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Magazine

October

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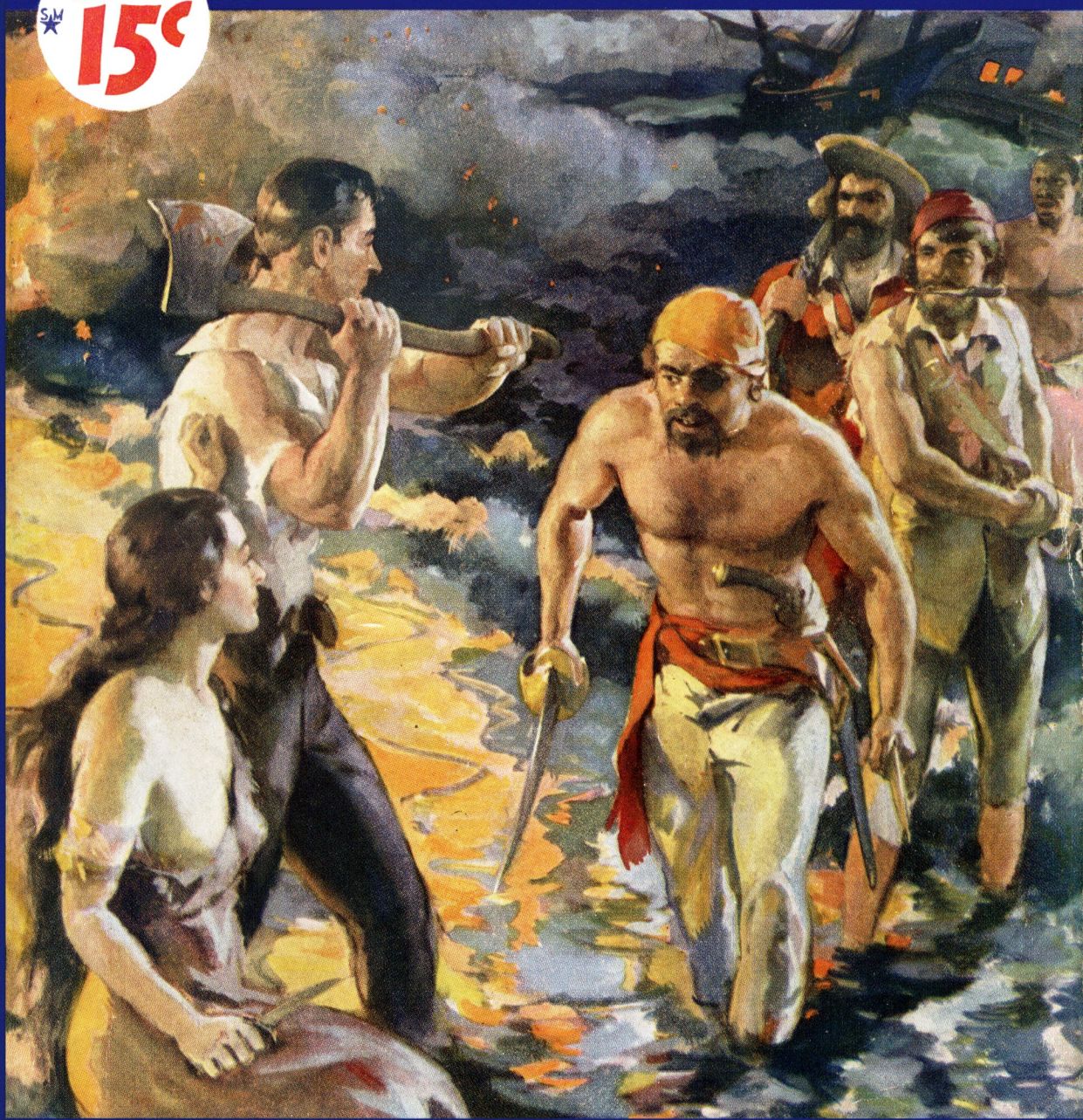

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BLADES of the LÉGION

by Percival Christopher Wren, who wrote Beau Geste

PIRATES' LAIR *by* Arthur D. Howden Smith

Talbert Josselyn, Frank Verney, Roy Chanslor

and many others · · · Cash Prizes for Real Experiences

OCTOBER 1933

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 57 No. 6

Sin Writes History

HAPPY is the nation—or man—who has no history. For, as Goethe remarked, *sin writes history; goodness is silent.* . . . So it comes about that the world's most stirring histories are those of unhappy nations, and some of our most fascinating stories are based on the lives of unhappy or unregenerate men.

Over a century ago France established a remarkable fighting force which has come to be a favorite refuge for such men—the Foreign Legion. One of it distinguished officers (gallant Major Pechkoff, who wrote "The Bugle Sounds") has perhaps best defined the character of the Legionnaires. They do not comprise a "legion of the lost ones and cohort of the damned." Rather, they are men who have been "wounded in their souls," and who seek in the iron discipline and rigorous campaigning of the Legion to forget their sorrows, and regain courage to face life again—or to lose it.

These tragic men, naturally, have long been a favorite theme both for reader and writer alike. Ouida's "Under Two Flags" was a famous best-seller of its day; there have since been many others, including the stories of our own Warren H. Miller. But perhaps no stories of the Legion have had such a world-wide success as Percival Christopher Wren's "Beau Geste," "Beau Sabreur" and "Valiant Dust." And for this reason we are especially proud to present to you in this issue the first of a group of six new stories of the Legion by this celebrated writer.

Major Wren of course knows his subject well. He has served in the British and the Indian armies as well as in the Legion, and in both North and East Africa. More important, he well knows the men and events he writes about—beginning on page 6 of this issue.

—The Editor

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BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1933 VOL. 57, NO. 6

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Blades of the Légion

By PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

The famous author of "Beau Geste" here gives us another deeply impressive story of the Foreign Legion.

FROM where, in his corner, McSnorrt was bent over the cartridge-case that he was polishing, came the unmistakable melody of "Loch Lomond." Perhaps "melody" is not quite the *mot juste* for McSnorrt's rendering. . . . And then —"Annie Laurie," definitely recognizable. I held my breath; and then came "Ye Banks and Braes."

Somehow it was a pathetic thing to hear these Scottish airs in a Legion barrack-room in Southern Morocco—to hear them whistled by this exile so far from home, this Scot who never again would see bank or brae, loch or glen, misty moor or purple heather.

For McSnorrt was in love: McSnorrt, of all people—the morose and embittered man, the drunkard, the failure, savagely at odds with himself and the world.

It was in jest that I first used the idiotic phrase, "McSnorrt is in love"—a feeble joke that was my comment on the fact that he was whistling. Actually whistling. A portent! Had I—or anyone else, for the matter of that—ever before heard such a sound from the lips of McSnorrt? He'd be singing next—God forbid!

Then it came. McSnorrt burst into song, and hurriedly I left the room—not altogether because his voice was harsh and discordant, his music flat.

From that day he began to change; and before long he was a different man.

Had you asked Captain Le Sage, before this episode, for a brief character-sketch of McSnorrt, he would have said: "The worst soldier and the best fighting-man in my company. The best marcher, the best shot and the best scout I've got—and a dirty drunken dissolute ruffian, God bless him!"

A month later, the drunkard was a teetotaler, the deliberately untidy dirty soldier was a model of spick-and-span smartness; the ruffian whose chief sport was trouble-making had become a pattern of deportment.

The canteen, the cells, the *péloton des hommes punis,* knew him no more.

McSnorrt was in love—for the first time in his life. . . . In love like a romantic boy, and determined to be worthy of the woman he worshiped. This was how love had "taken" McSnorrt—as it takes all men who have anything of the boy left in them, anything fine, romantic, noble.

Curious words to use in connection with this red ruffian, but how can they be wholly inapplicable to a man who loved as he did, and in love so behaved?

One moonlit night he paid me a tremendous compliment, did me an honor that I appreciated at its great worth, and valued enormously. Scot though he was, he opened his heart to me, and told me all about it. I suppose this was another manifestation and effect of his condition. He *must* talk about her to some one.

I was to understand that she was nane o' your common lassies; no fly-by-night besom; she was a good girl and worked honestly for an honest living.

In the daytime she worked at Angier's in the Place Bugeaud, and in the evenings she danced at Gaston's. It was there that McSnorrt had first seen her.

"How did I get acquent with her?" said McSnorrt. "I was sitting there in Angier's wi' a bottle in front of me, and

Illustrated by John Clymer
Decorations by Charles Fox

"She came from behind a curtain onto the little platform, and sang a song and danced a little—nice modest dancin', ye ken."

Tant de Soif sitting beside me; and she came from behind a curtain onto the little platform by the piano, and sang a song and danced a little—nice modest dancin', ye ken.

"Then she walked about the room haverin' with the soldiers, taking orders and helping the woman at the bar.

"Man, I liked her fine—her bonny sweet face and lovely great eyes! She walked like thistledown blown across a lawn, and she'd stand by a table like a long-stemmed flower that sometimes nods in the breeze, sometimes bends.

" 'Twas like that she bent to hear what some damned dog of a spahi said to her, and he seized her round the neck as she stooped, and round the waist with his other arm, and pulled her onto his knee.

"She screamed, for the puir lassie was new to the café business. . . . And, ma mannie, in the same meenit, yon spahi was on his ain knees—both o' them—and then on the floor for the count!"

"Did you hurt him?"

"We-e-e-l, I knocked him off his chair; I kicked him up, I knocked him down; I kicked him again, and when he picked up a stool, I hit him on the heid wi' a bottle—a full one. . . .

"He'll be all right when he comes out of hospital.

"Then she thanked me and I waited about, to see her safe to her home; for yon spahis hang together and are apt to be rough and violent men."

I gathered that this had been the beginning of a wooing that had prospered; that the girl was a Spaniard, that she was quite alone in Maraknez; that not only was she industrious, hard-working, self-supporting and self-respecting, but was gloriously beautiful and pure as a lily; a compendium of the graces, virtues and accomplishments; that McSnorrt now loved her as no man had ever before loved a woman, and that his love was returned.

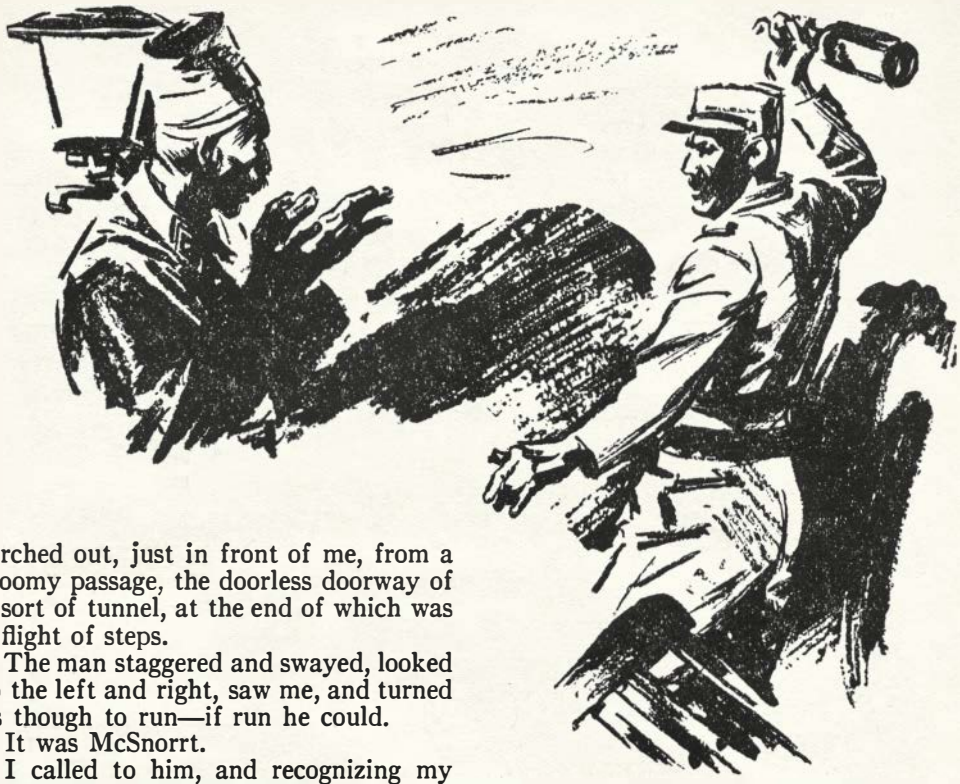
Well, well. Perhaps so. . . .

More probably the girl was a Spanish Jewess with a strain of Arab, one who slept all day when not consuming pastry, Turkish delight, sherbet and coffee, was not as young as she once had been, was neither as virtuous nor as beautiful as McSnorrt thought her, was anything but self-supporting—and was, in fact, a perfectly ordinary café-girl, dancing at Angier's and dancing also down the terrible road that begins at Marseilles and, by way of Algiers, Oran, Sidi-bel-Abbès, Casa Blanca, Marrakesh, Fez and Meknes, ends in some last dreadful outpost of "civilization."

Earnestly I hoped that I was wrong and that this strange drama might not end in tragedy.

Meanwhile it was comedy, delightful and intriguing, if a little pathetic, and McSnorrt, treading the narrow path of virtue, climbed from height to height, went on from strength to strength. Positively there was some talk of his being made a corporal, for Captain Le Sage believed in the theory that the worst poachers made the best gamekeepers, and the toughest law-breakers the best guardians of the law, when reformed. . . .

Then, one evening, as I was strolling through a narrow winding alley in the old quarter of Maraknez, a Légionnaire



lurched out, just in front of me, from a gloomy passage, the doorless doorway of a sort of tunnel, at the end of which was a flight of steps.

The man staggered and swayed, looked to the left and right, saw me, and turned as though to run—if run he could.

It was McSnorrt.

I called to him, and recognizing my voice he stopped, turned again, stumbled, and leaned for support against the wall.

He looked as I have seen men look after a desperate hand-to-hand fight. He looked, indeed, as though he had seen, not a ghost, but something a thousand times more terrible and terrifying.

His face, white to the lips, looked pinched and shrunken; his eyes, starting from his head, still seemed to behold some utter horror. He quivered and shook like a man in the first stages of fever; and with trembling palsied hand, plucked at his mouth.

I had seen McSnorrt in all stages of drunkenness, berserk rage, and fighting madness, but never like this—as though dying on his feet.

"What is it, Mac? What's up?" I said, taking him by the arm.

"God, man!" he whispered. "Help me!"

"What's happened? What's wrong?"

"Help me," he whispered. "Help me to get away from here. . . . For the love of God, get me a drink. Man, I—"

And McSnorrt slid heavily to the ground. He had fainted. . . .

That night the civil police visited the barracks where the company was quartered.

A woman had been murdered in the Rue Ramonones, and a man had seen a Légionnaire, obviously drunk, come from her room, stagger down the stairs and out into the street. There he had been met by another Légionnaire, evidently an accomplice, who had helped him away. Doubtless robbery had been the motive, the man priming himself with drink.

An identification-parade was ordered; and the informer, a greasy little rat of a half-caste, identified a big tall red-haired German who had been on guard and on sentry-go the whole evening, and could only have committed the murder if endowed with the unusual faculty of being in two places at once.

We heard no more of the matter, and the public heard nothing at all.

TALK, round the campfire, hundreds of miles from Maraknez.

Hungry, weary men, rested and fed, and each with a reward—more valuable than a *fougeron*—of a liter of wine; McSnorrt, who had filled up in the *bistro*, before receiving the gratuitous liter, was drunk, articulate and reminiscent.

"Huh! That was the most terrible thing that ever happened to you, was it?" he jeered, as Tant de Soif finished telling us of a ghastly deed that he had witnessed at Nak-Nam in the Tonkin campaign.

"Yes. And you, my friend? Doubtless your experiences have been—"

"Experiences, eh?" sneered McSnorrt. "One at a time! And how about this? I loved a woman once—"

"Once?" laughed Klingen.

"Aye, once. Loved her as— But why talk of such things to you? Loved her as all of you love your lives; and far better than I love mine. And we had our hidden place apart, our nest.

"It was a lovely, lovely idyl. . . . Perfect. Why, I was *happy!* I, McSnorrt, the damned disgrace of a known respectit family, a great clan and the finest country in the warrld. . . .

"I forgot all that I had been and remembered only what I was, the beloved of the sweetest woman on this earth—this earth, the better for her presence.

"I forgot all that I had done, and remembered only what I was doing, loving her, worshiping her, counting the hours till I should see her again. . . .

"And when I could not see her, she wrote me little love-letters—from which I kissed the very words away.

"I tell ye, I was happy—happier than I'd ever been in my life; happy for the first time in my life.

"And one day I got a blow—a blow upon the heart. . . . I asked her to marry me. Aye, I dared do even that, so uplifted was I! I maun ha' been fey.

"An' she told me she couldna. Fine she would ha' loved to, she said, but—she had a husband. . . . Aye, the nightmare in our dream, the poison in our cup, the ogre in our idyl! A shadowy husband, some damned dog of a rascal rogue whom she but rarely saw, and who but came for what he could get, including her money.

"Aye, 'twas a blow. But I soon recovered. . . . For, after all, what mattered—what could matter—while I loved her and she loved me, and the same fine warrld held us both."

McSNORRT paused, drank long, and gazed into the dying embers of the fire. . . .

"A blow, did I say? Then think o' this.

"One day I had a little note from her, a little loving note, saying:

"'*Come on Sunday evening, my loved one. Come at six. I shall be there; or very soon after. If I have not returned, the key will be—where you know.*'

"How did I get through the hours that divided me from Sunday and from her?

I worked, I whistled, I sang, I looked at clocks and said: 'Another hour has gone!' And although each minute was like an hour, each hour a day, I was the 'Happy Warrior.'

"D'ye hear me? Can ye believe me? I, McSnorrt, damned drunken, dirty deevil, was happy—and clean, mind, soul and body!

"And on the Sunday night I went—went once again to the old Moorish house, and climbed the stair that led to her room. The door was fastened, and I knocked our knock upon it.

"No answer.

"Aha! I was first, was I? . . . I'd get me in and hide, and spring out like a roaring lion when she came.

"Reaching up, I felt into the crack between two stones hidden by the ledge above the door. The key was there, and she was out—and at any moment I'd hear her light footsteps as she came up the winding worn stone stair.

"I unlocked the door, stepped into the room, and closed it behind me.

"She was not out. . . . Turning about, I saw her. She was lying on the bed—dead—strangled."

"With a silk stocking," said a harsh grating voice from the other side of the fire.

McSnorrt swallowed.

"Aye," said he, still staring into the embers, "with a silk stocking. Her hands were tied behind her back."

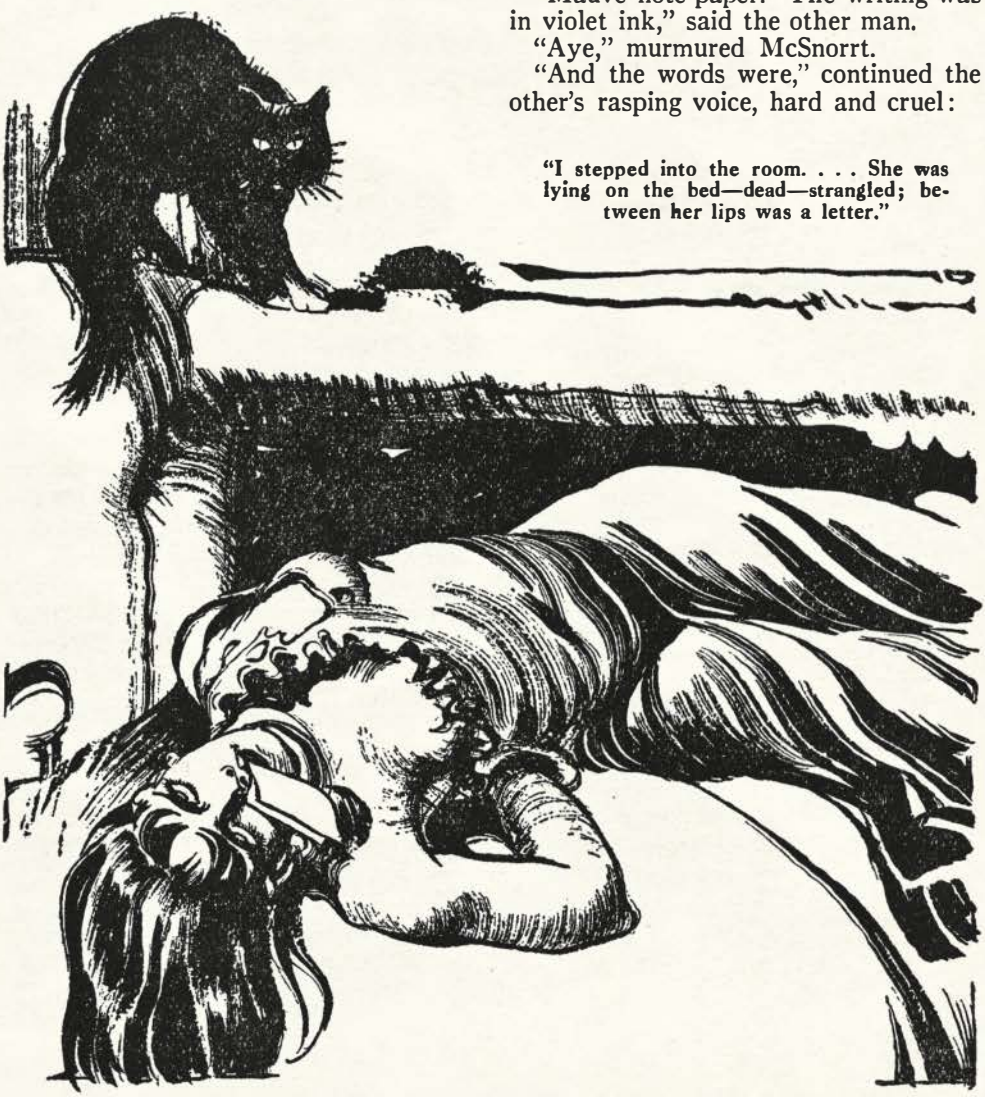
"With the other stocking!" grated the same harsh voice.

"Aye," said McSnorrt, breaking the tense silence. "And between her little lips outstretched to me, was a piece of her note-paper—a letter."

"Mauve note-paper. The writing was in violet ink," said the other man.

"Aye," murmured McSnorrt.

"And the words were," continued the other's rasping voice, hard and cruel:



"I stepped into the room. . . . She was lying on the bed—dead—strangled; between her lips was a letter."

"'Welcome, beloved. You will stay with me—again—tonight.'"

"Aye," agreed McSnorrt.

"Estella Margarita," said the voice.

"Aye, Estella Margarita," murmured McSnorrt—and suddenly awoke from his reverie to reality, to awareness.

"What?" he whispered. *"What* did ye say?" And he sprang to his feet.

The other man rose, as quickly. It was Spanish Maine.

Each put his hand upon the hilt of his bayonet.

No one else moved.

"You were her husband?" whispered McSnorrt, incredulous. And—

With hard-drawn, sobbing breath, they fought, stabbing as though with knives.

"*You* were her lover—her other lover?" said Spanish Maine.

In one motion McSnorrt drew his bayonet, and with the roar of a wounded lion, leaped across the fire.

Spanish Maine's bayonet flashed from its sheath; and with the long lean blades, they fought like wild beasts, no man interfering. Here was something terrible, something beyond the ordinary. It was their own private battle, the business of no other man.

At first they crossed blades like swordsmen fighting with rapiers, thrust and parried, feinted and lunged; quick as lightning was thrust, parry and riposte. . . .

And then like clumsier swordsmen with sabers, hacking, slashing and hewing, blade clashing heavily on blade, with every now and then a swift, sudden giving of the point as the opponent's blade was raised to strike. . . .

And then, with hard-drawn, sobbing breath, they closed and fought as though with knives, stabbing, stabbing, left hands holding right wrists, as they struggled and swayed like wrestlers.

And at length, clasped to each other, breast to breast, McSnorrt wrenched free his hand and drove his bayonet deep into the breast of Spanish Maine even as that sinewy fighter, left arm about McSnorrt's neck, reached over his enemy's shoulder and stabbed him deep between the shoulder-blades. Swaying, tottering, disarmed—for each had sheathed his weapon in the body of his foe—still clasped breast to breast, they lurched, staggered, fell, and finally lay still.

BY the irony of Fate—or of the Butcher (Monsieur le Médecin-Major commanding the military hospital at the base camp) McSnorrt and Spanish Maine lay side by side, slowly returning to life, gradually returning to life, gradually regaining strength and the power of speech.

Usually when the one awoke from sleep, coma and unconsciousness, it would be to find the face of the other turned toward him regarding him with baleful glare.

"And so *you* were the husband," whispered McSnorrt, one day. "*You* were Estella Margarita's husband!" And he licked dry lips.

"I was not her husband," painfully breathed Spanish Maine.

"Her lover? You killed her?"

"Her lover. But I did not kill her," answered Spanish Maine.

Silence.

Beads of perspiration broke out upon his pallid forehead.

"I found her—as you found her."

"At what time?" whispered McSnorrt.

"At five o'clock that Sunday evening. Did you also have a letter begging you to go, and not to fail her?"

"I did. . . . For six o'clock," breathed McSnorrt.

"And I," said Spanish Maine. "At five, I found her. *Kill* her? . . . I would sooner have eaten my own right hand. *Kill* her? I would have died for her."

"But the letter I got was in her own handwriting," murmured McSnorrt.

"And so was mine. Beyond the shadow of a doubt."

FEEBLY McSnorrt raised an emaciated hand and drew it across his eyes.

"Suicide?" he whispered.

"What, with her hands bound behind her back?" answered Spanish Maine. "Did she strangle herself without hands, or having strangled herself, did she then tie them behind her?"

"The husband—" muttered McSnorrt. "The husband. . . . He forced her to write the letters—"

"The jealous husband," agreed Spanish Maine, and bared his teeth.

"And *you* were her lover! Hell's curse on you!" he added, glaring at McSnorrt.

"Nae, nae," answered McSnorrt weakly. "Dinna say that, man. See, we both loved Estella Margarita. . . . Did ye love her? *Love* her, I mean?" he asked earnestly, wistfully.

"I loved her," answered Spanish Maine. "We talked and sang in Spanish. We talked of Spain. She was all Spain to me."

"Man, she was all the warrld to me," said McSnorrt. "Let's forgive each other—for the time. Let's thole each other—for a while. Let's be as friends—for a space. . . . Until we get him. . . . Until we get him. . . . And *then*, man, ye can kill me, if I dinna kill ye first."

Moving his head slowly and painfully, McSnorrt turned his face heavenward.

"Almighty God," he whispered, "I'm not fit to pray to Ye, and I'll not ask Ye for Your help. . . . But, God of ma fathers, I'll beg Ye, don't help yon other man, Estella Margarita's husband."

"Amen!" quoth Spanish Maine.

Another story of the Foreign Legion by the distinguished author of "Beau Geste" will appear in the next, the November, issue.

A surprising adventure of Windy Cox —a wily Texas Ranger who talked much and dared more.

A Horse

By CONRAD RICHTER

Illustrated by Monte Crews

MARTIN BELL, influential rancher of the Davis Mountain country, looked over the blue-eyed stranger—his patched shirt, the hole in his hat, his California "britches" worn and torn by Texas chaparral.

"You a Ranger!" he scorned.

"Ranger Cox, ready for business!" the stranger replied glibly. "I can eat more beef, chaw more tobacco and tell more lies than any *hombre* we got in the company. Last year me and another Ranger made good Indians outa half again as many bad men as all the sawbones in Texas—and that don't count Mexicans. From the Panhandle to the South Nueces Range they call me Twister Cox."

The rancher looked disgusted. "When is the rest of your outfit coming?"

"Rest?" puzzled Cox. "I'm here, aint I? You had only one hoss stole, didn't you? I recollect—"

"Listen, you windy biscuit-eater!" rasped the rancher. "I wrote Captain Toombs my horse was stolen by those snakes of 'Handsome Vic' Lerch who runs Cabezon. If a man wants that horse, he's got to go after it. And if you go into that rattlesnakes' nest alone, I'll never see my horse again, or you either. Now I don't give three burrs on a cow's tail what happens to *you*. But I want that horse; he's my top mount. That's why I sent for the Rangers."

"I'll have that hoss eatin' outa yore hand afore you wash it!" promised the Ranger. "I'm used to little one-hoss jobs. One day us Rangers lick a hull army o' cow-thieves, and the next we gotta hunt a cinch-buckle some politician lost. One day I was sent out to look for a calf, and the next Cap Toombs got a wire that Costales and a hundred and twenty *bandidos* had swam the Rio Grande—and if he didn't send down a hundred Rangers, the hull county'd be wiped out. 'Cox,' said Cap to me, 'they must think I'm General Grant, with the hull Union Army! D'ye figger you and Bill Brooks might be even to about a hundred and twenty Mex?' 'Hell, Cap,' I said, 'me and Bill'll outnumber 'em two to one.' And we did. Them Mexes come over in bolero jackets—but Bill and me shipped most of 'em back in wooden nightshirts."

The rancher's face was a picture.

"I don't know how a liar like you got into the Rangers!" he said acidly. "But I'll tell you one thing! If you ride into Cabezon on a horse like that, you'll never ride him out!" And his spurs sang as he turned on one high heel.

The blue-eyed stranger looked after him and scratched his head. A few minutes afterward he was on the trail to Cabezon. His handsome palomino with the two white feet rocked along in the middle gait of the long horse. All day the sand dropped monotonously from its tireless hoofs; all day the rider sniffed greasewood and mesquite scorching in the sun. Late that afternoon his keen blue eyes glimpsed a man flat on his belly on a cone-shaped sand-hill. Another moment, and the man was gone. Presently the Ranger saw a fleabitten gray being ridden hard toward the approaching brown walls of Cabezon.

The toad with the white foot started leisurely toward the middle of the table, but the gambler's toad leaped in wild jumps, like something crazed.

of Another Color

He found the fleabitten gray at sunset in the baked plaza of the silent adobe town. The gray's saddle-blanket and cinch were both wet. Cox left his palomino beside the gray and sauntered in the open door of the Full Deck, the biggest saloon in sight.

"A little rubbin'-alcohol," he told the barkeeper.

"Rubbin'-alcohol!" scowled the man behind the bar.

"You oughta try it sometime!" said the stranger. "It's shore good for sore muscles! Of course, my private liniment is better, but she's too strong for *hombres*. I recollect one time the Quantrell gang was hangin' me in White Rock Draw. They wasn't a tree for fifty mile, so they had to pump lead in an ol' jack burro on the edge of the cañon, sling a rope to one hindleg and hang me down over the cliff. They hadn't tied my hands much, and when they rode off, I started to pull myself up. But that ol' burro wasn't dead yet, and every time I yanked on the rope he give a spasm and his old carcass slid closer, till he was jes' on the edge with his tail hangin' over. One more pull, and both him and me'd be buzzard-bait on the bottom. I shore figgered I was plumb strung up, *that* time! Then I recollected I had some of my private liniment along. I poured a little out and started rubbin' that burro's tail. He give one jump like a hot brandin'-iron'd touched him, and scratched the skin off my face yankin' me up the side o' that cliff. Since that time they call me Liniment Cox."

"We don't have no rubbin'-alcohol," sourly informed the barkeeper. "Or horse-liniment either."

Through the glass Cox saw a big figure sauntering up behind him. He had dark glowing eyes and a handsome face. Might be the Governor now, if his sleekness, like that of a great and powerful cat, hadn't announced him as Handsome Vic Lerch.

"Have a drink?" the big man proffered smoothly.

"Jes' what I was tryin' to get," Cox said. "A little alcohol to rub on the inside o' my neck. But the barkeeper said no savvy."

Still scowling, the barkeeper served them.

"Sort of quiet this afternoon," said the gambler. "How about a little game of monte?"

"Don't have no *dinero.*"

"I might be able to fix that up," suggested the big man carelessly. "You want to borrow about a hundred on that palomino?"

"Don't have time," said the new arrival. "I'm s'posed to be out scoutin' for a stray hoss." His blue eyes raised to the other's. "Didn't see a bell brand amblin' around, with a black hoss fast to it, did you?"

The question was like flourishing a stick of dynamite. The big man stiffened.

"What the hell do you care if I did or didn't?" Behind him two hard-faced, well-armed Mexicans, one short, one tall, came sauntering up to the bar with all the extravagant carelessness of their race.

"It didn't eat me none," Cox said glibly. "I was jes' figgerin' maybe me and you could run a match, with the black hoss up as stakes."

The gambler looked out of the door. One of his big slow hands extracted a long black cigar from his vest and deliberately lighted it.

"You mean,"—his voice was smooth again,—"you want to run that palomino against something of mine, and bet your horse against the black?"

Cox ignored the warning shake of an old man's head along the bar.

"I'll run and bet my hoss," he beamed, "against anythin' that's got hair."

Handsome Vic coughed and shot a glance at the two listening Mexicans who hung around him like a bodyguard.

"Seems to me, boys," he said, puffing thoughtfully, "I saw a stray black horse grazing down the big arroyo. Luis, you and Gaspar ride down and see if he's got the bell brand on him. If he has, bring him up. Bring my white-footed horse along, ready to race, and my *oscuro.*" He turned to Cox. "I have a palomino myself. If he didn't have more white on him than yours, you couldn't tell the difference."

"Standin', mebbe you couldn't," Cox drawled. "Runnin', they'd be plenty."

IT was scarcely twenty minutes until the Mexicans were back. The tall one was riding the fleabitten gray, and leading a shiny black with the brand of a large bell on his left hip.

"Shore didn't take you boys long to pick him up," the Ranger commented.

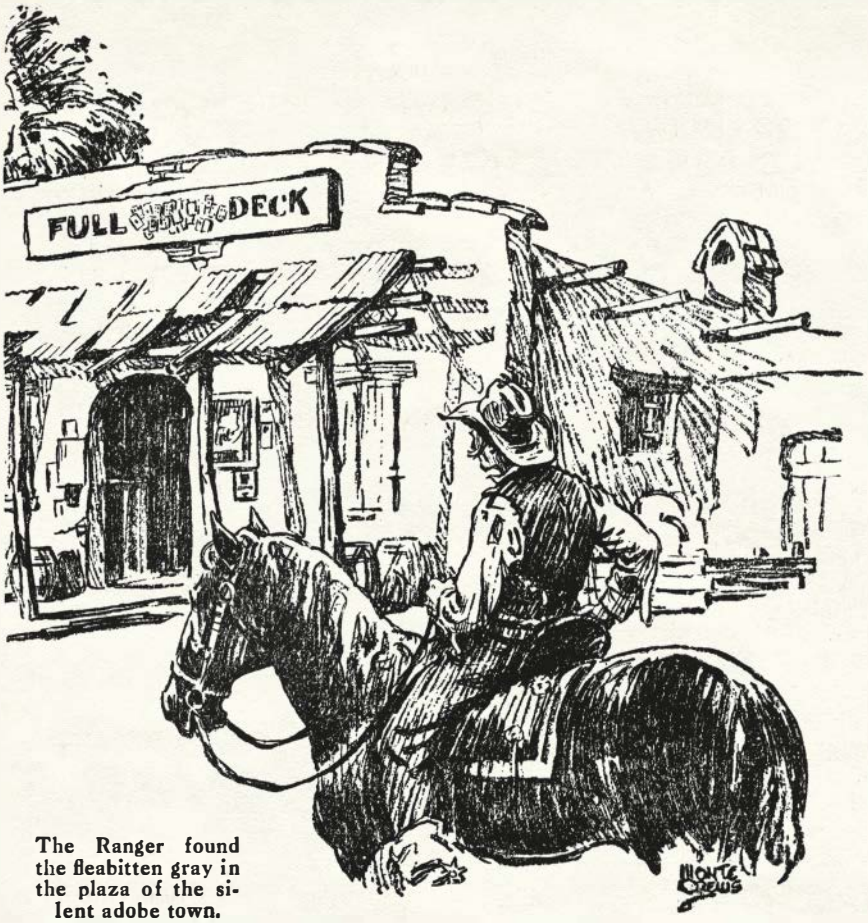
"Find heem down the beeg arroyo," informed Gaspar stiffly.

"Mighty handy of him to keep hangin' around thataway," Cox nodded.

The gambler threw him a sharp glance, but the Ranger had turned to look at the horse Luis was riding. It was a palomino the shade of his own. There was scarcely twenty pounds' difference between them. The gambler's horse had four white feet and a white splash on his nose. The creamy coats of both palominos were glowing a rosy purple in the late sunset.

Cox squinted up at the sky.

"I've run hosses in the heat of the sun, and when it was rainin' hell-bent for Noah, but this is the fust time I raced in the dark o' the moon. Reminds me of the time Johnny Jones got married to Sally Flint. It rained hard that afternoon and the preacher got held up by the arroyos. He didn't show up till one o'clock that night, and then the candles was burnt out. But nobody thought of puttin' off the weddin' for a little thing like that. The preacher said he could read the ceremony outa his head, so we went outside where it was a mite lighter and roomier, but still you couldn't tell a cactus bush from a chuck-wagon. Well, Johnny was shore excited and fussed! We'd made him put on stiff gloves you couldn't even milk a cow in. I tol' him here was his Sally's fingers, and he grabbed hold. The preacher recited his business, and said Johnny and Sally was man and wife. About that time Johnny turned to kiss his bride. I lit a match, and Johnny found hisself holdin'



The Ranger found the fleabitten gray in the plaza of the silent adobe town.

the clipped tail of an ol' cud-chewin' cow, while Sally was penned up in the house. Since that time they call me Weddin' Cox."

The old man who had shaken his gray head at him a little while before, was waiting as Cox carried his saddle into the saloon.

"Yo'll be *Funeral* Cox if you don't get out o' town *pronto* with that hoss!" the old man whispered hoarsely.

Cox bought him a drink and went back to fasten a surcingle about his mount. The gambler struggled up on a ridiculously small horse and led the way to the mesa.

"You'll take off at this ledge of rocks. That suit you? Finish between those two desert willows. I figure that's four hundred yards."

"If that's four hundred yards,"—Cox squinted,—"then I'm a tomcat with kittens."

"I want no bellyachin' after you lose," purred the gambler. "Say now if it suits you or don't."

"Man, man, who's doin' the bellyachin' stuff?" drawled Cox. "It's so close to midnight now that I can't tell if yo're ridin' a buckboard or a yearlin' calf. We come up here to run. Let's run afore we gotta get engine headlights on our bridles to tell who come in ahead."

The saddled body of spectators started for the desert willows to be in at the finish. The gambler herded them far to the right. He came back on his small mount, breathing heavily.

"Too near sundown to drop my hat," he announced. "Fire my gun suit you?"

"You can blow yore nose, and it's *bueno* with me," said Cox. "I knowed a man once went off a mesa and busted about two o' his legs. He fired off all his shells tryin' to get somebody to pack him in, but nobody heard him. That night he caught cold a-layin' out, and had to blow his nose. Didn't blow it more'n twice, till a posse come right up in the dark and found where he was at."

"Ready?" barked the gambler.

"When that man blowed his nose—" Cox went on.

A shot from the dimly upraised hand of

the gambler interrupted him. The Ranger was caught a trifle unprepared, but not his mount. Although tired from the day's travel, the palomino with two white feet had been trembling with eagerness at the impending race. Now he leaped like an arrow out of a bow. Cox heard the wind start to whistle about his ears. His horse had thrown himself into a snappy start, and laying his body low to the ground, he began to stretch his legs with the effortless ease of a wild creature. Cox told himself he might be flying, except for the pound of his horse's heart against his leg. The palomino with the four white feet and his Mexican rider were already falling behind.

Cox knew he was over halfway to the finish when the left foreleg of his mount sank into the sand. It felt to the rider as if of a sudden the mesa was no longer there. He pulled hard on the bit to save the horse, but there wasn't time to pull up that front foot. The palomino rolled head over tail, but not until Cox with the unconscious movement of the born rider had swung a leg clear and stepped off. All he got was a mouthful of sand which he tasted judiciously and spat out with disgust. But the palomino with the two white feet lay so long that Cox was afraid he had broken a leg. He heard Luis the Mexican yell like a triumphant Indian as he swerved his mount far to the left, then swept him back a winner between the dusky pair of desert willows.

THE losing palomino had scrambled up, and his late rider was running a practised hand up and down the bleeding front legs, when Handsome Vic rode up, peering through the dusk. He made no effort to conceal his exultation.

"What do you care if he broke a leg?" he jeered. "He aint your horse now."

"Got a match?" asked Cox.

The gambler gave him a handful. The Ranger lighted several and held them up. For a radius of a hundred feet the sand was honeycombed with prairie-dog holes. He understood now why Handsome Vic had herded the spectators far to the right.

"What do you think of my horse?" gloated the gambler.

"If you mean that little hoss yo're on," said Cox slowly, "him and you remind me of Big Bill Webb and his mare Betsy down along the Nueces. Like you, Big Bill weighed about three hundred, and Betsy didn't weigh more'n five. One time some of us was ridin' them *sacaguista* flats along the river, when we seen the curiousest sight a man ever seen—on the ridge against the sky to the west. The Mexicans claimed it was an *espantosa* spook with six arms and two heads. One of the boys figgered it might be a mirage, but whoever seen a mirage at sundown? Anyhow, we rode up to get a nearder look and found it was Big Bill Webb. His Betsy had plumb wore out under him, and he'd eased the cinch, put it over his head and was plumb packin' her home to the ranch. Since I seen you on that little mustang, I been tellin' myself it's shore yore turn to be packin' that hoss."

"I wasn't asking you about this horse!" snapped the gambler.

"If it was the palomino with the four white feet," drawled Cox, "I'll recite you a little pome:

One white foot, buy him.
Two white feet, try him.
Three white feet, look well about him.
Four white feet, do without him.
Four white feet and a white nose,
Cut off his head and feed him to the crows.

The gambler choked with anger. Cox went on, his voice suddenly cold and hard.

"Now if it wasn't them hosses at all, but this palomino with the two white feet you meant, I'd say he was sorta skinned up from tryin' to crawl into one of them dog-holes. I reckon I better ride him down to yore stable and doctor him up."

"If you want to doctor him up," the gambler snarled, "you can walk down. You're making no get-away on my new horse."

"You got human nature all wrong, *hombre,*" said Cox slowly. "Runnin' off from you after this dog-hole sandy is the last thing I'm hankerin' for."

"Just the same," Handsome Vic warned the two Mexicans, "keep him off that horse!"

For once in his life, Ranger Cox was silent as he followed the cavalcade down off the mesa on foot. Gaspar and Luis did not stop at the Full Deck saloon, but took the horses down a narrow street that twisted off the plaza. Cox kept plodding after them to a long adobe stable. The stable-yard was locked, but a loud shout in Spanish brought the stableman from the adjoining house. He carried a dim lantern. The gate was unlocked and swung open. Cox followed the others into the stable. Most of the stalls were separated only by pine poles, but at the front was a box stall, evidently the quarters of the victorious palomino with the four white feet.

While the hungry horses ground their small native cobs of maize, Cox washed the legs of the palomino that had been his. He flooded sand from the cuts, asked for bandages and securely wrapped the four skinned legs from fetlock to knee. Luis, Gaspar and the old Mexican stableman watched him in silence. Occasionally they looked at each other in the dim lantern-light and grinned.

When he was done, Cox slapped goodby to the palomino, and left. He did not go at once to the saloon on the plaza. In the dark shadow of a tamarisk he waited until he heard Gaspar and Luis ride back to the gambler. He heard the stableman lock stable and gate. Cox waited until all was silent. Then he crawled over the gate and found an open window to the stable. It was plenty dark inside. The faintest of starlight filtered through the two or three *ventanas*. But the Ranger needed little light. He remained perhaps five minutes, crawling out as he had crawled in.

Back in the plaza he saw a streak of white in the light from one of the saloon windows. He bent down to the ground. It was a horned toad with one leg scalded by some unknown bruise.

"One white foot, buy him!" Cox muttered to himself, and put the creature in his pocket.

Inside the Full Deck, everything was humming with the activity of nightfall. Oil lamps burned. Tobacco smoke floated in a thick haze. The clink of glasses and coins sounded above the endless round of talking, betting and singing. Handsome Vic sat enthroned on one end of his huge monte table and shuffled the Mexican deck with his deceivingly slow hands. He looked more handsome and governor-like than ever. Cox walked over. When he saw him, the monte banker showed his teeth.

"Well, if here isn't Sartin-for-Sure!" he said in a loud voice that everybody could hear. "How does she feel to be on foot?"

"I aint plumb on foot," said Cox. "I still got my saddle."

"Want to lose that?" taunted the monte banker.

"Don't care if I do," said Cox. "But not pikin' monte." He reached to his pocket and set out the white-footed toad. "I'll match you this filly against the fastest toad you got in Cabezon."

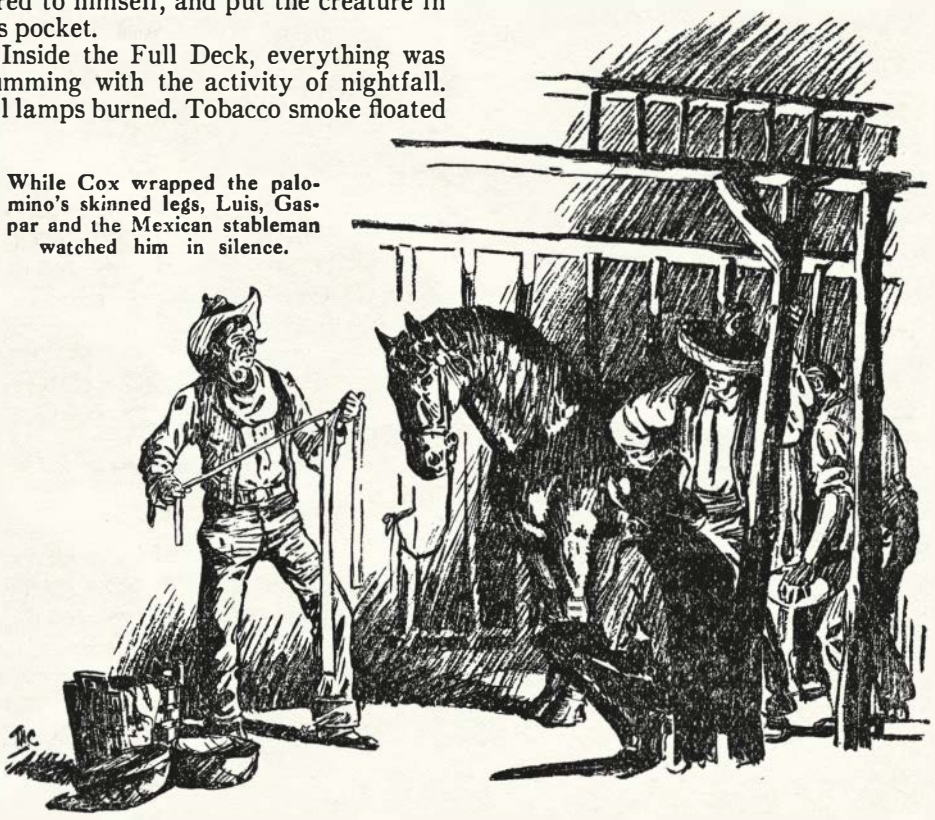
Handsome Vic stared at the small ugly creature.

"Where do you want to run him?"

"On this monte table," said Cox, "where there aint no dog-holes."

Several listeners laughed. The gambler's eyes started to glitter.

"No man's backed me out of a bet yet." He turned to the smaller of his Mexican



While Cox wrapped the palomino's skinned legs, Luis, Gaspar and the Mexican stableman watched him in silence.

lieutenants. "Luis, you and Gaspar light some *ocote* and get me a horned toad. He's got to be big as this one, savvy?" When the two Mexicans only stood there blinking at him and the toad on the table, he swore explosively, and they left with dazed alacrity.

"Sendin' them *hombres* out for a toad," Cox said, "reminds me of the time San Marcial sent me out to get a cat. The mice had got so bad in the schoolhouse the schoolmarm said she was leavin'. Well, I found plenty dogs, burros and mockin'-birds in cages, but nobody on the range had cats. Then up on the Triangle X, an old baldheaded hand tol' me he knowed where he could steal one for ten dollars and bring it down to San Marcial Saturday night. They was havin' a dance in the schoolhouse Saturday night. The old baldheaded galoot comes in with the gunny-sack and gives it to me. I heard the cat sorta purrin' and meowin' inside. So I give him the ten dollars, and give the sack to the schoolmarm. I tells her her worries are over—she won't have no more trouble. Everybody had stopped dancin' and started lookin' on. She says, 'Nice kitty!'—and dumps the sack on the floor. About that time the women screeches and all them gritty cow-hands with guns in the corner started high-tailin' for doors and windows. But they didn't get there in time. That glandered ole baldhead of a bull nurse had brung me a little ol' striped civet cat—and she shore dusted us afore we got out! Every ol' cow-thief and all the women took home a sample of perfumery that you don't need to pay *dinero* for. The tradin'-posts at San Marcial did a rushin' business in new dress-goods, shirts, soap and britches. And the schoolmarm she turned me down flat for Ed Ainsworth. Ever since that time in San Marcial, they call me Kittycat Cox."

IT was an hour before Luis and Gaspar returned, but they came back triumphant, their torch of *ocote* still burning. Luis' brown hand held a second horned toad. It was bigger than Cox's.

"You understand this race is plumb on the level?" drawled the Ranger; then as the gambler drew himself up in affront—"Jes' so we understand each other!" He took his horned toad with the white foot and placed him on the edge of the monte table.

"Be with you in a minute," said Handsome Vic. He walked behind the bar and poured himself a drink. Coming back to the table, he imprisoned his horned toad with one huge hand and held it at the edge of the table.

"Allow you twenty-five on the saddle?" he droned.

Cox shook his head.

"I'm puttin' up that saddle against the palomino with the two white feet."

Handsome Vic declared himself outraged, but a gleam of certain exultation couldn't be quite repressed from one eye.

"All right," he consented at last. "Now to show you Vic Lerch gambles straight, I'll let you do the counting—one to three. At three we let them go."

"Ready?" drawled Cox. *"Uno—dos—tres!"*

Both men flashed open their hands. The freed toad with the white foot started leisurely toward the middle of the table, but the gambler's toad leaped in wild erratic jumps, like something crazed. While the watching men yelled, it covered the length of table and sprang off to the floor. Again Handsome Vic showed his triumphant teeth.

"My saddle!"

The Ranger's eyes suddenly went bleak—like twin wells that had frozen over.

"Let's have a look at the inside o' yore hand!" His low voice stiffened every man within hearing.

"You figure I'd cheat you for a saddle?" ridiculed the gambler.

"Open up yore hand!" came back Cox, his eyes glued to the other's huge fist.

The monte banker's hand did not move.

"Drinks on the house!" he called suddenly, and started from the table.

"Stay where you be!" came the Ranger's low deadly voice. A gun had jumped into his hand. It covered both crowd and gambler.

A few feet away the hands of the two Mexicans twitched. Neither ventured to reach for his gun.

The gambler's eyes were drawn by the steady black hole of the Ranger's gun. His face now was becoming green—almost the color of the mesas in June before the summer rains.

"Sweatin' blood, aint you?" said Cox pitilessly. "Well, sweat some more!" His free hand suddenly leaped out and caught the thick wrist that had drawn back to toss something out of the door. One hard twist on the wrist, and the huge hand dropped a tiny bottle on the table. The Ranger picked it up and smelled the contents. "I'm startin' to savvy," he drawled. "You picked up that bottle when you went behind the bar for a drink. So that's why yore toad went over the

table like a jackrabbit with a coyote on his tail! You'd burned him up with High Life. Likely you burn yore racin'-stock the same way—but you don't my palomino with the two white feet! You won him and my saddle crooked, but right now me and you's goin' to have a new straight deal."

The monte banker recovered a trifle. His green hue faded and now he wet his lips. The glitter grew in his eyes.

"With cards?"

"With High Life!" Cox came back grimly. He pulled up a shirtsleeve. "Me and you's takin' turns droppin' this hot stuff on each other's hide. The fust man that opens his mouth loses the palomino with the two white feet and the saddle. After that we start all over for the black with the bell brand."

The monte banker had grown white.

"If you figure I didn't win that palomino square, take him back—and the saddle!"

"So it's thataway," drawled Cox. "Yo'll drop it on a pore toad, but not on Vic Lerch. You remind me of Swede Larkin, trappin' up along the Red River in New Mexico. He had skinned a skunk at his cabin when some ramblin' Utes lifted his hair. My ol' man was out lookin' for strays before the bad weather set in, when he run onto Larkin's cabin. The Swede was bleedin' right bad, so my ol' man slit that fresh skunk pelt, plumped the bloody side down on the Swede's head, and got him inside in his bunk. Well, next mawnin' it 'peared that skunk hide had growed fast a little durin' the night, and my ol' man was scared he'd start Swede bleedin' if he tore it off. So he trimmed off the tail and extry hide nice and elegant, and let her stay on. After that Swede Larkin never had to cut his hair, although he shed out plenty good in the spring. But they used to say about him what I'm sayin' now about you—he never could get away from the fact that he was part skunk!"

"You'll pay for this, *hombre,* when you cash in your chips!" the gambler snarled.

"Mebbe," said Cox. "Meantime I'm takin' that hoss you says is mine, and yo're goin' down to the stable and givin' him to me. Pick up that saddle!"

For a moment the face of Handsome Vic stung with hate. But when he picked up the saddle, Cox thought it was with not quite enough unwillingness. Keeping his gun trained on gambler and crowd, the Ranger started backward out of the door. As he pushed across the threshold, he felt the abrupt stab of a gun barrel in his back.

"Reach for the roof!" a voice hissed in his ear.

Slowly he elevated his hands. He had recognized the voice as that of the barkeeper. The man must have sneaked down through a trapdoor behind the bar during the telling of the skunk story.

AS soon as the gun was plucked from the Ranger's hand, the tension in the saloon relaxed. Most of the men surged to the bar. Gaspar and Luis hurried up with drawn guns, to take over the prisoner. The gambler threw the saddle to the floor.

"So you figured you could throw a half hitch on Vic Lerch!" His face twisted. "Gaspar, you watch him. If he wiggles a finger, let him have it!" The gambler took Luis to the front door and gave him some mysterious order. The little Mexican left immediately. In ten minutes he returned. As he came in he nodded grimly to the monte banker who came over at once to where Cox sat guarded in a corner.

"Now, you big windy liar!" the gambler gloated. "Maybe you'll tell us how you're going to get out of this!"

Cox gazed back at him levelly.

"Give me a whisky-bottle," he drawled, "and I can get outa anythin'. One time the James boys was on my tail for killin' their pardner, Bill Tobey. Now I never could keep warm sleepin' on the ground in the winter-time, and airly one mawnin' on the Arkansas I figgered it was time to get up and look for my gun I'd left on the other side of the fire. Well, I hadn't moved the tarp half an inch till I seen two rifles a-lookin' down at me from the bank. I knowed *pronto* who it was, and that time I figgered I was plumb done for." He stopped. "Mebbe you don't wanta hear any more of it?"

"Go ahead!" jeered the gambler. "I can stand it, if the crowd can."

"Well, about that time," went on Cox, "I remembered that breakin' a whisky-bottle allus broke my bad luck. But the minute I broke my bottle under the tarp, and smelled the whisky, I wished I'd drunk it and got warm afore they killed me. Two minutes afterward I started gettin' warm without the whisky. It was danged funny. I laid there a long spell, warm as a stone in a campfire. Afterwhile I lifted my tarp about the length of a conejo's tail. Then I found out why I'd got warm. She'd snowed! Already she musta been a foot deep, and

Keeping his gun trained on the gambler and the crowd, the Ranger started backward out of the door.

comin' down till I couldn't hardly see the rifles. That whisky-bottle shore had broke my bad luck. All I had to do now was wiggle like a mole under that snow till I found my gun. Then I started givin' them James boys ol' billy-hell. But the snow was comin' down so thick none o' us could hit the broadside of a house. Since that time they call me Whisky-bottle Cox."

"Yeah!" sneered the gambler. "Well, break a whisky-bottle and see if you can get out of *this!* I said you could have back that palomino with the two white feet. Now don't get the idea I'm going back on my word." He drew himself up. "Vic Lerch is a straight gambler. He doesn't bellyache when he loses."

"So I notice," Cox said dryly.

"But no *hombre,*"—the burly gambler flushed,—"claims I cheated him and gets away with it. I decided I didn't like the gait of that palomino with the two white feet. So I had it changed."

"You what?" Cox's eyes flashed fire.

"You heard me plenty." The monte banker's face was twisted with malevolent triumph. "You can have the horse now with the new gait I gave him."

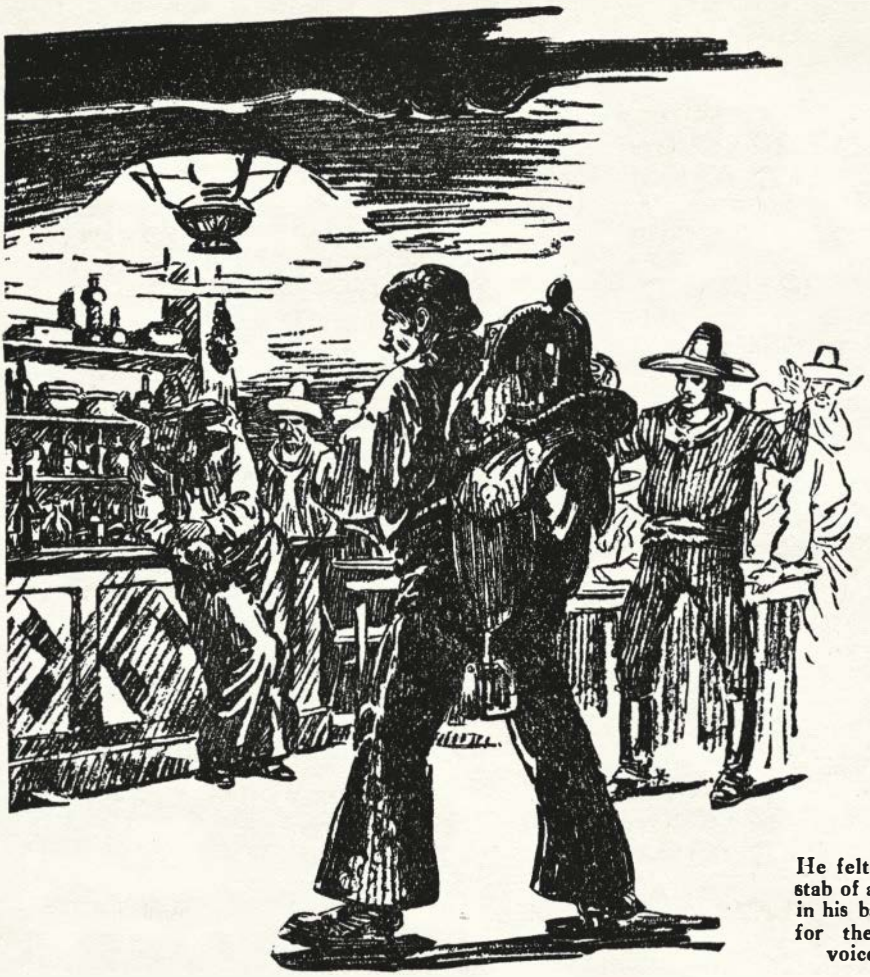
The Ranger rose to his feet.

"You snake-blooded cat—what did you do to him?"

"I had him kneed!" the gambler shouted in unrestrained glee. "I fixed him so he'll do no more racing. Maybe after this you'll savvy not to buck Vic Lerch."

Windy Cox's face was terrible to see. He had known plenty of kneed mares in his time. It was common practice for ranchers to sever the tendons above a mare's knee so a wild stallion could never coax her off. Such crippled mares stayed close to the ranch, breeding colts and throwing out the maimed leg like the paddle of a windmill at every step. Once a mount was kneed, there was no way back to a good leg; it remained a cripple till it died.

The gambler reveled in his victim's emotion.



He felt the abrupt stab of a gun-barrel in his back. "Reach for the roof!" a voice hissed.

"Who's sweating blood now?" he exulted. His expression suddenly changed. "Get the hell out of Cabezon—you and your kneed horse, both! And stay out!"

Cox's eyes blazed silently back at him. After a moment he went to the bar and laid down a coin.

"Pint o' whisky," he said.

The barkeeper set it out. Without pulling the cork, the Ranger threw it out of the door. They could hear the jangle of glass from the saloon.

"What's the idea?" glowered the barkeeper.

"I paid for it, didn't I?" said Cox.

The gambler choked with mirth.

"Damned if he isn't one of these liars that swallow his own lies! He figures that broken whisky-bottle's going to break his bad luck and fix up his horse's knee!"

Luis, who had evidently done the crippling, grinned broadly.

"San Vicente heemself," he boasted, "can do notheeng for that horse now."

"Luis," ordered the gambler, "you and Gaspar take this tinhorn down and give him his crippled mount. Then kick him to hell out of Cabezon."

"One minute!" said Cox. He walked to the bar and threw down another coin. "A pint o' whisky," he repeated.

The bartender looked at his employer.

"All right—let him have it," said Handsome Vic magnanimously. "He's going to drink this one. He'll need it when he sees his kneed horse."

With the fresh pint of whisky in his pocket, Cox went out of the saloon. The two Mexicans made him carry his own saddle down the narrow twisting street. One of them rode on either side and poked him with their guns. At the stable, Luis called and the *establero* came out with his smoking lantern. They told him ironically that the *Americano* had come for his "gran' caballo." Inside they found the palomino with four bandaged legs in his dim stall. One of the bandaged forelegs was covered with blood.

"He has bleed very bad," the stableman said nervously.

"Shore too bad," agreed Cox. "I hate to see any horse kneed—even a bag o' bones. But this aint my hoss."

The *establero* stared.

"Surely eet ees your horse, señor. I see you put heem in thees stall myself."

"Shore you did," nodded Cox. "But that don't mean it had to stay there. Don't you figger I know my own hoss?"

The three Mexicans now were staring stupidly at the horse in the feeble light.

"But hees legs, señor!" protested the stableman. "You wrap heem. *Mira!* Ees still wrapped."

"But not the same legs you seen me put 'em on," said Cox. "Unwrap 'em and see what you get."

When the stableman had tremblingly torn the bandages from the four legs of the maimed horse, it could be seen that all four of them were white.

"Madre de Dios!" he breathed, aghast.

"I reckon this is my hoss, up here in this box stall," said Cox. He made his leisurely way to the upper end of the stable, and brought out his palomino with the two white stockings—rested and unharmed. While he fastened his saddle he drawled to the three rigid Mexicans: "You might tell Vic for me it's too danged bad he had to knee his own hoss!"

At the door he stopped with his horse and drew the whisky-bottle from his pocket. At the sight of it the eyes of both Luis and Gaspar glazed.

"Mebbe you *hombres* recollect," Cox squinted, "what happened to them hosses when I busted the other bottle? Well, now I'm a-goin' to bust this'n and turn you three snakes into burros, with *all* yore legs kneed!"

He raised the bottle against the doorjamb. At the same moment the three Mexicans started to run. Where the stableman disappeared to, Cox had no idea, but he heard Luis and Gaspar reach their horses and gallop off as if the very devil was after them.

Some minutes later, riding the palomino with the two white feet and leading the black with the bell brand, the loquacious Ranger was riding the trail back toward the Bell Ranch. As he rocked along he reached in his pocket and tossed something out.

"Now I gotta wait till I get back to the outfit for a chaw of tobacco!" he complained. "That's what I get for usin' the last I had to rub out a white splash on a wuthless palomino's nose."

Cash on

Like Robin Hood and Raffles, the hero of this amusing story made a hobby of robbing the wicked rich to reward the deserving poor.

By
FRANK VERNEY

AMERICANS who visit Capetown say that Government House reminds them of the White House. English tourists say it is like that modest London mansion, Kensington Palace. Africanders say it matters not a *dompt* what it looks like, it is an old Dutch house that was here before you English butted in, and before you Americans were thought of. Be that as it may, to drive around its little tree-embowered square, swing under its pillared portico, and be passed in by a slim young gentleman whose black evening coat is adorned by the pale blue facings of the personal staff, is an accolade and an absolution. You either go, or you do not go. If you go, you belong without question to the elect. If you don't go, your place is back in England, the United States, Holland, Germany, or Czecho-Slovakia; or should you have to stay put, the Carlton Hotel, Johannesburg, and the beach amusements at Durban, for yours!

In any event, it is one of the few remaining places where social worth is not measured by an accountant, the Royal College of Heralds, or the acclaim of publicity agents.

There was no need for Jimmy Lace and his wife to show cards of admission, for when their car moved up in its processional turn to the scarlet-baized entrance steps, the A.D.C. on reception duty forestalled the red-coated linkmen and answered to the name of "Stringy."

Stringy—otherwise the Earl of Tring—launched them into the crowded hall, showed Pat the ladies' cloak-room, and concentrated his welcoming grin on Jimmy Lace.

the Nail

"So that's why you stole that letter from my desk, is it?"

Illustrated by R. F. James

"I'm damned glad you've got here at last, old thing. The Goat's leapin' about like a cat on hot bricks. He's just accused me of havin' shot your tickets at the wrong ship this morning."

Jimmy turned his blue eyes on the A.D.C., and in an amiable drawl inherited from his American mother, replied:

"We got held up by one of your road-hogging plutocrats, Stringy. What's the excitement, anyway? In my time, private secretaries didn't fire command invitations at poor sodgers before they hit the beach."

Tring shrugged his high shoulders and grinned. "Ask the Goat—you'll find him inside somewhere. You know your way about, Jimmy; see you later."

