a high-powered American wireless set with head-phones and dynamic speaker. In an adjoining cubicle was a wireless transmitting set with a night-range of five thousand miles ICW or three thousand with radio-phone.

IN the private office, magazines from the chairs had been removed to a shelf and the chairs hauled invitingly close to the desk. Wakeman peered over his glasses—then jumped up with outstretched hands.

"Been lookin' for you chaps, for the last forty-eight hours! Gentlemen—they've been combin' the country for you! Crossin' into Bulgaria was about the one thing they didn't figure on—they don't know it yet! You got 'em as far as Claire's villa, of course—an' the Wannerly yacht mounts a couple of four-inch Q. F. rifles, in case they want to go away from there without bein' disturbed. Personally, I don't think they'll interfere with the Queen or her friends down there—they've not got that far as yet. Well—you two an' the Prince aren't down here for your healths. I don't know how much you've learned or where you got it—but this little State is a hot corner if you ask me! What's on your minds? Eh?"

"H-m-m—as we see it, John, there are about four superfluous men in Carmania at present. Without 'em, the machine doesn't function."

"Needn't mention 'em! Unnecessary! Wondered if you'd twig! Well? Assassination's barred, I fancy?"

"The bloody sort—aye. But there's a calumnious kind which is often quite effective, as Machiavelli discovered—eh?"

"I've been wonderin' how that might be applied—aye!"

"Any question as to Guaranti's bribing Lariu's crowd—Members of Parliament?"

"Not the slightest—an' for large sums. Played it at first as winnings at cards—but now just hands it out in packages of notes."

"Has that been seen?"

"Aye—through the window-blinds of his cousin's study, out by the Jockey Club—lot of shrubbery around the house."

"That sounds like periodical paym'nts?"

"Right. Not so much risk of double-crossin'."

"Got any of Guaranti's handwriting?"

"Six notes. Cost me five hundred *lei,* but I fancied they might come in handy upon occasion."

"Know of a good journeyman-forger who doesn't dare blab?"

"Fancy I do. Pal of a convict I once got out of quod—an' I paid for an operation which saved his daughter's life. Forger will operate cheerfully for convict—convict will fix it to please me—nobody knows anything about other fingers in the pie."

"By Jove! . . . . Begins to look less diffic'lt than I'd feared!"

"Glad you think so, Marquess! I'm not so sure it's a cinch, myself—but you came to the right shop. We aim to please."

"Next point—are Guaranti, Lariu and the others mixed up with women in any way?"

"Oh, man! . . . . You're in the Balkans, you know! We're a bit on the mediæval side, down here!"

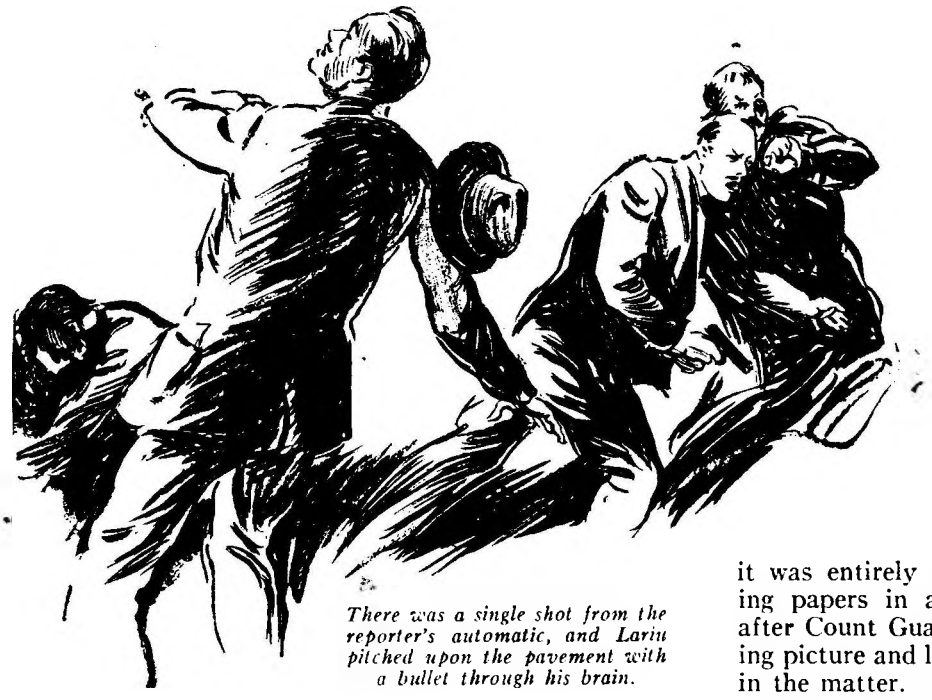
"Other men's wives?"

"Aye—an' then a few! In Jon Sebasco's case, it's an opera diva he's fairly insane about. Had so much attention she thinks well of herself—but scared blue if Sebasco finds her gabbing privately with some other man. Been trying to hold him at arm's-length—can't quite do it—knows he'll cut her throat if he gets proof that some other chap is thick with her!"

"H-m-m—shouldn't be such an impossible matter to give each of those men something to think about besides politics. Rather fancy we need about one more 'prop.' Have you such a thing in your tool-kit as an actress of such average build and appearance that she can make up to impersonate practically any other woman of outstanding personality? One who'll run some personal risk for—say—twenty thousand gold *lei?*".

"I say, old chap! . . . . You seem to be calling for odds and ends we've had in stock for some time, wondering just how they might be used to advantage! As it hap-

pens, there's a young Viennese playing here at this moment who is one of the cleverest impersonators I ever saw. Found her in a hovel over in the Turkish quarter three years ago—too ill to work an' nearly starved. Put her in a good nursing-home until she was on her feet again—staked her to living expenses in Berlin an' Vienna until she began to make good on her own. She has a small bank-account, now—after payin' back every penny to me—but she'll risk a lot for twenty thousand *lei,* an' I fancy there's nothing she wont tackle at my request. I fancied I saw the makin's of a first-chop news-correspondent on the side, from the fact that she speaks five languages fluently and three others middling well—wasn't far out, at that. What else can I offer you?"



There was a single shot from the reporter's automatic, and Lariu pitched upon the pavement with a bullet through his brain.

"Hmph! . . . . That'll be plenty to start with, John. Now—let's tackle the proposition of Il Conte di Guaranti, first. Suppose something like this were to happen—"

Trevor slowly and consideringly sketched three separate incidents, leaving the connection for their imaginations to fill in. A grin of sheer delight crept about Lammerford's mouth. Wakeman filled and lighted an old black brier before he spoke.

"My gosh almighty! Marquess, you're wasted in the Twentieth Century! Cesare Borgia would have fallen for you—hard! All this is a bit risky, you know—but with any sort of luck we'll pull it off without bein' implicated a-tall! An' it'll work—bound to work! What's the game with the other three?"

"Primarily, the stirring up of so much insane jealousy that they simply can't keep their eyes on the political game—don't care whether school keeps or not."

AN account of all the inner details in the smashing of that Carmanian frame-up—financed and directed by emissaries of a Power in the South (to be reasonably vague)—would make a novel in itself. One night when eight Members of the Carmanian Parliament were seated around a table with Il Conte Fernando di Guaranti in the study of his cousin, Silvio Brantomini, a dull report and a blinding flash of light just outside the opened window-blinds startled them to their feet, grabbing for the packages of banknotes which the Count was passing across the table to them. As they whirled about, full face, looking toward the window, there came a second flash. They suspected that a picture might have been taken—but though some of them ran out into the grounds a moment or two afterward, they found no trace of anyone about the premises. Two days later, four of the leading news-sheets in Rome carried excellent flashlight pictures of the scene around that table in Brantomini's study, over a *facsimile* of this note in Guaranti's unmistakable handwriting:

June 13th/'30

My dear Senatore:

As you have so cleverly surmised, there is much more to the scheme than Roman influence in your State. Work is being carried on under my direction in Bulgaria and Hungary—and the zero-night approaches. What say you to a soviet of the three States combined under a single Council of eight commissars, who will include your good self, Lariu, Sebasco, Scaldini, two from Budapest—two from Sofia—with myself as President? It is not, I'll admit, the result for which large sums have been advanced by a certain Power, but it is of far more pecuniary advantage to those immediately concerned. You will not question that, I think. The immediate situation, here, is to be handled in a way that will leave no future menace from that source.

Cordially,
F. G.

As those Roman news-sheets had a wide circulation throughout the Balkans, it was entirely permissible for *Resboiul* and other leading papers in adjoining States to send their reporters after Count Guaranti with copies of the editions containing picture and letter—asking him what he proposed doing in the matter.

Since he was quite too dumbfounded to give any coherent denial, all of those papers were privileged to print their account of the interview with reprints of letter and picture. They found it surprisingly easy to secure plates from the Roman papers. Inside of three days, Guaranti was recalled in disgrace—afterward being hounded as far as America. The existing Government in his country had no use for either blunderers or double-crossers—even when there was some reason to believe they might have been "framed."

In the case of Stefan Lariu and his confederates—where there had seemed the utmost harmony and smooth preparation for an approaching *coup d'etat,* there was, before the end of the week, not much of anything save black suspicion and insane jealousy. Lariu was found and photographed in a hotel suite with a woman whom one of the Senators swore was his idolized wife—and every friend who saw the newspaper half-tone agreed with him absolutely. The Senator didn't dare challenge Lariu—one of the best shots and swordsmen in the Balkans—but he started a campaign of panning him in Carmanian society until the "political" was effectively ostracized. A woman whom Sebasco swore was his opera diva drove over the mountains into Hungary in a luxurious landaulet with a handsome tenor. He followed them—shot and killed the tenor—was sentenced to ten years in a Budapest prison. He had found no trace of the diva until he heard that she hadn't left Carmanstadt—and got proof of it after it was a bit late for apologies to the tenor. The fourth man, Lodiani, was now beginning to sense approaching trouble when Lariu took him off for a motor-ride one night and got down to business in his own savage fashion:

"I'm at my wits' end to understand just what has been happening among us, Lodiani, or how it has come about! The whole scheme is a complete washout unless we manage to strike before Thursday morning. I can hold the Seventh, Ninth, Fourteenth and Twentieth Brigades if I show myself in control of the State within forty-eight hours—and a majority of the Parliament will follow me about that long. King Jon will go before them Thursday with his own scheme of Government changes and reforms. If he gets that far, they may follow him—and the Army also. Well—he wont get that far—that's all there is to it!"

Lodiani licked his lips nervously.

"You'd—er—arrest him?" he asked. "Chuck him in the cells?"

Lariu snorted derisively.

"And make a hero of him to the Army, if not to half the people? Hmph! . . . Haven't you more sense than that? We simply can't leave possible dangers on our trail! Listen, man! Jon, little Georges and Nikolas are in the Moldaucini Palace now. Queen Claire and Princess Mariana can be fetched from wherever they are by a telephone-message saying that the King is to be murdered at the palace tomorrow night. They'll come, without the least doubt. We make a clean sweep! With the whole family eliminated, we declare a Republic with ourselves in control. And then—who is to stop us or put up any resistance? The whole State will be paralyzed! You can see that as well as I—not? Eh?"

"Aye—it would be—if you dare go that far! If both of us aren't shot trying it!"

"Nonsense, man—where's your nerve? I can get five hundred brutal, utterly unscrupulous peasants into that palace before anyone realizes they are there!"

Lariu wasn't a match for Count Guaranti at chess—but he was more than a good player—and he had seen the chance for a stunning, paralyzing checkmate. Where he slipped up was in his ignorance of who he really was playing against—three men who, for a quarter-century, had been making players like even Guaranti realize that they still had much to learn about the game. John Wakeman's staff of clever reporters was much larger than one would have supposed a paper with but two thousand circulation possibly could need. His use of them, however, was frequently more political than journalistic. So it happened that Lariu and Lodiani hadn't driven a mile outside of the city before the fact was reported to Wakeman by phone and repeated to the three Free Lances who were sitting in his office at that moment.

A serious expression crept into the editor's face, and he said:

"What do you chaps make of *that?* I fancied we had those birds on the run! How does it happen those two are driving off into the night like the lamb and the pussy-cat? That's what I want to know! I don't like it! Lodiani hasn't much nerve, but Lariu has plenty for both, an' he isn't beating it out of the country by a damsite! How about it, Marquess?"

TREVOR filled and lighted his pipe—then said in his lazy, pleasant drawl:

"Way I see it, Lariu's either giving his pal a ride—in the Chicago-gangster sense—or else he's hatching up some last desperate coup as his final throw of the dice. As he has no conceivable object in killing Lodiani—as he can absolutely depend upon at least five hundred of the most murderous peasants in his party—and the Army itself if he is successful—I'd say the two of them are now cooking up something to break before Jon presents his program to Parliament, day after tomorrow. In fact, we'll assume they're doing just that. Next point—about what would it be? If he can wipe out the entire royal family in one blow—he'll be unquestionably sitting on top of the world as far as this State is concerned. King Jon, little Georges and Nikolas will be easy to get. They are in the Moldaucini Palace where he an' his peasants can get at 'em. As for Queen Claire and Mariana—well, suppose they get a phone-message that Jon is injured or dying and wants to see them. . . . . They'd come at once; you couldn't stop 'em! . . . . Great cats! I believe that's precisely what Lariu's going to do! —John! Get through to that villa at Mamaia—quick as you possibly can—as a communication from the British Legation! Tell the Queen her friends an' Sir Henry are handling this affair, and will see that Jon doesn't get hurt—she mustn't believe any other message she gets—and she absolutely mustn't stir from the Earl's yacht until we say it's safe! —Abdool, you take my car with Achmet! Make that hundred an' thirty miles in ninety minutes flat if you can! Keep Claire, Mariana, Countess Jane and the Baroness from coming a step this way if you have to drug 'em! —John, in your opinion, can any of the Army be really depended upon to protect the Royal Family?"

"Aye—Sixth Brigade—the one Jon formerly commanded. . . . I'm through to Mamaia! Here! . . . Take the phone, Marquess—she knows your voice! I'll get Sir Henry on the other phone and have him quietly fetch the Sixth Brigade into the palace on a confidential order from King Jon while you're talking to Claire!"

LARIU decided upon settling the King and Princess that night—taking his chances on luring Queen Claire into the Capital next day—or having his peasants catch and shoot her on the road wherever they found her. But when he got his peasants together at the back entrances to the palace at two in the morning, they were fired upon by the men of the Sixth Brigade.

Inside of ten minutes, the building resembled a veritable shambles.

Lariu sent for other regiments—telling them the Sixth were murdering or had murdered the King. Sheltered in a doorway with the Free Lances, one of Wakeman's star reporters asked:

"I say, Your Lordship! . . . . Anything's permissible in the street-fighting of a revolution, isn't it? Aye! Well, then—here's where Lariu gets his—he's certainly been askin' for it!"

There was a single shot from the reporter's automatic, and Lariu pitched down upon the pavement with a bullet through his brain.

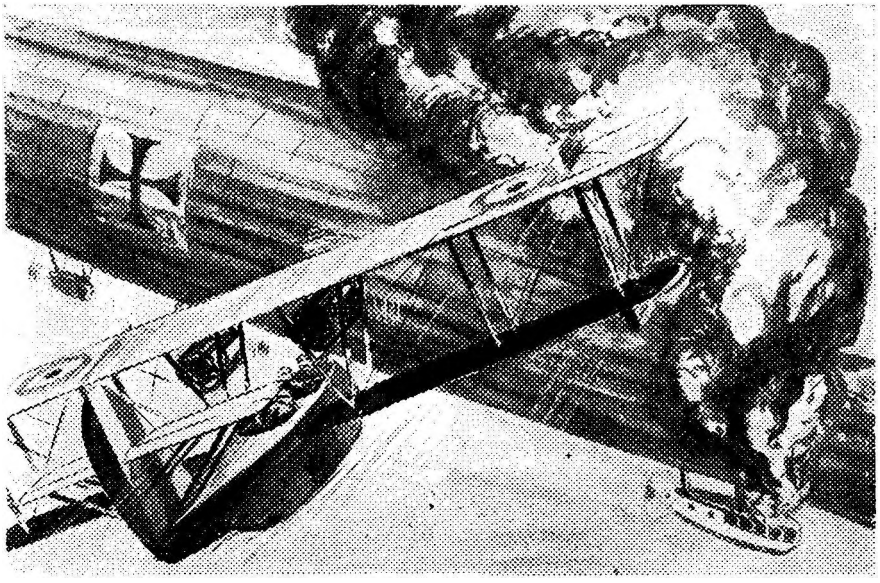
Then the General commanding the Sixth had sense enough to shout through a megaphone to his comrades-in-arms asking if it really was their intention to murder the King—motioning to Jon who was bleeding from a couple of wounds which he hadn't been able to escape—made by ricocheting bullets—and presented just the right appearance to his fighting-men, who shouted their undying loyalty, raising their swords in salute.

When Queen Claire got the whole story next day, at Mamaia, she almost tearfully kissed the Marquess, the Earl, and the Prince. Countess Jane followed her example—saying they certainly were in great luck when those innocent tourists happened upon them so casually at the Tirloschi Inn.

And John Wakeman sat musing in his cobwebby office—polluting the atmosphere with his old black briar, and marveling at the game of human chess whose moves he had watched.

"Hmph! . . . . If those three are really human—well, where does that leave the average lot? My word!"

REAL EXPERIENCES



Battling a Zeppelin

While Captain Munday was not officially credited with this Zeppelin, his gallant battle with the enemy aircraft certainly had much to do with its destruction.

By **Captain Albert H. Munday**

AS a pilot in the R. N. A. S. and R. A. F. in the Great War, I had countless thrilling experiences, patrolling above the fierce battle zones on the Western Front week after week while attached to a fight "circus," and as a Squadron Commander on Zeppelin and submarine patrols over England and the North Sea.

Shot down out of control, often to crash in No-Man's Land—having one's engine "give up the ghost" far out at sea—piling up the "bus" upon landing after having it riddled with bullets from enemy airplanes in a dog-fight and damaged by shrapnel from high-explosive "Archies"—these and many other such incidents made life a daily routine of miraculous escapes that left one with the thought that the easiest thing in life was to die, while the hardest problem was to live.

Of all my experiences, thrilling as they might appear to those whose lives have led along peaceful paths, the occasion when I fought the Zeppelin L-62 near Heligoland, on the afternoon of May 10, 1918, will be to me the most thrilling. The fight lasted one hour and five minutes and despite the fact that our machine was shot down, we successfully put the Zep out of business; subsequently it went down in flames, with the loss of all its crew.

I WAS sitting in the officers' mess having lunch on the eventful day, when a wireless report gave the information that "Dora" was patrolling over Heligoland. This was the fourth report of the airship that morning. During the War, Zeppelins were reported by using names of girls. The first time it would be with a name beginning with "A," such as Alice; the second time it would be with the letter "B," like Beatrice. Therefore, when word came of "Dora" it was the fourth.

For some reason Wing Headquarters was opposed to our proceeding so far from our base to intercept the enemy, so we had heretofore been forced reluctantly to give up the idea of a scrap.

When the report of "Dora" came, however, the commanding officer asked me if I would be game to go against orders. I jumped up and said: "I'm ready. Let's go!"

Inside of fifteen minutes our "F. 2-A" flying boat, carrying the C. O. as first pilot, myself as second pilot, and an engineer and wireless operator, was headed toward Heligoland. I was a friend of the C. O., and often accompanied him on lonely patrols, especially when only one machine was required. If two or more machines were necessary we each piloted our own craft. On this occasion we did not take a forward gunner as by taking less weight we had a greater radius of action. In case of an attack I was to act as forward gunner.

We covered the two hundred odd miles to Heligoland in about two and a half hours.

We sighted the coast and then flew on at a height of eight thousand feet. We had almost given up the idea of meeting the Zep when suddenly I looked down and spotted a sailing-vessel. I nudged "Pat,"—the C. O.,—then pointed to the ship and then scribbled a note to the effect that it was a funny place for a small vessel to be. It should be remembered that we could not talk to one another on account of the thunderous noise of the two engines; it was necessary for us to write our remarks back and forth.

I had no sooner written the message than I looked up—and thrilled at sight of the Zeppelin, one thousand to fifteen hundred feet above us!

Simultaneously, Pat noticed eight Hun battleships off to one side of the sailing-vessel. The Zeppelin was apparently working in coöperation with the cruisers by spotting for hostile aircraft or surface craft that might be on the offensive.

We opened the throttles of the engine to full power and headed the machine up toward the enemy. I rushed to the forward cockpit and prepared my machine-gun for action, while our engineer prepared his gun for action also.

We gained on the Zep and after a few moments got within about seven hundred feet of it. I was about to open the attack when our wireless operator informed us that the Zeppelin was sending an S. O. S., asking for the fastest airplanes to come to its rescue.

Here was a new danger! Any second now we might

sight a squadron of the fastest fighters that the enemy boasted at that time. One of these speedy planes could easily outmaneuver our craft and shoot us down in flames. We had to get the Zep before those machines got us.

PAT headed straight for the Zeppelin and then I opened up fire with explosive and incendiary bullets. A few seconds later, the engineer opened up fire.

I sprayed the bullets from end to end of the big Zep and all of my explosive and incendiary bullets appeared to hit the gas-bag. We gradually got closer and I continued to pour lead and fire all over the towering airship. I could see the leather-clad members of the crew in the gondolas rushing about in a state of panic.

The Zeppelin now started to sway dangerously backward and forward; just as I calculated that my next burst of fire would put an end to the enemy, one of the explosive bullets exploded in the gun and threw the pan of ammunition perilously past my face and over my left shoulder. Several pieces of lead penetrated my left cheek, causing my face to bleed.

We were now at a height of twelve thousand feet and as I had removed my gloves and had no windshield or any protection from the cold, raw atmosphere and the rush of air from a speed of about one hundred miles an hour, I was so numb that my hands started to swell. At the time of the explosion several pieces of the bullets also imbedded themselves in my hands, causing them to bleed. In this handicapped condition I was forced to strip my machine-gun to pieces, put in new parts, and place on a new pan of ammunition.

The destroyers now started shelling and suddenly the air around us seemed to be alive with death-dealing shells. The explosion tipped and threw our machine about in all directions and in hazardous positions.

The wind had drifted the Zeppelin immediately across the top of our craft and all manner of articles and bombs, thrown overboard to lighten the craft, fell within a very few feet of us. I now had my gun fixed and once again we headed straight for the Zep. It seemed that we were going to collide with the towering monster from which machine-guns were spitting fire at us. I heard the whistling of bullets as they sang dangerously over my head. At any second I expected to pass out of the picture. A well-aimed shot at Pat's head might also have spelled doom to us all, as I don't think I could have reached the airplane controls in time to right our craft, weighing five tons, out of the straight dive which would have resulted if Pat had been incapacitated.

I again fired several bursts at the huge bag and saw my bullets striking the envelope around one of the aft engines and at the stern of the Zeppelin.

SUDDENLY I saw the engine—around which my bullets were striking—stop, and I noticed a small spurt of flame around the petrol tanks. This spurred me on excitedly. We had won! I continued firing but again, my gun being hot, one of the explosive bullets lodged and exploded, throwing off the pan, hitting me on the right side of the head, tearing my flying-cap and cutting my ear.

In a split second, so it seemed, I stripped my gun to pieces again, and in record time had it in operation. By this time, additional machine-guns on the Zeppelin were firing, and unfortunately for us we were hit either by shrapnel from one of the battleships, or by machine-gun fire, as our engineer rushed forward with the message that our port engine had been hit. His scribbled note told that an oil-pipe had been fractured, and we would have to land.

The Zeppelin was now swinging, apparently out of control, the crew still in a panic. They appeared to be hanging to the rail at one minute to save themselves from being swept overboard as the big ship swayed at an angle of forty-five degrees, and the next minute they could be observed clutching the opposite side, as the huge craft threatened to turn upon its back.

With our port engine out of business we had no alternative but to glide down; however, being at a height of twelve thousand five hundred feet we had the advantage of a glide of about eleven miles.

The sea was tempestuous, but we made a landing. Looking back I saw the destroyers racing toward us at breakneck speed and at the same time shelling us with high-explosive projectiles, which fell within one hundred to three hundred feet of our craft. At the same time I saw the Zep coming down, a huge black smoke pall pouring from it.

I took a quick glance into our machine; I could not see the engineer and was greatly alarmed. I thought he must have fallen out on our way down or had been thrown out as we landed on the rough sea—it was rougher than any sea I have ever been on in an ocean liner.

We were now being buffeted about like a cork and it seemed each wave was about to swamp us. We figured the game was up. Immediately I threw all our ammunition overboard, as it is a contravention of the Berne Regulations of War that if explosive or incendiary bullets are used the enemy has the right to shoot the offender, and I did not want any evidence of this kind. Everything went overboard—maps, charts, machine-guns, and ammunition.

I was still greatly alarmed about our engineer, when suddenly, I saw a boot protruding from the far side of the engine which had been struck. I cheered up as I realized he was repairing the trouble. In a few minutes he climbed down and shouted "O. K.!" By using insulating tape he had made a temporary repair.

NEITHER Pat or myself thought we could "take off" on such a mountainous sea. However, it was our last hope, so we would attempt it. By keeping the nose of the machine high out of the water and opening up the engines full there was a chance of getting off, but in doing this it meant that the tail section, which contains the elevator and rudder, would be subjected to a terrific pounding by the waves. After several attempts we finally got the machine off the water just as the speediest of the German battleships was within hailing distance.

I jumped up on my seat and looked back. The shells were still falling thick and fast around us and how we escaped being struck by one was a miracle. I observed the Zeppelin going down in a pall of smoke and flames and I knew we had won the battle!

Upon examination of our craft, we found fifty-four bullet holes from the guns of the Zeppelin, and three rips in the fabric by shrapnel from the shell-fire of the battleships.

After the war the full story of this fight was told in the British newspapers, and the German side of the story was told later in an article under the heading of "The Zeppelins," by Ernst A. Lehmann and Howard Mingos, in a well-known weekly magazine.

"Then the Royal Naval Air Service and Royal Flying Corps fortunately amalgamated, and on the 10th of May, 1918, 'L 62' was destroyed by a flying boat, 'F2A' off Heligoland, by Captain Patterson, Captain Munday, and crew. The Zeppelin climbed to 9000 ft. When the flying boat was at 8000 ft. fire was opened on the Zeppelin; then she climbed to 12,500 ft., being closely pursued by the flying boat, which was under heavy fire whilst chasing her. This Zeppelin was severely damaged in this fine fight, and went into the sea off Heligoland in flames."

(From "Airmen or Noahs" by Rear-Admiral Murray F. Sueter, C. B., R. N., M. P.)

Jungle Arrows

Attacked by hostile Indians while prospecting for oil in Venezuela, the narrator barely escaped with his life.

By **Albert Lannier**

SEVERAL years ago Charles Stewart, Frank Arnold, Clyde Brown, Paul Reeves, Jim Crawford and myself met in a hotel at Maracaibo, Venezuela, bound into the interior on a tour of exploration for a major oil company—a cruise destined never to be completed.

For a matter of several weeks we kept pushing into the interior, mapping the structure of the land and the principal tributaries of the Rio Catatumbo, but never sighting another human being. After exploring the Rio Tarra and starting up the Rio de Oro, both rather large tributaries of the Catatumbo, our native boat-men began to show signs of uneasiness and a desire to turn back.

Some few days later we moved on up the river as far as we could get with the launch and barge. There the party split, Stewart, Brown and myself cutting into the foothills to the south and west, leaving the others to make a survey of the territory within a radius of twenty-five kilometers of the launch.

The next day Brown stayed in camp to complete some of his notes, while Stewart and I struck across to the west until we came to a creek we named Pedro Lonzo. Since the trip through the jungle had consumed the major part of the forenoon, we immediately started back, and upon arriving in camp found that Brown was not there; the single native left in camp said that Brown had taken two men and started up Agua Caliente only about an hour after we left.

We ate a hasty lunch and started to follow him, but had gone only a distance of about two kilometers when we came upon one of the natives badly wounded by two arrows through his lungs. He managed to tell us that they had been waylaid, and that he had tried to get back to camp. We left him and ran up the *"troche"* or cut trail as fast as we could. At the end, some three kilometers farther along, we found Brown and the other native. Brown was dead, with three arrows through his breast, and had been horribly mutilated.

We had just started to examine his body when the surrounding jungle commenced to vomit arrows. Even now I cannot account for the fact that we were not killed instantly. Falling behind what little shelter was provided by a small log and a pile of brush, we swept the jungle with our guns. We kept the fire up for some time after the arrows quit flying and when sure that the Indians had retired, we went forward and hastily buried Brown, leaving the native as he lay. A short scouting around the clearing brought to light one Indian and his equipment.

We returned to camp and early in the morning started to the river. While on the way we were attacked again, losing two of our natives. In this attack an arrow passed through the calf of my left leg and I had to discard my rifle and follow Stewart as best I could on an improvised crutch.

Arriving late in the evening of the third day at the river camp, with only our side-arms left,—Stewart having discarded his rifle in order to help me over the worst of the trail—we found it deserted, three dead natives and a new grave making it apparent that this camp had also been attacked.

That was one of the darkest moments I have ever experienced! With our last hope gone, besieged by hostile Indians, myself wounded and with a mounting fever, it seemed to us that the end was near.

However, Stewart started down to the boat landing—he later said because he didn't have anything else to do—and his joyful shout gave me strength to hobble after. Before I had fairly started I heard an answering shout from the river and almost immediately after the roar of the launch engine as it started. When I reached the bank the launch was just pulling in, under the guidance of Arnold.

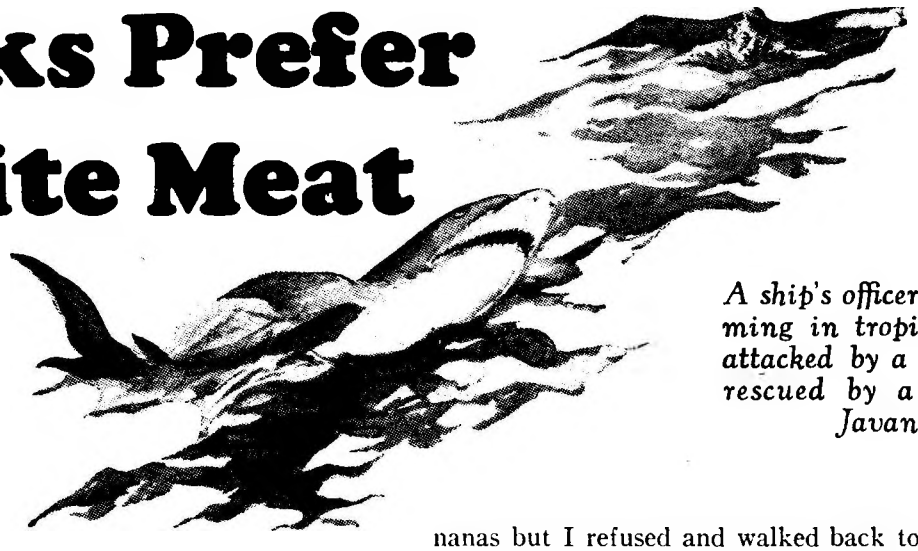
The sun was going down as we boarded—Stewart, myself and the one remaining native—and as the sun sank behind the peaks of the Andes we pointed her nose downstream on the long trail out.

Explanations were hurriedly made. We learned that they had been attacked early the previous day. Reeves had been killed, and they had buried him. In the afternoon they were attacked again and took to the boats. Crawford and the natives had been determined to strike for civilization at once, but Arnold remained firm in his decision to wait and make a try toward getting us out from the interior. Crawford had become fear-crazed; he had tried to kill Arnold and take the launch down the river. In the resulting mêlée Crawford was knocked into the river and swam to the barge where the natives were, cut loose and started to drift with the current downstream. We never saw them or the barge again.

AFTER our forty-eight-hour battle downstream, we came to Encontrados, got what medicine we could for my wound, which was now in a serious condition, and continued to Maracaibo. When we entered Maracaibo, blood-poisoning was setting in; then ensued a battle for limb and life at the Dutch hospital. After eleven weeks, I was able to hobble around a bit to the clubs and relate my experience.

It will be of interest to note in concluding that out of part of this territory which we explored,—namely, that on the Rio Tarra,—there is now being produced immense quantities of oil.

Sharks Prefer White Meat



By **Peter Bolsius**

A ship's officer goes swimming in tropic waters, is attacked by a shark—and rescued by a courageous Javanese.

I WAS second officer of the Holland Merchant Marine, *Samarinda*. We had shipped and discharged cargoes all over the globe and were lying off the coast of one of the islands of the East Indies. The shallow beach made it necessary for us to send our freight into the village by barge.

Bali is one of the richest islands of the Indies. It is almost within sight of Java. The natives who live on Bali, being rich and most of them "Mecca" Mahometans, will not work. They hire out but are so indifferent or careless they are practically useless. In our case they were not only useless but dangerous. For we were discharging gasoline, ten thousand liters of it, in five-gallon cans.

A number of these cans were piled together and a sling put around them. Then they were lifted from the ship's hold and swung out and lowered to the barge.

The Bali coolies could not, or would not, adjust the slings properly and a number of the cans crashed into the hold and burst. Our Captain fired the coolies. Although it meant two days' delay he decided to steam to Soerabaja, where he could get coolies whom he knew were good workmen. Meanwhile I was detailed on shore to look after the barge and get our "pick-ups" ready.

NEXT morning I was out early enough to see the shallow water turn from shell-pink and pale green to turquoise. I walked back from the shore past some native houses all alike, low, square, and white. I was nearing a house when a man came out and trotted ahead of me a little way. He stopped and facing about waited for me to come up.

In one hand he held several large bananas fast to a piece of their stem, small bananas in the other hand. First he thrust the large ones at me saying, *"Pisang radjah"* (king banana). Then he held out the little ones, *"Pisang Susu"* (sugar banana).

Suddenly, without waiting to see if I would buy he swept all his bananas under his arm and pointing, said, "Purty."

It was a necklace I had picked up as jade and silver, for my wife. When I found out how badly I had been fooled—it was even a bad imitation—I had slung it around my neck as a reminder of my gullibility.

I was so astonished to hear that native speaking English that I lifted the necklace off and held it out to him.

"Taabae Blanda?" he asked me. I knew almost no "Indies" so I merely shook my head.

"Taabae Blanda?" It was still a question, so I hung the thing around his neck. He tried to give me the bananas but I refused and walked back to the beach deciding his, "Purty," had not been English after all.

I soon noticed that wherever I went my banana merchant was at my heels. Some of the islands are infested with beggars and although I had seen none there I decided this fellow must be one.

I bargained with a native, who had a canoe hollowed out of a log, to take me out on the water along the coast. He paddled me a short distance and I stopped him and sat there looking at the forest of palms extending back on that flat island as far as I could see. I noticed the white temple glaring in the sun. No shadow fell upon it except that of its white dome. I watched a fisherman standing in water to his waist. (There are no waves at Bali. The water is a still mirror of the sky.) This man fished with a fine strong net attached to a rope. He rolled it up into a small wad and threw it far out and upward. He was as skillful with that net as a game fisher casting his flies. The net unrolled in the air and sank like a parachute into the water. After an interval he drew it in, unloaded the fish into a net sack hung from his shoulders into the water and cast the net again.

A figure approached the fisherman and I recognized my necklace; it seemed that beggar was bound to follow me.

I had noticed the natives of Bali were not swimming, but I was hot and decided to go in. I told my companion by signs that I was going to take a bath. He scowled at me but merely grunted. I wriggled out of my clothes carefully, not to turn the canoe over.

As I slipped into the water I thought I heard a shout from the shore. The water was warm and I swam about leisurely, diving and trying different strokes. I had gone some distance from the canoe and was about to turn back when I saw the fellow start paddling for the shore as though the devil were after him. He bent his back and the canoe fairly skimmed the water. I looked around and saw what looked like a torpedo coming toward me. It was perhaps an eighth of a mile away, out to open sea. A white streak was cutting the water, like a tiny racing rib tide. I knew. It was a shark. That was why there were no swimmers at Bali!

For an instant I was paralyzed. Then I remembered having read that in a shark attack the victim often dives deep and stirs up the sand, forming a screen behind which he can escape.

Lifting my head and shoulders as high as I could, I glimpsed the shark's course and dived. I struck to the left and saw the shadow passing on my right. I was in deep water, for I did not touch bottom. I swam toward shore under water until I had to come up for air. The shark was circling back, gaining speed. I dived again. That time I struck bottom. I grabbed sand with my hands and dug frantically with my feet but disturbed

only a pitiful amount. The ocean bed was packed solid with no waves to tear it loose. I knew the shark would be making shorter turns now, running closer, giving me less time to dodge. I came up a second time.

He was almost upon me, but I was gaining toward the beach. With a little luck, in that shallow water I could get in where the shark would run aground.

I dived shoreward again. Two shadows darted over me. I was lost. There were two sharks! From my fright and being so long under water, I was almost exhausted. At last I shot upward to die in the sunlight.

I came up in a red spot in the sea. Red waves slapped against me. I wondered if the sharks had struck each other—and then my beggar friend bobbed up beside me, clutching a bloody kris in his hand. The death-struggle of the shark was so near it splashed water over the knife.

My rescuer and I turned and swam to the shore. When we reached wading depth I turned to look back. The gutted shark floated, a white island on a red lake.

THE fisherman had run to call help from the natives and the whole village had come out. They did not babble and chatter, or crowd around as most people do. Bali is an island of reserved people.

No one seemed to notice we were naked as we came out of the water. My rescuer ran to the beached canoe and brought my clothes to me. I dressed hurriedly, but he took his time. I was feeling horribly sick and sat down on the sand, glad I was in Bali where I could be let alone.

The natives returned quietly to the village. The fisherman began casting his net. My friend kept his distance from me, fondling his necklace. I motioned for him to come to me. He sat down on the sand beside me and I spoke to him in one of the only two international languages. I laughed. It was a shaky nervous giggle so to make my meaning clear I extended my hand to him. He clasped it in a white man's salute. . . . I had had a close squeak and I was indebted for my life to a man I could not talk to!

We sat there in silence for a little while and then, with the most wonderful diplomacy, instinctively wishing to relieve me of my deep feeling of gratitude he exclaimed: "No danger Taabae Blanda. He likum white. Black man not good. Taabae Blanda safe."

"Taabae Blanda? Is that your name?" I asked him.

He nodded. Nor could I get him to talk again.

I saw the *Samarinda* steaming in from the horizon. Taabae Blanda and I walked back to the wharf. Several times I saw him adjusting his necklace and caressing it with loving fingers.

He hung about while we unloaded the gasoline and shipped coconuts. When we were ready to leave I went to say good-by to him. We shook hands. He was chewing betel and his mouth looked a horrid sight. I touched his necklace and asked: "You want one more, Taabae Blanda?" He grinned and held out the hand that had saved me. It was closed when he extended it but he opened the fingers one after another. I counted, "One, two, three, four," then the thumb, "Five?" He nodded vigorously like a happy child.

"Taabae Blanda likum!"

I never got back to Bali again. But Captain Joosten delivered the five necklaces for me, also a ring, suggested by my wife. Joosten has assured me that my banana merchant's passion for jewelry is satisfied.

Facing Execution

A war-correspondent in China is captured, taken for an enemy —and about to be beheaded by the executioner.

By **Colonel O'Sullivan Sloan**

WE had just taken Pengpu that summer afternoon in 1927. Pengpu, be it known, is the first decent-sized town on the railroad between Nanking-Pukow and Peiping—then Peking. "We" were the Nationalist armies under the command of Gen. Chiang Kai-shek, whose military adviser, propaganda agent and nurse for foreign observers, correspondents and cameramen I happened to be at that time.

In the outskirts of the town the fighting was still raging merrily between our gang and the Chinese and White Russian mercenaries of Chang Chung Chang, the war-lord of Shantung. The whistle of stray bullets, the rat-tat-tat of machine-guns, interspersed with the dull boom of artillery, could still be heard plainly as dusk fell.

It was one of those steamy, sticky afternoons that only China and the interior of the Malay jungle can seem to provide—unbearable indoors and almost as bad outside—and to a foreigner doubly so. Thus it was with a feeling of relief that I was detailed to accompany a party of officers to the "front" for observation purposes and to assure a complete mopping up of our position.

Our little Manchurian ponies were still in a car somewhere down the crowded single railroad track, so we had the choice of walking or running. We walked.

We reached the outskirts of town safely just as it began to grow dark.

Over to the east we could note threatening storm-clouds gathering—and they gather quickly in China. We

moved around for half a mile or so, keeping under cover as much as possible; then the party split, one group going to the right and another to the left.

The troops around us were new to the front—they were part of a division brought down from Hankow—mostly Cantonese who had been resting for months after their long trek northward from Canton.

THEN came the black Chinese night, settling down upon us like a blanket. Now and again there would be a sharp crack near us and a bullet would whistle over us, or we'd hear a low-voiced challenge which one of the Chinese officers with the party, who could speak Cantonese, would answer and pacify whoever it might be.

Then, swooping down with the force of a hurricane, came the storm. The sky split open with a lurid glare as a gigantic bolt of lightning struck something scarcely a quarter mile away from us. The rain fell in sheets, and, as it landed, steamed up from the hot earth to meet another downpour.

Lightning-flash after lightning-flash, boom after boom of thunder, and rain, rain, rain! Everyone in our party, of course, had but one thought—getting to cover. But that wasn't easy. It was a black night. We were on ground new to us—on a terrain checkered with ditches and canals. We were, by that time, more than a mile from the nearest house—and we had no flashlights or street-lamps to guide us. Only the unreal, weird glimpses which we had of the earth in the frequent lightning glare could help us.

It was but a few moments until we were all separated, for it was every man for himself. For myself I ran in the direction I thought the town lay and fell headlong into one of those evil-smelling Chinese creeks. My gun dropped from my holster and was lost. My cap, carrying my insignia and identification badge, went sailing some place—and I climbed out, covered with mud and slime, a pitiful caricature of what once had been an Irishman. I wiped the mud out of my eyes and the rain washed it out of my hair back into my eyes again. And, worse luck, I "smelled to Heaven!"

I REALIZED that it was useless for me to try to find my way anywhere until the storm let up or until I could orient myself. And just a little way from me I noticed a bridge crossing the creek—a dim bulk in the darkness. I ran for it and crowded under—smack into three other men.

I knew they weren't Chinese—because instead of the Cantonese cackle they gave vent to lusty Russian oaths. I placed them—three of the enemy—White Russians of Chang Chung Chang's forces.

Luckily I could speak a little Russian and I told them I was a newspaper-man who had gotten lost. And more luckily, they believed me and let me live—for I had no arms of any kind.

All night long the four of us stayed under that dinky bridge, waiting for daylight—soaked to the skin, covered with mud, hungry and hot. And with the dawn—

A group of Cantonese, wearing the familiar "Sun" insignia came rolling along and spotted us.

If there was one single thing that a Nationalist soldier in that revolution didn't like, it was a White Russian. They didn't object to fighting their own kind, but Chang Chung Chang's Russian brigade had a reputation for cruelty and ferocity toward Chinese captives that was unequaled even in that land of sudden death. And to be a White Russian captured by Nationalist soldiers was equivalent to a violent and quick exodus from all things in general.

As soon as the Cantonese came up to us, I smiled at them, tried to talk to them in Shanghai dialect, which they didn't understand—to no avail. My uniform was so muddy that it rivaled those of the Russians. I had lost all my insignia. The troops were strange to me and I couldn't speak their language. To them, therefore, I was a Russian the same as the other three.

With a bayonet pointed at my back I walked along the creek bank with the Russians ahead of me. They marched us into Pengpu and up to the *yamen* then occupied by their divisional headquarters, all the officers of which were strangers to me, for I'd never been through the fighting at Hankow, where they had come from.

OUR "trial" lasted about five minutes. A Chinese interpreter, who I had good reason to believe spoke neither truth or sense, listened to my story, plainly disbelieved it and translated that disbelief to the officers gathered around.

We were sentenced to death, of course.

I pleaded with the interpreter to send a messenger over to general headquarters and get some one to identify me. He told me he wouldn't take that much trouble for any damned foreigner and barbarian.

They hustled us roughly out of the *yamen* into a courtyard outside. Here lay several headless bodies in pools of blood, the heads already having been gathered up to be penned in little baskets as testimony to the efficiency of the executioner.