Jimmy did know his way about. He found it good to be revisiting a royal circle free of pre-war snobbery and post-war humbug, and met by a good halfway the greetings of a number of old friends. Adjusting the Order of St. Michael and St. George beneath his white evening tie, and settling the string of war decorations on his coat lapel, he rejoined his attractive wife, and they tailed in at the end of what he facetiously termed "Noah's Parade." An A.D.C. collected their "name cards" at the top of the flag-hung corridor, and passed them to an equerry who announced:

"Lady Patricia Lace and Major James Lace."

"God bless my soul!" the Governor-general greeted them warmly. "What are you two people doing out here?"

Jimmy grinned. Apparently the Governor-general was not in his secretary's confidence in the matter of unusual invitations. He said: "Mainly getting rid of Pat's influenza, sir—and attending to anything else that may bob up."

His Royal Highness stuck a thumb into the broad blue sash of the Garter, which was the only adornment of his evening clothes, and smiled.

"I'm extremely glad to hear it, James. I have been hearing the most remarkable rumors about you. One, that you'd been broke by death duties and had to leave the regiment; and the other that you were performing the miracle of set-

Lady Patricia

ting up half the down-and-out ex-service men in London."

"The first one was darned near the truth, sir," confirmed Jimmy cheerfully. "I was as broke as any other hero of the great war—all medals and no credit. Pat was about to hire a gas ring to burn my breakfast on, while I knitted socks for the baby. And as for the other, my little efforts at putting glory back on the gold standard have been exaggerated."

The Governor-general's consort broke in with:

"I've a bone to pick with you two people. Why aren't you stopping here with us?"

"With your permission, ma'am, I'll let Jimmy answer that question," Pat replied. "He has developed a most septic preference for hotels."

Jimmy smiled and explained: "In order to continue the privilege of serving my king and country, ma'am, I now do a little business in my spare time. And it would be highly indecorous of me to do it from Government House."

"It is highly indecorous of a Guards officer to do business at all," returned Her Royal Highness. "But as you invariably make people gasp, you are excused, James. I shall want two dances with you."

Jimmy grinned appropriately, bowed to standard prescription, and passed on with his wife among the anointed, wondering just what his royal friends would say if he told them what that business was, which he had mentioned.

To Pat he said: "Now, honey, I'll introduce you to a dozen or two good-looking young naval officers, a score or so of bronzed he-man planters and whatnot; then I'll hunt up the Goat."

"Don't be grim, darling," Pat urged. "After producing six new Paris frocks out of your hat for me this morning, the least you can do is to stop and watch the effect of this one. Surely you are not sickening for another moldy attack of business. You've got one of those efficient looks in your eyes, I notice."

"Nothing of the kind, Lady Patricia Lace," lied Jimmy with some of that same efficiency. "And if you give me any more back-chat, I'll stop your gin money."

After launching his charming wife on a social tide, Jimmy sauntered on in search of the private secretary. It was while he was doing this that Liebenbaum made his dramatic entrance—dramatic because of the frosty hush it created; and Liebenbaum interested Jimmy a good deal more than the royal secretary.

His broad shoulders hunched slightly forward like a fighter in the prize-ring, the famous Rand magnate stood appraising his fellow guests with violet eyes, strangely incongruous in the deep brown of his immobile face.

Jimmy lounged forward into the violet rays.

"Evening, Liebenbaum! On the way here this evening, you chipped over an ex-soldier with that Rolls of yours, cracked his skull and mixed his war medals with the candies he was hawking to the colored population. You saw the incident, and deliberately ignored it. What do you propose to do about it?"

"Nothing," said the nabob. "The streets are full of half-wits with war medals. If they haven't got sense to keep out of traffic, they deserve to be run over. Why?"

"My good sir," drawled Jimmy, "if anybody has a right to use the roads, it is those men who held the trenches while you and your indecently auriferous brethren were stacking your piles. And anyway, it was a peculiarly conscienceless trick."

Liebenbaum inspected the tall guardsman from patent leather feet to crisp brown hair, and stroked his own cleft chin.

"You've got a Yankee twang. What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say," returned Jimmy. "But it's Lace—Major Lace. I was 'Intelligence' here when you started that young Matabele war, while you nipped in and got those concessions you were after. That cost a few good men's lives."

Liebenbaum cocked his massive head and took another look at the soldier.

"So that's who you are! Major Lace, D.S.O., and so forth. Ever thought of leaving the army and growing oranges?"

"Not on your land," said Jimmy pleasantly. "You must be content with the ex-officers who did, and who dropped their gratuities in the process. To get to the main point, I am running a fund for the rehabilitation of half-wits with war medals—those who got it in the neck both ways in making their country fit for millionaires to live in. And your name is down on my list of those who owe it real money."

"Har," said Liebenbaum. "What's *your* rake-off?"

"I don't mind telling you that either," said Jimmy calmly. "Ten per cent, if I have to work hard to pry a contribution out of a man—and *he* pays that."

"If you can pry one out of me, you are welcome to your ten per cent—cash-on-the-nail," said Liebenbaum. And he walked away.

Jimmy gazed after him reflectively. Then, turning, he found the Governor-general's private secretary warmly grasping his hand.

"I've been trying to get you all day, Jimmy. Didn't you get my letter? I'm in the mess of my life. Can you come to my room in half an hour's time?"

"My dear Goat," smiled Jimmy, "a grateful country pays me thirty bob a day to be shot at in war and rubbered at in peace—not for getting royal bottle-washers out of messes. Talking of messes, what is old Liebenbaum doing here?"

"Liebenbaum *is* my mess," said the Goat grimly. "How will ten-fifteen suit you?"

"I'll make it suit me," said Jimmy with emphasis.

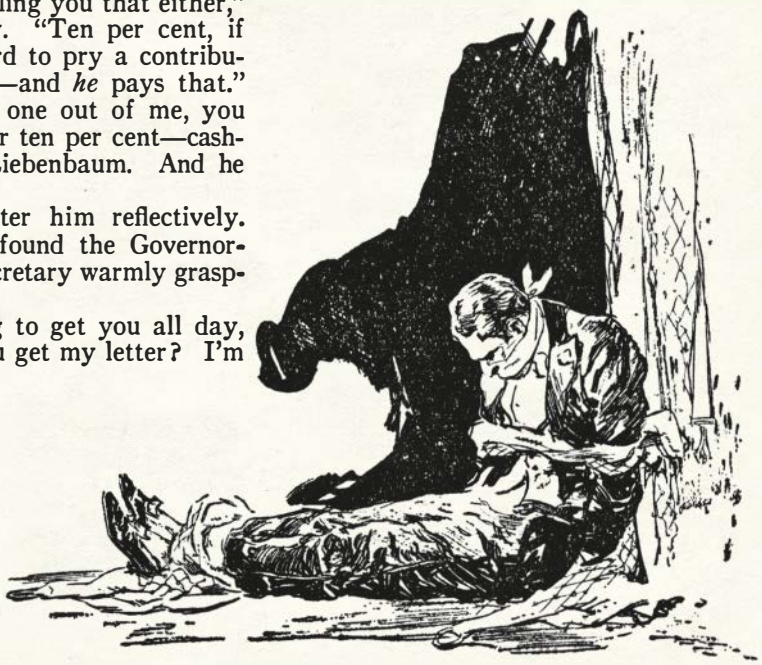
IN the interval he worked off his two dances with the Princess, and during them he noted without surprise that Liebenbaum's presence was causing as much of a sensation as might Al Capone's at a family party by a mayor of Chicago.

So when a lady-in-waiting had arrived with Her Highness' next partner, Jimmy carefully repolished his eyeglass and strolled to the private secretary's office. Here, pushing aside a silver desk-bowl of roses and sitting down in its place, he prompted:

"*Re* one Liebenbaum."

The Goat locked the door and resumed his chair. Then he focused his brother-guardsman through horn-rimmed spectacles and answered, grimly again:

"Liebenbaum's here tonight because he blackmailed an invitation out of me by threats to publish a confidential letter of the Governor-general's. What is still



He did not know who struck him on the chin, tied him up in a tennis net, and filled his mouth with a ball of tarred string.

With the fingers of God - knew - whom pressing into his jugular, and a pistol-muzzle boring into his spine, the butler neither moved nor spoke.

worse, unless that letter is recovered at once, he will be present at the private dinner-party tomorrow night. That'll put the lid on it."

Jimmy stopped chewing and drawled: "It certainly will. You might get away with a State Ball as a clerical error on the invitation list, but not the private party. What's in the darned letter?"

"Enough straight talk about certain respected politicians to cause complete secession from the Crown, if wrongly used," the Goat told him. "The one chance is you, Jimmy. When you were here, you dug up the histories of all that Rand gang; did you dig up anything that would give us a strangle-hold on Liebenbaum right away?"

"No," said Jimmy. "And why worry? Let 'em secede. They've as good as done that already. That's a darned sight better for the Crown than letting old Cash-on-the-nail foul the nest."

"My dear Jimmy," groaned the Goat, "the point is that if they secede on that letter, the Governor will be made the scapegoat!"

"That is quite another story," Jimmy said slowly. "We can't have that swine gumming up the Governor. Any idea where that letter is now?"

"I know where it is not," replied the Goat. "It isn't at his Cape office, and it isn't at his office at Jo'burg, for I've had 'em both burgled by the C.I.D."

Jimmy grinned appreciatively.

"Then it must be at his Zoo at Rondebosch, where he keeps his cash-on-the-nail boodle. Have your sleuths had a go at that?"

The Goat went to the door and admitted a little man with large teeth and a giggle.

"You've just come at the right moment, Shakes," he greeted ironically. "Lace wants to know if you've searched

Liebenbaum's house. Jimmy, I suppose you know Colonel Shakespeare—our chief of police."

"We are new to each other, as it happens," said Jimmy. "But don't let that hold up the traffic."

The policeman inspected the guardsman with humorless eyes that belied his giggle. "I've heard a lot about you," he offered. Then—taking up the Goat's lead: "My dear Lace, without a bombing-section my men have as much chance of getting into Liebenbaum's house uninvited as you have. There's not a crook in Africa who has not had a shot at his famous cash-box, not to mention more reputable citizens who've had a shot at the man himself. There's an eighteen-foot steel ring fence, a pack of terriers running wild, and a dozen or two gunmen as house-guards."

THE Goat looked at the clock. "Now that you have failed me, Jimmy, I am going to play my last trump by trapping him into admitting how he got that confidential letter, in the hearing of witnesses—you and Shakes. He'll be here any minute now."

"If he does that, you've got him," averred the policeman.

"And if he doesn't, I'm done," said the Goat.

Jimmy slid from the desk.

"I'll stop here and help you knock it out of him," he volunteered, "but listening-in doesn't suit my constitution. I'll go and have a drink at the bar."

"Anything on God's earth is justifiable to get that letter out of his hands," declared the Goat.

The argument was ended by a loud knock at the door.

"That's Liebenbaum," the Goat whispered. "You've damned well *got* to stop, now!"

Jimmy shrugged and followed Shakespeare through an inner door into the Governor-general's room.

"Well, Captain Hounslow," said Liebenbaum curtly, as the Goat admitted him. "Have you that dinner invitation ready?"

"Sit down," the Goat invited.

The nabob sat, crossed his legs, and helped himself to one of the secretary's cigars.

"Now, Liebenbaum, let's have this out," said Hounslow. "Government House and you have managed without each other for a long time, and forcing yourself on us is not going to increase your reputation, or do your social ambitions any good."

"Haven't got any," said Liebenbaum, lighting his cigar and throwing the match on the carpet, "but you can chew on this: It was through all these people you gather round you, that the peerage conferred on me by the British Government was withdrawn. It pleases me now to be accepted here at Government House, and thus make them all eat their own objections. It cost me a hundred thousand pounds cash-on-the-nail to get that peerage, and the mud that was raked up cost me as much more. I am now out to get that back."

Suavely Hounslow played his trump.

"So that's why you stole that confidential letter from my desk, is it?"

"You've been drinking, young man," said Liebenbaum.

"You know damned well you stole it," cried the Goat, losing his temper and spoiling his own tactics. "It disappeared from my tray the day you called and asked for the ban to be lifted; and it was in your possession the day after."

"If you will write me out that invitation I'll be getting along," said Liebenbaum serenely. "I've got a party at my own house tonight—the beauty-chorus from the Theater Royal. Better come along and bring the Governor-general and his missus."

This was too much for the frayed nerves of the private secretary.

"I'll see you in hell before I give you the invitation," he proclaimed.

Liebenbaum carefully shook the ash from his cigar to the carpet, walked to the open French windows, and glanced out on the wide lawns. Then turning to the Goat, he placidly delivered his ultimatum.

"I shall be at my Adderly Street office until four o'clock tomorrow. If that invitation is not there then, that letter will be in both my papers tomorrow, and in the world's press the day after. If you think of settling in Africa under the Republic, I've got some good orange-land you can have cheap." And he stepped out and walked along the path.

HE did not see Jimmy Lace standing in the shadow of the big oak tree just beyond the glass door of a passage at the far side of the Governor-general's room. Neither did he know who struck him on that wide cleft chin, carried him into the tea pavilion above the tennis

lawn, tied him up in a new tennis net, and filled his able mouth with a ball of tarred garden string. . . .

At that hour there was no one on duty in the improvised cloak-room where Jimmy removed his decorations and took Liebenbaum's big white coat and black soft hat from the range of pegs. And there was no one to see him exit through the A.D.C.'s snuggery to the garden again. To climb the fence into the shrubbery of the public gardens, and reach the royal car-park, took five minutes.

Liebenbaum's big red Rolls was just where Jimmy expected it would be—at the convenient end of the line. In the dappled shadows of the tree-lined avenue, Liebenbaum's two chauffeurs saw what they expected to see—a tall bulky figure in a long white polo coat, the high collar turned up to meet a soft black hat tilted forward over the left eye. Jimmy was betting on having to give no orders. Capetown is not a place where one goes anywhere but home after a party—and anyway, Jimmy had heard the magnate tell the Goat that he had a party of his own. So it happened—one man opened the door, closed it on the familiar six feet of coat and hat, and took his place beside the driver.

When the steel-studded tires began to hum on the concrete of the mountain road, Jimmy drew the blinds and clicked on the lights. In a side rack with a box of cigars, he found what he was almost sure would be part of its owner's defensive equipment—a loaded automatic.

FROM Government House, Capetown, to Liebenbaum's house on the mountainside above the suburb of Rondebosch is seven miles, but the Rolls did it in eight minutes. Jimmy knew the house well. He had often ridden past it to exercise his horses on Kenilworth racecourse, cursing the pack of terriers that tore wildly along the quarter-mile of steel fencing, yapping his nervous thoroughtbreds into mucky sweat. He was thinking more of those keen-scented terriers than of their two-gun colleagues when the car purred up to the gate, and a dozen or more white tails pricked the blue darkness of the drive. But when the familiar Rolls drew up before the house, there was not a dog to be seen—which explained to Jimmy the vicious-looking *sjambok* on the car floor.

The chauffeur's mate let his passenger out of the Rolls and received a volume of his employer's cigar-smoke directly in his face as he did so.

"Want me any more, boss?" he called, as Jimmy made straight for the stoep.

Jimmy gestured a negative, crossed the stoep and entered the hall, blowing his nose on Liebenbaum's large red handkerchief.

Quite unsuspiciously the butler closed the door behind him, shot the bolt—and received what was probably the surprise of his life. With the force of sinews that had learned their job in many a trench raid, the guardsman had gripped him by the back of his bull neck, and jabbed Liebenbaum's automatic into the small of his back.

"Don't speak and don't move!"

With his face jammed against a door of oak, the fingers of God-knew-whom pressing relentlessly into his jugular, and a pistol-muzzle boring into his spine, the butler neither moved nor spoke.

"Now," snapped Jimmy. "Where are the other servants?"

"'Aving their suppers, lucky for you!" was the muffled reply. "Let go my neck."

Jimmy jabbed again. "Where does your master keep his safe?"

"Upstairs in 'is office. Let go my neck an' take that gun a bit further away. You aint afraid of missin', are you?"

Jimmy swung him away from the door. "Lead me to it. Quick."

The man did not move immediately. Like Jimmy, he was staring at the green baize door beyond the Dutch staircase, through which came suddenly the blare of a phonograph and the sound of voices. Just as abruptly a distant door banged and all either of them could now hear was the ticking of the china clock on the mantelpiece above the carved stone fireplace.

"That was lucky for you," said Jimmy grimly. "You'll be the first to get hurt. Go ahead."

Surrendering to the menace behind him, the butler moved forward across the red-tiled floor, and slowly ascended the carpeted stairs.

ON the square landing halfway up, he flung himself face downward, and kicked backward at his captor's stomach.

Jimmy seized the leg, jerked the man flat, and snubbed the cold muzzle of the pistol into his ear.

"All right—I give in," gasped the butler.

Jimmy seized him by the coat collar and hissed venomously: "Get up and get on! And no more tricks."

The butler stopped at a door facing the stairs, and said sullenly:

"Here it is."

"Open it and go in," Jimmy ordered.

Inside the room, he closed the door with his foot, felt for a key, and found there was none.

"Now switch on the lights."

The butler complied, and tried to face his mysterious antagonist, but Jimmy checked him effectively.

"I don't suppose you are so fond of your master that you want to commit suicide," he said curtly, and blindfolded the man with the big handkerchief.

"'Ere, let's talk this out," the butler protested. "I'm an old lag meself; I've 'ad an eye on the old blister's boodle myself for a long time, but never 'ad no chance of doin' anything. I'll go in with you fifty-fifty, an' get you away in the old man's car, same as you come. It's your only chance, believe me."

"Shut up," said Jimmy, giving him another jab, and forcing him down into a big chair.

TAKING from his pocket the bunch of keys he had removed from Liebenbaum's person, Jimmy drew on gloves, and went to the big safe at the side of the large writing-bureau. As the large double-warded key on the magnate's bunch had indicated, it belonged, like its owner, to primitive days. There was, however, nothing in the safe but batches of old deeds, and a T-shaped rod of thin steel about eight inches long.

Glancing at the butler, who was sitting taut in the chair, listening to every movement, Jimmy next unlocked the bureau. Stuck in the center pigeonhole was a long official envelope, marked *"O.H.M.S.—Secret and Confidential."* Inside that was the missing document! Thrusting this item of imperial import into his pocket, Jimmy then examined the bureau, for he had not yet fulfilled his interest in the millionaire.

He did not notice the butler's right hand groping for the cord of a bell-push that hung quite near, for when he moved from the camouflaged bureau to the safe, the man's hands were again resting on the arms of the chair.

From the safe, Jimmy took the T-shaped rod, inserted it in the circular hole at one side of the bureau's range of dummy drawers, and uncovered Liebenbaum's real strong-box. On the shelf was a flat packet of one-thousand-pound bank-notes, and a big cash-box.

And while he was examining this, the butler found the bell-cord and glued a thumb to the gilt push at the end of it.

Jimmy buttoned the thick wad of bank-notes into a hip pocket, took from his vest pocket a thin gold box, and from that a small square of red, white and blue medal ribbon—the ribbon of the Mons Star. He laid the square of ribbon in the box in place of the notes he had taken.

Relocking the strong-box, he flung the key of it into the old safe. He was in the act of securing this when the room door crashed open, and four of Liebenbaum's men hurled themselves in. For perhaps two seconds they stared in amazement at the tall figure in their employer's white coat, the face half obscured by a black hat, and at the butler jerking off the red handkerchief. Then Jimmy jumped for the alabaster globe above his head and brought the whole cluster to the floor.

What happened then he never quite knew, excepting that in diving through that tough bunch he received a blow across the base of his neck that broke his collar-bone. The stairs he took in four leaps; then he was across the hall, with the front door open, inserting the key on the outside, when the first of his pursuers reached the bottom of the staircase.

"Good night, Whiskers," he called, and pulling the door into place, he shot the lock-bolt just as the bearded Dutchman reached the door.

In the bushes behind the gatekeeper's lodge, he watched the guards pour out of it in answer to shouts from the house windows, and heard the pack of terriers give tongue at the point of alarm.

Pulling the brim of his hat still farther over his face, Jimmy gained the gate just as the keeper was in the act of closing it on five argumentative guests while he went to investigate the furious clamor at the house.

SURPRISE was again the guardsman's weapon.

Coolly pushing past the gateman, he said: "Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen." And he was through the group and at the wheel of the unoccupied car before any of them realized the situation.

The next thing was a clip of shots through the railings that blew the hat

from Jimmy's head and smashed the wind-screen of the roadster. Another fusillade made a sieve of the hood, as Jimmy stepped on the gas and roared away downhill into Rondebosch. . . .

It was only twenty minutes past eleven when Jimmy Lace, minus hat and coat, parked the borrowed car at the main-line entrance to the railway station. Before the big mirror in the station lavatory he re-knotted his white tie and brushed his hair,—wincing with the pain of raising his arms to shoulder-level,—washed his hands, and wiped away the sweat streaked on his forehead.

AT a desk in the station telegraph office he sealed the envelope containing the makings of a South African Republic, and printed on it, *"Captain the Honorable Gerald Hounslow, C.V.O., Government House."*

Leaving the station by the suburban exit, he crossed to the general post-office, posted the letter, and cut up through Church Square to Government House.

A small bunch of Africa's democracy, mostly women, still stood opposite the austere illuminations of the center façade, gazing raptly at the entrance to the heaven of social eminence and civic distinction, while listening to the strains of a band drifting out past the scarlet-coated doormen and the flickering bayonets of the two sentries of the night guard. Jimmy did not interrupt that séance; he slipped in by the little staff entrance at the corner, resumed his decorations and eyeglass and made his way by familiar route to the public rooms.

Slightly gray beneath his tan, but otherwise looking as serenely undisturbed as when he left the Goat's room forty-five minutes before, he strolled to the ballroom. For a few moments he leaned against a pillar, watching Cape society weave itself into a brilliant pattern of Lancers; he waved a hand to Pat, who was partnering the Governor-general in the royal set; then he lounged away to the main corridor and the bar.

And it was while he was doping the jangle of his broken collar-bone with the royal brandy, that the Earl of Tring hurried in with the chief of police and ordered two whiskies-and-sodas.

"Have it with me," Jimmy called facetiously from the other side of a bank of flowers.

"I thought I'd roped everybody into the ballroom!" Tring exclaimed.

"I've danced enough for one night, Stringy," Jimmy yawned. "In fact, I was just thinking seriously of committing the awful crime of departing before the party's over."

Stringy turned to Colonel Shakespeare.

"There you are, Shakes. Staff work—even Jimmy Lace doesn't know."

The policeman drew Jimmy out of ear range of the buffet, and said:

"When you cleared off from the Governor-general's room and left me to do the listening, did you happen to go into the garden?"

"Yes sir," Jimmy declaimed. "As a courtier and a gentleman, I naturally seized the opportunity of calling on the Governor-general's rabbits. What's the joke anyway? I'll buy it."

"Liebenbaum was found trussed up in the tea house half an hour ago," stated Shakespeare with a certain amount of relish. "His Rolls was missing too, and we sent him off in a Government House car, breathing blue hell."

"That beats the band!" said Jimmy.

"It beats me too. I can think of several burglars who'd have hopped over the railings for a chance of finding that stiff without his gunmen. But barring a sore jaw, he wasn't even hurt."

"It must be a practical joke in extremely bad taste," said Tring in his best A.D.C. manner. "Nobody from outside could get into the cloak-room and pinch his hat and coat."

"It does not need a royal command to get in by a back door," the policeman retorted. "Any bright lad in a b'iled shirt could get away with it."

Here a footman hurried up to Shakespeare: "You are wanted on the telephone, sir, in the A.D.C.'s room—Colonel Liebenbaum."

"We'll come too," said Tring.

IT was the Rondebosch police-superintendent calling from Liebenbaum's house, and the conversation took five minutes. Then Shakespeare snapped the receiver back on its prong and announced curtly:

"Liebenbaum's safe has been burgled of fifty thousand-pound notes by a bird who was driven from the car-park here in the old man's car, and wearing his coat and hat."

"Well, I'm darned," murmured Jimmy—sitting there with the notes in his pocket. "That looks as though he was the cove who trussed the old rotter up."

"Obviously," snapped Shakespeare; "and a devil of a help *that* is! Nobody

The door crashed open, and four of Liebenbaum's men hurried in. They stared in amazement at the tall figure in their employer's white coat.

saw him here, and all Liebenbaum's push can say is that he had a bottom to his face."

"You'll get him by the note numbers," cried Tring.

"Of course," flashed the policeman sarcastically. "He's bound to pay 'em into his private account! Believe me, the feller who did this job knows a damned sight too much to cash out in places where thousand-quid notes bring out the fire brigade. He's got the whole of Scotland Yard guessing."

"What! D'you mean to say you know who did it?"

"Yes," said Shakespeare, pulling on his coat. "A gent well known to the romantic press as 'Star Ribbon.' He was kind enough to leave his card. And a fine lot of help *that* is, either! It was only a month ago he took a packet from a French war-profiteer in Paris, and a damned lot of good his bit of ribbon did there."

Jimmy stood up and drawled, "Well, Shakes, if you do nab him, bring him along to me, and I'll take him on as a collector for my war-fund. Fifty-thousand-pound dollops is just what it needs."

"It'll be a feather in my cap if I do nab him," said the chief of police. "Now I must be getting along to my office."

"I'll come with you," said Jimmy, "and you can drop me at the Mount Nelson."

And according to the night porter at that hotel, who heard the fall, and the Government House doctor, who repaired the injury, the stairs at the Mount Nelson were responsible for Major Jimmy Lace's appearing in the Governor-general's box at next day's race-meeting, with his left arm strapped to his side.

Another engaging story by Frank Verney will appear in an early issue.

Treasure

A great gold shipment by air and the daring raid upon it is vividly described in this lively novelette by the author-pilot who gave us "With the Night Mail—1932" and other excellent tales of pilots and flying.

"CERTAINLY it's murder!" said Vernon Hornsby grimly. "Mr. Rutherford, it can't be coincidence! It's plain murder—not so plain." He paused, and slapped a hard fist against his open palm. "However, the only place where I come in is as a spokesman. Speaking for the pilots on this run, we feel justified in refusing to go out with money shipments in the future, Mr. Rutherford, unless they're U. S. mail. This air express is too much like committing suicide." He ceased speaking, having said all there was, for him at least, to say; and sat back in his chair, his right knee crossed above his left, his fingers interlaced, supporting it. He was a clean-cut, youthful man, perhaps twenty-six or -seven, with clear gray eyes, brown crinkly hair, and a dimple in his chin.

Rutherford, division superintendent of Seaboard Airlines, for a moment sat silent. He was short, with a round face, a pleasant mouth. A thin scar upon his forehead marked some forgotten crack-up years ago. He was respected and well-liked upon the line. When trouble brewed, he was the arbitrator.

And trouble brewed now. Seaboard had the air-mail contract from New York to Miami. Nightly for the last ten days gold shipments had been going south—to Cuba, Panama and South America: gold certificates, which, in foreign lands, could be redeemed in actual metal. A panic was on the verge of following depression. A bank failure in Maryland had forewarned the closing of unnumbered other banks throughout the country. The bank holiday was a week away. Gold, and gold certificates, were on the wing.

Three nights ago Glenn Stokes had gone south from Richmond with a million dollars in his mail-pit. He checked in down the line as far as Florence, and then completely disappeared. Morning came, and a search was put in progress. At noon they found him in the cockpit of his plane at the Lanes emergency field. The plane was intact, unscratched. But Stokes was dead, and the million in certificates was gone.

A hue and cry went up. A dozen theories were advanced. There were no marks of violence on the body. The landing, from the wheel and tail-skid marks across the field, was normal. It was suggested that some one had seen the plane standing there, and had rifled the contents of the mail pit. Yet no actual mail was missing—only the express shipment of cold cash. And this theory failed entirely to explain why Stokes had landed on the field.

There was no single clue, at first. Later in the day the autopsy showed monoxide in the blood. So a theory was worked out that Stokes' engine-exhaust had poisoned him, and he had managed to land at Lanes before he died from gas and heart exhaustion. But that was only a theory, and it failed utterly to explain where the money had gone. It failed to explain how Stokes reached the field at Lanes and landed—how he could have landed without cracking up—when he was poisoned so badly by monoxide that he died soon after. Coincidence, perhaps; but that, again, was pure theory.

Then last night Doc Brewerton had gone south with three millions. At Richmond he had stood for thirty minutes talking with Vern Hornsby and "Deak" Perry about Stokes, before he shoved off into the night. He was, he

via Airplane

By LELAND JAMIESON

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

told them, much more afraid of gunmen than he was of weather, as long as gold shipments continued to come through.

Yet gunmen didn't get him. They found Doc at Lanes the next morning, dead in the cockpit, just as Stokes had died. The gold, again, was gone. And again there was no clue. The landing had been almost normal, in one corner of the field. Yet it was evident that something had been wrong, for Doc had landed hard on one wheel, and bounced and settled down again. But it was a safe landing—the airplane didn't have a scratch upon it.

"Of course it isn't coincidence!" barked Rutherford. "I agree with you, Hornsby—it's murder. But it's the damnedest mystery I ever heard of." He glanced at the five pilots sitting there, his eyes fastening upon each face for a brief moment. "Who knows what to do? The only facts we know are that Doc and Glenn took out of Florence on schedule, and—"

Vernon Hornsby interrupted, "Mr. Rutherford, after due consideration, we know what *we're* going to do. We've flown for Seaboard a long time. We're loyal enough, but we're not going out and face a thing like this. . . We're not flying air express, that's all. We'll take the mail—but no more air express as long as money's in it."

RUTHERFORD pursed his lips. This was a crisis, and he was in a corner. He didn't blame these boys for going on a strike; but he, an official of the line, was responsible for putting schedules through. He wondered if he would have the fortitude to take off on Trip 3 tonight with a mail-pit full of money.

He said carefully: "Maybe some of you can suggest a new angle if we review the facts we know. I would be inclined to call it an accident if only Glenn Stokes had gone down at Lanes with monoxide poisoning. We know that isn't impossible—isn't even improbable—flying Express-wings. Lanes is isolated; the field stands at the very edge of the Santee River Swamp—three miles from the caretaker's residence and five miles from town. It would be possible to land there and never rouse anyone. It would be possible for a passing motorist to see the landing-lights, and stop to investigate—find Glenn dead, and rummage in the mail-pit and stumble on the money—take it. We can conjecture that far; and in Stokes' case,—before they found Doc this morning,—I had just about accepted it."

"What about the engine-exhaust couplings?" Deak Perry asked. "Any leaks in Glenn's ship? I know what monoxide can do—I almost went under with it, once."

"Number One was badly cracked," Rutherford admitted slowly. "I've checked inspection sheets, and it wasn't broken when it left here. Oh, it was monoxide! But how could either of them have landed, if they were so far gone they died later? Why didn't they pass out in the air, and crash? The whole thing is—crazy!"

"Maybe," Vernon Hornsby suggested, "a gas-bomb could have been shipped in the mail-pit. It could be done, if somebody in the company—"

"I'm ahead of you," the superintendent interrupted. "I thought of that. But it wasn't. The monoxide came from the engine, unmistakably. At Florence a shipment of baby chicks was put aboard

He put on his gas-mask, and flying carefully, watched the canary there in the cage.

for Miami. The chicks were still alive after Stokes was found dead! So there wasn't any gas in the mail-pit. It all came from the engine—was sucked down through the cowling and back to the cockpit inside the fuselage, but on the outside of the pit. Otherwise, those chicks would have died long before Stokes did. Some of them were about gone, but none of them were dead."

Hornsby shrugged. "Another theory shot. What about Doc Brewerton? This thing seems supernatural! An exhaust coupling cracks at a certain place—just in time for Stokes to go into the most remote emergency field on the line. The money comes up missing. Stokes dies. The whole thing, if it weren't for Doc's going in the same way last night, would have been passed up as an accident. But by God, I know it wasn't any accident! I know that. . . . What about Doc Brewerton?"

"Almost an exact repetition, from the telephone report MacLanders gavè me this morning. I don't know the details yet. But frankly, gentlemen, I'm very much worried, and very much at sea."

Vern Hornsby laughed, and then was quickly grave. "If you're worried," he asked, "what do you think our state of mind is? It's damn' serious. Any one of us carrying money can be knocked off the same way. Until we clear this up, no man's safe on a night schedule—There's enough danger when things are going perfectly. If you'll get the company to stop carrying this air express with huge sums of money in it, we'll go on, and fly our runs. Otherwise—we feel entirely justified in staying on the ground."

Rutherford shook his head. "Won't do one bit of good to cancel air express. The banks in New York would send the stuff by registered mail—and it would be up there in the pit just as it is now."

Deak Perry contradicted mildly: "Not with any pilot here, or any pilot on this run. It isn't going till we find out what happened to Glenn and Doc."

"That's the view of all of us," Vern affirmed soberly.

A dispatcher came from the outer office, rapped lightly on the door glass, and, at a nod from Rutherford, came in. "Radio from Charleston, sir," he said, and put the white sheet on the desk.

The superintendent read the message with alert, troubled eyes.

WEEX OP 3 OV-BD CK 195 1027A
JOHN RUTHERFORD
RICHMOND
BREWERTON AUTOPSY SHOWS POSITIVE MONOXIDE POISONING NO HEART TROUBLE STOP SLIGHT SCRATCH UNDER RIGHT EYE NO OTHER MARKS ANY KIND ON BODY STOP EXAMINATION PLANE SHOWS NUMBER TWO CYLINDER EXHAUST COUPLING CRACKED ENOUGH MY OPINION BE DANGEROUS OR PERHAPS FATAL STOP MAIL CARGO INTACT BUT ENTIRE CURRENCY SHIPMENT MISSING STOP OTHER AIR EXPRESS INCLUDING CARTON CHICKS IN GOOD CONDITION BEING SHIPPED DESTINATION RAIL STOP FOUND PLACE ON HIGHWAY NEXT LANES FIELD

WHERE CAR STOOD SOME LENGTH TIME LAST NIGHT EVIDENCED BY OIL LEAK STOP DONT KNOW WHAT SIGNIFICANCE THIS HAS BUT AM FOLLOWING IT HOWEVER CANNOT SEE HOW EITHER STOKES OR BREWERTON COULD HAVE BEEN VICTIMS FOUL PLAY YET ASKING TOO MUCH OF COINCIDENCE TO BELIEVE BOTH ACCIDENTS COULD HAPPEN AS THEY DID STOP ON OWN INITIATIVE SINCE CHICKS FOUND IN BOTH PLANES CALLED HATCHERY FLORENCE AND CONFIRMED FACT THAT HATCHERY ACTUALLY SENT CHICKS BOTH NIGHTS STOP MORRIS COMMA WHO MADE SHIPMENT COMMA IS OF GOOD REPUTE STOP THING DOESNT MAKE SENSE ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT IT AM PLACING POLICE GUARD ON FIELD HERE TO REMAIN AS LONG AS MONEY SHIPMENTS CONTINUE TO COME THROUGH STOP ADVISE ANYTHING ELSE YOU DESIRE DONE

MACLANDERS

Rutherford read this, and passed it to Vernon Hornsby with the harsh comment: "Somebody worked this out—and it succeeded! But how? And who?"

Harold Goodwin suggested, "Maybe a mug was in the mail-pit with a gun, and when the plane got over Lanes he came up for air and made Doc land."

"Impossible," Rutherford disagreed. "There wasn't room left in either mail-pit for a man. One ship had four hundred pounds in pouches, and the other just a little less than that. The cover locks from the outside—a man couldn't have got out. And he couldn't have got in there without somebody knowing it."

There was a silence while they concentrated thought upon the possibilities. There could be no underestimation of the danger to every pilot on the Seaboard line. It seemed impossible that two men as old in the flying game as Brewerton and Stokes had been, could die this way. It *was* impossible that anything could be contrived to force them, in the middle of the night and at a certain prearranged time and place, to go down and land. Yet it had happened.

"Could somebody," asked Vern Hornsby, "have flown alongside with another plane and forced them down?"

"Not a chance," Deak Perry said. "First place, Doc or Glenn couldn't have seen a gun in the hands of somebody in another plane. Couldn't have even seen the other plane, except its lights. You know that, Vern. You've tried to fly a night formation in the Army, haven't you?"

"Tried," Vern acknowledged. "Forgot that. No, it wasn't done that way. . . . Well, whoever did it tied up this airline tight. The mail just doesn't fly until it's solved!"

Rutherford had been watching each man keenly. He sat forward in his chair, his elbows hard against the glass top of his desk, his fingers creasing little folds into the radiogram form still in his hands. Now he said slowly:

"There is a shipment of four and half millions scheduled to come down tonight. If it goes out, the pilot who takes it probably will be found dead somewhere along the line tomorrow morning, so—"

"It isn't going out!" Goodwin, a slight, sharp-featured pilot, interjected.

Rutherford went on: "No, it isn't. But somebody is going out—with a dummy set of cartons filled with cut newspapers. The only way we'll unearth this thing is with a plant. We can't shut down the line. We can't let pilots go on and risk their lives. But we can let some one pilot, properly prepared, start out on the run tonight. They'll probably try to jump him. And it will be up to him to find out just what's behind these murders—if he can."

"If he fails—" Deak Perry snapped. "Why, that's committing suicide!" He tamped a cigarette and lighted it almost between breaths. "What's the U. S. Department of Justice—Secret Service—Postal Inspection Service—what're they all doing since this happened?"

"Doesn't concern them," Rutherford asserted. "The mail wasn't touched. This was air express—has no connection with the mail."

"Well," said Deak, "I'm like the pilot who didn't hire out to be a parachute-jumper—I didn't go to work with this outfit to get bumped off!"

"Did any of us?" Rutherford asked mildly. "I'm not asking you to do it. I'm not asking anyone to do it." His eyes were bright, and quite hard now. "If you men have the nerve, we'll draw straws to see who goes. If you think that's too much risk, I'll go myself and see what I can do."

THERE was no show of bravado about his manner or tone or words. He said this as he might have said that somebody would have to get up at five tomorrow morning to ferry a spare plane to Newark Airport. And somehow this straightforward attack had its effect.

"I'll draw with you," Vern Hornsby said gravely. "After all, what's one

man? If this is a gang, and they aren't caught, they can prey on us at will for years to come!"

"I'll draw," Goodwin declared. "Although," he grinned, "I admit I'm not enthusiastic!"

"Well, I'll be damned if I will," Ben Purdy, silent until now, put in. "In fact, I think I'll just resign. I've got enough to live a year or two, and when they begin shooting at you without bullets—something you can't see or feel or smell—it don't take long to wash me up real clean!"

There was restrained laughter, short and vanishing. "I'll try my luck," Deak Perry put in after that; and Jake Thompson joined him with a nod.

So five toothpicks were broken into lengths, and one was longer than the others. Ben Purdy, respected for his blunt refusal—they all knew he had a family of his own, and half his wife's people on his hands—took up the sticks and arranged them against a thumb pressed tight against his hand.

"Good luck," he said, his voice having a trace of quiver in it; "good luck to all you guys. . . . And God help the one who goes!" He extended his fist to Superintendent Rutherford.

They drew, one after the other. Some of them looked quickly at the sticks and, not sure if they had won or lost, sat holding the fateful tokens in their hands. Deak Perry was the last. They stepped forward and compared their choices.

VERN HORNSBY snapped the long stick into pieces with quick jabs of his thumbnail on his forefinger. He, more than any of the other Seaboard pilots, had been responsible for the pilots' stand that they would fly no more until these money shipments stopped, or until the mystery of two deaths was solved. It was irony, now, that he must go out in search of that solution.

He stood there, paling for a minute. Then, ruefully, he shook hands with all the others. "Just for luck," he said, forcing a quick grin. . . . "Mr. Rutherford, I have one explanation. I'm your trouble-maker—I talked all the other boys into taking a firm stand against you. I'm the one to blame—not them. . . . Now, will somebody kindly tell me what to do when I go out tonight? I'm a novice at this detective business." He lighted a cigarette with nervous hands. "I don't mind telling you," he said, "that I'm scared half to death already! I've got the idea in my head my number's coming up—tonight."

THE New York plane, a passenger-and-mail section, was in long since, ahead of time. Trip 3, southbound with mail only on the coastal run, was ready, waiting on Vern Hornsby.

He stayed in the pilots' room for five minutes after his third call, talking in low tones with Superintendent Rutherford and Deak Perry. And then at last he left them, walked quickly through the hangar to the dispatcher's office, out to his plane. A policeman was standing in the shadows by the corner of the hangar, gun ready at his belt. Another sat unobtrusively in an automobile. Still another, Vern knew, patrolled the field entrance down beyond the hangar, put there to scrutinize all cars which turned from the main highway to the airport road. These men were evidence of authority, of caution, to convince any hoodlum scouts of the authenticity of those nine small wooden boxes which rested in the mail pit. Evidence that the money was and would be secure. But there would be no security, Vern knew, when once he left the ground. He climbed into the plane.

The floodlights spread a glow upon the northern runway. Vern gunned his engine, revved it up and checked his switches, swung out from the hangar ramp into the sweep of light upon the field. He started to ease the throttle open for the take-off, and then thought of something—stopped and called the dispatcher to the plane.

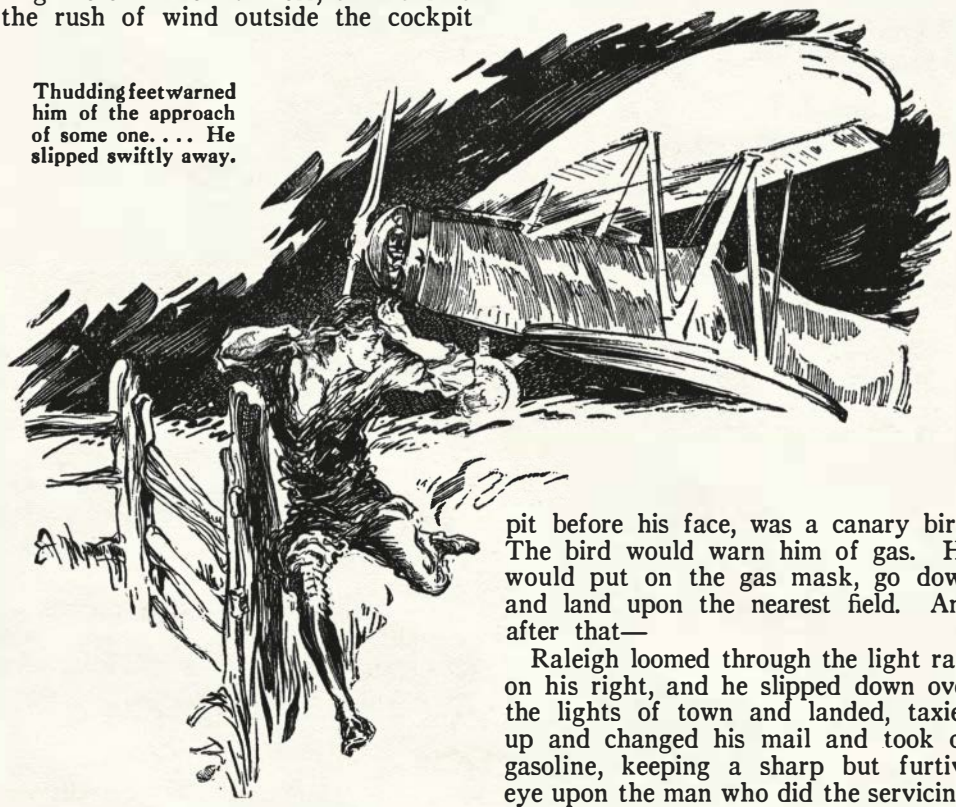
"Go inside and get an extra box of shells," he ordered. "My gun's a Banker's Special. Just in case—you know."

Later he took off, flying with no conscious thought after he had set his altimeters to compensate for "cockpit pressure" on the take-off run. He checked his instruments from habit, plugged in his radio headset, throttled slowly as, after he had made his southward turn, the plane picked up its cruising speed in a gradual, steady climb.

Up here, alone, his thoughts were clearer, steadier. The squeal of the radio-beam came into his ears, unheard. The lights of Richmond, glowing through a pall of smoke, moved rapidly and steadily behind. Here and there upon the countryside the single lights of farmhouses pricked holes in the utter blackness of the earth. The James, a

ribbon of lighter black than the ground two thousand feet below, meandered into the east and disappeared. The glow of Petersburg marched up on the left ahead; the first beacon, a finger of smoky light, twirled unceasingly and slipped behind.

These things he scarcely saw. His thoughts were upon the evidence. Sitting there in the darkness, oblivious to the rush of wind outside the cockpit and the roar of the engine in his ears, he let the plane fly itself almost entirely.



Thudding feet warned him of the approach of some one. . . . He slipped swiftly away.

His mission, first, was to avoid being killed as Stokes and Brewerton had been killed. Second, he was to apprehend the murderers, if he could come in contact with them. To these ends, he knew no method but to plunge on through the night until something happened, and then lay out a plan.

The shipment of chicks, he had thought at first, might be a clue; but he remembered that chicks were frequent cargoes as air express from one point to another. Florence was a point of shipment. Savannah was another. Jacksonville saw many cartons going out. There was nothing in that.

He was prepared for carbon monoxide, if somehow a mechanic had been operating in this game of death, and while servicing the plane, cut open an exhaust-coupling. Vern had a gas-mask in the cockpit with him. In the mail-pit, hidden underneath the pouches, was a very lifelike dummy of a man, with parachute, goggles, helmet—all the accouterments of flight. In a small cage hanging on an instrument-control there in the cockpit before his face, was a canary bird. The bird would warn him of gas. He would put on the gas mask, go down and land upon the nearest field. And after that—

Raleigh loomed through the light rain on his right, and he slipped down over the lights of town and landed, taxied up and changed his mail and took on gasoline, keeping a sharp but furtive eye upon the man who did the servicing. Policemen lurked in at least four places visible to him. Superintendent Rutherford had wanted those dummy currency boxes to seem real.

"Hale," Vern asked the dispatcher, "you were on last night when Doc went through?"

"Sure thing. That's plain hell, isn't it? I liked Doc Brewerton a lot. It's sure a crime!"

"Yes," Vern said dryly, "it looks like murder. . . . Did anything happen here, Hale? Anything go on the plane, besides the mail? Anybody out snooping, watching him go through?"

Hale shook his head. "No one special. Just some giddy college girls. Just like's out here every night to see the plane; just like what's out here now lined up along that rope beside the hangar."

Vern nodded, taxied out and took off half across the wind.

Because no one else could possibly have had access to the plane for sabotage, his suspicion, when he was settled in the air, centered speculatively upon the dispatcher-mechanic at Florence, the next stop south of Raleigh, and the last stop north of Lanes. This man was a surly individual. He could easily, Vern reflected, have opened up an exhaust-coupling. It doesn't take much monoxide to come back into the cockpit and put a pilot in a daze.

And yet it didn't make sense. How could a mechanic know just how far to crack the coupling in order for a pilot to get groggy twenty-seven minutes after he had taken off?

Suddenly a new angle came to Vern like a blow. Why hadn't either Stokes or Brewerton, when they felt themselves going, hung their heads outside the cockpit in the clean, fresh air until they had recuperated? He hadn't answered that when the Florence field lights took form out of the night ahead.

Three minions of the law were waiting for him on the ground. Grant, the mechanic, came out and changed the mail and gassed the plane. Vern stood up in the cockpit and watched him.

But Grant made no overt move.

"Were you on duty," Vern asked, just before he was ready to take off, "last night when Doc went through?"

"Gosh," said Grant, "I'm always on duty! I aint had a night off in four months! But I wish to God I hadn't been—Doc Brewerton stopped here the last—before they found him dead at Lanes."

The pilot said quietly: "Yes; I'm trying to figure it out. Anything happen here. What went on the plane, besides the mail? Any air express?"

"No," Grant ruminated for a moment. "No. Nothin' special. Just one air express. Fellow come out about thirty minutes before ship time an' give it to me. Left before the ship got in. But that was all. Sure upset me to hear Doc Brewerton was gone. Guess all you guys expect to get it sometime, though."

Vern said: "No, not all of us. There never was a pilot who didn't think that he, personally, could beat the game. . . . Well, I'll be seeing you."

LATER, flying over the emergency field at Lanes, on the edge of the Santee River Swamp, Vern circled twice, trying to see what Doc must have seen to make him land here at ten fifty-five or thereabouts the night before. But there was nothing. The beacon, lonely as a lighthouse on an isolated coast, flung its pencil of white unceasingly into the darkness; the green blinker winked repeatedly; the border lights were as they always were, a chain of yellow encircling an inky square, broken at each corner by green which marked the runways, and backed on the west side by the line of red which set off high obstructions.

He was here, and nothing had happened! He was past Lanes, and the canary in its cage was as alive as ever. He shook his head at the enigma of the situation, turned south and pounded through the night toward Charleston.

His nerves grew tauter with each rapidly flown mile. He cursed himself because he was unable to release his muscles, to let go and sink back normally in the cockpit and relax.

AT Charleston he came roaring in ahead of schedule. The rain had stopped, but the overcast still held, and the rain would begin again at any time. He crawled from the cramped closeness of the cockpit, and for twenty minutes stood at the wingtip and talked with John Barnes, the night dispatcher.

"Watch your step, Vern!" said John.

"Don't fret; I'll watch it, if I can. . . . You went up to Lanes? You saw what happened?"

"I went up there," John Barnes related. "But I didn't see what happened—there wasn't a doggone' thing to see! The caretaker didn't hear Doc land. We didn't know, last night, what could have happened. Doc got overdue. I damn' near chewed my fingernails off worrying about him. I called MacLanders"—MacLanders was the field manager—"at one o'clock, after Doc was an hour overdue. He came out, and we started telephoning up and down the line. We couldn't help—couldn't find him—thought he'd probably had engine trouble and had jumped out and landed in the timber or the swamp. Then the caretaker called back that he'd found him on the field at Lanes!"

"They told me everything in the mail pit was intact—that is, the mail."

"It was!" John cried. "Even a crate of baby chicks just hatched out, cheeping their heads off. . . . That's the thing I can't get through my head. Vern, Doc was killed by carbon monoxide. I'm a mechanic—I know how these planes are put together. And I know if enough

gas got to Doc to kill him, enough of it would have got into that pit to have killed those chicks a lot quicker."

Hornsby's head came up like a buck deer sniffing at a new scent in the air. "Yes," he said. "Yes! . . . Well, I'll be shoving off." He slipped into his life-preserver, as a precaution against motor failure over the swamps and open lanes of water south of Charleston, climbed into the cockpit, and turned sharply from the ramp.

It was so obvious! It was the simplest thing on earth to know that no small creatures like new-hatched chicks had survived a gas-attack severe enough to kill a man. Yet he had presumed the gas came from the engine, and hadn't reached the pit at all—had swirled around the outside of it and come back to the cockpit.

Those chicks were not in that mail-pit when Doc Brewerton was gassed! They had been put there at the time the currency was stolen. Simple! But it didn't solve anything. It didn't tell Hornsby when this new attack would be turned loose on him.

He landed at Savannah. Skeet Russel lugged mail from the pit, and put some more back in, for southern points. Skeet was a loquacious youngster, full of questions. But Vern scarcely heard them now, as he was thinking. Skeet finished with the transfer. "Get you out early, if you want to go," he said. "Tail-wind, Hornsby—boy, they make the winds blow right for you, I'll say! Slim Johnson will come through here cussing you tonight, like every other night. When you going to let him have a wind to help him, huh?"

Hornsby grinned, said nothing, filled out his forms and pulled his goggles down before taxiing out upon the field. He saw policemen sitting in a car parked in the shadows. Another one had gone inside with Skeet to guard the mail. Well, the next stop and the last stop was in Jacksonville, so hoodlums would not get him tonight, at any rate.

FROM the corner of his eye he saw Skeet Russel plunge from the office door, waving him to wait. Skeet ran to his side. "Fellow just drove up with a crate of baby chicks," he said. "Wants 'em sent to Miami, air express. I'll weigh 'em up and have 'em ready in a minute, Vern." He turned to leave.

Vernon Hornsby was noted for the coolness of his nerve, but now he yelled in quick anxiety, "Wait, Skeet! Come here!" More softly: "Do you know the shipper? Has he been out here before? Quick!"

"No," the dispatcher admitted. "First time I ever saw him in my life."

SWIFT excitement swept through Hornsby's veins like wine. "Skeet," he said, his voice low and harsh and driving, "I'll load that shipment up. Now listen: You dodge outside without his seeing you—find his car. See what's in it —other men, more chicks, or what. Get the license number. . . . Now, careful —get this: If I don't show up at Jacksonville, you have that license-number traced—find out who owns the car—and have that bird picked up, no matter who he is or where he is. Whatever you find out, you send me a radio as soon as you can, when I'm on my way. . . . Unless I'm off my nut, these are the guys that did for Doc and Glenn. Don't know—"

"What?" Skeet Russel ejaculated suddenly. "You mean— But how? What the devil are you talking a—"

"No questions! You get out there and do your stuff. Now move!"

He snapped out the cockpit lights, slid the gas-mask out of sight and hung his helmet over the cage housing the canary. Then he jumped lightly to the ground and went inside to make up the papers for this shipment of express. As he crossed the ramp, the rain began again.

A heavy, light-haired man stood beside the office counter, and on the counter was a brown cardboard case perhaps two feet square and seven or eight inches deep.

"Hello," said Hornsby, recording the other's detailed appearance with a penetrating glance. "I sent the dispatcher to get me a special weather report. I'll make out the papers for your shipment."

"All right," the other answered. "I thought I'd missed this plane! Thought I had until twelve-thirty. These chicks were hatched out tonight—aint hardly dry. It's remarkable to think they'll be in Miami before daylight."

"Yes," said Hornsby with a discerning glance. "Isn't it?" He saw that this man's fingernails were smooth and clean. His clothes were nicely tailored, old, perhaps, but good clothes once. . . . "I'll have to weigh that crate."

But he had no chance to lift the box. The shipper made a movement with surprising speed and picked it up and set it on the scales at one side of the room.

"There's drinking-water in the case," he said. "I know just how to handle it without its spilling."

Vern thought swiftly: "Drinking-water, for baby chicks an hour old that will be in transit only five hours and a half?" There was no doubt of the presence of the chicks, however; he could hear their cheeping clearly. The box weighed thirty pounds.

"Pretty heavy shipment, isn't it?" he asked. "I never would have thought it would weigh anything like that."

"Heavy box," the shipper explained quickly; and suddenly, now, he was not completely at his ease, although to casual observation the change would have been imperceptible. "I'll just carry it outside and put it in the plane—I know just how to handle it, you see."

"Yes," thought Hornsby. "Yes, I see! I guess I'm due to land at Harris Neck tonight, and see what's going on."

He overcame the impulse to rip that box apart and see what it actually contained. His job was to go deep into this plot, and break it up. It would do little good to apprehend one man. He must go on, and take his chances. If he lived through what was coming, he would save the lives of other pilots who had to earn a living pounding up and down the Seaboard line.

Skeet Russel did not again appear. The owner of the baby chicks stood on the ramp, watching, as if to be sure Hornsby would take off. So Hornsby took off, bareheaded, and pulled his helmet on when the ship was in a steady climb.

FROM the darkness of the sky he looked back—a habit formed through years of flying the night mail. Sometimes he forgot something, and the dispatcher could call him to return by blinking out the boundary lights.

As he looked to the rear, the boundary lights did blink! Once. Twice. Three times in quick succession. Then they burned as before. But suddenly they went crazy. Short dots in rapid sequence. Long dashes. Skeet was talking to him—trying to send a message!

"RADIO BROADCAST 5 MINUTES."

A wild elation drowned the fear that had crept into Hornsby's mind at the thought of what was coming. He muttered: "Good boy, Skeet! If you found what I think was in that car—"

Any minute now! At a given second, that box up there would emit a suffocating toxic gas, tasteless, odorless, the effect of which would go on unperceived until the pounding of his heart, a dizziness, a violent headache, warned him. It would be too late then to try to get back to Savannah. It would be too late to try to recuperate and finish out his run. He might hang his head out into the fresh air, but the sensation of fainting would drive through him a paralyzing fear. He knew what that was like; he'd known a pilot who for some unknown physiological reason had had fainting spells. In his hysteria of fear, the only thing that man could think of doing, when the dizziness took hold of him, was trying to land. He was afraid to jump, for fear he would pass out before he had a chance to pull his rip-cord.

SO. . . It was quite clear, at last. Hornsby understood why Stokes had landed at the nearest field. And Brewerton. Any other pilot would have done the same.

He put on his gas-mask. Flying at a thousand feet, throttled down so he was keeping schedule carefully, he watched the bird there in the cage.

The beam snapped off in his earphones, and a heavy voice came in.

"Double-u Double-u A Vee, Jacksonville, Florida. Special broadcast to pilot Hornsby on Trip Three. Russel advises some one telephoned him twice before your arrival asking exact time you would be there. Is positive after talking with party shipping air express that they are same. Contents of car as follows—another box of chicks similar to that shipped with you, a machine-gun under rear cushion, and New York license-plate Number Two-u-nine-four-seven-one. Car now has Georgia license-tag Number Eleven-forty-seven-five. Driver alone and left field immediately. No other information. Repeating to pilot Hornsby on Trip Three—"

The slow monotone went on. The voice of the operator had a peculiar grating quality that sent chills playing on Vern Hornsby's spine. It was like being called and told that the weather had closed in at every field that he might reach before running out of gasoline. It was like knowing positively that he would have to jump. . . . No, it was a lot worse than that, Vern decided. There had never been anything that he remembered which seemed to him so ominous.

A machine-gun, stolen license-plates, and another box of baby chicks! A

curious combination, and yet it made the picture clear to him. This man would drive immediately to Harris Neck, to substitute live chicks for the ones which died inside that box now riding in the mail-pit. This must have been the way Doc Brewerton and Stokes had died! The method these gangsters used was now almost entirely plain.

But the future was not plain at all. Within twelve minutes, if Vern's calculations were correct, he would have to land at the emergency field at Harris Neck, where, entirely without aid, he must bet his life against a band of killers—utterly ruthless, as evidenced by the way they went about their work.

The night slipped under him. Two beacons south of Savannah he took up his gun and thumbed the cylinder, inspected it and filled the one chamber which, ordinarily, he left empty so the hammer could not accidentally fire it. He was not actually afraid; yet physical weakness seemed to creep through his muscles and almost, for a moment, leave him helpless. He knew what he would do when he landed on the field; his plan of immediate action was complete, but that was all.

When he looked once more at the canary, the bird had drooped its head. And even as he watched it, it fell off its perch and rolled over on its side. The unseen hand was—here!

HARRIS NECK is a neck of land three beacons south of Savannah. The Georgia coast is sprinkled, dotted, with unnumbered islands, necks of sand —Georgia's golden isles. Harris Neck is but one of them, attached to the mainland by a narrow strip, and extending perhaps a mile toward the Atlantic. It is not touched by the ocean, however; there is an inland lagoon, an inland river it might be called, which parallels the beach. Harris Neck extends into this inland river.

It is an isolated place, lonely and barren, with crackers' cabins here and there at widely separated intervals. The field is laid out on the very eastern tip, so that the eastern boundary lights stand almost at the water's edge. The nearest house is almost a mile away, and the field caretaker lives four times that distance from it.

The field is big and flat and smooth, with the beacon tower in the southwest corner. A boat-landing—it cannot be called a pier in any sense—stands at the

channel's bank upon the west, where boats or seaplanes can, at will, come close enough to load or unload passengers. It is rarely used, for the only passengers who might come there are hunters when the duck season is on.

Through a steady fall of rain, Hornsby studied the outline of the lights, trying to decide quickly where it would be best to land. He had been four miles from the field when the bird collapsed. Perhaps, he decided suddenly, it would be wise to simulate distress—to fly erratically, as a pilot under the effect of monoxide might be presumed to fly.

For there were, undoubtedly, at least two or three men waiting for him in the darkness of the fringes of the field. He throttled the engine three hundred revvs, and let the plane describe a slow turn to the left, as if it were flying without guidance. Then, when forty degrees off the course, he turned back slowly, and headed for the field, descending rapidly.

His assailants, he reasoned, would be outside the field, not in it—for fear of being struck by the airplane when it landed. So Vern Hornsby snapped off his navigation lights while still a mile away, and left his landing lights still folded unlit in the wings, and came in low, at a speed that made his flying wires sing and shrill. He crossed the border of the field,—the amber lights which marked the boundary,—floated out across the landing area and "felt" the plane down in the dark.

He hit! He bounced, and did not gun the engine for recovery, but sat tense and waited till he hit again. And then, when the plane was rolling swiftly, unseen through the inky darkness, he slammed on his brakes with a force that

brought the tail up, and the plane to a sudden, skidding stop.

For he must move quickly! During the time it took these waiting men to find the plane, he had many things to do. One of the reasons for putting out his navigation lights, for landing "dark," was to make the plane more difficult to locate on the field. And the other was to avoid a telltale silhouette of his own body when he went about his plan.

He flung the canary-bird cage as far as he could behind the plane. With his gas-mask still protecting him, he leaped to the ground, opened the mail-pit with deft, hurrying fingers, and, from under the lighter mail-sacks at the rear, pulled forth the dummy pilot.

IN Richmond, before taking off, Vern had examined this dummy in amazement. The world's most skilled artisans had hurriedly fashioned it in New York that day, and sent it down to Richmond for this purpose. It was an uncanny piece of simulated human life. Its skin was pliable, some sort of rubber composition; even its face had short beard stubble! Its mouth could be pulled open, and would close itself again. An eyelid rolled back had revealed an eye which met Vern's gaze with such startling realism that it had sent a tingling to his scalp. It was as real as human ingenuity could make it.

For the briefest instant, down in the mail-pit, Vern snapped his flashlight beam upon it now. It wore a flying-suit, and had a bulky silk scarf around its neck. A helmet was buckled snugly upon its head, hiding half its face from view. Goggles, wide rubber-rimmed ones, were in place upon its eyes. It wore a parachute. A gun was strapped securely to its thigh. Nothing but a careful scrutiny would reveal that it was not of flesh and blood. When Vern moved it, its head even lolled limply to one side.

Rutherford had offered the suggestion. These killers would be working rapidly, pressed for time, and unsuspecting such a trick. It would be night, and, unless the figure were dragged completely from the cockpit, nothing but a minute examination would reveal the deception. Now, Vern thought, with rain smearing everything, in darkness broken only by the beams of flashlights, there should be no danger of discovery.

Working quickly, knowing that the plane might be located at any instant, Vern shoved the dummy into the cockpit and strapped the safety belt in place. He put one gloved hand on the throttle, and the other on the stick, resting both of them so that if the dummy should be moved, the hands would fall across the figure's thighs. Rapidly he rearranged the mail-sacks, closed and locked the mail-pit, and slipped swiftly away.

Thudding feet warned him of the approach of some one across the sandy turf, and he fell flat and lay there motionless. In the darkness, with a steady rain cutting the visibility to some extent, he could not even see the other pass, although at one time, from the sound of running feet, they were within a dozen yards of one another.

"Close!" Hornsby thought. "Ten seconds and they would have had me!"

He had left the dummy slouched down in the cockpit, its head lying as if dazed or unconscious on the cowling rim. Now, away, safe for the time being, he removed his gas-mask, his life-preserver and his parachute, and set them on the ground. Motionless, he stood and tried to see what was going on about the plane.

There were few words spoken; none that Vern could understand. He saw the play of a flashlight, saw it search and find the plane, and then hold for a moment on the dummy's face.

EVERYTHING depended on that dummy—upon its illusion of reality. No, not everything. But if that dummy, in the dark and rain, could pass as the succumbing pilot, Vern would be free and unsuspected.

He saw what they were doing; he knew, now, why Stokes and Brewerton had died there in the cockpits of their planes, after landing safely, still alive. For one man, visible in the glow of a flashlight, had stepped up and clamped a mask upon the dummy's face! More monoxide! Bloodless murder! A chill passed through Hornsby's taut body at the thought of what they would have done to him.

That explained the whole thing clearly. It explained the scratch beneath Doc Brewerton's right eye, for Doc had undoubtedly fought them when they made the effort to apply that mask. A pang of swift grief brought moisture to Hornsby's eyes as he thought about Doc Brewerton. And that turned almost instantly to a white-hot rage, a desire to step in now and blast these men. He moved forward resolutely, his gun ready

in his hand. And then, with effort, he fought down the impulse. That would be the safe way and the easy one. But his job would not be done. He must find out how many others worked within this gang, and get information back to Rutherford.

The rain was heavier now, a steady spring drizzle on the northeast wind. Vern had no raincoat, and his clothing in five minutes was soggy, clinging.

Carefully, slowly, he walked in a straight line toward the nearest boundary of the field, trying to stay in a position that his figure would not be thrown into relief against a border light to those behind him. The field was large, and this required time. He came to the boundary and skirted the field in the thick, wet darkness, walking faster now, through drenched grass that reached his knees. He kept the boundary lights between him and the plane, and broke into a run as the agitation of apprehension took a firmer grip upon his mind.

At various times while flying this run behind schedule, in daylight, he had noticed the sandy road that curved away from the beacon house toward the main paved highway connecting Savannah and Brunswick. The car in which the killers planned to make their get-away would be somewhere on that road, no doubt.

Just then he saw its lights, saw it stop, and the lights go off. That would be the man from Savannah with the chicks, he thought, and looked at his watch, astonished that a car could have traversed that thirty miles in only ten minutes more than he had required in an airplane. The driver had averaged more than sixty miles an hour!

HE waited. He saw the figure of the man pass in front of a boundary light; then quickly, he himself went on. His object was to cause these men delay —to damage their car in some obscure way so that they could not escape while he was getting transportation, help, with which to trail them.

So, when he reached the car, he examined it cautiously and furtively to locate any guard who might be posted there. He found no guard, but he did find the New York license plate, and knew this was the car that Skeet had examined at the field. The machine-gun, however, was no longer in it.

Quickly he opened the hood and removed the distributor rotor from the ignition system, turned and flung it far into the grass and weeds and scrubby pine that lined the road. They would be suspicious, perhaps, at the failure of their car to start; but at any event, they would be effectually delayed. He set out down the road again at a fast walk, his shoes thudding softly in the wet sand of the ruts.

FOR ten minutes he held this rapid pace, until he knew he had come almost a mile. He passed one dwelling of some sort, indefinite and remote in the darkness. There would be no telephone there, he knew, and it would be a waste of time, with the danger of rousing a dog, perhaps, to go in and inquire.

An automobile motor sounded to his right, traveling at high speed southward on the highway. For an instant, three hundred yards ahead, Vern saw the flash of its headlights in the rain as it passed the opening of trees where this trail joined the main thoroughfare. He quickened his gait, and three minutes later climbed the slope that led out to the pavement.

There, wondering in which direction lay the nearest filling-station where he would find a telephone, he lighted a cigarette. The match flared in his eyes, and he got the tobacco going, and puffed nervously. He decided to go south, and took one step before he heard the voice behind him:

"Up! Up! I got a gat on you. I'll smoke you if you move!"

A beam of light cut through the dark and rain and pinned itself on Vern from head to foot.

He whirled, and there seemed frozen to immobility at the voice and at the light. A lookout, left here to prevent some wandering car from threading down this road to Harris Neck! And he had stumbled blindly by the man. He had escaped one trap alive, and had fallen into another—from which, he knew in the first fleeting realization of the situation, he would not be able to escape. If this man took him prisoner, his life would not be worth a dime.

In times of acute danger the human mind works with amazing rapidity—perceptions resolve into physical action almost, it seems, without time for consideration or analysis. So it was with Vernon Hornsby now. He knew the penalty of losing this encounter. He stood there, full in the blaze of light, and his hand leaped with swift reflexive action to his gun.

But it was hopeless. A harsh, coughing sound came from the apex of that cone of light. A spurt of reddish-yellow flame erupted just beside it. And a bullet passed Hornsby's ear with a peculiar slapping sound. He raised his hands, the gun still in its holster.

"That's better!" the voice said from the darkness behind the light. "Keep 'em there. Now turn around and head back down that road."

Hornsby, his thoughts in seething confusion, obeyed. The captor halted him when they had gone fifty yards, and came up behind him and took his gun away, patted his pocket for another one, and found the extra box of cartridges. "Now walk straight! You can put your hands down, but no tricks!"

THERE was no need for conversation. Vernon Hornsby knew enough about the methods of these men to know how little hope he had to live. They might work deviously, but they accomplished what they started. He cursed himself for not having had forethought enough to know a rear-guard would be stationed at the highway.

"How'd you get away?" the captor asked presently, when they were halfway to the field. "You don't even look sick—what made you land?"

But Vernon Hornsby *was* sick, with the nausea of hopelessness. However, he replied, "When the time comes, I'll tell you all about it. You might tell me what you're going to do with me."

"Why, sure," the other answered easily. "Sure, I'll tell you. I'm going to bump you off—when the time comes."

Vern swallowed, and it was difficult. The night seemed suddenly stifling, filled with a hot rain that beat upon his face. He wondered if he could dart to one side and dodge among the scrubby pines before his captor could find him with a bullet, and decided that it was impossible. The flashlight beam was on him all the time.

They came to the car, and at the car, now, were four men who worked with flashlights trying to find the trouble with the engine. Hornsby heard them cursing before he came within their view around the curve in the sandy road. "Webb, you punk," one of them exploded, "I'll bet you forgot to fill this bus with gasoline!"

"Naw, I didn't," was the surly, high-pitched answer. "Don't take me for an idiot!"

"Well, we got to get started! We got nine million bucks aboard that tub, an' we got to scram!"

They saw the flashlight coming down the road, saw Vern Hornsby's soggy figure outlined sharply in front of it, and one of them challenged harshly:

"Seavey, is that you?"

"Yeah," said Hornsby's captor. "Yeah, it's me." He waited until they had almost joined the group. "What's the idea letting this pilot romp away, huh?"

"Pilot?" some one asked, a queer husk in his voice. "We did for the pilot! That aint the pilot you got there!"

"Well," said Seavey, "it aint my grandmother!"

There was a silence, followed by a whispered conference filled with hurried undertones. The car lights snapped on, revealing Vern more clearly. One of the men who had been working on the motor, a short man with a cap pulled low over his eyes, stepped up to him. "Who are you?" he asked. His tone was like a file. "Seavey," he demanded, when Vern had let a moment pass before replying, "where'd you find him? Quick! We aint got time to jaw."

"Up at the highway," Seavey related. "Tryin' to make a get-away. So I brung him back alive to let you handle him like you always want to do."

The stocky man cursed viciously. He asked the man, whom he had previously addressed as Webb: "Were there two pilots? Did you see this guy at the field—can you identify him?"

HORNSBY'S hopes sank to a new low, then came sharply up again. "I didn't go to the field," Webb said, from his position at the engine. "Morris went out there to ship the biddies. I stayed at the garage. Then he come back and took the train to Florence, and I drove here. So I never seen the pilot. But this car's been busted, I tell you! If this guy was wandering around here, he done it! I'm going to punch his face, that's what—"

"Shut up," the short man grated quietly. "There must have been two of 'em, then. The other one's back there in the plane, dead as a chipmunk, and this guy will be—" He broke the sentence, and looked for an instant at his men, as if summing up the situation and making final plans. "Here," he went on suddenly. "We got enough to do it. We'll push the car across the field to the landing where the cruiser is—push it on

board so it won't be left here as evidence. Then we'll do for this guy—quick!" He stepped forward and looked murderously at Hornsby. "I don't know how you scrammed out o' that plane, but I'd let Webb maul you for playing with this car—except I can't afford to have a lot o' marks all over you when they find you—see?"

Hornsby stifled a shudder.

They set to work, the six of them pushing the car through the rain and darkness across the field. Vern perforce did his share, a gun at his back constantly. He was reminded of it now and then by a quick prod at his spine.

He racked his brain for ideas he might use. The horror of that mask which he had seen them hold up to the dummy's face in the cockpit filled him with a penetrating nausea that robbed him of all strength. He would, he thought ruefully, have the muscles of a madman when the time came; but the struggle would be futile.

The short man with the cap and file-like voice was named Resnick, Vern perceived from conversation as they pushed the car along. He was the leader of this group, and his authority was evidently much respected. There was Seavey, who had brought Vern back; Webb, a big man with a high-pitched voice; and two others, unseen in the darkness, thus far only forms and names—Latta and Sifontes.

They passed somewhere near the plane in traversing the wet field, and came at last to the boat landing on the eastern end of Harris Neck. Out of darkness there loomed gradually a white hulk, a boat, the outlines of which were too vague to identify. But it was quite large. They rolled the car out on the little wharf; Webb and Seavey left Vern to the others' care, and went aboard. Presently they came back with two planks, which they slid from the rail down to the dock to make a runway. Everybody pushed, and the car went up and bumped down across the rail.

"Now, buddy," said Resnick evenly, "we'll take time to do for you."

Vern was shoved aboard, and down through a companionway into the main cabin of the boat. He did not resist, for his strength would have been paltry against five men; and he wanted to save it until a better opportunity arose. He stood rigid by a clothes-locker, and searched each man's eyes as they followed him into the room.

"You might tell me what you're going to do with me," said Vern. "Why, sure," said the other, "I'm going to bump you off."

Latta and Sifontes were slight, swarthy men of foreign cast, but he could not establish their nationalities. They had the battered faces and bullet heads of one-time pugilists. Their eyes were black beneath shaggy brows, and those eyes had a peculiar agate-like intensity. Webb, from his appearance, might have been a farm hand. He was enormous, with tangled yellow hair and blue eyes of the palest shade that Vern had ever seen. Seavey was tall, thin of body and features. Resnick, Vern decided, looking at the mouse-trap mouth and the determination of the fellow's face, was the most dangerous of them all.

"Say," said Webb suddenly in that high-pitched voice of his, "maybe this guy knows when more dough's coming through. You ought to try to make him sing."

Vern's hopes soared. If he could dissemble skillfully enough, and bring about delay—

But Resnick grated, "Lay off. I'll watch the dough. We aint got time to waste with him. There's only one place where he belongs—back there in the plane, stiff by daylight. Seavey," he went on, a new edge in his tone, "you and Webb go get that stuff."

"Okay, Chief," Webb agreed obediently, and he and Seavey went quickly through the companionway and clunked across the deck above the cabin.

"Buddy," Resnick said to Hornsby, "business is business. We got to bump you off—much as we regret it." His face took on the symptoms of a smile, that turned out to be a grimace. He pulled off his soggy cap and tossed it on a bunk. "You won't feel no pain. So just buck up and take it like a man."

PANIC for an instant swept a giddiness over Vernon Hornsby. He could, he knew, deny any connection with the airplane. But that would be fruitless, futile. They had found him, and, being who and what they were, they would kill him anyhow.

Yet, as he thought of this, it seemed to him that they must be curious about his presence here. They must wonder, for one thing, how he had escaped a gas attack which had poisoned the "pilot" of the airplane into unconsciousness. Either they were ignorant of Seaboard's operations, or else they were in too big a hurry now to give much thought to inconsistencies.

He had no opportunity, however, to plant suspicion in Resnick's mind, for, an instant later, his own mind was filled with utter horror. Seavey and Webb, in an incredibly short time, came into the room carrying a quantity of curious equipment. There was a mask, like the masks used in hospitals to put patients under gas. Webb had a small, black cylinder on which were dials and valves. Without words or preliminary, without any hesitation, as if they were thoroughly familiar with these grim proceedings, they set the cylinder down upon the little drop-leaf table in the center of the cabin, attached the mask tube to it, pinched the tube and turned a valve and for an instant watched the pressure build up on a dial.

"Buddy," Resnick ordered almost carelessly, "I'll just ask you to lie down on that bunk, behind you. You won't even know you're breathing anything but air. We know just how to do it, see?"

At that moment, when he should have been using his mind to bring about delay, all Vern could do was stare stupidly at that mask. In his imagination he could feel the sensations which would come presently in actuality. They would hold him, so that struggle would be useless. They would clamp the mask upon his face, and he would have to breathe. Then, without taste or smell, he would suck in mixed carbon monoxide and air, until he would grow dizzy, until his heart would pound in awful strokes in combat with the poison in his blood, until a violent headache took possession of his brain. And after that, oblivion and —death.

Suddenly he bunched his muscles, to spring at Resnick. If he must die, it would be easier in the heat of conflict than in a supine position on that bunk. But even as he was thinking that an uppercut might knock Resnick out, and that he might make the door—there was one chance in a thousand, possibly—he saw the black, stub automatics in Latta's and Sifontes' hands. . . . He had his choice, death by gas or death by firearms. Death—no matter what he did.

"You've opened those money boxes, have you?" he cried violently, with a force and suddenness that made Webb, nearest him, start ludicrously. The ability to think returned. "You know who I am? You know that was a dummy in the cockpit out there—instead of a live man? Are you all so dumb you haven't wondered how I escaped that gas attack, if I'd been riding in the mail-pit? You're all a bunch of fools!"

HE paused, out of breath, his eyes blazing with hatred and desperation, his cheeks on fire with excitement. And as he studied those men through the pause which clung like a mist behind his words, he knew that there was hope. Webb looked blank. Resnick was puzzled. Latta and Sifontes showed no response, except to watch him even more intently than before.

"Chief," Seavey reminded in a soft tone, "I asked you about where this guy come from. Remember?"

"Shut up," the leader snapped. He turned fiercely upon Vern, his eyes glowing with murderous intent. "What?" he snarled.

And for an instant that was all. Silence clung, as thick as fog, inside the cabin, broken only by Resnick's quick, short breathing. Then he ordered Webb and Seavey, "Get up there and bring it down." He turned back to Hornsby: "Buddy, you say that again!"

"There is," Vern Hornsby began very carefully, "nothing but a bunch of newspapers in those boxes. We were expecting you to try to get that money, so it was routed in another plane. You'll believe me, when you open them."

The effect on Resnick surprised Hornsby. He had expected anger, violence, perhaps physical reaction—a blow from

Resnick's fist. But none of these things came. Resnick became suddenly very calm and self-possessed. "Routed," he repeated, "in another plane. . . . I knew they'd do it, sooner or later. This was our last haul."

Webb and Seavey came back, carrying one of the small, white-pine boxes covered with wax seals and waybills. With his ham-like hands and a short hammer, Webb broke it open quickly. He tore away the inner covering, and there was no need to look carefully to see what the box contained. Newspapers, cut neatly to fit into the box, to make its weight the same as currency. That was all.

There were curses of anger and frustration, threats of violent destruction to Hornsby. These came from everyone but Resnick; he was still calm. And presently he shrugged and declared:

"Not so dumb! We're the ones—we're the suckers. Nothing we can do about it now, except make it look natural." He glanced keenly at Hornsby there at his side. His voice became as harsh as grating steel. "You two," he said to Webb and Seavey, "put this guy away—then take him back there to that plane and put him in the cockpit. Make it look natural. Come on back here and we'll scram. By daylight we'll be fifty miles at sea, just like we planned."

Webb, without a word, reached up his massive hand and pushed Vern back into a sitting position on the bunk. Seavey slipped around and pulled him down. Sifontes came forward with the mask, ready to hold it on Hornsby's face when Webb and Seavey had him quiet, in the right position.

VERNON HORNSBY had no time to think, to consider the possibilities of what he held out to them. They were killers, desperate men, and perhaps their predominant characteristic, aside from ruthlessness, was cupidity. Vern knew where that gold certificate shipment was, where it would be all night; furthermore, he knew how he could get it for these men. He had no time to realize that if something went wrong with the plans he would propose, some other pilot might be killed. He only knew that they were going to murder him.

"I can get that money for you!" he exclaimed, his voice muffled against Seavey's dripping coat. "You kill me, and you'll never get it. I know how it can be had!"

"Hold it," Resnick ordered. "Let him up. If he's just gabbing, we'll put him under, then. —All right, punk," he went on contemptuously, "you want to sing? Talk straight. If you really know something, out with it."

Hornsby swallowed. His blood felt cold. "Yes," he said, "I know where four and a half millions are, and I know how to get it. . . . But first, what will it be worth, to—me?"

"THAT'S sense," Resnick answered. "Well, it's worth your worthless life, punk, if you can deliver. If you don't deliver—if you try to cross us up—we'll burn you and ask questions afterward. Go on with your song."

Hornsby wiped perspiration from his forehead with trembling fingers. But he was thinking now; panic had passed, and his thoughts came clearly. He couldn't devise any plan on the spur of the moment which would both let him escape alive, and bring these murderers before the law. But he must try. He knew that this boat—he surmised it at least—was to be the avenue of escape these men had planned to use after making this last haul. No doubt others just as heavily involved as they were, at some rendezvous already planned, would meet the boat and go with it to some remote hide-away. South America, perhaps—or a forgotten island in the Bahama group, inhabited only by black sponge fishermen. But the boat, wherever it might go, eventually would hold the main group of these men. Even now it held the other millions that had been stolen from the Seaboard planes.

His problem was to get this information to some one more powerful than he. If he died now, other pilots, in dark nights to come, would die also.

"The money," he said slowly, "was sent south through Atlanta. The plane leaves Richmond at a little after midnight"—he glanced at his wrist-watch, and was amazed to find that everything had taken place in less than three-quarters of an hour; it was now only half-past one—"and gets into Atlanta at a little before six. If I leave here immediately and fly to Spartanburg, I can head the pilot off. I can take two of you with me, and you can—do your stuff."

"How?" Resnick demanded instantly, watching Hornsby through speculative eyes. "How the hell will we get to the money, in the air?"

In some inner recess of his mind he kept waiting for that gun to speak.

"Well, now," the pilot fenced cautiously. "I'm not so good at figuring these things as you are. Haven't," he added with a grimace, "had the practice. But you let me sit here and I'll figure out a way."

"You won't have much time to figure," Seavey said. "It's half-past one already. How far is Spartanburg from here?"

Hornsby considered. "About two hundred miles. I'm not just sure. But we can make it. We'll have time."

"Not if you sit there all night pounding your nut," Resnick said. . . . "You know," he went on to Seavey, "I've a mind to have this guy take us up there and get that dough with roscoes. May be a cop around, but we'll smoke him." He was silent, staring down at the floor through narrowed eyes. "Say, I've got it! We'll shove off right now. Seavey, you and I'll get in the mail-pit with typewriters. This punk can land there and drive up to the other plane and we can cut loose on everybody. Then he can fly us back here and we'll meet Webb and everybody else a little way at sea—the punk can land in the water alongside—let the plane sink, so there'll be no trace. . . . Punk, how long would it take for that plane to sink, after you'd put it in the water?"

"Without much gas in the tank," said Hornsby, "it probably wouldn't sink at all until the wings got waterlogged. But you could shoot holes in the tank and it would go down in a few hours—sooner, probably. Shoot enough holes and it wouldn't take long." A queer feeling of defeat took hold of him at the thought of how these men meant to get those millions from the plane at Spartanburg. Tom Walker was there, the night dispatcher; and Dan Potter, the pilot on Trip 5. There might, even at this time of night, be a parked car nearby, full of amorous youngsters. All of these would die.

BUT there was, on the other hand, some chance Hornsby could trick these men. The weather was bad—not, of course, unflyable, for everything was flying—but the ceilings were dropping steadily, with a light, drizzling rain over a large area. He would have to get the Atlanta line weather reports by radio—

With that thought came another, so swift, so startling in possibility that he almost forgot; he almost recorded his new hope in a sudden exclamation.

"That will work!" he said, meaning something else entirely. He caught himself. "I can land at sea—did it once, down at Galveston with a DH when I was in the Army. Nothing to it, in deep water. You can transfer the money to the boat and we can go our way—" He looked up into Resnick's eyes and forced a smile. "I suppose, if I go through with this, I'll be entitled to go along and join the gang?"

"Sure," said Resnick largely. "You get this dough, punk, and you can have a cut just like the rest of us."

"Yeah!" thought Vern. "I'll bet I can. When that job's done—if I'm

unlucky and don't get away with this—I'll be fish meat on the bottom of the drink!" Aloud, to Resnick, he declared, "I'll make the deal with you. But I want your guarantee you won't double-cross me, either."

"Listen, punk," the leader snapped. "Don't never say a thing like that again! I just told you what I'd do. I don't double-cross nobody—but rats. So long as you play along with me, you'll be okay."

"Let's go," Hornsby replied. He pursed his lips in thought. "I've got to get the Spartanburg reports by radio—weather reports. You send somebody out there with me now, and by the time you're ready, I'll be set."

"Radio?" Resnick repeated in quick suspicion.

"Don't worry," Hornsby declared. "I can't transmit messages—I've only got a receiver in the plane."

So Latta, the gunman, was appointed as Hornsby's escort, and together they left the cruiser and climbed down to the landing and trudged across the field through the steady downpour of cold rain. Latta had a flashlight, and he made Hornsby walk in front of him, and snapped the light repeatedly, so that Hornsby had no chance to dodge away.

But now Vern did not wish to do so. He had been sent upon this perilous mission by a fate which made him draw the longest of the straws. His life, so to speak, was on his cuff; he was playing a game, with death the penalty. By going on, he believed, he could lay plans for rounding up this group of killers. He felt no hesitation in attempting it. They would kill him, anyhow.

WHEN they reached the plane, Hornsby removed the mail-pit cover. He turned on the radio receiver, and, while he listened and tuned for the Spartanburg station, Latta removed the dummy from the cockpit.

Charleston came in, and Jacksonville. But the pilot could get no weather on the Richmond-Atlanta line. The radio reception, through the night, had been excellent, but now Hornsby carelessly explained:

"This rain makes static—can't hear much. I'll have to adjust my receiver some before I'll get that report we've got to have."

Latta permitted this. He didn't know a radio from a grand piano; his job was to guard this pilot, and he was doing it.

Express-wing planes, as used by Seaboard Airlines, have a receiver only; there is no transmitter. It is possible to receive messages sent by Department of Commerce network stations, on the phone broadcast and beacon frequencies, but it is impossible to transmit replies.

VERNON HORNSBY, however, had always been an enthusiastic user of what radio facilities he had. Because he believed that a pilot was only as good as the things he knew, he had studied the science in an amateur way, and knew the theory fairly well. He knew enough to know that a detector tube in oscillation, when coupled to an antenna through a sending key, could be used at very short range to send a message. He had read of this; and once a Seaboard radio mechanic had explained how it was done. Vern wished to know, he said, in case he was forced down in isolated territory and needed aid.

"I can make a key," he thought swiftly. "I won't have any trouble doing that. . . If I can make that receiver put a message on the air—"

So now, working under Latta's gun, aided, even, by Latta's nervous, darting flashlight, he opened the receiver compartment just behind the cockpit in the fuselage, took the screwdriver from his pouch—he always carried one—and set to work.

But it required longer than he had thought it would. And presently Latta growled at him, "Say, what you doing in there, punk?" He watched Vern's flying fingers for a moment. "Nothing doing, buddy—come out of that!" He prodded the pilot with his gun. "You can fix it—but don't try taking it apart. You wouldn't, just accidentally, be trying to talk to some guy, would you, now?"

"Certainly not," Hornsby said desperately, trying to make his voice sound appropriately indignant. "But I've got to listen to the weather reports. Don't want to start out and run into stuff I can't fly through. The weather up there may be bad." He went on working, driving his fingers to their task. But Lata saw him attach a wire to the set, and grabbed him by the shoulder violently and jerked him back. "Naw!" Latta snarled. "Don't try it, punk! I'm giving you a break—if the chief knew you tried that, he'd have that mask against your face in spite of hell. He's like that. You close up that box—forget it, see!"

There was nothing left to do. Vern Hornsby's last hope fell. He thought about Tom Walker and Dan Potter, with a machine-gun spraying death at them. He cursed himself for the coward that he thought he was, for not walking back there to that cruiser through the rain, and telling Resnick and his gang to go to hell, and taking what they'd have for him.

RESNICK and Seavey came through the wet grass and interrupted those painful thoughts. "You ready?" Resnick asked sharply. "Everything okay, Latta? .... Listen, punk!" He turned back to Hornsby: "You aint the smartest guy in the world, but you aint dumb. I been thinking you fell in with us a bit too easy. Maybe you didn't. But I'm telling you, just so you know—you make one false move and we'll blast you to hell before you bat an eye. You just remember that."

"Why, Chief," said Hornsby in a pained voice, "I'll be up there with you, won't I? How could I do anything?"

"I wouldn't know," Resnick growled. "But it won't be healthy if you do! You remember what I told you, see?"

The parachute which had been taken from the dummy was lying on the wing, protected from the rain. Resnick took it, and, showing surprising familiarity with its maze of straps and buckles, put it on.

"Where's mine?" Seavey asked suddenly. "Say, chief, I aint going to ride up there without a parachute, myself!"

Resnick turned to Hornsby. "Didn't you have one?" he asked. "Don't lie to me! Where's the 'chute you wore? This 'chute's dry—it aint been riding in the rain all the way from Richmond—where's your 'chute, punk?"

Hornsby debated for a moment. His parachute, with his gas-mask, was lying in the wet grass forty yards away. He would not be allowed the benefit of using it, of course; there was no use admitting that it existed—it would be a detriment, in fact, for, if Seavey had no means of getting down, he would not be apt to trouble Vern as long as the plane stayed in the air.

But another factor came to Hornsby. The gas-mask! These men, no doubt, had opened up at least one exhaust coupling, to give verisimilitude to the pilot's death from carbon monoxide. If he could get the mask and have it in the cockpit, to wear in self-protection; if he could make sure that coupling had been opened, and perhaps open another one or two, Resnick and Seavey would—

"Yes," he said to Resnick, holding his voice level and grave, "I had another 'chute. I dropped it somewhere on this field. I don't know where, but we'll find it, if we scout around. It's over," he lied easily, "to the west of us somewhere—the way I went in getting out of here."

"Watch him, Latta," Resnick said. "Come on," he added to Seavey. "We'll find it in a minute." They moved away, their flashlights cutting cones of white light through the dark and rain. Vern could hear their harsh tones as they receded.

"Latta," Hornsby said to his guard, "let's hunt some ourselves. You hold that light for me—on me, if you wish—and we'll make this faster, maybe. We'll have to step on it to get to Spartanburg in time."

And to his vast relief, Latta reluctantly agreed. Vern walked slowly northwestward, with the flashlight outlining his wet figure in the dark. They plodded through the soaked grass, with the rain in their faces as they gradually turned back to the north. To the west, the southwest, Resnick and Seavey were still hunting persistently. Vern made a slow circle, and, remembering the general locality where he had stopped to watch these men first come up to the plane, a moment later saw the dark lump of the 'chute. He walked up to it as if he had not seen it, stooped and picked it up, and with his back still turned to the light which Latta held, thrust and concealed the gas-mask in his coat. He threw the 'chute over his shoulder and started once more to the plane.

Resnick and Seavey came back, disgruntled, and cursed at their wetting in the rain when told that Hornsby had found the object of their search. They got into the mail-pit, and Hornsby climbed into the cockpit. Latta still stood at the wing.

HORNSBY knew the precariousness of this adventure, of this last attempt to save his own life and the lives of several others in Spartanburg. If he seemed the least unnatural and aroused suspicion by it, they would kill him on the spot. But, with the gas shut off so the engine could not start, he pushed the starter button. The engine, of course, revolved lifelessly. Vern tried again and then again, and finally muttered, loud

enough that they could hear him plainly in the mail-pit:

"Plugs wet. I'll have to get out there and dry them off."

"Step on it!" Resnick barked. "You're a helluva aviator!"

Hornsby grinned in the darkness. He got out, and, with his screwdriver in his hand, climbed up upon the engine cowl. Latta held the flashlight, but Latta was in no sense a mechanic, and he was concerned only as Vern's guard now. Hornsby himself, by the position of his body, shielded from Resnick's eyes the things he did. Hastily and silently he uncoupled the exhaust ports of the top three cylinders and pushed the flexible couplings down below the cowling. He wiped the spark plugs off, although, actually, they did not need it. He climbed down, and, standing underneath the engine, uncoupled two more ports and turned the couplings up and in. There would be a fire hazard, doing that; but he would take the chance.

Finally, with a quick, deft movement of his fingers while still standing there beneath the engine, he slid his screwdriver into the loop of safety wire on the carburetor mixture control lever, snapped it, and then moved the lever to the full "rich" position. Then he hastened back and got into the cockpit.

SO, at last, at one-fifty-five in the morning, they took off. Resnick and Seavey sat on the mail-sacks in the pit in front, their heads up in the full blast of the prop. Hornsby had left the mail-pit cover on the field, for Latta to remove.

He climbed immediately to the cloud-level—fifteen hundred feet, now, for it had come down steadily since he landed—and struck out on a compass course for Spartanburg. He ran the engine on one switch, so that the front spark plugs only were furnishing ignition. Being wet, these plugs were not normally efficient. Combustion in the cylinders would be incomplete. There would be monoxide spilling from those ports at every revolution.

There were no beacons flashing out in front of him now; the beacon line to Charleston was almost at right angles to his course, and now, in this steadily increasing rain, the visibility had dropped, until only two flashes came to Hornsby's eyes. He could not even see the glow of the city of Savannah, thirty miles away. The rain fell in almost horizontal lines, it seemed, against, or through, the glow cast by the navigation lights at the wing tips.

AFTER ten minutes, Resnick could not withstand the steady, slicing pain of the rain against his face. There was no windshield he could crouch behind. He ducked, and slid low in the mail-pit, got his head down to ease the sting. Five minutes later Seavey followed him.

Hornsby put on his gas mask. He could not feel the effect of monoxide yet, but he knew positively that it was there. He flew on and on, his mind filled with a queer apprehension, a fear that the gas would not do for Resnick and Seavey what it had, in past years, done to many pilots who had been subjected to it.

They passed Augusta, bearing to the right of it. They were halfway, and neither man up there had once come up to look around. The rain held steadily.

Spartanburg, somewhere ahead in the inky darkness, was quite near. The radio, because Hornsby had had to leave his job half done, was worthless, and he had been flying all this time entirely by dead reckoning. But he saw a beacon wink—the Atlanta-Richmond line—and a tension, a rigidity of mind and muscles, took possession of him. In ten more minutes the test would come. If Resnick and Seavey were still conscious, he, and Dan Potter and Tom Walker would die gruesomely before these gangsters' guns.

The town grew into a glow, seen first by the light reflection on the base of clouds instead of by lights upon the ground. They were almost on their schedule—Potter, with Trip 5, was due to land in fifteen minutes. Vern Hornsby, his mouth dry, the gas-mask gnome-like on his face, eased the throttle back and started down.

A flashlight, at that moment, burst into his eyes. In its backflare he could see Resnick half standing in the mail-pit, weaving in the wind. He saw Resnick reach up to his shoulder for his gun, and, like slow motion, saw the gun come out into Resnick's hand, and turn, and point itself at him.

He ducked. In a faint but desperate hope of throwing Resnick out, he kicked left rudder violently. He felt a stinging, numbing impact on his cheek, and it seemed that almost with the blow he tasted blood. For half a minute he sat

there, head down, shocked almost to semi-consciousness, flying by his turn-indicator from long habit formed in six thousand hours in the air. It seemed he could not raise his head, but he knew the earth was coming up to him, that he would crash unless he managed to do so. And, in some inner recess of his mind, he kept waiting for that gun to speak again.

AT a thousand feet he looked up. Resnick was not there. The mail-pit, for all that he could see, was empty.

A sticky mass of blood was forming under the gas-mask, and he jerked the cumbersome affair away. The blood spurted, blew back into his eyes. He felt, suddenly, as if consciousness were leaving him; there came a ringing, then a buzzing, to his ears. The lights of Spartanburg, the lights down there on the field, all danced and revolved queerly, seeming to blink out and then come on.

He had forgotten Resnick and Seavey; he had forgotten everything in a painfully intense concentration on holding his faculties to consciousness. He must land. He must . . . land. He repeated it, muttering, fighting in a daze. Mechanically, from habit formed long since and practiced night on night for years, he rolled the stabilizer, shoved down his landing lights and flashed them on. The wind here was from the northeast, but Vern did not try to see the wind sock. "Get down. . . . Hold—on—until—I get her—down," he muttered, blood sticky on his lips.

The plane swung out of the north, around the field, turned gradually to the east and then straightened to a fast glide, diving toward the north-south runway.

It crossed the lights at fifty feet. For a moment it seemed that it must overshoot, and crack up at the other end. But the wind was fairly strong. Hornsby, his head sunk almost to the cowling, leaning to the left and trying to concentrate on leveling off, on hauling the tail down when the ground inside the circle of the landing light was just far enough away, remembered seeing grass flick by beneath the wing, remembered the awful, distant roaring in his ears. . . . And that was all.

HE awoke to the cool wetness of a towel upon his face, and found himself inside the office, with calm, efficient Tom Walker bending over him. And with a rush, a dozen memories flooded back to him and shocked him to a realization of how he had come here. He struggled to sit up, but Tom pushed him back with quiet force.

"Not now," Tom said. "Just take it easy while I go out and meet Trip 5."

"But that's the trip!" Hornsby exclaimed weakly. "That's the trip that's got the money—the trip those birds were going to rob!"

"Who?" asked Tom. "How you feeling, Hornsby? Just take it easy—tell me what the devil happened. I've been getting special broadcasts for three hours about you. How come you here?"

"Resnick! Seavey!" Vern said jerkily. "Tom, I know where all that other money is! You let me up from here!"

And he got up. He grabbed Tom's gun, and staggered through the door, and to his plane, which stood now almost within the glow cast by the hangar floods, he stood at the mail-pit, and threw a beam from Tom's flashlight down into it. Seavey, unconscious, still lay on the sacks of mail.

THEY had found Resnick's body fifteen miles south of Spartanburg, his parachute unopened, late the day before. They had just had a message that the Coast Guard had picked up the *Dolfin* forty miles offshore from Fernandina, after a brisk fight in which they almost had to sink her. Now, sitting at John Rutherford's desk in Richmond, Vern Hornsby puffed at a cigar from the good side of his mouth, and occasionally stroked the bandage on the other side with a cautious, gentle finger.

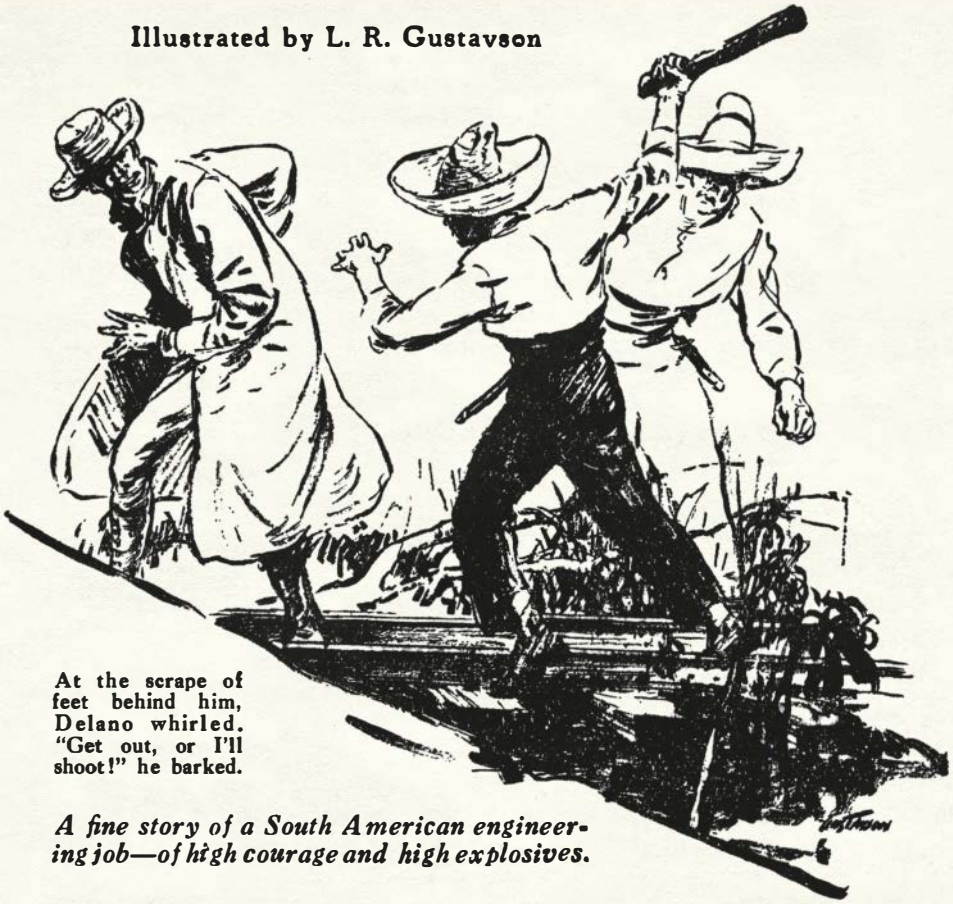
"I thought I was gone," he told Deak Perry ruefully. "When they got that mask ready to slap down on me, I thought my time had come."

John Rutherford smiled at Vern, and there was respect and admiration in his eyes.

"What I don't see," Deak Perry exclaimed suddenly, "is why you didn't jump out, when you saw that canary keel over in its cage! Boy, that would have scared me out of ten years' growth!"

"Well," said Hornsby, trying unsuccessfully to grin. "I thought of that, myself—and at the time. But the truth is, I was so scared I didn't have the strength to climb out and jump off. If you've got to know, if I'd been strong enough, I would have!"

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



At the scrape of feet behind him, Delano whirled. "Get out, or I'll shoot!" he barked.

A fine story of a South American engineering job—of high courage and high explosives.

Dynamite

By RALPH ANDRÉ

THE doors of Candelaria Hospital closed behind Delano, though he was still sick, sick in body and soul —bad business where stout hearts were needed to shove this railroad through the jungles of Brazil. But though Delano was still weak and shaky, his blood test showed no trace of the malarial germ, and beds were scarce in this wilderness hospital; there were others really sick. He was malingering, they said. . . .

His much-washed khaki suit hung loosely on his gaunt frame; his high laced boots were moldy with disuse. He staggered to the hand-railing, clutched it with sudden terror. Ahead of him were four flights of seven steps each, which he must descend to reach the railroad track. After that he must walk the three miles to Porto Velho. His dark eyes blurred. He jerked down his old Panama hat, that no one might see his weakness.

Through the shimmering sunshine beside the mighty Madeira River lay Porto Velho. Delano knew it well, too well. He had helped build some of its docks, shops, and yard-tracks. He could see the wireless station, the commissary and buildings for offices and living-quarters. A bit of the U. S. A., it was, placed here in the wilderness by American enterprise and held here by American courage.

Courage! Delano's face worked a trifle. How much had he left?

Alongside the dock lay the *Francisco Salles,* the white little river steamer which would take him away that night. He wanted to go home, but not this way: fired, beaten. His last shred of self-respect had caused him the previous evening to ask for another chance.

Neff, the assistant chief engineer, had been brutally curt. "Your transportation is ready, Mr. Delano."

Delano grinned ruefully and began the descent. The medicos would have sent a *mozo* to help him down, had he been of importance. He made it to the bottom step and sat down, panting for breath. Although it was still early morning, the sun heat beat mercilessly on his bowed head. Dizzily he looked up at the sound of a railroad automobile chugging up the grade, and a warm feeling spread through him, a pathetic gratitude that they had sent out a car for him.

Then he relaxed, misery plain in his dark eyes. It was "King John," the contractor, the ruler over the thousands of white, yellow and black men who toiled over this four-hundred-and-forty-kilometer stretch of track and grade. King John went everywhere and sometimes did odd things—but certainly he was not coming out to Candelaria to pick up an outcast.

Delano watched as the white-clad compact figure, radiating health and energy, got out of the car. He dropped his eyes as the confident tread came nearer, and swallowed bitterly. No good asking him for a job. King John would speak curtly and go on. Delano wondered, with a sick feeling, if he could get a job that would even support him and his mother, let alone continue sending his kid brother through college. Times were dull back in the States.

"Morning, young fellow! Feeling better now?"

As he spoke, King John lighted a fresh cigar and appraised the huddled figure. For a moment Delano was so startled by this little touch of friendliness that he could not speak. His throat tightened painfully. He looked up like a hurt dog.

"Yes, I'm feeling a lot better, uh—thanks."

The boss contractor coughed and looked away quickly. Disgust, Delano thought miserably, dropping his head. King John's eyes narrowed, for there had been that in Delano's look which told volumes, and King John knew men. He knew Delano's history and had drawn his own conclusions. The gaunt form, the pale blotched flesh, the shaking limbs, told of the ravages of fever, but that dull look in the dark eyes was brought only by despair.

"Get into the car, Delano," he said,

not unkindly. "Let's take a little ride; do you good."

"Sure would. B-but—how am I going to get back?"

"Get in and I'll tell you," King John chuckled.

Delano climbed into the car, trying not to see the chauffeur's sneering grin. The breeze whipped through his clothes and cooled him off, made him feel stronger. Through the trees he caught glimpses of the river sparkling in the sun; the swiftness of their flight over the rails exhilarated him.

King John grinned slightly as he turned. "How would you like to go to

work for me, Delano?" he asked suddenly.

The young engineer caught his breath. "Why—why, I'd like it. That is—could you arrange it?" His voice shook in spite of himself; he bit his lip, knowing it was an absurd question. King John could arrange anything. "You know—"

"I know," King John said gently, and thereby stepped completely out of character as most knew him. "I fixed up the transfer this morning." He did not mention that Neff had thrown up his hands and told him it was his own funeral.

"What could I—I mean, what would I do?"

"A man-sized job—and I was so sure you would take it that I had your trunk sent up this morning. Here's the job: We have a hundred Spaniards supposed to be ballasting the low track on the long tangent across that thirty-three-kilometer swamp between Camps Twenty-eight and Thirty-three. They've got a steam-shovel and a work-train with twelve ten-yard dump cars. I want that job in three months—two, if I can get it. The operating department can hardly run trains over it now that the rains have started. Want the job?"

"You bet I want it," Delano stammered. His eyes widened with the old haunting fear. "I've never run that many men—but—but I'll try it."

With a growl the *capataz* whipped out his knife. Death glittered in his black eyes, narrowed to slits, as he circled warily.

"*Try* it, hell! Grab onto it and lick it! It's easy, just like shooting fish! All there is to it is keeping the trains moving and that gang of hot-heads hitting the ball. Nothing to it. Make good and there's more money for you. I can always use a few more young fellows with nerve and brains."

Delano remembered that that hell-raising bunch had come in just before he got sick this last time. He shut his teeth, resolved not to let the big chief see how scared he was.

"Who's been running the job? You said, 'supposed to be working.' Don't they know what to do, are they loafing, or—or what?"

King John laughed on a chilly note. "Bradley was running it until Mendez, the *capataz* from Aragon, came at him with a knife, the first week. Bradley beat it down the track and never went back."

THEIR automobile caught up with the train at Camp Twenty-eight, where King John turned back. Delano

gave him a farewell grin and climbed aboard. In vain he told himself that it was his one chance to make good on the job; more, that it was his chance to make good with himself. As his imagination conjured up what lay ahead, cold sweat broke out on him.

Nick Murray, a fat, bald-headed conductor with fish-gray eyes, passed by without speaking. Delano writhed inwardly at the sneer on the man's face. He heard him talking and laughing with two new arrivals up ahead, two men who looked like bridge carpenters, and his face was hot and flushed when Murray came back. Delano's scalp prickled at his raucous laugh.

"So they got you up at the front at last? Heh! This is good! And Twenty-eight, of all places, the toughest camp on the line! Bradley got out by the skin of his teeth. And say! There was another stabbing scrape there last night."

"Was there?" Lumps showed on Delano's jaws.

"Yeah, an' they buried four more last week. Desmond, the Cockney timekeeper, has the wind up his back and is ready to pull out any time. They wouldn't hurt him, but it's sure a tough spot for the guy bossing the job! What they sending *you* out for?"

Delano lurched to his feet, eyes flashing. "None of your damn' business!" he spat out. "Maybe I was sent up here for a joy-ride—and maybe to see if any of these pot-bellied bald-headed seamstresses are too busy stitching lies to look after their trains! Beat it!"

Murray backed up, his face red. He remembered vaguely of hearing about this Delano "knocking the socks" off some big guy before his own arrival. And, though pale and gaunt, this shell of a man looked very much like an *hombre* who would enjoy doing it again.

"Oh, all right, if you feel that way about a friendly tip."

DELANO sat down, shaking all over. Losing your temper, he told himself miserably, doesn't show that you have nerve! He tried to think of his advantages. He could talk Spanish fluently; there are no better workmen in the world than Spaniards when well handled. Contrariwise, there are none more "ornery" when disgruntled. He wondered what he would do if one pulled a knife on him.

"A steam-shovel," he said half aloud, "ought to load around five hundred yards a day. Leave six cars to load, and six to haul—"

But the last remark of King John came back to his worried mind like a refrain: "Get on top of your job from the jump. You'll either boss them, or they'll boss you. I guess you know how long any of us would last if we were all like Bradley."

IT was dusk when the train slowed for the long wood trestle at Camp Twenty-eight. Delano introduced himself to Desmond, the timekeeper; to Sweeney, the hoghead on the work-train; to Peters, the steam-shovel operator. All three carried .44 six-shooters; Delano's was in his trunk.

Behind them milled a score of Spaniards who had come down to see the train come in. About their waists were broad colorful sashes, their bare feet were thrust into *alpargatas;* all were armed with knives at hips or in scabbards at their backs. Murray gave the hoghead the highball, and swung onto the rear coach.

"Be back tomorrow, Delano," he shouted. "If you're not dead, I'll keep my eyes peeled for you 'long the track."

Delano turned his back with a cold feeling at the pit of his stomach. The Spaniards eyed him curiously and returned with howls of laughter to their camp to report. "How's the job going, Peters?" he asked.

"Rotten, boss. If you c'n git these jiggers to do any work, you're a wonder. You saw the borrow-pit. I'm digging in this *cascalho.*" (A conglomerate of stiff red clay and gravel). "It's harder'n the hubs o' hell, but I don't have no trouble keeping the cars full."

"How many cars a day are you dumping, Sweeney?"

"Eighteen, generally." Sweeney removed the cigar from his mouth, spat, and laughed without mirth. "Once we got twenty-four and it was such a record that they put it in the papers."

A roar of laughter came from the *ramada,* the big roofed shelter under which the workmen ate and loafed after hours. Delano tingled with a faint resentment. Peters swore; Sweeney puffed a little faster. The little Limey timekeeper danced around in front of the new foreman.

"Hear 'em yellin', Mr. Delano?" Desmond cried. "Sink me if they're not a worthless lot! We're p'yin' the bloody savages three milreis a d'y and board

themselves—but they wants a contract. They wants garlic and onions; they wants red peppers—"

"You're running the commissary. Sell them those things," Delano said irritably.

"We 'ave none, sir. They wants the world with a fence abaout it, and when they gets it they grouses because it isn't pynted! As for me, sir, I'm merely wyting to turn over me books to get back to the port where there's some authority."

"Oh, yuh are!" Delano growled, drawing a deep breath. "Well, get this straight, Limo! You're going to stay on the job, *sabe?* First thing in the morning, put a couple of *hombres* on that handcar and send 'em to Camp Eighteen, and get a sack each of garlic, onions and red peppers. And don't forget the paint!"

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir. I can get the vegetables, but suppose there's no pynt?"

"Then," Delano said somberly, "your coffin will have to go unpainted."

WITH this he stalked off, leaving the three looking at one another. With gaping mouths they saw him head straight for the *ramada.* Rain began pelting down in great drops, but he did not hasten his stride. He carried his yellow slicker on his arm but did not put it on. Through the gloom he saw the camp boy go into the palm-leaf shack he was to occupy, carrying his baggage.

Delano's steps faltered. He felt an almost ungovernable impulse to go in where he could lie down and ease that griping pain in his vitals. No hurry about this thing; get acquainted with conditions; organize a campaign; use diplomacy. . . . No, that was not the word.

Bradley! "What if we were all like Bradley," rang in his ears. King John was depending on a "young fellow with nerve and brains." Delano's hollow laugh mingled with the hissing of the rain. But if trains stopped running across that swamp, the job would stop. King John had trusted him where all others had scorned him; had given him a chance— Delano straightened and went on.

He had no plan except to quell mutiny at its source. Then an idea born of desperation flashed into his mind and froze him to the marrow.

A sudden quiet held as a hundred swarthy faces scanned the pale gaunt man who stooped and stood within the shelter. All were curious; a few grinned slyly; a sneering laugh came from somewhere. Delano forced himself to gaze deliberately over the two rows of faces of the men seated at the long center table. Each man clutched a cup of red wine. Delano managed a faint grin.

"Is Julio Mendez of Aragon here?" he asked in clipped Spanish.

AT once a slender man in the upper thirties vaulted over the table. He was dressed a little better than his companions and with a little swagger he came toward the new boss, before whom he planted himself in silence. Piercing black eyes, narrowed to mere slits, appraised the American. A faint sneer on the man's lips was only partly concealed by the hand twiddling his black mustache.

"I am Julio Mendez," he asserted.

The hackles on the American's neck rose as the man winked at the nearest of his friends. "Mendez, just why did you attack the other camp boss?"

The question took the Spanish *capataz* by surprise. But only for a moment. "Why?" he asked insolently. "*Que Diablo!* Perhaps it was that I did not like him—señor."

The title of respect came out, drawled with the deliberate insult to it which only a Spaniard can give. Delano's heart beat faster, knowing that he must go on with his plan.

"You, Mendez," he rasped after an electric pause, "do not like anyone in authority, so you threaten him with your knife. *Bueno!* You shall have your chance to do it again. Here! Now! See, I am armed with neither knife nor gun! What is more, I have just risen from a sick-bed and am weak—but—we shall fight!"

Mendez' mouth jerked down. "You are *loco,* in truth!"

"That is as may be," Delano replied, turning slowly to the men. He felt a queer elation within him, whereas the men were open-mouthed with the audacity of his proposal. All knew of the Aragonian's dexterity with the knife, some to their sorrow. A huge blue-eyed Catalonian sprang to his feet in his excitement.

"But, señor, this is madness," he protested. He turned to receive yells of approval and slowly withdrew his own blade. "Why not fight him with a knife in your hand? Here, take mine! But

I warn you that no man here has beaten him."

"Let be, Hidalgo Gutierrez!" growled Mendez, feeling some of his leadership slipping from him. "If the fool wishes to fight that way, why should you interfere?" Knives came out, but Delano stilled the clamor with a single wave of his hand.

"Listen, *muchachos!* We shall fight, each in his own way. I know no other than with my hands. You all know well that there can be but one chief—well, we shall see which one it shall be. We have our work to do out there; and I know that you have been badly led, for you have not worked as true Spaniards."

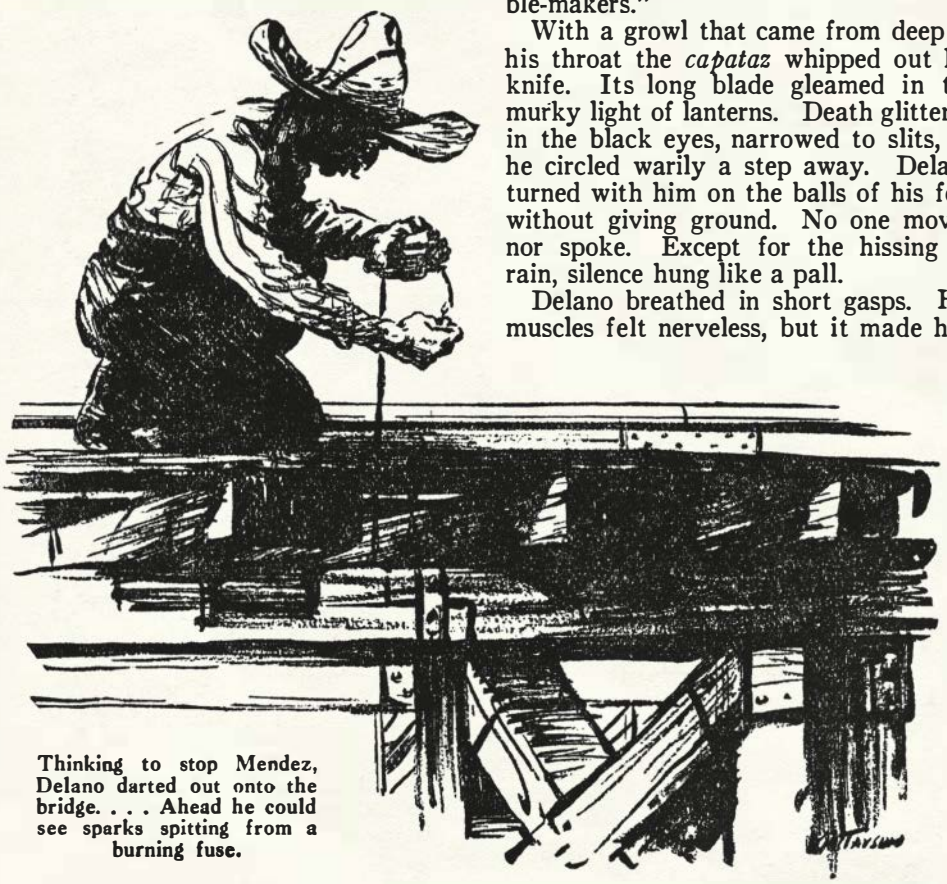
A snarl came from Mendez, a growl from a few others, but the American went on. "I have already ordered garlic, onions, and peppers for you, for I want you to eat well of the food to which you are accustomed. As to giving you a contract, I will promise nothing, only that there is plenty of work to be done on this railroad and I shall do my best with the supreme authority to give you contracts after this work is done."

"Idle words, *amigos,*" broke in Mendez. "This gringo—"

"As for you, Mendez, you must beat me or you are finished here. You shall go down the river with all other trouble-makers."

With a growl that came from deep in his throat the *capataz* whipped out his knife. Its long blade gleamed in the murky light of lanterns. Death glittered in the black eyes, narrowed to slits, as he circled warily a step away. Delano turned with him on the balls of his feet without giving ground. No one moved nor spoke. Except for the hissing of rain, silence hung like a pall.

Delano breathed in short gasps. His muscles felt nerveless, but it made him the more wary. He knew that he would be lost if it came to a clinch. For one red instant he saw that shining steel quivering in his heart, and beaded drops leaped to his brow. But he saw himself fighting not only for his life and his self-respect, but for King John, the man who had shown faith in him.



Thinking to stop Mendez, Delano darted out onto the bridge. . . . Ahead he could see sparks spitting from a burning fuse.

A smothered exclamation came from Peters outside, something about shooting. "No, just us two," Delano warned hoarsely.

In that instant, like a huge cat, Mendez leaped in. No foolish upward fling of the arm in his style of fighting. Delano had noticed that he gripped his long blade as if it were a sword, knew that it would be a lunge when it came. Like a tongue of darting flame, the knife ripped in, straight for his heart.

Delano rolled slightly in a spring to

the right. Swift as he was, the Aragonian was swifter. The keen point hissed through the coat, was buried to the hilt in the American's left shoulder, and withdrawn with the speed of lightning. It felt like a white-hot poker laid on his arm. Delano's right fist came up in a thundering uppercut. It thudded on the Spaniard's lean jaw as he leaned over for the lunge.

Mendez' right knee crumpled. He slumped to the ground with a look of comical amazement on his hate-contorted features. The knife was still clutched in his brown fingers. Delano snatched it up and straightened, his eyes alight with battle. Like rich wine the thrill of victory coursed through him, fear for the moment falling from him like a cloak.

But these others were to be reckoned with. He turned, oblivious to the blood dripping down his sleeve. *"Amigos!"*

A wild yell from lusty throats drowned him out in a shout of fierce admiration. Hidalgo Gutierrez flung his great arms about him for a bearlike embrace; cups of wine were thrust at him. Delano drank and then grinned at them. A wave of his hand and he strode out into the darkness with *"vivas"* for the *"jefe"* ringing in his ears.

But twice that night he awoke from terrifying dreams, his body bathed in sweat. Again he had seen that mocking smile, the dagger quivering in his heart.

SWEARING vengeance, Mendez left the next morning, with three of his friends. Delano laughed in his face; even his own countrymen howled jeers at him. Before starting out for work Delano took out his six-shooter from his trunk and looked at it thoughtfully. All Americans carried them; why not he? He could not, because he must show he was not afraid. He knew that he was, but he locked up the weapon and climbed on the work-train.

The men worked with the usual good will of anyone with an incentive. Rain hampered the work and the best they could do was thirty carloads that first day or the next two. Delano watched the shovel digging in the stiff clay bank and ordered dynamite, black powder, and drilling tools. With the bank loosened by blasts they loaded and dumped forty-two carloads; then, by repairing the borrow-pit track, fifty-four. That, Delano thought, was the capacity of the steam-shovel, and all the men could handle.

Constant exercise and the will to do were bringing back health to mind and body, made him think that he was beginning to get on top of his job. He wanted King John to come along and approve what he was doing. At night, however, he worried about Mendez, knowing that the man was living near Camp Eighteen.

NEWS of his fight with the Spaniard winged its way up and down the line. Delano repaired the worst places across the swamp and began getting words of praise from the harassed trainmen. Men slapped him on the back. Even Nick Murray came up and apologized. Delano only grinned, knowing well that he had been afraid.

But not a peep came from King John, although he must have seen the daily reports of progress. Delano began to fear that the big boss expected more of him—that he was waiting until he showed some real results. This worry transcended his secret dread that Mendez was biding his time until he could strike. . . .

Saturday evening of the tenth day the work-train discharged the track-ballasting crew at camp and continued on down to the big borrow-pit for the gang there. They rattled over the long trestle just below camp and Delano, standing in the cab, looked down into the racing yellow water and shuddered. They swung around the curve beyond the trestle and stopped at the diggings a mile farther down. The pit men and drillers climbed aboard.

Hidalgo Gutierrez came up with a worried frown. "Señor, some one has stolen half a case of dynamite. I fear that it was Mendez."

"Why do you suspect Mendez, Hidalgo?"

"It is simple," Hidalgo said, spreading his ten fingers. "He vowed to kill you, and he hates all *Americanos*. We know that he is living near Camp Eighteen."

Delano thanked him and Gutierrez shrugged and clambered aboard the train. Twilight was made gloomier by the heavy fog and drizzle which had set in; it seemed unearthly quiet when the train had pulled out for the siding at camp. Thinking to catch Train Number Six back to camp, Delano picked his way over the rough ground to the steam-shovel, where his watchman was banking the fire.

It would not be difficult for a person

to break into the little dynamite house, since the watchman hugged the warmth of the cab on the steam-shovel. That was where Mendez would strike. A shot there would cripple his enemy's work for weeks. Delano warned the watchman earnestly of his danger. Then he looked at his watch; the train was already overdue.

He returned to the track wondering at its unusual delay, and caught his breath at a terrifying thought. Had Mendez wrecked it? Then far to the north he heard a faint whistle and gave a gasp of relief. He continued on his way with the decision to send an additional watchman until Mendez had been run out of the country.

A brooding silence hung dankly over the right of way. The steady drip of water from leaves in the black forest made the clumping of his boots on the ties seem doubly loud. He shivered with a gloomy prescience of evil, for dynamite in the hands of a madman is a dangerous thing.

WITH nerves tense, he gave a sharp ejaculation at a sudden crash and a sodden *plunk* at the edge of the clearing. Then he grinned as he realized it was but the fall of a pod of Brazil nuts.

At the scrape of feet behind him he whirled. Two figures loomed menacingly through the gloom. Delano leaped backward, just avoiding the club which swished viciously past his head. He snatched toward his hip as they crouched on either side.

"*Salga, puchinos!*" he barked. "Get out, or I'll shoot!"

His hand came out as they hesitated; then they turned and ran, in the belief that all gringos carry guns. Fool, not to, Delano mused, watching them. Both were stocky. Mendez was slender. But where was Mendez?

The bridge! Delano's easy run became a mad flight. That was the purpose of the stolen dynamite. He meant to wreck it with Delano's own dynamite, destroy the train, and stop transportation to the hated Americans beyond! The flapping slicker bothered Delano in his headlong race. He flung it from him, rounded the curve at a furious pace. Again came the train whistle for the borrow-pit. With pounding feet he neared the bridgehead.

A guttural voice came from the darkness:

"Perez?"

"*Si,* the train comes," Delano called in a muffled voice. "Where is Mendez?"

"Imbecile! He is hanging the package of dynamite— *Diablo!*" he ended in a snarl.

Delano's fist lashed out for his jaw. He cursed as he slipped on the wet ties and the blow thudded high on the man's chest. Down they went in a tangle of arms and legs. The Spaniard closed short powerful arms about the American's back, and heaved. Delano was flung through the air, but he hung on. Locked together, they rolled down a ten-foot embankment.

At the bottom they came to a sudden stop. The American was on top. Savage with desperation, he slugged mercilessly with his right fist. His left hand clutched the corded throat. His enemy offered no resistance. His body was limp; his head had struck a stump.

Delano lurched to his feet. He heard the clank of Number Six's side-rods as he struggled up the slimy slope. Thinking only to stop Mendez, he darted out onto the bridge. On one side was a narrow runway, slippery wet, with no handrail. Along this he ran full tilt, praying that he might keep parallel with the track and stay on. A fall into that boiling flood was sure death.

Ahead he could see sparks spitting from a burning fuse; then they disappeared: Mendez had let the dynamite down. A groan came from Delano. It burned a foot a minute!

His steps slowed with a blood-freezing thought. He was too late—too late even if he knew exactly where the package of death was hanging. He ought to run back and save himself. No one would blame him if he tried to warn the train. Only the trestle would be destroyed. Once again he thought of King John and of the importance of unbroken transportation. He thrust the thought of safety from him with a sobbing curse and raced on desperately.

HE had nothing to signal with, in this darkness. And even if he could, the train would be well out on the bridge before it could be stopped. He skidded to a halt as a dark figure rose up between the rails.

"Mendez!" he cried. "Pull up that dynamite or I'll shoot!"

With a screaming oath Mendez leaped for the runway. His feet slipped. With a gasp of horror, Delano saw him plunge over the side. A dark form hurtled

downward, with a long-drawn-out shriek, and Mendez was gone. The splash when he struck the water was drowned in a whistle from the curve.

His breath coming in sobbing gasps, Delano ran eager fingers over the ties for the rope that was not there. The locomotive was slowing down, but to Delano the black monster seemed rushing to its doom with the speed of an arrow. It came around the curve with its kerosene headlights stabbing through fog and blackness. Like twin swords of gold they slashed around and partly lit up the scene for the man on the trestle.

He felt the structure tremble as the pilot wheels hit it a bare hundred yards away. "Where is it?" he groaned again and again. He could not see sparks, for the powder was now burning inside the fuse, but he could smell the acrid smoke coming up from just below. Like a flash he understood then what Mendez had done.

The dynamite was tied to a cap—the cross timber which supports the longitudinal stringers, which in turn carry the ties.

He had tied the rope around the cap, then lighted the fuse and let down his bundle of destruction to where it would surely tear out one bent as if it were made of matchsticks. It was diabolical!

THE yellow glare gave an eerie light to that lone figure kneeling between the rails.

Even as Delano whipped out his jackknife he knew that he could not reach down to the cap. Gripping his open knife between his teeth, he lowered himself between the ties. They were none too far apart. The huge thing of iron rolled down on him like a car of the juggernaut, while he fought to get through. His coat rumpled and there he stuck, unable to get either up or down. He pictured himself a bleeding pulp just before death and destruction came to those on the train.

Too late to remove his coat! For an agonizing moment his toes beat upon the side of the cap below, then with a frenzied tug he tore his coat downward and wriggled through. The locomotive passed above at a snail's pace, trailing sparks. One landed on the back of his neck, but he did not feel it. In the sudden engulfing blackness he lay on his chest over one corner of the cap, his feet dangling, and felt for the rope on both sides—found nothing.

Something hard was beneath his chest. He rolled a little and touched a knot in a rope. His left arm was hooked over the cap, taking the weight of his body as his right reached for his knife. He could just grasp the rope with his left hand on the opposite side of the twelve by twelve-inch cap. In one desperate slash he cut the hemp.

IT gave, but no expected weight came on his left hand. That package of death, hissing with venom, was lodged between a pile and a cross-brace! Precious, blood-freezing seconds were flying. In a fever of anxiety lest he jerk the rope loose from the sack, he pulled up carefully. The bundle rose. He gave it a little toss and let go, breathing a prayer that it would not catch on any braces on the way down. He imagined the splash, but the train was still rumbling overhead and he could not be sure. Would that train never pass? Rigid, with bulging eyes, with breath that choked him, he clung in an agony of suspense. Then—*boom!*

Water sprayed him from a terrific explosion just beyond the gaunt black piling. He hung, weak and panting for breath, until the last car had passed. Lantern-lights flickered as he crawled out. He could see the red markers of the rear coach, and knew that the train had stopped.

He sat on a rail, wiping his face with a shaking hand. Nausea seized him; he wanted to lie down. Several men were picking their way gingerly along the dangerous runway. A lantern revealed a white-clad, compact figure. King John!

Delano got to his feet. His back was straight, his head was up. Without analyzing his thoughts, he knew that he had won!

King John halted a few feet away in astonishment at the hearty laugh that came from Delano. Behind King John, Nick Murray gaped open-mouthed.

"What in the hell was that explosion, Delano?" King John demanded.

"Nothing much, Chief." And Delano chuckled. "Maybe some of the boys shooting fish."

King John peered down into the Stygian blackness, then scanned the face of the man before him. Then he laughed and put out his hand.

"I see," he said approvingly. "And you crawled down below to catch those that flew out of the water, huh? About like the dirt that's been flying around here!"

Something Heroic

By HAROLD TITUS

TO be completely the man of May's earlier dreams, Ernie should have been a tall, dark cowboy, occupationally competent and socially finished. Or a strong, silent person of the barren North, handling women, sled-dogs and drunken 'breeds with casual certainty. Or a sailor. Or an aviator. And, as one of such, he should have rescued her with romantic flourish from some unthinkable predicament and forthwith taken her to live in an establishment such as has never been seen on land or sea, but frequently is described on the printed page or pictured on the screen.

Instead of any of these, Ernie weighed a hundred and twenty; he was manager of B. and O. Store 653; May married him after he beat Red Quilliams with a mop for pawing her, and they lived in a three-room flat.

Ernie was not large enough to crave physical achievement, nor prepossessing enough to hope for conquests among women and too serious-minded ever to get very far away from his job. He had never aspired to aught else than groceries nor pretended to anything beyond diligence, honesty and courtesy.

But he was so earnestly devoted to his limited aims that his lighter-minded fellow-workers had plagued him consistently for years, considering themselves infinitely his superiors. This, however, but heightened their chagrin when Ernie's singleness of purpose caused Kelly, the B. and O. inspector for the group, to make him manager of Number 653 when the store's current executive was sacrificed to Kelly's Monday morning mood.

It was difficult for the others, especially Red Quilliams, who had always taken the lead in annoying Ernie, to forgo derision and accord him at least the outward respect due a manager—and this feeling rather set the stage for the complications following May's advent.

Ernie was certain he did not hire her because of her blue eyes or yellow hair or gentle, pretty mouth. Times were booming; he needed help, she wanted work; that settled it.