Over to that corner of the yard we were hustled roughly, and a cry went out which I presumed to be the call for the husky who wielded the nine-foot knife which is the Chinese guillotine.

The ceremony is this: The victim has his hands bound behind him. Then he is forced to kneel on the ground. As he does so, one member of the execution-squad passes a strip of cloth or a piece of rope around his neck and standing several feet away, pulls the neck out taut. Then, on a given signal, down comes the knife—nine feet of it—and some of them weight almost a hundred pounds—in a single blow which is supposed to decapitate the victim. Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. In old Imperial days, however, only executioners who could do it in a single stroke were able to hold their jobs.

They tied our hands behind us. One of the Russians, knowing what was coming, began to mutter prayers. One of the others took up a mournful chant. The third looked stolidly ahead. I was thinking of ten bucks I had won from one of the correspondents shooting craps a couple of nights before and which I hadn't collected.

JUST then the gate to the outside opened. I turned my head, thinking it was the executioner and wanting to get a sight of him—and who should walk in but one of the officers from general headquarters, who had been a member of my party the night before!

I never loved a Chinaman quite as much in my life—past, present or future, as I did that man then! I called to him by name. He came over, recognized me and began questioning the soldiers guarding me. Then, in a few words, he ordered all of us unbound. In his charge we were taken back to the *yamen,* where he identified me to the satisfaction, apparently, of everyone. The three Russians he ordered sent to general headquarters for questioning.

Well, there isn't much sequel to this yarn, except that just exactly forty days after this happened, I stood on the foredeck of the *President McKinley* as she sailed into the Golden Gate.

I'd had enough.

A Tough Bear

By **Burt M. McConnell**

A member of Stefansson's Arctic Expedition undertakes to photograph a polar bear and finds him a difficult subject.

HUNTING with the camera is an interesting hobby, but it is just as well to have some one along who is a good rifle-shot, especially when photographing polar bears at close range. This is one of the things I learned during my first year in the Great White North, as a member of Stefansson's third expedition.

The expedition commander had chosen me because I had a good pair of legs for dog-mushing, knew something about hunting big game, and could use a camera. Wilkins (not Sir Hubert Wilkins), recently returned from the Antarctic, was the official photographer; I was to assist him.

We found that we had too much equipment, and two of us were delegated to take some of it back to shore while waiting for an open lead to freeze over. Wilkins asked if he might go in my place, as he wanted to develop some films at the base camp; and so it was arranged. While he and his companion were ashore, however, a gale blew up from the southwest and carried our ice-field far out to sea. But it blew us in the direction we were traveling.

With Wilkins marooned on shore, the job of taking pictures fell to me. For two weeks we mushed steadily northward, struggling over jagged pressure-ridges sometimes fifty feet in height, camping at night on the ice, and shooting seals whenever we needed fresh meat.

One day we had just cooked a meal of seal-meat and I was sitting on an ice-cake, with a juicy morsel in one hand and my sheath-knife in the other, when we were brought to our feet by a sudden commotion among the dogs.

As I had used the dog-whip last, I yelled to Storkerson that he would find it on my sled; then we resumed eating. Almost immediately, however, we were brought to our feet by Storkerson's shout: "It's a bear!" Stefansson ran to get his rifle, which was in its case on the other sled; and I rushed to get the camera. The others leaped in among the dogs to restrain them from rushing at the shaggy brute, which stood in plain view on the edge of the opposite ice-field; not more than twenty feet of open water separated the dogs from the bear.

"Don't shoot till I get a picture!" I shouted.

Just as it seemed the bear had made up his mind to leap into the water and swim across to attack the dogs, Storkerson extricated his rifle from its case and I got the various gadgets on the camera adjusted. We straightened up at the same instant, and Storkerson fired just as I tripped the shutter. His bullet took effect in the bear's right foreleg. Partly as a result of his loss of equilibrium, the bear somersaulted into the open lead. We could see him, surrounded by air bubbles, performing frantic evolutions calculated to bring him quickly to the surface. In a few seconds his narrow head, with ears cocked forward in pained surprise, broke water. Turning swiftly, he made for the opposite ice-field.

But the bear was not to escape; by this time, Stefansson had extricated his hard-shooting Männlicher from its case, and planted a bullet behind the beast's right shoulder. Before either Stefansson or his aide could get in another shot, the wounded animal disappeared behind some rough ice; he was in full retreat.

During the commotion the ice-fields virtually had made contact with each other, so that it was now possible for me to cross the gap on a pair of skis. Carrying my camera, with Jim Crawford as bodyguard, I took up the blood-spattered trail of the sorely stricken bear. Our purpose was two-fold; to get another photograph and to put the animal out of its misery. We ran on and on, but did not even catch a glimpse of the fleeing creature until we had gone almost a quarter of a mile; he was dragging his right forefoot, yet could get over the rough ice as rapidly as we could. But he was growing weak from loss of blood, and apparently realized that his race was run. Instinctively, he dived into the nearest bit of open water.

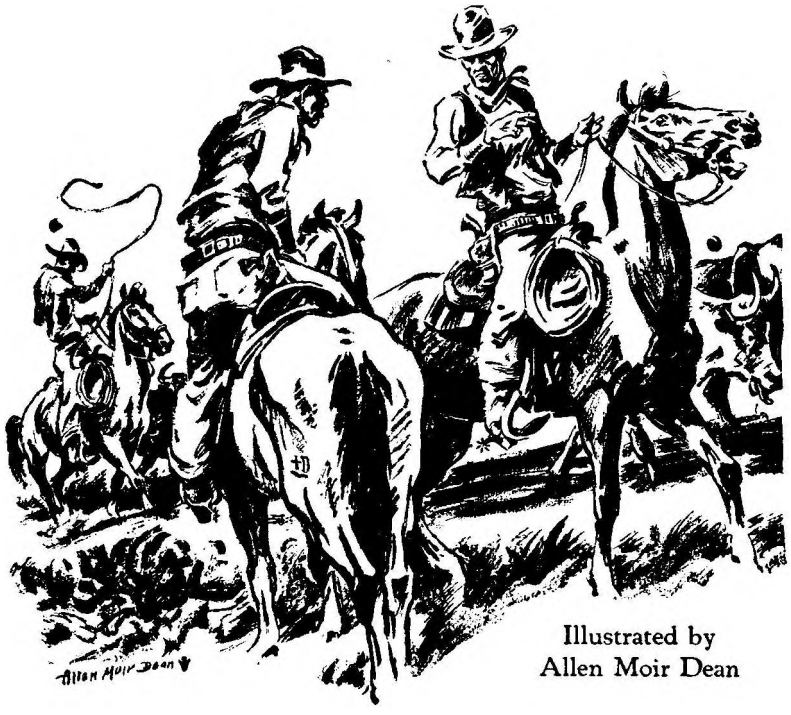
Crawford and I were perhaps a hundred feet away at that instant. We came up to the pool on the run, and waited at the edge for the bear's head to appear. When it did, I was in a favorable position about twenty feet distant, and snapped his picture; Crawford planted another bullet in the creature's head. With a hoarse cry of pain, the shaggy monster dived again. A moment later, when he came up for air, I got another picture and Crawford plugged him in the neck.

But he sure was a tough bear; instead of diving, the beast planted his huge forefeet on the edge of the ice, and hauled himself up out of the water. Crawford, at a distance of not more than twenty feet, aimed at the bear's heart—and the hammer of his rifle clicked! He was out of cartridges! With a common impulse, Crawford and I went into a huddle, and it was agreed that he was to go back to camp for more cartridges, while I stayed to head the bear off if he tried to escape. What I was to do if the bear recuperated sufficiently to charge was left to my own discretion.

Before Crawford had gone more than a hundred yards, he met Stefansson, who had heard the barrage and knew he must soon run out of ammunition. With one shot from his .256 straight through the heart, Stefansson dispatched the beast whose bump of curiosity had cost him his life.

ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

The gifted author of "Through the Red Dusk," "The Forest Legion" and other well-remembered stories here gives us a deeply interesting novel of the modern West—that splendid mountain land that is still stirring with drama none the less exciting because it is real.



Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

Riders of the Forest

DUST climbed in hazy streamers into the warm air. Cows bawled as they milled about through the sagebrush flats, and picked scant forage from the sun-baked ground. They were sleek, hardly showing the day's trail drive they had gone through.

Behind them rode two men. Beyond, were the camp wagons. At the edges of the herd, cow-hands rode through the filmy dust spirals, bunching back the stragglers. Nearly a thousand head of cattle were on the move. Summer range up in the high country was ahead of them.

The two men who followed the herd rode to one side of the wide little valley, and topped a ridge and pulled their horses to a halt.

Scott Nally, the heavy-set man with the broad, reddish face and deep-set eyes, squinted as he looked across the short stretch of country that began to break up ahead until it tumbled into the foothills below the ragged, sawtooth crest of the Maroon Mountains. Nally turned to his foreman, Walt Peacey—a six-footer. Peacey's deep-tanned face was lean, touched with a hint of ruthlessness even though softened by the shadow of his wide range hat.

"See that opening?" asked Nally. He pointed his hairy paw toward a break in the outer hills and a wide open cañon that seemed to extend back into the mountains in a broad sweep up to a swayback pass in the mountains.

"Yeh," said Peacey.

"That's Grassy Cañon," said Nally. "We're goin' through there."

"Yeh," agreed Peacey again.

There was silence a moment. Below there was the racket of the herd on the move, the yelling of the cow-hands as they worked the stock back into compact formation, the bawling of cows hunting for calves temporarily lost in the movement of the herd.

"You aint got no Gov'ment permit to go through the Sierra Amarilla Forest, hev you?" drawled Peacey as he leaned against the pommel.

"Course not!" exploded Nally.

"Thought you hadn't," observed Peacey. He took out cigarette materials and made one, licked it deliberately. "Just wanted to make sure."

"Well, you know now," snapped Nally a little tartly. "What of it?"

"Nothin'," agreed Peacey. "Just wanted to know what trouble there might be to that route you've just mapped out. Gov'ment sometimes sorta objects, you know; more so now than some years back. Them Forest men air squeamish about things."

Nally turned on his foreman angrily. "Look here, Walt, you've not got cold feet, hev you? Just a prospect of a little fight with them Gov'ment men—"

"Naw, I aint got no chills anywhere," broke in Peacey slowly. "You knowed I'd put them cattle through wherever you wanted to go when you started acrost here, Scott. You aint never seen me and this gang of *hombres* down there hazing them dogies lay down yit, hev you, now?"

"No, can't say I hev," agreed Nally in a more mollified voice.

"Well, then, we'll go through there ef you say go," said Peacey. "Aint afraid of no ranger fellow."

"But there is a bunch of homesteaders in there at the mouth of that cañon that might make more trouble than the Forest outfit. They might fight."

"Hell! Homesteaders!"

"But they've got permits for their stock up there in Grassy Cañon country. They might make some sort of a yelp or start trouble, at that. On the other hand," continued Nally, "I happen to know that some of 'em aint too friendly with the ranger on that district. Maybe they'll git fussin' among themselves and we kin git through while they're doin' it."

"We kin gentle 'em, I guess," drawled Peacey.

DECKER Meredith, slim, sinewy, brown-haired, boyish-faced U. S. Forest Ranger on the Grassy Cañon district, looked up from his desk as a quick, sharp knock sounded on the door. He shoved to one side the letter he was writing, opened the drawer a little until just the edge of blue steel on the handle of his automatic showed, and then yelled: "Come!"

The door swung open as though some one had started to rip it from its hinges. A leathery-faced and grizzled-

"You aint got no Gov'ment permit to go through the Forest, hev you?" drawled Peacey.

mustached little man with steady blue eyes came bouncing in.

"Why, hello, Jerry Quinn!" called Decker, closing the drawer. "Come in, come right in and tell me what's new."

Quinn winked rapidly several times, reached for a chair, found it with his hand, but did not sit down. Instead, he came to stand opposite Decker, the desk between them.

"Trouble's comin'!" said Quinn. "Loads of it. . . . Nally."

"Scott Nally from beyond the Junction?"

"Yeh."

"What's he doing around here?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Quinn tartly. "You know his reputation. Didn't you have something up with him regardin' a permit to graze in the high-country range, or some drive-way permit?"

"Yes, but we never gave it to him. He's not a Forest user. Has no standing at all. His place is twenty miles from the boundary. He hasn't any reason to expect grazing in the forest except after you smaller ranchers are taken care of, and then, after you fellows who have been grazing stock on the Forest range since before there was a Forest. They all get their crack at it first. The idea is to help the small fellows make a home and a living. Then if there is some range that isn't being used, maybe big fellows from a distance, like Nally, would stand a show. But not at all with the amount of demand there is for grazing on this Forest."

"Well, what's Nally and about a thousand head of his grade white-faces doin' down beyond Tuttle's place if he's not plannin' to put somethin' over? Camped there last night and starting up this way this morning."

"You can search me, Quinn. I didn't know he was around here."

"Well, he is. And he's headin' fer the Forest."

"He's got no right to go on the Forest," said Decker sharply. "He talked to me about it the last time I was over to the Junction. I told him there was no way for him to get even a driving permit to go across. He'd do too much damage to the range in transit."

"Say, how well do you know Nally?"

Meredith looked up at the pugnacious face of his homesteader friend. Quinn was one of the men in the Grassy Cañon Cattlemen's Association that he depended upon. Quinn knew what it was worth to do some good cooperation. It meant smoother handling of stock on the forest ranges; it meant better stock, too; for under good regulation better beef came out of the mountain meadows than when any one herd was allowed to eat out one pocket clear down to the roots before compelled to move on to the other parks and cañons. One such thoroughly punished grazing unit would not recover in several seasons. But under the good regulation of the Forest Service all the range was protected from overgrazing.

"Why, I've met Nally," said Decker slowly, in answer to the question that Quinn put. "What about him?"

"Ef you knew him," said Quinn, "you'd know that no lack of Forest Service permit would stop him from drivin' his stock where he wants to go through. I started to homestead over in his country some five years back. Nally was just gittin' some of a start then. I had fences cut, lost stock, and I've got a bullet scar here in my old leg that came from a run-in with some of the renegade riders he hires. He's a fearless sort and if he has it in his mind to go through here and lick up the range as he goes, there aint goin' to be much less than a standin' army that'd stop him!

"They're poison ivy when it comes to any encroachin' on their range. Remember last year that sheep case where that Mex came down from the high country and run his woolies on Ray Shafter's range? Remember?"

"Well, Nally isn't on the Forest," countered Meredith. "Until he gets there and breaks some rule, I've nothing to do with it."

"Aint, huh?" demanded Jerry. "Aint got nothin' to do with it? Well, let me tell you, you'll have plenty to do with it in another day's time!"

He turned and stamped out of the little office that occupied one end of the administration building. He stopped at the door.

"Let me tell you, Deck," he shot back, "there aint a man in the Grassy Cañon Association that cain't do a little defendin' of his own rights ef it comes to a showdown. They've done it in years past. And they kin do it again. There's some hotheads sidin' ag'in' you—takin' sides with Jepsons, they are. Ef the Gov'ment doesn't do what it should, then they may do what they've done years back. And that means blood spilled on this ranger district."

He went clumping across the little stoop, hobbled hurriedly to the hitching rail, untied his horse and went trotting down the road back in the direction of his own ranch.

FOR many moments Ranger Meredith stared at the top of the desk.

He knew of Nally. The rancher was wealthy. He had a reputation for disregarding anyone that got in his way. Sometimes it meant that whoever opposed him got a good trimming in a business deal. Occasionally it meant hot lead flying; there were several old range murders that people said—

Meredith jabbed at the blotter on the top of the littered desk. Some of these ranchers had the wrong idea of the U. S. Forest Service. They thought of it as something that could be hazed around to do almost anything that a nervy man could put over. Government property, to Meredith, was a sort of trust that was placed in his hands by the agents of the people. Mountains, streams, grasslands, forests, even the minerals that were hidden away in the depths of the Rocky Mountains, he felt were public wealth that should be administered so the most people would benefit.

Meredith swung in his chair. He pulled open a file, yanked out a folder, ran through the contents. He smiled grimly as he saw the carbon of his letter to Nally, denying a permit to cross through the most heavily grazed, richest part of the Grassy Cañon District. The forester stuck this

folder in his field case, then slowly crammed his pipe full of tobacco. A few moments later he cranked the telephone, and listened to the answer from the other end.

"Say, Lanky," he called to "Lanky" Hill, the old-timer who was on the district adjoining his, "you know this bird Nally, don't you?"

"Know him!" burst out Lanky Hill at the other end of the wire. "Sure. Nothin' good of him, though."

"Well, he's down here near the boundary just beyond Tuttle's. Jerry Quinn thinks maybe he's going to try to run his stock into the Forest. I think Jerry's got a little stampeded by Nally's reputation, but Nally's too near for comfort. I'm going down to his camp tonight to scout around. Just thought I'd warn you where I was headed for."

"You aint headed for no picnic," returned Lanky Hill shortly. "You're headed fer some sort of a ruction. Better think twicet afore you start rampsin' in on that cutthroat outfit."

"Why, Lanky, they're right good citizens," chided Meredith. "Substantial business men, that outfit! And besides, they've got a drag with some of the politicians up toward the Junction. I just wanted to pay my respects to Nally and talk general grazin' with him."

"You stay away from there," ordered Lanky as though he were talking to a youngster. "You'll get in trouble if you go tootin' around their camp. They don't like Forest people nohow."

"Well, maybe I can make them Christians," said Meredith with a laugh, and hung up the receiver.

He reached into the drawer, pulled out his gun, inspected it, filled his belt with fresh ammunition, dangled the gun at the end of the belt as he went to the residence of the ranger station, and then started leisurely to prepare supper. He was thoughtful as he opened a can of corn and fried potatoes. He cut off the slice of ham carefully and methodically.

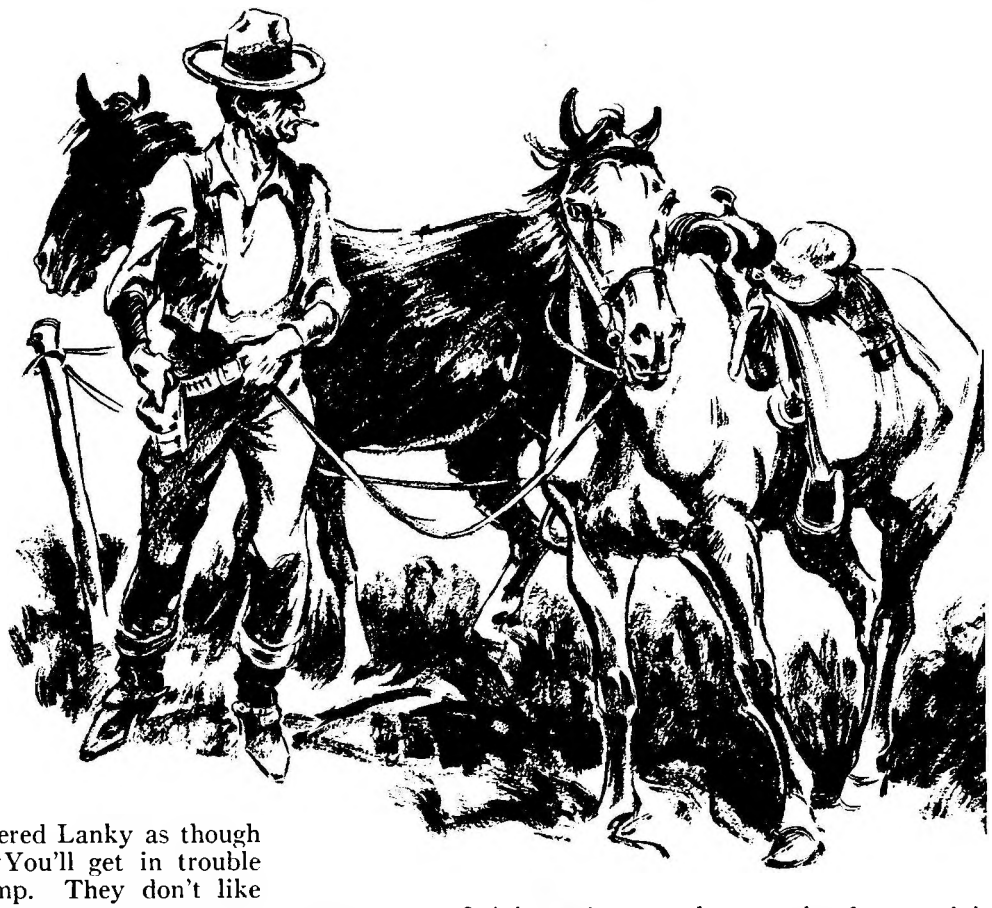
He had just finished washing the dishes after his lonely meal when he heard a horse coming down the trail. A moment later, the slender form of old Lanky Hill, veteran ranger on the Sierra Amarilla Forest, came swaying down the trail on his favorite horse Sandy, a bleached bay.

"Thought you sounded dead set on goin' down into that hornets' nest," he said as he swung off. "Ef you insist on goin', I guess I'll go along to pertect you ag'in' them sinful fellers Nally has in his crew. I aint huntin' no scrap, but I aint missin' none either. They aint no lily-white outfit, and you better keep your eye peeled. And I'll lend you a couple beside."

BLAZING glory of a Colorado sunset threw carnival colors on the camp where Nally stopped that evening. A series of little park areas above the camp had been selected as night bedding-grounds. The camp itself was spread out along the bench above Rough Water Creek, which came tumbling down over the rim-rock from the plateau that here extended out from the rougher mountains farther on.

Smoke curled up from where the cook was manipulating the Dutch ovens, and there was the smell of coffee in the air. The camp was being hammered into shape by Nally himself.

"Here, you, Shorty!" he bawled. "Git that rope corral strung out. Goin' to git an early start in the mornin'. We'll be into the cañon mouth by the middle of the forenoon. Hey, Powder—Powder Smith, ride up to the beddin'-grounds tell Peacey I want to see him here right sudden."



Nally went to the tumbling, foaming stream to wash. He stooped over, then straightened a little, took out his six-gun and laid it at the edge of the creek ready for his hand if there was any quick action. Nally never knew when he would have to reach for this gun.

A moment later Peacey came trotting his horse down the cañon.

He reached a point near Nally as the latter straightened up from washing. Peacey's sudden exclamation caused Nally instinctively to reach for his gun. For a moment, they watched the four riders coming into camp. Then Nally grunted and slipped his weapon into its holster and finished drying his hands on the seat of his overalls.