But for the life of him, Ernie could not be strictly managerial when May's shyness and lack of initiative proved her no great asset. He tried to be brusque and insistent, but what he started to say always petered out into a deferential coaxing, and he became aware of the snickers and winks which passed among the others—who acted as familiarly toward May as toward any other girl clerk.

Well, if they figured that way, maybe he'd give them something to giggle about, Ernie said to himself; and he screwed up courage to ask May to a movie. He was surprised at her enthusiastic acceptance; when he asked her again and she seemed pleased, he was puzzled—for he assumed that such a pretty girl would have difficulty finding time for him. As now and then happens to men, Ernie underestimated the impression he made on other people.

He was almost furtive about these excursions. He felt as if he were cheating better men, and to no permanent end for himself; but when May told him of the books she read,—all about strapping heroes and far places,—or when, at a movie, she sighed in a way he knew he could never make a girl sigh, Ernie had a sinking sensation which proved that after all he had harbored a few wild hopes, and dreamed a little himself.

Still, nothing at all might have eventuated had he not stepped into the stockroom one day to find her struggling in Quilliams' embrace.

"Ernie!" she gasped. *"Er-nie!"*

Supplication was in the tone, and he snapped: "Let her go!"

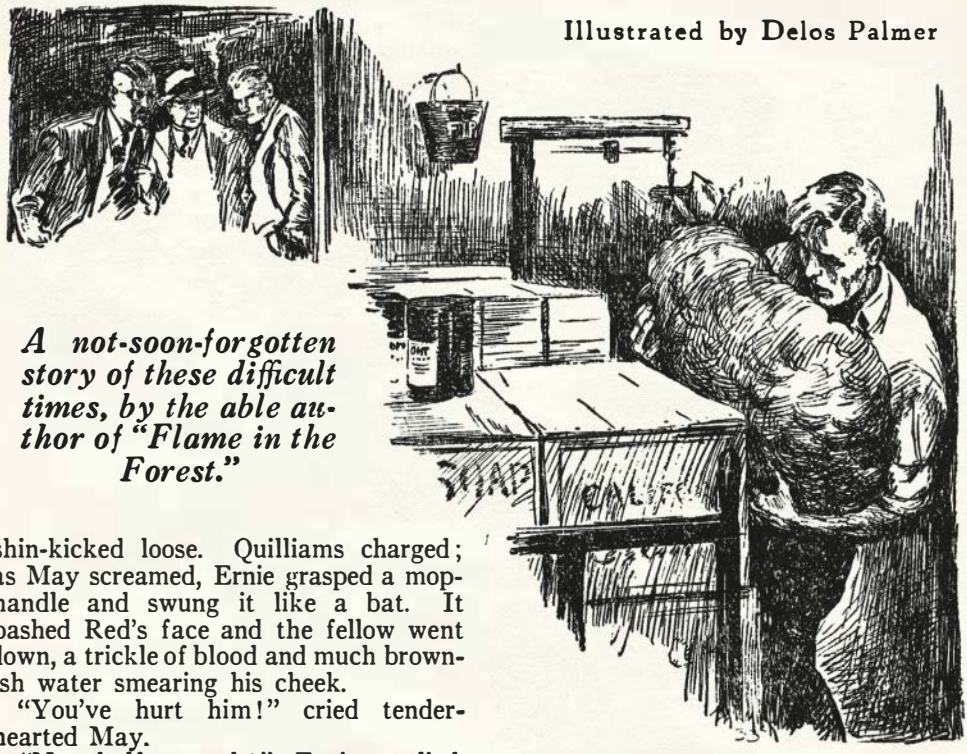
"Who says so?" blustered the hulking Red, who had been acting oddly independent for days.

"I do! Let her go or I'll knock you for a loop!"

"You and how many others?"—still holding May close.

Ernie rushed and struck—and Red's embrace turned from May to him, and from ardor to vengeance. But Ernie

Illustrated by Delos Palmer



A not-soon-forgotten story of these difficult times, by the able author of "Flame in the Forest."

shin-kicked loose. Quilliams charged; as May screamed, Ernie grasped a mop-handle and swung it like a bat. It bashed Red's face and the fellow went down, a trickle of blood and much brownish water smearing his cheek.

"You've hurt him!" cried tender-hearted May.

"Not half enough!" Ernie replied, shaken by rage and as well by amazement at his first physical triumph.

"You dirty half-pint!" roared Red, getting up.

"You're fired! Not for what you say to me; for what you did to her!"

"*You* firin' me! Aint that a hot number?" Red felt his injured temple gingerly. "Fire and be damned! I was walking out Saturday, anyway. Me, I got a place at headquarters, where a man's got a chance at real jobs and don't work under shrimps—and if you didn't have that mop I'd take you apart!"

"Well, you're fired from here!" insisted Ernie. "Nobody that works here can get fresh with lady help!"

"All right, wart! But get this: we're workin' for B. and O.—and mebby some time *I'll* be the one to do the firin'. Remember that!" And with what dignity a man with mop-water on his face can rally, he departed.

"My!" breathed May. "I was never rescued from *any*thing before!"

"Even-Stephen, then," Ernie said. "My first rescue." And he blushed and trembled at the things he could read in her admiring eyes. . . .

After a time they were married, and May wove Ernie into her dreams. While this made him incredibly happy it also gave him the feeling that he was some sort of impostor and would one day be discovered.

She was a delectable wife to provide for. If Ernie thought a certain price for a davenport was their limit, all right. She'd like the blue hat, but if he thought best to bank the extra two dollars, she'd buy the white. Or, certainly he needed new shoes, and even if they were pretty low, what of it? They'd be a long time dead! . . . Easily satisfied and generous was May, trusting her material future in his hands.

But, oh, the other things she craved!

"Wouldn't it be swell," she mused once, after viewing a picture, "if you were an aviator like that and I was held hostage, say, and you dived down and bombed them and carried me off?"

"Shucks!" said Ernie, smiling. "Who'd run the store while I was off?" But it pleased him and made him wish that sometime he might do something heroic. Not bombing, exactly, but still something unusual.

Again: "Sometime, maybe, we'll go to a dude ranch too—and if any of the other rich guests get gay, you'll fix 'em like you did Red!"

"Well, I'd make a try. . . . Say, Red's manager of Floor One at the warehouse now. He sure give me a dirty look yesterday when I went in."

"Mean old thing!"

"Yeah. Looked like he'd give his right eye to fire me, like he said. Fat chance, him or anybody else's got! Old 653's still out in front for the group; grossed eight-hundred-forty yesterday."

"Swell!" she breathed, her mind probably more on dude ranches than on the one per cent of the turnover which was Ernie's commission.

SO they lived, May dreaming along, Ernie attending to items of here-and-now—happy that May could be content just building air-castles, but with moments of regret that his chance of transmuting her dreams into reality was so slim.

May was excited when she knew she was going to have a baby. At once she commenced to plan—plans that were far, far away.

If it were a boy, now, mightn't he be an aviator? Or was the navy really a good thing for boys? . . . And Ernie would say that he thought the grocery-business was still a pretty fair field. . . .

It was a boy. "We'll name him Ernest," said May weakly, "and call him Junior. Classy, don't you say?" Ernie thought so, but he was more concerned about May's listlessness.

For May stayed white and weak. Her doctor said she'd come along, but she mustn't get too tired, or worry.

That was difficult for Ernie to avoid, —for she wasn't the same girl. Her dreaming was over; now her mind was on the tangible present. She fretted over the increased rent for the necessary larger apartment, and the balance due on furniture they just had to buy, and the doctor's bill, and how little they had saved. Contemplating these details, something like terror would grip her, and Ernie would feel more inadequate than ever. It was far worse than thinking he could never be the heroic figure she wanted, this being unable even to shield her from worries common to wives and mothers.

Things were not so good at the store, either. Times were tough, though prosperity was said to be just around the corner. Ernie hoped so, little dreaming that something else was around there, waiting for him. . . .

It was Monday morning. The wheel-factory where over half of Store Number 653's customers worked had cut down to two days a week, and Ernie's gross fell off correspondingly. The new style price-tags for which Ernie had asked twice had not arrived. The arrangement of specials, laid out by Kelly on Friday, was disapproved of by Kelly on Monday. One thing led to several, and all toward rage for Kelly—whose temper was always violent—until he roared:

"You're fired! Right now! Get out!"

Fired! Fired, when his gross led the group, and he'd done it with one less clerk than the next highest store! This, and many more items might have surged into Ernie's mind, but none did. The only thing he thought of was how May would look when she knew. . . .

"Listen here, Mr. Kelly! See here—"

"Leggo my coat!" snapped Kelly, making Ernie realize that he was clinging and about to beg. "Leggo and clear out!"

Ernie loosed his hold on the coat, and took hold of a counter to keep the stock from tumbling down on him from reeling shelves. He was conscious of a clerk's frightened look, of mumbled sympathy from another, but these were merely a background to May's imagined look and cry. "Fired?" she'd say, sort of strangled. *"Fired!"* As if the world were coming to an end, which, in a way, hers was.

Kelly was violently appointing a new manager, and after a while Ernie got his apron off and walked unsteadily to the rear for his hat and coat.

"Hold on!" barked Kelly. "You got an hour and a half coming."

Ernie faced about and drew himself to the limit of his inches.

"Keep your damn' pennies!" he shouted.

Then he stalked out, feeling that May, before Junior came, would have approved of that. . . . But he was out of a job; so he hit for the central offices of Shining Stores, Inc., telling himself that they would jump at the chance to get him.

BUT when he was back in the street his eyes were wide and he swallowed hard and as he walked toward White & Sons he tried to calculate how long he could keep this from May by drawing out of his savings and pretending to be at work.

He waited in line to sign another card, made a third call with like results, and then walked home, treasuring the brace of car-tickets in his pocket against a still worse fix. But, surely, he'd land something tomorrow, he told himself. A good man *always* found a job!

Ernie made no mention of the catastrophe, to May. He played with Junior and washed the dishes and was glad, in a way, that she was tired so he could also go early to bed and lie there prodding hope and courage. Why, he just *had* to land on his feet. If May even guessed—

"What's the matter?" she asked sleepily. "You're shaking all over."

He managed a kind of laugh. "Dreaming, must've been," he said.

He got up at his usual time and made his own breakfast, which was his regular procedure. By noon he had finished the chain stores, and began trying independent stores.

But there simply were no jobs—not even part-time work. For every such opportunity a dozen men waited.

What a tyrant Kelly was, firing good men! Why, in a time like this, Ernie wouldn't even have turned out a fellow like Red Quilliams. . . . He got to thinking about Red. Red would like a chance to fire him, though. Every time Ernie had seen him Red had looked as if that were the thing he wanted to do more than any other. Truck-drivers had told Ernie how hard a floor-manager Red was; just hanging on, himself, and always firing and hiring. And Red was a grudge-holding kind. He certainly would like to get back at anybody. But before a man can fire, he has to hire. . . .

"By jinks!" said Ernie to himself. "Might work. Anyhow, an hour's pay's an hour's pay, times like these!"

The B. and O. headquarters is a vast, tumultuous place. As Ernie approached, tractors thundered before the loading platform, backing their semi's and trailers into position; men with hand-trucks moved between platform and stock piles on Floor One; banks of elevators snatched other toilers up and brought them down from floors above. In the top-story offices the "big-shots" sat, demanding this noise, this movement, this surging flow of vast enterprise.

"Hullo, Red," Ernie said, trying to appear casual.

"Well, look who's here!" Surprise, then malevolence, showed in Quilliams' eyes. "On your vacation?"

"Well, might call it that."

"Yeah!"—nodding with evident relish. "Heard about it. How's it seem?"

Ernie overlooked the jeer.

"Not so good," he shrugged.

A pneumatic tube belched its projectile. Red opened the cylinder, shook

Ernie screwed up his courage to ask May to a movie, and was surprised at her enthusiastic acceptance.

out invoices, called a man's name sharply and tossed the sheets at him.

"What's the big idea, hangin' around here?" he asked, turning again to Ernie.

"Oh, thought I might pick up something. Got anything?"

"For *you?* On this floor? Say—" Red had started with heat; then he'd had an evident inspiration. "Oh, you're too light-built," he said evasively.

Ernie swallowed. "Kinda little," he agreed, "but 'oh, my!'—as the fella says." He watched the other's face. It was sort of like selling a customer specials the inspector unloaded on you and told you to move; you tried to figure what was in the customer's mind so you'd have a hunch what to say. "It aint all beef, that counts, Red. I'm pretty good in groceries wherever I'm put." Red's lip twitched as if it wanted to curl. "And I'm up against it. I'd have to be, to come to you, wouldn't I?"

"Huh! I don't hold grudges," Red said, flushing. "But you're not so hot. You never were." He tapped the desk. "I don't figure you could make the grade here, but there's nothing small about me. Had to let a guy out at noon. Tell you," —craftily,—"I might give you a try, if you think you can deliver." He wore a sly expression. "If you make good, you

"You're fired!" roared Kelly. *Fired!* Ernie thought of how May would look when she knew. *Fired!*

make good—but twenty-one a week's what we start at."

"That's O. K.," said Ernie, trying not to show his relief.

"Hardy!" Red bawled. "Show this fellow the stock lay-out!" And he turned back to his desk with the manner of one who has dismissed an inconsequential item completely from his mind; but as Ernie moved away he caught from the tail of his eye a malicious look from his boss and knew that Red felt his time was come. He could fire, now, when he was ready!

Within half an hour Ernie was at work. Others working on Floor One—huskies, all—eyed him askance as, the invoice gripped between his teeth, he wrestled weighty packages or put his slender strength against the push-bar of his truck.

Twenty-one a week wouldn't keep the flat running. And this job wouldn't last longer than it would take Red to find an excuse for doing what he most wanted to do. What a firing *that* was going to be, thought Ernie. But he was earning something; making a buffer of minutes, or maybe a few hours, between May and a realization of their fix.

He worked on with a funny feeling in his middle, due to his lack of lunch. He worked with an eye on the clock, not as a shirker works, but to calculate the dimes and pennies which each fractional hour meant to May.

Twice he saw Red's eye on him, and as Red started in his direction, Ernie thought the inevitable surely was coming then. But both times good fortune intervened, in the shape of a "higher-up."

First it was the warehouse superintendent, hailing Quilliams and leading him away. The second time it was the traffic manager and at his side the plump vice president himself, down from the top floor to watch the army function; and Red, listening to what they said, seemed humble and worried.

Then it was quitting-time; Ernie got his hat and went out quickly. He hadn't been fired yet—he'd get in a few more hours before he got his. Still, with these big-shots in and out so much, there was an outside chance that a good man would be noticed. By jinks, Ernie reflected, being under the eye of the bosses was something to think about, at that!

Things were popping in the morning: Motors popped outside. The traffic manager popped at the warehouse superintendent, and the warehouse superintendent popped at Red.

"Got to get those up-State trucks out of town or there'll be hell to pay!" the traffic manager declared, with the bang of a fist.

"We can do it if we get service out of this floor!" the warehouse superintendent boomed at Red. "You've got a swell flock of morons! Three trucks with overages yesterday; warehouse short, stores long! Your men've got to protect the warehouse. Now, put somebody on Eighty-eight who can read, so Henry can get his boy on the road and we won't be gypped!"

"Here, you!" popped Red, and he thrust invoices at Ernie as a man will who hates to do a thing, but has himself to look out for. "Step on it—and double-check everything!"

ERNIE flung himself at hundred-pound sacks of sugar, equally heavy bags of poultry feed, sixty-pound boxes of soap. He mauled and wrestled them. He loaded his truck until he could lift no more that high and shoved until his feet slipped, to start it rolling. He had strained his side slightly yesterday, and now it hurt, but he gave it no heed. Sweat stung his eyes and tickled his back, but he only shook his head and wriggled as he toiled, because the traffic manager watched so closely. The

man came and went, snapping a thumb, looking at his watch every few minutes.

"Now, there!" he said to the warehouse superintendent when the last items were being stowed. "If Red just had more men with dander—"

Red himself came up just then.

"That's how it should go *all* the time," said his immediate superior.

"Good man," observed the traffic manager, with a nod at Ernie.

"Too light," Red disagreed.

"Well, he gets there!" Which remark caused Red to settle his jaw as a campaigner will who, thwarted in one move, plans other strategy.

Ernie was winded and thirsty. But he snapped erect from the drinking-fountain as Red bawled his name, and flew at a new chore. It was hot, and he was almost exhausted before noon, but he did not slow down. In the warehouse, a good man sure caught the eye of the big-shots!

He had made a sandwich at breakfast, and at lunch-time he ate it in the stifling shade of the canopy. His hands shook, but he felt cheered. Red wasn't going to be in such a sweat to fire a man his boss liked!

A case of canned goods dropped on his foot that afternoon, and he limped badly thereafter. But that was all right, particularly when Red handed him his check with no more than a resentful "Here!"

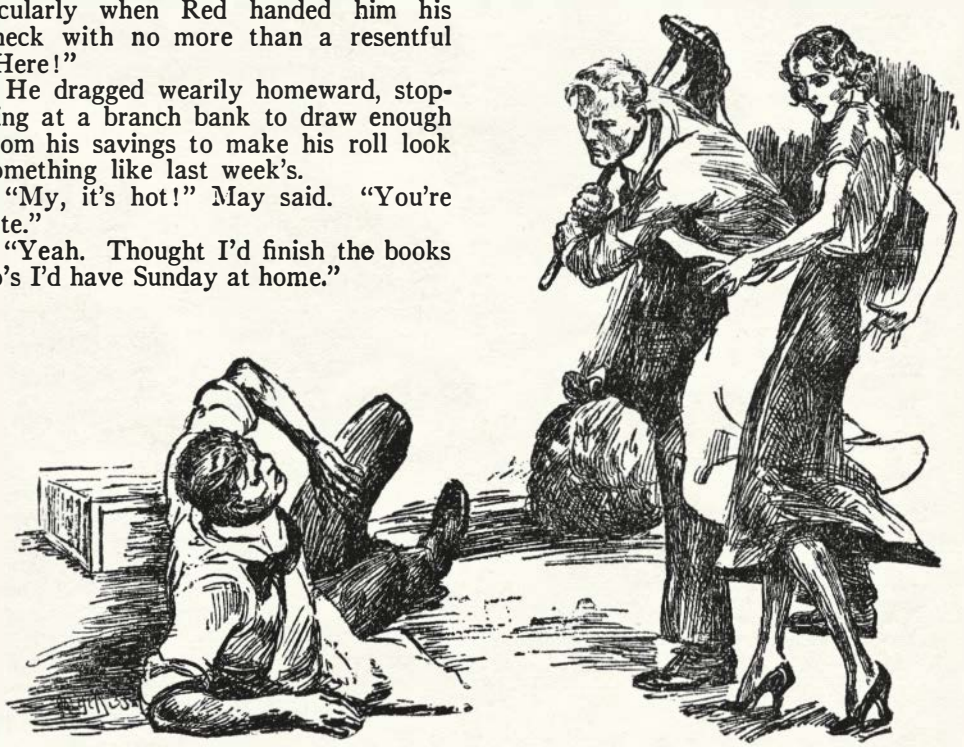
He dragged wearily homeward, stopping at a branch bank to draw enough from his savings to make his roll look something like last week's.

"My, it's hot!" May said. "You're late."

"Yeah. Thought I'd finish the books so's I'd have Sunday at home."

Ernie spent most of Sunday sprawled on the floor to gain relief from the heat. He pretended to sleep, but actually he was wide awake, figuring. Twenty-one a week, as against the thirty-eight he had hitherto averaged. . . . Let's see, now: he could carry a sandwich, and May would never know. That would save a dollar and a half weekly. He could walk: fourteen cents a day. He was only a moderate smoker, but he would quit even that, and save, say, forty cents a week. There were a few cigarettes in the house; he could smoke now and then to keep May from suspecting. Three cents a day, and a dime on Sunday for papers. May never read them, anyhow; when she felt like reading again it would probably be books about heroic deeds. Then he could pass up the doctor for a time, while pretending he was still nicking away at that debt. He could lie about savings, too, though that had limits. It sure took a lot of lying and twisting to make twenty-one bucks look like thirty-eight! Trying to scheme further, he dropped to restless sleep and dreamed Red was chasing him with a mop. . . .

Monday morning. "Put the little guy on it," the traffic manager said. Ernie felt a rush of gratitude. His side hurt and he still limped. "You'll work over-



"You've hurt him!" cried tender-hearted May. "Not half enough!" Ernie replied.

time tonight," said Red, as one who makes a threat. "Swell!" said Ernie, and the thought of extra pay made the work seem easier for a while. He was pretty stiff, though.

He lied again,—sort of,—phoning the janitor to tell May that stock was coming in and he'd be late. He squandered fifteen cents on stew, and labored until nine. . . .

Red glared each time he tossed Tuesday's invoices to Ernie—who realized that the toughest tasks, the hardest lifting, all the rush orders, were coming to him. "Oh-oh!" he said to himself. "Don't dare fire me because of the big-shots. Tryin' to wear me down, is he? Going to work my tail off, eh? Well—" He spit on his hands.

BY Wednesday noon spots swam before his eyes. Must be his stomach. Tomorrow he'd make two sandwiches. May might wonder at the way the bread went, but now he was getting used to fibbing. He had to stand the gaff. Red was after him in another way, but a man had a chance, just having the boss try to work him to death.

"You stay tonight," said Red. "Or are you playin' out?"

"Who—me? Should say not!"

But Red's grin was knowing.

When Ernie finally got home, May said he looked peaked.

"I'm O. K. Pretty long day. Hot, too." But he sat down quickly so he wouldn't stagger. If the heat would only let up! It seemed unfair to have the weather throwing in with Red. . . .

Thursday noon he couldn't eat his second sandwich. His stomach was a little upset, somehow. That afternoon the vice president walked Floor One. He stopped to watch Ernie wrestling sacks of sugar. Ernie's side hurt like sin, but he had to get the sacks up—butt on the truck edge, knee under the middle; grab the ears, heave and pivot and get the other end on top. Mustn't let it slip while you got your shoulder under; then shut your teeth and grunt and boost it up. . . . And he had to do it fast, too; all in one operation. If he stopped and gasped for breath they'd be onto him—they'd say he was too light.

Those danged spots came drifting before his eyes, and when he shook his head to be rid of them it made him wabbly.

"Overtime for you, wart!" said Red, and Ernie wondered if his voice were really so thick or if the roaring in his own head made it seem so.

"O. K." he agreed. Extra dollars for May! May was all that mattered. Spots, and a hurt side, and being sick were all jake, so long as nobody caught on. . . . But on his way home that night he had to sit down to rest on store steps, three times.

He caught Red watching him Friday afternoon with an alarming satisfaction. Red was too sure of something. What was coming off now? Had he been walking like a drunk? Was he slowing up? Or did Red think he looked like a man who'd quit just for being overworked? He fought for steady feet and loaded cases of syrup as if they were only soap-flakes. He whistled, after a fashion. Anybody'd think a man working fast and whistling was all right. . . .

Saturday morning he was ill. He forced down his coffee, but he could not swallow the dry cereal. He forgot to make a sandwich, but he couldn't have eaten it, anyhow. At noon he just lay in the shade, breathing quick and light. Tomorrow was Sunday again. . . . Give him a chance. Heat couldn't last always. He'd be all right. He'd keep May safe, you bet! Gee, he'd never be able to do anything heroic for her—and now he wasn't even keeping her safe from actual need! When she got strong he could admit it all and tell her they'd have to move. . . . When she got strong. And twenty-one from thirty-eight. . . .

"Now, rush this one!" Red's voice seemed a long way off. Ernie stared at the invoice and had to shut one eye to make it out, things swam so. Potatoes. A whole trailer-load of potatoes. . . . Potatoes, a hundred pounds to the sack.

Hundred pounds? Why, they must weigh more than that! He could lift a hundred pounds like nothing, but *this* danged thing— He started to grunt but the sound swerved into a moan and the spots became a swirl of snowflakes.

HE *must* lift that sack! Here was the traffic manager, the warehouse superintendent and the vice president himself, all standing in a spinning knot at the end of the alleyway. They went round and round, though their feet did not move—and they swayed and teetered, but didn't seem to notice; just kept right on talking.

He couldn't lift that sack. . . . It slipped away, trying to elude him. . . . It got mad and turned on him. . . . It

kicked his feet aside and he went down with a cry of surprise. But it didn't have him really down! He was on top! He'd let no damned sack of potatoes floor him! Any sack of potatoes that tried to tip May off to the jam they were in—

"Leggo, dammit!" he shouted, as the sack took hold of his shoulders with great hands. He struck at the clutching fingers. "Leggo!" he cried. "Leggo! I'm the best store-manager in Kelly's group! You can't fire me while the gross of old 653's what it is! And if you let May know— Twenty-one bucks— and he can't run me ragged, even if he don't dare fire—" But his voice became an incoherent roar in his ears; then it went out altogether.

It was some time before Ernie heard a voice that sounded like the warehouse superintendent's:

"I *thought* I'd seen him before."

THEN Ernie was yelling about the gross at Store Number 653 again, but he stopped it when he realized they had something cold on his head. He tried to sit up but some one shoved him gently back. He opened his eyes; the locker-room walls tried to fall on him, and the voices blurred again and said foolish things. The blurring made the vice president seem to say:

"Have Peterson bring Group Seven's June totals. I'm curious."

Peterson—Peterson? . . . Why, sure; the superintendent of city stores.

Then Red said, as if wanting to get away from something in time:

"He's coming round. I'll go back— lot to do."

"Lemme up," said Ernie thickly, struggling. "Those potatoes—"

"Steady!" The traffic manager put an arm around him. The vice president was staring at pink sheets which, Ernie knew, carried tabulations of gross turnovers for the stores. Then he looked at Peterson.

"He was out of his head—but wasn't it true?"

"Looks it. Kelly's story doesn't square with the figures. Looks like another one of those things: made a goat for somebody's ill-will."

"Led his group for a year. Since the change Number 653's dropped twenty per cent below his low." He looked at Ernie. "That's one of the bad features— getting so spread out you can't protect the good men. And if a man'll go on a truck and work himself sick— When he's fit, bring him up."

The vice president and Peterson went out. It had been raining, evidently, for a cool draft sucked through the room.

"Feel better?" the traffic manager asked.

"Oh, I'm swell!"—weakly. The warehouse superintendent and the traffic manager grinned in admiration.

"Well, you sit here. When you're steady, go up to Mr. Peterson."

They left him alone and he sat trying to make sense of it all. What had happened was not clear to him, except that he had been out of his head and yelled a lot, and they had checked up on what he'd said.

After a while he went up to the top floor. Peterson had a lot to say. He was almost apologetic in his manner.

"Luckily," he said, "you collapsed with important people near. You go back to Number 653 Monday. Kelly won't be there to bother you. You'll be in charge for a while. Then we'll see. A big organization like this offers opportunities. Perhaps they offset some of the bad guesses we make—sometimes."

Ernie's throat swelled. He twitched his nostrils to keep them from smarting. He mumbled something, and went out.

He still had the two car-tickets. He used one, propping his head on a hand and letting cool air blow on it. He wasn't as happy as he'd have expected to be, with his job back. Of course, May wouldn't need to know, now. He could manage somehow to put back what he'd drawn out of savings. Maybe he'd get a better job out of it in the end. . . . But May deserved something better than he could ever wrest from life.

IT was dark and cool in the flat. "Isn't it grand?" cried May. "My, how it rained! Why, this change makes me feel made over! Gee, Ernie, I feel better than I have since Junior came!"

"That's swell!" he agreed. A great feeling of relief swept him. "Say, if we could get somebody to stay with Junior, what say to a picture?"

"Oh, *Ernie!*" She kissed him. "I'd love it! D'you know what's on at the Lyric?"

"Huh-uh. Hope it's a good one, though; sort of celebration."

"So do *I!* Something thrilling. Something—well, heroic."

"You bet!" said Ernie, and went on in to see Junior.

We have all read romantic tales of the pirates of the Spanish Main. Here is a story of those pirates as they really were—and of a courageous New England ship-captain who fought them undauntedly.

NOTHING so laboredly dramatic as walking the plank for this Gomez whom his men called the One-eyed. He stumped up from the cabin, with a black scowl on his face, and tossed to his lieutenant the bags of coin he had found in the lazaret. "Not worth the powder of our guns," he grunted. "May the devil possess me! Who but Yankees would be content with coffee and hardwood?" His eye scanned the group of prisoners standing by the mainmast, and in that moment Ezra Cahoon knew what fate awaited his crew, these stanch, simple fellows whose home-lives he knew as well as his own. The master of the *Cotuit Lass* spoke up quickly, his tongue fumbling the unfamiliar Spanish phrases:

"Señor Capitano! If a ransom could be arranged—"

"A ransom?" cried the pirate Gomez jeeringly. "To give time for your cursed Commodore Porter to hunt me down with his cruisers? Insufferable pigs! Because you have defied the English in years past you consider yourselves masters of the seas. But I will teach you a lesson—I, Pedro Gomez!" The Cuban swaggered forward. "Has not the Governor-General himself proclaimed me the Wolf of Mona Passage? *Pouf!* I care no more for him and his dirty yellow tubs of frigates than I do for your Yankee cruisers. But"—he stopped suddenly, and a sinister smile creased his savage features—"if I do not care, it is because I respect the first rule of our brotherhood."

He clamped his hand on the shoulder of little Danny Bascom, and spun the lad around—and as he did so Ezra Cahoon stepped involuntarily out of the group of prisoners. Little Danny Bascom! Cahoon remembered the morning Danny's mother had come to see him in Church Street, and asked him to ship the boy for his next voyage. Mothers in Falmouth, mothers all up and down the Cape, liked to have their boys in the *Cotuit Lass*. A good ship, well-found; a good master, who took care of his men,

Pirates' Lair

By ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Illustrated by John Clymer

and returned home with the same hands he had cleared with. . . .

Little Danny screamed. And Gomez laughed horribly. "You are afraid, boy? Well, why not?"

"Stop it!" Cahoon shouted. "You can't do that!" One of the pirates struck him in the chest with the butt of a pistol. Little Danny screamed again —and went over the side in a huddle of thrashing limbs.

"We must not forget our friends the sharks," Gomez observed jovially, laying hands on a second man—stocky Sam Brewster. Brewster kicked out savagely at the pirate's legs, but Gomez easily evaded his hampered efforts and pushed him after Danny. The other hands, even the two mates, Tom Stark and Jed Perkins, and old Skipworth, the bos'n—he'd sailed with Hull in the *Constitution*—all milled fearfully inside the grim ring of pirate guards as Gomez regarded them thoughtfully, selecting his next victim.

"Captain," they appealed to Cahoon, "Captain, can't ye do suthin' with 'im? Captain—"

But Cahoon shook his head. "Take it like Americans, men," he said. "It's not the way I'd choose to go, but—" Gomez put a dirty, beringed hand on his arm, and he shook it off impatiently, switching into Spanish. "I am the master of this ship," he said. "I will go last."

"Ah, you are one who prefers to savor his end," the pirate remarked politely, and selected Jed Perkins, who walked straight to the side, calling over his shoulder: "That's right, sir. You've showed us how."

After that some of the men cried and struggled ineffectually, but most of them became dazed and simply hung back until Gomez gave them the final push. The worst of it, for Cahoon, was the floundering in the water, the gasping calls for aid. There were sharks around; the pirates amused themselves by betting which one would reach its victim first. Cahoon wished he couldn't hear it. He would have liked to be able to stop his ears and shut his eyes. Instead he continued to stand quietly, his trim slender body very erect, at the mainmast's foot, trying to steady the weaker ones by word and glance: "Take it easy, Saul." . . . "It comes to us some day, anyhow, 'Bijah." . . . . "Easy does it, William." . . . "That's right, my lad, that's right."

He was conscious of a sensation almost of physical exhaustion when the last of his men had gone, and there were only the strangling pleas from the water, pleas that grew fainter and fainter. Eighteen men, and two boys! Cahoon stared down from the loftier altitude of the *Cotuit Lass* at the slatternly decks of the pirate schooner. *Picaro* was painted upon her bows in sprawling red letters. Very apt name, that! Four ugly carronades were mounted in her waist, a twelve-pounder Long Tom for'ard. It was this weight of metal and her swarming crew manning the sweeps which had enabled her to carry the *Lass,* in the prevailing half-calm. How long ago had it happened? Must have been hours. The sun was beginning to set behind the green coast of Cuba; eastward the darkness was crawling slowly up the blue vault of the sky.

GOMEZ took his arm. "Your turn, Señor Capitano." The pirate's manner was mockingly deferential. "If I can be of any slight assistance—"

Cahoon's slate-gray eyes bored into the Cuban's. "Don't touch me," he said.

Gomez tightened his grasp ferociously; then as the gray eyes grew icier, he snatched his hand away. "Do it yourself, Yankee," he growled. "The sharks are still hungry."

Cahoon's one thought at the moment was to be done with the nasty business as speedily as possible. He walked straight to the side, climbed the low bulwarks deftly, despite the hands bound behind him, and poised himself for a last look at his ship. He'd had her five years now—his first command. He owned

a tenth interest in her; he'd hoped some day to own her outright. . . . For'ard, a group of the *Picaro's* scoundrels were heaving a barrel of tar and bunches of oakum from the stores down an open hatch. He realized what that meant, and a volcanic burst of resentment tore him free from the resignation which had ruled his mood. Those men and boys—and now the ship! It was too much. By the Eternal, he wouldn't give in!

"You do not seem in such a hurry, after all, Yankee," sneered Gomez.

Cahoon braced himself for the plunge. A lightning glance showed him the pirate schooner swinging from her grapnels hooked in the fo'c's'le bulwarks for'ard of where he stood on the port, or landward, side; and in that instant a plan—preposterous, all but impossible—came to him. He drew a deep breath and dived, head-first, heels close together, the pirates' mocking comments in his ears.

THE water, blue-green in the fading light, closed over his head. Down, down—then he jack-knifed vigorously and struck out with his legs to swim beneath the keel to the seaward beam of the *Cotuit Lass.* A bare chance they wouldn't be looking for him to come up on that side, and if he had time— His head bumped something irresistibly hard. If he was on the wrong side of the keel, his goose was cooked. He kicked his legs desperately, felt barnacles tearing at his left shoulder, and shot to the surface with a splash which sounded to him as loud as a twenty-four-pounder. Fearfully he glanced upward, expecting to see saturnine faces leering down at him. But the starboard bulwarks were deserted. He could hear feet trampling the deck, Gomez' harsh voice shouting commands. A whiff of burning tar stung his nostrils, sucking air for his tortured lungs. Obviously, they were in a hurry; probably they wanted to make their harbor before nightfall. Cahoon knew that these Cuban picaroons seldom kept the sea after they had made a capture; despite the bribes they paid the *Garda Costas,* they were uneasy of reprisals, especially since the United States had stationed a squadron of small, fast cruisers in Caribbean waters.

So far so good, then. Cahoon swam cautiously aft until he came to the overhang of the stern, where he took shelter behind the protrusion of the rudder-post. Little protection, to be sure, but better than nothing. And at least the approaching twilight was in his favor. Here he trod water, and rested momentarily before commencing to work on the knot in the rope which bound his wrists behind him. He dared not indulge himself for long, however, for the effort of keeping afloat by leg-motion alone was very tiring, and the longer the knot was immersed the more difficult it would become to negotiate. He worked his wrists tentatively and gathered his muscles for a convulsive test of strength. Its one result was to lose him his small margin of buoyancy; he came back to the surface sputtering and half-drowned.

This would never do—only the confusion on the deck above had saved him from being heard. He let himself sink until his nostrils were just out of water, and trod gently, conserving energy for another try. In his spasmodic fight to regain the surface he had turned himself completely around, so that his back was to the rudder-post, and while he concentrated his wits upon his problem he was startled to feel the square head of a copper bolt in one of the rudder-bands chafing the skin of his forearms. Instinctively he commenced to work this into the folds of the knot, working cautiously and deliberately, refusing to let panic master him. Nothing was to be gained by haste; it was chancy, at best. A long, cigar-shaped shadow slipped through the water beside him, and he kicked out at it, his heart in his throat. The shark veered off—but he lost the bolt, and finding it again was difficult.

He realized that he was wearying, and compelled himself to relax. Then he fumbled once more at the bolt, testing it first one way, then another. Overhead,

the deck of the *Cotuit Lass* was quiet, but he heard faintly the creaking of the schooner's booms as she released her grapnels and fell off before the light evening breeze which was stealing out of the south. The smoke had become heavier, and there was the crackling of flames. Not much time left, if he wasn't to be smothered before he was drowned. God, he was tired! It would be easy just to let go and sink. The water was soothingly warm. If a shark got him, why, that too would be over soon. But he remembered those eighteen men and two boys—and his ship, burning beside him. He gritted his teeth behind fast-clamped lips, inhaled easily through his nostrils, and tested the knot against the square edges of the bolt, prying craftily at the swollen fabric. Another shadow flitted past him. He ignored it. His wrists had gained a little play in their bonds. Was it possible? He felt the copper edges pierce through the knot to his skin and draw blood; then the knot fell apart. A thrust of his arms, and he was free!

A third shadow flitted past, shying away as he slapped the water with his hand. No time to lose. He forced his rebellious muscles to compliance with his will, and swam painfully along the starboard side, peering up for what he sought. But he had reached the middle of the waist before he found it—a rope's-end dangling within reach. There were shadows all around him now, and he snatched at the rope eagerly, swarming up hand-over-hand as a pair of monstrous jaws clicked under his heels. The smoke, thick and oily and black, made him choke as badly as the sea-water that had doused him, but the blanket it spread concealed him from those on the *Picaro,* standing in for the shore perhaps half a mile distant.

ON deck he fell, gagging for breath; but as soon as he could crawl he made his way aft to the wheel. Designedly clumsy, letting her fall off and on, with a noisy slatting of canvas and banging of yards, he gradually brought the *Lass* before the freshening wind and headed her inshore on a track nearly parallel with the schooner's. The wind blowing over the stern drove the smoke before her, and Cahoon, crouching low beneath the bulwarks, caught up a length of rope and made the wheel fast.

He could breathe now, but the deck planks for'ard were smoldering; soon the mahogany logs in the hold would

catch, burning with the fierce, slow heat of coal. He was glad the coffee was in the after hold; he had smelled before the acrid fumes of burning coffee-beans. As it was, the heat which poured from the fore hatch was like a brazen wall, and little tongues of flame were running up the sails on the fore and mizzen yards. His face, black and shiny as a negro's with smut and sweat and sea-water, felt dry and riven. His tongue was swollen in his mouth; his throat was parched.

He got down wearily on his knees, crawled to the cabin hatch and descended the shallow stairs. Everything here was in confusion—clothes, bedding, scientific instruments and table furniture strewn over the floor, stateroom doors banging on their hinges. The pirates had unearthed comparatively little worth the taking, and Cahoon was able, after a short search, to satisfy his few wants. In a cupboard in the for'ard companionway he found a bottle of Jamaica rum, half of which he quaffed at a draught. A water-jar in Danny's cuddy supplied a chaser. In a corner of the main cabin were remnants of the midday meal, a chunk of salt-beef and a handful of hard-tack. Cahoon consumed these with the relish of a hungry man who has sapped the ultimate resources of his vitality. Finally, from a rack under the stairs, he obtained an ax kept there for use in case of fire—he grinned sourly at the thought.

He had all he wanted. Draining the last of the rum, he took another pull at the water-jar and climbed up to the deck. The fire was spreading rapidly, but the wind was pushing the smoke over the port bow, and in the gathering twilight he made out the low hull of the schooner slipping into the mouth of a lagoon which indented the densely forested shoreline, already close at hand. The heat had be-

come insupportable, and after getting his bearings he retired into the hatchway and closed the doors behind him. The cabin was the one livable spot left aboard the flaming *Lass*. He wondered how much longer it would remain so. If the worst came to the worst, he'd have to risk deep water and the sharks. But there wasn't any use worrying about it—not after what he'd been through. So he sat by an open porthole on the windward side and tried to gauge the spread of the fire by the sounds which came to him from the deck and the cabin's rising temperature. The opportunity to rest was welcome; he needed to husband his strength, and the smoke and heat were making him drowsy. . . . He was caught unawares when the *Lass* struck. A shiver racked her. Her bow pitched up, settled forward; there was a crash as the foremast pitched overside, and a terrific roar of flames.

Cahoon raced up the stairs, pushed open the hatch and emerged on a deck which was a furnace of blazing wreckage. He jumped for the starboard bulwark, and dived overboard, ax in hand, heedless of what awaited him. . . .

Coming up, he turned on his back and floated motionless to see what had happened to his ship. She straddled the bar, her back broken, afire from stem to stern. The upper sails were shredding from the mizzen. The mainmast, charred at the base and weakened by the shock, sagged for'ard as he watched and sprayed the air with sparks. Cahoon ducked under, and when he regained the surface turned his face toward the shore, a jade-green barrier of foliage beyond the white rim of the narrow beach, not too distinct in the gathering dusk. Behind him the *Cotuit Lass* was a torch, leaping skyward, higher and higher, lighting a path for him. He thought, with a twinge at his heart, that the old girl was serving him to the end.

BLINDLY he staggered from the surf, and sank exhausted on the sand. The ax had weighed him down. But the man's iron will, the intensity of his purpose, overruled the protests of his aching muscles. Presently he was on his feet, propping himself on the ax-haft. He shook himself like a dog, brushed the water out of his eyes and sought to identify his surroundings as well as he could in the darkness. The jungle, a few feet away, was an impenetrable wall—no paths, no signs of habitations. The beach was a silvery strip between the green of the jungle and the creamy froth of the surf; it stretched to right and left in unbroken curves—rightward to the gash in the shoreline which had received the pirate schooner.

Cahoon's back straightened; he started off at a steady pace through the sand. It was typical of him that he did not look back at the flaming pyre of his ship.

He kept as close to the wall of the jungle as possible, taking advantage of the lengthening shadow of the foliage to blanket his figure; frequently he paused to reconnoiter the beach ahead.

HE must have been walking an hour and a half when the jungle thinned at his left hand, and lights twinkled beyond the trees. He bore off to the left, more cautiously than ever, and emerged in a few minutes upon the bank of the lagoon which sheltered the *Picaro,* herself a dim hulk in midstream. The pirates were evidently ashore in the huts and barracoons which straggled along this nearer bank. As Cahoon approached he could hear the clamor of bibulous voices, laughter, and once in a while a woman's scream. He stopped under the eaves of the nearest barracoon, wrinkling his nose tentatively. Too bad. The rascals had no negroes on hand. He would have liked to free a couple of hundred raging blacks on this crew—blacks whose bodies smarted from slave-whips! But something else would do— His grip on the ax stiffened as a figure lurched into view around the corner of the building.

Cahoon didn't even give the man a chance to challenge him. The ax whirled up, and the pirate dropped to the sand, his skull cleft. Cahoon emitted a faint sigh of contentment, and stole on along the leafy way which answered for a street. Voices were all around him now, voices singing, voices amorous, voices angry—plenty of women's voices; the smell of cooking-fires, too, arousing his half-appeased hunger. Two men came out of a house together, arguing, plainly comfortably in liquor. Cahoon stalked them like a wraith. The first man had no opportunity to make a sound; the second died with a gasp of surprise. Cahoon drew their bodies into a thicket, and prowled on. His blood was up. Not a bad plan he had framed in the desperation of his plight only a few hours ago! The swine had so intimidated the coastal folk that with the bought connivance of the *Garda Costas*—a share of slaves out of

Suddenly the door of the hut flew open and two figures reeled out. One was Gomez; the second was a tall woman with chestnut hair tumbling over her shoulders. Gomez struggled with the woman, laughing excitedly and showering her with love-names in Spanish, heedless of her clawing fingers.

each batch, a fistful of coins now and then—they felt no necessity to keep a watch. It was an eventuality Cahoon had hoped for, but scarcely anticipated.

A GROUP of pirates at that instant poured out of what he suspected was a storehouse, and he dodged behind a hut to elude them. Through a chink in the rear door he spied a man sitting alone. He opened the door, and entered, a presence so fearsome in the malignity of his expression that the Cuban stared at him, pop-eyed in terror, while the ax swung down upon its deadly errand.

Cahoon snatched at a bottle of wine the man had been drinking, and carried it out into the night with him. He drained the bottle, and dropped it, patting the ax appreciatively. He had made good progress, but not enough—no, not nearly enough! The warmth of the wine, the exhilaration of his accomplishments, combined to arouse in him a lust for greater achievement. Eighteen men and two boys had gone over the side of the *Cotuit Lass*—and there was the ship, besides. He resumed his stealthy progress. . . .

Here, near the head of the lagoon, the pirate village was more closely grouped, and for the first time women appeared, passing to and fro, slim young creatures in the starshine, tawny, brown, copper, black, their nakedness draped in a short skirt, at most. Some of them laughed and chatted together, but several walked slowly, with heads bowed. . . . Cahoon checked thoughtfully, lurking in the shelter of a dark barracoon. This was other than he had bargained for. He turned toward the lagoon, where a rickety pier showed indistinctly, and a huddle of small boats. The place was deserted. Not a soul visible, a screen of ragged jungle intervening between the village and the landing. His glance focused on the schooner, riding at anchor a short distance from shore. No lights on her, he noted again, therefore no watch. The lazy fools! It was too good an opening to miss. He crept carefully to the pier, and unloosed a dugout which would be least conspicuous on the starry surface of the water.

A few strokes of the paddle, and he had reached the schooner's side, and vaulted the rail, painter in hand. For minutes he crouched, holding the rope, his eyes flitting in every direction. Nobody aboard. Making fast the dugout to the mainstays, he felt his way aft to the cabin. The odor that met him as he opened the hatch drew a snort of disgust, but he set his feet to the ladder and descended, a step at a time. No portholes reflected the starlight, so he drew flint-and-steel from a pocket and struck sparks. Over a dirty table hung a battle-lantern, which he detached and placed on the floor, crouching over it until the wick had caught.

Now he moved swiftly. A trapdoor must give entrance to the lazaret. He yanked it up, and lowered himself, the lantern in his fist, into the stinking darkness. Yes, there were the powder-barrels, two tiers of them on either hand—slow-match also. He hoisted a keg up to the cabin floor, tucked a generous length of match in his shirtfront and swung up out of the lazaret. The barrel he placed on the edge of the open trapdoor. Next, with a clasp-knife, he cautiously forced the heading and introduced one end of the match. The other end he applied to the wick of the lantern. The match fizzed and sputtered, glowed scarlet. Cahoon doused the light, and hastened up the hatch stairs, a grim smile crinkling his leathery features.

In a trice he was overside, paddling for the shore. To hell with the pier! He drove the dugout up on the beach, and sifted into the shrubbery, ax in one hand, knife in the other.

THE pirates had all disappeared indoors, which was the reason, perhaps, why none of his victims seemed yet to have been discovered. So he wove amongst the huts with a boldness he had not previously ventured, peering in at windows and crannies, bending an ear to catch the hateful tones of a remembered voice. But he had worked his way to the farther end of the village before he heard it. Here, where the land commenced to climb sharply to a low hillock, stood a hut twice the size of its fellows. It was a glitter of light at every crack, and a chorus of mocking voices within made the night hideous. Cahoon ducked behind a palm-tree as the door flew open and two figures reeled out.

One was Gomez; the second was a tall woman, with chestnut hair tumbling over her shoulders. She wore a tawdry frock of cloth-of-gold, one shoulder of which had been torn away, revealing the ivory whiteness of her breast and side. Gomez struggled with her in the doorway, laughing excitedly, and showering her with love-names in Spanish, heedless of her clawing fingers.

Cahoon started forward, but drew back when she broke free and sped off into the shadows. "Never mind, my sweetheart," the pirate called jeeringly. "I'll tame you again, as I have before." He chuckled drunkenly as another woman, a tigerish octoroon, came to his side and wound an arm around his neck. "Damn my soul, Pepita," he said, "that's why I like her! The rest of you won't fight." The octoroon answered him scowlingly, and he shoved her back inside, wabbling uncertainly on his feet as if half-disposed to follow the fleeing woman. Cahoon waited, hoping he would; but two men came out and plucked at his arm, urging him in fawning voices to remain. He muttered a curse, and flung in after them.

CAHOON, hesitating over what to do, decided to follow the woman of the chestnut hair. She looked like a fighter, that one. It might be he could use her—if she hated enough. He followed in the direction she had taken, and his eyes, accustomed to the darkness, soon descried her gaudily clad figure walking slowly up a path which seemed to ascend the overhanging hill. Noiseless as a cat, he was at her heels before she heard his footsteps. She was rigid, in the grasp of an acute hysteria, her head sunk on her chest, her hands clenched at her sides. And to his utter amazement, she was murmuring over and over to herself, in English: "Oh, God! Oh, dear Christ! Oh, God! I can't, I can't. Not any more, God."

"Ma'am," said Cahoon, speaking low, "if you don't mind—"

She whirled, her body tensed.

"I tell you I'll drown myself," she screamed. "I'll—" And then, staring at him in the starlight, some quality in his manner, possibly the accent of his voice, diverted her. "Who—who are you?" she asked.

"It was my ship these devils burned this afternoon," replied Cahoon. "And drowned my men, damn 'em—if you'll kindly pardon me, ma'am."

She laughed wildly.

"Sir, ordinary damnation will not be sufficient for these beasts. You—you are moderate."

"Not so's you could notice it," rejoined Cahoon. "I've killed four of 'em in the last hour, and—"

An enormous fiery flower reared itself above the lagoon; a mighty roar detonated in the night.

The woman clapped hands to her ears.

"What was that?" she cried, in the midst of the echoes and the whistling descent of wreckage.

"The schooner. Blew her up," Cahoon explained crisply.

A howl went up from the village below, footsteps padded in the sand, torches and lanterns flickered.

The woman bent forward to stare into Cahoon's face.

"That was brave," she said, after an interval of silence. "But are you satisfied?"

"When I remember my hands—eighteen men and two boys—drowned like blind kittens?" He laughed harshly. "Ma'am, I aint finished with them!"

Her fingers, long, tapering, delicate, pawed at his shirt-sleeve.

"I can show you something," she said eagerly. "Would you care to come with me—up the path? That's where it is."

Cahoon regarded her reflectively. After all, he knew nothing of her.

"English, aren't you, ma'am?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes—once."

"My name's Cahoon," he said, as abruptly as before. "Come from Falmouth, Massachusetts."

"I am— Call me Joan," she answered. "My other name is forgotten. I am really a dead woman, Captain Cahoon; I died months ago."

He sensed in her tone a measure of suffering incomparably bitter.

"Maybe we can fix that," he muttered. "First thing is to wipe out these scoundrels—if so be we can."

"We can," she promised. "Come. And don't worry about me. This is the best night I've known—since I died."

HER fingers encircled his wrist, and she led him up the easy grade of the path at a run, leaving the bedlam of the village, where men continued to bawl antagonistically and women screeched and wailed. In a moment they had reached the hillock's summit—it was an elevation only because the land to seaward was so low—and several rough structures loomed vaguely before them.

"See?" she exclaimed. "The lookout—a man sits in it with a spyglass by day. And there—the powder-house! It is full, Captain; the kegs tier to the roof. Can't we roll them down into the village, and touch them off?"

Cahoon scratched his chin, pondering.

"Humph," he grunted. "Maybe we'll go to glory with Gomez."

"I ask nothing better. But we can do it?"

"I don't know why not," he returned. "We'd better hurry. Some of these *picaros* might take a notion to climb up here."

She followed him anxiously to the powder-house. It was a tumbledown shanty, scarcely weatherproof. The door he easily kicked in with his foot.

"Tell you what," he said. "I'll have to carry a keg to the foot of the path and set her going. It's a risk, but we can't help that. And as soon as you see the sparks shooting up from the train I lay, you start rolling kegs down after me. I'll climb back a mite over there to the right, where the growth isn't so thick. Just keep a-rolling kegs until I get back, ma'am."

"You give me the easy part," she objected. "Can't I—"

"I don't guess you know how to handle powder," he pointed out, heaving a keg onto his shoulder. "Ticklish stuff. Do you mind keeping this ax for me?"

"No—oh, no. Whatever you suggest, Captain."

He left her at the top of the path, standing straight and tall in the starlight, an uncanny specter in that torn and tarnished gaudy dress—which had come from Paris, very likely, to bedeck some señorita for a *fiesta* in the Governor-general's palace in Havana—that dress which was all the more repulsive for its failure to conceal her pitiful nakedness.

Jogging at a trot, it took him no time at all to reach the spot where the path debouched upon the clearing in front of Gomez' hut, which was silent and empty. The mounting uproar on the shore of the lagoon indicated that the pirate chief was immediately concerned with the destruction of his schooner. Cahoon chuckled dryly, and set the keg on the ground several yards short of the clearing and in the direct line of his descent. With his knife he pried off the head, and proceeded to scatter a lengthy train of powder up the path. At a safe distance he struck flint-and-steel to it—and ran for all he was worth. Almost at once he heard the slithering of loose earth beneath a heavy object, and knew that the woman above hadn't failed him. He leaped from the path, plunging into the open scrub which rimmed it, reckless of the branches ripping at his garments. He was halfway to the summit when the explosion knocked him off his feet. Another—then a third. An earthy rain pattered around him as he rose, and the detonations became one blurred, continuous cataclysm of sound, dominating the night, abolishing its darkness with the crimson glare of flames which licked out ferociously at the brittle jungle growth.

When he regained the hillock's summit the woman was standing where he had left her, staring down at the ruin they had wrought, with a rapt, contemplative interest. Grime and powder-dust had marred the whiteness of her breast and face; her beautiful hair was matted and disheveled. But there was a majesty, a strength, in her bearing which impressed Cahoon more than her loveliness.

She pointed at the arc of fire sweeping seaward around both banks of the lagoon.

"If there isn't any other hell, we've made one here," she said. "I'm sorry for the women—some of them. But they'll all be better, really dead. Death

in life is worse than true death. That's why one isn't afraid."

"Not many can say as much," Cahoon answered respectfully. "But we haven't finished yet, ma'am. If you're tired—"

For the first and only time she laughed naturally.

"Tired? I'll never know tiredness again."

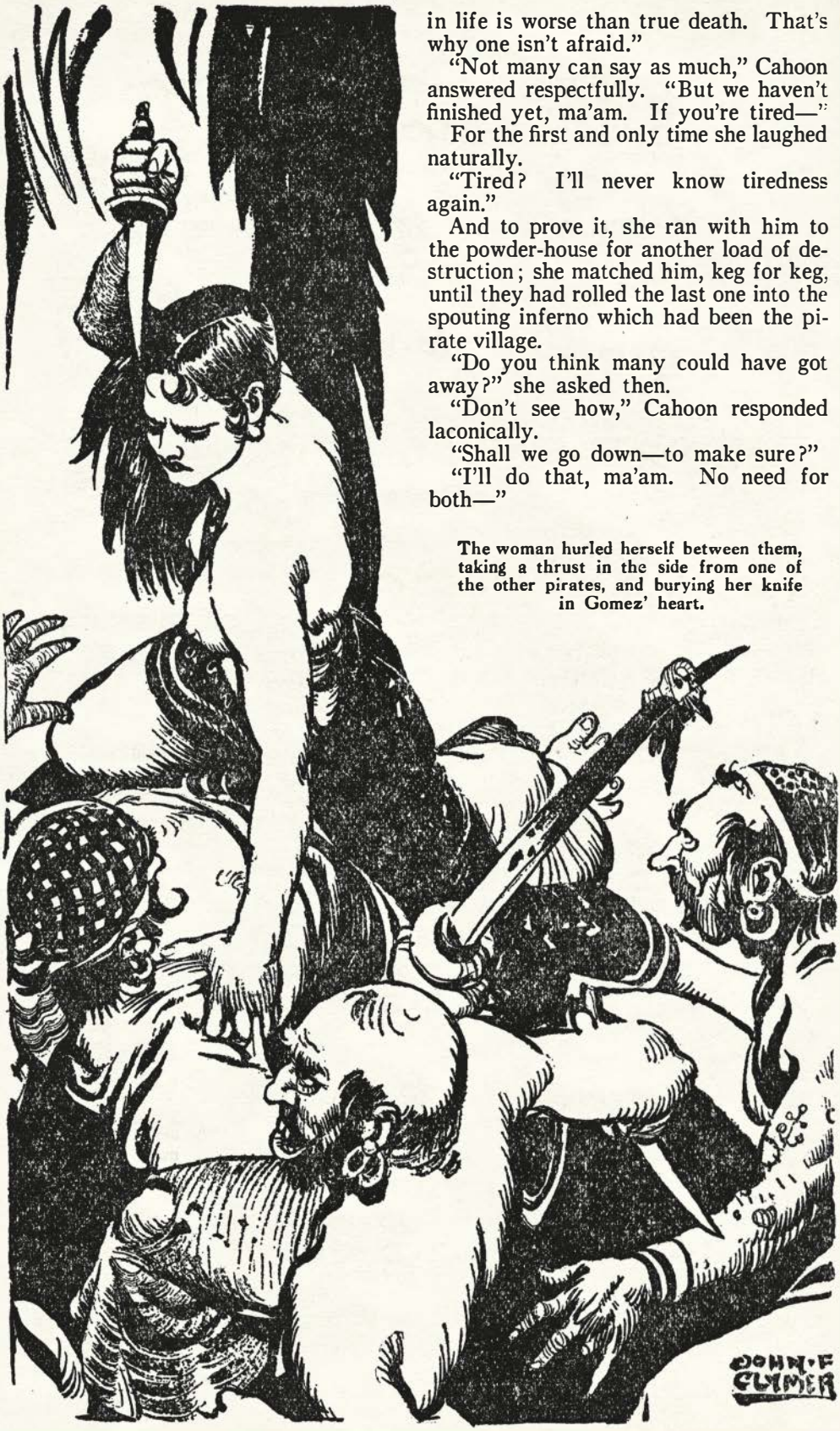
And to prove it, she ran with him to the powder-house for another load of destruction; she matched him, keg for keg, until they had rolled the last one into the spouting inferno which had been the pirate village.

"Do you think many could have got away?" she asked then.

"Don't see how," Cahoon responded laconically.

"Shall we go down—to make sure?"

"I'll do that, ma'am. No need for both—"



The woman hurled herself between them, taking a thrust in the side from one of the other pirates, and burying her knife in Gomez' heart.

"Please," she said. "But may I have your knife?" And reading his sudden uneasiness, added quickly: "Oh, not that. . . . There may be a few still alive. The lagoon, you know. The sharks don't come in, except on very high tides."

"We'll have to go slow," warned Cahoon, offering her his blade. "That fire's pretty hot, ma'am."

"Yes," she agreed. And then, with knitted brows: "But I can't believe it was hot enough for Gomez. I won't believe he's dead unless I see his body with the breath out of it—he had no more soul than a snake. We *must* make sure, Captain Cahoon."

"Humph," growled Cahoon. "Just as you say, ma'am. I'd rather it was a clean sweep, myself. But you'd best leave it to me. A lady like you—"

"Oh, please," she appealed. "You don't understand. I *want* him to be alive. Otherwise, I can't be sure."

CAHOON nodded, almost abashed. He was a good hater, but he knew his match when he met it. . . .

The ground at the foot of the hillock was covered with embers which charred the thin soles of her slippers, but she made nothing of it, running swiftly through the shifting smoke-clouds. They came out on the shore at the head of the lagoon, to see four figures wading toward them. The first was Gomez, easily identifiable by his one eye, in the half-light of the receding flames. He did not recognize Cahoon's smutted visage, but he knew the woman's gleaming dress and shouted hoarsely:

"Was it you we must thank for this, slut? A good meeting!" And to his followers: "The knife for both—whoever he is, he is with her."

Cahoon turned to the woman as the pirates floundered clumsily across the knee-deep flat.

"We can still get away," he urged. "In this smoke—"

She shook her head.

"They will be tired," she said calmly. "We'll kill them here."

"Well, you leave them to me, ma'am," he said. "I can manage with this ax."

"Four?" she chided. "You are a very brave man, Captain Cahoon, but that is too heavy odds. Don't argue any more; we'll meet them at the water's edge, before they have time to rest."

Cahoon had no recourse but to follow her, and to save himself he couldn't better her nervous stride.

Gomez stamped out of the water with a howl of satisfaction, his three cutthroats at his heels; and Cahoon, on the spur of the moment, seized the woman by the shoulder and spun her behind him. "Stay there!" he barked. He parried a thrust with his ax-haft, and sliced a man's arm—stooped to dodge a thrust from a third, and looking up, saw Gomez striking at him.

The blade of the pirate chief pricked his upraised arm as the woman hurled herself between them, taking a thrust in the side from one of the other pirates, and burying her knife in Gomez' heart. Cahoon, white with rage, regained his feet and dealt the man who had stabbed her, a backhand blow which cracked his skull, received a thrust on a rib from the one unwounded pirate left—and as the fellow turned to flee, cut him down from collarbone to midriff.

The wounded man squealed for mercy: "Ah, señor, señor, for the love of God's Mother!" But Cahoon brained him expertly, tossed away the ax and knelt by the woman's side.

She smiled up at him, her eyes dim, her face free of that harrowing look.

"You see," she said, "you did need me, Captain! Don't mind. It's better so." And after a pause, her breath fluttering: "Put me, please, in the sea. . . . It's clean."

THE U.S.S. *Somers,* brig-o'-war, blowing close-hauled through Mona Passage, sighted a small dugout, tossing in the trough of the waves. A white man lay in her, his lips cracked, eyes feverishly bright, an undressed wound in his side crusted with blood.

"I buried her," he said after they had hoisted him aboard, "just like she said. At sea. Found a tarpaulin and an anchor. . . . Who? Joan, she said her name was—English. Fine woman, gentlemen! We wiped out Gomez and his crew. You know Gomez—the One-eyed? Well, we wiped him out—wiped out the lot of 'em. . . . She's satisfied, and so am I. . . . Who am I? Name of Ezra Cahoon, master of the ship *Cotuit Lass,* out of Falmouth, Massachusetts—only there isn't any more *Cotuit Lass.* And I'm the last man left of her—last of nineteen men and two boys. If you'd been here yesterday, now, we'd all be alive—but I guess Joan wouldn't be so happy."

"Drink this, Captain," the ship's surgeon said kindly. "There are some things it's best to forget."

The Sportsman's Scrapbook

The World's Longest Prize Fight

By EWING WALKER

"LA-DEES AN' GEN-TLE-MUN: In dis coin-ah Andy Bowen of Nawleens, a hunderd an' t'irty pounds. In de udder coin-ah Jack Burke of Gal-ves-ton, a hunderd an' t'irty pounds. Dis fight—will be—to a fin-ish—for de lightweight—champeenship—of de South. I thank you."

Time, about nine o'clock on the night of April 6, 1893; place, the old Olympic Club of New Orleans—the club where, the year before, Corbett had defeated the immortal John L. Sullivan.

The Olympic Club seated about ten thousand. On that night forty years ago, there were few vacant seats, for each man had a large following, both were reported in fine condition, and the admission charge was modest. "Professor" John Duffy was the referee. Five-ounce gloves were used. It was destined to be the longest fight in the history of the ring. We tabulate a few other long ones:

James Kelly and Jonathan Smith; Melbourne, Australia; November 1855. Bare knuckles. 6 hrs. 15 min.

Mike Madden and Bill Hayes; Edinburgh, Scotland; July 17, 1849. Bare knuckles; 6 hrs. 3 min.

J. Fitzpatrick and James O'Neil; Berwick, Me.; Dec. 4, 1860. 4 hrs. 20 min. This the longest bare-knuckle battle in America.

Dan Needham and Patsy Kerrigan; San Francisco; Feb. 27, 1890. 6 hrs. 39 min. This, up to the time Bowen and Burke met, was the longest glove fight in the United States, lasting 110 rounds.

It wasn't so much of a fight. Experts at the ringside said that of the 110 rounds there was actual fighting in fourteen only. The only blood drawn in the entire fight of 110 rounds was in the second round when Burke landed on Bowen's eye, drawing a few drops.

On the rounds dragged. There were few knockdowns; these were scored by the more rugged Bowen. Bowen himself went down three times, but not from his opponent's blows. Once when wrestling, he fell, and twice he swung a couple of haymakers, missed and hit the canvas.

Still the rounds snailed by. The spectators hissed and laughed—and snored. In the fifty-first round, said Mr. Bowen to Mr. Burke: "Why don't you fight?"

Said Mr. Burke to Mr. Bowen: "I can't. Both my hands are broken."

Said Professor Duffy to Mr. Burke and Mr. Bowen: "Fight, or I'll throw ye both out."

After 108 rounds, Duffy announced to the crowd he would allow two more rounds. He told the principals the same. Burke said he was doing the best he could, that both his wrists were broken.

Just before the gong for Round 110, Duffy announced it would be the last; but he made a mental reservation: If the contest speeded up, he would have the men keep on. His plan was wasted, for during the round *not a blow was struck.* The fight was over.

Then came the question of a decision. Duffy was in a quandary. If he said "Draw," he was afraid that, under the rules, the club would have to return the gate-money, for the fight that was supposed to have gone to a finish hadn't gone to a finish. The Professor didn't say, "Draw." He thought for a few sleepy moments and announced: "No contest."

Mr. Bowen and eke Mr. Burke winced. Seven hours and twenty minutes of fighting and—*not a dime for it!*

AFTER the fight, Burke lay stripped in his dressing-room, proud of the fact he hadn't been knocked out. But he somewhat resembled one over whom a train recently has rolled. They put him to bed, and in bed he stayed several days.

Bowen protested vigorously against the decision, adding: "I'm feeling as well as when I first went into the ring." That afternoon he was in the streets, looking none the worse.

Later, club officials relented, and the purse was divided between the two men.

The next year—1894—Bowen fought "Kid" Lavigne, lost, and died the following day from the effects of the punishment he had taken.