"Damned Gov'ment men," said Nally in a low voice, scowling as he recognized the rangers' uniforms. "I suppose they'll begin talkin' of permits and regulations."

"I thought so," said Peacey in a low voice.

"Shut up," snapped Nally. "They'll just chew the fat. Always do. Nothin' more come of it—except maybe trespass proceedin's about six months from now."

"Know them *hombres* with the two forest fellers?" asked Peacey.

"One of 'em," said Nally with a nasty little laugh. "That's old Jerry Quinn, that thought he wanted to homestead over our way once. You've heered how Buckshot Williams put a little hunk of hot stuff in his laig. Quinn

decided after that that he'd come over here and homestead. No friend of ours. Don't know the other *hombre*."

The four men rode up. Nally's hands shot them curious glances, but no one stopped work.

Yet as Meredith came into camp, he had the feeling that there was some hidden, crouching thing ready to break bounds and come leaping if only some upsetting little incident started a queer move.

"Keep your shirt on, Jerry," he said in a low tone to the pugnacious little rancher who rode by his side. "This bunch won't dodge trouble if it starts coming their way. So let's settle anything peaceably if we can."

"Peaceably!" said Jerry Quinn sarcastically. "Peaceably! Hell's fire! With Nally?"

The ranger dropped back to ride a moment beside the fourth man in the party, while Lanky Hill pulled up beside Jerry. This fourth man in the group was young, stocky, curly-headed, blue-eyed, sandy-complexioned. He was one of the group of homesteaders who had come in near the edge of the Sierra Amarilla Forest after the war, men who had served in the conflict and now had exercised their rights to take up homesteads from the public domain.

"Listen cowboy," said Decker Meredith in a low voice. "It looks to me like old Jerry was headed for starting a row here tonight. Just you help me keep him headed out of it, will you?"

David Rayburn, the curly redhead, chuckled a little.

"Ever try to keep a badger from usin' his fightin' equipment?" he asked, smiling a little more. "Anyway, I'll do my bit."

"Howdy!" said Nally grumpily as they reined in. "Pile off and spread yoreselves around. We're about ready to hit the grub line. Make yoreselves at home."

Jerry Quinn reined his horse in a few feet from Nally.

"What you plannin' on doin' here, Nally?" he asked sharply. "Where you headin'?"

Nally's face clouded with a scowl. "We're drivin' to my range over on the Ritos Cincos. Winter range all eaten out down below; held this stock in the feed-lots and pastures at the home ranch until range over at that place I've got leased on the Cincos was ready for grazin'. Drivin' 'em over now."

"Which way you trailin' 'em?" inquired Jerry persistently. "How you goin' to get beyond the Maroons?"

"Say," broke out Nally angrily, "since when have I got to come to you, Quinn, and ask your advice as to what my plans are? Huh?"

Several of Nally's cow-hands came strolling up to group themselves behind their boss and Peacey. All were armed; all were tough-looking, hard of body and face.

Decker Meredith sent his horse forward a little, up beside Jerry Quinn's restive little cayuse.

"You'll have to admit, Nally, that we're somewhat curious as to what your plans are," said Deck evenly. "We just don't see how you're going to get across the range without going into the Forest. And you've no permit to go through the Forest, and can't get one either."

"Nally, you've no permit to go through the Forest, and you can't get one, either."

"Can't, huh?" Nally turned on the ranger. "Well, I was just comin' up to git one."

"Saved you the trouble," said Deck with a little laugh. "I've come down to check up and tell you that my views haven't changed a bit since last spring when you asked for one through Grassy Cañon."

For a moment Nally eyed the men on horseback. It occurred to him that maybe the best plan was to play friendly. He slapped a forced grin over his face.

"Oh, all right," he said shrugging. "Get off, and have some garbage with us. We kin talk peaceably about it, I guess. No use to go off half cocked."

Decker lost no time in swinging off his horse. The others hesitated. Then Lanky Hill climbed off, to be followed by Quinn and Rayburn.

"Come and git it, before I throw it away," bawled the cook. "Snap it up!"

"Git yore cups and plates over there, boys," said Nally, trying his best to appear the cheerful, hospitable host.

"Nope," said Deck. "We've all eaten, Nally. But you go ahead. We'll wait for you."

Nally eyed them suspiciously. "Don't want to eat with us, huh?"

"I told you every one of us has had supper," declared the ranger again.

"Well, I'll wait supper, then," said Nally a little shortly. "If we've got anything to talk, let's do it now."

"Oh, we've got plenty to talk," snapped Jerry Quinn. "I want to know how you plan to git through to the Cincos range you talk about by goin' this-a-way."

"An' I told you it was none of yore business," growled Nally. "Is that plain enough, nester?"

With the quick springy courage of a terrier, Jerry Quinn threw his wiry little body at the beefy form of Nally, his fists flashing through the air. His old hate of this bluffing, bulldozing rancher came surging through the old man, and Quinn would have battled two of Nally if the situation had called for it.

Turmoil broke. Decker saw the hands of several of Nally's cow-hands steal toward their guns. He saw the swift, slicing motion of Nally's hand as it reached for his holster.

And in that split second Decker leaped, crashed into Nally. It was like throwing himself against a solid rock. But Decker's long, well-muscled body, thrown with all the might of his stout legs, was not a force even Nally could stand up against.

Deck felt Nally's arm come up with the gun. Something blazed and roared at his cheek. He felt the singeing touch

of powder-grains still burning hot. Murder was bellowing out of the throat of that old six-shooter; a voice that had belched death before.

And then he felt the impact of Jerry Quinn's body as he crashed into them. But Deck was between Quinn and Nally.

"Quit that," snapped the forester. "Drop that gun, Nally!"

Nally swore, hatefully.

Deck could hear quick, excited voices around him. He felt the impact of Quinn's fist as it struck at Nally and hit him. And then with a quick, whirling twist, Decker sent Nally spinning away down toward the creek-bank.

They fell. Nally came charging up, rearing like a mad bull. Deck threw his weight against him. Back of him, he heard a quick command from Dave Rayburn, who had Jerry by the collar, jerking him out of the way.

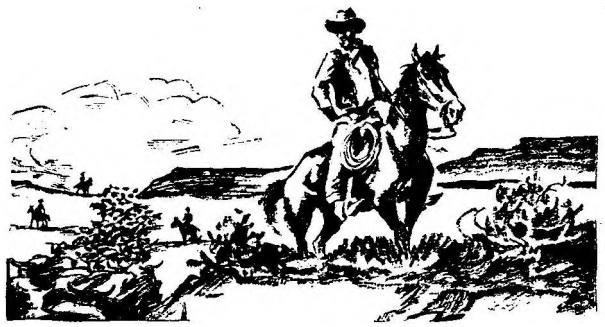
Nally went stumbling from the quick shove Deck had given him. They fell again, rolled, struggled.

And in that instant, Deck felt some quick, crashing, breath-smashing force slammed at his ribs. He twisted free, leaped clean of the clutches of Nally, whirled.

Facing him, his face black, his teeth showing in an evil grin, was Peacey.

"Out of the fightin'," ordered Peacey. "Ef you don't git that gang of yourn out of this camp in double-quick time, I'll sick my men on you. Now git up there, and make tracks!"

For a moment Deck hesitated. The very expression on



Peacey's face drove him to fighting anger. The quick, swirling clash with Nally, Nally's shooting at Jerry Quinn, the whole taut situation, drove Deck toward striking at the leering face in front of him. This bruiser had struck Deck when he was down.

For seconds the issue hung in the balance. Deck wanted to hit, and hit hard, and smash that grin off of Peacey's face. But he knew that if he did, there would be general turmoil.

Slowly he turned from the bully foreman and strode to where Jerry Quinn was cursing Dave fluently and heartfully for jerking him off Nally. Lanky Hill, his old eyes keen as a hawk's, had started forward scowling as Peacey struck his partner. His old eyes blazed now. But he had seen that immediate retaliation on the part of Deck would throw the whole camp into a blazing caldron of death, and he had stopped. There were four on one side, all of Nally's crew on the other. And Nally's men were only waiting word from Peacey to break loose.

"All right," ordered Deck. "Let's get out of here."

He walked to his horse, leaped on. He knew that back of him Peacey was grinning and gloating. But he knew, too, that the moment when there was murder heavy in the air had passed. It is part of the creed of the Forest men even to take abuse, shy at a forced fight, if it will ultimately bring an issue to a peaceable settlement.

Decker rode out of Nally's camp with fight-hunger in his heart. That one moment when he had faced Peacey, the moment he had grappled with Nally and then had not been able to finish the fight, rankled.

But it was up to him to play the game, and the game was to keep Nally out of the Forest, or if he got in, to run him out, as peaceably as possible.

Behind him trailed Lanky, Jerry Quinn and Dave Rayburn. And behind them, the camp of Nally chalked up first victory. The Forest men and the homesteaders had found out nothing, had been thoroughly bested in the quick row that had broken when Jerry Quinn's temper boiled over.

FOR half a mile they trotted their horses through the dusk-mantled forest. Then Jerry Quinn reined up.

"I've been thinkin'," he said. "There's goin' to be trouble. But I'm backin' you, Deck, to settle this without a killin'. I've seen enough of that before to last the rest of my life."

Lanky Hill drew out the makings of a cigarette. The match flared, then the cigarette glowed in the dark.

"I'm no prophet," said Lanky laconically. "But I'd say maybe yo're right, Jerry."

"All right; then what's the next move?" said Deck shortly. "I'll admit that my respect for that outfit is not what it should be right now. What's their next move —and ours?"

"As I started to say," said Jerry, "I've been thinkin'. And there aint no other route they can take from here to the Ritos Cincos except through Grassy Cañon. That would put them over the ridge at the head of the Zapata Creek basin, and they could drift right down to the range Nally speaks about."

"You know where he's going to run his cattle this year?" asked Lanky.

"Old Priest place," said Jerry. "And that settles it. No other way fer him to git over the range except right through the areas under permit to the Grassy Cañon Association and its men. And let me tell you another thing: If that herd of Nally's goes through, there's going to be one awful short tally in our stock this fall. If I'm any judge of Nally and his methods, I'd say that there'd not be any too much feed left fer those critters of ours that he didn't take along with him as he goes through."

"Well, you might as well get the idea out of your head that he is going through my district without a permit," said Deck. "He's got no permit to cross, and he'll not get it."

"What'll you do ef he goes on the Forest anyway?" demanded Jerry. "Answer me that."

"He'll be in trespass, and we'll take usual action," answered Decker.

Jerry snorted. "A hell of an effective way! He goes on. You go over to him and that foreman of his'n that walloped yore ribs fer you, and tell 'em they're in trespass. 'Git out,' you say. 'Yo're in trespass.' 'Oh, am I,' says Nally. 'And whut of it?' 'It's ag'in' the law,' sez Mr. Ranger. 'Phwut the hell do I care?" replies Nally. 'I'll have it on ye,' says the ranger, nice and polite so as not to injure nobody's feelin's. 'Have and be damned,' says Mr. Nally, just to show his appreciation. Then the ranger rides away and sits down at his typewriter and pecks out a report to his supervisor; and the supervisor takes it up with the district office in Denver; and they put it in the hands of the assistant to the solicitor who's away on a vacation; and when he gits back—"

"Now, look here, Jerry Quinn," broke in Deck. "You know—"

"It aint you," Jerry said sourly. "You'd do yore part. But you've got a mess of red-tape regulations around you,

and policies and handbooks and manuals and things that git in the road of something that would be effective. Ef I'd followed my first inclinations, I'd git out the whole membership of the Grassy Cañon Cowman's Association, and we'd have enough rifles at the boundary of the forest that ef that Nally herd started across, none of 'em 'ud git more'n a hundred yards. But I'll back you to the limit to settle it peaceable, as I said. I've no stomach fer fightin' like I usta have."

"Look here," broke in Dave Rayburn. "Suppose we ride on to yore ranch, Jerry. And you kin call half the bunch together yet tonight. If what you guess about Nally's plans are true, then we'll have to back up this forest bunch, or they'll have to back us later. We can't go squawkin' at Deck here until he's not done somethin' effective. And maybe he can depend on us in a pinch too."

"I wish you'd do that, Jerry," said Deck. "I'll think the regular permittees and Lanky and I should pow-wow on this; and if I have to, I'll go in and see what Dan Lander, our supervisor over to the Junction, has to say about it."

"All right," agreed Jerry. "Come along. I'll phone 'em, and then we can thrash it out what we're goin' to do, and how."

There was another reason why Decker wanted to go by Jerry Quinn's ranch on the way back to the ranger station. That reason was Nora Quinn. Her dark blue eyes had stirred something around Decker Meredith's heart; and the threat of young 'Fet Jepson that he would kill Deck if he paid more attention to Nora was not an altogether pleasant element of the situation. But it had not stopped Deck from visiting Quinn's ranch whenever he could.

Night had come when they arrived at Quinn's. Brilliant stars winked out from the blue dome of the evening sky, and the tints of faint afterglow spread up from the western mountains. The neat white ranch-house stood out of the shadows where big spruces towered against the skyline. Beyond were the corrals and barns. Light in the windows gave a welcome.

The door opened, and Nora stood outlined in the light. There was a big tug at Deck's heart as he saw her slim, graceful figure touched by the highlights of the lamp behind her.

There was the flurry of greetings.

"Why, Dave," said the girl, "you came back up here?"

"Yes, and brought the Forest men with me," said Rayburn, laughing. They were good friends, these two. Neighbors, nothing more, but with the good-fellowship that comes when two ride the open range together. Nora was always doing that. She was the daughter of a cowman, his "top hand," Jerry Quinn would say when they were hunting strays in the fall roundup. And Nora lived up to his statement.

"The Forest men?" she said, peering into the dusk. "Oh, you, Deck," she said, a touch of happy greeting in her voice. "You-all come up for a visit or something?"

"Nope," said Deck awkwardly. "Just some business."

While the three talked, Lanky Hill smoked, and gazed at the ragged rim of the mountains; then his eyes strayed to the notch at the head of Grassy Cañon, and his thoughts turned to what would happen if Nally should really try to drive his stock over that notch.

Inside the ranch-house, Jerry Quinn was sending quick, short, sharp messages to other members of the Cattlemen's Association. A few moments later he came out on the porch.

"Couldn't get Rasmussens," he said. "And there were none of the men-folks at O'Neils. But Jepsons, Shafter and Toothakers are on the way down, and Cort will stop here on his way back from the village if Mrs. Cort can get him on the phone there."

"Jepsons are coming, then?" asked Deck.

"Yeh. Aint that all right?" asked Jerry. "They've paid their dues to the Association, and they've been pretty decent lately."

"Well, I guess that we'll have to take them as reformed so long as they play white," said Deck. "But you know that they tried to run in nearly double the number of cattle they had a permit for. Not their own. Some of the J-Bar-G stuff from over on the Conejos. I had to tie into them pretty hard, and I don't think Lafayette Jepson has been any too friendly toward me since."

"Sure it was that permit and them extry cattle?" asked Lanky Hill laconically. 'Fet Jepson's threat against Deck because of Nora Quinn was not altogether a secret.

Deck felt his face grow hot.

"Yes," said Deck quietly, "I think that's it without a question. If he's got any other real right to go rampsin' around telling me where to head in, he can come to me direct, and we'll have it out together man to man, and not as a permittee and a ranger."

There was a second of quiet. Deck felt the touch of Nora's shoulder against his in the dark, and an instant later, a little, quick, friendly squeeze of his arm. He reached for her hand, but it was gone.

"All right," said Jerry Quinn. "You butted in on a fight of mine with that Nally just a few minutes back. Now don't you go stagin' any blusterin' contest with that 'Fet Jepson around this ranch, Deck, or I'll have to sit on your haid. This is neutral ground between you two so far as I'm concerned."

ARGUMENT had seethed inside the living-room of the Quinn ranch-house for an hour. Windows were open, and the blue haze of tobacco smoke that gathered drifted out through the screens into the night.

Decker was on his feet facing the cow-men. He had talked, argued, stormed a little. Through it all he had held his temper.

"I tell you, Ranger," flared 'Fet Jepson, "yore regulations may be all right when they're not dealin' with such a renegade as Nally. We-all know that bird. There aint no halfway about him. Ef he's made up his mind to go through here, then he'll go through. And ef he starts to go through, I'm one that's goin' to see that he doesn't."

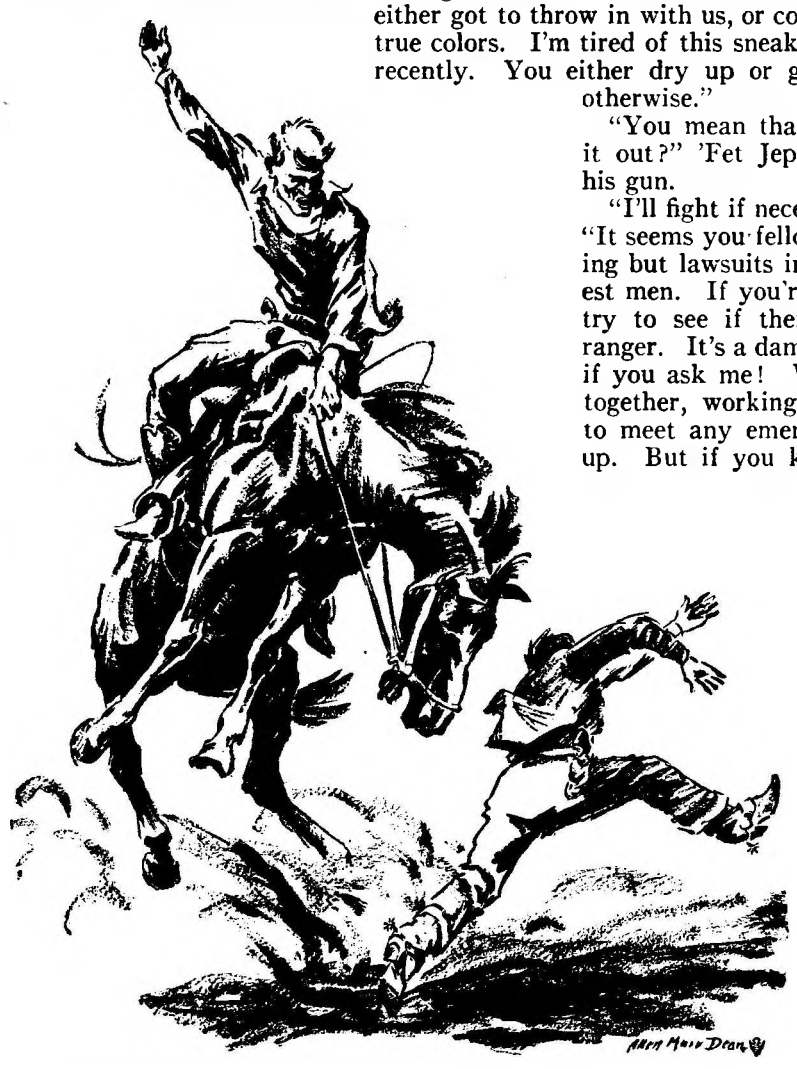
"But you know that I've assured you all that if that man takes his stock across the line, there'll be action by the Service. He's got no permit. He's got no right on the forest. You have, with your stock. He'll be in trespass." Deck repeated these arguments for the twentieth time.

"Yeh, but what do yuh do," sneered 'Fet Jepson, his saturnine young face scowling. "Kin yuh *keep* him off?"

"He's not in trespass until he passes the line," answered Deck. "You must remember that I've no jurisdiction over acts committed outside my ranger district, outside the forest boundary."

"Yeh, I remember!" 'Fet Jepson grinned evilly. He saw a situation ahead where Decker, the ranger, might be put in an awkward situation if not actually smashed.

"How would it be to git the members of this Association strung out along the forest boundary?" suggested Jerry. "He can't go in except a couple of places. There is the main driveway right smack up the center of the cañon. Then there's that ridge drive that he kin git to by goin' up the side cañon just above where he's camped tonight. And ef he wants to go around a little farther he might go up by Stephen's sawmill. There's enough of us to patrol those places and I think ef there was just the determined show that he needs to understand we mean business, then he'll not try it. Maybe pull off peaceable like."



Nally, facing the risk of being battered by flying hoofs, scrambled clear.

"You fergit one way," said Lanky Hill slowly. "He might drive right up through the ranger station and down New Moon Gulch that runs from there into the middle of the cañon. It's by far the most direct and best way in."

Several of the crowd laughed.

"He would do that, likely!" jeered 'Fet Jepson. "He's probably willin' to tangle with us if he has to—probably counts on it. But he'd have to cut the wire on the ranger station pasture to git through that way. And that would mean somethin' besides ordinary trespass, wouldn't it?"

"Well, yes," agreed Deck. "But whatever he does, if he goes into the Forest, we'll make it warm for him."

"Lawsuits!" snorted Tom Toothaker disgustedly. He had kept quiet most of the evening. Tom was a good listener, up to a certain point. "Is that all you can do?"

"Sure, it's all the Forest kin do," snapped 'Fet. "They cain't run them cattle off until they're on; and after they're on, they serve the owner with lawsuits. Meanwhile he's strippin' the forage out of the cañon. Probably workin' over brands on some of our stock, too. Any lawbreaker kin git away with it if he's got guts."

Slowly Decker turned. "Look here, Jepson," he said. "You've led the opposition to the Service all through this meeting. You've tried to throw trouble in my path when we've been trying to work with this bunch to the best advantage to all. It's time for a showdown. Now you've either got to throw in with us, or come out and show your true colors. I'm tired of this sneaking stuff you've pulled recently. You either dry up or get yourself on record otherwise."

"You mean that yo're honin' to fight it out?" 'Fet Jepson's hand strayed to his gun.

"I'll fight if necessary," snapped Deck. "It seems you fellows think there's nothing but lawsuits inside the hides of Forest men. If you're in doubt, you might try to see if there's any fight in this ranger. It's a damned poor time to fight, if you ask me! We should be working together, working on some sane policy to meet any emergency that may come up. But if you keep on with your obstructionist tactics, then I'm telling you, all of you, that the Forest Service will not stand for any of this blood-and-thunder stuff that you propose."

"That's a good speech," sneered Jepson, coming closer. "That's a damned fine sort of a talk! But I've ast you a good many times tonight what you plan on doin', an' you keep dodgin' away from the question. And now I've ast you another. Do you want to fight it out?"