Smuggler's Cove

A light-hearted novel

The Story Thus Far:

IT had been a wild, wild day for Frederick Alonzo Binns; for though F. Alonzo was a large and amiable young man, he had a fatal flair for getting into jams.

Jam No. 1 for the day began when he halted his car across the field from a vast crowd gathered at the airport of his native California city to welcome the latest hero aviator. To avoid slaughtering his admirers, the aviator had landed on the nearly vacant space near Mr. Binns. That blithe young man had taken upon himself the duty of welcoming the hero and had driven him to town in the Binns car. As a result the welcoming committee was left with no one to welcome—and the chairman of that committee was none other than Clarendon Webster, father of F. Alonzo's lovely fiancée Mary Webster, and a power in local business and politics. A painful scene followed later, in which Mr. Webster expressed to Mr. Binns his outraged feelings—and in which the lovely Mary all but returned Frederick's ring and hinted at a return to his rival Morley Buck.

Worse came at supper-time, when Alonzo's servant He Gow delivered to him a letter from one Wally Pidge, to whom Alonzo, in more affluent days, had loaned some money secured by an old house on the coast near the town of Seashore. Mr. Pidge stated, in effect, that he had given up hope of repaying Mr. Binns, and was therefore turning over the house to him instead. The deed would follow in a day or two. Herewith enclosed, however, was a plan of the house, a huge place which had been built many years before by a half-crazy Frenchman named Du Port, and which contained not only a secret staircase, but secret tunnels to the barn and to a neighboring cove of the sea. A caretaker named Harley Gann was in residence.

Impulsively F. Alonzo piled He Gow and his diabolic pet cat into the car and drove to Seashore to claim his house. He arrived about midnight—and was met by a burst of pistol fire!

Something queer about all this, decided F. Alonzo as he went hastily away from there. He decided to lie low, at least until the deed to the house arrived, and find out what sort of people were shooting at visitors from his house.

He put up in town therefore; and to account for his presence took a job as delivery-boy for the local grocer, Delfus Jones. In this guise he met the caretaker Harley Gann, but failed to get beyond the kitchen of his strange house. So that night he broke into the barn, found the entrance to the secret passage as located on the map, and with the aid of a jimmy and an electric torch explored the amazing old place. He found plenty of boxes and barrels and dust and barked shins in the basement, and some fine old rooms above-stairs; he found a picnic party of young people in the cove at the end of the seaward secret passage; but nothing to explain the strange warlike conduct of Harley Gann.

Next night a diversion occurred; Seashore celebrated the New Deal and the reopening of the cannery and the sawmill, with a Venetian pageant on the lagoon. F. Alonzo attended, along with He Gow, his cat and his delivery-boy friend, young Chesterfield Wurzel; more he took a

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By TALBERT JOSSELYN

Illustrated by Margery Stocking and Harry Lees

of joyous adventure

prominent part, which included ramming the gondola of his rival Morley Buck. Indeed the whole fool show ended in a gaudy riot, and all the fireworks went off at once.

Next day in his delivery truck Alonzo encountered Mary gazing ruefully at a flat tire. He was doing a nice job of changing it for her and of regaining her lost affections, when who should appear but Miss Lotus Givens, a charming but eccentric young woman who had taken a fancy to F. Alonzo.

"My delivery-boy!" she intoned with flute-like voice, and bounded forward.

"Arrouw!" cried F. A. Binns.

"You!" Miss Givens turned to Mary Webster. "Daughter of the rich, oppressor of the poor. Trying to lure my poor boy away from me!"

F. Alonzo got to his feet. "Hey, hey, hey, *hey!*" he cried. But the situation had got past all heying. Mary Webster was already half a dozen strides away toward the car of Morley Buck, which must needs show up at that evil moment. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THE afternoon was spent. A breeze was whispering through tall pines overhead; the hidden sea coughed and talked to itself; evening was wheeling up out of the east.

Enough light remained, however, for the reconnoitering Frederick Binns, peering out from behind a wild lilac screen, to get a good view of the stable and the kitchen corner of the tall old Du Port house. A light shone through the kitchen window; Caretaker Gann was evidently at supper.

The gray-clad, sneaker-shod owner of the Du Port place drew an easing breath and slipped around the stable-corner. Once more was Frederick Alonzo Binns the man of action. Through a day of a thousand years, he had been buoyed up by one thought—night and a searching of the secret stairway in the big chimney.

He edged along the north side of the stable. He retrieved the chunk of firewood from the underbrush, placed it under the shutter that he had the day before pried loose, and swiftly lifted himself.

The shutter gave to his touch.

He found the bran bin, pulled it aside, and lifted the trapdoor. He inclined an ear and listened long. No sound came up from the ink-black tunnel. He swung down a leg, found ladder rung, descended. Hands touching either side of the wall, he felt his way along the planked passage, eyebrows minutely going up and down, nose a little off at one side, and his scalp now taut. He came to the basement door. He put velvet fingers over the latch and moved it warily.

The latch gave; the door was inched open, and Frederick A. Binns was in his own basement. His own, that is, after a fashion.

Slowly he got his bearings. A horizontal crack of light, ceiling high, showed on his left. It came from beneath the kitchen door, at the head of the basement stairs, and testified that caretaker and cook Harley Gann was still about his supper duties. The big chimney, the goal of Explorer Binns, lay directly ahead and an unknown distance away. Toward it he set kitten-light feet.

It was while his head was turned that he collided with the first of the packing boxes. Sweat came out on him as though he were in a Turkish bath. He tried to

edge around the box. Another was in his way. He shuffled in the other direction, to be met by another.

"Judas!" said Frederick Binns.

Life, for the next half hour, became a thing on which nightmares are built. In inky darkness, in nerve-racking silence, he moved one obstruction after another.

When the Binns knuckles at last struck a brick wall, it was for a moment as unreal as firm land to a spent swimmer. But there is nothing unreal for long about a brick wall, especially when one has banged hard into it.

The map of the impossible Wally Pidge now sprang before his eyes; the map with the printed instructions:

"*Press third brick from left in tenth row above floor.*"

Frederick Alonzo hunched down, and with a chair-rocker digging him in the back, found the floor and the left-hand edge of the chimney. He counted ten up, three over. His hand touched the key brick, and a tingle went through him. Now for it!

Crouched on his knees, he pressed. He pressed again. He set himself, and shoved. The brick did not budge.

A panic surge went over him. What if Wally Pidge had pulled a whizzer on him —what if the whole thing was a fake? "I'll kill him if he's done that!" wheezed the toiler in the dark. "I'll give this thing just one more shove—"

Braced on his knees, he shoved. Swiftly, things happened. With a hollow, protesting "Ka-chung!" the brick gave way. F. Alonzo Binns was propelled forward. The next thing he knew he was lying sprawled on a hard floor with the smell of dead air heavy in his nostrils.

The secret door had opened. He was inside the chimney.

"Whooie!" exclaimed Frederick Alonzo softly. "Here we are."

HE whipped out the electric torch and snapped it on. Its ray hit upon brick and mortar closely penning him all around; brick flooring; plank ceiling. That was all.

Nothing; nothing in the chimney vault of the house of Frenchman Du Port. Empty. Brick and mortar and dust. In a corner, a tall stack of unused bricks. Nothing more.

No counterfeiters' tools, no moonshiners' stills, no weirdly embalmed bodies, no loot of thieves. Nothing.

He turned the torch upon the closed door and studied the lock. Powerful springwork ran to the door hinges from the inner face of the brick that he had pressed. This key brick was set, not solidly in mortar, but in what looked to be white felt. Pressed from the outside, it slid inward, tripped the springs and swung open the door, then itself fell back into place again.

THE torch now took in the narrow brick steps and the plank ceiling. What lay above? Gann and a gun?

Frederick Binns started up the steps.

There were six steps in the side wall, then six in the back wall, and by the time he had topped the last one, he was close under the plank ceiling. Bracing himself against the brick facing, he prodded at the planks with finger-tips. A section of planking gave slightly. He put his weight under it and lifted; the planking swung up.

"Jack and the Beanstalk," he said. "Wonder where the Giant is? Hitch my hatchet, and up I go."

He went, with the torch stabbing the unknown darkness before him. It discovered a narrow, high-walled room, more a box chute than a room, with wooden stairs ascending toward another ceiling at ladderlike steepness. Three of the walls were of paneled wood, the fourth was of brick. The chimney had narrowed: he was out of the brick vault, and the chimney had now become merely one side of the chute.

"First floor. Should be a door leading into a room, or more likely a clothes-closet." The torch probed about, hit upon hinges and a lock. "Thought so."

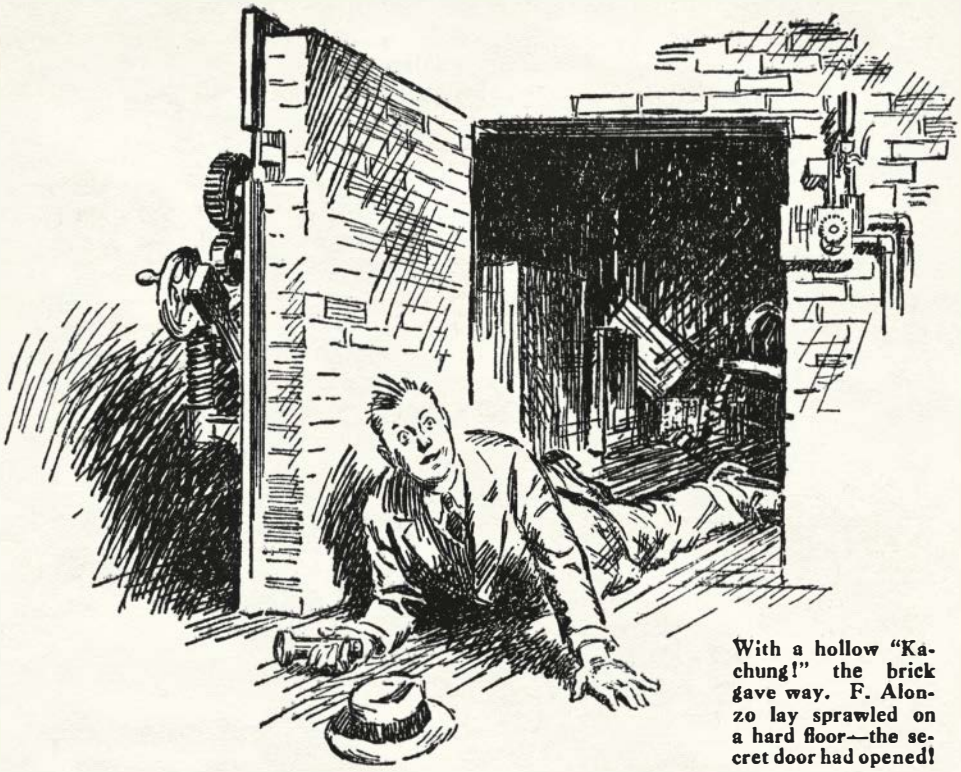
He pressed the lock, and with a snap and creak of hinges, the paneling opened.

The hat of Frederick Alonzo Binns rose from his head and settled back over an ear.

He squeezed through the opening. His plotting of the house plan had been correct; he was in a closet below the big stairs. Pleasure at his perception gave way as the probing electric torch revealed only emptiness. This was the room whose paneled door beneath the front-hall stairs he had found locked, and was about to jimmy open, when the rained-on picnickers had swarmed into the house. The torch showed the inner face of the paneled door now. He tiptoed to it; yanked at it—and it opened. It had merely been stuck.

"Washout!" he growled.

Enthusiasm began to ooze away, but there was another floor above. "Hitch



With a hollow "Ka-chung!" the brick gave way. F. Alonzo lay sprawled on a hard floor—the secret door had opened!

my hatchet and up I go again!" murmured F. Alonzo.

The secret door squeaked like loud mice as he stepped into the chute and inched it shut behind him. He mopped his forehead, and began to clamber up the ladder-like stairs. Once more he came to a ceiling; once more his fingers sought and prodded; once more a section of plank lifted to his thrust.

He heaved himself up through the opening.

Again the torch stabbed the closed-in, heavy-smelling dark. Another chute-like room, a ladder stairway, a plank ceiling.

"I'm glad I'm not climbing the Woolworth Building," muttered the explorer, then turned attention to discovering the exit and whither it led on this, the bedroom floor of the house. He found the door; he worked the stiff lock and the paneling yielded to let him into an empty clothes-closet. "Damn!" said Frederick Binns.

The dull gleam of an ordinary door-handle showed in the torch-beam on the closet's far side. Gingerly he tried it; the door gave, to open upon a huge bedroom, peopled with high bed and other ghostly furniture.

On sudden impulse the dweller in the chimney stepped out into the room and made swift round of scrutiny. Only ghostly furniture.

"One more floor." There was dry, tired finality in his tone as he slipped back into cupboard and secret chute.

Up the ladder-way he went. Within a moment he was on the attic floor level, out through another panel-work door and prowling through empty attic rooms. Not even furniture to greet him.

From basement to attic—nothing! A wild-goose chase. From start to finish, the whole thing had been a wild-goose chase. He closed the last of the secret doors behind him, and sitting down heavily, he gave himself over to a tired man's words of one syllable.

AND now, while Frederick Alonzo Binns, owner of Du Port house, sat disconsolate up in the attic of that dwelling, a different scene was taking place in the darkness of the driveway near the stable. A figure had come from nowhere in the night and whistled; Caretaker Harley Gann stepped to the door.

"It's the Cap," came a voice.

"Hello, Cap."

"Everything O.K.?"

"O.K."

The new arrival slipped closer. He dropped his voice still lower, and there was steel in the tone.

"That car that came into the driveway just after I pulled out, the one you gave me the three-shot signal for—what about it?"

"Went right out again like a scalded cat. Huh!" The Gann voice was filled with pride. "I didn't miss his cap by an inch. You can bet he didn't stay long."

"Who do you figure he was?"

"Some drunk getting the wrong place, or somebody just out riding and trying to be smart."

"Maybe. Any kick-backs to it?"

"Nope. Nobody's come in about it. Haven't heard a yip."

THERE was a moment's silence. Then the man known as Cap put his face close to Harley Gann's.

"Better not be any! Listen. It'll be tomorrow night. Midnight. May be the last load for a while; I've had a tip-off that the Feds up in the city are getting busy. But we'll be all mopped up and away." There was another period of silence, and then the Cap broke out again. "You sure there's been no follow-up from that shooting? Nothing at all? Think now." The speaker's voice was hard. "Use the bean!"

Caretaker Gann gave himself over to this complicated task. "Le'me light my pipe." Pipe-smoke rose; and as it rose, it seemed to start things going in the Gann memory.

"Why, now you speak of it, there has been a young fellow around here, but he's only the grocery-boy of Delfus Jones, over in Seashore. He come asking for grocery orders."

"When?"

"Why, le'me see. Just a grocery-boy, the morning after the shooting."

"What's he look like?" The man Cap grasped Harley Gann by a shoulder.

"Big fellow, kind of fat, with a round-like face, and a grocery-boy's cap and apron. He come in here—"

"Big, kind of fat, with a round-like face," the other repeated aloud. It was clear that he was driving his memory to put a finger on a description of this sort. "No, I don't know one of them like that. But they might have got in new ones, as I told you. Well, what did he do after he came in here?"

"Chinned awhile with me and drove away. Came back in the afternoon with some ketchup and tobacco I ordered."

"You *would* order something!"

"Well, I didn't want to hurt the fellow's feelings. He seemed kind of soft-minded, and I thought—"

"It's thinkers like you that fill cemeteries with themselves. Go on, go on."

"Now, look here, Cap, no need riding a man so hard," protested Caretaker Gann. "I do what I'm told, and—"

"All right, all right. Now get along with it."

"Well, he come back with the order, and—yes, by golly!" The wellsprings of Mr. Gann's memory opened. "He come right into the house, the kitchen, without knocking; or anyway, he just knocked and then come right ahead, and was looking around for a place to set things down when I showed up. He startled me so that I had my gun—"

The man Cap put both hands to his head and bobbed it to and fro.

"You would, you would!"

"Well, I told him that people had tried to burglarize the house and that I was touchy. He seemed to believe it."

"Yeah. Seemed to."

"Say!" Caretaker Harley Gann's voice rose. "If you don't like the way I'm taking care of things here, just say the word!"

The figure of Cap grew taut, menacing.

"Oh, I'll say it all right; any and all I have to. And when I get through saying, you'll be a mile deep offshore. The fish like to feed on a soft guy like you."

CARETAKER Gann wilted. "Do you think he's a Fed?"

"Don't know. Either he's what you say he is, just a dumb grocery-boy, or else he's a smart dick. Will he be coming over here tomorrow?"

"He'd bring over an order if I asked him."

"Do it. And if he's what I think, he's going to get put out of the way until after tomorrow night. If he starts anything, he'll be put away permanent. Because,"—and Cap's voice rasped,—"that shipment is coming through, no matter who tries to stop it; and if we have to bump 'em, we'll bump 'em. Easy as long as we have to be, and then, the works!" The Cap's teeth were bared like an animal's.

"Sure," agreed Harley Gann. He breathed gustily, and ran a sleeve across his forehead.

The Cap stood for a moment deep in thought. "I'll stay here tonight. I'll stay here until things go through. Let's get inside. And if anything happens, leave it to me."

CHAPTER XI

AT about the same hour, conversation of another sort was taking place in a grim, granite building over whose roof flew the Federal customs flag, a hundred miles to the north.

The three men who sat thus passing the time of day around a flat-topped desk in the room of that granite building looked the sort who had had bricks and hardware for breakfast, and this same pleasing combination for lunch and dinner.

"We've just about coopered it down that the stuff is coming in from around the region of the town of Seashore," said the one with the squarest shoulders of the three. "Now, by sometime tomorrow afternoon, Roscommon will have gotten through with that Chink case. At that time, Burke, you take Roscommon and Gringle here, and you go down to Seashore. You're new to the region, so nobody knows you. Camp there until you get results. And I want nothing but. That'll do."

The speaker took out a cigar and bit off an end as though he dared it to bite back. "Oh, yes: One thing more. Keep your mouths extra shut. I don't want the sheriff's office getting even a smell out of this thing. They've gummed up enough of our work."

The square-set gentlemen known as Gringle and Burke got to their feet.

"All set, Chief. We'll bring 'em in."

They went out the door. . . .

F. Alonzo Binns roused himself with a start. Whether he had fallen asleep or not in the hidden chute in the attic, he couldn't say; he was tired enough to have fallen asleep anywhere.

"Whooie!" he exclaimed giving a reassembling shake. "I'd hate to go to sleep in here and not wake up," he mused. "I don't believe I'd ever be found. I don't believe anybody has been in this stairway since Wally Pidge left this place. Look at the stiffness of that catch. Dry; hard to move. I'll bet Gann doesn't know of the stairway! I could have died in here and nobody been the wiser, and when they tore down the house, years and years from now—*'Body found in secret stairway. Thought to be that of young man who mysteriously disappeared. Sweetheart waited and waited—'* Say, I'm going to get out of here!"

The Binns feet took the Binns body down the ladder-way. And his thoughts

were bitter: "Well, that's through. Grocery-boy detective, and all I detect is a returned engagement ring! Gah!"

The descender of steep stairways added further emphasis to his remarks by banging the last of the trapdoors shut. He started down into the chimney vault of the basement.

"Hark!"

Caretaker Harley Gann, seated across the kitchen table from Cap Warrington, held up a hand.

"What is it?"

Cap Warrington glanced at him. Seen now in the light, the Cap looked like a theological student who had dropped in on a friend to discuss a certain chapter in Proverbs for the next day's lesson, with his high forehead, long upper lip, and solemn eyes framed in tortoise-shelled glasses.

"What is it?" repeated the Cap.

"Sounded like a window or a door closing. I don't know of any being open, but I could swear I heard—"

Cap Warrington rose casually from his chair, and moved toward an inner door of the kitchen, his right hand slipping toward a coat pocket.

"Well, then let's go have a look." His tone was as casual as his rising from the chair had been. But there was never anything casual about Cap Warrington.

Harley Gann followed, and the darkness of the next room swallowed them.

House-owner F. Alonzo Binns put a hand on the catch of the squat brick door in the basement vault.

"Well, I'll never see this place again."

He ran the torch over the vault interior in a good-by flick, and the torch picked up the neat stack of unused bricks in one corner. The torch lingered.

"I wonder," mused F. Alonzo, "just why he left those bricks there. Well, I'm leaving this house."

He snapped off the torch and eased open the squat door. He emerged and closed it solidly behind him. Without colliding with more than three boxes, he worked his way across the No Man's Land of the Du Port basement, reached open footing, and slipped toward the tunnel door that led to the stable.

It would have interested Frederick Alonzo Binns exceedingly if he had known that no sooner had he penned himself within the tunnel and was feeling his way along it stableward, than the sliver of light at the head of the basement stairs became a wedge, a large wedge. Down the basement stairs drifted two figures. At the foot of the stairs one went to the right, the other to the left; the two rejoined each other near the stairs; and here one, as though acting on an afterthought, stepped to the door that gave access to the stable tunnel. At the same time he yanked a small electric torch from his pocket.

He threw open the door and flooded the tunnel with light.

If this flooding had taken place six seconds earlier, it would have discovered at least one of the legs of F. Alonzo Binns going up the stable ladder; taking place when it did, it discovered nothing.

"I guess I'm getting jumpy," said Caretaker Harley Gann, snapping off his electric torch and closing the basement tunnel door. "I'm getting so I imagine I hear things all the time. Why, just a little while ago—"

"Then lay off the booze," growled Cap Warrington.

"I aint had a drink in weeks," protested Harley Gann. "I guess it's just living here alone all of the time."

"There'll be company for a while tomorrow night," came the reminder.

They went up the basement stairs.

FIVE minutes after F. Alonzo had dropped out of the stable window and shaken the dust of Du Port house from his feet forever, he edged his hidden car out from the unused wood road and sent it toward Seashore.

"A good night's sleep," he announced to the passing world, "and then off for the city early in the morning, and if I never hear of this region again, it'll be too soon. Whooie, I'm tired!"

But as he was slumping roomwards after garaging his car, a number of people suddenly accosted him as though they had never heard of the word *tired*.

"Come on! We're putting on a party! And now you're here we can make it a real howl."

The lackluster eyes of Frederick Binns finally made out last night's boatmates and friends of the lagoon, now in their civilian attire.

"Can't make it. Sorry."

The late Venetians became all the more importunate, and in trying to answer, F. Alonzo was swept into the long gallery of the Seashore post-office. Here, amidst a peering into lock-boxes for the evening's mail, the demand continued. And here, like a slow, damp bomb going off, recollection nudged young Mr. Binns.

He had rented a lock-box the morning after he came to Seashore. In a welter of other things he had forgotten all about mail. Now he made search.

A letter lay in his box, a long, heavy letter, a legal-looking letter. He ripped it open, and the deed to the Du Port house, Walter Gallington Pidge to Frederick Alonzo Binns, signed, sealed, and now delivered, lay in his hand. He growled aloud.

"Not bad news, I hope?" asked one of the late galleymen.

"Nope." And swoopingly it came over Frederick Binns that it wasn't. The deed to the place, proof of ownership!

Why should he quit Seashore like something with a tin can tied to its tail? Why should he be remembered merely as a grocery-boy and festival-upsetter—when by but a little effort he could be remembered as that charming

gentleman who had given that amazingly pleasant party at the wonderful old Du Port place? Why not?

"Say," he made announcement, "I can't come with you tonight. But now tomorrow night— I've just had great news in this letter. Wipes out all my losses in that stock deal, and then some. A house gets thrown in for good measure. Now, I'm going to open up that house with a bang, and I want everybody that's taken part in the Celebration to come. All those who were in the Venetian Show, and those who are working in the Indian play up at the theater. What's its name? 'Winnikahaha, the Indian Maid?' . . . . That's it. That's tonight and tomorrow night, isn't it? We'll throw it right after they get through tomorrow night, and have a big whoop and holler. There'll be no city marshal to stop us. I'm outside the city limits. It's the big old Du Port house up north of town. Think you fellows can make it?"

From the chorused answer that arose, seemingly they could.

"Fine!" glowed Frederick Alonzo Binns. "Now I got to go."

As he went, the fineness of the thing grew. Newer illumination dazzled him. Wonderful! That was it. . . . He'd invite 'em, old man Webster and Mary and Buck; and then, in distant lands, he could read of Mary's marriage without turning a hair. . . .

Stroke of genius! He'd put it on thick.

IN the length of time it takes to remove a burglar suit of clothes, to bathe and to don the blue flannel coat and the white flannel trousers, a re-born, effulgent Frederick Alonzo Binns was bounding down the Jones steps.

At their base he all but collided with Delfus Jones, who with difficulty recognized his delivery-boy.

"Stocks," said the delivery-boy, taking D. Jones by the hand. "Stocks have gone up. I was looking for you to tell you. I've got lots to tell you."

"Say," cried Mr. Jones at conclusion of the tale, "that's wonderful! But I dunno where I'm going to get another delivery-boy. And now, it's awful nice asking me to come to the blow-out, but I can't come."

"Well, you're going to. Won't be any party if you don't. You'll be there tomorrow night, and so will Chesterfield."

Without giving Mr. Jones time for rebuttal, F. Alonzo Binns directed his best pair of after-six shoes toward garage and car.

A repeated hammering at the Webster front door finally convinced Webster Senior that all the fools weren't dead yet, and that one of them, at this hour, must be outside wearing his knuckles down. With outspoken desire to do a little knuckle-wearing himself, he flung open the door.

"Humph," said Mr. Webster. "Through with groceries for the night?"

"Exactly. But I could run right back uptown and get you whatever you want. Soda for an unsettled stomach, tobacco in any form—"

"No!"

"So glad, for I really came here—"

Mary Webster had entered the room.

"Oh," said Miss Webster, stopping short.

At first she tried looking through him as though he did not exist, but this not being successful, she concentrated on his cravat, which was an old trick of hers.

"Best necktie," said Frederick Binns. "Not a colored handkerchief or a Japanese napkin hastily knotted. But I didn't come here to talk ties. Not at all." And the caller seated himself.

WITH an ill-suppressed groan Clarendon Webster whittled off the end of a cigar, while the contour of Miss Webster's mouth became the first problem in geometry, which is a straight line.

Whereat the caller beamed. High-hat him, would they?

"No, I called to let you know that I've finished up the business that brought me to Seashore. I've just got a clean bill of health on my new property, and I'm asking you, along with a hundred or so others, to drop in tomorrow evening after the Forest Glade play and sort of warm it up. It's the old Du Port place, up north of town."

Young Mr. Binns threw in this last statement as one adds a minor bit of information for good measure.

A squeak like that of mice caught out in the open came from Mary. She sat down swiftly and leaned forward.

"The Du Port place? You mean—"

"Yes, the one that's been closed so long. You may possibly remember it."

"Ha!" Clarendon Webster coughed explosively into his cigar. "Cock-and-bull story. And—and what the devil do you mean by giving a place a clean bill of health?"

The Binns bait had been rightly placed

for one of the elder Webster's temperament.

"Oh," came light explanation, "just certain suspicions that I had of the place. When somebody shoots at you from out of the darkness, almost parting your hair with a stream of bullets, one naturally at first wonders— But I cleared that all up." The caller started to rise. "So I'm asking if you two will drop in tomorrow evening."

"Freddy!" The ice had gone out of Mary Webster's eyes. "You mean that somebody *shot* at you?"

"Probably poking his head in through a window and was naturally taken for a burglar," growled the older Webster.

"Oh, no, not quite," said Frederick Binns patiently, as one might to a backward child. "Shot at right out in the driveway. So I decided to investigate."

A hollow sound came from the older generation. "I knew it. You've turned detective."

Mary Webster's eyes suddenly took on the color of blue waves on a sunshiny day.

"Then that's what you were trying to tell me this noon, when you were repairing the tire? Why didn't you—"

Memory welled over Frederick Binns. Momentarily he lost his poise.

"I was going to," he snapped, "but you had to go and get smart and drive away with that Morley Buck. We won't go into that again."

The younger Webster's chin went up. "We certainly won't."

"I guess that about explains everything," the caller said stiffly. "So if you would care to drop in any time tomorrow evening, Du Port house will be glad to see you."

THE senior Webster held up his hand, as though something was still sticking in his mind.

"You say you were shot at, and you didn't do anything about it?"

"Oh, I did something about it. Found out it was a zealous caretaker, looking out for the owner's interests."

Mr. Webster pursued his thesis.

"Maybe. And maybe not. Listen, young man, there's altogether too much promiscuous shooting going on around here. I hadn't intended coming to your party. I've seen enough of what you're able to do, to hold me for some time. And I'm not coming to your party now. But I am coming over there tomorrow night to have a look at that caretaker of yours." He resumed newspaper and cigar.

"Fine. Well, good night," said Frederick Binns. He opened the door.

But it was Mary Webster who closed it—closed it, from the porch side, upon both herself and her caller. She caught at an elbow of the Binns coat and swung the caller around as a small and vigorous tug-boat swings an ocean liner. With her free hand she struck him thumpingly in the chest.

"You big dummy! Now, I want to talk to you!"

FROM the street came the squeal of automobile brakes, and one Morley Buck sprang up the Webster porch steps.

"All right, Mary, let's go." Then, peering, he added: "Oh, hello, Groceries."

For a moment the desire of Frederick Binns to round off the corners of Morley Buck's chin was overpowering, but somehow he contrived to fight it off. So he laughed. It was the sort of laugh that used to be heard so often in the good old melodrama days, being the kind known as hollow.

"Well, Mary, drop in tomorrow night if you think you'd be interested. And oh, yes, maybe Buck would like to come. I believe you know the place, Buck. Old Du Port house. I happen to be the owner, but don't let that stop you. I'm putting on a little party tomorrow night, so drop right in and make yourself at home, Buck, just as usual. Good night."

"Frederick!" said Mary.

But Frederick was in his car. . . .

To He Gow, cook and counselor of the Binns household, the appearance of Frederick Alonzo in the Jones kitchen wearing the blue flannel coat and white flannel trousers of a perfect gentleman was no more surprising than when he had appeared in the Eat More Ham cap and spotted apron. Nor did He Gow take as surprising his interruption of philosophic discourse between himself and See Fong and nephew Willie Kee, with the brisk announcement of, "All right, He Gow, we go to the big house. Catchem deed, everything fixed up. Come on."

Cook and counselor He Gow put a mental pin in the battle-map of philosophy to mark where he had left off, and rose from his chair beside the cooling Jones range. A philosopher grows to expect anything, even to moving one's lodgings during the night.

Moving quickly. By the time Kitty-cat Ash Can had been rounded up from beneath a mixing table, and a lean suit-case packed, young Master Frederick had already crammed his own bags to a bulging limit and was seated at the car wheel, glowering out into the night.

The ride to the new home was punctuated only by the comments of the Kitty-cat. In a gloom so deep as to be joyous, young Master Frederick continued to glower. He'd throw the party tomorrow night—he'd not quit that now—and then he'd be off to the ends of the earth; and there were lots of women at the ends of the earth—beautiful, kindly women, not ice-eyed chits who went riding with street-sweepings. Fiercely did F. Alonzo hug happy sorrow to his breast.

He roused himself for a certain amount of action as he saw the Du Port driveway pillars loom ahead. Caretaker Gann might need a little leading up to, if the changing of lodgings at this hour of the night were to be passed over without fatalities. He put the Wally deed in his lap, ready for quick introduction, and turned the car down the long, curving drive and up to where a light shining from the kitchen caught the Binns eye. Here he halted the car and shouted:

"Hello, Gann! Hello, the house!"

CHAPTER XII

AS Frederick Binns had interrupted a philosophic discourse in the Delfus Jones kitchen, so now did he interrupt conversations in the kitchen of the Du Port house. Caretaker Harley Gann and his companion Cap Warrington, after touching upon the hazards of certain trades, had during the ensuing hour found a variety of subjects to their liking, as became men seated at a table with a small drink of something before them.

The present topic was that of ventriloquism—of the ability of a man to throw his voice.

"Beats all what people can do," Gann averred.

Suddenly his face went happily startled and he extended a hand across the table to Cap Warrington and gave it a vigorous shake.

"Say, that's wonderful! My golly, I didn't know you could do it yourself. And me sitting right here watching you!"

"Do what?" demanded Cap Warrington.

"Why, throw your voice. Don't tell me you didn't, and it seemed as though it was coming right through that window."

Cap Warrington smiled indulgently from behind horn-rimmed glasses. "I didn't throw my voice. I was telling about people who could. Of course, at a pinch I might be able—"

"Hello, Gann! Hello, the house!"

"There!" cried Mr. Gann triumphantly. "I told you that you did it, and you trying to kid me—"

Something in the expression of Cap Warrington's face caused Caretaker Harley Gann to stop.

Cap Warrington was on his feet, and his hand was in his pocket. His eyes were on the outer kitchen door.

"Good gravy!" cried Harley Gann.

He was nearer the door than Cap Warrington.

"Hey!" cried the Cap. "Come back here!"

But the spirit of investigation was upon Harley Gann. Also, there was a genial drink inside him. He threw open the door, and thrust his head out.

A large roadster had stopped close at the foot of the kitchen steps. In it were two men: a heavy-set young man and a lean old Chinaman. In the lean old Chinaman's lap was a bird-cage; and in the cage was a cat. The rumble-seat of the car was piled with luggage.

The young man swung out of the car, and held up a folded paper.

"I don't blame you for looking a little startled. But this paper will explain it. A deed—a deed from Walter Gallington Pidge, the former owner, to Frederick Alonzo Binns, which is myself. Now, the last time that I was here—"

The peering Harley Gann had it. This night visitor of the dressy clothes and the large car was the delivery-boy! The grocery-boy of the Eat More Ham cap and spotted apron; the boy who had come for orders, the one whom Cap Warrington thought might be—

Harley Gann backed up three steps, bumped into something, and came swiftly down a step. He turned to find the something was Cap Warrington. He started to speak, but didn't have time.

"Deed. Deed to the place. Just look it over, and you will see. Very unconventional, I know, dropping in upon you bag and baggage at this time of night, but if we'll just go inside, we can—"

Here the unconventional young man saw Cap Warrington.

"Oh, hello. Friend of Mr. Gann's? Then friend of mine." He crowded past the caretaker to extend greetings to Cap Warrington.

Mr. Binns continued to radiate. "Just let me get these things put down in the kitchen. Come along, He Gow. This is old He Gow, my cook; he's cooked for the Binnses for forty years. And this is Ash Can, He Gow's pet."

He entered the kitchen. So did Cap Warrington. So did Harley Gann.

"There," said the voluble guest, closing the door and opening the cat-cage at the same time. "Make yourself at home, Ash Can."

Ash Can did. With a rousing "*Phutt-arrouw!*" the homemaker leaped from cage to a happily extinct range, took off

from here and landed on a hanging kettle, zoomed across to the table, dropped to the floor, and was just settling himself to do some really serious room-circling, when a laden He Gow swung open the door.

At the sight of such a lack of company manners, He Gow gave vent to shrill cries and made violent gesture. The yellow courser drew in feet and ears and retired beneath the indicated sink, shadow-boxing *en route* with the nearest human leg, which happened to belong to Cap Warrington.

"There," glowed Frederick Alonzo Binns. "Now Ash Can's at home, and we can be the same. Explanations on my part, Mr. Gann, are certainly in order, and here they come."

THEY came—and to them Messrs. Gann and Warrington lent painfully attentive ears.

"Shot at," said young Mr. Binns, "so decided to investigate. . . . Rôle of grocery-boy detective. . . . But nothing found. . . . Into stable and up and down tunnels—all vacancy. . . . House the same way. . . . And I'll bet," concluded Mr. Binns, "that you'd have laughed if you'd have known I was sitting at the top of the big stairs when the picnic party came in!"

At each revelation something else happened to the Gann features.

Not so to those of Cap Warrington. The Sphinx could have taken him for a model.

At intervals during the telling, the door opened to admit He Gow with more luggage, and on each of these occasions Caretaker Gann gave perceptible starts which culminated in a jump as the Cantonese red-cap, when through with carrying, opened the leanest of the suitcases and took out six long knives, which, after a glance about the kitchen, he proceeded to sharpen upon the top of the great range.

Like Kitty-cat, He Gow was also now at home.

So was Frederick Binns.

"There," he summed up. "I think that about explains everything. Now, if you'll just look at this deed that you've been holding, you'll see that everything is all shipshape. Wally Pidge's signature and everything."

Like a not-too-well-wound automaton, Harley Gann thumbed the deed.

"Yeah," he said at length, creakily.

"Fine! And that's that. Now, I want you two to feel right at home, just as though I wasn't here. And that brings me down to what I'm planning for tomorrow night."

Frederick Binns paused, and Caretaker Gann shot Cap Warrington the look of a man who has difficulty in breathing. The Cap's right hand doubled in his pocket.

"Yes, that's it," continued the new

owner, after due pondering. "I'm having a little party here tomorrow night. Say around a hundred. Of course you'll be my guests—that is, if you haven't anything else planned."

Again the new owner of Du Port house paused, and beamed.

Caretaker Harley Gann left off trying to fill his pipe. A chair being providentially near, he sat down.

But Cap Warrington was of sterner stuff.

"Party to a hundred people! Say, now, that'll be fine, and Harley and I want to thank you for your hospitality. Believe me, we sure won't forget it. I'll say we won't!"

While voicing appreciation, he contrived to get in a look of admonition at Caretaker Gann.

"Sure is swell," mouthed Mr. Gann. "Swell. Yeah, swell." Like a faulty phonograph record, he continued to go around on one note. "I dunno of anything sweller." He finally contrived to get off dead center. "The Cap and I were saying—"

"Sure were," agreed the watching Cap. "Only tonight Harley was telling me how his nerves were getting on edge being alone so much. Well, I guess he'll have enough people around to suit him now. Ha, ha!"

It being wise to close on a laughing note, the Cap so closed, and Frederick Binns, sensing the fitness of this, concluded in the same manner.

"I'll just cruise through the house and look it over, all above-board this time. Come along, He Gow, and see what the latest Binns property looks like. And believe me, it's going to be pleasant walking around and not wondering if I'm going to get a bullet in the ribs!"

Mirth enveloped Mr. Binns as it had Cap Warrington. The door leading to the butler's pantry opened and shut upon him and his companion He Gow, as they began their tour of the house that had once been Frenchman Du Port's.

FOR possibly as long as five seconds Caretaker Gann and Cap Warrington remained statuelike in the kitchen, the eyes of both glued on the pantry door. Then Harley Gann was clutching at Cap Warrington.

"Quick! They've gone on into the dining-room. We can make a run for it. My car. By the time they hear us going, we're gone!"

With a sweep of the arm Cap Warrington threw him off. His right hand plunged into a pocket and came out gripping a small, flat, blue-black automatic pistol. Noiselessly on his rubber-soled shoes, like a huge cat stalking its kill, he projected himself across the room to the pantry door. With his left hand he edged the door open, held himself be-

hind it, crouched, sinister, ready, weighing his next move.

Then he closed the door, straightened, dropped the automatic into its pocket, stared off into space, and observed:

"He can't be a Federal man. Not even the dumbest dick that ever was could be as dumb as this guy! It's the thousand-to-one chance, at last come true! The fool is just what he appears to be. And he's fallen in upon us. All right." The back of Cap Warrington's right hand smacked the palm of his left. "He'll wish he'd never fallen!"

He gave a short, ugly laugh, and glowered at the caretaker.

"What the hell was that you said about our getting out of here? Do you think that we're running out?"

Appalled silence was his answer.

"All right," said Cap Warrington, "then I'll speak for you. We're sticking here until the stuff comes through."

"But—" said the caretaker.

"But nothing! I tell you we're sticking here until the stuff comes through. Yes, and after it has, that dumbhead and his party are going to help us!" Cap Warrington threw back his head and softly laughed.

"Don't you get it? With a gang of a hundred around here having a whoop, who's going to notice an extra half dozen people coming and going in the dark? Nobody. If it was just this fatneck snooping around, that would be different; yes, and he'd be given the works! But as it is, we're going to walk through and be away without drawing one short breath."

Caretaker Harley Gann worked upon his features until they responded with the imitation of a smile.

"Sounds O. K. But it's going to be tough between now and then, with that

goofy guy popping in and out. And now he's got a Chink with six razor-edged bread-knives, and a cat big enough to be in a museum. He's just bugs!"

"Bugs or not," summed up Cap Warrington, "you and I and him are going to be the finest pals until midnight tomorrow night, that you ever saw. After that, things may be different."

CHAPTER XIII

FREDERICK ALONZO BINNS, in pajamas, sent slippered feet across the floor of the great second-story bedroom toward curtained bay windows. He threw back the curtains and looked upon a new day. Through lattice-work made by the branches of tall green-clothed pines swaying in the morning breeze, he glimpsed sunlight glinting upon a rippling sea, out toward a distant horizon low-banked with blue-gray fog.

For a long time he stood and drank in the scene. What a place to live! Then he turned scowlingly away. No living there now, with things the way they stood with the Webster household!

Tired though he had been, he hadn't made a huge success of sleeping. He had never before tried to sleep in a museum room, surrounded by museum furniture, and covered with bedding that had been stored away for five years. Repeatedly had he awakened through dark hours with the feeling that somebody was standing in the doorway looking in at the great bed, as tourists stand and look at the canopied beds in the palace at Versailles.

"Too much imagination," growled the new owner of Du Port house. "Curse of the Binnses, imagination! Look what it's done to me."

He sought out a suit of homespun from the clothes-closet, and as he took it from its hanger, his under lip came out and his face darkened.

"Example of imagination right here!"

His fingers began to seek and punch at the closet paneling, and suddenly a part of the closet wall was no longer a wall but a door, swinging inward upon a dark chutelike room with ladder-steep stairs.

He studied the chute. His under lip came in, and he sighed. Always had he wanted a home with such things: tunnels and a cove and the sea, a secret stairway in a chimney. But what good were they now, with Mary—

Morosely he closed the paneling, dressed, and went downstairs.

Cook He Gow stood in front of the mammoth range, feeding wood into it like an old-time Mississippi steamboat fireman.

"Morning, He Gow!" greeted the new owner. "Where other men?"

A finger indicated outdoors. A voice added: "No like um." The cook-counselor started to fry eggs.

"Oh, they're all right," defended young Mr. Binns. "You've just been up too long, that's all. They had breakfast?"

"Eat hours ago. Cook their own, you bet. Some people wake up mornings. This goddam stove,"—the cook-counselor reached into the stove's fire-box with a long slice-bar and poked furiously,—"this goddam stove maybe heat up Christmas. Breakfast ready four-fi' minute."

There are times when it doesn't pay to stand around when people are cooking. Mr. Binns took himself softly outdoors.

A MAN in oversize overalls was working on a small car in front of the stable. It was Caretaker Harley Gann.

"Hello!" greeted Frederick Binns.

Mr. Gann removed a face, a calabash pipe, and two prominent eyes from within the intimate details of the motor.

"H'lo." And then, as though reciting something that he had been primed to recite, volubly he began: "Good morning, sir, good-morning. It sure is a fine morning. Hope you slept well—I sure slept well myself." The recitationist stopped. Then—

"Yes sir," he proceeded to grind on, "nothing like a good night's sleep. Working on my car. Always like to have it in running condition, and then if I want to go anywhere, why, I can go, even if it's only around the block. Yes sir, even if it's only around the block. Yes sir, even if it's—" The Gann phonograph had evidently again become held up on one note. Violently he wrenched it free, eyes protruding. "Well, I guess I've done enough work on it! Cap Warrington, he's around somewhere, looking at birds and squirrels and what not. City men seem crazy about such things. Yes sir, they seem crazy about such things."

"Breakfast," came a voice from the kitchen door.

"I've got to go in," said Frederick Binns. "If I didn't sit down right away, that old cook would start working on me with all six of his knives! I'm damned,"

he muttered to himself as he went up the steps, "if I noticed that that Gann was so nervous before. Just shows what living alone will do. I sure wouldn't want to be a caretaker."

Said the nervous caretaker, as the door closed behind the ample form of the new house-owner: "Knives, hey? I'll bet that old Chink would use 'em, too. Slept well, my eye! How the hell do you suppose a man can sleep well with a six-knife Chink right in the next room to him, and a cat that size tramping around the halls going *'Phutt-phutt!'* all the time?" Mr. Gann broke off to look all about him, then raised a flap pocket in the tonneau of the little car and drew out a flat bottle, which, screened by the car, he raised swiftly to his mouth. When he put it back in the pocket, the bottle was two drinks lower than it had been previously.

In the dining-room of the big house, under a thousand pounds of glass chandelier, Frederick Binns beamed at the breakfast set out for him.

"Wonderful!" Then a shadow crossed his face. "But where did you get all this food, He Gow?"

"Found 'um."

Frederick Binns laid down his napkin.

"Listen, He Gow. All the food in this house belongs to the caretaker. You hadn't any right—"

"Our house; our food. More toast?"

Frederick Alonzo took the toast. He would explain to Harley Gann later; he would replace the borrowed foodstuffs. Maybe that was why Gann seemed a little nervous; He Gow at times did have a way about him that caused people no little concern.

He finished breakfast with a sigh of satisfaction; he had been hollow down to his heels. He rose. Now for town and a tonneau-load of whoop-and-holler supplies, and a gross of invitations.

Through the dining-room window the sea sparkled in the sun. He paused, looking out. "Doggone, this is a pretty place! Devil of a note to occupy it for only a couple of days. Damn that Morley Buck, anyway. Some day I'm going to strew his bones all over the landscape."

He passed out into the kitchen and engaged the stove-presiding He Gow in food-computation for a hundred guests. "And I'm going to get See Fong and Willie Kee to come help you," he made hasty parenthesis in the middle of the Gargantuan list of supplies.

"See Fong and Willie Kee ten men?" demanded He Gow.

"Get you ten men," retorted the party-maker. "Get you fifty."

"Huh. See Fong and Willie Kee enough to have in the way." The presiding genius resumed an attack on the range. "You come back sometime before tomorrow with groceries."

As the Binns car rolled out of the yard, Seashore bound, its driver caught sight of the Gann companion, Cap Warrington, standing near the gate. He had a pair of binoculars and was studying something up in one of the trees.

"Hello!" he cried in return to the Binns greeting. "Watching a red-headed woodpecker. Awful interesting." He beamed from behind his horn-rimmed glasses.

The Binns car whirled down the road.

The Cap person lowered the binoculars and sauntered back toward the house. "Nothing to it," he commented. "Just keep drawing the breath easy."

ONCE more in the proper guise of a gentleman did Frederick Alonzo Binns enter the town of Seashore. Done was he with stratagem and subterfuge, with detective delivery-boy and detective

delivery-boy ideas. All of that was behind him. Now, the owner of a landed estate, he was entering a pleasant little town to purchase supplies and issue invitations for an enjoyable evening party.

The past was behind. Yes, indeed. And then—

Before his eyes, he saw the Seashore marshal on horseback, arresting Chesterfield Wurzel in the Jones truck.

"Good Lord!" cried Frederick Binns. "I might have known it!"

He jumped his car ahead, and all that he had abandoned came winging back to him. Stratagem, subterfuge; the wildest flights of fancy, the most specious argument. He went his limit. . . .

When the city marshal of Seashore departed therefrom, he was empty of hand, and his eyes were those of one who has been under hypnosis. As for the reprieved Chesterfield Wurzel, all that he could do was to babble.

"Gosh! Good gosh! Say! Say, but that was slick!"

"Slick?" said Frederick Binns.

A wild, hopeful look flamed in the Wurzel eyes.

"You mean you wasn't lying to him when you told him just now about your being a Secret Service man? That you really was disguised as a delivery-boy and that I been helping you to run down crooks?"

Frederick Alonzo Binns shook his head sadly. "No, Chesterfield, I wish we had been, but we haven't. All made up out of whole cloth."

"Well, it was pretty slick, if you ask me!" radiated Master Wurzel. "I just sat here and believed it. Like the Marshal done. Haw!"

"Fatal gift," said Frederick Binns. "Inherited from a great-uncle. But shouldn't have done it."

"Well, I wish I had a fatal gift like it," stoutly defended Chesterfield. Again he harked fondly back. "You mean there aint two detectives coming to Seashore to help us and the Marshal catch these here international burglars?"

"No. I wish there were, but there aren't."

"Nor no reward for 'em—that the Marshal is going to get half of?"

"Nope."

THE Wurzel enthusiasm tapered off. "Gee, the Marshal will be sore when he finds it out. What you going to do then?"

"Won't be here. Now listen, Chesterfield: you can't drive trucks any more; all right, you've got a job for the time being with me."

"What kind of a job?"

"Don't know yet, but I'll get you one. Right now we've got to find a delivery-boy for Delfus. Garage ought to know about that. Garages know everything."

Master Wurzel's was a one-track and persistent mind.

"What kind of a job do you think it might be?"

"Oh, any one of half a dozen. House detective, maybe."

"House detective?"

"Yes, for the party tonight."

"Oh, boy, that'll be swell! I heard all about the party. Everybody's coming. House detective for it, hey? Gee, 'at's swell."

"Yes, yes. I got to go now. See you at the store." The man who had abandoned all stratagem and subterfuge headed for the garage.

AN expostulating Delfus Jones greeted him when he finally arrived at the Jones emporium.

"Now, now, Lonnie, I can't think of your putting yourself out to find a delivery-boy. Chesterfield has just told me about it."

"Don't have to," said Lonnie. "Got one, just like that!" And he snapped his fingers. "Garage man's nephew or cousin, who's just come back to town. Name's Elmer or Josephus."

"You don't mean Ogilvy? Ogilvy Thomas?"

"That's the one."

"But he run off to go to the South Pole."

"Then he must have lost his ticket, because he's back. He'll be ready to go to work in a minute. Now if you'll just start filling out this list of goods, I'll help you after I've been over to the post-office."

Going thence, the party-giver rounded a corner, and all but collided with a monumental figure reading her morning's mail as she walked: Mrs. J. Mosby Chichester. "My dear Mr. Binns!" cried Mrs. Chichester.

A hand enclosed a Binns hand, firmly, rapturously.

"You are the talk of the town!" said Mrs. Chichester, rolling her eyes. "You depart from your city home for Seashore as a man of wealth, yet so swift is adversity as personified in the stock-market, that you arrive without the

means of purchasing a crust. You accept a humble position. You strive to forget your disaster by throwing yourself heart and soul into the Seashore Celebration. Then word comes that you are again a wealthy man, that you can occupy the house of your dreams; more, that you are tonight throwing it open to all who have given their bit, high or low, for the success of our little town. Tonight will be an event long to be remembered!"

"Yes'm," said Mr. Binns.

The lady of pageants fixed upon Frederick Binns a speculative eye. Speculative in more ways than one.

"I had been intending seeing you. I believe that the actors in 'Winnikahaha the Indian Maid' are coming over to your place directly after the performance, in costume."

"Yes'm," said Frederick Binns.

"Then I was thinking, wouldn't it lend a piquant touch if the others of us also came in costume, and we could have at your mansion what might be termed the Mingling of the Mimes."

IT suddenly occurred to Frederick Alonzo that he had been more than derelict in keeping his end up. He seized Mrs. Chichester by the hand.

"Marvelous! Who but you could have thought up so wonderful an idea?"

"It is nothing. Ah, Mr. Binns, I see that you are going to be a great addition to our dramatic colony."

"Just a humble laborer in the vineyard," protested Mr. Binns. "But now I must be going. Will you please tell all your friends that I shall be expecting them at around eleven this evening?"

"I shall! *Au revoir!* Good-by!"

It was a grinning Frederick Alonzo Binns who continued his way post-officewards. Life sure *is* a drama.

The roving Binns gaze came to a halt. Inside a building a small man in shirtsleeves was busy with a number of large hampers.

The Binns brain did further functioning. If some were going to come to the party in costume, why not all? He descended upon the little giant costumer of Gilberstein's.

"Well, good morning. You don't mean to tell me that you're still sorting costumes?"

The little giant left off struggling with a Laocoön group of finery, and a parody on laughter escaped him.

"The next time I come to this town, I come with guns and start shooting as soon as I get inside the town limits! Sorting? Ha, ha! All I done for t'ree days is sorting. Everyt'ing thrown in on me at once, and wringing vet. Me, I'm t'rough with the costume business!"

Mr. Binns vigorously expressed commiseration, with the further hope that the giant wouldn't wind up affairs until at least after that evening. He went into detail concerning the party. "All I'll want will be just a hamperful or two. Odds and ends will do," he concluded.

"Odds and ends will be just the t'ing you'll get," said the little giant. "All right, I come. But I got to help put red paint on Indians first up at the open-air theater; that's part of the contract, or I wouldn't lift a hand. How'll I find how to get to your place?"

"Follow the Indians."

By the time the giver of parties had reached the Jones store and acknowledged all the salutations bestowed upon him *en route,* he had come to a certain definite conclusion.

"I guess we'll just double that order of mine," he said to a busy Delfus Jones. "I never knew that so many people were taking part in the Celebration. Well, as long as the Jones stock lasts, and the walls of the Du Port house hold—" He slipped behind a counter and began to help with the doubling.

From the store's back room came a low, sibilant whistle. A head adorned by a none-too-large fedora hat appeared around the intervening doorway. It took Frederick Binns several moments to recognize that the head belonged to Chesterfield Wurzel.

"Hey," sounded a suppressed Wurzel voice. "I'm all ready."

The feeling of an impending something went over Frederick Binns. He stepped into the back room, and now saw that Master Wurzel had on a coat too short in the sleeves, and trousers that lacked length in the leg—evidently a one-time best suit that had been hauled from hiding. Under the tightly buttoned coat something bulky was most obviously concealed.

"What's that?" demanded Binns.

FOR reply Master Wurzel thrust a hand beneath coat, underwent contortions, and dragged out five pounds of revolver. He shook his head.

"Darn it, I guess I aint got that quick draw all learned yet! But I'll get it before tonight."

The cannon muzzle gaped at Frederick Binns like a railway tunnel. He did a gazelle leap aside. "Hey!" he crackled. "Is that thing loaded?"

"Nope. But it will be," came assurance, "just as soon as I can find the ca'tridges."

"Well, don't try to find 'em!" The Binns stomach ceased turning over—and then: "Oh, my Lord, more hell!"

Miss Lotus Givens herself, in person, was advancing, seemingly looking for some one.

Frederick Alonzo Binns tried to back up, but a vinegar keg blocked his way, and by the time he had skirted it, Miss Givens had penned him in the angle of the door.

Her eyes were extra bright. "I have heard!" she intoned like flutes not quite in tune. "But one hears so many things that are not so. *I* understand. You have made them believe that you are the owner of the murder farm; and under the guise of a party, you will have a chance to investigate, to find out what you are seeking. I shall not fail you. I shall be there. Farewell!"

She turned and was gone.

Frederick Binns became plaintive. "Does she carry around a patent trap-door to jump out from and back into?"

A tense voice sounded from the back-room's semi-darkness:

"Has she went?"

"Yes. She's went."

"It's a doggone good thing she has," gruffed the house detective, coming out from behind a kerosene drum. "If I'd found my ca'tridges, I'd of opened fire."

For a wild moment Mr. Binns found himself sharing the Wurzel views. The moment passed.

"Oh, the poor thing means well." He began to stow foodstuffs into the car tonneau. Then he jumped. If Mary came to the party and saw the Givens girl there— "Let 'em both come," he said savagely. "The place is big enough for 'em. I'm not particularly anxious to see either one. I'd like to give that Morley Buck another punch for luck! Ow, I forgot to speak about See Fong and Willie Kee!"

The last of the Binnses sought out Mr. Jones. At the same time the house detective whacked hands together like one also suddenly remembering, and rushed indoors. He reappeared just in time to clamber aboard the Binns car.

"Got 'em," said Mr. Binns.

"So did I," said Chesterfield, and slapped a pocket.

"Eh?"

"The ca'tridges. I just happened to remember where I hid 'em."

"I guess that before anything else is remembered," said Frederick Binns, "we'd better get out of town!"

CHAPTER XIV

"GEE, this is sure some different from the first time we come in here," said Master Wurzel as the Binns car turned into the driveway of the Du Port place. "We was only grocery-boys then, and now you own the place, and I'm the house detective." He hauled the too-small fedora professionally over an eye. "Who do you want me to start working on first? That caretaker? I don't like his looks."

"You'll work on helping unload these groceries," was the brief answer.

It was on Harley Gann, however, that Master Wurzel unwittingly worked. The caretaker of the Du Port property was still engrossed with his car, but for all practical purposes a monkey-wrench and a screw-driver were now the same to him. He looked up in time to see the Binns car stop, and a youth in tight-fitting suit spring down. As the youth descended, he made a clutch at his mid-section and called out, but neither clutching or calling prevented five pounds of revolver from flashing into view and spinning end over end to go *clunk* upon the ground.

"Doggone!" cried Master Wurzel, following after the fallen one. "I guess I got to quit carrying it there. Well, now it's out I'll load it up."

He retrieved the weapon, seated himself on the running-board and hauled from a coat pocket a number of cartridges that would have done for a shotgun.

He caught Caretaker Gann's eye.

"H'lo," he greeted. "Loadin' up the old gat."

"You come round here and unload the old wagon," amended F. Alonzo Binns. "Back with a ton of supplies," he called to Mr. Gann, and seeing the Gann eyes

still upon the loader of the old gat, he furthered with explanation. "Chesterfield has come over to help."

"House detective," specified Chesterfield. "Nothing phony is going to go on around here from now on. There!" He eyed the cannon admiringly. "Now she's ready for. trouble." He crowded it into a coat pocket.

"So are the rest of us, I guess," mouthed Frederick Binns. "Here—get hold and help."

An endless procession of foodstuffs began to go into the Du Port kitchen. A string of ants storing away a winter's supply couldn't have been busier.

"See Fong and Willie Kee come tonight," said the leading toiler to He Gow. "Catchem Chesterfield to help, too."

"H'lo, He Gow, old sport," greeted the new help. "But I aint a grocery-boy no longer. I'm a house detective. Sharpenin' up the knives, huh? Now listen, He Gow, if anybody gets funny in the kitchen tonight, trying to crowd out here and grab grub ahead of time like lots of the Seashore crowd do, you just holler for me. I got something better than knives. Me and what's in this pocket will 'tend to 'em." He significantly tapped the bulging pocket.

COOK He Gow favored the owner of the bulging pocket with a single contemptuous glance.

"Boy keep out of kitchen," crisped the knife-sharpener.

"Boy keep in kitchen if there's any work to be done," said F. Alonzo.

"Aw, I didn't sign up to be no cook's helper!" cried Chesterfield.

Frederick Binns pursed his lips.

"Listen, Chesterfield. We all three of us have got to work if we're going to put this party over, and I know you're not going to throw an old pal down. And as soon as See Fong and Willie Kee come—"

"Oh, all right," grudged the old pal's companion. "But I got to get some revolver practice this afternoon so's to be ready for any monkey business tonight."

The eyes of Frederick Binns, after a moment, gleamed bright. "Fine, Chesterfield! And I want to come out and watch you. Now let's get that car unloaded."

Help appeared from a new quarter. Around a corner of the stable, binoculars in hand, came Harley Gann's companion, Cap Warrington. He smiled genially.

"Back from town? I've been down on the beach watching the seagulls. Say, how about letting me do a little of that lugging?" He dropped the binoculars and caught up an armful of packages. His eyes meanwhile took in the newer of the arrivals; took in Chesterfield Wurzel—took him in from top to toe without seeming more than to glance.

"Hello, young man," he said.

"H'lo," said Master Wurzel, frankly and openly taking in Cap Warrington.

"First of the party, I see," said Cap Warrington. "Say, come on here, Harley, and help! That tub of yours will never run any better or worse, no matter what you do to it."

Although the Cap spoke in bantering tone, his words immediately brought Mr. Gann at a lumbering trot.

Chesterfield Wurzel had by now had time to digest the Cap's comment.

"I aint the first of the party. I'm working here now. House detective. Lookit." After protracted tugging and muttering, he was able to reward the Cap's patience.

The Cap looked. Never in the Cap's colorful career had he seen any larger a revolver, or one so jauntily handled. Involuntarily he stepped swiftly to one side; ability to step aside had enabled the Cap to survive more than one demonstration of revolvers. From behind the horn-rimmed lenses the Cap's eyes made lightning calculations. A broad smile was the result, but no one save Cap Warrington knew how near the smile had been to something else.

"Atta boy!" he complimented. "I bet you'll make the party behave!" And he started houseward with his load.

Master Wurzel followed; then came Harley Gann; and Frederick Binns

brought up the rear. Now, there was nothing about the kitchen steps that should have caused a man to trip. The laden Cap Warrington and Chesterfield Wurzel negotiated it without trouble, but Harley Gann tripped and fell.

"Whuppo!" exclaimed Frederick A. Binns, and seeing that Mr. Gann did not immediately arise, he laid aside his armload and assisted the fallen one up.

"Good thing you weren't carrying eggs," he bantered. Then, noting the Gann face, he swiftly changed tone. "Didn't hurt yourself, did you? Gad, man, you look pale!"

"Knocked—wind out," said Caretaker Gann thickly, clutching at Frederick Binns for support.

"You sure did. Say, you've been working too hard out in that sun. You didn't look so well when I left this morning. Hey, Harley fell up the steps and knocked the devil out of himself!"

MESSRS. WARRINGTON and Wurzel looked back.

Mr. Gann continued to clutch at his support.

"Hit himself a devil of a bump," repeated the support. "But I got something that'll fix him up. You come right along with me." He assisted the stricken one down the steps, sought in a recess of the big car and whipped out a flask, which he thrust into the Gann mouth and upended.

After a more than reasonable length of time the first-aid was removed.

"There," smiled the rescuer. "Got your breath back now, I'll bet! Have another little snort?"

"No!" cried the recovered one, now able to gasp, and to the onlookers it seemed that he shuddered and almost shoved his rescuer away. "Guess—I'll go lie down." He stumbled into the house.

"He certainly got a nasty smack," said Mr. Binns.

The rest of the car was unloaded in silence.

"Golly, this sure is a big kitchen," admired Master Wurzel, when finally at liberty to look about. "Say, I'm going through the rest of the rooms, to kind of get the lay of things."

"Show 'em to you," said Frederick Binns proudly.

As owner and detective went through one door, Cap Warrington slipped out the back one.

"By the jumping— If you'd told me there were two such people on earth, I wouldn't have believed it! The damnedest big moron and the damnedest little moron that ever drew the breath of life, and both of them right now in that house. And on top of it, that curly-eyed Gann gets the heaves and passes out. Well, I'll pass him back in again!"

The Cap walked up and down for a while in blistering silence, then let go once more. "If those two were clever, I wouldn't mind! You can tell what a clever bird is going to do, nine times out of ten. But with this pair, how can you guess what they're going to do when they don't know themselves? Damn' near shot me. And that lout Gann gets the heaves!"

The Cap continued to walk up and down, and now, for the first time, he cast an appraising eye at the sun. It was only noon.

"Twelve hours to go. I'll be kind of glad when this thing's over."

The first hour didn't go so badly, but it was during the second that a roaring *"Whong!"* came from among the trees on the ocean side of the house. The Cap, with lunch finished and a book under his arm, spun about from the nook toward which he had been heading for a mind-relaxing read, and hastened to a vantage-point at a corner of the tall old building. The Cap arrived at his lookout station just as a second loud *"Whong!"* shattered the afternoon calm.

"I might have known it!" he said.

Through the trees were to be seen two figures, one large, one small. The small one was aiming a revolver—the cannon-size revolver—at the trunk of a not-distant tree. Once more the gun roared, and bark flew up. The marksman, after staggering back under the recoil, ran forward and made examination.

"Well, I hit it that time!" the Cap heard him gleefully announce.

"Fine!" bubbled the large onlooker. "Nice work, Chesterfield! See if you can do it again."

Cap Warrington turned away, his face slowly working. "Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you that you never could tell what that kind would do? If one of those shots was to get loose—" The Cap knew shots; he put the house between himself and the marksman. "And that damned big lout applauding him!"

HEREIN Cap Warrington did F. Alonzo Binns a grave injustice. Applauding the marksman, Frederick Binns was, but only outwardly; and if Cap Warrington had known why F. Alonzo was doing the outward applauding—

"Fine!" glowed F. Alonzo as round after round roared out and bark flew and the marksman recoiled. "Four—five—six. . . . And that's ten. Fine. Have you got any more left?"

Numb of hand, Chesterfield flapped at limp pocket. "Nope, that's all. Gee, but this old cannon sure can kick."

"Splendid," said Frederick Alonzo Binns. A long sigh escaped him, and his face assumed a look of ineffable peace.

"That's all, I mean, in that pocket," came amendment from Master Wurzel. "I got a lot more in the other."

Frederick Alonzo Binns leaned heavily against a tree, and although the tree was large, it bent under his sagging weight.

"I'd shoot some more," said Chesterfield, "but my hand feels like a stick of wood, and I got to save the rest for tonight."

THE afternoon wore slowly on. Host F. A. Binns, after hauling furniture into positions across an acre of floor-space, departed for Seashore to purchase the hundred party things that are inevitably overlooked.

Cap Warrington, watching him go, was moved to bitter comment.

"Going to bring back more hell, I suppose."

The Cap's mood was justifiable. Within that moment he had come upon Caretaker Gann lolled against a tree-root gazing vacuously about, and after a lashing cross-examination, the Cap had departed with the following knowledge: One, Gann was drunk. Two, the meddler Binns had got him drunk by pouring more raw liquor into him after he had fallen up the steps.

"I wonder," flared the Cap, eyes going red behind the horn-rimmed glasses, "if that damned fool gave him that drink on purpose?" The Cap's eyes grew hotter with further speculation. "Yeah, and got that blasted kid to try and bump me off with that gun!" The Cap relaxed. "I guess I'm getting goofy. They don't know enough to pull anything like that—but just the same it's my damned luck to have fallen in with them."