"Just as you say," said Deck. Underneath, he was boiling. On the surface he was cool, collected. It was the culmination of many months of sneaking opposition from Jepson. The clash with Nally earlier in the evening had left him edgy. 'Fet Jepson's ragging during the evening, his sneering toward the Service and its men, had put Deck up to a point where he was ready to tackle anything.

The clock ticking in the kitchen, the talk of the womenfolk that had come along and were visiting with Mrs. Quinn and Nora in one of the upstairs bedrooms, came clearly, softly, to the group in the big living-room.

'Fet Jepson took a step.

Jerry Quinn suddenly jumped to his feet.

"That ranger's right," he said sharply. "It's a darned poor time to go around to find out who's afraid to fight or who kin git licked. Cut it out, 'Fet. Yo're in my house as a guest!"

"Aint this a meetin' of the Cattlemen's Association?" countered 'Fet. "And if it's a meetin' of the Association, there aint no rule ag'in' decidin' who's best man in this fuss."

"Sure," agreed Jerry. "But an emergency meetin', and strictly informal. Let me remind you that down there in the valley below is them thousand head of Nally's stock,

and that he's got Walt Peacey and his gang of roughnecks herdin' 'em. Nally's said he's goin' to the ranch he's leased over on the Ritos Cincos. And whatever way he goes, there's goin' to be trouble fer us of the Association members."

"Well, who in hell's forgot that?" snapped Rocky Jepson, father of young 'Fet. "That's what all this row's about. This ranger aint goin' to do nothin', and he objects to some action on our part."

"That is not true," flared Deck.

"You mean I'm a liar?" snapped old Rocky.

With a quick lunge, 'Fet Jepson leaped at Deck. There was an instant of scuffling, then quiet. Dave Rayburn was on one side, Jerry Quinn on the other.

Out of the side of his eye, Deck saw Rocky Jepson start crouching from his chair. And in that same flick of an eye, Deck saw Lanky Hill move over to the older Jepson.

"Now, don't do it," said Lanky soothingly to Rocky Jepson. "It aint no place to fuss!"

Rocky looked up at him. Then he settled back. Lanky Hill's eyes never flickered.

" 'Fet," said Rocky, "come on back here and sit down."

The boy turned a surprised look at his father. Then he shook himself loose from the grip of Dave and Jerry, and slouched over to sit by Rocky.

In that instant, Deck knew, as did all the others, that the Jepson plan of attack against the ranger was only deferred.

"Well," demanded Jerry Quinn, "what'll we do? Huh?"

"I move we place the men of the Association at the call of Ranger Meredith and Ranger Lanky Hill," said Toothaker, a little tartly. "Then it's up to them. They've talked a lot. Now let 'em show results."

"Second it," barked Dave Rayburn.

"All in favor," said Jerry snappily, "say *aye.*"

Several muffled "ayes" sounded out along with the crisp agreement of Dave and Jerry.

"Those against, say *no,*" directed Jerry.

There was an instant of silence.

"All right, Decker," said Jerry significantly. "I guess this puts the responsibility where you want it. And it gives you the backing you want from the Association. Now it's up to you."

Deck felt eyes leveled at him. With crushing realization he sensed that the whole trouble had been shifted to his shoulders. If he did not handle the situation, then the cattlemen would come in and use force. If he did handle it, his getting away with it would be because of the backing they had just voted him. And if he used the help of the Association he would have Jepson's underhanded campaign to battle.

And if he failed—Jepson would see him driven out of the Service! It might come to that!

"All right," Deck said shortly. "All I ask is that you put yourselves ready for call if the emergency arises. We'll try to handle it with a Forest force first—keep you boys out of it. There might be trouble if Nally started shoving his stock over your range and you tried to stop him. But it's up to the Federal men to keep him from doing that."

"Just try," breathed 'Fet Jepson. "Just you fly at it, Ranger."

"All right," said Jerry Quinn. "A motion for adjournment is in order."

"NOPE, you cain't count on Jepsons," agreed Jerry Quinn after the crowd had gone and the pow-wow between the two forest men and the two ranchers had begun. "They'll work ag'in' you even though the Association votes to back your play."

"Well, who can we count on?" demanded Deck. "You know better than I do. And if I'm going to run this campaign, if it ever starts, then I want nobody but what I can tie to from hell to breakfast."

"Well, there's about a dozen, I'd say, wouldn't you, Dave?"

" 'Bout that."

"There's Rasmussens, sure, and one rider they've got workin' fer them. And there's the two fellows I've got here. And Toothaker don't like to none, but he'll go with you until he believes you cain't swing it. And that's the way with Snow over beyond Red Creek, with Shafter, and about the case with Thomas up the Spruce Cañon. Guess that covers the field that you can count on—so long as you're puttin' over yore plan. And besides Jepsons, there are the Twilligers that'd just as leave see the Forest men git in a jam as not—a little rather see 'em in trouble than not, I guess."

"I guess," echoed Lanky Hill.

THEY had moved down toward the hitching-rack. Deck looked back toward the ranch-house; and catching sight of the shadowy form of Nora Quinn, he edged out of the group and walked back.

"Just about to go away without saying good-night," said Deck as he came up, holding out his hand. She saw the hand. But no answering gesture on her part met it.

"What was the cause of the row in the meeting between you and 'Fet Jepson?" she asked.

"Just over what we'd do if Nally tries to go through Grassy Cañon to Ritos Cincos. He wanted to start shooting right away. I want to avoid that if possible."

"Was that all?"

"Yes."

There was a moment of silence.

"I thought maybe—maybe it was because of—perhaps I was some way partly the cause," she said slowly.

"No, it wasn't that," assured Deck.

"I'd hate to think of anyone that cared a lot for me dragging my name into a backwoods fight," she said shortly. "I'm glad I wasn't in any way the cause of this trouble. Good-night, Mr. Meredith."

She turned away through the doorway. Deck, dumbfounded, feeling that he had not fathomed whatever had suddenly come between them, stood for an instant looking after her. Then he turned and walked hurriedly back to the horses.

"All right, Lanky, let's beat it," he said. "Call you on the phone tomorrow, Jerry, if anything new pops."

They clattered away through the night. But as they rode, Ranger Meredith felt an altogether unofficial yearning to smack fists with young 'Fet Jepson. And also he had an unreasoning feeling that he would like to catch Nora Quinn by the shoulders and shake her.

They rode silently on a cut-off trail that humped over a ridge. It would save a mile on the way to the ranger station. Hill would stay all night at the Grassy Cañon Station and then pull out early in the morning for his own station.

"I'd stay over tomorrow," he had told Deck earlier in the evening. "But I've got to meet Frank Sampson over on May Creek tomorrow noon on that timber sale he's been talkin' about. If anything fogs up, I kin git back over here tomorrow night."

The road wound under a canopy of aspens that whispered and rustled as though scared night spirits were flying away out of the shadows under their horses' feet. Off to one side there was the mellow hoot of an owl. And a coyote chorus on the hill echoed through the timber and from cliff to cliff.

A low exclamation from Lanky Hill jerked Deck out of his reverie.

"What's the matter?" asked Deck in a low voice.

"Listen," commanded Lanky.

Ahead of them, where the old woods road again joined the main highway, voices were lifted in argument. Above them all came the voice of Rocky Jepson.

"Of course my kid was right," he bellowed. "You kin go along jest as you please, Cort. But I, for one, aint goin' to fool 'long with what them Forest men try to do. Ef there's any trouble, then you kin bet we'll not be out of it 'cause we're not skeered like that ranger, Meredith."

'Fet Jepson's voice lifted above the others.

"That ranger's yellow," he declared. "He wouldn't of put up no scrap tonight. Knew he was safe in Quinn's house. And he'll quit and run away afore this Nally outfit—high-tail it out of the country. We might as well do our business first as last. This forester's just a useless meddler."

"Well, you boys do as you please," said Cort. Deck could see him climbing into the car as he spoke. "I'm goin' to give the Gov'ment men some sort of a chance to show what they've got that kin protect us if anything breaks. 'Course ef what you say is right, and ef he runs away from a scrap—"

His voice was lost in the roar of the starting motor. The autos moved away over the road, each taking its way to the individual ranches reached from this junction point.

For several seconds, the Forest men sat in the dark watching the lights go bouncing away into the night. Finally Lanky spoke.

"Well, Deck," he said slowly. "There's been some tough propositions for some of the boys in the service to buck through. But this is one real tough one. Jepsons seem to be out fer yore hide. You can count on Cort, for a while anyway."

"Yes, unless something changes his mind," agreed Deck.

They crossed the highway, swung off on the ranger station road, and a little later came into the corrals at the station. As they had ridden up the open ridge that led from the highway to the administrative site, Deck had felt more than ever that he was about to be faced with the fight of his life if Nally and Peacey moved on the forest. It was a three-cornered scrap from here on—Nally, the Jepsons and Deck.

They unsaddled, stopped for a few moments to smoke a last pinch of tobacco, then went inside. Lanky carried his saddle gun with him.

"What's that for, Lanky?" said Deck, pointing to the .23-.35. "Don't think there's going to be war tonight, do you?"

"Listen here, Deck," said Lanky solemnly. "You've been here only a couple of years. I've been here about twenty, all told. You've got the idea that the old West is dead. Well, I've been here a long time. And there's just about as much gun-play possible right this minute in this situation as any I've seen in the past. Just 'cause there's radios, and airplanes, and a lot of that newfangled stuff, is no reason that men when they git stirred up to a certain pitch won't shoot, and shoot to kill. You ought to know enough after tonight to go well heeled and be ready to shoot, and shoot first, too, if anything starts barkin' yore way. No sir, I may be an old fogy but I've got an idea that I'll sleep a lot better with this here rifle near my head than ef it was out in the saddle-scabbard."

"Well, have it your own way," said Deck. He liked old Lanky—somehow he represented the spirit of those men who had fought through and built up the Forest Service to the great institution that it was.

Deck scratched a match, threw his field case on a chair and walked toward the kerosene lamp on the table in the center of the room. Lanky laid down the rifle across another chair and tossed his hat into a corner. Deck bent over the lamp. Then the flame caught on the wick, and—

A bullet splintered the window into a thousand fragments, hummed by Deck and smashed a pile of dishes on an open shelf at the far side of the room.

With a leap, Lanky Hill threw himself at Deck.

"Fall down!" he ordered sharply. "Down on the floor. Pretend yo're hit."

Deck obeyed, sinking to safety below the table and out of the glare of the light rays.

Lanky was below the table level, hitching toward the door. He reached up and opened the door cautiously. For long seconds, he peered out of the door before he crawled on hands and knees to the porch. Deck felt his heart thumping now in the quick reaction at the thought that some one had tried to pot-shot him out of the dark. That there could have been a mistake was out of the question. This was his station, and anyone on the little slope back of the building could certainly see his face in the light of the lamp.

He rolled over to one side of the room, got to his feet and eased into his own bedroom beyond. He felt for his rifle on the wall, then cautiously raising the window, he slipped out to the porch where Lanky was lying flat.

If the Jepsons had declared war, they could have it!

"See anything?" whispered Deck.

"No," answered Lanky. "He's gone. I heered him. Thought he got you. We better let the light burn and git back into the house through the window you come out of. We kin git to bed that way, and ef they come scoutin' back, we kin rather close up on 'em. They might do such a thing as come snoopin' back ef that light keeps burnin' long enough, and come in to see how good a job was did."

Undressing in the semi-light of the bedroom, leaving the kerosene light burning as Lanky had suggested, they piled in. Lanky rolled over and was soon snoring, but not without his rifle within easy reach of his hand. Deck lay looking at the dim ceiling for many moments, but fatigue soon spread a blanket of sleep over him, and he did not know anything more until the morning light through the window awakened him. He looked out into the room beyond. The kerosene light was still burning, its rays feeble and ineffective against the brightness of the sun.

"You rustle breakfast," directed Lanky. "I'll tend to the nags."

He stomped out of the house, his rifle under his arm. Deck felt that maybe the old-timer knew what he was about when he went armed. There had been a story of a ranger murdered a year before Deck had entered the service. A man found shot on the range. There had been suspicions as to who might be to blame but no one had been brought to justice. He had not thought much of the killing then, marking it down as some personal dispute rather than any squabble over range. Now he was beginning to feel differently.

He went to the shelf where the bullet had crashed the night before. He found a fragment of a copper jacket. The whole thing had exploded when it had struck the pane of glass. It was a miracle some splinter of the soft-nosed death missile had not touched him. He had escaped this time. The next time — well, they'd have to catch him napping the next time!

Pancakes were brown and coffee steaming when Lanky came in. In his hand the old ranger held a cigarette-stub, which he handed to Deck.

"Ef you kin make out the teeth-marks on this, maybe you'll find the bird that took that shot at you," he said.

"Any other sign?" asked Deck quickly.

"Not a bit," said Lanky. "He was squattin' up there on that rock stretch at the crest of this little ridge fer long enough to smoke a cigarette afore we came up with the horses. That's about all I could figure out just now. Horse, if he had one, probably tied over the ridge. But it's all dry-rock stuff up there beyond, and no chance to pick up any track; you'd have to search every stand of oak and pine ef you found where his horse was tied."

"Who—"

"Yeh, who?" snapped Lanky. "What do you care? He didn't git you. It may have been one of them Jepsons takin' this chanc't to pot you with Nally here to take the blame. Maybe it was one of Nally's outfit tryin' to git you out of the way. Just keep yore eye peeled, Deck. Now let's have flapjacks!"

After breakfast, with the sun still down toward the eastern horizon, both rangers hurried away from the station. Lanky went on his way to meet the sawmill operator. Deck first scouted the immediate vicinity of the point from which the shot had been fired at the station. He found no other sign, as Lanky had forecast.

Then he jumped in his old car, a battered and weather-worn vehicle which could hunch itself over the forest roads that were anywhere near passable in his district, and started down toward the camp where Nally had spent the night. Deck wanted action this morning. If any crisis should come, it might very well come within a few hours. Nally might lose no time in rushing his stock into the forest and then sit back to see what happened. But until that move came, Deck could do no more than warn him again against trespass and trouble.

Deck so fully expected to see the camp abandoned and Nally's outfit starting the herd toward the forest boundary that he was surprised to find Nally's wagons still there and most of the men loafing about. Above him, he caught a glimpse of the herd as it was feeding in the little open parks above camp. He slowed his car to a halt. Nally himself came slouching forward after he saw who the visitor was. Peacey, apparently, was not in camp.

"Well," said Nally, scowling a little, "you come back to jaw around some more about regulations and stuff?"

"No," said Deck shortly. "I've come to talk turkey, Nally."

"All right," agreed the cow-man. "Talk it. Maybe I kin speak some of the same language."

"I don't know what your plans are," said Deck evenly. "There's any one of a number of things you might do. But on the face of it, it looks like you were planning on bulling your way through the Forest without a permit."

"Yeh?"

"Yes," answered Deck. "Now, I've never had you as a permittee, and I don't know as I care to have you as one on this district. But I know your rep. Let me tell you, Nally, you'll just drop into a hell of a lot of trouble if you try to go into that Forest illegally."

"What you mean, trouble?" demanded Nally. "Not with the Forest Service."

"Not altogether," agreed Deck. "But with the Forest Service first. Maybe other trouble too. I know those permittees that have their herds in Grassy Cañon well enough to know that if you start jamming through there, they'll fight. And when they shoot, they shoot to kill. And,"—Deck's eyes narrowed as he watched Nally,—"they don't miss, even in the dark!"

"What do you mean?" asked Nally, scowling. "What you drivin' at?"

"If you don't know," said Deck slowly, "it'll never trouble your conscience. But if you do know—just send a surer shot next time, Nally. Before night there'll be a bunch of information in the office of the supervisor about a certain bit of rifle-practice that will make it awfully unhealthy for anyone, even you, to declare open season on Forest men!"

Deck, watching closely, thought he saw a twitching around Nally's eyes, thought he saw the blood slip away from Nally's cheeks. But he could not be sure.

"Well, I don't know what yo're drivin' at," growled Nally. "What's that all got to do with this herd of mine?"

"I'm not quite sure myself, but I'm going to find out; and when I do—some one's left foot'll be in a sling!"

"What in hell you drivin' at?" began Nally, blustering.

"Just this," snapped Deck. "Just you get any idea of crossing the Forest out of your head. Get that herd of yours around by South Fork. It's open range there. Specifically, don't go into trespass on my district. Savvy?"

Deck threw in the gears of his car and rolled away. He suddenly decided that since Nally's cattle were not on the move, he could run into the Junction and talk to his supervisor, Daniel Lander. Lander, like Hill, was an old-timer. Although Deck had talked with him plenty before about trespass, and the policies to govern on the forest were clean-cut, he felt that he wanted Lander to

get the facts of what had happened.

Dan Lander was not in his office. He was due in that afternoon, the clerk informed Deck when he inquired for his chief.

"There's some mail for you over there," said the clerk, pointing. "Might mop that up while you're in here."

Deck spent an hour in going over memoranda, a few letters, a number of forms. He dictated a memorandum regarding the shot fired at him. Then he walked the streets of the town. He was impatient. But he must have Lander's O. K. on his plan before he acted. Hours dragged to mid-afternoon. Lander had left the Pitchfork Ranch at noon, he found out when he went back to the office. That meant he might be in as early as three-thirty or four. Deck fumed. Nally might find Deck was away from the district and start into the Forest

Dusty, his clothes torn from a ten-day field trip, his face drawn a little from fatigue, Dan Lander gripped Deck's hand hard and invited him into the private office when the ranger intimated that there was trouble to talk over.

"All right, Deck, shoot the works," directed Lander when he had cocked his feet up on the desk and filled his pipe.

Deck briefed the whole situation.

"Then you want to borrow all the Forest force for 'bout three days?" Lander asked when Deck had finished telling of the events of the day before and of the meeting with Nally that morning. "Pretty risky with the fire hazard increasing with each new day without rain!"

"I'll not hold them long," said Deck. "If this thing breaks, then we can handle it *pronto*. Nally won't go fooling around very long before he does something. If he'll pull away peaceably and not come on the Forest, *bueno*. If he does come on, we'll handle him. If we handle him, Jepsons won't count much weight in my district from now on."

For some moments Lander puffed his pipe in silence. Finally he banged down the front legs of his chair.

"All right, old-timer," he said. "I'll give you full swing on it, Deck. You want the boys to show up at Quinn's ranch as early tomorrow as possible, and you'll meet them there, and you reckon the thing will come to a head within three days. That it?"

"Exactly," said Deck.

"I'll phone 'em to that effect. If you need me along with the rest, just yell," said Lander in finishing. "I've had a grudge against that Nally outfit for some time, and Jepsons needs to be shown they can't run this district. Never been able to get anything on either of them. Maybe we can make Christians out of the two outfits this trip."

"You run the rest of the Forest," said Deck, grinning. "I'll handle Nally's outfit with our bunch. I may have to lick those Jepsons myself. But I'll show that Grassy Cañon outfit just a few little things about the Forest Service." . . . .

At the camp of Scott Nally, Peacey faced his boss.

"You just couldn't wait, could you?" Nally said angrily. "You had to go ahead on a little huntin' expedition of yore own. Why didn't you tell me, huh?

"Maybe you've spilled the beans all over the range. Maybe git the sheriff mixed into this. You know I can handle him so far and no farther. Shootin' at that ranger was damn' poor stuff—especially missin'!

"Now don't fumble this next deal. We've got to move, and do it quick. We've waited today just to ease things up a little. Instead of movin' tomorrow, we're going to move tonight. Now you git ahead up there to the ranger station and take a couple of them men you kin trust and git this *hombre* out of the way. And no rough stuff, savvy? I mean—no rougher than you've got to!"

"All right," said Peacey, slouching away. "But if he shows fight—"

"I said nothin' rougher than you have to!" snapped Nally. "Trespass and murder are two different things, and it's time you got discriminatin' enough to know different degrees in breakin' the law. I cain't keep you out of jail forever!"

An hour later, when the night shadows were closing down, Peacey, with two others, rode out of camp. The other riders of Nally's looked at them curiously but did not ask questions. It was not a part of the etiquette of Nally's camp to be too inquisitive about what the others were doing.

"All right," said Nally a little later. "Time to git movin'. Come on, let's see whether or not you kin haze these cattle through open country after dark without gittin' so tangled up you'll lose half of 'em. Come on there, Powder, git the gang movin'."

ON returning from his talk with Lander, Deck ran his car into its shed, stepped out, picked up an armful of supplies that he had brought from town, and started toward the ranger station. Everything seemed quiet, yet he felt as though there were eyes somewhere in the dusk that were watching him. He told himself he was getting as nervous as an old woman over the expected clash with Nally.

He went to the porch, stopped to fumble with the Service key that fitted all of the locks. He inserted it, turned

There had been a hard ride through the night with his hands tied behind him. He sensed the way they traveled—recognized certain turns in the trails.

the bolt back, entered. He walked through the deep dusk in the room, piled the supplies on the table.

Out from the corner, a figure leaped. Deck dodged, threw himself toward the door of his room. Inside there was his rifle. His six-gun he had just hung in the administration building, figuring that with one gun in the house and one in the administration building, he would always have one handy while at the station.

Another man came leaping out of another corner.

"Watch out for his gun," called a voice sharply. Deck thought he recognized it.

A body crashed into him, driving him against the side of the room, knocking the breath out of him. He saw a third man leaping out of the dusk in the room straight ahead.

Deck turned toward the door through which he had come, picked up a chair and threw it with all his might at the man he saw outlined against the night light outside the door. He shoved the table toward another. Then a man leaping from behind hit him. They went down. Deck's hand found a chunk of wood that had rolled from the little pile at the store. He grabbed it, clubbed it. The man below him groaned; that blow would leave a mark.

He sprang up, and leaped toward the open door. Something hit him from the side, and he reeled. Then both men who were on their feet jumped at him.

Deck twisted, partly broke loose. He got an arm free from the clutches that were encircling him, and struck. One of the men yelled and reeled away. Deck twisted out from the arms of the other man and leaped for the open door. One of the men slammed into him. Out of the door they stumbled, carried along by the momentum of Deck's plunge. They hit the floor of the porch, fell, rolled, got up when they hit the ground. It was lighter here. Deck might have seen them more plainly, but now his eyes were blurred. He was quite certain he knew his antagonists, but he could not be positive. He struck at the man he thought he saw in front of him. He missed and went reeling.