In the kitchen, repartee between its two workers was scarcely more genial than the Warrington monologue. Add to the group one cat, large, of disposition playful, of claws sharp, and things considerably thicken up.

"I guess these sandridges are being cut good enough for anybody! I guess you don't know Seashore; they'd eat stove-lids if somebody told 'em they was food. Hey, you doggone' cat! You quit clawin' my leg or I'll bust you one."

"Boy know everything. You bust cat—you mince-meat. Get um hell out of kitchen!"

"'At's just what I was going to do, and you needn't think you thought of it first."

Master Chesterfield Wurzel slammed down a knife, and sandwich-making, as expressed in hunks hacked from a loaf, was over for the day. With a glittering look, cook He Gow caught up the knife and ran a solicitous finger over its edge. His scowl deepened.

"Gettum hell out of kitchen, and stay out! Ruin everything you touch."

"Haw!" Master Wurzel hitched at his trousers and swaggered toward the dining-room, fedora hat over an eye.

Kitty-cat Ash Can uttered a *"Praaow!"* and bounced after him.

"You better keep back, there, cat," stated Master Wurzel. "I'm going to be practicing quick draws, and we don't want no dead cat at this party."

To which warning Kitty-cat paid no heed.

"All right," said Master Wurzel. "I've warned you."

He Gow, busy getting an edge back on the Wurzel mishandled knife, sent flickering looks after the pair. It does not cheer one up to have the pride of one's life prefer the company of a person like Chesterfield Wurzel.

The party-giving Mr. Binns returned.

AFTERNOON waned. The long shadows faded across the grass; the sea darkened toward a fog-banked horizon; stars clustered in the purpling sky. Evening came upon the world—then night.

Night in the old house of Frenchman Du Port. A heavy-set young man seeing for the hundredth time that all was party-right; a youth and a cat practicing at slipping out from hiding-places; a cook and his reinforcements stacking food against Seashore's hungry coming; a caretaker and his city friend counting dwindling hours in his own way, one sitting gazing at nothing, the other walking sharp-eyed up and down beneath the trees.

Night, in Seashore. Citizenry rubbing on red paint in the dressing-rooms of the Forest Glade theater, tongues at wag, party-minded.

Night, farther afield. Three heavy, powerful men emerging from a city Federal building and driving southward, Seashore-bound.

Night, farthest afield of all. A low, lean craft, cleaving the trackless sea without telltale light, heading through blackness for a high-cliffed cove!

Lady Luck, unbidden, also attends the party—in the forthcoming November issue.

A strange murder mystery solved by Dr. Adams,

Murder with

By CLARENCE

IN sketching for Lammerford the main points of the affair, some time afterward, Doctor Adams said that he seldom had been so thoroughly impressed with the sheer beauty and mediæval fascination of an old family home as upon his visit to Grenellton Castle—for eight hundred years the seat of the Grenellton Barons, Viscounts and Earls—on the west coast of Cornwall.

"You know what that country is like, Lammy? Rolling moors covered with gorse and heather until you come to sheer precipitous drops of three or four hundred feet to surf breaking on the rocks below—with a horizon-line of the blue Atlantic.

"I'd known the Earl in the States—I promised I'd look him up if I came this way. And when I turned up, he put in the whole afternoon showing me over the castle. That place is a museum, aside from its own mellow beauty. Paintings — furniture — bric-a-brac — which are simply priceless. Other guests? . . . Oh, yes—several, including Grenellton's fiancée Alma Lee, and her mother. You know the Lee oil interests? Very wealthy family, the Lees. Of course Grenellton has plenty of money, too."

Doctor Adams went on to say that the twenty-four hours after his arrival were delightful. Everybody in the castle —both guests and servants—seemed of a cheerful disposition. Lady Helen, the Earl's sister, was acting as chatelaine until he married, and she was apparently very much attracted to Alma Lee, which wasn't in the least surprising. . . .

After dinner on the second evening, Adams had gone for a chat with the Earl in the small private library which he used as a study at the rear of the ground floor, looking west over the cliffs and the sea. The room had a big triple window of Tudor diamond panes. Around three sides were shelved the Earl's reference-books, favorite types of fiction, and some first editions that would have sold for a thousand guineas each. There was a large Tudor fireplace with several feet of oak paneling at either side. Grenellton's desk, reconstructed from an old refectory-table, stood at one end of the triple window. Comfortable leather chairs and a divan were scattered about. Against the oak paneling over the book-shelves hung several portraits of Grenellton ancestors painted by famous artists. One portrait in particular, over the fireplace and facing the Earl as he sat at his desk, was that of a girl who must have been a famous beauty in her day—the Countess Edith at the age of twenty—painted by Velásquez during her honeymoon trip to Madrid in 1640. It was a charming face, with a lovely, mysterious smile just beginning to show in the curves of lips and cheeks.

Adams was about to comment upon this portrait when Miss Lee came into the room for a word with His Lordship. Presently she turned to the Doctor:

"You've not seen Francis since he was in the States, Doctor—don't you think he's looking exceptionally fit?"

Doctor Adams nodded in agreement.

"That's occurred to me more than once, Miss Alma—he looks to me like a good risk for any insurance company."

As she left the room, the Earl remarked:

"When I was up in town last month, I had Sir Charles Janeway go over me from head to foot, and he gave me an absolutely clean bill—no organic trouble of any sort—said I ought to see a hundred. And the joke of it is, that examination has some bearing upon an occurrence last evening. Never told you any of our family traditions and super-

physician friend of the Free Lances in Diplomacy.

a Smile

HERBERT NEW

stitions, have I? In this case, however, I'll have to mention the superstition connected with that Velásquez portrait of my ancestress, the Countess Edith. It was painted just after her marriage to Earl Eustace, with whom she was passionately in love—supposing his feeling for her was fully as strong. But quite a number of our men have been as helpless in any question of petticoats as a person with an insatiable craving for liquor.

"Well, she found him in compromising circumstances with a girl she supposed was her most devoted friend. She said nothing at the time, but that night she came into his room to ask if he no longer loved her. He protested that he did—but simply couldn't promise her that he never would look at another woman. Eustace knew his weakness.

"Countess Edith stood looking at him, with a slow beautiful smile beginning to show around her mouth and in her eyes—the smile of a woman looking at the man she loves. Then she said—sadly but sweetly: 'You've not lied to me, Eustace—and for that I respect you. But you never will hold another woman in your arms—for at this time tomorrow night, you will die.'"

"By Jove! Did she kill him?"

"There was no evidence of it—not a shred! He just pitched off the top of the Norman Tower, landing on his head upon the stone flagging of the courtyard. Her last interview with him, and what she said, have been sufficiently well attested to leave no doubt as to its being authentic. How or why the superstition started is considerably more obscure. But it's been believed from that time that anyone of our house, man or woman, who ever saw that speaking, lovely smile come into the face of that portrait would certainly die at the same hour the following evening. . . . The amazing fact is that four Earls and one Countess of Grenellton *have* died exactly twenty-four hours after seeing that wistful smile of the Countess Edith! They were a stout-hearted lot, too—couldn't help telling of what they'd seen, but made light of it—ridiculed the tradition—yet died just the same."

"FOR the same reason that Eustace did, presumably?" asked Adams.

"In only two of the cases, as far as anyone knows. The other three were absolutely faithful—just why Countess Edith should have had it in for them nobody ever has found out. In my own case, I can't for the life of me imagine what I ever did to her! She always has had the place of honor here in my favorite room. I'm not married yet—true—but since our engagem'nt I've not had a thought of any other girl but Alma. And there isn't a woman in the world who has any claim whatever upon me!"

"Then—the Countess actually has smiled for you? Or were you dreaming?"

His Lordship shook his head.

"I wasn't dreaming. I'd been working last night, over papers connected with the estate—a new will I'd blocked out, among other things. But I was impressed enough to drive my car into Penzance this morning—execute the will and leave it with my local solicitors! Along toward midnight my man Jarnock, whom you knew in the States, fetched the Scotch-and-soda I usually take for a nightcap. I was tired from writing and figuring all the evening, so I sat

back, relaxed, and filled my pipe, fancying I'd finish a book I was half through, before turning in. I chanced to glance up at Countess Edith before getting out of my chair. As the only light in the room was this electric reading-lamp on my desk, the face was in shadow—so I tilted up the bronze shade and threw the light upon it. I fancy the picture never had appeared more lovely than it did at that moment. As I was looking at it, I could have sworn the lips began to curve, and the eyes to turn until they were looking directly into mine. I was as positive of the change in those features into that lovely smile as I am that I'm talking to you at this moment! Of course the most likely explanation is that in my relaxed condition, with the stimulus of good whisky and tobacco, the throwing upon the picture of much stronger illumination than it usually gets may have produced something of an hypnotic condition, in which the old tradition would have suggested the smile until it seemed that I did see it. I've dug into modern science too much to take any stock at all in ghosts or supernatural phenomena. If my lovely ancestress does get me tonight for any one of a thousand reasons which may have been dormant in her head all these years, I'd wager that she does it by perfectly normal human means an' not by any sort of 'haunt' whatever!"

"Say! . . . Look here, old chap! What you've given as a likely explanation is doubtless pretty close to the mark. It's simply got to be something along that line. But let's check up a bit and see if there may be a sidelight upon it. For instance, if Jarnock or one of the servants who could have had access to that bottle of whisky happened to have some grudge against you, and wanted to give you a jolt—even if he had no intention of going further than that—it would be entirely possible to slip a drug into that whisky that would make you imagine a lot of things. A small bit of hasheesh or opium in your pipe-tobacco would have the same effect, only more pronounced. Is there anyone in the household who just by chance might have such a grudge?"

GRENELLTON smiled confidently. "Not a soul! There isn't a man or woman who hasn't been with us at least ten or fifteen years—most of them are children of families who have served us for two or three centuries. There isn't a guest or retainer whom I wouldn't trust with my life or fortune. To the best of my knowledge and belief, I haven't an enemy in the world."

"Nevertheless, Grenellton," said Doctor Adams, "a rather sound idea would be for you to come up to my room in the south wing, barricade the door and windows, spend the night there with me. If you're alive in the morning that busts the old superstition, doesn't it? There are two excellent beds there, as you know. Come now! . . . How about it?"

"Playing safe, eh? But there seems to be a mental quirk in all of us which makes it almost physically impossible to run from danger. Foolish, if you like—oh, quite so! But there it is, d'ye see. I'll sit here at this desk with my pipe an' a book, as I did last evening—just to see what happens. My service-gun is here in the drawer, at my hand—I'm by way of bein' a qualified marksman with either rifle or pistol."

They left it at that, and went out to dance or play cards with the guests. None of them were of the night-owl breed—so they went up to their rooms before midnight, and their genial host returned to his study.

IT was about three in the morning that Adams woke with an uneasy feeling of apprehension. He donned a dressing-gown and slipped out into the hall. Alma Lee, similarly garbed, was just coming along toward him from the door of her room. She spoke in so low a tone that it was scarcely above a whisper:

"Did you hear anything, Doctor—any unusual sound?"

"Nothing but the distant murmur of the surf at the foot of the cliffs—and the slight creaking of timber which is common to all old buildings."

"What was it that made you get out of bed and open your door?"

"Just some vague hunch which I can't explain—an impression that something is happening, somewhere about the place. How about you?"

"Same thing! I'm worried—though I don't know of any reason why I should be!" And the girl shivered slightly.

"How are your nerves?" He took her wrist gently and tested the pulse. "Suppose something has happened—something which might be a pretty severe shock?"

"I'm out of doors too much to be bothered with nerves. —Why did you ask that, Doctor?"

"Simply because I can't seem to get rid of this fool hunch—that's all! I left Grenellton in his study when I turned in—he was going to finish a novel he'd been reading. You come down with me and stay in the hall while I have a look into that room. If there are burglars about, that's the place they'd make for—and if they hold a gun on me, you can rouse the house before they come out after you. Don't come into the study until I've found out whether anybody is there!"

He conveyed so entirely by his manner that it couldn't be anything save burglars who had aroused them, that she obeyed orders and stayed out in the main corridor—though she wanted to look into that room herself.

THOSE who know Doctor Adams best are firmly convinced there are always grounds for the amazing "hunches" he sometimes gets. This proved to be another case in the record.

The Earl was still in his swivel-chair—tilted back with his feet upon one corner of the desk, with a book upon his lap. A drawer was pulled out from the desk at his left, and his gray-bronze reading-lamp was still burning, throwing the light upon the pages of his book, but leaving his face in the shadow. In a couple of seconds, however, the Doctor saw the bullet-hole in the center of his forehead and the trickle of blood which ran down across his left cheek and upon the front of his dress-shirt. Adams stepped carefully up to him and felt of one hand. There was no pulse.

Then Adams noticed that the eyes were not fixed upon the book in his lap but had been raised to the portrait of Countess Edith, opposite to him, not ten feet away—they seemed to have an alert, speculative expression as though some trifling sound had distracted his attention from the book. It was not in the least an expression of pain or alarm—death must have been practically instantaneous. Where the lamplight fell upon the Persian rug at his left, lay his service-pistol which had been in the partly opened drawer—his left arm hung down straight as though it had dropped when the shot took effect, relaxing the grip of the fingers upon the pistol. The pipe had dropped from his mouth on the other side of the chair.

Without disturbing anything at all in the room, Adams softly went out to the girl in the hall and drew her toward the telephone-booth at its rear end—asking her to stand guard as he closed himself in, and tap on the glass if she thought the sound of his voice could be heard ten feet away. She nodded understandingly—supposing there had been burglars at work.

Putting in a trunk-call for Sloane 9A-564, he opened the door a crack for ventilation, and they stood there fully fifteen minutes before he heard the warning click which preceded the operator's voice saying he was "through."

Chief Inspector Beresford sleepily answered the call from his West End apartment. The Doctor closed the door and said softly:

"This is Adams—speaking from Grenellton Castle, twenty miles north of Penzance, on the cliffs. Something has occurred here which you'll want to investigate whether you interfere with the County force or not—Sir Edward, also. I want you both here as soon as you can make it by plane; there's a good landing on the moor back of the castle—ought to make it before breakfast at the outside. Fetch your dinner-kit. Understood?"

"Hmph! .... Aye. You'd not make such a request without jolly good reason. Haven't had but two hours' sleep, but I'll prob'ly get a couple more while flyin' down. Very good, Doctor! .... Fancy you may depend upon us."

COMING out of the booth, Adams found the puzzled girl wondering whom he'd been talking to—she'd caught nothing of the conversation but occasional words.

His next question, however, began to alarm her.

"Do you know of any first-class physician in this neighborhood whom Grenellton occasionally consults, Alma?"

"Why, yes. Doctor Snaith, just outside of St. Ives—he's been the family physician for years. Man of fifty-five or so, I'd say."

"Right in his prime—he won't mind getting out of bed at this time of night. Fortunately, Grenellton has paid a night operator in this exchange out of his own pocket for several years—and some other peer has done the same thing at St. Ives. So we'll probably get a connection into Snaith's house."

"Why do you want him, Doctor? You've the reputation of being a fairly big specialist, yourself! Is anything wrong with Francis?"

"Alma, girl—get a grip on yourself for some mighty sad news. Frank's gone from us. He saw the Countess Edith smile, night before last—you've heard the old superstition, of course? He laughed at it, as we'd expect him to do. Insisted upon staying there in the study to see what would happen—though I tried to persuade him to come up and spend the night with me. And he's in there now, apparently reading in his chair—but shot through the forehead, with his service-automatic on the floor at his side."

"You—you mean—that he—*shot* himself? Oh, that's impossible! I can't believe it! Why should he?"

"He shouldn't—unless some old inherited family weakness got him with a sort of auto-suggestion that all his house are supposed to do it if they see that picture smile. But Francis Grenellton's brain was entirely too sound for that sort of thing! On the other hand, the first casual impression of the evidence in that study would convince nine persons out of ten, I think, that he committed suicide in a moment of temporary irresponsibility induced by some inherited weakness. That's why I'm determined that nothing in that room shall be touched until his own physician has seen him. If Snaith has any doubts, we'll call in the County police. Just on the chance that we'll have to call them in, I've talked with Chief Inspector Beresford of Scotland Yard—he'll be down here with the Deputy Commissioner by seven at the latest."

THE girl sank weakly upon a bench. "Can't I—can't I go in and—look at him, Doctor?"

"Well—this is the way I see it, Alma. First place—if you get a look at him now, it will burn into your mind with a horror which will stay there as long as you live. Never get rid of it! Then—there's a side to this which hasn't penetrated yet, with you. If Francis *didn't* commit suicide—as neither you nor I admit—then every human being in this castle is under more or less suspicion of murdering him—I myself, as well as the others. If you remain your usual clear-headed self, girl, you'll see that there are pretty sound reasons for your not going in there at present. You can do nothing for him."

"Oh, I—I suppose you're right, Doctor! Frank—gone! It seems incredible! But I won't believe he deliberately killed himself when we were so happy together. . . . Oh, get Doctor Snaith quickly, can't you? Don't you see I'm trying to keep myself in hand? Hurry, please!"

Doctor Snaith promised to be at the castle in half an hour—and he did it. Adams had locked the study door to prevent anyone else from getting in there—and had roused Jarnock, who was heartbroken when he heard what had happened. As he knew more about his master's habits and tastes than anyone else, the two doctors took him into the study with them.

GRENELLTON had told his man that the Countess Edith had smiled at him—and Jarnock had laughed at what he considered a moth-eaten joke. Now, seeing the master to whom he had been unselfishly devoted, dead in his chair while looking up at the portrait, Jarnock muttered:

"My word! . . . So she *did* get 'im! Hypnotized 'im while the optic nerves were in a strained position, lookin' up at 'er, until he pulls open that drawer, reaches for 'is service-gun, an' does what she's eggin' 'im on to do!"

The two doctors glanced at each other and then at Jarnock in questioning surprise. This practical scientific theory hadn't occurred to either in just that way. In a moment Snaith remarked:

"I'd really not consider that impossible—with this old superstition runnin' through his mind every little while! Keeping the eyes fixed upon some object higher than the head until the optic nerves begin to feel the strain is the most favorable condition for hypnosis. Wouldn't you consider that an admissible theory, Doctor Adams?"

"If the person were not upon his guard against any sort of influence from that picture—yes. You'd consider it suicide, would you, Snaith?"

Doctor Snaith looked amazed.

"Why, what other explanation is there? The loyalty of the Grenellton servants is a byword in the County—and the guests now in the castle are well-known persons—quite above suspicion of harming their host. When the gates an' doors of the castle are locked for the night, it would take an outsider some hours to get in, an' he'd make a bit of noise doin' it. There's the man's own service-pistol lyin' on the rug—recently fired. You both say he kept it in that partly open drawer. . . . If ever there

was a clearer case of suicide than this, I never heard of it!"

"You're willing to sign a death-certificate as suicide, are you, Snaith?"

"Why—of course! Why not? What else is there to do?"

"Then there really is no reason for calling in the County police?"

"Well—when a person dies from a stab or gunshot-wound, it's generally advisable for the attending physician to call in the Coroner for a look-see. If he's satisfied, there's no inquest an' it's not a police matter at all. If he fancies there is anything suspicious, he orders the inquest an' fetches in a few constables to examine the persons in the house at the time of death."

"If you're thoroughly satisfied, would you be expected to call in the Coroner at this time of night—or would it be all right to wait until after breakfast?"

"As long as nothing is moved in the room, I fancy he'd thank me to wait until after breakfast."

"Well, I was hoping the usual procedure would be something like that, Doctor—it gives us time to do a little investigating upon our own account. First—I want to ask our friend here a question: Jarnock, do you believe His Lordship shot himself—or don't you?"

"Well, sir—when I first looked about this room I'd 'ave said 'e did—without any 'esitation. Now—well, I'm not so sure! It's just about the last thing 'e'd do in any circumst'nces, because 'e was not flighty, d'ye see—proper cool-'eaded, 'e was. An' there's something about this that I just don't get. I fancy I'll 'ave it in another moment—an' then it'll slip me again."

"Suppose he held that pistol at arm's-length—pointing at his forehead—pulled the trigger with his thumb? Would there be any powder-burns on his face, or wouldn't there—at that distance?"

"My word! I never thought of that! Possibly that was one of the things I couldn't grasp! Say the length of 'is reach to the butt of the pistol would be about two feet from 'is forehead. That would fetch the muzzle six or eight inches nearer—call it eighteen inches at the outside. Well, d'ye see, sir, at eighteen inches there'd be a reg'lar peppering of blackened dots from red-hot powder-grains all over 'is face, even with a twenty-two-caliber — an' this service-gun's a thirty-eight! I know somethin' of guns—I was by way of bein' the best

pistol-shot in our comp'ny, durin' the war, sir."

"Well, then, did His Lordship fire that shot at his forehead himself—or didn't he?"

"'E did *not*, sir—it would be quite h'impossible to do so without making any powder-burns!"

Adams turned to his colleague.

"There's another little point worth checking. All the indications are that the pistol was held in his left hand. But he never used his left hand for anything except to hold something he was working on with his right—from any sort of tools to unscrewing a cover from anything. How about it, Snaith? Are you still quite positive as to its being suicide?"

"Faith—I'm not! You an' Jarnock have given that supposition a rare jolt! I've handled firearms sufficiently—have observed the Earl for years enough—to know that you're both quite right. But—dammit all—where does that leave us? If he didn't kill himself—what other supposition is there? You're parin' it down to a d'rect inference of—well—actual murder, Adams! An' that's rather impossible, you know! What?"

"Why? The man's dead, isn't he? We're satisfied that he couldn't have killed himself! Where does that leave you?"

"With the inference that, in each case, the traditional deaths after seeing the Countess Edith's famous smile—or infamous, if you like—have been brought about by normal human enemies who did their work so craftily that they never once were suspected, an' bolstered up this crazy superstition by each infernal act. This of course supposes the existence of some enemy who hated Grenellton. Can you think of anyone like that, Jarnock?"

"No sir. I've never 'appened to know a person who was better liked by h'everyone who knew 'im than 'Is Lordship, Francis of Grenellton! There's not a soul in this 'ouse'old who'd 'ave done it, Doctor—not even if they went suddenly balmy. An' it would be simply out of the question with any of the guests h'at present in the castle."

"H-M-M—after all, Adams, we'd best have the Coroner here as soon as we can get him!" said Snaith. "This affair is showing up in a vastly diff'rent coloring than it did at first appearance. Of course if it's murder, it's a police matter, entirely out of my hands. Any loss of time is helpin' the murderer to escape!"

"Er—just a minute, Snaith. You said it would appear perfectly all right if you didn't call the Coroner before breakfast. If you call him now, that means we'll have the Chief Constable here within a couple of hours at the outside. Sir Borden Flommock, isn't he? I'm told that he's a martinet who thinks very highly of himself. Well, if a man like that takes charge, he'll go at it bull-headedly—fill this study with his constables until they're likely to destroy a lot of evidence which may be here, and possibly place everyone in the castle under arrest. Now—for half an hour after you got here you'd have sworn this was suicide. Chances are Sir Borden and the Coroner will take the same view—for some time, anyway. So I can't see that you're taking much risk in waiting until breakfast-time. Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Inspector Beresford are flying down from Scotland Yard—they'll reach the castle by seven, getting a chance to examine this room thoroughly before Sir Borden gets here. After photographing what they want to, and thoroughly going over the premises, they'll stand aside—appear as two of the Earl's guests—let Sir Borden take any course he wishes to with his County police, unless he oversteps his authority. Then we can call them in officially and get some action. How does this strike you?"

"Oh, if the Deputy Commissioner is coming down with Beresford, I can only compliment you on your foresight. Do anything you suggest, Adams!"

THE plane carrying Sir Edward Pelham and Beresford came down on the moor back of the castle at ten minutes before seven. None of the other guests or servants had been told as yet of the night's tragedy, so the household was functioning as usual. Jarnock merely informed the butler and chef that several guests were arriving by plane at an unusually early hour and they'd all appreciate a hot breakfast upon their arrival.

It developed that Beresford had also fetched down his best photographer and expert fingerprint man on the conviction that they'd be needed in whatever the Doctor seemed to be messed up in.

After finishing breakfast, they went out on the cliff-brow for a conference. Here it was certain that nobody could overhear them. Without giving them any of the conclusions already reached, Adams rapidly sketched the Countess Edith tradition and his talk with Grenellton in the study concerning it; then of his going downstairs with Alma Lee in the middle of the night—and what he had found. Then he took them into the study, with the photographer and the fingerprint man, bolting the door to prevent interruption.

"Here you are, gentlemen, exactly as I found things. I'd like to have you examine the body and ask any questions which occur to you. Examine this room as thoroughly as if you scented an insoluble mystery—but do it as quickly as possible, in case Snaith wants the Coroner to come down for a look-see."

Beresford nodded.

"Aye—it's always best to do that in the case of gunshot or knife-wounds, so as to prevent subsequent misunderstanding or suspicion. Of course we're not down here officially, unless the Earl's family or the local police call us in. Sir Borden Flommock is a diffic'lt sort to work with—he never calls in the Yard on his own initiative. Well—we've been

digesting what you've given us about the superstition connected with that portrait. Of course that old superstition would frequently recur to any Grenellton descendant. Diffic'lt to say how far we ever can admit auto-suggestion as a compellin' cause—but there's no question whatever that it's had to be taken into account in any number of cases. This would appear to be one of them. Two of you certify that the pistol is the one Grenellton habitually kept in that drawer. One shot has been fired—ejected shell on the floor—wound made by a 'thirty-eight'—pistol dropped from his fingers as he died. Any suggestions, Doctor, as to other points you fancy we should look for, here?"

"Well—I'd like to be dead sure that nobody came into this room during the night. See if you can find anything to indicate that."

"But—one doesn't precisely see—"

"For example. There were hickory logs blazing on those andirons when I left the Earl last night—quite a lot of charred embers and white ash upon the stone flagging of that fireplace. A faint trace of them is on the waxed floor at the right of it. Looks to me a bit small to have been made by the Earl's foot—but it might have been. There may be other traces where I haven't looked. I've kept everybody out of this study until you got here, just so you'd find it absolutely undisturbed—made no attempt to examine it myself, lest I displace something."

WITH their flashlights, the officials minutely examined every inch of the woodwork, book-shelves, furniture and floor. They found and had photographed the fingerprints of different persons in several places—cigarette-ash of two different kinds—the sharpened stump of a cedar pencil with a round rubber on its end, lying against the foot of the wainscoting at the right of the fireplace—a trouser-button behind the door leading into the hall—the only exit from the room. Under the leather divan was a scrap of manila wrapping-paper with a few lines of writing and figures penciled upon it—not the Earl's. As the entire castle was kept in a meticulously neat condition, all of these things, presumably, had been brought into the room since the maid had dusted it the previous day. At last there seemed nothing further worth photographing—no crack or corner which they hadn't examined. So they went out and locked the door. The experts flew back in the plane and developed their negatives, while Sir Edward and the Chief Inspector had a wash-up in the rooms assigned them by Murdock the butler, then joined the other guests at their late breakfast.

DOCTOR SNAITH phoned for the Coroner. When this official reached the castle, he was accompanied by the Chief Constable, who had heard a rumor in St. Ives that Snaith had been sent for in the middle of the night, and thought it suspicious that he should now send for the Coroner. Snaith had been waiting in the great hall and took them at once into the study. Sir Borden promptly sent for Doctor Adams and proceeded to put him through an exasperating grilling, which the American took good-humoredly at first. Finally he said:

"I've answered your questions courteously, Sir Borden—told you exactly how I happened to come down here with Miss Lee during the night and what we did. Your manner and questions imply that you consider me a liar occasionally, if not all the time—yet I didn't shoot my good friend Lord Grenellton, and you don't even imagine I did. Now—you'll get at the facts a lot more quickly if you keep a civil tongue in your head. —Taking the situation as you see it, Coroner, what's your opinion?"

"Well—officially, Doctor, I really can't see anything but suicide, prob'ly caused by His Lordship dwelling too much upon this old superstition an' imagining he saw things he couldn't have seen. But of course if the Chief Constable isn't satisfied—" Brown said diffidently.

"Seems to be up to you, Sir Borden. If it's suicide, the police simply don't come into it. If not, we'll naturally give you all the assistance we can."

"Aye? . . . . Will ye so! An' what if I fancy it may be—murder?"

"Then the matter is in your hands, of course. But out of consideration for the Earl's family and his fiancée, you should decide as soon as possible. This is a pretty sad time for all of them, you know."

The Chief Constable, without having made any close investigation of the room or the body, decided to let the case go as suicide. But as he reëntered the hall, he saw the two Yard officials discussing the tragedy with the other guests, who were much too shocked to occupy themselves with anything.

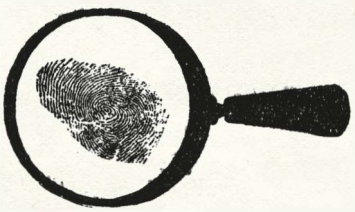
Flommock's face was almost purple as he remarked:

"We seem to be unusually favored, gentlemen—havin' expert assistance from the C.I.D. in a suicide-case before we even consider it a police matter at all!"

Sir Edward was suavely apologetic: "We certainly will not offer assistance, Sir Borden, until you do ask for it—we didn't even know His Lordship was dead, until we flew down here this morning." This was literal truth—Adams certainly had mentioned nothing of the sort over the wire. "If it's a clear case of suicide, you're not ordering an inquest? I'm sure the family will appreciate that very much."

When Flommock and the Coroner had disappeared, Adams, Snaith, the two Yard men and Jarnock went into the armory for a discussion and lighted their pipes. The Chief Inspector had been doing a lot of concentrated thinking. In a moment, he brought his fist down upon the arm of his chair with a bang.

"What a blithering bat—to overlook a thing staring us in the face! The whole appearance of that room was so infernally conclusive that it seemed ridiculous to consider any other explanation! I've been wondering—trying to figure out what Adams could have had in his mind when he sent for us to come down. My word! An' all the time it was as plain as my own nose! No powder-marks on Grenellton's face—there's the whole story, as far as the killing goes! The shot was fired from the side of the room he was looking at—somewhere along by the fireplace or book-shelving—from a distance of prob'ly eight or ten feet!



Hmph! . . . . This is where Sir Borden would seem to have slipped a cog an' offered himself up for sacrifice! He had everything to see that we saw—particularly, the absence of powder-marks. An' he's officially lettin' it go as suicide! When we get the case all sewed up we can eliminate Flommock without making a goat of the Coroner, Brown, who is a very decent sort—for you say Doctor Brown put it d'rectly up to Flommock for decision an' he accepted the responsibility. Now—what would be your suggestion, Sam? We're with you—all the way! It was murder—fiendishly clever an' damnable murder!"

ADAMS lighted his pipe reflectively. "As I see it, the whole affair hinges upon that devilishly beautiful portrait, which unquestionably has been used for five murders before this one. Each of the murderers must have known, in his day and generation, some secret connected with that picture which enabled him to use it for his purpose. Such murderers, seventy or eighty years apart, scarcely could have been outsiders getting that secret by accident—could they? No! . . . . It's much more likely that they were members of the household with an investigating turn of mind in each case. They figured, just as we are doing now, that there must be some secret connected with that portrait—and concentrated upon that detail until they found it. We must presuppose that in each case it has been some household retainer—some near or distant relative. The very fact that the absolute loyalty of everyone in the castle always has seemed above suspicion would be very materially in the murderer's favor. Of course I don't yet know your slant upon the affair—the way what we know so far will react upon the regular crime-investigating mind. But it seems to me there are only two main lines of investigation. Grenellton executed a new will yesterday morning down at Penzance and left it there with his solicitors. Know who they are, Snaith?"

"Aye—Forbes an' Wilkins—known 'em for years."

"Then they'll make no bones about giving you a copy of that last will for Lady Helen and Miss Lee if you drive down there this morning—tell 'em what's happened—and say the request comes from the Deputy Commissioner of the C.I.D. We'll get some clue from that will—depend upon it! Next—I recall His Lordship's telling me the afternoon I arrived that he had among his most treasured possessions the architect's plans for additions to the castle in 1420 and also other restorations at later dates. Lady Helen will know where those plans are kept, and I'm betting we'll find something in them which will give us a clue as to where we might look for more or less direct evidence. He said that portrait has hung over the fireplace in his study for five generations to his cer-

tain knowledge—had old letters which mentioned its being there. If we can dig up data somewhere that it has hung there since Earl Eustace fetched it home from Madrid with his bride, a solution of this affair ought to be easier. One fact to keep steadily in mind is that we're not dealing with any ghostly fiend who reappears at intervals of half a dozen generations! I fancy examination of the records will show exactly who profited by the previous murders. If you can arrange to run down to Penzance, Doctor Snaith, and get that copy of the will from the solicitors, the rest of us will have a conference with Lady Helen. By the way, Jarnock—do you know where the Earl's safe is concealed, in the study?"

"Aye, sir. The Persian rug under his desk-chair covers a trap-door which is matched so closely to the oak strips of the parquetry floor that it doesn't show at all when you lift the rug. A section of the window-casing opens on hinges, an' there's a long steel lever be'ind it. Pull that out an' one edge of the trap lifts a couple of h'inches so one may grasp an' swing it up. Then there's a bit of a ladder down into the little stone room below, in which a steel door swings out from a steel frame set ten inches into the solid masonry. New combination-locks were put on that thick steel door just before the war. Be'ind the door, the space is big enough to stand an' turn about in—shelves an' pigeon-'oles at the back. Doubtless the plans you speak of would be found down there, sir, although there are storage-boxes for jewels an' valuables in the master's private suite as well."

"That's almost directly over the study, isn't it?"

"Aye, sir—two baths an' three communicatin' rooms which are bein' done over as Miss Lee wished, in view of their approachin' marriage, which was to have been next month. The painters an' plumbers finished three days ago, sir."

"So there was actually nobody sleeping over that study—nowhere near over it, or around any side of it—at the time he was shot? No wonder none of us heard that shot! These walls are four or five feet thick—and even more than that in places."

LADY HELEN knew the combination for the strong-room under the study, though she never had unlocked the steel door herself. It took them but a few minutes to open it and look about for the old plans—which they found, drawn upon parchment and glued to thin wooden backing, stacked against one of the steel walls in an oilcloth wrapping. For nearly an hour they studied them—finding dotted lines indicating secret passages and small chambers in the thickness of the masonry. Upon the old plan

of the ground floor and study, there was a scrap of yellowed parchment—memoranda concerning the location of a spring in the oak wainscoting at the right of the big fireplace which opened a panel in it and gave access to a secret passage and small chamber which apparently must be six feet or more above the floor-level and directly behind the Countess' portrait—the chimney-flue going up through the rear half of it. Without much confidence that the old mechanism would work after so long a stretch of intervening years, they presently located the strip of molding which covered the spring, and pressed hard upon it. To their amazement, the panel slid noiselessly into a socket at one side. They found that the steel levers and springs had been covered with a preservative grease, with evidence that a modern lubricating oil had been recently added to the moving parts.

From the chamber around the chimney-flue, they found another passage leading up through the wall to a large oak chest, richly carved, which was built into the wainscoting of the master's suite overhead and for that reason had not been disturbed by the decorators—the bottom of it lifting up on concealed hinges when the chest was empty.

Beresford was of the opinion that the murderer somehow had obtained the combination of the strong-room door—studied the plans—and got down into the chamber through that chest—then

cleaned and lubricated the mechanism of the study-panel from behind, at some time when the Earl was away for a week or two.

WHEN they came to examine the wall of the secret chamber, back of the portrait, they found an opening cut through the stone a little smaller than the frame surrounding it, which seemed to be solidly set in—the canvas being glued to a laminated oak backing an inch thick. A narrow strip of this backing just behind the eyes of the portrait had been cut out, the ends shortened a quarter of an inch, and the eyeballs skillfully cut around the lids with a sharp knife—evidently by some one who had stood on a ladder placed against the fireplace on the other side.

By sliding this strip of oak backing to which the eyeballs were glued, a fraction of an inch from side to side, the effect as seen from the study was that of living, moving eyes glancing from one side to the other. Just where the curves of the cheeks deepened at the sides of the mouth, little round plugs had been cut out of the laminated backing and two loops of braided silk glued to the back of the canvas. When these were gently pulled back a little, the effect from the study-side was that of dimples in the painted cheeks which seemed to enlarge and deepen the smile. The big ruby depicting the pendant of the necklace had been very neatly cut around its setting and a plug cut from the backing to which it was glued. When this plug was pulled out, it left a hole an inch-and-three-quarters in diameter, through which everything in the study could be distinctly seen—particularly, any person seated at the desk, nine feet away. The edges of this hole behind the big ruby were blackened with powder-burns—bearing mute witness to the way the last three victims had been killed. From the study, there was no indication whatever of the cutting and fitting which had been done—the laminated oak backing, with the strip and plugs, prevented any sinking or indentation of the canvas, especially as seen from a level several feet lower.

Upon a table and shelving in this little cubby-hole were a supply of tinned foods and bottles of wine—in the opposite corner, a mattress and blankets on the floor, badly in need of washing. Of course after the panel-mechanism had been put in working order anyone who holed up in that secret chamber could get in or out through the study and let himself in or out of the castle any night, if he had duplicate keys. . . .

In the afternoon, Doctor Snaith returned from Penzance with a copy of the last will. Lady Helen invited them to join her, with Alma Lee, in her attractive living-room on the second floor—and asked Doctor Adams if he would read the will to them. When he had finished, she remarked that there seemed to be nothing in it beyond what her brother Francis had had in mind to do for some time. As most of the beneficiaries, aside from household retainers and family connections, were known to them, neither Pelham, Beresford nor Snaith could spot anything in the will that seemed to indicate a possible murderer. But after considering a moment, Adams said:

"Let me read one of these paragraphs over to you—seems to me the clue we're after may be in it:

> After due consideration, some discussion with Lord Rantoul, and hearty agreement upon his part, in consideration of the lump sum of fifty thousand pounds for which I gave him a check six weeks ago—I have decided to break and cancel the entail-provision in the wills of the Grenellton Peers during the last three hundred years in regard to the temporary succession, for one lifetime only, of descendants of the Bastard of Dregarthen to the Grenellton fortune, title and estates, which at the death of said inheriting descendant again reverts to the Grenellton heir in the direct line. While this Dregarthen inheritance has only occurred a few times when the Grenellton succession failed of a son or daughter, I feel, as my father and grandfather did, that it is a survival of traditional mediævalism which has no place in modern life and always constitutes a potential injustice to my collateral heirs. As Lord Rantoul is in comfortable circumstances and is in this generation merely a distant connection of my family, he quite agrees with me that this old traditional provision in the entail should be abolished. So I hereby abolish it for all time and instruct my solicitors to file the necessary document to that effect.

"Now," Adams went on, "as this cancellation appears to be entirely satisfactory to Lord Rantoul, who I understand is a well-known personage, there would appear to be no object whatever in his killing Grenellton before this will could be executed. Yet somehow I can't get rid of the hunch that the clue to the mur-

der is in that paragraph. What's the story, Lady Helen?"

"Countess Mary Grenellton stabbed herself, at about the end of Elizabeth's reign, and while dying confessed to the priest that her son was not the child of Earl Richard, to whom she was said to be very much attached, but was the son of Sir Robert Dregarthen. The son, Robert, swore she was out of her mind —but Richard asked why, if that were true, Countess Mary should kill herself, eighteen years afterward. Of course there could be no proof either way—but the son was known thereafter as the 'Bastard of Dregarthen' and neither he nor his descendants ever had any legal claim upon us. But just because there was no proof, the Earl of the next generation put this proviso in the entail, and it has been there ever since."

A SUDDEN recollection struck Sir Edward.

"But—I say, you know! That old provision couldn't affect Lord Rantoul one way or the other! It just occurs to me that the news-sheets mentioned his dying of heart-disease while his son was motoring down with him from Scotland, at the beginning of this week. The son is by way of bein' a speed-maniac an' has a car which does over a hundred, at times. Rantoul's heart had been wonky for two or three years—an' the medicos said that some of the youngster's narrow shaves at high speed quite possibly jolted his father until the old heart went out of business. Were they here with you occasionally, Lady Helen?"

Lady Helen nodded. "Frequ'ntly. Rantoul and my brother were by way of being very good friends. None of us care so much for the Honorable James. He's clever—not much good at sports, but a capital shot and rides well when anyone cares to risk a horse with him. I fancy he inherits a cruel streak from his Greek mother, as well as her good looks, for he seems to enjoy tormenting any dumb animal, and he has an ungovernable temper. Our servants are well-trained, of course, but they dislike him extremely. The father and son were recently down here for a month."

"Wait a bit—let me get this properly. You say they're both down here frequ'ntly—doubtless they know this castle from one end to the other. If Lord Rantoul died of heart-disease a week ago, this son must be now Lord James Rantoul. An' if he was the *de facto* Lord Rantoul at the time of Earl Francis' death last night, without a direct heir, unquestionably he would have inherited the Grenellton title, estates and millions to do with as he pleased durin' his lifetime, as lineal descendant of the Bastard of Dregarthen—if Grenellton hadn't cancelled that entail-proviso in this last will, which James saw no possibility of his having time to execute and which the Earl *wouldn't* have executed, if it hadn't been for Countess Edith's 'death smile.' (As it is, you inherit, as Countess Helen of Grenellton.) James knew the condition of his father's heart—drove him down from Scotland like a crazy man, no doubt knowing it was likely to kill him! Oh—I say! Look here, Lady Helen! . . . . Have you seen any of these things before?"

Beresford drew from his pocket half a dozen objects and laid them on a small table before her.

"Why, of course—many times! This is James Rantoul's stub-pencil—his miserly streak never would let him use one that cost more than a ha'penny. And everyone about the place has seen him use this cheap pocket-knife. The figures and writing upon this scrap of wrapping-paper are James'. This outline of a footprint is about the size of his shoe—though of course I couldn't be positive about that."

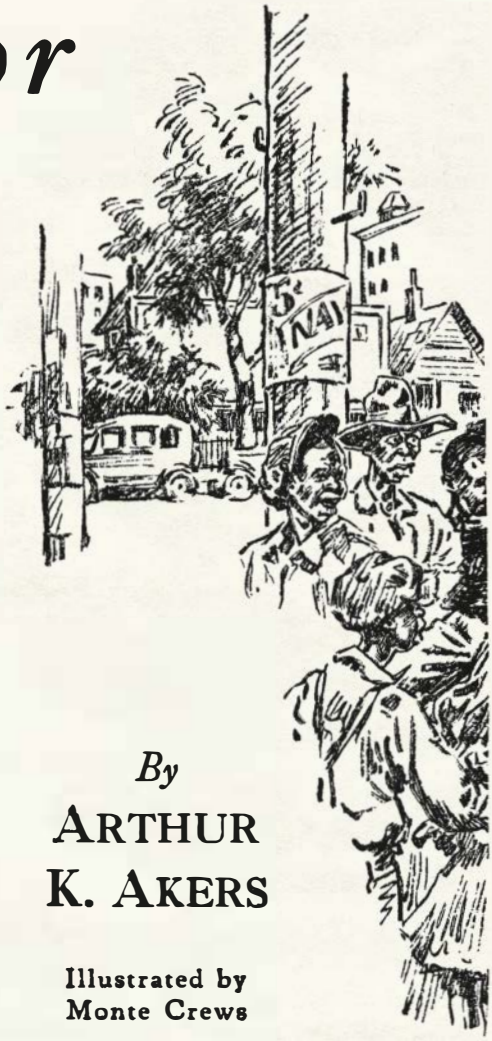
THE Chief Inspector drew a long breath of mingled amazement, disgust and relief. He had anticipated a thoroughly baffling mystery in the affair —had feared to order an inquest because of the practical certainty that a verdict of suicide would be given.

"The Doctor was right—as he so frequ'ntly is! I'll put through a trunk-call to arrest Lord James Rantoul wherever found! We'll have Doctor Brown get a Coroner's jury together at once and hold an inquest here before we move the Earl's body. They're practically certain to call it suicide—which will be in the London news-sheets on every breakfast-table and make Rantoul consider himself absolutely safe; so we'll have no trouble in finding him—prob'ly at his club or his town diggings. My word! . . . . I'm not bloody-minded—but I mean to see that fiend hanged! And next time the Countess Edith smiles upon any Grenellton, let's hope he goes up at once to find who's been camping in her private room!"

Another of these, the last of Mr. New's stories, will appear in the November issue.

Toreador

A man from Mexico stages a bull-fight in Darktown—and the devil takes the hindmost.



By

ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Monte Crews

"EIGHT-ROCK" SPENCER dropped his jaw and a fresh-caught fish. What if Lily saw what he was seeing! Eight-rock was squat-figured, overalled, and named after his color, which was locally known as "dark black." And if the darky dismounting from that motorcycle across the Square were not a phantom, Mr. Spencer's love-troubles were fixing to start!

For Lily loved the glitter of life. And did this re-arrival glitter! From jingling spurs at Cuban heels, he soared shiningly upward through button-studded black pants, crimson sash, and short blue velvet jacket to the crashing climax of a three-gallon sombrero that finished setting off its wearer from all the rest of the human race north of the Rio Grande.

Worse, open-mouthed and irresistibly this costume drew all beholders, until even Eight-rock found himself greeting its wearer, his rival, in reluctant admiration: "Dawggone! Cave-mouth! When you git back? And whar from?"

"Monty to you—short for de name of de town in Mexico whar-at I been." Magnificence airily combined correction with answer. "Monterey Hunt's de *full* name."

"Mexico!" The murmur ran awed through Mr. Hunt's gallery.

"Been splatterin' myself all over de map, copious," he elaborated more loudly. "Jest gits back. Motorin'. Uh—whar-at my gal Lily live now?"

"Kaufman's Alley. Shows you de place!" volunteered a dozen knob-eyed auditors.

"Shows me nothin'!" Mr. Hunt was remounting his machine. "Jest tell her *I* is back, at de Walda'f-'Storia Ho-tel for Cullud. Stoppin' regular. She can git herself a load of lookin' at me dar!"

The murmur mounted. In Mexico, it seemed, they *told* women instead of asking them!

Eight-rock recovered his fish, and dusted it off. "Feets, do your stuff! Me and de fish follers on," he issued orders vaguely to himself. With Monty back in town like this, his own campaign for Lily's favor was again headed for haywire!

But halfway up Hogan's Alley, he halted to gape. New things were afoot there, too. Atop a ladder, Bugwine Breck, undersized and underbrained assistant in the Columbus Collins detective agency (for colored) was trying to hang a sign.

"Buys it cheap, from de laundry white-folks," Columbus answered unspoken inquiry in the halted Eight-rock's eyes. *"—Git dat sign right-side up, Bugwine!"*

"What de sign say?" Eight-rock had to act interested, even in his suffering.

"Say, 'Let us do your dirty work.'

Aint dat what private detectives is for, too?"

Mr. Spencer couldn't deny it. Besides, he was in a hurry to reach the Waldorf. Where he found feared and further knots in his luck: not only Monty, but Lily, had preceded him there—with Monty all mouth and Lily all ears.

"Come here, Eight-rock, and learn yo'-

"Why, I jest draps off to sleep, on a boat, down Mobile, once," Mr. Spencer responded recklessly to her mood. "Rides as fur in my sleep as Monty is *conscious!*"

"Wakes up across de Bay, eh?" jeered

"Jest gits back from Mexico—motorin'," boasted the new arrival. "Whar-at my gal Lily live now?"

self somep'n!" she hailed the overalled one on sight. "Mist' Hunt done been places and seed things! Like a bull-fight!"

Eight-rock scowled. Foreign travel sure built a boy up with the women!

Yet, even as his night darkened, inspiration flashed cometlike across it. If the way to fight the devil was with fire, then why not a liar with—

"Aint never seen no sense in all-time big-mouthin' about whar you is been," he followed his gleam, launched his counter-attack. "I been places, too—plenty."

Lily sparkled delightedly. Nothing was more ladylike than to have a couple of gentlemen start razoring each other over her!

Mr. Hunt. Liars must know their geography.

"Naw; wakes up in—Mexico!"

"Yeah? Whar-at in Mexico?" Monterey Hunt set his trap then.

"Right alongside de bull-fightin' grounds, dat's whar!" Eight-rock sidestepped the snare. "And starts right in helpin' round de stables. Aint no time till I's de mainmost head bull-fighter in de place. You goes to see a bull-fight, is you? Well, *me and dem bulls* was what *you* went to see!"

Lily leaned like a dusky flower on its stalk toward the abler liar. What if Eight-rock had been in Mexico—instead of in jail in Montgomery, as reported—all last spring? And hiding his bull-fighting light under the bushel

of a job sweeping out the poolroom in "Fish Alley" ever since. . .

"Boy what's been *in* bull-fights," she concluded judicially, "is got it all over one what's jest been to *see* one." Then, femininely, archly: "But what counts wid me is, who de best man *now?*"

"Aint no bull-fightin' up here to tell by." Mr. Spencer's regret was a work of art.

Mr. Hunt, taken aback, scowled, snorted—and retired for a huddle on the hoof with himself. How to put Eight-rock in his place had become a question.

For four blocks he met with no answer. Then he met "Frogface" Reeves.

The portly Frogface had come honestly by his nickname,—which described him,—if not by his office, which dignified but did not nourish him. Mr. Reeves was starving, fraternally, in the midst of plenty, being Supreme Exalted Potentate of the Sons of Asia, Africa, and America—a lodge that at the moment was taking in more territory than dues.

Simultaneously this Potentate caught his breath and first glimpse of Mr. Hunt's hat. Then, "Hang around de Hill long in *dem* clothes, Cave-mouth," he recognized and welcomed a wanderer home, "and you gits lodge-office six minutes after you j'ines!"

"'Monty' to you—after de name de town in Mexico whar-at I been," corrected Mr. Hunt mechanically. "And got too much on my mind to mess wid j'inin' no lodges."

"A boy what aint head-man of a busted lodge," rebutted the rebuffed Mr. Reeves, "aint know nothin' about havin' nothin' on his mind!"

Mr. Hunt thought of Eight-rock and Lily—and knew better, saying so aloud.

"Naw," persisted the Potentate sarcastically, "*I* aint got no trouble—jest four hundred of de brothers is behind wid dey dues . . . . and Grand Lodge meetin' comin' on me in no time now! I got to pep 'em up quick, or it—and my administration—fixin' to be a flop. And us done all out of pep."

BUT here Mr. Hunt, who had apparently been eying impatiently the new ex-laundry sign of the Collins Detective Agency across the alley, suddenly and seemingly went crazy. He leaped a foot; he slapped the overstuffed and startled Potentate resoundingly on the back; he did a foreign-looking dance on the sidewalk. "You say de lodge needs revivin' up?" his eager question followed.

"Yeah," wheezed and crowed the reviving Potentate warily, "but aint no sense in figurin' on dat Columbus and Bugwine place you's lookin' at, doin' it. Dem boys gum up eve'ything dey touches —all time gittin' dey foot in it—"

"Who say nothin' about Columbus and Bugwine!" scoffed Monty. "I says when you meets *me,* luck done lit on yo' limb! I done scum up a scheme jest den, to pep up yo' lodge and rake in de coin, copious. Boys'll flock, financial, from fur as Memphis to look at it!"

"Look at what?"

"Bull-fight!"

"Bull— *Huh?*" Mr. Reeves' vest ballooned as his figure flattened in a relapse.

"Says bull-fight—what me and you is fixin' to put on for yo' lodge."

RESPECT dawned swiftly in Frogface's outstanding orbs: here was something to jar the brothers from their lethargy, and restore his administration!

"I 'tends to eve'ything," the toreador followed through. "Lodge gits all but eighty per cents of de gross gate. I gits dat, and furnishes de bull, free. Foller me?"

"I's way ahead of you!" crowed the Potentate.

"Fine! Den all you got to do now is tell me whar-at I gits de bull. *I* 'tends to eve'ything, from now on," Mr. Hunt kept the iron of promotion sizzling hot.

"Dey's a good stout fence around de cullud ball-park, wid plenty seats inside, at two-bits a seat," Mr. Reeves' own intellect got hurriedly into gear.

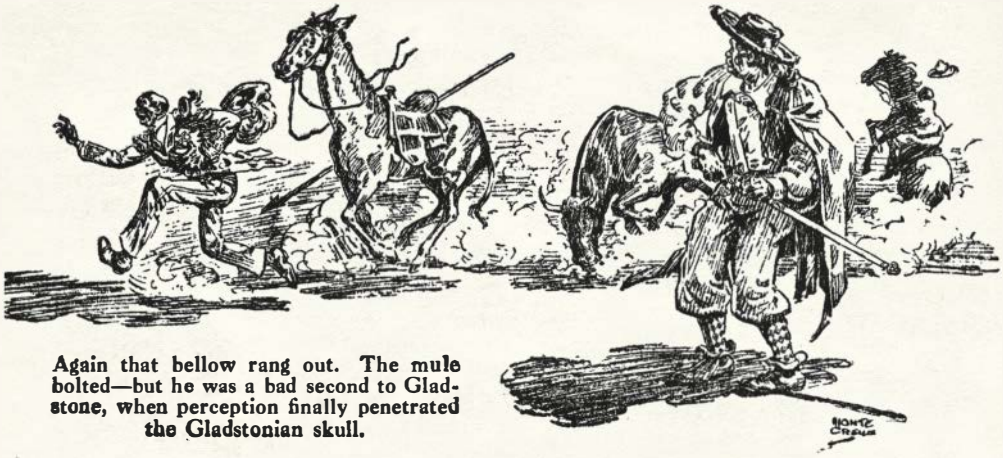
"Which takes care of eve'ything but de bull. Who got one?"

"Samson G. Bates is. Only he kind of wild—de bull is, I means. Nourished hisself too much on mash from Samson's still when he was a calf and git de taste; regular souse when he can git it, only he cain't git it. Makes him wild, now."

"Craves 'em wild. Matadors and picadors got to show de folks action: relies copious on de bull for action!"

"Git Samson's old black Bolivar bull, and you *gits* action!" promised Frogface darkly.

Return to the scene of Mr. Hunt's recent temporary reversal showed already a change in the wind in his favor:



Again that bellow rang out. The mule bolted—but he was a bad second to Gladstone, when perception finally penetrated the Gladstonian skull.

Eight-rock had gone, but Lily still lingered.

Monty gave her an eyeful, and: "Me and Mist' Reeves gittin' up a big bull-fight."

Lily's reaction was gratifying. And, "Fight what bull?" she got down to earth and details at length.

"Samson G. Bates' old Bolivar."

"Hot dawg!" Lily got goggle-eyed. "Eve'ybody knows dat bull—ruint hisself on still-mash when he was a pup! And aint he de grouch now! Wuss'n a live lion!"

"Bulls cain't come too tough for me!" Mr. Hunt deprecated Bolivar.

"You sho is brave—Monty!" Lily's eyes widened, then softened.

"Got to be, in my business."

"And here comes Eight-rock back again, too! *You* tell him about it, Mist' Hunt!"

Then, as that fish-bearing biped neared, "Step on yo'self, Eight-rock! You and de fish fixin' to hear a mouthful!" she hailed him happily.

"Done heard too much now!" Mr. Spencer tried to show animation, but remained neck-and-neck with his fish in that respect.

"Us fixin' to put on a bull-fight as *is* one, like down in Mexico, for benefit de Three-A lodge," Mr. Hunt ignored boorishness in the lower classes.

"Yeah? Well, bull-fights aint nothin' to me," Eight-rock hid an aching and envious heart beneath an outward scorn. "I been *in* more bull-fights dan *you* is seen!"

"Jest what I been tellin' Lily here," purred Mr. Hunt. "And how boys will come from as fur off as Memphis and Pensacola to see it when dey hears dey gwine see *you* fight a bull!"

"See *me* fight a—" Mr. Spencer's startled yelp of dismay got turned into a strangling spell only in the nick of time. But under its cover he saw all! In bragging before Lily he had bragged himself into his rival's hands—and into a bull-fight! With half the county, and Lily, looking on!

"—And us advertises eve'ywhar,"—above his paroxysms Eight-rock could hear Matador Monty quoting devastatingly from his own earlier fabrications, —"to come see de big mainmost Mexican bull-fighter, Señor Eighter, fight wid de world's most ferocious bull, Bolivar—"

Mr. Spencer's retchings grew too great for mere stranglings to conceal. He knocked over two chairs as further smoke-screen for his sufferings, for he knew this Bolivar bull—all too well!

"I done fix eve'ything," Monty's monologue was relentless. "Me and you startin' now to see about gittin' de ball-park for de arena. Den sees Samson about de bull, and Willie Freeman about de tickets. Let's go! Grand Lodge fixin' to meet!"

Seated sourly beneath his framed business motto, "I COLLECTS OR CRIPPLES," the bulky Samson G. Bates glowered across his littered table-top at a couple of callers.

"Us is gittin' up a big benefit bull-fight, for de lodge—" they began as one.

"And who's stoppin' you?" cut in the misanthropic Mr. Bates.

"De bull is. Still short de bull. Craves to rent yourn for de fight."

"Trouble wid you boys,"—a darker shadow crossed Samson's brow,—"is you is too late—"

Eight-rock's instant relief sounded like unharnessing a horse.

"—On account," pursued Mr. Bates, "of me done sold dat bull, so long ago dat de boy what bought him is done three installments back on his payments a'ready."

It sounded final—until Eight-rock, leaving without any bull, brightened like a house afire—then got put out like one, as: "Lodge—and Lily," ultimatumed his escort, "lookin' for a bull-fight. And bull-fight dey gits! Stockyards next stop!"

But again Monty was wrong. Beef—not battle—proved the packer's sole policy—again leaving Monty right back where he had started, exulted Mr. Spencer; and Eight-rock away ahead of himself. Old bull-fight was fixing to turn into a boost for him, a boomerang for Monty! Bulls wouldn't face Eight-rock, was all!

Then they met Jeff Baker.

JEFF was a born buyer. But at this moment—

"Looks like you is done step in de seat yo' own pants!" Eight-rock hailed him.

"Aint sca'cely got no pants to step in, since dat *last* buy I makes," mourned Jeff.

"How-come *last buy?*" Mr. Spencer inadvertently opened the door to more trouble.

"White gentleman sellin' fertilizer. Hires hisself de courthouse and makes a speech. Say de way to bust up de de-pression is git all de *town* boys on de farms what de *country* boys is done all starved off of. Sho hollers noble! Till, when de dust die down, finds out I is done bought myself a plow and a plowin'-bull and a whole mess of fertilizer, on de credit. Only, de bull aint plow none—he raise hell instead of a crap. And already de muddyfoots is flockin' so thick I cain't *stay* on de farm after I gits dar—tryin' to collect for dat bull—"

"Bought a bull?" Mr. Hunt's interrupting question cut through the plaint of high-pressure's latest victim.

"Uh-huh, and—"

"Boy!" the pæan of Monty drowned the dirge of the dirt-farmer. "You is *made!*"

"Hollers which? How-come *made?*" Mr. Baker blinked bewilderedly.

"Says you is done *rented* yo' bull! To us. Pays off after de big benefit bull-fight de lodge is puttin' on Tuesday at de ball-park."

Jeff struggled, then brightened. What he didn't know about bull-fights helped heroically—and a deal was closed.

Shortly after which a triumphant Monty turned upon the glassy-eyed Eight-rock shuffling beside him. "Lily cravin' to see you fight a bull, like you brags about," he reminded the sufferer scornfully. "And you aint even appreciate my fixin' it up for you! Lettin' *you* fight Bolivar and git all de glory, instead of me. And all time gwine about lookin' like you'd just et a owl!"

The stricken Eight-rock swallowed his Adam's-apple in silence, and saw himself getting lilies instead of Lily. Ahead already was the buzz of Baptist Hill. For if the Hill had underestimated Eight-rock previously, it was joyously willing to make amends now. Any boy presenting its populace with a Roman holiday at two-bits a head was their idol, let the toreadors fall where they may! With plenty of favorable comment left over for a broad-gauged rival like Monty who had so unselfishly engineered a spectacle in which—if still living at its close—Eight-rock was bound to get both the glory *and* the girl!

The "if" in that outlook was already building gate-receipts most gratifyingly. The ball-park was fast beginning to resemble an arena and Eight-rock a matador—or a corpse, depending upon the point of view. A new wire netting enclosed the bleachers, as guarantee of life and limb to the lower-priced spectators; while Mr. Spencer began inspecting despairingly the slender lodge sword that was to be his similar—and sole—guarantee.

Then it was Monday, with only twenty-four hours left to live, if a boy looked at it that way. Hours were galloping now; but so were the arrangements for his downfall, with the fullness of Monty's strategy burning into him all the while. All that Monty had to do now was to let the bull attend to his business—and Eight-rock.

NOON, afternoon, and darkness came, but no way of escape appeared. Like a trapped rat, Matador Spencer shuffled up one alley and down another. All were "blind."

But as he stumbled for the fourth time, moaning low, up Hogan's Alley, he halted agape, smitten by the first full consciousness of the significance of that sign so recently and laboriously hung by Detective Bugwine Breck. For sud-

denly it had begun to glow like a lighthouse, like a beacon in the darkness! "Let us do your dirty work," it read. And who, more than Eight-rock, needed dirty work done now, if he would continue to live—and love?

Forthwith his hand was on the detectives' door, rattling the latch.

"—And fotch me de file on de Mayberry case. Step on yo'self wid de clue in dat burglary business, Bugwine! Den rally fast and feed de bloodhound—'spectin' a call from de Sheriff for him, any minute now!" At the click of the latch under Eight-rock's hand, the gangling and plaid-suited Columbus Collins within had burst into a volley of orders aimed at his overalled and addled assistant, for the edification of any entering prospect. Then, "Come in, Mist'—er—er—" he called.

"*Spencer,* de name. Calls me 'Eight-rock' 'count de complexion," supplied the caller, impressed. "Sign says y'all does de dirty work—"

"Aint *no* knot in a boy's business stands up long before *us,*" admitted Mr. Collins avidly. "Seat yo'self, and spill de case while Bugwine gittin' out de handcuffs."

Eight-rock spilled it.

"And you is in a jam," Columbus summarized his client's situation swiftly. "Stay round and fight de bull, and you gits killed off; but run, like Monty Hunt figures you'll do, and *you* gits de gate while *he* gits de gal."

"Done ruint," Mr. Spencer further condensed his case, "whatever I does."

"By no means!" Mr. Collins here saw a greenish glint at the entrance to Eight-rock's cash-pocket. "Merely a situation callin' for a down-payment of one dollar, and a conference. You pays de dollar; me and Mist' Breck, de human bloodhound, confers."

Eight-rock forgot rumors in reference to these eminent sleuths' unerring ability to gum up anything intrusted to them, and shed a dollar. Life and Lily would be cheap at that.

Columbus broke for the back room, with Bugwine hot on his—and the dollar's—heels.

"Service wid a gallop!" admired Eight-rock as his first hope in days dawned.

But, behind the door: "Cain't think wid a empty stomach!" quarreled Mr. Breck.

"Trouble wid you," scoffed his chief, "is tryin' to think wid a empty head.

He was soaring up—up, it seemed, forever. What awaited when he came down?

Besides bein' too numb in de knob to think, nohow. All time gums up eve'ything. But me, I done got a idea already. Straightens out de client's—"

"Aint gum up nothin'," Bugwine's defense still sounded forced.

"Sho aint! Not dis time, beca'ze all you got to do is carry out orders—and a bucket."

"Bucket?"

"Step back in and listen to a smart man talk now, and you finds out 'bout buckets."

Eight-rock eyed his staff admiringly as they filed back in. Commanding all this brain-power for a dollar was indeed a bargain!

"Mist' Spencer," Columbus instantly shattered any remaining ice, "us smells 'em out whar others jest sniffs about. A criminal wid eve'y case. Always gits our man—"

"Comes here about a bull," reminded a mere client timidly.

"Jest gittin' to de bull!" rebuked Mr. Collins testily. "Mist' *Breck* handles de agency's bull department—understands all about bulls."

Eight-rock shuddered involuntarily: so did Monty understand them!

"And de way *he* dopes it out," continued Columbus, "aint nothin' for you to do but go on and git in de ring wid dat bull—wid eve'ybody lookin' at you and hollerin'—"

Mr. Spencer caught the picture—and a slight rigor, as well.

"Den, when de bull comes bouncin' and bellerin' in, lookin' for you—"

Eight-rock's feet got to raising a dust on the floor before he could calm them.

"*Den* is when our service really starts! —Soon, now, as you slips de agency two bucks and a half more on account, dat is—for liquidatin' expenses."

"Liquidatin' 'spenses?" Eight-rock loosened reluctantly, to the tune of a she-note and four-bits, lawful Alabama money.

"Us liquidates dis bull," expanded Mr. Collins under their feel in his fist, "jest like a busted bank, only more so. You see, Mist' Breck knows Bolivar—from a pup. Dat whar de brain-and-bucket work comes in: brain-work by me, and bucket-work by Bugwine."

Adenoids neck-and-neck, client and assistant-sleuth battled open-mouthed to master this one, but muffed it.

"Meanin' dat Bugwine gits a job round de arena," Columbus remained patient with a cash customer, "disgusted as a janitor. De weather's hot and Bugwine's job is to water de bull. Only he aint water him—not till jest before de fight starts. Den he water him copious—and dar is whar de two-fifty for de *liquidatin'* comes in!"

"Liquidates de bull!" murmured Mr. Spencer eagerly but vaguely.

"By gittin' de bull drunk on a gallon of dat Frawg Bottom drinkin'-corn," completed Mr. Collins triumphantly. "Still got a taste of dat mash wid him. Old Bolivar aint been ever able to git hisself enough before, but he sho is dis time! And dat stuff'll eat holes in a bucket. One quart of it and a elephant sees mice! Two quarts, and he pulls up trees lookin' for snakes under 'em. But give him—or nobody else—a *gallon* of it, and all dey lookin' for is a good gutter to sleep it off in. Boy, all you got do now is stay in de ring wid him till dat corn wrop itself around him about twice—and den stand on top of Bolivar wid yo' sword and listen to de boys—and your gal—hollerin' *'Hooray for Eight-rock!'* You struts while Bolivar sleeps!"

Eight-rock's eyes shone. Everybody knew what that Frog Bottom product did! And, like all truly great schemes, it was simple, sure, and fool-proof.

TUESDAY morning of the great day dawned hot and bright. With its first—and perhaps last—bull-fight ahead of it, Baptist Hill boiled and seethed with its excitement, until only Samson G. Bates was able to keep his mind upon business at all. But business was something that Samson's mind never left. As now, an hour before the great spectacle, when instead of being in the grandstand he was in conference with his head muddyfoot, or collector, Frisco Johnson.

"How fur back dat Jeff Baker boy now wid de installments on dat bull?" Mr. Bates dealt with profit and loss in a bass rumble and with a cold eye.

"*All* de way back. Jeff must heard de wrong speech at de courthouse—"

"Gwine hear de *right* speech—'I collects or cripples'—is he aint git up-to-date wid dat bull! Done started lookin' like Jeff's last day to live. —What all dat fuss outside about?"

Frisco craned an inquiring neck and ear, to report, "It's Bugwine Breck. Out in front de speak-easy, hollerin' at his brains, tryin' to recollect what he come after."

"Sounds more like he'd done remembered: Bugwine so runty he cain't git his brains fur enough from dat Frawg Bottom panther-prespiration when he carries it, to keep from gittin' hisself soused on de smell. Let's go!"

AGAIN the hours passed. With the big contest scheduled to start at one, already Toreador Spencer was palpitantly parked beneath the grandstand, trying to bolster his wavering courage with purely absent treatment of Frog Bottom's product.

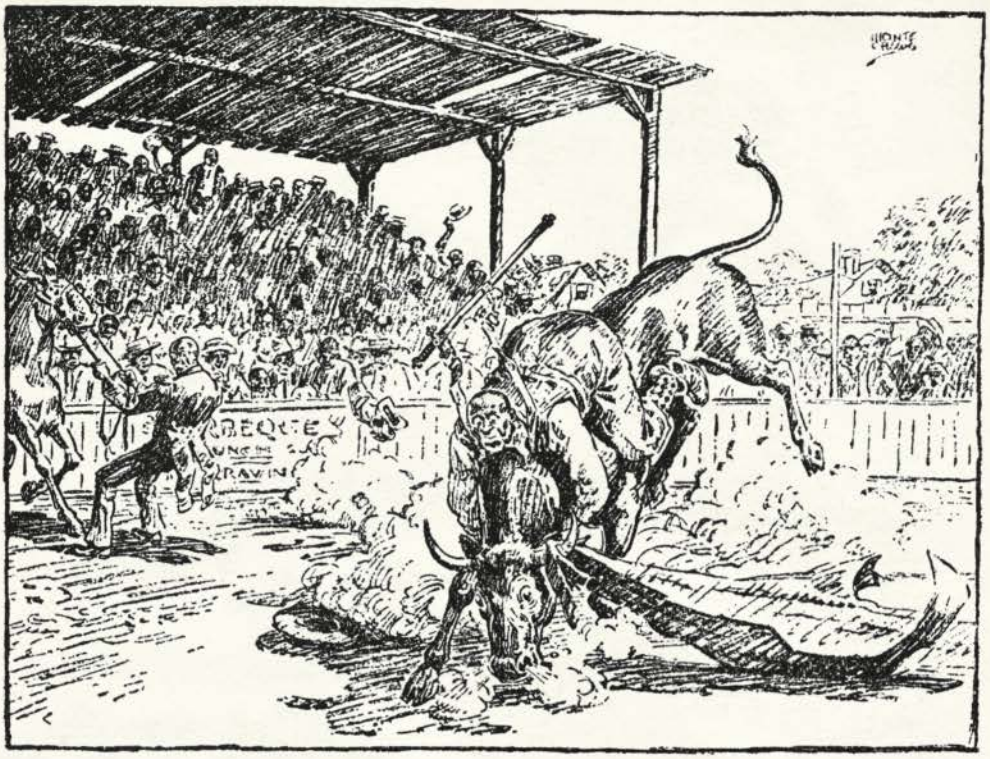
Over his head was the tramp and scuff of a thousand early-comers' feet. Back of the stand he could hear the pawing and bellowing of his thirsty adversary. And, near by, he could smell but not see the liquidation processes being got under way in the privacy of a stall by the Columbus Collins detective agency staff.

"Git yo' nose out dat bucket!" its head was even then chiding a pitchfork-armed and loose-lipped aide. "Sniff dat dynamite a couple more times, and you's liable liquidate de wrong bull!"

"Gimme three more sniffs, and I'll *fight* de bull!" Mr. Breck got his eyes back into focus with difficulty. "Dat's how-come I thunk up de system."

"If *you* thunk it up, it aint no system," quarreled his chief. "How-come you got dem drinkin'-buckets one painted blue and other aint painted a-tall?" he further questioned the workings of a brain that only a mother would trust.

"Keeps 'em straight dat way: dat's de syshtem!" hiccoughed Mr. Breck triumphantly. "Jest water in de blue



Now he *would* be taken for a ride. "Ride 'im, Eight-rock!" yelled the stands.

bucket—for chaser. Bull-medicine's in de *plain* one."

Columbus sniffed and stared suspiciously. Then: "I knowed it!" he snapped. "Jest cotch you in time! You got eve'ything straight in yo' mind and backward in de buckets! I cain't hardly smell nothin' for de smell round here—but you is got de bull-medicine in de blue bucket and de *water* in de plain one. Git dat straight in yo' mind!"

"Gits de drinks straight, instead," amended and volunteered Mr. Breck obligingly, as he reached upward for an empty tub on its nail. "Easier to change de bull-medicine dan my mind."

Twelve-thirty clanged on a distant clock. And, momentarily alone in his dressing-room, a mighty matador from Mexico again re-checked his arrangements, and found them good. Condescendingly, in fact, he reflected upon a Monty Hunt who had a sombrero but no sense; didn't have brains enough to hire his brains, as Eight-rock had done. Some boys might lick bulls, but Eight-rock liquidated them—with a local brand of liquid paralysis that the dipsomaniac Bolivar had never been permitted his fill of, before. Well, he would get it this time. . . . And, instead of playing into Monty's hand, Monty was now playing into Eight-rock's.

There was a knock. Admirers were getting thick, swelled Mr. Spencer as, flinging about him Lily's latest gift, a crimson cloak, he threw open his door. At first he saw nothing, until his gaze got nearer the floor. Then eyes and nose detected there a disturbance of two senses, the sight and smell as it were of some great and recent calamity. All combined in the stunted person of Bugwine Breck, aromatic, breathless, but cold sober now and in stark terror.

"Done put my foot in it!" yowled Mr. Breck.

Eight-rock looked at the foot. "In what?" he demanded, perplexed by its dimensions. "And you sniffs like a saloon."

"*In de bull-medicine!* Steps in de bucket, accidental, and spills it! Now I got to git two bucks and a half more from you, quick! To git a fresh batch from Frawg Bottom wid, or me and you both done ruint!"

Instinctively Eight-rock fumbled in his pockets—and an express elevator dropped forty floors with him, leaving his stomach to come by local. That first two-fifty had also been his last!

Then without the gong clamored warningly, and along the passageway sounded the footsteps of strong men, coming to escort him to battle with an undoped bull! While in the air rang only the thin despairing squawk of Bugwine in retreat: "Tames him all I *can* wid de drinkin'-water, den!" . . .

Sick, blinking, stumbling, with his puny lodge sword dangling dangerously between leaden legs, Eight-rock found himself in the arena. In a few brief moments more he was going to find himself facing a bull with whom there had just been a fatal slip 'twixt bucket and lip.

Applause swept the stands, and nausea swept Eight-rock. Near at hand he caught sight of the beaming Lily, the cunning Monty. Music by the Alex Dinghouse one-man band swelled the breeze. All about hearts stirred afresh as the gangling Gladstone Smith, gay of garb and dull of brain, galloped gloriously across the ring on a mule, brandishing a spear in his new capacity of picador. Behind him came "Dead-eye Ducktooth" Carnes, the Hill's mightiest marksman, mounted on a horse. And shortly Ducktooth became the core of a disarmament more successful than Geneva's as his muzzle-loader was rudely denied him.

THEN suddenly there fell a hush, shattered by harsh grating of hinges. From beneath the stand rang a short sharp bellow; from the mob a swelling roar of, *"De bull!"*

Eight-rock's knees started fanning each other frantically beneath his red cloak. Black muzzle dripping, head and tail upflung at first, the ferocious Bolivar trotted heavily into the arena, looked dazedly about him, sniffed the air—and glimpsed Gladstone the picador.

Again that bellow rang; his head went down. But if Gladstone was dim-witted his mount was not: that bellow was the same as two-bells to the mule. Instantly he bolted. Yet when perception finally penetrated the Gladstonian skull he didn't wait around on his mount; any mule that he rode thenceforth would have to overtake him first! Hence his steed was but a bad second to him, the bull a close third, before the trio could complete the first lap around the rim of the arena—with Ducktooth's horse heroically endeavoring to climb a tree, the howling Ducktooth still aboard him.

The spectators went mad. Here were features not even mentioned in the bills! With the main and most hair-raising event,—Eight-rock *versus* the bull,—yet to come!

"At 'im, Eight-rock!" shrilled Lily as Bolivar turned from mule to man.

"At 'im, Eight-rock!" yelled that snake-in-the-grass, Monty Hunt, beside her.

The bull had paused, swaying, to paw once more, dirt showering the bleachers back of him, his eyes red and rolling. Then down went his great head, and rumblings shook the ground. Simultaneously, back of him, was a disturbance at the gate, fresh shoutings on a new note, and Eight-rock glimpsed two men running toward Bolivar, waving their arms, signaling frantically.

HOPE of intervention rose, then died, as again the fearsome challenge rang—and Eight-rock made the second most awful discovery of his career—his legs wouldn't work! Fear had him rooted like a tree. While it flashed over the acute case of catalepsy that had once been Eight-rock, that picadors might be Bolivar's playthings but matadors were his meat!

"Sic him, Eight-rock! Stay wid him, Eight-rock!" the clamoring stands forthwith mistook engine-trouble for bravery. The mob was on its feet.

On came the bull! Behind him came the same two men, shouting, gesticulating; Eight-rock only had time to note that one of them was white, wore a star, before the bull was upon him; black, huge, red-eyed, swaying, slobbering. . .

With a final desperate squawk, but too late, the spell was lifted, his muscles loosened and instinctively the doomed matador flung his crimson cloak at the oncoming lowered horns, missed—and found himself no longer rooted!

Rather, he was soaring. Up, up, it seemed forever, into the blue and sunlight, while what clutched at the pit of his stomach in midair was the thought of what awaited him when he came down! Life, love, and Lily would all be gone glimmering before the hoofs and horns of the bull—the havoc started by Bugwine Breck's blundering feet and bungling brain.

But, with an awful *Ooof!* Eight-rock's business instantly altered again—and became four times worse than it had ever been before! With a fresh feeble squall of horror, he discovered that he was down again—and yet he wasn't! He had landed—but *landed astride the bull!*

Instant and awful screechings, drowned by the rising roar of the enthralled crowd, signalized his realization and reaction. Now he *would* be taken for a ride!

"Hooray for Eight-rock! Ride 'im, Eight-rock!" swept the stands in delighted misunderstanding. Here *was* their money's worth!

Bucking, bellowing, leaping, twisting, the maddened Bolivar sought to shake his involuntary rider. Like grim death Eight-rock locked convulsive arms about the plunging beast's vast neck. He was in a fog, but old bull must have stepped in that bucket, too, if his nose knew anything! Yet it couldn't be long now. Already Eight-rock's head was snapping back and forth like the cracker on a whip, his futile lodge sword banging and flapping wildly at the end of its childish chain. Once down, and he was doomed —no matter if a dozen men with stars upon their vests should continue running to his rescue, shouting to distract a bull that was all battle to rid himself of his squalling incubus.

"Hold on to him, Eight-rock!" roared the stands.

Eight-rock didn't need telling. Earth, sky, mob, Mexico, Monty, Lily, and those two running men in the arena were all one to him now, as he clung despairingly to a hold that was loosening, a life that was as good as gone—

When suddenly, incredibly, incomprehensively, the motion slowed. The bull halted, stood swaying, shaking his head bewilderedly, went down—and in the final flickering moment before the crash that closed his career as matador, Eight-rock heard far and feeble above the chirpings of little birds a triumphant cackle that could but be his own, saw knees that wore his pants propping him momentarily erect, sword uplifted, above the black and fallen bulk of Bolivar—and slid, still questioning it all, into an onrushing darkness that swallowed him.

EIGHT-ROCK awoke groggily to adulation. Chronic difficulty in ever telling whether he was conscious or not had evidently resulted in adulation not waiting on him. For now, too dazed to understand, too dazzled to question, he was being borne aloft on shoulders—the acclaiming and again-solvent shoulders of Frogface and his lodge members, while below and beside him beamed adoringly, inexplicably, Lily his love—all combining to confirm the fabulous fact that mysteriously, incomprehensibly, he had somehow been snatched from the bull and the grave. But how?

But nothing answered; only the uproar swelled. It was too much for Eight-rock in his addled intellectual condition. Rather, it was enough for him as his mists cleared, that Monty was in visible retreat; that Bugwine Breck was not only visible but audible—treed atop a telephone-pole with Columbus his chief at its base, begging bloodthirstily for a shotgun, while a grim Samson, and a starred and disgusted deputy sheriff mounted perplexed and perplexing guard above an inert bulk that had once been the ferocious Bolivar.

IT was only later, much later, in the office of Mr. Bates—and too late ever to dim or dampen for Lily Spencer the glory of that mighty *ex*-matador Eight-rock, her husband—that mystery was no longer such but became a mere record of mental, legal, and digestive processes, as:

"When dey buys from *me*," Samson was grimly reminiscing to that peerless muddyfoot, Frisco Johnson, "I collects or cripples. Jeff Baker nor nobody else aint never gwine git four installments back on no bull wid *me* and git away wid it!"

"Tells me you and de sheriff gits right out in de ring wid dat bull and Eight-rock," admired Mr. Johnson. "But how-come you aint git home till mawnin', after dat?"

"Well, de reason for *dat* delay," rumbled a Samson incensed at even the memory, "was what Columbus shot Bugwine down off dat pole for—along about two o'clock dat mawnin'."

"Shot Bugwine off de pole?"

"Yeah. For bein' so dumb he couldn't even be crooked straight. Seems Bugwine done hired hisself out to dope Bolivar, wid panther-prespiration. But Bugwine step in de bucket and spill it. So all he can do den, he say, was water de bull—"

"Water aint tame no bull!"

"Naw, but Bugwine so *damn*' dumb, it turn out he'd stepped *in de wrong bucket*—had his mind mixed—and it *was* de drinkin'-liquor he give Bolivar, after all. Old bull gits so soused directly he cain't hit de ground—or Eight-rock—wid his horns! Keels over—and it's plumb breakfast-time before me and de Sheriff can ever git dat bull awake enough to repossess him, and fotch him back home to me from Jeff!"

There's Murder in

The intensely dramatic climax of this extraordinary and unique detective novel by the author of "The Game of Death."

The Story Thus Far:

RUTH TYLER was young and beautiful—and blind. She was also a greatly gifted violinist; and she was possessed, it began to appear, of a strange power. For occasionally, while she played her violin, that delicately attuned mind of hers would receive a message from the mind of some other person—almost as if it were a super-acute radio antenna. Always these messages were from some one wrought up to a terrific intensity of thought and feeling—from persons infuriated to the point of murder. Finally when she caught the murder message from Zangara just before his attempt on the life of the President-elect, her father consulted a distinguished psychologist; and Dr. Karasc sent his assistant Nat Benson to live with the Tylers and—observe.

A few weeks later another strange mind-message came to the blind girl: some one, somewhere, hated to the point of murder. Finally the name came to her—Paul Gordon.

Tyler looked up that name, found it that of a wealthy financier. They called upon him at his country place—a great estate, close-fenced and guarded, where he lived with his son David, his second wife Carlotta, his daughter Hélène and his adopted daughter Doris.

He proved skeptical of Ruth's power; but a few nights later, the message came to Ruth again; Nat Benson called Gordon on the telephone to warn him; and even as Gordon answered, the crash of a pistol shot drowned his voice over the wire. But the financier escaped—that time—and the would-be killer vanished. However, it was arranged that Ruth, with her father and Nat, should occupy a cottage on the Gordon estate, so any future warning might be given instantly.

Sure enough, Ruth received another warning. And almost immediately the burglar-alarm sounded, and great flood-lights illuminated the whole estate. A man leaped from the ledge where he had stood outside Gordon's window and ran; but Nat captured him. He refused to speak. But Gordon now confided to Tyler and Benson the probable reason for these attacks: in 1915 his son David had been kidnaped; he had been recovered, and the kidnapers convicted; one of them, Gaudio, had escaped and had sworn vengeance. . . . And not long afterward a bomb had killed Gordon's wife. In despair he had gone to New York, placed his two children in the care of a friend, made his way to England and enlisted. He had been badly wounded; and while the surgeons had restored his shell-torn face, his features were much changed. Recuperating in Spain, he had fallen in love with Carlotta and married her. And believing his changed appearance made him safe from discovery, he had changed his name from Moridon to Gordon, returned to America, and gained a great fortune. When the friends who had sheltered his children were drowned, he had adopted their orphaned daughter Doris. And now—had Gaudio found him out?

Again Ruth received that dreadful message of imminent murder—this time, strangely, the threat menaced Hélène. Nat ran for the house, plunged through open French windows, saw a pistol thrust from between heavy curtains. Then he heard a shot, and fell, badly wounded.

No trace of the assailant was discovered, but the gun was found under Doris' bed. The switches controlling the burglar-alarm had in two places been opened, making it ineffective. All signs pointed to the crime being the work of some one inside the house. . . .

Hélène, in a serious state from shock, was sent to a sanitarium for safety. Useless precaution! For next day—following Carlotta's disappearance—a band of armed thugs held up the sanitarium and carried off Hélène captive.

Three notes came to Gordon next day: one each from Carlotta and Hélène saying they were held captive and requesting him to pay the ransom demanded. But clearly they had not been told what this ransom was; for the third note was

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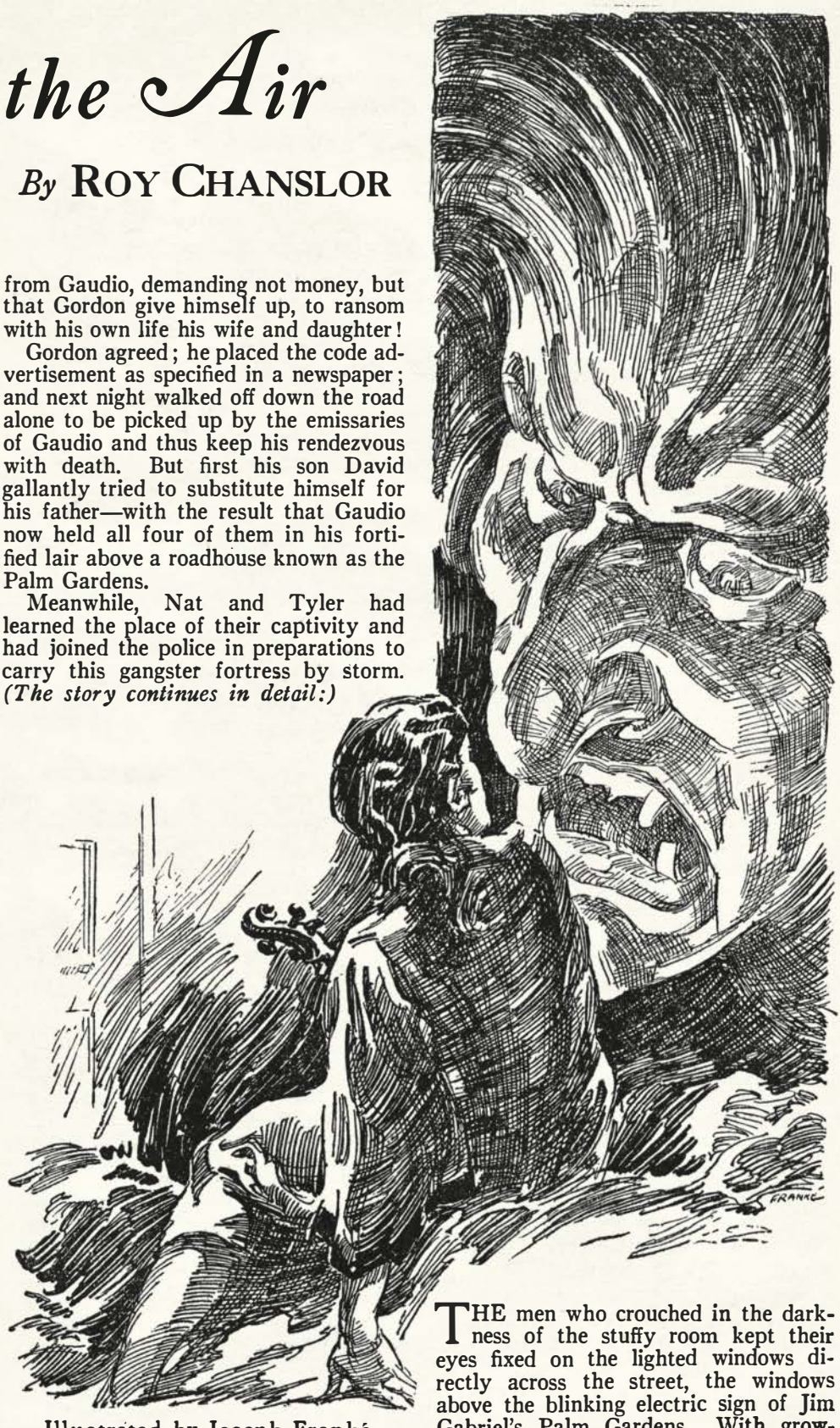
the Air

By ROY CHANSLOR

from Gaudio, demanding not money, but that Gordon give himself up, to ransom with his own life his wife and daughter!

Gordon agreed; he placed the code advertisement as specified in a newspaper; and next night walked off down the road alone to be picked up by the emissaries of Gaudio and thus keep his rendezvous with death. But first his son David gallantly tried to substitute himself for his father—with the result that Gaudio now held all four of them in his fortified lair above a roadhouse known as the Palm Gardens.

Meanwhile, Nat and Tyler had learned the place of their captivity and had joined the police in preparations to carry this gangster fortress by storm. *(The story continues in detail:)*



Illustrated by Joseph Franké

THE men who crouched in the darkness of the stuffy room kept their eyes fixed on the lighted windows directly across the street, the windows above the blinking electric sign of Jim Gabriel's Palm Gardens. With grow-

The men across the street saw Flaherty at the window. . . . There was one shot. Flaherty toppled out; his body crashed to the street.

ing disquiet they awaited the signal of Detective Flaherty.

Now and again Commissioner Kilrane glanced at the luminous dial of his wristwatch. No word was spoken. To Tyler and Nat, beside Kilrane, the minutes dragged interminably. Why didn't the signal come? Fear and a growing cold rage fought within Nat's mind, fear for the fate of Gabriel's prisoners, rage at their captor.

A row of sub-machine-guns lay in front of the closed windows, and a detective hovered over each of them. Nat could see them lying there so ominously every time the sign flashed.

Kilrane glanced once more at his watch, and shook his head worriedly.

"Looks like Flaherty's failed," he whispered. "We'll give him five minutes more. If he doesn't give us a sign by then—we've got to strike. It's the only chance."

Tyler nodded slowly. By the flash of the electric sign, Nat saw his grimly tightened jaw. The younger man shivered. Again he felt the cold steel of the automatic; it steadied his nerves. Rage began to predominate over fear. The fate of the prisoners was in the lap of the gods now. If they were too late—at least the victims could be avenged.

There was a quick low knock at the door. Some one opened it slightly, masking the thin shaft of light with his body. A huge figure bulked in the doorway, a tall man with red hair. Behind him Nat saw Cooke, from the Gordon estate. They slipped into the room.

"Well, Mac?" said Kilrane to the red-haired giant.

"This guy says Gordon's inside Gabriel's joint," said Detective Sergeant MacDonald. Kilrane gave a low exclamation. Tyler said something to Cooke in a low voice.

"He's in there, all right," Cooke said. At Kilrane's quick, "Quiet, man!" he dropped his voice and went on: "I followed 'em, on Nelson's orders. A guy in a sedan picked Gordon up a mile east of the estate. They drove here, by the back way. I seen 'em go in. Then the guy who'd picked Gordon up drove out again. The bulls grabbed him."

"It was Nicky Gabriel, Jim's younger brother," said Red Mac. "God, chief, nobody said anything about keepin' people *out* of the joint!"

Kilrane cursed helplessly. The Sergeant began to apologize. The Commissioner silenced him.

"Where's Nicky?" he demanded.

"We got him down the road a piece," said MacDonald. "He don't know nothin', of course. But my hunch is Jim's been tipped off. He gave the kid an out, see?"

"Afraid you're right, Mac," said Kilrane. "Back to your station now. Pass the word that nobody's to go in or come out of the Palm Gardens. Grab everybody—and hold 'em!"

"Right, Chief," said Red Mac. He slipped from the room quietly.

"Time's up," said Kilrane suddenly. "Gabriel's wise to us, all right. I've got one more angle. I'll try to make a deal with him. If he won't play ball, we shoot the works!"

FROM the darkened hallway the two men stepped into the lighted apartment and faced each other after eighteen

years. Jim Gabriel grinned, scrutinized Paul Gordon's expressionless face, gave an admiring chuckle.

"Aint science wonderful!" he said. "You got away with that dead pan for years, Moridon. I got to hand it to you. Plastic surgery! What a gag!"

THE man who had been James Moridon stared into the eyes of the kidnaper-killer who had been Joe Gaudio—eyes that grew hard and cold as the grin faded from his face. Then Gordon shrugged, threw out his hands, said quietly:

"Here I am, Gaudio. I've kept my bargain. Now—keep yours."

"Oh, sure!" said the dark man.

He laughed shortly, and turned his eyes to the floor by the radiator. Gordon's followed. He gave a start, stared at the figure of the man handcuffed to the pipes. Gabriel bent over Flaherty, flipped his coat back, looked up at Gordon significantly. Gordon saw the detective's badge. Its meaning struck him like a blow.

"Remember what I said about ringin' in the bulls, Mister?" asked Gabriel.

Gordon recoiled.

"But—God, man, I didn't—" he began.

Gabriel cut him short.

"What the hell's the difference now?" he demanded, rising.

The phone jangled. Gabriel glared at it, hesitated. Then he drew an automatic, covered Gordon, and went to the phone swiftly, his eyes never leaving the man across the room, who was standing as if stupefied, his eyes again on the gagged and manacled Flaherty.

Gabriel lifted the receiver.

"This is Kilrane," a voice said. "We've got you sewed up, Gabriel. You haven't got a chance. I'm talkin' turkey. We want Gordon, his daughter, his son, his wife and Flaherty, unharmed—and you. We've got the kid—I mean Nicky. We'll lay off him and all your boys if you play ball. If you don't—it'll be just too bad."

At mention of his brother, Gabriel's eyes flickered; he held the phone tighter.

Kilrane paused, then went on:

"My word on it, Gabriel. We'll forget the kidnaping rap on Nicky—and all the rest. And you'll get a fair trial on those old Chicago charges. I've notified your boys downstairs they can come out—with their hands in the air. I'm givin' you the same out. What say?"

The house-phone buzzed. Gabriel stared at it.

"Gimme a minute to think," he said huskily.

He covered the mouthpiece of the phone with one hand, lifted the receiver of the house-phone with the other.

"It's Sam," said a voice. "They just give us our chance, Jim. The answer is nuts! Open up!"

Gabriel grinned suddenly.

"Kayo, Sam," he said. "We'll give 'em hell."

He hung up the house-phone. His hand darted to the switch on the wall. He pressed it, listened a moment, heard Sam and the boys crowding up the steps. Then he pressed the button again, locked the downstairs door, turned back to the other phone.

"Okay, Kilrane," he said. "I'll play ball."

He slammed the phone down and looked at Gordon. Despair and hope were in the man's eyes, but his face was completely blank. Gabriel laughed. Bending low, he hurried to the side of the helpless detective, quickly unlocked the cuffs, removed the gag.

"Get up, Flaherty," he said softly. "An' give 'em the old signal."

Flaherty lay where he was, staring at Gabriel pleadingly. With his automatic Gabriel motioned the detective to rise. Gordon gave an exclamation of horror and started toward the man with the gun. Grimly Gabriel waved him back.

"Get up, Flaherty," he repeated.

IN the stuffy room across the street the men waited. They saw Flaherty suddenly loom up at the window. He raised his hands despairingly, gave a hoarse shout. Then there was one shot. Flaherty toppled forward out of the window. His body struck the electric sign, rolled, crashed into the street.

Across the open windows of Gabriel's apartment steel shutters clashed.

The shutters rang with the hail of police machine-gun bullets. In a corner Gordon, manacled with the handcuffs taken from Flaherty, crouched, dazed by the rush of events, still shocked at the fate of the detective, his mind numb. The gunfire increased to a fantastic crescendo.

Above this devil's tattoo Gabriel was shouting staccato orders. He was like a man possessed. Gordon, as if slowly coming out from under an anesthetic, saw hard-faced men crowding into the

room. Firearms appeared, sawed-off shotguns, sub-machine-guns, automatics.

Men sprang to prepared slots in the armored shutters, began to return the police fire. Others were running down the hallway to protect the rear.

Outside the Palm Gardens, giant searchlights flooded the night. The outline of the building was etched against the sky. Men and women, guests interrupted at their tables; minor employees hovered, terrified in the foyer, just inside the door.

The police ceased their fire. Shouts were flung to the besieged gangsters to let the people out. But if they heard, they paid no attention. The rain of bullets continued from both front and rear. Those in the foyer shrank back as far as they could. The police resumed fire, concentrating on the closed shutters. But their bullets glanced off, screaming as they ricocheted into air.

In the street, directly beneath the still-blinking electric sign, sharply visible in the reflected glare of the searchlights, sprawled an inert figure, the body of Detective Flaherty. Behind each police gun a face was set stonily.

A block away, behind the restaurant, Commissioner Kilrane stood beside an armored truck, the sort of truck used to transport money. He faced a line of grim-faced men, the men of Flaherty's precinct. Two of them carried sub-machine-guns, two sawed-off shotguns, two giant sledge-hammers, the others service-automatics.

THE tall red-haired sergeant stood stiffly at attention.

"You're in charge, Mac," said Kilrane quietly. "Run the truck through the rear gate. Bang her back up against the porch. Then make a dash for it. Got to smack down that rear door. Don't blow her unless you have to. Remember, there's two women in there."

Red Mac nodded.

"Hop to it," said Kilrane huskily. "Take 'em alive if you can. But if you can't—remember Flaherty! God bless you—and give 'em hell!"

"Okay, Chief," said the Sergeant grimly.

He barked orders. Men climbed into the truck. Red Mac vaulted in beside them. Suddenly Nat sprang from beside Tyler and Kilrane, clawed his way past two surprised detectives, jumped into the truck beside the Sergeant. Hands started to force him out. He flung an appeal to Kilrane. The Commissioner hesitated, then nodded. The door closed. Through the bullet-proof glass Nat saw the small group recede as the car gathered momentum. Tyler flung up one hand in a salute.

AS the armored car plunged into the rear yard, bullets rained against its steel sides, then down upon its top. The car swerved swiftly, stopped, then backed until it struck the porch with a crash. The doors opened. The police, Nat with them, rushed across the narrow open porch.

Two of them fell, clutching at their bodies. A third stumbled, and Nat pulled him to his feet with a mighty heave. Then they were under the wall. Heavy sledges struck the barred door, once, twice, three times. It gave, and they tumbled into the kitchen.

Red Mac looked about him quickly, his eyes going to a door on the right. "From Flaherty's story, that would be the door," he said. Again the sledges went to work. Strong arms crashed them against the door. It held stubbornly, but they kept after it, until after an agonizing delay it gave.

They were then inside the narrow room, facing the steel door which led to the stairs. The Sergeant motioned two men to the door. They fell to work with their sledges. But they bounced off ineffectively.

Abruptly Red Mac called a halt.

"Got to blow it down," he said crisply. "Stand by with a drill, Jensen."

The man he had called Jensen produced a heavy drill, held it firm. The two other men alternated with lusty blows with their sledges. Slowly the drill bit into the steel, terribly slowly. The Sergeant began to prepare the charge of nitro-glycerin. The precious seconds raced past.

Upstairs, a man ran into the apartment from the hallway, and reported to Gabriel: "The bulls got through the rear in an armored car! They're downstairs, now, hammerin' at the steel door!"

Gabriel wheeled, clenching his fist.

"Stand by at the top of the stairs!" he cried.

He seized Gordon roughly by the arm, flung him into the hallway, prodded him ahead of him with his automatic. Gordon half stumbled down the hall. At a tug from Gabriel, he stopped in front of a door. Men with guns were running

The heavy charge went off, hurling the steel door crashing against the wall. Guns ready, they leaped forward.

past them, toward the rear. He could hear the ring of hammers against the heavy door.

Gabriel opened the door in front of them, pushed him inside, stepped back quickly, slammed and locked the door. Hélène, starting up from her couch, heard the crash of gunfire, the wail of sirens for the first time. Then it was blotted out, and she was looking into the gray face of her father.

"Dad!" she cried, and ran to him, clutching for him. She felt the manacles on his wrist, and recoiled. "Hélène!" he groaned. He raised his arms, put the cuffed hands about her, held her close.

Gabriel ran to the door beyond, unlocked it, curtly motioned David Gordon into the hallway. "We got company," he said significantly.

"The police!" David cried, his face lighting with hope.

Gabriel laughed, and prodded him in the ribs with his automatic.

"And papa," he said, chuckling.

David groaned. At a low command he stopped before the next door. Gabriel opened it, and Carlotta sprang up.

"Come out and join the party," said Gabriel. She saw David then, and turned, staring wildly at Gabriel.

He jerked her by the arm, pulled her into the hallway. She began to struggle.

"No, no!" she moaned. "No, no. You can't—you *can't!*"

"Shut up!" Gabriel barked. "I aint got all night."

He pushed them ahead of him, to the door leading to Hélène's room. This he unlocked. He motioned them inside. David entered. As if dazed, Carlotta followed.

"It's a family reunion," said Gabriel, grinning. He closed and locked the door. Carlotta suddenly flung herself against it, sobbing. He hurled her from it. She shrank back under his hard glare.

"Carlotta!" said Gordon gently.

She stared at him, then back at Gabriel, wildly. He was standing with legs wide apart, caressing the automatic in his hand lovingly. The grin was gone from his face, and his eyes were narrowed to mere slits. Carlotta clenched her hands until the knuckles stood out.

"Well," said Gabriel softly, "so here we all are at last! Just us—and a million coppers."

"Gaudio, I swear I kept faith with you!" said Gordon. "I didn't tell the police!"

"So what?" said Gabriel, shrugging. "We're here, and they're here; and this is the old pay-off."

"This is suicide for you!" said Gordon. "For God's sake, let us go! I give my word. I'll never prosecute you. The whole thing will be forgotten. I swear it!"

"Don't be that way, Moridon," said Gabriel. "Nobody can save me now—or any of you. I tell you this is the pay-off."

There was the sound of a muffled explosion, barely distinguishable through the heavy walls. The building rocked. Gabriel flung open the door, glanced briefly down the hallway, slammed it again, and locked it, turned and faced the four people.

"Here they come," he said quietly. "We just got time for the party."

NAT, Red Mac and the raiding party were crouching against the far wall of the kitchen when the heavy charge went off, hurling the steel door crashing against the wall. Guns ready, they leaped forward, led by the tall Sergeant.

Nat tried to follow Red Mac, but heavy bodies pushed him aside. He fought his way through them, saw the Sergeant and three men plunge through the wreck of the door.

There was a sudden rattle of gunfire from above. Red Mac plunged on up the stairs, but the three men dropped. Nat, in a surge of other men, jumped over them, lunged up the stairs behind the Sergeant, stumbling, shouting.

ANOTHER man went down, cursing. The dark stairs were illuminated by the flashes of the guns. At the top men struggled, hand to hand. The defenders began to give way. In a moment they were running down the hall, firing back sporadically.

Nat stumbled over a still body, regained his footing, fired down the hallway at the sudden flood of light from an open door. It closed. Men were flinging themselves against it. It gave, and Nat saw half a dozen detectives, led by the berserk Red Mac, sprawl into the room.

Nat saw a man on the floor fling up a sawed-off shotgun at the Sergeant. Nat fired, saw the shotgun explode harmlessly in the air, felt a strange sensation, half-sickening, half-exultant: he had killed a man!

He ran into the room. Backed against the wall, all of them apparently wounded, were half a dozen gangsters. The Sergeant, a red streak across his forehead, one arm dangling, brandished his automatic, shouted: *"Drop those rods!"* He was answered with a defiant volley, clutched at the air, pitched forward.

Then, close beside him, Nat heard the crashing roar of a Thompson gun. The men against the wall toppled over, grotesquely, as if hewn down by a giant scythe. Nat turned, saw the police machine-gunner slowly lower his piece, giving a low sigh.

The red-haired Sergeant was pulling himself to one knee, swaying drunkenly. He stared at the row of bodies, and wiped the blood from his head with his one good arm.

"Okay, Flaherty," said Red Mac. . . .

In the locked, soundproof room, his back to the door, Gaudio slowly swung the automatic back and forth, from Gordon to Hélène, to David, to Carlotta, and then from Carlotta to David, to Hélène, to Gordon, as if trying to make up his mind just where to begin. The two women and the two men followed the black muzzle of the gun with their eyes, back and forth, back and forth.

Finally it stopped on a line with Gordon's breast. Gaudio, making the most of his final scene, dramatizing it,

smiled. He spoke slowly, almost in a drawl: "A long time ago, Moridon, I told you what would happen if you squealed to the police. You did squeal. So I'm going to keep my word."

He paused and smiled again, showing his even white teeth. Gordon drew himself up, stood waiting. But Gaudio slowly shook his head. "No, no," he said. "I'm not making it so easy for you. I'm saving you, Moridon, for the last."

He laughed, suddenly, harshly, and moved the gun in a swift arc until it covered Carlotta. She gave a gasp, then, of terror. "You can't, you can't, you *can't!*" she moaned. Then she flung herself forward, desperately, clutching for the gun in his hand. With his left he struck her in the mouth, and she fell sprawling, her lips running red.

Gordon gave a hoarse cry, raised his manacled arms high and sprang at the man with the gun. Gaudio lashed out; the automatic raked across Gordon's face; a livid welt stood out. Gabriel swung the gun on David as he hurled himself forward.

With the gun in the pit of his stomach, David stopped, fell back, raging impotently. Gaudio followed him with the gun, his eyes cold. David stared into them; then he stiffened himself, prepared to die fighting.

There was a loud crash at the door. Gaudio's eyes flickered toward it. There was another crash, and another, the sound of heavy sledges hammering on steel. Gaudio cursed; his eyes went back to David; the gun jumped forward in his hand. There was one shot then; but not from Gaudio.

It came from a gun in the hand of the wild-eyed woman on the floor. Gaudio seemed to buckle up; he clutched at his middle, lurched forward, fired wildly, but missed. A second shot struck him high in the chest. He gave a dreadful cry and then fell heavily on his back.

From the floor Carlotta, her lips flecked with blood, fired again and again, emptying the small automatic in her hand into Gaudio's motionless body.

CHAPTER XVIII

Again—the Unknown

RUTH TYLER lay with every quivering nerve tense in the darkness of her room in the cottage. That shutter was completely open now; her mind was flooded with light; it was sharp and clear. She had no need of her violin. She was completely possessed by her strange power.

With the realization of her utter helplessness to avert what must happen, she had achieved a philosophic fatalism. What must be, must be. And it would now be played out entire in the theater of her mind. It was as if she were *inside* a malignant brain.

As she lay there alone, the blind girl could actually feel the bitter triumph in that brain, its mocking laughter, its frightful hate. She knew its awful purpose; and powerless to stay it, observed its workings with a kind of fascinated detachment.

OUTSIDE her door, held there by the blind girl's peremptory command, stood Olga and Harrigan, waiting. Below, in the garden beneath her window, staring up into the darkness, were Doris and Johnson. And watching them like a hawk was Nelson.

A few minutes before, Doris had wrested herself from his grasp, flung herself into the garage, slammed and locked the door. He had hammered impotently at the door, briefly. Then he had heard her frantic voice at the telephone, without being able to distinguish what she had said.

Out of the darkness Johnson had appeared. Together the two men had flung themselves against the door until it had yielded. Doris had replaced the receiver, turned to stare at them with eyes wide in terror.

"Too late! Too late!" she had cried.

They had heard the violin again then, and had run to the garden under the window. The music had stopped. And there they had been standing, ever since, waiting, without speaking.

Above them the blind girl stiffened. Death had been dealt, suddenly, coldly. And she knew from inside that brain the name of the victim. Flaherty. . . . *Flaherty.* An unfamiliar name. Then, slowly, other names, those marked for death. . . . Moridon. . . . *Moridon.* . . . That would be Paul Gordon!

Then Hélène—David—Carlotta. She strained, hardly able to bear the agony of suspense. No further names. Nat and her father were still safe! But the others—Gordon and his family. Were they doomed?

Presently, like a flash, she felt an interruption—a sudden moment of inde-

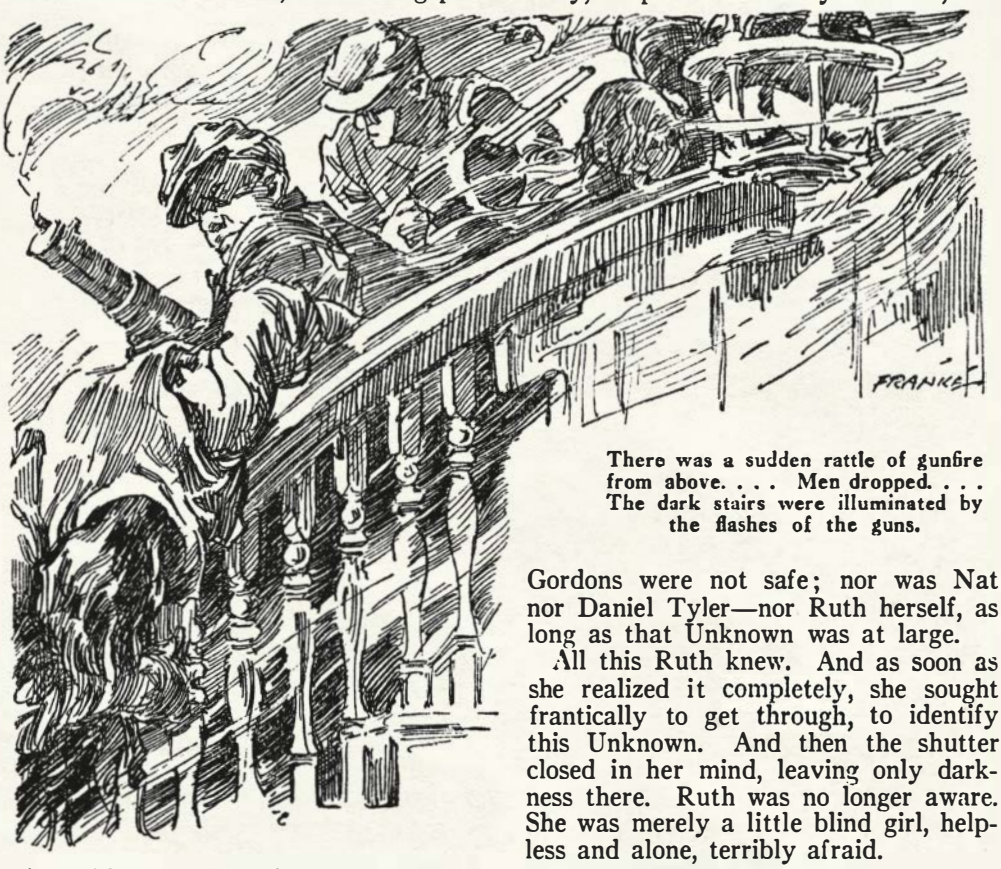
cision in that mind. Then its purpose crystallized. It was a mind desperate, but even more grimly determined. The mind of a person trapped—and completely indifferent to its own fate.

That interruption—Nat had something to do with it! Nat was trying to break through! Perhaps he could save them! From her mind Nat was suddenly obliterated again. Once more she was inside that other mind. Plainly she could hear words: *"Here they come. We just got time for the party."*

In sick despair the blind girl clenched her hands until the nails bit into the flesh of her palms. Above that room, she knew, the Angel of Death hovered. This, then, was the Gordons' zero hour.

The Destroyer, implacable, was about to strike. . . .

Then there was a shriek, the impact of another mind upon that of the Destroyer, another mind, a mind possessed by stark terror. A sudden shot, a moment of bewilderment, devastating pain.



There was a sudden rattle of gunfire from above. . . . Men dropped. . . . The dark stairs were illuminated by the flashes of the guns.

A rapid succession of shots. Then enveloping darkness, a void.

The Destroyer—had been destroyed.

The Gordons were safe. Their fanatic enemy was dead. That malignant brain was stilled, and with it the blood-lust which the blind girl had known so well these last months. But *were* they safe? What then, was that awful feeling which Ruth had—that foreboding of disaster which would not be downed?

Ruth realized, of a sudden, that only *one* of the minds that had sought the death of Paul Gordon was quieted. There had been *two* minds at work! One, that had willed Gordon's destruction, that had been dominant, commanding, was gone.

But that other mind, a mind that had followed orders—had known action, the mind behind the actual physical attempt to shoot Gordon and Hélène, the mind that had caused that hand behind the curtains to press the trigger when Nat was shot—that mind still functioned.

And it was a mind desperate with a sick terror, harassed by the haunting fear of exposure, a mind that would protect itself now, at any cost. A mind sullenly determined, crafty, increasingly wary, suspicious of everyone. No, the Gordons were not safe; nor was Nat nor Daniel Tyler—nor Ruth herself, as long as that Unknown was at large.

All this Ruth knew. And as soon as she realized it completely, she sought frantically to get through, to identify this Unknown. And then the shutter closed in her mind, leaving only darkness there. Ruth was no longer aware. She was merely a little blind girl, helpless and alone, terribly afraid.

THE heavy door yielded at last to the police assault, and Commissioner Kilrane, Tyler and Nat followed a surge of detectives into the room. They saw Gabriel lying flat on his back, his face contorted in a horrible grimace. Hélène, her face covered with her hands, shrank against her father, who was awkwardly trying to comfort her, hampered by his manacled wrists. Carlotta stared with a dead-white face at the body of the man on the floor, the pistol still held limply in one hand. David stood close to her, one arm supporting her shoulders.

Tyler dropped beside the still figure of Gabriel, quickly placed a hand inside the blood-soaked shirt bosom. Kilrane went to Gordon, removed the handcuffs. Tyler looked up, shook his head.

"Dead as mutton," he said.

He rose quickly, drew Kilrane aside.

"Take the girl to one of the other rooms, with Gordon," he said. "I've got to talk to her. Have one of your

men question Mrs. Gordon and David somewhere. Get their full statements. I promised to phone Ruth. I'll be right back."

He left the room; and Kilrane, calling in an inspector and a stenographer, ordered them in a low voice to take Mrs. Gordon and David to the room which she had occupied, and to get their complete story of their experiences.

Then, with Nat, he took Gordon and Hélène to the room which had been David's prison, summoned another police stenographer, and stood by to wait for Tyler's return.

IN a short time Tyler entered the room, his face set grimly.

"Mr. Gordon," he said, "I hate to disturb Hélène now, after all she's been through, but it's absolutely imperative that I ask her a few questions."

"But she's in no condition—" said Gordon protestingly.

Hélène broke in: "I'm quite all right, Dad."

She smiled bravely; and Gordon, with a sigh, subsided, but kept watching her anxiously. Tyler looked at her gravely.

"Gaudio is dead," he said quietly. "But his accomplice, the person who was inside your household, who made two attempts on the life of your father, who tried to kill you and who shot Nat, is still at large. We've got to find this person—and we want you to help us."

"But we know it's Collins!" Gordon interposed impatiently.

"Collins?" Hélène asked wonderingly.

"He has disappeared," said Tyler. "Perhaps he's the guilty one, perhaps not. Do *you* know who stood behind those curtains in your room?"

"I?" said the girl. "Of course not! But it couldn't have been Collins! How could he have got into the house?"

"You've no idea who it might have been?" persisted Tyler.

"No idea whatsoever," said the girl.

Tyler looked at her sharply.

"Hélène," he said, "do you remember what happened—that night?"

The girl shuddered and covered her face with her hands. Tyler repeated the question. Hélène dropped her hands and looked up at him.

"Yes," she said. "I—I remember."

Her eyes went to Nat. He smiled at her reassuringly.

"I—I was asleep," she said. "I heard something—I don't know what. . . . I turned on the light. I saw Nat running into my room, from the balcony, heard him shout. Then there was a shot—he was holding onto the curtains for support. I—I thought he'd been killed. I began to scream. . . . That—that's all I remember."

"You're quite sure?" Tyler persisted, his voice heavy with disappointment.

"Yes, quite," said the girl. "The next thing I knew, I was in a large white room. The—the hospital. A doctor told me everything was all right. I asked for Nat; he said Nat had been only slightly hurt. I wanted to see my family. The doctor said I could—the next day. Then, that night—*they* came—took me away."

"Had you ever seen any of the men who kidnaped you before?" Tyler asked.

She shook her head.

"They were all masked," she said. "They tied me up and then put me into a barrel. Then—the man who was killed took me out of it, carried me upstairs to a room. Later he told me to write to Father. I pretended to faint and got a glimpse of his name on an envelope. It was *Jim Gabriel.* I tried to convey that name to Father—"

"We finally got it," said Tyler, interrupting.

She gave a helpless little gesture.

"You know the rest," she said.

Tyler was looking at her searchingly.

"Hélène," he said, "some one tried to kill you. That some one must have had a reason. Fear perhaps—fear of something you knew—"

"But I've told you I knew nothing," the girl broke in. "What could I possibly know that would cause anyone to —to want to kill me?"

"Think!" said Tyler sharply. "Did you notice anything—anything at all unusual—suspicious on the part of anyone?"

The girl shook her head.

"You saw no one anywhere in the house where they had no business to be?" he pursued. Again she shook her head. "You—overheard nothing?" he went on.

"Nothing — nothing at all," said Hélène decisively.

AS Kilrane and Tyler stepped into the other room, Carlotta, in a low voice, was telling her story. The police stenographer was rapidly taking it down. They had left Nat with Gordon and Hélène. Carlotta stopped, looked at them inquiringly.

"Please go on," said Kilrane.

The inspector prompted her.

"You were saying, Mrs. Gordon, that when you realized that this man was going to kill you all—"

She nodded.

"I—I don't know just what happened then," she said huskily. "I—I was terrified—lost my nerve. I remember fighting with him. . . . He—he struck me. I fell to the floor. Then—then he was going to shoot Dave. . . . The next thing I knew, I was shooting—shooting wildly—saw him lying on the floor—on his back—realized I had killed him!"

SHE began to sob brokenly. David put an arm about her shoulders. She buried her face in her hands. Kilrane glanced at the inspector, who nodded toward the automatic which lay on the small table.

The Commissioner cleared his throat.

"Mrs. Gordon," he said.

She lifted her face and stared at him tragically. He pointed to the gun.

"The gun," he said. "How did you happen to have the gun?"

She flashed a look at it, shuddered, turned away.

"It—it was my gun," she said. "Paul made me take it—when we went shopping. . . . Just to please him, I took it. I concealed it—in my clothing—forgot all about it. They didn't search me very carefully. When—when that man struck me, and I fell—I felt the gun. That's all I remember—until—"

Her eyes filled with tears, and she began to weep.

"Thank you, Mrs. Gordon," said Kilrane sympathetically. "That's all."

David and Carlotta were taken to join Gordon and Hélène. Nat appeared in a moment, saying he had thought it best to leave the Gordons alone.

Kilrane dismissed the stenographer and the inspector. When they had gone, he turned to Tyler. "Well, that's that," he said tiredly. "I guess that washes us up on this case. We lose five good men—and four wounded, Red Mac seriously. We got Jim Gabriel—and nine of his hoodlums."

He smiled bitterly.

"We saved four lives—at a cost of fifteen men, if you can call Gabriel and his killers men. Well, we've got one prisoner, Nicky Gabriel. And for him it's going to be the big rap—murder. He's an accessory to the murder of five policemen, just as much as if he was in there with a sawed-off shotgun. By God, that's some satisfaction! But it won't put those five men back on the job—and it won't help their families a hell of a lot."

Tyler nodded sympathetically. He held out his hand, gripped Kilrane's firmly. "I know it's a poor return for those fellows, Kilrane," he said huskily. "But Gordon, years ago, as Moridon, offered a reward of one hundred thousand dollars, dead or alive, for Joe Gaudio. The New York police got him—dead. That offer still holds good. He's giving the reward to the widows and the children of those five men, to be apportioned equally."

Kilrane nodded mutely. Finally he cleared his throat. "Okay," he said. "Guess I'll wind things up now. Anything else I can do for you, old man?"

"Yes," Tyler said. "One more favor. Strictly under the hat. I'd like to talk to Nicky Gabriel—alone."

Kilrane looked surprised.

"Guess that can be arranged," he said. "I'll have the boys bring him in here. Afraid it's a waste of time, though. You know those fellows. They never talk. If you think he's going to tell you who was his brother's inside man, you're going to be disappointed."

"Oh," said Tyler. "But you see I know who acted as Gaudio's accomplice."

Nat and Kilrane stared at him in incredulous amazement.

"You—know!" Nat gasped. Kilrane was speechless. Tyler nodded, a grim smile playing briefly across his face.

"But I haven't the foggiest idea of the motive—nor a lick of proof," he said regretfully.

"But—God, man, if you know—" Kilrane began.

Tyler shook his head.

"I've got to have the proof before I show my hand," he said.

"But—at least you can tell us who it is you suspect!" Nat cried.

Again Tyler shook his head. "You wouldn't believe me, son," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

The Trap

TWENTY minutes later a group led by Commissioner Kilrane and Tyler emerged from the foyer of the Palm Gardens. A great shout went up from the tremendous crowd which surged beyond the emergency police lines held

firm by every available detective, mounted men and reserve patrolmen.

Reporters and photographers, cards in their hats, swarmed toward them. Directly behind Kilrane and Tyler, between two husky detectives, stood Nicky Gabriel, his face sullen and defiant. He looked neither to right nor left. Nor did he flinch or try to cover his face when the flashlight bulbs blazed. Other detectives cleared a path and he was hustled to the waiting police car.

The flashlight bulbs blazed again upon Paul Gordon, and upon Carlotta, the heroine of the occasion, who shrank back against him, trying to shield her eyes from the sudden glare. Then it was the turn of Hélène and David to pose.

Reporters began to bombard them with questions, but at a brisk command from Kilrane half a dozen detectives stepped in and quickly disposed of them. Then the Gordons, with Tyler and Nat, were escorted to a second car.

Gordon and his family got into the rear; Nat and Tyler climbed in beside the police chauffeur. Kilrane was still standing on the steps. They waved at him, and he raised his hand. The motorcycle escort, sirens screaming, started, the crowd fell back and the two cars passed through.

Nat stole a glance at Tyler, sitting beside him. The older man was staring ahead, into the night. The muscles in his lean jaws worked, but he gave no other sign. Nat's mind and his heart were filled with dread.

IN the darkened room in the cottage Daniel Tyler held his daughter closely in his arms. With his lips he caressed the lids of her sightless eyes. The slight shiver which had been running through the muscles of her shoulders and her arms ceased.

"It's all right, Father," she whispered. "You can depend on me."

"It's the only way, Ruth," he said huskily. "You won't be harmed. If I have to, I'll shoot—and shoot to kill."

The girl shivered again.

"Don't, Father, unless you have to," she said. "There's been so much of death."

He held her until the trembling had stopped. Then he kissed her lightly on the forehead. He led her to the bed. She lay down, and he placed the violin beside her. Then he went quickly to the windows, closed them, returned and looked down at the girl.

"Remember," he said softly. "If you play, do it very, very quietly. No one must hear."

"I understand," said the blind girl.

SWIFTLY Tyler crossed the lawn. When he entered the living-room, he found them waiting for him, as he had requested, Gordon, on the sofa, between his wife and daughter, Doris, in a big chair, with Nat perched on the arm, David, Johnson, Nelson and Harrigan, all standing.

Tyler stood in the center of the group. He smiled sympathetically.

"This will be no inquisition," he said pleasantly. "All that is done with, now, for good. You've all had a terrible time. You've come through it beautifully. It's been a pleasure to know so many people of courage and integrity. Now the nightmare in which you have lived for weeks is ended. You can all go back to your old way of life, secure and happy."

His eyes went to Nelson and Harrigan.

"You and your men have done well," he said. "But there's no longer any reason why this should be an armed camp. I'm afraid your jobs are finished."

Nelson grinned.

"Know just how you feel, Mr. Tyler," he said. "Guess we could use a little relaxation ourselves, now. I'll be takin' my Boy Scouts back to town. And it might as well be tonight, if that's all right with Mr. Gordon."

Gordon looked surprised, while Johnson, starting forward impulsively, protested: "But you can't do that! Gaudio's accomplice—"

Tyler cut in: "Is no longer a menace, Johnson. We've got him where we want him."

"But I don't understand," Johnson said.

"I just had word from Kilrane that they picked up Collins in New York," said Tyler. "Of course he denies everything, but he's our man, all right. And there's enough evidence against him to send him away for a long, long time. Maybe even enough to put him in the chair alongside Nicky Gabriel. No, Johnson, this family has no further need of guns and guards."

Tyler uttered this lie with a complacency that was almost smug. To Nat what was happening was almost incredible; he was half inclined to believe that Tyler had taken leave of his senses.

Johnson gulped dazedly, but made no further protest. Everyone else was exclaiming over Tyler's "news."

Gordon rose, as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He smiled at Tyler gratefully, and then went to Nelson, put out his hand. The man looked at it, abashed, for a moment, then wrung it warmly.

Gaudio gave a dreadful cry and fell heavily on his back.

"Of course, it's all right with me, Nelson," said Gordon. "You've all earned a rest. Also, it might interest you to know—a little bonus."

Nelson shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

"Thank you, boss," he said.

"But it's getting late," said Gordon. "No need of you rushing off like this tonight. Won't tomorrow do?"

Nelson saw Tyler's lips move. He shook his head, grinning.

"I got a wife who's gettin' lonesome," he said. "So if you don't mind—"

"Not at all," said Gordon. "I'll have a couple of the chauffeurs run you in whenever you're ready. Good-by, Nelson. And you, Harrigan."

He shook hands with the burly Irishman. Then the two men departed.

Tyler smiled after them. Then he turned to the others.

"There's something I want to tell you all," he said, "and then we'll call it a night. Something about myself—and about Ruth—and Nat. Something I think that will make you understand just why we've done what we did. I'll go back and start at the beginning."

SLOWLY, quietly, he told the story of the development of Ruth's strange power. Of her first vague, unformed premonitions of disaster. Of her eventual certainty, that night, of the murder of Martha Erik. Of the astonishing night when Zangara, the assassin, was about to strike at Franklin D. Roosevelt.

To those who had never heard the story he addressed himself directly—to Johnson, to Doris and to Carlotta Gordon. He came to the first realization by Ruth that Paul Gordon's life was in danger. In detail he recited what had followed. Gordon squirmed uncomfortably, when Tyler told of his skepticism, his refusal of their aid.

But Tyler smiled at him reassuringly and went on with his story. How Ruth had known that the assassin was about to shoot Gordon, how his life had been saved by her warning. How later, she had known of the invasion of the grounds of the estate by Espi, the hired killer.

He described the scene in the cottage on the night that Ruth had foreseen peril for Hélène, told how he and Nat had run to her aid, how they had been puzzled by the circumstance of the turned-off burglar alarms, how they had even suspected that some member of the family, or Johnson, had shot Nat to escape detection.

"I've already apologized for those suspicions," Tyler said with a smile. "I apologize again. But what was I to think? Until I realized that Collins was Gaudio's creature, it seemed incredible, yet true, that it was a member of this very household."

He went on briskly, as if hurrying to get through, to tell the rest of the story. He talked with the top of his mind, his sharp eyes ever observant for the slightest sign of betrayal on the part of the guilty person, a sign that did not come. In his mind was a grudging admiration for the iron nerve which held that person calm, interested, apparently, but apparently absorbed only as everyone else was absorbed.

When he had finished he gave a little sigh. There was a moment of silence, and then everyone was talking excitedly, but no one more than another. Tyler answered their questions until they had exhausted them. Then he threw out his hands expressively.

"That's all," he said. "Except for one thing: Always there has been a limitation of Ruth's power, that supernormal cognition which has enabled her to sense, somehow, the malignant purpose of the human mind."

He paused and then said, significantly: *"She has never been able to identify the person to whom that mind belonged!* Thus, we have worked in the dark. She knew what was in Gaudio's mind, but she did not know who the man was. The same was true of Collins."

He paused again, impressively.

"The next step," he said quietly, "the step we are working toward, is the development of her power to the point where she can not only sense this malignant purpose but *also* identify the person who holds it. That step, I think, is very near at hand."

He paused once more, dramatically, and swept the circle of faces with his probing eyes. He masked the exultance which flooded through him. Ah, that had struck home! He had planted the seed, the seed which he hoped would sprout luxuriantly, the seed of fear, of desperation.

"I AM a little afraid of this step," he went on, gravely. "Frightened—for Ruth. It's something which I cannot hope to understand, you see. A while ago, as I talked with her, I could see it coming. I stopped her, because I was afraid. I—well, I persuaded her to take a sleeping-powder. Because I want some one present when she makes the great experiment, some one who understands such phenomena—Dr. Karasc."

"Dr. Karasc—he is coming?" Nat cried.

Tyler nodded.

"I telephoned him, told him," said Tyler. "He feels that he can safely leave his patient in Baltimore for a day. He is coming—in the morning. Then we will put Ruth to the test. She knows nothing about Collins. We will ask her to name Gaudio's accomplice. And if I'm right, she will name—Collins."

A murmur ran through the room. Tyler kept his eyes on Nat. He had no need of watching the others now. He

felt a wave of sympathy for the boy. He was so strained and white. Obviously, he had divined his purpose, realized that a trap had been set—with Ruth as the bait. And he was pitifully afraid of what that trap would bag.

TYLER turned to Gordon with a tired smile.

"And now I'm going to say good night," he said. "And since I've got to pick up Dr. Karasc at his home at eight o'clock in the morning, I think I'll run into town tonight."

"I'll drive you in," said Nat promptly. He banished the dread from his heart. It was time for the showdown, he realized. The trap was set. He must follow Tyler's cue, give the killer a chance to walk into it. Tyler nodded to him gratefully. Gordon was protesting. But Tyler was firm.

"We'll be back by nine in the morning," he said. "I'm sure Ruth will sleep until then. I gave her a stiff dose. Poor child, she's been under a terrific strain. She needs the rest."

"But won't you be worried about her, leaving her all alone?" Johnson demanded. Tyler shook his head.

"Worried?" he asked. "What's there to be worried about now?"

As they came out onto the porch, two cars, containing Nelson, Harrigan, Cooke and the other guards came around the side of the house. The men shouted good-bys, and those on the porch waved to them as the cars went down the driveway and then headed toward the city.

Nat got out Tyler's car. He picked him up at the porch. They called good-nights. Then they were rolling down the long driveway. Tyler spoke rapidly to Nat. Near the gate a figure appeared, swung onto the running-board. Without stopping, Nat slipped from under the steering-wheel. The figure was that of Cooke, who took the wheel as Nat and Tyler silently dropped off the running-board.

The car turned in the direction taken by the others. Two men loomed up out of the darkness silently—Nelson and Harrigan. No word was spoken. Noiselessly the four stepped off the gravel driveway, began to make their way back toward the dark cottage. Lights began to appear in the upstairs rooms of the big house.

Reaching the cottage, the four men stepped into the dark living-room. No lights were turned on. Tyler whispered to Nelson: "You and Harrigan wait here." Then he went toward the stairs, Nat following. They mounted the steps, stood in front of Ruth's door.

Tyler opened it slowly, calling out in a low voice: "Ruth, it's Nat and I."

"Father!" she said hoarsely.

They went close to her quickly. Tyler leaned over and took her hand, gently.

"Yes?" he said.

She groped with her other hand until she found Nat's. Then she sighed, gratefully. "I—I played," she said in a low vibrant voice. "And then it came: Murderous determination to strike—tonight. . . . To strike, Father—at me!"

CHAPTER XX

The Final Stroke

PAUL GORDON was deep in dreamless sleep when the telephone tinkled. He stirred, then sat up quickly. The phone—it was the house-phone—tinkled lightly again. Gordon reached for it.

"Mr. Gordon," said Tyler's voice. "Don't speak. Come at once to the cottage. Use your private stairs, and make no sound. Cross the garden in the shadows. And hurry."