The wind was slammed out of him. He felt hands gripping. He fell, partially struggled up.

"Bean him, Fred," said a voice near him. "Knock him out."

Deck's head seemed to explode under a terrific impact; then he sank into a whirlpool of lights and limitless voids.

SUNNY morning broke over the Quinn ranch next day. Smoke rose lazily through the still air. There was a piñon jay that screeched in a big yellow pine back of the house, and magpies were in some ribald convention beyond the corral.

Jerry Quinn hustled about the chores. Nora sang a little as she helped her mother with the breakfast things. At other moments she was thoughtful and quiet.

"I declare," said Mrs. Quinn, "the way the men go around these last few days with guns strapped to them, you'd think it was back fifteen years! I thought I'd seen the last of the range wars, thought this regulation of grazin' that the Forest people have put in had stopped all the shootin' over grass."

She was a slender woman, still retaining some of the youthful charm that appeared in her daughter.

"Well, you'll admit Deck is doing a lot of talking and riding around," retorted Nora a little tartly. "If that will help matters, this trouble with Nally wanting to go through the center of the Association's grazing grounds and take most of the grass and some of the stock along with him should be settled right soon."

"You're just put out because Deck didn't fight over you the other night," said the older woman sagely.

"I'm not, either," flared Nora.

"Oh, I know," returned her mother. "I used to say the same—and think the same, which isn't what I said. But I can see now that Deck used real good judgment in not fighting 'Fet Jepson the other night. He's got a bigger fight on just now, and he's savin' hisself for that. Let me tell you, Norrie, Deck will fight for you when the time comes!"

"How do you know?"

Before her mother could answer, there was a call from outside. Nora hurried to the door. Lanky Hill, a pack horse following him, was coming in the gate and calling to her father. She hurried out to hear if there was any news concerning the grazing trouble. The previous evening her father, with Dave, had gone down and had come back to report that Nally was still in camp at dusk. Both had agreed that perhaps Nally had decided to push his cattle back to the railway and ship around by car to save the long drive around the nose of the Maroons. Or he might be planning to drive the herd around the end of the range and pasture them a day or so at a time at some of the ranches he might hit. Some of the men with small herds of cattle would be willing to sell surplus alfalfa at a good figure.

"Hi, Miss Nora," called Lanky, piling off his horse. "Any of the rest of the Forest outfit here?"

"No; they coming here?"

"Whole passel of 'em," said Lanky as he ambled over to the porch. Jerry Quinn came up.

"What's the plan?" demanded Jerry. "You say there's a bunch comin'?"

Lanky nodded. He deliberately took out a plug of tobacco, opened his big pack-knife, shaved a generous slice off its rim, handed the plug to Jerry. Lanky tucked the quid away in his cheek, gazed up at the mountains.

"Don't know what is up," he said finally. "Dan Lander called me late yesterday. He said Deck had just been in there, that they had a plan to see that nothin' was put over by this Nally, and that every ranger on the Forest was to meet Deck here, and Deck would tell 'em the plans."

"First we'd heard about it," said Jerry.

"I supposed Deck had telephoned you last night," said Lanky, surprised.

"Tried to get him late to tell him that Nally hadn't moved his stock yesterday—seemed to have sorta changed his plans, maybe. But I couldn't raise the station at all."

"Well, he was in town late in the afternoon."

"But I called later, about ten o'clock."

"Probably asleep," remarked Lanky, and ambled to his pack-horse to ease a strap on the breast-band.

Ray Powell, ranger on the Big Creek district, appeared presently, and was followed by Matt Ard, whose district was beyond Lanky's. Both had ridden since early morning. Two were yet to come—Charley Sanders, whose district was across the Maroon range, and Big Bill Hannigan, the red-faced giant from the north end of the Forest.

Noon came. The rangers prepared to cook their food in the open, undoing packs.

"Now, look here," protested Mrs. Quinn. "I've plenty. You come right in, every one of you, and set up to the table."

The meal passed with a good deal of banter.

"I'm gittin' worried about Deck," said Lanky finally. "He was supposed to show up afore this, sure."

"Oh, he's scouting something," protested Powell. "Probably ridin' herd on this Nally outfit.

"Might one or two of us ride down there," suggested Matt Ard. "Fill in the time."

Sanders came in as the other rangers left the ranch-house.

A few moments later Lanky and Ard were saddling their horses to ride to the place where Nally was supposed to be camped. Dave Rayburn rode up as they were about to leave.

"I'll bust along," he suggested.

The others resigned themselves to waiting. Early afternoon hours passed. The sun was throwing mid-afternoon shadows, when Big Bill Hannigan came into the ranch pasture a half mile up the cañon. He gave a whoop, and sent his horses trotting along, saddle hardware jingling, the sound of trotting hoofs muffled by the meadowy underfooting.

"Seems Bill's got somethin' on his mind," observed Powell. "And I wonder why Lanky and Matt Ard aren't back?"

Big Bill came up and piled off his horse.

"Say," he exploded almost as he hit the ground, "who's that wild Injun up there in New Moon gulch, off to the side of main Grassy? That feller with the big herd of grade white-faces?"

"No white-faces up in that section. Nobody's put any stock in there yet. Association holdin' it fer late range," said Jerry.

"You mean there aint nobody supposed to be up there?" demanded Big Bill. "Well, let me tell you, pardner, there's a whole lot up there. White-faces, and men with rifles. I started to ride up just to sorta git a line on things. Thought maybe Deck was up there. And some one sent a little message with a copper jacket and a lead nose spinning over my head to tell me I wasn't wanted."

Jerry Quinn looked around the little group. His face showed puzzlement.

"That's Nally," he said finally in a husky voice. He's sneaked around and got into the Forest. We thought he'd come right up the cañon. Counted on his goin' by some of the ranches and the men hearin' the herd as it passed, even if it was night. He must of went through the ranger station and along that open ridge. Ef he did, Deck should of seen him, sure."

Nora Quinn had been standing near, had heard all of the conversation.

"Deck!" she said sharply. "They've done something to him. That's why you couldn't get him last night, Dad. They had to get him out of the way before they could put the herd over that route. He was alone at the station. Something's happened!"

Terror was in her voice. It touched the others. Quick, sharp glances passed between the others in the group. An instant so they stood with minds racing, tongues quiet, letting this new thought soak in; then there came sounds of galloping hoofs along the trail down-cañon. A moment later, Lanky, Matt Ard and Dave came racing out from the aspen that covered the road with a canopy.

"There's been trouble at the ranger station," announced Lanky as he pulled up. "That Nally! Deck's not there. There's been a fight. Furniture busted, door of the station open, blood on the floor."

Nora Quinn gasped, went white, then like a good campaigner, held her peace.

"That all you found, Lanky?" asked Jerry.

"Cattle-tracks all around the station. Fences cut on the station pasture. Whole grass crop tromped out on the ridge up above. Cattle-tracks and horse-tracks everywhere. Nally's whole herd moved up there last night after dark. He's camped now at the upper end of New Moon gulch. Herd's spread around over the slopes there, apparently holdin' 'em there to feed out that gulch afore he goes into the main cañon. We followed up until we could see it all plain enough, and then we came high-tailin' it back here."

"Did you pick up any tracks around the station at all?" demanded Big Bill.

"Tried," said Lanky. "No chance. Cattle-tracks and tracks of Nally's riders all around and covered up anything that might have happened. No trace of Deck. His horses not disturbed in the corral. His outfit for the field not disturbed. And all over the place, sign of one whale of a fight. Must have been several men in it besides Deck."

"But *Deck!*" breathed Nora Quinn.

"We've got to corner Nally," said Lanky; "he knows!"

CHAPTER IX

SECONDS ticked away. Big Bill Hannigan looked up toward the wrinkle in the hills that was New Moon gulch. Lanky Hill looked searchingly at the faces around

him; then his eyes dropped to the guns that hung at the hips of the forest men. Rarely did they carry weapons on field trips, but Dan Lander had warned them this time to take their guns and plenty of ammunition.

Lanky's eyes raised to look into the faces of the men in service uniform. There is a brotherhood among men of the U. S. Forest Service that is not understood unless one has been a member of this quiet, efficient, hard-hitting band of men who wear the bronze shield with the spruce tree in the center.

"Well," said Lanky, "I guess maybe we better be movin'. You fellows ready?"

"You know it," burst out Big Bill Hannigan. Sudden vision of one night in a lumber camp over beyond the Sawtooth ridge of the Maroons when he and Deck had cowed a bunch of drunken roustabouts flashed before his mental vision. And another remembrance had come too; when he had had the "flu" the previous winter, it was Deck who had come on skis in answer to his call; then Lanky had come too, and between them they had got a doctor and medicine into the lonely cabin beyond the Maroons and had nursed Big Bill back to health again.

"I'm goin' too," declared Dave Rayburn, starting to fall in behind Big Bill.

The eyes of the foresters turned on Dave. On each Forest there are men who are lay-members of the foresters' order—ranchers who are believers in conservation, good citizens.

Lanky swept him with a quick, searching glance.

"All right," he said. "I guess we'll be good for whatever there may be ahead of us here, but one good man more will be welcome. Let's git goin'."

"You going, Dad?" asked Nora Quinn, coming close to the wiry little sandy-haired rancher.

His eyes narrowed. He did not reply.

"Deck's in danger somewhere," said Nora anxiously. "And I—I was mean to him the other night. Are you going with them?"

"I'd like to go, Norrie," he said slowly. "There's goin' to be trouble whenever those fellows and Nally git together. And I'd like to do everything fer Deck. But there's goin' to be other trouble afore tonight's over. You kin bet Jepsons and Toothakers will find out that Nally's left his camp, and that the herd has gone right up through the ranger station. They'll think of only one interpretation of that. They'll think Deck let that gang through so they'd not know, and that he's reached some compromise with this Nally. Jepsons'll start some rumor. They'll make the most of Deck's disappearance. And when they git up about so much steam, there's goin' to have to be about all of the cool-headed counsel that can be raked up around here to keep 'em from startin' a war—a real one!"

"But Deck—" started Nora in protest.

"Deck's got the best bunch of men in the county ridin' for him right now," declared her father emphatically. His gaze rested on the little cavalcade, a tiny army in the foresters' green, going through the gates beyond the corral, heading for New Moon gulch. "Yep," breathed Jerry, "I'd like to go along. But I guess it's my job to stay here. Guess Deck'd want me to carry on here. There's double trouble now. And what happens here now may be just as important to Deck as what happens up there!"

AT the fork of trails Lanky Hill turned the nose of his horse toward New Moon gulch. It was an open basin above the level of the wide main floor of Grassy Cañon. A little bench rise blocked the mouth except as a rider might look into the basin from some point up the cañon.

"There's some *hombre* up there on that bench with a rifle," warned Bill as they swung facing the mouth of the side gulch. "Better scout a little, Lanky."

"Just one, you reckon?" he asked.

"Not more than a couple, I guess," admitted Big Bill.

"We'll go right at them as though nothin' was up," directed Lanky.

He urged his horse into a trot. His range-keen eyes searched every bit of cover as he reached down and loosened his rifle in its scabbard. Others, noticing the motion, did likewise. There were six of them in the foresters' party. Nally had more cow-hands than that; but Lanky would have steered his band into the face of five times their number if necessary.

They trotted for two hundred yards. Suddenly a man jumped up from the brush in front of them, ran for his horse, and a moment later was spurring away over the slightly rolling land at the mouth of New Moon.

Lanky pulled his horse out to one side until he could talk to the file that was following.

"We'll have to shag along," he said sharply. "That bird's on the way for help. Didn't want to face this bunch alone. Just about what I figured. He'd report to Nally instead of tryin' to start anything hisself. Now it's up to us to git into the gulch, past the bench there, afore Nally kin git any of his outfit down and stop us. Don't take no chances ef anything starts, but don't go shootin' until the time comes."

"Bueno," said Powell. The others nodded.

Again they rode, and now hit a faster gait. They reached the grade of the dim trail that reached up into the gulch. It slowed their speed, and their horses were puffing from the first steep upslope. They zigzagged back; then they came out into the basin and crashed through a screen of willows at the bottom of a little slope back of the earthen barrier at the mouth of New Moon.

There was an almost involuntary reining in on the part of the whole group as they came into the gulch. It was not more than a half mile to the other end. But below the fringe of spruce that festooned the higher sides of the gulch was open grassland with a tiny stream trickling from water-hole to water-hole. Over this grass-land were Nally's white-faces.

It was a pretty picture—if it had not held such a definite suggestion to these men of trouble. Several riders were near the edge of the herd. The figure of a lone horseman at the head of the gulch, indicated a guard there. Nally had taken precautions against being surprised.

Near the center of the head of the gulch was Nally's camp. Even the bed- and chuck-wagons had been pulled over the head of the gulch by the way of the open ridge above the ranger station.

Just as the camp came into view of Lanky's bunch, several of Nally's riders got up from around a camp-fire. One man jumped to a horse and started running some stock away from the points near the camp.

"See that?" demanded Dave. "I'll bet there are new brands, Nally's brands, on that stock, over some old brands that were there before. They don't want us to see 'em!"

Several other riders started to get to their horses. Then something seemed to change their plans. They turned their mounts loose and gathered behind the wagons.

A few moments later, when Lanky Hill came up to the camp, he found a scene of peace and industry. One of Nally's cow-hands was sitting on the tongue of a wagon cleaning a rifle. His six-gun was strapped to his hip, but his rifle was knocked down and getting a thorough cleaning. Another was whittling, with his rifle across his lap. They hardly looked up at the Forest men. No stranger would have guessed the tension in this situation.

The other riders had seemingly disappeared. Lanky's sharp eyes searched the near-by landscape, but the low willow brush and the tangle of rocks along the side of the stream, topped with berry bushes and a few scrub fir trees, gave no indication that they sheltered men.

Nally himself arose from a rock he had been sitting on near the fire. He came forward, his face expressionless, his eyes searching and keen.

He nodded in answer to Lanky Hill's curt, "Howdy."

"What's the reason fer this visit?" demanded Nally.

"Where's Meredith?" asked Lanky Hill.

Nally's eyes flickered. "I don't know," he said shortly.

"The hell you don't," snapped Lanky. "Where's Deck Meredith? We're not foolin' none. Don't think you kin lie out of it."

"What's eatin' you?" snapped Nally. "What you drivin' at?"

"You know. Deck's missin' from his station. Signs of a fight. Probably with several men. Blood on the floor. Door open this mornin'. You drove yore herd right through there sometime durin' the night. Couldn't have done it with Deck on the job—at least without his gittin' everyone around all roused up over yore goin' through. Had to git him out of the way to carry out yore plans. We figured that out easy enough. Now where is he?"

"I tell you I don't know," snapped Nally. "You Forest fellows come snoopin' around my camp, try to keep me from goin' acrost the range here peaceable to my grazin' on Ritos Cincos, and now you come in here accusin' me of knowin' something about this Deck Meredith. I tell you I don't know anything about him!"

"I don't believe that," blurted out Big Bill Hannigan.

"You call me a liar?" demanded Nally, his hand straying to the butt of his pistol. Matt Ard loosened his gun. Lanky Hill never moved. His eyes were centered on a thicket of willows back of the camp. Some sharp glint had caught his attention. He had seen a movement of the twigs, and a rifle-barrel pointing in line with Big Bill's breast.

"Shut up, Bill," demanded Lanky sharply. "Let me handle this."

"But he—"

"Cut that gab," snapped Lanky. He turned his gaze to Nally. "Nally, you seem to have the drop on us. I don't know how many men you've got out there in the thickets. Probably enough to wipe us out afore we could find where they were located and clean up on 'em."

FOR the first time Big Bill Hannigan saw the rifle pointing at his heart. He gulped, licked his lips, and then his eyes slitted and he hunched a little in his saddle. Others of the party, too, saw the glint of sun on steel. There was an instant of silence.

"All right," said Nally surlily. "There won't be any trouble if you go on down the trail. But if you don't, there's goin' to be some one git hurt. Let me tell you that I plan to go through Grassy Cañon, and I'm goin' to take my time about it. I asked fer a permit regular, and you didn't give it to me. You said that ef I went through it'd take all the feed that belongs to these nesters. I see one of 'em there." He pointed to Dave. "Well, it belongs to me just as much as them. I've been ranchin' in this section longer than they have. I aint never been on permit in this Forest and don't care to be. I'll come on Gov'ment range whenever I want to, either public domain or forest. It don't make no difference. The fact that they've put you birds on here in nice little green uniforms don't stop me. This is Gov'ment land, and it's as much mine as it is anyone's, and I intend to git my part of it.

"And as fer that ranger feller," he added, "that bird you call Deck, we tried to find him last night as we came in. Three of my men went up to the station to give him fair warnin' that we was goin' through, and tell him to clear out afore we run him out. But when they got there, he wa'n't there. So we came through anyway. And now, git! And don't look back. Yo're safe as long as yo're ridin' away. And just tell those nesters down at the lower end of Grassy that I'm runnin' my herd into the main cañon tomorrow, and I'll take my time about goin' over the pass. I'd like to see any of that crowd stop me—or the Gov'ment either!"

THERE were two ways out. Lanky Hill considered them both. One was to shoot it out. But Nally had his men hidden. They would cut down the horsemen around Lanky before there was a good fight started. Lanky wanted to fight; and the others did too. But it had to be somewhere near an even break.

The other way was to work strategy.

"Ef you git yore cattle back over that ridge, Nally, and do it afore sundown, and tell us where Decker is, there won't be no more trouble. Ef you don't—"

"I told you what to do," growled Nally. "You've got just one way out of here, Ranger. And you better hit it right damned sudden. Yore bein' around my camp makes me nervous, and probably makes my boys itchy too."

"All right," snapped Lanky. "In the presence of these witnesses I'm warnin' you, Nally, yo're in trespass on the Forest. You've got no permit. You've got no right here. You came acrost the line without any authority. Git out by sundown tonight, and back on the public domain outside, or we'll come and git you!"

"Come when you want to," snarled Nally, anger beginning to boil up within him. "But git out of here now. And remember there's a hot welcome for anyone who gits in the road of this herd fer the next week."

Lanky Hill's horse had become restive. He was prancing, moving around in mincing little steps, lifting his forefeet in the air.

"Whoa, thar, you Piute," ordered Lanky, jerking the bit a little. "Come on, it's time fer us to be movin'." Lanky seemed to be giving orders to his men. He turned the head of his horse a certain way.

With a plunge, the horse leaped. The next moment, it was diving, bucking, thrashing with front hoofs, pounding down on Nally.

The suddenness with which the animal had leaped threw everyone off guard. The turmoil hit the tense, quiet camp like a tornado. The man who had been cleaning the rifle dived to safety over the tongue of the wagon. The horse bucked. Lanky Hill seemed to leap clear into the air as the horse gave a nasty pitch.

Nally, facing the risk of being battered by the flying hoofs or at least bowled over, scrambled clear, and pressed over against the side of the cook wagon, seeking shelter.

The next moment he felt the jab of a gun in his ribs.

"Now, Nally," said Lanky Hill coolly. The big ranger had leaped from the saddle directly behind Nally instead of being thrown. "You can order yore gang of cutthroats

to shoot, but ef you do, you'll be eatin' dirt yoreself afore a fly kin bat an eye. What do you say? Call 'em off?"

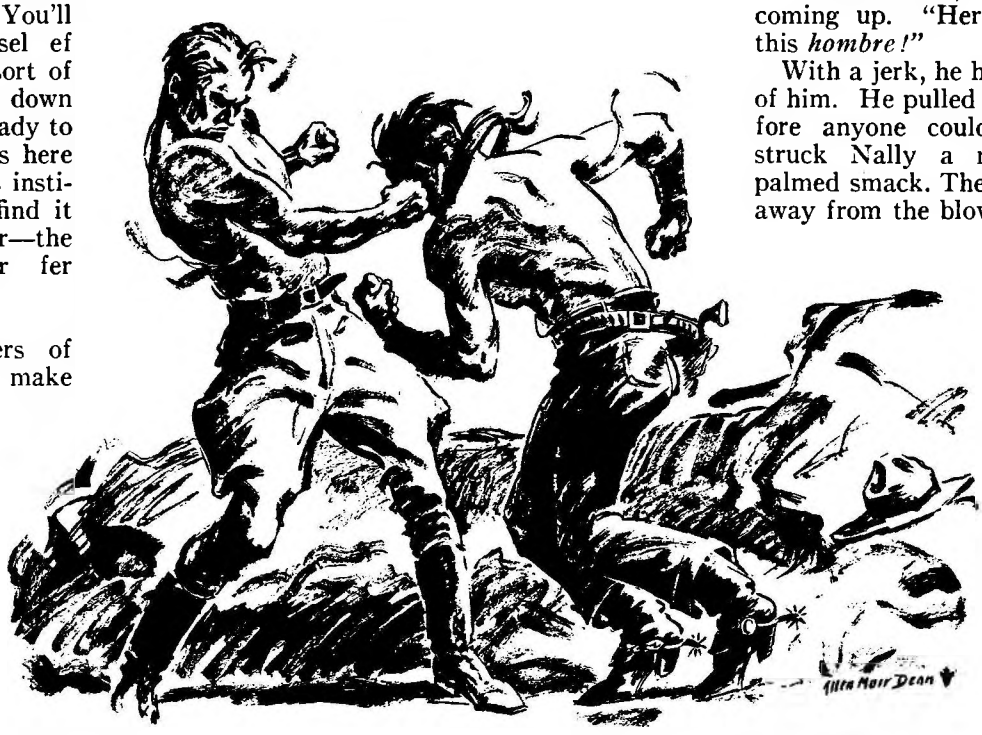
Nally cursed, glared at Lanky Hill. They were close to the cook wagon. There might be other men at the side that could fire at Lanky without hitting Nally, but the cook wagon protected all of Lanky but his legs on one side, and Nally's own body was protecting him on another.

"There, there!" advised Lanky soothingly. "You'll break a blood-vessel ef you keep up that sort of talk. Better calm down yore mad and git ready to talk business. This here Forest is a business institution, and you'll find it out sooner or later—the sooner the better fer you!"

Nally gulped.

"Git them killers of yourn in here and make 'em lay down their arms. And stick yore hands high like everything, Nally.. Quick!" Lanky had dropped pretense at banter.