Gordon heard the phone click with finality. He hung up, filled with bewilderment and alarm. Quickly he slipped into dressing-gown and slippers. Furtively he let himself into the hallway, tiptoed down the steps, closed the door behind him noiselessly.

He stared across at the cottage. It was totally in darkness. A shiver of apprehension passed through him. He shook it off. The voice had obviously been that of Tyler. There was nothing for him to do but obey its urgency.

He crept toward the cottage, careful to keep in the shadows. Near the door he glanced back at the big house. It too was in total darkness. He saw the door to the cottage open slightly, and stepped forward. Inside he heard Tyler's low voice, reassuring.

He could dimly make out several dark figures. He heard Tyler give a low-voiced order: "Nelson, you and Harrigan cover the outside. Let anybody come in—but nobody go out. If there's any mix-up—you know what to do."

Astonished, Gordon heard Nelson's mumbled reply. The two men slipped into the garden. Gordon felt a firm pressure on his arm, and then heard

Nat's voice. Gordon started to ask questions, but Nat silenced him, warningly. They led him up the stairs.

As they entered Ruth's room, Tyler spoke to her softly, and she answered. Tyler whispered something to Nat, who drew his automatic and stepped noiselessly to the wall, just inside the door from the hallway.

Tyler took Gordon's arm and guided him to the shadows in the far corner of the room. "Stand by," he whispered. "And don't make a sound, no matter what happens, until I give the word!" Gordon, chilled, full of foreboding, crouched against the wall, waiting for he knew not what.

Tyler went swiftly to the side of Ruth's bed nearest the window. He dropped to one knee. His left hand held one of Ruth's, his right a heavy automatic. He turned his eyes toward the lightless house and the moonswept lawn. He saw nothing else.

NOW that the moment was near, Ruth was unafraid. She tightened her hand in that of her father, and he gave it a firm squeeze. From her mind she excluded every thought. For what seemed like æons she lay there, blankly.

Presently, almost without her realizing it, there was that sensation of light in her mind, as if that shutter had rolled back. Then she knew that the Unknown had made up its mind. Fear Ruth felt in that mind, a desperate fear, but a fear held firmly in leash by grim determination.

Very softly she whispered to her father: "Now—it is coming."

Again she felt her father's long fingers tighten. Then she was detached, waiting. She knew that a figure was letting itself out of the house, knew that it was feeling its way through the dark shadows, eyes on the cottage. She made one conscious effort to identify that figure—and felt her consciousness of it begin to recede. With an effort she cleared her mind of speculation. . . .

And again she was inside that unknown mind. With it she stood in the shadows of the garden, near the house. With it she was wary, alert. There was a long moment of indecision, a moment in which fear almost got the upper hand, and caution almost stayed its purpose.

But fear and caution were conquered at last. With the Unknown, Ruth slipped from the shadows, stood in front of the door, listening. Then the figure was at the door, was opening it very slowly, without sound.

Ruth gripped her father's hand. Tyler stiffened. He heard no sound for a long moment. Then, very faintly, he made out the soft pad of approaching footsteps. Just outside the door they ceased. There was an agony of waiting.

Then the door to the bedroom opened, inch by inch. He could just descry a dark shape there. Then the shape was moving, almost noiselessly, toward the bed. Ruth, game to the end, was simulating the natural rhythmic breathing of sleep.

The dark form drew nearer. Tyler moved the muzzle of the automatic until it was on a line with the figure's breast. Then, very quietly, he said:

"Stand where you are, *Mrs. Gordon!*"

Nat pressed the switch, and the light flared on.

Carlotta, hair drawn back tightly from her pale brow, knotted at the back, stood there barefoot, in pajamas, a long thin knife clutched in her hand. She whirled and saw her husband staring at her in sick despair.

She gave one choked little cry then. The blade gleamed as she turned it toward her breast. Nat, dropping his gun, sprang toward her. But the knife had been driven up to the hilt. She swayed into his arms, went limp.

ON her own bed in the big house, Nelson and Harrigan laid the body of Carlotta Gaudio. At a sign from Johnson they stepped quietly from the room. The man who had spent the best years of his life in the service of Paul Gordon and his family looked down broodingly at the dead face. He bowed his head. In a moment he raised it. Gently he covered her with a sheet.

Downstairs, in the living-room, Paul Gordon sat slumped on the divan, his masklike face gray, only his deep-sunk eyes betraying his suffering. On either side of him, holding his nerveless hands, were Hélène and Doris. In a chair at one side, unable to bear the sight of those tragic eyes, was David.

Near by sat Ruth, her delicate face filled with sympathy. On the arm of her chair was Nat, his hand resting lightly on her arm but his eyes upon Doris. His back to the room, looking moodily out of the window, was Tyler. No word was spoken until the three men had returned from upstairs.

Tyler turned then, quietly motioned them to chairs. He looked at Gordon. "There are things to be done," he said gently. "Before I do them, I want you all to know the facts. We'll have the truth, at last. . . . And then it will die—here, with us."

The people in the room nodded. Gordon, by an effort, raised his head, met Tyler's eyes. For a moment Tyler hesitated. Then he drew in his breath. The thing must be got through with now. He spoke, quietly:

"I'll tell the story as matter-of-factly as I can. First, when and how I learned the identity of Gaudio's inside ally." He flashed a look at Ruth, who had leaned back in her chair, her head partly against Nat's arm, her great dark eyes turned toward her father.

"Ruth told me," said Tyler, "although she didn't know it herself. This is how she did it: You'll remember that she had unerringly foreseen every attempt made upon the members of this family. To my satisfaction, at least, she had proved she could detect the malignant purpose in that mind which was plotting death and destruction.

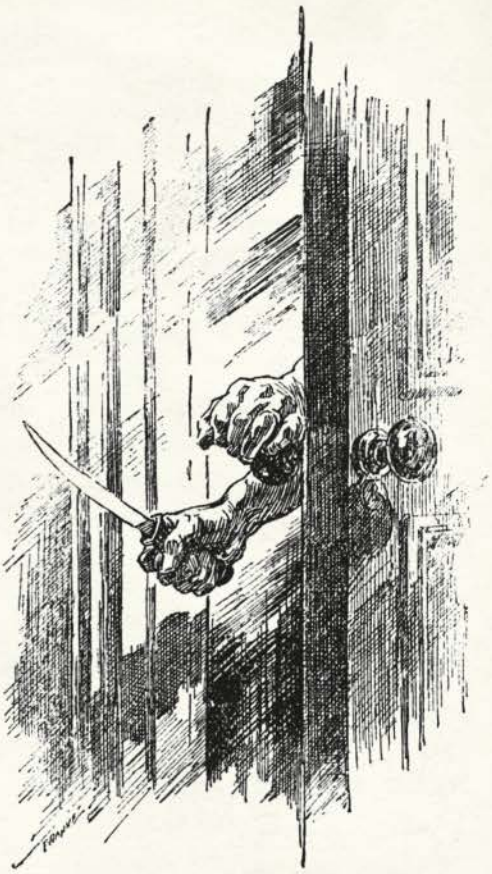
"Yet when Mrs. Gordon disappeared, ostensibly kidnaped by Gaudio, Ruth knew nothing whatever about it until I myself told her! And just a little later she knew that danger again threatened Hélène—knew it at the very moment that Gaudio's men were forcing their way into the sanitarium."

He paused, but no one spoke. Ruth merely nodded.

"Therefore," Tyler resumed, "I was convinced that Mrs. Gordon's disappearance was *not* part of Gaudio's vengeful plan. I was certain that she had disappeared of her own free will! As far as I was concerned, that branded her definitely as being in league with Gaudio. But I had no proof whatsoever, and not the shadow of a motive.

"Furthermore, I could not be sure that *some one* else was not aiding her, some one else who had access to the house and to its secrets. Then I learned that Doris had obtained from Collins the whereabouts of Hélène, obtained this information only a short time before Hélène was kidnaped.

"But Doris had previously tried to throw suspicion on Mrs. Gordon! And Mrs. Gordon, very subtly, while seeming to protect Doris, had planted a seed of suspicion against her in my mind—by a falsehood, by telling me that Hélène, in her delirium, had been deathly afraid—of Doris.



Then the door to the bedroom opened, inch by inch.

"Whether Doris was involved, or how, I didn't know. But I had to move carefully. Collins helped me. I arranged his 'disappearance,' hoping that the conspirators would really believe us all drawn off the trail. I shall add, now, that Doris, of course, was not involved, that she obtained Hélène's whereabouts innocently, for Mrs. Gordon, so that they could send Hélène a surprise package of gifts. For Nelson's benefit, I shall also explain the seemingly strange behavior of Doris when she learned, through Ruth, that we had all gone to the Palm Gardens and that we were in danger."

He smiled at Nelson.

"Her first instinct was to rush to the Palm Gardens to try to warn us. You ran after her. She ran into the garage. Then she realized the futility of driving to the Palm Gardens, and instead telephoned, hoping to get one of us in time to warn us."

Doris nodded.

"That's that," said Tyler. "Now, as to Mrs. Gordon: I was sure that for some reason, undoubtedly connected with Gaudio, she had twice tried to kill her husband—then Hélène—had shot Nat to avoid exposure—and finally had betrayed Hélène into Gaudio's hands.

"Here I made an error, which I based on the circumstances. I assumed that the attack on Hélène and the subsequent betrayal of her to Gaudio were made because Mrs. Gordon was afraid that something Hélène knew was incriminating to her.

"That's why I was so bitterly disappointed when it developed that Hélène knew absolutely nothing incriminating about *anybody!* I realized, then, that it was hopeless to prove her guilt without setting a deliberate trap. But I knew, too, that even if we caught her red-handed, we should probably never know what had inspired her—and never know for sure whether or not Doris, or anyone else had aided her. That's what I had to find out. By the use of a bit of guile—I did so."

TYLER paused briefly, then resumed: "Commissioner Kilrane gave me permission to talk to Nicky Gabriel, Gaudio's younger brother, alone. I told him the truth. That, as Kilrane phrased it, he was due for the 'big rap,' murder. That he didn't have a chance of beating it. And then I told him that Carlotta had killed his brother.

"I had to prove it to him. I've never seen such an expression of murderous hatred as that which crossed his face then. I think he would have torn her to pieces with his own hands if he could have got them on her. Then—" Tyler paused and smiled. "Then I used an old trick I learned in the office of the prosecutor. I judiciously flavored the truth —with lies.

"I told him that Carlotta had deliberately double-crossed them. Betrayed them, so that she could continue to live in wealth and luxury. That had the effect I'd hoped for. He was ready to forget his underworld code then—anything to strike at her, knowing that with his brother dead and himself doomed, there was no one else to avenge them.

"Well, Nicky talked. And this, in essence, is what he told me: At the time that David Moridon was kidnaped, he, Nicky, was living with his mother, who was separated from his father, in New York. They made their home with a sister of his father, a widow with a young daughter. This daughter was Carlotta.

"Gaudio found Chicago too hot for him after the bomb outrage which resulted in the death of Mrs. Moridon. He fled to his mother for shelter, leaving his underworld associates to continue the reign of terror against the Moridons.

"CARLOTTA, although very young, was even then extremely beautiful. And she was like a tigress. Already she had knifed a too-importunate lover, ostensibly in defense of her honor. She was Gaudio's kind. And although she was his cousin, he married her not long after he came to New York.

"As for her, she fell completely under his domination. He was bold and ruthless, a killer with a price on his head. She obeyed him like a slave. Gaudio changed his name to Jim Gabriel, a name which his worshipful young brother Nicky also adopted. And he made Nicky and Carlotta, as Gaudios, swear with him to find Moridon some day and avenge the deaths of his father and other brother, which he laid directly at Moridon's door.

"But Moridon had apparently vanished utterly. Gaudio knew only that he had left Chicago. Daily he searched the newspapers, hoping to find some trace of him, incredulous that a man of Moridon's wealth and position could drop entirely out of sight. And one day he was rewarded. He found a small newspaper story, a story which had somehow found its way past the censor. And he read that James Moridon, former Chicago financier, who had enlisted in the British army and had been badly wounded, was in Spain, recovering from a series of critical operations.

"Gaudio was afraid Moridon would never return, and that he would again lose track of him. He determined to go to Spain and carry out his vengeance. But he was a fugitive from justice; he dared not risk getting a passport, even under his assumed name, because in those days the passport regulations were growing more and more strict. He would have sent Nicky, but Nicky had got into a shooting-scrape and was under indictment for assault—a charge, incidentally, which he subsequently beat.

"Gaudio acted characteristically. He ordered Carlotta, his bride, to go to Moridon and avenge her blood. In spite of her oath, in spite even of his domination over her, she protested, begged. But

he was utterly remorseless. She had sworn; she would keep her oath—or else! And at last she promised, and left for Spain.

"There she took the name of Montez to bolster the fiction of her Spanish descent. And there she did find James Moridon. . . . But more important—to her, she found freedom at last from Gaudio's ruthless dominance. She cultivated Moridon, and when she saw that he was falling in love with her, she decided on a bold stroke.

"She double-crossed Gaudio, married Moridon, got him to change his name, and returned with him, as Mrs. Paul Gordon, certain in her own mind that the new identity and the changed appearance of her husband would insure her a life of wealth and luxury. She was, you see, a complete opportunist. And she made the most of her opportunity.

"For years she acted her rôle of the loving wife and the comradely stepmother, acted it until it became a part of her. Acted it because it gave her what she had always wanted—luxury, creature comfort. She was a clever woman, and she won the family over.

"MEANWHILE Gaudio, as Gabriel, had carried on his fruitless search for Moridon—and for Carlotta. He had become a shrewd and powerful racketeer, always keeping his own skirts clean, delegating all his lawless activities to trusted hoodlums, knowing that if he were ever so much as even arrested on a minor charge, it would almost surely mean his identification through fingerprints, as Gaudio, and a return to Chicago to face charges of jail-breaking—and the murder of Mrs. Moridon.

"Then one day he saw Carlotta. She was in her smart, expensive car, with her chauffeur. He recognized her immediately. He had her followed, communicated with her. She was terrified, I imagine, but didn't dare disobey his summons. He dragged the whole story from her. And he had found Moridon at last.

"Grimly he told her that there was only one way she could escape a frightful death. She must carry out his original command; she must keep her oath; she must kill Moridon and avenge the blood of the Gaudios. If she failed—or if she tried to cross him again—nothing could save her.

"She was under his sway again from then on. She agreed to follow his orders, knowing it was actually her only hope of escaping his vengeance. It was she who planted that bomb. When that failed, Gaudio curtly ordered her to proceed on her own—but not to fail again.

"She tried again, but Ruth's warning saved Moridon. She was afraid then, and told Gaudio that an inside job was suspected. And in his characteristically ruthless fashion, he tried to create an alibi for her, so that she would have the chance to strike at Moridon again.

"Knowing the exact nature of our precautions, knowing that a man had utterly no chance of getting through that alarm system to Moridon, he deliberately sacrificed one of his men, the torpedo Espi, to make it appear that the attacks had come from the outside.

"They had hoped that the capture of Espi would result in a relaxed vigilance inside the house. But they soon saw that they were mistaken. Gaudio, in the grip of his lust for vengeance, grew more insistent; and Carlotta grew more desperate. She tried to put him off, to make him wait. But he was past waiting.

"For years he had lived on his hatred for Moridon, on his determination some day to destroy him. Now he saw that this was impossible, for the time. And he conceived the idea of striking at his enemy through Hélène. He ordered Carlotta to kill *her*. Carlotta dared not disobey. He had set a time limit. She waited her chance.

"That night she heard Doris leave her room. She decided to make her bid then. She unlocked the door to Doris' room, turned off the alarm there, crept into Hélène's room, where she also turned off the alarm.

"She stood behind the curtains, ready to shoot Hélène and then to flee through Doris' room into her own. But Ruth's warning had come in time. Nat plunged into the room, sprang at the curtains. She fired, and managed to get back to her own room, first throwing the gun and rubber glove under Doris' bed, in the wild hope of implicating her."

Doris gave a little sob. Gordon, his emotions under control now, caressed her arm gently. Tyler paused until she had recovered. Then he went on: "The time Gaudio had given her was up the next day. When Mrs. Gordon communicated to him the circumstances, he gave her an extension.

"She then decided to betray Hélène into his hands. She staged the shopping-

party, making it appear that it was really Doris who was anxious to go. She got Doris to obtain Hélène's whereabouts, as I have told you. Then she 'disappeared,' going of course to Gaudio with the information.

"Gaudio kept her there, ostensibly as an alibi for her, but actually he had no intention of letting her leave there alive. He hated her for her deceit almost as much as he hated Moridon. Then he conceived his diabolical plan of using Carlotta and Hélène as hostages to make his enemy deliver himself to him—for execution. Knowing his man, he was sure Gordon would willingly sacrifice himself for those he loved.

"For Gaudio, that was the cream of the irony. He had planned to stage a macabre final scene, to toast them with champagne, then to tell the story of Carlotta's treachery—finally to destroy them all. Carlotta did not realize this until Gaudio had forced her into the room with the others.

"When she did see through Gaudio's plan, she flew at him, desperately. He knocked her down. It was a case of self-preservation then. She shot him from the floor, and in blind fury, emptied the gun into his body.

"But almost immediately she realized that she was still in danger. Suppose Hélène had caught a glimpse of her that night as she stood behind the curtains? But when she heard that Hélène had no idea who had tried to kill her, she thought she was safe at last.

"She must have had a terrible moment, however, when she learned that Nicky had been captured, when she stood face to face with him in the foyer of the Palm Gardens. But Nicky gave no sign, and she must have felt that he would stand by the underworld code, that he would never squeal.

SO I had to build my trap, to use my own daughter as bait, knowing that Carlotta was in too deep then to back out, knowing that if she could be convinced that Ruth would be able to identify her as Gaudio's accomplice, that she would seek to destroy Ruth as she had her husband and Hélène—and Nat.

"The 'next step' that I spoke of, the appointment with Dr. Karasc, the sleeping-powder, the dismissal of the guards, the trip of myself and Nat to town—these were all, of course, pure fiction. Ruth and I set the trap—and Carlotta walked into it. . . . That's all there is to say, except this:

"This family has been through too much. There is no need for this story to fill the columns of the newspapers as a nine-day sensation. Carlotta Gaudio is dead by her own hand. I propose that her secret be buried with her. To the public she is now a heroine who saved her family from a fiend.

"In truth, she did save them, even though she was thinking only of herself. Shall we drag this story across the front pages of the world—or shall we let her remain a heroine?"

Gordon raised his face to Tyler.

"If only we could!" he murmured.

"Then we shall," said Tyler. He moved quickly to the telephone. Nat recognized the number of Manhattan police headquarters. Tyler asked for the reporters' room, then for Doc Crandall, of the *Star*. "Doc," he said, "this is Dan Tyler. I have an exclusive for you. It's about Carlotta—Mrs. Gordon. Her terrible experiences unbalanced her mind. She has committed suicide."

THE strains of the violin came to Tyler, faintly, through the door of his room. He stared upward, muscles tensing, then relaxing. The music was soft and sweet, untroubled. Tyler smiled. Quietly he went into the living-room, up the stairs. He opened the door.

Inside her own, near the windows which overlooked the garden, the blind girl stood, her violin under her small chin. Her great dark eyes were wet with tears. He strode toward her.

"Ruth—Ruth! What's the matter, darling?"

"Shhh," she said. *"Shhh!"* And she continued to play, softly.

Her father came close to her.

"It—it's just that I'm so—so happy—for Nat," she whispered.

Tyler stared from the window. Beside the fountain which splashed gayly in the warm morning sunshine stood Nat and Doris, seemingly oblivious, locked in each other's arms.

As they stood there thus, they were suddenly aware, as one, of the music. They raised their faces toward the window, toward the soft and languorous song, a love-song—the same, they both realized instantly, that Ruth had played in the darkness above them on that night which now seemed so long ago, the love-song which had seemed a benediction.

THE END

REAL EXPERIENCES

What hour of your life was most crowded with excitement? (For details of this prize contest for stories of real experience, see page 5). In this department five of your fellow-readers each tells of the most exciting event in his career. First a one-time forest ranger (now president of the Oregon Trappers Association) tells of the time he was himself trapped in an Indian elk-pit during a forest fire.

In the Elk Pit

By PAUL A. WELLER

DURING the season of the big forest fires in the Pacific Coast region I had charge of a fire on the south fork of the Winchuck River. This fire was running up a long, heavily timbered ridge, and nearing a beautiful stand of virgin redwoods of which the region is justly proud. The Ranger gave me instructions to get the fire under control as soon as possible, then scout for more fires, as lack of visibility at that time rendered the lookouts almost useless as far as locating fires were concerned.

We had to be hauled in fifteen miles from the Ranger Station by truck; then we hiked five miles over a steep mountain trail to a small stream in a big cañon about a mile in the lead of the fire. There our provisions, mess-kits, utensils and pack-sacks, were unloaded from the pack-animals. As we finished eating our hastily prepared supper and were gathering up the necessary tools, the sun sank out of sight beyond the ocean. We began our mad scramble through timber which had a dense undergrowth of huckleberry, hazel, vine maple, salal, and live oak. The night was inky black before we got to the cause of the continuous roar ahead, but in time we hit the fire at almost the top of the big ridge. There was a cañon on either side almost three miles apart, with fire the entire distance. Luck was with us, for there was no wind so the fire was not running badly. We split the crew, leaving ten men in each with a straw-boss in charge of each crew. We then began building trail in opposite directions ahead of the fire.

The crew I was with made rapid progress. I knew they would complete the trail to the cañon long before break of day; so I called to Harry, the boss, and told him I would cut across the burn to the other side, and see if the other crew needed any assistance.

It was farther to the other crew than I had expected it to be; fighting my way through the fire-scorched brush was no easy task, so I didn't get to where the boys were working until midnight. They were doing so well that I told the boss I'd scout around to make sure there was no fire on the other fork of the river.

As I left he warned: "Better keep a lookout for cougars; we heard one scream a couple of times tonight."

"I'll just jerk a couple of knots in his tail, if he bothers me," I laughed—for I had trapped and hunted cougar with much success, and counted them among the cowardly class when it came to molesting humans.

I wound around through blackened trunks of trees and singed brush along the cañon rim for almost two miles, noticing that the fire was dying out. All there was now to fear was a tree or snag burning down close enough to fall across, or a crown fire being blown across when the wind raised at daylight. As I was congratulating myself on our good luck in

not having a bad fire, I noticed fire in the butt of a big red fir two hundred or more yards ahead. The tree had evidently been decayed at the ground, and the fire had got in and gutted out a great hole. Now it was roaring like a blast-furnace, the hungry flames running out and licking at the body of the tree, thirty or forty feet up one side. I started in that direction to see if it would be possible to drown the fire with a back-pump. Naturally, I was watching the tree instead of my footing; and going directly toward the blaze affected my vision somewhat.

THE next instant I lit with a thud that knocked me breathless. All was dark but an oblong patch of light several feet above. At first I thought I had stepped off a bank, but as I recovered from the shock of the fall I knew that couldn't be possible. I felt myself all over and was much relieved to find no bones broken. Next, I began to search for my ax; but I remembered throwing my hands forward as I fell, and the ax must have gone clear over my prison. I began to make a systematic exploration and found the hole I was in to be about twelve feet deep, five feet wide, and between eight and nine feet long, with walls vertical and smooth. There were some rotted bits of wood in the bottom.

I had it then—this was an elk pit, such as the coast Indians had once used in capturing elk! I didn't suppose there was a pit in the whole region but what had caved in or been filled up, although I had heard of a hunter losing three hounds in one on Gilbert Creek two years before. These pits, dug supposedly by the Indians, were covered with dead or rotten alder limbs that break very easily; these in turn were cunningly covered with grass, leaves, and moss, so that an elk attempting to follow his usual trail would fall through the blind. He was surely doomed to die of a blow from his captors or from starvation, for to get out was impossible. As this fact flashed across my mind, I began to realize the predicament I was in. Naturally, I began to yell for help, but the four walls seemed to absorb the greater part of the sound, which couldn't have been heard more than two hundred yards. I was over a mile from the closest men, with a fire between them and me. Besides, the noise they were making with their tools while working on the trail would have made it impossible to hear me a quarter of a mile away. I just couldn't help calling, however.

I opened my pack, though I knew before I did it that I had nothing in it which would aid me in any way. I did have one small can of fruit; this I finally succeeded in getting open with a sharp-edged stone. I then pounded it flat, folded and flattened it again. After a time I had made a crude blade an inch wide by about four inches long. Wrapping my handkerchief around one end of this makeshift knife, I attacked the hard wall. To my chagrin, the tin bent double without making a scratch that I could perceive. I tried all four walls with the same result, straightening the tin blade after each stroke. At last it fell in half.

It was cold, musty, and damp in the pit, and I was chilling to the bone. Panic seized me; I began to yell at the top of my voice, while trying to climb the hard walls with my feet and hands. My fingernails were broken off, my hands cut, scratched, and bleeding. At last I fell from sheer exhaustion. The outlook was gloomy, for no one would be expecting me at camp, or any other place, since I was a special patrolman.

The rattle of dirt and small stones brought me out of this line of thought. Perhaps some one had come to my assistance! I leaped to my feet, letting out a loud shout. Then I froze in my tracks; my flesh felt prickly all over, and clammy sweat broke out on my face and hands, for I was staring up into the eyes of a large cougar! He was crouched as though ready to pounce down upon me. In skulking up to the edge of the pit, he had probably dislodged the earth and stones; then my sudden leap and shout had startled him, causing him to hesitate for a time. The firelight from the burning tree enabled me to get a good view of his big head and powerful shoulders. He watched me as I flattened back against the farther wall, much as a cat watches a mouse in a bin or box. He seemed to know he could dine on me whenever the notion suited him, regardless of time. I discovered that any move on my part caused him to tense his muscles, and crouch, while his eyes seemed to burn right into me. He didn't stare into my eyes, but I couldn't move even one hand the least bit but what his eyes would concentrate on that movement.

I HAD often heard and read that a cougar would not attack a person as long as that person faced them. This was surely going to be an endurance-test —although I felt sure what the result

would be, for if I relaxed my vigilance for one second, the brute would spring. My chances were slim of living through the inevitable attack with no means of defending myself other than my bare hands. His intent gaze finally got the better of my judgment. I felt that I wanted it over with, so I let out several shouts, as loud as I was able to produce, at the same time waving my arms.

As if in contempt of my vocal outburst, he rose to his feet, lifted his head, and gave a series of piercing shrieks.

My hair rose on my scalp when, as he ceased his throaty cries and sat silent, expectant, I heard a shrill answering scream not far away. Then the great cat disappeared—probably to meet his mate.

I could watch one cat very well, but if two came at once, I had no way of keeping both in front of me at the same time.

I could hear the stealthy *pad-pad* of the cats coming closer. At that instant there was a sharp report, like a pistol-shot, then the groan and creak of a heavy tree starting on its crash to the ground. This must, I thought, be the big tree that I had started to examine before. Then panic seized me, for it was sure to fall on the side where the fire had eaten away its base. That would be directly toward my pit! I could already see the immense top sweeping directly down toward me. Great limbs would be driven into the ground as though by an immense pile-driver. Some were headed directly into my pit!

I huddled in a heap in one corner. Then there was a terrible crash. I was covered with twigs, limbs, and fir browse, but as I scrambled up through the mass, I realized that I was unhurt. Neither was I long in climbing one of the big limbs that was rammed into the bottom of the pit.

As I climbed over the bole of the big fir that lay directly across my prison, my eyes alighted on my ax, a few feet to one side. Eagerly I grasped it—I now had a means of defense when the big cats should get over their scare from the tree's thundering crash.

As one throws a cloak or coat from his shoulders, my perils vanished with the light of day. I arrived in camp within an hour—and was the butt of many jokes when I related my experience to the crew.

At Four

They gave Mr. Whiteside a decoration for a mistake—but it was a gallant mistake that cost the enemy dearly.

By JOHN E. WHITESIDE

MY outfit was the Forty-second—the Rainbow Division. I won't bore you with the details as to our movements up to the time of this tale, but in the middle of September, 1918, we were in the front-line trenches in the St. Mihiel sector. The line along most of this front was pretty straight, but in this particular part there was a salient, or protuberance, that projected into the German lines. That was the position we held; it was extremely precarious, because Fritz might squeeze us from both sides and the front at the same time. There had been rumors all the day before—the 17th, it was—that we might fall back to the next line of trenches, as our position was hardly worth what it would have cost to hold it in case of such an attack. If we could have advanced our line on each side of us a few hundred feet, the situation would have been greatly ameliorated, but that was thought impossible.

I was a machine-gunner. Very seldom did any of us have a full crew for his gun in those days. One to operate, one to put in fresh belts and another to pass them from the box, or on occasion, to load the belts. Some times we had no passer, and on the night I mention, I even had no loader. I had a full box by my side, however, and as it only takes a moment to slip in a fresh belt

and jerk the bolt a couple of times, one man was sometimes left alone for awhile. This night I had a nest at the extreme right end of the salient, and kept in touch with the man in the next nest—his name was George—by shouting.

The night air was chill, a mist hung close to the earth, and the star-shells threw every detail into ghostly relief. Things had been comparatively quiet during the night and I was thinking of a lot of things not even remotely connected with the army, when I became aware that an order was being passed down the line. Although I could make out the tones, I could not distinguish the words, until George got the message and called it on down to me. As I heard it the order was, *"We eat at four."* Good, thought I—it must be nearly that now, and I was hungry enough to eat a steer! Impatiently I waited, keeping an eye on the German lines, while the sky in the east paled, presaging the approach of dawn. I judged it to be a little past four already, and wondered where the old chow was, as light began to steal through the mists.

SUDDENLY an apparition appeared. A huge gray line, tipped with spiked helmets of steel, materialized out of the dawn and bore down on our trench. I made a dive for the gun, swung it in their direction and let go. To my intense surprise, although I had no time to think of it then, the line seemed to hesitate and waver as if in indecision. I kept banging away and abruptly the line broke and scurried confusedly back toward their trenches, with a khaki-clad line that seemed to come from our rear, in hot pursuit. The Germans never stopped at their first trench, but went on to the next, and the Yanks tumbled into the one they had vacated. All this happened very quickly; and I was examining my gun when an orderly came crawling along the trench. "The old man wants you right away," said he. "Come with me." "Me?" said I, in astonishment. "What the dickens does he want with me?" But the only information my inquiries elicited was a grunted "Dunno." With wonder and foreboding in my heart, I followed him.

I was ushered into a dugout, which contained three or four officers, including our "old man" and a French colonel. "This is him," laconically said the orderly. The Frenchman grabbed my hand and shook it enthusiastically.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "Ah, the reckless courage of you Americans! For that piece of incomparable bravery you shall have a *Croix de Guerre.* I shall report it to my Government at once."

"Why, I didn't do anything out of the ordinary," I said in surprise.

"What?" shrilled the Frenchman. "Nothing out of the ordinary? Hear him! He, away up there all alone, facing a whole German army,—gallantly firing on them when they tried to advance,—and now he says he has done nothing out of the ordinary! Never before did I see such modesty!"

"Alone, alone"—the words burned into my brain and a creepy feeling started at the base of my spine.

"Return to your post," said the captain. "I'll have you relieved directly."

Still in a daze as to what he meant about my being all alone up there, I returned to the trench. They were serving chow at last. George sat on a rock with a piece of hardtack in one hand, a portion of canned beef in the other.

"Listen, George," said I, "what the devil was that order you shouted down the trench to me at about three-forty-five this morning?"

He swallowed with difficulty, took a deep breath and spat. "Oh, that? It was—*'We retreat at four.'*"

Well, I received the decoration. When we were relieved at the Front and returned to a base camp, the company was formed and I was embraced by the same Frenchman and had the Cross pinned on my breast. For the information of some of the dignitaries present he briefly outlined the incident.

The powers that be had decided to retire at four that morning and permit the enemy, if he wished, to occupy our trenches, because as I explained before, they were not considered worth trying to hold. Fritz—through espionage, no doubt—had learned of our decision to retire, and after allowing us a few minutes to get out had begun to move in. Not anticipating any resistance, they started leisurely across the field, when the unexpected fire of my machine-gun threw them into confusion. The thought probably occurred to them instantly that they had been double-crossed, and a trap laid for them. The commander of our retiring troops, witnessing their confusion, although unaware of its exact cause, had instantly ordered a charge, the result of which was that we gained the margin necessary to hold our own.

After a long career at sea, Captain Hartman was at last accounts in charge of Admiral Byrd's old ship at Chicago World's Fair. He employs his leisure in carving beautiful bas-reliefs of famous ships, and is known to many through his interesting radio talks. Here he tells of a significant incident in his friendship with that great writer of sea stories, Joseph Conrad.

The Bali Girl

By CAPTAIN HOWARD HARTMAN

I FIRST met Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski in the "Chain Locker" on Tower Hill, London, on November 2, 1887—the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee.

The Chain Locker, as most mariners know, is in the basement of the Board of Trade Building, which houses the headquarters of the British Mercantile Marine, and stands facing the Imperial Mint and the historic Tower of London. With its iron railings, clean basement windows and blackboards whereon are posted the names of ships arriving and sailing, the Chain Locker is the main office in which all mariners are signed—on and off—in the Port of London.

Conrad and I met that raw November morning when Captain Charles Morley of the tramp steamer *Fishguard* was signing on a crew. It was a dreary day, and in the mist that hung along the dock-side, the waterfront looked gray. The famous London fog was partially heavy this morning, and like a dark curtain was slowly rising, revealing the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral over a forest of chimney-pots.

The *Fishguard* was bound for the Orient, for tropical skies, warm spice-scented breezes, brilliant sunshine and flying-fish weather; so you can imagine there was keen competition, as the Captain sized up the polyglot crowd of applicants for the posts he had to offer—a crowd composed of weather-beaten sailormen who had faced adventure in every port of the world, and others who were hoping to do the same, all eagerly craning their necks, hopeful and expectant.

After a time the Captain beckoned to Conrad and me, and told us that he had chosen all his officers, but if we cared to take the post of quartermaster, he would sign us on. Conrad, with deep disappointment in his dark eyes, refused; but I signed, and was instructed to be aboard next day.

As Conrad and I came out of the Chain Locker onto Tower Hill, the clock on St. Paul's was booming the midday hour.

The knots of mariners congregated on the corners swept like migrating birds toward the public houses in the streets beyond. We were facing the famous Black Horse Tavern, so I turned to my companion and said:

"Now then, Mr. Korzeniowski, I've just signed on, and it's my treat."

Arm-in-arm, therefore, we entered the famous tavern, and joined the crowd at the bar.

"Mr. Korzeniowski," I cried, "the smell of steak-and-kidney pie has put an edge on my wits and appetite. I say, barmaid, please serve my mate and me to steak-and-kidney pies and two pints of ale."

The barmaid expeditiously served us.

"Now, shipmate, let's carry these over to the Admiral's Kennel!"

Conrad followed my gaze to the paneled alcove with its mullioned windows, and said in surprise:

"Admiral's Kennel, did you say?"

"Aye, that alcove in the far corner. Famous skippers, commodores and admirals have sat there. You must remember, shipmate, that this is one of the most ancient and popular taverns in good old London Town. Masters and officers of ships have forgathered here for generations, to compare their adventures. You mean to say you've never heard of it?"

"No," he replied, as he stood gazing in admiration at the spot I had pointed out to him. Reverently he placed his plate and glass upon one of the old oaken tables as if it were a shrine.

THIS modest treat of mine was the means of creating a friendship between us that lasted a lifetime. The following day I sailed for the Orient. Conrad followed later from Amsterdam, as mate of the ship *Highland Forest* of Glasgow. We met again in Samarang, in the island of Java, in June of the following year. Conrad had received an injury aboard his ship and came with us as a passenger to Singapore, where he entered the Marine Hospital. A few days later I developed blood-poisoning from a nail-wound in a foot, and I also entered the hospital. My ship sailed without me.

Conrad and I were together quite a bit for a month or so, during which time we discussed many subjects, including the Linguard family of Samarang, whom Conrad later made famous in several of his books, namely James Linguard, as "Lord Jim," and Thomas Linguard as the hero in "The Rescue."

Close to the Marine Hospital and overlooking the bay was Dutchy Schalberg's Tavern, where Conrad and I called occasionally during our convalescence. Schalberg—or "Dutchy" as he was called on the waterfront—had one of the most popular taverns in Singapore—a melting-pot wherein every kind of adventure could be brewed. Here you could find men ready to undertake any desperate venture. The building was a rambling one-story Oriental structure, half of which hung over the bay on piles, while the other half clung to a clump of palms. One was almost inclined to feel, upon approaching it, that it would momentarily fall into the bay, as it was only held there by the graceful curving branches of the palms.

Mrs. Schalberg loved flowers, and there was a riot of color banked all around the screened-in veranda. Close by were the water-stairs, to which the sailors from the tall ships moored their boats when they came ashore. Dutchy employed a small native orchestra to entertain his customers, and from time to time he brought attractive dancing-girls and waitresses from the famous island of Bali, which lies to the eastward of the island of Java.

It so happened that I went alone to the tavern one afternoon, and found he had just secured a new waitress from Bali. Without a doubt she was one of the most beautiful half-caste girls I had ever seen east of Suez. As I watched the crowd I noticed that there was keen rivalry amongst the men for her favor. The eyes of the Dutchman's wife had a jealous glint in them, as she watched the girl flit gracefully like a butterfly, from table to table.

I immediately fell under the beauty's spell; she reminded me of a delicate orchid, clinging to the dank crushing jungle. Her firm flesh reminded one of exquisite golden-bronze statuary. The glinting afternoon sun coming through the screen threw purple shadows beneath her deep velvety eyes.

A flimsy silken sarong seemed to float around her loins and as her tiny bare feet slipped across the floor her anklets jingled like silvery bells.

ONLY one jarring note was in the picture before me—that was the presence of two notorious beachcombers, "Big Bill" Falk and "Limehouse" Hawkins. The former, a burly bully with a broken nose and shark-like eyes set in a mop of gingery whiskers and bristling hair, was leaning close to his companion, holding a whispered conversation, as his eyes followed every movement of the girl. In contrast the rat-faced Hawkins' shifty eyes seemed to jump about the place, as if searching for some sort of opportunity. The sight of these two men disgusted me, and I left the place. Hurrying back to the hospital, I told Conrad about her. He laughed at my enthusiasm; but that evening he startled me by suggesting that we go and singe our wings, like moths, at the flame of this beauty from Bali. As we strolled from the Marine Hospital to the tavern, Conrad crooned an old Polish melody, and as we were walking along the waterfront, under the blazing tropical stars of Singapore, I put words to his melody.

Today, the words come back to me with renewed meaning:

I'm dreaming tonight such a wonderful
dream, under the tropical skies;
Dreaming I found a most wonderful soul,
in a pair of most glorious eyes.
And as I dream of this woman divine, and
clasp her to me, so it seems.
The ashes of love float away on the
breeze, and leave me my wonderful
dreams.

As Conrad and I drew near to Dutchy's Tavern, we found it flooded with the soft radiant light of dozens of Chinese lanterns. A billion fireflies winked at us, and on the tropical scented trade-wind the soft strains of music came to welcome us. Schalberg was in the main entrance, and when he spied us, he shouted:

"Ach, here cooms some more friendts of mine! How vas you, Mr. Korzeniowski, und you too, Mr. Hartman? Coom righdt in!"

"Thank you, Schalberg, thank you," Conrad replied. "Ah, you've got quite a crowd here tonight and a new beauty from Bali, they tell me."

"Mr. Korzeniowski," the Dutchman exclaimed, "that woman has alreaty giff me plendy droubles. *Ja*—she haff gesmashed dishes—und *mein* wife is jealous alreadty enough! Here, dake a seat here. I vill call dis beauty; she shall vait on you—"

Conrad put a detaining hand on Schalberg's arm.

"One moment—sit down with us a moment, and let me see the faults of this beauty before she comes to serve us."

The Dutchman, anxious for a rest, slipped wearily into one of the chairs at the table, as I watched Conrad's face to discern what impression the Bali maid would make upon him. His dark eyes followed every movement she made as he tugged softly at his black mustache. Suddenly his eyes swept around the room, and his firm teeth showed themselves in an amused smile as he gazed past me to some one at the next table. Surprised, I turned quickly and saw the inflamed faces of Big Bill and Limey Hawkins.

Conrad turned back to Schalberg, saying: "Herr Schalberg, I see two customers at the next table who think that your girl certainly is very attractive."

Schalberg gave a snort. "Ach, dose two beachcombers! Vhat do dey know?"

With a smile Conrad replied: "Well, my friend, they see the artistic side, as I do, not the practical. Come, call her and have her serve us."

Schalberg's portly form heaved out of the chair, and in a loud guttural voice he called:

"Neola, Neola! Coom *jetzt!*"

The girl, a full tray in her hands, was serving customers at a farther table. Not being accustomed to do two things at once, she turned her head quickly at the call of her master—and dropped the tray.

Schalberg ran his fat fingers through his hair in despair.

"Ach, *Dummkopf!*" he cried. "She hass everydings gesmashed!"

Neola's black eyes filled with terror at the sight of Schalberg's face, and she shrilled wildly as she ran out the screen door onto the beach.

"Ach," bellowed Schalberg, as he wrung his fat hands. "Dat womans will ruin *mein* business!"

There was a scraping of chairs behind me as Bill Falk sprang to his feet:

"Ruin your business!" he roared. "Why, you squarehead fraud, she draws a crowd here! Don't she, Hawkins?"

"Yer bloomin' well right she do, Bill—not 'alf," replied Hawkins.

"*Ja,* Bill, dat may be so," agreed Dutchy. "Budt *mein* vife is jealous from dis womans, und now she break everydings. *Ja*—und dere is dat Jim Linguard, he vants the girl—und berhaps it is bedder dat I let him dake her away."

"Jim Linguard, eh?" snarled Falk. "'Tuan Jim,' they calls him, eh! An' what makes you think that His Glorified Lordship is going to take the girl away, I'd like to know?"

"Aye, Dutchy, and so would I," chirped Hawkins. "'E's a fine bloomin' gent to take care of a lidy—an' no mistake! Blime, the blighter abandoned 'is ship, 'e did! Didn't 'e, Bill?"

"Bah, Hawkins, belay the jaw-tackle!" snapped Falk. "Here you, listen to me, Dutchy Schalberg. From tonight on the girl is mine; and if this Tuan—or Lord Jim—interferes, well, there'll be trouble in your place! I'll flatten him! Won't I, Hawkins?"

"O' course yer will, Bill. An' blime, I'll bleddy well 'elp yer, shipmate," agreed his companion.

"*Ach,* chentlemans," Schalberg entreated as he wrung his fat hands, "I vant no droubles—*nein,* no droubles, blease!"

CONRAD and I watched the Dutchman as he tried to calm the two toughs with the promise of a bottle of wine. The broken dishes lay in the center of the room, where the beauty from

Bali had dropped them when she fled the room. Mrs. Schalberg, whose eyes were fixed on the screen door in a fascinated stare, suddenly gave a hiss to attract her husband's attention.

THE door opened; a tall, bronzed, clean-shaven man in white ducks and pith helmet, entered.

"Good evening, Mrs. Schalberg," said the newcomer. "Good evening, Schalberg!"—as he turned to the Dutchman. "By the way, what have you been doing to my little lady from Bali? I found her weeping outside. Tell me, what's it all about?"

"*Ach,* noddings, noddings, Lord Jim," replied the innkeeper.

"Oh, but I say, old chap, there must have been something terrible, don't y' know, to make her carry on the way she has been doing," he insisted.

"Vell, if you musd know, she gesmashed everydings, und I think dat I vill haff to led her go," mumbled Schalberg.

"Really? I'm sorry. It's very unfortunate indeed," Linguard hesitated. "But—er—I'll tell you what I'll do, Schalberg." He looked around the room. "I'll pay for the damage, and take the girl off your hands."

There was a snort as from an enraged bull, as Big Bill jumped to his feet and kicked back his chair with a clatter.

"Oh, you will, eh?" he bellowed. "Well, Hawkins and I'll have something to say about that! Won't we, Hawkins?"

"Aye, yer bloomin' well right we will, Bill," shrilled the little man.

"Really!" Lord Jim smiled sarcastically. "How very interesting, to be sure! Listen to me, you two beachcombing pirates. If I hear that you molest the lady, I'll severely chastise you"—and he looked at them with a sneer. "D' you hear? I'll chastise you!"

"Oh, you will, eh?" Big Bill snarled. "Beachcombing pirates, yer calls us. An' what are you, you mincing lollypop? You, who abandoned your post on the bridge of a pilgrim ship, an' left your passengers to their fate! Bah! I'll mop up the deck of this tavern with you." As he spoke he drew his knife from its sheath, and with a sweep of his hand brought it into view.

"What!" roared Linguard. "You dare draw a knife on me?" He raised a hand to his breast.

"Look out, Bill! Blime, 'e 'as a gun!" squeaked Hawkins.

"Yes, you thieving rats, and I'll use it too!" Linguard drawled, nonchalantly drawing the gun into view. "Back up, back up—up against the wall, you two vultures. Now then, if either of you move while I'm in here, I'll pin you to the wall with a bullet."

A dead silence fell upon the room; the orchestra stopped playing; everyone craned their necks watching the two bullyragging beachcombers slowly back up against the wall. An amused smile spread over the face of Lord Jim as he turned and stepped back a few paces, swinging the weapon and toying with it, the while keeping the two men at bay.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Schalberg," he murmured politely. "I regret that this incident has occurred." He bowed to her. "Now, Mrs. Schalberg, it's my intention to marry the girl, and give her a chance in life. Here,"—and he tossed some coins into her hands,—"get the girl some decent clothes—something—er—appropriate for our honeymoon."

Mrs. Schalberg was too surprised to utter a sound, but she took the money Lord Jim handed to her.

Linguard turned to the men. "And as for you two beachcombing rascals, remember, you touch my future wife at your peril!"

At this he turned to Schalberg, handed him several more coins, and remarked, "Let everyone drink to our happiness! Ta-ta, Schalberg!"

"*Ach,* Lord Jim, you're not going already!" Schalberg exclaimed. "Vell, goot-by!"

"Ta-ta, Mrs. Schalberg. Come to the wedding! Good-by, everybody." And he nonchalantly sauntered out.

Utter silence reigned in the room for a long moment; then Big Bill Falk rasped:

"Well, Hawkins, what do you think of that for blasted gall?"

"Blime, Bill, I thought as 'ow yer said yer wasn't afraid o' 'im?" questioned the rat-faced one.

"I'm not afraid, Hawkins, not at all," bellowed Falk. "But—ahem—there's not a half-caste woman in the world worth getting shot over! Come on, let's line up at the bar."

CONRAD looked dreamily at me. I then noticed he had been gripping my arm all through this fracas. As he relaxed, he said with a twinkle in his eye:

"A strange ending for your romance, shipmate, eh?"

Many years later, when I read Conrad's "Lord Jim," I appreciated more than any other reader the epic he had created.

He's a well-known Washington lawyer now, but in his youth he drove a stage-coach on a mail-contract—and forestalled two bold hold-up men.

Cattle Money

By McKINLEY W. KRIEGH

I HAD just finished loading the mail on the overland stage at Syracuse, Kansas, bound for Konantz, Colorado. I was sub-contractor on this route, which had been let to my father by the Post Office Department. E. M. Scott, cashier of the First National Bank, came up hurriedly with three bank-pouches.

"Mack, I want you to deliver these to Hank McGowan at Konantz. Think you can take them through safely?"

"Of course I can, Mr. Scott," I replied.

I lifted up the load of mail and shoved the bank pouches underneath where they could not be seen. Then taking up the reins which were snubbed to the hub of the front wheel, I was ready to leave, when Ray Rodgers, the assistant postmaster, came out.

"Mack," he said. "I think you are carrying about forty thousand dollars in gold, silver and bank-notes in those bags; and I wouldn't want any passengers along today if I were in your place—that is, unless I knew them."

"What makes you think the shipment amounts to that much?" I asked him.

"Because a few days ago I overheard Mr. Scott tell Dad there were several cattle-buyers down around Stonington, and that the bank had brought in a large supply of cash for them."

Ray's father was postmaster at Syracuse. Stonington was a small town located in Baca County, Colorado, about seventy-five miles southwest of Syracuse. It served principally as a trading-post, to which supplies for the cattlemen and settlers were freighted by wagon from railroad points on the Santa Fe. Generally, anything for Stonington was sent through Lamar, Colorado, but shortly prior to this time, the Lamar-Springfield stage had been robbed, and the bandits were still at large. I thought of this, but I said:

"All right, Ray; I'm glad you told me; but I don't think I'll have any passengers today. So long."

But I was wrong about not having passengers. When I drove up in front of the Rex Hotel, Manager M. W. Rex came out and called to me to stop for two passengers who were eating breakfast. I swung the lead team over to the curb, pulled both teams to a stop and waited.

Within a short time two men came out and said they wanted to go to Konantz. Their baggage consisted of two Western stock saddles, blankets, and a suitcase. I gave this no thought at the time as cowboys frequently shipped their saddles as baggage. I had never seen the men before. I accepted their fares, told them to toss their saddles on top of the mail in the rear seat and climb in, which they did. Clucking at my ponies, I held the wheel team until the leaders leaned forward in the harness, then released the brake lever, and we were off.

My passengers were seated directly behind me. Both appeared to be past middle age, although one seemed older than the other. He was also the smaller of the two. His hair was brown, streaked

with gray; his face smooth-shaven, with a deep scar across the left cheek. The other had sandy hair and was also smooth-shaven, and his beaklike nose was tinged with red.

AFTER leaving Syracuse, we crossed the bridge over the Arkansas River a mile south of the town and entered the first lonely stretch of road extending through approximately eight miles of almost barren sandhills, then ten miles over the open prairie to Irene, Kansas, the first ranch post office on the route. During this part of the trip I tried to get acquainted with my passengers, but I soon found they preferred not to talk to me.

When we reached Irene, they climbed out and stood beside the stage while I took the mail-pouch in.

I chanced to glance out of the window and noticed my passengers were standing on the opposite side of the stage. One was examining the pouches in the rear seat, while the other watched the house. Upon seeing this there came over me a feeling of suspicion and apprehension which grew upon me after we started again. By the time we arrived at the post office at Hatton, Kansas, my intuition told me I was in danger. I thought of arranging to have a constable join me at Fisher, Kansas, for the remainder of the trip, but did not do so as I was afraid my fears would be laughed at.

The stage was a large open spring wagon, of a type commonly used at that time, with three seats, each for two passengers, and made to carry an additional load of five hundred pounds. It was equipped with an open top over which in stormy weather I fastened a heavy canvas covering. It depended on the load and the condition of the road whether I used two, four or six horses. Generally, most of the load of mail and baggage was strapped on a carrier at the back, but on this occasion I had loaded the mail and bank pouches in the rear seat space, and placed the small amount of baggage on the carrier. The middle seat was occupied by my passengers. I occupied the driver's seat alone. This seat was about a foot higher than the others. Under it I had built a small, well-concealed pocket where I kept a six-shooter.

As soon as we left Fisher, Kansas, post office, I sat sideways with my feet on the seat, my left side toward the passengers, holding the lines in my left hand across my legs, and thus leaving my right hand free to reach the revolver under the seat. At the same time I could see every move they made and every expression on their faces. I was far from anxious for such an experience as I feared, and I hoped it would prove a trick of my imagination. I continued in this position after we left the Rea Ranch, where we changed horses and were served the noonday meal.

I finally concluded that if the men intended to rob the stage, they would make the attempt somewhere between this ranch and Monon, Colorado, the next and last post office on the route before reaching Konantz. In that event it would be perhaps six hours or more before anyone would begin to worry about the stage being late, and it would probably be the next morning before cowboys from the ranch at Monon would start out to investigate. In the meantime, with my sturdy horses (all broken to the saddle) to make their get-away on, they could be safely hidden in the sparsely settled Twin Buttes country to the west, or across the State line in New Mexico, or down in the Oklahoma strip well on their way toward a hide-out in the Panhandle country of Texas.

The stage was nearing Bear Creek. I suspected the men were familiar with the country as I overheard them talking about an old abandoned ranch near by. Two or three times within the last five minutes they had looked around in every direction and scanned the horizon. Not a rider or a wagon was in sight. My passengers ceased talking. The only sounds were the *clip-clop-clip-clop* of the trotting animals, the creaking of the harness and the crunching of the wheels rolling over the rutted road. A light haze of clouds softened the sunlight. The silence of the men seemed ominous. I had previously observed that they were both armed. One wore a shoulder holster; the other had a bulge at his hip which in those days usually indicated the presence of a .45.

WE approached the slope where the road meandered down to the bed of the creek. What was I to do? They had made no move as yet that was hostile. Was I justified in acting solely on suspicion? Then I noticed a certain tenseness in their attitude. Would they shoot me down in cold blood or give me a chance? I was frightened inwardly almost to the point of abandoning the plan

I had in mind. But at that moment I saw the man in corduroy reach for the gun in his shoulder holster, and at that precise instant I acted—resorted to a trick I had previously planned for just such an emergency: I dropped the lines.

As they slipped over the dashboard and down onto the wagon-tongue, I pretended to grab for them and missed, at the same time shouting, *"Whoa!"* in a tone I knew would excite the horses. Immediately four Western broncos started to gallop, apparently out of control. I glanced back. Scarface had the gun in his hand but seemed to be debating what to do. I pretended not to see it, and cried out as if terrified:

"We're going to be smashed up. What'll I do—what'll I do?" And turning I again yelled desperately: "Whoa! Whoa! *Whoa!"*

By that time the men had caught the spirit of my simulated fear of the runaway and both were shouting: "Stop them! Stop them! Damn it, can't you stop them?"

And I shouted back: "I can't. How can I stop them without the lines? You'd better jump."

THAT suggestion was all they needed. They jumped—one on one side, and one on the other. And what a sight! I almost forgot the runaway stage. Scarface landed on his feet, dropped his gun, stumbled and fell. Hooknose was not so fortunate. He had dived out, and fell on his side with a grunt that sounded as if a piledriver had hit him. Then he rolled downhill fully thirty feet.

I had no time, however, to watch what happened after that. I had to stop those horses before they reached the gully at the bottom of the slope. If I did not, the stage was sure to turn over. Even now it was swaying from side to side, part of the time on two wheels. I seized the brake-lever with both hands, jerked it back and locked the rear wheels. At the same time I again called to the horses—this time in soothing tones: "Whoa, whoa! Steady, boys, steady!" They immediately began to slow down. I climbed out over the dashboard onto the tongue between the wheel-horses and recovered the lines, which were tied together. With the lines and the heavy drag of the wheels to restrain them, they came to a stop just at the edge of the steep dip into the creek bed, about two hundred yards from where the runaway started.

When I next looked back, Hooknose was sitting up hugging his abdomen and groaning. Scarface, with the gun in his hand, was leaning over him and swearing like a madman. He called to me:

"Come here and help me carry Jake. He can't get up."

"I can't leave the horses," I replied. "Wait till Jake gets his breath."

At that Scarface straightened up, and muttering to himself, started back up the hill, gun still in hand. For the moment I was out of danger. I had to do some quick thinking. I must either drive on without them, or make them leave their guns and come down to the stage unarmed. I decided on the latter course. Much of my fear had left me. Throwing the lines over the dashboard, for the horses needed no further attention, I jerked my revolver from its pocket under the seat, and shouted:

"Drop that gun, and bring your friend down here. And you might leave his gun there before you start."

He turned with a snarl, and seeing my gun ready, blurted out: "What the hell is this, a hold-up?"

"Call it what you like," I replied, "but do as I say; and no monkey business, or I'll shoot."

"Well, of all the goddam foolishness I ever heard of, this takes the turkey!" But Scarface dropped the gun, walked back to his pal and helped him up. At first Jake thought he couldn't walk, but he straightened out one leg and then the other and found they were not broken. Scarface was limping from a wrenched knee. He made no move to drop the other gun, so I ordered:

"Stay where you are, until you drop that other gun."

HOOKNOSE started to reply, but Scarface stopped him and began to temporize:

"Say, kid, we aint got no other gun. I dropped it somewhere. Honest, kid, that's the truth. My leg's getting stiff, and I won't be able to walk."

I thought he was lying about the gun, as I had not seen it fall, but I said:

"All right, come on down. But don't try to start anything."

They limped down to the stage. I stood back well beyond reach and ordered them to get onto the front seat. With considerable effort they did so. They were silent, but I didn't trust them. I made no attempt to search them, but gave myself ample room for

action. I climbed into the seat they had occupied, then ordered Hooknose to drive. He turned, glared at me and started to curse, but upon looking into the muzzle of my gun he thought better of it and took up the lines. We were on our way once more.

Before arriving at Monon, I gave them some instructions. I had decided to take them to Konantz without assistance. In this I was partly influenced by the fact that the postmaster's wife was afflicted with heart attacks and the least excitement might bring on one of these attacks, with fatal results.

"Now you fellows listen," I said. "When we get to Monon, I'm going to stay right here, and you're going to stay right there, as if nothing is wrong. The postmaster will think it's peculiar, so I'm going to call him out to get the Monon pouch and tell him I'm not getting out because I'm sick. This gun will be out of sight, but it will be pointing straight at your backs. I don't want the boys at Monon to learn that you tried to hold me up, or they might take you out of my hands. That might be worse than what I am going to do with you. So it's up to you."

They seemed thoroughly cowed. We drove on in silence. At Monon old man Johnson, the postmaster, came out and received the pouch. He thought I ought to come in the house and have Mrs. Johnson fix up something hot, which he said would make me feel better. He said: "Boy, you are pretty pale." But he finally went in without suspecting anything was wrong.

The remainder of the trip was made without further trouble. I kept them covered and did not once relax. As we approached the end of the trip, they regained some of their belligerence and made all sorts of threats against me. These I ignored; I did not intend to be thrown off guard.

I REALIZED that I'd have difficulty in having them convicted of attempted robbery. Therefore, upon arriving at Konantz, I released them, and advised them to leave the country as nothing but a square game could be played in that country without most unpleasant consequences. Hooknose now had little to say. But I was considerably touched when Scarface came up to me, held out his hand, and said: "Kid, you sure outguessed us, and you'll not have to regret letting us go." I never saw them again.

Lawyer Livers

A Michigan fisherman, caught in a storm with a crippled motor, proves he is resourceful indeed.

By PATRICK O'HENRY

UP to a few months ago, I shared the common belief that seasickness and dangerous storms were confined pretty much to the seven seas. Now I know that plenty of both are to be had right here on the Great Lakes.

I had been "beating the depression" by peddling fish in the surrounding country. I bought these fish from commercial fishermen of the Ludington harbor, on Lake Michigan. In order to sell the fish the same day they were caught, I often went out with the boats, cleaning the fish on the way in to save delay. On this particular day, which was in the winter long after the official closing of navigation, a big dead swell was running from a previous blow but there was only a slight breeze and the glass was high. I went out with the Lindstrom Brothers in their thirty-foot boat, the *Ellen L.*

Fifteen minutes from the pier we passed the arms of the breakwater. The swell would have been easy to ride if we could have headed into it, but the nets were to the north, off Big Point Sable and we had to take the seas on the quarter. There was quite a bit of pitching and rolling and long before we had sighted the inner buoy of the nets I was distinctly seasick.

I helped to haul the buoy aboard and put the line in the lifter, after which the long grind of lifting the nets began. Due to the reduced speed, the motion of the boat got much worse in spite of the fact that we were now headed into the seas. The nets were set in a gang of nine boxes —which is about three miles of nets set along the bottom of the lake at a depth of from thirty to sixty fathoms. Ordinarily the lifting takes about two hours, but Eric Lindstrom and his brother Axel

decided to set the nets back wet instead of taking them in to dry, since the weather was too uncertain to insure their getting out on the morrow. This meant that the nets must be cleared of snarls, débris, bloaters and "lawyers" as well as of lake trout and occasional whitefish or blackfins. The consequence was that after three hours of labor the lifting was not yet completed; but the breeze had freshened almost to a gale, and further lifting was out of the question. When the boat rose on the crest of a wave the lifter would stop and slip, and when the boat dropped into the trough it would scarcely recover what it had lost. There was also danger of wrecking the nets, so Eric untied the last one, attached a buoy, and threw it overside.

The wind had come up so quickly that they decided not to set the nets back but to run for the harbor.

By this time I was really sick. Perhaps you may think that seasickness consists of simple nausea. That isn't half of it. The violent agonies and retching that follow must be felt to be appreciated. Axel told me he has had old deep-water "salts" get so sick on his little boat that they prayed for a wreck to put them out of their misery! I had had light attacks before, but this was my first experience with the real thing. I curled up in the corner of the cabin speculating on the chances of swimming the two or three miles to the beach. I would have done anything to get out of that pitching, rolling, smelly boat; no amount of scrubbing can remove the fishy smell from a fish tug and seasickness surely thrives on those odors.

We had been running along for a few minutes with the waves slapping under the rear over-hang, when the motor began to act up. It gave a few jerks in its bed and began to pound; then a couple of grunts and stopped. Axel grabbed the starting-bar and tried to turn it over.

"Froze," he muttered.

Eric dropped a stick into the oil sump and pulled it out.

"No oil," he said.

"Where's the can?"

"Here—empty."

At first I wasn't interested, but after we lost headway the boat swung around into the trough and began to roll, seeming to spend most of its time in deciding whether to roll clear over or to right itself and try it in the other direction. That brought me around a little.

"Think she'll sink?" I asked hopefully.

"Put on this life-preserver and shut up," replied Axel.

"How about an anchor?" I asked. "I read in a book that an anchor makes a boat ride better."

"What do you think this is?" demanded Axel. "A steamboat? We don't carry an anchor."

The boat rolled way over; one of the windows smashed and a tubful of water came pouring in.

We were only two or three miles from shore, but at least seven miles north of the Ludington station. The wind had whipped up quite a spray and it was doubtful if a small boat could be seen at that distance.

"Maybe they'll sight us from the Point and phone in."

We took in some more water.

"Use your grappling-hook for an anchor to hold her nose into the seas," I suggested.

Axel grumbled, but tied the hook to a half-inch buoy line and tossed it out over the bow. It hit bottom and soon caught on a submerged log or rock. Axel took a turn around the timber-head and the boat slowly swung around. The rolling stopped. Then a large wave came along and the line snapped off short. Axel began to swear, using choice Scandinavian oaths.

"Let's run up a white flag," I next suggested.

"Help yourself," growled Axel.

We were rolling in the trough again and Eric was doing his best with the hand-pump. It developed that the only white cloth aboard was my underwear. I started to undress. With the boat jumping around like a thing alive it was no small feat, but I finally accomplished it and even got some of my other clothes back on. I tied what was left of the buoy line around my waist and Axel held the other end while I crawled through a door onto the rear deck. There was a pole set up on the rear end of the cabin to carry a lantern at night. I grasped this and stood up. The cold wind and a couple of waves served to revive me somewhat. Then the boat took a bad roll and the pole snapped in my hands. It was luck that the buoy line was holding me. One moment I was in the water, the next, I was being hauled into the cabin along with several barrels of Lake Michigan—but without the underwear.

"Any more ideas?" asked Axel.

"Yes," I said. "We need something that will drag along on the bottom enough to hold the boat into the wind."

WE gathered up anchor stones, pieces of chain, tools, anything that would sink. We tied them together and to one end of the nets, and tossed the whole thing out. It worked fine. The boat now held its bow to the wind—but of course the anchor was dragging and in time we would find ourselves on the beach. Also the anchor might catch on something on the bottom and part the nets—which were no stronger than the buoy line, even when twisted up.

"Well," said Eric, "all we can do is to wait for the Coast Guard. They'll see we're not moving, and come after us."

"They'll think we're still lifting, maybe," said Axel, "until we get so close to the beach that they can't get to us in time."

"If we only had some oil!"

Axel was poking up the fire; the boat carried a small stove which was wired and braced so that it was still working.

"Say," I said, "how many lawyers you got there?"

"More than you'll peddle today," replied Axel. "Maybe a hell of a lot more than you'll peddle tomorrow."

THE lawyer is one of nature's jokes. It goes by various other names—eel-pout or eel-pouch, burbot, fresh-water cod and even dogfish. In appearance it resembles a bullhead or catfish. It has a rounded tail and a heavy skin without noticeable scales. The head is flat but the rear half becomes vertical rather than horizontal and is capable of twisting around like an eel. This makes it bad for fishermen, since the lawyers live in deep water with the trout, are very numerous, and twist and tear the nets when caught. The belly of the fish is puffed out like a large pouch. The meat and liver resemble that of the codfish, and there is supposed to be a close relation between the lawyer and the salt-water cod. They average three pounds or more in the round, of which about one pound is edible fillet, over half a pound is liver and the rest is skin, head and offal. I had been getting these fish for practically nothing, since there was little market for them in Chicago. I sold some for table use and some to fox and mink farms. The large liver of these fish yields an oil that is similar to cod-liver oil, and this gave me an idea.

"We'll run in on cod-liver oil!"

Axel was hardly enthusiastic.

"Did you hit your head when you went overboard?" he wanted to know.

"They used to use castor-oil in airplanes."

We took the lid off the stove, sunk a pail in the hole and boiled lawyer livers. In a half hour we got two quarts of oil. We poured some in the priming-cups to loosen the pistons, and started the engine. The rest of the oil was poured into the crank-case—and we were off, with three burned-out rods pounding away in the sweetest music I had ever heard.

Two hours later we entered the breakwater basin at half speed.

"Listen," said Axel, "I was just kidding about your ideas."

"Sure; I knew it all the time."

"I—I've got a bottle in the shanty that will fix that seasickness of yours."

"Whoops!" shouted Eric. "I've waited ten years to see him pass that bottle around!"

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