Slowly the cowman obeyed. A pasty white had come under his wind-reddened skin.



Deck had to finish this. His strength was going. He plunged in, striking swiftly.

"Yo're under arrest," continued Lanky. "First fer refusin' to take yore cattle off here when they're in trespass, and second because of Deck! Now hustle them there men of yourn in here quick."

Surlily, Nally gave orders. With evil looks, threats, his men came forward. They realized that if they turned a hand to start anything, Lanky Hill would drill Nally. They might get Lanky later. But Nally would be beyond recall.

Most of all, Nally had got a scare, the biggest fright in years.

"All right," ordered Lanky. "Matt, you take charge of the arsenal. Bill, you take a peek around to see that all of the guns are in here. Might be some of them boys in the brush yet. Better rampse through there and find out afore I let up on Nally, here."

A FEW moments of search followed. Nally's men stood around the camp, scowling. Dave Rayburn came back, a frown on his face.

He walked directly to Nally.

"I guess I've got something to file against you in the way of charges too, Nally," he said seriously. "There's three of my heifers and two of Toothaker's over there with yore brand fresh burned over our brands. Just had to add cattle-rustlin' to grass-stealin' too, didn't you?"

Nally scowled. For the moment he was trapped, and Lanky's gun in his ribs had shaken his nerve. But he was not through by any means.

"Got 'em all?" asked Lanky, as he saw Big Bill coming back to the wagons.

"Reckon," said Big Bill, grinning grimly.

Lanky looked over the faces in front of him.

"Where's Peacey?" he asked suddenly, turning on Nally.

"Try and find out," snapped the cattleman.

"Guardin' Deck some'eres?"

"Naw! Haven't I told you I don't know where that damned ranger—nor none of my men know, either! Now lay off that."

Lanky Hill regarded him a long time.

"I believe, by gosh, yo're tellin' the truth," he said finally.

"Don't be soft," snapped Big Bill, coming up. "Here, let me handle this *hombre!*"

With a jerk, he had Nally in front of him. He pulled back his hand before anyone could stop him and struck Nally a resounding open-palmed smack. The cattleman reeled away from the blow, cursing.

"Look here," bawled one of Nally's men, throwing himself before Big Bill. "You big bully! You just try that ag'in and there'll be hell a-roarin'!"

Bill turned on him with a snarl.

"Cut it out, Bill," snapped Lanky.

But Big Bill Hannigan had reached out and gathered Nally to him again. His grip sank into the cattleman's shoulder until Nally winced.

"By God, yo're goin' to tell about Deck!" he swore.

"I tell you, I've told the truth," bawled Nally. There was queer fear in his voice now. He was beginning to revise his idea of Forest men. "I don't know where Meredith is. I sent three of my boys up there to run him out. We saw the tracks of the fight. When my men got there, he had gone. We never did see him—just the tracks of the fight!"

For a long second Big Bill looked Nally in the eye. Bill's teeth showed evilly. Then he gave Nally a quick shove away.

"I guess yo're right," he said with a tinge of disappointment. "Guess he was tellin' the truth, Lanky; he's scared enough to be truthul."

The old ranger, leader by virtue of seniority, so long as Meredith, ranger of the district, was not present, glanced toward the western horizon. The sun was touching the hills; there was no chance to move Nally's herd out of New Moon before dark, even though it was only a mile over the ridge to Deck's station. In the morning they could shove them over without difficulty.

The Forest regulations provide that when stock is on a Forest without a permit, the man in charge can be ordered off the Forest. If he ignores the order, the Forest men can put the stock off, provided they do no damage to the stock. And they can arrest the man in charge and take him to court. Usually they do not take such drastic action. Nally had counted on the usual delay in such situations; but he had not counted on the temper of the Association.

"We'll camp here," said Lanky shortly. "String out yore stuff. Bill, you ride herd on Nally and his bunch. Then we'll rig up some sort of a guard to keep tabs on 'em

during the night. And we'll have to rig up some sort of a night-ridin' schedule too, to hold this bunch of cattle here."

"Won't need much of that," suggested Dave. "Plenty of feed here, and they'll not drift bad."

"Where's Peacey?" again demanded Lanky, facing Nally. The recollection of the absence of the foreman had come back with a rush.

"Fired him today," said Nally shortly. "Run him off the range!"

"You lie," said Lanky Hill coolly, his eyes searching Nally's.

Nally shrugged. "Go ahead, call me names, git heavy, have yore way! Yo're in a position to put it over now. Ef you don"t like that story about Peacey, I'll tell you a better one!"

Lanky Hill turned abruptly away and called Big Bill to one side.

"Don't think Nally's stringin' us when he says he don't know what happened to Deck, do you, Bill?" he asked.

"If I thought Nally'd lied, I'd go over and twist the truth out of him," growled Bill.

"Damned funny," mused Lanky.

FIERY accusations, threats, hurtled back and forth in the living-room at the Quinn ranch, where the Grassy Cañon Association had again assembled.

"You kin talk all you want to, Jerry Quinn," snapped Rocky Jepson. "This Forest feller had his chancet. He said he'd handle it. He aint. That bird's skipped. Don't answer the telephone. Scared out. Nally's herd's on the Forest. He's startin' out to do just what he intended to when he came up here again' all law and order and regulations and Forest permits; and now—"

"Now, look here," broke in Toothaker. "It seems that I'm about the only one that aint took sides. Rocky, you and them kids of yourn are hot to go out shootin' up Nally's bunch. That'll bring trouble, you know. It's on Forest land. And they'll turn again' us if we do that."

"Let 'em turn. Let 'em turn!" sputtered Rocky Jepson.

"Now listen, Toothaker," broke in Cort. "I was ready to give this Deck Meredith his show to handle this. He said he could stop it. Everybody agrees he's beat it. And I'll tell you fer one that I'm not goin' to see that Nally go through my range without doin' something about it. You know what he's done other places, pickin' up stock and things like that. You remember two years ago when he cut fences at Carmody's place over beyond the Bear Hills and just drove his herd on it and then let Carmody sue him and be damned. Ef he is in New Moon gulch an'—"

"I'm with you," suddenly said Rocky Jepson, jumping up. "Let's not go foolin' ourselves a bit about this. This Nally—"

"Now, calm down," advised Rasmussen heavily. He was a stocky man, slow-moving. "I've got just as much at stake as any of you, and I'm willin' to let the Forest men try to work this out their way. May take a day or so, but I'll have some patience."

"They've had their chancet," broke in 'Fet Jepson again. "I tell you, Nally won't listen to nothin' but hot lead. And by the Lord, he'll git it afore another day goes by!"

"You said it, 'Fet," affirmed Fred, his brother. "Let's show this Forest outfit that we've got the guts and the means to protect our range ef they haven't."

"Ef you do that, you'll be headin' right into the middle of trouble," declared Jerry Quinn earnestly. "Ef you'll listen to level-headed—"

"Oh, hell!" bellowed Rocky Jepson, suddenly standing up. "Go on, then! I'm goin' too. This wranglin' aint gittin' us nowhere. Come on, Cort, and you, Toothaker. All this Jerry Quinn's hopin' to do by his line of talk is to git favors from that Forest ranger—maybe more grazin' or some preference. Why, he's let even his daughter—"

Rasmussen, sleepy one instant, terribly alive the next, leaped. He threw his arms around Jerry Quinn, wresting the gun out of Quinn's hands. Even Rasmussen's weight could not fully subdue the fury that had swept over Quinn.

"God! Let me kill that—" His voice died in a slow hissing breath.

"Git out of here, Rocky," snapped Cort. "Git—while there's no murder! Hurry!" Cort grabbed Rocky Jepson and Fred by the arms and herded them toward the door. They stumbled into the dark.

"You played hell!" growled Toothaker as they reached the edge of the porch. 'Fet Jepson trailed along. "You sure did play hell. You know there's some of the bunch will stay with Quinn—especially after that dirty remark you made, Rocky." They stumbled ahead in the night toward their horses at the hitching-rack.

Inside the lighted room, Ramussen stood facing the haggard Jerry Quinn.

"Yes," said Quinn slowly, "I guess probably you saved me from murder in my own house. But," he added, "I'm not so damned sure that I'm glad you done it, neither."

"Well," suggested Rasmussen to the several men who had stayed in the room and who by that action showed that they had thrown their lot with Jerry Quinn in this split inside the Grassy Cañon Cattlemen's Association, "I guess there's not much more we kin talk about tonight. All of us here are still backin' Decker, wherever he is."

All gave silent assent, and presently they said good-night and left.

Jerry Quinn walked into the kitchen where Mrs. Quinn sat. She arose as he entered, came toward him with anxious face.

"Do you know where Norrie is?" she asked anxiously.

"Why, aint she here?" inquired Quinn, surprise and alarm in his voice.

Mrs. Quinn shook her head.

"I haven't seen her since we finished the dishes before dusk. I've wanted to come in there and tell you ever since an hour ago, but there was such loud talk that I was just a little afraid. Thought there might be trouble in there."

"There was," confirmed Jerry; "heaps! But where you suppose that girl went to?"

Mother and father stood a moment looking into each other's eyes and recognized fear lurking there. It was no time for a girl to be riding mountain trails after dark and alone. . . .

Dark had come on Nora Quinn as she rode. She had been to the ranger station. Her eyes wide, she had looked at the disorder in the room. Her heart was wrenched with fear for Deck at the sight of the fight that had been waged there. Yet there had come some new courage just because she had seen it. If they had killed Deck, his body would have been found.

Black midnight shadows were creeping into the spaces under the aspen leaf canopy when she came to the road. Suddenly, as her pony stopped with ears pointed forward, she saw the flare of a match in the trail ahead. It was the point where the roads to Jepsons' and Corts' branched.

Some one said, "Good night." And then two other shadows started coming along the trail.

Nora's heart stepped up to a rhythm of excitement. She shoved her pony over behind some thick trees. The leaf covering on the ground deadened all footfalls.

The moving shadows stopped.

"Naw," said a voice which she recognized as belonging to Fred Jepson. *"I wouldn't. He's too fresh, anyway. Let him eat salt if he's hungry!"*

Then the shadows went up the road in a brisk trot.

But that queer, drawling, sneering remark struck home. For long seconds, Nora sat pondering. Then her pony, ready to take the home-trail, started along through the dark. Nor did the girl try to guide him, but allowed him to take his way.

And as they went on through the night, there came some quick suggestion to Nora Quinn. It was a long chance, a very long chance. But back of that remark might be something connected with the whereabouts of Deck. She rejected the thought as absurd—then was not so sure.

At home she evaded the questioning of her mother and father and sought her room. But she did not fall to sleep at once. There was far too much to think about. . . .

While the Grassy Cañon Cattlemen's Association was split wide open in the row that nearly ended in blazing death, the camp in New Moon gulch assumed almost the peaceful appearance of a normal cow-camp. The little army of Forest men that had taken possession by the quick thinking and action of Lanky Hill, had their field outfits along with them. Nally's men were allowed to go about the routine of camp as usual. The only unusual feature about the place was the extra large fire that lit up a wide circle around the camp, and the figure of Big Bill Hannigan standing at the edge of the circle, near the rear end of one of the wagons, rifle in hand.

Clear starlight made the shadows in the bottom of the gulch seem deeper than if there had been no light at all. After supper was over and the dishes washed, Lanky gave orders about bedding down the prisoners. They had to be bunched. There was grouchy objection from several, but in the end they pulled over their tarps where they would be more nearly in the light of the big fire, and some prepared to go to bed.

"Yo're dealin' with Uncle Sam now," quoth Lanky Hill to one objector. "You cain't monkey with the buzz-saw when it comes to dealin' with the U. S. So git that shakedown of yourn over there, *pronto*."

TWO Forest men had been assigned to ride herd while another had been put on as guard in place of Big Bill. He would take the last hitch of the night.

The camp quieted. The guard, Matt Ard, walked carefully around the camp. Some of the men in Nally's crew snored. Beyond the wagons, the little balloon-silk field-tents of the Forest men stood like sharp-headed ghosts.

Night wind sighed by. There was no intimation of that hair-trigger tension that actually existed underneath this calm. Lanky Hill was not fooled by his easy victory. The absence of Peacey bothered him. And then the thought of the guard he had seen at the head of the gulch when they came in from the lower end suddenly gave him an idea. That had been Peacey up there. And he had not come riding down when the trouble broke. He certainly must have seen what had happened in the gulch below.

Lanky Hill got up, and thoughtfully pulled on his boots. Big Bill, beside him, rolled over and cocked an eye open.

"What's the matter, Lanky?" demanded Bill. "Hear anything?"

"Nope," grunted Lanky. "I aint heered nothin' at all—yet! But I've got a restlessness."

He strapped on his gun and ambled out. He found everything shipshape around the camp. Ard was wide awake and watching the crew that slept near the fire. Lanky skirted the willow patch. He saw the bleary white faces of cattle in front of him. He moved quietly, talking in a low tone to the cows. Some of them got up and ran a few steps into the night. And then they quieted.

Lanky Hill turned back to the camp. His disquiet seemed a bit foolish, now that he was out here. He walked slowly to the door of his field tent, stooped to thrust his head inside—paused, froze motionless. Then he came out from the tent with a quick whirl.

Up the cañon, coming like the thunder of wind rushing down a hillside of dead spruce, a sound had started—a muffled, drumming, vibrating sound.

"Hey, you, Bill! Charley!" yelled Lanky Hill.

Ard jumped, facing up the cañon.

"Watch those Nally men," yelled Lanky, his hand reaching for his gun.

Out from the tarp leaped Nally. He had not been asleep. He too had heard that sound. With a quick jump, he was at the water-pail.

Without an instant of hesitation, Lanky Hill fired.

Like a blight, the campfire was blotted by the spilling water. Embers glowed; steam hissed out; but there was no more flame to light the night.

Out from the tent, came Big Bill charging. Again Lanky's gun barked, spitting red. He heard Nally curse. Ard was plunging through the night toward Nally's men, yelling for them not to move.

And then, disregarding the warning, the whole company of men who had been sleeping the moment before, leaped free and scattered.

They too had caught the sound up-cañon!

Lanky Hill ran for the place where the guns were cached, in Ard's tent beyond his. Some one crashed into him in the dark.

"Who is it?" he demanded. The figure leaped on. Lanky did not dare fire. He plunged into the night, trying to catch that figure. A tongue of flame leaped at him from the edge of Ard's tent. It was not a Forest man who had gone to that tent.

Lanky fired point-blank. He knew it was get the man who was there at the gun-cache, or there would be a gun battle.

The figure jumped and ran. Lanky fired again. He

saw the man stumble and fall. And then there were other figures leaping through darkness lighted by a spasmodic blaze from the half-dead fire.

He heard Big Bill calling. Lanky ran back toward the wagons, calling to Big Bill. There was no answer. Back of the wagons, he caught sight of Bill's big form heaving and tossing in combat with two others. His gun broke out in a roar. And then it was wrenched from his hands.

LANKY leaped toward the other Forest man. Ard was back of the wagon now, shooting.

With the impact of an avalanche slamming into a solid bank, Lanky hit the group that swayed back of the wagon. They went down in a tangled mass, surged up. Lanky felt the tremendous strength of Big Bill pick a man up and throw him on the ground, grunting. Then they were both wrestling with the other man. Bill picked him up. He sailed through the air toward the fire, fell, rolled, scrambled right through the center of the fire.

"Here, Bill, back here, guard the guns!" ordered Lanky quickly. It had occurred to him that there was still a major part of the guns belonging to Nally's outfit cached in that tent; perhaps that one man had got two or three away with him, had probably dropped several in the excitement. And the others would have to be protected.

They went crashing back toward Ard's tent. Some one leaped at them out of the dark. Bill swung. The other man grunted and fell away. Two men went leaping away from Ard's tent.

Snarling, spitting death, fire leaped out of the night. Bill cursed. Lanky knew he was hurt. But the big forester went lurching into the blackness, not stopping an instant. Again the gun roared. Bill crouched an instant as the bullets whined away in the night.

In that fraction of a second Lanky Hill heard the drumming feet of hundreds of scared cattle. That ominous sound he had heard long seconds before was clearer now. Something had started the herd stampeding down the cañon like the flood-waters out of a broken dam.

Lanky lost sight of Big Bill. There was another roar of a six-gun beyond where he had last seen him. Then there was a yell back of him. Ard was calling. The first of the scared white-faces streaked by. Then came a wave.

Lanky fought back to the wagons. He saw Ard's tent go, then his own. Drumming hoofs, frantic beasts, streamed by.

The old ranger looked out into the night. He saw the last of the fire go out, tramped to nothing by the cattle. And then he was safe with Ard, in the rear end of the wagon away from the menace of those pounding cloven feet. But—the wagon began to move backward, the tongue dragging; the pressure of the herd against it had started it down the hill toward the creek.

"Git the brake!" shouted Lanky, scrambling toward the side of the vehicle.

From the other end of the wagon flame blazed. Both Forest men flattened. One of Nally's men, armed, was there at the other end.

The wagon moved faster. Neither of the Forest men, crowded close beside each other in the wagon-bed, dared move. Lanky squinted up, trying to see the man in front against the sky. They jounced over a little cliff. Below them was another series of rocky breaks bordering the little creek where it went through a miniature cut in a rock outcrop in the middle of the valley.

They hit another bump. Out came Lanky's hand from under his body, and his heavy pistol crashed loudly in the blackness.

One roaring shot, almost in their faces, came bellowing back at them, and then there were no more. A figure seemed to spring from nothing in front of them, and then went plunging out.

"Git out of here!" yelled Lanky. "Jump, Ard!"

They both leaped out. Lanky Hill landed on his feet like a cat. Ard stumbled, rose, crouched by Lanky's side.

On down the hill rattled the wagon, and an instant later it toppled over a little cliff above the stream and smashed.

"Hurt?" asked Lanky under his breath.

"Bruised up, I reckon," answered Ard quickly. "But still in the fight. How about you?"

"Powder-burnt some from that fellow's cannon," drawled Lanky. "Lucky he shot high."

They scouted to the edge of the willows along the creek. The crazy sounds of the stampede had quieted. Most of the cattle had spilled out, helter-skelter, into the broad floor of Grassy Cañon.

But now the whole gulch was an armed death-trap in which the slightest move might bring a bullet singing a finish to a life. At the camp there still glowed a few of the coals of the fire that had blazed earlier in the evening. But no figures would show themselves against those winking red sparks.

"What started that stampede?" asked Ard, his voice touched a little with awe. "Suppose some wolf scared those cattle?"

"Wolf was right," growled Lanky Hill. "It was a curly one, and his name's Walt Peacey—Nally's foreman."

DECK MEREDITH was beset by conflicting emotions as the second morning after the fight in the ranger station sent light through the corners of the cabin in which he had been thrown by the three men who had attacked him. There had been a hard ride through the night with his hands tied behind him and his feet lashed to the stirrups. He sensed the way they traveled, recognized certain turns in the trails. And then they had stopped before the salt cabin that now held him.

Without a word, speaking only when they had to, these men had pitched him inside with his hands still tied behind him. And then he had heard them wiring the hasp so no amount of working with the latch would open it from inside.

The first night he had worked all through the dark hours to get his hands free. Finally the knots had given. He had wasted one match and verified the fact that he was inside the salt cabin on the head of Spruce Creek, five miles back and above the station. Then he had settled himself as best he could against some piled salt in the corner, trying to rest a little. Finally he had slept.

It was bright day when he woke up, stiff and sore in spots. He knew that Lanky and the rest of the rangers were waiting for him at Quinn's and wondering why he did not come. They would find out, of course, when they visited the station. There would be some trail leading them to him.

Deck walked slowly around inside the cabin. He had supervised the building of that cabin the year before. It was without windows, without any opening whatever, except the door; that was of two-inch planking and the long spikes through the stout cross-pieces were clinched effectively. A salt cabin is no dwelling-place at all. It is just a storage-place for the salt that a cattlemen's association puts out on the range. And this one had been built to stand any snow-load on the roof, or any other assault.

For several hours, Deck worked around the dim walls of the salt cabin, curiously inspecting it, chafing at the delay. He could not know that Nally's cattle had obliterated any chance of picking up a trail out of the ranger station. He was figuring all the time that the other rangers would simply follow the trail and come directly to the salt-cabin and release him.

When that first day waned, Deck had finally realized that something was wrong. It was then that he had started really to try to get out. He started with his pocket knife at the plank door digging a hole near the heavy hasp. For a time, the work had gone very well. Then—the blade snapped.

Panic had touched him then, and he had gone around the cabin like a caged animal, seeking little crannies that might be spread apart or some other way to get out.

In one corner was the piled rock salt. It was in heavy chunks about the size of a man's head. Deck had grabbed one of these, had taken it to the door, had thrown it with all his might in an effort to splinter the plank on the door. But the salt had shattered.

In another corner was a pile of dry wood stacked there by provident cowwaddies so there would be kindling for a fire if anyone should have to make camp here in a rainy spell. But none of these sticks was large enough to use as a lever or a battering ram. Deck tried one, prying against the door. But the plank barrier did not budge and the dry pine stick in his hand splintered.

An attack on the roof had likewise proved futile. There had been a surplus of logs cut, he recalled, and these had been used for the roof instead of the more customary poles; weighted with deep-piled clay above, it proved impregnable to any assault he could make upon it.

So the second night came after he had fought desperately in the ranger station. But there was nothing to do. While there was the split in the cow-men's association at Quinn's, and while Lanky Hill was dodging death from the stampede in the basin of New Moon creek, Deck alternately fretted and tried to find rest. Hunger was greater, his restlessness increasing. And so the morning of the second day came.

AT the first peep of sunlight through the chinks of the cabin, Deck started another round of inspection. He knew it would be fruitless. Even the chance of digging under the bottom log did not offer any possibilities, as there had been twenty-four-inch concrete footings poured below that lower log, and this rested on rock. Deck, with bare hands and a few wooden sticks, stood no chance at all.

He went back to sit on the block of salt, drew out his smoking, reached for his matches. He struck one of the few remaining—and paused abruptly.

A desperate plan had popped into his head. In sober moments he would never have considered it, but now . . . . He got up, moved to the woodpile, gathered up a handful of tindery splinters, piled them against the resinous yellow pine planks of the stout door and struck a match. It was a wild chance he was taking. Deck knew it. But if he could burn the corner of the door out without being suffocated, he might beat through to safety.

The fire caught, blazed up. Deck beat it back a little. He would hold it small if he could, until it had eaten a hole, then smother it out.

The fire blazed again. The planks caught. The flame licked in a long streamer up the side of the door. Resin sizzled. Deck slapped at it with a branch, knocked it back.

Smoke began to fill the inside of the cabin. It burned his eyes, and throat. Back at the door, the flames crept up the planking. Hot rosin steeped out, and falling into the fire below, added rich fuel to the burning twigs.

Deck held back the fuel he had in his hand. Again came the feeling that he had tackled something that he should kill at once before it got away from him. Instead of killing the fire, he set more sticks of wood against the planks. The planks caught, and flame ate at their fiber.

Deck went groggily back to the woodpile. The smoke began to settle down. At first it had been a layer in the upper part of the room. Now it was halfway down the walls, thick and stifling.

Deck hurried back to the fire. The smoke masked the upper part of it. Sudden panic struck the ranger. This fire would snuff out his life if he did not kill it! He started smashing away at it with the branch in his hand. The flames scattered. And then the draft of the fanning stick started them up greater than ever. Deck dived into the face of the fire; thrashed at it desperately, trying to beat it out in one last desperate effort.

It drove him back. Then he lay flat on the floor, gasping. He could feel the suck of the tiny wind-currents as they raced along the cool floor to the fire.

There was one chance to win out, after all. He would keep his face to the floor as long as he could. Perhaps in that time the fire would burn through somewhere and let this suffocating smoke all out.

Some sense of being in a torture-chamber struck Deck. Here he lay watching the cloud of smoke edging down the wall ahead of him. And over in the corner the fire flamed and died and flamed again. Gigantic anger at those who had made him prisoner, rushed through him.

Suddenly he heard a voice—the voice of Nora Quinn—calling his name!

Deck started to his feet. He yelled once, and then the inrush to his lungs of the gaseous atmosphere in the cabin sent him blindly groping for the thin stratum of clean air below the smoke.

Again he heard that voice. This was delirium, probably, but he called, this time with his face close against the floor.

Then some one was at the door!

He yelled madly. And outside came the clear, quick answer of the girl.

Again there was the racket of the latch being wrenched, the wire that held it being torn away by desperate fingers.

"Get back away from the door when you've got that unloosed, Norrie," he yelled. "Be sure to get back!"

He knew that with the opening of that door, there would be a roaring furnace there. He had to beat it.

He heard the wire being pulled out. Before him, near the bottom of the ground, a crack appeared at the edge of the door.

"Get back, Norrie!" he called. Then he leaped—hurled his body with all his might against the door. He tripped, stumbled, fell rolling, and then plunged again.

FOR a moment, Deck lay gasping on the ground. His hair was singed; there were black rings around his eyes, around his nostrils; his hand was angry red where flames had touched it as he plunged through. But—he was safe and fairly sound.

He opened his eyes to look up at the blue sky, and looked instead into a pair of anxious blue eyes. He smiled.

"Good work, Norrie," he said huskily, thankfully. "How in the dickens did you find this, and in the nick of time?"

"You hurt, Deck?"

"Nope," he declared; then, sitting up: "Singed, but safe. But how did you figure out where I was?"

"First I didn't know. I just heard some of the men that were at the meeting at the house again last night talking. I'd been up to the ranger station, hoping I'd find you back there. They were at the junction where the roads cross, talking. And I heard them say something about some one that might be hungry having plenty of salt to eat. I went home and kept thinking. I couldn't go to sleep. As I lay thinking, I realized it might be you they were talking about, and that you might be a prisoner in this cabin. And then the more I thought, the more I was certain."

She pulled out a vacuum bottle of hot coffee and a paper sack crammed with sandwiches. Deck reached ravenously for them.

"What's happened?" asked Deck between mouthfuls.

NORA sketched what had occurred. She did not tell of the stampede in New Moon gulch, for that news had not reached the Quinn ranch before she left.

"This morning, about daybreak, Rasmussen telephoned my dad," she finished. "Rasmussen said that Cort and Jepsons and Toothaker had ridden by his place, all of them with rifles on their saddles and six-guns in their belts, headed for Grassy Cañon. They wanted Rasmussen to go with them, but he said he was still back of the Forest Service until they knew for certain that you could not get Nally off the forest."

"Think that Lanky and the other boys are over in New Moon ridin' herd on Nally? Got him corraled?"

"So far as we know," she replied. And she added: "I was so sure you were here I stopped at the station and picked up your horse for you."

"I guess I owe you my life, Norrie," he said.

"It's a good worth-while life," she replied with a little laugh that had a chok-

In an early issue!

"In Celestial City, competition is met with gunfire—which accounts for the fact that we have only one grocery, one hardware store, one preacher, and so forth."

With this preface, one of the most joyous stories we've ever printed gets away to a running start. Of course it's

***By* Bud La Mar**

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ing sound in it. "I'll just chalk up that life among my real treasures!"

"You going back to the ranch?" he asked.

"I'd planned on going along to New Moon," she replied.

"I don't think you'd better," said Deck.

For a long moment she studied his face. "All right," she agreed. "I guess I'll be going back, then."

LANKY HILL looked up quickly from the scanty breakfast that had been salvaged from the wrecked grub-wagon of Nally's outfit. As daylight had come to the New Moon gulch, the Forest men had come out into the open from places of hiding, a ragged, red-eyed outfit, but still ready to carry on.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" exploded Lanky. "No, it—can't be. . . . Yes, by gosh, it is Deck!"

"Good gosh, where you been?" demanded Big Bill, who stood stiffly because a bullet had scratched his ribs.

"Just jumped out of the door of hell itself," said Deck. "And found a slice of heaven outside too, if you'll believe me!"

Quickly he told what had happened. And then, while he gulped coffee and wolfed tinned meat, Deck listened to the recital of the night before.

"Well," said Deck as Lanky finished, "I guess there's a showdown today. Jepson's and Toothaker's and Cort's outfits are on the way up-cañon now, and they're just snortin' for trouble."

"Means they'll slice a few hundred head of cattle out of Nally's herd at least," observed Matt Ard. "Might serve him right to let them fight it out."

"Yes, serve 'em right," agreed Lanky. "But that aint the way we handle it on the Forest."

"I know it aint. I just said it would serve 'em right," replied Ard.

"Nope," declared Deck, rising to his feet. "I'm goin' down right to Nally, and put the thing up to him, cold turkey. This has got to stop. If it goes further, there'll be a funeral for some one and a rope for some one else."

Nor could any argument on the part of Lanky Hill or the others dissuade Deck from riding alone, unarmed, directly toward Nally for the purpose of parley.

AS Deck reached a point near where Nally's men were grouped, they saw him raise his hand. Then they saw Nally himself ride out from the group to meet Deck.

All had been ready to go swooping if there was one move of hostilities. There was a little catch of relief in the breath of every man there when Deck reached a point face to face with the renegade cattleman.

"By gosh, he put that over!" exclaimed Big Bill to the other forest men of the ridge above. "Now ef he kin reason with Nally—"

"Reason with the devil!" snorted Lanky. "Git yore guns ready."

"Nally," Deck was saying slowly, "you've got yourself sort of in a jackpot, haven't you?"

"I don't know as I have," countered Nally. There was a queer flicker of admiration in Nally's eye as he looked at Deck. It had taken nerve to come across the open meadow directly toward Nally's crew.

"Let me sort of point it out in case you can't see it all," said Deck. His voice was low, would not carry to the men behind. "You just can't go on," said Deck abruptly.

"Why?"

"You're a man with some judgment, Nally. You've got horse sense as well as nerve. Do you want to land on the other side of the range minus about half your herd and half your men?"

"I'll not do that!"

Deck saw Peacey talking to one of the riders. Both had rifles ready.

"You've headed for just that if you try to keep on up this cañon the way you've started," declared Deck. "Look here! Up there on the bench are a half dozen men of the Forest Service. Do you know what they're here for? They're here to see that grazing regulations are obeyed. You or anyone else. It's their job, and they're likely to do their work. You've gone rough-shod over those regulations. You're outside the law. Just at the present moment you're a fugitive from the law, if you want to know. Lanky Hill put you under arrest last night. You may not know it, but a Forest man is a Federal officer, and we've got the whole U. S. A. behind us. Listen, Nally: if it takes every ranger in Colorado, we'll round you up and we'll stick you for trespass. And if there's one of the boys killed while we're doing it, you'll hang for it, or spend the rest of your life at the big house at Cañon."

Deck saw doubt come to Nally's eyes.

"What if I don't listen to you?" the cattle-man asked.

"Then there'll be dead beef-stock all over the range and there'll be men packed out of here stiff and cold, on horseback, and you'll be responsible for having started this whole trouble."

The sound of horses' hoofs down-cañon turned all eyes in that direction. For a moment Deck thought he had been too late, that the Jepsons and their gang had come before he could get Nally out of the way and avoid a wholesale killing.

But it was only Quinn and Rasmussen.

Nally's hand dropped to his rifle in the saddle scabbard.

"Cut that!" ordered Deck sharply. "And don't let your men make any fool moves. These men are with the Forest Service."

Jerry Quinn and his companion rode up.

"This outfit better git over the ridge," said Jerry seriously.

"What's the trouble now?" demanded Nally curtly.

"Jepsons and Toothaker are down beyond the Forest border. They're holding a big pow-wow—lots of war-talk. They're waiting for three other men to come up before they start on the high lope up

here to clean you out, Nally. They're all armed, and they're all lickered enough to be mean. They say the Forest Service hasn't been able to handle you but that the old six-gun law will."

Deck turned on Nally. "There's about a dozen of them," he declared. "There's around that among your men. And there's about eight of us in that Forest bunch, including Jerry, Dave and Rasmussen. Get your stock rounded up and back up there in New Moon gulch and over the hill to the ranger station. If you do that, I'll promise you all the protection we can give you. We can protect them at the station. They'll be in Government custody there. If you don't do that— Come on, Nally, you're facing one hell of a fight if you don't pull in your horns."

Nally looked over to where some of his whitefaces were grazing near by.

"Remember, Nally, you're under arrest yet for trespass, and just this minute you're a fugitive from justice. If you don't come peaceably, you'll come some other way. *And I'm not bluffing!*"

Nally swung around in his saddle. Back of him his men milled uneasily.

"You say if I git this stock off here and give myself up for a trespass case, you'll see there's no more fightin'?"

"This is my Forest district," countered Deck. "I've got no love for those Jepsons that have tried to smash me. They've pulled all the tricks they know, to discredit me and make trouble. If you'll get those men of yours to shove that beef up and over to the ranger station, I'll guarantee that there'll be no more loss to you in men or cows, if I have to fight the bunch single-handed! And if you don't—then there's going to be three-sided trouble! Come on, Nally, you can't afford to run your bluff a foot further."

"No," said Nally slowly, "I guess I can't." He turned to face his men. Behind them, rather close-bunched, were his cattle. In quick, gruff orders he sent them out rounding up the stock.

Peacey came riding up.

"What's the matter?" he snapped. "You quittin'?"

"Yes," snapped Nally, "I'm quittin' while the quittin's good."

And Deck knew the licking Nally had just acknowledged would go harder with Peacey than any physical beating that could be administered.

HUSTLE and action filled that section of Grassy Cañon below New Moon gulch. Deck motioned for the Forest men to come riding. With grins, with quick words of approval at Deck's victory, they went hurrying along to help shove the cattle into the gulch. The work progressed rapidly.

"Think they'll get that all done before Jepsons show up?" asked Deck of Jerry.

"Depends on when those other fellows start," replied the stocky little cow-man. "After we git this feller corraled, I guess we'll have some few things to settle with them Jepsons."

"You know it!" agreed Deck. "I'm going to teach them a lesson, Jerry!"

"Ef you don't, I will," agreed Jerry. "But ef they should show up here afore them cattle git into New Moon or even over the hill—"

"There'd be hot hell popping," agreed Deck.

The cattle went up into the gulch in a long string. With all the crew to run them, there was quick work in bunching and driving.

Nally came riding close to Deck as the last of the bunch went up the little slope to the bench.

"Now that we've got things movin' off the Forest, I'm dead anxious about those Jepsons," he confided in Deck. "My boys aint any too sweet about this whole business. Some of 'em want to fight now. Ef anyone should pull a gun, there'd be a slaughter. Kin you hold them Jepsons back ef they come?"

Almost as he got the words out of his mouth, there was the clatter of hoofs from down cañon. With a yell, a wild band of horsemen came around a bend, headed directly for the mouth of New Moon gulch where the last of the Nally herd was in sight.

"Get that bunch of stuff over the ridge. As quick as you can! Drive 'em! Don't mind anything but get them out of here," directed Deck. "Those are Jepson's men!"

"What you goin' to do?" asked Nally.

"I'll stop 'em," declared Deck sharply.

Nally loped away after his men. The Jepsons spurred their horses into a run; they had caught sight of Nally riding into the gulch, and rode toward him.

Lanky Hill came tearing back on his horse, pulling up to face Deck.

"What you goin' to do, Deck?" he asked. "You cain't let them hyenas git to Nally and his outfit. Nally's got our protection now! There'd be murder all through the gulch ef they come together."

"I'm going to stop them!" declared Deck. "You go on and keep those cattle on the move, as fast as you can. I'll hold this bunch here long enough for you to get the stuff over near the station."

"Here," said Lanky quickly. And he reached down his own rifle.

THEY had reached the little level bench that lay at the lower end of New Moon gulch. It lay like a flat little stage below an immense amphitheater. Deck turned. The Jepsons had stopped; they were talking and waving their arms. Lanky looked back, then went racing away after the swiftly moving herd.

Back of Deck there was the bawling of cattle, the yelling of riders. He looked and saw the front of the herd go over the top of the hill. The others were crowding after. Then he heard the quick drum of hoofs as the Jepson gang started charging the gulch. Deck swept the little bench area with his eyes. He walked calmly to the center.

Up over the lip came the three Jepsons and their men. They reined in abruptly as they saw Deck there in that open space. For a moment there was nothing said. Deck had counted on this moment of surprise.

Back up the gulch Jerry Quinn and Lanky Hill had suddenly reined in in front of a trim figure on horseback that had come charging over the ridge. Nora Quinn had been watching from a high point; and now, seeing Deck standing alone with the Jepsons in the cañon, fear seized her.

"Let me go," she said fiercely, to Lanky as he reached out and caught her horse's bridle. "I tell you, it's murder for him to stay there. *Let me go!*"

In our next issue:

The Phoenix Tourmaline

a fascinating mystery story by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

With a quick, plunging drive, she threw her horse loose. Down the gulch they raced. They were not two hundred yards away from the bunch when Lanky and Jerry finally caught up with her.

"Are you going to let him face them alone?" she asked, whirling on Lanky. "What sort of a man are you?"

"Look," said Lanky. All three gazed down on the little bench. They saw the group around the Jepsons suddenly separate; then 'Fet Jepson got off his horse.

"GOOD morning," said Deck to the Jepsons. "Riding for strays?"

"How did you get here?" snapped Rocky Jepson.

"You didn't expect me, did you?" flashed Deck. "You thought that when you kidnaped me and took me up to the salt cabin, you'd be able to put the skids under me here in this district as you've been trying to do ever since I came here."

"That's a lie!" shouted Fred Jepson. "We never were at yore station."

"It's no lie," snapped Deck. "And you know it isn't. How about that bruised place on your cheek where I hit you with the stove-wood?"

"I won't stand fer any such blackguardin' from you," cried 'Fet Jepson. "You yellow-bellied coyote!"

Deck whirled on the others.

It was time, delay, he wanted—time to get the last of that herd over the ridge and down into the ranger station pasture. And he wanted the Jepsons to fight, man to man.

"Look here," he said, addressing Cort, Toothaker and the other ranchers. "Are you going to follow these hot-heads any longer? You going to let the Jepsons stampede you into this trouble? Their whole aim is to get me, and they're heading you for a fall. Wake up!"

"You'll keep yore mouth shut, Ranger!" flared 'Fet Jepson angrily. "You've said about enough about us around here. I'll take it out of yore hide ef you don't keep that trap shut!"

"Night before last," said Deck, his words cracking, "these fellows kidnaped me, these three Jepsons. They locked me in the salt cabin. Knocked me cold to do it. And left me there. That's why I wasn't on the job yesterday. I just got free this morning. They wanted this trouble. They wanted a few killings. Do you want to drill with the sort of an outfit that has to lie and kidnap and—"

"You'll take that back," said 'Fet Jepson angrily. His hand swooped to his saddle scabbard. "I'll kill you and then I'll go on and git that Nally and that other crew up there—and Quinn too, the dirty rat!"

"You'll be hanged for murder if you shoot," warned Deck. Somehow he was not afraid. There were those other men, Cort, and Toothaker. Cort was a square-shooter, if hot-headed; Toothaker was always known to be fair, even in a fight.

"Put up the gun," growled Cort. "You cain't start anything like that on an unarmed man, 'Fet!"

Young Jepson whirled on him angrily. "What the hell have you got to say about it?" he demanded.

"Fight ef you want, but on even terms," snapped Cort. "Ef what he says is true about you three kidnapin' him, then I'd say you've been in some small business!"

Deck half turned. The cattle herd was still going over the hill. More time was still required.

Beyond that, the accumulated anger of months was seething in Deck, and he wanted to get his hands on 'Fet.

"Oh, hell, that ranger wouldn't fight," sneered 'Fet. "He's yellow all the way. Come on, let's git them cattle!"

"You're afraid, 'Fet," snapped Deck. "You Jepsons have to fight in the dark, and three against one. That's the kind you are!"

It worked. 'Fet Jepson leaped from his horse.

"Take that back, or I'll smash you!" he snarled.

"I'll say it again!" declared Deck. "You're the kind that has to have odds with you when you fight. All by yourself, every one of you, you're cowards."

With a quick, running leap, 'Fet Jepson crashed into Meredith.

The Forest man grinned and stepped forward to meet the rush.

'Fet's arms, swinging through the air, fanned as his lighter opponent ducked.

Deck struck. His fingers felt numb from the blow he landed in 'Fet's ribs.

"Fair fight," warned Cort, as Rocky Jepson made a move as though to help his son. "Just keep yore seat, Rocky, until this is over, and then maybe the ranger'll fight you too!"

Deck came plunging. The footing underneath was mostly solid, but in a few places there were water-washed pebbles on the surface. His foot hit one of them. 'Fet was on him in an instant. They fell.

Deck felt Fet's hands reaching for his throat. Then he threw him off. They charged up. Deck lunged; 'Fet ducked. There was a moment in which they danced and turned and whirled. Then they crashed together like angry wolves.

Deck's hands came up and grappled. Their bodies smashed together, and the wind was nearly knocked out of both.

UP the hillside two hundred yards distant, Lanky Hill sat with a grim smile on his face.

"I guess he's teachin' 'em a little first-hand Forest policy," he drawled. Nora Quinn sat white-faced, her blue eyes wide, watching every little move. She knew in her heart that there was something besides Forest policy involved down there.

With a roar, 'Fet came slashing again at Deck. Fists flailed, and Deck felt his head rock. He pulled his chin down on his breast, bored in. He felt 'Fet giving ground. He smashed in. There was a moment in which 'Fet stood still, and they slugged. Something seemed to rock Deck from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. He swayed; another blow came crashing. He heard Rocky Jepson calling to his son to finish the Forest man.

Deck went dancing away in a drunken stumbling run. 'Fet was after him. Deck stopped, threw all his weight into meeting the cow-man.

At the head of the gulch the last of the Nally herd went over the top of the hill. Out of the group of men that drove them, several turned back. Deck's strategy had worked; the band with the Jepsons were stopped, slowed up until the cattle and Nally's men were safe in the protection of the ranger station.

But Deck had started something else that had to be finished. His hands hurt; there was a dizziness in his head that he could not shake out. And yet he was madly hungry to feel his hands on the man who fought him. He reached out to grapple with 'Fet Jepson. A stinging blow met him. Then for a few seconds there was a breathless, twisting clinch.

"I'm goin' to bust you!" breathed 'Fet. "I'm goin' to smear you! Nora Quinn's up there watchin', and she's goin' to know yo're nothin' but a yellow-belly! I'm goin' to run you off—"

With a quick whirl, Deck twisted loose. New madness filled him. His arms came up in a savage attack. 'Fet threw up his arms to guard. Deck plowed in. He hammered 'Fet's stomach. 'Fet dropped his guard. Deck punched him on the jaw.

With a roar, 'Fet came back.

"Keep yore saddle, Rocky," admonished Cort again. "This fight's goin' to be fair. Let 'em settle it!"

EVERY spectator knew that wrapped up in this was the question of who was going to run the Grassy Cañon district of the Forest. If Deck was beaten, he could not stay. And Cort was willing to let it be decided fairly. Other horsemen gathered around Jerry Quinn, his daughter and Lanky—Powell and Ard and the rest of the Forest men. Dave Rayburn was with them.

"Some fight," breathed Dave.

Nora Quinn looked at him quickly. There was fear in her eyes, fear and a tremendous pride in Deck.

With a desperate move, Deck threw 'Fet back. The cow-man came at him, cursing. There was an instant in which they poised. Out of his swollen eyes Deck caught a look at 'Fet's face; he knew that his antagonist was badly battered. But the next instant he felt the strength of the man in front of him. They went careening through a little thicket of scrub brush. It tangled at their feet. They fell; then they came up, weaving.

Deck had to finish this, and soon; his strength was going. Another blow rocked him. But he felt his own fist smack on 'Fet as he swayed away.

He threw new fervor into the fight. He felt 'Fet give, and bored in, though he could hardly see. He felt 'Fet ahead of him again, plunged in, striking swiftly. He felt 'Fet give. He threw his might into the attack—and found nothing in front of him. He peered dizzily around, looked down at his feet.

Huddled there, limp, face down, was 'Fet Jepson.

Back of him, Deck heard the hoarse voice of Toothaker.

"Cort's right," he howled. "You cain't fight that kid now, Rocky. Some other day ef you want to tangle with Uncle Sam's man, you kin—ef you think it's healthy. But you cain't tackle him now. There's goin' to be fair fightin' ef there's goin' to be any fightin' on this district, ef I have anything to say about it!"

"WELL," said Lanky dryly, as he started down the ridge and glanced sidewise at Nora Quinn, "I guess that settles the question of who's the better man. And maybe it's settled several kinds of trespassin'!"

THE END

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